



# Illinois Department of Natural Resources

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JB Pritzker, Governor  
Colleen Callahan, Director

## Illinois Thirty-by-Thirty Conservation Task Force Listening Session #2: Cities & Towns

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**Date:** March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022  
**Time:** 11:45 A.M. – 1:15 P.M. CST  
**Location:** Remote meeting via WebEx  
**Subject:** Listening Session on Cities & Towns  
**Website:** [www2.illinois.gov/dnr/programs/30by30](http://www2.illinois.gov/dnr/programs/30by30)

**Members Present:** Sen. Dave Koehler, John Rogner, Todd Rettig, Mike Vanderhoof, Austin Omer, KJ Johnson, George Czapar, Lindsay Keeney, Matt Montgomery, Jason Bleich, Jim Herkert, Olivia Schickel, Ava Nollen, Emma O'Lone, Paul Ritter, Todd Katz, Emilie Collins

**Members Absent:** Sen. Jason Barickman, Rep. Robyn Gabel, Rep. Thomas Bennett, Ellicia Sanchez, Brian Rennecker, Kyle Rorah

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### Call to Order

- The meeting was called to order by Chair Rogner at 11:50 am
- Roll call was taken by Michael Lynch, DNR staff

### Presentation on Conservation Efforts in Cities and Towns

#### Introduction

- Chair Rogner introduced Chicago Wilderness, an organization presenting this session.
  - As far back as the early 1900s, leaders in the Chicago area believed that preservation of and access to open space was both critical and at risk and pushed for the creation of Forest Preserve Districts that have since acquired hundreds of thousands of acres of natural lands.
  - Chicago Wilderness has been promoting an urban green vision that goes beyond protected land to corporate parks, rights of way, backyards, and more.
  - To speak, we have Ben Haverford from Kane County Forest Preserve District and Stacy Meyers from Openlands, both involved with Chicago Wilderness.

#### Chicago Wilderness

- Ben Haverford
  - Chicago Wilderness as an initiative was prompted from findings from the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory, which produced a report in the 1970s showing that the state was at risk of losing unique natural areas.

- The resulting alliance includes most organizations doing nature work in the Chicago area, who have been convening regularly, even remotely during the pandemic.
- Can offer a great tool with the Chicago Wilderness GIS Hub, overseen by the Field Museum.
- Stacy Meyers
  - The United Nations announced in 2021 that climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution are three self-inflicted planetary crises that are closely interconnected and put the wellbeing of current and future generations at risk.
  - We need to conserve land and water by 2030 to try to avoid losing 25% of species and hitting the tipping point where our own food web collapses.
    - This is a food security issue as well as an extinction crisis.
  - Right now, 4.15% of land in Illinois is publicly or privately protected natural lands, totaling 1,496,000 acres.
    - 30% of land would be 10.9 million acres
    - 5% would be 1,801,000 acres, requiring the addition of 305,000 acres
  - Currently, 75% of Illinois land is in agriculture, 23 million acres, and of that 2.5%, or 594,000 acres, is in CRP
- Ben Haverford
  - In the Chicago area, there are 375,000 acres of protected parks and natural lands out of 4,770,000 total acres. To reach 30%, another 1,056,000 acres would be needed.
  - If we break it down by land use though, it starts to look more feasible, as different practices can get conservation value out of different land use types.
  - Important that throughout this is a process that is by the people that live there, not happening to them.
- Stacy Meyers
  - Open space in cities is generally thought of as groomed parks, like Millennium Park, but it can also include natural areas like Indian Ridge Marsh, a remnant wetland on the South Side hosting over 200 bird species, including some endangered.
  - These areas and other formerly industrial areas can be both a natural asset and an economic driver by healing that part of the state.
    - Improving the Chicago River system can do the same.
  - Throughout, need to engage communities, honor their priorities and values.
  - Even in urban areas can have vast landscapes like Glacier Park
- Ben Haverford
  - Looking at biodiversity concentration, the area with the most concentrated biodiversity at risk is actually Northeast Illinois, because the geologic processes that left much of Illinois productive farmland did not make it advantageous to develop NE Illinois for farming.
  - Chicago Wilderness has produced a series of reports: Atlas of Biodiversity, the Biodiversity Recovery Plan, and Green Infrastructure Vision
    - These cover where biodiversity is and is threatened, how we protect and recover, and how we more specifically connect hubs through corridors
- Stacy Meyers
  - There are a wide variety of opportunities to promote green space in urban settings, ranging from parks and urban farms to yards, tree canopy, corporate campuses, and providing green infrastructure.
- Ben Haverford
  - Even in urban cores, there is a lot of green space that could be restored to serve as natural habitat, like the Burnham Wildlife Corridor

- Converting turf to pollinator habitat can be cheap, take only 2-3 years, and reduce mowing costs and emissions
- Stacy Meyers
  - The SpaceToGrow program converts broken asphalt in schoolyards to mixed-use green space for play and education, which also soaks up extra rainwater.
- Ben Haverford
  - Looking at different land cover types, residential opportunity really stands out to work with private individuals to do this work.
  - Open space conservation is still a large category, and the latest FPD was established just in 2008, but new models of conservation are important too.

## Approval of Minutes

- Chair Rogner called for the approval of the minutes of the previous two meetings, on 2/10/22 and 3/3/22.
- Jim Herkert motioned to approve the minutes.
  - Olivia Schickel seconded the motion.
- The minutes were approved unanimously.

## Presentation

### Tree City USA

- Mike Brunk, from DNR's Urban and Community Forestry Program, presented on the Tree City USA program and opportunities for cities to improve urban tree canopy.
  - The Program's main task is to promote how trees play a key role in the vitality of a community, to grow, maintain, and preserve urban forest across the state.
  - The Arbor Day Foundation provides an excellent outreach tool with their Tree City USA program, in which Illinois has 188 participants covering 61% of the population, ranging from Chicago to the village of Stuart with just 229 people.
  - Tree cover can mitigate heat islands, sequester carbon, and provide wildlife habitat, and help communities further by attracting residents and businesses, providing energy savings, and improving local health.
  - The Tree City USA program helps make communities aware of this, to build support among community residents, and provide education and assistance.
- John Rogner
  - Have worked with the Chicago Trees Initiative and understand the value of urban forestry, which as Mike noted contributes to both mitigating climate change and biodiversity loss.
- Todd Katz
  - Is there a Tree School USA program?
- Mike Brunk
  - Yes, it is called the Tree Campus USA program, feel free to reach out to me with more questions.
- Olivia Schickel
  - Agree that it is important to have a discussion on how to bring those resources to schools.
- Jim Herkert
  - Would like to thank Chicago Wilderness, we often take for granted what an incredible organization it is and how much they provide in opportunities for protection and outreach.
- John Rogner

- Also struck me that it is not an insurmountable lift when we think outside the box.

### Listening Time (Public Comment)

- Belinda McAllister, Heartland Conservancy
  - Work in Southwest Illinois, have spent the last two years figuring out creative ways to work with IDNR on urban forestry, and especially with BIPOC communities in the area.
  - Have found that bringing directly to local governments is less effective for lack of funding, but there are private landowners that would like to plant trees on their land, so directing funding and assistance there can improve habitat and build support with the local government.
- Todd Katz
  - Many companies will provide a match for donations, could that be set up for tree planting through Tree City USA?
- Mike Brunk
  - Certainly, have worked previously to help direct funds to communities, and have discussed the possibility of getting corporate matches.
- Jim Herkert
  - Think that option has real potential, especially in underserved communities, to make funding such projects viable.
  - Can think about what has to happen to support that.
- Paul Ritter
  - Seems like we have a marketing problem, and could have a vast impact if we make the connections with these community members, cities, schools, since people are willing.
    - Living Lands and Waters wants to give away a million trees
- Todd Katz
  - At a previous school, Chicago Streets and Sanitation and Forestry Departments came to plant ~70 trees in a single day, using S&S equipment to cut concrete made it really easy.
  - Could we offer that opportunity to residents.
- Kimberly Fair, Illinois Environmental Council
  - The 30 by 30 movement requires us to prioritize the most vulnerable communities that are on the front lines of climate change, and to build climate resiliency in nature-deprived, low-income communities.
  - Need to consider historic inequalities in open lands, natural areas, and green infrastructure.
  - Suggest a staged approach:
    - 1. Community organization and engagement to understand local priorities and needs, focusing on communities with high levels of socioeconomic nature deprivation.
    - 2. Training and employment of communities members, especially youth, to build green infrastructure, not just in labor roles but in planning, organizing, and management.
    - 3. Implementation of a variety of forms of green infrastructure: trails, paths, tree canopy, restoring degraded land and water, and education.
- Belinda McAllister
  - Working on that kind of approach in Southwest Illinois

- Received a letter from an East St. Louis resident that wanted to create a park, so worked with them to apply for a grant to create it.
- That work sparked more engagement by the city, and future efforts such as an Earth Day cleanup and tree planting.
- Sarah Surroz, Openlands
  - There are opportunities to scale up existing programs, such as the Conservation at Home and the Lands and Harmony Programs
  - There has been high demand for Conservation at Home, which has certified over 1,700 properties, mostly residential.
  - People want to contribute, but need to know how, to plant trees, reduce invasive species, create pollinator habitat, manage stormwater.
- Olivia Dorothy, American Rivers
  - Illinois can create ribbons of conservation along rivers.
  - See three issues in this area
    - For the biodiversity crisis, floodplains are some of the most productive habitat in the world
    - Urban flood plains are also environmental justice areas, where redlining and racist housing policies have kept communities of color and low wealth in high hazard areas
    - Climate change is expected to cause more flooding, expanding the 100yr flood plain by 40% by 2100 in general, and by 100% in certain areas of Illinois.
    - This is creating a domestic refugee crisis as well as the opportunity to do conservation along our rivers.
  - We must be intersectional and bring in multiple agencies to deal with these issues and areas, not just restoration but public safety, affordable housing and relocation needs.
    - Think the state can do a much better job of integrating resources in these areas.
  - No one from DNR's Office of Water Resources is here now.
- Paul Ritter
  - Having these great discussions, a great amount is focused on land, but should include water.
  - Many speakers today, but seems like we lack connectivity, except in this task force.
- Sen. Koehler
  - Think it would be nice to identify projects in urban areas that could promote interest and education.
  - Floodplain in Peoria is often forgotten.
- Todd Katz
  - Thinking about establishing bird areas, for nesting and migration.
  - How do we provide for hunters and anglers and improve the quality of environment.
- Bob Caveny
  - Most river pollution comes from land runoff, so land policies to reduce nutrient load, improve water filtration, and create wetlands can help with water habitat.
- John Rogner
  - Agree important to remember that floodplains are often EJ areas.
- Ben Haverford
  - Lack of state level coordination seems to be a theme.
- Jim Herkert

- Think the Prairie State Conservation Coalition would be a partner in that kind of coordination, as they do want to reach beyond land trust work, but would not be the coordinator.
- Agree that connecting existing great programs could be something for the task force to discuss.
- John Rogner
  - Think that Chicago Wilderness is a good model for this
- Stacy Meyers
  - The existing 30 by 30 coalition, many members in Chicago Wilderness, could be a helpful tool for that.
- Austin Omer
  - Seems like we need to have an idea of what all the conservation efforts around the state are so we can get our arms around it.
- Paul Ritter
  - Is it beyond the task force to have a central location set up to show all these programs?

### Other Business

- Olivia Schickel
  - Have created a survey and had it sent around to 4H and FFA students to provide their thoughts on this work
- John Rogner
  - Per requirements in the legislation, have reached out to indigenous nations with land rights in Illinois to invite them to these sessions and to offer a dedicated session if any of them would like to take advantage of it. Have heard no responses as yet.
  - We have one more listening session, on remaining public and privately owned habitat, which will have a similar structure
  - Want to have at least one meeting beyond that to discuss what we have heard and give direction for the report.
- George Czapar
  - Could we put together a website to host all these presentations and contact information of the presenters to make it easier for people to engage?
- Michael Lynch
  - We have an existing website, which has background on the movement, meeting recordings and presentations, and upcoming meeting information.
  - This could be expanded to host other tools to facilitate discussion.
- John Rogner
  - Want to note that we have a hard deadline at July 1<sup>st</sup> to submit the report.
- Paul Ritter
  - Not sure if this is within the realm of the task force, but could we reach out to other state agencies and see what low-hanging fruit they have for conservation?
  - Could we hear from each Department?
- John Rogner
  - Would have to think which Departments would be the most relevant.
- Todd Rettig
  - Think that is a good idea, have to think how to include that going forward
- Felicia, Dalton Park District
  - Do you have resources that individuals and public entities can use to see how they can further the 30 by 30 initiative?

- What direction should we begin to go to use our land properly to help the goals of the task force?
- Bob Caveny
  - CICADA has a variety of resources for private residential and commercial landowners.
- Ben Haverford
  - The Illinois Parks and Recreation Association will have relevant resources on restoration.
- Laura Reilly, Chicago Wilderness
  - Serve as Chair of Chicago Wilderness, happy to talk if that would be helpful.
- Olivia Schickel motions to adjourn the meeting.
- Austin Omer seconds the motion.
- Chair Rogner calls the meeting adjourned.