

Conservation Congress 2014

Charting a Course to Protect and Preserve Our Natural Resources



April 11 and 12 - Springfield, Illinois

A bit of history...

Conservation Congress began in 1993 as a formal process to give the public an opportunity to propose and advocate for actions to protect and preserve Illinois' natural resources. While this process was discontinued in 2003, it was reconstituted in 2009 under the leadership of Governor Pat Quinn and Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) Director Marc Miller. With a firm belief in giving everyone a voice in government, the next Conservation Congress was held in 2010. The focus centered on developing a funding plan for three key areas – clean water, land acquisition and agency operations – designed to re-charge the agency and help it achieve its mission. And, the results speak for themselves.

Conservation Congress 2010 laid the groundwork for what has come to be known as the Sustainability Bill, now law, which provides dedicated funding for IDNR to help the agency fulfill its purpose. It is estimated to raise between \$20-\$30 million annually.

The beginnings of Conservation Congress 2014...

Eager to build upon the success of the previous Conservation Congress, IDNR set out in early 2013 to establish even greater public involvement in setting its future priorities. While the official goal was to gather input from individuals and organizations in anticipation of the upcoming Conservation Congress, it quickly became apparent that IDNR needed to step up its efforts in its partnership with the public.

As **regional meetings** were happening across the state in the early part of 2013, IDNR staff listened to the public's concerns and ideas on a wide-range of issues. But, many of the issues being discussed were already being addressed by the agency in some form. So, what did this mean for IDNR? It meant that the agency needed to do a better job of giving the public a window into the work it was performing and providing greater opportunities for engagement.

In the fall of 2013, then, IDNR began laying the foundation for a fresh approach in working with the individuals and organizations it serves. With technology changing and communication methods continually evolving, IDNR sought to use new platforms to reach individuals where they "live." The agency developed an **online survey** built upon the shoulders of the regional meetings to further take the pulse of the public on key issues. And, for the first time in the agency's history, IDNR set in motion a plan to host **live, interactive webcasts** which would give the public an opportunity to meet key staff members, learn about the latest IDNR endeavors and ask questions on a variety of issues.

As the new year began, IDNR unveiled the survey to the public and worked to ensure a diverse, cross-section of Illinois residents had an opportunity to make their voice heard. From January 13 to January 27, more than 2,500 individuals weighed in with their opinions.

In the midst of the survey, IDNR launched its series of live, interactive webcasts called "Thursdays with IDNR." From January 23 until February 20, the agency hosted five webcasts focused on the following topics: Habitat Restoration and Protection; Land and Water Management; Outdoor Recreation; Partnerships to Promote Education and Volunteerism; and Communications and Customer Service.

While both the survey and the live, interactive webcasts would help set the table for the Conservation Congress event in April, they also signaled an even deeper commitment by IDNR to strengthening its partnership with the public.

The main event...

Following the regional meetings, the online survey and live, interactive webcasts, IDNR and the public were ready for Conservation Congress 2014: *Charting a Course to Protect and Preserve Our Natural Resources*. While previous Conservation Congresses featured representatives from various state interest groups, on

April 11 and 12, 2014, IDNR opened its doors to all members of the public. In addition, for the first time since Conservation Congress began in 1993, the two-day event was webcast online.

The event kicked off with an overview and panel discussion of IDNR's role as manager, conservator and protector of Illinois' natural, recreational and cultural resources through regulation, stewardship and advocacy. The intent of the discussion, similar to the "Thursdays with IDNR" series, was to provide participants with a deeper understanding of the agency's work which will, in turn, give them a greater ability to weigh in on agency actions, strategies and priorities. In addition, the discussion provided participants with an opportunity to interact with agency leaders who served as panelists: Todd Rettig, Office of Realty and Environmental Planning; Arlan Juhl, Office of Water Resources; Rafael Gutierrez, Illinois Conservation Police; and Scott Fowler, Office of Mines and Minerals.

But, IDNR did not stop there. Key agency staff delved further into their work and led 12 breakout session discussions with participants on the following topics:

- Communicating IDNR's Work to the Public: Getting Info When and How You Want It**
- Conservation Education: Giving the Public a Greater Knowledge and Appreciation of Our Natural Resources**
- Enhancing the Visitor Experience at State Sites: What Programming and Services are Important to You?**
- Illinois Conservation Laws: Protecting the Public and our Natural Resources**
- Let's Get Outdoors: Providing Opportunities for All Constituents to Recreate at State Sites**
- Making Conservation Relevant to Illinois' Urban Communities: Expanding Our Constituencies through Outreach**
- Managing a Healthy Deer Population: Informational Briefing**
- Preserving Our Natural Habitats: Giving Focus to Habitat Acquisition and Management Needs**
- Protecting Our Environment from Invasive Species: Prioritizing IDNR's Resources in This Effort**
- We're All in It Together: Working with Friends Groups and Attracting Volunteers to Serve**
- Wildlife Management: A Look Ahead**
- Open Forum: Choose Your Topic**

These smaller discussions, which were largely based upon the input IDNR received from the regional meetings, online survey and live, interactive webcasts, provided an opportunity for agency staff and participants to work together and refine recommendations for future IDNR endeavors.

On day two of Conservation Congress 2014, participants reconvened as a group and a representative from each breakout session provided an overview of what had been discussed the previous day and the recommendations that were developed. And, through a new voting software that was introduced at this event, the entire group of participants were then able to prioritize the recommendations from each breakout session.

The second day of Conservation Congress 2014 also offered the agency an opportunity to host a panel discussion entitled, "Apex Predators in Illinois: Now and in the Future," which featured an overview of the status of large carnivores in Illinois and a discussion of how their presence should be viewed, analyzed and

addressed by the agency and others. IDNR Director Marc Miller led the discussion among a diverse set of participants including John Buhnerkempe, Chief of IDNR's Wildlife Resources Division; Scott Bryant, Board President of the Illinois Federation for Outdoor Resources; Rafael Gutierrez, Director of IDNR's Law Enforcement Division; Seth Magle, Director of the Urban Wildlife Institute at the Lincoln Park Zoo; and Terry Treacy, Springfield Representative for the Illinois Sierra Club.

The intent of the panel discussion was to educate participants on the status of large carnivores in Illinois, including presenting the research and knowledge that currently exists, and, looking ahead, determining the information that IDNR and others need to gather to make educated decisions. In addition, IDNR provided participants an opportunity to weigh in on this discussion and present their views on living safely with large carnivores in Illinois—including how best to ensure public safety, the safety of other animals and the welfare of the apex predators themselves. It was clear this discussion must continue across Illinois and allow for even greater public participation.

As Conservation Congress 2014 wrapped up, IDNR committed to posting the event recommendations and results on its website and giving the public another opportunity to offer comments.

And now...Conservation Congress 2014 Recommendations: A Roadmap for the Future...

The recommendations outlined below represent a culmination of discussions and priority-setting by IDNR and members of the public.

Communicating IDNR's Work to the Public: Getting Info When and How You Want It

1. Website improvements.
 - a. Better internal search functionality
 - b. Simplify home page
 - c. Develop app for permits/licensing
2. Better use of relationships with constituency groups to spread IDNR messages.
3. Improved 1-on-1 customer service communication.
4. Develop interactive maps for public to identify hunting areas, trails, lakes parks.
5. Tailor communications by region-Understand and acknowledge that communication methods and topics will vary by region.

Conservation Education: Giving the Public a Greater Knowledge and Appreciation of Our Natural Resources

1. Engage in Web-based Education and Outreach.

With very little staff and funding available, the best way to reach the most people is to utilize technology and make educational materials available via the Web. Web-based lessons, online ENTICE workshops, video podcasts and other Web-based programs will continue to exist but other options that can be explored and added include Webcasts, Webinars and mobile phone apps. The Kids for Conservation® program will be added as a Web-based version when staff and funding permit. Web-based programming will be targeted to various age groups and users (landowners, educators, school children, etc.).

2. Obtain More Staff and Funding to Develop and Promote Outreach and Education to All.

Qualified staff members are needed in the Division of Education to meet the demands of creating materials and implementing programs. To advance in utilizing Web-based educational options, qualified staff members must be hired and provided with the technological tools needed to deliver the desired products. Funding must be dedicated to the Division of Education in order to create materials, hire staff, provide more

grants and, most importantly, to be able to reach the hardest and most critical students and populations (minorities and poor areas of the state).

3. Conduct an Asset Inventory and Needs Assessment within IDNR.

Although Education is, in itself, a Division in IDNR, education and outreach activities are conducted throughout IDNR without agency coordination. Regular communication is needed between all IDNR Offices/Divisions about all educational activities that are occurring. An asset inventory would allow IDNR to find out what educational activities are occurring in the agency, assess gaps that may exist in needs of our agency and our audiences and work together internally and externally to get information out to partners, constituents and other targeted audiences.

4. Build and Use Partners to Develop and Distribute Educational Materials.

The group recommended that IDNR should expand its educational partners across the state and utilize them to develop and distribute educational materials. Suggestions included using partner experts in developing Webcasts and materials, using partners to help with ENTICE (Environment and Nature Training Institute for Conservation Education) educator training and using partners to help reach minorities and underserved areas.

5. Provide the Public an Opportunity to Purchase Educational Materials Online.

Understanding that there are virtually no dollars for the printing of materials, IDNR needs to make available for purchase manuals, posters, videos and other educational materials for the general public with the goal of generating revenue. Offering educational materials for purchase would require development of new publications and/or agreements with the photographers and others who have provided resources for the current publications.

Enhancing the Visitor Experience at State Sites: What Programming and Services are Important to You?

1. Re-establish a strong interpretive program and make it a high priority.
2. Renewed focus on quality hires with an emphasis on customer service training and include this as a metric for performance review. This goes to the heart of the visitor experience.
3. Develop a strategy for a vibrant volunteer program to assist with stewardship. (Emulate successful programs: Appalachian Trail, Shawnee National Forest, Adopt A Highway program. Overcome obstacles.)
4. Maintain with regularity the basic amenities of each site and prioritize based on available staff and hold accountable through IDNR Inspector General. Insurance company example – send in picture of an area or facility that needs basic maintenance.
5. Become relevant in the Cloud Mobile/Tech world: Apps, GIS mapping of all state parks/areas, reliable signage, QR codes at sites (Shawnee National Forest example), Wi-Fi in camp sites, etc.

Turn the switch on and amplify message, activity and experience.

Illinois Conservation Laws: Protecting the Public and Our Natural Resources

1. Increase staffing levels of uniformed Conservation Police Officers (CPOs) based on current needs analysis.
2. Create a CPO-dedicated investigative unit to handle complex and undercover investigations.
 - *A potential CPO-dedicated investigative unit's priority should be:
 - a. Environmental crimes (pollution, chemical spills)
 - b. Fish/Wildlife Investigations
 - c. Internal Investigations
 - d. Commercial Investigations

3. Create statutory authority for CPOs to conduct criminal records inquiries on potential employees and volunteers who work with minors, vulnerable adults.
4. CPO's enforcement duties should be prioritized as follows
 - a. Invasive species (Asian Carp, illegal transportation of fish/aquatic life)
 - b. Public safety (boating, snowmobile, park enforcement)
 - c. Commercial (licensing, taxidermy, fur buyers, fish, outfitters, timber buyers etc.)
 - d. Hunting (wildlife enforcement/trapping)
 - e. Sport Fishing (licensing, creel, size limits etc.)

Let's Get Outdoors:

Providing Opportunities for All Constituents to Recreate at State Sites

1. Volunteers should be mobilized more at our sites: veterans groups, friends groups, communities, etc. There is willingness to help care for, promote, and use our sites, but the lack of good communication prevents users from being tapped into.
2. Improvements in providing outdoor recreation opportunities lies much with the need of hiring more experienced staff and improving communication with constituents and internal staff about events, hunting seasons and uses at IDNR sites.
3. Interact with the users more through our services and less through regulations. IDNR provides a great many services but we don't share our message well or often enough. IDNR should be more proactive in our message to the public.

Making Conservation Relevant to Illinois' Urban Communities:

Expanding Our Constituencies through Outreach

1. Support other successful partners and programs – particularly fishing-in communities. (Chicago Park District, Forest Preserves, clubs and organizations, faith-based, health, athletic clubs, social justice).
2. Bring back the Kids for Conservation® program or similar curriculum. Tailor to communities. Include staff engagement, smart phone apps in parks, ecowatch, web-based lesson plans.
3. Recognize the importance, and increase awareness of natural resources within communities (in the neighborhoods).
 - a. Protect, enhance, steward those local areas as opportunities become available.
 - b. Connect what people see in their backyards to cultural heritage (e.g. monarch butterflies to Hispanic community).
4. Staff appropriately based on demographics and population need.
5. Transportation is major issue – make more resources available (funding) for transportation. Many grants will not pay for transportation – should make sure this can be included.
6. Meet with people where they are to find out what they would like to see and do, and how they want to interact with nature. Provide opportunities to hear them multiple times.

Preserving Our Natural Habitats:

Giving Focus to Habitat Acquisition and Management Needs

1. Create a grant program to support acquisition and stewardship by Illinois Conservation Land Trusts.
 - a. Model this as a revolving loan program such as the one the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency has for infrastructure improvements for water treatment plants.

- b. Conservation Land Trusts can close acquisitions much faster than IDNR (IDNR takes 18 months whereas a Conservation Land Trust averages six months.).
 - c. Involving Conservation Land Trusts ensures that stewardship will continue after acquisition.
 - d. New York, Ohio, and Minnesota (Reinvest in MN) have programs that can be used as an example.
 - e. Investigate opportunity to use money received as a result of environmental damages to support grant program.
 - f. Look at opportunities of buy and hold programs to support this effort.
2. Create a strategic, prioritized land-acquisition-implementation plan for Illinois.
 - a. The plan should step down the broad goals and needs identified by the Wildlife Action Plan and other plans to more specific actions.
 - b. Regional needs and opportunities should be identified to better support local efforts.
 - c. The strategic plan generated by Clifftop is a great example.
 - d. Identify land acquisition needs in urban areas that must occur before key natural areas are lost to development.
 - e. Funding sources that can be used for each acquisition should be identified in the plan.
3. Create an IDNR policy that encourages IDNR to partner with Conservation Land Trusts or other conservation organizations to leverage funds when acquiring land.
 - a. Conservation Land Trusts close acquisition deals faster and cheaper than IDNR.
 - b. Including partners ensures local buy in and sustained stewardship of properties.
4. Create promotional campaign to inform public of open space acquisition.
 - a. The Governor and IDNR Director should jointly openly promote land acquisitions.
 - b. While it may seem on the surface to be politically incorrect to talk about open space acquisitions when other budget cuts are being made (e.g., welfare), we are using dedicated funds for acquisitions. We need to inform the public of the difference and celebrate our successes.
5. Foster development of regional strike or stewardship teams that serve contributing members in stewarding private land.
 - a. Model this after the Southern Illinois Prescribed Fire Team, which serves private land.
 - b. Investigate utility of this model for serving public land.

Protecting Our Environment from Invasive Species: Prioritizing IDNR's Resources in This Effort

1. Fill the current vacancy of IDNR's Terrestrial Invasive Species Coordinator currently housed within IDNR's Division of Natural Heritage. This position has been vacant for three years. Since invasive species pose one of the greatest threats to IDNR's lands, this position should be given high priority.
2. Education/outreach campaigns. Develop and make available, in printed and online formats, information and plant identification resources for the public in Illinois. These resources should include common names, pictures and key characteristics for identification.
3. Employ invasive species strike teams to combat invasive species on IDNR lands, in particular to protect and manage resource rich areas, and to serve as an Early Detection and Rapid Response System for IDNR.
4. IDNR serves as a leader in facilitating better interagency coordination and communication on invasive species management and education efforts. A specific example was working with IDOT to combat roadside invasive species such as teasel.

5. Provide funding and cost-share opportunities through a grant program for Cooperative Weed Management Areas, Non-Governmental Organizations and other groups specifically addressing invasive species. Collectively, these groups have proven to be an effective means of managing invasive species on a regional scale.
6. IDNR support for permanently establishing May as Illinois Invasive Species Awareness Month through a legislative process.

We're All in It Together: Working with Friends Groups and Attracting Volunteers to Serve

1. Create principle point of contact for volunteer network as well as additional staff to address ongoing events, opportunities, needs and issues.
2. Foster/improve relationships with statewide organizations – example: U of I Master Naturalists – they are represented through a statewide network and are willing to assist with sites, events, etc. But, the lack of contact of knowledge of opportunities prevents them from engaging with IDNR on a regular basis.
3. Create/improve the mechanism for collecting funds/donations from volunteers and friends groups – example: Friends of Pyramid would like to improve facilities at the site and have funds available but are unable to transfer/apply those funds for the site's benefit.
4. Expand educational network beyond schools – example: friends' groups are unable to get educational resources from IDNR to use at site events or in their outreach and support of activities, but there is a willingness to educate beyond just schools.
5. Create and maintain a comprehensive volunteer network clearinghouse to mobilize volunteers for all groups using our facilities.
 - a. Contact information, expertise, willingness to help with site related events.
 - b. Improve the communication among the network, web, social media, etc.

Wildlife Management: A Look Ahead

1. Dwindling Habitat

Effort/programs to address the problem of dwindling habitat, encourage landowners to provide habitat for wildlife on their lands. Possible program to support development of wildlife habitat on landowner's property. Fits broadly under Goal 2 of the Wildlife Division: Wildlife Habitats.

2. Wildlife Communication Strategies (tie)

Develop a series of communications strategies to obtain public support, appreciations and engagement with wildlife programs. Emphasize social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.). Objective 3.17 from the Wildlife Division's Goals and Objectives.

2. Website to Assist Landowners (tie)

Building off of the Wildlife Division's objective 3.9 (Wildlife Customers) – Develop a website that will assist landowners with developing and managing wildlife on their property.

- a. Talk of including restoration.
- b. Suggestion that maybe this should be expanded to all resource divisions (i.e., Forestry, Natural Heritage, Fisheries).
- c. Suggestion to have a meeting about restoration and management support, including tracking progress so that coordination could be achieved among the various efforts currently underway (e.g., DNR Wildlife, Vital Lands, other Divisions, etc.).

3. Natural Plantings (tie)

- a. Encourage natural planting along roadsides, continue/expand programs that might support that (i.e. Forestry Nurseries).

b. Work with and/or encourage IDOT to address problem invasive species, in particular Autumn Olive and Teasel.

3. Local Seed Sources (tie)

Address the issue of the availability of local seed sources for restoration and management; consider the IDNR state nurseries as possible source for some of this.

Open Forum: Choose Your Topic

1. Coal reforms announced by IDNR need to continue and be implemented.
2. Need environmental assessments of headwater streams to establish baseline data for assessment of potential impacts of mining on headwaters.
3. Need tracking of water quantity withdrawals and environmental impacts related to mining.
4. Need better review and assessments of longwall mines moving into areas of productive farmland with inadequate protections for land and water resources.
5. IDNR should review recommendations presented by participants supportive of Starlight Restoration for Future Generations and Light Pollution Mitigation. The recommendations, which were not voted on by the full Conservation Congress, focus on ensuring that every Illinois resident has an opportunity to view a pristinely dark night sky, filled with stars and the Milky Way. They include:
 - a. IDNR should begin the process of starlight restoration and recovery of the health of the environment, ecosystems and our fellow citizens of Illinois of today's and future generations via significant light pollution abatement.
 - b. Illinois State Parks in rural settings should work to preserve the night sky darkness because inappropriate night lighting: (a) contributes to light pollution obscuring the sky, (b) has numerous deleterious side effects on wildlife, and (c) wastes energy resources. Select parks should regulate their outdoor use of night lighting in compliance with policies recommended by the International Dark-Sky Association.
 - c. IDNR ought to be a good example and use responsible "best practices" in reducing light pollution and waste. Every Illinois State Park and other IDNR properties, including IDNR administrative properties, should reevaluate their choices of outdoor use of light at night. IDNR can also build public awareness about the importance of reducing light pollution.
 - d. Illinois State Parks should provide educational opportunities (through staff/volunteers and appropriate interpretive and observing sites) to visitors to help them learn about the night sky as part of the natural environment.
 - e. Star Parks and stargazing should be included on websites and brochures and welcomed at all IDNR facilities. This is an issue with locked gates/early closing hours at many IDNR properties.
 - f. IDNR ought to be a good core collaborating center, inviting interested NPOs, schools, individuals inviting discussion, plans, outreach and use responsible "best practices" in reducing light pollution and waste.
 - g. IDNR should support Governor Quinn's 2014 proclamation creating Starlight Week (August 9-16) in Illinois. The week starts with International Starry Night, the new initiative envisioned to become the "Star Night" version of "Earth Day" – with public events throughout participating IDNR sites.

From the breakout session categories listed above, Conservation Congress 2014 participants were asked to prioritize the area of IDNR's work they viewed as "most important." Here are the results:

1. Acquire Habitat and Managing Needs
2. Enhance the Visitor Experience at State Sites
3. Expand Our Constituencies Through Outreach
4. Enhance Educational Programming
5. Attract Volunteers to Serve
6. Communicate IDNR's Work to the Public (tie)
7. Strengthen Our Conservation Laws (tie)
8. Manage Wildlife (including deer)
9. Protect Our Environment from Invasive Species
10. Provide Opportunities for All Constituents to Recreate

Conservation Congress 2014: Public Comments...

As previously mentioned, IDNR committed to posting the event recommendations and results on its website and giving the public another opportunity to offer comments. From April 29 until May 23, IDNR received feedback from nearly 30 individuals. The comments focused on three areas: the urgent need for hiring a site superintendant at Jubilee State Park; support for starlight restoration and efforts to reduce light pollution; and support for a year-round youth hunting permit.

Moving forward...

With the results and comments in-hand, IDNR established a plan of action to thoroughly review and address the Conservation Congress 2014 recommendations and communicate that information to the public. The plan includes:

*Formalizing an internal team of IDNR staff focused on reviewing and addressing the recommendations. The team, representing different areas of focus within the agency, will also be responsible for:

-Developing strategies to strengthen IDNR's partnership with the public with a focus on increased communications and agency transparency.

-Identifying new opportunities to hold public, informational briefings on key issues.

-Working with agency colleagues to ensure full, diverse participation as the recommendations are being reviewed and addressed.

And, while the breakout session topics and subsequent recommendations were largely based upon the regional meeting comments, survey and live, interactive webcasts, this internal team will undertake an additional review of the information provided.

*Establishing quarterly live, interactive webcasts to provide the public updates on actions taken by the agency. Webcasts may feature IDNR staff and members of the public.

*Providing the public updates through the agency's monthly newsletter, website, social media and other communication methods.

In addition, IDNR intends to:

*Establish an annual survey and additional opportunities to gather input from the public.

*Host Conservation Congress every three years.

*Strengthen inter-agency communications.

More information...

To learn more about Conservation Congress 2014, please visit www.dnr.illinois.gov. The "Conservation Congress" section of the agency's website includes the 2013 regional meeting notes; the 2014 online survey results; videos of the "Thursdays with IDNR" webcasts; videos of the April event; and, additional information.

Cover page photo descriptions...

Conservation Congress 2014 featured a display of photographs by Adele Hodde, IDNR Manager of Photographic Services. The images, placed on the cover of this report, were selected based upon their individual beauty and ability to give the viewer a greater understanding and appreciation for the natural resources that exist in Illinois. Additional photographs were integrated into the production of the event. Below, though, are descriptions for the images placed on the cover of this report:

From the top (and L to R):

Common prickly pear (*Opuntia humifusa*)

Sand Prairie-Scrub Oak Nature Preserve

This cactus is surprisingly common in Illinois as it is known from about half of the 102 counties within Illinois. It can occur in very dry habitats such as gravel and/or rocky slopes or bluffs and glade communities, but is characteristic of sand prairies, savannas or forests along major rivers and lakes. The flowers are pollinated by a wide range of bee species and many species, including humans, eat the fruit and pads.

Northern saw-whet owl (*Aegolius acadicus*)

Weldon Springs State Park

This small owl with a rounded head is an occasional breeder in the northernmost counties of Illinois where it prefers large blocks of dense forest. It is a common winter resident and, undoubtedly, more common than believed due to its secretive and nocturnal nature. They eat mostly mice and the male does all the hunting and feeding of the young nestlings.

Bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*)

Walnut Point State Park

Bluebells are one of everyone's favorite spring woodland wildflower. They occur in most counties in moist, wooded areas usually in floodplains or bottomlands where they can form large dense colonies that carpet the forest floor in soothing blue and velvety green. They are easy to grow in shaded areas and can add a unique flavor of native Illinois to your landscaping.

Regal fritillary (*Speyeria idalia*) on milkweed (*Asclepias* sp.)

Sand Prairie-Scrub Oak Nature Preserve

The Regal fritillary is listed as Threatened by the Illinois Endangered Species Protection Board. The breeding requirements for this butterfly are fairly specific requiring large areas of prairie type vegetation where the larvae feed exclusively on violets. Consequently, the current distribution of this species is very limited. Where it does occur, it may be very common. It is also a strong flyer which, sometimes, shows up unexpectedly far from known populations.

Bald Cypress (*Taxodium distichum*)

Horseshoe Lake State Fish and Wildlife Area

Southern Illinois represents the northernmost extent of the Gulf Coastal Plain in North America. Cypress - Tupelo swamps reminiscent of much further south occur in the bottomlands. Bald Cypress

is one of two deciduous conifers that grows in Illinois, the other is Tamarack, which grows in the bogs of the extreme northeastern Illinois.

Rock Creek

Kankakee River State Park

Rock Creek flows through the State Park and empties into the Kankakee River. The adjacent section of the river and select tributaries are outstanding examples of small rivers and creeks in the Illinois River watershed. This segment contains known populations of seven state-listed fish and six state-listed freshwater mussel species. This diversity of both fish and mussels is indicative of a healthy river and tributary system.

A Final Note

Words from Conservation Congress registrants...

IDNR asked individuals registering for Conservation Congress 2014 a simple, yet meaningful question: What does conservation truly mean to you? Here is what they had to say:

-Managing outdoor resources for long term availability. –**David Adcock**

-A landscape that is self sustaining through the use of periodic prescribed burns. Devoid of invasive species. This land has multiple uses in both recreation and hunting. –**Jim Alwill**

-To conserve and expand the biodiversity and ecosystem services that our natural lands and waters provide, the IDNR will acquire and protect a system of natural areas made up of large habitat reserves connected by waterways and greenways and will restore and manage all lands and waters in the system to improve ecosystem functions and native community diversity in and around Illinois. –**Jim Anderson**

-Conservation means being a good steward of the land for now and future generations. –**Lucy Bagot**

-Saving Natural Areas a lifelong effort. Blessed to be a delegate and on executive committee for all Conservation Congresses, finally the Human Impact on Natural Areas reached the top ten. Then Conservation Congress stopped. Viewing the webcast fulfilled another vision. People lacked knowledge of the great things IDNR is doing. Wise education to protect and preserve our Natural Area. Intelligent interpreters to help visitors appreciate sites. –**Ellen Baker**

-The activities in conserving, protecting and, if necessary, restoring the natural resources of the State of Illinois for residents now and into the future. It is a class of activities that takes place in both public and private sectors and is one that all should be engaged by all citizens in some degree. It is my hope that it becomes less a green foot note and more a common value that is always under consideration in human endeavors. –**Judy Beck**

-Pinchot put it perhaps best: "Conservation is the foresighted utilization, preservation and/or renewal of forests, waters, lands and minerals, for the greatest good of the greatest number for the longest time."
–**Shae Birkey**

-Conservation means the protection of the environment from any forces that pollute or in other ways harm the balance of nature and ensuring that healthy and intact ecosystems are available for wildlife and future

generations. All things are connected. True conservation is recognizing that the total impacts of what humans do to the environment must be taken into account from our use of fossil fuels to climate change.

–**Joyce Blumenshine**

-As many pieces of the world as possible remain or return to being pristine places. –**Dale Bowman**

- Access to the outdoors, using resources wisely, acting on Leave No Trace ethics, public involvement versus private opinion. –**Patricia Brown**

-Conservation involves understanding the role of humans in the environment and not overstepping our reach. –**Anthony Cefali**

-Conservation equates to human action predicated by the knowledge that natural resources are finite and fragile. To conserve is to realize humans do not possess the natural world. To conserve is to understand that all life relies upon the health of nature. –**Tom Clay**

-The management of state owned property, both for recreational as well as hunting and fishing. –**Jim Dees**

-Conserving natural areas for people to enjoy until the end of time. –**Ed DeVries**

-Preserving, restoring and maintaining healthy natural eco-systems. –**Donna Ducharme**

-Conservation is protecting the profoundly intrinsic natural resources for future generations. This includes the cherishing of all life and all of nature...from the butterfly to starlight. –**Audrey Fisher**

-Preservation of the natural biota for the enjoyment of present and future generations. –**Tracy Evans**

-Protecting, preserving, and restoring our natural environment. –**Debbie Fluegel**

-Conservation means to me the wise use of our natural resources, with a special emphasis on the wise use of our renewable resources. –**David Gillespie**

-Conservation means to me having engaged communities and stakeholders caring for our natural areas and supporting habitat management and restoration. –**Daniel Goldfarb**

-Preserving our resources for future generations. –**Michael Gorman**

-Conservation, the very act of applying the science, and knowledge of our resources to secure, maintain, and advance them for the betterment of all the citizens of Illinois. –**Mike Gragert**

-Conservation to me means not just the acquisition of land, but the maintenance required for the habitat to support and proliferate rare and endangered species for the benefit of the future. –**Brian Heynen**

-Saving plants and animals for the future. –**James Heynen**

-Protecting the public and our natural resources to be enjoyed by all people. –**David Johnson**

-In part it means taking proper care of the resources set aside for public use. –**Marcia Johnson**

-Conservation means living sustainably and in harmony with natural ecosystems and native organisms. It means protecting the biosphere which provides our life support system and enjoying the natural beauty which surrounds us. –**Ruth Kelley**

-Conservation is an essential responsibility of our public service workers who act as stewards of public lands and ambassadors of proper resource management for all residents and visitors. Conservation is the balance between the needs of the people, and the needs of all living creatures. Conservation is a noble endeavor, and we all owe a debt to those caretakers for the water, air, beauty, and food we live on. –**Dustin Kelly**

-Wise use of natural resources. –**Aaron Kuehl**

-Harmonious interdependence of all the indigenous species. I would like to see an increase in the awareness of and respect for our native species. I would like to see a halt to invasive species - their entrance into the state, their continued spread, their continued sale. I would like to see a concerted program to develop sustainable wildlife corridors. –**Marilyn Leger**

-Using our natural resources in a sustainable way to ensure their access for generations to come. –**Dan Linn**

-Conservation is the enhancement, protection and wise use of our natural renewable resources. –**Dick Little**

-Conservation has meant more than what our forefathers intended as the wise use of our natural resources. We must educate our next generations that getting involved is a must and will be increasingly harder as our population grows. –**Jim McFarlane**

-Understanding that best management practices for conservation should include safe and responsible use of our resources to preserve and enhance the quality of life and economic prosperity for all Illinois citizens. –**Shawn McKinney**

-Conservation is an essential undertaking. It means the protection and prudent use of natural resources for their own intrinsic value and so that they may be wisely utilized for the benefit of future generations. –**Angela Morris**

-Practices that encourage the prospering of the native flora and fauna (including humans) in a mutually healthy manner. –**James Pelton**

-Conservation is being an advocate to and for all things nature. Conservation also means that we ensure nature will be around for generations to come and to recognize the importance wildlife has to humans. –**Andrew Pudik**

-Webster's Dictionary defines conservation as: a careful preservation and protection of something; especially: planned management of a natural resource to prevent exploitation, destruction, or neglect. What does conservation truly mean to me? It means learning from our past to protect our planet's future and resources. It means continuing to learn with science, technology and studies to integrate a protection for those resources. –**Michael Rasmussen**

-Conservation is the deliberate and conscientious effort to preserve and protect our natural environment. It is imperative to create opportunities for our children and adults, of all ages and abilities, to be challenged

with the responsibility of taking care of the resources we have, understanding the impact of their behaviors on the environment, other living things and the future. I know that we must create legislation to protect and conserve while living harmoniously with nature. –**Dr. Larry Reiner**

-Conservation means preserving our natural resources, habitats, and species while planning for a growing and evolving human population. –**Makenzie Riedle**

-Conservation means saving natural resources such as water, land, air, forest, rivers, lakes, ponds, etc. We have abused the natural resources and now we see the unbelievable price that future will pay for our irresponsibility. It is about to wake up and make a campaign to open the eyes of people who being able to see they say "I CANNOT SEE." Being able to hear they say "I CANNOT HEAR." Let us to begin saving the little resources that we presently have it. –**Luz Rivas**

-Conservation is all about protecting and preserving the natural resources of Illinois for all to appreciate for decades to come. –**Marcia Rossi**

-Conservation means creating smart solutions that work for the community, for our lands, waters, and air, and for the wildlife that inhabit them. –**Rebecca Sanders**

-To me, conservation truly means to conserve for our future. It is taking steps now to conserve our resources, heritage, and the environment. Conservation does not mean to fully protect and deny access to resources, heritage and the environments; it's more about ensuring the longevity of these for future generations to come. –**Scott Sarkan**

-Preserving our fish, wildlife and natural habitats for future generations. –**Eric Schenck**

-Conservation of our natural resources means to use them wisely. –**Dave and Therese Scifres**

-Conservation covers both developed and open space. –**Lydia Scott**

-Conservation is the management of a resource to a level that it finds more of the people of Illinois coming outside to experience and enjoy it. –**Andy Shaw**

-Saving the earth and its inhabitants. –**Darryl Smith**

-Conservation means being smart and careful when using our natural resources, including land, water and animals. –**Denise Smith**

-Conservation is the ethical and wise usage of a given resource. In terms of IDNR, conservation is about the science of managing our ecological resources as it relates to species and their habitats – while at the same time trying to balance a human population with a wide array of diverse interests. –**Mickey Stewart**

-Conservation means managing and building our states natural resources. That would include wildlife, habitat, parks and other areas for the public to get out and use that may not have another place in the outdoors. –**Randy Stretch**

-Protecting and preserving our natural resources for future generations to enjoy. This can be through hunting, fishing, habitat restoration, land management and other projects. –**Heather Theriault**

-Preserving our native trees, plants and animals. Managing this for the ecosystem not just one individual species. –**John Torbert**

-Protecting and enhancing the environment and native plants and animals for our families and our future. –**Terri Treacy**

-Conservation means conserving our natural resources so that the public can enjoy our recreational facilities, state parks, historic sites, and natural flora and fauna while still maintaining bio-diversity and making sure that the resources we have today will be available for use by the generations who follow us. –**Mary Jo Trimble**

-Conservation is protecting the environment and ecology to prevent further deterioration of the biosphere as a necessary component in maintaining the well-being and health for human survivability. –**Alan Vest**

-Protecting and preserving our natural environment for the benefit of all. –**Carl Wenning**

-Preservation of our parks, conservation areas, nature preserves and natural communities. –**Terry Werner**

-Conservation, to me, is the human effort and passion to repair, maintain, and improve upon the land, water, and animals of nature. We must also protect and educate as a part of these conservation efforts to make sure all of nature is being preserved for us, now, and future generations of humanity. Conservationist or not. –**Andrew Wheeler**