

ILLINOIS NATURE PRESERVES COMMISSION
Minutes of the 225th Meeting
(Subject to approval at the 226th Meeting)

Illinois Department of Transportation
2300 S. Dirksen Parkway
Springfield, IL 62703

Tuesday, January 24, 2017

225-1) Call to Order, Roll Call, and Introduction of Attendees

Commissioner Dann called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m. Tom Lerczak read the roll call.

Commissioners Present: George Covington, Pen Daubach, Charles Ruffner, Deborah Stone and Donnie Dann

Commissioners Absent: William McClain, Jo-Elle Mogerman, Abigail Derby Lewis and David Thomas

Commission Advisors Present: Kevin O'Brien, *Prairie Research Institute* (PRI); Ryan Prehn, *Illinois Historic Preservation Agency* (IHPA); Thomas Emerson, *Illinois State Archaeological Survey* (ISAS); Lee Solter, *Illinois Natural History Survey* (INHS)

Commission Consultants Present: Joe Roth, Openlands

Others Present: Tom Lerczak, Valerie Njapa, Angella Moorehouse, Emma Plotts, Kelly Neal, John Nelson, Kim Roman, Steven Byers, Debbie Newman, and Marni English, *Illinois Nature Preserves Commission* (INPC); Ann Holtrop, Keith Shank, Jenny Skufca, Libby Erickson, Spencer Woodward, John Wilker, Dawn Cobb, Natalia Jones, Alexandra Davis, Teresa DeStasio, Chris Young, Connie Waggoner, Nancy Williamson, Tammy Miller, Susan Duke, Tim Schweizer, *Illinois Department of Natural Resources* (IDNR); George Rose, *Friends of Sangamon Valley*; George Johnson, Rosalie Johnson, Sue Harney, Katie Meyer, Susanne Masi, *Dundee Township*; Kathleen O'Conner, *Libertyville Township*; Sarah Surroz, *Conserve Lake County*; John Sherrill and Preston Marucco, *Illinois Department of Transportation* (IDOT); Jim Herkert, *Illinois Audubon Society*

225-2) Adoption of Agenda

It was moved by Commissioner Covington, seconded by Commissioner Daubach, and carried that the Agenda be adopted.

Commissioner Dann commented that he read the staff report and was astonished at the work INPC staff were able to accomplish under the circumstances we all have had to endure. On behalf of all the commissioners, he thanked INPC staff and reassured them that we would get past these difficult times.

225-3) Approval of Minutes for the 224th Meeting, September 13, 2016

The minutes were adopted and approved by all Commissioners present.

225-4) Next meeting date and location

May 9th, 2017	Nachusa Grasslands, Franklin Grove, IL
September 12 th , 2017	Noble Center, Peoria Park District, Peoria, IL

Commissioner Dann read the following:

At the 224th Meeting of the INPC, held on September 13, 2016, at the Danada House, 3S501 Naperville Road, Wheaton, Illinois, legal protection was completed by the Commission for 5 tracts of land totaling 181.69 acres. These areas are privately owned by individuals, corporations or not-for-profit groups who donated the value of the protection agreement to the public. This private land was permanently preserved without further acquisition of the land by the State. The dollar value of the tracts of private land is \$826,500 dollars based on conservative estimates of the fair market value of the land. Lands protected included Trout Park River's Edge Land and Water Reserve, and additions to Tallmadge Sand Forest Land and Water Reserve, Grainger Woods Nature Preserve, Brickey-Gonterman Memorial Hill Prairie Nature Preserve and Harlem Hills Nature Preserve.

Protection of these lands came about because the Commission had seven staff in the field working with private and public landowners. There are now 386 dedicated nature preserves totaling nearly 58,234 acres and 182 land and water reserves totaling in excess of 50,754 acres.

225-5) INPC Staff Report

Tom Lerczak indicated \$100,000 of INPC operating funds was budgeted for stewardship projects and \$90,000 of that has been dedicated for proposed projects. The projects have to be completed by June 30, 2017 and will limit the types of work that can be done. Due to the budget impasse, some contractors have not been paid for work done in 2015 and those contractors may be reluctant to take on new contracts since they have not been paid for work already done. There is money to move forward for new nature preserve signs and to order herbicide for all INPC staff and volunteers. A new ATV for Angella Moorehouse and a brush mower for John Nelson have been approved for equipment purchase. There is money to purchase commodities. We are moving forward but still struggling. INPC staff completed 24 burns, totaling 1,288 acres. Brush control and vegetation restoration was conducted at 10 sites, totaling 122 acres. He hopes to provide more meaningful information in staff reports as to the type of work being done in the field. The review of the strategic plan was deferred to when the INPC has a Director. There is

not much happening in Area 6 and Area 9 since those positions are vacant. Tom stated he would answer any questions regarding the written staff report and/or dashboard (Appendix I).

Commissioner Ruffner asked about the hiring of Randy Heidorn's replacement or the upper management positions.

Tom answered that Chris Young indicated there might be movement on the Area 9 position after the end of the month.

Tom highlighted on activities happening in the field:

- Kim Roman has been collaborating with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and The Nature Conservancy; attending public meetings, reviewing planning documents and meeting private landowners, working on the new Kankakee National Wildlife Refuge.
- Debbie Newman has been speaking with and emailing concerned residents about a proposed student housing consisting of nine three-story buildings with nearly 500 dwelling units on a 15 acre parcel adjacent to the Bohm Woods Nature Preserves complex in Edwardsville, Madison County. Even though it has gone through IDNR legal counsel, INPC staff feels it still poses a threat to the nature preserve.
- Angella Moorehouse has been working on conservation guidelines for the State threatened regal fritillary and twenty-plus element of occurrences (EORs) for the rusty patch bumblebee to document this species in her area.
- Bob Edgin conducted 14 prescribed burns on 1,003 acres and performed restoration work at Embarrass River Bottoms State Habitat Area.
- John Nelson spent time at Hanover Bluff Nature Preserve clearing invasive trees and brush for a state endangered reptile.
- Steve Byers worked on an intergovernmental agreement between Crystal Lake Park District and IDNR in which \$35,000 of INPC operating funds used for hydrological restoration.
- Tom worked with Pekin Park District to apply for a grant, under which they received \$2,500 from Illinois American Water, to do invasive species removal along the Lick Creek Watershed that passes through Dirksen McNaughton Woods Land and Water Reserve. The work was done by inmates from a local minimum-security corrections facility.

Commissioner Daubach thanked Debbie Newman and Valerie Njapa for all of their work on the potential threat to Bohm Woods Nature Preserve.

Commissioner Dann asked if the contractors who have not been paid from 2015, could be paid from the operating budget we have now.

Tom answered no because the funds the contractors are to be paid from are tied to the capital budget.

225-6) IDNR Staff Report

Acting Chief Ann Holtrop updated the Commissioners on changes within the Division of Natural Heritage.

The leadership team and Chief Holtrop have identified five strategic goals for their work. (Appendix II). Their leadership structure has been revised and the Watershed Protection Section is now part of the Division of Natural Heritage. They will now be working with three regions instead of five: a Northern Unit formerly Regions 1 and 2; a Central Unit formerly Regions 3 and 4; and Southern Unit formerly Region 5. New positions for regional stewardship and recovery that are vacant will now be filled and allow District staff to promote and create opportunity for new people to come into the Division. Terry Esker and Eric Smith have temporarily been moved into these Regional Administrator roles. Four new residents will begin in February, one in Mason County with Tom Lerczak and three in Jasper County with Bob Edgin. They will be Natural Heritage Residents but with Bob's upcoming retirement will allow for a work team in Jasper County that can cover both Natural Heritage and INPC workloads. Heritage and INPC field staff continue to work collaboratively. For example, Sweet Fern Savanna in the Kankakee Sands Area, Sand Prairie Scrub Oak and Fults Hill Prairie brought together a lot of Heritage and INPC staff. In 2016, Heritage began tracking prescribed fires spatially to see where and how many acres are burned. At this time, 10,000 acres have been burned by both Heritage and INPC staff. At the 72nd meeting of the Natural Areas Evaluation Committee, 37.8 acres of high quality natural communities were added as well as two sites approved for Category II which is specific suitable habitat for listed species. Between July and December 2016, there were over 1,500 submissions to Consultation for environmental review including a breakdown by nature preserves, land and water reserves and natural heritage landmarks. Road vacation legislation was introduced in 2015 and effective January 1, 2016, and gives the IDNR authority to vacate streets and alleyways on IDNR owned property and to dedicate those vacated parcels. In 2016, the road and alley vacation was completed at Wolf Road Prairie and will allow 12.5 acres of road and alleyway to be dedicated into the INPC system. Road and alley vacation is being pursued at Illinois Beach. Director Rosenthal and Chief Holtrop attended the National Planning and Strategy meeting for the Monarch butterfly. The goal was to ensure state-led efforts will address the regional and national targets for the species, not only monarch butterfly conservation but all pollinators. They continue to align staff within Illinois to get a state-led plan together and work with conservation partners to ensure success in implementing a plan.

Commissioner Dann asked if there is good data on the Monarch in Illinois, baseline or measurement.

Chief Holtrop answered that there are pockets of data but no solid data throughout the State. The conservation goals will be working on habitat based goals and have a better measure of what habitat is out there, not specifically the density of milkweed but prairie or grassland habitat. Part

of their conservation strategy will be identifying what baseline it is and counting habitat changes. They are working on getting a monitoring system in place for monarchs and habitat.

Commissioner Dann commented that it would be useful data in addition to the habitat measures.

Chief Holtrop agreed and commented that they need to ensure it is consistent with the regional and national movement so when the State of Illinois reports, it is consistent with what other states are reporting.

225-7) Endangered Species Protection Board Staff Report

See Appendix III.

225-8) Cook Co. – Jens Jensen Grasslands and Woods Land and Water Reserve, Registration

Steve Byers on behalf of the Forest Preserves of Cook County, requested approval to register 221.1 acres of the Jens Jensen Forest Preserve as the Jens Jensen Grasslands and Woods Land and Water Reserve. Jens Jensen Forest Preserve and nearby Deer Grove Forest Preserve total 1,800 acres. Embedded within Deer Grove Forest Preserve is the 1,035.7-acre Deer Grove West Woodland and Wetland Nature Preserve (INAI #1775). Jens Jensen Grasslands and Woods includes Grade B and Grade C mesic woodlands (74 acres), Grade C freshwater marsh and Grade C sedge meadow (42.7 acres), and a cultural community undergoing habitat restoration as prairie (103 acres). To date, 398 native plant species have been recorded from the site. Jens Jensen Grasslands and Woods meets two of the criteria for designation as an Illinois Land and Water Reserve: 1.) the site includes more than 80 acres of grasslands that support habitat-restricted wildlife, and 2.) the site supports a population of the State-threatened marsh speedwell (*Veronica scutellata*). Jens Jensen Grassland and Woods is located within the Morainal Section of the Northeastern Morainal Natural Division in south-central Cook County, Illinois. Restoration at Jens Jensen Grasslands and Woods was initiated in 2009 and much of the support for restoration can be traced to the designation of a 181-acre parcel (located almost entirely within Jens Jensen Grasslands and Woods) as the O'Hare Modernization Mitigation Account (OMMA) site. Oversight for management of this OMMA site is provided by Openlands and their consultant, Stantec Consulting Services, Inc. with the permission of the Forest Preserves of Cook County. Protection of Jens Jensen Grasslands and Woods supports elements of the Illinois Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plan; specifically action steps identified in the Farmland and Prairie Campaign to "...establish or restore grasslands..."; the Forest Campaign to "restore and manage high-quality examples of all forest communities"; and the Wetland Campaign to "...restore hydrological function to wetland basins." In addition, at least 25 species of birds, and 1 mammal species, identified in the plan as Species in Greatest Need of Conservation have been reported from Jens Jensen Grassland and Woods. The Forest Preserves of Cook County reserve the right to extend the OMMA agreement with Openlands and to conduct monitoring and management activities that may be necessary for the site to meet performance standards established by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Registration of Jens Jensen Grasslands and Woods as an Illinois Land and Water Reserve reaffirms the significance of the Deer Grove Forest Preserve/Jens Jensen Forest Preserve complex as the site of the first acquisition of land by the Forest Preserves of Cook County. And, in

doing so, honors the foresight of many (including Jens Jensen) who sought establishment of the Cook County Forest Preserve District Act of 1913 that authorized the Forest Preserves to "... preserve, protect, and restore..." land in Cook County. Registration of Jens Jensen Grasslands and Woods fulfills a requirement stipulated by Openlands that lands benefitting from the OMMA will be presented to the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission for inclusion in the Illinois Nature Preserves System. Registration of Jens Jensen Grasslands and Woods also honors the vision of the Forest Preserves of Cook County, as articulated in their "Next Century Conservation Plan" to preserve and manage their holdings. The Commission recognizes President Toni Preckwinkle and General Superintendent Arnold Randall for their leadership with the Forest Preserves of Cook County and their support for Registration of Jens Jensen Grasslands and Woods as an Illinois Land and Water Reserve and Joseph Roth and Linda Masters with Openlands. John McCabe, Chip O'Leary, and Rebecca Collings with the Forest Preserves of Cook County are also acknowledged.

Commissioner Stone recused herself from voting.

Joe Roth, on behalf of the Board and Staff of Openlands, the Forest Preserves and the Deer Grove volunteers, thanked the Commissioners for their consideration of this site. He indicated this site is heavily used by the public and tells the story of restoration to the people who visit the site. They completed a storm water modeling exercise as well as an economic model (Implan) of the money spent and it came back with a very good result of the return to the public in the restoration investment.

It was moved by Commissioner Covington, seconded by Commissioner Daubach, that the following resolution be approved:

The Commission grants approval for the registration of Jens Jensen Grasslands and Woods as an Illinois Land and Water Reserve, as described in the proposal presented under Item 8 of the Agenda for the 225th Meeting.

(Resolution 2373)

Commissioner Covington thanked Toni Preckwinkle and Arnold Randall for the change in emphasis and direction of the Forest Preserves of Cook County under their leadership.

Commissioner Dann agreed and work by local authorities during this time is needed more than ever.

225-9) Kane Co. – Buffer Addition to Dixie Briggs Fromm Prairie Nature Preserve, Dedication

Steve Byers, on behalf of Dundee Township, requested preliminary approval for dedication of a 94.4-acre nature preserve buffer addition to Dixie Briggs Fromm Prairie Nature Preserve (INAI #1625). The 56.5-acre Dixie Briggs Fromm Prairie Nature Preserve received final approval for dedication at the Commission's 179th meeting in May 2003 (Resolution # 1722). Dundee Township has requested that the original name (Dixie Fromm Briggs Prairie Nature Preserve) be changed to Dixie Briggs Fromm Prairie Nature Preserve because the requested name change more accurately reflects the landowner's (Dixie Briggs Fromm Trust) interest in protecting the land. The proposed nature preserve buffer addition includes 18 acres of Grade C mesic upland forest and a 71.4-acre

cultural community (formerly cropland) that is being restored to either prairie (66.4 acres) or forest (5 acres). Restoration of the prairie began in 2004. Dixie Briggs Fromm Prairie Nature Preserve and the proposed addition are located in the Morainal Section of the Northeastern Morainal Natural Division in the northeast corner of Kane County, Illinois. Protection of the proposed addition supports elements of the Illinois Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plan; specifically action steps identified in the Farmland and Prairie Campaign to "...establish or restore grasslands..." and the Forest Campaign to "restore and manage high-quality examples of all forest communities." In addition, at least six species of birds identified in that plan as Species in Greatest Need of Conservation have been reported from the proposed addition. Dedication of the proposed nature preserve buffer addition will increase the size of Dixie Briggs Fromm Prairie Nature Preserve from 56.5 to 150.9 acres and honors a recommendation articulated in the first proposal that stated: "...the balance of the land (owned by Dundee Township) should be included as nature preserve buffer once the crop production is replaced with an active prairie restoration effort." The proposed nature preserve buffer addition will provide water quality benefits, will provide a large block of grasslands for a suite of grassland birds that have size requirements, and further protect Dixie Briggs Fromm Prairie Nature Preserve from incompatible land uses. The Commission acknowledges the long-term interest and support of Dundee Township in the protection and stewardship of Dixie Briggs Fromm Prairie Nature Preserve.

Commissioner Ruffner asked if the area on the north end of this parcel would be a problem burning since it appears close to a residential area.

Steve answered that he felt it is always an issue when you have residential development adjacent to a nature preserve but Dundee Township have a staff that will incorporate smoke management into the controlled burning.

Commissioner Daubach asked if this site would have high public use and if there is sufficient parking at the already dedicated section.

Steve answered there is limited parking and asked Sue Harney if she would comment on the potential future use of the site.

Sue Harney answered that they are very careful to cultivate good relationships with their neighbors who are notified ahead of a time. Some neighbors initiated unofficial burns before Dundee township acquired the property and were happy to have them come in and do it. As part of the management, she indicated they do not aim to be a regional attraction for their open space sites and along with the neighbors, do not have a desire to create a large area for parking. On the west side of the preserve, Algonquin has a park and there is room for parking there.

Sue thanked the Commissioners, staff and her volunteers for all they do and the help they have provided. She especially thanked Steve Byers.

It was moved by Commissioner Stone, seconded by Commissioner Ruffner, that the following resolution be approved:

The Commission grants preliminary approval for the dedication of a buffer addition to Dixie Briggs Fromm Prairie as an Illinois Nature Preserve, as described in the proposal presented under Item 9 of the Agenda for the 225th Meeting.

(Resolution 2374)

225-10) Lake Co. – Donnelley Buffer Addition to Liberty Prairie Nature Preserve, Dedication

Steve Byers, on behalf of Libertyville Township, requested preliminary approval for dedication of the 109-acre Donnelley Buffer addition to Liberty Prairie Nature Preserve (INAI #1252). The 47-acre Liberty Prairie Nature Preserve received final approval for dedication at the Commission's 129th meeting in November 1990 (Resolution # 1062). Since that time Libertyville Township has formally protected two nature preserve buffer additions to Liberty Prairie; the first addition receiving final approval for dedication at the Commission's 180th meeting in October 2003 (Resolution # 1743) and the second addition receiving final approval for dedication at the Commission's 212th meeting in October 2012 (Resolution # 2206). Liberty Prairie Nature Preserve (now totaling 75 acres) and the proposed Donnelley buffer addition to Liberty Prairie Nature Preserve (109 acres) are centrally located within the 5,770-Liberty Prairie Reserve located in south-central Lake County, Illinois. Liberty Prairie Nature Preserve and the proposed Donnelley buffer addition are located in the Morainal Section of the Northeastern Morainal Natural Division. The proposed Donnelley buffer addition consists of a cultural community (croplands) that will be restored to dry-mesic, mesic, and wet prairie. Efforts to begin conversion of the cropland to prairie began in 2014 when Libertyville Township adopted the Casey Road Land Use Plan that called for conversion of cropland into prairie. Since then, Libertyville Township has adopted a restoration plan and timeline for establishment of the prairie, a 5-year management plan, and has developed seeding mixes for the prairie restorations. One of the first elements of the 5-year management plan, removal of tree lines, was initiated by Libertyville Township in 2016. Protection of the proposed addition supports elements of the Illinois Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plan; specifically action steps identified in the Farmland and Prairie Campaign to "...establish or restore grasslands...". The proposed Donnelley buffer addition will provide water quality benefits, will provide a large block of grasslands for a suite of grassland birds that have size requirements, and further buffer Liberty Prairie Nature Preserve from incompatible land uses. The proposed Donnelley Buffer addition, the third such addition to Liberty Prairie Nature Preserve, will increase the size of Liberty Prairie Nature Preserve from 75 to 184 acres. The Commission acknowledges the long-term interest and support of Libertyville Township in the protection and stewardship of Liberty Prairie Nature Preserve.

Steve thanked Kathleen O'Conner and Sarah Surroz for their efforts to adopt the Casey Road Land Use Plan.

Commissioner Ruffner asked if there was confusion to calling this the Donnelley buffer addition to Liberty Prairie Nature Preserve rather than just a buffer addition to Liberty Prairie Nature Preserve.

Steve answered they wanted to recognize the Donnelley family for their previous commitment to the protection of this site and their heirs who continue to be involved in the restoration management and providing the funds to be able to do so.

Commissioner Covington recused himself from voting.

It was moved by Commissioner Daubach, seconded by Commissioner Ruffner, that the following resolution be approved:

The Commission grants preliminary approval for the dedication of the Donnelley buffer addition to Liberty Prairie as an Illinois Nature Preserve, as described in the proposal presented under Item 10 of the Agenda for the 225th Meeting.

(Resolution 2375)

Kathleen O’Conner, on behalf of Libertyville Township, expressed gratitude for all the support over the years from the INPC, Lake County Forest Preserve District, Lake County Stormwater Management and especially Conserve Lake County.

225-11) Logan Co. – Addition to Elkhart Hill Grove Nature Preserve, Dedication

Tom Lerczak, on behalf of Elizabeth Pasquesi and Catherine Carolin, requested preliminary approval for dedication of the 65.2-acre Elkhart Hill Grove Land and Water Reserve, as a nature preserve addition to Elkhart Hill Grove Nature Preserve (65.2 acres), dedicated in 2002. The existing dedicated nature preserve is owned by William McClellan Drake Jr, Victoria Evan-Cook, Valentine Snell, Mason Hammond Drake, and Ascha Kells Drake. All of the proposed preserve addition is grade A mesic upland forest that is included within the 210.2-acre Elkhart Hill Natural Area (INAI #0178). Elkhart Hill Natural Area is located in the Springfield Section of the Grand Prairie Natural Division; it is the only prairie grove in Illinois located on a glacial kame (from the Illinoian glacial period). Sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), blue ash (*Fraxinus quadrangulata*), and bur oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*) are important canopy species. Other common species in smaller diameter classes include slippery elm (*Ulmus rubra*), American elm (*U. americana*) and hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*). Wood nettle (*Laportea canadensis*) is a dominant herbaceous species. Pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*) is a common understory tree that typically occurs in large patches. The forest supports a rich wildflower display which includes species such as dutchman's-breeches (*Dicentra cucullaria*), Virginia bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*), blue-eyed Mary (*Collinsia verna*), false rue anemone (*Isopyrum biternatum*), bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*), broad-leaf waterleaf (*Hydrophyllum canadense*), white trillium (*Trillium flexipes*), toothwort (*Dentaria laciniata*), and spring beauty (*Claytonia virginica*). Hiking and limited horseback riding, a reserved right with provisions to be outlined in the site’s master plan for management, will be allowed with permission from the landowners and restricted to established trails. White-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) hunting will be allowed with permission from the landowners as a population control method following INPC management guidelines (Volume 5, Number 1). Dedication of this site supports the Illinois Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plan in its Land and Water, Forest, and Invasive Species campaigns. The landowners are seeking dedication of their registered reserve for the higher level of protection.

Commissioner Dann asked if the blue ash tree is subject to the emerald ash borer.

Tom Lerczak answered that the emerald ash borer is one of the threats to the natural community at this site and has been detected in Logan County.

Commissioner Ruffner asked if there would be a way to identify it going from a land and water reserve to a nature preserve and if it would become a large 130 acre parcel.

Tom answered that the existing nature preserve has different landowners who are family members but that will not always be the case.

Commissioner Dann asked what the geological origin of the hill is in these flatlands.

Tom answered it is a morainal feature called a kame from the Illinois glaciation which occurred thousands of years before the latest called the Wisconsin glaciation and there was the interglacial period between the two. It is an ancient remnant of the landscape.

Commissioner Dann commented that it is an anomaly being out there by itself with nothing similar.

Commissioner Ruffner commented everything has eroded around it.

Tom commented if you look at a color-coded, geological map of Illinois you do see there are other types of features like this.

Commissioner Covington commented that he recalled there being a lot of historical figures connected to Elkhart Hill.

Tom answered that is correct.

Commissioner Stone asked if the horseback riding provision was just for the landowners.

Tom answered that it is worded as limited horseback riding meaning that it would be the landowners and their designated guests.

Commissioner Ruffner commented that he hoped the landowners would try to reinvigorate the woodland structure before it is completely gone.

Tom answered that the landowners are not completely in favor of doing prescribed fires. The hill was probably not subjected to fires as much as it would have been because of the wetland. They have talked about bringing in oaks, blue ash and other desirable seedlings and fence around them to protect from deer. A new management plan is needed to address all the issues.

It was moved by Commissioner Ruffner, seconded by Commissioner Stone, and carried that the following resolution be approved:

The Commission grants preliminary approval for dedication of Elkhart Hill Grove Land and Water Reserve as an addition to Elkhart Hill Grove Nature Preserve, as described in the proposal presented under Item 11 of the Agenda for the 225th Meeting.

(Resolution 2376)

225-12) Cook Co. – Harms Flatwoods Nature Preserve, Dedication

Steve Byers, on behalf of the Forest Preserves of Cook County, requested final approval for dedication of 101.9 acres to the 250-acre Harms Woods Forest Preserve as the Harms Flatwoods Nature Preserve. Harms Flatwoods includes 96.8 acres recommended for dedication as nature preserve and 5.1 acres as nature preserve buffer. The proposed nature preserve lies within the boundary of the Harms Woods Forest Preserve INAI site (INAI # 1573) and supports populations of two state-listed plant species; the brome hummock sedge (*Carex bromoides*) and dwarf raspberry (*Rubus pubescens*). Harms Flatwoods is located in the Chicago Lake Plain Section of the Northeastern Morainal Natural Division in the northeast part of Cook County. Harms Flatwoods was presented at the 224th meeting of the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission in September 2016 as consisting primarily of Grade B and Grade C northern flatwoods totaling 93.3 acres, 4.277 acres of Grade B mesic upland forest, and approximately 10 acres undergoing restoration; at this meeting, the Commission granted preliminary approval for dedication (Resolution # 2365). In December 2016, the nomination packet for Harms Flatwoods submitted to the IDNR – Natural Areas Evaluation Committee was revised to show the presence of 93.3 acres of sand flatwoods (as opposed to 93.3 acres of northern flatwoods). Of that total, 26.135 acres of sand flatwoods were considered Grade B. Sand flatwoods are restricted to sandy plains, or lakebeds, in the Chicago Lake Plain Section of the Northeastern Morainal Natural Division. Northern flatwoods, in contrast, are restricted to the Morainal Section of the Northeastern Morainal Natural Division. Only 21 acres of Grade B sand flatwoods were recognized in the initial INAI. Management, primarily control of invasive species, has been ongoing since the late 1970's. Reserved rights include the continuation of an adaptive management strategy, monitoring and restoration of surface hydrology, and continued maintenance of the existing trail system. The proposal specifically provides the FPCC with the right to route and construct a multi-use trail along the northern boundary of the site. Dedication of Harms Flatwoods as an Illinois Nature Preserve supports recommendations of the "*Biodiversity Recovery Plan for the Chicago Wilderness Region*" and elements of the Illinois Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plan; specifically action steps to restore and manage high-quality examples of all forest communities. Dedication of Harms Flatwoods as an Illinois Nature Preserve is consistent with the recommendations of the Forest Preserves of Cook County's "*Next Century Conservation Plan*" and the "*Natural and Cultural Resource Plan for the Forest Preserves of Cook County.*" The Illinois Nature Preserves Commission staff and staff of the Forest Preserves of Cook County recommend dedication of Harms Flatwoods as an Illinois Nature Preserve.

Commissioner Dann commented that the stewards of this site, John and Jane Balaban, should be recognized.

Steve commented that they are preparing for a North Branch Annual meeting and were hoping to recognize this site has been added to the nature preserves system and that he would relay that to them.

It was moved by Commissioner Ruffner, seconded by Commissioner Covington, that the following resolution be approved:

The Commission grants final approval for the dedication of the Harms Flatwoods as an Illinois Nature Preserve, as described in the proposal presented under Item 12 of the Agenda for the 225th Meeting.

(Resolution 2377)

225-13) Randolph Co. – Rockcastle Creek Nature Preserve, Dedication

Debbie Newman, on behalf of Priscilla Bollinger and Tony Hernandez, requested final approval for Rockcastle Creek as an Illinois Nature Preserve (NP). It is a 79.1-acre site that is part of the Rockcastle Creek Illinois Natural Areas Inventory site (INAI #828). The proposed preserve includes approximately 37 acres of the 71-acre INAI site. The proposed Rockcastle Creek NP contains several qualifying features, including 2.9 acres of Grade B dry-mesic barrens, 1 acre of Grade A mesic sandstone cliff, ¼ acre of Grade B dry sandstone cliff, two state-endangered plant species, and one state-threatened bird species. In addition to the qualifying features, the site contains 2 acres of Grade C dry-mesic barrens, 40 acres of Grade C dry-mesic upland forest, 8 acres of Grade C mesic woodland, and ¼ acre Grade C glacial drift hill prairie. The site also contains 25 acres of cultural community, including 18 acres of planted prairie with all local ecotype seed, and 7 acres of old field. The proposed preserve has populations of 14 documented Species in Greatest Need of Conservation (SGNC) listed in the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan (IWAP). Besides protecting the natural communities and habitat for listed species, the proposed nature preserve supports several campaigns identified in the IWAP, including the Forests Campaign, the Invasive Species Campaign, and the Land & Water Stewardship Campaign. The site is located in the Illinois Ozarks Resource Rich Area in the Central Section of the Ozark Natural Division. The owners have a long-standing commitment to conservation. During the 14 years they've owned the property they've conducted over 40 prescribed burns, done an immense amount of exotics control, and worked on restoration of the oak forest, barrens, and glacial drift hill prairie. They hand collected local seed for the prairie plantings. And they kept excellent records of species and restoration work. Their contribution to the restoration and protection of this natural area is significant and greatly appreciated by INPC staff. The Commission granted preliminary approval for dedication of this site at its 224th meeting (Resolution # 2364).

It was moved by Commissioner Ruffner, seconded by Commissioner Daubach, that the following resolution be approved:

The Commission grants final approval for the dedication of Rockcastle Creek as an Illinois Nature Preserve, as described in the proposal presented under Item 13 of the Agenda for the 225th Meeting.

(Resolution 2378)

225-14) Winnebago Co. – Buffer Addition to Searls Park Prairie Nature Preserve, Dedication

John Nelson, on behalf of the Rockford Park District (RPD), requested final approval for dedication of approximately 62.8 acres of land as a buffer addition to Searls Park Prairie Nature Preserve. This dedication will help protect and expand a significant area of the Searls Park Prairie Illinois Natural Areas Inventory (INAI #0920) site. Searls Park Prairie Nature Preserve, located in the Freeport Section of the Rock River Hill Country Natural Division, is currently 66.0 acres in size and is owned and maintained by the RPD. The Commission granted preliminary approval for dedication at its 223rd meeting, held on September 13, 2016 (Resolution # 2358). The existing nature preserve and proposed buffer addition are part of a larger area of open space land (161.0 acres) owned and managed by the RPD. These public lands are known locally as Searls Memorial Park and Northwest Community Park. Natural communities survive within these park lands and consist of floodplain forest, wet-mesic prairie, wet prairie, sedge meadow, marsh, pond, and oak savanna. The existing nature preserve protects high-quality wet-mesic prairie and wet prairie natural communities that were identified on the original Illinois Natural Areas Inventory in 1977. A population of a rare calciphitic plant, restricted to wet prairie and fen wetlands, also survives within the nature preserve. The natural communities found on the proposed buffer addition consist of riparian forest, degraded wet-mesic prairie and sedge meadow, and old fields. The proposed buffer suffers from invasive species, but the area has been undergoing large-scale restoration and management by RPD staff since 2011. The RPD has developed and implemented an impressive restoration effort, including the completion of a State Wildlife Grant (SWG) that removed 25 acres of invasive brush and trees to re-establish a 90-acre native prairie landscape. The SWG agreement requires the legal protection of the proposed buffer addition within 3 years of project completion (December 31, 2014).

John recognized David Holman for his assistance with legal descriptions and for finding and correcting an error found in the legal description for this buffer addition.

Commissioner Dann asked if this correction was considered.

John answered it was and prompted the RPD to have a legal surveyor look into it and now have a new legal survey and plat.

It was moved by Commissioner Daubach, seconded by Commissioner Ruffner, that the following resolution be approved:

The Commission grants final approval for the dedication of the buffer addition to Searls Park Prairie as an Illinois Nature Preserve, as described in the proposal presented under Item 14 of the Agenda for the 225th Meeting.

(Resolution 2379)

225-15) Cook Co. – Jurgensen Woods North Nature Preserve - Woodland Tree Thinning

Steve Byers, on behalf of the Forest Preserves of Cook County (FPCC), requested approval for a woodland thinning as part of restoration efforts. FPCC completed a natural and cultural resources master plan in partnership with the Illinois Natural History Survey and Prairie Research Institute for

FPCC lands. The plan sets an ambitious goal to restore FPCC natural areas to ecological health. Through that process fifteen landscape units were identified as priorities for restoration. The FPCC received approval from INPC for large-scale restoration work at the four top-ranked units at the 222nd Meeting of the INPC in January 2016 (Resolution #2350). The FPCC is now ready to begin similar restoration work at Jurgensen Woods North Nature Preserve (INAI #0501) as part of their five-year management plan for the site. As with the four previous preserves, this site has also suffered from the effects of fire suppression and invasive plants. Most of the planned restoration work consists of standard restoration practices, such as invasive plant control, that can be approved in management plans under INPC's Rules for Management of Nature Preserves (17 Ill. Adm. Code, Part 4000). However, despite invasive species control and having re-instituted a fire management program, some of the ecological problems have grown beyond the ability for fire and small invasive species control programs to rectify. In particular, some trees have established in heavy abundance and are shading out the understory plant communities. The result is an expansion of bare ground and the relegation of once pervasive plant communities to small light gaps. This restoration includes thinning of over abundant native trees in two woodland units that have a heavy canopy of mature oaks and opportunistic trees. FPCC plans to thin canopy trees in these woodland units to <200/acre to achieve appropriate tree densities that should increase light levels and stimulate plant growth in the sub-canopy vegetation layers. FPCC has made a commitment to monitor the plant community response, treat re-sprouts and new invasive species and to continue maintenance as needed as part of its habitat enhancement program. The FPCC requests Commission approval to proceed with these plant community restoration efforts.

Commissioner Dann asked what the FPCC's experience has been since the initial thinning.

Steve answered that they are beginning to see resurgence in the understory and evidence the oaks are starting to survive.

Kelly Neal presented the staff opinion.

Commissioner Ruffner asked if there would be stump treatment to the cut trees so they would not re-sprout.

Kelly answered that those types of standard management practices are used.

Commissioner Dann asked if with new growth, there would be deer protection for the oak seedlings and small plants.

Kelly answered since the implementation plan submitted last year had a lot of detail that she would refer to that to see if they have a deer protection plan. If not, she can request that they monitor deer and protection for regeneration.

It was moved by Commissioner Covington, seconded by Commissioner Daubach, that the following resolution be approved:

The Commission grants approval for the tree thinning at Jurgensen Woods North Nature Preserve, as described in the proposal presented under Item 15 of the Agenda for the 225th Meeting.

(Resolution 2380)

225-16) Review of Closed meeting minutes

Tom Lerczak reported he spoke to Connie Waggoner of IDNR's Office of Realty and Environmental Planning and requested that the closed meeting minutes remain closed. In accordance with the Open Meetings Act, Commissioners are to review the closed minutes at least twice a year to determine if they must still remain closed. The following meetings had closed minutes and need to be reviewed: August 2, 2005; May 2, 2006; May 6, 2008; May 5, 2009; May 7, 2013; and September 10, 2013.

It was moved by Commissioner Covington, seconded by Commissioner Stone, the following resolution be approved:

The Commission agreed that the closed meeting minutes from August 2, 2005; May 2, 2006; May 6, 2008; May 5, 2009; May 7, 2013; and September 10, 2013, remain closed, as described in the proposal presented under Item 16 of the Agenda for the 225th Meeting.

(Resolution 2381)

225-17) Public Comment Period (3 minutes per person)

No Public Comments.

225-18) Other Business

No other business.

225-19) Adjournment

Commissioner Ruffner motioned to adjourn. It was seconded by Commissioner Covington and approved. The INPC adjourned at 12:14 PM.