

Conservation Congress Regional Meeting Notes

Heartland Community College, Normal

February 27, 2013

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Resource Harvest

- Improve amount and quality of available habitat for Illinois' native wildlife; this will improve populations of harvestable animals
 - o Create habitat on private lands
 - o Promote stewardship to private landowners
 - o Modify Conservation Reserve Program rules to promote native and high-quality vegetation in practices
 - o Spread word about well-managed properties to: County Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Extension, Future Farmers of America
- Need science-based management to IDNR properties; the Department needs to set the model for private citizens to follow
- Need to address invasives and other threats to native species
- Bloomington paper recently promoted public access on private land for hunting and fishing; need to encourage promotion of similar programs
- IDNR made a good move when they introduced otter trapping
- Collect berries from invasive species (e.g., Autumn Berry); see www.autumnberrynspired.com for more information

Recreational Access

- Work with municipalities to increase trails and access
- Move away from intensive use of public land (e.g., Ag Lease) and promote small organic or community based farms
- Look at Ag Lease program and demonstrate on IDNR lands what we promote to the public (e.g., cattle impacts on state lands)
- Motors have no place on DNR lands or natural areas; foot-based activities are welcome
- More trail availability for mountain bikers; create new trails rather than add new user groups to existing trails; reclaimed lands are a potential source for new trails

Resource Protection

- Nature Preserves are Illinois' best kept secret
- Natural areas are secrets; need to find balance between promotion and increased usage

- Master Naturalist program – Community colleges thinking of adding naturalist courses to curriculum; DNR needs to provide motivation and resources to finish education materials (e.g., dragonflies of IL)
- IL Master Naturalist program is an example for the nation
- Geocaching could facilitate people’s exploration of natural areas and IDNR managed resources
- Create trip route of natural areas
- Ask staff to create a talk/web material of their top ten favorite places
- DNR is sending mixed messages (e.g., allowing sand quarries near Starved Rock State Park)
- DNR could create five 5 minute snip-its of natural areas and parks and cycle on website – What will you see when you visit?
- Feature the Natural Division slide show that Michael Jeffords created on the IDNR website
- Investigate a trail pass system (look at ipass as an example)
- IDNR needs to advocate for our parks
- Consultation process should be reviewed and improved
- Get sites on IDNR properties dedicated as Nature Preserves

Resource Extraction

- IDNR should partner with the Illinois State Geological Survey to identify unmined aggregate resources so that they may be protected from future extraction rather than being built over by housing or industry
- Get Timber Stand Improvement (TSI) Program refunded
- Need more staff to do timber stand management plans
- Need to enhance oak/hickory forest through management
- Need dedicated private land biologists to help landowners with management options
- Coal mining needs to include permitting fees for all phases of mining permits
- Improve IDNR website for mine permits (Office Mines and Minerals)
 - o May require rule changes for public notice
 - o Need dedicated staff to keep the website current
 - o Set up alert option (e.g., Illinois Pollution Control Board)
 - o Archival storage for permits
- Office of Mines and Minerals Division of Reclamation should include on their website shining examples for reclamation (i.e., award winners)
- Pursue protection of the Mahomet aquifer because of its importance to the drinking water supply
- Address the disconnect between mine permitting and other agencies (e.g., public water supply)
- Concern that IDNR mine permits are renewed to repeat NPDES (national point source discharge elimination system) permit violators; there was discussion on this topic. These permits can be violated because of actual water quality standard violations or because the data were reported late from the permittee.

Building Bridges

- Focus more on restoration post-mining; IDNR could develop resource guide on post-mining practices and programs
- IDNR should provide education for resource users (e.g., provide information to motor boat users on the impact of wakes on sediment; contract motor boat usage on Rice Lake vs. Emiquon)
- DNR has lots of information already developed for youth in schools. The Department should look at current educational materials and identify deficiencies in the available content. There may be willing partners (e.g., mining industry) that is able and willing to fill in gaps.
- Need to create incentives to get teachers to use the available materials.
- Need to change mindset of teachers
- Look at science standards and curriculum in elementary and high schools
- Link educational materials to core educational standards
- In general, there was consensus among the group members to focus educational materials on youth.
- Promote bee keeping (could sell honey) and create pollination education tools
- Work with Girl and Boy Scouts
- Promote small organic farm movement
- Work with university clubs for demonstrations
- IDNR could improve our use of volunteers and retirees
- Adopt a _____ (e.g., strip mine); need to connect people with local places
- Connect with travel agencies to create a "Visit Illinois" promotional campaign
- Create a passport program for state parks similar to national park program; those that fill the passport would receive a token (e.g., patch, pin)
- In addition to visiting parks, we could offer some incentive for spending night at a certain number of parks.
- Park staff should be available to give talks to public schools and other interested groups
- Get school groups to IDNR parks
- Create "eye candy" promotional literature for parks
- Investigate opportunities to have DNR presence at farmer's markets and fairs
- Collaborate to expand natural areas
- IDNR could partner with mining industry to develop a resource booklet for the mining industry that outlines programs offered by non-governmental and governmental organizations to aid in ongoing reclamation efforts and other mining related sustainability practices. This process could begin by gathering information from each organization that participates in the IAAP's Sustainability reception.
- IDNR staff should act as neutral party to bring together mining groups with conservation groups. There was some discussion among the group members on this point. All members expressed an interest in having DNR be a neutral party that provided scientific facts, but did not lean toward extreme resource protection, or extreme resource extraction/use. Participants noted that IDNR needs to do this internally and externally.
- IDNR should offer an "Ask the Experts" opportunity for individuals on our public website; people could submit questions about mining or other resource topics and have them answered by IDNR experts; including an opportunity to chat with IDNR would be a fantastic addition to the website

- Promote the wise use of mined land (e.g., stormwater retention)
- Get dedicated tax to support programs. This requires us to get a good spokesperson (e.g., Manning, Poshard)
- New tax needs to be spread widely
- Create an 0.8% sales tax similar to Missouri to fund resource protection

Closing

- Why does IL not have a bottle return like other states? If this were started now, it would require an advertisement campaign to spread purpose of the program. Also, who deals with the bottles that are returned to a store?
- Members of our group reiterated that they care about IDNR and want a strong agency to be restored.
- IDNR needs to identify priorities and hire staff to do those specific jobs well.
- IDNR needs more than just more money; the Department needs a change of thinking. This includes doing current jobs more efficiently, and reevaluating what jobs are needed.
- IDNR should read the “lean start up” book, which is a staple in the business world.