
Opening Address

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Good Morning and Welcome! At this time I would like to convene the Opening Session of the 2005 Governor's Conference on the Management of the Illinois River System. I am Bob Frazee, Natural Resources Educator with University of Illinois Extension and am serving as Co-Chair for this conference.

Five weeks ago, Hurricane Katrina struck the coastal shores of Louisiana and Mississippi and caused major devastation of life and property. Although this natural disaster occurred 850 miles away from Peoria, it has resulted in several major changes to our program.

U.S. Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton was intending to be our Wednesday Noon Luncheon Featured Speaker. She is now directly involved with coastal clean-up and restoration efforts. Chad Pregracke, Manager of Living Lands & Waters was to have been our Thursday Noon Featured Speaker. Chad has extensive "hands-on" experience in cleaning up hundreds of miles of shoreline on the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers. Due to Katrina, Chad has cancelled all of his speaking engagements through October and has taken his crew and equipment to the Gulf to assist with clean-up efforts.

Colonel Gapinski was to have provided the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Focus & Vision for the Illinois River as part of the Federal Panel of Agency Directors. Instead, Colonel Gapinski has been deployed to Louisiana to lead hurricane recovery efforts. Dr. Mark Davis, with the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana was to have been a speaker at Tuesday's Illinois River Coordinating Council meeting, but had to decline due to the impact of Hurricane Katrina on the coastal areas being restored.

Although these speakers will not be able to participate in our conference, we recognize that their leadership and expertise will be invaluable to the clean-up and restoration efforts resulting from Hurricane Katrina.

The "Good News" for all of you, is that immediately upon learning of the devastation from Hurricane Katrina, members of our Conference Planning Committee went into action and developed a "what if" scenario and quickly identified "back-up" speakers. The end result will be a top-notch conference agenda which I am sure you will enjoy.

This morning as I mingled with people in the hallways, it was exciting to be a part of the interest and enthusiasm that is being generated by holding this tenth biennial conference on the Illinois River System. The theme for this year's conference is "The Illinois River: Progress & Promise". During the next two days, our conference speakers will be showcasing not only the significant progress that has occurred during the past twenty years, but will be looking through the crystal ball to explore what promises lie ahead for the Illinois River System.

I am very pleased to report, that as of a few minutes ago, we now have over 250 individuals registered. What a journey each of you have made to arrive here at this 2003 Governor's Conference on the Management of the Illinois River System. This is your conference and we want to do all we can to make this an enjoyable experience.

This conference provides a true indication of the growing interest that is concerned about protecting our Illinois River System for the future! In looking over the registration list, we have a very diverse group of participants in terms of their backgrounds and the groups and agencies they represent. This is tremendous!

With this diversity in mind, I would like to encourage each of you, throughout this conference, to actively seek out individuals with different opinions and viewpoints on river management. Share your thoughts and concerns with each other, open your minds to new perspectives, and explore the opportunity for compromise. A tremendous opportunity for networking will occur this evening during our barbecue on the Peoria Riverfront.

Our Planning Committee envisions this conference to be more than just a gathering to hear speakers, eat some good food, and visit in the hallways (although these are always important components of any good conference). Instead, we hope this conference will educate, enthuse, and empower you, so that on Thursday, you will leave being motivated to aggressively work to protect and enhance our state's most important inland water resource – the Illinois River.

The Governor of Illinois, Mr. Rod Blagojevich, recognizes the tremendous importance of the Illinois River System to our state and further realizes that it also provides Illinois with a key environmental challenge. Consequently, the 2005 Conference on the Management of the Illinois River System has been designated a Governor's Conference. A special Governor's proclamation has been issued to emphasize our state's commitment to conscientiously manage this important natural resource for the benefit of future generations. This Proclamation reads as follows:

WHEREAS, the Illinois River System is a critical component of our state's geography, history, economy, and ecology; and

WHEREAS, many attributes are threatened as a result of the cumulative effects of human activities that have significantly altered the Illinois River system; and

WHEREAS, our state is embracing an integrated approach to large river management and is working in a coordinated and continuous manner for this river; and

WHEREAS, the implementation of the Illinois River Coordinating Council, the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, the Illinois Conservation 2000 Program, Illinois Rivers 2020, and the Open Lands Trust Fund are important milestones in efforts to protect the resources of the Illinois River; and

WHEREAS, the theme of the conference is "The Illinois River: Progress & Promise;" and

WHEREAS, the conference will be taking place October 4 - 6 at the Holiday Inn City Centre in Peoria, Illinois;

Therefore, I, Rod R. Blagojevich, Governor of the State of Illinois, do hereby proclaim October 2005 as ILLINOIS RIVER SYSTEM MANAGEMENT MONTH in Illinois, and encourage all citizens to recognize the economic, recreational, social, and environmental benefits of conserving to properly utilize the resources of the Illinois River Basin.

Signed, Governor Rod Blagojevich

This Proclamation will be on display in the foyer throughout the conference and will also be printed in the Conference Proceedings. Unfortunately, Governor Rod Blagojevich is unable to attend this Illinois River conference, as he is conducting other official state business.

At this time, it is my pleasure to recognize my co-chair for this conference, Kim St. John. Kim is the Executive Director for the Prairie Rivers Resource and Conservation and Development Office, located in Henry, Illinois. Kim will be chairing the conference sessions tomorrow. Kim, thank you for the excellent leadership you have provided to this conference.

As you look around our Conference Room and the Exhibit Hall you will notice a number of breath-takingly beautiful photo/art prints that have been taken of the Illinois River and its watershed. These are just part of the Illinois River Collection of Dr. Dan Overturf, Professor of Art at Southern Illinois University. This evening as part of the Barbecue at the Peoria Riverfront, you will have the opportunity to view Dan's Illinois River photo/art collection which will encompass the Ballroom area of the Gateway Building. We greatly appreciate Dan sharing his Illinois River Photo/Art Exhibit with us at this conference.

Two years ago, following the 2003 Illinois River Conference, a statewide planning committee was formed to begin making plans for the conference convening here today. These committee members are listed on pages 55 & 56 of your Abstract and Speaker Information Booklet. They have done an outstanding job of developing the program and making the necessary arrangements. Would the planning committee members please stand and be recognized.

This year, we are especially indebted to a number of agencies and organizations for providing significant financial contributions to enhance the quality of this conference. Platinum, Gold, Silver and Bronze Financially Supporting Sponsors are listed on page 54 of the Speaker & Abstract Booklet. These contributions have enabled our Conference Planning Committee to provide a complimentary meal for our speakers and moderators - a gesture that I'm sure is greatly appreciated.

I am also pleased to announce that we have over 60 co-sponsoring agencies and organizations that have assisted in promoting this conference and are committed to protecting and preserving the Illinois River System. They are also listed on page 54 of the Abstracts and Speaker Information Booklet. We welcome each of you and thank you for helping to make this conference a success!

At this time, I would like to recognize the efforts of several individuals who have made significant contributions to the organization of this conference.

The Heartland Water Resources Council of Central Illinois has been serving as the local administrative entity for handling the many arrangements necessary to make this a successful conference. Tom Tincher is their Executive Director and Pashion Gaworski is the Administrative Assistant. Please join me in thanking Tom and Pashion for their efforts in organizing this conference.

I am pleased to recognize Kim St. John, Executive Director for the Prairie Rivers Resource Conservation and Development Area, Nancy Erickson, Illinois Farm Bureau, and Tom Austin, Executive Director of the Peoria Farm Service Agency, who were responsible for organizing yesterday's very successful Conference Conservation Tour. Tour participants explored many features of the Illinois River Valley - from recreation resources to historic cultural resources and from backwater wetland restoration to the multiple aspects of a working waterway. Thank you Kim, Nancy and Tom, for an outstanding Conservation Tour!

Yesterday, our conference was very pleased to host the Quarterly Meeting of the Illinois River Coordinating Council. Lieutenant Governor Pat Quinn and the members of the Coordinating Council shared their vision of what the Illinois River could be in the future. It is my pleasure to introduce Marc Miller, Senior Policy Advisor for Lt. Governor Pat Quinn and Staff Coordinator for the Illinois River Coordinating Council. Marc was responsible for organizing and conducting yesterday's evening meeting of the Illinois River Coordinating Council and the Open Public Forum & Discussion.

Jennifer Fackler, Program Specialist with the Environmental Council at the University of Illinois, compiled our Conference Abstracts and Speaker Information Booklet and is also serving as our Proceedings Editor. Jennifer is unable to attend this conference, so speakers, before you leave, please provide the Conference Registration Desk with a CD of the paper that you will be presenting.

Another individual I would like to recognize is Linda Dexter, who chaired our Exhibits Committee. This year, through Linda's leadership, we have 30 educational exhibits. Thank you, Linda for your help in organizing the exhibits.

The next three individuals are truly unsung heroes in my mind. They include Jay Solomon, Susan Meeker, and Somjad Puangngern with University of Illinois Extension. Jay, Susan and Somjad are the technology wizards who have worked behind the scenes to ensure that the speaker's presentations work properly and the conference is kept on schedule. Thanks Jay, Susan and Somjad for a great job!

Throughout our two-day conference, please refer to the Abstracts and Speaker Information Booklet for the agenda and for more complete information regarding the speaker's topic and personal background. On behalf of the State Planning Committee, I hope that you will find this conference to be exciting, informative, stimulating, and enjoyable.

At this time, it is my pleasure to introduce to you Mr. Russ Crawford, President of the Heartland Water Resources Council of Central Illinois. Russ will officially welcome you to the friendly City of Peoria, situated midway on the Illinois River between Chicago and Grafton.

The Opening Session of our tenth biennial Illinois River Conference examines the Illinois River System by providing a State Focus and Vision. The Moderator for this session is State Representative Frank Mautino from Spring Valley. Frank is State Representative for the 76th District and is very active in legislative matters involved with the Illinois River Watershed. Frank will introduce the speakers for our Opening Session.

Thank you State Panel members for your insight and direction for the Illinois River for the future. We are now adjourned for a mid-morning break located in Salon C. We will reconvene promptly at 10:35 am for the Federal Focus & Vision Panel.

In just a moment, I will be introducing the Moderator for our next session. But before I do this, I need to introduce another VIP – that is, my boss, Dr. Ryan Hobson. Ryan is Regional Director for University of Illinois Extension. I would to thank Ryan for providing me with the opportunity to serve as the Conference Co-chair for the past 9 conferences and for being very supportive of my Extension programming in the Illinois River Basin.

Our Conference Planning Committee felt it was important to also hear from our federal partners. For the second half of our morning session we will learn about the Federal Focus and Vision for the Illinois River. It is now my pleasure to introduce our Moderator for this next session, Dr. Richard Warner. Dick is the Assistant Dean for the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences with University of Illinois. Thank you, Dick, for serving as our Session Moderator.
