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Governor's Conference on Management of the Illinois River System
Holiday Inn City Centre, Peoria
Wed., Oct. 3, 2007–9 a.m.
(Panel with Directors Hartke, Scott, and Lavin and Secy. Sees)

- § **Just as the history of the State of Illinois and the Department of Natural Resources are strongly tied the Illinois River, so too is our future.**
- § **The Illinois River drains almost half of the State;**
- § **More than 90 percent of our population lives in its watershed;**
- § **It is a major environmental, economic, and transportation resource.**
- § **From our perspective at the IDNR, much of what we do throughout the state is reflected in our priorities for the Illinois River system.**
- § **Our work throughout the state focuses on restoration, enhancement and protection of our natural resources.**
- § **Our focus in the Illinois River basin includes restoration, enhancement, and protection of this key resource.**
- § **We understand the importance of increasing the Illinois basin's economic vitality – a theme that will be highlighted throughout this conference.**
- § **The IDNR vision for the future is one of strong cooperative partnerships.**
- § **Those partnerships are intended to implement strategic projects and programs that will enhance the Illinois River for recreation, transportation, as a water supply, and as a wildlife-habitat resource.**
- § **That vision and the IDNR commitment to it will be echoed throughout this conference's sessions and in the presentations by the many IDNR staff that are passionate about their work on the Illinois River and its watershed.**
- § **Human beings have been interacting with the Illinois River for more than 8,500 years.**
- § **Every major change and development throughout Illinois history has links to the river and its watershed.**
- § **As the human population in the watershed grew, the lack of knowledge and understanding of environmental issues brought the river to the brink of destruction.**
- § **The good news is that through efforts beginning as far back as early 1900s, there have been dramatic changes and much has improved.**

- \$ **Our Illinois State Museum has been at work since its founding in the 1870s in identifying, analyzing, and recording, the archeological resources, biological resources and the geologic past of the Illinois basin.**
- \$ **The Museum has created amazing exhibits on the history of the Illinois River basin both at the Museum and online where students and interested citizens have access to them.**
- \$ **You will have the opportunity later today to hear speakers present some of this fascinating history.**
- \$ **The present-day IDNR had its beginnings back in the 1800s.**
- \$ **Illinois' population was growing and the Illinois River was critical for transportation and the livelihoods of those early Illinoisans.**
- \$ **The Office of Water Resources was established in 1823 and focused on the Illinois Waterway.**
- \$ **The 1830s brought about the construction of the Illinois and Michigan Canal and later – locks and dams on the Illinois River.**
- \$ **Today, our Office of Water Resources regulates waterway construction issues, water conservation, the National Flood Insurance Program, and is deeply involved in initiatives such as safety at dams and water planning.**
- \$ **Our Illinois Natural History Survey provides another link to our past in the Illinois River basin.**
- \$ **Beginning in 1876, the Natural History Survey became the biological memory bank for the Illinois River watershed.**
- \$ **The Natural History Survey today maintains research programs that keep it at the forefront of efforts to understand the biological processes and components that reflect the threats and recovery of the Illinois River.**
- \$ **The other State Scientific Surveys have also played roles in expanding understanding of the Illinois River through assessments, mapping, monitoring, and innovative restoration strategies.**
- \$ **Today, the State Water Survey houses the Illinois River Decision Support System – the repository for the data that has been collected and analyzed by all researchers on the Illinois River watershed.**
- \$ **The Illinois River has long been renowned for its game and fisheries and the commercial harvest of both were legendary.**
- \$ **Lack of early regulation and rapid environmental damage were devastating to fish and**

game populations.

§ They resulted in the hiring of the first Illinois Game Wardens in 1885.

§ And our predecessor agency – the Department of Conservation – was created in 1925.

§ The Department administered fish and game codes and was charged with preventing stream and water pollution and promoting forestry.

§ Just as Offices and Divisions of what is now the IDNR were shaped by what was happening on the Illinois River, so too have the many programs that we administer.

§ To see that evolution, just look back at the proceedings from these Illinois River Conferences over the past 20 years.

§ The focus and vision of the IDNR has been shaped by the threats and opportunities of the Illinois River watershed.

§ The major threats identified to the Illinois River and its tributaries in 1987 were erosion and sedimentation, along with declining water quality and fish and wildlife habitat.

§ These threats impacted the watershed and the state's economy.

§ In 1997, IDNR played a major role, along with others, in helping to develop the Integrated Management Plan for the Illinois River.

§ The state authorized the Conservation 2000 program, from which the watershed-based Ecosystem Partnership Program and the Critical Trends Assessment Program were developed.

§ The integrated management plan called for implementation of regional strategies to restore the Illinois River basin.

§ The C2000 program provided a way to create state, federal and local partnerships to protect, restore and expand critical habitats.

§ A particular focus was key high-quality tributaries throughout the watershed and the headwaters in northeastern Illinois.

§ IDNR played a leading role in the development of the Illinois Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program.

§ The CREP program today is a product of the cooperative work of the state and federal agencies, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the Extension Service, Farm Bureau, TNC and many other organizations represented here today.

§ CREP is without a doubt the most successful conservation program the state has ever implemented because of the strong state, federal and local partnerships working with private landowners.

- § **CREP has restored or is in the process of restoring more than 125,000 acres into native grasses, forested practices and wetlands.**
- § **This habitat is helping more than 225 state or federal listed species.**
- § **Assessments by the Illinois State Water Survey show that conservation practices in the areas with the majority of CREP lands have shown a steady decrease in sediment and nutrient loading.**
- § **IDNR has played a leading role in the development of the Illinois River Basin Restoration Comprehensive Plan with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.**
- § **This plan will be used to design critical restoration projects.**
- § **It will help restore backwater lakes, fish passage, recreation opportunities, water quality and critical habitats in the Illinois River Basin.**
- § **The IDNR will be the primary non-federal partner for critical restoration projects identified in the plan.**
- § **However, the planning and implementation of the Comprehensive Plan is dependent upon many other state, federal, other organizations and local partners.**
- § **Since the last conference, IDNR has developed a number of new initiatives with partners to further improve the Illinois River watershed.**
- § **These efforts include partnerships with USDA and others to implement the Spoon River Initiative to stabilize stream bank erosion;**
- § **We are partnering with IEPA and others to address water quality and habitat issues in the LaMoine watershed and Bureau Creek;**
- § **We have worked on a cooperative fish management agreement with The Nature Conservancy at the Emiquon area to provide new recreational opportunities.**
- § **There are new threats to the Illinois River watershed that will affect our programs and focus.**
- § **These include invasive species such as the Asian Carp, emerald ash borer, and plant species that are overtaking rare natural communities and natural areas.**
- § **To help address these issues, IDNR staff are working with others to study, assess, and develop solutions to the Asian carp threat.**

- \$ **You will hear speakers today discuss commercial options for management of Asian carp.**
- \$ **The Scientific Surveys are conducting research, monitoring and assessment activities to address climate change issues.**
- \$ **IDNR is a partner in the new Illinois Conservation Climate Initiative to help sequester carbon.**
- \$ **IDNR is working on the state's new three-year, \$5 million dollar effort to develop pilot comprehensive water quantity planning processes in northeast and east-central Illinois.**
- \$ **The Office of Water Resources and the State Water Survey are helping the regional committees develop a public participation process for water planning and developing management options for meeting long-term water supply needs, including conservation strategies.**
- \$ **The IDNR coordinated development of the new Illinois Fish and Wildlife Action Plan to address declining plant and animal populations.**
- \$ **624 animal species that have been identified as declining or at risk because of habitat loss or degradation.**
- \$ **The implementation of that plan is underway through Illinois Fish and Wildlife Action Team, comprised of nine workgroups representing dozens of agencies and non-governmental organizations.**
- \$ **They are helping identify strategic opportunities to increase, enhance and protect habitat.**
- \$ **An update of the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory has been initiated this year.**
- \$ **This is a three-year project that will use new technologies and techniques to update information gathered in the mid-1970s.**
- \$ **The INAI is used by IDNR and other state and local agencies to protect natural lands by guiding decisions on land acquisition and management priorities.**
- \$ **A new program – the Landowner Incentive Program – is a partnership of the IDNR, Fish and Wildlife Service, 24 soil and water conservation districts and other groups focusing on rare natural communities on private lands to help implement the Illinois Fish and Wildlife Action Plan.**
- \$ **The program currently is in two focus areas: the Lower Sangamon River and Alton Bluffs.**
- \$ **It is working to restore and enhance hill prairies, tall grass prairies, oak/hickory timber, natural wetlands, sand forest, sand prairie, and high quality stream segments.**
- \$ **Since its beginning in 2005, it has developed projects that are restoring and enhancing 583 acres of some of Illinois' rarest and most unique habitats.**

- \$ We hope to continue this program and see it evolve statewide.**
- \$ The C2000 program has been reauthorized and has evolved into “Partners for Conservation.”**
- \$ It will continue the work with local partnerships and help with leveraging federal dollars to expand private land work in targeted areas.**
- \$ It too will play a large role in implementing the Fish and Wildlife Action Plan.**
- \$ Efforts to expand other recreational activities at state areas along the Illinois River are also underway through initiatives with the Corps of Engineers.**
- \$ That work includes the efforts with our Waste Management Research Center to develop innovative technologies to remove sediment and to find beneficial uses for it.**
- \$ We want to continue the success of what has come to be known as our “Mud to Parks” effort.**
- \$ It is turning river sediment into useable topsoil for industrial reclamation and recreational lands.**
- \$ As you can tell, the IDNR is very committed to the Illinois River and all of Illinois’ rivers.**
- \$ We will continue to work with our state, federal and local partners to restore and preserve the greatness of the Illinois River to provide clean water, wildlife habitats, and recreational and economic opportunities for Illinois citizens and its visitors.**
- \$ The future of the IDNR will continue to evolve with the focus on the Illinois River and all of our key waterways and watersheds.**
- \$ They are the true lifelines of our state.**
- \$ Future efforts will depend even more on cooperative efforts with state, federal, and local agencies, and organizations, and the public.**
- \$ We have to pool our resources and ideas for continued success.**
- \$ That is why this conference is so vital for all of us to share our ideas, visions, and – most of all – our passion for these efforts.**
- \$ I thank you for the opportunity to be here today.**