

## CLOSING COMMENTS

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What a well attended and informative few days we've had here in Peoria during this, the *12<sup>th</sup> Biennial Governor's Conference on the Management of the Illinois River System*. Our theme for this 2009 conference *Looking Back—Moving Forward* was given clearer focus by virtue of the thoughtful and energetic presentations from a whole host of talented individuals. I believe this conference helped, and will continue to help nurture professional relationships and build even stronger synergies among all stakeholders long into the future.

Successes have been numerous over the last 24 years since the first Governor's Conference on the Management of the Illinois River System and particularly in the last 12 years since the implementation of the *Integrated Management Plan for the Illinois River Watershed*. The Integrated Plan detailed 34 separate recommendations and steps for implementation. Past Lieutenant Governor Dr. Bob Kustra stated in January 1997 when the Integrated Plan was released to the public that *"carrying out these 34 recommendations will go a long way toward saving the Illinois River for future generations and in the future we must monitor our progress and reevaluate our efforts, and we certainly must never forget just how important and fragile this river is."*

Successes have been realized and we've had an opportunity to hear about, and see documentation on, many of these successes at this conference. You should all be proud of your accomplishments.

I believe the continued collaboration among so many talented individuals here this week bodes well for the future. I anticipate seeing many, many more successful and innovative strategies, programs, and projects that support sustainability of the Illinois River system. So remember, many more success stories about enhancing and sustaining the Illinois River system will soon be written and citizens will be aware of these success stories because they will see the results, not just by hearing about them or reading plans, but by observing what is happening "in-the-water" and "on-the-ground."

The Conference Planning Committee consisted of over forty people including scientists, researchers, policy makers and policy advisors, practitioners, and educators representing local, state, and federal agencies and constituency groups along with the specific talents of non-governmental organizations and volunteers. The Planning Committee members are grateful to the Illinois River Coordinating Council, keynote speakers, exhibitors, interactive digital technology session facilitators, conservation tour coordinators, those participating in the plenary sessions, concurrent sessions, moderators, and all who played a major role at this conference. Each of them helped us *"look back at where we once were and understand how we really have been moving forward."*

My hope is that we are now more familiar with the *Integrated Management Plan for the Illinois River Watershed* and how this plan provided a necessary framework for future restoration of such a major waterway system. The Plan served as a “benchmark” for several successful planning and implementation efforts and to this day still helps us appreciate where we’ve been, assess our most recent accomplishments, and set (and for some of us to perhaps re-set or re-align), our plans, strategies, and projects to help ensure future progress in building capacity to sustain the Illinois River and its watershed.

We are grateful to all of our Sponsors for their financial and in-kind contributions to this conference. Special heartfelt thanks to Kim St. John and Bob Frazee, my Co-Chairs, for their long-time dedication to the Illinois River system and to this conference. Kim is one of the easiest people to get along with, and while extremely dedicated as I’m sure you are aware, always one of the hardest workers and a pleasure to work with. Bob Frazee is stepping down as a Co-Chair of this conference after being at the helm as a Conference Chair for 24 years. His special knowledge will be irreplaceable. We wish Bob the best and many happy days fishing with his children and grandchildren.

We are most grateful to you, the attendees, for having the interest and taking the time out of your busy schedules to attend and make this such a successful gathering; especially during such an economically troublesome time. We were thrilled to have your active participation and hope the opportunity to network gave you some new contacts and ideas to implement further successes.

The 2009 Governor’s Conference on the Management of the Illinois River System is now officially adjourned. Thank you for helping us on our little journey this week. We stopped to take a *Look Back* and in so doing *realized how much has recently been accomplished*. Now it’s time for us to go forth—to *Move Forward and create even greater SUCCESS STORIES!*

Thank you!