

**13th Biennial Governor's Conference on the
Management of the Illinois River System**

October 4-6, 2011

Hotel Pere Marquette

Peoria, Illinois

Welcome and Opening Remarks

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Good morning! My name is Bill White. I serve as a Geomorphologist at the University of Illinois' newly established Prairie Research Institute, Illinois State Water Survey Division; Center for Watershed Science. I serve as one of the Conference Co-Chairs.

On behalf of the Planning Committee I welcome you and am pleased to convene the Opening Session of this, the 2011 Biennial Governor's Conference on the Management of the Illinois River System. This is the thirteenth consecutive biennial Governor's Conference to be held on the management of the Illinois River system. Remember, you can go to the Illinois Rivers Decision Support System to review all past conference proceedings. For further information, go to: http://ilrds.isws.illinois.edu/links/all_results.asp?strSearch=Governors+Conference.

I am happy to say we have over 260 people registered for the conference. This indicates continued interest in the protection of the Illinois River system; especially in these difficult economic times. It is wonderful to have such a diverse group of people coming together with interests in the Illinois River and its watershed.

The Planning Committee for voted on this year's Conference THEME. The Committee decided the theme would be "**The Illinois River: A National Opportunity**".

Governor's Proclamation

The Governor of Illinois, the Honorable Pat Quinn, recognizes the tremendous importance of the Illinois River System to our state, the country, and the world and he realizes that we face many environmental challenges in protecting and improving the Illinois River System.

On February 10th, 2011 Governor Quinn issued a special proclamation to communicate our state's commitment to manage and care for this very important natural resource. The Proclamation reads as follows:

- WHEREAS, the Illinois River 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, the state of Illinois is embracing an integrated approach to large river management and is working in a coordinated and continuous manner for the Illinois River; and
- WHEREAS, implementation of the Illinois River Coordinating Council, Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, Partners for Conservation Program, Illinois Rivers 2020, Open Lands Trust Fund, Mud to Parks capitol program, Landowner Incentive Program, Illinois Fish and Wildlife Action Plan, Illinois Conservation Stewardship Program, Illinois Conservation Climate Initiative, Watershed Assessment and Restoration Program and the Farm Bill Conservation Title are important milestones in efforts to protect the resources of the Illinois River; and
- WHEREAS, the theme of the 2011 Conference on the Management of the Illinois River System is focused on strengthening "National Opportunities"; and,
- WHEREAS, the conference will be taking place October 4-6, 2011 at the Hotel Pere Marquette in Peoria, Illinois: and,

THEREFORE, I, Pat Quinn, Governor of the State of Illinois, do hereby proclaim October, 2011 as **ILLINOIS RIVER MANAGEMENT MONTH** in Illinois, and encourage citizens to recognize the economic, recreational, social, and environmental benefits of conserving and managing to properly utilize and sustain the resources of the Illinois River System.

This Proclamation will be on display in the main hallway throughout this conference, it can also be found in your conference program, and will be published in the conference proceedings.

One of the missions of the Conference Planning Committee is to garner more **national interest and support** for the Illinois River system and, hence, the theme for this year's conference. The Illinois River system deserves significant national recognition because it is an incredible resource for the citizens living in the watershed, Illinoisans in general, and the nation. Many of the reasons for this will be discussed at the conference.

Recently, the Illinois River Conference Planning Committee assigned a sub-committee to create a process for stakeholders to begin "**Labeling or Branding**" the Illinois River System. This

"Branding" effort is intended to enhance marketing of the values of the Illinois River and its tributaries. In doing so we intend to elevate the awareness Illinoisans and people outside Illinois and across the nation have of the Illinois River system. The "Branding" effort just started so it would be a very good time to contact Conference Planning Committee Co-Chairs or members (listed in this Conference Program) if you would like to assist us with this important task. Perhaps we will be announcing new programs and projects at the next 2013 biennial Governor's conference that are direct outgrowths of this newly initiated "Branding" effort.

While degradation of the basin occurred over the years, recent efforts by stakeholders set the stage for several significant and recent improvements in the watershed. Several more improvements are in the implementation or planning phase. Actions taken by local people and watershed groups along with assistance from state and federal agencies and non-profit organizations have been the driving force behind these recent environmental improvements. **Our hope is that we can increase awareness of the natural and economic attributes of the Illinois River system as a means to garner more national attention as well as technical and funding assistance.**

The conference has already included:

- The Quarterly Meeting of the Illinois River Coordinating Council, in conjunction with a Public Forum for Discussion on the evening of October 4th
- Illinois River Watershed Conservation Tour on October 4th, and
- RiverWatch Symposium on October 4th

The Conference continues today and tomorrow with high profile keynote speakers and concurrent sessions as outlined in your Conference Program Brochure. Presentations today and tomorrow will include sessions that will feature watershed successes & challenges related to:

- Federal and State Ecosystem Restoration Opportunities
- Transportation and Commerce
- Natural Resources Challenges and Solutions
- Illinois and Chicago River History and Pertinent Water Law Issues
- Results of Scientific Monitoring
- Water & Sediment Management
- Nutrient Management in Rural Landscapes
- Agricultural Land-Use & Conservation
- Urban Green Infrastructure
- Implications and Challenges of Climate Change
- Sustainable Economic Growth

High profile featured speakers and concurrent technical sessions will keep us captivated but there will also be time to visit the **Interactive Digital Technology Open House** and the many informative and educational exhibits on display. Of course, like many conferences, one of the most important things for the general participant will be ample opportunity to network with other water resource colleagues.

At this time **I am honored to introduce my two fellow co-chairs, Chris Davis** with the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and **Rick Mollahan** with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Both of these colleagues have a wealth of knowledge, are a joy to work with, and have provided outstanding leadership in the planning and implementation of this conference. Thank you both Chris and Rick for your outstanding efforts.

The University of Illinois – **Office of Conferences and Institutes** is our administrative entity handling the registration, organization, and behind the scenes arrangements in making this a very successful conference. Michelle Chappell is the Administrative Coordinator and Michelle Marquart is a Program Specialist. We appreciate their efforts in organizing this conference.

This conference has been two years in the planning by a diverse committee of people representing state and federal government, non-governmental organizations, and community volunteers. These planning committee members are listed on page 5 of your conference brochure. The planning committee has put together a first-rate conference for all. **Would the planning committee members please stand and be recognized.**

We are grateful to the **sponsors** that have provided a significant financial contribution to enhance the quality of this conference. The Platinum, Gold, Silver, Bronze Sponsors and Financial Contributors and Conference Supporters are listed on page 8 of the conference brochure with a complete list in your conference bag.

At this time I would like to recognize **Nancy Erickson, Illinois Farm Bureau, and Scott Wallace, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service**, for their terrific efforts with yesterday's **conservation tour** that took participants to several interesting sites including Island being constructed along McCluggage Bridge, Senachwine Creek restoration, Wightman Lake outside Sparland, locally grown organic food for lunch, Jenkins Farm, Woodford County Fish and Wildlife Area, and Bass Pro Shops. Thank you, Scott and Nancy for a great tour!

One of the major quests in 2009 was to look back at the Integrated Management Plan for the Illinois River watershed. We were able to share many highlights on the accomplishments since its completion fourteen years ago. As a result, today the Integrated Management Plan is receiving even more attention and "fine-tuning" from direction and guidance provided by the Illinois River Coordinating Council. Therefore, these conferences on the management of the Illinois River System are indeed helping to update the plan and address problems and solutions outlined so well in the plan. Last evening, it was our pleasure to host the **Quarterly Meeting of the Illinois River Coordinating Council** and its public forum. The Council shared their successes and continued vision for the Illinois River and the update and continued implementation of the Integrated Management Plan for the Illinois River System.

April Burgett and Aaron Yetter with the Illinois Natural History Survey co-chaired the exhibit committee. They have put together an excellent assortment of displays in the Marquette

North Ballroom. Thank you once again Aaron and April for developing this exhibit area for all of us to learn and enjoy.

The **Digital Technologies Open House** will be held this afternoon from 1:15 to 4:15pm in the Illinois Room. The open house was organized by Drew Phillips, Illinois Geological Survey, and Gary Johnson, U. S. Geological Survey. The Co-Chairs are grateful to Drew and Gary for putting together this unique, hands-on, opportunity so participants can “dig deeper” into the available natural resource planning and data analysis technology.

Carla Blue with Illinois Water Resources Center compiled the very comprehensive Abstract and Speaker Information Book that you will find in your conference bag. We thank Carla for sharing her talents and expertise in putting together the Bio/Abstract Booklet and for additional assistance with the Conference Proceedings. Throughout the conference please refer to the Abstract and Speaker Information Book for the agenda and more detailed information on each speaker’s topic and personal background.

Please remember, at our noon luncheon we will have Dr. Richard Berg give us a short keynote address on the geology of Illinois. Prior to the luncheon keynote presentation we will begin with a short but wonderful PowerPoint Presentation suitable for the occasion. The presentation is entitled “***The Illinois River Watershed—National Opportunities***” prepared by April Burgett (U. of I., PRI, INHS), Jody Christiansen (USDA-NRCS) and Kim St. John (USDA-NRCS).

We are also developing the Conference Proceedings that will recap this entire conference. It will be available electronically at the Illinois Rivers Decision Support System web. Again, you can visit this site at

http://ilrdss.isws.illinois.edu/links/all_results.asp?strSearch=Governors+Conference.

At this time I would like to introduce the Mayor of the City of Peoria--Jim Ardis--to officially welcome us to the beautiful city of Peoria situated midway on the Illinois River between Chicago and Grafton.

Please welcome Peoria Mayor Jim Ardis

Thank you Mayor Ardis for your warm welcome and insightful remarks.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Senator Dave Koehler who has graciously agreed to serve as Moderator for the first 2 Plenary Presentations.