

Executive Summary

Outdoor Recreational Access to Public and Private Lands

**Report of the Public Access Committee of the
Illinois Natural Resources Advisory Board
to the
Illinois Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Congress
October 16, 2009**

The Access/Hunting & Fishing Committee was formed to review previous access programs within Illinois, the access programs of other states, and human dimensions literature with the purpose of providing recommendations to improve outdoor access for consideration by Conservation Congress. This committee met three times at different locations around the state: Springfield, Quincy, and Bartlett.

As a result of these meetings, the committee developed four recommendations. Recommendation # 1 is to restore liability protection for private landowners who open their lands for recreation. Recommendation # 2 is to develop an access program within the Department of Natural Resources to open up public and private lands to outdoor recreation. Recommendation # 3 is to create a State Water Trails Plan and a Model State Heritage Water Trail. Recommendation #4 is to create Starparks in every Illinois State Park and/or recreational/conservation area.

Recommendation # 1. Recreational Use of Land and Waters Area Act

Title: Restore liability protection for private landowners who open their land for recreation.

Objective: Pass legislation which amends the Recreational Use of Land and Water Areas Act by limiting landowner liability to encourage landowners to make land and water areas available for recreation or conservation purposes by:

- Reinstating protection for landowners who open their land to the public for recreation and conservation purposes, which was in place for 40 years under the Recreation Use of Land and Water Areas Act.
- Retaining the protections offered for landowners who open their land to individuals for hunting and recreational shooting gained through the legislation in 2005. (Public Act 94-0625.)
- Providing protection to landowners who contract with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to open their lands to outdoor recreation.

Approach: IDNR should actively support and work in partnership with advocate organizations who are leading the effort to pass legislation which reinstates the liability protections for outdoor recreation.

IDNR should work closely with outdoor organizations on the following activities:

- Actively working with the Governor and legislators to increase their understanding of the issue and the need to amend the Act.
- Coordinating local support by reaching out to recreation and conservation organizations who in turn can contact their members to spread the word, talk to local media and contact legislators as concerned constituents.
- Providing examples of landowners or recreational activities which are being impacted by the current law, illustrating the need to change it.
- Negotiating with the Illinois Trial Lawyer's Association to introduce language that will reinstate protection for broad recreation and conservation purposes.

Recommendation # 2. Access to Lands for Public Recreation

Title: Develop an access program within DNR to open up public and private lands to outdoor recreation.

Objective:

The IDNR needs to increase access to available land in Illinois for the purpose of hunting, trapping, fishing and other compatible recreational interests.

Approach:

1. The IDNR needs to make this agenda a priority and take the primary lead on efforts to increase access. It will be their responsibility to seek and secure all appropriate federal match dollars associated with this program.
2. A committee should be established to maintain and further this agenda. This committee should be comprised of appropriate outdoor interest groups, a private landowner, and a representative from the IDNR.
3. An access stamp will be created to fund costs associated with the program. Initial costs will be related to IDNR personnel and program development. Long term costs will be associated with the implementation of efforts to increase access. This can take various forms including, but not limited to: cost share incentives for landowners, leasing land from landowners, technical assistance for landowners and purchasing property from willing sellers.

Recommendation # 3. Create a State Water Trails Plan and a Model Heritage Water Trail

Title: Proposals to Create a State Water Trails Plan and a Model State Heritage Water Trail

PROPOSALS:

We are making two proposals, #1 proposes a statewide approach to planning Water Trails. #2 proposes a demonstration State Heritage Water Trail.

Proposal #1

Objective:

IDNR should create a State Water Trails Plan, which includes State Heritage Watertrails, with input from all local, regional and statewide stakeholders that:

1. increases paddling related tourism throughout the state;
2. expands public access to Illinois rivers and streams;
3. accurately reflects the current recreational use of Illinois' waterways; and
4. establishes designated watertrails on waterways identified in the Plan

Approach:

1. IDNR should coordinate with Metro Greenway Planning Councils, Ecosystem Partnerships, municipal, county and regional planning agencies, local business, residents, paddling clubs and other recreational users, as well as Museums and Historical Societies, in identifying waterways to be included in the Plan and in implementing the recommendations of the Plan.
2. IDOT, CDOT and other transportation providers should consider in their assessment of projects, any potential impact on and/or possible improvements to existing and proposed watertrails, including providing access where road improvements cross rivers.
3. IDOT, CDOT and other transportation providers keep existing accessible sites open when rebuilding bridges and other structures.
4. Extend availability of BAAD grant funding to Not-for-Profit organizations.

Proposal #2

Objective:

That the DNR establish one model State Heritage Water Trail outside of Northeastern Illinois between January 1, 2010 and December 31, 2012, with the further suggestion that the model State Heritage Watertrail should be a refurbished and rededicated Lincoln Heritage WaterTrail on the Sangamon River

Approach:

1. IDNR should approach potential partners such as Museums, Historical Societies Forest Preserve and Park Districts, Metro Greenway Planning Councils, Ecosystem Partnerships, municipal, county and regional planning agencies, local businesses, private landowners, paddling clubs and other recreational users, and create a planning coalition
2. IDNR should consider safety, emergency access, impacts on existing wildlife and habitat, environmental problem areas, the location and protection of unique natural resources, waterway hydrology and the design and on-going maintenance of launchsites
3. IDOT, CDOT and other transportation providers should be asked to consider providing access over existing bridge and other state owned rights-of-way.
4. IDNR should design produce and place trail signage, maps, and marketing materials which are consistent with the existing Northeastern Illinois Water Trail System. As well as unobtrusive historical interpretive signage and or self guiding interpretive materials for use on the river.

Recommendation #4: Create StarParks in every Illinois State Park and/or recreational and/or conservation area.

Title: Create StarParks in state-owned recreational/conservation areas.

Objectives:

- Stop the exponential increase of light pollution across the State of Illinois, starting with our State Parks. Keep in mind, that there is not a single mile within the State of Illinois that is not light polluted. This is unacceptable. Begin the process of reviving and then preserving our starry night skies for future generations for the benefit of both people and biodiversity of nature.
- Recover and preserve the cultural heritage related to our natural nightscape. This current generation is humankind's first whereas the majority has not experienced a starry night sky, and lost that connection to our heritage.
- Provide a place to enjoy the starry nightscape as best as Illinois currently can as an immediate and short-term goal. First, with a little oasis-type StarPark within each State Park. StarParks will provide a source of educational, sustainable ecotourism, artistically stimulating to both enjoy & value the night sky and be inspired help reduce light pollution.

Consider the possibility permitting an observatory built on site, funded totally by donations and fundraisers, manned by volunteer amateur and professional astronomers, astronomy societies and/or clubs including university, high school and primary school astronomy clubs, and scouting groups. Consider volunteer astronomers as a valuable resource for public outreach. Note: The Chicago Astronomical Society has a telescope and mount that would be perfect to allow access to individuals using wheel chairs and is interested in putting it to good public use.

- Conserve energy, reduce the waste of resources and contribution to climate change by using artificial light only when need, where needed and in the correct amounts and spectrum.
- Reduce harm caused to the local ecosystems, disruption of the circadian clock that all living organisms have, be it plant, animal or human due to reducing dramatically the production of critically essential melatonin. The circadian clock is not only important on a daily basis, it also sets the cues in motion for important seasonal changes through receptors in the Pineal.
- Reduce harm and provide safe haven and safe passage of migratory birds and animals, that artificial light at night causes harm, due to the distraction of light glare which is known to attract and *capture* birds so that they circle the light source until exhaustion or death; and in other cases, sky glow light pollution obscures the constellations that birds are known to track and obscures visibility of the horizon, an important aspect of flight.
- Bring new dimensions to management and protection of natural areas considering the night cycle needs and the nightscape.
- Initiate long-range planning so that one specified area in the entire state of Illinois can qualified as and be awarded Starlight Reserve/Dark-Sky Preserve status. One requirement is that it will have a bortle rating of 1~2 at the core. No small task... but not impossible with commitment and planning.
- StarParks and StarLight Preserves are potentially sustainable ecotourism site sources bringing increased economic value to the surrounding area.

With the long-term plan and intent of choosing one of these StarParks for developing a StarLight Reserve/Dark-Sky Reserve thereby eliminating all light pollution sources within the State Park and through educational outreach, encourage surrounding communities to also consider reducing their light pollution.

Approach:

- IDNR should invite International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) experts to look at proposed area for StarPark at each State Parks and/or Conservation Areas to provide recommendations and/or coach appointed individuals or groups in the basics of light pollution as an aid for decision making.
- IDNR should Invite volunteer amateur and professional astronomers, astronomy societies and/or clubs including university, high school and primary school astronomy clubs, and scouting groups to *adopt a StarPark* they would have particular interest in developing programs and public outreach events, etc. and maintain contact with IDNR.
- IDNR should involve all agencies that affects lighting decisions within the State Parks and/or Recreational Areas including state-owned/rented buildings, roadway and highway lighting for mid and long-term goals.

Careful attention will be given toward:

- types of lighting fixtures, that no upward lighting or glare shall be permitted;
- the brightness of the lumens, that it be minimum lux needed for the required task;
- the color spectrum of the light output, understanding that the blue spectrum at night is harmful to nature's ecosystem.
- lights with motion detectors, timers or dual spectrum output luminaires considered.
- People will be encouraged to bring their telescopes and binoculars to this StarPark area to enjoy astrophotography, nightscape photography, star gazing, meteor showers, comets, lunar eclipses, Int'l Space Station passes, etc. for recreational and research use by amateur and professional astronomers, scouts, vacationers. Star Festivals with music under the stars and mythology and regional cultural folk stories told and/or StarParties with day-time speakers and workshops and night-time observing and astrophotography can introduce new funding, ecotourism, scientific, cultural and artistic opportunities to the area for children and adults.
- StarPark Signage shall be used
- Inclusion of StarParks on all Illinois recreational maps, brochures, tourism guides and other like- materials.
- an interpretive center and/or signage of varying degrees including:
 - helpful star maps identifying the most popular constellations and other key celestial objects;
 - basic facts of light pollution, its serious ecological and human health consequences, and recommendations on how each of us can reduce light pollution
- Creating a systematic method to reduce light pollution in Illinois state-owned properties with short, mid, and long-term goals. Starting with an oasis of little StarParks within each State Park, and then choosing the best candidate for the long-range plan of creating Illinois' very first Starlight Reserve/Dark-Sky Preserve. This will have Illinois' only, and first-recovered pristine night sky that rates 1 or 2 on the Bortle scale,that emits starlight, zodiacal light and light glow equally... only possible when light pollution is absent.

An Addendum:

Note, These areas will have valuable cross-uses as observational research areas for nocturnal species,etc and of course, providing a natural, healthy environment for light-sensitive ecosystems and safe migratory passage. Partnering with groups interested in this is greatly encouraged and welcomed.