
Closing Comments

Kimberly A. St John
Coordinator - Prairie Rivers Resource Conservation & Development
USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service
400 Edward Street
Henry, Illinois 61537
E-mail: Kim.StJohn@il.usda.gov

It is almost time to close the 10th biennial Conference on the Management of the Illinois River System. The theme for this year's conference The Illinois River: Progress & Progress was certainly addressed in the past three days. In preparing for this conference I took the opportunity to review the proceedings of the past nine conferences and the keystone for all the conferences was the Illinois River SYSTEM.

As I think about a system it reminds me of an annual occurrence that I marvel at on many late summer mornings when I pull-out of my driveway heading east across the Spoon River bridge about a half-mile from my residence. On both sides of the road I come upon hundreds and maybe even thousands of orb-shaped spider webs with their dew-covered gossamer glistening in the morning sun.

These silken structures are an analogy to the river's system. Like the web's many parts the Illinois River System has many parts - cropland, urban land, wetlands, woodlands, pastures, prairies, and streams & rivers. The different spokes in the web are the distinctive landscapes in the watershed - bluffs & ravines; flatlands & floodplains; and hills & dales.

As every part of the web contributes to the whole, so does every part of the Illinois River Watershed have a function or purpose. The purpose of the spider's web is to trap food or maybe to just be there for me to admire as I drive to work. The Illinois River System has a vital combination of economic, environmental, and social purposes. The river is our state's most important inland waterway. It is an artery for commerce and transportation. The watershed comprises over 44% of state and is home to 90% of Illinois' population, producing many agricultural commodities, supporting a wide array of wildlife, offering scores of recreational opportunities and supplying drinking water for several communities.

The Illinois River System is interconnected with its spokes and threads each playing an important role. As John Muir said – “When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to rest of the world”.

The spider web is a metaphor for the structure that it takes to make this conference happen. It is a network of diverse and gifted people who provide the leadership for this effort. Over 30 people - scientists, researchers, policy advisors, funders, practitioners, and educators, who represent state, federal, & local agencies along with community volunteers, work for nearly two years to make this conference a reality. These people are the strong threads woven throughout this whole conference - thank-you for all of your efforts.

This planning committee identifies cutting-edge topics and then secures the presenters that we that we have learned from during past three days. Thanks to our keynote speakers, state & federal directors, concurrent session presenters, and moderators who provided us with timely information and valuable insight. In the tightly woven center of this web – is our co-chair Bob Frazee with 20 years of outstanding leadership for this conference and for past conferences.

Like the web it takes an infrastructure of financial and in-kind support of over sixty sponsors to put on an event

of this nature. Special thanks to Pashion Gaworski, Tom Tincher, and Heartland Water Resources Council for their support of this conference.

And finally, it takes all of you, over 350 participants, to be here and I would not say to be trapped in the web, but to be a wonderful captive audience. We sincerely appreciate your active participation.

We leave here having celebrated the progress of past accomplishments and with a promise to focus our collective knowledge and resources on future challenges. The 2005 Conference on the Management of the Illinois River System is now adjourned. Go and continue to do good work by spinning many more webs to make the Illinois River Watershed a better place. Thank-you!

