
News Release



The 2005 Conference
on the Management of the Illinois River System
October 4 – 6, 2005, Peoria, IL

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PEORIA, Ill. – Over 350 people attended the tenth biennial 2005 Governor’s Conference on the Management of the Illinois River System, held Oct. 4-6 in Peoria.

Keynote speaker William F. Hartwig, chief of the National Wildlife Refuge System at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service within the Department of the Interior, emphasized “cooperative conservation” as essential, particularly when the recurrent issue involves funding shortfalls. He encouraged agencies to pool their funds for best results. Active citizen engagement continues to build on the strong legislative base that has strengthened the overall system for fish and wildlife refuges established more than 100 years ago, he said. He also noted that, thanks to the Internet, citizens access more information more easily than any other generation.

At the Illinois River Coordinating Council session held Oct. 4, Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn expressed his enthusiasm for the ways the various state agencies have worked together to support environmental initiatives on the Illinois River. The group also heard Len Bahr, director of the Louisiana Governor’s Applied Coastal Science Program, tell of his area’s critical need to rebuild coastal wetlands with soil – a resource currently filling the Illinois waterway. Emphasizing the interrelationship of problems in Louisiana and Illinois, he’d been working with Illinois officials even before the recent hurricanes. A mud-to-parks project facilitated by the Lt. Governor has shown the feasibility of moving dredged sediment by barge from central Illinois as far as the Lake Michigan shore. There a former industrial site is being converted to a park.

The group also heard speakers discuss the huge jump in the numbers of invasive Asian carp in the Illinois River, and measures being taken to keep them from reaching Lake Michigan. Other speakers told of the expansion of the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program and the challenges facing the Farm Service Agency. The importance of historic aerial photographs along with contemporary satellite views and the development of a national map for land and resource management, science, recreation, policy-making and homeland security was also discussed. The recent designation of the central Illinois river valley as a scenic byway and the economic benefit of nature-based tourism was another focus.

An all-day motorcoach tour began the conference. Participants traveled along the Illinois River valley north from Peoria and visited a sand and gravel mining operation, the Hennepin-Hopper wetland restoration site, and a Native American burial ground. The group saw historic Hennepin, barge-loading activity and a floating

grocery store, and observed streambank stabilization and conservation reserve sites and wildlife refuges and learned about the duck clubs, decoy carving, wetlands, historic aspects of river navigation including the early dam at Henry, and the mud-to-parks initiative that barged silt dredged from East Peoria's Spindler Marina to a planned Chicago park on a former US Steel site on Lake Michigan.

This tenth biennial conference continued a tradition begun in 1987, bringing together representatives of local, state and federal agencies, groups and individuals for news of research, management techniques and initiatives to protect and improve the Illinois River. The conference opened with talks by the directors of state and federal agencies involved with the river, or their representatives. More than 60 groups were involved as cosponsors.

Conference participants received a CD containing the proceedings from the nine previous conferences. Early next year, a CD of the 2005 proceedings will be distributed. The compilation was the work of the Illinois Rivers Decision Support System of the Illinois State Water Survey in Champaign, Ill. Additional copies are available for \$5 from the Heartland Water Resources Council, 416 Main St., #828, Peoria, IL 61602.

Conference co-chairs were Bob Frazee of the University of Illinois Extension's East Peoria office and Kim St. John with Prairie Rivers Resource Conservation & Development (Henry, Ill.) of the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

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