

## OPENING REMARKS

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Good morning! I am pleased to convene the Opening Session of the 2009 Governor's Conference on the Management of the Illinois River System. I am Kim St John with USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service and I am serving as one of the co-chairs for this conference. I am happy to say we have over 300 people registered for this conference; this is a marker for the tremendous interest in the protection of the Illinois River system. It is wonderful to have such a diverse group of people coming together with a common interest in the Illinois River Watershed.

On behalf of the Planning Committee I welcome you to the 12<sup>th</sup> Biennial Governor's Conference on the Management of the Illinois River System. If anyone of us walked out the front door of this hotel a person on the street might ask "Why are the Illinois River and its watershed important?" Here are a few responses to share:

The Illinois River system is vital to our economy, environment, and society. The river is our state's most important and yet vulnerable inland waterway that stretches some 345 miles in length. The watershed comprises over 44% of the area in Illinois along with portions of Wisconsin and Indiana and:

- It is home for us and 90% of Illinois' population
- It feeds us with its agricultural bounty
- It transports commodities and products efficiently
- It awes us with its beauty
- It wows us with a wide array of wildlife
- It restores our spirits
- It is our playground with many recreational opportunities
- It binds us together with 54 Illinois counties draining into the Illinois River
- It quenches our thirst supplying drinking water for several communities
- And it physically links us to the rest of the world as a conduit from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico.

The theme of this conference is "Looking Back, Moving Forward". This conference and its eleven predecessors provide a forum to share successes, to learn about new technologies, and serve as catalyst for new collaborations to improve the overall health of the Illinois River basin.

For the next two days there will be conference speakers who will be covering a wide variety of topics. During the plenary sessions we will be looking back at the very important ***Integrated Management Plan for the Illinois River Watershed*** with highlights on the accomplishments since its completion twelve years ago along with the legal interpretations of Illinois Water Law and its impacts in the watershed. Our featured luncheon speakers will be U. S. Secretary of

Transportation, Ray LaHood, today and tomorrow David Zalaznik will share his beautiful photo presentation “*Life Along the Illinois River*”. The concurrent sessions will be showcasing the progress and advancements in both agricultural and community landscapes, the benefits derived from the ecosystem services, key projects in the river corridor, important water and sediment research and monitoring occurring in the watershed, and the vast economic development attributes of its natural resources. Along with these top-notch sessions there will be a digital technologies open house this afternoon that will provide an opportunity to see first-hand data resources, mapping, and measurement tools available via the Internet. There will be more time to catch up on advancements and available resources in the exhibit area and of course, great opportunities to network during the breaks, the luncheons, and at the casual dinner at the Gateway Building this evening.

The purpose of this conference is to bring together a diversity of disciplines, expertise, and viewpoints. During this conference I encourage each of you to share your interests and information, seek different opinions and viewpoints, meet new people, and catch up with colleagues. By tomorrow afternoon I am sure we all will gain greatly from whom we have met and what we have learned from one another.

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 March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009 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, our state is embracing an integrated approach to large river management and is working in a coordinated and continuous manner for this river; and
- WHEREAS, the implementation of the Illinois River Coordinating Council, the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, the Partners for Conservation Program, Illinois Rivers 2020, the Open Lands Trust Fund, the Mud to Parks Program, the Landowner Incentive Program, the Illinois Fish and Wildlife Action Plan, the Illinois Conservation Stewardship Program, the Illinois Conservation Climate Initiative, the 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 2009 Conference on the management of the Illinois River System is “Looking Back, Moving Forward”; and
- WHEREAS, the conference will be taking place October 20-22, 2009 at the Hotel Pere Marquette in Peoria, Illinois:

THEREFORE, I, Pat Quinn, Governor of the State of Illinois, do hereby proclaim October, 2009 as **ILLINOIS RIVER MANAGEMENT MONTH** in Illinois, and encourage citizens to recognize the economic, recreational, social, and environmental benefits of conserving to properly utilize the resources of the Illinois River basin.

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.

We were honored to have Governor Quinn at the conference last evening for the Illinois River Coordinating Council when we were able to recognize him along with former Congressman Ray LaHood for their bipartisan efforts in the protection and enhancement of the Illinois River Watershed. An engraved rock has been placed just outside of the Gateway Building on the riverside to mark their exemplary efforts. Please take time to look at this during the evening gathering.

At this time I am honored to introduce my two fellow co-chairs for this conference, Bill White with Illinois State Water Survey and Bob Frazee with University of Illinois Extension. Both of these gentlemen have a wealth of knowledge and have provided outstanding leadership in the planning and implementation of this conference. Thank you both 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 pages 6 and 7 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 and Financial Contributors are listed on page 8 of the conference brochure with a complete list in your conference bag. Also, there are conference supporters listed on page 8 of the conference brochure.

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 Emiquon, Dickson Mounds Museum, a wind farm, a US Geological Survey streamgaging station, and several other interesting sites. Thank you, Scott and Nancy for a great tour!

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.

April Burgett and Aaron Yetter with the Illinois Natural History Survey co-chaired the exhibit committee. They have put together an excellent assortment of thirty displays in the Marquette North Ballroom. Thank you Aaron and April for developing this exhibit area.

The Digital Technologies Open House this afternoon is organized by Drew Phillips, Illinois Geological Survey, and Gary Johnson, U. S. Geological Survey. Many thanks to Drew and Gary for their skills in putting together this unique session.

Jennifer Fackler and Lisa Merrifield with University of Illinois compiled the very comprehensive Abstract and Speaker Information Book that you will find in your conference bag. This team is also developing the Conference Proceedings that will recap this entire conference. It will be available electronically in early 2010. We thank them for sharing their talents and expertise in

these endeavors. 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.

I would like to bring your attention to one more item in your conference bag; it is a flash drive with an excellent publication, *A Decade of Changes in the Illinois River*. This publication was compiled and produced by Chris Davis, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and Jody Christiansen and Jon Hubbert, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, and edited by Marilyn Leyland, community volunteer and conference media coordinator. It is a document of stories that reflect the accomplishments and the continuing work of partners protecting the Illinois River Watershed that has been guided by the *Integrated Management Plan for the Illinois River Watershed* that was developed in 1997. Thank you for your labors in the development and production of this timely document.

At this time I would like to introduce two leaders from the City of Peoria Mayor Jim Ardis and Councilperson Bill Spears, to officially welcome us to the beautiful city of Peoria situated midway on the Illinois River between Chicago and Grafton. Thank you Mr. Ardis and Mr. Spears for your welcome and remarks.

Plenary Session One will be looking at 12 years of implementation of the *Integrated Management Plan on the Illinois River*. We are delighted that former Lieutenant Governor of Illinois, Bob Kustra, agreed to come back to Illinois from Boise, Idaho to be part of this conference. This plan was developed under his watch and leadership and has been a key guide for the progress that has occurred in the watershed. The moderator of this session is Senator David Koehler from the 46<sup>th</sup> Legislative District of the Illinois General Assembly. Senator Koehler serves as chair of the Local Government Committee and is a member of the Agriculture and Conservation, Energy, Higher Education, and Transportation committees. Senator Koehler will preside over our first Plenary Session. Thank you Senator Koehler.

Thank you Mr. Kustra for your lively and inspiring presentation including a retrospective of accomplishments and perspective for the continued bright future for the health of the Illinois River Watershed.

We will now have a break in the Marquette North Ballroom to learn, network, and enjoy some refreshments. The conference will resume at 10:15 am in this room for Plenary Session Two - Water Law and Court Interpretation. Kate Tomford, Director of Sustainability for the Office of Governor Pat Quinn, will moderate this distinguished panel of experts.