



A Proposed Public-Private
Partnership to Manage
Nature Preserves in Illinois:

The Illinois Nature Preserves Alliance

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Dow Sustainability Fellowship

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For information, visit: <http://sustainability.umich.edu/dow/about>

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dow Sustainability Fellowship

This project was completed between February and December 2015 in fulfillment of the Dow Sustainability Fellows Masters and Professional Fellowship Program, by a multidisciplinary group of five masters and professional students from the University of Michigan School of Public Health (Max Aung), the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy (Matthew Bishop), the School of Natural Resources and the Environment (Alyssa Cudmore), and the University of Michigan Law School (Rachel Hampton and Sarah Stellberg), henceforth the “Dow Team.”

Purpose

This report proposes a solution for critical funding and capacity shortages in the management of the Illinois Nature Preserves System. It does so by reviewing the state of Illinois’ public land management needs, existing actors and resources, and by ultimately proposing the basic architecture of a nonprofit tailored to work in concert with the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission.

Background

The Illinois Nature Preserves System is a series of 563 natural areas scattered throughout Illinois. They are not preserved for recreational benefits, like state and county parks, but rather as examples of the historic biodiversity present in Illinois. They are presently managed by the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission (INPC), a 12-person staff commission with a nine-member volunteer board. The Commission approves dedications of new land parcels, prepares master plans for the management of Nature Preserves, and oversees the protection and preservation of these high-quality natural areas. The protection now encompasses over 108,206 acres of private and public land in 94 of Illinois’ 102 counties. Over time, the portfolio of lands under INPC management has grown, and the stewardship and defense capacity of the Commission and its staff has been spread thin. Cutbacks in state agency funding threaten to exacerbate the problem.

Methodology and the Problem

The Environmental Law and Policy Center (ELPC)—a nonprofit environmental organization based in Chicago—asked the Dow Team to design and propose a nonprofit organization that would work alongside the INPC to ensure that Nature Preserves in Illinois get the attention they deserve and require. The ELPC was most interested in determining whether a public-private partnership “urban park conservancy” model, similar to the Central Park Conservancy in New York City, could be a viable option for the Nature Preserves System given its rural, scattered nature and the fact the parcels are preserved for their high biological value, in contrast to the recreational value of a park.

To create the nonprofit design, the Dow Team conducted its research from February to December 2015. Through interviews and reviewing the INPC’s meeting minutes and its five year strategic plan, the Team determined eight main threats to the Nature Preserves System that a nonprofit might be able to address more effectively than a state agency alone:

1. Lack of stewardship and defense capacity
2. Unstable funding
3. The scattered and non-contiguous distribution of the Nature Preserves
4. Staff vacancies, retirements and lack of young professionals interested in natural resources management
5. Growing inventory of Preserves
6. Increasing landscape threats from adjacent lands
7. Lack of training capacity
8. Unstable political climate

Given these main threats, the Team then focused its research on strategies for public-private partnerships managing land. These practices were collected through surveys with nonprofits managing land throughout the country and were supplemented by land management expert interviews, websites, online news stories and academic literature on effective public-private partnership practices.

The Recommendation

As a solution to the land management problems detailed above, the Dow Team proposes a business plan for a nonprofit partner organization called the Illinois Nature Preserves Alliance (INPA). This organization would be a private, statewide, 501(c)(3) organization with a starting operating budget of approximately \$2 million. The INPA would work in a close public-private partnership with the INPC to ensure that land stewardship needs are met for underserved Nature Preserves owned by the state of Illinois. The INPA would achieve these goals by raising funds, supporting and improving land stewardship activities, and providing professional training and educational programs for local land stewards. However, it would not be responsible for acquiring new lands; this function would be left to the INPC.

The INPA would have a staff of ten and would be managed by a diverse board of directors from the public and private sectors located throughout the State (see Figure 1 below). It would be funded through a number of potential strategies including foundation support, partnerships with private businesses and industry, limited private landowner support, federal and private grants, supplemental environmental projects,

a potential oil and gas tax dedicated to Nature Preserves, Conservation Corps funding, or state bonds dedicated to the Preserves (see Figure 2 below).

The INPA's work would be focused on three main objectives: (1) land stewardship, (2) training and outreach and (3) advocacy, communications, and fundraising.

- 1. Land Stewardship:** The INPA would have a decentralized nature similar to the INPC. It would have six Stewardship Coordinators located in the regions with the highest need Nature Preserves. In each region the Coordinators would develop a strong network of contractors, land stewardship professionals, conservation groups and other stakeholders. The Coordinators would develop stewardship contracts with these partners to undertake land stewardship activities on the highest need Nature Preserves. This would provide for the stewardship of the Nature Preserves while also infusing funds to support local natural resource jobs in the Illinois economy. To increase its stewardship impact and its ability to manage public and private lands in a more connected way, the Stewardship Coordinators would also assist the current INPC staff to develop relationships with the private preserve landowners surrounding the highest need preserves and connect them to resources and contractors.
- 2. Training and Outreach:** To address the lack of skilled staff, the six Stewardship Coordinators would develop a "Land Management Training Academy" and "Practitioners Network" in collaboration with a new Volunteer and Training Coordinator. The Training Coordinator and Stewardship Coordinators would work with stewardship professionals and contractors, public and private nature preserve owners, volunteers, DNR/INPC staff, land trusts, and others to understand the best practices in land conservation, and then disseminate these best practices through trainings, webinars, and workshops. This would help ensure consistency in and quality of management and stewardship across all of the lands.
- 3. Advocacy, Communications and Fundraising:** This third objective of INPA would be carried out by the Executive Director and the Director of Development and Communications, who would focus on advocacy, communications and the promotion of the Nature Preserves System for its recreational, ecological, historical, educational, scientific, and intrinsic value. This branch of the organization would develop a "regional brand" for the Nature Preserves. It would also provide advocacy at the legislative level for increased funding, and to local corporations and industries to support and sponsor local stewardship projects, initiatives, and workforce development training programs.

Another consideration we weighed is housing this new 501(c)(3) at an existing "incubator organization" already located in Illinois, such as at the Nature Conservancy, Open Lands, the Prairie State Conservation Coalition, the ELPC, or another organization with a similar regional natural resource management-related mission.

Conclusions

As a way to both support and challenge the proposed nonprofit solution, the Team conducted a strengths and limitations analysis and responded to perceived shortfalls that critics may have of the proposed model. Upon addressing these limitations, the Team believes this model is a sustainably viable solution for managing the unmet needs of the Illinois Nature Preserves System. Overall, the proposed model (1) provides long-term stewardship for Nature Preserves with the greatest unmet needs; (2) shares best practices through a training academy for natural resource professionals, partners, volunteers, and Nature Preserve owners; (4) promotes the recreational, ecological, historical, educational, scientific, and intrinsic value of the Nature Preserve System; and (5) supports local jobs in the natural resources sector throughout Illinois.

FIGURE 1. INPA ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE.

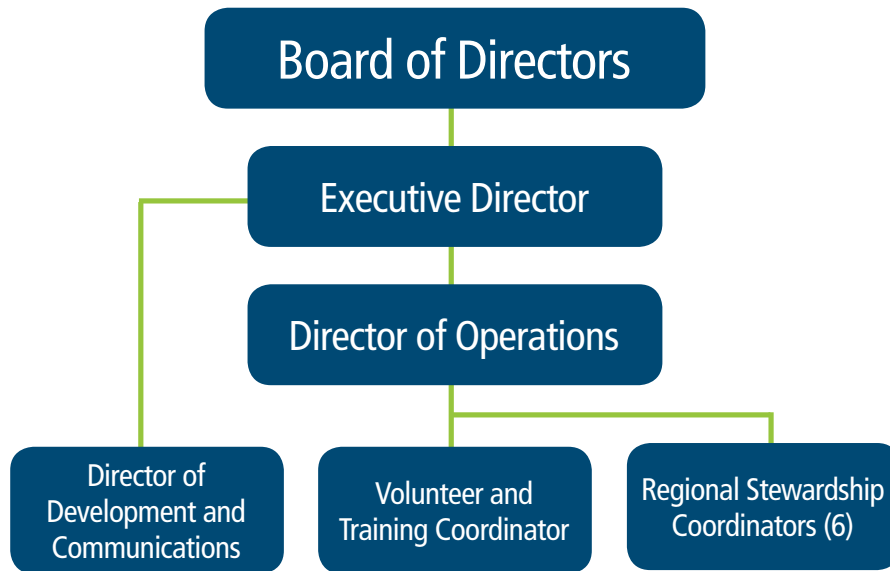
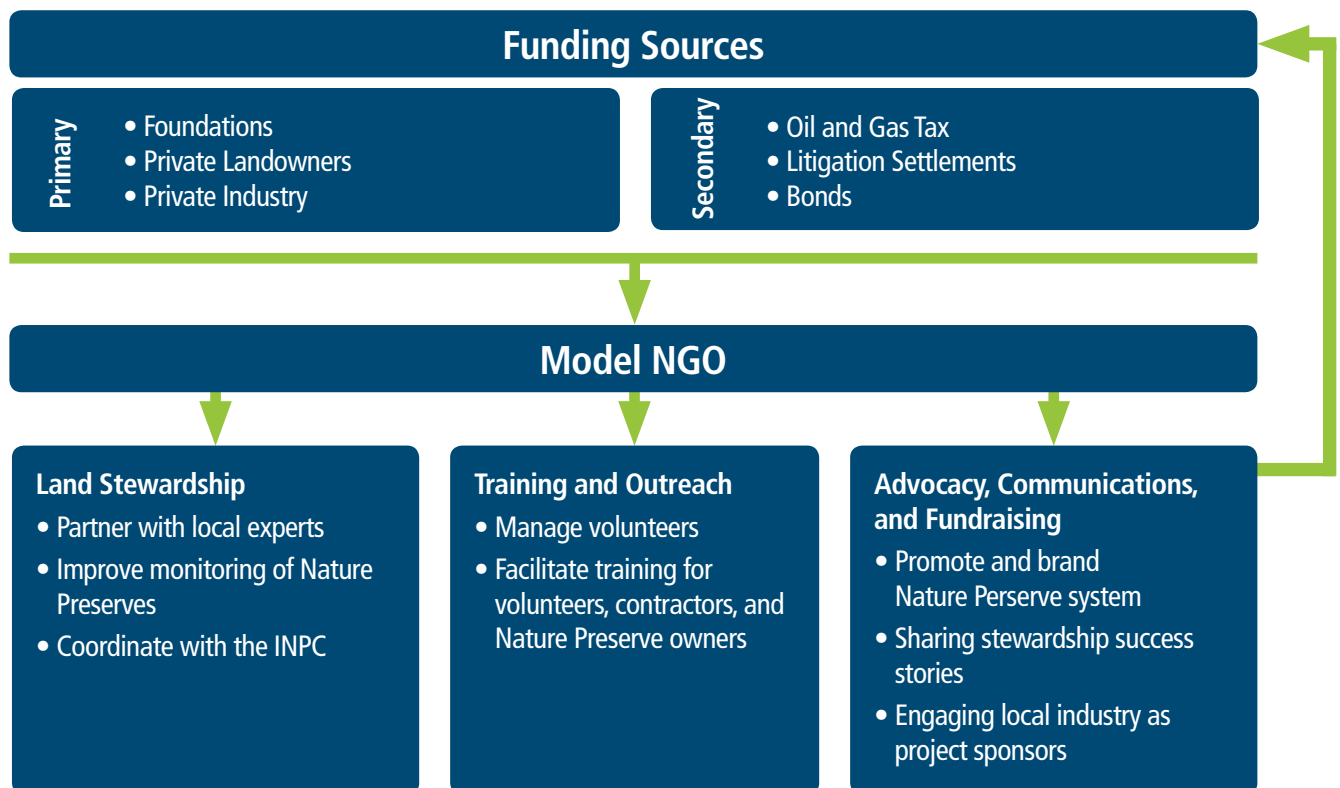


FIGURE 2. INPA FUNDING AND FUNCTIONS.



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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Scope and Objectives

The Environmental Law and Policy Center (ELPC), based in Illinois, is an environmental legal advocacy and eco-business innovation nonprofit organization that strives to improve environmental quality and protect natural resources. The ELPC commissioned a team of graduate fellows from the University of Michigan to propose a public-private partnership for the management of Nature Preserves in Illinois. Currently, Illinois' Nature Preserves System is managed and stewarded by the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission (INPC). This project is in direct response to recent budget and staff cuts that have left a gap between state capabilities and nature preserves' legal requirements. This Report proposes a model for sustainable stewardship to support state efforts.

1.2 The Dow Fellows Team

Our fellows team is comprised of masters and professional students from the University of Michigan School of Public Health, the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, the School of Natural Resources and the Environment, and the University of Michigan Law School. In the initial developmental stage of this project, we capitalized on the foundational knowledge of our respective disciplines to incorporate several perspectives into our project. As such, our individual skillsets and background allowed our team to approach the issue of land management in Illinois in a multifaceted way. With our primary objective being focused on the structural design of a nonprofit organization to manage Nature Preserves in Illinois, our interdisciplinary lens challenged us to develop our proposed model with respect to its impact on community stakeholders, government relations, local economies, and the natural environment. Our project draws upon four pillars of sustainability: environmental, social, economic and political.

- **Environmental.** This project focuses on the management and stewardship of public lands in the state of Illinois for its intrinsic value, its public health value, and for the enjoyment of future generations to come. Healthy ecosystems provide invaluable benefits, including improved local air and water quality, critical wildlife habitat, and reduced flood damage. We seek to identify and highlight the environmental impacts and opportunities of Illinois Nature Preserves.
- **Social.** Environmental sustainability cannot be achieved without understanding its human dimensions. We aimed to incorporate lessons from the social sciences to engage impacted communities and

strengthen community involvement; to promote education, training and awareness in Nature Preserve maintenance; to ensure equitable access to well-preserved Nature Preserves; and to overcome behavioral obstacles to land stewardship in Illinois. For guidance, we looked to practitioners for examples of successful social engagement in the field of land stewardship.

- ▶ **Economic.** This project also explores the economic factors that influence environmental outcomes. Our research closely evaluates the limitations of state funded programs and considers viable alternative funding opportunities to address stewardship and management of the Nature Preserves System.
- ▶ **Political.** This project also draws upon the political, legal, and institutional aspects of sustainability by looking into the obligations that the state of Illinois has towards its public lands, and the ways private actors can enhance and support these obligations.

1.3 Methodology

The Dow Team conducted its research through the 2015 calendar year. We focused our research on identifying strategies in existing public-private partnerships dedicated to land management and conservation by collecting data through individual case study interviews and surveys. This research was supplemented with (1) consultation and advice from the ELPC, academic scholars, and land management practitioners; (2) nonprofit websites, reports, news and academic literature; (3) INPC Strategic Plan & meeting archive; (4) group brainstorming sessions; and (5) a needs assessment of the present state of public lands management in Illinois.

The case study and associated research focused on eight topic areas for effective public-private land conservation practices that included:

1. How the organization initially formed,
2. its geographic scope and scale,
3. its long- and short-term funding sources,
4. its general organizational capacity and structure,
5. how it performed on the ground stewardship activities,
6. its public-private relationship with a public partner,
7. its relationship with other partner organizations and actors, and
8. other interesting or innovative land management or organizational practices.

Upon gathering information from expert consultations, our team outlined several potential solutions for addressing the core issue of managing the Illinois Nature Preserves System. Afterwards, we reviewed the self-identified needs of the INPC's most recent needs assessment. Informed by the above research topics and the results of the needs assessment, the Dow Team documented a list of strategies in land conservation that are currently implemented by various nonprofit organizations and state entities, and could be applied to the unique characteristics of the Illinois Nature Preserves System.

BACKGROUND

2.1 Illinois Nature Preserves System

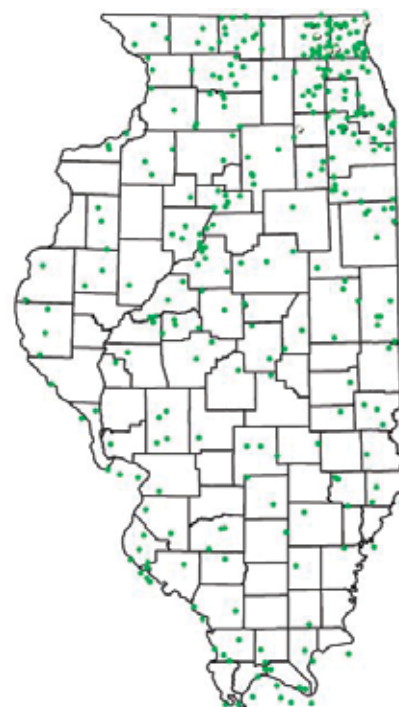
2.1.1 Overview

Established by the 1963 Illinois Natural Areas Preservation Act,¹ Illinois' system of Nature Preserves provides permanent protection for high-quality natural areas across the state. In order to receive the Nature Preserve designation, the land must generally retain its original natural character, support unusual ecological or geological features, provide habitat for endangered species, or possess other natural features of statewide significance. Ranging in size from one acre to more than 2,000 acres, Nature Preserves cover a wide swath of original forests, prairies, bluffs, meadows, and wetlands. To date, over 563 public and private sites in 94 counties totaling 108,206 acres have been protected as Nature Preserves or Land and Water Reserves. Nature preserves may be owned by the State of Illinois, as well as localities, private individuals, or institutions.² Roughly 53% are owned by the State of Illinois; the remaining 47% are owned by localities, private individuals, or institutions.³

2.1.2 Land Management

Designation of private or public land as an Illinois Nature Preserve provides immediate legal protections through a recorded easement administered by the state. Private land can become a Nature Preserve when the owner volunteers property that meets certain quality requirements. Nature Preserves are generally open to the public for hiking, wildlife viewing, education, and scientific research. However, they are very different from state parks or other recreation areas in that their focus is preservation rather than

FIGURE 3. MAP OF ILLINOIS NATURE PRESERVES (JULY 2015).



1 525 ILCS 30/1: Illinois Natural Areas Preservation Act. Illinois General Assembly. 1963. Web. 12 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/ilcs3.asp?ActID=1739&ChapAct=525%26nbsp%3BILCS%26nbsp%3B30%2F&ChapterID=44&ChapterName=CONSERVATION&ActName=Illinois%2BNatural%2BAreas%2BPreservation%2BAct%2E%20>>.

2 See, e.g., "Guide to Natural Areas in Northern Illinois." Natural Land Institute. March 2008. Web. <http://www.naturalland.org/docs/Natural_Areas%20Guide3_finalfullbook.pdf>.

3 Illinois Nature Preserves Commission. Minutes of the Special Meeting. 11 Jul. 2012. Web. 15 July 2015. <<https://dnr.state.il.us/inpc/minutes/specialmeeting11jul2012notes.pdf>>.

recreation. State regulations restrict certain uses in order to protect the plants, animals, and features found on these lands. In exchange, the landowner receives the benefits of reduced taxation, protection of natural features, and land management assistance. Violations of these protections can result in criminal penalties, civil fines or legal action.⁴

The INPC creates a master plan for every Nature Preserve to direct “the preservation, protection, management, development, and use of the Nature Preserve, identify the Nature Preserve owner, the location and description of the Nature Preserve, and conditions of custody and access.”⁵ The landowner—either the State or a private entity—is then legally obligated to “administer, manage, and protect the nature preserve in accordance with” this master plan, as well as the the instrument of dedication and general regulations governing to the Nature Preserves System.⁶ Land management activities may include invasive species control, prescribed burns, hydrologic restoration, girdling of trees, and habitat restoration. For private owners not capable of maintaining, limited resources may be available through local and regional conservation organizations, the regional volunteer stewardship network, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), or the INPC. Additionally, the owner must submit a report each February on visitor use, natural catastrophes and possible violations.

FIGURE 4. MAP OF NINE ILLINOIS NATURE PRESERVE REGIONS.



2.2 Actors

2.2.1 Illinois Nature Preserves Commission (INPC)

Because our focus is primarily on Nature Preserves owned by the state of Illinois, we detail who is in charge of taking care of that land. The Nature Preserves System is administered by the INPC, a nine-member volunteer body appointed by the state governor for three-year, unsalaried terms. The INPC holds biannual, public meetings throughout the state to approve new dedications, oversees management projects, and establishes general rules or policies for the Nature Preserves System, among other tasks.⁷

The Commission is also supported by “advisors” and “consultants,” including the representatives of the Illinois Natural History Survey, the Illinois State Museum, and other such institutions as the Commission may determine. Advisors and consultants “have the privilege of discussion and debate, but without the right to vote, in the meetings of the Commission.”⁸

Importantly, the INPC also has small, paid administrative staff in Springfield, IL and designated field staff in eight of its nine regions.

The Springfield staff consists of the Director (who also covers the ninth region), the Stewardship Project

4 “Dedication of Land as an Illinois Nature Preserve.” Illinois Nature Preserve Commission. Vol. 1, No. 2. 10 Apr. 2003. Web. 12 Nov. 2015.

5 17 Ill. Admin. Code 4000: Management of Nature Preserves. 31 Jan. 1994. Web. 12 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.ilga.gov/JCAR/AdminCode/017/017040000A01500R.html>>.

6 525 ILCS 30/1: Illinois Natural Areas Preservation Act. Illinois General Assembly. 1963. Web. 12 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/ilcs3.asp?ActID=1739>>.

7 “Illinois Nature Preserves Commission.” Illinois Department of Natural Resources. 1 Dec. 2010. Web. 12 Nov. 2015. <<http://dnr.state.il.us/INPC/index.htm>>.

8 525 ILCS 30/5

Manager, the Defense Specialist, and the Office Specialist. There are also Preservation Specialists, who work in each of the nine Nature Preserve regions. Although they meet several times a year, they mainly work remotely, often located in offices within park districts, state parks, and visitor centers. The Preservation Specialists have expertise in ecology and environmental science, and are often working in the field, talking with landowners, monitoring land, performing prescribed burns, and contracting out work. However, contracting is budget-limited.⁹

The INPC's work can be characterized as acquisition and protection, defense, and stewardship. Upon acquiring a new parcel of land (through purchase or donation), the state can designate it as an Illinois Nature Preserve, an Illinois Land and Water Reserve, or a National Heritage Landmark. Each designation implies particular protections and available uses. The INPC defends lands by assessing threats to their environmental integrity, which most often occur on surrounding property. The INPC works with governments and developers to minimize adverse environmental impact on protected lands and their ecosystems. In the event of a violation, the INPC has the authority to respond with litigious, civil or criminal penalties.¹⁰ The INPC also works with The Nature Conservancy's Volunteer Stewardship Network on activities such as site surveillance and trail construction/maintenance.¹¹

The state appropriated the INPC \$2.7 million in FY 2015 to support its operations.¹² That budget authorized 15 permanent staff and three paid resident interns. Furthermore, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources' (IDNR) Office of Resource Conservation supports the INPC's administrative processes, including accounting, human resources, timekeeping, and procurement.¹³

Funding for INPC staff and operations comes primarily from the state's Natural Areas Acquisition Fund (NAAF), which is managed by the IDNR and derived from the state's Real Estate Transfer Tax. The NAAF was created by the Illinois General Assembly in 1989 for "the acquisition, preservation and stewardship of natural areas, including habitat for endangered and threatened species, high quality natural communities, wetlands, and other areas with unique or unusual natural heritage qualities."¹⁴ The NAAF is used primarily for new land acquisitions. Additionally, 10% of the funds are set aside each year to pay for stewardship projects for existing natural areas, including Nature Preserves. Each year a project list is developed by the Division of Natural Heritage and INPC staff.

The NAAF reached its highest level of funding in 2001 at over \$15 million. Over the decade, however, funding has reduced drastically due to the state's economic conditions. Funds originally destined for the NAAF have been moved to the state's General Revenue Fund or used to pay for IDNR staff, at the expense of land conservation. On March 10, 2011, for example, the Governor announced his intention to use his interfund borrowing powers to take \$9 million from IDNR administered funds, including \$3.5 million from the Natural Areas Acquisition Fund. In fiscal year 2015, funds designated for administration of the Illinois Natural Areas Preservation Act were estimated at \$2.3 million.⁹

9 Illinois Nature Preserves Commission. Minutes of the Special Meeting. 26 Jan. 2015. Web. 15 July 2015. <<http://dnr.state.il.us/INPC/minutes/SpecialMeeting26JAN2015Minutes.Draft.pdf>>. PAGE 2

10 "Defense Programs." Illinois Nature Preserves Commission. Illinois Department of Natural Resources. 2015. Web. 12 Nov. 2015. <<http://dnr.state.il.us/INPC/defense.htm>>.

11 "Volunteer for Nature." The Nature Conservancy. 2015. Web. 12 Nov. 2015 <<http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/illinois/volunteer/>>.

12 "Enacted FY2015 Budget By Line Item." State of Illinois. 2015. Web. 12 Nov. 2015. <https://www.illinois.gov%2Fgov%2Fbudget%2Fdocuments%2Fbudget%2520book%2Ffy%25202015%2520budget%2520book%2Fenacted_fy15_budget_by_line_item.xls>.

13 "Resource Conservation." Illinois Department of Natural Resources. 2015. Web. 12 November 2015. <<http://dnr.state.il.us/orc/>>.

14 "Illinois Profile of State Programs and Policy Framework." Conservation Almanac. The Trust for Public Land. 2013. Web. 12 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.conservationalmanac.org/secure/almanac/midwest/il/programs.html>>.

2.2.2 Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR)

The IDNR plays a central role in managing natural resources and public lands in Illinois. The Department's functions include oversight of the state's park and recreation areas, enforcement of fishing and game laws, oil and gas permitting, forestry management, conservation of wildlife and habitat, stewarding endangered species, and field research and surveys. The IDNR oversees the INPC and staff members and both work closely together.



The IDNR serves several key functions in the stewardship of Illinois Nature Preserves. First, the IDNR is the largest landowner in the Nature Preserves System, owning more than 50% of the Nature Preserves System by area. The IDNR and the INPC share the responsibility for the protection, stewardship, and defense of these Nature Preserves. Second, the IDNR consults with local government owners of Nature Preserves to ensure compliance with the Illinois Endangered Species Protection Act, the Illinois Natural Areas Preservation Act, and the Illinois Interagency Wetland Policy Act.¹⁵ Third, the IDNR and INPC frequently collaborate on the preparation of dedication proposals for new Nature Preserves. Fourth, the IDNR provides some funding through the INPC to help other landowners manage their Nature Preserves. Finally, several sub-agencies of the IDNR implement stewardship and defense of Nature Preserves. For example, the field staff of the Illinois Division of Natural Heritage (IDNH), a subdivision of the IDNR, “routinely partners with INPC field biologists for specialized activities such as prescribed burning, legal protection of IDNR sites, biological surveys, and restoration activities.”¹⁶

2.2.3 Other Actors

The INPC depends heavily on partners within the IDNR, local government agencies, and other conservation groups to accomplish its mission. These actors more specifically include county forest preserve districts, conservation nonprofits, individual landowners, and land trusts.

- **County Forest Preserve Districts, Conservation Districts, and City Park Districts.** These land preservation agencies play an integral role in the Illinois Nature Preserves System, and represent the second-largest collective landholder of Nature Preserve lands.¹⁷ Larger public entities, such as the Cook County Forest Preserve District, have full-time stewardship staff, conservation capacity, and developed volunteer networks that can effectively manage their Nature Preserve holdings.¹⁸ However, smaller public entities may rely on direction from the INPC, and NAAF Stewardship assistance.

15 “Interagency Wetland Policy Act of 1989” Illinois Department of Natural Resources. 2015. Web. 12 Nov. 2015. <<http://dnr.state.il.us/wetlands/ch6e.htm>>.

16 Illinois Nature Preserves Commission. 2015-2020 Strategic Plan With Implementation Objectives: Public Review Draft. 11 Aug. 2015. Web. 2 Oct. 2015. <http://dnr.state.il.us/INPC/pdf/INPC15_20StratPlanPublicReviewDraft81115.pdf>.

17 County Forest Preserve Districts and Conservation Districts own roughly 35% of all Nature Preserves. Illinois Nature Preserves Commission. Minutes of the Special Meeting. 11 Jul. 2012. Web. 15 July 2015. <<https://dnr.state.il.us/inpc/minutes/specialmeeting11jul2012notes.pdf>>.

18 “Resource Management.” Forest Preserves of Cook County. Web. 12 Nov. 2015. <<http://fpdcc.com/about/departments/resource-management/>>.

- **Nonprofit Conservation Organizations.** Several nonprofit conservation organizations exist throughout the state of Illinois, and their functions vary depending on their specific missions. Natural lands see tremendous benefits from the activities and advocacy that these organizations engage in. Examples of these benefits include community empowerment, improvement of land quality, mitigation of anthropogenic causes of land degradation, and in some cases direct stewardship of Nature Preserves. Current large nonprofits (e.g. The Nature Conservancy, Chicago Wilderness, and Openlands) are similar in scope and capacity to large county governmental organizations. Some of the organizations acquire and donate parcels of land to the IDNR or other public agencies.

However, given the logistical and financial obstacles to owning a dispersed inventory of Nature Preserves, these groups own or maintain only a small fraction of Nature Preserves in the state.

- **Individual Private Landowners.** Individuals are incentivized to seek legal protection for their properties with the help of the INPC through reduced tax burden and access to stewardship assistance, such as the parcel's management plan. Private landowners retain title to their property and acquire primary stewardship responsibilities. This represents a small proportion of Nature Preserve owners by area.¹⁹
- **The Volunteer Stewardship Network.** Co-established by the INPC and The Nature Conservancy, The Volunteer Stewardship Network engages volunteers in stewardship activities and provides training and tools for its volunteers to remove invasive species, plant trees, and perform prescribed burns. In 2014, the Volunteer Stewardship Network supported the work of over 15,000 volunteers.²⁰
- **Land trusts.** The 40 land trusts in Illinois protect 200,000 acres with some overlap with the Nature Preserves System. They perform similar functions to the INPC and are supported by regional networks like the Prairie State Conservation Coalition.²¹
- **Independent Contractors.** Given the scope of the Nature Preserves System, contractors are an integral component of land management in Illinois. These forestry professionals perform such functions as prescribed burns, invasive species removal, forest management, wildlife and habitat management, and GPS/GIS mapping.²²

19 Illinois Nature Preserves Commission. Minutes of the Special Meeting. 11 Jul. 2012. Web. 15 July 2015. <<https://dnr.state.il.us/inpc/minutes/specialmeeting11jul2012notes.pdf>>.

20 Volunteer for Nature.

21 "Land Trust Alliance Member Land Trusts Operating in Illinois." Land Trust Alliance. 2015. Web. 12 Nov. 2015. <http://findalandtrust.org/states/illinois17/land_trusts#statewide>.

22 "2014 Illinois Director of Professional Consulting Foresters." University of Illinois Extension. Technical Forestry Bulletin NRES 202. June 2014. Web. 12 Nov. 2015. <<http://dnr.state.il.us/conservation/forestry/Documents/IllinoisDirectoryOfProfessionalConsultingForesters.pdf>>.

03

<https://flic.kr/p/jr3K5d>

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

“[W]e are past the doing more with less. The cutbacks in State government started more than seven years ago. The number of sites we have to manage has increased and the number of staff is far below where it was four to five years ago. . . . What looms over this process is [that] we have a new administration and a huge deficit and there will be cuts.”

— Illinois Nature Preserve Commissioner Dr. David Thomas²³

3.1 Problem Statement

The Illinois Nature Preserves System has long been strained by budget shortfalls, understaffing, and an ever-increasing inventory of lands. Land acquisition is outpacing the INPC’s budget growth while staff capacity has diminished and hiring is prohibited, all during a time of fiscal crisis in the state of Illinois. The Nature Preserves System has suffered as a result. Stewardship efforts are fragmented; prairies, wetlands, and forests are being lost to woody and exotic species; and threats to water quality or wildlife are left unaddressed on an alarming number of sites.

In early 2015, INPC convened a special meeting to assess its long-term challenges and goals.²⁴ Staff, Commissioners, consultants, advisors, and members of IDNR, municipal governments, and conservation partners provided input. The special meeting and subsequent planning efforts led to the creation of a 2015-2020 Strategic Plan, in which the INPC identified the following economic, political, and landscape threats to the Nature Preserves System:²⁵

- **Lack of Stewardship and Defense Capacity.** The needs of the Nature Preserves System far outstrip the financial resource currently available for land management. With only 12 staff people spread thin across the state, the INPC is unable to meet many critical needs of the 563 areas under its protection.²⁶

²³ Illinois Nature Preserves Commission. Minutes of the Special Meeting. 26 Jan. 2015. Web. 15 July 2015. <<http://dnr.state.il.us/INPC/minutes/SpecialMeeting26JAN2015Minutes.Draft.pdf>>.

²⁴ Illinois Nature Preserves Commission. 2015-2020 Strategic Plan With Implementation Objectives: Public Review Draft. 11 Aug. 2015. Web. 2 Oct. 2015. <http://dnr.state.il.us/INPC/pdf/INPC15_20StratPlanPublicReviewDraft81115.pdf>.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

INPC staff estimated that there were approximately \$4 million in unmet stewardship needs in the Nature Preserves System in 2007 alone.²⁷ The situation has only worsened since then. Even as the INPC budget has marginally increased in recent years, the number of field and administrative staff has not proportionally increased. Citing staffing inadequacies, INPC notes that it has reached the point where it “does not have the capacity of people to put [additional stewardship project] contracts in place.”²⁸ A former Commissioner estimates that currently half of all Nature Preserves are not being maintained.²⁹

- ▶ **Scattered and Non-Contiguous Distribution of Preserves.** Part of the problem surrounding Nature Preserves relates to the size and scope of the lands. Nature Preserves are small—most under 100 acres in size.³⁰ Furthermore, the parcels are geographically dispersed across the state, complicating the task of monitoring and management.
- ▶ **Unstable funding.** Stewardship efforts on Nature Preserves are supported primarily through the Natural Areas Acquisition Fund (NAAF), which is derived from the state’s Real Estate Transfer Tax, a notoriously unstable source of revenue.³¹ The NAAF has declined to around \$5 million per year, from \$13.6 million in 2006.³² Furthermore, in recent years, funds originally destined for the NAAF have been extracted to the state’s General Revenue Fund or used to pay for IDNR staff, at the expense of land conservation.³³
- ▶ **Staff vacancies and retirements.** Staffing issues have exacerbated capacity issues for some time. Vacancies for field staff and administrative positions have remained unfilled for years. For example, the Assistant Director and Natural Areas Protection Manager positions have been vacant since 2005; the Area 9 Natural Areas Preservation Specialist position has been vacant since 2011; and the Natural Areas Defense Specialist position has been vacant since 2013.³⁴ Consequently, for over a decade, field and project personnel have been completing statewide programmatic and administrative tasks, which would typically have been handled by midlevel managers.³⁵ INPC’s Director and other long-tenured staff are also reaching retirement, potentially leading to large gaps in institutional knowledge and expertise.³⁶ Potential increases in retirement in partner agencies, such as the IDNR and IDNH, and the lack of young professionals with an interest in land conservation place further constraints on filling vacancies.³⁷
- ▶ **Growing Inventory.** The INPC has never had enough staff or money for stewardship on publicly or privately owned lands. However, the strong interest in protection programs has precipitated a significant growth in the number of new dedications, further straining the INPC’s resources. Since 2003, the inventory of protected lands has grown by 50% while the number of staff people has remained stable. In the last five years alone, the inventory has grown by 20%.³⁸

27 Illinois Nature Preserves Commission. Minutes of the Special Meeting. 27 Jan. 2014. Web. 10 Oct. 2015. <<http://dnr.state.il.us/INPC/minutes/SpecialMeeting27JAN2014Notes.pdf>>.

28 Illinois Nature Preserves Commission. Minutes of the Special Meeting. 26 Jan. 2015. Web. 15 July 2015. <<http://dnr.state.il.us/INPC/minutes/SpecialMeeting26JAN2015Minutes.Draft.pdf>>.

29 Rosenthal, L. Telephone interview. 17 Mar. 2015.

30 Illinois Nature Preserves Commission. 2015-2020 Strategic Plan With Implementation Objectives: Public Review Draft. 11 Aug. 2015. Web. 2 Oct. 2015.

31 Ibid.

32 Figures compiled from INPC meeting minutes archive.

33 Illinois Nature Preserves Commission. Minutes of the Special Meeting. 27 Jan. 2014. Web. 15 July 2015. <<http://www.dnr.state.il.us/inpc/minutes/specialmeeting27jan2014notes.pdf>>.

34 Ibid.

35 “Marc Miller’s budget message.” *Hearland Outdoors*. 16 Mar. 2011. Web. 15 Oct. 2015. <http://www.heartlandoutdoors.com/scattershooting/story/marc_millers_budget_message/>.

36 Illinois Nature Preserves Commission. Minutes of the Special Meeting. 27 Jan. 2014. Web. 15 July 2015. <<http://www.dnr.state.il.us/inpc/minutes/specialmeeting27jan2014notes.pdf>>.

37 Ibid.

38 Figures calculated from INPC meeting minute archive.

- **Increasing Landscape Threats.** Oil spills, neighbor encroachments, groundwater contamination, all-terrain vehicle trespass, illegal hunting, herbicide drifting, transmission lines and other infrastructure developments, and hydrology disruptions continue to degrade Nature Preserves.³⁹ These threats are growing in number due to changes in adjacent land use. The INPC also notes that protected areas “are under ever increasing threats from landscape scale pressures. Natural areas and the systems that support them are stressed by climate change, exotic and invasive plant and animal species, increased demand for energy and other economic development, lack of land use planning in much of the state, and general degradation of natural resources, such as water and air quality.”⁴⁰
- **Lack of training capacity.** A lack of mid-level staff has also hindered efforts to manage volunteers.⁴¹ Given the scale of the Nature Preserves System, the INPC relies heavily on the work of partners, including landowners, private sector restoration service providers, and land conservation groups.⁴² To help supply these groups with volunteers, the INPC and The Nature Conservancy jointly founded the Volunteer Stewardship Network (VSN), a statewide network of volunteer stewards and stewardship groups working within natural areas in Illinois.⁴³ Due to staffing shortfalls, however, INPC’s capacity to train, coordinate, support, and direct these volunteers has substantially declined.⁴⁴
- **Political climate.** Political uncertainties and IDNR budget cuts loom over the state’s conservation efforts. A decade of severe budget and staffing cuts at the IDNR has decimated the capacity within the agency. From 2002 to 2011, IDNR’s budget decreased by more than 50% and staff decreased by more than 30%, which necessitated a hiring freeze within the agency.⁴⁵ Amid these budget cuts, the Governor has also begun to extract funds originally destined for the NAAF, the primary source of INPC stewardship and land acquisition funding. In 2011, for example, the Governor announced he would use his interfund borrowing powers to withdraw \$9 million from IDNR administered funds, including \$3.5 million from the Natural Areas Acquisition Fund (NAAF), for use in the state’s General Revenue Fund or to pay for IDNR staff, at the expense of land conservation.⁴⁶ The problems are only getting worse. As a result of the current state’s fiscal crisis, Governor Rauner has proposed to reduce IDNR’s operating budget by \$15 million in FY2016, a roughly 6 percent cut.⁴⁷ Of the 171 threatened layoffs of state employees, 107 are from the IDNR.⁴⁸

3.2 INPC’s Self-Identified Goals

In a 2012 special meeting, the INPC staff, Commissioners, advisors, and consultants contemplated creating a private, 501(c)(3) partner organization to assist the INPC in stewarding underserved lands. This partner would serve as a repository for charitable donations for the Nature Preserves System, funds which could be used to hire stewardship contractors or provide direct grants to local land trusts. Importantly, this partner organization would protect such funding from being swept or borrowed by the state government. The concept draft for this 501(c)(3) organization provides the basic foundation for our recommendations.

39 Illinois Nature Preserves Commission. Minutes of the Special Meeting. 27 Jan. 2014. Web. 15 July 2015. <<http://www.dnr.state.il.us/inpc/minutes/specialmeeting27jan2014notes.pdf>>.

40 Illinois Nature Preserves Commission. 2015-2020 Strategic Plan With Implementation Objectives: Public Review Draft. 11 Aug. 2015. Web. 2 Oct. 2015.

41 Illinois Nature Preserves Commission. Minutes of the Special Meeting. 27 Jan. 2014. Web. 15 July 2015. <<http://www.dnr.state.il.us/inpc/minutes/specialmeeting27jan2014notes.pdf>>.

42 Ibid.

43 “Volunteer for Nature.” The Nature Conservancy. Web. 15 Oct. 2015. <<http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/illinois/volunteer/>>.

44 Illinois Nature Preserves Commission. Minutes of the Special Meeting. 27 Jan. 2014. Web. 15 July 2015. <<http://www.dnr.state.il.us/inpc/minutes/specialmeeting27jan2014notes.pdf>>.

45 “Illinois State Budget Fiscal Year 2016.” State of Illinois. Chapter 6-92. 18 Feb. 2015. Print. 12 Nov. 2015.

46 “Governor Pat Quinn to borrow from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.” The Examiner 23 Mar. 2011. Web. 15 Oct. 2015.

47 Edwards, K. “Budget sacrifices DNR jobs in Illinois.” KWQC 5 Aug. 2015. Web. 15 Oct. 2015. <<http://kwqc.com/2015/08/05/budget-sacrifices-dnr-jobs-in-illinois/>>.

48 Ibid.

Additionally, the INPC's 2015-2020 Strategic Plan stakes out a path that depends crucially on assistance from INPC partners. The goals and strategies in that Strategic Plan, reproduced in part below, highlight both the critical and concrete opportunities for a statewide partner organization.

TABLE 1. INPC 2015–2020 STRATEGIC GOALS.

| Issue | Goal | Strategies |
|----------------|---|---|
| Protection | To protect more of Illinois' high quality natural areas and other significant lands. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Promote good preserve design, connectivity, and long-term sustainability. 2. Better define lands that qualify for inclusion in INPC System. 3. Encourage transfer of fee ownership of privately owned Nature Preserve sites to conservation organizations. 4. Consider inclusion of affirmative landowner responsibilities in instruments of dedication/registration. 5. Conduct landowner contact for all new Illinois Natural Areas Inventory (INAI) sites and high priority existing INAI sites. 6. Increase landowner incentives to encourage participation in Nature Preserve programs (increase funding for land acquisition and management). |
| Stewardship | Improve and maintain the condition of natural areas within the Nature Preserves System. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Engage our partners, landowners and the public to increase stewardship in the Nature Preserve system (by leveraging funding and other assistance from those partners). 2. Conduct a needs assessment to determine the scope of management needed within the Nature Preserve system. 3. Develop a systematic approach to gather baseline information (with assistance from landowners, partners, volunteers, and students). 4. Integrate best science available into the development of management plans for Nature Preserves and Land & Water Reserves. 5. Promote compatible research opportunities that support adaptive management within the Nature Preserves System (information cycle, research on best management practices, and apply as appropriate at INPC sites). |
| Identification | Identify suitable areas of significant natural resources to assure comprehensive representation of Illinois biodiversity. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dedicated funding for biological inventories, land acquisition, stewardship, and defense. 2. Establish a geographically and temporally appropriate monitoring program for INPC sites. 3. Establish a natural areas training academy. 4. Identify high potential sites identified within the INAI update process to finalize. 5. Facilitate development of online biodiversity databases (i.e. mussel database). 6. Research—encourage basic biological surveys (streams, caves, important bird areas, insect sites, pollinators etc.) with university partners. |
| Defense | To proactively avert threats to lands or sites protected in the Nature Preserves System to prevent adverse effects. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strengthen coordination and communication with IDNR. 2. Define roles and responsibilities and tools available to avert threats. 3. Strengthen coordination and communication with landowners and other partners. |
| Defense | Increase efficiency and effectiveness in responding to incidents in foreseeing the Illinois Natural Areas Preservation Act when violations occur on sites protected in the Nature Preserves System. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop response protocols (standard operating procedures and work flow charts by incident type). 2. Obtain baseline data that can be used to document/show impact (can be prioritized for sites in Nature Preserve System). 3. Communicate response protocols to all stakeholders. |

| | | |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| Outreach and Partnership | Enhance partnering opportunities using innovative approaches so as a model in preserving biodiversity in Illinois. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work with partners to increase outreach to and engagement of the public (i.e. stewardship activities at INPC sites). 2. Work with partners in creative ways (funding) to protect and preserve biodiversity in Illinois. 3. Work with partners to increase research that provides baseline information. |
| Outreach and Partnership | Increase public awareness, support and understanding of INPC, its partners and their impact. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work with partners with expertise in communication to increase public awareness and support of INPC, its partners and their impact. 2. Examine the effectiveness of how bilingual/bicultural communication could enhance the public profile of INPC and its partners. |
| Outreach and Partnership | Increase agency efficiency and effectiveness. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Leverage partnerships to meet the agency's goals. 2. Develop a succession plan. 3. Meet technology needs to realize agency goals. 4. Develop and implement staff training plan with emphasis on changes in federal/state conservation rights and tax law. |

Source: Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, 2015–2020 Strategic Plan With Implementation Objectives

3.3 Why Care?

“Parks are essential to the health of individuals and communities. They offer recreation and renewal, promote exercise, reduce crime, revitalize neighborhoods, protect the environment, and bring communities together.”

—Trust for Public Land⁴⁹

Illinois ranks in the bottom third of states in spending for open space, falling from an average of nearly \$50 million a year in the early 2000s to now less than \$10 million annually.⁵⁰ Nationally, the state “ranks 48th in terms of open space and recreational areas available per citizen.”⁵¹ As a result of chronic underfunding, Illinois has lost more than 90% of its original wetlands and prairie.⁵² Public-private partnerships can help prevent further decline of open space in Illinois and ensure the care of existing Nature Preserves for generations to come.

Land stewardship should be understood as inherently valuable, but from a political and action standpoint, understanding and articulating the benefits of land conservation is useful to further justify spending in this area. The paybacks from land conservation include improved ecosystem services⁵³ as well as increased recreation and property values. The Trust for Public Land estimates that every dollar invested in Illinois land conservation produces \$4 in economic value of natural goods and services.⁵⁴

49 “Make Room for Parks, Land & People.” The Trust for Public Land. The Trust for Public Land. Web. 12 Nov. 2015. <<https://www.tpl.org/magazine/make-room-parks%C2%97landpeople>>.

50 “Study Finds IL Far Behind in Open Space Protection.” The Trust for Public Land. The Trust for Public Land. 1 Mar. 2007. <<https://www.tpl.org/media-room/study-finds-il-far-behind-open-space-protection>>.

51 McDonald, C.D., Miller, C.A., and Stewart, W.P., “Public Attitudes Toward Open Space Initiatives in Illinois: Technical Report to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.” 28 July 2003. <<http://www.inhs.illinois.edu/files/4613/3970/8206/OpenSpaceReport.pdf>>.

52 “Study Finds IL Far Behind in Open Space Protection.” The Trust for Public Land. The Trust for Public Land. 1 Mar. 2007. <<https://www.tpl.org/media-room/study-finds-il-far-behind-open-space-protection>>.

53 Kovacs, K., Polasky, S., Nelson, E., Keeler, B., Pennington, D., Plantinga, A., and Taff, S. “Evaluating the Return in Ecosystem Services from Investment in Public Land Acquisitions.” PLoS ONE, 8(6): e6220211 (2013). Web.

54 The Trust for Public Land. “Measuring the Return on Investment in Land Conservation.” Illinois Needs Assessment and Return on Investment in Land Conservation. 2015. Print.

From an ecosystem perspective, protected lands can improve local air and drinking water quality, preserve critical wildlife habitat, reduce flood damage, and provide other ecosystem services.⁵⁵

These estimates do not include the value of outdoor recreation, which is a huge driver of economic activity in Illinois. Roughly \$3.8 billion is spent on wildlife recreation in Illinois each year, supporting 22,000 jobs.⁵⁶ In 2011 alone, nearly four million Illinois residents and nonresidents fished, hunted, or wildlife watched in the state.⁵⁷ The INPC stewardship programs can benefit outdoor recreation and help drive economic activity by preserving some of the state's most beautiful natural areas for public use. Although certain recreation activities are prohibited on Nature Preserves because of their designation, many publicly-owned Preserves are open to the public for hiking and wildlife viewing.⁵⁸ Relatedly, access to public lands and recreation opportunities has a positive impact on physical and mental health.⁵⁹

Increased property values are another source of value from land conservation. Natural open space is likely to be regarded by homeowners and buyers as an asset, especially where the land is well maintained.⁶⁰ For example, an economic study of the Garman Nature Preserve in Waterloo, Wisconsin found that parcels directly adjacent to the preserve enjoyed a 10% property value premium, and those within the viewshed enjoyed a 7.5% premium associated with the natural area.⁶¹

55 Ibid.

56 U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and U.S. Census Bureau. 2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation. 2014. Web. 20 Oct. 2015. <<http://www.dnr.illinois.gov/about/Documents/FHW11.pdf>>.

57 Ibid.

58 "Illinois Nature Preserves Commission." Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Web. 12 Nov. 2015. <<http://dnr.state.il.us/inpc/>>.

59 "Economic & Health Benefits." The Trust for Public Land. Web. 20 Oct. 2015. <<https://www.tpl.org/economic-health-benefits>>.

60 Numerous studies suggest that parks and open space can increase nearby property values. See, for example, Crompton, J. L. 2004. *The proximate principle: The impact of parks, open space and water features on residential property values and the property tax base*. Ashburn, VA: National Recreation and Park Association; Miller, Andrew R. "Valuing open space: Land economics and neighborhood parks." Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Center for Real Estate, 2001. Print.

61 Kelly, C., Klaas, J., Olson, E., Van Hecke, S. "The Impact of Park Expansion on Property Values and Municipal Services in Jefferson County, Wisconsin." Fall 2015. Print.



04

<https://goo.gl/UmwYNY>

ADAPTING THE “URBAN PARK CONSERVANCY MODEL” FOR THE ILLINOIS NATURE PRESERVE SYSTEM

Urban Park Conservancies are gaining popularity across the country as a response to the declining capacity of government entities to maintain public lands. Conservancies are generally private, nonprofit organizations designed to revitalize public parks by “rais[ing] money independent of the [government entity] and spend[ing] it under a plan of action mutually agreed upon with the government. Most conservancies neither own nor hold easements on the parkland; the land remains the city’s, and the city retains ultimate authority over everything that happens there.”⁶²

Our Team was tasked with determining whether a public-private partnership “conservancy model” would work for the Illinois Nature Preserve System despite its rural, scattered character and the fact the parcels are preserved for their high biological value, in contrast to the recreational value of a park. Given this direction, our Team analyzed the added value that a public-private partnership “urban park conservancy” could bring to the INPC and the Illinois Preserve System. We also assessed aspects of the preserve management that a new nonprofit partner could address more effectively than a state agency (see Section 4.1). Lastly, considering the main threats to the Preserve System outlined in Section 3, our Team then focused our research on strategies for public-private partnerships managing land (see Section 4.2). The following section (Section 4) outlines this research and analysis.

Section 5 then details our proposed model. The final proposed model focuses directly on implementing stewardship projects. It would entail creating a new nonprofit partner to the INPC with staff capable of undertaking or overseeing invasive species management, prescribed burns, and other stewardship efforts. The nonprofit would supplement, but not substitute, the INPC. Its strategy would be to tackle and grow: first, to tackle the immediate need for more boots-on-the ground stewardship work; second, to build community capacity and an advocacy voice for the Nature Preserves System. However, another consideration we weighed is using infrastructure already in place instead of creating a new entity. The new

⁶² “Public Spaces/Private Money The Triumphs and Pitfalls of Urban Park Conservancies.” The Trust for Public Land. 1 Feb. 2014. Web. 2 Nov. 2015.

501(c)3 could instead be housed at an existing “incubator organization” already located in Illinois such as the Nature Conservancy, Open Lands, the Prairie State Conservation Coalition, the ELPC, or another organization with a similar regional natural resource management-related mission. This could avoid duplication of missions and infrastructure like office space, administrative staff, human resources, and IT support (see Section 5.3.1).

4.1 Public-Private Partnerships and the “Urban Park Conservancy Model”

Across the country, state and local governments have been experiencing significant budget cuts to natural resource management programs and increasingly lack the capacity to provide basic functions like natural area preservation, maintenance, acquisition, or stewardship.⁶³ In response to these financial challenges many governments are partnering with nonprofit and private organizations using public-private partnerships.⁶⁴ Much like business partnerships, public-private partnerships take advantage of partners’ complementary strengths and permit the government and private entities to focus on what they do best. Nonprofits tend to act quickly, have community credibility, and are said to “bring an atmosphere of possibility” around stalled or seemingly impossible projects. Conversely, governmental actors bring public legitimacy, legal authority and organizational infrastructure (see figure below).⁶⁵

TABLE 2. PUBLIC AND PRIVATE ASSETS AND LIABILITIES.⁶⁶

| | Potential Assets | Potential Liabilities |
|---------------------------|--|--|
| Public Sector | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Stable source of funding ▶ Organizational Infrastructure ▶ Public legitimacy ▶ Natural constituencies ▶ Institutional knowledge and expertise ▶ Legal authority | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Chronic underfunding ▶ Bureaucratic inertia ▶ Popular indifference ▶ Narrow constituencies |
| Non Profit Partner | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Flexible funding ▶ Organizational flexibility and agility ▶ Community credibility ▶ More in touch with and responsive to community needs ▶ Broad constituencies ▶ Lack of bureaucracy and history | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Unpredictable funding ▶ Lack of follow-through ▶ Unrealistic expectations ▶ Shallow support |

Table above is adapted from the Wallace Foundation’s *Partnerships for Parks* report and Endicott’s *Land Conservation using Public-Private Partnerships*.

In the context of land conservation, public-private partnerships have often been used to manage urban parks or regional park systems using a “conservancy” model.⁶⁷ Over 41 urban conservancies have been

63 Bischoff, Shelli. “Land management and public-private partnerships.” Telephone interview. 15 Oct. 2015; Mann, Jim. “Public Private Partnerships and Land Conservation Models.” Telephone interview. 23 Mar. 2015; Yaffee, Steve. “Land management and nonprofits.” In-person interview. 9 Apr. 2015.

64 Mann, Jim. “Public Private Partnerships and Land Conservation Models.” Telephone interview. 23 Mar. 2015; Van Putten, Mark. “Public Private Partnerships and Land Conservation Models.” Telephone interview. 6 Apr. 2015; Endicott, Eve, ed. *Land conservation through public/private partnerships*. Island Press, 1993.

65 Endicott, Eve, ed. *Land conservation through public/private partnerships*. Island Press, 1993.

66 Ibid.; Walker, Charles. “Partnerships for Parks - Lessons from the Lila Wallace-Reader’s Digest Urban Parks Program.” 2000. Web. 10 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/urban-parks/Documents/Partnership-for-Parks.pdf>>.

67 Mann, Jim. “Public Private Partnerships and Land Conservation Models.” Telephone interview. 23 Mar. 2015; Van Putten, Mark. “Public Private Partnerships and Land Conservation Models.” Telephone interview. 6 Apr. 2015; Endicott, Eve, ed. *Land conservation through public/private partnerships*. Island Press, 1993.

developed, the majority since 2000.⁶⁸ Most of the conservancies have similar formation stories and structures; most emerged from a “crisis”—often stemming from a severe lack of funds or support to provide basic maintenance and stewardship of public lands. They are typically private, nonprofit organizations that raise money independent of the public partner and spend it under a plan of action mutually agreed upon with the government entity. Many conservancies do not own or hold easements, and the public partner retains the ultimate authority over most management decisions for the lands. They also tend to have very large, representative boards and a small staff.⁶⁹

Due to the “urban park conservancy” model’s success in bringing in significant funding and providing for the long-term management and stewardship of large tracts of land in close partnership with their public partner, many lessons were gleaned from them in the Trust for Public Land’s 2014 report *Public Spaces/Private Money: The Triumphs and Pitfalls of Urban Park Conservancies*. The lessons from this report are captured below as they could apply to the more rural, spread out, and non-recreational focus of the Illinois Nature Preserves System:

Lessons Learned from the Urban Park Conservancy Model⁷⁰

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). One of the best ways to ensure success of a conservancy public-private partnership is through a formal agreement that defines both parties’ roles. It details the authorities and responsibilities for fundraising, public land management planning, maintenance, programming, and other matters. For the newly formed nonprofit, the MOU provides legitimacy, specifies how much responsibility the new organization will take on, and indicates the capacity it needs to accomplish these responsibilities. For the public entity, the MOU protects the public interest in the public lands, defending against any unexpected nonprofit initiatives or donor influences. It also answers key issues like who the stakeholders are and how much leverage they will have in planning and implementing the agreement, which partner will handle bidding on projects, how maintenance will be divided between the partners, what safeguards will protect private dollars from being misspent, and how donors will be recognized.

Planning and Project Prioritization. Donors and board members of a new conservancy often have strong opinions about where its money should be spent, and those opinions could conflict with the agendas of governmental partners. To curtail this conflict, public-private partnerships often develop a “visionary document” that respects the history of the governmental agency’s work while also incorporating the new ideas of the nonprofit and its members/donors. The visionary or planning document needs to create a prioritization system for projects and areas to be managed. Additionally, it must specify what should be done and when.

68 Walker, Charles. “Partnerships for Parks - Lessons from the Lila Wallace-Reader’s Digest Urban Parks Program.” 2000. Web. 10 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/urban-parks/Documents/Partnership-for-Parks.pdf>>.

69 Mann, Jim. “Public Private Partnerships and Land Conservation Models.” Telephone interview. 23 Mar. 2015; Walker, Charles. “Partnerships for Parks - Lessons from the Lila Wallace-Reader’s Digest Urban Parks Program.” 2000. Web. 10 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/urban-parks/Documents/Partnership-for-Parks.pdf>>; Yarrow, Andrew L. “Private Money Is Keeping Central Park Healthy.” The New York Times. 29 Oct. 1990. Web. 8 Nov. 2015. <<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C0CECFDE1038F93AA15753C1A96695826>>.

70 “Public Spaces/Private Money The Triumphs and Pitfalls of Urban Park Conservancies.” The Trust for Public Land. 1 Feb. 2014. Web. 2 Nov. 2015. <https://www.tpl.org/sites/default/files/files_upload/ccpe-Parks-Conservancy-Report.pdf>.

Maintenance and Basic Stewardship. Providing basic maintenance and stewardship for public lands is often the biggest challenge conservancies face. Many public-private partnerships focus their initial energy and funds on large capital projects or projects that are tangible and “donor worthy.” This helps build momentum and trust of foundations, grantors, and donors. Later, if successful, many private organizations then extend their missions into maintenance, stewardship and management of the land, and sometimes full administration. Donors often appreciate this because it alleviates concerns that private contributions might be spent on responsibilities that should be fulfilled through tax revenue. Some conservancies build a long-term maintenance or stewardship fee into the initial budget of each capital or large project—an upfront gift from the donor or foundation that becomes a permanent trust fund. Alternatively, some conservancies start out small with programming, and then build capacity to take on larger projects. The latter is more difficult to sustain long-term funding.

A Strong and Representative Board of Directors. While having a dynamic executive director and staff is very important for a new conservancy, the organization’s board of directors can make-or-break the new group. The board of directors must help with fundraising, advocacy, strategic guidance, political connections, technical expertise, connection to regional communities, and other key resources. The best boards have plenty of members with wealth and connections to government and industry, but also a few recognized land conservation champions with good credibility, knowledge and history with the communities surrounding each of the parks or natural areas. Some conservancies help broaden their board’s capacities by creating a second “advisory board” that can include issue advocates, community leaders, or stewardship experts. While this group may not bring in high donations, they can create important grassroots and political support, especially when the lands are scattered throughout a region.

Small Staff and Use of Contractors. Most conservancy models have a small staff that generally focuses on outreach, fundraising, advocacy, and contractor management, with only the very largest conservancies hiring significant numbers of maintenance and program workers.

Fundraising. In many ways, an underfunded conservancy that is part of a public-private partnership is worse than no conservancy. If the conservancy is unable to raise sufficient funds to fulfill their responsibilities, both the government and the conservancy could be under severe public scrutiny and key responsibilities could be left unfulfilled. One best practice many conservancies use to encourage large donors is the use of plaques or designating names of preserves or parks after their donors. Establishing minimum thresholds for these name rights is important.

Relationship with the Public Partner. Balancing the authority between the public partner and the new nonprofit needs to be a priority with careful consideration of how the nonprofit is not simply replacing the governmental partner. Other careful consideration should be paid to issues between conservancy and governmental workers working side-by-side. Issues around differences in pay-scale and rules and policies that may apply to one but not the other can arise. To help alleviate these issues, the conservancy will often agree to the governmental partner’s policies even if it is not legally required to do so.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD: Urban Park Conservancies

New York's Central Park Conservancy, formed in 1980 following decades of declining budget constraints and management capacity, was the country's first urban park conservancy. The Central Park Conservancy is a private nonprofit organization that manages Central Park under a public-private partnership contract with the City of New York and NYC Parks. The city retains control over major policy decisions about the Park as well

as the enforcement of rules and laws within it. The Conservancy is responsible for the day-to-day maintenance and operations. When the partnership was formed, they hoped to create "something permanent and non-political, not subject to changes when a commissioner or mayor leaves office; but also something that was accountable to the public and worked in partnership with the city."⁷¹



In 1997 in Philadelphia, the city-owned entity, the Fairmount Park Commission, performed a study to determine the feasibility of a more formal and effective development program for the park. The study recommended the creation of a separate 501(c)3 fundraising organization, which led to the creation of the Fairmount Park Foundation. The Foundation spent ten years raising over \$20 million for the Philadelphia parks system. Then in 2001 the Foundation became the Fairmount

Park Conservancy. Much of the Conservancy's time now is dedicated to being a collaborative leader and partner in a park system of 353 parks. They have shifted their focus from capital projects development to primarily focusing on strategic planning, project management, contract management, program development, community outreach, and technical trainings for all of the parks throughout the region. The Conservancy works in a close public-private partnership with the Philadelphia Parks and Recreation Department.⁷²



Other notable examples of the public-private partnership conservancy model include the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy (managing 10 parks), the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy (managing 21 parks and parkways), the Louisville Olmsted Parks Conservancy (managing 18 parks and parkways), or the Staten Island Greenbelt Conservancy (managing 10 parks).

4.2 Strategies in Land Conservation

The urban park conservancy model has been shown to work very effectively for parks within urban settings, which generally have large donor bases, high visibility to people, high recreational value, and the ability to fund themselves through rental and concession fees. They are able to generate significant funding and

71 "Public Private Partnerships: New York and the Central Park Conservancy." Sustainable Cities Collective. 15 Jan. 2013. Web. 30 Oct. 2015. <<http://www.sustainablecitiescollective.com/city-parks-blog/111581/public-private-partnerships-new-york-and-central-park-conservancy>>; Yarrow, Andrew L. "Private Money Is Keeping Central Park Healthy." The New York Times. 29 Oct. 1990. Web. 8 Nov. 2015. <<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C0CEFDE1038F93AA15753C1A96695826>>.

72 "Explore Philly Parks – Fairmount Park Conservancy." Fairmount Park Conservancy. Web. 15 Nov. 2015. <<http://myphillypark.org/explore/>>.

provide for a wide variety of maintenance and stewardship needs. However, few examples of this model have been researched to understand how effectively an urban conservancy can manage lands being preserved for their biological value in more rural settings, especially when scattered throughout an entire state, like the Illinois Nature Preserves System. Therefore, in order to address the complexity of effectively managing the Nature Preserve System, our team closely examined other organizations throughout the U.S. that have made meaningful strides in public lands stewardship, in addition to the lessons learned from the urban park conservancy model.

These practices and strategies were identified through surveys with nonprofits managing land throughout the country and were supplemented by land management expert interviews, websites, online news stories and academic literature on effective public-private partnership practices. We found that a select number of the following strategies for land conservation that focus on rural, dispersed lands of high biological value, combined with the “urban park conservancy” public-private partnership model, could be viable options for the future management of Illinois Nature Preserves.

4.2.1 Contracting for Stewardship and Land Management

One avenue that many conservation organizations and government agencies are increasingly exploring is stewardship contracting.⁷³ Stewardship contracting can increase the pace and scale of restoration work that may not otherwise have been possible due to funding or personnel constraints. Furthermore, outsourcing work is often more cost-effective than building internal capacity and can provide a continued source of income and employment for local communities. That is to say, it allows agencies to invest in local community-based jobs by placing funds directly into the hands of these local experts. It capitalizes on the idea that restoration professionals at the local level have a distinct understanding of the local landscape.⁷⁴ It also allows agencies to lean on this expertise instead of having to build and maintain in-house expertise. Often, local land conservancies, nonprofits, and agencies have existing connections with restoration professionals and can be utilized to create a list and regional network of skilled restoration and stewardship contractors.⁷⁵

STORIES FROM THE FIELD: Stewardship Contracting

In the past ten years the US Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management have turned more and more to stewardship contracting as a flexible approach to implementing natural resource stewardship projects on federal lands.⁷⁶ They are increasingly working with regional collaborative groups to identify and prioritize stewardship needs, and then contracting out with local resource and stewardship specialists to carry out the projects. In this way they are investing in the local communities that house the federal lands, creating and ensuring a future of natural resource jobs in the communities, and are using economies of scale instead of using only BLM and USFS staff.

73 Bischoff, Shelli. “Land management and public-private partnerships.” Telephone interview. 15 Oct. 2015; Endicott, Eve, ed. *Land conservation through public/private partnerships*. Island Press, 1993.

74 Brush, Lisa. “Michigan Stewardship Network Overview.” Telephone interview. 29 Sept. 2015.

75 Kerkvliet, Joe. “The Practice and Economics of Stewardship Contracting: A Case Study of the Clearwater Stewardship Project.” *Forest Products Journal* 60.4 (2010): n. pag. Web. 2 Nov. 2015. <http://wilderness.org/sites/default/files/Practice-Economics-of-Stewardship-Contracting_0.pdf>

76 Bischoff, Shelli. “Land management and public-private partnerships.” Telephone interview. 15 Oct. 2015; Endicott, Eve, ed. *Land conservation through public/private partnerships*. Island Press, 1993.

The Michigan Stewardship Network (TSN) is a statewide nonprofit that seeks to empower and connect people and organizations to care for the land and water in their communities. They have divided the state into 11 “stewardship clusters” or regions. Each “cluster” is led by a local leader that facilitates partnerships with local groups and volunteers. One duty of the leader is to work with local partners to maintain a network of “restoration contractors” and connect these contractors to private and public stewardship projects within each “cluster.” A significant portion of TSN’s budget is allocated to stewardship contracting. This type of model helps provide for lands scattered throughout an entire state, while ensuring quality and professional work.⁷⁷



Local stewardship contractor conducting a prescribed burn in Southeast Michigan. Photo courtesy of The Stewardship Network’s Grand Raisin Cluster.

The East Bay Park District (the largest urban regional park district in the U.S.) in California contracts with local contractors and restoration experts to provide for capital projects and basic maintenance and stewardship to be conducted within their park system. It has an open, online, and transparent bidding process, prioritization system, and interactive map of potential projects for contracting on all of its parks. This provides easy access for all restoration specialists wanting to work within their system.⁷⁸

Furthermore, instead of keeping these skilled workers on staff, most of the urban park conservancies located throughout the U.S. use the private contracting model as well for their stewardship and capital projects.

4.2.2 Job Training Academies and Workforce Development

A common concern for many state and federal natural resource organizations when hiring staff or developing partnerships to perform stewardship activities is a lack of technical expertise and knowledge.⁷⁹ One way many organizations have addressed this issue is through the creation of training academies and workforce development programs.⁸⁰ Training programs ensure that all staff and partners share a common skillset and knowledge of land management practices. This sharing of information helps ensure continuity

⁷⁷ Brush, Lisa and Borneman, Dave. “Michigan Stewardship Network Overview.” In-person interview. 6 May 2015; Brush, Lisa. “Michigan Stewardship Network Overview.” Telephone interview. 29 Sept. 2015; “Michigan Stewardship Network- Clusters.” The Stewardship Network. Web. 13 June 2015. <<https://www.stewardshipnetwork.org/clusters>>.

⁷⁸ “East Bay Park District - Park Maps.” East Bay Park District. Web. 1 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.ebparks.org/parks/maps>>.

⁷⁹ Bischoff, Shelli. “Land management and public-private partnerships.” Telephone interview. 15 Oct. 2015; Kern, Diana. “Nonprofit Management Models.” In-person interview. 6 May 2015.

⁸⁰ Endicott, Eve, ed. *Land conservation through public/private partnerships*. Island Press, 1993.

in expertise and care across all lands. It also provides professional workforce development so staff and contractors are able to build skills, advance in their field, and perhaps continue their careers in natural resource management into the future.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD: Job Training Academies & Workforce Development

One of the Central Park Conservancy's main programs is its "Urban Park Management and Training Seminars" Program. This program is dedicated to leveraging the Conservancy's long-standing expertise in park management to provide training and assistance for other park management staff located throughout the region. They provide online webinars, a Seminar Series that brings together Conservancy staff and other park professionals to share their ideas about how to improve local parks, and in-class and field-based training for park professionals or those that hope to develop their careers in park management.⁸¹



One of the Central Park Conservancy's 'Urban Park Management Training and Seminars' at their 'Institute for Urban Parks.' Photo courtesy of the Central Park Conservancy.

Florida has created a similar program with their "Natural Areas Training Academy." The academy was developed through a partnership with The Nature Conservancy and the University of Florida's Extension Program to meet a growing demand of trained land management personnel. It brings together regional land management experts from numerous agencies and organizations to provide training and share experiences with newer land managers. Participants can register for a single workshop or take a series of courses that lead to a "Certificate in Natural Areas Management." Some of their courses include (1) Conservation Site Assessment and Planning, (2) Managing for Diversity Across Florida's Unique Landscape, (3) Collaborating to Manage Ecosystems, (4) Managing Visitors and Volunteers in Natural Areas, and (5) Florida Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Training. They are provided at sites throughout the state.⁸² The Michigan Stewardship Network similarly provides educational, hands-on trainings on topics for volunteers, private landowners, and professional land managers. They additionally hold an annual conference where practitioners and land stewards from throughout the state come to share their best practices, new techniques, and connect with one another to brainstorm about new ideas in restoration, maintenance, and stewardship.⁸³

Another model of sharing information between land stewards, resource professionals, and private landowners is being promoted by the American Forest Foundation. They are using a "Neighbor

81 "Urban Park Management Training and Seminars." The Official Website of Central Park NYC. Web. 11 Oct. 2015. <<http://www.centralparknyc.org/about/about-cpc/institute/urban-park-management-1.html>>.

82 "Florida's Natural Areas Training Academy." American Trails Association. Web. 15 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.americantrails.org/http/Natural-Areas-Training-Academy-ntp.html>>.

83 Brush, Lisa and Borneman, Dave. "Michigan Stewardship Network Overview." In-person interview. 6 May 2015; Brush, Lisa. "Michigan Stewardship Network Overview." Telephone interview. 29 Sept. 2015; "Michigan Stewardship Network- Clusters." The Stewardship Network. Web. 13 June 2015. <<https://www.stewardshipnetwork.org/clusters>>.

to Neighbor” peer network and training program model that creates a regional network of private landowners.⁸⁴ Seasoned private landowners with demonstrated skills and expertise in land management are given small stipends to work with surrounding landowners to share best practices, quell concerns about working with the government, and describe the programs and assistance available to them from the area’s conservation agencies and NGOs. It has been shown to increase effective land stewardship on private easements, help create a “culture of stewardship within a community,” and often encourages new landowners to begin stewarding their land. Chicago Wilderness is developing a similar program focused on creating case studies of landowners that represent exemplary examples of land managers. They then hope to share these experiences by developing regional networks of landowners who may not have the expertise or resources to manage their lands at the same level.⁸⁵

4.2.3 Landscape-Scale Management and Collective Impact

Over the past decade, natural resources management has shifted its focus to an “ecosystem management” approach, one which recognizes that ecological systems span individual parcels and jurisdictional boundaries. This paradigm shift stems from an understanding that solely conserving individual tracts of land often fails to address threats facing broader ecosystems, such as fragmentation and development on adjacent parcels. While not abandoning the focus on small, significant parcels, many conservation organizations have shifted their management strategies toward “landscape-scale management.” This model recognizes that “inside the fencepost” approaches are insufficient to protect regional ecosystems and looks to conserve systems of regional or interconnected properties or landscapes to achieve greater conservation outcomes than you could working at a smaller scale.⁸⁶

To address greater ecosystem-wide and landscape-level challenges, organizations are recognizing that no one group can adequately tackle them on its own. Instead, organizations are better able to address these problems by working across ownership boundaries with other groups. They are bringing together diverse partners that may have not worked together in the past that include managers, private landowners, hunting groups, urban partners, agricultural interests, federal and state agencies, NGO’s, businesses and others based on their individual strengths or understanding of a landscape.⁸⁷ By coming together, the group is able to pool its resources, better understand the problem at hand, compile and standardize its data, share and identify gaps in knowledge, and monitor its progress together over time. This “collective impact” approach is being used to tackle many deeply complex social and environmental problems across the country. It is a structured approach or framework to making collaboration work across governments, businesses, nonprofits, and citizens to achieve significant and lasting social and environmental impacts more holistically and cost-effectively than has been done in the past. It also provides a collective voice when advocating for legislative action or applying for grants or foundation funding.⁸⁸

84 “Wisconsin’s Driftless Area: Landscape-scale Conservation, One Woodland Owner at a Time.” American Forest Foundation. Web. 5 July 2015. <<https://www.forestfoundation.org/wisconsin-driftless-area-spring-2012>>.

85 “Landowners - Chicago Wilderness.” Chicago Wilderness. Web. 15 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.chicagowilderness.org/?page=Landowners>>.

86 Wondollock, Julia M., and Steven Lewis Yaffee. *Making collaboration work: Lessons from innovation in natural resource management*. Island Press, 2000; Yaffee, Steve. “Land management and nonprofits.” In-person interview. 9 Apr. 2015; Endicott, Eve, ed. *Land conservation through public/private partnerships*. Island Press, 1993.

87 Wondollock, Julia M., and Steven Lewis Yaffee. *Making collaboration work: Lessons from innovation in natural resource management*. Island Press, 2000.

88 Kern, Diana. “Nonprofit Management.” In-person interview. 6 May 2015; “Collective Impact Model and Open Space Management.” Nature of Cities. 6 Apr. 2014. Web. 13 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.thenatureofcities.com/2014/04/06/collective-impact-a-new-model-for-regional-open-space-planning/>>.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD: Landscape-Scale Management & Collective Impact

Representative of this new shift to large landscape-scale conservation, in 2006 a large gift from the Little Beaver Creek Land Foundation allowed 13 land conservancies encompassing 17 counties in Ohio to merge to create one large private, nonprofit organization, called the Western Reserve Land Conservancy. The Conservancy has expanded their focus to include not only high quality nature preserve preservation, but in order to create a connected network of lands and open space, they have focused their efforts to acquiring and managing agricultural parcels, private lands, and vacant lands in urban areas. They primarily do this through their “county land bank.” The county land bank gives them the ability to acquire foreclosed and vacant property and farmlands in urban and rural areas. The land bank safely holds a distressed property and cleans its title, in an effort to create a connected network of new parks, working agricultural lands, nature preserves and green space throughout the region.⁸⁹

One of the most notable “collective impact” organizations is Chicago Wilderness. The organization is a regional alliance of member organizations that connects leaders in conservation, health, business, and science to tackle issues and lead a strategy to preserve, improve and expand nature in parts of Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, and Michigan. They focus on the idea that there are many experts in the region that need to be connected, and by working together they will be able to work more effectively and achieve greater conservation and community outcomes. Chicago Wilderness sees itself as a facilitator that brings together disparate partners that might have not worked together traditionally, in an effort to create a more open and natural space in the region.⁹⁰ They work with the idea that each partner brings its own knowledge, resources, data, or expertise to the table, making it easier to tackle problems all of the groups are facing. For example, in order to collaborate across the region to manage all of the natural areas effectively, one of their long-term goals is to create a regional data system all members and organizations in the regional can utilize.⁹¹ Organizations with similar models include the Intertwine Alliance, the Michigan Stewardship Network, the Mississippi River Delta Coalition,⁹² the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana, and the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy, among many others.⁹³



Western Reserve Land Conservancy's and Chicago Wilderness' maps on a new landscape-scale conservation approach or seeing a region as an interconnected ecosystem to their work. Photo courtesy of the Western Reserve Land Conservancy and Chicago Wilderness.

89 “Creating Parks, Preserving Private Lands.” Western Reserve Land Conservancy. Web. 15 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.wrlandconservancy.org/whatwedo/protecting/>>.

90 “Landowners - Chicago Wilderness.” Chicago Wilderness. Web. 15 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.chicagowilderness.org/?page=Landowners>>.

91 Boyd, Bruce. “Public Private Partnerships and Land Conservation Models and the TNC and Funding.” Telephone interview. 3 Aug. 2015.

92 Herbert, Jacques. “Mississippi Delta River Coalition.” Telephone interview. 20 Oct. 2015.

93 “Collective Impact Model and Open Space Management.” Nature of Cities. 6 Apr. 2014. Web. 13 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.thenatureofcities.com/2014/04/06/collective-impact-a-new-model-for-regional-open-space-planning/>>.

4.2.4 Place-making or Regional Branding

Landscape-scale conservation often focuses on the protection of easily connectable landscapes, such as river corridors, migration corridors, waterways, or recreational greenways. However, one way many organizations have been able to achieve landscape-scale conservation is by “re-branding” a set of singular parcels as a larger system of interconnected private and public lands through “place-making” or “regional branding.” This idea is centered around observing, listening to, and asking questions of the people who live, work, and play in a particular region in order to understand their needs and aspirations for that region. With this knowledge, groups can come together to create a common vision for that place and find out key features or natural areas are most commonly recognized. This is all in an effort to “regionally brand” a series of natural areas or parks by understanding a region’s particular “local flavor.”⁹⁴ This type of connection is especially helpful when parcels, preserves or open spaces exist in a region that is underserved or does not have strong friends or advocacy groups. It ties these individual parcels within an interconnected network of parcels, “gives them a name,” empowers regional communities to invest in their management, and can attract local tourism.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD: Place-making or Regional Branding

Many park systems are using place-making processes to help connect neighborhoods to one another through the natural areas and trails in their communities. Chicago’s 606 Project is a series of six parks and trails which is named for the zip code where it exists.⁹⁵ It seeks to use the newly branded park and trail system and an associated interactive map that highlights the parks, trails, transportation, and other points of interest in the community to connect the four separated neighborhoods. Groups like the Fairmount Park Conservancy, the Grand Traverse Land Conservancy,⁹⁶ the Hermann Park Conservancy, the Palisades Park Conservancy, Indiana Department of Natural Resource’s Division of Nature Preserves⁹⁷ and others similarly have created interactive maps of their Nature Preserves or parks with detailed maps, surrounding local attractions, trail maps, directions and summaries of the preserves each manages. It has helped create a sense of collective identify and buy-in from the communities surrounding the natural areas, especially in rural areas.



Chicago’s 606 Project. Photo courtesy of The Trust for Public Land.

94 Campbell, Scott. “Landscape Scale Conservation, Planning and ‘Branding Regions’.” In Person interview. 29 Oct. 2015; “What Is Placemaking? - Project for Public Spaces.” Project for Public Spaces. Web. 10 Nov. 2015. <http://www.pps.org/reference/what_is_placemaking/>.

95 “Interactive Map - The 606.” The 606. Web. 15 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.the606.org/visit/map/>>.

96 “Map and Guide of Preserves.” Grand Traverse Land Conservancy. Web. 15 Nov. 2015. <<http://landtrust.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/PreserveMap2013.pdf>>.

97 “Indiana Land Protection Alliance.” The Nature Conservancy. Web. 15 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/indiana/partners/indiana-land-protection-alliance.xml>>.

4.2.5 Conservation Corps and Volunteer Network Programs

A method many land management organizations have used to perform their basic stewardship and outreach functions is through the use of volunteers, “Friends Groups,” and conservation corps.⁹⁸ Conservation corps crews and volunteers provide cost-effective and flexible alternatives when performing stewardship activities across large and diverse landscapes. Participation in conservation corps has also been shown to have an extremely significant impact on how members think about the environment, their communities, outdoor recreation, and their commitment to pursuing a career in natural resources management in the future.⁹⁹ Another way many organizations provide for needed stewardship is by sharing volunteers through a connected network.¹⁰⁰ Land trusts, environmental NGO’s and others share their volunteers throughout a region to ensure they are getting boots on the ground in the areas with the greatest need. Through this economies of scale model, the groups can collectively provide training, evaluation, and recognition of volunteers more effectively together. In sum, volunteer and conservation corps models offer low cost options to perform land stewardship while building the capacity of members to be future natural resource professionals.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD: Conservation Corps & Volunteer Network Programs

The 21st Century Conservation Service Corps was created by the Obama Administration in 2013 to put young people and veterans to work in hands-on service and job training experiences on public lands and community green spaces so that they can gain skills and experiences to become the next generation of American conservation and community leaders. Examples of projects the corps is performing include GIS inventory, stream restoration, park construction, wildfire prevention, invasive species removal, and outreach, among other tasks.¹⁰¹



Veterans-Youth Conservation Corps Partnership members perform basic trail maintenance. Photo Courtesy of the Corps Network

One outcome of the 21st Century Corps was in Colorado when the Conservation Lands Foundation and the Colorado Youth Corps Association created the Veterans-Youth Conservation Corps Partnership, a public-private collaboration that unites the Bureau of Land Management, conservation corps, private energy companies, and veterans groups to provide Colorado veterans and youth with employment and job training opportunities while working to restore and maintain Colorado’s public lands.¹⁰²

98 Endicott, Eve, ed. *Land conservation through public/private partnerships*. Island Press, 1993; Kern, Diana. “Nonprofit Management.” In-person interview. 29 Sept. 2015; Sandell, Jennifer. “How the AmeriCorps Program Works.” Telephone interview. 1 Nov. 2015.

99 Traverse, Hannah. “Study Finds That Service in Conservation Corps Programs Has Numerous Benefits for Participants, Increases Conservation Stewardship.” The Corps Network. 16 Apr. 2013. Web. 11 Aug. 2015. <<https://www.corpsnetwork.org/press/study-finds-service-conservation-corps-programs-has-numerous-benefits-participants-increases>>.

100 Endicott, Eve, ed. *Land conservation through public/private partnerships*. Island Press, 1993.

101 “Civic Works and The Corps Network Join Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell for 50 Cities Initiative Launch.” The Corps Network. 4 June 2015. Web. 1 Sept. 2015. <<https://www.corpsnetwork.org/tags/sally-jewell>>.

102 Traverse, Hannah. “Veterans-youth Conservation Partnership to Restore Colorado’s Public Lands.” Bureau of Land Management-The Corps Network. 12 Dec. 2012. Web. 1 Sept. 2015.

Other examples of conservation corps models include The Yosemite Conservancy's "Build Youth Stewardship for Public Lands" and its volunteer program,¹⁰³ the California Conservation Corps, AmeriCorps, the Backcountry Trails Program¹⁰⁴ and many others throughout the country.

Examples of volunteer network models include the Michigan Stewardship Network volunteer program, The California Stewardship Network,¹⁰⁵ the Illinois Volunteer Stewardship Network and the New England Stewardship Network.¹⁰⁶

4.2.6 Equal Access to Natural Areas

With an increased awareness that natural areas and open spaces are often located disproportionately in areas with more resources, a strong movement over the past decade has been dedicated to ensuring underserved communities have equal access to open areas and green space.¹⁰⁷ This includes ensuring the stewardship activities are equitably distributed especially in communities that may not have "friends groups" or local partners to provide basic maintenance.¹⁰⁸

STORIES FROM THE FIELD: Equal Access to Natural Areas

After criticism stating that the Conservancy perpetuates disparities in the park system by only providing money to a privileged group of parks, the Central Park Conservancy created the Five Borough Crew (FBC). To help contribute equity in the park system, the FBC helps with maintenance and stewardship in neglected parks in low income areas and, most importantly, trains and shares best management restoration techniques with the local staff in each of the underserved parks.¹⁰⁹

In order to more effectively create access for underserved communities to parks in their region, the East Bay Regional Parks District started the Healthy Parks, Healthy People Initiative.



The Central Park Conservancy's Five Borough Crew train parks department workers in turf care at Fort Greene Park in Brooklyn. Photo Courtesy of the New York Times.

103 "Youth in Yosemite Yosemite Conservancy." Yosemite Conservancy. Web. 13 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.yosemiteconservancy.org/youth-yosemite>>.

104 "Backcountry Trails Program." *Backcountry Trails Program*. Web. 13 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.ccc.ca.gov/work/programs/Backcountry/Pages/bc.aspx>>.

105 "California Stewardship Network." California Stewardship Network. Web. 15 Nov. 2015. <<http://castewardship.org/about/>>.

106 "New England Stewardship Network." Stewardship Network. Web. 15 Nov. 2015. <<http://newengland.stewardshipnetwork.org/>>.

107 Abercrombie, Lauren C., et al. "Income and racial disparities in access to public parks and private recreation facilities." *American journal of preventive medicine* 34.1 (2008): 9-15; Dai, Dajun. "Racial/ethnic and socioeconomic disparities in urban green space accessibility: Where to intervene?" *Landscape and Urban Planning* 102.4 (2011): 234-244; Lee, A. C. K., and R. Maheswaran. "The health benefits of urban green spaces: a review of the evidence." *Journal of Public Health* 33.2 (2011): 212-222; Sherer, Paul M. "Why America needs more city parks and open space." *The Trust for Public Land* (2003).

108 Kern, Diana. "Nonprofit Management." In-person interview. 29 Sept. 2015.

109 Foderaro, Lisa. "With Training Program, Central Park Conservancy Spreads Its Wealth." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 19 Oct. 2014. Web. 8 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/20/nyregion/with-training-program-central-park-conservancy-spreads-its-wealth.html>>.

The campaign promotes the use of parks and open spaces throughout the region as pathways to healthy lifestyles. The Initiative has a variety of different programs including a (1) Trails Challenge with a guided map to hikes and “things to see” in 20 parks, (2) Parks Express, a initiative funded through private sponsorships providing low cost transportation for low-income schools and groups to visit the area’s parks, and (3) Kid Healthy Outdoors Challenge a program to introduce children to regional parks through classroom based activities in schools.¹¹⁰ Similarly, the Intertwine Alliance working in the Portland Metro Area in Oregon is undergoing an eight-month formal assessment of their equity and inclusion practices when conducting their work around natural area preservation and conservation. As a coalition of regional conservation partners, the Alliance provided series of equity workshops for all its partners in an effort to bring more equity to open space preservation and conservation.¹¹¹



4.2.7 Creative Funding

The purpose of this report was explicitly not focused on funding strategies.¹¹² However, given the political and economic context of Illinois and its system of Nature Preserves, we pulled out a number of potential strategies that could be viable. The organizations and their associated funding strategies that we researched represent a broad range of funding sources. These sources include private corporate funding, tax revenues resulting from legislative action, and EPA enforced funding allocations from litigation. Some sources that are normally considered for conservation funding such as the use of lottery funds or vanity license plate taxes are already being used in the state of Illinois to fund other initiatives.¹¹³ The use of increased hunting or recreational fees are not applicable to the Preserves, as they are not managed for recreational activities. Additionally, the intent is to not create an entity that is competing with existing groups for funding. And lastly, a new nonprofit organization should not ‘put all of their eggs in one basket.’ A diverse funding structure that is planned out over the long term is crucial for a new nonprofit.¹¹⁴

- **Corporate Partnerships and Sponsorships.** Conservation organizations throughout the country are developing partnerships with industry, utility companies, and corporations to help fund their conservation programs.¹¹⁵ Many companies and corporations are increasingly recognizing that investments in conservation helps protect their business assets, mitigates risks, creates opportunities, and helps their shareholders and consumers visibly see how they are giving back to the community and the environment. One way many conservancies encourage partnerships with large corporate sponsors is through use of plaques or designating names of preserves or parks after the companies.¹¹⁶

110 “East Bay Park District - Park Activities.” East Bay Park District. Web. 1 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.ebparks.org/parks/activities>>; “Parks Express.” Regional Parks Foundation. Web. 11 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.regionalparksfoundation.org/page.aspx?pid=526>>.

111 “The Intertwine Alliance: A Coalition for Parks, Trails and Nature in Portland Oregon & Vancouver Washington Region.” The Intertwine Alliance. Web. 15 Nov. 2015. <<http://theintertwine.org/>>.

112 Mann, Jim. “Public Private Partnerships and Land Conservation Models.” Telephone interview. 23 Mar. 2015.

113 Creagh, Keith. “Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund.” Telephone interview. 1 Oct. 2015; Endicott, Eve, ed. *Land conservation through public/private partnerships*. Island Press, 1993.

114 Kern, Diana. “Nonprofit Management.” In-person interview. 6 May 2015.

115 Endicott, Eve, ed. *Land conservation through public/private partnerships*. Island Press, 1993; Van Putten, Mark. “Public Private Partnerships and Land Conservation Models.” Telephone interview. 6 Apr. 2015; “Working with Companies.” The Nature Conservancy. Web. 15 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.nature.org/about-us/working-with-companies/index.htm>>.

116 Endicott, Eve, ed. *Land conservation through public/private partnerships*. Island Press, 1993

STORIES FROM THE FIELD: Creative Funding

The Nature Conservancy, the largest environmental nonprofit in the world, has embraced the role of the private sector in its work. The Conservancy has partnerships with thousands of companies around the world that invest in new projects, preserve lands, but also help develop best practices for corporate conservation that can be shared with other companies.¹¹⁷ Many other organizations and agencies have followed suit. For example, in 2013 Sally Jewell, the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, announced the first major private funding commitment by American Eagle Outfitters and Camelback to support the 21st Century Conservation Services Corps dedicated to restoration of public lands.¹¹⁸ The Trust for Public Land recently announced a large partnership with Coca Cola.¹¹⁹



Sally Jewell, the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, announces the first major private funding commitment by American Eagle Outfitters to support the 21st Century Conservation Services Corps dedicated to restoration of public lands. Photo courtesy of the Park Trust.



Corporate Work Weekend. Photo courtesy of the Yosemite Conservancy.

Corporate sponsorship for land conservation does not occur only at national and international conservation organizations. One way The Yosemite Conservancy sustains long-term funding is through corporate sponsorships from nearby corporations. One such avenue for corporations to engage in the Conservancy's work is through a "Corporate Work Weekend." The Weekend includes a two-night stay at the Park where the company's staff works with park staff

personally on one of the Conservancy's restoration or rehabilitation projects.¹²⁰ The experience gives the company a better connection to the natural areas they are preserving, expands the corporation's visibility in the community and sustainability awareness, gets work done, and is a significant revenue stream for the Conservancy.

Another way many land conservancies have forged partnerships with the private sector is by working with local utility companies.¹²¹ An advantage of working with utilities is their ability to finance activities, including land purchases, by increasing their user charges.

117 "Working with Companies." The Nature Conservancy. Web. 15 Nov. 2015.

118 "Civic Works and The Corps Network Join Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell for 50 Cities Initiative Launch." The Corps Network. 4 June 2015. Web. 1 Sept. 2015.

119 "Conservation Trailblazers: Meet Bea Perez, Coca-Cola's Chief Sustainability Officer." The Trust for Public Land. Web. 15 Nov. 2015. <<https://www.tpl.org/blog/conservation-trailblazers-meet-bea-perez-coca-colas-chief-sustainability-officer>>.

120 "Corporate Work Weekend." Yosemite Conservancy. Web. 13 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.yosemiteconservancy.org/corporate>>.

121 Van Putten, Mark. "Public Private Partnerships and Land Conservation Models." Telephone interview. 6 Apr. 2015.

Land conservation by utilities can take several forms including direct land acquisition, partnership with open space protection entities, and provision of mitigation funds for land protection. For example California's East Bay Regional Park District has collaborative arrangements to lease 25,000 acres from four water management districts in the region. It manages the lands to enhance the public's nature and recreational opportunities, with restrictions that ensure the protection of the water supply. The utilities then continue to pay taxes on the lands, which include about 1/3 of all of the Park District's holdings.¹²² In a similar fashion, the construction of a major regional pipeline by New Jersey's Columbia Gas Transmission Company helped to create a 60 mile Cross-Jersey trail and greenway tying together 17 existing state and local parks, streambeds, nature preserves and other natural corridors.¹²³

- **Oil and Gas Taxes.** In some states, taxes are levied on the production, or severance, of oil and gas extraction, and in most states those revenues are then placed into the general fund. Several states, however, have utilized more creative revenue allocations by depositing a proportion of these funds toward environmental trust funds that address documented environmental externalities.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD: Creative Funding

The Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund was established in 1985 following a constitutional amendment approved in a statewide referendum that requires revenues for oil, gas, and other mineral leasing on state-owned lands be placed in a trust fund, with proceeds used for land acquisitions and land development projects. Each year the amount available for project grants and program administration is determined by combining $\frac{1}{3}$ of the annual leasing revenues with interest from the trust fund account. Board members of the trust oversee, review, and distribute grants for local governments to carry out acquisitions and development. The funds presently go into a trust fund or a “public park endowment.”¹²⁴



An overview of the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Projects throughout the state. Photo courtesy of the Detroit Free Press.

- **Funding from Mitigation and Supplemental Environmental Projects (SEPs).** Most federal and state actions against businesses, companies or individuals for failure to comply with environmental regulations and laws are resolved through settlement agreements. As part of a settlement the company or group that has performed the violation may voluntarily agree to undertake an environmentally beneficial project that is somehow related to the violation in exchange for mitigation of the penalty to

122 "East Bay Park District - Park Activities." East Bay Park District. Web. 1 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.ebparks.org/parks/activities>>.

123 Endicott, Eve, ed. *Land conservation through public/private partnerships*. Island Press, 1993.

124 Creagh, Keith. "Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund." Telephone interview. 1 Oct. 2015; Endicott, Eve, ed. *Land conservation through public/private partnerships*. Island Press, 1993; "History of the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund." *DNR*. Web. 15 Nov. 2015. <http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-58225_58301-39513--,00.html>

be paid.¹²⁵ This is often how many land conservation organizations were originally created, or how they have received large influxes of funding to start new initiatives or programs.¹²⁶

STORIES FROM THE FIELD Creative Funding

The Great Lakes Fishery Trust was created in 1996 as a result of a settlement from Consumers Power Company (now Consumer's Energy) and the Detroit Edison Company regarding damage to fish and wildlife near a utility facility. The settlement allowed the Trust to gain ownership of 10,000 acres of land acquired from the settlement and invest the revenue in a long-term grant program that funds restoration and research projects. Since its creation, the Trust has distributed over \$50 million in grants. These grants have been administered to nonprofit organizations, governments, tribes, and academic institutions.¹²⁷



The Michigan Stewardship Network, which initially emerged as an organization following an environmental lawsuit, has a similar origination story.¹²⁸

- **Other options.** A few examples of other funding options for land conservancies include (1) working with the state legislature to pass a bond with funds dedicated to nature preserves,¹²⁹ (2) applying for federal capacity grants (the U.S. Forest Service and the Environmental Protection Agency's Great Lakes Restoration Initiative are two sources of funding that have helped get initiatives like this off the ground in the past),¹³⁰ and (3) creative taxes (some states have used tobacco trust fund settlements or tobacco product taxes to help fund state parks. In Arizona, these sources have been marked for health and youth programs. A cigarette tax passed in Texas helps support state and local parks).¹³¹

125 "Supplemental Environmental Projects (SEPs)." Environmental Protection Agency. Web. 15 Nov. 2015. <<http://www2.epa.gov/enforcement/supplemental-environmental-projects-seps>>.

126 "State Revenues and the Natural Gas Boom: An Assessment of State and Oil Gas Production Taxes." National Conference of State Legislators. Web. 15 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.ncsl.org/research/energy/state-revenues-and-the-natural-gas-boom.aspx>>.

127 "Accomplishments." GLFT. Web. 13 Nov. 2015. <<https://www.glft.org/about/history/accomplishments>>; Yaffee, Steve. "Land management and nonprofits." In-person interview. 9 Apr. 2015.

128 Brush, Lisa and Borneman, Dave. "Michigan Stewardship Network Overview." In-person interview. 6 May 2015; Brush, Lisa. "Michigan Stewardship Network Overview." Telephone interview. 29 Sept. 2015; "Michigan Stewardship Network- Clusters." The Stewardship Network. Web. 13 June 2015. <<https://www.stewardshipnetwork.org/clusters>>.

129 Endicott, Eve, ed. *Land conservation through public/private partnerships*. Island Press, 1993; Yaffee, Steve. "Land management and nonprofits." In-person interview. 9 Apr. 2015; Van Putten, Mark. "Public Private Partnerships and Land Conservation Models." Telephone interview. 6 Apr. 2015;

130 Brush, Lisa. "Michigan Stewardship Network Overview." Telephone interview. 29 Sept. 2015.

131 Endicott, Eve, ed. *Land conservation through public/private partnerships*. Island Press, 1993.



05

RECOMMENDATION: ILLINOIS NATURE PRESERVES ALLIANCE

As documented in Section 3, our team determined eight main threats to the Nature Preserves System that a new public-private partnership might be able to address more effectively than the INPC alone. These threats included (1) a lack of stewardship and defense capacity, (2) unstable funding, (3) the scattered and non-contiguous distribution of the Nature Preserves, (4) staff vacancies, retirements and lack of young professionals interested in natural resources management, (5) a growing inventory of Preserves, (6) increasing landscape threats from adjacent lands, (7) lack of training capacity, and (8) an unstable political climate.

Addressing these challenges provides a significant opportunity for the State of Illinois, not only because of the inherent value of natural lands open space, but also because of the paybacks from land conservation, including ecosystem services, recreation, and property values. However, the “solution” for Illinois could take many forms and requires serious consideration of the alternative models for change, best practices for groups engaged in similar work, and strategies for maximizing the impact of additional investments in Nature Preserves stewardship.

This section outlines our proposal for a new nonprofit organization that would work alongside the INPC to ensure that Nature Preserves in Illinois get the attention they deserve and require. This organization—what the Dow Team calls the Illinois Nature Preserves Alliance (INPA)—would be a private, 501(c)(3), statewide organization with an estimated annual operating budget of approximately \$1–2 million. Similar to many of the urban-park conservancy models assessed in Section 4, the INPA would work in a close public-private partnership with the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission (INPC) to ensure that land stewardship needs are met for underserved Nature Preserves owned by the state of Illinois. This new public-private partnership would achieve these goals by raising funds, supporting and improving land stewardship activities, and providing professional training and educational programs for local land stewards. The INPA would not be involved with acquiring new Nature Preserves. While we are proposing the creation of a separate entity, one mechanism for launching the NGO could be by first incubating the organization within a larger existing NGO already working in the state of Illinois in the natural resources management sector (see Section 5.3.1).

5.1 Mission Statement

The INPA's proposed mission is "To ensure, promote and preserve the ongoing stewardship and protection of underserved Nature Preserves in the State of Illinois through partnership with the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission."

5.2 Objectives and Functions

The INPA advances its mission through three core objectives: (1) Land Stewardship, (2) Training and Outreach and (3) Advocacy, Communications, and Fundraising.

Broadly, these objectives aim to provide long-term stewardship for Nature Preserves with the greatest unmet needs as identified by the INPC; share best practices through a training academy for natural resource professionals, partners, volunteers, and Nature Preserve owners; promote the ecological, recreational, educational, and scientific value of the Nature Preserve System; and support local jobs in the natural resources sector throughout Illinois.

5.2.1 Objective 1: Land Stewardship

The main function of the INPA is to perform or contract with others to undertake "boots-on-the-ground stewardship work" on the most underserved nature preserves in Illinois. To ensure this happens, the INPA's management of field work would be decentralized, similar to the INPC. It would have six Stewardship Coordinators located in the regions with the highest need Nature Preserves. In each region the Coordinators would develop a strong network of contractors, land stewardship professionals, conservation groups and other stakeholders. The Coordinators would develop stewardship contracts with these partners to undertake land stewardship activities on the highest need Nature Preserves. This would provide for the stewardship of the Nature Preserves while also infusing funds to develop local natural resource jobs in the Illinois economy. To increase the INPA's stewardship impact and its ability to span public and private lands, the Stewardship Coordinators would also assist the current INPC staff to develop relationships with the private preserve landowners surrounding the highest need Preserves and connect them to resources and contractors.

The "Land Stewardship" objective of the INPA would protect and maintain the natural and cultural resources of Illinois Nature Preserves by:

- ▶ **Contracting with regional natural resource professionals** (contractors, conservation groups, and other stakeholders) to undertake land stewardship activities such as prescribed burning, invasive species control, brush cutting, seeding, planting, hydrologic restoration, soil conservation, and habitat restoration.
- ▶ **Improving the monitoring of underserved Nature Preserves** to ensure continued evaluation and knowledge of the health and the subsequent stewardship of those Nature Preserves.
- ▶ **Working with and providing additional capacity for the Illinois Volunteer Stewardship Network** to organize volunteer groups, "work days" and, where needed, capacity building for volunteer "friends chapters."

- **Increasing the INPC’s ability to manage public and private lands in a more connected and strategic way** by identifying unmet needs of Nature Preserves and developing relationships with private preserve landowners in underserved areas. Through these relationships the field staff would share best practices and connect the landowners with local contractors, private landowners with land management expertise and knowledge, and resources to help them implement their individual land management plans. By trying to create corridors of interconnected public and private lands, the INPC and INPA would have a greater ecological and biological impact on the regional flora and fauna of Illinois. It would also be a more effective way of sharing resources between the landowners. This would be done in collaboration with the INPC coordinators already present in each of the regions.

5.2.2 Objective 2: Training and Outreach

To address the lack of skilled staff, the Stewardship Coordinators would develop a “Land Management Training Academy” and “Practitioners Network” in collaboration with a new Volunteer and Training Coordinator. The Training Coordinator and Stewardship Coordinators would work with stewardship professionals and contractors, public and private nature preserve owners, volunteers, DNR/INPC staff, land trusts, and others to understand the best practices in land conservation, and then disseminate these best practices through trainings, webinars, and workshops. This would help ensure consistency in quality of management and stewardship across all of the lands. The INPA would also work in collaboration with the INPC to increase the capacity and effectiveness of the Volunteer Stewardship Network throughout the state.

The “Training and Outreach” objective of the INPA would enable stewardship partners by:

- **Developing a Training Academy** for natural resource professionals, land trusts, volunteers, Nature Preserve owners and others to disseminate best practices and provide continuing education. Trainings could include but are not limited to 1) Conservation Site Assessment and Planning, (2) Managing for Diversity Across Illinois’ Landscape, (3) Collaborating to Manage Ecosystems, (4) Managing Visitors and Volunteers in Natural Areas, (5) Invasive Species Management and Identification or (5) Illinois Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Training.
- **Strengthening regional networks of natural resource professionals** by forging relationships with restoration and land management service providers located throughout the state. This network would allow INPA to pair private landowners with qualified contractors, surrounding private landowners with expertise in land management, and other service providers in order to more quickly address unmet stewardship activities without expanding its own workforce. This would also help infuse and support local natural resource jobs into the Illinois economy.
- **Mobilizing volunteers to lead or participate in fieldwork** to increase INPA’s stewardship capacity. Many of the more basic land management activities, such as invasive species removal, can be performed by volunteers under the oversight of an INPA staff person. The INPA will work with the INPC to increase the capacity and management of the Illinois Volunteer Stewardship Network. An increase in volunteer work days at the Nature Preserves and other natural areas throughout the state will improve community engagement with Nature Preserves and reduce labor costs for stewardship projects. To ensure that volunteers have the skills necessary to conduct these stewardship activities, the INPA would facilitate routine training sessions as a part of its Training Academy. Training sessions can be open to contractors, staff from other natural resource organizations, private Nature Preserve owners, and others.

- **Educate next generation of natural resource managers and stewards** through apprenticeships, internships, and fellowships in collaboration with local professional schools, community colleges, workforce development programs, and universities.

5.2.3 Objective 3: Advocacy, Communication, and Fundraising

The INPA's third objective focuses on advocacy, communications and the promotion of the Nature Preserves System for its ecological, historical, educational, scientific, and intrinsic value. This objective would be primarily carried out by the Executive Director and the Director of Development and Communications, who would develop a "regional brand" for the Nature Preserves. By developing a regional brand for the Preserve System, the INPA can help tie individual parcels together within an interconnected network of parcels. The branding would help give the parcels "a name" that resonates with the local community, empower the regional communities in the investment and management of the Preserves, and could also attract local tourism. The Director and the Development Director would also work to provide advocacy at the legislative level for increased funding and to local corporations and industry to support and sponsor local stewardship projects, initiatives, and workforce development training programs.

The "Advocacy, Communications and Fundraising" objective of the INPA would ensure the sustainability of the Nature Preserve System by:

- **Promoting and branding the Nature Preserves System** for its ecological, historical, educational, scientific, and intrinsic value. The INPA could create an interactive online and paper map that highlights preserves, trail systems, transportation options, and other points of interest in the communities to try and visually connect the individual Nature Preserve parcels.
- **Sharing stewardship success stories** with surrounding communities, visitors, potential funders and policymakers.
- **Engaging with local corporations and industry** to support or sponsor local stewardship projects, initiatives, and workforce development training programs.

5.2.4 Potential Programs

The primary goal and objective of INPA is to address land stewardship through contracting. But as the functioning of INPA grows, it may be worthwhile to expand its programs to further address and accomplish its objectives. Below are potential future programs the INPA could incorporate:

- **AmeriCorps Program:**

Explanation: Coordinate with AmeriCorps or existing conservation corps in Illinois (e.g. Illinois Trail Corps, the Illinois Youth Conservation Corps, YouthBuild, or the Golconda Job Corps Civilian Conservation Center) to bring volunteers to work with INPA and other land stewardship organizations with which INPA has connections.

Purpose: The addition of a conservation corps for the Nature Preserves would expand the INPA's stewardship capacity. It would additionally bring in young volunteers and provide them with providing training, work experience, and hopefully an understanding of the importance of natural resource management in Illinois. The corps could help the INPA's ability to help shape the future leaders in land stewardship and natural resource professionals in the state.

This program would further the goals listed in Objectives 1 and 2.

► **Increased Use of Technology such as the use of Telecommunicated Trainings or the Creation of Other Online Tools:**

Explanation: Incorporate and encourage of the use of technology tools to increase the ability of the INPA and the INPC to better communicate their message and coordinate their data with other organizations and groups. The INPA could provide capacity to incorporate telecommunicated trainings, online databases, and other online tools that the INPC does not presently have the capacity create or implement.

Purpose: Increase efficiency by tackling more rural projects from a centralized management office while also reaching out to the broader community (organizations, other states, etc.), and promoting the name and legitimacy of INPA as a land stewardship organization.

This program would further the goals listed in Objectives 2 and 3.

► **Private Landowner Membership Network:**

Explanation: Create a network with a membership fee that provides resources through newsletters and outreach to private landowners. Encourage landowners to use best practices in managing lands.

Purpose: Build a Nature Preserve constituency and strengthen the alliance.

This program would further the goals listed in Objectives 1, 2 and 3.

5.3 Organizational Structure

The INPA would be managed by a diverse board of directors from the public and private sectors located throughout the state of Illinois. It would have a staff of ten highly skilled workers with expertise in administrative tasks, grants, contracting, land stewardship, communications, volunteer management, development, fundraising, and marketing. This staff number was determined based on the goals of the organization (discussed in Section 5.2) and the INPA's potential budget (discussed in Section 5.4). Six of the staff members would be seasoned natural resource management coordinators located in six of the highest need regions of the state. These field staff (Stewardship Coordinators), alongside regional INPC coordinators, would conduct needs assessments of each region to understand stewardship needs and available local restoration expertise in order to increase stewardship capacity. The staff would then work with local contractors and natural resource professionals to undertake the land stewardship activities for the highest need public Nature Preserves. To increase its stewardship and landscape-scale impact, the Stewardship Coordinators would also develop relationships with surrounding private preserve landowners in these highest need areas, as determined in concert with the INPC. Through these relationships, the field staff would share best practices and connect the landowners to local contractors, experienced private landowners with expertise in land conservation, and resources to help them implement their individual land management plans. INPA's Volunteer and Training Coordinator would coordinate with the INPC's Natural Areas Stewardship Project Manager to organize volunteer work days to supplement the work being done in the high need areas.

5.3.1 Co-location or Incubation

One mechanism for launching the INPA would be co-locating the organization within a larger, existing NGO, either permanently or during a multi-year incubation period. There are several advantages to a

co-location approach. First, sharing office space would help reduce start-up costs, such as rent and IT infrastructure, while providing access to more sophisticated resources, such as conference room space and video conferencing. Second, the incubator could provide services, such as HR payroll processing, bookkeeping, group health insurance pooling, and on-site IT support, that the INPA would otherwise have to contract out. Third, the host organization would also provide a community of peers for the INPA to help address strategic and operational challenges common to new organizations. Fourth, co-location would encourage program collaboration on new initiatives by virtue of physical proximity. Finally, as funders may be reluctant to support a new, untested initiative, partnering with a well-established incubator organization might benefit fundraising efforts.¹³²

5.3.2 Board of Directors

Who they are: The Board of Directors for the INPA will be a distinct body from the INPC's present board of directors, but could benefit from having at least one representative from the INPC's Board. The other board members should be recruited and selected to ensure diverse geographic and mission-related representation among the nonprofit (e.g. the Nature Conservancy, OpenLands, land trusts, etc.), business (representatives from corporations that are well connected with regional corporations and companies), government (e.g. NRCS, extension offices, EPA, county park districts, etc), recreation (like hunting, fishing or birding groups), and academic sectors (e.g. University of Illinois Natural Resources department) in Illinois. This process could likely be facilitated by leaders in the incubation organization and primary funders. Pursuant to section 108.10 of the General Not For Profit Corporation Act, the board of directors of a not-for-profit corporation shall consist of at least three directors. Given the scope of the INPA and the desire to be geographically inclusive of citizens of the state of Illinois, particularly those from the four highest need areas, the Board of Directors should likely have at least ten members—two from each of the sectors listed above, while still ensuring representation across the state of Illinois. The Board could benefit from targeting local corporations, companies, and other individuals with political and financial influence to join. The board will engage with the INPC annually to ensure that INPA's activities complement rather than duplicate or impede the objectives of the INPC. To help create grassroots and political support the INPA could also consider creating a secondary "advisory board" comprised of issue advocates, community leaders, lobbyists, philanthropists, or stewardship experts.

What they do: The Board of Directors' primary responsibilities would include strategic planning, long-term visioning, financial stewardship, and policy formulation for the INPA. Board members should additionally be required to participate in board meetings and donate financially to INPA on an annual basis. The Board members will be responsible for appointing and overseeing the Executive Director.

5.3.3 Staff Positions

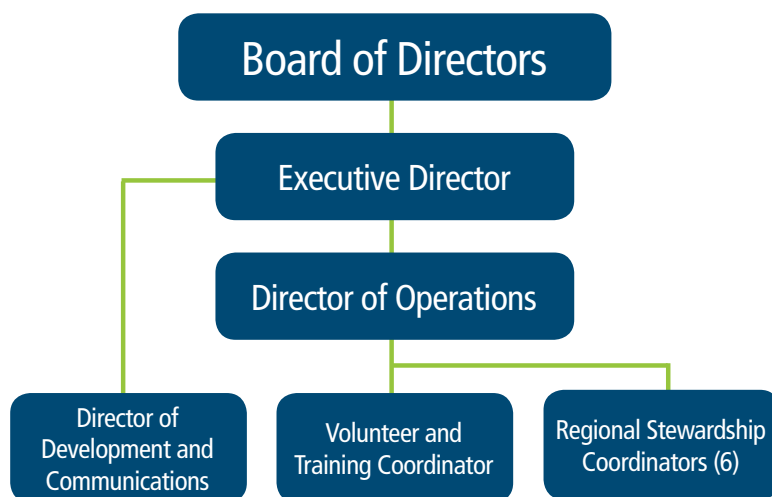
- **Executive Director:** The Executive Director, or the head of INPA, would be charged with the responsibility of building external relationships for the mutual benefit of INPA and its partners, including developing relationships with industry and other potential funders, steering directions and organizational growth, and communicating INPA's actions and progress to the Board of Directors. The Executive Director should have demonstrated success in nonprofit management and leadership,

¹³² See, e.g., Butzen, J. "Expand Your Nonprofit's Mission Through Co-Location." Stanford Social Innovation Review, 11 Jan. 2012. Web. 3 Jan. 2016. <http://ssir.org/articles/entry/expand_your_nonprofits_mission_through_co_location#sthash.dIT1bmoy.dpuf>; Mr. Auburn Associates. *Measuring Collaboration: The Benefits and Impacts of Nonprofit Centers*. Prepared for the NonprofitCenters Network and Tides. 2011. Web. 3 Jan. 2016. <https://www.tides.org/fileadmin/user/ncn/Measuring_Collaboration_Executive_Summary.pdf>.

and the requisite knowledge of land stewardship in the state of Illinois.

- **Director of Operations:** The Director of Operations would be responsible for human resources, managing staff, ensuring that deliverables are met, annual reviews, and bookkeeping, including payroll, expense reimbursement, managing donations, balancing budget, developing RFPs, paying contractors, and working with auditors. Given this, the Director of Operations should have demonstrated experience in people and finance management.

FIGURE 5. INPA ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE.



- **Director of Development and Communications:** The Director of Development and Communications’ responsibilities would be two-fold: they are responsible for (1) overseeing INPA’s fundraising and (2) managing INPA’s external communications. Activities related to these responsibilities include writing grants and proposals for private donations, and donor outreach; creating web content, social media engagement; serving as the media contact for the organization; and working to create a “regional brand” for the Nature Preserve system. Given the complexity of the Director of Development and Communications role, this person should be skilled in both fundraising and public relations.
- **Regional Stewardship Coordinators (6):** The six Stewardship Coordinators would be located in satellite offices throughout the state and would be responsible for surveying Nature Preserves for needs assessments, establishing and evaluating contracts with restoration service providers, developing relationships with private landowners, meeting with regional NGOs and community partners, and implementing management plans of the Nature Preserves. They would also communicate regularly with the INPC. These Coordinators should be highly experienced in land stewardship and communication skills.
- **Volunteer and Training Coordinator:** The Volunteer and Training Coordinator would be responsible for coordinating with INPC’s Natural Areas Stewardship Project Manager to organize volunteer trainings and work days. In collaboration with INPA staff and regional partners the Coordinator would also be in charge of identifying training needs and then creating and managing the Training Academy Program. The Volunteer and Training Coordinator should be skilled in community education, and project and people management.

5.4 Budget

We propose a 3-year operating budget that includes one-time costs for office fixtures and technology, as well as ongoing operational expenses. This budget is easily scaled based on the success of fundraising campaigns by increasing or decreasing stewardship project contracts.

- **Fundraising.** To demonstrate how funding growth might change over time, we include the following as a general trajectory for the first three years of INPA. In FY1, we suggest that INPA will likely rely completely on foundation money. As the organization grows, we project this will change. By FY2, funding for INPA should diversify, relying on private individuals, corporations, foundation grants, government grants, and other sources, such as litigation settlements or bonds. In FY 3, the amount of contributions from private individuals and corporations is projected to expand. Section 5.5 further details funding strategies. We base our estimates on the funding structures of existing NGOs in Illinois with similar aims, but adjusted for our budget constraints.¹³³

TABLE 3. FUNDRAISING STRATEGY.

| | YEAR 1 | YEAR 2 | YEAR 3 |
|---------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| Foundation Grants | 100% | 70% | 25% |
| Private Individuals | 0% | 10% | 30% |
| Corporations | 0% | 10% | 35% |
| Government Grants | 0% | <5% | <5% |
| Other | 0% | <10% | <10% |

- **Payroll.** This budget assumes a staff of ten people, whose positions are detailed in the section above. All state and federal taxes, health insurance, and other fringe benefits are estimated using a factor of 30% of salaries. Salaries were estimated using GlassDoor, an online career tool with anonymous salary details for job types and companies.¹³⁴
- **Facilities.** The INPA will require a central office, most likely in Springfield or Chicago, and remote or home offices for the regional stewardship coordinators. We assume a gross rent of \$32 per square foot at 350 square feet per full time employee for the central office, where at least 5 staff people would be located.¹³⁵ We assume no rental costs for the regional home offices. Co-locating with an existing organization would help trim facility costs.
- **General Administration.** This category includes one-time costs—including computers (\$1,200 x 10) and other IT infrastructure (\$500), office phones (\$200 x 6), mobile devices for field staff (\$200 x 6), printers (\$1,500), web design (\$7,500), and workstations (6 x 2,500)—as well as basic administrative expenses, such as printing (\$300), postage, subscriptions, and office supplies (\$1,200), IT support (\$500) and audit services (\$5,000). Co-location could reduce the costs of acquiring office equipment.
- **Travel and Meetings.** To complete the objectives outlined above, trips to in-state Nature Preserves and training facilities are required. Travel costs principally include car travel for regional stewardship coordinators and training coordinators, at the standard IRS reimbursement rate of 57.5 cents per mile.¹³⁶ Meeting expenditures, including hotel rooms and per diem for trainings and board meetings, is also included.
- **Stewardship Projects.** We project that each Stewardship Project costs between \$5,000 and \$50,000. These estimates are based off of the INPC's own historic project costs.¹³⁷ Given these estimates, INPA

133 Personal communications with nonprofit organizations on file with authors.

134 Glassdoor. <<https://www.glassdoor.com/>>.

135 CBRE Nonprofit Practice Group. "National Nonprofit Report." Winter 2015. Web. 26 Dec. 2015. <<http://www.cbre.us/services/office/AssetLibrary/NTL%20Report%20NPG%20-%20Witt%20r1.pdf>>.

136 "Standard Mileage Rates." IRS. 29 Dec. 2015. Web. 30 Dec. 2015. <<https://www.irs.gov/Tax-Professionals/Standard-Mileage-Rates>>.

137 Illinois Nature Preserves Commission. "Minutes of the 206th Meeting." 21 Sept. 2010. Web. 12 Nov. 2015. <http://dnr.state.il.us/INPC/minutes/206_Minutes.pdf>.

could likely complete between 30 and 100 stewardship projects a year. Examples of projects include exotic and invasive species control, prescribed fires, and prairie planting.

- **Miscellaneous.** This category is intended to capture irregular and unanticipated expenditures.

TABLE 4. PROJECTED BUDGET.

| | FY 1 | FY 2 | FY 3 |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| SUPPORT AND REVENUE | | | |
| Private Individuals | variable | variable | variable |
| Corporations | variable | variable | variable |
| Foundation Grants | variable | variable | variable |
| Government Grants | variable | variable | variable |
| Other (litigation settlements, bonds, etc.) | variable | variable | variable |
| TOTAL REVENUE | \$1,300.00 | \$1,700.00 | \$1,700.00 |
| EXPENDITURES | | | |
| PAYROLL (wages, benefits, payroll taxes) | \$817,000 | \$817,000 | \$817,000 |
| Executive Director | \$90,000 | \$90,000 | \$90,000 |
| Chief Operations Officer | \$70,000 | \$70,000 | \$70,000 |
| Director of Development & Communications | \$50,000 | \$50,000 | \$50,000 |
| Volunteer Training Coordinator | \$45,000 | \$45,000 | \$45,000 |
| Land Steward Coordinators (6) | \$360,000 | \$360,000 | \$360,000 |
| FACILITIES (rent, utilities) | \$56,000 | \$56,000 | \$56,000 |
| GENERAL ADMINISTRATION | \$48,220 | \$10,420 | \$10,420 |
| Workstations | \$15,000 | — | — |
| Computers or laptops (10) | \$12,000 | \$500 | \$500 |
| Desk or cell phones (12) | \$2,400 | \$100 | \$100 |
| Printers and cartridges | \$1,800 | \$300 | \$300 |
| Phone and internet service | \$2,820 | \$2,820 | \$2,820 |
| Other IT infrastructure | \$500 | — | — |
| Web and IT services | \$7,500 | \$500 | \$500 |
| Office supplies | \$1,200 | \$1,200 | \$1,200 |
| Independent audit | \$5,000 | \$5,000 | \$5,000 |
| TRAVEL AND MEETINGS | \$55,000 | \$55,000 | \$55,000 |
| Stewardship projects (auto mileage) | \$35,000 | \$35,000 | \$35,000 |
| Meeting transportation and lodging | \$20,000 | \$20,000 | \$20,000 |
| STEWARDSHIP PROJECTS | \$303,780 | \$751,580 | \$751,580 |
| Small projects (30–75) | \$303,780 | \$511,580 | \$511,580 |
| Large projects | — | \$240,000 | \$240,000 |
| MISCELLANEOUS | \$20,000 | \$10,000 | \$10,000 |
| TOTAL EXPENDITURES | \$1,300,000 | \$1,700,000 | \$1,700,000 |

5.5 Potential Funding Strategies

This section details funding opportunities for INPA. We consider diverse funding approaches, categorized as primary and secondary strategies. Initially, INPA may meet its funding needs through primary strategies, like foundations and donors. It may also work to develop relationships with local industry and companies to sponsor specific stewardship activities or initiatives on the Nature Preserves in their region. Private Nature Preserve landowners can also be engaged to donate a small stream of funds in exchange for benefits like stewardship training and access to high value local restoration contractors. As time progresses there are a variety of secondary funding options that may be pursued to ensure a sustainable and long-term funding stream into the organization. Below is our list of funding strategies and brief summaries of their relevance.

PRIMARY STRATEGIES:

► Foundations.

- Initial funding involves building relationships with foundations that have a high interest in natural areas preservation and stewardship. The INPA expects to share details on the progress and success of our deliverables and organizational objectives with foundation leaders. The INPC anticipates that some donors may have an interest in landscape-scale management (a more cost-effective method for managing natural lands). For those donors, the INPC can advance efforts in engaging private landowners and businesses to participate in landscape-scale management.

► Private Businesses and Industry.

- This aim involves identifying private industries, particularly those which are interested in contributing funds toward increasing the environmental quality of adjacent land. Private companies would be incentivized to donate funds toward stewardship projects because of two direct benefits: (1) public recognition from INPA sharing the company's commitments for land stewardship of nearby Nature Preserves, and (2) tax credits.

► Private Landowners.

- A substantial portion of Nature Preserves are owned by private landowners, and these parcels are often located near state-owned Nature Preserves. To increase stewardship spending on private Nature Preserves, the INPA could connect landowners with its network of stewardship and restoration contractors. This opens up additional revenue opportunities with a fee-for-service model for contract management or access to a contractor database. Combining the economies of scale of bulk contracting and opportunities for contractor discounts allows stewardship efforts to be done at lower cost. This opportunity also removes barriers of access to stewardship services for private landowners who are interested in maintaining their lands, but otherwise lack the expertise to do so.

► Federal and Private Grants.

- INPA would actively engage in submitting grants for federal funding and private funding. A strong emphasis on project-based grants serves to accomplish high priority stewardship projects.

SECONDARY STRATEGIES:

► Supplemental Environmental Projects (SEP).¹³⁸

- Supplemental Environmental Projects are environmentally beneficial projects performed as a result of a settlement in an environmental enforcement action. Often, a defendant will agree to perform a SEP in exchange for reduced monetary penalties. SEPs are intended to help restore public or environmental health in a community impacted by the environmental law violation. SEPs must satisfy three basic legal requirements:
 - (1) There must be a relationship, or “nexus,” between the underlying violation and the human health or environmental benefits that would result from the SEP.
 - (2) The SEP must improve, protect, or reduce risks to public health or the environment, although in some cases a SEP may, as a secondary matter, also provide the violator with certain benefits.
 - (3) The SEP must be undertaken in settlement of an enforcement action as a project that the violator is not otherwise legally required to perform.
- While highly regulated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), SEPs provide a potential source of funding for the INPA, especially where mitigation efforts are required to restore Nature Preserves that have been damaged through anthropogenic causes. The Illinois EPA maintains a SEP Idea Bank¹³⁹ to get ideas from the public for potential SEPs. While INPA cannot rely on the availability of SEP funding, we recommend that it submit several project ideas for consideration to the SEP Idea Bank.

► Oil and Gas Tax.

- As detailed above in Section 4.2.7, the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund illustrates that legislative advocacy can result in revenue for natural resources via oil and gas taxes. For instance, Illinois levies a severance tax on the extraction of oil and gas. This tax, established only recently in 2013, collects revenues based on the value of oil or gas severed, but then places all revenues directly into the state general fund. Because this revenue source is so new, the state might benefit from allocating it in more unique ways—as other states have done in creating permanent trust funds or targeting expenditures towards areas of environmental concern—instead of placing them directly into the general fund. Such a model would divert a percentage of the tax revenues towards the fund. The principal of the fund would then be invested, with the earnings used towards grants for environmental projects. While not currently implemented in the state of Illinois, this option presents a potential future opportunity for the state to explore.

► Conservation Corps.

- Conservation Corps programs have been used across the country to engage young adults in volunteer service on public lands. These programs provide a powerful, enriching experience for volunteers and help train young adults for natural resources careers. Corporate and foundation partnerships often held sponsor service projects or volunteers and provide a potential source of

¹³⁸ “Supplemental Environmental Projects (SEPs)” EPA. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 23 Mar. 2015. Web. 13 Nov. 2015.

¹³⁹ “Supplemental Environmental Projects.” *Illinois Environmental Protection Agency*. 2015. Web. 30 Dec. 2015. <<http://www.epa.illinois.gov/topics/compliance-enforcement/sep/>>.

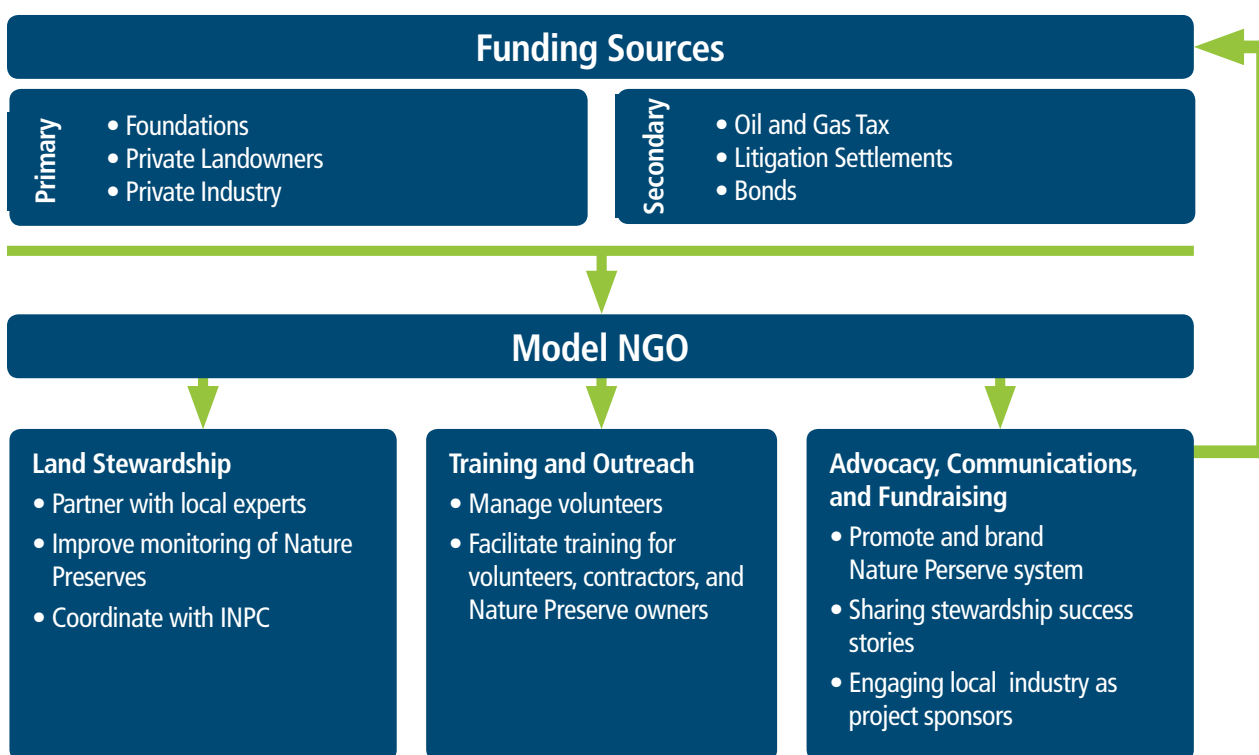
financial support of the INPA's volunteer programs. To engage with these Corps programs, INPA could become a host organization for volunteers or seek donations from national companies to support a Corps program within the Illinois Nature Preserves System.

- Conservation Corps initiatives could also incorporate welfare-to-work and anti-recidivism programs.

► **Bonds.**

- As a long-term funding strategy, the INPA could work with the Illinois state legislature and Illinois voters to pass a bond measure devoted to protecting wildlife habitat, preserving water quality, and enhancing public access for nature preserves throughout the state. A 2009 poll of Illinois voters shows strong state support for investments in land and water conservation. 73% of those polled agreed that “even though state revenues are down, the Illinois state budget should include funding for land and water conservation.”¹⁴⁰

FIGURE 6. INPA FUNDING AND FUNCTIONS.



140 “Benefits.” *Partners for Parks and Wildlife*. Web. 28 Dec. 2015. <<http://partnersforparksandwildlife.org/benefits/>>.

06

ANAYLYSIS OF STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

This section addresses the advantages and potential limitations of our proposed model, including our responses to some questions the limitations and advantages might raise.

6.1 Strengths and Potential Limitations

Strengths

- ▶ Fills critical need for additional funding
- ▶ Flexibility to respond to quickly changing demands
- ▶ No risk of budget being swept into other state programs
- ▶ Requires no immediate legislation
- ▶ Increased advocacy for Nature Preserves
- ▶ Improved preservation of open space
- ▶ Increased community engagement with Nature Preserves
- ▶ Development of a “regional brand” for the Nature Preserves System
- ▶ Underserved Nature Preserves receive needed stewardship
- ▶ Economies of scale advantage over one-off grant projects
- ▶ Eligible for public and private grants¹⁴¹
- ▶ Increasing the state’s ability to manage public and private lands in a more connected and strategic way
- ▶ Increasing involvement of private landowners
- ▶ Mobilizing volunteers grows interest and awareness in land stewardship
- ▶ Redirecting private industry wealth for the environment
- ▶ Contracting with in-state stewardship providers supports local economies

141 “Knowledge Base: What Are the Advantages/disadvantages of Becoming a Nonprofit Organization?” *GrantSpace*. Web. 12 Nov. 2015. <<http://grantspace.org/tools/knowledge-base/Nonprofit-Management/Establishment/pros-and-cons>>.

Potential Limitations

- ▶ Perception that this encourages the government to neglect its basic mandate¹⁴²
- ▶ Distinguishing INPA as a unique entity separate from the INPC
- ▶ Lack of existing institutional capacity (i.e. starting new organization)
- ▶ Competition for funding
- ▶ Turf consciousness by state actors and other nonprofits

6.2 Addressing Concerns

Why aren't we increasing the INPC's capacity? Recognizing the critical work already being done within the INPC, we first considered alternatives for increasing the staffing and resources of the INPC itself. For example, charitable funds could be used to pay for additional staff members or stewardship projects. This model has a number of limitations, most notably that foundations and donors are generally uninterested in funding government agencies to perform their basic mandate. Even if foundations were interested in this approach, however, legal and bureaucratic limitations on contributions to government agencies would complicate any attempt to funnel money into the INPC.

What about other groups? Natural lands see tremendous benefits from the activities of existing nonprofit conservation organizations in Illinois. Some of the organizations acquire and donate parcels of land to the IDNR or other public agencies. However, given the logistical and financial obstacles to owning a dispersed inventory of Nature Preserves, these groups maintain only a small fraction of Nature Preserves in the state and have generally avoided retaining ownership of preserves they help acquire. This leaves many Nature Preserves without a well-funded or experienced custodian. Thus, the proposed INPA is designed to address a critical gap that existing groups have not filled. By focusing on underserved state-owned lands and preserves without an organizational custodian, the INPA will reach the most underserved lands and ensure no duplication of work.

Couldn't the new NGO distribute grants to existing partners? We also considered the option of creating a trust, foundation, or other repository for funds dedicated to Nature Preserves stewardship. The sole function of this entity would be to fundraise, award stewardship project grants, and oversee project implementation. Simply pushing funding out to existing groups in this way could yield strong results quickly and at lower cost. However, we identified two fundamental challenges with this model. First, there are large gaps in coverage of active "friends of" or land trust groups that could undertake such work, and relying on existing organizations alone would foster persistent disparities in Nature Preserve upkeep. Second, this model would nonetheless require an institutional structure for overseeing and administering grant funds. Therefore, the most viable model would need to circumvent these pitfalls by directing resources equitably throughout the Nature Preserves system and rely on a more centralized, efficient approach.

What about competition for funding? One potential obstacle associated with any new nonprofit is competition for funding. We propose that the INPA avoid tapping into the same funding sources as existing

142 Cohen, Rick. "Philanthropy Funding Government Work? There's a Foundation for That-Several, Actually." *Nonprofit Quarterly*. 13 Apr. 2012. Web. 12 Nov. 2015. <<https://nonprofitquarterly.org/2012/04/13/philanthropy-funding-government-work-theres-a-foundation-for-thatseveral-actually/>>.

land conservation groups. While a large grant would be necessary to get this type of group off the ground, this proposal focuses on de-centralized fundraising opportunities, including individual and corporate donations, bequests, and environmental litigation settlements. The long term strategy is to connect with local industry and individuals that have ties with individual parcels or regions and wouldn't otherwise be contributing to state land stewardship efforts.

Shouldn't the state be paying for this? Nature Preserves may be loosely divided into two categories: those owned by the IDNR and those owned by other entities. Non-state landowners are legally obligated to manage and protect their own Nature Preserves “in accordance with the instrument of dedication, rules, and the master plan.” While some private landowners have the resources and expertise to undertake prescribed burns, invasive species management, and other stewardship tasks, others do not. The state has been left to fill this gap, while also remaining responsible for managing IDNR-owned lands. However, many of the state-owned preserves were donated by private entities, such as The Nature Conservancy, without adequate funds for their long-term upkeep. Thus, the state has to come up with stewardship funds itself. This model has proven unsustainable. With an increased INPC budget unlikely, a private partner can complement the INPC in refocusing its efforts on monitoring, and defense of existing preserves.¹⁴³

Shouldn't the government be reducing its services if there are not sufficient resources available? A relatively popular rhetoric amongst proponents against land stewardship is to systematically save capital by reducing private and public involvement in such activities. Ignoring the stewardship needs of Nature Preserves is a shortsighted mistake that can lead to harmful consequences to the integrity of the preserves, surrounding lands, and the environmental health of neighboring communities. When natural lands become overgrown and unkempt, the likelihood of human related environmental abuse increases. Examples of these threats include, littering, unlawful building of fences, development, land use and storage, leaching industrial pollutants, and water pollution.

143 Cohen, Rick. “Philanthropy Funding Government Work? There’s a Foundation for That-Several, Actually.” *Nonprofit Quarterly*. 13 Apr. 2012. Web. 12 Nov. 2015. <<https://nonprofitquarterly.org/2012/04/13/philanthropy-funding-government-work-theres-a-foundation-for-thatseveral-actually/>>.

What are potential challenges that Public-Private Partnerships face? According to the Urban Institute,¹⁴⁴ Public-Private Partnerships may face challenges such as capacity shortfalls, inadequate commitment, flawed strategies, insufficient returns and failures to communicate. INPA, however, anticipates and responds to these potential challenges by looking towards strategies involving training to consistently increase capacity and avoid some potential capacity shortfalls. INPA ensures commitment by making its mission focused and committed to the stewardship of Nature Preserves. Additionally, INPA's structure would respond to any conflict regarding communication by having Regional Stewardship Coordinators who would work regularly with not only the contractors, but also the INPC. INPA would also work to communicate its stewardship projects to the public through its promotion and branding of the Nature Preserves System.

How would INPA address issues of turf consciousness? INPA must work closely with the INPC in order to set mutually beneficial priorities and prevent duplication of stewardship activities. This allows the INPC to build upon its strengths while INPA addresses the high-need Nature Preserves in Illinois. With regards to other conservation organizations, INPA would strategically target underserved Nature Preserves. By focusing on this unique problem, INPA complements, rather than competes with, work already happening in Illinois. Therefore, INPA's relationship with the INPC would be a high priority for the organization.



144 Walker, Chris. "Partnerships for Parks: Lessons from the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Urban Parks Program." Urban Institute, 1 Apr. 1999. Web. 12 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/urban-parks/Documents/Partnership-for-Parks.pdf>>.

07

CONCLUSION

Upon reviewing several potential solutions that address the needs of public Nature Preserves in the state of Illinois, our research supports the implementation of the Illinois Nature Preserves Alliance (INPA). The apparent evidence of shortfalls that surround public management of Nature Preserves and inequitable endeavors of existing private groups emphasizes the need for a novel model that ensures holistic management of the Nature Preserves System. The INPA model mirrors a tailored public-private partnership with the INPC and existing organizations within Illinois, and innovatively addresses some of the needs of the Nature Preserves System.

Careful consideration of funding, objectives, and long-term strategic planning influenced our proposed solution. The INPA model is supported by the collection of innovative land management strategies of existing nonprofit organizations throughout the U.S. What distinguishes the INPA model is the unique combination of its objectives, which include creative methods for landscape scale management and stewardship, inclusive training and outreach efforts, and comprehensive advocacy, communication, and fundraising strategies. Most importantly, we qualitatively evaluated the impact that our model would have on the INPC, existing nonprofit organizations in Illinois, local economies, and community members. The INPA promises a sustainable opportunity to address many of the INPC's self-identified needs and to strengthen the ecological integrity of the Nature Preserves System and its surrounding landscapes.

Overall, the proposed model (1) provides long-term stewardship for Nature Preserves with the greatest unmet needs; (2) shares best practices through a training academy for natural resource professionals, partners, volunteers, and Nature Preserve owners; (4) promotes the recreational, ecological, historical, educational, scientific, and intrinsic value of the Nature Preserve System; and (5) has the potential to support local jobs in the natural resources sector throughout Illinois.

Dow Sustainability Masters/Professional Fellows Symposium '15

A Proposed Public-Private Partnership to Manage Illinois Nature Preserves

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PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Illinois Nature Preserves Commission (INPC) administers the state's Nature Preserves system. The INPC has long been strained by budget shortfalls, understaffing, and an ever-increasing inventory of lands. These problems include:

- Lack of stewardship and defense capacity for Nature Preserves
- Staff vacancies due to retirement and too few young professionals
- Loss of mid-level staff to manage contracts and volunteers
- Need for added monitoring, stewardship and defense capacity
- Lack of training capacity for stakeholders
- Absence of concerted outreach and communication effort

Stewardship efforts are fragmented; prairies and wetland are being lost to woody and exotic species; and threats to water quality or wildlife are left unaddressed on an alarming number of sites. To address these problems, the Environmental Law and Policy Center in Chicago, IL asked our team to design an NGO to work alongside the INPC to ensure that Illinois' nature preserves get the attention they deserve and require.

NATURE PRESERVES BY THE NUMBERS



METHODOLOGY

The Team researched best practices for organizational structure and land management practices of public-private partnerships that manage land through:

- Individual case study interviews and surveys with nonprofits
- Consultation with the ELPC, academics, practitioners, consultants
- Nonprofit website, report, news and academic literature review
- INPC Strategic Plan & meeting archive review

WHY CARE?

- Illinois ranks in bottom 1/3 in state spending for open spaces
- Illinois has lost >90% of its original wetlands and prairie
- Public-private partnerships can help fill this critical funding gap
- Paybacks from land stewardship include:
 - Improved ecosystem services
 - Increased recreation
 - Increased property values



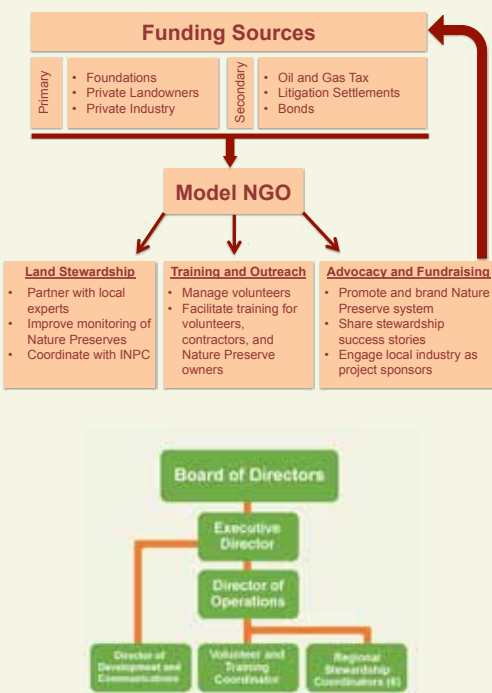
Map of Nature Preserves in Illinois

• Public and Private Nature Preserves
 \ Boundaries of the 9 INPC "Nature Preserve Areas"

SOLUTION: Proposed Public-Private Partnership

Proposed Organization: The Illinois Nature Preserves Alliance (INPA) is a statewide 501(c)(3) with a budget of approximately \$2 million. It will work in a close public-private partnership with the INPC to: (1) steward underserved Nature Preserves; (2) train landowners and partners on best practices; and (3) promote the Nature Preserve system for its ecological, recreational, educational, and intrinsic value.

Structure: INPA will have a highly-skilled staff of 10 with expertise in grant writing, land stewardship, communications, volunteer management, and fundraising. Field staff will work with local contractors to undertake the land stewardship activities.



INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

The interdisciplinary nature of the team allowed us to examine the problem of land management in the state of Illinois and experiment with nonprofit models through the combined efforts of multiple legal, public health, public policy and natural resources approaches.

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<http://goo.gl/euk2GR>

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