



PRAIRIE STATE CONSERVATION COALITION

A Collective Voice for Land Conservation in Illinois

Strategic Plan 2024-2026



Illinois Clean Energy
community foundation

This strategic plan and the implementation work to follow is made possible by a grant from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation.



(Photos) Cover. Showy goldenrod at Eagle Prairie on the 80-acre Luella Schaefer Memorial Hill Prairies Land and Water Reserve near Valmeyer in Monroe County overlooking the Mississippi River valley in southern Illinois. Photo by Joann Fricke.

Page 2. Alley Ringhausen at Great Rivers Land Trust property, Palisades Nature Preserve, overlooking the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers in southwest Illinois.

Uncredited photos throughout this booklet were taken by Cynthia Kanner during visits to PSCC member organizations throughout 2023.

prairiestateconservation.org

Who We Are

Founded in 2005, Prairie State Conservation Coalition (PSCC) advances land conservation efforts by supporting and serving its many members and partners throughout Illinois who work hard every day to conserve land, diverse habitats, and biodiversity, *forever*. In 2023, PSCC hired its first staff and Executive Director, a milestone for the organization. This new position offers the opportunity, through compassionate leadership, for a deeper and broader approach to serving conservation organizations, their people, and the land.

Through a commitment to build a more diverse organization, PSCC will position itself as a clearinghouse of information, expertise, and resources on conservation-focused endeavors—from sharing best practices to advocating for policies that help build capacity for member organizations. With conservation land trusts as the backbone, PSCC will broaden its base of support to include many other conservation groups, non-profits, public agencies, and businesses throughout Illinois. *Together*, we will elevate a collective voice for conservation in Illinois.

With this strategic plan as a guide, PSCC will focus on communities throughout Illinois that offer diverse perspectives on past, present, and future land stewardship with a focus on restorative relationships with both the land and people. With a focus on shared interests and opportunities as well as understanding historic and present-day injustices, PSCC intends to elevate the work of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Justice, and Accessibility (DEIJA) in all that it does.

Our state is made up of amazing people who truly are stewards of the land. Illinoisans are passionate people working on big ideas that will advance conservation in Illinois. In fact, the meaning of “Illinois” which derives from the Native American word Illiniwek, is “best people.” PSCC is proud to serve as their coalition.



(Photos) 1. Cypress trees on the lower Cache River in southern Illinois 2. Mike and Joann hug a chinkapin oak at White Tail Glade in southwest Illinois 3. Shooting star in flower at Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation's Rutherford Refuge at Twin Bridges Property in northwest Illinois



Vision

The vision of the Prairie State Conservation Coalition is to foster and lead a diverse, statewide conservation community that:

- Understands the pivotal role land preservation and stewardship plays in mitigating the effects of climate change and its impact to the natural landscape and its inhabitants;
- Possesses the skills, capacity, connections, and energy to adapt preservation strategies to protect and steward Illinois' valuable biodiversity and natural resources;
- Embraces diversity, justice, equity, inclusion, and accessibility at all levels as critical principles for success and connecting people to the land.

Mission

To unite and strengthen the land and water conservation community throughout the State of Illinois.

The statewide conservation community includes conservation land trusts, local and state conservation agencies, and other public and private organizations where land and watershed conservation are part of their mission.



Our Values

As a coalition of conservation organizations we champion the values of consistency, kindness, leadership, optimism, respect and teamwork in our commitment to:

- Bringing land and water conservation and stewardship to the forefront
- Supporting all of our member organizations equally
- Developing sound policies that support natural areas
- Collaborating with diverse communities within Illinois
- Sharing expertise, energy and passion
- Honoring partners
- Bridging divides.

We uphold these values as they guide the work we do in developing programs, policies, and partnerships.

2024-2026 Strategic Focus Areas

Focus Area	Goals
Identity & Voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Marketing and outreach• Identify audiences and target messaging• Develop shared language and library• Redefine and communicate vision, mission and values
Belonging & Connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cultivate leadership for an inclusive coalition• DEIJA education through learning and training• Expand PSCC network and partnerships• Develop a model for land rematriation to tribes• Strengthen the infrastructure for conservation land trusts• Build a vast coalition for conservation and stewardship
Leadership & Longevity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Align, access and pursue all initiatives and funding• Develop an annual policy platform• Build capacity for organizational longevity• Be a leader for permanent, sustainable funding sources for conservation• Cultivate a culture of private philanthropy for conservation

(Photo) Gray-headed coneflower. Photo by Jo Fessett.



Goal 1: Update PSCC marketing plan.

- Research and implement customer relations management software.
- Overhaul website with improved navigation, enhanced user experience, updated content, and additional resources for members.
- Produce a new messaging plan and communicate revised vision, mission, and values.
- Finalize messaging for the updated membership model.
- Identify marketing platforms to communicate new messaging to expanded audiences.

Goal 2: Identify regional audiences & develop targeted messaging.

- Develop working groups with regional leadership through conferences and strategic partnerships.
- Create and share regional narratives and success stories locally, regionally, and statewide than align with the coalition's values.

Goal 3: Develop shared language & a resources library.

- Identify and learn from polling conducted by other conservation organizations..
- Develop a resources library, identify a platform to house it, and provide training on how to use it.
- Assess the possibility of hiring a contractor to create a shared language, resources, and a unified voice.

(Photo) Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority at a tree planting project, Hoffee property/Pink and Greenspace of St. Clair County Greenspace Foundation in southern Illinois. Photo by Donna Dougherty.



- Create an outreach plan to recruit land and non-land trust members; and prioritize efforts to reach organizations/communities underrepresented within or served by PSCC.
- Develop shared language for DEIJA messaging and a toolkit for members (i.e., how to talk about conservation with diverse audiences).

Belonging & Connection

Goal 4: Cultivate leadership for an inclusive coalition.

- Define DEIJA with the Board of Directors for a foundational understanding and shared language for PSCC.
- Create a more inclusive process for Board and Committee recruitment.
- PSCC leadership will increase participation, support, and collaboration with BIPOC-led land trusts and organizations and reach next generation of land conservation leaders/professionals.
- Create a strategy to reach the next generation of land conservation leaders and professionals.

Goal 5: DEIJA education through learning and training.

- Host courageous conversation workshops and organize programs on DEIJA-focused topics.
- Facilitate, share, host, and develop DEIJA member-led conversations on best practices, ideas implemented, and lessons learned.

Goal 6: Expand PSCC network & partnerships.

- Identify diverse groups and encourage programming for these groups, working with conservation organizations where possible.
- Establish, expand, and solidify statewide relationships, through continuous meetings, sharing, and collaboration.

(Photos on page 8-9) 1. Board of Directors at the 2023 Annual Meeting 2. Monarch butterfly on New England aster (photo by Jo Fessett). 3. Cynthia Kanner and Princess Harris of Faith in Place 4. Cynthia Kanner with Illinois Department of Natural Resources leadership at the 2023 Annual Meeting 5. Middle school student with a 10,000-year-old spearpoint found at Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation's Wapello Land and Water Reserve



Goal 7: Develop a model for land repatriation to tribes.

- Organize a team of Indigenous and Tribal Advisors.
- Engage legal advisors with expertise in this area.
- Develop a framework for land trusts to transfer their land to tribes.

Goal 8: Strengthen the infrastructure for conservation land trusts.

- Establish regular communications for members to share info and highlight accomplishments.
- Survey members annually to solicit their feedback and learn their priorities and challenges.
- Initiate regional conferences and workshops.
- Build support for conservation land trust services and expertise.
- Connect, share, and model examples of successful BIPOC and accessibility programs.

Goal 9: Build a vast coalition for conservation and stewardship.

- Foster grassroots relationships of conservation focused groups and individuals across Illinois.
- Advancement Committee will develop a new membership structure with 'why' case statements and benefits at each level.
- Connect and collaborate with various groups, from sustainable farms to BIPOC-led organizations.

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Leadership & Longevity

Goal 10: Align, access, and pursue federal, state, and local initiatives and funding

- Identify and communicate funding opportunities with partners in real-time.
- Assemble a rapid review and response team to assess funding opportunities.
- Serve as a main advocate for conservation funding in Illinois.
- PSCC is a leader to advance and help create a permanent statewide funding solution.

Goal 11: Build organizational capacity and longevity.

- Increase financial support from Board of Directors through individual and organization membership.
- Provide and review AAA Board Training, DEIJA Training, and organize a board retreat.
- Foster relationships to increase funding from major gifts and membership growth.
- Establish a plan for an endowment fund and develop additional financial strategies.
- Hire additional staff.

(Photos, page 10-11) 1. Prairie trillium on a Conservation@Home property in northern Illinois 2. Ho-Chunk Nation Elder Chloris Lowe in traditional ceremonial regalia at Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation's Casper Bluff Land and Water Reserve 3. View from Cave in Rock State Park in Illinois looking across the Ohio River to Kentucky



DEIJA

- Be on the lookout for federal funding opportunities that support underrepresented groups, such as BIPOC and accessibility organizations, and provide available resources.
- Work on legislation impacting underserved communities for systems change.
- Recruit representatives of many diverse backgrounds from the community at large to serve PSCC.



Goal 12: Develop an annual policy platform

- Identify and communicate land conservation policies with partners in real-time.
- Organize an annual Conservation Policy Retreat and a Conservation Lobby Day.
- Build relationships with lawmakers and local decision makers.
- Lead the effort to advocate for and build power within the conservation community to pass legislation.

Goal 13: Cultivate a culture of private philanthropy for conservation.

- Maintain a list of “shovel ready” projects to quickly match to funding opportunities. Develop a clearinghouse of immediate and long-term needs.
- Form and connect a network of advocates, both funders and programs.
- Tell the story, or create a campaign, to communicate the value of conservation for funders and philanthropists.

(Photo, back cover) Lake Michigan as seen descending from the Jean and John Greene Nature Preserve property, Lake Forest Openlands Association in northeastern Illinois.

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