



Meet our 2025

Board of Directors and staff



Cynthia Kanner, Executive Director

Cynthia Kanner is our first executive director and brings a broad spectrum of experience to the position, most recently 15 years with Environmental Defenders of McHenry County as its executive director for the last four years.

She served as director of communications and marketing and as a consultant for Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, Arizona, and as executive director of World Affairs Council of Washington, D.C.

She holds a Bachelor's degree in International Comparative Studies from Duke University. Kanner has been a long-time supporter of conservation and environmental organizations locally as well as statewide and serves on the board of directors of the Food Shed Co-op, a cooperative grocery store breaking ground in McHenry County in 2023.

Her yard received the designation of Conservation@Home through the Land Conservancy of McHenry County and has both a native prairie and native woodland garden as well as several old bur oak trees. She is a former stream monitoring educator with Friends of the Fox River and is a river guide on the Fox.



Brook McDonald, President

The Conservation Foundation

Brook McDonald has been President and Chief Executive Officer for The Conservation Foundation since 1996. He chaired the DuPage River Coalition from 1989 to 1995, and is past chairman of the DuPage River Watershed Ecosystem Partnership. He is principal author of Illinois's first citizens stream monitoring manual published in 1990.

He served on the Warrenville Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals from 1993-1996, and sat on the Board of Directors for the National Association for Interpretation from 1994 to 1998. He also served on the board of the Illinois Environmental Council from 1998 to 2001, served as a member of the Kendall County Extension Unit's Advisory Council, and is a past member of the board for the Campaign for Sensible Growth.

He served more than 10 years as an appointed member of the DuPage Environmental Commission, served as chairman of the DuPage County Trails Maintenance Task Force, and as the chairman of the DuPage Green Government Council.

He worked as Public Affairs Director for the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County, Manager of Interpretation and Natural Resources for the Wheaton Park District, a naturalist for Metro Parks of Columbus and Franklin County, and as a Stream Monitoring Coordinator for the Ohio Scenic Rivers program for Ohio Department of Natural Resources.



Jim Johannsen, Vice President

Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation

Jim Johannsen is the Director of Land Conservation for Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation (JDCF). His day-to-day work is focused on two program areas: Land Preservation and Land Stewardship.

In his work with JDCF's Land Preservation program, Jim leads acquisition of land and conservation easements. In the Land Stewardship program, he leads a team of four that maintain over 2,000 acres of land owned by JDCF across 12 preserves.

He holds a B.A. in English and Religion from Augustana College and a Master's of Public Administration from the University of Illinois – Springfield. Jim is currently serving on the board of directors of the Natural Areas Association (NAA), a national nonprofit organization. Jim also serves as Treasurer for NAA.

Jim volunteered for the PSCC Executive Director Hiring Committee and also serves on the PSCC Board Development Committee.



Paul Botts, Secretary

The Wetlands Initiative

Paul Botts has been President and Executive Director of the Wetlands Initiative since 2011. In that capacity he's served on a variety of statewide and regional councils such as Vital Lands Illinois, the Chicago Wilderness Executive Council, Illinois The Beautiful, and PSCC starting in 2021.

Previously, he was Director of Chicago Programs at the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation. Paul served in operations and development roles at The Nature Conservancy of Illinois during the 1990s, and spent a few years as managing director of a professional theater company in Chicago. A Chicago native, retired local musician, and recovered newspaper reporter, Paul now lives with his family in the city's South Loop.



Erin Herbez, Treasurer

ParkLands Foundation

Erin Herbez is Administrative Director for ParkLands Foundation. She was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, and remained there through the first two years of college. She completed her Bachelor's in Ecology, Evolution and Conservation from the University of Texas at Austin.

Through this program, she found a love of observing wildlife, including reptiles and birds. After working for a local water conservation nonprofit and completing two years of field jobs, she attended Louisiana State University and studied management of Red-cockaded Woodpeckers to earn her Master's Degree.

She worked as a consultant on pre-construction surveys for wind turbine siting before moving to Bloomington where she became acquainted with ParkLands Foundation and the small, but passionate group of philanthropists and nature lovers that keep the foundation thriving. In her free time Erin likes to go birding and take her children to outdoor spaces so they can hopefully begin a lifelong love of nature as well.



Amy Doll

Friends of Illinois Nature Preserves

Amy Doll became the first Director of Friends of Illinois Nature Preserves in 2021. She is responsible for leading the nonprofit organization as they build collaborations throughout the state of Illinois to provide support for the Illinois Nature Preserve System.

Doll joins the Friends with more than 15 years of Illinois public lands experience, most recently leading the DeKalb Park District for the past 5 years. She brings her passion and energy for conservation and natural lands protection, along with experience in developing collaborative partnerships.



Joanne Fessett

Illinois Audubon Society

Jo has worked for the Illinois Audubon Society since 2006. Before becoming Executive Director in 2022, she previously had been the Assistant to the Director under Marilyn Campbell, Tom Clay, and Jim Herkert. Jo's history with Illinois Audubon Society began as an At-Large member of the Board of Directors from 2000 to 2006. She served as the Chair of the Education Committee before becoming staff. Her experience with the Society has included administration, marketing, grant writing, volunteer management, event planning and coordination as well as designing and conducting the annual Adventures Field Trip program for members and nonmembers. Jo's

past employment includes Argonne National Laboratory near her hometown of Lemont, Illinois, and The Nature Conservancy. She received a B.A. from Lewis University (Business Administration).



Allison Frederick

Citizens for Conservation

Allison Frederick is Administrative Director at Citizens for Conservation, a nonprofit organization in northeastern Illinois. Prior to that, she held positions in public relations, environmental education, limnology laboratories and as an aquatic entomology research technician.

She is an active citizen scientist, surveying calling frogs and Odonate populations in McHenry County. Her background in Forestry and Natural Resources from Purdue University and passion for land stewardship makes her well-suited to lead a conservation agency.

She believes that we can join forces to take major action against climate change and other environmental challenges—and strong, clear communications are the first step. From restoration workdays in local preserves to exploring natural areas with her family, she works daily to inspire positive changes in the world around us.



Caleb Grantham

The Nature Conservancy, Southern Illinois

Caleb is the Community Engagement and Conservation Specialist for the Southern Illinois program of The Nature Conservancy.

He grew up in Central Illinois and has lived in Southern Illinois since 2010. He received a Bachelor of Science Degree in Forestry Natural Resource Management and a Minor in Environmental Studies from Southern Illinois University – Carbondale in 2014.

He has been with TNC since the beginning of 2014 and focuses his professional efforts in the southernmost 13 counties of Illinois. He has extensive stewardship knowledge and experience working in and around the Shawnee National Forest with an array of

conservation professionals and partners from state, federal, nonprofit, and even private landowners. He has built strong partnerships locally and enjoys supporting and collaborating remotely with TNC colleagues throughout the state and TNC Midwest Division.

His role with TNC has evolved over the years and he currently assists with land acquisitions, conservation fee and easement monitoring, stewardship, GIS, marketing, community engagement, and much more. He is on the Executive Committee of the Shawnee Resource Conservation & Development, provides increasing support for TNC's and INPC's statewide Volunteer Stewardship Network, and is creatively expanding his role and impact in community engagement.

Caleb is an Illinois certified Prescribed Fire Manager and closing the gap on his nationally accredited Prescribed Fire Burn Boss (RXB2) qualification.

He assisted with the PSCC's Southern Illinois Regional Gathering in the fall of 2024 and looks forward to continuing to support PSCC in conservation efforts and initiatives in years to come.



Fran Harty

retired

Fran Harty is retired from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. He is a co-founder and past president of Prairie State Conservation Coalition.

He is co-founder and current treasurer for the Friends of the Illinois Nature Preserves. He helped write and pass the Illinois Prescribed Fire Act.

Fran helped establish the 19,000-acre Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie and add 9,000 acres to the Upper Mississippi River Wildlife Refuge at the Savanna Army Depot. He secured a \$1-million-dollar donation to support the TNC/Forest Service Volunteer program at Midewin.

Yes, there's more! He wrote the Illinois Natural Areas Stewardship Act, is an advisor to the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, and is a past president of the Natural Areas Association. He also developed the Division of Natural Heritage's Natural Heritage Residency Program.



James Hill

Clifftop NFP

James (Jim) Hill has provided diverse professional conservation and life quality services in Illinois for over 40 years. He earned a BS in Forestry from Southern Illinois University – Carbondale in 1982. James worked for the St. Louis District US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) for over 32 years as a Natural Resource Specialist/Project Manager.

After retirement from USACE in 2013, James founded JMHill Consulting and provides natural resource and outdoor recreation planning and development services for numerous clients.

James also volunteers extensively and serves on the Board of Directors for 4 southwestern Illinois regional not-for-profit organizations: Clifftop, a natural heritage land trust, since 2013; Kaskaskia Cahokia Trail Coalition since 2012; Discover Downstate Illinois Tourism Bureau (formerly IL South Tourism Bureau) since 2014; and the Monroe County IL Economic Development Corporation since 2016.

James has been an active member of the PSCC since 2017 through his Clifftop affiliation and looks forward to serving on the PSCC Board of Directors to help positively drive the organizations ongoing and future conservation/quality of life initiatives statewide.



Lindsay Keeney

Illinois Environmental Council

Lindsay Keeney has been in her current position as Conservation Director since 2017, where she serves as lead staff on IEC's conservation, open space, and river issues. She also supports IEC's sustainable agriculture and local food programming.

She has been with the IDNR's Jim Edgar State Fish and Wildlife Area, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, Illinois Natural History Survey's Illinois River Biological Station and the Illinois Stewardship Alliance. She's served as network architect for the Illinois Vital Lands Network and is on the board of the Old Capitol Farmers Market in Springfield.

Lindsay holds a Master's degree in Biology from the University of Illinois at Springfield and a Master's certificate in Geographic Information Service.



Sarah Livesay

Grand Prairie Friends Land Trust

As a Central Illinois native, Sarah Livesay graduated from Eastern Illinois University and pursued a career in field biology and environmental education. From 1995-2017, Sarah focused on the development and capacity building of conservation non-profit and government entities including state DNRs, Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and Japan Parks & Recreation.

In 2017, Sarah was hired as the first Executive Director for Grand Prairie Friends Land Trust. Since 1984, Grand Prairie Friends has served as a conservation land trust which preserves, protects and restores over 1,200 acres of natural areas across six counties in East-Central Illinois.

Sarah recently completed her tenth (and final) year on the board of Commissioners for the Champaign County Forest Preserve District. She now assists with development work for the Forest Preserve as a board member on the Forest Preserve Friends Foundation.



Alley Ringhausen

Great Rivers Land Trust

Alley Ringhausen has served as the Executive Director of Great Rivers Land Trust since 2001. He joined Great Rivers Land Trust in 1999 as Developer and Manager of the Piasa Creek Watershed Project. Under his leadership, Great Rivers Land Trust has protected thousands of acres of property in Illinois and Missouri; developed wetlands, reduced erosion, planned parks, restored streams; and partnered with numerous organizations on a wide variety of conservation projects.

He has an extensive background in conservation consultation and assists other nonprofit organizations, municipalities, colleges, government agencies, corporations, and school districts. Some of his accomplishments include implementing the Piasa Creek Watershed Project in partnership with Illinois American Water Company, restoration of the Boy Scout Lake at Camp Warren Levis, and improvement of scenic, historic and ecologically significant properties along the Meeting of the Great Rivers National Scenic Byway in Illinois.



Matt Ruhter

Openlands

Matt Ruhter is the Conservation Attorney at Openlands where he works on conservation easements, land preservation, and overall company success. For more than 15 years Matt has enjoyed a varied career in law and natural resources. Matt holds a Bachelor's degree in Wildlife Ecology from the University of Florida, a Master's degree in Biology from DePaul University, and a Juris Doctor from Indiana University

Maurer School of Law. He sits on the board of the Illinois Indiana Bison Association and is an attorney with Administer Justice.

PSCC staff



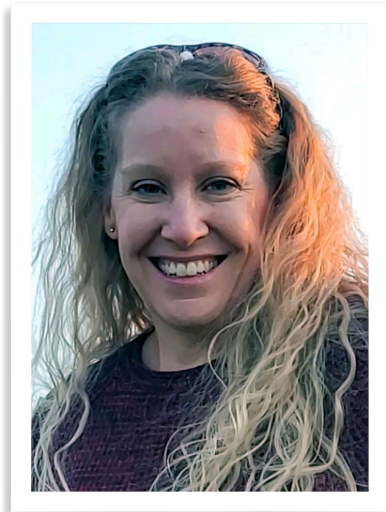
Sandy Kaczmarski

Prairie State Conservation Coalition

Sandy Kaczmarski has been a contract employee since 2015, initially hired to handle PSCC's Hike App software. Her role has expanded to include communications and media and anything else that pops up.

As a photojournalism student at Roosevelt University in Chicago, she honed her craft in the darkroom (remember those?) by shooting events in and around the city. Sandy's B.A. in Journalism led her to a broadcasting career working as a radio news anchor in the suburbs and the top news stations in Chicago. She has worked as an editor and reporter for AOL's Patch online news, and as a freelance reporter at numerous metro and Chicago news publications. She provides media consulting at Sanderella Media.

Her passion for the environment led her to communications positions at Chicago's Brookfield Zoo, Forest Preserve District of DuPage County, and The Conservation Foundation providing her skills in photography, video, writing, and graphic and web design to further the mission of conservation and preserving the environment.



Jodie Owen

Prairie State Conservation Coalition

Jodie Owen is a self-employed accountant with a focus on nonprofit accounting. She began working for PSCC in early 2019 after the board decided they would like to expand the role beyond what was previously done by the treasurer.

Jodie's career began at the Illinois State Museum Society as a bookkeeper after she graduated from the University of Illinois at Springfield in 1997. Since then she has expanded her business to include several nonprofits in Illinois including the Illinois Audubon Society, the Illinois State Academy of Science, and the Illinois Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

She enjoys laid back mornings and spending time with her husband, four daughters and three dogs. She homeschools her daughters and lives in rural Taylorville, IL with her husband of 28 years.