

2026 PSCC Land Conservation Conference



**PRAIRIE STATE
CONSERVATION COALITION**

A Collective Voice for Land Conservation In Illinois

March 4, 5, 6

I Hotel and Conference Center, Champaign IL

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4 — LAND TRUST DAY

9 a.m.

10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Coffee & Registration

[Deep Dive Workshops](#)

Chancellor Room

Indigenous knowledge for land managers, and best practices in land co-management with tribal partners

In this panel-based workshop, hear from cultural preservation staff from three Tribal Nations that trace their ancestry to what is now Northern Illinois on reconnecting their people with areas in their ancestral footprint.

Kim Vigue (Oneida/Menominee), Gichigamiin Indigenous Nations Museum

Samantha Skenandore (Ho-Chunk/Oneida), Skenandore Wilson LLP

Bill Quackenbush, Ho-Chunk Nation of Wisconsin

Raphael Wahwassuck, Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation

Charles Harris, Sac and Fox Nation of Oklahoma

Steve Barg, Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation

Hillary Holt, Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation

Alma Mater Room

Red Alerts and Red Herrings: Strategies to Prevent Flare-Ups from Becoming Full-Blown Dumpster Fires

Everything is running smoothly at your land trust when suddenly a crisis hits – how do you respond? Bold Bison will share tools and skills to assess the situation and boost your ability to communicate with confidence during a crisis.

Brandon Hayes and Patrick Williams, Bold Bison Communications & Consulting

Lincoln Room

Cultivating Relationships: Sharing Community-centered Conservation Successes and Challenges

Learn about the successes and challenges of building new relationships and strengthening partnerships that benefit communities and nature through collaboration, listening/learning, and sharing power and resources.

Alison Paul and Kyla Muhammad, The Conservation Foundation

1 p.m.

2 p.m.

LUNCH buffet & Registration

CHANCELLOR ROOM — Welcome Remarks

[Afternoon Concurrent Sessions](#) — Follow a TRACK or mix and match!

For a detailed description of the programs below, click or scan the QR code



TRACK – BIPOC – Chancellor Room

2:30 p.m. – Beyond Inclusion: Building Meaningful Partnerships with BIPOC Communities in Land Conservation — *Jay Young, American Indian Center of Chicago*

3:30 p.m. – Rooted Figures: Engaging Youth in Land Stewardship through Storytelling and Traditional Knowledge — *Nataka Moore, The Mbwakawen Harambee Collective*

4:30 p.m. – Learning from Bison: What We've Learned Rematriating Bison to the Landscape — *Sarah Voska, Bluestem Ecological Services; Jeff Sebert, co-founder of Bluestem Ecological; Raphael Wahwassuck, Tribal Council Member, Prairie Band Potawatomi; Bill Quackenbush, Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, Ho-Chunk Nation*

TRACK – Farmland and Conservation – Lincoln Room

2:30 p.m. – Does Illinois Need a Conservation-driven, Community-building Farmland Trust? — *Nathan Aaberg*

3:30 p.m. – Corridors Through the Corn Belt: Linking Farms, Wildlife, and Climate Goals — *Angie Doucette, American Farmland Trust, Midwest Region*

4:30 p.m. – Identifying and Reporting Herbicide Driven Injuries on Conservation Land — *Kim Erndt-Pitcher, Prairie Rivers Network*

TRACK – Nuts and Bolts Organizational – Alma Mater Room

2:30 p.m. – Executive Director and Board Management — *Lisa Haderlein, The Land Conservancy of McHenry County*

3:30 p.m. – Getting Started in Planned Giving — *Shari Fox, Fox Philanthropic Advisors LLC*

4:30 p.m. – Hackmatack: A Collaborative Partnership — *Steven Byers and Ed Collins, Friends of Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge; Matt Ruhter, Openlands*

TRACK – Stewardship – Quad Room

2:30 p.m. – Ecosystem Restoration in Public and Private Spaces, Stewardship Practices, Conserving Biodiversity — *Jack Pizzo, Pizzo Group*

3:30 p.m. – Nature Revealed: Rare Plant Finds in Restored Habitat — *Eric Mollahan, Land Conservation Foundation, Mike Hansen, Lead Ecologist, ILM*

4:30 p.m. – A Batty Model for Endangered Species Restoration — *Sarah Livesay, Taylor McClain, Grand Prairie Friends; Tara Hohoff, UIUC IL Natural History Survey*

6:30 p.m.

PSCC Board of Directors/Staff Dinner Meeting
Big Grove Tavern, 1 E. Main St., Champaign

THURSDAY, MARCH 5

CHANCELLOR ROOM

9:15 a.m.

WELCOME REMARKS

9:30 a.m.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: University of Illinois Ornithologist and Chair of Sustainability, Dr. Michael Ward, opens the conference with a look at Illinois Biodiversity through the avian lens, Illinois's Birds: A Legacy of Conservation and a Vision for Tomorrow

10 to 10:30 a.m.

PSCC Business Meeting and election of Board members

10:30 to 11 a.m.

Dave Holman, 2025 Year In Review

11 to 11:30 a.m.

News from the Land Trust Alliance — *Ajjah Gilbert, Community Centered Conservation Program Manager and Justin Merrifield, Senior Project Manager NRCS Conservation Acquisition Team*

11:30 a.m. to Noon

Cultural Exchange with Bill Quackenbush

Guests who brought a cultural exchange item that represents their organization, holds personal significance, or reflects on their heritage or culture will be given as a gift to another attendee during the conference.

12:15 p.m.

Pick up boxed lunches

1 to 4 p.m.

All Things Local Field Trips – Off-site

Field Trip 1: Food for Thought: A Model to Feed Communities through Conservation

Sola Gratia Farm serves a mission across East-Central Illinois to make healthy food accessible for all by nurturing productive land and cultivating diverse, inclusive communities. Walk the farm with Sola Gratia staff and partners, including The Savanna Institute. Tour the edible windbreaks, the packing plant, the greenhouse, and imagine how partnerships in your community can “harvest” these results. Outdoors and indoors, dress for conditions. Approximately 1 mile walk.

Field Trip 2: VIP Tour of Science in the Making: Meet the Scientists

For the first time in nearly four decades, a team of Illinois scientists reassessed and released an updated endangered and threatened status list of plants in the state (Aug 2025). Meet the team as they narrate the outcomes from their two-year journey across Illinois. Participant groups will then cycle through the eDNA and Medical Entomology lab where scientists will share discoveries in mosquito/tick pathogens and Bat eDNA. The tour also includes visits to the UIUC Herbarium and Bird collections.

Field Trip 3: A Bird in the Hand is Worth 100 Years of Science Discoveries

Join UIUC Natural Areas Coordinator and Botanist James Ellis for a field experience steeped in history and scientific research. Walk through two ancient 60-acre forests, Trelease and Brownfield Woods, that are both remnants of the Big Grove, an island of trees in the Grand Prairie that once covered about 15 square miles in present-day Champaign County. We will encounter a series of stations including ornithologists mist-netting birds, mammalogists demonstrating tracking technologies and foresters involved with the global ForestGEO program, sharing their research from the field. Outdoors, dress for conditions. Approximately 3-mile walk.

ILLINOIS BALLROOM

5:30 p.m.

Cocktail Reception

6:30 p.m.

Conference Banquet — Annual PSCC Awards, Dining with UIUC and Cultural Exchange

7:45 to 8:45 a.m. Guided meditation connecting with sacred Mother Earth

In our western culture, we live in a world of separation and disconnection from nature, and from each other. Join *Kerry Leigh* in this guided experiential session exercise/journey in restoring and deepening our awareness of our interdependence with nature as human beings outside of an intellectual or conceptual understanding. This work has the potential to deepen our personal relationships to the natural world as well as to each other.

9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. General Sessions – Chancellor Ballroom

There will be 10-minute breaks between sessions

Updates from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources

Panel with Natalie Phelps Finnie, Director; Todd Strole, Assistant Director; and Ann Marie Holtrop, Chief, Division of Natural Heritage

Building Relationships with your Elected Officials

Panel with Steve Barg, Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation; Lindsay Keeney, Illinois Environmental Council; Claire Shipp, American Farmland Trust; and Paul Botts, The Wetlands Initiative. Facilitated by Amy Doll, Friends of Illinois Nature Preserves

The Illinois Conservation Funding Initiative

Panel with representatives from The Nature Conservancy, The Conservation Fund, The Trust for Public Land, Openlands, Illinois Environmental Council, and Friends of Illinois Nature Preserves

12:30 p.m. Wrap-up and conference concludes

1:30 to 3:30 p.m. Post Conference Field Trip

Walk the Path of the Bison: Partnerships in Prairie at Buffalo Trace

Transportation on your own. Buffalo Trace Prairie is a 20-minute drive on I-74.

The Champaign County Forest Preserve District’s Buffalo Trace Prairie project began a quarter century ago with a community grassroots desire to restore a few acres of native prairie along a popular new asphalt bike path at Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve in Champaign County. The partnership between a land-holding government agency with limited ecological restoration experience and capacity and an eager local land trust, Grand Prairie Friends, has resulted in a long-lasting and constantly expanding story of restoration success.

With the input of thousands of volunteer hours, grant awards, and interdepartmental cooperation within the Forest Preserves, this site has become a hub for wildlife, education, and recreation. Dive into the history of this model community project which melds local nonprofit conservation, community partners and governmental action. Outdoors and indoors, dress for conditions. Approximately 1 mile walk.

