



2026 Annual Land Conservation Conference **Program List**

Wednesday DEEP DIVE WORKSHOPS 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

CHANCELLOR ROOM: Indigenous knowledge for land managers, and best practices in land co-management with Tribal partners

Kim Vigue (Oneida/Menominee), Executive Director of the Gichigamiin Museum

Samantha Skenandore (Ho-Chunk/Oneida), Attorney and Founding Partner, Skenandore Wilson LLP

Bill Quackenbush, Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, Ho-Chunk Nation of Wisconsin

Raphael Wahwassuck, Tribal Council Member/Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation

Charles Harris, NAGPRA Director, Sac and Fox Nation of Oklahoma

Steve Barg, Executive Director, Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation

Facilitator: Hillary Holt, Director of Education and Outreach, Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation

In this panel-based workshop you will hear from cultural preservation staff from three Tribal Nations that trace their ancestry to what is now northern Illinois; a Tribal lawyer active on forward-facing, sovereignty-advancing policy and the Rights of Nature movement; and the Native Executive Director of an Indigenous-led museum in Chicago. As well as sharing the importance of reconnecting their people with areas in their ancestral footprint, they will share case studies, current policies, procedures and best practices to give participants actionable tools in working with Tribes and Native people to manage land in partnership.

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

Brandon Hayes and Patrick Williams, Bold Bison Communications & Consulting

Crisis communications is an exercise requiring regular practice to build muscle strength. We argue in this session that when land trusts face "crises," they are often right on the cusp between being manageable and spilling over into a high-risk scenario, and that the actions organizations take to address these situations are often as important as the messaging they craft. Participants will work in teams through simulated crisis scenarios, requiring them to weigh consequences, choose a plan of action, and develop key messages before sharing their decisions with the full group of participants.

LINCOLN ROOM: Cultivating Relationships: Sharing Community-centered Conservation Successes and Challenges

Alison Paul, The Conservation Foundation

This interactive session will focus on lessons learned by presenters and session participants as they work to develop and deepen a community-centered conservation model and move towards a Conservation 2.0, whole communities, approach. The session will include a brief history of Conservation 1.0 and the current move towards a more inclusive Conservation 2.0 model.

We will include break-out discussions intended to further the community of practice around community-based conservation. Presenters and participants will share stories of how they got started, challenges they've encountered, proven relationship-building strategies, and how new and innovative partnerships have amplified their conservation efforts.

Wednesday AFTERNOON CONCURRENT SESSIONS

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

Land conservation efforts have often overlooked or excluded the voices of Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color, despite the fact that these communities hold deep knowledge and connections to land and water. This session examines how conservation organizations can move beyond tokenistic outreach to create authentic, equitable partnerships with BIPOC communities. Barriers to engagement, strategies for building trust, and ways to integrate cultural knowledge with Western conservation practices will be explored. Participants will leave with tools to reframe their work through the lens of equity, reciprocity, and shared leadership.

3:30 p.m. – Rooted Figures: Engaging Youth in Land Stewardship through Storytelling and Traditional Knowledge

Nataka Moore, The Mbwakawen Harambee Collective

We'll explore how to meaningfully engage youth in land stewardship and climate resilience work through storytelling, cultural history, and hands-on practice. Drawing on personal experiences working with African American youth through summer youth ambassador programs, as well as youth from diverse ethnic backgrounds in private school settings, I'll share how to tailor approaches to meet the needs of young people across different places and spaces.

A central theme of this work is the integration of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) into nature-based art, ecological practices, and opportunities for reflection. These approaches create pathways for young people to connect to ancestry, explore their own identities, and imagine their future roles as stewards of the land. By weaving stories of resilience and highlighting the cultural gifts passed down through generations, we inspire youth to see themselves as capable of addressing pressing environmental issues such as soil regeneration and climate change.

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

The Great Plains once was home to nearly 60 million bison. Extermination policies by the U.S. Military reduced their numbers to a mere 300. But thanks to efforts from the Intertribal Bison Exchange, National Bison Association, and Department of the Interior, there are now nearly 400,000 head as part of restoring landscapes to pre-colonial reference habitats by re-introducing large grazing mammals such as the bison. This panel discussion will show the benefits of rematriating large grazers to the landscape, the basics of herd managements, and cultural connections to the buffalo.

TRACK – Farmland and Conservation Lincoln Room

2:30 p.m. – Does Illinois Need a Conservation-driven Community-building Farmland Trust?

Nathan Aaberg

The state of Illinois uses 75% of its land for agriculture. As the dominant land use, agriculture's practices have tremendous impact on the state of the Prairie State's natural resources. While modern agriculture's practices are built on amazing engineering and chemical advances, they are also deeply damaging to the ecosystems of soil, water, and land of the farmland they are used on and on properties far beyond the farmland.

This presentation lays out the logic for the establishment of a hybrid, state-wide conservation organization with its roots in the Illinois land trust community. This hybrid, state-wide group would carry out several key functions — preservation of farmland, transition of donated farmland to regenerative practices, making resources available to non-farming farmland owners around the state about life-friendly farming practices, and building community among non-farming farmland owners dedicated to some form of conservation.

3:30 p.m. – Corridors Through the Corn Belt: Linking Farms, Wildlife, and Climate Goals

Angie Doucette, American Farmland Trust (Midwest Region)

Illinois's farmland is more than cropland—it is a cornerstone of the state's ecological infrastructure and a linchpin in achieving long-term conservation outcomes. At a time when Illinois faces both the accelerating impacts of climate change and mounting development pressures, protecting farmland is not only about preserving food production—it is about safeguarding the ecological services and connectivity that working lands provide. This session examines the critical role farmland protection plays in advancing landscape-scale conservation goals. By strategically securing farmland, we can achieve multiple benefits: sequestering carbon in productive soils, reducing emissions by curbing sprawl, buffering rivers and wetlands from nutrient runoff, and creating continuous habitat corridors that connect Illinois's fragmented natural areas.

4:30 p.m. – Identifying and Reporting Herbicide Driven Injuries on Conservation Land

Kim Erndt-Pitcher, Prairie Rivers Network

Herbicide drift and pesticide trespass: what it means for Illinois ecosystems, how to identify and report it, and how to be proactive in a solution for prevention. Landowners and land managers learn how to identify herbicide injury to trees and plants, how to monitor and report it, and what actions they can take to prevent further injury. Understand how and why drift occurs, gain the ability to identify and report drift, and become better-equipped to contribute to a widespread issue threatening the health of Illinois ecosystems.

TRACK – Nuts and Bolts Organizational Alma Room

2:30 p.m. – The Executive Director and Board Management

Lisa Haderlein, The Land Conservancy of McHenry County

To be effective, the Executive Director and board relationship needs to be peer-to-peer. This can be easier said than done given that boards are often dynamic! This relationship in any nonprofit is critical to the success of the organization, land trusts included. This session provides the tools for a building a successful relationship, including best practices for director's management of the board of directors, keys to a constructive Executive Director-President relationship, and some common challenges and potential solutions faced by this partnership.

3:30 p.m. – Getting Started in Planned Giving

Shari Fox, Fox Philanthropic Advisors LLC

Developed for nonprofit executive leaders, finance, and fundraising staff, this session addresses the basics of planned giving in a fundraising program. We define planned gifts, bust common planned giving myths, discuss basic planned gifts for every charitable organization, and suggest manageable action steps for including planned gifts in participants' fundraising programs. This program shows how to make raising non-cash and deferred gifts accessible for every not-for-profit institution, including land trusts and conservation organizations.

4:30 p.m. – Hackmatack: A Collaborative Partnership

Steven Byers, Friends of Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge

Ed Collins, Friends of Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge

Emily Ruesswig, Openlands

Participants will learn how a group of individuals built the biological case and public support for establishment of Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge. Details regarding the size and shape of the Refuge and the role of Land Protection Partners in preserving the third largest protected conservation area in Northeastern Illinois will be shared. The value of large, connected and restored landscapes in preserving regional biodiversity is a constant theme. Finally, the importance of community building among a variety of stakeholders (and by inference support for the Refuge) will be shared via the three presentations.

TRACK – Stewardship Quad Room

2:30 p.m. – Ecosystem Restoration in Public and Private Spaces, Stewardship Practices, Conserving Biodiversity

Jack Pizzo, Pizzo Group

From bustling cities to wide-open landscapes, nature can be restored anywhere. Restoring nature is our mission, and success begins by fostering a deep connection between the owner, planner, contractor, and the natural systems of the site. When all stakeholders are aligned and grounded in the unique environment to be restored, projects can flourish, both ecologically and aesthetically. This session explores how to understand site conditions, communicate nature-based solutions, create effective designs and contracts, and why before-and-after photos are essential tools for tracking and sharing success. With long-term stewardship, restoration becomes not just possible, but truly transformative.

3:30 p.m. – A Batty Model for Endangered Species Restoration

Sarah Livesay, Taylor McClain, Grand Prairie Friends; Tara Hohoff, UIUC IL Natural History Survey

On a hot, buggy day in the woods of Coles County in 2015, a researcher located a federally endangered female Indiana bat with her pup. This discovery set in motion a 30-year, multiple-partner mitigation project including research, habitat restoration, and volunteer monitoring at Grand Prairie Friends' Warbler Ridge Conservation Area. Explore the plans, prices, people and processes that led to a successful flight.

4:30 p.m. – Nature Revealed: Rare Plant Finds in Restored Habitats

Eric Mollahan, Land Conservation Foundation

During habitat restoration, unexpected discoveries can often be the most rewarding part of the work. This presentation explores how restoration activities—such as invasive species removal, prescribed burns, and hydrological improvements—can reveal rare or overlooked native plants that have persisted quietly in the landscape. We'll share examples of projects where hidden native seedbanks and remnant populations were uncovered, discuss why these findings are ecologically significant, and provide practical tips on how to identify, document, and protect these plants during fieldwork. Attendees will gain a deeper appreciation of how restoration not only repairs ecosystems but can also rediscover and safeguard native biodiversity that might otherwise remain hidden.