

A National Priority: America's Great Outdoors

Earlier this year, President Obama announced the America's Great Outdoors initiative, a nationwide mission for the 21st century to protect our lands and waters and to reconnect all people with our natural and cultural heritage.

Development of the initiative brought together many of today's top leaders in conservation and reached out to a rich diversity of people across the nation—people with varied stories, traditions and connections to the wild resources that define America. Our rivers, forests, prairies, coasts and mountains that have been a source of national wealth provide a treasured place where we reflect, relax, enjoy recreation and create lasting memories with friends and family. It is the duty of our generation to restore and protect these wild national treasures for all future generations.

Created as an effort to engage grassroots organizations and individuals, more than 50 listening sessions occurred during the development of the initiative, including the Aug. 30, 2010 session in Chicago involving approximately 400 Illinoisans. From that collective input, the federal



government developed a plan to enable communities to accomplish their own, local conservation and recreation priorities.

Key factors in the plan include the involvement of urban and youth constituencies and the alignment of programs with federal priorities, including in Illinois the State Wildlife Action Plan

which provides for science-based guidelines for landscape-scale, multi-partner efforts. The action plan, when implemented, will result in:

- accessible parks or Green spaces for our children
- a new generation of urban parks and community Green spaces
- newly restored river restorations and recreational "blueways" that power economic revitalization
- stronger support for farmers, ranchers and private landowners who help protect rural landscapes and provide access for recreation
- the reinvestment of revenues from oil and gas extraction into protection of parks, open spaces, wildlife habitat and access for recreational activities
- a 21st century conservation ethic that builds on local ideas for environmental stewardship and connecting to our historic, cultural and natural heritage

The America's Great Outdoors initiative stresses the importance of connecting Americans—urban residents and youth in particular—with the great outdoors and their natural and cultural heritage. The initiative also recognizes the need to conserve and restore America's great outdoors, and that achieving

these goals requires collaboration, communication and coordinated efforts between the public and private sectors.

Here in Illinois, work continues toward achieving goals of the initiative, with many upcoming activities focusing on youth involvement.

Throughout April and May, teams of youth will head outdoors to participate in Earth Day in the Parks activities, planting trees and prairie plants, creating wetlands and removing invasive plants.

On May 15, 100 youth will gather for Illinois' second Youth Conservation Congress, where students and leaders will have the opportunity to showcase their achievements and learn about many youth-related conservation activities, ultimately providing for better coordination among these groups statewide.

In June, organized activities will provide family-oriented fun celebrating Illinois' Leave No Child Inside initiative, including events at Gebhard Woods State Park (Morris, June 4 or 5), William Powers State Park (Chicago, June 4), I&M Canal Lock 14 (LaSalle, June 11), Moraine Hills State Park (McHenry, June 11), Volo Bog State Natural Area (Ingleside, June 12) and McHenry County Conservation District (Marengo, June 25-26). For additional information on LNCI events, see www.kidsoutside.info/june.php.

Please share the responsibility. Get involved locally. Take part in the grassroots effort to reconnect Americans with our great outdoors.

Marc Miller, Director

“America's Great Outdoors—A Promise to Future Generations” is available for review at www.americasgreatoutdoors.gov.

Watch a video on the initiative, learn what is new and share your thoughts. Be a part of the promise to future generations.