

Illinois Forests



"The Voice for Illinois Forests"

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2022 Illinois Forestry Association Board of Directors

Executive Committee

PRESIDENT
Paul Deizman
Springfield, IL
217/381-9619
pauldeizman1@gmail.com

VICE-PRESIDENT
Tricia Bethke (Region 1)
Naperville, IL
630/234-7325
tbethke@mortonarb.org

SECRETARY
Dave Gillespie (Region 2)
Chatham, IL
217/494-6982
dandgisp@aol.com

TREASURER
Mike McMahan (Region 4)
Vienna, IL
618/977-3415
mcmahan3465@hotmail.com

IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT
Tom Walsh
Durand, IL
815/721-6287
walsh10@stateline-isp.com

PROGRAM COORDINATOR
Zach DeVillez
Makanda, IL
618/8410932
zachd@illinois.edu

Regional Directors

Region 1

Brad Petersburg
Galena, IL
641/420-5851
bf2100@gmail.com

Region 2

Debbie Fluegel
Tremont, IL
309/613-0095
dfluegel@treesforever.org

Region 3

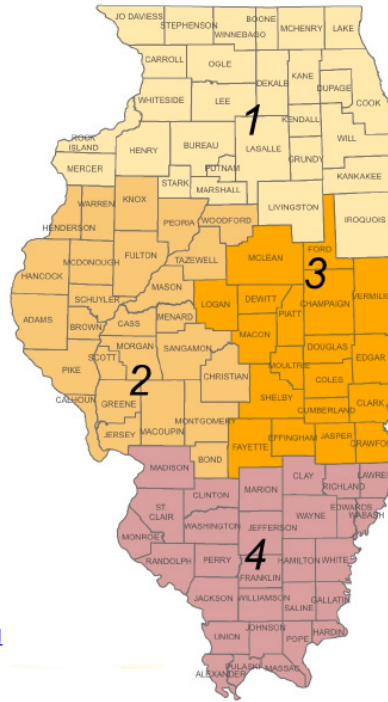
Stan Sipp
Mansfield, IL
217/714-1855
sklipp@illinois.edu

Sarah Vogel
Decatur, IL
217/877-6042
sklipp@illinois.edu

Region 4

Roger Smith
Benton, IL
618/927-2057
smithtreefarmllc@hotmail.com

Bill Buechel
Highland, IL
904/480-0006
wmjebuechel@yahoo.com



Jeff Biethman
Red Bud, IL
618/282-3651
jcbiethman@gmail.com

Gary Hake
Nashville, IL
618/231-3081
teresaandgary85@gmail.com

Landon Satterfield
Benton, IL
270/704-2687
lsatter@siu.edu

IFA Technical Advisors

Chris Evans (Chair)
University of Illinois
Extension Forester
618/695-3383 (office)
cwevans@illinois.edu

Wade Conn
State Forester, USDA-NRCS
217/353-6647 (office)
wade.conn@il.usda.gov

John Edgington
University of Illinois (retired)
217/840-5162
johnedg@illinois.edu

Stan Sipp
Forester
217/489-9003
sklipp@illinois.edu

Gary Stratton
Forester - Retired IDNR
618/736-2854
stratton@hamiltoncom.net

Chris Whittom
IDNR Forest Resources
217/785-8264 (office)
217/280-3659 (cell)
chris.whittom@illinois.gov

Our Mission...

"to act on issues that impact rural and community forests and to promote forestry in Illinois."

Our Goals...

- Promote forest management and help landowners manage their forests
- Educate members and the general public about rural and community forestry
- Advocate for favorable legislation and policies to benefit/protect landowners managing their forests
- Understand and engage our members, and increase IFA membership
- Govern the IFA efficiently and effectively to better serve our charitable mission

<https://ilforestry.org>

Message From the IFA President

by Paul Deizman



Letter to IFA membership and millions of potential members -

Warm Spring wishes to all Illinoisans and our membership. Happy Arbor Day. I so enjoy watching the colors of our bountiful Spring forests as they turn an amazing deep green. Nothing quite like taking a pleasant break or a May or June nap under a newly leaved forest on a bed of herbs. Hope you all cherish the Spring season as it unfolds in our forests or in a newly planted forest. After a typically busy, hardworking Winter and Spring many foresters, woodsmen and landowners alike I hear enjoy the rich, landscape views of deep, green forests – with the windows rolled down.

Forestry remains the answer! ... to huge social and environmental concerns for this state and planet. Our Illinois timber, forests and habitats are renewable; so are wood products and wood energy. Practicing forestry to sustainably use and grow forests and timber can sustainably sequester huge amounts of global carbon and retain critical wildlife habitat yet most of Illinois forests are unmanaged or poorly managed. Forests are indeed the answer - as clear as the oceans should be. Scientists and practitioners of the many forestry disciplines applying practice and research is the solid path. Forestry is wood, carbon, soil, wildlife, water, shade, habitat, recreation and more.

Allow me to again thank the leadership and members of IFA for their passion and dedication to Illinois forests. All people of Illinois might support important forestry organizations and forestry initiatives if all people knew the importance of forests to nearly all people. Please consider joining IFA if you are not a member or join one of the important IFA committees if you are a member. I suggest members and citizens voice their support for IFA and other forestry organizations and partners including the IDNR Division of forest Resources who is critical in delivering forestry laws, programs, incentives, and services to landowners yet is literally, grossly understaffed.

Arbor day is this week April 28, 2023 so if nothing else remember to plant your tree or attend an Arbor Day celebration! Also worth celebrating are some IFA "firsts" which have occurred at this halfway point to our year. Thanks to many motivated IFA volunteers and leaders who have been busy helping IFA realize needed objectives and opportunities as they arise. Here are three great accomplishments we share since the wonderful 2022 annual meeting last August.

The IFA board undertook for the first time to fully evaluate, re-organize and add important committees as well as adopt internal procedures to guide committees. All committees have a chair and some committee members. There are now 5 committees which are: Public Policy Committee, Land Management Committee, Annual Conference

Planning Committee, Sponsorship Committee and the Tree Conservation Committee The volunteer chairs of these committees meet and work with committee members and bring important projects, issues, ideas, motions to the full board. Based on the current and future missions and visions of the IFA I believe these committees are all important and needed. Thank you all for volunteering and supporting forestry in this way.

The IFA board accepted a land donation from a Marion County IFA member landowner. This is the most important "first" for IFA this year and as an organization to date. The land is a well managed 80 acre forest already having a forest management plan. Mr. John Gerrish proposed over a year and a half ago donating forestland to IFA if the forest, its use, and its assets were dedicated to outreach, education, and the practice of sustainable forestry. IFA communicated their position to accept and accomplish that forestry covenant and has since been working with the owner until very recently when the donation and acceptance were final. Thank you, Mr. and Mrs. Gerrish, so much for your generous donation which will be realized and recognized for generations to come.

Continued on the next page -

The IFA board supported another “first” and will coordinate volunteer Fall tree seed collection through networking, education and volunteerism to support the IDNR nursery and facilitate more reforestation statewide. You will hear more in the IFA Summer Newsletter and by email. The Tree Conservation committee is now seeking volunteers who can be available on an occasional/regular basis late Summer into mid-Fall to accept and handle oak, hickory,

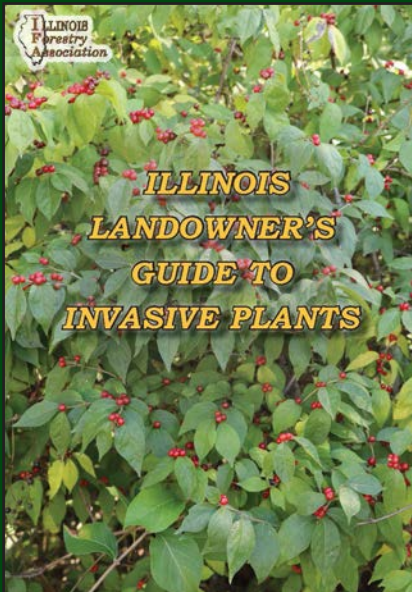
and walnut tree seed and IFA will coordinate transport to the IDNR Mason Tree Nursery. The committee equally and more importantly seeks any and all members or people to collect the acorns and nuts and bring them to a local or regional volunteer point. Contact info for you to volunteer or collect seed will be forthcoming. Keep your eyes open for good seed trees now.

This IFA is your state forestry organization and we advocate the

benefits and outputs of managing, conserving and/or protecting forests and habitats specifically with 200,000+ forest landowners owning and deciding the future on 85% of our total Illinois forests in mind! Please consider attending an upcoming IFA and Partners Spring Forestry Field Day in northern or southern Illinois and definitely plan to attend an excellent 2023 Annual IFA Meeting this September 21st-23rd at the Allerton Park and Illinois 4-H Camp forests and grounds located in central Illinois.

Other IFA News and Updates

By Zach Devillez



these booklets by now. However, if you have not received a copy, or would like to take multiple copies for friends or neighbors, they should be available at most IFA events after June.

To see an electronic version of the booklet, go to the link below:

<https://ilforestry.org/resources/Documents/Forms/Landowners%20Guide%20to%20Invasive%20Plants%20Final%20Electronic%20Copy%202021.pdf>

IFA Gift Memberships

If you're ever looking for a great way to help grow the Illinois Forestry Association, consider sharing an IFA gift membership. This can be a great gift for a loved one or friends. It can also be a great way to introduce neighboring forest landowners to the benefits of responsible and active forest management. A major

part of IFA's mission is to get forest landowners to take an active interest in their forest in a way that maximizes the benefits of responsible forest management. We all have different reasons that drive our forest management actions. However, we are all unified in that we want to maximize forest productivity as well as preserve these forests for future generations. With your help, we can share that message.

To print a copy of the IFA Gift Membership Form go to: <https://ilforestry.org/resources/Documents/IFA%20GIFT%20membership%20form%201-23.pdf>

New Printing of the IFA's Illinois Landowner's Guide to Invasive Plants

The IFA has just put in a new order for the printing of more Illinois Landowner's Guide to Invasive Plants booklets. Many IFA members have



The New IFA William Gerrish Woodland

The Illinois Forestry Association just made an exciting announcement! On April 18th, the IFA accepted a major donation from longtime members John and Debra Gerrish. John and Debra Gerrish have donated 80 acres of forested land to the Illinois Forestry Association.

This is truly a historic day for our organization. Thanks to the extraordinary generosity of John and Debra Gerrish, the IFA can now own, manage, and demonstrate sound forestry practices on a forest that can serve as a model for responsible forest management.

We thank all of those who participated in this process. This effort was spearheaded by IFA Region 1 director, Brad Petersburg. We also thank the Gerrishs for being patient with our organization as we took all the necessary steps needed for us to responsibly accept this donation. This forest will now be known as the "William Gerrish Woodland"

Get to Know John

John Gerrish grew up just east of the donated property near Patoka, Illinois. In high school, John was flipping through a University of Illinois course catalog when he happened upon the Department of Forestry's program. John was captivated by the idea of working in the woods where he had spent much of his youth playing. John applied for a tuition waiver to U of I which is available in each county to children of war veterans. John's father (William Jackson Gerrish) had

served in both WW2 and the Korean conflict. John said that this was a no-brainer decision for him. He was awarded the waiver and earned a Bachelor of Science in Forestry from U of I in 1976.

John worked a few stints with the US Forest Service in the 1970's, including a 180 day appointment on the Elizabethtown Ranger District on the East side of the Shawnee National Forest doing "compartment examinations" where he surveyed resources. In 1982, John and his brother Grant purchased 15 acres of forest from his dad's cousin, Harold Collins, a parcel of the property that his great grandfather (William Stein Gerrish) had divided among his four children in 1924. In the 1990's his sister Pat bought the parcels which had been given to his dad's uncles.

In 1980, John enlisted in the Army reserve and was trained in computer programming. This led John to a career in computer programming. In 1990, John followed Debra to Juneau, Alaska, where they still live after his retirement from the Alaska Department of Transportation in 2015.

In recent years, John acquired his siblings' interests in the wooded parcels they owned. At the end of 2021, John owned 80 contiguous acres of forest. With this forest, he envisioned having good forest management practices implemented so that the forest could serve as an example to other woodland owners. Being a longtime member of IFA, he felt that our organization would be the right vehicle to see this through.

Interview with John Gerrish

Question: How did you first get involved with the Illinois Forestry Association?

John: In 2014 I started thinking about retirement and that I would have time to get back to Illinois to do something with the property I owned or had inherited with my siblings. With my forestry background I was browsing around to find information on forest production in Illinois: looking for the timber price bulletins, extension programs, sawmills and other enterprises. This led me to discovering the existence of IFA and I thought it was the most natural thing to join and support.

Question: Many of us have different drives for wanting to manage our forests. Why is responsible forest management important to you?

John: Growing up and traveling around the area, I saw the sawmills in the area and also saw that most of the woodlots in the area seemed never to have any activity in them (except deer hunting two weekends each year and paying property taxes). From my family's garden and Mama's Organic Gardening subscription and my brother and my log cabins in the woods, I developed a bit of 'back-to-the-land' ethic and thought it should be possible to make something of the woodland. Through my forestry training I came to realize how large the resource really is in our state and my early aspirations was to become a private forestry consultant in my home state. Life took me elsewhere.

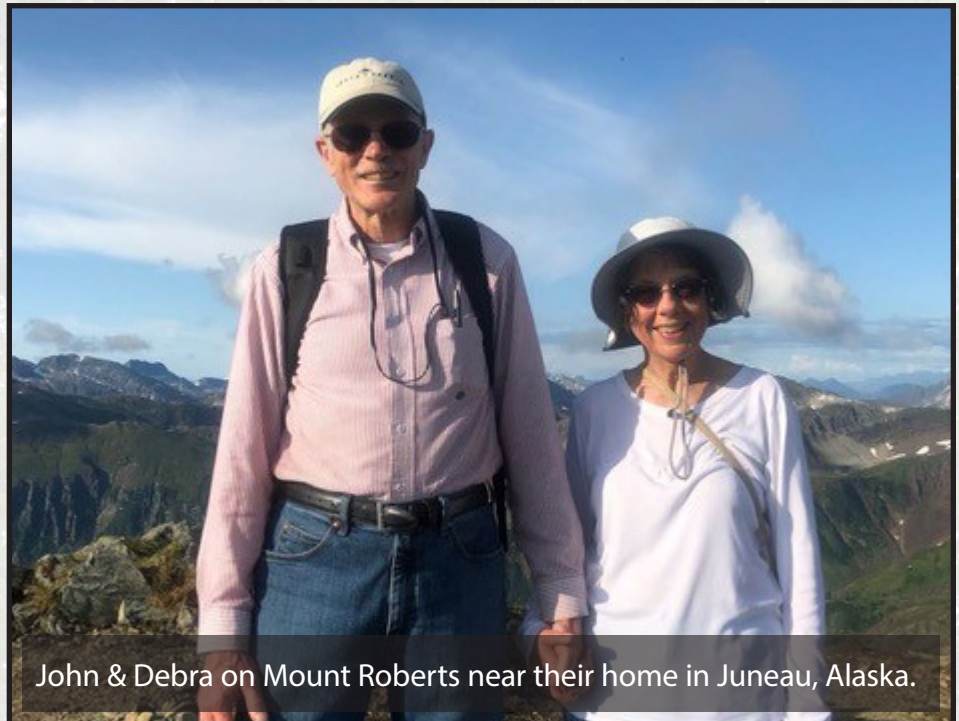
Question: At what point did you realize you wanted to make this donation to the Illinois Forestry Association?

John: As mentioned, I had bought some of the land in the early 1980's and my sister had bought 60 acres of our great-grandfathers land (some tillable), but none of our children & grandchildren really wanted to have hands-on management of a future inheritance. Many in the family had good feelings about the land being "in the family" but that doesn't pay the taxes, keep the invasives out or profit from the ownership. And me living in Alaska, it just wasn't practical to do a lot myself. Even if I had created some kind of foundation or trust to hold the property forever, unless there are folks interested to be trustees or stewards, there just isn't much point to it. So IFA was just about the first possible steward I thought of. I came to this conclusion in late spring of 2021 and it took me the rest of 2021 to get my siblings on board with the idea and acquire their interests in the various parcels. Luckily in 2020 I had some successes in the stock market and used that and more to purchase land from them.

What's Next?

Now that the donation has been finalized, the IFA will be forming a committee to oversee the management decisions being made at the property. This committee will be made up of professionals, private landowners and volunteers. Management decisions will be made with the consent of the board of directors. Management actions carried out by the committee will be made with transparency, making reports to the board and ultimately the membership of IFA.

If you are interested in serving on such a committee, please email zachd@illinois.edu



John & Debra on Mount Roberts near their home in Juneau, Alaska.

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Even without the specifics, it's easy to search for the Illinois Forestry Association as your preferred charitable organization. Just remember to enter "smile dot" before amazon dot com. At no cost to you, Amazon will donate 0.5% of eligible purchase totals to the IFA.

Every little bit helps.
Thanks for your support!

IFA, IL Chapter of the Walnut Council and Tree Farm Host Successful Joint Field Day

In mid-April, the Illinois Forestry Association, the Illinois Chapter of the Walnut Council and Tree Farm joined forces to hold a spring field tour in Monticello, Illinois. This event, that took place on two separate properties near Allerton Park, was well-attended and all of the presenters did a wonderful job leading discussions. In all, there were 60 attendees at the field day. The topics discussed included invasive plants, transitional forest, even aged stands, forest pests, a coppice demonstration, forest soils, a pruning discussion and a crop tree selection exercise. We want to thank all who attended and all the speakers that gave their time to help lead the field day. See the list of speakers and photos from the event below.

- Invasive Plant Control** - Chris Evans, U of I Extension Forester
- Transitional Forest/Even Aged Stand Discussion** - Dan Schmoker, Retired IL District Forester
- Forest Health** - Tricia Bethke, Forest Pest Outreach Coordinator
- Coppice Demonstration** - Casey Calvert, President of IL Chapter of Walnut Council
- Soil Pit Discussion** - Steve Felt, Retired IL District Forester
- Allerton Management** - Alex Lourash, Allerton Natural Areas Manager
- NRCS EQIP** - Ivan Dozier, NRCS State Conservationist
- Pruning Demonstration** - Greg Vogel



The Mason State Tree Nursery

by Holly Fainer
IDNR Natural Resources Technician II

Nestled discreetly out in the middle of the country is a little gem known as Mason State Tree Nursery.

Traveling into the country of Mason County just outside of Topeka, Illinois, you will see fields and fields of corn, soybeans, potatoes, and other conventional crops... As you turn onto 2400 E from IL-Rt 136, you will begin to see a shift in the landscape... Stepping onto the 240- acre Mason State Tree Nursery grounds, you will see the most beautiful array of colors in other types of crop: native prairie plants, grasses, shrubs, and trees. Whether the plants are started in the greenhouse, planted in the field, or thriving in pots-there's always something going on at the Nursery!



Photo 1: Left-over 100,000 prairie plant plugs have been started in one of the greenhouses.



Photo 2: A field of Purple Coneflower at Mason State Tree Nursery.

You will see land with a plan! Some of the things you will see are oak and cypress trees perfectly spaced apart at planting, beautiful rows of shrubs that make up an exquisite orchard ready for every pollinator in the surrounding area, and masses of land with plants of every blossom color and splendor for all Seasons... The burst of colors of the changing of seasons, begins with seeing the new growth in the orchards. It's robust color of new bark growing to new heights even before the snow melts, the conifers start shooting up their buds of new growth, and the flowering shrubs will soon start pushing out this year's blossoms. By the time the Plums have finished blooming, and as Spring has sprung into action, the cascading changes throughout the landscape of the Nursery will continuously change to unfold the next season's sensation.



Photo 3: One of the red oak plots after freshly fallen snow at Mason State Tree Nursery.

As we drive around the Nursery checking out this year's crop of seedlings, one can start to see the greenery of the Prairie plants starting to emerge and the seedlings pushing out its first set of leaves.



Photo 4: One of the tree field's seedlings will be harvested from in the Fall.



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Featured Articles

When the Summer plants begin to push out of the ground, Spring's kaleidoscope is transitioning into flower heads that are now chucked full of seed for the picking.



Photo 5: A prairie plant field that will be used for picking seed for the pollinator mixes offered at Mason State Tree Nursery.

We turn on a Nursery road that will weave us to another plot of fields, I can see a deer poke its head up out of a field, a family of quail scurry from the native Big Blue Stem grass field, owls, butterflies, and so much more! And then that's when it hit me... They're not just growing plants—they're growing homes as well! Conservation of our lands, conservation of the animals that use the land for habitat, and conservation of our hardwood resources to name a few is taking place.



Photo 6, 7, and 8: All animals were photographed at Mason State Tree Nursery.

Throughout the Season, it is a churn and burn of watering, weeding, and staying ahead of Nature's timeline until this year's trees and plants have been grown to their maturity and everything has been harvested.



Photo 9: Freshly harvested red osier seedlings preparing to be bundled.



Photo 10: Different species of seedlings in bundles.

Bareroot Seedlings are brought in from the field and then graded into bundles of 25's and 100's... Almost a million seedlings will go through the Nursery in the scope of a few months! Pictured above left, you can see the fiery, Red Osier Dogwood Seedlings; above right, you can see bundles of 25's wrapped and filed according to species in one of our multiple coolers that are used for storage.

Seed-Cleaning season also progresses full-force in the Fall and Winter. This is when spent blooms have been taken from the field at the ideal time to capture the seed those plants have expressed. That seed will then be used to make pollinator mixes or grow future plants! We often think blossoms are the prettiest part of the flowers, but their seeds are just as mesmerizing as the flowers.

Both of these came from the same plant! New England Aster seed to the left, and it's showy plant on the right. Isn't that impressive?



Photo 11 & 12: New England aster seed and New England aster plant.

Mason State Nursery has been at this location since the 1930's with production being mainly for the State of Illinois' agencies to provide plant and tree material needs for projects until the 1980's. Then the shift of demand transitioned to private landowners and land managers. Mason State is now the only State-run Nursery in Illinois.

Mason State Tree Nursery will continue to enhance the landscape with native plant material to promote and encourage pollinators, as well as giving a safe environment for animals.

White Oak Planting at the Dixon Springs Agricultural Center

By Chris Evans, U of I Extension Forester



Earlier this year, the University of Illinois Extension Forestry Program was asked by the University of Kentucky and the United States Forest Service to serve as a site for their white oak genetic study. Research plots filled with white oak seedlings were being planted throughout the native range of white oak and they were looking for an additional site in the Midwest. The only challenge was they needed a site ready for plantings this spring. Luckily, the University of Illinois had adequate space for this research at the Dixon Springs Agricultural Center in Pope County and started right away with prepping the site for the planting.

This study, led by Dr. Laura DeWald, with the University of Kentucky based White Oak Genetics and Tree Improvement Project, looks at performance of white oak seedlings from different locations over fifteen years. Some of the goals of this research include identifying the white oak genetics that best perform in this region and to create seed orchards for future seedling development.

The project had a tight timeline to get the site ready for planting, but the Shawnee National Forest stepped in big time! Silviculturist Justin Dodson was able to organize a huge crew to assist with installing an eight-foot-tall fence around the entire 3.5 acre site and help with hand-planting over 1,000 seedlings. The Dixon Springs research site has seedlings from 45 different locations throughout the Midwest and Southern United States. This was a great opportunity for Illinois to assist with some crucial research on one of the most ecologically and economically important trees in the state!



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Shawnee Resource Conservation and Development Area Inc. Updates

by Raymond Bieri
Executive Director, Shawnee Resource Conservation & Development

The Shawnee Resource Conservation & Development Area Inc., or Shawnee RC&D, is a nonprofit organization that provides grant administration and project oversight services for conservation and community development projects within the Southern 16 counties of Illinois. You are probably familiar with some of our projects. We created and oversee the River to River Cooperative Weed Management Area, Let The Sun Shine In, the Forest Restoration Support Team, and Community Wildfire Protection projects. In addition, we provide the personnel that coordinate the Southern Illinois Prescribed Burn Association. Most of our work occurs on private lands, but we also work with federal and state agencies, as well as other local nonprofits and private organizations to achieve our organizational goals of conservation, community outreach/education, landowner support, and community development. The Shawnee RC&D occupies a critical niche within conservation and community development for Southern Illinois. Our projects currently focus on improving and restoring natural landscapes, controlling non-native invasive species, implementing prescribed fire, and community wildfire protection. If you are a landowner that is interested in conducting conservation practices on your property or would like to learn more about local conservation strategies, we can help!

The organization has seen some significant changes recently and has received some exciting funding opportunities that we would like to spotlight. In 2022, Jesse Riechman, coordinator of the Southern Illinois Prescribed Burn Association, Isaiah Tanner, volunteer coordinator of the Forest Restoration Support Team, and Nick Seaton, coordinator of the River to River Cooperative Weed Management Area, moved on from their positions with the Shawnee RC&D.



Photo 1: Jesse Riechman, previous coordinator of the Prescribed Burn Association.



Photo 2: Isaiah Tanner, previous volunteer coordinator of the Forest Restoration Support Team.



Photo 3: Nick Seaton, previous coordinator of the River to River Cooperative Weed Management Area.

We have found new coordinators for the Southern Illinois Prescribed Burn Association and the Forest Restoration Support Team. Zack Stawicki is the new coordinator for the Southern Illinois Prescribed Burn Association and Megan Gulik is the new volunteer coordinator for the Forest Restoration Support Team. We are in the process of hiring a new River to River Cooperative Weed Management Area Coordinator.

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Photo 4: Zack Stawicki, the new coordinator for the Southern Illinois Prescribed Burn Association.



Photo 5: Megan Gulik, the new volunteer coordinator for the Forest Restoration Support Team.

Also, in 2022, our Executive Director, Tabitha Ayers, stepped down from the director position and became our grant specialist. We then hired Raymond Bieri to be our new Executive Director.



Photo 6: Tabitha Ayers, Grant Specialist of Shawnee RC&D.



Photo 6: Raymond Bieri, Executive Director of Shawnee RC&D.

Moving into 2023, we have received 3 new grants that provide funding for community wildfire protection, the Southern Illinois Prescribed Burn Association (SIPBA), a new forestry technician, and funding to help private landowners implement forest management plans through the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Funding for our community wildfire protection project comes from a State Habitat Stamp grant, totaling \$115,120. This grant will provide funding to implement forest stand improvement, brush management, and prescribed fire on private lands.

Lands that are adjacent to public lands, harbor threatened or endangered species, or lands that are enrolled in the Forestry Development Act Program will be prioritized. Funding for SIPBA comes from two grants, one from the National Wild Turkey Federation and a Landscape Scale Restoration grant from the U.S. Forest Service. The National Wild Turkey Federation grant will provide \$10,000 for the implementation of 1500 acres of prescribed burning by the Southern Illinois Prescribed Burn Association and the newly formed Great Rivers Prescribed Burn Association. The Landscape Scale Restoration grant will provide two-years of funding for the coordination of the Southern Illinois Prescribed Burn Association. This funding is critical to achieve prescribed burning across Southern Illinois and will allow SIPBA to implement 2000 acres of prescribed fire. Finally, the Landscape Scale Restoration grant will allow the Shawnee RC&D to hire a new forestry technician, full-time for 3 years, that will work with district foresters with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to create new forest stewardship plans and help implement management actions in existing forest stewardship plans. This grant also provides \$91,000 to fund 625 acres of forest stand improvement and non-native invasive species removal, as well as 25 acres of tree planting on private lands. Lands that consist of large forest blocks and that are within, or adjacent to, forest stewardship clusters will be prioritized.

If you are a private landowner within the Southern 16 counties of Illinois seeking a forest stewardship plan, or would like to implement conservation actions, please contact your district forester or Raymond Bieri, director@shawneercd.org, to be considered for any of the mentioned projects. Please check our website and Facebook for more information on the Shawnee RC&D and new project information: [Shawnee RC&D](#) | [The Shawnee RC&D \(shawneercd.org\)](#) | [Shawnee RC&D](#) | [Golconda IL](#) | [Facebook](#)

Updating the Illinois Big Tree Registry

by Christopher David Benda
Botanist and Researcher at Southern Illinois University

Like most people, I am fascinated with huge trees. It's somewhat counterintuitive that Illinois, "the prairie state," would have large trees, since Illinois was once covered in tallgrass prairie, which is an area devoid of trees. However, groves of forest occur in some areas within the grand prairie, areas that did not frequently burn due to aspect, soil moisture, and topography. And forests that have been spared by timber harvest still contain many giant trees, although severe weather events and old age have resulted in the death of some of these. For example, many large trees, even some state champions, occur within Brownfield Woods and Trelease Woods in Champaign County. Both sites are dedicated nature preserves, owned and managed by the University of Illinois Urbana/Champaign.

Other parts of the state are densely forested, particularly within the Shawnee National Forest in southern Illinois and other protected sites with old growth forests like White Pines State Park in Ogle County and Beall Woods in Wabash County. These forested remnants are a glimpse into the past and are an essential part of the biological heritage of Illinois.

In an effort to give attention to trees and raise forestry awareness, a program called the Illinois Big Tree Registry (IBTR) began in 1962 to recognize the largest individual of each native tree species in Illinois. A total of 184 native tree species have been identified for inclusion in the program and currently there are state champion trees for 100 species.

Illinois also has two national champion trees, Ohio Buckeye (*Aesculus glabra*) in Oakbrook and Kansas Hawthorn (*Crataegus coccinioides*) at The Morton Arboretum in Lisle. Both sites are located in DuPage County, Illinois.

A state or national champion tree is determined by adding the values of three measurements: the circumference of the tree trunk in inches, the height of the tree in feet, and $\frac{1}{4}$ of the average spread of the canopy (the crown width) in feet. For example, the largest tree in the state of Illinois is an Eastern Cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*) at Bald Hill near Byron in Ogle County. It has a circumference of 28.5 ft, a height of 122 feet, and a canopy spread of 116 feet. So that's 342 inches (28.5×12), plus 122 feet, plus 29 feet (116×0.25), and equals 493 points ($342+122+29$).

Anyone can nominate a champion tree, but it's the responsibility of the nominator to re-measure the champion tree every 10 years. For various reasons, many of the state champion trees listed on the IBTR had not been measured in the last 10 years as of the year 2020. Funding from the Illinois Forestry Development Council (IFDC) in 2020 and 2021 allowed me to visit many of the state champion trees that needed updating. During the two year project, I investigated 80 state champion trees. Of these, 16 had died or could not be relocated, 23 were recertified as state/national champions, 15 were ousted or otherwise disqualified, and 26 were nominated as new state champion trees.



Photo 1: Chris Benda measuring the champion cherrybark oak (*Quercus pagoda*).

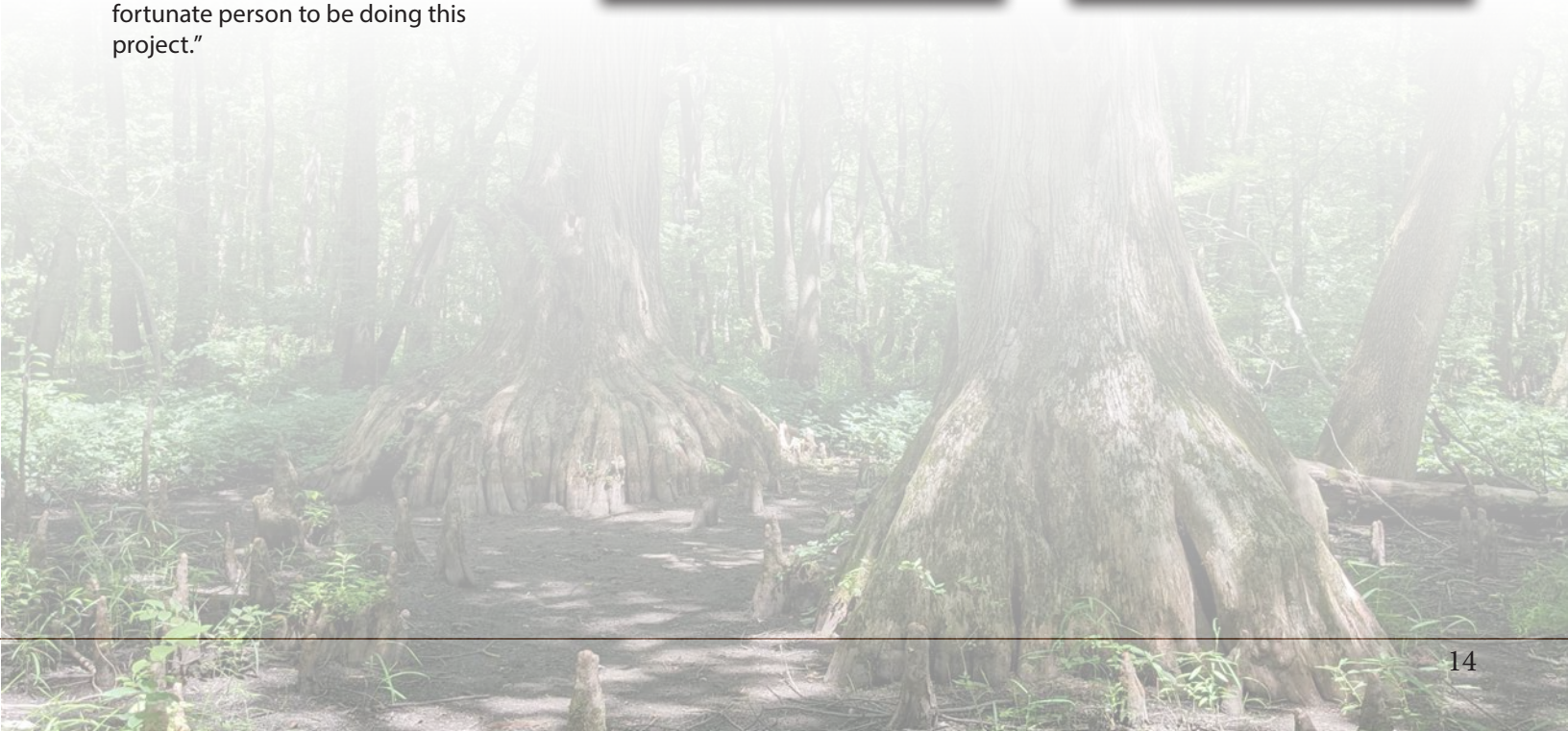
Featured Articles

I was fortunate to be able to visit and measure some very impressive state champion trees. The state champion Bald Cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) near Perks (formerly the largest tree in the state) meant wading into the swamps of the Lower Cache River. Nearby I measured a large Swamp Locust (*Gleditsia aquatica*) and Swamp Privet (*Forestiera acuminata*) to fill vacancies. The gigantic state champion Cherrybark Oak (*Quercus pagoda*) at Heron Pond had not been measured in decades and was substantially larger than previously recorded. I was honored to update the measurements of this iconic tree visited by so many. But the most amazing tree I saw was the state champion Sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*) on private land near Auburn. Upon entering the floodplain forest, I was greeted with a carpet of blooming Virginia Bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*) interspersed with leaves of Virginia Waterleaf (*Hydrophyllum virginianum*) and was subsequently immediately mesmerized by the huge, tall, and straight tree trunk of the Sycamore, with its large, spreading, white branches and in nearly perfect health. That was a very busy day; I measured 7 trees and travelled hundreds of miles, but I distinctly remember soaking up every moment of glory offered by that magnificent tree and thinking, "I'm a very fortunate person to be doing this project."

People often ask how old these trees are and the honest answer is that it's difficult to correlate age with size because different tree species grow at different rates and individuals of the same species can also grow at different rates. For example, a large Tulip Tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) grows really fast and can be younger than a smaller tree, especially a slow growing oak, like Post Oak (*Quercus stellata*). To obtain an accurate estimate of tree age, one needs to obtain a core sample and count the tree rings, which I did not do for any of the state champions.

Thanks to the Illinois Forestry Development Council for funding this project and to Jay Hayek for his guidance.

For more information about the IBTR and to see a list of state champion trees, please visit <https://go.illinois.edu/championtrees>.



Greenhouses: A Space for Growing Trees for Planting

By Mike McMahan, IFA Treasurer

Other than marrying my wife, building our greenhouse is one of the best things I have ever done. It started a couple years ago as a "covid project" – we needed an excuse for doing something like this and it seemed to fit into our plans perfectly.

We both knew it was going to be fun as soon as it started to take shape. I built it on the south side of our barn and it seemed like I planned it from the beginning even though the barn was over 10 years old. If you look closely, you can see Gracie, one of our barn cats, enjoying it in spite of the snow.



Photo 1: Original greenhouse in the snow.

We purchased all of the uniquely green house materials from GreenhouseMegastore in Danville, Illinois. Jeff Bridgewater, a very knowledgeable representative, was helpful in improving my basic design. If you need advice, he is the guy to go to. All the other materials were purchased locally and readily available.

It was not our intention originally but we enjoyed it so much the first year that we decided we needed twice the space. Even now, we are almost overrun with a wide variety of plants.



Photo 2: Greenhouse addition under construction.

My primary interest is growing oak and walnut trees from acorns and nuts I collect in the fall. The very first step is to collect both acorns and walnuts. Mother Nature is a factor in when to collect so I have to observe what is going on starting in mid-September. Usually by mid-October both acorns and walnuts fall to the ground and can be collected. Any nuts that have obvious damage I simply discard in the woods. The rest I take back to the house. Once back here, I wear gloves when I am peeling the husk off the walnuts because the stain is something else. (Photo #3 – completed greenhouse as it is today.)



Photo 3: The completed greenhouse.

When that is done, step 2 is to "float" the nuts. I take a 5-gallon bucket of water and just dump the acorns and walnut in. Some float immediately – those are my rejects – more on them later. Other nuts will come to the surface after a few minutes. These too are rejected. After 5 minutes or so, I dump the water out and separate the acorns from the walnuts. I am now finished with this initial step and can move on to the "stratification" part of this process. Total elapsed time so far is about an hour.

Continued on the next page -

“Stratification” is, to me at least, trying my best to duplicate what Mother Nature does every day over the winter. Walnuts need to be “cool” for a couple of months so they don’t start to germinate and get damaged by later freezes. White Oak acorns left in the forest often start growing in late winter and send out a small root called a “rhizome”. This means you can do one of two things with White Oak acorns – start growing them in late October or stratify them until early March – I have done both and each has their positive aspects.

By planting them early, I get to see trees start to grow within a couple of weeks in my greenhouse. I use a medium-sized storage bin approximately 28” x 36” x 5” and fill it with potting soil. I simply spread out the acorns and cover them over with ½” of soil. I water them a couple of times a week. After 3 or 4 weeks, I will see a small sprout coming out of the soil which quickly grows into a small tree. When they are 4” or 5” tall I transplant them into my pots designed for trees with tap roots. Mine are 4”x 4” at the top, 3” x 3” at the bottom and 14” tall and they work great. Now I settle back and watch them grow for another couple of months. Typically, I put them in the ground sometime in early May.

I mentioned “rejects” earlier. Years ago, I simply threw these back into the woods with no real thought. A friend told me to throw them into a container with a little dirt, water them once in a while, and see what happens in the spring. Guess what!? I did this and had a few “volunteers” come up – no real work, no special effort and a few more trees – sounds like a deal to me.

The second way to plant White Oak acorns and Walnut nuts is to stratify them from mid-October until mid-February. This is done by putting them in a zip-lock bag with some potting soil and a LITTLE water and then leaving them in a refrigerator. How much water is the key question. I had an “old-timer” friend tell me once that if you can see a few, small droplets on the inside of the bag, that is what you want. If you don’t see any moisture, you need to add some. If there is a little “puddle” in the bottom of the bag, you have too much. This seems to work well for me.

I monitor the bags throughout the winter, changing the order in which they are stacked when I check the water content. I also make 100% sure the bags are sealed tightly.

When mid-February arrives, I take the bags out and simply dump them into a container similar to the one I started the acorns in earlier. These seem to sprout after 3 to 4 weeks with the walnuts taking a little longer but when they come up, they come up!

Obviously it depends on how many nuts I started with in the Fall but it is not unusual for me to have 250 or more small trees growing by the first week in April. The opportunity to watch this entire process up close and personal is what I enjoy the most. Then, when I actually plant the trees, I have the satisfaction of watching them grow each year until I can’t reach the top.....FUN!



Photo 4: Young saplings inside the greenhouse.

When I put them in the ground, I use a short tree protector to protect them a little as they grow to about 24” in height. Experience has taught me to plant Oak on the higher ground with the Walnut down lower. They both seem to like their respective locations.



Photo 5: Tree planting area.

My wife, on the other hand, enjoys her half of our greenhouse for her plants and I must tell you, she has plenty of them! She overwinters several different kinds and then come late winter, the vegetable seeds arrive and we have more than enough little plants.

As I said earlier, this addition to our lives has proven to be an activity we both ENJOY and can do together!

Here is what we see today when we visit the trees we planted 20 years ago (see photo below).



Photo 6: Walnut tree planting.

History of Conservation in Illinois

Installment #43

by Dave Gillespie, IFA Secretary

This account of the history of conservation in Illinois was written by Joseph P. Schavilje in 1941. This installment begins where installment # 42 ended.

The Forestry Division made its first experimental forest planting of 20 acres in Henderson County near Oquawka in the spring of 1928. White, jack and red pine were set out on sandy soil unfit for agriculture.

With the acquirement of land suitable for a nursery site on the State Forest, plans were made to grow trees for the Forest and by landowners. Cooperation was received from many commercial nurseries of the State in the production of forest seedlings. One nursery had grown 75,000 white and red pine seedlings at a very reasonable price for State use in 1930. (Illinois Blue Book, 1929-30) It was in the spring of 1930 that the first tree production schedule at the Union State Forest was inaugurated. (To be continued in the next issue of "The IFA Newsletter".)

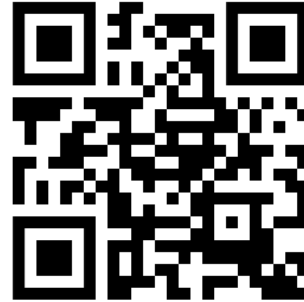
(To be continued in the next issue of "The IFA Newsletter".)



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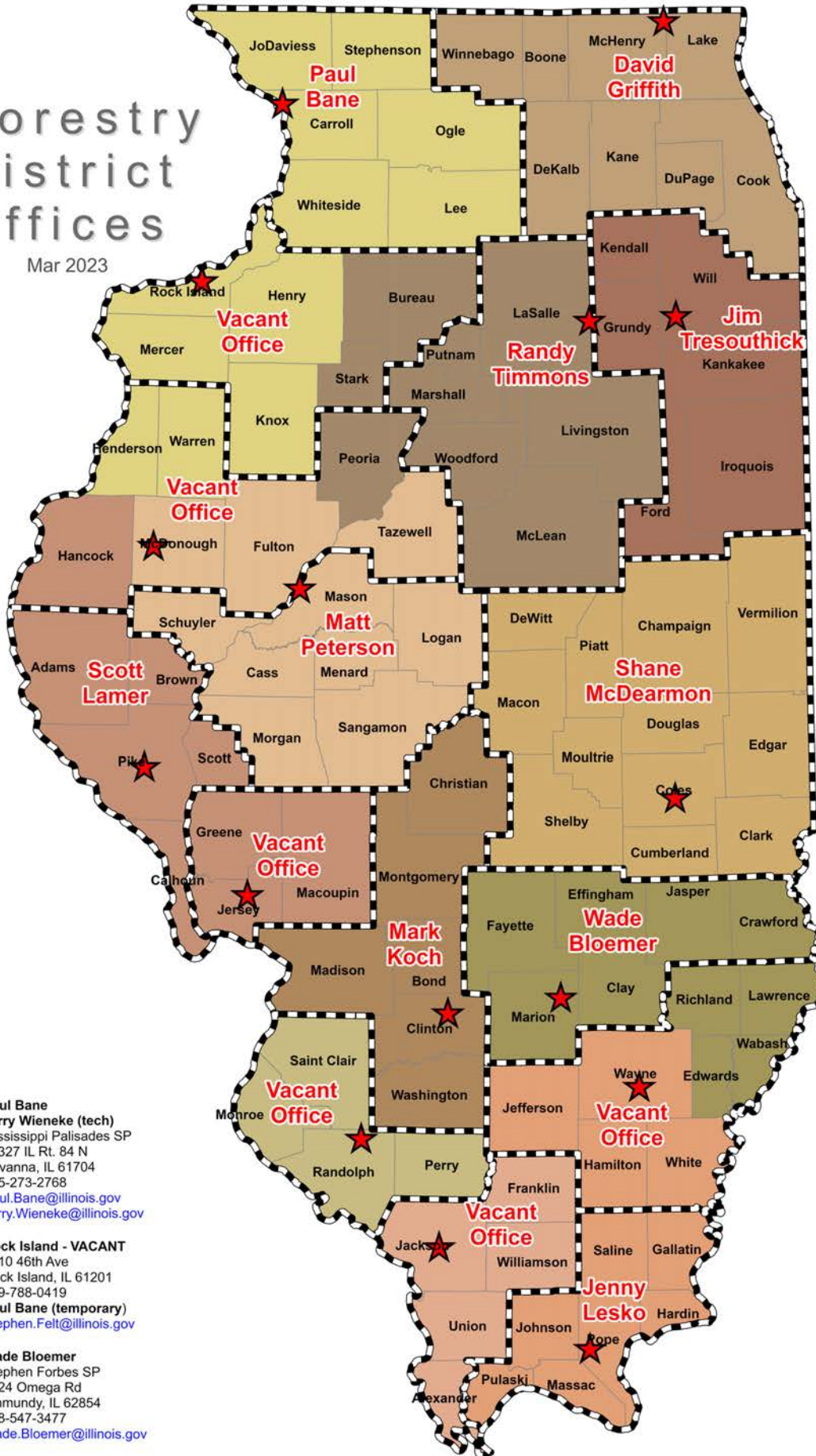
Stan Sipp
Director, Region 3
P.O. Box 111
Mansfield, IL 61854

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Questions?
Contact Stan by email at:
stanley.sipp@usda.gov

Forestry District Offices

Mar 2023



Paul Bane
Terry Wieneke (tech)
 Mississippi Palisades SP
 16327 IL Rt. 84 N
 Savanna, IL 61704
 815-273-2768
Paul.Bane@illinois.gov
Terry.Wieneke@illinois.gov

Rock Island - VACANT
 1510 46th Ave
 Rock Island, IL 61201
 309-788-0419
Paul Bane (temporary)
Stephen.Felt@illinois.gov

Wade Bloemer
 Stephen Forbes SP
 6924 Omega Rd
 Kinmundy, IL 62854
 618-547-3477
Wade.Bloemer@illinois.gov

Sparta - VACANT
 World Shooting Recreation Complex
 One Main Event Dr. Suite 140
 Sparta, IL 62286
 618-295-2877
Mark.Koch@illinois.gov

David Griffith
 Chain O Lakes Sp
 8916 Wilmont Rd
 Spring Grove, IL 60081
 815-675-2386
Dave.Griffith@illinois.gov

Mark Koch
 Eldon Hazlet SP
 20100 Hazlet Park Rd
 Carlyle, IL 62231
 618-594-4475
Mark.Koch@illinois.gov

Scott Lamer
 1252 W. Washington
 Pittsfield, IL 62363
 217-285-2221
Scott.Lamer@illinois.gov

Jerseyville - VACANT
 604 E. Franklin
 Jerseyville, IL 62052
 618-498-1627
Scott Lamer (temporary)
Scott.Lamer@illinois.gov

Jenny Lesko
 Dixon Springs SP
 945 State Hwy 146W
 Golconda, IL 62938
 618-949-3729
Jennifer.Lesko@illinois.gov

Fairfield - VACANT
 106 Andrews Rd.
 Fairfield, IL 62837
 618-847-3781
Jenny Lesko (Temporary)
Jennifer.Lesko@illinois.gov

Shane McDearmon
 1660 West Polk Ave
 Charleston, IL 61920
 217-348-0174
Shane.McDearmon@illinois.gov

Argyle Lake - VACANT
 Argyle Lake SP
 640 Argyle Park Rd
 Colchester, IL 62326

Matt Peterson
 Office
 700 South 10th
 Havana, IL 62644
 309-543-3401
Matt.Peterson@illinois.gov

Murphysboro - VACANT
 Lake Murphysboro SP
 52 Cinder Hill Dr
 Murphysboro, IL 62966
 618-656-2828
Ben Snyder (temporary)
Benjamin.Snyder@illinois.gov

Randy Timmons
 124 W. William St.
 Seneca, IL 61360
 815-357-8846
Randy.Timmons@illinois.gov

Jim Tresouthick
 30550 Boathouse Rd
 Wilmington, IL 60481
 815-476-0256
Jim.Tresouthick@illinois.gov