



## State Highlights in Conservation: Illinois

### Profile of State Program(s)

**Illinois Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development Program:** Begun in 1986, Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development (OSLAD) focuses on providing basic, local outdoor recreation opportunities, including land for parks and facilities such as ball fields and playgrounds. The program matches funds provided by park districts, municipalities, forest preserve districts and other local government entities, providing up to 50 percent of the funding. Grant awards up to \$750,000 are available for acquisition projects (grant award maximum in Chicago is \$1.15 million), while development/renovation projects are limited to a \$400,000 grant maximum. OSLAD funding is provided through the state real estate transfer tax, and is managed by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

**Illinois Natural Areas Acquisition Fund:** The Natural Areas Acquisition Fund (NAAF) was created by the General Assembly in 1989 for “the acquisition, preservation and stewardship of natural areas, including habitat for endangered and threatened species, high quality natural communities, wetlands and other areas with unique or unusual natural heritage qualities.” NAAF also includes a stewardship component: 10 percent of the land acquisition fund is set aside each year to pay for stewardship projects on natural areas and nature preserves, including exotic species removal, prescribed burning in the prairies and hydrologic restoration in wetlands and streams. Funding is provided through the state real estate transfer tax and is managed by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Since 1998, NAAF provided \$47.4 million in funding to acquire 15,321 acres of high quality natural habitat. Between 2010 and 2014, less than \$1 million total has been spent on land acquisition. This stems from both fluctuating real

estate transfer tax revenues and government decisions that have redirected NAAF funds for operational support and staffing.

**Illinois Conservation 2000:** In 1995, the state legislature passed Conservation 2000 (C2000), a program designed to promote ecosystem-based management of privately held land in a public-private partnership. The C2000 Program funds nine programs across three state agencies in Illinois – the Department of Natural Resources, the Department of Agriculture, and the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency. C2000 devotes most of its funding to planning and management activities, but a portion of its funds go towards land acquisition. C2000 also invests in conservation easements and other mechanisms to help protect privately held land with high quality habitat. The C2000 program sponsors 41 Ecosystem Partnerships – coalitions of local stakeholders such as private landowners, businesses, scientists, environmental organizations, recreational enthusiasts and policy makers – covering 85 percent of Illinois.

C2000 was originally a six-year, \$100 million program, but in 2008, House Bill 1780 was signed into law as Public Act 95-0139, extending the program to 2021, and calling it Partners for Conservation. This program no longer actively acquires land.

**Illinois Department of Natural Resources – Open Land Trust:** The Open Lands Trust (OLT) funds the acquisition of land from willing sellers for public conservation, open space, and natural resource related outdoor recreation purposes. Funding was previously split between matching grants for local governments and direct acquisitions by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Created in 1998, 94 percent of OLT spending occurred from its first funding authorization of \$200 million by the General

Assembly. OLT funded \$135.7 million to acquire over 42,000 acres between 1998 and 2003, and just \$8.6 million to acquire nearly 1,931 acres from 2004 to 2013. In 2009, OLT received a \$25 million appropriation for new land acquisitions. As of 2014, those funds are not yet fully expended.

**Park and Recreational Facility Construction Grant Program (PARC):** Established in 2009, this program provides funding for local governments pursue projects including acquisition, development, construction, reconstruction, rehabilitation, and improvements to buildings, structures, and lands for park and recreation purposes, as well as for open space and natural areas. The program provides significant matching grants to local governments of up to 75 percent for bondable projects. The maximum grant per project is \$2.5 million. The program was established with \$150 million in total appropriations and is now largely exhausted.

### Substantial State Investment

State spending for conservation in Illinois is generated from a real estate transfer tax and from appropriations from the Legislature, either in bonding or general fund revenue.

Funding for both Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development (OSLAD) and Natural Areas Acquisition Fund (NAAF) comes from a statutorily dedicated state real estate transfer tax, a fee of \$1 per \$1,000 paid for property sold in the state. Half of the funds raised from the transfer tax goes to affordable housing assistance, 35 percent for OSLAD and 15 percent to the Natural Areas Acquisition Fund.

Funding for the Conservation 2000, Hunting Heritage, and Open Lands Trust – now largely inactive – were funded through authorization from the General Assembly.

In 2013, drivers who renewed their license plates paid an extra \$2, part of the DNR Sustainability Bill passed by the Illinois General Assembly, to provide a steady source of funding for parks improvement and maintenance that was independent of the ups and downs of general tax revenue. The fee is deposited in the Parks and Conservation Fund. DNR expects to receive \$18-\$22 million annually, with about \$10 million going to operations and \$10 million to capital projects.

In early 2015, a state spending freeze restricted nonessential state spending. This included

conservation program spending. Conservation spending is currently greatly reduced, although grant awards for OSLAD were released in August 2016. In November 2016, Illinois voters approved a constitutional amendment, known as the “lockbox,” that prohibits all revenue generated for transportation for any other use. It is unclear how this will impact the DNR Sustainability Bill.

### State Incentive for Local Conservation Funding

OSLAD matches funds provided by park districts, municipalities, forest preserve districts and other local government entities, providing up to 50 percent of the funding. Grant awards up to \$750,000 are available for acquisition projects (grant award maximum in Chicago is \$1.15 million), while development/renovation projects are limited to a \$400,000 grant maximum. The PARC program provides grants to local governments of up to 75 percent for bondable projects, including acquisition.

### Public-Private Partnerships

The Illinois Nature Preserve Commission (INPC), a division of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, regularly evaluates land under consideration for property tax incentive conservation programs. Qualified lands also receive support from INPC, benefitting from increased legal protections and professional stewardship. Lands enrolled in the nature preserve system are protected in perpetuity and receive a property tax reduction to \$1 per acre. As of May 2014, there are 375 dedicated nature preserves covering 56,744 acres. Landowners may also register their land as an Illinois Land and Water Reserve, a level of protection lower than a nature preserve. Registered properties are evaluated at 8 and 1/3 percent of fair market value (25 percent in Cook County). As of May 2014, there are 172 land and water reserves totaling 48,676 acres.

The Illinois Habitat Fund, currently inactive, provided grant opportunities to non-profit and government organizations to protect, acquire, enhance, or management wildlife habitat and to support limited research and educational programs to further this mission.

### Local Financing Enabled

Illinois statute enables forest preserve, conservation, and park districts to acquire and manage open space

land. Counties and municipalities also acquire open space and parkland.

There are several finance mechanisms for the purchase and management of parks and open space land, including general obligation bonds, the sales tax, and property taxes. Municipalities, counties, conservation districts and park districts have a number of local financing options including bonds, sales tax and property tax.

### Local Programs Included

Local conservation programs include:

- DeKalb County Forest Preserve District, IL
- DuPage County Forest Preserve District, IL
- Kane County Forest Preserve District, IL
- Kendall County Forest Preserve District, IL
- Lake County Forest Preserve District, IL
- McHenry County Conservation District, IL
- Will County Forest Preserve District, IL

Visit [www.landvote.org](http://www.landvote.org) for detailed information on these programs.

### Federal Partnerships

Federal agencies and programs that have conserved land in Illinois include:

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA)
- U.S. Forest Service
- U.S. Forest Service – Forest Legacy Program (FLP)
- U.S. National Park Service
- U.S. National Park Service – LWCF Stateside
- U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service – Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)
- U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service – Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)
- U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service – Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)



The Trust for Public Land creates parks and protects land for people, ensuring healthy, livable communities for generations to come.

#### The Conservation Almanac

A comprehensive database of land conservation and public conservation funding in America, the Conservation Almanac provides a context for assessing impacts of conservation and the growing conservation finance movement. The Almanac offers information on public dollars spent and acres conserved, details on local, state, and federal conservation programs, and geospatial mapping of conserved land.

Almanac data collection efforts focus on land conserved using public dollars; contributions funded by private and non-governmental organizations are not tracked comprehensively. Federal data is complete from 1998-2017. State and local data is complete from 1998-2015. In the tables and charts below, acres are allocated to each program proportionate to the size of the contributions to each acquisition. For example, if an acquisition had two contributions, and each program contributed equal dollar amounts, each program receives 50% of the acres. If you have questions or want to provide updated information, please contact Jessica Welch at [jessica.welch@tpl.org](mailto:jessica.welch@tpl.org).

[www.tpl.org](http://www.tpl.org)

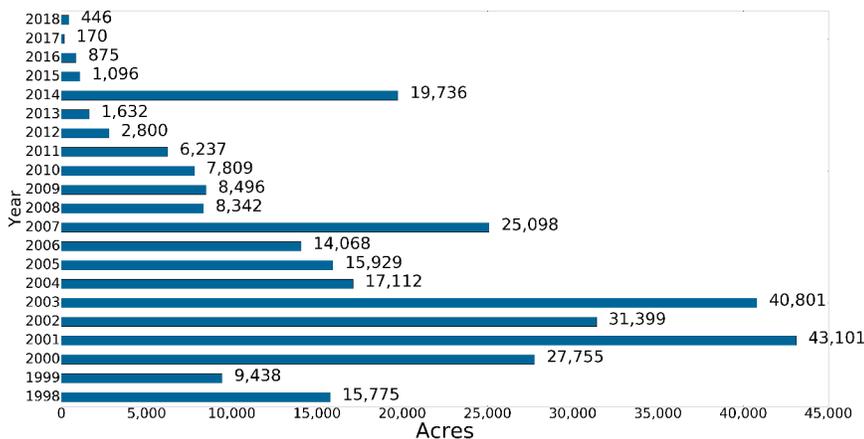
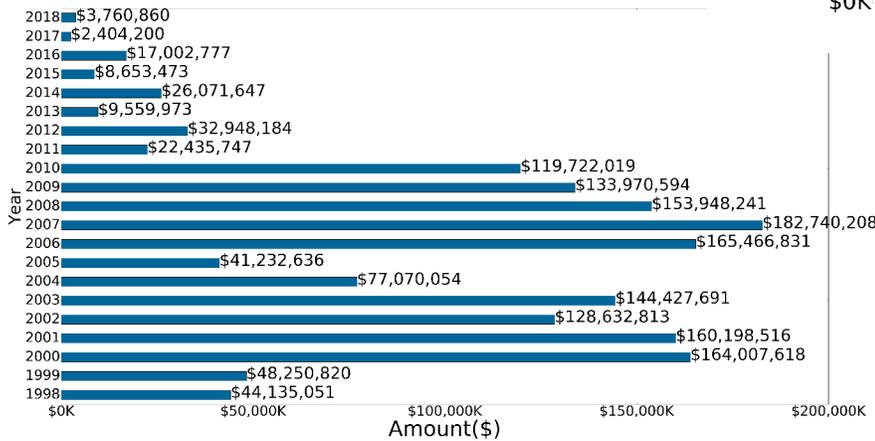
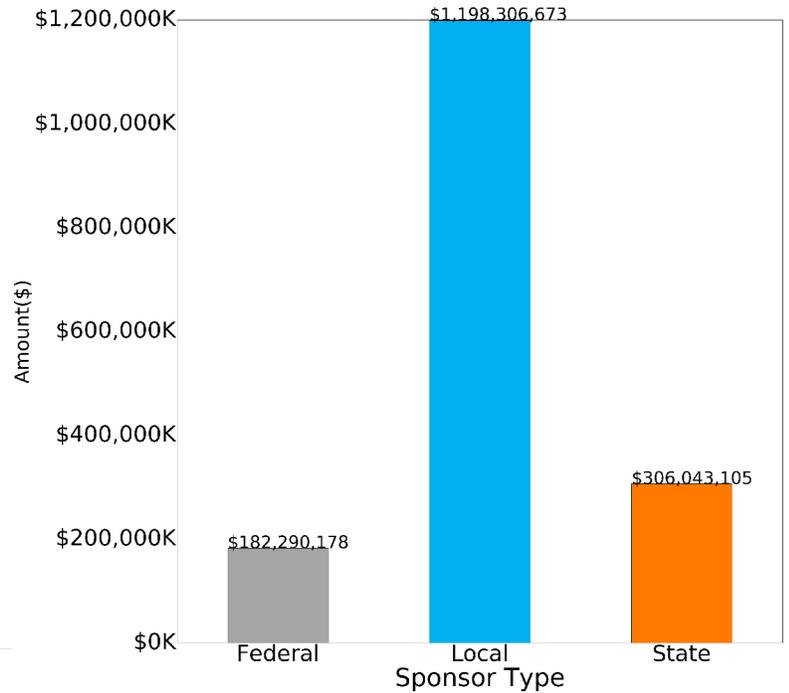
[www.conservationalmanac.org](http://www.conservationalmanac.org)

# State Conservation Report Illinois



CONSERVATION ALMANAC  
Tracking Investments in Protected Lands

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The data in the Conservation Almanac track the impacts of public spending on land conservation. Created by The Trust for Public Land, the Conservation Almanac brings those data together along with state policy profiles, current conservation finance news, and an interactive map, to provide a powerful online tool.