

September 5, 2024

The Honorable JB Pritzker
Governor of Illinois
401 S. Spring St.
Springfield, IL 62704

Dear Governor Pritzker,

As communities across Illinois grapple with torrential rains, flooding and tornados, we the undersigned organizations, write to ask for your support for vital legislation to foster climate resiliency and promote water quality, floodwater storage, and wildlife habitat through wetlands protection.

Recently, in *Sackett vs. Environmental Protection Agency*, the U.S. Supreme Court drastically shrank the scope of federal wetlands protections. Illinois is vulnerable because unlike Michigan, Ohio and Wisconsin, Illinois lacks a comprehensive state wetlands program. Except for a handful of counties that codified wetlands programs, most of our state is entirely reliant on federal protections. Illinois has already lost 90% of the state's wetlands since the 1800s and cannot afford to lose more.

Illinois wetlands are precious environmental assets and vital to public health. Wetlands contribute to community resilience against extreme weather events and flooding by acting as natural sponges, absorbing excess precipitation and mitigating flood damage. Protecting wetlands is even more urgent as flood-related damages cost Illinois over \$3 billion between 2000-2018¹. The cost and frequency of these events is expected to rise.

Wetlands play a crucial role in purifying our water. By filtering pollutants, wetlands can improve the quality of our water supply and provide enormous cost savings to local economies. The value of wetlands to the U.S. economy has been estimated to be about \$10,000 per acre per year². The health of both the built environment and natural environment is inextricably tied to the protection of our state's wetlands.

Wetlands are central to Illinois' outdoor recreation industry, providing opportunities for residents to find respite in nature through activities such as fishing, hunting, camping, and boating. Illinois' outdoor recreation sector is responsible for an estimated 177,120 direct jobs³. Also, wetlands are among the most biologically diverse places on Earth; they provide critical habitat

¹ [Surging Waters Report](#), American Geophysical Union: 2019

² Ingraham, Molly & Foster, Shonda. (2008). The value of ecosystem services provided by the U.S. National Wildlife Refuge System in the contiguous U.S. *Ecological Economics*. 67. 608-618.

³ Illinois State Report: Outdoor Industry Association: 2022

for hundreds of endangered species of birds, fish, and amphibians. Recent polling demonstrates that the people of Illinois treasure and strongly support accelerating protection of wetlands, forests, and prairies⁴.

The Illinois Wetlands Protection Act was introduced in the 2024 Spring Session, and gained significant momentum with 47 co-sponsors in the House and 23 co-sponsors in the Senate. We worked, and will continue to work, with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and the regulated community to address concerns and seek passage of a reasonable, cost effective, self-sustaining, and practical wetlands protection program that works for Illinois. While we have addressed many of our opponents' concerns, some opponents simply do not believe in wetland protections. As such, it is more important than ever that our state's leadership vocalize support for a robust wetlands protection program and prioritize final passage of the wetlands protection bill in the fall veto session.

Every day that passes without protections is another day of loss for a precious and shrinking natural resource. Last month, Council on Environmental Quality Chair Brenda Mallory urged states to boost wetlands protections in the wake of last year's Supreme Court Decision. Illinois has the opportunity to demonstrate national leadership in response by enacting a state wetlands protection program.

Thank you for your leadership on this critical issue. We look forward to working with you and the General Assembly.

Sincerely,

Alliance for the Great Lakes
Alliance of the SouthEast (ASE)
Audubon Great Lakes
Bird Conservation Network
Citizen Action Illinois
The Climate Reality Project: Chicago Metro
Chapter
The Conservation Foundation
Delta Institute
Environment Illinois
Environmental Defenders of McHenry
County
Environmental Law & Policy Center
Faith in Place Action Fund

Friends of the Chicago River
Friends of Illinois Nature Preserves
Friends of the Forest Preserves
Go Green Glen Ellyn
Go Green Winnetka
Grand Prairie Bird Alliance
Hispanic Federation
Illinois Audubon Society
Illinois Clinicians for Climate Action
Illinois Environmental Council
Illinois Federation for Outdoor Resources
Illinois People's Action
The Land Conservancy of McHenry County
Land Conservation Foundation

⁴ Illinois State Comprehensive Outdoor Action Plan: 2020

League of Women Voters Illinois
League of Women Voters of Chicago
LWV Upper Mississippi River Region ILO
Metropolitan Planning Council
Midwest Sustainability Group
National Parks Conservation Association
Natural Resources Defense Council
The Nature Conservancy in Illinois
Neighbors for Environmental Justice
Nordson Green Earth Foundation
Openlands

The Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum of the
Chicago Academy of Sciences
Peoria Audubon Society
Planned Parenthood Illinois Action Fund
Prairie Rivers Network
Prairie State Conservation Coalition
Shedd Aquarium
Sierra Club Illinois
The Wetlands Initiative
Wild Ones of Greater Kane County

CC:

Deputy Governor Andy Manar
Deputy Governor Bria Scudder
General Counsel Ann Spillane
Senior Adviser for Policy and Legislative Affairs Emily Miller