

AN ACT concerning government.

**Be it enacted by the People of the State of Illinois,  
represented in the General Assembly:**

Section 1. Short title. This Act may be cited as the Illinois Natural Areas Stewardship Act.

Section 5. Legislative findings and statement of public policy.

(a) The General Assembly finds that:

(1) The Illinois Natural Areas Preservation Act defines natural areas and creates the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission to preserve the highest quality natural areas in perpetuity to sustain for the people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of natural areas, including the elements of natural diversity present.

(2) The Natural Areas Acquisition Fund, established in the Open Lands Acquisition and Development Act, shall be used by the Department of Natural Resources for the acquisition, preservation, and stewardship of natural areas, including habitats for endangered and threatened species, high quality natural communities, wetlands, and other areas with unique or unusual natural heritage qualities.

(3) The condition of dedicated and registered sites tends to degrade over time without stewardship actions. Once degraded, the public's significant investment is devalued and these natural areas provide reduced benefit to the people of present and future generations.

(4) Conservation land trusts have experience managing natural areas in order to counter the constant and increasing pressures exerted on conservation lands by ecological succession, habitat fragmentation, hydrological alteration, pollution, encroachment by invasive and exotic species, and criminal trespass.

(5) This Act and the powers afforded to the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission are desirable to guide and preserve the highest quality natural areas in perpetuity.

(b) It is the purpose of this Act to:

(1) increase stewardship by providing stewardship grants to conservation land trusts to help perform stewardship actions on eligible lands; and

(2) to enhance stewardship capacity within conservation land trusts in local areas.

Section 10. Definitions. As used in this Act:

"Administrative decision" has the same meaning ascribed to the term in Section 3-101 of the Administrative Review Law of the Code of Civil Procedure.

"Commission" means the Illinois Nature Preserves

Commission.

"Conservation land trust" means an entity exempt from taxation under Section 501(c)(3) of the federal Internal Revenue Code whose purposes include the restoration, stewardship, or conservation of land, natural areas, open space, or water areas for the preservation of native plants or animals, biotic communities, geologic formations, or archeological sites of significance.

"Department" means the Department of Natural Resources.

"Eligible land" means a site that has been dedicated by the Commission as an Illinois Nature Preserve or dedicated buffer or registered as a Land and Water Reserve, and has a current, approved management schedule.

"Illinois Natural Areas Stewardship Grant Program" means a program established under Section 20 of this Act.

"Land" means real property and ownership rights applying to it and includes the real property, structures, and improvements.

"Management schedule" means an approved document consistent with rules for Management of Nature Preserves or rules for Register of Land and Water Reserves under the Illinois Administrative Code developed for the preservation, protection, management, and use of lands.

"Stewardship actions" means actions identified in an approved management schedule which are designed to maintain, preserve, or improve the condition of native natural

communities, diversity of species, and ecological processes on eligible lands, such as, but not limited to, prescribed burns, control of exotic and invasive species, fencing, and other restorative practices.

"Stewardship grant" means a grant from the Department to a conservation land trust for the purpose of providing stewardship actions under Section 20 of this Act.

Section 15. Powers, duties, and authorizations. The Department may:

(1) make stewardship grants under Section 20 of this Act under an appropriation made from the Natural Areas Acquisition Fund to conservation land trusts to conduct stewardship actions on eligible lands;

(2) establish the total amount of funds available for annual stewardship grants, except the amount of stewardship grants made for any fiscal year may not exceed the amount set by administrative rule and shall not result in adverse impacts on the operations funded by the Natural Areas Acquisition Fund;

(3) accept and receive any funds including by agreement, grant, contract, donation, gift, or bequest from any corporation, foundation, non-governmental agency, individual, or instrumentality of any of those for the purposes of executing stewardship grants under this Act and these funds are to be deposited into the Natural Areas

Acquisition Fund;

(4) develop and administer the Illinois Natural Areas Stewardship Grant Program within the Department;

(5) adopt rules to effectuate the purposes of this Act;

or

(6) from an appropriation made to the Department for this purpose, use funds received under this Act to pay for the cost of departmental personnel; contractual, professional or technical services; and equipment, materials, and supplies necessary or appropriate to perform the functions under this Act.

Section 20. Illinois Natural Areas Stewardship Grant Program.

(a) The Illinois Natural Areas Stewardship Grant Program is established to make grants to conservation land trusts for the purpose of promoting stewardship actions on eligible lands.

(b) A conservation land trust in good standing with the federal Internal Revenue Service may apply for a grant.

(c) An agency, organization, or entity that has taxing powers, collects taxes, or has eminent domain powers is not eligible to apply for the grant program under this Act.

(d) Eligible land held by agencies, organizations, or other entities may be the recipient of stewardship actions conducted under the grant as long as there is a properly executed agreement between the agency, organization, or entity and the

conservation land trust that has been awarded the grant.

(e) The Department shall adopt administrative rules in consultation with the Commission for grant writing, the selection of grant recipients, amount of grant awards, and eligibility requirements to implement the purposes of this Act. However, the rules shall include the following requirements:

(1) amounts for match and caps for any stewardship grant under this Act; and

(2) the Commission shall be notified of any agreement between a conservation land trust and an owner of eligible lands for stewardship actions to be conducted under the grant agreement.

Section 25. Priorities. In considering applications for grants under this Act, the Department shall establish priorities that:

(1) provide the greatest benefit to implementing the needs and priorities identified in the Illinois Natural Area Plan, the Illinois Sustainable Natural Areas Vision, and the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan;

(2) provide the greatest benefit to other stewardship needs identified by the Department, in consultation with the Commission, in administrative rule; and

(3) consider, but not be limited to, the rarity and condition of resources, severity of stewardship need, timeliness of actions, proposed stewardship actions, and

availability of other resources.

Section 30. Administrative Review Law. All final administrative decisions under this Act are subject to judicial review under the Administrative Review Law of the Code of Civil Procedure.

Section 35. Fund depository. All funds, assessments, fines, settlements, compensations, transfers, appropriations, penalties, and donations made under this Act shall be deposited into the Natural Areas Acquisition Fund subject to the limitations described in subsection (2) of Section 15 of this Act.

Section 99. Effective date. This Act takes effect upon becoming law.