

Illinois Forestry Development Council

November 12, 2025 Meeting Minutes

In Attendance (or represented):

- **Chris Evans** (Chair): Extension Forester, University of Illinois.
- **Dale Shumaker**: President, Association of Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts (AISWCD).
- **Mike Brunk**: IDNR Urban and Community Forestry Manager and IFDC Liaison.
- **Kenneth Jolly**: State Forester, IDNR.
- **Paul Deizman**: Illinois Forestry Association (IFA).
- **Lori Karcher**: Illinois Finance Authority (IFA).
- T.J. Benson: Wildlife Ecologist, Illinois National History Survey, representing the Illinois chapter of the Wildlife Society.
- **Felipe Cano**: Forest Supervisor, Shawnee National Forest.
- **Avery Viadero**: Community Forestry Outreach Coordinator, Illinois Extension.
- **Scott Schirmer**: Illinois Department of Agriculture, State Plant Regulatory Official.
- **Benjamin Snyder**: Fire Program Manager, Illinois DNR.
- **Tracey Glenn**: Senior Southwest Region Manager, Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO). (First meeting).
- **Tricia Bethke**: Forest Pest Outreach Coordinator, Morton Arboretum, representing the Illinois Forestry Association (IFA).
- **Joe Hansen**: Illinois Arborist Association (IAA).
- **Lydia Scott**: Consulting Forestry/Environmental Representative (Attended part of meeting).

Minutes Review and Approval

- The minutes from the September meeting were circulated prior to the meeting.

- A motion was made to accept the minutes, seconded by Dale Shumaker.
 - The motion passed unanimously.
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Chair's Report (Chris Evans)

Initiative: Promoting Forestry Contractors

- The Chair is interested in an initiative to promote the development of more forestry contractors and consultants in Illinois. This is intended to address the bottleneck in private land forestry management where landowners struggle to find help to write plans or execute work.
- The initiative is inspired by the Pennsylvania-based "**Forestry Contracting 101**" program, which is a series of webinar classes aimed at people starting or adding this as a business.
- The target audience includes graduating natural resource/forestry students, retired professionals, and those in adjacent industries like Arboriculture.
- The idea is currently in the research phase but may become a future Council initiative.

IFDC Success Stories

- The Council changed reporting requirements for grant recipients to include **pictures and a short, non-technical summary**.
- The purpose is to convert these into **Success Stories** to better communicate the impact of the Council's work.
- A new "Success Stories" link has been added to the IFDC website.
- The first posted success story is from the Walnut Council. The Council encourages all grant recipients to write their required summaries in a way that works well for the website success stories.
- **Promotion Discussion:**
 - Lori Karcher suggested local promotion through news releases, radio, or TV coverage of grant awards.
 - Mike Brunk suggested including a request for copies of local promotion efforts in future grant requirements.

- Dale Shumaker noted that AISWCD districts already publicize their small grant projects, often resulting in about 30 news releases for 40 participants.
 - Tracey Glenn offered to include information about the grant application opening in the DCEO Team Red newsletter, which is sent statewide to municipalities and other stakeholders.
 - Chris Evans suggested the DNR could put out a press release at the beginning of the grant cycle, and Mike Brunk suggested a follow-up story with the website link once the final reports and success stories are posted.
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IFDC Liaison Report (Mike Brunk)

- **State Mandated Training:** The process for state-mandated training verification was easier this year, offering options for hand-signing/printing or electronic signature (Adobe/link forms).
 - Only **three members** are left to complete and submit their verification forms.
 - **FY26 Small Grant Awards:** Preparation work is complete, including collecting W9 forms.
 - A new requirement is an **interim progress report** due at the end of the year to provide timely information on the Council's activities.
 - **IFDC Vacancies:** The Council needs to submit its member list to the Governor's office. The following vacancies need to be filled:
 - One **Private Timber Grower**.
 - Two **Farmers** actively engaged in forestry.
 - One statutory vacancy (Office of Rural Affairs).
 - Members were asked to submit any recommendations for these positions.
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Shawnee National Forest Update (Felipe Cano)

- **Good Neighbor Agreement (GNA):** The Shawnee is in the final stages of discussion with Pope County and its new County Commissioner, Chris Walker, on a Good Neighbor Agreement. This will create opportunities for foresters in the near future and assist with vegetation management.

- **Pulp Market:** New discussions are underway with Phoenix Paper in White Cliff, KY, to address the pulp market, which directly affects small-diameter forest products.
 - **Extension Partnership:** The Forest is planning to work with the new Illinois Extension Associate Dean and Director, Dr. Matthew Vann, on a "forest multiplier effort" for land management.
 - **Reforestation Grant:** The Shawnee is a recipient of a \$300,000 National Forest Foundation grant for reforestation.
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State Forester Report (Kenneth Jolly)

- **Forest Development Act (FDA) Cost-Share Program:** The program is officially **back up and running** after a number of years, following updates to administrative rules and the application form.
 - The first short sign-up period in October received approximately **\$636,000** worth of applications, which would overwhelm the available annual funding of \$1.25 million if continued at that rate.
 - The successful reopening is a positive item for the report required by the **Illinois Forestry Fix** legislation.
 - Future sign-up periods are planned for **January** and **April**.
 - Most of the funding is sourced from a \$5 million IRA grant with a \$1.25 million state match (using 4% funds).
 - All applications received were for **priority practices**. Time-sensitive herbicide drone applications for the fall were immediately approved.
- **Utilization Program:** The computerization of forest harvest reports is helping to track and map harvesting across the state effectively.
- **Federal Forest Service Reorganization (Interim Operations):**
 - The public comment period has ended, and an **Interim Operations Plan** has been announced.
 - Nine former regions have been consolidated down to **four regions**.
 - Region 8 (Southern US) and Region 9 (which includes Illinois) have been combined under one interim Regional Forester, Ken Arnie, based in Atlanta, GA.

- "State Private Forestry" has been tentatively renamed "**State Assistance**," and all cooperative forestry programs are under the supervision of Ken Arnie.
 - Tribal relations are now under a different person, separate from state and private assistance.
 - The process is expected to roll out over the next year. There is also hovering legislation that would move the USDA Forest Service entirely to the Department of Interior.
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Fire Program Report (Benjamin Snyder)

- **Prescribed Fire:** The program facilitates prescribed burning through internal policy, burn plan review, and securing smoke permits from the Illinois EPA.
 - In 2024, approximately **27,384 acres** of prescribed fire were implemented across the DNR.
- **Certified Prescribed Burn Manager (CPBM) Program:** Offers training and field days using NWCG training. Approximately 30-40 applications are received annually for certification, which helps private individuals obtain insurance for burning.
- **Wildland Fire Program:** Forestry is the lead agency for wildland fire suppression in the state.
 - Responded to a 1,000-acre fire on Green River State Fish and Wildlife Area, in partnership with local fire departments.
 - Trained 220 firefighters this year through wildland fire field days and refreshers using NWCG courses.
 - **Out-of-State Response:** Crews are sent out of state for training and task book opportunities. This year, a Type 6 engine was sent out three times (to San Juang National Forest, CO, and Tahoe National Forest, CA). A hand crew module was sent to the Cram fire in Oregon and another module to Montana.
- **Volunteer Fire Department Assistance:**
 - **Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) Grants:** Awarded 47 grants totaling \$322,193 to rural fire departments for wildland fire supplies.
 - **Training:** Provided wildland fire training to 151 rural firefighters through the Fire Service Institute.

- **Federal Excess Equipment:** Provides fire suppression equipment on loan from federal departments to rural departments.
 - **Volunteer Opportunities:** DNR accepts volunteers for prescribed burns. Interested individuals should contact Benjamin Snyder or local Forestry, Heritage, or Wildlife staff.
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Urban Forestry Program Update (Mike Brunk)

- **Legacy Tree Program Task Force:** The task force has held six or seven meetings, led by Lydia Scott.
 - The 17 members were subdivided into three groups to define the criteria for designating legacy trees across the state.
 - Five IFDC members are active on the task force.
 - **Tree City USA:** The program is very active and communities have been encouraged to submit applications early.
 - The state has already approved nearly 40 applications before the end of October.
 - Illinois is actively competing with Ohio (the top state) in the number of participating communities.
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Old Business

IFDC State Fair Committee (Tricia Bethke)

- Tricia Bethke and Avery Viadero plan to meet in December.
- The committee has been collecting partner logos and will share a list and messaging with the Council in January.
- **Wood Utilization** will be a primary focus for the next fair.
- Chris Evans announced that Extension Forestry has a new, very quiet, **battery-powered Wood Miser sawmill** that they are willing to bring and operate at the State Fair.

State Forest Action Plan (SFAP) Suggestions

- The SFAP is due for a mid-term review and update.
 - A **Qualtrics survey** has been created to collect targeted feedback on the plan's partnerships, recommended actions, and threats.
 - The Chair will send an email with the survey link, and members are asked to spend an hour reviewing the plan and providing feedback within the next two weeks.
 - Public participation in this review is a requirement from the US Forest Service.
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Council Member Updates

- **Illinois Forestry Association (IFA):**
 - The IFA is focused on developing young, new leadership and establishing a nomination committee.
 - A free webinar series, "Canopy to the Understory: Forestry for the Birds," is coming up on December 2nd, partnering with the Shawnee and the American Bird Conservancy.
 - Family Forestry Day is planned for **May 16th** in Pecatonica, partnering with Illinois Tree Farm and the Walnut Council, and involving FFA and Scouts.
 - The annual conference is set for September 2026 (members requested to avoid the third week of September).
 - **Extension Forestry (Chris Evans):**
 - Abstract submission is open for the **Illinois Invasive Species Symposium** in Champaign next May.
 - Planning for the next **Beginning Invasive Species Management class** (a successful hybrid course) is underway for late May/early June.
 - Continuing with high-demand **chainsaw safety** and **prescribed fire trainings**.
 - Planning is underway for **Tri State** in March.
 - **Illinois Arborist Association (IAA) (Joe Hansen):** The annual conference is next Monday-Wednesday, offering technical climbing, rigging, pests, diseases, and plant health care training, and is very well attended.
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Adjournment

- The meeting was officially adjourned.