



Illinois Forestry Development Council

Fiscal Year 2026 Annual Report



From the Chair:

Forests continue to be an important resource for the state of Illinois. We have almost five million acres of forested land (4,958,276 acres to be exact) in the state, an increase of over 100,000 acres in just the last five years. Of these nearly five million forested acres, 82% are privately owned.

It is estimated that we now have just over 2 billion live trees in the state, a number that continues to grow each year. White oak continues to be the most abundant tree, by volume, in Illinois, making up over 10% of the total volume of trees in the state.

The Forest Industry, which includes consultant foresters, contractors, timber buyers, loggers, sawmills, arborists, non-timber forest products, and manufacturing, is an important economic driver in the state. In 2025, over 2,200 timber sales were conducted in Illinois, harvesting over 53 million board feet of timber for a value of over \$56,000,000.

The forestry community in Illinois continues to promote smart, active management to maintain healthy, productive and sustainable forest resources on public and private land.

While Illinois continues to see great success and growth in programs that provide both technical and financial assistance for forest management, there is still a lot of work to be done. Over the last five years, 80% of forest landowners did not seek advice about the management, care, or protection of their forests, 82% do not have a forest management plan, and 25% report not doing any forest management at all in the last five years. This shows a need for the forestry community in Illinois to continue to build capacity, develop projects, and collaborate on efforts to work with private landowners on forest planning and management.

The work of the Illinois Forestry Development Council (IFDC) directly supports the enhancement of forests and forestry in Illinois. This annual report highlights the accomplishments of the IFDC in Fiscal Year 2026.



Sincerely,
Chris Evans, Chair

Accomplishments:

During fiscal year 2026, **the Council met six times**. All meetings are open to the public. The Council meets on the 2nd Wednesday of the odd months. Five meetings were virtually and one in person.

Small Grants Program

In Fiscal Year 2026, IFDC provided funding for seven projects through our small grants program. These projects helped address forestry issues defined by the Council and included action to mitigate these issues as outline in the Illinois Forest Action Plan.

- Illinois Walnut Council hosted a national meeting that provided educational opportunities and tours for landowners to learn more about forest management topics such as digital forestry, mid-rotation management practices, wood utilization, forest health, and tree regeneration.
- Campton Township enhanced open woodland ecosystems on public lands through native understory restoration plantings.
- The Association of Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts and University of Illinois Extension 4-H conducted community tree plantings at forty five locations across the state by partnering with local schools, nature centers, and other organizations and agencies. A total of 1,125 trees were planted this year.
- Illinois Tree Farm engaged the private forest consultant industry to update the certified tree farm program through inspections and recertifications. A total of 56 tree farms were inspected, reupping 2,800 acres of forest in the Tree Farm system.
- Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever partnered with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to develop and host prescribed fire workshops and demonstrations.
- The Illinois Forestry Association held a series of educational events to promote forests and active forest management. These events

included an annual meeting, field days, and webinars.

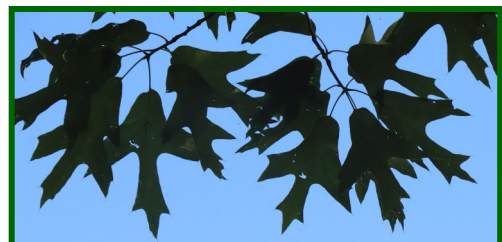
- The 4-H Memorial Camp controlled invasive species, removed downed and dead trees, and created a new nature trail. These improvements will increase the camp's ability to provide learning opportunities on forest ecology and forest management.

FDA Cost-Share Program

The Council provided input to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources Division of Forestry in affirming three priority forest management practices that would be given preference for Forest Development Act (FDA) cost-share funding: (1) afforestation or reforestation; (2) forest stand improvement; and (3) invasive and exotic species control. The Council also assisted the Forestry Division in communicating the announcement of the initial FDA Cost-Share Application period through its network of forestry organizations throughout the state, helping to make the initial Application Period a significant success.

Sawmill Directory

The Council partnered with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources Division of Forestry to produce an updated directory of the sawmills in Illinois as an accurate representation of sawmills in Illinois. Sixty-three (63) sawmills were included in the directory. While several mills could not be reach or elected not to be included, this directory is the most up-to-date and accurate representation of the sawmill resources in Illinois.



State Forest Action Plan – 5-Year Review IFDC Subcommittees

The Council provided input to the Forestry Division as part of the federally mandated 5-Year Midpoint Review of the 2020-2030 State Forest Action Plan (SFAP). No major revisions were recommended. Initial discussions have begun for the Council's participation in the next SFAP Review and Updating, which will take place in 2028-2029.

Urban Forestry Grant Review

This responsibility of the Illinois Forestry Development Council was removed in the 2025 update of the Urban and Community Forestry Assistance Act (30 ILCS 735/). As such, the Council no longer reviews or provides guidance on these grants.

Council Leadership Structure Change

The Council transitioned to a new Leadership structure in FY26, moving from an Executive Director leadership structure to a Chair leadership structure. This change required redistribution of some Council administrative tasks, but the Council adjusted well and maintained activities as usual throughout the year.

Council members required training

All council members and proxies completed the state mandated trainings

- Ethics Training Program for State Employees and Appointees
- Harassment and Discrimination Prevention Training
- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Training
- LGBTQIA+ Equity and Inclusion Training
- Security Awareness Training

The Council had two active sub-committees in 2026: Urban and Community Forestry and State Fair.

- *Urban Committee*

The Illinois Forestry Development Council Urban and Community Forestry (IFDC UCF) Committee has four committee members participating in a new Illinois Legacy Tree Program Task Force (Public Act 103-0863) that is studying the feasibility of creating a Legacy Tree Program within the State under the guidance of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. The purpose of such a program would be to enhance awareness, commemoration, and preservation of significant trees in Illinois. The Legacy Tree Program Task Force is reviewing and discussing the necessary components of such a program and had its first active year in studying the issue in FY26.

The Legacy Tree Program Task Force has mentioned interest in utilizing IFDC's UCF committee to help facilitate a statewide Legacy Tree Program so the IFDC UCF involvement on this Task Force has already provided some positive outcomes and ideas. Another notable mention for the UCF committee is their effort in assisting IDNR's UCF Forestry staff in reviewing many IDNR Forestry web pages, links and documents, to assist with updates and accessibility fixes. This web page review work was time consuming and tedious and greatly appreciated.



- *State Fair Committee*

The IFDC State Fair Subcommittee was established to develop consistent messaging for the Illinois State Fair and other events where the Illinois Forestry Development Council is represented, as well as design a banner to use at these events. The committee met three times. The first meeting focused on identifying forestry partners to include, brainstorming key messaging, and assigning partners among the committee members, the second meeting included discussions with representatives from the IDNR to ensure the messaging appropriately reflected all partners and to refine the partner list. The final meeting addressed the remaining details related to banner design, including style and size. Based on feedback from the IFDC, the final messaging tagline was refined to “Uniting Illinois Forestry for the Future.”

Recommendations to the Illinois General Assembly for Future State Action:

1. Increase Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) Forestry Division budget by \$4.0M. IDNR Division of Forestry’s mission is to protect, perpetuate, restore, conserve, and manage the forests of Illinois, both public and private, rural and urban; and to ensure for future generations the greatest economic, scientific, and social benefits that can only be provided through a forest ecological system. This increase in funding would allow backfilling of long-standing staff vacancies and stabilizing cost-share funds dedicated to assisting private landowners in the management of their forests.
2. Utilize the Illinois Forestry Development Council and its members as an expert source for forestry issues in the state. The Council has a wealth of expertise on forests and the forest industry in Illinois. Council members would be available to testify at legislative hearing and provide information on any issue regarding forestry in the state.



Council Members:

The Illinois Forestry Development Council was created in 1983 upon passage of the Illinois Forestry Development Act (525 ILCS 15). The Council's charge is to identify and evaluate the social, economic, scientific, and educational value of Illinois' forest lands and forest products industries. The 29 members of the Council represent the following interests or groups:

MEMBER	REPRESENTING	MEMBER	REPRESENTING
<i>Vacant / Candidate Member Nominated</i>	Landowner Engaged in Farming	Mr. Joe Hansen	Illinois Arborist Association
<i>Vacant / Candidate Member Nominated</i>	Landowner Engaged in Farming	<i>Vacant / Candidate Member Nominated</i>	Urban Forestry Representative
Mr. Steve Graves	Private Timber Grower Woodland Owner	Ms. Lydia Scott	Environmental Issues
<i>Vacant / Candidate Member Nominated</i>	Private Timber Grower Woodland Owner	Mr. Therin Bradshaw Dr. T.J. Benson **	Illinois Chapter of The Wildlife Society
Dr. Christopher Merrett	Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs	Dr. Robert Schooley Mr. Chris Evans ***	University of Illinois Dept. of Natural Resources & Env. Sciences
Mr. Nathan Phillips Beaumont Lumber	Wood Products Forest Industry	Dr. John Groninger	Southern Illinois University Carbondale Dept. of Forestry
Mr. Rick Collins Firmitas Timber	Wood Products Forest Industry	Mr. Jerry Costello II Mr. Scott Schirmer **	Illinois Department of Agriculture
Mr. Matt Pustejovsky	Illinois Tree Farm Program	Mr. Kenneth Jolly **	Illinois Department of Natural Resources Division of Forest Resources
Mr. Paul Deizman Ms. Tricia Bethke **	Illinois Forestry Association	Ms. Sylvia Garcia Ms. Kim Watson **	Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity
Mr. Casey Calvert	Illinois Walnut Council	Mr. Chris B. Meister Ms. Lorrie Karcher **	Illinois Finance Authority
Ms. Taryn Bieri	Illinois Chapter of the Society of American Foresters	Ms. Tammy Willis * Mr. Wade Conn **	Illinois Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA)
Mr. Steve Stierwalt Mr. Dale Shumaker **	Association of Illinois Soil & Water Conservation Districts	Mr. Felipe Cano* Mr. Justin Dodson**	U.S. Forest Service (Shawnee National Forest)
<i>Appointee of John Curran, IL Senate Minority Leader</i>	IL Senate Minority Leader	<i>Appointee of Don Harmon, IL Senate President</i>	IL Senate President
<i>Appointee of Tony McCombie, IL House Minority Leader</i>	IL House Minority Leader	<i>Appointee of Emanuel Chris Welch, IL Speaker of the House</i>	IL Speaker of the House

*Ex-officio Members ** Designee or Alternate + Council Chairperson

Note: The Council chair is currently working with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the Governor's Office of Executive Appointments to appoint nominated candidates to fill the vacant positions on the Council. We fully expect to have a full roster for Fiscal Year 2027 and are on pace to meet that goal.