

# Meeting Minutes

## Illinois Forestry Development Council

May 13, 2026

**Location: Remote (Zoom)**

**Presiding: Lydia Scott, Acting Chair (substituting for Chris Evans)**

### 1. Call to Order & Roll Call

**Acting Chair Lydia Scott called the meeting to order at 10:03 AM. Roll call was conducted via self-introduction.**

#### **Council Members & Partners Present:**

- **Lydia Scott: Acting Chair / Urban Forestry Consultant**
- **Kenneth Jolly: State Forester, Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR)**
- **Matt Pustejovsky: Chair, Illinois Tree Farm Committee / Forest Landowner**
- **Taryn Bieri: District Forester, IDNR / Chair, Illinois Chapter of the Society of American Foresters (SAF)**
- **Casey Calvert: President, Walnut Council Illinois Chapter Representative**
- **Steve Graves: Private Landowner & Timber Grower (Kendall County)**
- **Tricia Bethke: Forest Pest Outreach Coordinator (USDA APHIS/Morton Arboretum) / VP, Illinois Forestry Association (IFA)**
- **Joe Hansen: Liaison, Illinois Arborists Association**
- **Laura Lyon: Vice President, Heartlands Conservancy**
- **Mac: Project Coordinator, Heartlands Conservancy**
- **Kyle Burkwald: Timber Buyer Licensing Program Manager, IDNR Forestry**
- **Nate Phillips: Owner, Beaumont Lumber**
- **Felipe Cano: Forest Supervisor, Shawnee National Forest (USFS)**
- **Rick Collins: Guest / Owner, Galesburg-area Sawmill & Timber Frame Company**
- **Sgt. Chris Johnson: Guest / Conservation Police Officer, IDNR Office of Law Enforcement (OLE)**

## **2. Approval of Previous Minutes**

The minutes of the previous meeting were reviewed.

- **Motion to Approve: Joe Hansen**
- **Second: Casey Calvert**
- **Disposition: Passed unanimously without opposition or further amendments.**

## **3. Acting Chair's Report (L. Scott on behalf of C. Evans)**

- **FY 2027 Small Grants Program: The Request for Proposals (RFP) has officially been released. Council members are urged to distribute the RFP widely. Submissions are due July 1, 2026.**
- **FY 2026 Grants: Grantees are reminded that final reports for the current funding cycle are due by Friday, May 15, 2026.**
- **Council Expansion: Chris Evans is actively working on filling vacant seats and expanding Council membership, with a formal update expected at the July meeting.**
- **Hybrid Meeting Upgrades: IDNR has procured a new OWL meeting camera to improve the visual and audio experience for hybrid/remote participants during in-person meetings.**
- **September Meeting: The location is still being finalized, but the Council plans to return to the Champaign-Urbana area.**

## **4. State Forester's Report (K. Jolly)**

- **State Forest Action Plan (SFAP) Highlights: The 5-year midpoint highlights document (covering achievements from 2020–2025) was submitted to the US Forest Service on March 31, 2026. The USFS confirmed receipt and stated no formal approval was required. The highlights document will soon be published on the NASF website.**
- **USDA/USFS Federal Grants Lawsuit: Illinois, alongside 20 other states and Washington D.C., has entered a lawsuit against the USDA regarding controversial terms and conditions, which include some presidential executive orders appended to federal grants.**

- **Illinois must submit all federal grant applications with a "reservation of rights." Currently, the USDA is refusing to accept applications with this clause, placing federal funds in a temporary freeze.**
- **Operational Impact: While Illinois currently operates on a rolling balance of FY24 funds (grant cycles are valid for 5 years), long-term delay will cause funding shortfalls.**
- **Impacted Projects: A critical \$250,000 seedling cooler replacement at the Mason State Nursery is on hold. The \$2.5M Consolidated Payment Grant (CPG), covering four core forestry programs, is due June 1st and will be submitted under reservation of rights. Urban Forestry, Forest Health, and Fire programs are at the highest risk due to their heavy reliance on federal funding.**
- **Mitigation: The state has \$14M in Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding available through 2027 to serve as a financial cushion.**
- **Federal Budget (FY27): The federal administration's proposed budget again zeroed out state, private, and tribal forestry programs. State Foresters traveled to Washington D.C. to lobby Congress, which is expected to reject the cuts and restore funding.**
- **Advocacy Action Item: Jolly emphasized that individual constituent organizations (such as IFA and the Walnut Council) sending letters to Congressional delegates is much more effective than the Council sending a collective letter. Key congressional allies include Representative Jackson (urban forestry supporter) and Representative Bost (fire program supporter).**
  - **Note: Last year's advocacy template was shared in the chat by Joe Hansen. Casey Calvert will locate and share Walnut Council's letter as an additional guide.**
- **FDA Cost-Share Program: Since its October 2025 restart, the program has been highly successful. Out of the \$5M in federal funds, \$2.5M has been allocated over three sign-up periods. To date, approximately \$200,000 has been paid out for completed practices. Jolly cautioned that the division is burning through the federal funds quickly and will eventually return to lower, state-level funding.**
- **NRCS Partnerships: The \$1.2M contributory agreement remains in place. However, NRCS has placed a nationwide pause on all new agreements for the year.**

- **Shared Stewardship Agreement (SSA):** Shawnee National Forest Supervisor Felipe Cano has initiated discussions on establishing a new SSA with IDNR. This agreement could include a Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) option to allow the state to implement various management practices on federal lands using federal seed money. The IDNR Director's Office is currently reviewing the proposal.
- **Personnel:** Hiring processes for the Carlyle District Forester position remain bogged down in state administrative processes but the position is expected to post soon.
- **Special Recognition:** District Forester Jenny Lesko was named the Northeast-Midwest State Forester Alliance (NMSFA) Cooperative Forest Management Committee Forester of the Year for 2025.

#### **5. New Business: Timber Transportation Act & Form Revamp (K. Burkwald & Sgt. C. Johnson)**

**Sgt. Chris Johnson and Kyle Burkwald presented the revised Proof of Transportation/Ownership Form designed to streamline roadside checks, safeguard landowners, and support the industry.**

- **Key Form Modifications:**
  - Replaced the archaic Township/Range legal description with GPS Coordinates (Latitude/Longitude).
  - Added driver's license state and email fields. When Conservation Officers enter inspections into the real-time electronic database, the system will automatically email a digital copy of the form to the driver/transporter, reducing stop times.
  - Implemented a structured Box System with accompanying instructions to eliminate confusion:
    - **Box 1:** Filled out by the transporter/driver.
    - **Box 2:** Filled out by the primary timber buyer (responsible for the 4% fee under the Timber Buyers Act).
    - **Box 3:** Designed for secondary buyers/transfers (e.g., yard-to-yard transfers or hauling logs where the 4% fee has already been recorded and paid). No timber buyer's license is required for these secondary transports.

- **Discussion:** Nate Phillips (Beaumont Lumber) discussed operational scenarios concerning buying logs from licensed loggers (acting as secondary buyers) and how to handle repeat forestry fraudsters in the state. Burkwald noted that legal counsel restricts IDNR from barring or suspending licenses unless there is a direct violation of the Illinois Timber Buyers Licensing Act but encouraged the community to report tips to OLE.
- **Next Steps:** The form is being fast-tracked for administrative review and OLE inservicing.

## 6. IDNR Program Report (K. Burkwald)

- **Timber Buyer Licensing:**
  - **Fall/Winter 2025 timber prices** have been updated on the website.
  - **Metrics (as of May 11, 2026):** 345 licenses issued/applied for, with 141 active buyers (40.9% active participation). Illinois hosts 251 buyers, followed by Iowa (26), Missouri (24), Indiana (21), Wisconsin (12), Kentucky (5), Michigan (2), Ohio (2), New York (1), and Arkansas (1).
  - **Harvest Volume (2026 to date):** 15,000,000+ board feet harvested across 53,000 acres over 784 reported sales. Average sale value is \$25,552.07. 4% fees collected total \$801,060.29.
  - **Species Trends:** Top species include Black Walnut, White Oak, Red Oak, Hickory, and Ash. Ash has experienced a significant surge due to strong international Asian market demand following tariff relief.
- **Intern Recognition:** GIS/GPSI intern Shreya Jeksani completed her internship on May 5th and will graduate this week. Two new GPSI database and GIS interns have been brought on to assist the division.
- **Wood Utilization & Marketing:**
  - **Collaborating with U of I Extension** on a Blackjack Oak utilization project; testing the wood's water-holding capability for use as spirits/distilling cooperage. Specimens are being delivered for milling today.
  - **Developing a "Forestry Contracting 101"** curriculum with Chris Evans for landowners and new operators.
  - **Wooden Dollars:** Transitioning to an online HTML format via the AEM web system. Historical issues will remain archived as PDFs.

- **State Fair: The Forestry Tent theme will focus on wood utilization, highlighted by a cooperative display with the Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA) Food/Wood Export program.**
- **State Forests:**
  - **Utilizing 2024 Bilateral Infrastructure Law (BIL) funds to contract forest inventories at Big River State Forest and Trail of Tears State Forest (re-inventorying 2000 data).**
  - **Sand Ridge State Forest completed a highly successful 1,700-acre prescribed burn. A pine harvest is currently out for bid.**
  - **Hidden Springs State Forest completed 200 acres of drone-applied invasive spraying last fall in partnership with the Wildlife Division. A hardwood harvest bid packet is being prepared.**
  - **Reforestation: Completed a 6.1-acre planting at Union County SFWA on behalf of the City of Herrin, and a 33-acre planting at Apple River Canyon SP in partnership with IDOT District 2.**
  - **Signed two new Intergovernmental Agreements (IGAs) with IDOT Districts 4 and 8, valued at \$340,000 to fund 113.3 acres of tree planting.**

## **7. Old Business & Partner Updates**

- **Illinois Department of Agriculture (S. Schirmer, read by T. Bethke): Forestry pest activity is quiet. There are no spongy moth treatments scheduled in Illinois this year.**
  - **Monitoring continues for Spotted Lanternfly (tracking phenology; no active hatches reported).**
  - **EAB activity remains high with persistent treatment calls. Surveys for Elm ZigZag Sawfly are underway in the Cook County Forest Preserves.**
- **State Fair Committee: Avery Viadero has drafted the partner state banner under the theme "Uniting Illinois Forestry for the Future." The draft will circulate to the Council for logo and layout review this week.**
- **Illinois Forestry Association (T. Bethke):**
  - **Hosted successful field days in Clayton and Casey.**

- Hosted two well-received webinars: Jared Brooke (Purdue) on forest management for wildlife, and an Invasive Species Awareness Month webinar on emerging tree pests (both uploaded to IFA's YouTube channel).
- Family Forestry Day: Scheduled for Saturday, May 16, 2026, from 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM at the Torsten Center in Pecatonica, IL. Partnering with the Walnut Council and Tree Farm Committee. Features include soil/forest health, native ID, tree planting demos, the IDNR Education Mobile Unit, and a free seedling giveaway (Red Oak, American Plum, Hazelnut). Over 35 adults and 10 youth are currently registered.
- **Walnut Council (C. Calvert):**
  - The Walnut Council National Meeting will be held in Warsaw, Indiana, on July 26–28, 2026.
  - Completed a volunteer-led CSP enhancement planting (several hundred trees) on the "Gett" property across the Wisconsin border.
  - Calvert noted dry conditions on his southern Illinois property but reported successful tree plantings using root-dip moisture management.
- **Society of American Foresters (T. Bieri):**
  - Following Luke Koett's resignation due to a new professional role, Taryn Bieri has assumed the SAF Illinois Chapter Chair position.
  - New officers elected to fill the board: John Lovseth (Vice Chair / Chair-Elect), Ben Snyder (Secretary), and Jenny Lesko (Treasurer).
  - Chapter focus is on revitalization, and Bieri expressed strong interest in co-hosting professional development and field days with regional partners. Felipe Cano (USFS) expressed interest in coordination.
- **Heartlands Conservancy (L. Lyon):**
  - Lyon outlined their work as a southern Illinois-based conservation land trust serving 36 counties. Heartland focuses on land preservation, watershed planning, and municipal forestry support as an IDNR Tree City USA core partner.

## 8. Adjournment

Hearing no further business, Lydia Scott called for a motion to adjourn.

- **Motion to Adjourn: Casey Calvert**
- **Second: Joe Hansen**
- **Meeting Adjourned: 11:52 AM. The next meeting is scheduled for July 8, 2026.**