

The four Cornerstones to a Healthy Environment: Jobs and the Green Economy, Smart Growth, Clean Air and Clean Water.

I. Jobs and the Green Economy

Energy Conservation

Illinois must establish and support efforts that espouse and educate citizens about the importance of increasing our energy independence by way of conserving current energy, work with schools to develop curriculum that fosters attitudes in line with energy conservation and environmental stewardship. Please see The Center for Neighborhood Technology - tools for a smarter, sustainable community www.cnt.org and the Community Energy Cooperative, www.EnergyCooperative.org .

Illinois must strive to develop alternative energy sources such as wind, hydroelectricity, recycling and hydrogen power systems that generate electricity for our homes, schools and businesses without polluting the environment. We must reduce our use of nuclear energy however realize that we may be dependent upon this source of power over the near term. Nonetheless, we must develop a realistic timeline to reduce our dependence on this type of power and insure a safe disposal process to store its byproducts (spent plutonium, etc.) Please see the Chicago Solar Partnership - www.ChicagoSolarPartnership.org, www.windpower.com and www.eren.doe.gov Illinois needs to begin educating consumers and teaching its young people that Fossil Fuels (FF) are old-fashioned and should be phased out in a realistic timeline. And if not phased out, at least cut back to a reasonable and well-researched level. Tax credits, for example, should be provided to car buyers who purchase energy efficient automobiles such as "Hybrid" vehicles and electric cars. State agencies and other governmental agencies at the county and municipal level must lead the way by requesting bids on alternative-fueled cars and trucks. Please see I-GO; The Smarter Way to Drive, Like Owning a Car, Only Better www.i-go-cars.org.

A sustainable development strategy is good for the environment and the economy.

By diversifying our power supply that has relies to heavily on old, highly polluting coal and nuclear plants, Illinois will reduce pollution, improve electricity reliability, create new "green" manufacturing and installation jobs, and provide renewable energy "cash crops" for farmers. Please see "Re-powering the Midwest". Stationary sources such as power plants or other industrial sources are only part of the air pollution picture. Cars, trucks, and buses contribute to the problem. New technology emerging from the auto manufactures such as the use of bio-diesel in trucks, more efficient gasoline motors, hybrid cars, as well as utilization of public transportation, ride sharing, high occupancy lanes on freeways are all ways to reduce mobile source air pollution. These opportunities need to be promoted through public education, tax incentives, and proper planning.

Landfill capacity and recycling

The State of Illinois has adequate landfill capacity for the next decade or so. While capacity has been growing over the last several years, that situation will not continue without either decreasing volumes going into the landfills or building new and/or bigger

landfills. Most communities are averse to citing a new landfill within their jurisdictions; attempts to increase the size of an existing landfill often meet with a similar response. The alternative to new or bigger landfills is to maximize our landfill space by reducing the volumes that are currently entering the landfills. Between 1970 and 2000, national recycling volumes increased by 49 million tons or 23% while material entering landfills increased from 113 million tons to 155 million tons. While there is always room for improvement in household programs, the additional volumes will not be a significant factor in increasing landfill capacity. An effective policy would be to place more effort into programs that will divert industrial construction and demolition debris (areas that lags behind other recycling efforts).

Market development is another area in which Illinois must take a leading role.

The availability of grants and/or funding to encourage businesses to increase the use of recycled materials will increase the value of materials diverted from landfills and encourage more recycling. Illinois' continued efforts to buy recycled products and promotion of buy-recycled programs must be furthered. Another option for diverting industrial waste from landfills would be the establishment of a statewide materials exchange to act as a clearinghouse where businesses list materials that are waste products for them but might be usable materials for another business.

A Bottle Bill

There is a national effort to enact a "bottle bill" requiring a refund be placed on drink containers to encourage their recycling and this issue has also been raised at the state level in the past. At this point in time, however, a refund program would in fact be detrimental to the recycling programs of Illinois communities. Aluminum continues to be the most valuable of the materials collected for recycling, often supporting the other materials. A bottle/can refund program removes the aluminum cans from the curbside recycling bins, thereby forcing the companies collecting the recyclables to find alternate ways to fund the programs. Additionally, the stores, who must now take back the containers and find storage space for them until they can be picked up, often find this a hardship. Illinois must creatively find its way to use fewer plastics in packaging, which are derived from petrochemicals and rely more so on renewable materials such as glass and wood or fiber.

Environmental Justice

Environmental Justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Fair treatment means that no group of people, including a racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic group, should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial operations or the execution of state and local policies. The State of Illinois must be committed to protecting human health and the environment. Illinois must educate and empower its communities in the creation of partnerships for clean sustainable communities and environmental justice.

Education

None of the above mentioned issues can be addressed without also supporting the need for education and outreach. Education and outreach by conservation agencies, municipalities, private citizens, special interest groups and schools is the one thing that can be intertwined through out all of these issues. Any resolution has to include these two components.

II Smart

Growth

Land use

State funds should be offered locally to assist communities with their long term planning. When people work together on issues, success follows. Bringing government agencies, including natural resource conservation professionals, local residents, special interest groups and lawmakers to the same table has long been a goal. The availability of state funds to assist projects that were planned in this manner will provide for more sustainable development. Compromises will be reached, and Illinois residents will be happier. Land use is at the heart of long term planning. The decision as to how open space should be made available for homes, industrial sites and recreational Parks should be made in the presence of several agencies and interest groups with the support of State funding to assist with final projects.

Our soils

Northern Illinois boasts some of the most fertile soils in our nation. Yet valuable farmland is being bought and replaced with high-density housing, industrial parks and strip malls. Fertile topsoil is stripped, put in bags and sold at local garden centers, never to be as productive again. With the population of Illinois continuing to increase, we cannot continue to expect to maintain the historically high level of exports of corn, soybeans and other grains while continuing to strip the our most fertile farmlands. Illinois must embark upon a bold initiative to revitalize our inner cities and to more prudently plan for less invasive growth of our more rural areas.

Biodiversity

Loss of the Biodiversity and our natural history is something our state can no longer afford. Habitat destruction, introduction of invasive alien species and fragmentation of our natural lands has led to the incredible loss of Illinois' heritage. To counteract these assaults, state funding is needed to protect open space, acquire additional land and support restoration efforts. Illinois must develop public policy that supplements the Endangered Species Act and provides localized protection as needed. This legislation should highlight and publicize the use of Best Management Practices (BMP).

III. Clean Air

Air pollution in Illinois continues at unacceptable levels.

One of the major contributors to air pollution in Illinois are the old coal-fired power plants that were exempt from new pollution standards contained in the Clean Air Act in the 70s. - A plethora of studies have linked air pollution to health problems. Recent scientific studies by the American Lung Association confirm that tiny soot particles, produced chiefly by electric power plants and motor vehicles are linked to premature death and serious lung disease. Infants and children - especially those with asthma - the elderly, and people with heart or lung disease are especially vulnerable. High ozone levels have been linked to increases in the severity of asthma attacks and other respiratory health problems, especially for children and the elderly.

Illinois must accept as a scientific fact that global warming, the increase of the earth's temperature, is caused by what are known as "greenhouse gases". The main pollutant of concern is Carbon Dioxide (CO₂), produced by burning fossil (coal, oil, natural gas) fuels in power plants and automobiles. Another reason for global warming is widespread deforestation as trees act as a trap for carbon dioxide.

This increase in the average global temperature through human activity has severe consequences: Any rise in temperature causes heat waves and produces droughts and wildfires, increases the amount of heat related deaths, has a negative effect on local air quality, and might increase the range of tropical diseases. The increase in warmth (energy) in the global climate can cause more intense rainfall and severe storms in some areas.

The disruption of ecosystems causes a reduction in species diversity and loss of species. Sea levels rise because of glacier ice melting and early thaw on lakes and rivers causing loss of coastal wetlands and coastal flooding.

The chemical Mercury is emitted into the atmosphere by coal-fired power plants and incinerators and then deposited into the waters of Illinois. Methyl Mercury is more toxic than previously thought. In fact, the Illinois Department of Public Health has issued a health advisory for the consumption of fish caught in any Illinois body of water.

Illinois must establish a progressive and proactive schedule to reduce global warming and lung disease caused by air pollution.

Decommission Oldest Coal Fired Power Plants Older coal run electric plants were grandfathered under the federal Clean Air Act. Technologies have improved. We should, therefore, follow through with updating the technology of the plants AND the locations where the electricity is produced. Illinois should require that, after all this time, that the old plants meet "New Source Standards". That is, older plants would have to retrofit their smoke stacks with scrubbers. Also, with newer technology these plants could use coal from Illinois that, although higher in sulfur content, could be "scrubbed out" of the effluent. This would put more Illinois coal miners to work while allowing us to decommission these older plants, build new plants right at the source of the coal. Instead of transporting the coal, transport the energy from the south to the north. This will lessen pollution in the north while providing needed jobs in the southern Illinois. To facilitate this transition, Illinois should provide subsidies to assist energy producers in retooling and adding pollution controls. Further, re-employment services should be provided for workers who have positions that are phased out.

IV. Clean Water

Our Earth is the only planet in our solar system to have water and is essential in providing life. The surface of our planet is about one-third water. Of all of the water available on Earth, about one percent is available for us to utilize. All forms of life must share from this same small percentage.

In order to keep our water supply clean and available, it is essential that we address all threats to clean water.

A new and growing threat to our water supply is Non-Point Source Pollution. This type of water pollution is difficult to address because the pollutants coming from many different sources and is difficult to trace and address. An example of Non-Point Source Pollution would be pollutants reaching a body of water via the streets and storm sewers. Road salt, for example, is a Non-Point Source Pollutant. Illinois must provide industry incentives to better research safer chemical alternatives to keep our roadways clear of snow during winter.

Connected to Non Point Source Pollution is the issue of detention and retention ponds in new developments. These ponds drain directly into our streams, rivers and lakes and do little to enhance water quality. A specific concern related to these ponds is how they are cared for after the development is complete. Very often these ponds are to be maintained by the homeowners association or the industrial park management. These detention ponds are often being swapped for small wetlands found on the development site. Recognizing that man made detention ponds create more water quality issues than they solve.

Illinois must provide local municipalities incentive preserving the number of smaller more diversified wetlands.