

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
April 20, 2009

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## **GRAND VICTORIA FOUNDATION ANNOUNCES NEW LAND CONSERVATION GRANT PROGRAM**

### *‘Vital Lands Illinois’ to Support Statewide Land Protection Strategies*

CHICAGO – Grand Victoria Foundation Monday unveiled “Vital Lands Illinois,” a new grant program aimed at supporting acquisition and preservation of vitally important and irreplaceable natural landscapes across Illinois.

Culminating 18 months of research and collaboration with conservation organizations throughout the state, Vital Lands Illinois will support land acquisition projects that aim to create a statewide system of permanently protected natural lands, ensure their long-term stewardship and build public support for conservation.

Those goals were shaped by more than 30 land conservation groups from across Illinois that collaborated with Grand Victoria Foundation on the guidelines for the new grant program. The groups met at a Summit sponsored by the Foundation and also participated in an on-line dialogue during the past year. They advised the Foundation on the kind of land conservation projects that should be a priority for funding.

“It has been gratifying to work with the many passionate conservationists who helped us shape Vital Lands Illinois,” Grand Victoria Foundation Executive Director Nancy Fishman said. “We’re confident that this program will help them reach their goals because it reflects the priorities they expressed to us.”

Grand Victoria Foundation will begin accepting applications for Vital Lands Illinois funds on May 15th. Nonprofit organizations that are involved in natural areas protection throughout Illinois are eligible to apply. The Foundation will also support some of the restoration and stewardship expenses associated with the parcels acquired under Vital Lands Illinois. Guidelines and additional information can be found at <http://www.grandvictoriafdn.org>.

Under Vital Lands Illinois, to qualify for Grand Victoria Foundation’s support, conservation projects must seek to permanently protect the land and adhere to a uniform set of standards for ecological significance, compatibility with existing conservation plans, and other key factors. Those guidelines were formulated by the team of conservation organizations that worked closely with Grand Victoria Foundation throughout the past year.

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The need for more robust investment in land conservation has escalated as Illinois communities struggle with flooding, the strains of poorly planned growth, and the need for local economic development. Protecting the places that Illinoisans love provides assets to support local tourism and enriches our daily lives.

“Illinois’ natural landscape has been so iconic that we call ourselves the ‘Prairie State,’” Fishman said. “But as our valuable natural areas disappear, we’re losing pieces of our shared identity. We hope that Vital Lands Illinois will represent a new frontier of coordination to preserve the state’s remaining natural treasures before they are lost forever.”

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Grand Victoria Foundation provides strategic funding to Illinois organizations working for long-lasting economic, educational and environmental change. Since it was established in 1996 by the Grand Victoria Casino in Elgin, Illinois, the Foundation has provided more than \$100 million in grants to help communities across the state become vibrant places to live and work. Through grantmaking and leadership initiatives, Grand Victoria Foundation supports five elements of great communities: good jobs, a healthy environment, great places for kids, capable organizations and homegrown philanthropy. The Foundation has offices in Chicago and Elgin. For more information, please visit [www.grandvictoriafdn.org](http://www.grandvictoriafdn.org) or call 312.609.0200.