

“Cultivating Community & Empowerment”

presented by **Friends of Illinois Nature Preserves**

Prairie State Conservation Coalition

March 10, 2022



Friends of Illinois Nature Preserves

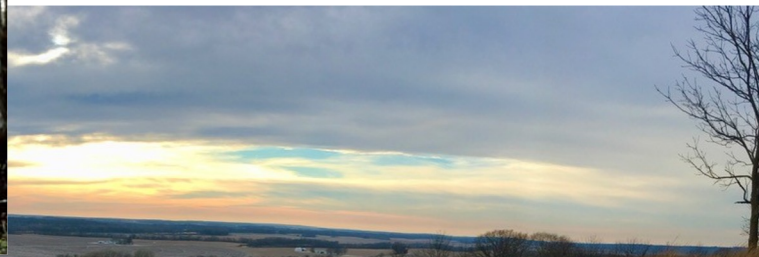
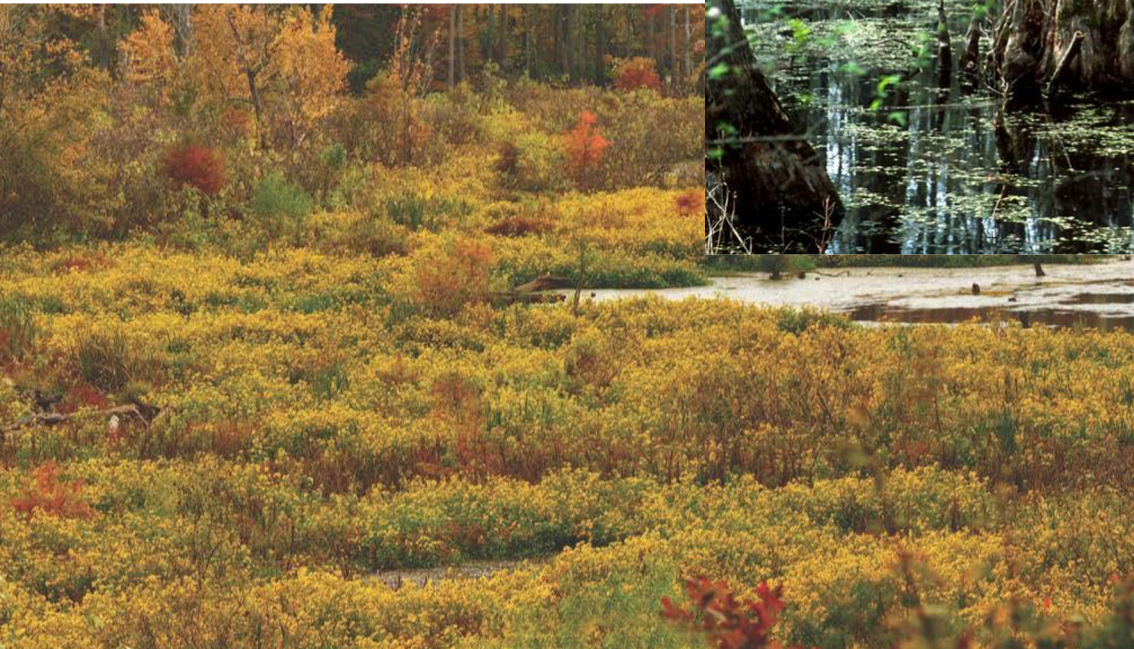
Today's takeaways:

- ❑ ***why*** are Illinois Nature Preserves special
- ❑ ***who*** the Friends are and ***why*** we formed
- ❑ ***what*** is the work, learn, lead model
 - ❑ ***how*** to implement the model





Illinois, a biodiversity hotspot?



Spectacular wildlife...



Sandhill cranes
© Carol Freeman



Baltimore Checkerspot
Peter Dziuk



Mudpuppy
© Carol Freeman



Banded Hairstreak
© Carol Freeman



Smooth Green Snake
© Carol Freeman



Blanding's Turtle
Michael Jeffords/Susan Post

Illinois, a biodiversity hotspot!

- ❑ ***dozens of unique natural communities*** represented across the state
- ❑ ***thousands of species*** of native plants, fungi, and animals that are special in themselves
- ❑ we believe there is a ***moral imperative*** to conserve them
- ❑ healthy ecosystems are vital ***cultural, aesthetic, and scientific resources*** for Illinois (and the world)
- ❑ ***unique genetics*** of many plants soils, fungi, and microbiota are of crucial importance to future ***science, industry, and technology***

Why Are We Telling You This?

*Because this story is crucial
to conservation success ...
and most people don't
remotely know it*

What are Illinois Nature Preserves?



What are Illinois Nature Preserves?

Biodiversity conservation areas permanently preserved by their owners and permanently protected by state law



What are Illinois Nature Preserves?

Created by the Visionary Natural Areas Preservation Act:

“Areas dedicated as nature preserves are hereby declared to be put to their highest, best and most important use for the public benefit.”



Why Are We Telling You This?

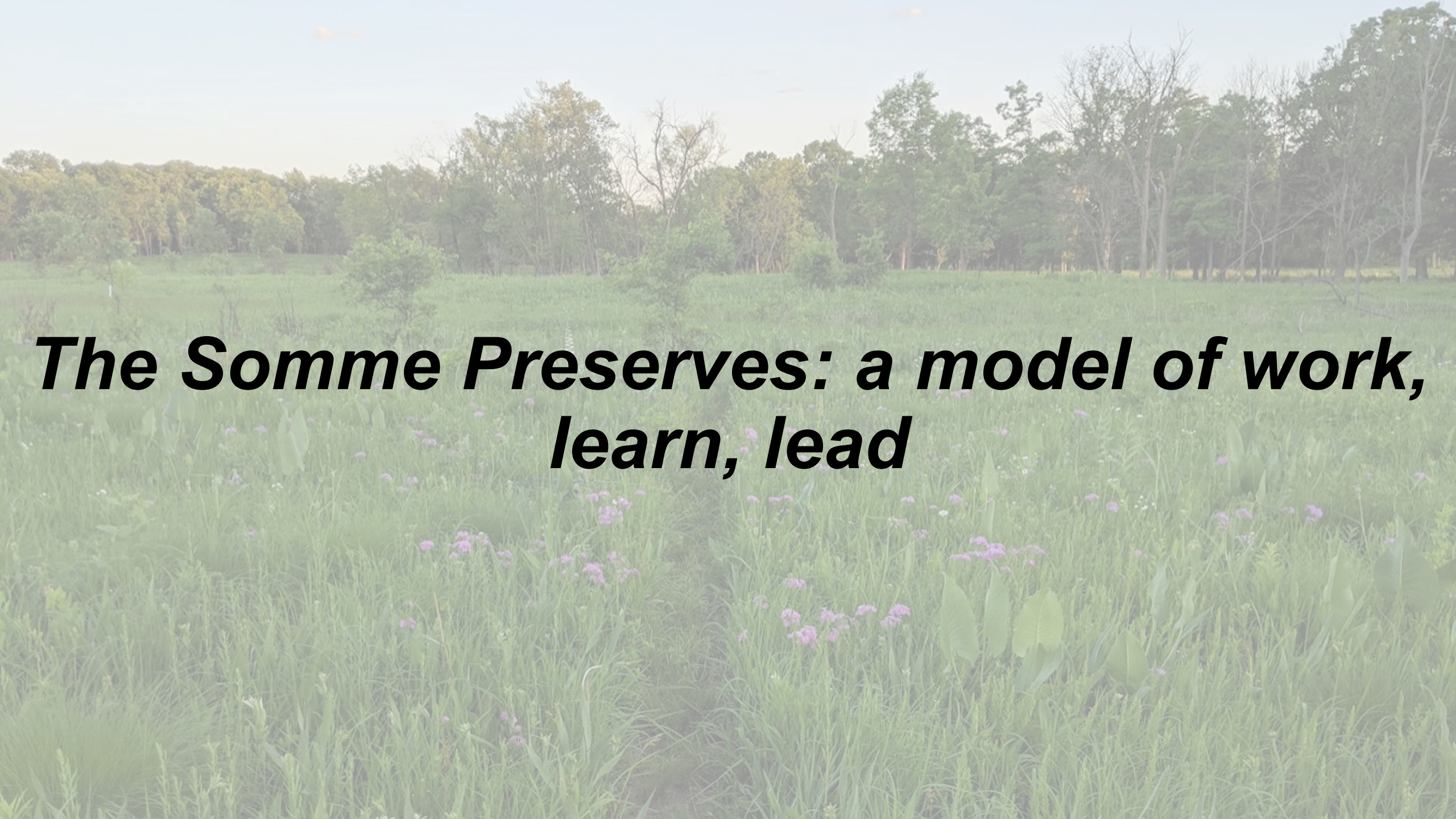
Because the Illinois Nature Preserves Commissioners and staff recognized in 2015 that the system was in trouble. There were not enough staff, funding, or volunteers to reverse the degradation of many or most preserves. A not-for-profit was needed to build more energy and resources into the mix



Why Are We Telling You This?

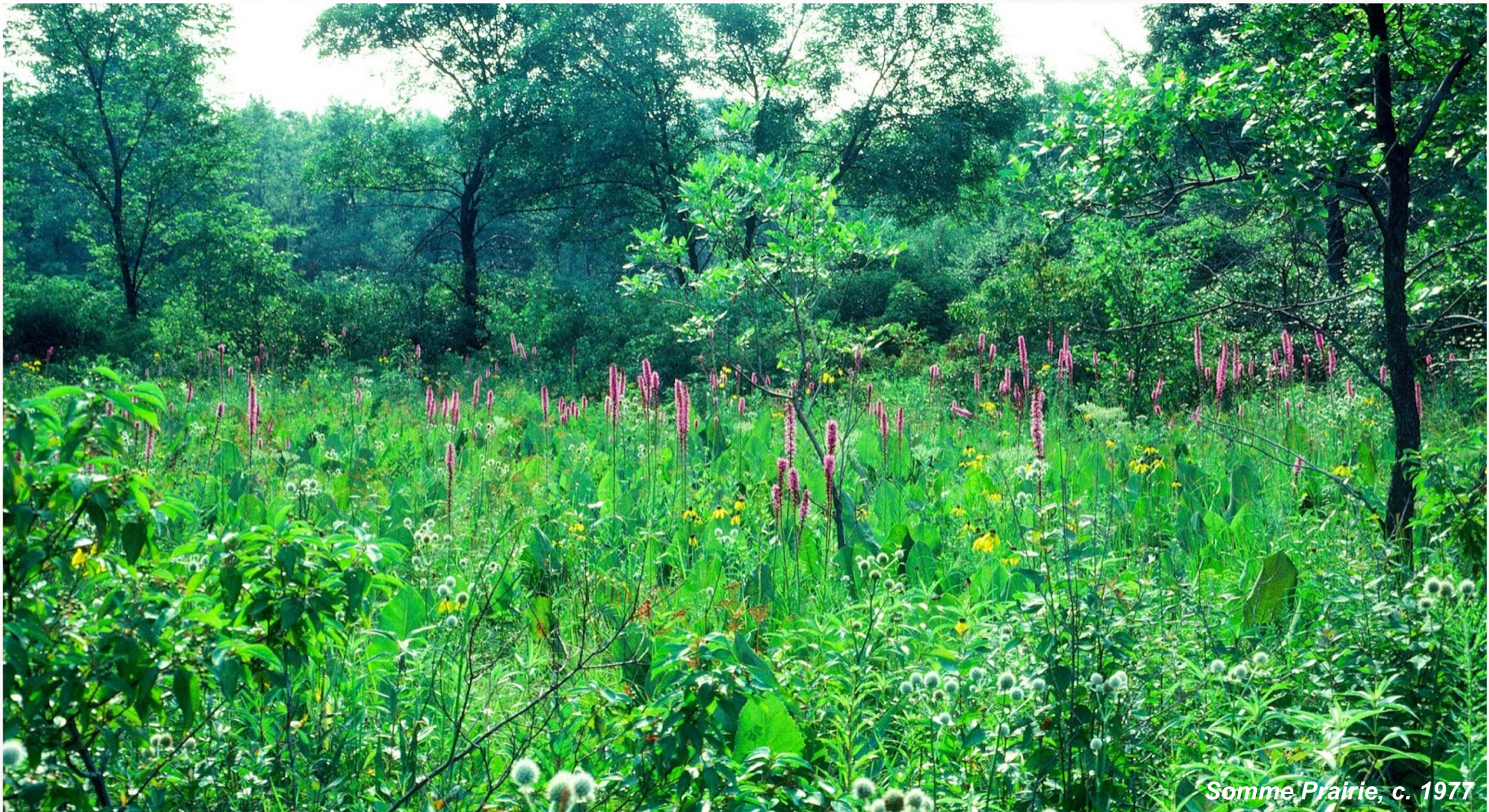
- ***Much more is needed in the way of funding, staff, volunteers, and especially public support, which is key to all.”***
- ***Funding and staff increases are facilitated by constituency and public support.***
- ***One powerful catalyst behind increased resources is knowledgeable, motivated, and passionate communities.***





***The Somme Preserves: a model of work,
learn, lead***

Somme: challenges and opportunities



Somme Prairie, c. 1977



Somme: challenges and opportunities



Somme Prairie Grove's "party spot," c. 1977



The North Branch Prairie Project: early history



A close partnership between staff, experts, and volunteers



Caring for nature is becoming part the culture in many Illinois communities



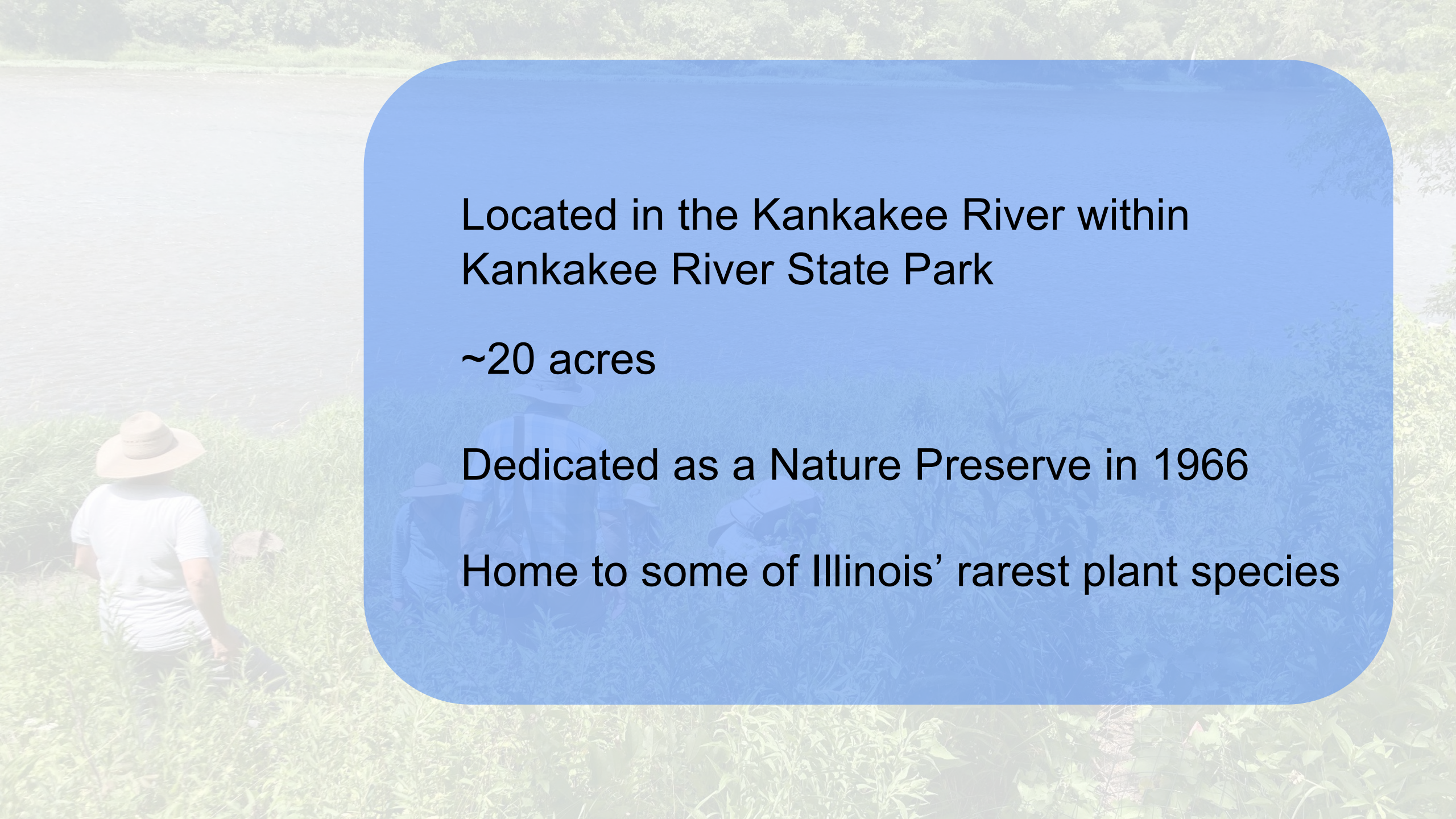
Somme Woods' "solstice bonfire," 2017





Langham Island

***An Island of Rare Plants and
a Community that Cares***

- 
- ❑ Located in the Kankakee River within Kankakee River State Park
 - ❑ ~20 acres
 - ❑ Dedicated as a Nature Preserve in 1966
 - ❑ Home to some of Illinois' rarest plant species



Kankakee mallow (Iliamna remota), Mark Kluge



❑ ***Nature Preserves need maintenance and consistent care.***

❑ It takes a village.

❑ Stewardship communities tend to ecological needs, educate the public, and train new communities in stewardship.



Removing invasive species

Collecting seeds



Other Great Examples

- *Orland Grasslands*
- *Short Pioneer Cemetery Nature Preserve*
- *Nachusa Grasslands*
- *Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards*
- *Middle Rock Conservation Partners*
- *Fults Hill Prairie Nature Preserve*



Community Building & Empowerment Lessons Learned

❓ key to success is a *partnership* between *staff*, *volunteers*, *scientists*, and *many, many others*



Community Building & Empowerment Lessons Learned



- ❑ crucial motivations are ***active support and empowerment*** from partners, ***a sense of ownership*** in the work, and a clear understanding of the ***importance of the mission***



Community Building & Empowerment Lessons Learned

? ***people from all walks of life are interested*** and will rise to the occasion, if given the chance



Community Building & Empowerment Lessons Learned



? *have been, can, and (we think) should continue to be replicated* all across the state to preserve our rare nature



Keys to Cultivating Community and Empowerment

- Start with **why!*****
- Empower volunteers to care for your agency's most precious sites - these are the ones that need it the most.***
- Equal partnership between staff, volunteers, scientists***
- Create a sense of ownership***
- Community building takes time, but our nature preserves need care forever!***



What Will You Take Away

- Does the language you use when talking to volunteers empower them?*
- What stops some organizations from fostering volunteer leaders who grow for years and become as skilled and dedicated as staff?*
- How is community building work different than ecological restoration work? Do you have the right people in place?*



The Friends' "Game Plan"

- A global model of fine volunteer stewardship and other community support for Nature Preserves.*
- Dramatically increased budgets for INPC, DNR, and scores of other Nature Preserve owners - as a result of public support.*
- Much more funding for contractors, interns, monitors, and scientists, as needed.*
- Strengthened state and local biodiversity conservation laws - as a result of public support.*
- A preserve system where regular monitoring shows that the preserves are increasingly being all they can be.*



A low-angle photograph of a field of tall, thin grasses reaching towards a bright, hazy sky. The grasses are in sharp focus in the foreground, creating a sense of depth. A faint, stylized molecular structure graphic, consisting of grey spheres connected by thin lines, is overlaid on the left side of the image. The overall tone is soft and natural.

Questions?

Thanks for your attention!

reach out at to Friends' Director Amy Doll:

amy@friendsinature.org

(779) 212-2785

or visit us at www.friendsinature.org

