



Open House transcript for Executive Director applicants

September 20

PSCC Board: President Brook McDonald, Kerry Leigh, and Ryan London
PSCC Hiring Committee: Chair Viv Bennett, Mila Marshall, Princess Harris
[Video of the Sept 20 Open House](#)

September 22

PSCC Board: Meredith Suangka, Susan Lenz
PSCC Hiring Committee: Chair Viv Bennett, Jim Johannsen, Princess Harris
[Video of the Sept 22 Open House](#)

Agenda:

- Welcome and Reason for Open House – slide of board members; slide of hiring committee members
- Introductions – Name and Physical location ONLY
- PSCC Board Members – intro to Illinois land conservation; intro to work of land trusts; intro to PSCC: including but not limited to strengths/weaknesses; challenges/opportunities; statement of intention related to DEI; future collaborative initiatives.
- PSCC Hiring Committee – job description and compensation package
- PSCC Hiring Committee – process, next steps
- Q&A

Welcome and Reason for the Open House (HIRING COMMITTEE)

- On behalf of the Board of Directors and the Executive Director Hiring Committee, we'd like to welcome you to this Open House.
- The purpose of this Open House is to find out more about the Illinois land conservation community, how land trusts work, PSCC itself, the executive director position, and the hiring process.
- We will start with a full gallery meet and greet, then switch to speaker view only and record the presentation portion, then we will stop the recording and return to full gallery for the Q&A portion of Open House. Depending on the quality of the recording, it may be posted on the PSCC website for others to reference who couldn't attend the two dates/times of the Open Houses.
- Please hold all your questions until the end, then use the Raise Hand function in Zoom.

Introduction to Illinois Land Conservation (BOARD MEMBER)

- **Diversity of Illinois’ landscape, habitat, and people** (14 natural divisions in IL and less than 1% of prairie still remains) (highly fragmented but still areas of pure wilderness) (diverse people but in clusters and not evenly distributed throughout the state; differing needs and motivations)
- **Sense of Place** – For those who live locally, there is a strong sense of place. We have everything from forest to wetlands to Great Lakes to Big Rivers to cactus to dolomite prairie to farmland to dense urban areas with high biological diversity to an abundance of freshwater resources including lakes, rivers, streams, and aquifers). Note that all photos in the Job Description are from Illinois, and show the breadth and depth of the types of work we do and the places where we work.
- **Land ownership is fragmented** but because of PSCC, land trust community is much less fragmented and more collaborative; work with federal and state partners, as well as local government and governmental bodies such as forest preserve districts
- **Different mission, sometimes based on the varied natural divisions or sense of place** (some land trusts focus on preserving nature and natural habitats; some land trusts focus on creating trails and other outdoor recreational opportunities; some focus on protecting farmland and other open space from development; some work to protect historically-important sites from being destroyed; and many land trusts work in several of these areas. What all land trusts have in common is our desire to protect land and water.)

Introduction to Land Trusts (BOARD MEMBER)

- **NFP ORGs, charitable donations, and grant funding** (Land trusts are nonprofit organizations that, as all or part of their missions, work to conserve land and water resources. Collectively, land trusts in Illinois have protected more than 200,000 acres of land and water. As nonprofit organizations, land trusts rely on charitable donations and grant funding in order to fund their operations. Philanthropy and volunteerism are critical components of land trusts’ success).
- **Land Acquisition/Conservation Easements** (We mentioned that collectively, land trusts in Illinois have “protected” more than 200,000 acres of land and water. We use the word “protected” to refer to the legal interests that land trusts can own on land – either through outright acquisition of all the rights that come with land or through conservation easements that purchase a portion of those rights. Land trusts protect land and water resources by doing two main things: acquiring land (either by purchasing it or accepting land as donations) and working with landowners to protect their private land through legal agreements called conservation easements. In addition, we only buy interests from willing sellers. And, although we aren’t obligated to pay real estate taxes, some of our members choose to do so.)

- **Land Stewardship, Education and Outreach** (Many land trusts also have other program areas besides protecting land. Many land trusts have programs that work to care for and manage the lands we've protected. We call this "Land Stewardship." Some land trusts also have education and outreach programs to help people learn to love the places we've protected.)
- **Partnerships.** In addition to the partners mentioned above (federal, state, local municipality, quasi-governmental) we also work with other land trusts, other not-for-profits, businesses, donors, and other interested parties. No one can do it all by themselves, it takes us all working together. Individual land trusts develop working partnerships with other regional, local and state-wide groups, as well as cross state partnerships (such as Natural Area Networks, Gathering Waters, Middle Mississippi River Partnership and so on)
- **Challenges and Opportunities.** Challenges including funding particularly around stewardship and general funding. The value proposition of land trusts is not well understood if even known.

Introduction to PSCC (BOARD MEMBER)

- **Land Trust Alliance** (There are currently more than 1300 land trusts across the U.S. At the national level, land trusts are serviced by the Land Trust Alliance. 35 land trusts are currently operating in Illinois. At the state level here in Illinois, land trusts are serviced by the Prairie State Conservation Coalition which is a 501c3 charitable trust.
- **Diversity of Illinois land trusts, fiscally, geographically, and mission orientation.** (The scale and scope of land trusts working in Illinois is widely varied. Financially, land trusts in Illinois vary from having multi-million-dollar annual budgets and dozens of staff to all-volunteer land trusts having no paid staff and very modest annual budgets. Geographically, the service area of a land trust working in Illinois may be relatively small (some focusing on just a single municipality or county) whereas other land trusts may protect land internationally and Illinois is only a small part of their overall operation.)
- **PSCC, organizational structure, mission, fiscal condition, member communication & learning opportunities.** (Currently, 23 land trusts and like-minded organizations are members of PSCC. PSCC is currently governed by a 13-member, all volunteer Board of Directors and supported by a part-time communications consultant, contract support for book-keeping, and a GIS contractor. It's the job of PSCC to service Illinois's land trusts, other like-minded organizations, and help sustain and accelerate the work of land and water conservation in Illinois. PSCC's fiscal year income streams are primarily from memberships, the annual meeting registrations and grants. This organization needs to build an individual donor portfolio and continue to pursue grants and capacity building sources.

- **Future Direction of PSCC** - while we have had a long history of supporting land trusts, it is our hope and intent to be of service to a broader constituency of conservationists, thereby branching out beyond just land trusts. The new Executive Director will be leading us on that expansion effort.
- **Statement of Intention Regarding Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion as well as Summary of Vision, Mission:** Last year, the PSCC Board of Directors adopted a Statement of Intention Regarding Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. Advancing PSCC's work in these four areas will be a major focus for the Executive Director.

Diversity for PSCC means not just race and ethnicity, but also age, ability, economic circumstance, gender identity, religion, education, and sexual orientation. That being said, PSCC is currently a very white-dominated space. A quick glance at our current board of directors is ample evidence of that.

If you were to take a quick look at the wider land trust community (and the conservation sector in general), you'd find that many of those spaces are white-dominated as well. The factors that have led to this current reality are many and varied, not the least of which is decades of institutional racism and access barriers for people of color. Another factor is that many land trusts work primarily in rural areas, which we already know have overwhelmingly white populations.

That being said, the makeup of our Hiring Committee members, many of whom are in the room today, are just one indicator that PSCC has begun to work in the right direction. But, at the risk of sounding cliché, PSCC still has a ton of work to do with diversity as well as inclusion, equity, and justice.

To the extent that some people of color may find dominated-spaces like PSCC hard to step into, we felt it was important to let any people of color who are considering applying for this position know that our current reality is not where we want to be in the future and our Board of Directors is committed to effectuating change.

PSCC HIRING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- **Goal** - We are looking to better deliver our mission by building a united group of conservation champions with the goal of helping to reflect the diversity of our state to safeguard Illinois' lands, water, and wildlife for all present and future generations to come.
- **Intent** - We look forward to hiring someone to help PSCC prepare for a culture shift as we look forward to expanding beyond our "traditional" land trust membership as well as building an operations financial reserve to support the Executive Director's initial years of employment.

- The primary responsibilities of the ED will be
 - Leadership and Coalition Building (25%)
 - Development and Fundraising (25%)
 - Communications and Education (25%)
 - Management and Administration (15%)
 - Public Policy, Government Relations, Advocacy (10%)
- Job description - As PSCC's first Executive Director, the work will be to promote a strong network of land trusts and like-minded organizations so that we may learn from one another and work cooperatively towards our common goals in conservation. Bringing new organizations and new people under the PSCC "umbrella" will be part of that success. PSCC has an annual conference 1st quarter of every year that acts as a networking opportunity as well as educational outreach, sharing of best practices, and making connections. The ED position will design and implement the annual conference. Occasionally policies that affect land trusts and land and water conservation need to be advocated for at the state and local levels. And to do all this work, funds will need to be raised to support PSCC, the staff and contractor positions, and the critically important work that PSCC and its members are doing. There is time to ramp up the fundraising as the first three years' salary of the Executive Director position has been secured.
- The Compensation Package is both competitive but also unique in that you get to choose the benefits that are most relevant to you. So, if the total selection is 100%, you get to choose up to 70% of those items – again, the ones that are most relevant to you. In other words, you customize your own benefits package within the parameters established by the board.
- This is a unique opportunity to build the structures and systems for growth of an organization with a strong vision and engaged members. Collaboratively generating a new shared vision, developing new innovative programs, building a strong team, and driving a culture of learning, service, and growth are all elements of this position. The ability to make bridges and connections and identify gaps is one of the most important requirements for this position.
- This position can work remotely to a certain extent, however there is travel involved when visiting land trusts, attending the Annual Meeting, or when required to go to Springfield for advocacy work, for example.

Application and Hiring Process

We want/need to be inclusive, welcome diversity, and avoid unconscious bias. To do this the best we can, here is the hiring process:

- Send your cover letter and resume to executivedirector@prairiestateconservation.org. Those received on or before 10/14th will be given full consideration but the position is open until filled. Early applications are strongly encouraged.
- Viv monitors that email address and will be sending you a questionnaire soon after.

- The questionnaire, cover letter and resume will be put into a private box folder where all personal information is redacted.
- The redacted information packet will be shared with the 7 member Hiring Committee who will rank them based on a standard set of criterions. Ranks will range from 1-5, with five the highest ranking.
- The rankings will be added and those applicants with the highest rankings will move forward to the first interview of two interviews.
- All interviews will be done virtually, over Zoom or Microsoft Teams (applicants' preference).
- The first set of interviews will be done by members of the Hiring Committee.
- All applicants will be asked the same questions. It is unlikely that any follow up questions will arise based on your answer except for clarifying questions.
- The hiring committee will use a standard set of criterions to rank the applicants. Those with the highest rankings (with 5 being the highest) will be asked back for a second interview.
- The second interview will be with a subset of the PSCC Board. They will also use a set of questions that will be asked of all applicants. And they will rank using the same criterion used by the Hiring Committee, with 5 being the highest ranking.
- Offers will be made to the highest- ranking candidate first, then on down the line.
- It may take some time for us to go through all these steps. As of right now, our timeframe is as follows:
 - Applications due to executivedirector@prairiestateconservation.org ideally by October 14th but will remain open until the position is filled
 - Start HC interviews October 25th and end by November 4th
 - HC finalizes candidates by November 9th
 - Finalists referred to PSCC hiring board members by 11/11th
 - PSCC hiring board members interviews the week of 11/14th
 - Finalist decided 11/18th; offer extended with answer back 11/30th
 - Start date 1/1/2023 or earlier

Contact Chair Viv Bennett at executivedirector@prairiestateconservation.org or at vbennett@tnc.org.