

Wetland Task Force Meeting - 4.30.2025

8:30 AM - 9:30 AM @ RI City Hall

Wetland Task Force Members and Key Roles

Attended meeting

- Mike Thoms - RI Mayor
- Miles Brainard - RI Community Economic Development
- Thomas Flaherty - Assistant to RI City Manager & Economic Development Director
- Todd Thompson - RI City Manager
- Sarah Hayden - RI Community Engagement Manager
- Randy Hurt - RI Second Ward Council Member
- Tanner Osing - Planning & Zoning
- Missy Gasiorowski - General contractor with Hodge construction with the development
- Nina Struss - River Health & Resiliency Organizer with Prairie Rivers Network
- Tim Pressly - Land owner
- Jon Duyvejonck - Retired Wildlife Biologist (USFWS), Sierra Club
- Kathy Wine - Executive Director at River Action

Agenda

A. Wetland Protection (easement) Options

a. **Conservation Easement with land trust** (i.e. Natural Land Institute, Prairie Land Conservancy or Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation)

i. **Process**

1. The city enters into agreement with land trust (for example, NLI) for conservation easement.
2. NLI will go through a check list during site visit(s) to determine costs and baseline assessment for property. Two appraisals are needed to understand the value of the conservation easement.
3. NLI will help write a management plan for proper function of the property.
4. NLI hires a consultant & legal team for review and development of the conservation easement agreement.
5. Estimated time for the entire process (not including creation of a wetland management plan) would be a minimum of 9-month process.
6. Once CE is secured, the site is inspected annually in perpetuity to ensure compliance, but the land trust is not responsible for care and maintenance of the site.

ii. **Considerations**

1. A wetland management plan is not required, but is strongly suggested and would be the city's responsibility.
2. The entire process for CE would potentially take 9 months, but would have to seek out an additional consultant and funds for the wetland management plan.
3. No administrative burden to the city, NLI handles all of the legal logistics.
4. Fees range from \$7,500 - \$10,000 for the CE (does not include the wetland management plan) and would fall under the city's responsibility.
5. Additional partners would be critical to ensure proper site maintenance (i.e. invasive species removal, prescribed burns, etc.) if needed.
6. A basic conservation easement (without a management plan) would provide protection in perpetuity, but would still take the same amount of time to secure.

b. **Registration as an Illinois Land and Water Reserve** (with IDNR)

- i. **Description** - "Lands and waters of Illinois that support significant natural heritage or archaeological resources qualify for this land protection tool. The agreement to

register an area as a Land and Water Reserve determines allowable uses and stipulates management objectives. Registered Reserves may be in public or private ownership. The agreement may be for a term of years or permanent. The property can be sold or passed on to heirs subject to the agreement. Land and waters permanently registered may qualify for reduced tax benefits in the form of a local property tax reduction and possibly a charitable contribution deduction on federal income taxes.”

ii. **Process**

1. Meet with Lorriane Foelske (Lead with IDNR here in QC) to discuss the full process and enter into agreement to move forward.
2. A formal commitment from the city (council vote) would be needed for Lorraine to begin work on the LWR application process and management plan.
3. Over the next 12 months, Lorraine would work collaboratively with the Task Force to develop the two documents needed to present to the commission: Proposal Document - Why important, what exists, photos, maps Management Plan.
4. Once the Proposal and Management Plan are developed, it would move forward for consideration by the commission at the May 2026 meeting. The plan would be approved for 5 years and then reassessed with the landowner.
5. Once approved by the commission, implementation of the management plan would begin, including drafting terms for a permanent conservation easement.
Signs that show the boundaries
Recreation, education that is permitted
6. Fees (before proposed to the commission): surveys, state picks it up but if landowner can pay it is easier. Hire and state can reimburse?
 - a. Title search fee? - covered by the state

iii. **Considerations**

1. LWR is not quite the level of legal protection as a nature preserve but uses are more flexible. Potential uses could include: Hunting, Hydraulic restoration/alteration, seed collection, hiking, trail maintenance/creation, species research, birding, food plot maintenance and establishment.
2. Aside from collaboration with the TF, the management plan and easement would be taken care of by IDNR.
3. Initial fees would include surveys - state can pick up this fee, but it is an easier process if the landowner can pay. Potential for reimbursement from the state. There may be a title search fee that would be covered by the state.
4. Long term management of the site would vary depending on the needs. More funding = more involvement. State does provide stewardship through staff work days like species surveys, burns, removals, etc.
5. Internal grants may be available for small projects on an annual basis - would work with a contractor and is funded through the state.
6. Recommended the City of RI dedicate some sort of recurring money, no matter how small, to have reliable funding in case there is a shortage at the state level. (trails, infrastructure, maintenance...)

B. Recommendations from TF

- a. Land & Water Reserve designation
- b. Funding for any fees not be associated with TIF

C. Open Discussion & Questions

D. Next Steps