

AN ACT concerning conservation.

**Be it enacted by the People of the State of Illinois,
represented in the General Assembly:**

Section 1. Short title. This Act may be cited as the Healthy Forests, Wetlands, and Prairies Act.

Section 5. Findings. The General Assembly finds it is in the interest of the State to encourage natural solutions as one component of the State's efforts to reduce and remediate the impacts of climate change. Natural solutions must include planting native trees and other vegetation demonstrated to reduce carbon dioxide. To accomplish this purpose, the State must offer assistance to other units of local government that are taking steps to fight climate change by restoring forests, wetlands, prairies, and other landscapes that are native to Illinois and that are demonstrated to have a positive environmental impact.

Section 10. State goal. It is the goal of the State that there be no overall net loss of the State's existing forest, prairie, or wetland acres or their functional value due to State-supported activities. Further, the State and units of local government shall preserve, enhance, and create forests, prairies, and wetlands where practical in order to mitigate

the impact of climate change and reduce carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

Section 15. Receipt of federal moneys. The Department of Natural Resources may receive federal moneys to administer a Healthy Forests, Wetlands, and Prairies Grant Program.

Section 20. Establishment of the Healthy Forests, Wetlands, and Prairies Grant Program.

(a) The Department of Natural Resources, subject to appropriation, shall establish and administer a Healthy Forests, Wetlands, and Prairies Grant Program to restore degraded forest lands and native prairies and to promote the growth of native vegetation that removes carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and helps mitigate the impact of climate change.

(b) Entities that may apply to participate in the Healthy Forests, Wetlands, and Prairies Grant Program include:

(1) State agencies and units of local government, including, but not limited to, municipalities, townships, counties, forest preserves, and park districts;

(2) conservation land trusts;

(3) not-for-profit entities with conservation missions, including, but not limited to, climate change mitigation, preservation of natural lands, and conservation of the State's natural resources; and

(4) other entities that, because of their missions, are determined by the Department to be eligible recipients of the grants under this Act.

(c) At least 75% of the moneys appropriated for the Healthy Forests, Wetlands, and Prairies Grant Program shall be awarded to the State agencies, units of local government, land trusts, and other entities that the Department determines are eligible for a grant under this Section. The Department may use an amount not to exceed 23% of the moneys appropriated for the Program for the purposes of restoring degraded forest lands and native prairies and to promote the growth of native vegetation that remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and help mitigate the impact of climate change. The Department may use an amount not to exceed 2% of the moneys appropriated for the Healthy Forests, Wetlands, and Prairies Grant Program for administrative costs associated with the Program.

(d) The Department shall adopt any rules necessary for the implementation of this Act, including rules establishing requirements and timeframes for the submission of grant applications by entities that are authorized to apply to participate in the Healthy Forests, Wetlands, and Prairies Grant Program.

(e) Grants provided under this Act may be used by eligible entities for the purpose of:

(1) matching funds for federal or private dollars for projects that forward the goal of climate change

mitigation through promotion of the management, planting, maintaining, and preserving of native grasses, plants, and trees;

(2) financing projects along roadways and in parks and forest preserves on public or private lands to plant native trees and prairie grasses demonstrated to absorb carbon;

(3) financing projects that promote the stewardship of existing public and private urban forests and natural lands, including the removal of invasive or nonnative plant species;

(4) funding regional teams tasked with planting native prairie grasses and trees, prescribed burning for the maintenance of natural lands, removing invasive plant species, and educational outreach; and

(5) promoting education and marketing regarding local projects or steps community members may take to promote the growth of native vegetation that removes carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

Section 25. Healthy Forests, Wetlands, and Prairies Grant Fund. The Healthy Forest, Wetlands, and Prairies Grant Fund shall be administered by the Department of Natural Resources. The Fund may receive moneys appropriated by the General Assembly or from the federal government, private donations, or any other legal source. Subject to the limitations in

subsection (c) of Section 20 of this Act, moneys in the Fund shall be used by the Department for the purpose of providing grant assistance in accordance with this Act and for the purpose of administering the grant program established under this Act.

Section 90. The Department of Natural Resources Act is amended by changing Section 1-15 as follows:

(20 ILCS 801/1-15)

Sec. 1-15. General powers and duties.

(a) It shall be the duty of the Department to investigate practical problems, implement studies, conduct research and provide assistance, information and data relating to the technology and administration of the natural history, entomology, zoology, and botany of this State; the geology and natural resources of this State; the water and atmospheric resources of this State; and the archeological and cultural history of this State.

(b) The Department (i) shall obtain, store, and process relevant data; recommend technological, administrative, and legislative changes and developments; cooperate with other federal, state, and local governmental research agencies, facilities, or institutes in the selection of projects for study; cooperate with the Board of Higher Education and with the public and private colleges and universities in this State

in developing relevant interdisciplinary approaches to problems; and evaluate curricula at all levels of education and provide assistance to instructors and (ii) may sponsor an annual conference of leaders in government, industry, health, and education to evaluate the state of this State's environment and natural resources.

(c) The Director, in accordance with the Personnel Code, shall employ such personnel, provide such facilities, and contract for such outside services as may be necessary to carry out the purposes of the Department. Maximum use shall be made of existing federal and state agencies, facilities, and personnel in conducting research under this Act.

(c-5) The Department may use the services of, and enter into necessary agreements with, outside entities for the purpose of evaluating grant applications and for the purpose of administering or monitoring compliance with grant agreements. Contracts under this subsection shall not exceed 5 ~~2~~ years, without an executed extension in length.

(d) In addition to its other powers, the Department has the following powers:

(1) To obtain, store, process, and provide data and information related to the powers and duties of the Department under this Act. This subdivision (d)(1) does ~~not~~ give authority to the Department to require reports from nongovernmental sources or entities.

(2) To cooperate with and support the Illinois Science

and Technology Advisory Committee and the Illinois Coalition for the purpose of facilitating the effective operations and activities of such entities. Support may include, but need not be limited to, providing space for the operations of the Committee and the Illinois Coalition.

(e) The Department is authorized to make grants to local not-for-profit organizations for the purposes of development, management, maintenance, and study of wetland areas, forests, prairies, and other landscapes demonstrated to reduce the impact of climate change.

(f) The Department has the authority to accept, receive and administer on behalf of the State any gifts, bequests, donations, income from property rental and endowments. Any such funds received by the Department shall be deposited into the DNR Special Projects Fund, a trust fund in the State treasury, and used for the purposes of this Act or, when appropriate, for such purposes and under such restrictions, terms and conditions as are predetermined by the donor or grantor of such funds or property. Any accrued interest from money deposited into the DNR Special Projects Fund shall be reinvested into the Fund and used in the same manner as the principal. The Director shall maintain records which account for and assure that restricted funds or property are disbursed or used pursuant to the restrictions, terms or conditions of the donor.

(g) The Department shall recognize, preserve, and promote our special heritage of recreational hunting and trapping by providing opportunities to hunt and trap in accordance with the Wildlife Code.

(h) Within 5 years after the effective date of this amendatory Act of the 102nd General Assembly, the Department shall fly a United States Flag, an Illinois flag, and a POW/MIA flag at all State parks. Donations may be made by groups and individuals to the DNR Special Projects Fund for costs related to the implementation of this subsection.

(Source: P.A. 102-388, eff. 1-1-22; 102-699, eff. 4-19-22; 103-363, eff. 7-28-23.)

Section 95. The State Finance Act is amended by adding Section 5.1015 as follows:

(30 ILCS 105/5.1015 new)

Sec. 5.1015. The Healthy Forests, Wetlands, and Prairies Grant Fund.