



**NEWS FROM MADISON COUNTY  
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT  
157 N Main, Edwardsville, IL 62025  
Frank Miles –Administrator**

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**For Immediate Release:**

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### **MADISON COUNTY A LEADER IN CONSERVATION INITIATIVES THROUGHOUT SOUTHWESTERN ILLINOIS**

**Edwardsville-** This Earth Day 2008, Madison County Planning and Development Administrator Frank Miles, released a report about the many programs and projects that Madison County has undertaken to protect and enhance the environment. In fact, the County was recently named a finalist in the National Association of Counties Conservation Leadership Awards.

Miles said that Madison County has been a leader in conservation and environmental management initiatives for many years. Both Chairman Dunstan and the County Board should be commended for the leadership they have provided throughout the years to promote environmental programs.” Miles said, “sure we have a comprehensive recycling and solid waste management program, but there are other areas that the County has went out far ahead in environmental excellence.”

Miles said that “ever since 1993, the County has developed and implemented a comprehensive Conservation Initiative Program to address several problems and needs that were evident after the Great Flood of 1993. The County developed several components that make up multiple conservation initiatives to solve problems and to build on the synergistic effect of each component. The initiatives are essentially, the Ecological Restoration Program, the Metro-east Park and Recreation District, Stormwater Management Program, support for the Confluence Greenway, supporting the Madison County Trails Network and Resource Planning for Future Growth.

The Great Flood of 1993 captured the nations’ attention and wreaked havoc in Madison Co. However even greater flooding occurred in the years that followed. Since 1993 the area received Presidential Disaster Declarations for flooding four times. As a result, a regional study was undertaken by the St. Louis District of the Army Corps of Engineers to solve the flooding problems of the county. The study concluded the need to reestablish the natural ecosystem of the historic stream systems in the American Bottom. This \$240,000,000 plan titled the E. St. Louis and Vicinity Ecological Restoration Plan requires local units of government to acquire the necessary land rights to implement the recommendations. In the past three years, the county has acquired over 60 acres of land needed to implement the first project in the plan.

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This first project will recreate the Old Cahokia Creek and riparian forest corridor that was eliminated with the drainage of the bottomland before the 1900's. Funding for the land acquisition to date has been a joint effort between the IDNR Conservation 2000 program and a financial commitment from Madison County.

To help accelerate the solutions to stormwater and general interior flooding in the County, the county sought enabling legislation to provide the authority and funding to implement comprehensive stormwater solutions. This enabling legislation was passed by the legislature under Senator William Haine's leadership and was signed into law by the Governor in 2005. Last year, Board Chairman Alan Dunstan, established a Stormwater Commission that is based on this new legislation. The legislation calls for a comprehensive stormwater management plan to be developed that includes funding based on either a referendum based sales tax or property tax. The plan will use natural systems to solve the stormwater issues. The county also provides a Stormwater management office, under the guidance of the Planning and Development Department, which provides advice and coordination for stormwater issues throughout the entire metro-east. The office coordinates stream cleanups, educational outreach and works with other county agencies and the state to manage stormwater issues in the county.

Building on the need for flood control and to provide for open space and trails for an expanding population, the County also participated in a legislative effort to create a new regional park and recreation district mechanism with a funding stream based on a sales tax. This new district, called the Metro East Parks and Recreation District, was created by referendum in 2000. The funding for this new district is based on a 1/10<sup>th</sup> cent sales tax. By statute 50% of the funds are directed to local park and recreation districts and 50% is held by the regional district to be used for open space, trails and greenways, natural areas, wetland and floodplains. Most funds are leveraged with state and federal resources.

Madison County is also a partner in the regional Confluence Greenway, which is in partnership with the Trust for Public Land, along with 4 other not-for-profit organizations. Madison County has a representative on the board of the Southwestern Illinois RC&D – Dr. Hal Patton, which is one of the five partnering organizations that make up the Greenway. A signature project in the Greenway is Chouteau Island, a three island complex in the Mississippi River totaling 5,500 acres. In the Great Flood of 1993 the entire 3 island complex was entirely under water. A Master Plan was developed that utilized unique funding partners to leverage local resources. Working with the City of Madison, Illinois, a goal for the Greenway is to acquire all 5,500 acres of the island and make it available for public open space that includes hunting, fishing, boating, trails (hiking, biking, and equestrian) and primitive camping.

Another part of the county's conservation initiative, is the development of a vast network of biking and hiking trails throughout the county. Under the leadership of Jerry Kane of the Madison County Transit District and the MEPRD, this system of trails has been steadily developed over the past 10 years.

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As a result Madison County now has over 100 miles of improved trails that connect most of the county's communities. This trail network is the most expansive trail system in the entire St. Louis region. The trails of the county were developed through a unique partnership under the direction of Madison County Transit, the county's public transportation agency and was the early entity to acquire the abandoned rail corridors in the county.

This early vision has led to the extensive trail system that exists today. Funding to develop the trail network has been primarily through the both the federal Transportation Enhancement Program and the Congestion Mitigation Air Quality Program (CMAQ). In addition the IDNR Bikeways program has been used for a local match.

The most recent initiative undertaken by the County is a visioning process that involved the cities of Edwardsville and Glen Carbon. The effort is titled the "I-55 Corridor Project". This project was conceived by Madison County and the partnering communities to jointly plan for growth in a corridor that is experiencing rapid urban development. The idea was to collaborate together instead of fighting as to what happens to growth in this area. It was also recognized that uniform development standards need to be developed. All parties also agreed that the natural resources are an asset and need to be protected before development plans are approved. This area contains a unique and significant wooded bottomland hardwood forest corridor. The Silver Creek corridor is an intact riparian forest corridor that is currently privately owned. The goal of the I-55 Corridor plan is to protect this significant forested corridor and to serve as a natural flood storage corridor. The County, in cooperation with the partnering cities, completed a contract of a strategic analysis to determine the extent of the area that needs protection and the available programs that can be used to protect this corridor.

In addition to the I-55 corridor resource planning effort the County has expanded its efforts and is currently evaluating the resource conditions of the I-255 corridor through the northern portion of the county. This effort will provide the necessary information to decision and policy makers to help protect the resources in this developing area before the development occurs and will provide for natural corridor protection that link habitats.

Miles said that "future projects will include wetland management, flood mitigation programs and further partnerships with Lewis and Clark Community College, the National Great Rivers Research Center, SIUE and other regional organizations. These conservation initiatives provide inter-related benefits and begin to address the many natural resource problems that have plagued the County. It also lays the foundation to avoid these problems in the future".