

Conservation Stewardship Program

Summary: The Conservation Stewardship Program is administered by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) and provides significant property tax incentives for owners interested in preserving and enhancing the land's natural qualities. It is a 10-year program, not a permanent one.

Qualifying Lands: Eligible land for this preferential assessment includes woodlands, prairies, wetlands or other undeveloped land that is not used for any residential or commercial purposes. A minimum of five acres is required for enrollment. Land already under conservation easement is eligible, but land under other preferential assessment systems such as Illinois Nature Preserve designation is not eligible.

Important Details: Landowners are required to submit an application to the IDNR along with a Conservation Stewardship Plan. This plan includes basic information about the property, but also must specify conservation and management practices which are designed to preserve and/or restore the land. Plans approved under this program will be reviewed by IDNR staff every 10 years and can be re-approved at that time. The sale or transfer of properties enrolled does not affect the valuation of the land unless the acreage requirement is not met or the land use changes. Notification of approval is provided by the IDNR to the Illinois Department of Revenue for property assessment purposes, which then notifies the County Assessor.

Status in Lake County: As of November 2008, there are at least five properties in Lake County that have been approved for the program.

Benefits to Landowners: A great many landowners are already practicing good stewardship, and this program rewards them for their efforts with a significant property tax reduction. It also inspires additional landowners to manage their land for ecological improvement without having to make a permanent commitment.

Tax Incentives: Property for which a stewardship plan is approved by IDNR staff will be valued at 5% of market value instead of the standard 33% assessment. This is equivalent to an 83% property tax savings. There is no penalty for withdrawal from the program before the 10 years has ended. However, property taxes will revert to the rates existing before enrollment. There are no income or estate tax benefits.