

Illinois Nature Preserve/Nature Preserve Buffer/Land and Water Reserve

Summary: The Illinois Nature Preserve designation is the strongest form of land protection in Illinois. Land that is designated as such can in almost no situation ever be developed. In fact, the Illinois Natural Areas Preservation Act provides criminal and civil penalties for violations. The Illinois Nature Preserves Commission also offers two other designations that offer lesser protection.

Qualifying Lands: High quality natural areas are the only ones eligible for full Illinois Nature Preserve designation, and landowners must be committed to the idea of permanent protection. The land must contain ecosystems that have retained a significant amount of their land, soil, plant and animal communities dating back to pre-settlement times. A landowner who has recently converted property to native prairie, for example, would not qualify.

Important Details: High quality natural areas can be considered for Nature Preserve status by submitting a nomination for the property to the nine-member Illinois Nature Preserves Commission (INPC). If a property is approved for Nature Preserve status by the Commission, it must also be approved by the Governor and the Director of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources as well. Natural lands that are dedicated as nature preserves by the INPC may only be used for hiking, wildlife viewing, nature photography, and approved scientific research. Any activities and access at nature preserves must receive the permission of the landowner.

Status in Lake County: There are 27 Nature Preserves in Lake County, totaling over 1,500 acres.

Benefits to Landowners: The major benefit for landowners is they know their property is strongly protected from all sorts of possible negative changes to its natural qualities and beauty. There are also significant tax incentives.

Tax Incentives: If land becomes designated as an Illinois Nature Preserve, it is assessed at \$1/year in perpetuity. This is the lowest property tax rate available for any taxable lands.

Nature Preserve Buffer Areas: Properties that are near Illinois Nature Preserves are eligible for this lower level designation. Buffer areas must protect, provide access to or otherwise serve as a necessary adjunct to a nature preserve or registered natural area, or because in the opinion of the Commission it will, with protection, become a natural area suitable for dedication as a nature preserve in the future. An area may be dedicated as a buffer area in the same manner as provided for the dedication of a nature preserve. A dedicated buffer area has the same status and protection as a nature preserve, except in the case of eminent domain, which a state nature preserve is exempt from but a nature preserve buffer is not.

Land and Water Reserves: Areas designated as land and water reserves are ecologically quite similar to those designated as nature preserves, but allow for hunting, fishing and other approved activities that do not harm or change the natural features of the protected area. The approval process for land and water reserve designation is similar to that of Illinois nature preserves, but requires only the approval of the Commission, the Director of the DNR, and not the Governor. The permission of the landowner is needed for any activities and access at land and water reserves