

Congress 2022 Schedule

12:00 PM	Registration/Check-in
1:00 PM	<p>Welcome:</p> <p>Land Acknowledgement: Bradford Kasberg, <i>Argonne National Laboratory, Citizen of the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma</i></p> <p>John Rogner, <i>Illinois Depart of Natural Resources</i></p> <p>Keynote: Debra Shore <i>Regional Administrator, U.S. EPA Region 5</i></p> <p>President's Award: Colleen Callahan, <i>Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and Director, Il Department of Natural Resources</i></p>
1:55 PM	<p>State of Chicago Wilderness and The Green Vision Initiatives</p> <p>Elizabeth Kessler, <i>Chair, Chicago Wilderness Alliance and Executive Director, McHenry County Conservation District</i></p>
2:05 PM	<p>Mainstage Panel:</p> <p>Celebrating Conservation Successes and Looking Forward</p>
2:55 PM	BREAK
3:15 PM	Exploring the Region: Field Trips Coming in 2023
3:20 PM	<p>Once-in-a-Generation: Federal Funding Opportunities</p> <p>Shalini Vajjhala, <i>Founder and CEO, re:focus partners</i></p>
3:35 PM	Exploring the Region: Field Trips Coming in 2023
3:40 PM	<p>Mainroom Panel:</p> <p>Mentoring New Leaders in Conservation Careers</p>
5:00 PM	SOCIAL HOUR BEGINS
5:30 PM	<p>Networking Conversations Begin</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Green Vision Initiatives Data and Mapping (Room D) Once-in-a-Generation Federal Funding (Room E) Mentoring New Leaders in Conservation Careers (Room F)
6:30 PM	End of Day

Panels

Celebrating Conservation Successes and Looking Forward

Moderated by Amy Rosenthal, The Field Museum

Panelists:

- Dani Abboud, *Brushwood Center at Ryerson Woods*
- Tim Brennan, *The Farm Foundation*
- Cathy Geraghty, *The Forest Preserves of Cook County*
- Ted Haffner
- Mark Johnston, *The Field Museum*
- Sara Race, *ComEd*
- Matthew Santagata, *Openlands*
- Pati Vitt, *Lake County Forest Preserves*

Mentoring New Leaders in Conservation Careers

Moderated by Mila K. Marshall

Panelists

- Cesar Almeida, *Faith in Place*
- Katie Fleming, *Openlands*
- Mike Gleister, *Magnolia Land Partners, LLC*
- Debby Moskovits, *Field Museum (retired)*
- Arnold Randall, *Forest Preserves of Cook County*

Masters of Ceremony:

Mila K. Marshall, Nathanael Pilla, and Lucia Whalen

Congress 2022 Speaker Biographies

John Roger

Assistant Director, Illinois Department of Natural Resources

John Rogner has had a career in government spanning over 3 decades and including both federal and state natural resource agencies. He started his career with the US Army Corps of Engineers in Chicago, eventually serving as Chief of the Regulatory Branch which regulates activities in wetlands and other waters. From there he moved to the Chicago Field Office of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, serving as Field Office Supervisor, Coordinator of the Upper Midwest And Great Lakes Landscape Conservation Cooperative, and finally as Project Manager for the establishment of the Hackmatack and Kankakee National Wildlife Refuges. He also chaired the Chicago Wilderness Steering Committee and Executive Council for 10 years. After his retirement from federal service in 2018, Rogner was nominated by Governor JB Pritzker to serve as Assistant Director of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, a position he currently holds.



Keynote: Debra Shore

Regional Administrator, U.S. EPA Region 5

Debra Shore, US EPA Region 5 administrator and Chicago Wilderness Congress 2022 keynote speaker. We are thrilled to announce our keynote speaker, Debra Shore. She is the regional administrator for U.S. EPA Region 5. Her responsibilities include overseeing environmental protection efforts in the Great Lakes states of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin, as well as 35 federally recognized tribal nations. One of her roles is manager of EPA's Great Lakes National Program, in which she leads restoration and protection of the largest freshwater system in the world. Prior to joining EPA, Shore was an elected member of the Board of Commissioners of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago.

Also an award-winning author, Shore founded Chicago Wilderness magazine, was a leader in the creation of Chicago Wilderness, and founded Friends of the Forest Preserves. Shore has been an active habitat restoration volunteer in oak woods and savannas, prairies and wetlands of local forest preserves for more than 25 years.



Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (MAFWA) President's Award: Colleen Callahan

MAFWA President and Director, Illinois Department of Natural Resources

Appointed by Gov. J.B. Pritzker in 2019, Callahan brings a wealth of professional and public service experience to the department. Prior to her appointment to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Callahan served as state director of Illinois' Rural Development for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Appointed by President Barack Obama, Callahan managed a 20 percent reduction in staffing at Rural Development while, at the same time, generating a \$1 billion increase in the Illinois loan portfolio. Callahan's success as Illinois' director for Rural Development led the agency to ask her to train other Rural Development state offices.



Photo Credit: University Illinois, The News Gazette

Congress 2022 Speaker Biographies

Elizabeth Kessler

Chair, Chicago Wilderness Alliance and Executive Director, McHenry County Conservation District

Kessler has dedicated her 35-plus year career to parks, recreation and conservation, a field she has immersed herself in wholeheartedly with tireless effort, unending enthusiasm, and forward-thinking leadership. During her tenure in McHenry, she has overseen a successful \$73 million, voter-approved referendum, the protection of 5,600 acres of land, the opening of 14 sites with public access and outdoor amenities, the addition of 12 miles of regional trails, the welcoming of over 1 million annual site visitors, and the opening of the Lost Valley Visitor Center, the county's first gold-level LEED-certified public building. Kessler has served at the regional, state, and national levels including President of the National Recreation and Park Association. Currently, she is an advisor to the McHenry County Conservation Foundation, sits on the board of Naturally McHenry County, is a fellow of the American Academy of Park and Recreation Administration and serves as chair of Chicago Wilderness.



Facilitated Discussion: Once-in-A-Generation Federal Funding Opportunities

Shalini Vajjhala,

Founder and CEO of re:focus partners

Shalini Vajjhala is a nationally recognized infrastructure expert with two decades of experience designing and financing community-centered resilient infrastructure solutions. She has testified before the US Senate on the costs of climate change and created national partnerships to leverage insurance for coastal protection, improve procurement of green infrastructure, and provide technical assistance to communities to reduce disaster risk through nature-based solutions. Before starting re:focus partners, Vajjhala served as Special Representative in the Office of Administrator Lisa Jackson at the US EPA. Previously, she served as Deputy Assistant Administrator in the Office of International & Tribal Affairs at EPA and as Deputy Associate Director for Energy and Climate at the White House Council on Environmental Quality. She joined the Obama Administration from Resources for the Future, where she was awarded a patent for her climate adaptation mapping work. Vajjhala received her PhD in Engineering & Public Policy and B.Arch in Architecture from Carnegie Mellon University.



Bradford Kasberg

is a citizen of the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma and alum of the Masters of Landscape Architecture program at the University of Michigan

A citizen of the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma and an alum of the Masters of Landscape Architecture program at the University of Michigan, Bradford brings a design-focused, intercultural approach to restoration science at the landscape level. He was an Invasive Plant Management Crew Leader with the Cleveland Metroparks and a consultant in geospatial research and ecological design. He is committed to revitalizing the practice of traditional ecological knowledge and its role in ecological restoration for his community and other indigenous communities in the Midwest.

Congress 2022 Masters of Ceremony

Masters of Ceremony

Chicago Wilderness Congress's mainstage is hosted by three dynamic Masters of Ceremonies. Not only are our MCs engaging on their own, they are each conservation professionals contributing to our region.

Mila K. Marshall works to mobilize and energize diverse networks across Illinois around clean water issues related to wastewater, agriculture and industry. She advocates for novel partnerships that protect the quality of streams, lakes, rivers, and Illinois tributaries for all. Furthermore she addresses the legacies of water infrastructure disinvestment by building bridges towards solutions through connecting and educating the scientific and legislative communities at the city, county and state levels.

Twitter (@greenkels), Instagram & Facebook (@herbandplanning)



Nathanael J. Pilla is a botanist for Orbis Environmental Consulting who previously worked with Save the Dunes and the Indiana Dunes National Park. He is well versed in the terrestrial and aquatic flora of the Chicago region bringing his knowledge and charisma with him in and outside the workplace. He has experience in botanical research and identification, hands-on resource management, project management and plant identification, and his written work has appeared in many peer-reviewed journals.

Instagram (@botany_and_beer)

Lucia Whalen is an environmental communications specialist currently working at Openlands and a Chicago-born and bred comedian, writer, and concerned citizen. Her clever, feminist perspective paired with a shameless storytelling style has made her a favorite to audiences all over the country. She has opened for Dave Attell, Chad Daniels, and SNL's Sasheer Zamata, to name a few. Lucia has contributed to The New Yorker and is a cohost of the environmental comedy podcast What a Waste. Her biggest credit is that she once made Al Gore laugh.

Instagram (@luciawhelen), luciawhelenworks.com



Interested in being part of the exciting Chicago Wilderness Alliance Green Vision Initiatives?
[Sign up to get more information about what's coming next for the goal teams.](#)

Learn More about the Green Vision Initiatives

- Managing Healthy Landscapes
- Growing with Agriculture
- Prioritizing Green Infrastructure
- Protecting Landscapes for Biodiversity Conservation
- Increasing Equitable Access to Nature
- Taking Climate Action
- Protecting Healthy Water



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