We save land. We save rivers.

Environmental Summit 2026:

A River Runs Through:

Exploring the Ecological and Community Impacts of Dam Removal on Local Waterways

Thursday, November 12, 8:30-12pm | Virtual



What happens when we give rivers room to flow again?

For generations, dams have shaped our local waterways, supporting industry and communities. Today, communities across the country are taking a closer look at removing these structures —and the results can be remarkable. Free-flowing rivers can create healthier habitat for fish and wildlife, improve water quality, address aging infrastructure and safety concerns, and open new opportunities for recreation and connection with nature.

This year's Environmental Summit will explore the ecological and community impacts of dam removal through local stories. Presenters will share science and research on rivers and watersheds where nature is rebounding, explore what dam removal can mean for local communities, and discuss how we can balance ecological restoration with the needs and concerns of the people who live, work and play along our waterways. **Join us to discover how restoring the natural flow of our rivers can benefit both people and nature—and what these changes could mean for our own communities.**

Learning Objectives:

- **Describe the ecological and wildlife benefits associated with dam removal**, including potential impacts on river and stream health.
- **Identify key ecological, social, and community considerations involved in dam removal decisions**, including the need to balance different interests and priorities.
- **Recognize examples of dam removal projects in Northeast Illinois** and describe their local ecological and community impacts.

AGENDA

8:30am **Welcome Remarks by Brook & Sponsors**
Brook McDonald, President & CEO | The Conservation Foundation
Saba Haider, Environmental Committee Chair | DuPage County Board
Barb Szczepaniak, Vice President for Programs | DuPage Foundation

8:45am **STORY: The Conservation Foundation's Role in Protecting Rivers and Streams**
Brook McDonald, President & CEO | The Conservation Foundation

Brook will provide an overview of how The Conservation Foundation builds partnerships and coalitions to protect and restore rivers and streams—including, when appropriate, the removal of dams. Drawing on his 30+ year tenure at TCF, Brook will share his perspective on balancing ecological priorities with the needs and values of local communities. He will also reflect on lessons from this work and how future communities can apply them as they seek thoughtful, collaborative ways to enhance quality of life and strengthen the places they call home.

8:55am **Introductions to the Morning**
Amy Phillips, DuPage County Programs Director | The Conservation Foundation

9:00am **PRESENTATION: Rivers Reconnected: The Story of Dam Removal Across the U.S.**
Sara Burns, Associate Director, River Restoration | American Rivers
Explore inspiring examples of dam removal from across the country and discover how communities are restoring rivers, creating healthier habitat for wildlife, and reconnecting people with their waterways.

9:30am **STORIES: Nature Rebounding at a Watershed Scale**
Steve Pescitelli, Retired Fish Biologist | Illinois Department of Natural Resources

This talk will focus on dam removal benefits on a larger watershed scale using examples from studies on the Des Plaines River and Blackberry Creek. The Des Plaines River is a larger stream where 11 low head dams were removed, which combined with water quality improvements, resulted in rather remarkable restoration story for a historically degraded urban river. Removal of a dam at the mouth of Blackberry Creek allowed recolonization by many fish species on a moderately sized tributary to the Fox River. The dam was in place for over 100 years and its

removal helps demonstrate the importance of connectivity for maintaining fish species richness and stream quality in smaller tributary streams.

10:00am **BREAK with VIDEOS: Nature Rebounding at Fullersburg Woods**
Clips by Jonathan Mullen, Social Media Strategist | Forest Preserve District DuPage County

10:20am **PANEL: Dam Removal in Our Backyard: What Have We Learned?**
Deanna Doohaluk, Watershed Project Manager | The Conservation Foundation
Jennifer Rooks Lopez, Director of Planning and Land Protection | Forest Preserve District of Kane County
John Quail, Director of Policy and Conservation | Friends of the Chicago River
Sarah Hunn, Director | DuPage County Stormwater Management

Hear from local experts about dam removal projects happening across our region. Explore the benefits, challenges, and lessons learned—from restoring river health and wildlife habitat to considering recreation, history, and community needs.

11:15am **STORY: The River We Fought For**
Janine Prorok | River Rats

A community's 16-year journey to remove a dam, restore its river, and reclaim a place for people and nature. Through stories and images, discover why neighbors organized, what they fought for, and how the river—and the community—have changed.

11:30am **PRESENTATION: Two Sides of the River: Balancing Community & Conservation**
Marty Melchior, Principal Geomorphologist/River Ecologist | Inter-Fluve

Removing a dam is about more than the river. Explore how communities are balancing the ecological benefits of healthy, free-flowing waterways with recreation, history, and the places people value—while finding a path forward that considers both people and nature.

12:00pm **End & Wrap Up**

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About our Speakers

Listed alphabetically by last name:

Sara Burns, Associate Director, River Restoration | American Rivers' Great Lakes Region



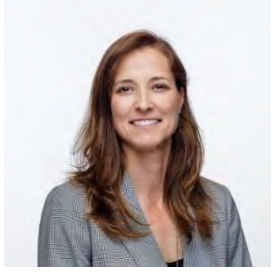
Sara has a meandering professional career that started on an AmeriCorps field crew in the Pacific Northwest, moved through organic vegetable farming in Michigan, utility forestry in Chicago, and working on river and watershed restoration via dam removal, nature based solutions, climate resilience, and community partnership with The Nature Conservancy in MA and most recently Duck's Unlimited Great Lakes Atlantic Region.

Deanna Doohaluk, Senior Watershed Project Manager | The Conservation Foundation



Deanna Doohaluk is a Watershed Project Manager with The Conservation Foundation and fulltime staff to the DuPage River Salt Creek Workgroup (DRSCW), Lower DuPage River Watershed Coalition, and Lower Des Plaines Watershed Group. She has over 25 years' experience in water resource management in both the public and private sector. Ms. Doohaluk serves as project manager of the Master Plan for Salt Creek at Fullersburg Woods which includes the removal of the Graue Mill dam and the restoration of 1.25 miles of Salt Creek. She also worked on the development of the Nutrient Assessment and Reduction Plans (NARP) aimed at identifying phosphorus reductions by point source and nonpoint sources and other measures to improve the water quality in the Lower Des Plaines River, DuPage River and Salt Creek watersheds. Ms. Doohaluk has a Masters of Public Health in Environmental Health Sciences from the University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina and a BS in Environmental Science from Mercer University, Macon, Georgia.

Sarah Hunn, Director | DuPage County Stormwater Management



Sarah Hunn received her Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering from Michigan Technological University in 2002. She began her career at the Illinois Department of Transportation and has worked for DuPage County for the past 21 years, currently serving as Director of the Stormwater Management Department. In this role, Sarah leads nearly 40 staff members, oversees the operation of 19 flood control facilities and manages flood control and water quality projects countywide.

Brook McDonald, President & CEO | The Conservation Foundation



Since 1996, Brook McDonald has been the President and Chief Executive Officer for The Conservation Foundation, a private not-for-profit land and watershed conservation group based in Naperville, Illinois. The Conservation Foundation focuses on land preservation and watershed protection in the outlying Chicago counties of DuPage, Kane, Kendall, and Will. Mr. McDonald received his M.S. from The Ohio State University in Natural Resources and his B.S. from Otterbein College, Westerville, Ohio in Life Sciences. It is through his leadership that The Conservation Foundation has thrived for the past 28 years and embraced the aspirations of Conservation 2.0.

Marty Melchior, Principal Geomorphologist/River Ecologist | Inter-Fluve



Marty has over 30 years of professional experience in river restoration and fluvial geomorphology. He is one of Inter-Fluve's senior restoration scientists, having completed over 80 dam removals and over 600 river assessment and restoration projects to date. He specializes in river restoration design, dam removal, bioengineering, forensic geomorphology, and engineered wood applications. Marty has served on state and federal workgroups developing standards of practice for dam removal design and sediment management for dam removal projects.

Steve Pescitelli, Retired Fish Biologist | Illinois Department of Natural Resources



Stephen Pescitelli is retired from ILDNR Division of Fisheries where he spent over 30 years as Streams Biologist in Northeastern Illinois covering the Fox, Kankakee, Des Plaines, DuPage and Chicago River Systems. In addition to monitoring and researching fish assemblages in rivers and tributary streams, he managed sport fisheries, and was active in outreach and stream restoration with many local partners. His primary focus was on restoring stream connectivity through dam removal and fish passage. He also co-authored a field guide titled "Fishes of the Chicago Region", released in 2025.

Amy Phillips, DuPage County Program Director | The Conservation Foundation



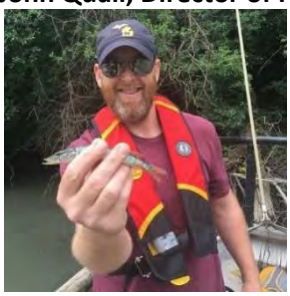
Amy supports, creates, and coordinates conservation programming tailored to community needs in DuPage County. She is responsible for building relationships with local leaders, municipalities, and communities, coordinating stormwater outreach programming, leading the DuPage Nature Rx Coalition, and curating the DuPage Environmental Summit each year. Amy is an accomplished public speaker, facilitator program manager, and strategic thinker. Amy holds advanced degrees in Biomimicry, Business Administration, and Architecture.

Jennifer Rooks Lopez, Director of Planning and Land Protection | Forest Preserve District of Kane County



As the Director of Planning, she oversees land acquisition, design, capital planning, and construction of existing and future preserves. In this role she serves a diverse county population of over 500,000, including the protection and management of over 24,000 acres, ten (10) Illinois State Nature Preserves, and five (5) Historic sites. She has over 17 years planning and project management experience in public sector parks and recreation. Prior to joining the park and recreation field in 2009, she worked for the landscape architecture and planning firms; Wood and Partners, Inc of Hilton Head Island, SC and the Hitchcock Design Group, Ltd. in Naperville, IL, where she managed land planning, construction and landscape design projects throughout the south-east and mid-west. Jennifer holds a Bachelor degree in Landscape Architecture from the University of Georgia and is a Certified Park and Recreation Professional (CPRP) and LEED AP.

John Quail, Director of Policy and Conservation | Friends of the Chicago River



John Quail, is the director of policy and conservation for Friends of the Chicago River. He has worked for over 25 years at Friends identifying potential areas for restoration or habitat improvement, managing Friends' restoration and habitat strategy, and coordinating Friends policy efforts. This work has resulted in hundreds of acres of restored land and riparian improvements throughout the Chicago River system, reconnecting the waterway through the removal of 4 dams, and recreational access points throughout the city and suburbs. He also coordinates Friends advocacy efforts aimed at improving water quality, creating equitable access, and protecting the Chicago-Calumet River system for all people, water, and wildlife. He possesses an extensive knowledge of the natural and human geography of the watershed, having developed many relationships and an understanding of the cultures of different agencies and municipalities over his tenure with Friends. In 2025 he was recognized as a Chicago Wilderness Force of Nature. He has a degree in environmental policy and behavior from the University of Michigan.