

DNR Director Colleen Callahan announces departure Callahan First Woman To Lead IDNR Steps Down

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SPRINGFIELD – Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) Director Colleen Callahan will step down from her post on Jan. 16 after nearly four years leading the state agency charged with managing, conserving and protecting Illinois’ natural and cultural resources.

Callahan has served as director since March 1, 2019, when she was appointed by Gov. JB Pritzker. During that time, she guided the agency through a global pandemic, which resulted in millions of visitors seeking to nurture their physical and mental health in the outdoors at Illinois’ nearly 400 state parks, natural areas, and historic sites.

During her time at IDNR, Callahan oversaw efforts to develop a strategic plan for the agency, with a focus on positioning IDNR as a leader on reducing the state's carbon footprint and mitigating the effects of climate change. A climate action plan is currently under review and set to be released in early 2023.

Callahan also ushered the agency into a new era of diversity, equity and inclusion, and she led the launch of Copi – a new brand name for invasive carp designed to spark consumer interest in the plentiful fish found in Illinois waterways.

Since IDNR's Enhanced Contract Fishing Program was established in 2019, commercial fishers have removed more than 9.4 million pounds of invasive carp from the Illinois River. In 2022, Callahan advocated for IDNR to receive its largest state budget in 20 years to address long overdue improvements at state sites and to offer the largest round of Open Space Land Acquisition and Development (OSLAD) grants in the history of the agency. Also during her tenure at IDNR, Callahan was named president of the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (MAFWA) and vice president of the national Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA).

Prior to her appointment as IDNR director, Callahan served as state director of Illinois' Rural Development for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. She broke glass ceilings in broadcast media as the first female agribusiness director for WMBD Radio and Television in Peoria. Her 30-year career at WMBD led her to the National Association of Farm Broadcasters, where she served as the first female president of the organization and was the first woman inducted into their Hall of Fame.

Callahan is a graduate of the University of Illinois with a degree in agriculture communications. She and her husband, Dick, raise cattle and grow corn and soybeans on their farm in Peoria County. IDNR manages nearly 400 state parks, recreational and natural areas, historic sites, the Illinois State Museum, and the World Shooting and Recreational Complex.

The agency's offices and divisions include the offices of Resource Conservation, Land Management, Water Resources, Coastal Management, Nature Preserves, Historic Preservation, Mines and Minerals, Oil and Gas Resource Management, the Illinois Conservation Police, and more.