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December 19, 2017

The Honorable Evelyn Sanguinetti
Lieutenant Governor of Illinois

Dear Ms. Sanguinetti:

The scientists of the Prairie Research Institute are pleased to present you with this review and report on the progress made toward the objectives of the 1997 Integrated Management Plan (IMP) for the Illinois River Watershed.

A truly comprehensive evaluation of the ecological status and trends of this vast watershed would demand a coordinated effort of PRI and other state, federal, and private partners. However, over the past several months, PRI scientists from diverse disciplines across all five scientific surveys have 1.) gathered extensive data, reports, and research studies to provide this overview of the IMP, and 2.) made recommendations for future activities to advance our understanding of the Illinois River Watershed.

Based on PRI's review of the seven objectives of the 1997 IMP, Illinois has achieved mixed results. For example, we have successfully restored thousands of acres of wetlands and have reestablished habitat. On the other hand, there are some areas in which progress has stalled and where we need to do more research, such as quantifying the functional contribution of restored wetlands. Illinois has not effectively realized integrated management partly because no single program or entity is specifically charged with regular, detailed evaluation and monitoring of the status and trends throughout the Illinois River Watershed.

This leads directly to one of PRI's major recommendations: Establish an inventory of efforts that inform the stewardship of the Illinois River Watershed. This inventory would help identify research and monitoring data needed to continue to assess the health of the Illinois River Watershed. Additional recommendations include: 1.) maintaining and creating long-term monitoring programs, 2.) restoring critical habitats, 3.) reducing the negative impact of non-native species, 4.) examining and reducing contaminants, 5.) assessing groundwater resources and withdrawal impacts on the Illinois River Watershed, and 6.) implementing cultural resources protections and inventory.

Unfortunately, the interruption of needed resources and funding has significantly hampered the continued implementation of the IMP. However, the inherent mission and research efforts of PRI overlap with the IMP objectives and have enabled some of the monitoring and research to continue.

It is critical to acknowledge that a full, comprehensive evaluation of the ecological status and trends of the entire watershed is a significant endeavor that would require a coordinated multi-year effort leveraging existing capacities and the potential of the state scientific surveys and their federal, state, and private partners.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark R. Ryan", written in a cursive style.

Mark R. Ryan
Executive Director