



## **Heartland Water Resources Council of Central Illinois** *“At the Heart of Saving the Peoria Lakes”*



**Russ Crawford, President HWRC**  
April 24, 2009 Celebration Speech

### **Construction Initiation for Peoria Riverfront Development, Illinois Upper Mid-sized Island Critical Restoration Project, Stage I**

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Good afternoon. We'd like to thank the Peoria Park District for hosting this event. Well finally another celebration. I'm Russ Crawford, Heartland Water Resources Council President and Past Chairman of the Peoria Lakes Basin Alliance, a group consisting of Heartland, The Nature Conservancy, the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission, and the former Tri-County Riverfront Action Forum.

Some of our members are hydrologist, biologist and engineers and they fully appreciate the acquisition, development and planning that is required for such a project as the Upper Mid-Sized Island Critical Restoration Project – Stage 1. However, others, such as myself, are public servants. Our constituents that are concerned about sedimentation and endangerment of the Peoria Lakes and Illinois River Basin ask a familiar and reoccurring question, “What are you doing about the problem”.

We last came together across the River in Tazewell County and north a bit for another celebration. We had initiated a project to remove sediment from our lakes and ship it to a “brownout” area that the Chicago Park District used to give Cook County kids a safe place to play. This project that our friend Dr. John Marlin called “Mud-to-Parks” was a win for us in Central Illinois and a win for Chicago.

Some of us have suggested other uses and applications for our sediment. Could we find a commercial application? Why couldn't the Illinois Department of Transportation utilize this sediment in its work? If it is safe enough for children's parks, surely it would be appropriate for autos to drive upon. Another idea was to construct an island, or better a series of islands where we could utilize the sediment without heavy transportation costs. These islands would create deep water habitat and improve ecology for life existing on land, in water and from the air.

For over 20 years Heartland, and more recently our Peoria Lakes Basin Alliance partners, have led the local charge to prepare and support an action plan that would include State and federal focus and resources to our challenge. We cannot afford to lose this critical and beautiful natural resource to sedimentation and fecal contamination, problems that require collaborative action to resolve.

And so we are here today to celebrate the commencement of the first of many initiatives required for mitigation. This project represents the 1<sup>st</sup> phase of establishing the opportunity for a secondary channel in the Lower Lakes, which will ultimately provide the longer-term, sustainable solution to saving and managing the Lower Lake.

A celebration requires thanks, and this one requires much gratitude. There are many people and organizations that deserve recognition for their role in bringing this important project into being. The “thank you’s” must first go to our Governor Pat Quinn and his bi-partisan partner former Congressman, now Transportation Secretary, Ray LaHood. It is their collaborative effort and work with the State Department of Natural Resources and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers respectfully, that led to the securing of the State and federal funding required to move the project into this implementation stage.

One of Congressman LaHood’s last congressional acts was to arrange for Peoria County to get funding to implement a regional stormwater management plan. This stormwater plan is important because while it’s critical to deal with sedimentation in the river with projects like this new island, we also have to deal with the source of the problem by doing a better job with stormwater management and erosion control. So we thank former Lt. Governor Quinn and former Congressman LaHood and look forward to continued progress with Governor Quinn, Transportation Secretary LaHood and our new Congressman Aaron Schock.

Some local efforts also deserve credit. Those funding commitments alone were not all that was required. The State turned to Heartland and our Peoria Lakes Basin Alliance partners to find the means to acquire the necessary privately-owned property to allow the project to happen. That’s when Jim Baldwin, Tom Tincher and Don Meinnen went to work. Jim secured a funding commitment from Ted & Rita Kress, and Tom and Don worked with Clarence Christe, the property owner, in soliciting his cooperation for the purchase. Needless to say, they were successful. Thus, we give a great big “thank you” to Jim, Tom, Don and especially Ted, Rita and Clarence for their support and cooperation. We need to thank our State and federal elected officials, all of our member cities, counties, individuals and organizations that provide leadership and advocacy required to sustain our quest to “Save Peoria Lakes”. This is especially true of our major supporter Caterpillar. Finally thanks, goes to our own local newspaper, the Journal Star, who has always been on the right side of the issues.

Finally, more good news, we’ve determined locally not to end the Annual Illinois River Awareness Cruise that was sponsored by the Tri-County Riverfront Action Forum. A team is currently reviewing options to continue this popular and educational opportunity.

So, thanks for attending our celebration. This is only a start, but restoring and preserving our beloved Peoria Lakes and Illinois River Basin is a long-term project. Thanks for being part of this important step, and we look forward to additional similar events, hopefully in the not to distant future.

Thank you.