DRAFT as of 5 Aug 2026

Illinois River Cities and Towns Initiative (IRCTI)
2026 Annual Meeting – Draft Agenda

October 13-14, 2026
Starved Rock Lodge, Oglesby, Illinois
Theme: "From Vision to Action: Building Resilient, Sustainable, and Prosperous Illinois River Communities"

The 2026 IRCTI Annual Meeting will focus on turning shared vision into action by highlighting successful projects, fostering collaboration, and identifying opportunities to build resilient, sustainable, and economically prosperous communities throughout the Illinois River watershed.

Tuesday, October 13, 2026

1:00-4:00 PM | Grant Readiness Workshop in La Salle Meeting Room

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5:30 – 8:00 PM | Opening Reception

- Welcome and Opening Remarks – **Mayor Robert Hasty**, City of Ottawa and Co-Chair, IRCTI
- Sponsor Remarks – (TBD): The Importance of the Illinois River, Community Vitality, and Regional Prosperity
- Networking Reception

Wednesday, October 14, 2026

8:00 – 9:00 AM | Registration & Networking Breakfast (Sponsored by TBD)

Light breakfast and networking opportunities with peers and partners

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9:00 – 9:20 AM | Opening Remarks

- **Mayor Robert Hasty,** City of Ottawa & Co-Chair, IRCTI
- **Robert Navarro**, President & CEO, Heritage Corridor Destinations Welcome to Starved Rock Country

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9:20 – 9:30 AM | A Look at Key Accomplishments, Challenges & Opportunities Across IRCTI Communities

- **Dr. Anshu Singh**, Executive Director, IRCTI

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9:30 – 10:00 AM | Federal and State Partnerships for Resilient River Communities

Exploring federal and state programs, investments, and policy initiatives that support transportation, infrastructure, economic development, environmental stewardship, and community resilience along the Illinois River corridor.

- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Rock Island District: Illinois Waterway operations, navigation, and infrastructure priorities
- U.S. Coast Guard: Ensuring safe, reliable, and efficient navigation on the Illinois River system
- U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA): Rural development programs, community facilities, infrastructure funding, and economic development resources available to Illinois River communities

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10:00 – 10:45 AM | Building Economic Resilience Along the Illinois River

Exploring how freight trends, market intelligence, infrastructure investments, and regional collaboration can strengthen local economies and support informed decision-making across Illinois River communities.

- **Todd Main:** Illinois Soy's 2050 Transportation Vision: Advancing Illinois' Transportation Network for Future Growth
- **Ken Eriksen**: Illinois River Freight & Economic Outlook: Using Data to Drive Better Decisions

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10:45 – 11:30 AM | Clean Water, Healthy Ecosystems and Resilient River Communities

Exploring partnerships and practical approaches to improve water quality, reduce pollution, advance ecological research and conservation, and strengthen the health and resilience of Illinois River communities.

- **Brian Johnson**, Executive Director Greater Peoria Sanitary District: From Compliance to Collaboration: Best Practices for Wastewater, Stormwater, and Community Resilience.
- **Jim Lamer**, Executive Director, Illinois River Biological Station. Understanding the Illinois River: An Overview of Ecological Research and Conservation Efforts.
- **Jenny Wendt**, Executive Director, MidAmerica Clean Future Alliance: Reducing Plastic Pollution: Building Cleaner Communities and Healthier Rivers.

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11:30 AM – 12:30 PM | Networking Lunch

11:40 AM – 12:10 PM | Mayors' Press Conference & Group Photo
Starved Rock Lodge Verandah

Join IRCTI mayors, community leaders, and partners as they highlight regional accomplishments, discuss priorities for the Illinois River corridor, and reaffirm their commitment to building resilient, sustainable, and prosperous river communities.

12:30 – 12:45 PM | Workforce Development & Future Talent Pipelines

Dr. Honey Zimmerman, Western Illinois University: Building the Future Workforce: The Corn Belt Ports Rural Maritime & Logistics Training & Education Consortium

An overview of the Corn Belt Ports Maritime Training & Education Consortium, a collaborative initiative established by Corn Belt Ports in partnership with Western Illinois University and We Work the Waterways to expand workforce development, education, training, and career awareness opportunities within the inland maritime industry.

12:45 – 1:30 PM | Economic Transformation Through Industry, Energy & Waterfront Revitalization

Exploring how communities are leveraging sustainable industry, brownfield redevelopment, and waterfront revitalization to drive economic growth, strengthen community resilience, and improve quality of life.

- ENTACT: Redeveloping Brownfields
- **Sharon Uslan**, OPTERRA: The Hidden Cost of Doing Nothing: Addressing Illinois' Infrastructure Challenges
- **Adam Tindall-Schlicht**, Ramboll: Beyond the Riverfront: Building Resilient Waterfronts that Drive Community Prosperity

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1:30 – 2:00 PM | Healthy Rivers, Vibrant Communities: Tourism, Arts, Recreation & Quality of Life Along the Illinois River

Exploring how cultural programming, tourism, recreation, placemaking, and ecosystem restoration strengthen local economies, attract visitors, improve quality of life, and reconnect communities to the river.

- **TBD,** Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity – Office of Tourism
  Highlighting tourism initiatives, resources, and opportunities available to support Illinois River communities and strengthen riverfront tourism.

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- **John Taylor**, Crossroads Cultural Connections
  Leveraging music, arts, and cultural events to strengthen communities and attract visitors.
- **Jason Webley**, Flotsam River Circus
  Connecting Illinois River communities through arts, storytelling, and river-based cultural experiences.

2:00 – 2:10 PM | Break

2:10 – 2:25 PM | Ports, Freight & the Future of River Transportation

An overview of the Port of Henry Master Plan and the role of public-private partnerships in advancing port development and long-term economic opportunity.

- **Jeff Bergfeld**, City of Henry
- **Steve King & Isaac Yun**, Ozinga Ventures

2:25 – 2:45 PM | Community Success Stories: Turning Vision into Action

Featuring Illinois River communities that have successfully leveraged partnerships, grants, innovative planning, and local leadership to strengthen their economies, enhance quality of life, improve infrastructure, and reconnect their communities to the river.

- Community Success Story #1 – TBD
- **Emily Jenkins**, PhD, PE, CFM, Farnsworth Group: "Boneyard Creek: How a Flood Mitigation Project Became an Economic Development Showcase in Champaign"

2:45 – 3:00 PM | Closing Session

- **Mayor Rita Ali,** City of Peoria & Co-Chair, IRCTI: Closing Remarks & Conference Reflections, Recognition of Sponsors and Partners
- **Mayor Danny Bryant**, City of Havana: Special Video Presentation – Invitation to the 2027 IRCTI Annual Meeting in Havana, IL

3:10 – 5:10 PM | Fall Color Trolley Tour of Starved Rock State Park

Enjoy the beautiful fall colors aboard a historic trolley, with stops at the Starved Rock Visitor Center, Illinois Waterway, and St. Louis Canyon. The approximately 40-minute canyon hike is a mild walk with some stairs. The trolley will return to Starved Rock Lodge by 5:10 PM.

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5:30 – 8:00 PM | Reception & Networking Dinner

Closing Remarks: Mayor Chris Brown, City of Morris & Co-Vice Chair, IRCTI

Sponsor Remarks: TBD

Celebrate the accomplishments, partnerships, and momentum driving the future of Illinois River communities.