

## **LESSONS LEARNED FROM A DECADE OF PROTECTING AND MANAGING PIONEER CEMETERY NATURAL AREAS IN ILLINOIS**

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*Abstract:* The original Illinois Natural Areas Inventory (INAI), conducted in the late 1970s, examined 3,923 pioneer cemeteries and identified 24 of these with prairie and savanna communities worthy of listing as high quality natural areas. There are now 30 pioneer cemeteries on the INAI; 21 of these have received permanent legal protection. In spite of the high percentage of cemeteries protected, enormous management challenges remain as a result of the need to consider both the ecological and sociological impacts on these small sites, averaging 2.2 acres. The attitude of the cemetery owners and the local community greatly influences the type and extent of traditional management practices which can be implemented within the cemetery. This presentation will summarize the use of Illinois state law to provide legal protection for the natural vegetation communities in conjunction with the protection of the cultural resources within the cemetery. Testament will be given on the success and failures of various adaptive management strategies utilized over the past decade for 13 cemetery natural areas in western and northwestern Illinois. Management challenges and strategies discussed will include: public relations; multi-discipline cooperation; documentation of the condition and location of burial markers; cleaning, repairing and resetting stones; fencing; trail maintenance; changes to hydrological drainage and soil erosion; loss of plant species diversity; alterations to the timing and amount of prescribed burns; use of herbicides to control invasive exotic and ornamental plants; expansion of buffer zone; and compatible economic use (depository for crematory remains and green burials).