

Rethinking Conservation: Expanding Native Biodiversity Across Private and Public Landscapes

Amy B McEuen, Ph.D., Associate Professor and Chair, Biology Department, University of Illinois Springfield

Current rates of extinction are faster than those that resulted in the five mass extinction events in earth's history. However, although we are on pace to experience the quickest mass extinction event ever, the species are not yet gone. This creates a window of opportunity where, if we dramatically decrease rate of extinction, we can possibly prevent a 6th mass extinction. How though do we achieve such a goal when so many other pressing environmental and social issues must also be simultaneously addressed? One necessity is to vastly increase the area of land that fosters biodiversity preservation. Michael Rosenzweig created the field of Reconciliation Ecology to help us discover methods where we can conserve biodiversity in human dominated landscapes, thus increasing the available land area for conservation. What might Illinois look like if we fully embraced a Reconciliation Ecology approach and increased native plant diversity across all public and private lands? What partnerships must be strengthened? What incentives might tip our state to widespread implementation of roadside habitat restoration, backyard and school pollinator gardens, and native plant landscaping? What cultural changes are necessary? How can biodiversity conservation be integrated into other sustainability initiatives? These questions will be explored with the hopes of creating dialog and discussion around opportunities for reconciliation ecology research involving natural and social scientists among other partners.