

# Quinn aide named to head DNR

By Chris Young

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SPRINGFIELD, Ill. — Saying the state needs an experienced professional at the helm, Gov. Pat Quinn on Thursday introduced Marc Miller as the new director of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

Miller, 39, is a Springfield resident who has served as senior policy adviser to Quinn since 2004. He replaces former state representative Kurt Granberg, who was fired Wednesday. Former Gov. Rod Blagojevich appointed Granberg Jan. 16.

Quinn introduced Miller as someone with varied interests in the outdoors.

“He’s a fisherman. He’s a hunter. He’s a birdwatcher. He canoes. ... He’s a stargazer,” Quinn said, ticking off a long list of outdoor activities. “I saw first-hand in the last five years how dedicated Marc is.”

A few minutes earlier, with the leaders of state conservation organizations gathered around his desk, Quinn ceremoniously signed a bill to restore more than \$9 million in wildlife funds to DNR’s budget. The money was needed to guarantee a \$16 million federal match.

Quinn said Thursday was a day to focus on conservation, the state’s land and water and the importance of connecting Illinois citizens with nature.

Part of that mission, Quinn said, is reopening state parks closed late last year. Although no timetable was given, Quinn was adamant the seven parks would eventually reopen.

“We’re not going to let parks be shut down.”

Miller said getting a handle on the agency’s finances will be his first order of business when he takes office Friday.

DNR has endured budget cuts and layoffs and lost many experienced hands to early retirements. Some key positions never were filled, such as the biologist that once oversaw the state’s flock of wild turkeys. Illinois hunters bag as many as 16,000 turkeys during the spring season.

“I think it will take a good deal of work to rebuild the agency,” Miller said.

Miller also said he wants to take politics out of conservation and return to “science-based” decision-making.

But the state's economic climate may make the rebuilding job tougher. With the state facing a deficit potentially reaching \$9 billion, extra money for conservation programs probably will be scarce.

Miller said improving communication and changing a culture that did not encourage input will be changes that don't cost a cent.

"I don't want to be oversimplistic," he said. "But you can start by talking to (DNR staff, constituents and conservation groups)."

Miller said he wants to let DNR staff members provide honest input without the fear of retaliation. DNR employees had been under a gag order, prohibiting most from talking to the media, and even the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said its representatives had to get information from top DNR officials rather than through usual channels due to the restrictions.

That may have been one reason the state nearly lost \$16 million in funding for wildlife and fish restoration projects when it "swept" money out of six state funds that are repositories for fees from fishing and hunting licenses and other activities. If those funds are spent for other uses, or states risk losing federal matching dollars.

Illinois faced a deadline this week to restore the money.

Miller said he and Quinn have a good working relationship.

"We've got great people at DNR," Miller said. "We just need to start encouraging them to be creative without worrying.

"We'll allow them to work and feel proud again."

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### **Bio box**

Marc Miller, 39, Springfield

Education: Bachelor's degree in political science from Eastern Illinois University, master's in environmental administration from the University of Illinois at Springfield.

Experience:

Senior policy adviser to Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn since 2004; liaison to the Illinois River Coordinating Council for the lieutenant governor's office; worked on "Mud to Parks" program that reused sediment accumulating in the Illinois River; helped secure funding for Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program to preserve wildlife habitat along the Illinois River; helped create coordinating councils for

Mississippi and Ohio and Wabash Rivers; promoted “green infrastructure” in urban areas to reduce flooding in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; watershed organizer for Prairie Rivers Network from 1999 to 2004.