

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Advocates Announce Litigation to Challenge Bell Bowl Prairie Demolition** *Preliminary injunction requested to temporarily halt Rockford Airport construction and save rare remnant prairie*

ROCKFORD, IL (Oct. 27, 2021) — Environmental advocates joined local residents today to announce litigation in the effort to save Bell Bowl Prairie, an ancient Illinois prairie set to be demolished as part of the current Chicago Rockford International Airport expansion. Today, Natural Land Institute filed a lawsuit for injunctive relief to temporarily halt the bulldozers from destroying this rare remnant prairie to allow time for the adoption of an alternative project design that preserves the prairie, and for additional environmental assessment of this irreplaceable natural landscape.

“The action we are taking today would allow for this ancient prairie, a special place that has captured the hearts of so many Americans across the state and the country, to continue providing habitat to endangered species, and not be destroyed for the construction of a parking lot,” **said Kerry Leigh, the executive director of Natural Land Institute.** “Why is an ancient prairie expendable, and a parking lot so precious?”

Bell Bowl Prairie is a site of both ecological and historical importance. Rich and diverse prairies, developing only over millennia, used to cover 22 million acres of Illinois. Today, less than 1/100th of one percent of that is left even partially intact, and each fragment that survives is unique.

“The complex ecological associations that make this prairie special developed thousands of years ago and cannot be reconstructed or transplanted,” **said Brad Roos, president of Sustain Rockford.** “Bell Bowl is irreplaceable. To destroy or diminish it would be extremely short-sighted.”

The Bell Bowl Prairie supports rare and endangered species, such as the federally endangered Rusty Patched Bumble Bee. Continuing with work as planned will likely imperil this population and be a tremendous blow to a species that is in a precipitous decline.

"Previous generations worked to save this rare prairie, and volunteers have been caring for it for decades," **said Sierra Club Illinois Director Jack Darin.** "The Rockford Airport Authority should be looking at alternatives that allow both the airport to grow and the public to enjoy this rare piece of the Prairie State — not getting ready to bulldoze our natural heritage. We call on the airport to take a timeout, and look at solutions that avoid this senseless destruction."

Supporters of today's legal action are calling for the adoption of an alternative project design that would preserve the Bell Bowl Prairie as well as the anticipated airport

services and jobs connected to the project. A temporary halt of construction would allow more time for community input and the identification of such a solution in partnership with the Greater Rockford Airport Authority, the Federal Aviation Administration, the Illinois Department of Transportation and other local decision makers.

“The Biden administration has committed to protecting open space under the America the Beautiful plan in an effort to preserve biodiversity and mitigate climate change,” **said Lindsay Keeney, conservation director at the Illinois Environmental Council.** “This prairie represents one of the steps our state can take to lead the charge by ensuring important ecosystems remain intact. If we hope to mitigate and reverse the worst of the climate crisis, we must get serious about preserving natural lands like the Bell Bowl Prairie in Illinois.”

More than six thousand Illinoisans have contacted decision makers over recent weeks pushing for the adoption of an airport expansion plan that protects both the prairie and goals of the Chicago Rockford International Airport expansion project. For more information on the grassroots movement to Save Bell Bowl Prairie, visit [www.savebellbowlprairie.org](http://www.savebellbowlprairie.org)

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