

Talking points

1. We support responsible economic development. Expansion of capacity at Chicago Rockford International Airport can be done in ways that do not damage the Bell Bowl Prairie or impact its rare and endangered species.
2. Bell Bowl Prairie is a historic, cultural, and scientific asset to the airport, the local community, the state, and the world. The City of Rockford passed a resolution in October 2021 to protect and conserve birds as part of the Bird City Illinois initiative. Protecting birds means protecting bird habitat like Bell Bowl Prairie. This prairie is something to be proud of and care for, not destroy forever.
3. The environmental assessment supporting current work plans is flawed and incomplete and needs to be redone. The Illinois Natural Areas Inventory found Bell Bowl Prairie is a top priority Category I site, a rare, high-quality ecosystem. At least one federally Endangered species (the rusty-patched bumblebee) and two state Endangered species (the large-flowered beard-tongue and prairie dandelion) live at Bell Bowl Prairie and are threatened with destruction. The environmental assessment overlooked these features of the site due to poor design.
4. No public agency is known to have destroyed an ecosystem of this rarity and high quality since the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory identified and demonstrated their importance almost 50 years ago.
5. Prairies are an ultra-endangered ecosystem: only 0.01% of original prairie is left in Illinois (with similar statistics in all states where this rich ecosystem survives). Bell Bowl Prairie is a 5.8-acre high-quality dry gravel hill prairie. According to the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory, only 19 acres of high-quality dry gravel prairies were left in the state in 1976.^[1]
6. A tiny fraction of Bell Bowl Prairie biodiversity would survive if an attempt was made to move it. Its natural features developed in their current location over thousands of years and are irreplaceable. The prairie is akin to old-growth forest and cannot grow back.

[1] Not sure about this. I'm getting this from PDF page 206 of the INAI:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yhvDzOkIUv-kOCSPb1Nm9kgbAUALV3Qi/view>

Example Letters

email to senator Durbin:
Senator,

I, like most Illinoisans, believe in revitalizing our state's infrastructure. Like most of them I also believe it should be done in a responsible way that does not hurt the environment. In case you have not heard, the ongoing expansion of capacity at Chicago-Rockford Airport – which I believe you and many others have rightly supported – will unnecessarily destroy an original prairie of rare quality. This site has been listed as a Category I site (high-quality remnant ecosystem) on the widely-respected Illinois Natural Areas Inventory and is home to one federally-endangered and two state-endangered species.

I am very happy that the expansion of the airport will promote regional and state economies, something we sorely need. But I am aghast that the importance of this site for global biodiversity has been overlooked in the development plans. Destroying this ecological gem would be extremely short-sighted. Luckily, we still have a small window (until November 1) to choose to pursue responsible expansion of the airport that keeps the prairie intact.

If our state is to be seen as a leader in sustainable economic development, I and countless Illinoisans believe this project should not proceed as planned, and that construction should be halted until alternatives that keep the highest-quality parts of the prairie intact should be properly explored.

I would like to ask what your stance is on this topic, and what you think you can do to prevent losing this global biological treasure.