



amidon research report

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A Tale of Two Agencies: Closing Illinois Parks and Historic Sites

An earlier *Amidon Research Report* delineated a modest but statistically significant bias against Republican locales in the selection of Illinois state parks to be closed. Now the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) has closed several of those parks, and the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (IHPA) has closed several state historic sites, in order to reduce operating expenses as Governor Rod Blagojevich has mandated. The question remains, *Do these closings, as implemented, have a disproportionate impact on Republican or Democratic counties?*

The IDNR and Park Closings

As of early November, the IDNR was still planning to close eleven facilities in nine counties. Special funding from the legislature has enabled the IDNR to keep open four of those properties, at the same time that the agency has proceeded to close seven sites in five counties.

The closed locations are as follows:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| ▪ Castle Rock State Park | <i>Ogle County</i> |
| ▪ Hidden Springs State Forest | <i>Shelby County</i> |
| ▪ Illini State Park | <i>LaSalle County</i> |
| ▪ Lowden State Park | <i>Ogle County</i> |
| ▪ Moraine View State Recreation Area | <i>McLean County</i> |
| ▪ Weldon Springs State Park | <i>DeWitt County</i> |
| ▪ Wolf Creek State Park | <i>Shelby County</i> |

Of the eleven sites earlier designated for closing, the following locations remain open:

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|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| ▪ Channahon Parkway State Park | <i>Will County</i> |
| ▪ Gebhard Woods State Park | <i>Grundy County</i> |
| ▪ Hennepin Canal Parkway State Trail | <i>Bureau County</i> |
| ▪ Kickapoo State Recreation Area | <i>Vermilion County</i> |

NOTE: Media reports that correctly label Hidden Springs a state forest typically identify all ten other facilities as state parks, even though the IDNR Website designates Hennepin Canal as a state trail and both Kickapoo and Moraine View as state recreation areas. Please note below all the different designations used to group 125 IDNR facilities.

Six of the seven closed IDNR sites are located in counties that gave the Republican ticket for Governor and Lieutenant Governor more than 54% of the major two-party vote in 2006. Only one closing has occurred in a county carried by Democrats in the 2006 gubernatorial race. In one of the counties where the IDNR rescinded a park closing, the 2006 Republican ticket won more than 54% of the combined major-party vote; the other three counties getting a reprieve from park closings gave Republicans Judy Barr Topinka and Joseph Birkett 47.5% to 52.5% of that vote.

	OBSERVED DISTRIBUTION		PREDICTED DISTRIBUTION	
	Republican Counties 2006	Competitive and Democratic Counties 2006	Republican Counties 2006	Competitive and Democratic Counties 2006
Closings	6	1	4.45	2.55
Closings Rescinded	1	3	2.55	1.45

Three of the affected counties, home to five of the seven closed sites, remained solidly Republican in the 2008 Presidential election. They are Ogle and Shelby Counties, with two closings each, and DeWitt County, with one closing. The other two closings befell McLean County, where a slight edge for Obama-Biden followed a sizable margin for Topinka-Birkett, and LaSalle County, which shifted farther to the Democratic side.

	OBSERVED DISTRIBUTION		PREDICTED DISTRIBUTION	
	Republican Counties 2006 to 2008	Competitive and Democratic Counties 2006 to 2008	Republican Counties 2006 to 2008	Competitive and Democratic Counties 2006 to 2008
Closings	5	2	3.18	3.82
Closings Rescinded	0	4	1.82	2.18

The four sites that the IDNR has decided not to close all belong to counties that were already competitive or Democratic in 2006 and remained so in 2008 or became competitive in 2008. Bureau and Vermilion Counties, which were moderately to strongly Republican in 2006, both ended up in the Democratic column this year—by a margin of less than 6% of the two-party vote, in one instance, and less than 0.6%, in the other. Will County went from moderately Democratic to strongly Democratic. Grundy was competitive in both elections, with the Republican edge dropping below 0.1% this year.

When the additional funding enabled the IDNR to reduce the number of facilities that it had to close, the agency may not have intended to act with party bias in choosing which of the eleven sites to remain open; but neither is the apparent disparity in its treatment of Republican and Democratic counties likely a matter of happenstance. The chances of getting the actual results by random selection are lower than one in twenty or 5%.

The further question is how the seven sites now closed compare, in terms of party alignment by county, with other IDNR properties—both the 118 IDNR sites that continue to operate on their usual schedules and, among those 118, the 62 sites that might also have been suitable candidates for closing.

As the earlier *Amidon Research Report* details, the IDNR manages 125 parks and recreation sites in 72 of 102 Illinois counties: 43 wildlife or fish and wildlife areas, 42 parks, 18 recreation areas, eleven natural areas, six forests, three trails, one marina and one shooting complex. The expenses to be saved by closing any one of the 54 wildlife and natural areas are presumably too little for the agency to target any of those sites for closing, whereas the fees to be lost by closing the shooting complex or the marina completely may be too large for the agency to consider closing either of them.

The overall distribution of closed and unclosed sites, among the 125 total IDNR locations and the 69 suitable for closing, demonstrate somewhat less bias against Republican locales than does the final treatment of the eleven sites earlier scheduled for closing. Yet the disparities still are statistically significant. That is, the odds of getting such disparities by chance are less than 10%. Observed and predicted or average random distributions, for both larger and smaller samples, appear below.

	OBSERVED DISTRIBUTION			PREDICTED DISTRIBUTION		
	In Counties Topinka Vote >54%	In Competitive Counties	In Counties Blagojevich Vote >54%	In Counties Topinka Vote >54%	In Competitive Counties	In Counties Blagojevich Vote >54%
Sites Closing	6	1	0	3	2	1
Sites Not Closing	51	41	26	54	40	25

	OBSERVED DISTRIBUTION			PREDICTED DISTRIBUTION		
	In Counties Topinka Vote >54%	In Competitive Counties	In Counties Blagojevich Vote >54%	In Counties Topinka Vote >54%	In Competitive Counties	In Counties Blagojevich Vote >54%
Sites Closing	6	1	0	3	2	1
Sites Not Closing	27	22	13	30	21	12

The number of sites actually closed in strongly pro-Topinka counties is twice the number that we would expect from selection of seven facilities at random, from among all 125 properties or from among the 69 that would have been reasonable candidates for closing.

The IHPA and Closings of Historic Sites

Facing even more severe budget cuts than the IDNR, the IHPA has closed twelve of 30 staffed sites. Twenty unstaffed sites are not affected.

The closed locations are as follows:

- Apple River Fort *Jo Daviess County*
- Bishop Hill *Henry County*
- Cahokia Courthouse *Saint Clair County*
- Carl Sandburg *Knox County*
- Dana-Thomas House *Sangamon County*
- Fort de Chartres *Randolph County*
- Fort Kaskaskia *Randolph County*
- Hauberg Indian Museum *Rock Island County*
- Jubilee College *Peoria County*
- Lincoln Log Cabin *Coles County*
- Pierre Menard Home *Randolph County*
- Vandalia Statehouse *Fayette County*

NOTE: Because the Hauberg Indian Museum is located on the grounds of the Black Hawk Historic Site, which remains open for other use, the IHPA prefers to count each component as a half site and the total number of closings as 11½, not 12. Because this report compares closed to unclosed sites, however, any disparity between Republican and Democratic counties would be apparent whether we assigned Rock Island County 0.5 closed site and 0.5 open site or 1.0 closed site and 1.0 open site.

What stands out on the list of closings is the fact that three of the twelve closed sites are located in a single county. That county, Randolph, gave the Blagojevich-Quinn ticket

nearly 56% of the major two-party vote in 2006. Rock Island and Saint Clair Counties, each with one closing, voted even more heavily for the Democrats in the gubernatorial race that year, while Knox County gave the Democratic ticket about 51% of the combined Democratic-Republican vote. The other six closed sites are all located in separate Republican counties, although the Topinka-Birkett ticket received more than 54% of the major-party vote in only three of those counties.

The six-six split, which suggests the absence of party bias in the closing of historic sites, better represents the overall result of the IHPA’s site selection than does the degree to which the ten affected counties fall on one side or other of the party divide. Whether we compare the party make-up of counties for closed and open sites among all 50 IHPA locations or among only the 30 staffed sites, the odds of getting observed distributions by chance are greater than one in ten.

Consider the two tables below, which focus on the 30 staffed sites. In neither instance does the observed distribution differ so much from the predicted distribution that we would accord the disparity even a threshold level of statistical significance (*i.e.*, 0.10).

		OBSERVED DISTRIBUTION		PREDICTED DISTRIBUTION	
		Topinka Vote > Blagojevich Vote	Blagojevich Vote > Topinka Vote	Topinka Vote > Blagojevich Vote	Blagojevich Vote > Topinka Vote
Sites Closing		6	6	8	4
Sites Not Closing		13	5	11	7

		OBSERVED DISTRIBUTION			PREDICTED DISTRIBUTION		
		In Counties Topinka Vote >54%	In Competitive Counties	In Counties Blagojevich Vote >54%	In Counties Topinka Vote >54%	In Competitive Counties	In Counties Blagojevich Vote >54%
Sites Closing		3	4	5	5	3	4
Sites Not Closing		10	3	5	8	4	6

Equivalent tables for all 50 staffed and unstaffed sites combined would reflect no greater divergence between observed and predicted data. For the larger sample too, the disparity is so small that it would be likely to occur more than 10% of the time that the agency selected sites simply at random.

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As before, we would caution that selections that diverge sharply from random choices do not necessarily demonstrate “cause and effect.” At the same time, the IDNR’s selection of sites to close, as compared to sites to keep open, clearly represents a degree of party bias not evident among choices made by the IHPA. What citizens might expect from the two agencies next spring is uncertain, except that the IHPA expects funds from the state’s Lincoln Bicentennial Commission to permit the agency to increase the number of hours that four Lincoln sites are open to the public.

Please note: Data on IDNR and IHPA sites come from the agencies’ Websites and direct communications covering the closings. Data on election returns derive from the Illinois Secretary of State’s *Blue Book* (available online) and from www.CNN.com. In virtually every county, the combined two-party vote in 2008 differs by no more than 1% to 2% from all votes cast. A much higher percentage of votes went to the 2006 Green Party ticket. It took more than 20% of the total vote in each of four counties, including Ogle County.

For details on sources and data, please submit requests to askus@amidonresearch.com.

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