

# NATURE MATTERS

2019 PROGRESS REPORT



# BRINGING PEOPLE AND NATURE TOGETHER

The Forest Preserve District of Will County is dedicated to protecting, conserving, enhancing and promoting Will County's natural heritage for the educational, recreational and environmental benefit of present and future generations.

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## A MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT

Nature is excellent therapy. Numerous studies have shown that nature can help us to think less and to relax more. Our forest preserves allow us opportunities to take advantage of the nurturing benefit of nature, while at the same time offering experiences that can also be quite engaging, refreshing and energizing. They provide open spaces where we can learn new things about our environment, see and experience some of the natural wonders of Will County and exercise our bodies to improve our physical fitness. The Forest Preserve District provides more than 50 preserve access areas, 125 miles of trails, several visitor facilities and hundreds of public programs where you can tap into this natural resource that you have helped to create and sustain. I look forward to carrying on the traditions of those who have served as Board President before me and to continue an emphasis on expanding and improving our forest preserves. We have some exciting things planned for the next few years that will protect thousands of acres, restore hundreds more and improve transportation mobility and access to nature. I hope that you take some time to join me in experiencing and enjoying all that the Forest Preserve has to offer.



**Kenneth E. Harris**  
Board President

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kenneth E. Harris". The signature is written in a cursive style and is placed on a light gray rectangular background.



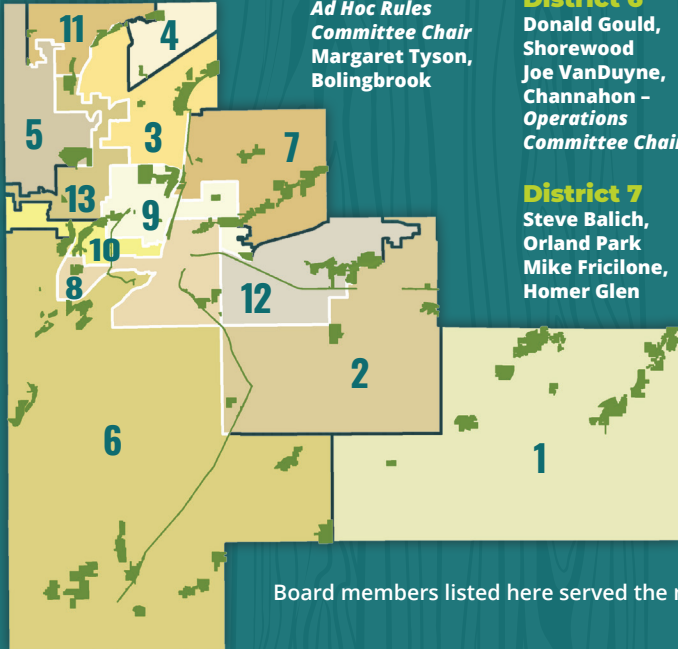
© Thorn Creek Woods Nature Preserve



# FORESTS MATTER

**Trees absorb many pollutants, including carbon dioxide, nitrogen dioxide and sulfur dioxide. The ability of trees to clean the air has a measurable effect on human health. In urban areas of the United States, the purifying ability of trees can save \$6.8 billion a year in health care costs.**

## BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS



### District 1

Judy Ogalla,  
Monee  
Sherry Newquist,  
Steger

### District 2

Amanda Koch,  
Frankfort -  
*Vice President*  
James G. Moustis,  
Frankfort

### District 3

Elizabeth Rice,  
Bolingbrook -  
*Ad Hoc Rules  
Committee Chair*  
Margaret Tyson,  
Bolingbrook

### District 4

Kenneth E. Harris,  
Bolingbrook -  
*President*  
Jacqueline Traynere,  
Bolingbrook -  
*Operations  
Committee Vice Chair*

### District 5

Gretchen Fritz,  
Plainfield  
Meta Mueller,  
Aurora - *Finance  
Committee Chair*

### District 6

Donald Gould,  
Shorewood  
Joe VanDuynes,  
Channahon -  
*Operations  
Committee Chair*

### District 7

Steve Balich,  
Orland Park  
Mike Fricolone,  
Homer Glen

### District 8

Herbert Brooks Jr.,  
Joliet - *Finance  
Committee Chair*  
Denise Winfrey,  
Joliet

### District 9

Annette Parker,  
Joliet  
Rachel Ventura,  
Joliet

### District 10

Gloria Dollinger,  
Joliet  
Tyler J. Marcum,  
Joliet - *Treasurer*

### District 11

Julie Berkowicz,  
Naperville  
Mimi Cowan,  
Naperville - *Secretary*

### District 12

Ray Tuminello,  
New Lenox  
Tom Weigel,  
New Lenox

### District 13

Mark Ferry,  
Plainfield  
Tim J. Kraulidis,  
Joliet

Board members listed here served the majority of 2019.

## A MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

Our Will County forest preserves improve our quality of life, help to clean our air and water and protect critical habitat for some of our rarest species of plants and animals. They offer us opportunities to experience nature firsthand, pursue our hobbies, inspire our art, refresh our minds, strengthen our bodies, gain new insights into how we interact with our environment, and spend time with friends and family – four-legged members included. In 2019, nearly 148,000 people participated in Forest Preserve programs, events and permitted activities or visited one of our facilities. Hundreds of thousands of others spent time in a forest preserve and hiked, biked or ran on the vast trail network. Our mission remains the same: to connect people with the outdoors and to protect, restore and interpret Will County's natural areas and open spaces for generations to come. More than 250,000 people follow the Forest Preserve through various social media outlets, allowing us to spread the conservation message and provide insights into the many opportunities we offer. I'm especially impressed by the number of you who also share your messages and amazing photographs with us through our social media accounts. You provide the rest of us with an opportunity to see and experience the forest preserves through your thoughts and images. Looking forward to 2020, we will continue to provide the high level of service you've come to expect and to feed the conversation as we preserve and restore Will County's natural landscape. I hope that you can take time to make a forest preserve a regular stop in your routine and enjoy a bit of nature.



**Ralph Schultz**  
Chief Operating Officer

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ralph Schultz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.



2019

# MILESTONES





## **\$25 MILLION CAPITAL PLAN APPROVED BY BOARD**

A \$25 million bond issue that will extend and connect trails, improve preserves and facilities, and allow for additional land acquisition was approved in 2019 by the Forest Preserve District's Board of Commissioners. The capital plan allows the Forest Preserve to continue to offer the high-quality facilities and trails that visitors have come to expect and to protect them for future generations. Of the \$25 million, \$13 million will be used for preserve, facility and trail improvements and \$12 million for land preservation during the five-year capital plan. Acquisition of high priority parcels throughout the county will provide land needed for natural area buffers, trail extensions and connections, future preserve access areas and natural habitat restoration projects. The parcels also will provide flood storage, water infiltration to replenish underground aquifers and storage for atmospheric carbon. The capital plan will not increase the Forest Preserve's tax rate because \$45.2 million in previously issued general obligation capital appreciation bonds from 1999 were retired before the new bonds were approved. In general, the Forest Preserve makes up around 2 percent of the average Will County property tax bill.

## **KENNETH E. HARRIS SUCCEEDS SUMMERS AS BOARD PRESIDENT**

After Laurie Summers resigned from the Board in October, Kenneth E. Harris of Bolingbrook moved up from his position as vice president to succeed Summers as president of the Forest Preserve District's Board of Commissioners. Harris is a self-employed certified public accountant who worked for the State of Illinois for 32 years before retiring in 2018. He has served on the Board since December 2013. In addition to Harris becoming president, Amanda Koch of Frankfort was named vice president. Mimi Cowan of Naperville replaced Koch as secretary, and Tyler Marcum of Joliet remained as treasurer.

**"I don't take this position lightly, and I truly thank my fellow commissioners for having faith in me."**

**- Kenneth E. Harris**



2019

## MILESTONES

### SHIRLEE BECOMES NEWEST BLANDING'S TURTLE AMBASSADOR



Isle a la Cache Museum gained a new Blanding's turtle ambassador in 2019 with the addition of Shirlee, a turtle that is part of the Blanding's Turtle Recovery Program the District is participating in with the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County. This 2-year-old turtle was reared by program participant Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum in Chicago, but Shirlee couldn't be released into the wild due to a genetic mutation that gives her a bright yellow color. Shirlee joined two other Blanding's turtles on display at Isle a la Cache Museum in a 4,000-pound tank. The three will serve as ambassadors and, due to genetic mutations, will spend the rest of their days in captivity, educating the public on the plight of this state-endangered species. As a participant in the recovery program, the Forest Preserve raises batches of Blanding's turtles that will eventually be released. The program – also underway at Illinois zoos, universities and other northern Illinois forest preserve districts – is designed to increase the odds that the turtles will survive to adulthood. A large percentage of the turtles perish as eggs or as newborns, and many more don't survive to age 1.

## OLD PLANK ROAD TRAIL INCLUDED IN THE GREAT AMERICAN RAIL-TRAIL ROUTE



Graphic courtesy of Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

In 2019, the Old Plank Road Trail (OPRT) in Will and Cook counties was included in a 3,700-mile Great American Rail-Trail route by the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) organization. The local path is one of more than 125 trails designated along the “Great American” route, which stretches from Washington, D.C., to Washington State. The OPRT is a 22-mile trail that travels from Joliet through New Lenox, Frankfort, Matteson, Richton Park, Park Forest and Chicago Heights and is owned and managed by multiple jurisdictions, including the Forest Preserve District of Will County. The remainder of the Great American route in Illinois uses the I&M Canal State Trail in Will, Grundy and LaSalle counties and the Hennepin Canal Parkway in Bureau and Henry counties. The preferred route of the nation’s first cross-country multiuse trail is detailed in a comprehensive report released by the organization. The Great American Rail-Trail Route Assessment Report outlines RTC’s recommendation for the route, developed in close partnership with state and local trail planners and managers. The route travels through 12 states and the District of Columbia.



## **FORENSIC ENTOMOLOGY WORKSHOP HELD AT A LOCAL FOREST PRESERVE**

Thirty death investigators scooped, plucked and netted insects from pig carcasses during a forensic entomology workshop held in 2019 at a rural forest preserve. The investigators were members of area law enforcement agencies who signed up for the course to learn how to estimate the time of a person's death based on the types of insects and the stages of bug larvae – including maggots – that can be found on corpses. Pig carcasses in various stages of decomposition were placed in an unimproved preserve for educational purposes in a partnership between the Forest Preserve District and the Tri-River Police Training Region organization. The pigs died naturally at local pig farms and were donated specifically for the course. The two-day workshop was taught by Neal Haskell, Ph.D., an internationally known forensic entomologist who has testified in more than 1,000 death investigations. Haskell was assisted by Ralph Williams, Ph.D., entomology professor emeritus at Purdue University. A shorter summary course also was offered to local high school students.

## **PICNIC AND CAMPING PERMIT RESERVATIONS AVAILABLE ONLINE**

The Forest Preserve began offering picnic shelter and campsite reservations online in 2019. This added service provides the public with the convenience of making their reservations at home and on their mobile devices. In total, 553 picnic permits were issued in 2019. Of those, 351 were booked online. In addition, of the 142 total camping permits, 64 were online transactions.



2019

## MILESTONES



### NEW POLLINATOR GARDEN FEATURED AT ISLE A LA CACHE

A portion of the over-sized, under-utilized terraced seating area in the Isle a la Cache amphitheater was transformed into a pollinator garden in 2019. Enough seating was retained to accommodate programs, while the remaining space was planted with native perennials that benefit pollinators. Retaining the existing amphitheater structure allows the area to be used as a unique teaching garden, which now ensures the entire space will be utilized. Interpretive signs were added to further increase the educational value of the garden for visitors. In addition to supporting pollinators such as monarch butterflies, the intent is for the garden to serve as an example of how people can combine conservation and aesthetics. The hope is that it will inspire visitors to creatively build their own pollinator gardens. The project was funded by The Nature Foundation of Will County and through a grant from Monarch Watch.

2019

## MILESTONES



### **DOG PARK CALENDAR PROVIDES NEARLY \$6,000 FOR THE HUMANE SOCIETY**

The Forest Preserve created a dog park calendar in 2019 featuring dozens of dogs from the District's six dog parks. A total of 606 calendars were sold, with all proceeds from the sale of the 2020 calendars going to the Will County Humane Society. The effort raised \$5,865 for Will County's oldest no-kill shelter, while highlighting the adorable pups of the District's dog parks. The calendar features a wide variety of breeds, sizes and ages, and includes some of the Humane Society's successful placement stories.

### **JURIED ART SHOW DEBUTS AT PLUM CREEK NATURE CENTER**

Plum Creek Nature Center partnered with The Nature Foundation of Will County to host its first juried art competition and exhibition. The show titled "Vernal Equinox: Spring Awakens," included 53 diverse artworks chosen from a total of 270 entries and connected a new audience to the nature center by inspiring the appreciation of nature through art. First place went to Frankfort resident Richard Schmidt for his oil painting, "Bluebells with Footbridge." This painting was inspired by the Forest Preserve's Messenger Woods Nature Preserve, which is known for its stunning bluebell displays in spring.





## FOREST PRESERVE BEGINS SELLING GIFT CARDS

Individuals wondering what to get for the nature lovers in their life can now consider buying a Forest Preserve District gift card. In 2019, the Forest Preserve District began selling gift cards for the first time. The cards can be used for a variety of purchases ranging from picnic shelter and dog park permits to camping gear rentals and gift shop purchases. Any monetary amount may be loaded onto the cards, which are adorned with photos of nature scenes taken in Will County forest preserves. Also, funds can be added to a previously purchased gift card, and refunds for services and products purchased with cards can be reapplied to gift cards. Gift cards can be purchased at Four Rivers Environmental Education Center in Channahon, Isle a la Cache Museum in Romeoville, Monee Reservoir in Monee Township, Plum Creek Nature Center in Crete Township and Sugar Creek Administration Center in Joliet. Gift cards are good for both in-person and online purchases.



## BOLD MULTIMEDIA CAMPAIGN URGES PEOPLE TO DO THE RIGHT THING

The Forest Preserve District rolled out a big, bold multimedia “Don’t Be A Jerk” campaign in 2019 designed to get people to behave in the preserves and treat nature and other preserve visitors with respect. The initiative consisted of videos showing what not to do, eye-catching signs featuring photos and messages that encouraged better behavior, and social media posts depicting the latest garbage dumped in a preserve. The campaign had an overwhelmingly positive reaction from the public and gained regional and national media attention, using a bit of humor and simple messages to educate and encourage positive behavior for the benefit of all who spend time in the preserves.







# OPEN SPACE MATTERS

**In partnership with local park districts, municipalities, federal and state conservation agencies and others, the Forest Preserve continues to piece together greenways that improve quality of life, provide access to public recreation, help keep water resources and the air clean, protect and restore habitat and provide sanctuary for wildlife.**



2019

# LAND PRESERVATION

The Forest Preserve acquired three parcels of land in 2019 at no cost to the District, thanks to a donation and grant funding. All three properties extend existing open space. A 40.15-acre property adjacent to Hadley Valley preserve in Joliet and Homer Glen was acquired through an Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation Grant and through O'Hare Modernization Mitigation Account (OMMA) funds. The District also accepted the donation of a 2.06-acre parcel adjacent to Romeoville Prairie Nature Preserve in Romeoville, and a 3.98-acre parcel adjoining Moeller Woods Preserve in Crete Township. These acquisitions help to accomplish the District's goal of connecting open space throughout Will County.

## FOUR KEY DEVELOPMENTS WERE ALSO COMPLETED IN 2019



### 1. Centennial Trail-Schneider's Passage Improvements

A key trailhead for the overlapping Centennial and Veterans Memorial trails in Romeoville, Schneider's Passage was improved to include an expanded parking lot and the installation of a latrine at the heavily-used site north of 135th Street and east of Route 53. Total parking was expanded from six to 30 spaces and a cul-de-sac was added at the eastern end of the road allowing cars to turn around.

### 2. Normantown Trail Extension

Normantown Trail – an important link in the region's

trail network – was extended 0.85-mile from 111th Street in Naperville south to Rockwell Lane in Plainfield. This new segment adds to the northern 1.75-mile existing section of trail which runs from Vermont Cemetery Preserve in Naperville to 111th Street. The 1.1-mile southern section, from 127th Street to 135th Street, also is complete. In the future, the Village of Plainfield and the Plainfield Park District plan to create a 1-mile section of shared-road trail in the middle, from 119th Street to 127th Street. Once completed, the trail will extend 4.7 miles from Vermont Cemetery Preserve to 135th Street in Plainfield and will link Vermont Cemetery to the District's Wolf Creek Preserve in Naperville.

### 3. New Section of Plum Creek Greenway Trail

A new section of the Plum Creek Greenway Trail was completed in 2019 at Plum Valley Preserve – Burville Road Access in Crete Township. This crushed limestone trail segment is 1-mile in

length and was supported by an Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development (OSLAD) grant. The trail was added as part of the new preserve access at Burville Road, which opened in November 2018 and includes a 9-acre dog park and a picnic shelter.

### 4. Whalon Lake Shelter Construction

A large-capacity picnic shelter was constructed at Whalon Lake in Naperville. The shelter has a 150-person capacity and replaces a smaller 25-person pavilion that previously existed lakeside. The shelter is anticipated to be available for rental by summer of 2020.



Whalon Lake Shelter



Plum Creek Greenway Trail

## NATURAL AREA RESTORATION PROJECTS

The Forest Preserve District is committed to being a good steward of the land it has been entrusted with preserving, protecting and nurturing. In 2019, land management activities were conducted on more than 4,700 acres of the District's holdings, with efforts focused on 14 preserve locations.

Some of the most significant projects include ongoing restoration of:

### Kankakee Sands Preserve, Sand Ridge Savanna Nature Preserve, and Braidwood Dunes

A total of 1,423 acres of sand savanna, prairie and wetland is being restored at Kankakee Sands Preserve in Custer Township, Sand Ridge Savanna Nature Preserve in Wilmington/Custer Township, and Braidwood Dunes and Savanna Nature Preserve in Braidwood. This involves invasive species control and collection of seed from about 300 species of local native plants for use on-site.



### Prairie Bluff Preserve

In all, 679 acres of Prairie Bluff Preserve in Crest Hill are being converted from agricultural fields to restored prairie and wetland, which will provide a feeding ground and buffer habitat for the federally endangered Hine's emerald dragonfly.



### Goodenow Grove Nature Preserve

Restoration of 465 acres of Goodenow Grove Nature Preserve in Crete Township is protecting and restoring habitat for state-listed endangered species. The work also preserves and promotes the health of high-quality woodlands.



### Hickory Creek Barrens Nature Preserve

Work throughout 405 acres of Hickory Creek Barrens Nature Preserve in New Lenox consists of invasive species control and prescribed burn management of high-quality seeps, woodlands, savannas and prairies.



**These restoration efforts help the District to protect a diversity of habitats as well as the animal and plant species that live within the preserves. They also contribute to the ecological health of the region, assisting in keeping water resources and the air clean.**



2019

LAND PRESERVATION





# WILDLIFE MATTERS

**Wildlife research provides a direct indication of the benefits of land restoration. It's important to care for the places that wildlife call home because this ensures the overall prosperity of the ecosystem. Animal and plant biodiversity is key to keeping ecosystems healthy. In turn, flourishing ecosystems filter our air and water, regulate our soil and help maintain the climate, which is good for everyone.**







## WILDLIFE RESEARCH PROJECTS

Monitoring of local flora and fauna is conducted each year within the forest preserves. In 2019, these projects included a butterfly survey at Braidwood Sands Area preserves in Braidwood, Custer Township and Wilmington; a preliminary survey of ornate box turtles at Kankakee Sands Preserve in Custer Township; and wading bird nesting surveys at Lake Renwick Nature Preserve in Plainfield and Rock Run Rookery Preserve in Joliet. In addition, the District once again cooperated with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources in the removal of Asian carp from the Des Plaines River system at Rock Run Rookery Preserve, and partnered with this agency to continue monitoring the spread of chronic wasting disease in deer in the southern part of Will County. Aerial deer population surveys also were completed at 24 preserves and the impact of deer browse was documented at eight preserves.

Ornate Box Turtle Survey



Butterfly Survey



Aerial Deer Population Surveys



Bird Nesting Surveys



Asian Carp Removal





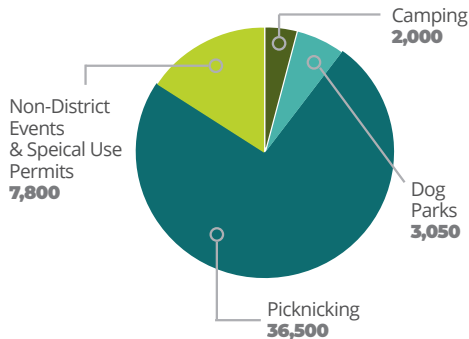
2019

# PROGRAMS & EVENTS

## PRESERVE USE, PROGRAMS AND SPECIAL EVENTS

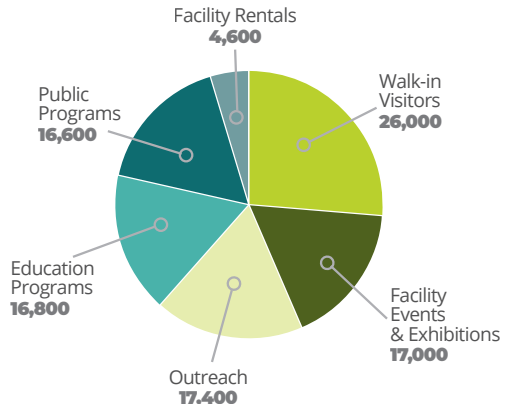
The Forest Preserve hosted four facility events, six exhibitions and a wealth of nature education programming in 2019. In all, nearly 90,000 people spent time at one or more of the District's visitor centers throughout the year. In addition, permitted activities such as picnicking, camping or enjoying a dog park brought close to another 50,000 visitors to the preserves.

### PERMITTED ACTIVITIES



Nearly  
**148,000**  
visitors in 2019

### PROGRAMS & SERVICES



2019

# PARTNERSHIPS



## AWARDS IN APPRECIATION OF PARTNERS

Lewis University received the Appreciation of Partners award for 2019 during the Forest Preserve's Board of Commissioners meeting in February 2020. Each year, the District selects its award honorees from dozens of partnering organizations, and recipients are recognized and awarded a plaque by the Forest Preserve's Board. The award was presented to Lewis for the university's ongoing assistance with preserve restoration including brush control and seed collection, preserve shoreline cleanup, District programming and more. The partnership with Lewis began with Lee Witkowski, the District's longtime volunteer interpreter at Lake Renwick Preserve in Plainfield and steward at Keepataw Preserve in Lemont. Witkowski, who teaches environmental biology at Lewis, wanted to give his students real-life experiences in the field. Other professors at Lewis have now also become involved, and are using District volunteer opportunities as teachable moments for their students.

## COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

The Forest Preserve received a total of \$60,224.50 in 2019 through sponsorships and donations. Thank you to the following sponsors and donors.

- **Anna Carter-Scott**
- **Chevron Corporation**
- **Crete Park District**
- **Dorothy Darden**
- **Goldman Sachs**
- **Gwendolyn J. Sterk and the Family Law Group, P.C.**
- **Joliet Bicycle Club**
- **Kristine Kijowski**
- **Linda S. Engels**
- **National Environmental Education Foundation**
- **Resource Management Prairie People Volunteers**
- **Richard Wachenheim**
- **Ronald Kapala**
- **Shorewood HUGS**
- **The Doogan Family**
- **The Nature Foundation of Will County**
- **Vancina Landscaping Inc.**
- **Volunteer Stewardship Network**
- **Village of Beecher**



More than  
**\$60,000**  
received in  
sponsorships  
and donations

\* Sponsorships and donations listed exceed \$250 cash or in-kind value.

## GRANTS AND DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIPS

The following grants were awarded to the Forest Preserve District in 2019. Grants expand local tax dollars to enable the District to provide more amenities to Will County citizens.

Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning.....\$5,353,791  
Trail Extension  
*Veterans Memorial Trail  
(159th Street south to Hadley Valley)*

Illinois Department of Natural Resources.....\$112,500  
Special Wildlife Funds Grant for Habitat Restoration  
*Goodenow Grove Nature Preserve*

Monarch Watch.....\$1,314.50  
Milkweed Restoration  
*Hickory Creek, Lake Renwick and McKinley Woods preserves*

National Endowment for the Humanities.....\$1,000  
Frida Kahlo's Garden Exhibit  
*Four Rivers Environmental Education Center*

ONEOK Inc.....\$975  
Sandbox Exhibit  
*Four Rivers Environmental Education Center*

**Total grants for 2019.....\$5,469,580.50**



## CERTIFICATE OF ACHIEVEMENT IN FINANCIAL REPORTING

### Government Finance Officers Association

For the 24th consecutive year, the Forest Preserve District has been awarded the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting. The certificate was awarded by the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada for the District's comprehensive annual financial report ending December 31, 2018. This award is the highest recognition given in governmental accounting, and designates the Forest Preserve's financial statements as being of the highest quality and transparency for the users and residents of the District.



## EXCELLENCE IN ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION PROGRAM ACCREDITATION

### Chicago Wilderness

Interagency collaboration and restoration success at Hadley Valley Preserve were recognized with a 2019 Excellence in Ecological Restoration Program (EERP) silver accreditation from Chicago Wilderness. The EERP program recognizes the largest and highest quality natural areas in the Chicago region and beyond, as well as the organizations that manage the sites. The Hadley Valley restoration project is the largest such effort in the District's history. Six-hundred acres of the 767-acre preserve have been restored over a 12-year period. The restoration project is beneficial for the entire region, providing additional high quality habitat for hundreds of plant and animal species, protecting drinking water resources and helping to clean streams and improve air quality.

## ENVIRONMENTAL/CONSERVATION AWARD

### National Association of County Park and Recreation Officials

Restoration work at Kankakee Sands Preserve earned the Forest Preserve an award from the National Association of County Park and Recreation Officials (NACPRO). The Environmental/Conservation award is given annually "to recognize an exceptional effort to acquire, restore, preserve, operate, or develop unique or significant conservation and natural areas or programs," according to NACPRO. The Kankakee Sands success story dates back to 1999 when the Forest Preserve first began purchasing land for the preserve. Restoration efforts began in earnest in winter of 2013-2014 when the District began using seeds donated by The Nature Conservancy that were especially suited to the region. The seeding program has continued annually. In addition to planting hundreds of native species, restoration efforts have included: re-establishing natural hydrology, controlling invasive species, and reintroducing fire by way of controlled burns. Kankakee Sands Preserve is a key spot for restoration because it is located between three nature preserves. The combined nature preserve area supports 700 native plant species, 500 wildlife species, 12 threatened or endangered plant species, two threatened or endangered turtle species and seven insects listed as species in greatest need of conservation.





An aerial photograph showing a lush green wetland area. A dark river flows through the left side of the frame, bordered by dense, vibrant green trees and vegetation. A paved road curves through the right side of the image, and a concrete drainage structure is visible at the bottom center. The overall scene is a natural, undisturbed landscape.

# WATER MATTERS

**Wetlands play a vital role in the health of our local ecosystem. They replenish underground aquifers and filter out pollutants to improve water quality – including water used for drinking. They also provide important habitat for a wealth of animal and plant life, with many species found only within wetland areas.**

2019

# FINANCIALS

## FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

In 1926, voters approved a referendum to establish the Forest Preserve District of Will County as a separate taxing body of county government. Even then, when Will County was overwhelmingly rural, its citizens realized the importance of preserving its natural treasures. Today, the Forest Preserve District's Board of Commissioners, made up of 26 members from the county's 13 elective districts, oversees all District business and approves property purchases and District expenditures. The District currently owns, manages and leases nearly 22,000 acres of land. The Forest Preserve is organized financially into two operating funds. The Construction and Development Fund supports new site improvements and associated staffing costs, maintenance of existing facilities and properties, and infrastructure improvements. The Corporate Fund is used for employee salaries, benefits and general administrative costs of the Forest Preserve.

## BOND ISSUES

In November 2019, the Forest Preserve's Board of Commissioners approved the issuance of \$25 million in general obligation limited tax bonds. The transaction took place in December, and the bonds will mature in 2039. Of the \$25 million bond issue, \$13 million will be used for preserve, facility and trail improvements and \$12 million for land preservation over the course of a five-year capital plan.

## DEBT SERVICE

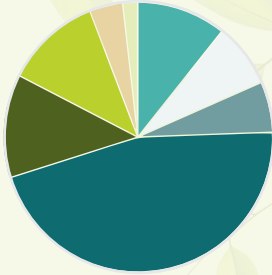
Each of the bond issuances requires debt service. These are scheduled to be paid down over 20 years for each.



**\$12 Million**  
in land preservation  
over the next  
five years



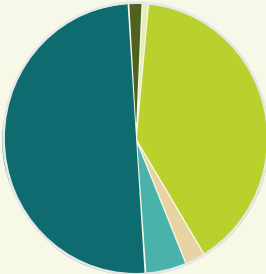
### USE OF FUNDS



General Government.....	4,067,060
Planning & Development.....	2,930,438
Visitor Services and Marketing & Communications.....	2,304,455
Debt Service.....	17,393,524
Capital Outlay.....	4,762,406
Operations.....	4,416,836
Police.....	1,518,146
Other Financing Uses.....	684,649

**Total** **38,077,514**

### SOURCE OF FUNDS



Property Taxes.....	31,797,292
Licenses & Permits.....	1,009,153
Investment Income.....	488,778
Bond Proceeds Utilized.....	25,244,961
Grants & Other Intergovernmental.....	1,553,650
Miscellaneous Other.....	3,190,766

**Total** **63,284,600**

LEVY YEAR	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Corporate/C&D	0.0728	0.0722	0.0702	0.0687	0.0682
Debt Service	0.1249	0.1215	0.1242	0.1208	0.0822
<b>Total</b>	<b>0.1977</b>	<b>0.1937</b>	<b>0.1944</b>	<b>0.1895</b>	<b>0.1504</b>

2019

# VOLUNTEER SUPPORT



Volunteers play a vital role in accomplishing the Forest Preserve's mission. In 2019, a total of 12,036 hours of service were generously donated by 1,681 volunteers. Of these, 200 were Prairie People volunteers who, through their dedication, routinely support the District year after year. The remaining 1,481 individuals participated in District volunteer opportunities for the first time or intermittently throughout the year. Whether large or small, the donation of time and talent by these volunteers made an important and impactful difference in all that the District does in service to the citizens of Will County.

<b>DIVISION OR DEPARTMENT</b>	<b>VOLUNTEERS</b>	<b>HOURS</b>
Business Administration and Financial Services	12	988
Law Enforcement	23	1,862
Maintenance and Operations	286	722
Planning and Development	1,255	5,987
Visitor Services	105	2,477
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1,681</b>	<b>12,036</b>



## INDIVIDUAL VOLUNTEERS

Diane Aigner  
JoDell Albi  
Gilbert Anderson  
Jason Andre  
Linda Andrews  
Jim Avila  
Dave Babich  
Frank Basile  
Athanasios Bastas  
Isabel Bejar  
Deb Bettenhausen  
Gary Bettenhausen  
Mark Bettin  
Bonnie Blevins  
Greg Bluhm  
Claudia Boothe  
Brad Bosch  
Eric Brossman  
Pete Caldwell  
Therese Caldwell  
Vanessa Caldwell  
Pam Canton  
Scott Carevic  
Olive Carlisle  
Joan Carrigan  
Jo Chenell  
Carol Chiasson  
Melissa Chiasson  
Jeff Chrisman  
Jean Christensen  
Robert Christensen  
Sarah Clevenger

Carol Cooley  
Jan Corbett  
Anna Craig  
Jimmy Craig  
Joel Craig  
Reese Crate  
Scotland Crate  
Tiffany Crate  
Kerri Counts  
Danny Cuevas  
Rodney Dabe  
Paul Dacko  
Georgeann Davis  
Judy Dehm  
Joan Dietrich  
Joanne DiNovo  
Dawn Downey  
Brian Duffie  
Frank Dundek  
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Kathy Hearne  
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Sabrina Hines  
Pat Hoffman  
Scott Holladay  
Cindy Hostert  
Bill Huish  
Glenn Johnson  
Debbie Jones  
Jill Juban  
Ronald Kaye  
Efty Kelly  
Emily Kenny  
Bill Kibler  
Jackie Kibler  
Scott King  
Ed Klama  
Kathryn Lewellen  
Ken Lewellen  
Krystal Lewellen  
Robert Lewis  
Wayne Lezon

Amanda Listermann  
Keith Listermann  
Mary Listermann  
Chuckie Llewellyn  
Rich Llewellyn  
Valarie Loekle  
David Lowe  
Sue Malkowski  
Carol Malnar  
Stan Malnar  
Tom McCaffery  
Jessica McQuown  
Sean McQuown  
Ruth Meyer  
John Mittelbrun  
Bill Morris  
Sandra Munoz  
Kent Munro  
Mary Nachtwey  
Swathi Narayanan  
Don Nelson  
Espie Nelson  
Dave Nordin  
Michael O'Brien  
Michelle O'Connor  
John O'Lear  
Izzy Opiola  
Bernie O'Reilly  
Jack Panozzo  
Jon Panozzo  
Jodie Payne  
Carol Picciolo

Andrea Pletzke  
Gloria Pollack  
Denise Pollworth  
Alan Potyen  
Jessica Prince  
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Rene Russell  
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Mike Rzepka  
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Jennifer Schmuhl  
Paul Schroeder  
Max Scott-Schroeder  
Sam Scott-Schroeder  
Phyllis Schulte  
Rose Scofield  
Sadie Scofield  
Ray Setzke  
Robert Sherwood  
Stephen Sherwood



**1,681**  
total volunteers  
in 2019

The very special members of our community who share their time with us are known as **Prairie People Volunteers**. At the Forest Preserve, not only do we cherish our volunteers, we couldn't do what we do without them. We rely on generous, dedicated people to help us achieve our mission and encourage the stewardship of our natural areas for a greener, healthier and more beautiful world.

Larry Skisak  
Sally Skoff  
Carol Smith  
Bob Soukup  
Jeff Spanbauer  
Kathy Stephens  
Tom Stephens  
Mary Stivek  
Madison Stokoski  
Sharon Sullivan  
Grace Swift  
James Swift  
Jerry Swift  
John Swift  
Kathy Swift

Max Swift  
Molly Swift  
Karen Tellef  
Al Thomas  
Al D. Thomas  
Megan Tornatore  
Bernie Twait  
Delia VanZyl  
Huck VanZyl  
Linus VanZyl  
Oliver VanZyl  
Patrick VanZyl  
Zoey VanZyl  
Richard Wachenheim  
Jacob Weber

Dave Wendt  
Marie Wendt  
Mark Wieclaw  
Sally Wieclaw  
Bill Willis  
Robert Wilson  
Connie Witkowski  
Lee Witkowski  
Patrick Woloszcuk-Mrugala  
Tyler Woodworth  
Carter Wright  
Michelle Zaleski





## COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER GROUPS

**Bloom High School**

**Bloom Trail High School**

**Boy Scout Troop 12**

**Boy Scout Troop 15**

**Boy Scout Troop 40**

**Boy Scout Troop 57**

**Boy Scout Troop 63**

**Channahon Music Boosters**

**Clearwater Paper**

**Earth Week Naperville Volunteers**

**Girl Scouts of Greater Chicago and Northwest Indiana**

**Girl Scout Troop 398**

**Joliet Central High School**

**Joliet Junior College**

**Joliet Montessori School**

**Joliet West High School**

**Latinos Unidos – Joliet Junior College**

**Lewis University**

**Lincoln-Way Central and Lincoln-Way West High Schools Airforce ROTC**

**Lincoln-Way East High School Key Club**

**Lincoln-Way High Schools Asset Team**

**Lockport High School**

**Neuqua Valley High School**

**Plainfield Central High School**

**Plainfield East High School**

**Providence Catholic High School**

**Romeoville High School**

**St. Mary Catholic Church, Mokena**

**Sertoma Centre**

**ShareFest Volunteers**

**Thorn Creek Audubon Society**

**University of St. Francis**

**Will County Trail Riders**





## CORPORATE VOLUNTEER GROUPS

Goldman Sachs

IKEA

Xylem



**THANK YOU**  
for supporting  
the Forest  
Preserve's  
mission

2019

# STAFF ROSTER

## Business Administration and Financial Services

Matthew Pehle,  
*Chief Financial Officer*

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Lisa Lukasevich, *Director*

Mary Borgra  
Meredith Clavenna  
Renee Gauchat  
Diana Jaworski  
Leisa Nevins  
Donna Suca

## Information Technology

Denise Steffen, *Director*

Sheri Bembenek  
Tom Mancari  
Michael Prybell  
Barb Sudsberry  
Eleanor Wagner

## Operations and Program Services

Ralph Schultz,  
*Chief Operating Officer*

## Law Enforcement

Tracy Chapman, *Chief of Police*

David Barrios Jr., *Lieutenant*

Jason Allbert  
Robert Baikie  
Anthony Balsamo  
Steven Bettenhausen  
Russell Burroughs  
Eric Cecchi  
Cody Columbus  
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James Gerdich  
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Jennifer Hemmeger  
Brandon Hermann  
Gregory Hidebaugh  
Mark Houlihan  
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Daniel Olszewski  
Dan Rankovich  
Michael A. Reilly

Kelly Robertson  
David Starceвич  
Nicole Veerman  
Robert Veron  
James Wendt  
Matthew Yates

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Cole Biltgen  
David Blaskey  
Elise Brazzale  
Tyler Brown  
Thomas Burns  
Jason Buss  
Scott Carevic  
Justin Casillas  
Rina Cheney  
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Gerald Dawson  
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Brian Krabbe  
Karl Krudup  
Eric Latz  
John Latz  
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Brian Mackey  
Edward McDermott  
Arthur Moeller  
Christopher Moeller  
Ryan Nichols  
Adam Oestmann  
Ryan Osman



Jon Panozzo  
Justin Parks  
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Colin Talkie  
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Cindy Cain  
Glenn P. Knoblock  
Katie McCollum  
Meghan McMahon  
Chad Merda  
Rose Scofield

## Planning and Development

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Allison Borecky  
Glen Buckner  
Nick Budde  
Floyd Catchpole  
Corinne Crawford  
Julianne Mason  
Colleen Novander  
Matt Novander

**2019 PROGRESS REPORT**

John O'Lear  
Jessica Quinn  
Karen Rinke  
David Robson  
Matthew Ruhter  
Barbara Sherwood  
Livia Verklan  
Judith Wallace  
Rachael West

## Visitor Services

**Lynn Kurczewski, Director**

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Kylee Beckwith  
Bob Bryerton  
Catherine Caldwell  
Cylee Fuller  
Ashley Grynienc  
Jen Guest  
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Ben Hecke  
James Hurd  
Mark Loekle  
Suzy Lyttle  
Jessica McQuown  
Jenna Newcomb  
Angela Opiola  
Kelli Parke  
Kayla Pierson  
Jessica Prince-Sharrar

Christopher Quick  
Angela Rafac  
Tina Riley  
Sara Russell  
James Segatto  
Bailey Stevenson  
Jason Stevenson  
Mary Thomas  
Heather VanZyl  
Erin Ward  
Melissa Zanzola

## Retired

John Gerl  
Jeff Kure  
Mike Speller



*Photo credits: Cindy Cain, Chris Cheng,  
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# MAP YOUR NEXT ADVENTURE

*ReconnectWithNature.org*



*Bringing People and Nature Together*

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EDUCATION CENTER**  
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