



# ANNUAL REPORT

2023

The background is a solid teal color with faint, stylized leaf patterns in a slightly darker shade of teal. The leaves are arranged in a symmetrical, branching pattern, resembling a tree or a large leafy branch. The overall aesthetic is clean and nature-oriented.

## Mission

**The Forest Preserve  
District protects and  
enhances Will County's  
natural and cultural  
resources for the benefit  
of current and  
future generations.**



How much do you know about our visitor centers? Find out which one received accreditation as an inclusive facility from the National Inclusion Project, which one immerses visitors in natural history, which one offers kayak and canoe rentals, and more by scanning the QR codes on some of the following pages.

# Board of Commissioners

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## Photo credits:

Cindy Cain, Glenn P. Knoblock,  
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# Hello

from the board president

Aside from our main purpose to acquire, preserve, protect and enhance your forest preserves, one of our foremost priorities at the Forest Preserve District is to help connect people to nature and realize the physical and mental health benefits of being outside. We did that in many ways throughout 2023, leading hundreds of free public programs, maintaining more than 50 public access areas, providing multiple opportunities to access our waters – including a new state-of-the-art, fully accessible kayak launch at Lake Chaminwood – and offering more than 135 miles of local and regional trails. We were especially pleased with your response to the Take It Outside Challenge through which thousands of individuals, couples, families and friends trekked across the county learning about our forest preserves, having fun and getting a bit of exercise along the way. What an inspiration!

We know that our forest preserves protect some of the rarest plants and animals in Will County and provide invaluable habitat for many others. But just as important, they are for you. So, I hope that you will make some time in 2024 to explore your forest preserves and trails, attend one of our events or programs, and find the enjoyment and inspiration that nature has to offer.

Sincerely,

Annette Parker



# Hello

from the executive director

In 2023, we continued the transition of both Four Rivers Environmental Education Center and Hidden Oaks Nature Center by making strategic investments in the planning, engineering and improvement of these two facilities to better serve our visitors, improve universal accessibility and accommodate our unique programming approach. Work will continue at these two sites in 2024 with the completion of two new outdoor program spaces at Four Rivers and a full interior renovation, exhibit expansions and outdoor program space additions at Hidden Oaks.

Thanks to the funding assistance of The Nature Foundation of Will County, we were also able to complete the first phase of improvements at Lake Chaminwood in 2023, expanding the parking area and improving visitor accessibility. In 2024, we will complete the second phase of the project linking the preserve's internal trail system to the I&M Canal State Trail. These projects, in addition to other planned trail improvements along the Rock Run Greenway Trail and Plum Creek Greenway Trail, will expand visitor access and continue with our efforts to provide safe and welcoming places to commune with nature. In addition, they will further serve to connect our communities and their forest preserves in the most accessible ways possible. You can keep track of all that's happening at the Forest Preserve District of Will County through our website, [ReconnectWithNature.org](https://ReconnectWithNature.org), or by following us on social media and subscribing to our three digital newsletters. I'm sure you'll find something that will motivate you to explore all that we have to offer.

Sincerely,

Ralph Schultz

The background is a solid teal color with faint, stylized oak leaf patterns in a slightly darker shade of teal. The leaves are arranged in a symmetrical, branching pattern, with some leaves pointing upwards and others downwards.

## Purpose

**As the Forest Preserve has evolved over the past century, we have witnessed many changes in the landscape and the built environment. What remains unchanged is our commitment to our mission.**



One of McKinley Wood's key features — and what the education center is named for — is the four rivers that flow around the preserve. The preserve sits at the spot near where the Des Plaines, DuPage and Kankakee rivers converge to form the Illinois River. This confluence, or area where the rivers meet, provides unique habitat for all manner of birds.

## Land acquisition

Highlights include:

- 1** Acquisition of 7.94 acres of land on South Blackberry Lane in Channahon, contiguous with the road leading to Four Rivers Environmental Education Center. This parcel buffers and protects the Forest Preserve's existing holdings at McKinley Woods.
- 2** The agreement to enter into a conservation easement granted by the Plainfield Township Park District at 23308 W. Bentley Drive in Plainfield. This acquisition is necessary to connect an existing trail from properties owned by the Park District to the Forest Preserve's Hammel Woods. The planned trail is part of the regional DuPage River Trail.



**For local bird lovers, the biannual arrival of American white pelicans at McKinley Woods is one of the most anticipated events each spring and fall. They can weigh up to 30 pounds, making them one of the largest birds on the continent.**



Isle a la Cache Museum transports visitors back to the 18th century, when "Illinois Country" was home to the fur trade.

Scan here to learn more about the facility.





^ The bicycle repair station along Hickory Creek Bikeway.

# Preserve, visitor center and trail enhancements

Highlights include:

- 1** Four Rivers Environmental Education Center in Channahon being awarded the National Inclusion Project's first accreditation for a nature center in the country. Months in the making, the accreditation shows Four Rivers is a facility where all visitors, regardless of ability level, can participate.
- 2** The reopening of Lake Chaminwood Preserve in Troy Township in June 2023 after being closed for two months for improvements, including a bigger parking lot, a pedestrian welcome plaza and new pathways linking to the existing trail. In September, a new accessible kayak launch with adaptive features and a floating dock opened on the preserve's 35-acre lake. Support for the improvements came from The Nature Foundation of Will County through funding from the Joseph Dollinger family.
- 3** The new and improved Tackle Box bait shop opening to customers in July 2023 at Hidden Lakes Trout Farm in Bolingbrook. When the Forest Preserve District acquired Hidden Oaks Preserve from the Bolingbrook Park District in February 2022, the old bait shop was torn down and a new one constructed in its place. The bait shop sells bait, food and fishing supplies.
- 4** The installation of two new bicycle repair stations, bringing the total number in Will County preserves to six. The Joliet Bicycle Club donated money for the repair station at the intersection of the Old Plank Road Trail and Hickory Creek Bikeway in Mokena. And The Nature Foundation of Will County helped fund one where Spring Creek Greenway Trail connects to Veterans Memorial Trail in New Lenox.



# In 2024, we will:

- 1** Continue to pursue land preservation priorities in the Jackson Creek and DuPage River greenways, utilizing proceeds from the 2020 bond sale.
- 2** Prepare a comprehensive Land Preservation Plan to help guide and direct future decision makers in developing new preservation programs for properties with the most conservation, recreation and open space potential to meet our mission.
- 3** Explore options for continued land preservation, habitat restoration and multi-use trail expansion through a bond sale or voter referendum.

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## Stewardship

**As stewards, we preserve,  
manage and restore significant  
natural and cultural resources  
to support an environmental  
legacy and encourage a  
community-wide respect  
for nature.**



Prescribed burns were completed on more than 3,200 acres at 72 burn units to introduce natural fire disturbance on remnant and restored plant communities.



Seeds Forest Preserve staff collect in the preserves will be used to establish native plant communities in newly restored areas and to enrich degraded natural areas.

## What we did in 2023

### Research

The Forest Preserve monitored 153 populations of 32 different rare plant species at 11 preserves in coordination with the Plants of Concern monitoring program. The District also conducted a variety of surveys from small mammals to grassland birds, and cooperated with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to remove Asian carp from the Des Plaines River system. Forest Preserve volunteers participated in calling frog, Illinois butterfly and Illinois odonate monitoring as well as the monitoring of six RiverWatch sites.

### Restoration

Natural area restoration was conducted on more than 6,300 acres of District holdings, with efforts focused on 16 preserves located throughout the county.

### Invasive species control

More than 16,000 hours were spent performing invasive species management on more than 3,600 acres in 2023. Fifty-four different invasive plant species were controlled within 44 preserves.

### Native seed collection

Forest Preserve staff and volunteers collected more than 630 pounds of seed from 146 different native plant species in 2023.



# In 2024, we will:

- 1** Complete invasive species control and other natural resource best management practices on 4,100 acres of restored and remnant natural areas.
- 2** Restore 168 acres of lands that are currently in agricultural production at Jackson Creek Preserve in New Lenox. The property is planned to be acquired with the assistance of an Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation grant.
- 3** Manage agricultural lands with regenerative practices to improve soil conditions or grassland bird habitat including 3,000 acres of row crop and 700 acres of grass hay.
- 4** Expand opportunities for volunteers to engage in resource management activities.

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## People

**The Forest Preserve provides multiple avenues for the public to experience nature. Through these opportunities, we share the very purpose for which forest preserve lands have been preserved, protected and managed as well as the value that they provide.**



Stay up to date on upcoming events in the preserves by subscribing to our digital newsletter, *Get Going*. Each week, it will land in your inbox, pointing you to the must-do programs for the week. Visit our website to subscribe!

# People served



## Permitted Activities

Picnics	<b>46,000</b>
Camping	<b>1,700</b>
Dog Parks	<b>3,000</b>
Non-District Events and Special Use	<b>11,400</b>

## Programs and Services

Volunteer Events	<b>1,400</b>
Community Outreach	<b>13,500</b>
Education Programs	<b>11,000</b>
Public Programs	<b>16,000</b>
Events and Exhibitions	<b>23,300</b>





^ Fishing programs are offered seasonally at select preserves.

## Facility Visitation

Four Rivers Environmental Education Center	<b>8,900</b>
Isle a la Cache Museum	<b>10,200</b>
Hidden Oaks Nature Center	<b>10,600</b>
Monee Reservoir	<b>7,300</b>
Plum Creek Nature Center	<b>9,700</b>
Permitting and Recreation	<b>11,500</b>
Sugar Creek Administration Center	<b>2,300</b>

## Total People Served

Four Rivers Environmental Education Center	<b>23,800</b>
Isle a la Cache Museum	<b>31,700</b>
Hidden Oaks Nature Center	<b>20,100</b>
Hidden Lakes Trout Farm	<b>7,700</b>
Monee Reservoir	<b>11,700</b>
Plum Creek Nature Center	<b>20,800</b>
Permitting and Recreation	<b>23,600</b>



**HIDDEN  
OAKS**  
NATURE CENTER

Hidden Oaks Nature Center is getting a major makeover in 2024. Once the interior of the building is renovated, exhibit work will provide new design features and a new permanent live animal tank for the nature center's resident turtles.

Scan here to learn more about the facility.





A team organized by the Forest Preserve's police department raised \$3,600 for Special Olympics Illinois by participating in the 2023 Illinois Law Enforcement Torch Run Polar Plunge. The event has become an annual tradition for the District's officers. The police department also participates in the Special Olympics Illinois Plane Pull, Torch Run and Cop on a Roof events.

## Marketing highlights:

The launch of the Take It Outside Campaign in January 2023 to encourage people to create healthy outdoor habits and embrace nature in new ways. The campaign included a Take It Outside Challenge and more than 1,200 people participated, completing around 115,000 nature-themed missions.

The conclusion of "The Buzz" nature show, which ended its 41-episode run in November 2023. Started in July 2020, every month the show shared the beauty and intrigue of nature. "The Buzz" aired on Facebook, YouTube, local cable channels and WJYS TV. It won a marketing award in 2020 from The National Association of County Parks and Recreation Officials.

The creation of an online store selling a variety of T-shirts and other items with proceeds going to The Nature Foundation of Will County.

Also, the Forest Preserve closed out the year with 472,917 followers across all social media. Other digital media highlights include:

### **Social Media Posts:**

29.4 million impressions

### **Videos:**

4.7 million views across Facebook, X, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube

### **Website Traffic:**

2.85 million page views

### **Traditional media:**

178.1 million estimated impressions



[Forest Preserve merch >](#)

# In 2024, we will:

- 1** Offer more than 400 public, youth and family education and recreation programs.
- 2** Host three traveling exhibitions at visitor centers in Romeoville, Channahon and Crete Township. The exhibits are on loan from the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum, Mitchell Museum of the American Indian and the Chicago Botanic Garden with support provided by The Nature Foundation of Will County.
- 3** Host 12 public events throughout the County offering individuals and families unique opportunities to engage with staff, presenters, partners, and the environment.
- 4** Initiate exhibit design, fabrication and installation at Hidden Oaks Nature Center in Bolingbrook.
- 5** Continue to offer a Take It Outside Campaign to grow further awareness of and participation in Forest Preserve offerings.
- 6** Increase subscribers to our weekly newsletter, The Compass, and the number of followers on social media, while implementing new digital avenues for the public to connect with us.
- 7** Continue to manage dynamic websites and digital newsletters that are a valuable source of information about our natural and cultural landscape.
- 8** Continue to support The Nature Foundation of Will County's native plant sales and other efforts that encourage people to bring nature to their homes.



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## Wellness

**The Forest Preserve strives to make nature accessible to all and to offer a variety of ways for people to engage with the outdoors in support of their mental and physical health.**



Research shows that nature is healing. Having access to nature is important to realize this effect. The Forest Preserve strives to make nature accessible to everyone, regardless of race, gender, socioeconomic status or ability.

## What we offer

- 1** Programs for audiences with special interests or needs including autism and sensory sensitivities.
- 2** A built environment with an emphasis on ADA best practices.
- 3** Regional trails that connect many of our communities and people to each other.
- 4** Welcoming visitor centers and staff that are firmly committed to appreciating and promoting equity, diversity, inclusiveness and wellness.
- 5** Digital options in the form of online programming, newsletters, websites and social media platforms.
- 6** A Forest Preserve police department that provides assistance and law enforcement within the preserves. In 2023, police officers logged more than 9,300 additional foot patrols, building checks and details. The department hosted trail safety days to engage and educate the public about the importance of safety while recreating. They also created a directory of resources to share with people they encounter who are in need of various types of community assistance.



Four Rivers is a facility where all visitors, regardless of ability level, can participate. It is the first nature center in the country to receive accreditation as an inclusive facility from the National Inclusion Project.

Scan here to learn more about the facility.



# In 2024, we will:

- 1** Initiate reconstruction and improvement of a 2.25-mile segment of the Rock Run Greenway Trail within Rock Run Preserve in Joliet.
- 2** Start construction of a 0.65-mile trail segment closing the last remaining gap in the 12-mile Rock Run Greenway Trail in Joliet.
- 3** Initiate renovation of the Hidden Oaks Nature Center and surrounding campus in Bolingbrook to improve accessibility and increase program and exhibition space.
- 4** Complete expansion of the Lake Chaminwood – Dollinger Family Access in Channahon to improve trail and kayak access and provide additional visitor amenities.
- 5** Offer a series of recreational and outreach activities to encourage an active lifestyle and promote the use of forest preserves to improve physical and mental well-being.
- 6** Initiate development of an accessible canoe and kayak launch at the confluence of the DuPage and Des Plaines rivers in McKinley Woods in Channahon.
- 7** Continue to develop engineering and construction plans to connect segments of the Plum Creek Greenway Trail to Goodenow Grove Nature Preserve and Plum Valley Preserve in Crete Township.
- 8** Initiate engineering on critical trail connections along the DuPage River Trail linking Bolingbrook and Naperville and along Wolf's Crossing Road linking Aurora to the Normantown and Tallgrass Greenway trails.
- 9** Initiate visitor amenity and trail improvements at Isle a la Cache in Romeoville to enhance visitor experiences and provide additional opportunities for nature exploration.





## Collaboration

**Together with federal, state,  
and local agency partners;  
non-governmental  
organizations; volunteers; and  
private citizens, the Forest  
Preserve multiplies its efforts  
and improves the environment  
for all life that calls Will  
County home or relies on its  
natural resources for survival,  
sustenance, health  
or inspiration.**



The adaptive kayak and canoe launch at Lake Chaminwood assists paddlers as they head out onto the water. It includes pull bars that allow users to pull themselves down the chute.

## Grants

Trail Connection: Plum Creek Greenway <i>Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning</i>	<b>\$3,089,500.00</b>
Acquisition of 158 Acres: Jackson Creek Greenway <i>Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation</i>	<b>\$1,079,784.00</b>
Railroad Pedestrian Warning and Gate: Wolfs Crossing Road and Hafenrichter Road <i>Grade Crossing Protection Fund</i>	<b>\$760,000.00</b>
Ecological Restoration: Kankakee Sands Preserve and Sand Ridge Savanna Nature Preserve <i>Illinois Department of Natural Resources</i>	<b>\$92,000.00</b>
Accessible Kayak Launch: Lake Chaminwood Preserve <i>Illinois Department of Natural Resources</i>	<b>\$80,000.00</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$5,101,284.00</b>



^ In 2024, The Nature Foundation of Will County will have a new leader, a new garden tour event and a host of activities that are designed to raise money for Forest Preserve programs and initiatives.

## Partnerships

- American Museum of Fly Fishing
- Bolingbrook Arts Society
- Canal Corridor Association
- Channahon Township
- Chicago Sports & Fitness
- City of Lockport
- City of Wilmington
- County of Will
- Friends of Illinois Nature Preserves
- Illinois Department of Natural Resources
- Illinois Secretary of State
- Illinois State Toll Highway Authority
- Midwin National Tallgrass Prairie
- Orvis
- Professional Art Quilt Alliance
- Romeoville Art Society
- SCARCE (School & Community Assistance for Recycling and Composting Education)
- The Conservation Foundation
- The Nature Foundation of Will County
- Thorn Creek Audubon
- Trout Unlimited
- U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary
- Village of Channahon
- Village of Manhattan
- Village of Minooka
- Village of Plainfield
- Wheatland Township Road District
- Working Bikes

A herd of bison lives at Midwin National Tallgrass Prairie in Wilmington as part of a 20-year experiment in restoring the landscape to its native tallgrass prairie. >





Some of the most valuable benefits of volunteering are knowing that you are making a positive impact on our environment, improving your mental and physical health, and enhancing the quality of life within your community.

# Volunteering

More than 13,900 hours of service were generously donated in 2023 by over 840 Forest Preserve volunteers, allowing the District to accomplish much more than it could without their diligent efforts.

## Prairie People Volunteers

- Megan Abellera
- Jo Dell Albi
- Linda Andrews
- Todd Aschbrenner
- Jim Avila
- Dave Babich
- Alex Baxter
- Mark Bettin
- Trish Bochenek
- Stacy Browner
- Julie Buehner
- Kate Caldwell
- Maura Carlisle
- Lorna Carrara
- Cam Cassidy
- Jo Chenell
- Tiffany Clark
- Michelle Clauss
- Jim Colwell
- Bernie Conway
- Carol Cooley
- Jan Corbett
- Cathy Costello
- Joel Craig
- Christina Cruz
- Rod Dabe
- Donna Davlantis
- Dawn Downey
- Ann Dralle
- Eli Eisfeller
- Mallory Eisfeller
- Carrie Ephgrave
- Nicholas Epley
- Jim Evans
- Marilyn Evans
- Barb Ferry
- Gail Fischetti
- Sean Flannery
- William Frankenberger
- Barb Fuqua
- John Fuqua
- Jeanne Golec
- Joel Greenberg
- Carolyn Gudgeon
- Bailey Hantak
- Kate Harrington
- Kathy Hearne

The Monee Reservoir Visitor Center offers a variety of recreational opportunities. Canoes and kayaks are available for rental for use May 1-Sept.30.



Scan here to learn more about the facility.

## Prairie People Volunteers (continued)

- Greg Hejnar
- Leda Herrera
- Mary Holden
- Cindy Hostert
- Steve Hoxworth
- Bill Huish
- Paul Ingram
- Debbie Jones
- Jill Juban
- Ron Kaye
- Jackie Kibler
- Bill Kibler
- Floyd King
- Lynn Kurczewski
- Lindsay Lake
- Kathryn Lewellen
- Ken Lewellen
- Bob Lewis
- Susan Malkowski
- Sarah Mastny
- Tom McCafferty
- Amy McGuinn
- Mary Anne McLeann
- Dan McNamee
- Kara Morales
- Scott Mortenson
- Rafael Munoz
- Pat Naylor
- Don Nelson
- Espie Nelson
- Dave Nordin
- Eliana Nungaray
- Mike O'Brien
- Michele Olson
- Izzy Opiola
- Bernie O'Reilly
- Maren Oslac
- Diane Palumbo
- Curt Pascarella
- Janelle Pasch
- Grace Pesavento
- Carol Picciolo
- Andrea Pletske
- Gloria Pollack
- Angie Potter
- Al Potyen
- Lorie Power
- Heidi Provost
- Lydia Pultorak
- Mike Puskar
- Rita Renwick
- Carrie Rock
- Roger Ross
- Michael Rusnak
- Mike Rzepka
- Jim Salkas
- Mark Sanders
- Gina Sandvik
- Bev Scheidt
- Jim Scheidt
- Janet Schleeter
- Paul Schroeder
- Phyllis Schulte
- Sam Scott-Schroeder
- Kim Shehorn
- Robert Sherwood
- Stephen Sherwood
- Lucy Singireti
- Sally Skoff
- Diane Sniegowski
- Bob Soukup
- Catherine Suchy
- Russ Swanson
- Kathy Swift
- Karen Tellef
- Elaine Torrence
- Alex Vancina
- Richard Wachenheim
- George Wagemann
- Chuck Wanner
- Erin Ward
- Dave Wendt
- Marie Wendt
- Robert Widuch
- Mark Wieclaw
- Sally Wieclaw
- Royce Williams
- Bill Willis
- Rob Wilson
- Connie Witkowski
- Lee Witkowski
- Carter Wright
- Danielle Wright-Hantak
- Jessie Young
- Rick Zilz

## Community Volunteer Groups

- Boy Scouts of America
- Catholic Charities
- Girl Scouts of Greater Chicago and Northwest Indiana
- Joliet Catholic Academy
- Joliet Junior College
- Lewis University
- Nature Schoolers
- New Lenox 4-H Explorers
- Oak Meadows Christian Academy
- Prairie State Road Runners
- School District 17
- School District 202
- School District 204
- School District 205
- School District 210
- School District 365U
- U.S. Air Force JROTC
- U.S. Army JROTC
- Will County Trail Riders

## Corporate Volunteer Groups

- Amazon
- Americold
- Clark Dietz
- ComEd
- Crane Composites
- DHL
- Everbridge
- Goldman Sachs
- IKEA Joliet
- McKinstry
- Ozinga
- Pembina
- Phillips Chevrolet
- Target
- Xylem Watermark



# In 2024, we will:

**1** Participate in three outreach events in the local communities surrounding our Visitor Centers in Romeoville, Channahon, Bolingbrook, Beecher, and Joliet to increase residents' awareness of the Forest Preserve and The Nature Foundation of Will County as well as the importance of sharing a concern for the environment.

**2** Secure an Intergovernmental Agreement with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources for standing permission to provide educational programming on IDNR properties.

**3** Partner with local organizations to offer three collaborative recreational or specialized population programs at Four Rivers Environmental Education Center, following its accreditation by the National Inclusion Project in 2023.

**4** Continue working with Plainfield Park District to preserve properties along the DuPage River and extend the Normantown Trail.

**5** Work with partner agencies to engineer trail extensions connecting our communities along the DuPage River Trail in Naperville and Bolingbrook and Wolf's Crossing Road in Aurora and Naperville.

**6** Continue to expand partnerships with non-profit organizations and private groups to utilize Forest Preserve facilities and trails to promote outdoor activities and facilitate events.



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## Sustainability

**The concept of sustainability has many facets at the Forest Preserve. The physical and biological nature of our preserves, our ability to fund their management, maintenance and improvement, and the workforce necessary to achieve our goals are all vital to our sustainability.**

# Financials

## Use of Funds

General Government	<b>4,000,918</b>
Planning & Land Preservation	<b>1,333,335</b>
Conservation	<b>2,648,118</b>
Visitor Services and Marketing & Communications	<b>2,844,657</b>
Debt Service	<b>15,570,600</b>
Capital Outlay	<b>6,906,423</b>
Operations	<b>5,228,302</b>
Police	<b>1,861,747</b>
Other Financing Uses	<b>669,530</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>41,063,630</b>

## Source of Funds

Property Taxes	<b>32,081,643</b>
Licenses & Permits	<b>1,094,611</b>
Investment Income	<b>1,019,768</b>
Grants & Other Intergovernmental	<b>2,370,655</b>
Miscellaneous Other	<b>3,035,975</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>39,602,652</b>

### Levy year

	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
Corporate/C&D	0.0682	0.0672	0.0668	0.0667	0.0648
Debt Service	0.0822	0.0790	0.0775	0.0672	0.0609
<b>Total</b>	<b>0.1504</b>	<b>0.1462</b>	<b>0.1443</b>	<b>0.1339</b>	<b>0.1257</b>



# Donations

In 2023, nearly \$16,000 in donations was received from the following individuals and corporations:

- Eduardo Alvarez
- Jason Bryan
- Chevron
- Michael Craig
- Christopher Garand
- Caren Kilroy
- Hector Molina and Elizabeth Stone
- Theresa Nolan
- Susan Pallay
- Kathleen Phillips
- Angela Sandberg
- Patrick Schlomas
- Jackie Smith
- Richard Wachenheim

Donations listed above exceed \$250 in cash value.



# Sponsorships

More than \$457,000 in sponsorships was received by the Forest Preserve in 2023.

**Enbridge Energy: Birding and River Ecology Events** **\$6,750.00**  
*Four Rivers Environmental Education Center*

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**Pembina Pipelines: Programming and Restoration** **\$6,416.48**  
*Four Rivers Environmental Education Center*

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**Phillips Family Memorial: Binoculars for Observation Station** **\$538.04**  
*Four Rivers Environmental Education Center*

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**The Nature Foundation of Will County:**  
Contribution Directed from the Family of Joseph Dollinger **\$375,000.00**  
for Improvements to *Lake Chaminwood Preserve*

Prescribed Burn at *Lily Cache Wetlands*  
and *Vermont Cemetery Preserve* **\$11,480.00**

Nature Education Program Supplies **\$9,077.86**

"The Buzz" Nature Show **\$8,700.00**

Take It Outside Campaign/Challenge **\$7,303.45**

Wellness Package **\$6,552.82**

Bicycle Repair Stations **\$4,963.13**

Educational Program Supplies **\$3,999.00**  
*Hidden Oaks Nature Center*

Fly Fishing Exhibit **\$3,500.00**  
*Monee Reservoir*

Restore Will County Volunteer Program **\$2,897.58**

Golden Opportunities Exhibit **\$2,434.00**  
*Four Rivers Environmental Education Center*

Animal Ambassador Supplies **\$1,969.96**

Journey Stories Exhibit **\$1,497.24**  
*Isle a la Cache Museum*

Preserve the Moment Photo Contest Prizes **\$1,500.00**

Personal Protective Equipment for Natural Resource Management **\$1,120.94**

Willy Mascot Costume **\$1,040.00**

Willy's Wilderness Website **\$1,000.00**

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**Total** **\$457,740.50**



Sand Ridge Savanna Nature Preserve features a sandy, glacial lakebed with scattered, low, wind-blown dunes. The preserve is monitored yearly for plants of concern, upland birds, state-threatened rattlesnake master (*eryngium*) stem borer moth and ornate box turtles.

## Awards

### **Certificate of Achievement in Financial Reporting**

#### *Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA)*

For the 28th 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, 2022. This award is the highest recognition given in governmental accounting.

### **Excellence in Ecological Restoration, Gold Accreditation**

#### *Chicago Wilderness*

The Excellence in Ecological Restoration Program recognizes large, high-quality natural areas and the organizations that manage them. In 2023, the Forest Preserve received the program's gold accreditation for its restoration efforts at Sand Ridge Savanna Nature Preserve, a 941-acre preserve that contains a mosaic of high-quality remnant lands in a matrix of formerly plowed and heavily disturbed land.



Plum Creek Nature Center offers visitors a place to explore the natural world, with hands-on exhibits and interactive play elements.

Scan here to learn more about the facility.



# In 2024, we will:

- 1** Continue funding the Infrastructure Maintenance and Replacement Program, allowing for renovations of the Rock Run Greenway Trail and other facilities across the county.
- 2** Initiate expansion of the Hadley Valley Operations Substation to accommodate additional crew members and equipment to provide maintenance on recently expanded trails and preserves.
- 3** Continue habitat restoration efforts in the Kankakee Sands Area Preserves, Goodenow Grove Nature Preserve and Forked Creek Preserve.
- 4** Continue land management activities on the highest-quality natural areas and restoration sites throughout the forest preserve system.
- 5** Continue to support the Prairie People Volunteer program.
- 6** Continue to assist The Nature Foundation of Will County build capacity and identify projects, programs, events and exhibitions that it can support.





^ Bob Bryerton



^ Juli Mason

# Staff

## Executive Director

- *Ralph Schultz, Executive Director*
- *Leisa Nevins*
- *Tracy Chapman, Deputy Director/Public Safety Administrator*
- *Tara Neff, Community Partnership and Engagement Coordinator/ Executive Director of The Nature Foundation of Will County*

## Accounting and Finance

- *Lisa Lukasevich, Director*
- *Sheri Bembenek*
- *Meredith Clavenna*

## Human Resources

- *Donna Suca, Director*
- *Crystal Del Rio*
- *Veronica Frausto-Sarwark*
- *Emily Kenny*

## Information Technology

- *Denise Steffen, Director*
- *Omar Lopez*
- *Thomas Mancari Jr.*

## Marketing and Communications

- *Laura Kiran, Director*
- *Cindy Wojdyla Cain*
- *Glenn Knoblock*
- *Katie McCollum*
- *Meghan McMahon*
- *Chad Merda*
- *Anthony Schalk*

## Planning and Land Preservation

- *Colleen Novander, Director*
- *Corinne Crawford*
- *Matt Novander*
- *Jessica O'Connor*
- *Megan Raimbault*
- *John Stecyk*
- *Sara Wittchen*

## Visitor Services

- *Lydia Pond, Director*
- *Kylee Beckwith*
- *Bob Bryerton*
- *Margaret Chervinko*
- *Michelle Cipiti*
- *Jerome Gabriel*
- *Jen Guest*
- *Anita Healy*
- *Marissa Jones*
- *Jenna Krukowski*
- *Alexis Lyons*
- *Suzu Lyttle*
- *Michael Manna*
- *Amy McNeil*
- *Jessica McQuown*
- *Ethan O'Keefe*
- *Julie Panozzo*
- *David Piotrowski*
- *Michelle Poplawski*
- *Jessica Prince-Sharrar*
- *Angela Rafac*
- *Tina Riley*
- *Sara Russell*
- *Brittany Schaller*
- *Carrie Sharma*
- *Jason Stevenson*
- *Barbara Sudsberry*
- *Alyssa Szymanski*
- *Kirsten Thalacker*
- *Mary Thomas*
- *Angela Trobaugh*
- *Heather Van Zyl*
- *Emily Wilcher*
- *Jessica Wolff*
- *Jenna Wright*
- *Danielle Wright-Hantak*
- *Melissa Zanzola*
- *Janet Zavoral*

< Sara Russell



## Land Conservation

- *Andrew Hawkins, Director*
- Michelle Blackburn
- Becky Blankenship
- Allison Borecky
- Nicholas Budde
- Floyd Catchpole
- Greg Ferdinand
- Andrew Fleisleber
- Allen Hartmann
- Julianne Mason
- Karey O'Brien
- Jessica Quinn
- David Robson
- Barbara Sherwood
- Judith Wallace
- Jessica West

## Law Enforcement

- *David Barrios Jr., Director*
- James Pacetti, Lieutenant
- Steve Bettenhausen
- Antonio Camardo
- Morgan Carrier
- Thomas Cimbalista
- Jesus Espinoza
- James Gerdich
- Jessica Glecier
- Phillip Glecier
- Bradley Greenup
- Robert Guerrieri
- Mark Houlihan
- Kimberly Kaniewski
- Eric Kobe
- Dorota Lepionka
- Richard Lewandowski

- Darrell Mayle
- Hugh McCorkle
- Jeffrey McKenzie
- Caitlin Mosier
- David Neumann
- Daniel Olszewski
- Andrew Paver
- Jeffrey Pogose
- Darren Prochaska
- Dan Rankovich
- Michael Reilly
- Robert Reyes
- Kelly Robertson
- Terrence Shubert
- Nicole Veerman
- Matthew Yates

## Maintenance and Operations

- *John Fay, Director*
- Tracy Bianco
- Cole Biltgen
- Mason Boerema
- Elise Brazzale
- Thomas Burns
- Jason Buss
- Scott Carevic
- Josh Catlow
- Anthony Congelosi
- Steven Crobie
- Nathaniel Degnan
- Paul Doran
- Ian Eskridge
- Terrence Garvey Jr.
- Ben Gauchat
- Jesus Gonzalez
- Austin Gugliemucci
- William Hibler
- Shane Hondrombilas

- Eric Hummitsch
- Sean Johnson
- Randall Jones
- Nicholas Kalcsits
- Brian Krabbe
- Karl Krudup
- John Latz
- Brian Mackey
- Juan Martinez
- Terrance Matuszewski
- Sydnee McDaniel
- Jace McWilliams
- Christopher Moeller
- Thomas Murray
- Ryan Nichols
- Adam Oestmann
- Justin Parks
- Daniel Parthun
- Kimberly Pasch-McQuen
- Alex Pasteris
- Grace Pesavento
- Denise Pollworth
- William Prince Jr.
- Michael Prybell
- Isaiah Romo
- Noah Schad
- Jacob Shewmake
- Kyle Siegel
- Roy Smith
- Steve Stronk
- William Suca Jr.
- Gabe Suhadolc
- Collin Talkie
- Richard Therkildsen
- Charles Thomas III
- Nicholas Vella
- Thomas Watson
- Jonathan Wychocki

## Retired

- Calvin Anderson
- Rina Cheney
- Cedric Foster
- Lynn Kurczewski
- Eric Latz
- Rose Scofield
- Robert Zinkiewicz





# JOIN THE CHALLENGE



**WIN COOL PRIZES**



**ENJOY THE VIEW**

Funding for the Take It Outside Campaign is provided by **The Nature Foundation of Will County**. Additional prizes are furnished by **Wild Birds Unlimited in Joliet**.

# PLAN A VISIT

## FOUR RIVERS ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTER

 25055 W. Walnut Lane  
Channahon, IL 60410  
 815-722-9470

## PLUM CREEK NATURE CENTER

 27064 S. Dutton Road  
Beecher, IL 60401  
 708-946-2216

## ISLE A LA CACHE MUSEUM

 501 E. 135th Street  
Romeoville, IL 60446  
 815-722-9301

## SUGAR CREEK ADMINISTRATION CENTER

 17540 W. Laraway Road  
Joliet, IL 60433  
 815-727-8700

## HIDDEN OAKS NATURE CENTER

 419 Trout Farm Road  
Bolingbrook, IL 60440  
 815-722-4121

## MONEE RESERVOIR

 27341 Ridgeland Avenue  
Monee IL, 60449  
 815-722-9303

**FOREST  
PRESERVE  
DISTRICT  
WILL COUNTY**



ReconnectWithNature.org

