



Forest Preserve District  
OF WILL COUNTY

# FIND YOUR HAPPY PLACE

2020 PROGRESS REPORT

# Bringing People & 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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# From the Board President

Like most people, 2020 was not the year we anticipated. As an organization, we started off the year by opening the Four Rivers Environmental Education Center as a daily visitor facility and hosted “Eagle Watch,” the first of our planned annual events. Four Rivers will continue to evolve over the next few years with a dedicated stream of funding to enhance the visitor experience and help interpret and further appreciate this facility’s unique setting. The event was a success too. We welcomed our visitors who were treated to guided hikes and a fantastic and up-close view of raptors in a live show hosted inside the main hall.

Unfortunately, everything went a bit sideways from there. With the onset of the pandemic, we had to react to changing sanitation recommendations and group capacity guidelines. We ended up canceling the rest of our events for the year but quickly pivoted to the online world to reach our residents. As our social media and website traffic exploded, we connected with students and teachers through nearly 350 online field trips and in-school programs and hosted more than 220 online public programs. Some of those programs have now been viewed thousands of times on social media. We also recognized the need for people to break free from their homes and explore their neighborhoods, nearby trails and local forest preserves. We welcomed the activity, kept our preserves and trails safe and clean, continued to manage our natural areas, broke ground on new projects, acquired additional lands to restore and to provide access, all while continuing to plan for the future.

Looking back, we’re glad we were able to provide you the inspirational and fitness outlets that have been so needed during such a trying time, and we look forward to seeing you in your Will County forest preserves throughout 2021.



Sincerely,

**Joe VanDuyne**  
*Board President*

# Board of Commissioners



**District 1**  
Judy Ogalla,  
Monee  
Sherry Newquist,  
Steger – *Operations*  
*Committee Vice Chair*

**District 2**  
Amanda Koch,  
Frankfort  
James G. Moustis,  
Frankfort

**District 3**  
Raquel Mitchell,  
Bolingbrook  
Margaret Tyson,  
Bolingbrook –  
*Ad Hoc Rules*  
*Committee Chair*

**District 4**  
Kenneth E. Harris,  
Bolingbrook –  
*Finance*  
*Committee Chair*  
Jacqueline Traynere,  
Bolingbrook

**District 5**  
Gretchen Fritz,  
Plainfield  
Meta Mueller,  
Aurora

**District 6**  
Donald Gould,  
Shorewood  
Joe VanDuyne,  
Channahon –  
*President*

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Steve Balich,  
Orland Park  
Mike Fricilone,  
Homer Glen

**District 8**  
Herbert Brooks Jr.,  
Joliet  
Denise Winfrey,  
Joliet – *Operations*  
*Committee Chair*

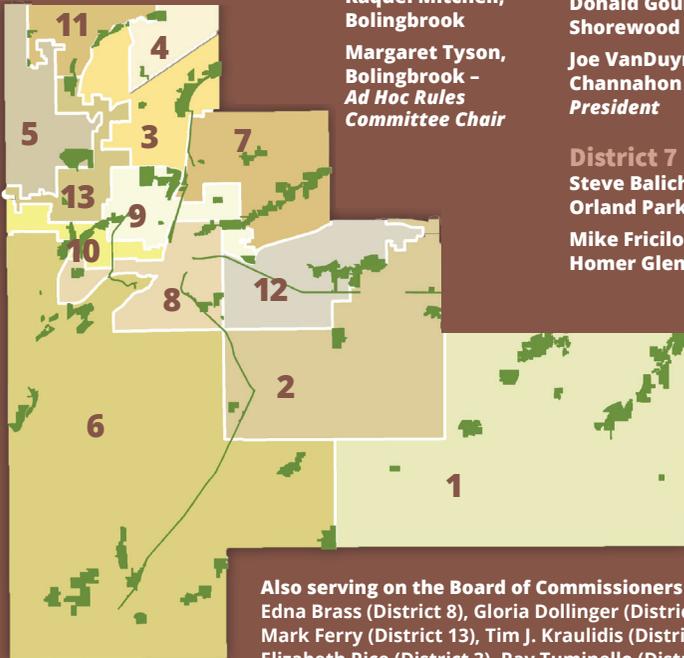
**District 9**  
Annette Parker,  
Joliet  
Rachel Ventura,  
Joliet – *Vice President*

**District 10**  
Natalie Coleman,  
Plainfield – *Finance*  
*Committee Vice Chair*  
Tyler J. Marcum,  
Joliet – *Treasurer*

**District 11**  
Julie Berkowicz,  
Naperville – *Ad Hoc Rules*  
*Committee Vice Chair*  
Mimi Cowan,  
Naperville

**District 12**  
Frankie Pretzel,  
New Lenox  
Tom Weigel,  
New Lenox

**District 13**  
Mica Freeman,  
Plainfield – *Secretary*  
Debbie Kraulidis,  
Joliet



Also serving on the Board of Commissioners in 2020:  
Edna Brass (District 8), Gloria Dollinger (District 10),  
Mark Ferry (District 13), Tim J. Kraulidis (District 13),  
Elizabeth Rice (District 3), Ray Tuminello (District 12)

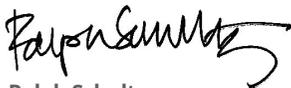
# From the Chief Operating Officer

Despite the challenges of 2020, the Forest Preserve was able to initiate planning and construction on several significant projects to improve our visitor centers, trails and preserves as part of our ongoing commitment to connect people and nature. We were also able to preserve several key parcels in the Plum Creek and Spring Creek greenways, expanding the Forest Preserve to more than 22,500 acres. These lands are set aside for people and nature in perpetuity and enliven the fabric of our communities.

I believe that many of our visitors this past year have either renewed or gained an appreciation for the forest preserve system, the amenities it provides and the natural wonders that it protects or supports. Those who couldn't visit in person were treated to hundreds of online opportunities to explore the forest preserves and learn about the plants and animals that inhabit them. While we'd encourage a personal visit in 2021, we'll continue to expand opportunities for you to experience and learn about your forest preserves through our website and social media outlets.

We've also planned for more than a dozen events in 2021 in anticipation of an easing of pandemic mitigations. Additionally, we'll continue with expansion and improvement of the forest preserves with new trail connections, habitat restorations, land preservation projects and facility improvements. I hope that together we will be able to celebrate these new additions and look forward to future enhancements for the benefit of all Will County residents and the flora and fauna that call the preserves home.

Sincerely,



**Ralph Schultz**  
*Chief Operating Officer*



## Debi Shapiro ▶

Debi Shapiro has fond memories of her photography outings with her ill mother at Rock Run Rookery Preserve. Shapiro said she wishes more people knew how a drive into or through a preserve could boost the spirits of someone with a disability or illness.



Forest Preserve District  
OF WILL COUNTY

# FIND YOUR HAPPY PLACE

Life can be stressful. Thankfully, there's a local forest preserve nearby to help brighten your mood. Let these stories inspire you to get outside and find your "Happy Place."

## The Stellato Family ▲

Some people see litter and they walk on by, but not Vince Stellato and his two sons, Vincent and Camden. The family trio can be seen most days walking the paths of Hammel Woods, enjoying nature, but also leaving the woods cleaner than when they started. With his desire to teach his sons about the environment and why it is important to keep it clean, Stellato has truly made Hammel Woods his family's "Happy Place."



## ◀ Earin Land

For Earin Land, the Waupensee Glacial Trail is his “Happy Place” because it keeps him fit both mentally and physically, and it’s “a wonderful ride.” He loves how long the trail is and how few road crossings there are. It gives him the time he needs to keep both his body and his mind in tip-top shape.



## Barb Parisi ▲

Barb Parisi turned to nature during a dark time in her life. After the death of her father, Parisi had trouble overcoming her sadness. Parisi began hiking at McKinley Woods. Eventually, when she saw “really cool birds” on her walks, she started bringing a camera with her. The walks and photography helped, and the darkness finally waned.

2020

# MILESTONES





## Work Begins on Black Road Project

A pedestrian bridge over the DuPage River was set in place in mid-August 2020 as work continues on a Forest Preserve District trail connection project along Black Road. The project will provide a safer way for walkers, runners and bicyclists to cross Interstate 55 and the DuPage River while traveling between two Forest Preserve trails: the Rock Run Greenway Trail in Joliet and the DuPage River Trail in Shorewood, which both cross Black Road.

The pedestrian bridge over the river did not open for public use in 2020 because work needed to continue on retaining walls and bridge decking. The Interstate 55 pedestrian bridge is scheduled to be installed in 2021. Once both bridges are in place, trail connections along Black Road have to be constructed to complete the project and open it for public use.

Grants from the federally funded Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program (ITEP) and the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) Program are providing 80 percent of the project's cost, with the Forest Preserve contributing 20 percent as a local share. The project, which is contracted through the Illinois Department of Transportation, will provide a critical link to more than 50 miles of regional trails including the I&M Canal Trail and the Old Plank Road Trail.

## Board Elects VanDuyne As President



The Forest Preserve District's Board of Commissioners elected Joe VanDuyne of Wilmington as president during the Board's December 2020 reorganization meeting.

VanDuyne succeeded Kenneth Harris, who stepped in as president when former president Laurie Summers resigned from the Board in October 2019. Harris declined to seek re-election to the post. VanDuyne is a union electrician who served as a Wilmington alderman from 2013-2017 before being elected to the Forest Preserve Board in 2018.

"As president, I would like to continue to provide top-notch amenities to all of the residents of Will County including those who enjoy running, bicycling, hiking, fishing, camping and so much more," VanDuyne said. "With Will County being one of the fastest growing counties in Illinois, I think it is imperative that we also commit to continue to acquire land and to restore it to its natural state."

Also elected by the Board were: Rachel Ventura, vice president; Mica Freeman, secretary; and Tyler Marcum, treasurer.

## Online Programming Offered for Schools and the Public

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the Forest Preserve District quickly pivoted to keep programming available. Forest Preserve educators reinvented field trip programs by teaming together to research teachers' needs, ensure technological connectivity, and develop 15 new online learning units for the 2020-2021 school year. Field trips traditionally presented in the preserves were adapted for the small screen. Themed online learning units featured a variety of topics and satisfied Illinois learning standards. Each unit was designed to include three parts: a live virtual program, self-guided teacher resources and an online wrap-up with students. The Forest Preserve was ahead of the curve in offering these real-time, curriculum structured programs not long after the pandemic began, which demonstrated the District's commitment to education and its ability to adapt to unusual circumstances.

The Visitor Services Department also successfully modified nearly 200 public programs to offer them online instead of canceling them due to pandemic restrictions. These programs provided an unforeseen benefit, reaching new audiences that otherwise would not have attended in-person programs, as well as participants from other states and countries. Additionally, these virtual programs have received thousands of views on Forest Preserve social media platforms after the live presentation date. The Forest Preserve will refine its technologies and capabilities in 2021 to continue to offer online programs for the public as part of its schedule.

Other pandemic-related adjustments included providing a greater number of Facebook Live programs, hosting a Stay at Home Backyard Nature Photo Contest and initiating a Roving Naturalist program. Although visitor centers were closed for periods in 2020 during COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, interpretive naturalists went out into the preserves to enhance visitor experiences by sharing information and their enthusiasm about the natural world.



*(Picture: Program coordinator Angie Opiola during a virtual program.)*



## Improvements Begin at Four Rivers Environmental Education Center

In 2020, improvements began at Four Rivers Environmental Education Center in Channahon to transition the site to a public visitor facility and rental space. The work included renovation of interior spaces to provide an exhibit gallery and the addition of exhibits.

Work continues into 2021 with expected completion early in 2022. Planned exterior enhancements will create improved water access, viewing platforms and expanded trails. Funds awarded from a \$750,000 Illinois Public Museum Capital Grant from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources will be used to create indoor and outdoor educational visitor components. These improvements will help expand the visitor center's ability to serve the public as a true multifunctional facility.

## Ban on Feeding Wildlife Formalized

In 2020, the Forest Preserve District formalized its effort to stop people from feeding animals in the preserves. While the Forest Preserve has always strongly discouraged visitors from interacting with and feeding wildlife, the District's revised General Use Ordinance 124, which was approved in August, now bans the feeding of all creatures in the preserves and violators will be ticketed. Tickets could range from \$25 to \$100.

No matter how well-intentioned people are, it is never a good idea to feed wild animals, said Becky Blankenship, the Forest Preserve's wildlife biologist. "Feeding wildlife increases the number of interactions with people, which can have severe consequences such as human injury and can also lead to animal extermination," Blankenship said. The more that animals interact with humans, the less afraid they are and they can become pests, she added. Putting out food for animals also can lead to the transmission of diseases because it attracts animals to the same spot and if one is sick, more will become ill.



## Visitor Center Becomes Autism Certified

In August 2020, Four Rivers Environmental Education Center earned the Certified Autism Center™ designation from the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards. The certification consisted of staff trainings to better serve those with autism.

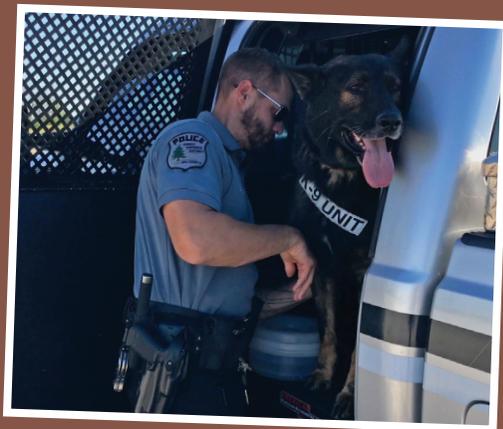
Having this credential lets families of those with autism know that Four Rivers is a safe place to visit, and the facility has staff who are knowledgeable, understanding and able to assist when needed. The certification is part of a greater inclusivity initiative that will continue beyond 2020, including programming and visitation hours designed specifically for families with children with autism.

## Police K-9 Jullo Retires

The Forest Preserve District bid farewell to its furry, four-legged police officer Jullo in 2020.

Jullo served as a Forest Preserve ambassador, sniffed our burglars and starred in educational videos. After eight years on the job, the German shepherd will live out his retirement with his handler, former K-9 officer and Forest Preserve police Sgt. Dean Klier, who took a new position with Plainfield police in 2020.

“Jullo assisted in hundreds of activities and incidents since his arrival in early 2013,” said Police Chief Tracy Chapman.





## Forest Preserve Surpasses 22,000-acre Milestone

The acquisition of additional property in 2020 pushed the Forest Preserve District's total acreage to more than 22,500 acres. The parcels included more than 400 acres in Crete Township and 40 acres in Homer Township.

The Crete Township acquisitions consisted of nearly 200 acres of property formerly operated as the Longwood Country Club golf course. Located south of Steger Road and west of Longwood Drive (and the Indiana border), the parcel is surrounded on the west and the south by the Forest Preserve's 825-acre Plum Valley Ravines. Purchase of this property allows the District to expand and protect the Plum Creek Greenway.

The other acquisition in Crete Township included 201 acres directly south of the existing 191-acre Moeller Woods Preserve, which is located along Exchange Street, east of Route 394. Expanding Moeller Woods will help the Forest Preserve close a gap between that preserve and Plum Valley Preserve.

The Forest Preserve also acquired 40 acres of property on the east side of Cedar Road in Homer Township, expanding Hadley Valley Preserve and removing a critical gap in the Spring Creek Greenway.

"Reaching this acreage milestone illustrates how the Forest Preserve is working to improve the quality of life for its residents and to protect land for future generations," said Ralph Schultz, the Forest Preserve District's chief operating officer. "Future land acquisitions will continue to expand our greenways, connect our communities and help create an open space network we can all benefit from and enjoy."

## Forest Preserve Launches “The Buzz”

The District’s new video series, “The Buzz,” debuted in July 2020. The 22-minute monthly nature program airs the last Wednesday of every month at 8:30 p.m. on Facebook and YouTube, and it keeps viewers up to date on all of the latest Forest Preserve District nature news.

The program also is carried on local cable television channels in Joliet, Naperville, New Lenox, Romeoville and Tinley Park, and episodes can be watched after they have aired on the District’s Facebook page, YouTube channel and the IGTV channel on Instagram.

Program coordinator Suzy Lyttle hosts the show, which has her traveling around the county highlighting different aspects of the preserves, including wildlife, recreational opportunities, history and restoration efforts. Public response to the program has been favorable and the Forest Preserve will continue to look for ways to expand the show’s reach in 2021.



(Picture: Program coordinator Suzy Lyttle during an episode of “The Buzz”)

## Dog Park Calendar Raises Nearly \$6,000 for the Humane Society

A 2021 calendar highlighting the Forest Preserve District's dog parks and its many canine visitors, as well as the plight of homeless animals, raised almost \$5,820 for the Will County Humane Society through 2020 sales.

The collaborative project highlighted how much fun the Forest Preserve's off-leash dog parks provide for canines and their owners year-round. But it also detailed the important work the Humane Society does to help homeless animals. Each calendar sold raised \$10 for the Humane Society. The shelter, which is located at 24109 Seil Road in Shorewood, cares for up to 30 homeless dogs and 60 cats looking for homes. The Humane Society receives no local or federal funding.

The calendar included dozens of photos of dogs frolicking at the Forest Preserve's six dog parks, which are located in Crete Township, Homer Glen, Joliet, Naperville, Shorewood and Wilmington.



Tucker (Mr. November in the 2021 calendar) ▲

2020

# LAND PRESERVATION

In 2020, the Forest Preserve acquired five parcels of land totaling more than 480 acres, the majority of which extends existing open space.

Nearly 200 acres were purchased adjacent to Plum Valley Ravines in Crete Township. Formerly Longwood Country Club golf course, the property will provide resource management opportunities to protect and enhance Plum Creek as well as development opportunities linking Will County's Plum Creek Greenway to Cook County Forest Preserve's Plum Creek Forest Preserve.

A second parcel in Crete Township was acquired along the south side of Exchange Street, directly south of Moeller Woods. The 201-acre purchase will assist to bridge the gap between Moeller Woods and Plum Valley Preserve in the Plum Creek Greenway.

The Forest Preserve also acquired a small 0.38-acre inholding along the DuPage River and adjacent to Riverview Farmstead in Naperville. This property allows for continuity in management in addition to development opportunities for the extension of the DuPage River Trail south.

Utilizing an Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation Grant, the Forest Preserve also acquired 40 acres of land on the east side of Cedar Road in Homer Township, expanding holdings at Hadley Valley Preserve and removing a critical gap in the Spring Creek Greenway.

Additionally, the Forest Preserve accepted the transfer of 40 acres of the Tempest Farm, located in Washington Township. The entire 160-acre property is held under a conservation easement by the Forest Preserve.

These acquisitions will provide land needed for natural area buffers, trail extensions and connections, future preserve access areas and natural habitat restoration projects. Preserves also hold and absorb flood waters, replenish underground aquifers and create natural storage areas for atmospheric carbon. The Forest Preserve District works to connect islands of open space and greenways throughout Will County in partnership with local park districts, municipalities, federal and state conservation agencies and others. These greenways improve the quality of life, provide access to public recreation and offer a sanctuary for wildlife.



more than  
480  
acres of land  
acquired

# Preserve Developments

Developments completed in 2020 made improvements to preserves and trails.



Picnic shelter @ Isle a la Cache

## 1. Isle a la Cache Site Enhancements

Funded through a \$270,000 Illinois Public Museum Capital Grant, site improvements at Isle a la Cache in Romeoville included the construction of an Island Grove boardwalk/deck, the creation of a trail connection linking the Island Grove to the museum campus, and installation of native plants, trees and shrubs. Also completed was the installation of a 150-person capacity picnic shelter at the preserve as well as a parking lot renovation project. The shelter is expected to be available for rental by summer of 2021. Funding for these improvements came from the District's Capital Improvement Program and Infrastructure Maintenance and Replacement Program and from a contribution by the Village of Romeoville.

## 2. Hadley Valley Preserve - Route 6 Access Trail Amenities

Construction of a pedestrian node with a new drinking fountain and bench was completed in 2020 along the Spring Creek Greenway Trail at Hadley Valley Preserve - Route 6 Access in Joliet. This project was funded through the District's Capital Improvement Program.

## 3. Theodore Marsh Trail Improvements

This asphalt project corrected periodic flooding and standing water on and along a portion of the Rock Run Greenway Trail at Theodore Marsh in Crest Hill. The intermittent flooding resulted in segments of the trail being unusable at times.



Wauponsee Glacial Trail bridge replacement

## 4. Wauponsee Glacial Trail Bridge Replacement

Removal and replacement of the existing 92-foot Jackson Creek bridge along the Wauponsee Glacial Trail was completed in 2020. Located just south of Delaney Road and east of Cherry Hill Road in Manhattan Township, the structure was one of the original rail bridges dating back from when the property was utilized as a railway corridor. Deterioration over time made it necessary to replace the bridge with a new structure. Funding for this project came from the Forest Preserve's Capital Improvement Program.

Bench @ Hadley Valley Preserve





# Natural Area Restoration Projects

The Forest Preserve District has been entrusted with protecting and nurturing the land it preserves. In 2020, land management activities were conducted on more than 4,980 acres of the District's holdings, with efforts focused on 15 preserve locations. Some of the most significant projects include the ongoing restoration of:

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

1,423 Acres

1,423 acres of sand savanna, prairie and wetland communities located 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 restoration involves invasive species control as well as the collection of seed from about 300 species of local native plants for use on site.

## Goodenow Grove Nature Preserve

898 Acres

898 acres of Goodenow Grove Nature Preserve in Crete Township. This project protects and restores habitat for state-listed endangered species, and preserves and promotes the health of high-quality woodlands. The restoration is funded in part by an Illinois Department of Natural Resources Special Wildlife Funds Grant and by wetland mitigation funds administered by The Nature Foundation of Will County.

679 Acres

## Prairie Bluff Preserve

679 acres of Prairie Bluff Preserve in Crest Hill. This includes converting agricultural fields to restored prairie and wetland communities, which will provide a feeding ground and buffer habitat for the federally endangered Hine's emerald dragonfly. Approximately 411 acres of the restoration project is being funded by the Army Corps of Engineers. An additional 39 acres is funded in part by a ComEd Green Region grant.

443 Acres

## Messenger Woods Nature Preserve

443 acres of Messenger Woods Nature Preserve in Homer Glen. This project consists of continued follow-up weed control within restored wetland and prairie communities (90 acres) funded by O'Hare Modernization Mitigation Account (OMMA) mitigation. Continued invasive species control and prescribed burn management also is taking place in the preserve's remnant natural areas.

## Hickory Creek Barrens Nature Preserve

405 Acres

405 acres of Hickory Creek Barrens Nature Preserve in New Lenox. Work at this preserve involves invasive species control and prescribed burn management of high-quality seeps, woodlands, savannas and prairies. This project combines the efforts of a dedicated team of volunteers, contractors and staff.

## Lockport Prairie Nature Preserve

320 Acres

320 acres of Lockport Prairie Nature Preserve in Lockport Township. This project continues protection of federal- and state-listed endangered species through habitat management and monitoring. This is the third year of a five-year initiative funded by the Army Corps of Engineers, including large-scale invasive species treatments and prescribed burning.

These restoration efforts promote biodiversity, contribute to the ecological health of the region, and provide habitat for the animal and plant species that call the preserves home.



# Other Stewardship Efforts

## Prescribed Fire Management

Forest Preserve staff and contractual services conducted prescribed burns on 1,913 acres in 2020 to introduce natural fire disturbance on remnant and restored plant communities. The spring burn season was curtailed by COVID-19 restrictions but the fall season was more productive than usual due to dry weather.

## Invasive Species Control

In 2020, Forest Preserve staff, volunteers and contractual services controlled 57 different invasive plant species within 30 preserves. In total, more than 7,600 hours were spent performing invasive species treatments covering more than 3,200 acres.

## Native Seed Collection

District staff and volunteers collected more than 605 pounds of seed from 280 different native plant species in 2020. The collected seed is used to establish native plant communities in newly restored areas and to enrich degraded natural areas.



## Wildlife Research Projects

The Forest Preserve monitors local flora and fauna each year within the forest preserves to assess the success of its restoration efforts. In 2020, these projects included conducting grassland bird surveys at nine preserves; a dragonfly and damselfly survey at Braidwood Sands Area preserves in Braidwood, Custer Township and Wilmington; and wading bird nesting surveys at Lake Renwick Preserve in Plainfield and Rock Run Rookery Preserve in Joliet.

Aerial deer population surveys also were completed at 11 preserves and the impact of deer browse was documented at five preserves.

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 in Joliet, and partnered with this agency to continue monitoring the spread of chronic wasting disease in deer in the southern part of Will County.

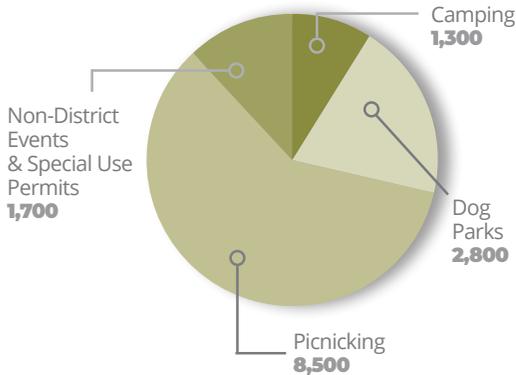
2020

# PROGRAMS & EVENTS

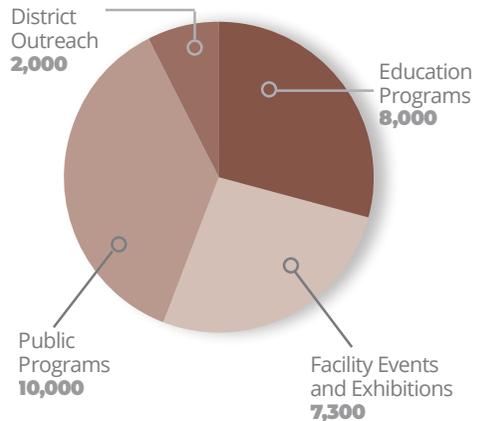


COVID-19 mitigations closed visitor centers for a good portion of 2020 and also limited some in-person programming and large events. However, the Forest Preserve was still able to successfully host six events and exhibitions that attracted 7,300 visitors. In light of group gathering size limitations, the District modified more than 200 of its public programs to offer them online. This provided an unforeseen benefit by allowing new audiences to be reached. The pandemic also presented challenges for engaging with schools, and the Visitor Services department found creative ways to continue to connect with students. As such, 15 online learning units for schools were developed. These programs were presented to 110 classrooms and more than 3,000 students.

### Permitted Activities



### Programs & Services



### Facility Visitation

|  |               |
|--|---------------|
| Four Rivers Environmental Education Center | <b>9,000</b>  |
| Isle a la Cache Museum                     | <b>10,500</b> |
| Monee Reservoir                            | <b>18,000</b> |
| Plum Creek Nature Center                   | <b>17,000</b> |
| Sugar Creek Administration Center          | <b>900</b>    |

### Total

|  |               |
|--|---------------|
|  | <b>9,000</b>  |
|  | <b>10,500</b> |
|  | <b>18,000</b> |
|  | <b>17,000</b> |
|  | <b>900</b>    |



2020

# PARTNERSHIPS

▲ Crane Nuclear

Jaden Fehrenbacher ▲

## Awards in Appreciation of Partners

Two Appreciation of Partners awards for 2020 were presented during the Forest Preserve District's Board of Commissioners' meeting in February 2021. Each year, the District selects its award honorees from dozens of partnering organizations and individuals, and the recipients are recognized and awarded a plaque by the Forest Preserve's Board.

### Crane Nuclear

The 2020 Appreciation of Partners award presented to Crane Nuclear was earned by the company's Bolingbrook branch for its staff participation in two Forest Preserve volunteer workdays. A total of 40 Crane employees worked to open the view of the DuPage River along the trail at Riverview Farmstead Preserve in Naperville, making the area more scenic and enjoyable for the preserve's trail users. During the course of two workdays, these volunteers cut and hauled small trees and tree limbs to the trail's edge for wood chipping. Through the group's diligence, huge piles of branches were generated to produce the viewshed. The area cleared by Crane employees was nearly eight car-lengths long.

### Jaden Fehrenbacher

Boy Scout Jaden Fehrenbacher of Manhattan was selected for a 2020 Appreciation of Partners award for his Eagle Scout project, which repaired a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) trailside shelter in Hammel Woods in Shorewood. This shelter is one of multiple structures that had been constructed in the preserve but, unlike some of the others, it had fallen into disrepair and was a mere remnant of the originally constructed piece. The extent of the disrepair required the reconstruction of both limestone pillars and the complete redesign and construction of a new roof, including all structural timbers, as the once present roof and top two feet of each column had been absent for decades. Fehrenbacher is an Eagle Scout candidate from Boy Scout Troop 49 in New Lenox.

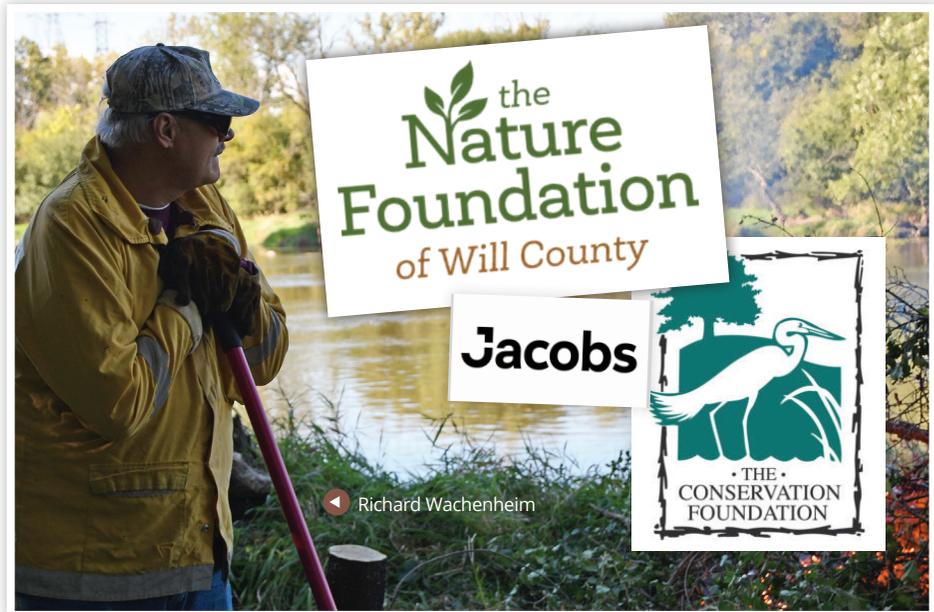
# Community Partnerships Program

The Forest Preserve received a total of \$81,367 in 2020 through sponsorships and donations. Thank you to the following sponsors and donors.

Jacobs Engineering Group  
Mary Sokol  
Midwest River Expeditions  
Norman Onstad  
Richard Wachenheim  
The Conservation Foundation  
The Nature Foundation of Will County



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



# Alternative Revenue Initiatives

## Grants and Development Partnerships

Illinois Department of Natural Resources.....\$750,000

Illinois Public Museum Capital Grant  
*Four Rivers Environmental Education Center*

Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation.....\$208,000

Land Preservation  
*Braidwood Dunes and Savanna Nature Preserve*

Will County Green.....\$3,500

Electric Vehicle Charging Station  
*Isle a la Cache Museum*

**Total Grants for 2020.....\$961,500**

2020

# AWARDS

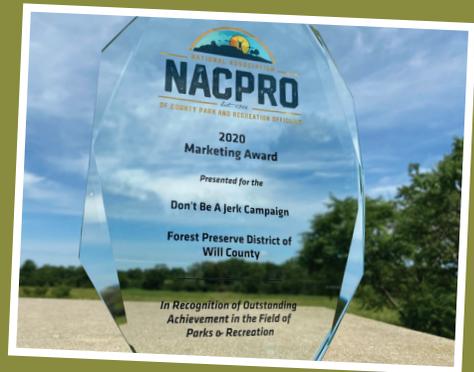
## Certificate of Achievement in Financial Reporting Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA)

For the 25th 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, 2019. 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.



## Outstanding Achievement in Marketing National Association of County Parks and Recreation Officials

The Forest Preserve District's "Don't Be A Jerk" campaign won a first-place award in 2020 from the National Association of County Park and Recreation Officials. The award was given for "outstanding achievement" in the marketing category. The bold and humorous 2019 campaign used catchy messages to educate and encourage positive behavior for the benefit of all who spend time in the preserves. The multimedia campaign grew out of complaints by members of the public who were tired of encountering "jerks" in the preserves. The effort also highlighted wildlife that can be harmed by improperly disposed of cigarette butts, fishing line and other refuse. The "Don't Be A Jerk" campaign featured four videos on: reining in your dog, how to use a garbage can, how to use a trail, and how to dispose of fishing line and hooks so wildlife aren't harmed. Eye-catching signs, which were placed in the preserves and remain there today, feature pictures of cute animals with these messages: don't be a litter bug; don't be a trail hog; don't be a butthead, discarded cigarette butts kill wildlife; don't be a wiener, keep your dog on a leash and pick up its poop; and don't be trashy, fishing line kills wildlife.



2020

# 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 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 more than 22,500 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

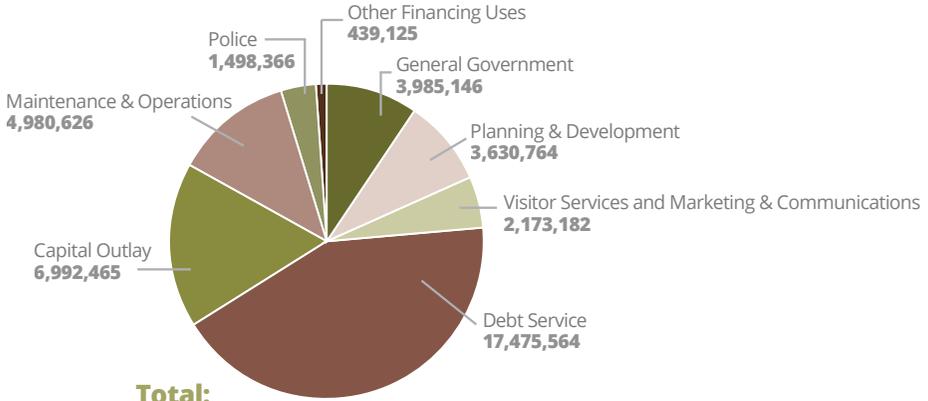
In November 2019, the Forest Preserve's Board of Commissioners approved the issuance of \$25 million in general obligation limited tax bonds. The transaction took place in December, and the bonds will mature in 2039. Of the \$25 million bond issue, \$13 million will be used for preserve, facility and 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.

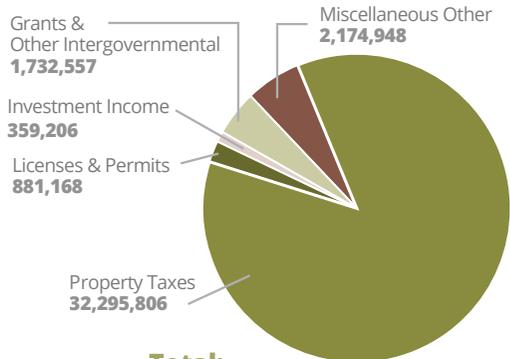


## Use of Funds

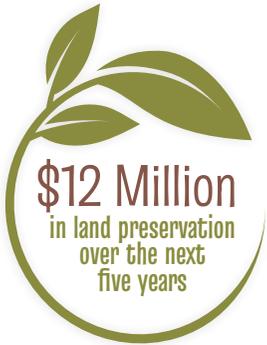


**Total:**  
**41,175,238**

## Source of Funds



**Total:**  
**37,443,685**



| Levy Year     | 2016          | 2017          | 2018          | 2019          | 2020          |
|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Corporate/C&D | 0.0722        | 0.0702        | 0.0687        | 0.0682        | 0.0672        |
| Debt Service  | 0.1215        | 0.1242        | 0.1208        | 0.0822        | 0.0790        |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>0.1937</b> | <b>0.1944</b> | <b>0.1895</b> | <b>0.1504</b> | <b>0.1462</b> |

2020

# VOLUNTEER SUPPORT



Boy Scout Group 13 ▲

Whether the efforts are large or small, the donation of time and talent provided by volunteers plays a vital role in accomplishing the Forest Preserve's mission. In 2020, a total of 8,539 hours of service were generously donated by 310 volunteers. That is the equivalent of approximately five full-time employees, and translates into a savings of approximately \$220,000.

| Division or Department                         | Volunteers | Hours        |
|--|------------|--------------|
| Business Administration and Financial Services | 10         | 566          |
| Law Enforcement                                | 27         | 1,795        |
| Maintenance and Operations                     | 78         | 676          |
| Planning and Development                       | 141        | 4,792        |
| Visitor Services                               | 54         | 710          |
| <b>Grand Total</b>                             | <b>310</b> | <b>8,539</b> |



▲ The Schroeders



▲ Bernie O'Reilly



## Individual Volunteers

Diane Aigner  
 JoDell Albi  
 Gilbert Anderson  
 Linda Andrews  
 Erik Attaway  
 Jim Avila  
 Dave Babich  
 Alex Baltius  
 Laticia Laltius  
 Olivia Baltius  
 Isabel Bejar  
 Roberta Bennett

Mark Bettin  
 Deb Bettenhausen  
 Gary Bettenhausen  
 Greg Bluhm  
 Claudia Boothe  
 Eric Brossman  
 Joan Carrigan  
 Julie Chamlin  
 Jo Chenell  
 Robert Christensen  
 Carol Cooley  
 Jan Corbert

Kerri Counts  
 Joel Craig  
 Jeff Crisman  
 Danny Cuevas-Lopez  
 Rodney Dabe  
 Paul Dacko  
 Georgeann Davis  
 Judy Dehm  
 Dawn Downey  
 Frank Dundek  
 Lee Ecker  
 Nicholas Epley  
 James Evans  
 Marilyn Evans  
 Joan Fasanella  
 Sarah Felicelli  
 Barb Ferry  
 Dennis Finnegan  
 Gene Fisher  
 Joyce Flanagan  
 Tammy Forrest  
 Bill Frankenberger  
 Jim Garrison  
 Courtney Gray  
 Yvonne Greer  
 Jeanne Golec  
 Amy Godbey  
 Scecilia Hampton-Tyler  
 Kathy Hearne  
 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  
 Ed Klama  
 Kathryn Lewellen  
 Ken Lewellen  
 Robert Lewis  
 Wayne Lezon  
 Keith Listermann  
 Rich Llewellyn  
 Valarie Loekle  
 David Lowe  
 Kayla Lowell  
 Susan Malkowski  
 Carol Malnar  
 Stan Malnar  
 Tom McCafferty  
 Ken McCallister  
 Ruth Meyer  
 John Mittelbrun  
 Scott Mortenson  
 Kent Munro  
 Don Nelson

Espie Nelson  
 Cindy Neumann  
 Dave Nordin  
 Michael O'Brien  
 Michelle O'Connor  
 John O'Lear  
 George Opiola  
 Izzy Opiola  
 Bernie O'Reilly  
 Jodie Payne  
 Carol Picciolo  
 Andrea Pletzke  
 Gloria Pollack  
 Denise Pollworth  
 Alan Potyten  
 Rita Renwick  
 Carrie Rock  
 Roger Ross  
 Mike Rusnak  
 Rene Russell  
 Jessica Ryan  
 Mike Rzepka  
 Joe Sanchez  
 Midge Saunders  
 Janet Schleter  
 Paul Schroeder  
 Phyllis Schulte  
 Rose Scofield  
 Sadie Scofield  
 Max Scott-Schroeder  
 Sam Scott-Schroeder  
 Kim Shehorn



◀ Mark Bettin



▲ Barb Ferry



▲ Michael O'Brien

Robert Sherwood  
 Stephen Sherwood  
 Larry Siskas  
 Sally Skoff  
 Carol Smith  
 Bob Soukup  
 Darryl Steffen  
 Kathy Stephens  
 Tom Stephens  
 Jessica Sterna  
 Mary Stivek  
 Sharon Sullivan  
 Grace Swift  
 James Swift  
 Jerry Swift  
 John Swift  
 Kathy Swift  
 Max Swift  
 Molly Swift  
 Cynthia Tabor  
 Theresa Tabor  
 Karen Tellef  
 Shashi Thakur

Al Thomas  
 Al D. Thomas  
 Louisa Torres  
 Tristan Trobaugh  
 Lukas Troha  
 Tammy Trovani  
 Richard Wachenheim  
 Chuck Wanner  
 Dave Wendt  
 Marie Wendt  
 Mark Wieclaw  
 Sally Wieclaw  
 Bill Willis  
 Robert Wilson  
 Connie Witkowski  
 Lee Witkowski  
 Carter Wright

## Community Volunteer Groups

- Boy Scout Troop 13
- Boy Scout Troop 107
- Boy Scout Troop 133
- Boy Scout Troop 466
- Cornerstone Services
- Girl Scout Troop 70031
- Girl Scout Troop 70398
- Girl Scouts of Greater Chicago and Northwest Indiana
- Green Birds
- Joliet Junior College
- Lewis University
- Potawatomi Chapter of the Takhone Order of the Arrow
- St. Jude Catholic Church, New Lenox
- Spanish Community Center
- University of St. Francis
- Will County Trail Riders

## Corporate Volunteers Groups

- Crane Nuclear
- Phillips Chevrolet

2020

# STAFF ROSTER

## Business Administration and Financial Services

Matthew Pehle,  
Chief Financial Officer

## Accounting and Finance

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  
Steven Bettenhausen  
Russell Burroughs  
Eric Cecchi  
Donald Gardiner  
James Gerdich  
Jessica Glecier  
Bradley Greenup  
Brandon Hermann  
Gregory Hidlebaugh  
Mark Houlihan  
Kimberly Kaniewski  
Shane Kelly  
Steven Kirsch  
Dean Klier  
Eric Kobe  
Joshua Lane  
Richard Lewandowski  
Michael Liebermann  
Darrell Mayle  
Jeffrey McKenzie  
Daniel Olszewski  
James Pacetti  
Dan Rankovich

Joshua Reid  
Michael A. Reilly  
Kelly Robertson  
Nicole Veerman  
Robert Veron  
James Wendt  
Matthew Yates

## Maintenance and Operations

John Fay, Director  
Calvin Anderson  
Tracy Bianco  
Cole Biltgen  
David Blaskey  
Elise Brazzale  
Tyler Brown  
Thomas Burns  
Jason Buss  
Scott Carevic  
Justin Casillas  
Rina Cheney  
Steven Crobie  
Gerald Dawson  
Michael DeBow  
Paul Doran  
Ian Eskridge  
Cedric Foster  
Terrence Garvey Jr.  
Ben Gauchat  
Austin Guglielmucci  
William Hibler  
Eric Hummitsch  
Brian Krabbe  
Karl Krudup  
Eric Latz  
John Latz  
Brian Likar  
Brian Mackey  
Edward McDermott  
Arthur Moeller  
Christopher Moeller  
Ryan Nichols



Adam Oestmann  
 Ryan Osman  
 Jon Panozzo  
 Justin Parks  
 Daniel Parthun  
 Kimberly Pasch-McQuen  
 Alex Pasteris  
 Denise Pollworth  
 William Prince Jr.  
 Isaiah Romo  
 Alex Ruettiger  
 Kyle Siegel  
 Roy Smith  
 Denzil Smothers  
 Dylan Suca  
 William Suca Jr.  
 Gabe Suhadolc  
 Colin Talkie  
 Dane Thayer  
 Richard Therkildsen  
 Charles Thomas  
 Nicholas Vella  
 Thomas Watson  
 Jonathan Wychocki  
 Robert Zinkiewicz

### Marketing and Communications

Laura Kiran, Director  
 Cindy Cain  
 Glenn P. Knoblock  
 Katie McCollum  
 Meghan McMahon  
 Chad Merda  
 Rose Scofield  
 Anthony Schalk

### Planning and Development

Andrew Hawkins, Director  
 Michelle Blackburn  
 Rebecca Blankenship  
 Allison Borecky

Nick Budde  
 Floyd Catchpole  
 Corinne Crawford  
 Julianne Mason  
 Colleen Novander  
 Matt Novander  
 Karey O'Brien  
 John O'Lear  
 Jessica Quinn  
 David Robson  
 Matthew Ruhter  
 Barbara Sherwood  
 John Stecyk  
 Livia Verklan  
 Judith Wallace  
 Rachael West

### Visitor Services

Lynn Kurczewski, Director  
 Kylee Beckwith  
 Bob Bryerton  
 Catherine Caldwell  
 Vanessa Caldwell  
 Jen Guest  
 Christopher Gutmann  
 Amy Haller  
 Ben Hecke  
 James Hurd  
 Suzy Lyttle  
 Jessica McQuown

Amy Moore  
 Jenna Newcomb  
 Angela Opiola  
 Kayla Pierson  
 Jessica Prince-Sharrar  
 Angela Rafac  
 Tina Riley  
 Sara Russell  
 James Segatto  
 Bailey Stevenson  
 Jason Stevenson  
 Mary Thomas  
 Heather VanZyl  
 Erin Ward  
 Melissa Zanzola

### Retired

Diane Basile  
 David Blaskey  
 Mark Loekle  
 Karen Rinke



*Photo credits: Chris Cheng, Joel Craig, Renee Gauchat, Glenn P. Knoblock, Global Aerial, Laura Kiran, Suzy Lyttle, Chad Merda, Eugene Rothgery, Anthony Schalk, Phyllis Schulte, Michelle Wendling*



**Forest Preserve District**  
OF WILL COUNTY  
*ReconnectWithNature.org*

## **Sugar Creek Administration Center**

17540 W. Laraway Road  
Joliet, IL 60433  
815.727.8700

## **Four Rivers Environmental Education Center**

25055 W. Walnut Lane  
Channahon, IL 60410  
815.722.9470

## **Isle a la Cache Museum**

501 E. 135th Street  
Romeoville, IL 60446  
815.886.1467

## **Monee Reservoir**

27341 Ridgeland Avenue  
Monee, IL 60449  
708.534.8499

## **Plum Creek Nature Center**

27064 S. Dutton Road  
Beecher, IL 60401  
708.946.2216

