

2024

A LOOK OUTSIDE YOUR DOOR

Annual Report



VISIT US

- Four Rivers Environmental Education Center**
25055 W. Walnut Lane
Channahon, IL 60410
815-722-9470
- Hidden Oaks Nature Center**
419 Trout Farm Road
Bolingbrook, IL 60440
815-722-4121
- Isle a la Cache Museum**
501 E. 135th Street
Romeoville, IL 60446
815-722-9301
- Monee Reservoir**
27341 Ridgeland Avenue
Monee, IL 60449
815-722-9303
- Plum Creek Nature Center**
27064 S. Dutton Road
Beecher, IL 60401
708-946-2216
- Sugar Creek Administration Center**
17540 W. Laraway Road
Joliet, IL 60433
815-727-8700

Four Rivers, Hidden Oaks, Isle a la Cache and Plum Creek Nature Center are open Wednesday-Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and closed on Monday and Tuesday. Sugar Creek Administration Center operates Monday-Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. and is closed on weekends. Monee Reservoir's hours vary seasonally. Call for details.



How much time should you spend outdoors?

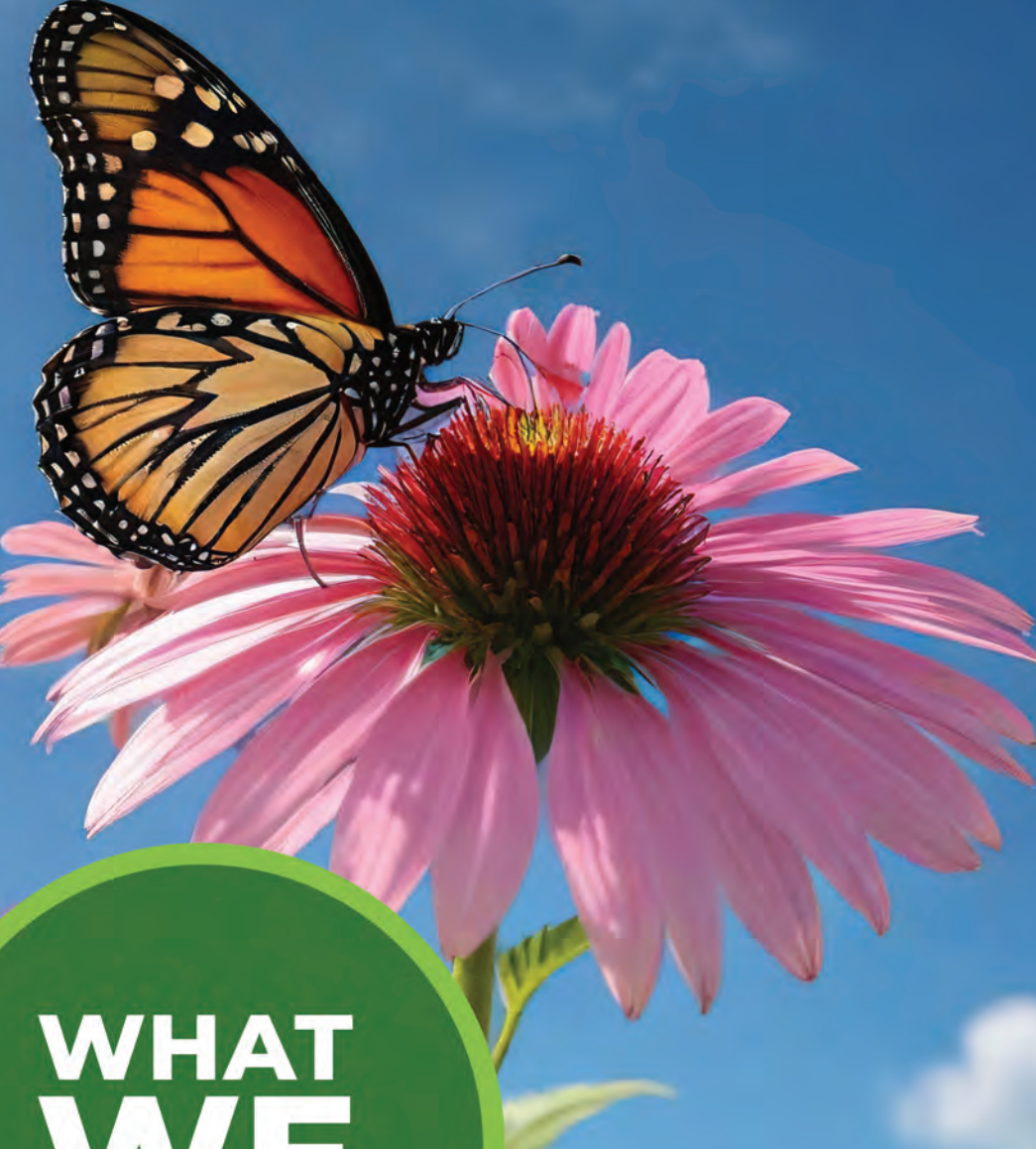
Follow the 20-5-3 rule.



Be a Trailblazer in 2025!

Get outside. Discover nature. Win cool prizes.

Scan the QR code to learn more >



WHAT WE SPENT

FINANCIALS

Source of funds

Property Taxes	\$32,030,099
Licenses & Permits	\$1,023,138
Investment Income	\$977,574
Bond Proceeds Utilized	\$50,000,000
Grants & Other Intergovernmental	\$1,574,919
Miscellaneous Other	\$977,122
Other Financing Sources	\$2,536,911
Total	\$89,119,763

Use of funds

General Government	\$4,924,855
Planning & Land Preservation	\$1,902,801
Conservation	\$2,690,508
Visitor Services and Marketing & Communications	\$3,040,710
Debt Service	\$14,880,750
Capital Outlay	\$9,094,810
Operations	\$5,726,441
Police	\$1,981,648
Other funding uses	\$668,730
Total	\$44,911,253

	Levy year				
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Corporate/C&D	0.0672	0.0668	0.0667	0.0648	0.0626
Debt Service	0.0790	0.0775	0.0672	0.0609	0.0538
Total	0.1462	0.1443	0.1339	0.1257	0.1164



OUR FRIENDS MAKE IT POSSIBLE

VOLUNTEERING

In 2024, more than 940 dedicated Forest Preserve Volunteers generously contributed over 13,200 hours of service, enabling the District to achieve far more than it could have without their tireless efforts.

Prairie People Volunteers

- Julisa Aguirre
- Jo Dell Albi
- Gretchen Anchor
- Linda Andrews
- Todd Aschbrenner
- Jim Avila
- Dave Babich
- Alex Baxter
- Mark Bettin
- Trish Bochenek
- Marianne Borio
- Stacy Browner
- Julie Buehner
- Kate Caldwell
- Maura Carlisle
- Lorna Carrara
- Cam Cassidy
- Leigh-Anne Clark
- Michelle Clauss
- Jim Colwell
- Carol Cooley
- Jan Corbett
- Joel Craig
- Kate Cuthbertson
- Anne Cygan
- Rod Dabe
- Donna Davlantis
- Martha Delaney
- Layla Dennehy
- Bob Eggert
- Eli Eisfeller
- Mallory Eisfeller
- Carrie Ephgrave
- Nicholas Epley
- Jim Evans
- Marilyn Evans
- Barb Ferry
- Gail Fischetti
- Sean Flannery
- Tracy Foreman
- William Frankenberger
- Barb Fuqua
- John Fuqua
- Jeanne Golec
- Joel Greenberg
- John Grygiel
- Pat Hansen
- Bailey Hantak
- Kathy Hearne
- Andrew Hedman
- Greg Hejnar
- Cindy Hostert
- Nick Howard
- Jordan Huenink
- Bill Huish
- Paul Ingram
- Sheila Ingram
- Joe Isdonas
- Glenn Johnson
- Debbie Jones
- Jill Juban
- Ron Kaye
- Mary Kelliher
- Carrie Kelly
- Kevin Kelly
- Al Kempf
- Jackie Kibler
- Bill Kibler
- Floyd King
- Kevin Korst
- Lynn Kurczewski
- Lindsay Lake
- Susan Larsen
- Kathryn Lewellen
- Ken Lewellen
- Bob Lewis
- John Lindquist
- Keith Listermann
- Susan Malkowski
- Carol Malnar
- Stan Malnar
- Alex Marcoci
- Tom McCafferty
- Amy McGuinn
- Dan McNamee
- Sean McQuown
- Ruth Meyer
- Peyton Meyerhoff
- Kara Morales
- Scott Mortenson
- Rafael Munoz
- Pat Naylor
- Don Nelson
- Espie Nelson
- Dave Nordin
- Nick Nothhelfer
- Mike O'Brien
- Michele Olson
- Bernie O'Reilly
- Maren Osloc
- Diane Palumbo
- Grace Pesavento
- Gloria Pollack
- Angie Potter
- Al Potyen
- Heidi Provost
- Mike Puskar
- Rita Renwick
- Emma Rimkunas
- Carrie Rock
- Roger Ross
- Devin Ruddick
- Michael Rusnak
- Sandra Rust
- Mike Rzepka
- Jim Salkas
- Gina Sandvik
- Midge Saunders
- Janet Schleeter
- Paul Schroeder
- Phyllis Schulte
- Sam Scott-Schroeder
- Ray Setzke
- Donna Shehane
- Kim Shehorn
- Robert Sherwood
- Stephen Sherwood
- Aidan Siegel
- Lucy Singireti
- Sally Skoff
- Diane Sniegowski
- Bob Soukup
- Russ Swanson
- Karen Tellef
- Elaine Torrence
- Linda Trzesniewski
- Bhargavi Vaidya
- Alex Vancina
- Richard Wachenheim
- George Wagemann
- Nick Wallace
- Dave Wendt
- Marie Wendt
- Mark Wieclaw
- Sally Wieclaw
- Lynne Wilbanks
- Bill Willis
- Rob Wilson
- Connie Witkowski
- Lee Witkowski
- Laura Wodrich
- Kate Wojtulewicz
- Carter Wright
- Danielle Wright-Hantak
- Jessie Young
- Laura Zielinski
- Kirk Zoellner
- Matthew Zook

More than **13,200** volunteer hours!

Community Volunteer Groups

- Boy Scouts of America
- Catholic Charities
- Channahon Music Boosters
- Girl Scouts of Greater Chicago and Northwest Indiana
- Joliet Catholic Academy
- Joliet Junior College
- Lewis University
- Lockport Township Public Works
- Prairie State Road Runners
- State Senate District 45 Youth Advisory Board
- School District 5
- School District 17
- School District 204
- School District 205
- School District 210
- School District 365
- U.S. Air Force JROTC

Corporate Volunteer Groups

- Amazon
- Americold
- Batory Foods
- Chase
- ComEd
- Crane Composites
- Crane Nuclear
- Goldman Sachs
- Goodwill
- HOERBIGER
- IKEA Joliet
- JB Hunt
- Pembina
- Phillips Chevrolet
- Target
- Xylem Watermark

Want to elevate your hike?

Check out these natural surface trails.



AWARDS



Certificate of Achievement in Financial Reporting

Government Finance Officers Association



Lake Chaminwood Phase II Improvements

Engineering Excellence Merit Award (awarded to WSP engineering firm)

American Council of Engineering Companies



Sand Ridge Savanna Nature Preserve

Restoration Award
Chicago Wilderness



Take It Outside Challenge

Outstanding Environmental Education Program Award

Illinois Park and Recreation Association

PHOTO CREDITS

Emily Kenny, Glenn P. Knoblock, Chad Merda, Anthony Schalk, Joe Viola



ReconnectWithNature.org



A message from the
BOARD PRESIDENT

2024 has been an amazing year for the Forest Preserve District of Will County. We've expanded access to green spaces, hosted events like the Pelican Party and Take It Outside challenge, and deepened our community connection to nature. Our conservation efforts, trail improvements and educational programs reflect our commitment to preserving these natural treasures. Thanks to our staff, volunteers and supporters for making this year a success and ensuring our preserves remain a vital resource for all.

Sincerely,
Destinee Ortiz
Destinee Ortiz



A message from the
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In 2024, we embraced new opportunities to connect people with nature. From hosting events to advancing conservation, this year showcased our collective achievements. We remain committed to preserving Will County's natural spaces while creating engaging experiences for all ages. Thank you for supporting our mission to protect these special places for future generations.

Sincerely,
Ralph Schultz
Ralph Schultz

1

Hidden Oaks Nature Center closed for renovations, including new exhibits, animal habitats and upgraded spaces. The visitor center will reopen in spring 2025.

2

A six-year, \$8.3 million project transformed Prairie Bluff and Lockport Prairie preserves, restoring native plants, hydrology and habitats through 40,000 hours of work led by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in partnership with the Forest Preserve.

3

In August, a Rent.Fun kayak rental station opened at Lake Chaminwood Preserve, offering eight sit-on-top kayaks stored in a secure metal locker near the launch.

4

Four Rivers Environmental Education Center now features an updated Riverside Shelter, designed to host environmental education programs, weddings and special events.



5

The Forest Preserve Board approved a \$50 million bond issue for land preservation, trails, access areas and habitat restoration.

6

Seven Title I schools benefited from a bus reimbursement program, doubling field trip participation from 2023 and awarding over \$2,500 in scholarships.

More land, more opportunities

The Forest Preserve acquired more than 65 acres of land adjacent to the existing properties of Forked Creek Preserve (Wilmington), McKinley Woods (Channahon) and Fiddymet Creek Preserve (Homer Glen). Of these, nearly 10 acres were donated. Every acre conserved adds value to the Forest Preserve by removing inholdings, creating buffers and expanding current holdings.



6

Seven Title I schools benefited from a bus reimbursement program, doubling field trip participation from 2023 and awarding over \$2,500 in scholarships.



WHAT WE ACCOMPLISHED

PRESERVE IMPROVEMENTS

Lake Chaminwood Preserve (Channahon): Phase II added a paved path with a 90-foot bridge connecting to the 61.5-mile I&M Canal State Trail, two accessible fishing piers and links to Lower Rock Run Preserve and McKinley Woods.

Rock Run Greenway Trail (Joliet): Enhancements included a new multiuse path along Essington Road, trail rehabilitation between Essington and Covered Bridge Way and flood mitigation south of Theodore Street.

Wauponsee Glacial Trail (Manhattan): A new asphalt path now connects the trail to Wauponsee Park, linking residents to transportation and recreation along the 22-mile route.

Hadley Valley Substation: A two-bay addition and staff reallocation have improved operational zones and added equipment storage, enhancing maintenance service in the county.

CONSERVATION

The Agricultural Wetland Bank at Forked Creek Preserve (Wilmington) was approved by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, with the first 1.4 acres of wetland credits sold in 2024. The project will restore 72 acres of former farmland.

Restoration efforts included work on more than 6,700 acres across 16 preserves, more than 20,800 hours of invasive species control on more than 3,600 acres in 40 preserves and prescribed burns on more than 1,400 acres.

Wildlife research included surveys of birds, turtles, butterflies and frogs; rare plant monitoring; and observation of the endangered rusty-patched bumble bee at two preserves.

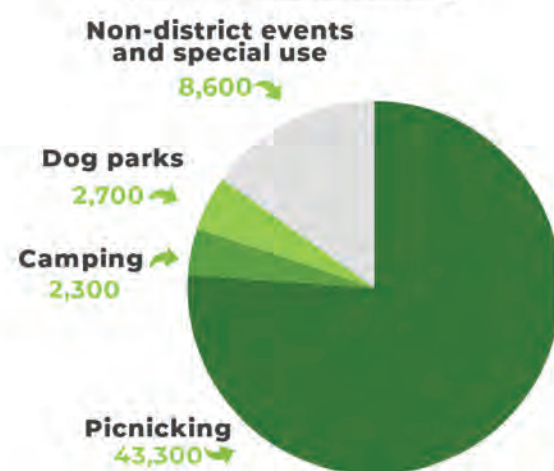
LAW ENFORCEMENT

The Forest Preserve Police conducted 10,842 patrols and building checks, ensuring public safety. They raised over \$11,500 for Special Olympics, hosted National Night Out at Monee Reservoir and participated in various community events.

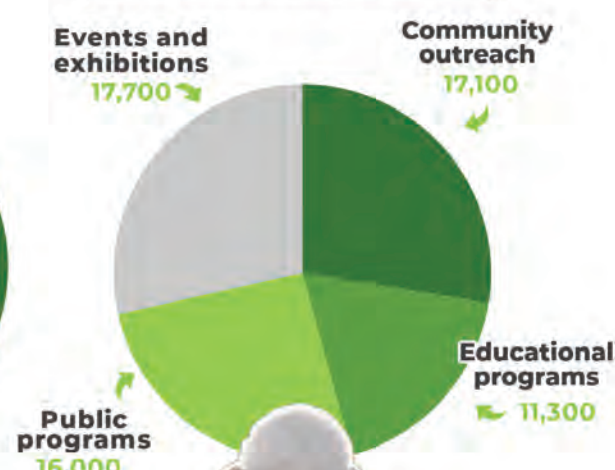
VISITOR SERVICES

With events, programs, field trips and over 30 outreach opportunities, Visitor Services engaged thousands of patrons and highlighted the Forest Preserve's offerings.

PERMITTED ACTIVITIES



PROGRAMS AND SERVICES



TOTAL PEOPLE SERVED



Nearly **60,000** facility walk-ins!

More than **62,100** people served through programs, events and outreach.

*Closed in February 2024 for renovations.

WHAT WE RECEIVED

SPONSORSHIPS

Earthrise Energy \$5,633
Hummingbird Fest

Old National Bank \$5,000
Fun & Food Trucks

The Nature Foundation of Will County \$375,000
Contribution Directed from the Family of Joseph Dollinger for Improvements to Lake Chaminwood Preserve

\$21,390
Take It Outside Campaign
Restoration Activities

\$12,927
STEM/STEAM Program Supplies

\$11,190
Visitor Center Exhibitions

\$6,400
Fish Stocking at Hidden Lakes Trout Farm

\$6,127
Community Events at Four Rivers Environmental Education Center
\$5,000
Bench Installation at Whalon Lake and Hidden Oaks Preserves

\$3,726
Isle a la Cache Outdoor Bird Feeding Station Enhancements

\$3,488
Restore Will County Land Stewardship Program

\$3,000
Signs at Hidden Lakes Trout Farm

\$2,877
Woods Walk

\$2,626
Teacher Appreciation Days

\$2,500
Tractor and Wagon Acquisition for Riverview Farmstead Preserve

\$2,276
Funding for Care of Animal Ambassadors at Visitor Centers

\$670
Willy's Wilderness Website

\$500
Serve Will County Youth Service Program



GRANTS

\$150K

Development and Construction of an Outdoor Shelter at Hidden Lakes Trout Farm (Bolingbrook)
Department of Commerce and Economic Development

\$150K

Normantown Road Trail Development (Plainfield/Naperville)
Department of Commerce and Economic Development

\$50K

Old Plank Road Trail Improvements (Frankfort Township)
Department of Commerce and Economic Development

DONATIONS

Nearly \$11,000 in donations was received.

Kathy Boyer and Renee Cushing
Christina Chavez
Bill Chisholm
Employees of Univar Solutions
Josh and Molly Finn
Clint Johnson
James McAndrews
Jacqueline McTee
Paul Michel
Catherine Trezek

Donations listed here exceed \$250 in cash value.

DID YOU KNOW WE HAVE A FREE WEEKLY NEWSLETTER?

SUBSCRIBE



BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Destinee Ortiz, President | Judy Ogalla, Vice President | Mica Freeman, Secretary
Julie Berkowicz, Treasurer | Stephen Balich | Herbert Brooks Jr. | Dawn Bullock | Daniel Butler
Elalnay Costa | Katie Deane-Schlottman, Chair, Operations Committee | Kelly Hickey, Vice Chair, Operations Committee | Vince Logan, Vice Chair, Finance Committee | Raquel Mitchell
Sherry Newquist, Chair, Finance Committee | David C. Oxley | Frankie Pretzel | Mark Revis
James Richmond | Jackie Traynere | Sherry Williams | Denise Winfrey | Joe VanDuyne