

# NATURE CONNECTIONS

2022 ANNUAL REPORT



FOREST PRESERVE DISTRICT  
WILL COUNTY





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



We protect the health and well-being of nature and the residents of Will County by conserving land – some of which is of the highest quality and has rare ecological value.



We enhance our communities by restoring land as closely as possible back to its natural state and providing opportunities for people to engage with the outdoors through trails, fishing lakes, dog parks and more.



We benefit current and future generations by helping to keep air and water clean, by preventing flooding in residential areas and by promoting an overall healthy ecosystem.



# Board of Commissioners

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Wilmington  
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New Lenox  
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Aurora  
*President*

## District 11

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Bolingbrook  
*Vice Chair, Finance Committee*  
**Jackie Traynere**  
Bolingbrook



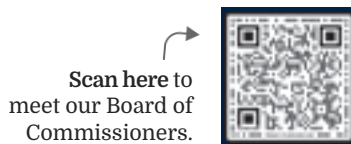
## Contents

**Letters from leadership**  
(Page 2)

### Our six guiding principles

1. Purpose (Page 4)
2. Stewardship (Page 8)
3. People (Page 12)
4. Wellness (Page 16)
5. Collaboration (Page 18)
6. Sustainability (Page 24)

**Staff roster**  
(Page 30)



### Also serving on the Board in 2022:

Amanda Koch (District 2), James Moustis (District 2), Margaret Tyson (District 3), Saud Gazanfer (District 4), Gretchen Fritz (District 5), Donald Gould (District 6), Mike Fricilone (District 7), Herbert Brooks Jr. (District 8), Rachel Ventura (District 9), Tyler Marcum (District 10), Mimi Cowan (District 11), Tom Weigel (District 12), Debbie Kraulidis (District 13)



## From the Board president

In 2022, the Forest Preserve provided hundreds of public programs, events and special exhibitions introducing individuals and families to some of the wonders of Will County and the habitats, plants and animals it contains. These programs serve to engage, inspire and educate our visitors as well as cultivate an appreciation of the nature that surrounds us.

News today is filled with reports of the state of our physical and mental health. Physical ailments including obesity, diabetes and hypertension along with mental stress, anxiety and fatigue plague our society. Research shows that nature is healing and having access to nature is important to realize this healing effect. The Forest Preserve strives to make nature accessible to everyone, regardless of race, gender, socio-economic status or physical abilities. We work to make your forest preserves accessible to as many people as possible and to offer a variety of ways for people to engage with the outdoors through their choice of recreational pursuits.

Whether you enjoy hiking, biking, running, paddling, photography, meditation or learning about the natural environment, you'll find opportunities at the Forest Preserve. Alone, or together with others, we offer a variety of ways for you to engage with nature.

You'll likely find that being in nature has a positive effect on your mood, boosts your energy and helps you focus on your tasks or issues at hand.

To offer some motivation, the Forest Preserve launched the Take it Outside Challenge in January 2023. This is a fun and interactive way for you to explore the rich diversity and unique attributes of your forest preserves. I encourage you to visit us at [ReconnectWithNature.org](https://ReconnectWithNature.org) for more information on how to participate in the yearlong program and to learn more about all the opportunities the forest preserves have to offer.

Sincerely,

**Meta Mueller**  
*Board President*





## From the Executive Director

The Forest Preserve exists to protect and restore Will County's natural resources, provide public access to the preserves and to interpret what they contain. In 2022, we continued to manage our highest-quality sites and to restore natural habitats in several others. These efforts were supported by grants and partnerships as well as by the dedication of hundreds of volunteers who logged thousands of hours engaged in resource management activities. This important work helps to restore our forest preserve landscapes and improve the health and resiliency of our natural areas.

We were also able to complete rehabilitation projects on two of our oldest rail trails, Old Plank Road Trail and Joliet Junction Trail. And the newest segment of the Veterans Memorial Trail opened, creating a truly multimodal transportation corridor along Interstate 355. Additionally, we expanded or upgraded other preserve access areas, making sure to maintain the high-quality public spaces that visitors have come to expect from the Forest Preserve. We also renovated the Four Rivers Environmental Education Center and opened the newly acquired Hidden Oaks Nature Center, further broadening our outreach and supporting our environmental education initiatives – another area of our service that the public relies on and appreciates.

In 2023, we will continue to invest in renovating and enhancing existing forest preserve access areas and trails.

We will also initiate or complete new trail linkages that connect our communities and preserves, and we will continue our planning of others for the future.



In addition, you will be able to enjoy dozens of free events, programs and exhibitions throughout the year. You can also keep track of all that's happening through our website, *ReconnectWithNature.org*, by following us on social media and by subscribing to our three digital newsletters. I'm sure you'll find something that will pique your interest and motivate you to explore your forest preserves.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ralph Schultz". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a white background.

**Ralph Schultz**  
*Executive Director*









More than  
**160 ACRES**  
of land acquired

## Land acquisition

Highlights from 2022 include:

**The agreement to purchase Hidden Oaks Nature Center and Hidden Lakes Trout Farm in Bolingbrook was made official in 2022.** This 33-acre parcel, formerly owned by the Bolingbrook Park District, is adjacent to the Forest Preserve's 249-acre Whalon Lake preserve. A DuPage River trail bridge connects the two sites. The property serves as a central access to the local and regional trail systems.

**The acquisition of 73 acres of land, north of and adjacent to Black Walnut Creek Preserve in Crete Township.** Acquisition of this property will protect high-quality hydric soils, in addition to wetland and marsh habitat. The parcel will expand the Forest Preserve's current holdings at Black Walnut Creek and provide continuity for management and maintenance.

**The purchase of 47.5 acres of land located within the Spring Creek Greenway, adjacent to Hadley Valley in Homer Township.** The parcel

buffers and protects the Forest Preserve's existing property at Hadley Valley and offers continuity in management and access. The Forest Preserve was awarded an Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation Grant to assist with this acquisition.

**The donation of 6.3 acres of land adjacent to Kraske Preserve in Crest Hill.** This property holds value to the Forest Preserve for continuity with resource management along with the opportunity to preserve open space in an area facing development pressures. This donation, in combination with Lockport Township Park District's property and Kraske Preserve, will conserve approximately 80 acres of land, protecting natural resources including wetlands and floodplain.

PHOTO: Hidden Oaks Preserve offers access to shoreline fishing on four lakes at Hidden Lakes Trout Farm. Hidden Lakes Trout Farm will also include a new bait shop which, when construction is complete, will sell bait, tackle and concessions.



## Preserve, visitor center and trail enhancements

A new exhibit hall, Four Rivers at the Confluence, opened in 2022 at Four Rivers Environmental Education Center in Channahon. Exhibits include an interactive river table, a watershed sand table, birdfeeder and identification display, mussel exhibit, and a 2,000-gallon aquarium showcasing local fish species. The exhibit hall provides hands-on opportunities for visitors and was funded in part by an Illinois Department of Natural Resources Public Museum Capital Grant.

In the summer of 2022, the Forest Preserve celebrated the opening of the newly acquired Hidden Oaks Nature Center in Bolingbrook. To kick off the opening of its sixth visitor center, the Forest Preserve partnered with the Morton Arboretum's Nature Artist Guild to host the Visions of Nature Art Exhibition, funded by the Nature Foundation of Will County. The interior space of the nature center was transformed with temporary exhibits as staff continued to work on a comprehensive exhibit plan, including architectural improvements both inside and out, and to schedule a full complement of events and programs for the public and youth groups.



Operations department crews began installation in 2022 of 1,980 new trailhead signs at 396 Forest Preserve trail locations. The new signs include information on trail length, width, grade, surface, cross slope and obstructions. This information will help all trail users, including those with disabilities, to be better informed about each trail's features.

An All-Persons Trail was constructed in 2022 at Four Rivers Environmental Education Center in Channahon. This accessible trail includes six interpretive signs located along the concrete walkway around the visitor center. The signs highlight the wildlife and habitats surrounding Four Rivers. Additionally, the trail includes sensory panels, and rumble strips to indicate arrival at each interpretive sign. Audio readers that can verbally describe the information along the trail for individuals with hearing or visual disabilities are also available for use. The project was partially funded by contributions from J-Power USA and The Nature Foundation of Will County.

PHOTOS: The 2,000-gallon fish tank at Four Rivers is stocked with catfish, black crappie, smallmouth bass, bluegill and walleye. The new trailhead signs list the grade of each path, making the trail distances more accurate than they have been in the past.



PHOTO: Construction of the new trail segment of Veterans Memorial Trail in June 2022. The trail officially opened in October of 2022.

A new 3.5-mile section of Veterans Memorial Trail officially opened in Homer Township in fall of 2022. The new paved trail segment travels north from Spring Creek Greenway Trail in Hadley Valley preserve in New Lenox to the state-owned 159th Street Bikeway in Homer Glen. The 7-mile bikeway links to a trail system in and around Orland Park's Centennial Park in Cook County. From there, path users can travel east on trails into Chicago or north into DuPage County. The project was funded in part by a Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) grant and through contributions from the City of Lockport and the Village of Homer Glen.



Scan here to watch the Veterans Memorial Trail project.

### In 2023, we will:

1. Continue to pursue land preservation priorities in the Spring Creek, 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.







## Land Management

In 2022, natural area restoration was conducted on more than 6,300 acres of District holdings, with efforts focused on 16 preserves located throughout the county. These included: Braidwood Sands Natural Area (1,423 acres), Hickory Creek Barrens Nature Preserve (1,000 acres), Goodenow Grove Nature Preserve (898 acres) and Messenger Woods Nature Preserve (443 acres).

## Prescribed Fire

In 2022, prescribed burns were completed on more than 2,700 acres at 57 burn units to introduce natural fire disturbance on remnant and restored plant communities.

## Invasive Species Control

More than 11,300 hours were spent performing invasive species management on more than 4,800 acres in 2022. Fifty different invasive plant species were controlled within 41 preserves.

## Native Seed Collection

Forest Preserve staff and volunteers collected more than 490 pounds of seed from 177 different native plant species in 2022. These seeds will be used to establish native plant communities in newly restored areas and to enrich degraded natural areas.



PHOTO: Controlled burning requires extensive planning, training, personnel and equipment. Planning is often underway six months or more prior to implementation.

Scan here to learn more about prescribed burns.



## Regenerative Agriculture

The first acre of the local growers' program was awarded in 2022. The program allows urban farmers to grow herbs and vegetables. They will also seed a pollinator buffer and use cover crops. The farmland will be available for site visits to educate the public on urban farming. In addition, in 2022, a total of 147 acres at Jackson Creek Preserve in Green Garden Township began the transition to organic and will become certified organic by 2025. Farm fields at Fiddymont Creek Preserve, Hadley Valley and Jackson Creek Preserve saw a substantial increase in cover crops from 85 acres in 2021 to 398 acres in 2022. The Forest Preserve also hosted the first "Growing with Agriculture" Will County field day. The Chicago Wilderness Team was assembled in 2021, and the first outreach goal of the group was to host such a field day to showcase different agricultural practices in Will County. More than 50 people attended the event.

## Research

In 2022, the Forest Preserve partnered with Midwest Bat Hub/NABat to deploy and maintain four bat detectors at Braidwood Dunes and Savanna Nature Preserve in Reed Township. The Forest Preserve also completed grassland bird surveys at seven preserves; wading bird nesting surveys at Lake Renwick Preserve in Plainfield and Rock Run Rookery in Joliet; and aerial surveys of deer populations at 29 preserves. Among other projects, seven populations of rare plant species were monitored at seven preserves in coordination with the Plants of Concern monitoring program. In addition, Forest Preserve volunteers participated in a number of wildlife surveys including the Calling Frog Survey at four preserves, the Illinois Butterfly Monitoring Network Survey at eight preserves, and the Illinois Odonate Survey at six preserves.



### In 2023, 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 60 acres of lands that were previously converted to agriculture in Sand Ridge Savanna Nature Preserve in Wilmington and Hadley Valley Preserve in Homer Glen.
3. Manage agricultural lands with regenerative practices to improve soil conditions or grassland bird habitat including 3,200 acres of row crop and 700 acres of grass hay.
4. Expand opportunities for volunteers to engage in resource management activities.



PHOTO: The Illinois Butterfly Monitoring Network engages citizen scientists in the process of collecting quantitative data on butterfly populations.





PEOPLE





More than  
**48,500**  
 people served  
 through programs  
 and outreach

## Community engagement

### Permitted activities

Picnics	41,700
Non-District events and special use	7,000
Dog parks	3,300
Camping	2,000

People served

### Programs and services

Events and exhibitions	15,600
Public programs	12,000
Education programs	9,600
Community outreach	9,100
Volunteer events	2,300

People served

**PHOTO:** The Forest Preserve District offers youth group programs. Many programs are designed to meet specific badge or adventure requirements for scouting groups. However, any youth group may book these programs.

Scan here  
 to browse our  
 event calendar.



### Facility visitation

Isle a la Cache Museum	24,000
Four Rivers Environmental Education Center	17,000
Plum Creek Nature Center	15,400
Monee Reservoir	13,000
Hidden Oaks Nature Center	8,600
Permitting and Recreation	18,000
Sugar Creek Administration Center	2,000

People served

### Digital communications

Social media impressions	39.7 million
Social media video views	1.2 million
Website page views	3.68 million
Traditional media impressions	98.3 million

Views and impressions



### Law Enforcement

The Forest Preserve's Police Department participated in multiple community outreach events in 2022. These included the Special Olympics Illinois Polar Plunge, Plane Pull, Torch Run, and Cop on a Rooftop. It also hosted a National Night Out event at Monee Reservoir and participated in many touch-a-truck events as well as parades.



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



### In 2023, we will:

1. Offer more than 400 public, youth and family education and recreation programs.
2. Host three traveling exhibitions – on loan from the Smithsonian Institution, Denver Botanic Garden, and the American Museum of Fly Fishing – at visitor centers in Romeoville, Channahon and Monee.
3. Host 10 public events throughout the county offering individuals and families unique opportunities to engage with staff, presenters, partners and the environment.
4. Complete installation of exterior exhibits as part of improvements to Four Rivers Environmental Education Center in Channahon and initiate phase I exhibit design for Hidden Oaks Nature Center in Bolingbrook.
5. Host a yearlong campaign to grow further awareness of and participation in Forest Preserve offerings.
6. Increase the number of followers engaging with our 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.

PHOTO: Fishing programs are offered seasonally at select forest preserves.











PHOTO: Paddling is a great way to enjoy nature and see the preserves from a different perspective. You can explore all the nooks and crannies and see parts of the preserves you would never be able to from land.

## Promoting health

The Forest Preserve offers a variety of recreational opportunities from hiking, biking, bird-watching and photography to meditation, kayaking, yoga and more. These activities allow people to engage with the outdoors in support of their mental and physical health.

The Forest Preserve also provides:

- Programs for audiences with special interests or needs including bilingual programs as well as programs for those with autism and sensory sensitivities.
- A built environment with an emphasis on ADA best practices.
- Regional trails that connect many of our communities and people to each other.
- Welcoming visitor centers and staff that are firmly committed to appreciating and promoting equity, diversity, inclusiveness and wellness.
- Digital options in the form of online programming, newsletters, websites and social media platforms.

Additionally, the Forest Preserve's Police Department logged more than 7,400 additional foot patrols, building checks and special details in 2022 to ensure safe and secure environments for the public and Forest Preserve staff.

### In 2023, 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, increase program space and develop additional exhibition space.
4. Complete an expansion of the Lake Chaminwood – Dollinger Family Access in Channahon to improve trail and kayak access, and provide additional visitor amenities.
5. Finish construction of the Hidden Lakes Bait Shop in Bolingbrook.
6. Continue planned bridge and trail renovation and reconstruction in several locations on the Wauponsee Glacial Trail.



COLLABORATION





PHOTOS: The new trail segment of the Veterans Memorial Trail officially opened in October 2022. Tollway Executive Director Cassandra Rouse and Rocco Zucchero, the Tollway's chief planning officer, accepted the Appreciation of Partners award at the Feb. 9 Forest Preserve Board of Commissioners meeting in 2023.



## Partnerships

The Forest Preserve partners with dozens of organizations each year to further its mission. From these, the District recognizes agencies annually with its Appreciation of Partners Award. Honorees are presented with a plaque before the full Board of Commissioners. The Illinois State Toll Highway Authority received the 2022 award. By dedicating a 20-foot-wide corridor along Interstate 355 for a future multi-use trail, the Tollway laid the groundwork for local jurisdictions and municipalities to make this trail a reality. To date, more than 8 miles of the Veterans Memorial Trail have been constructed, 4.7 miles connecting the Centennial Trail to the Southern DuPage County Regional Trail, and most recently, a 3.5-mile addition connecting the Spring Creek Greenway Trail to the Illinois Department of Transportation's 159th Street Trail. With the continued commitment of the Tollway and local agencies, it is the Forest Preserve's hope to make the remaining phases of the Veterans Memorial Trail a reality.

Other partnerships in 2022 included:

- City of Lockport
- District 201 Balmoral Elementary School
- Easterseals Joliet Region
- Elmhurst History Museum
- Illinois Environmental Protection Agency
- Romeoville Art Society
- Village of Homer Glen
- SCARCE (School & Community Assistance for Recycling and Composting Education)
- U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary



PHOTO: Lockport Prairie Nature Preserve protects a diversity of habitats, including forest, prairie, savanna, wetland and a portion of the Des Plaines River.

## Grants

In 2022, the following grants were received:

- **Restoration at Lockport Prairie Nature Preserve and Prairie Bluff Preserve**  
Army Corps of Engineers  
**\$281,935.36**
- **Trail cleanup along Joliet Junction Trail**  
Youth Service America  
**\$100.00**

**Total grants: \$282,035.36**

More than  
**\$282,000**  
received in grants

## Projects

Highlights from 2022 include:

- Collaborating with Working Bikes of Chicago to offer the Recycle Your Bicycle program, collecting bikes to refurbish and distribute locally and around the world.
- Coordinating efforts with Irons Oaks Environmental Learning Center of Olympia Fields, Will-South Cook Soil and Water Conservation District, Will County Land Use, the Environmental Education Association of Illinois, and the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency to present the “Dive IN!” Traveling Special Exhibition at Plum Creek Nature Center.



# Volunteering

In 2022, more than 11,800 hours of service were generously donated by 792 individuals, allowing the District to accomplish much more than it could without their diligent efforts.

## Individuals

Megan Abellera  
 Jo Dell Albi  
 Linda Andrews  
 Todd Aschbrenner  
 Jim Avila  
 Dave Babich  
 Amy Bala  
 Alexandria Baxter  
 Isabel Bejar  
 Emily Berndt  
 Mark Bettin  
 Patricia Bochenek  
 Arianna Borgra  
 Bill Bromer  
 Stacy Browner  
 Daphne Burke  
 Eileen Burke  
 Jennifer Cain Vocu  
 Katie Caldwell  
 Pete Caldwell  
 Therese Caldwell  
 Maura Carlisle  
 Lorna Carrara  
 Camryn Cassady  
 Jo Chenell  
 Jim Colwell  
 Carol Cooley  
 Jan Corbett  
 Kerri Counts  
 Joel Craig  
 Tiffany Crate  
 Jeff Crisman  
 Rodney Dabe  
 Georgeann Davis  
 Donna Davlantis

Dawn Downey  
 Frank Dundek  
 Lee Ecker  
 Carrie Ephgrave  
 Nicholas Epley  
 James Evans  
 Marilyn Evans  
 Joan Fasanella  
 Barb Ferry  
 Gail Fischetti  
 Ash Fitzwater  
 William Frankengerger  
 Michele Friske  
 Barbara Fuqua  
 John Fuqua  
 Jim Garrison  
 Amy Gibson

Amy Godbey  
 Jeanne Golec  
 Joel Greenberg  
 Courtney Grey  
 Cindy Gustafson  
 Bailey Hantak  
 Kathy Hearne  
 Greg Hejnar  
 Leda Herrera  
 Sabrina Hines  
 Yvonne Hines-Greer  
 Scott Holladay  
 Cindy Hostert  
 Bill Huish  
 Paul Ingram  
 Sheila Ingram  
 Katie Jandeska

Glenn Johnson  
 Debbie Jones  
 Jill Juban  
 Ronald Kaye  
 Carrie Kelly  
 Efty Kelly  
 Jackie Kibler  
 William Kibler  
 Lindsay Lake  
 Kathryn Lewellen  
 Ken Lewellen  
 Bob Lewis  
 Keith Listermann  
 Nicole Lomax  
 David Lowe  
 Deborah Maish  
 Susan Malkowski  
 Carol Malnar



PHOTO: There are many benefits to volunteering with the District. You engage in some physical activity while meeting like-minded people. And you help improve Will County's preserves, which enhances the quality of life for all residents.

## Individual volunteers continued

Julie Massa  
Kenneth McAllister  
Thomas McCafferty  
Mary Anne  
McLeann  
Dan McNamee  
Sean McQuown  
Ruth Meyer  
John Mittelbrun  
Scott Mortenson  
Rafael Munoz  
Pat Naylor  
Don Nelson  
Espie Nelson  
Dave Nordin  
Nick Nothhelfer  
Michael O'Brien  
Ceile O'Neill  
George Opiola  
Izzy Opiola  
Bernie O'Reilly  
Carrie Palmiter  
Diane Palumbo  
Carol Picciolo  
Gloria Pollack  
Alan Potyen  
Lorie Power  
Heidi Provost  
Lydia Pultorak  
Michael Puskar  
Rita Renwick  
Ron Richter  
Carrie Rock  
Jeff Ronspies  
Roger Ross  
Michael Rusnak  
Sandra Rust  
Mary Catherine  
Ryan

Mike Rzepka  
Alfredo Salcedo  
Nuño  
Joe Sanchez  
Gina Sandvik  
Courtney Sass  
Midge Saunders  
Janet Schleeter  
Paul Schroeder  
Ryan Schuda  
Phyllis Schulte  
Max Scott-  
Schroeder  
Samuel Scott-  
Schroeder  
Kim Shehorn  
Robert Sherwood  
Stephen Sherwood  
Greg Siefert  
Steve Sierra  
Lucy Singireti  
Sally Skoff  
Ryan Sorrells  
Bob Soukup  
Kathy Stephens  
Tom Stephens  
Sharon Sullivan  
Russ Swanson  
Grace Swift  
James Swift  
Jerry Swift  
John Swift  
Kathleen Swift  
Max Swift  
Molly Swift  
Karen Tellef  
Tristan Trobaugh  
Alex Vancina  
Richard  
Wachenheim

Chuck Wanner  
Erin Ward  
Dave Wendt  
Marie Wendt  
Robert Widuch  
Mark Wieclaw  
Sally Wieclaw  
Royce Williams  
Bill Willis  
Robert Wilson  
Connie Witkowski  
Lee Witkowski  
Carter Wright  
Danielle Wright-  
Hantak  
William Zoch  
Wyatt Zoch

## Community volunteer groups

Boy Scouts  
of America  
Catholic Charities  
Girl Scouts  
of America  
Joliet Junior College  
Lewis University  
School District 203  
School District 204  
School District 210  
University of  
St. Francis

## Corporate volunteer groups

Amazon  
Crane Composites  
Goldman Sachs  
Home Depot  
IKEA  
Phillips Chevrolet  
Xylem Watermark

Scan here to  
learn about our  
upcoming volunteer  
opportunities.







More than  
**11,800**  
hours of volunteer  
service donated



PHOTOS: Volunteers contribute in many ways, from taking part in habitat management or assisting with programs to monitoring local wildlife or serving as the eyes and ears of the Forest Preserve District while riding the trails.

### In 2023, we will:

1. Participate in the yearlong 175th anniversary celebration of the I&M Canal throughout the I&M Canal National Heritage Corridor.
2. Participate in three outreach events in the local communities surrounding our visitor centers in Romeoville, Channahon, Bolingbrook, Crete Township and Joliet to increase local residents' awareness of the Forest Preserve as well as the importance of the environment.
3. Secure an intergovernmental agreement with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources for standing permission to provide programming on IDNR properties.
4. Partner with local organizations to offer three collaborative recreational programs or programs for specialized populations at Four Rivers Environmental Education Center.
5. Continue to work with Plainfield Park District on preservation of properties along the DuPage River and the extension of Normantown Trail.



**SUSTAINABILITY**



## Financials

### Use of funds

General Government	\$3,872,078
Planning & Land Preservation	\$1,536,006
Conservation	\$2,570,572
Visitor Services and Marketing & Communications	\$2,598,260
Debt Service	\$16,070,200
Capital Outlay	\$9,618,471
Operations	\$5,537,485
Police	\$1,724,007
Other Financing Use	\$545,875
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$44,072,954</b>

### Source of funds

Property Taxes	\$31,938,948
Licenses & Permits	\$920,888
Investment Income	\$246,212
Grants & Other Intergovernmental	\$4,023,253
Miscellaneous Other	\$2,117,996
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$39,247,297</b>

Levy year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Corporate/C&D	0.0687	0.0682	0.0672	0.0668	0.0667
Debt Service	0.1208	0.0822	0.0790	0.0775	0.0672
<b>Total</b>	<b>0.1895</b>	<b>0.1504</b>	<b>0.1462</b>	<b>0.1443</b>	<b>0.1339</b>



**PHOTO:** The Forest Preserve District launched a campaign in 2022 called “The Preserves Are for You.” As part of the campaign, the Forest Preserve featured the stories of people of varied cultures and abilities who spend time in the preserves. One story highlighted Mokena residents Bill Bogdan and his daughter Hannah. Born with a tumor on his spine and paralyzed since he was eight months old, Bill Bogdan is extremely active in adaptive sports and loves nature. His lifetime of exploring the preserves, especially Hickory Creek Preserve near his home, has inspired his daughter, Hannah, to seek a career in adaptive outdoor recreation.





## Donations

In 2022, a total of \$25,000 in donations was received from the following individuals and groups:

Jeffery and Marcia Baldacci  
 Rita and James Brady  
 Deborah Wise, Gianna Ellis and Peyton Charley  
 FEMA Region 5 - Mitigation  
 Forest Preserve employees  
 Tammy Horvath  
 Robert W. Jonas  
 Mark and Gail Page  
 Robert Petrouski  
 Christina Snitko  
 Deb Stamm  
 Allen Thomas  
 Jackie Traynere  
 Richard Wachenheim



*Donations listed above exceed \$250 in cash value.*

## Sponsorships

### Illinois Environmental Protection Agency

Dive IN! Traveling Special Exhibit	\$2,000.00
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### The Nature Foundation of Will County

Accessible audio readers at Four Rivers Environmental Education Center's All-Persons Trail	\$5,000.00
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Animal Ambassadors at Four Rivers Environmental Education Center, Isle a la Cache and Plum Creek Nature Center	\$1,421.57
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Dive IN! Traveling Special Exhibit	\$1,851.70
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Diversity of Life Exhibit	\$2,260.00
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Supplies for Volunteer-Managed Natural Areas	\$1,999.00
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"The Buzz" Nature Show	\$8,750.00
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The Preserves are For You Campaign	\$1,500.00
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The Way We Worked Exhibit	\$3,000.00
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Visions of Nature Art Exhibit	\$2,392.04
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Willy's Wilderness Website	\$1,000.00
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Woods Walk Program	\$1,460.21
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### Thorn Creek Audubon Society

Hummingbird Fest	\$300.00
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<b>Total</b>	<b>\$32,934.52</b>
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## Awards

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

The Forest Preserve District has been awarded the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting for the previous 26 consecutive years. 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. In 2022, the Forest Preserve submitted the most recently completed Annual Comprehensive Financial Report for the period ended December 31, 2021. As of this printing, the report is still under review for consideration of the award.

### **Outstanding Achievement in the Field of Parks and Recreation National Association of County Park and Recreation Officials (NACPRO)**

The Forest Preserve received a NACPRO award for Outstanding Achievement in the Field of Parks and Recreation for the Black Road Regional Trail Connection Project. The project, which was completed in 2021, linked two major trails and provided a safer route for path users with the installation of pedestrian bridges over the DuPage River and Interstate 55. The Black Road Regional Trail Connection project dates back more than 20 years when Forest Preserve staff sought to connect two trail systems that were separated by the DuPage River and Interstate 55. The existing route along Black Road was not safe for pedestrians due to a lack of a shoulder and a 45-mph speed limit on the road. The Forest Preserve obtained grants to fund 80 percent of the \$3 million project and the trail connection opened to the public in November of 2021.



PHOTO: Becky Blankenship (second from left) received the Young Professional Award.

### **Young Professional Award National Association of County Park and Recreation Officials (NACPRO)**

Forest Preserve wildlife ecologist Becky Blankenship of Shorewood won NACPRO's 2022 Young Professional Award, which recognizes "up-and-coming leaders in the parks and recreation profession 30 years of age and younger, who possess leadership qualities and talents," according to NACPRO. Blankenship, a 2017 graduate of the University of St. Francis in Joliet, has worked for the Forest Preserve District since June 2020. She is responsible for wildlife monitoring, management and concerns in more than 23,000 acres of preserves in Will County. In her rookie year with the District, Blankenship started a radiotelemetry tracking program to capture and track the movements and habitat use of state-endangered ornate box turtles. She also worked with Canadian National Railroad to get turtle crossings installed in a rail line that runs through critical habitat for the state-endangered Blanding's turtle, which will help reduce turtle mortality. And she monitors wildlife at preserves using game cameras, which have generated photos of many species, including rare pictures of bobcats at a southern Will County preserve.



**In 2023, we will:**

1. Continue funding the Infrastructure Maintenance & Replacement Program, allowing for renovations of the Wauponsee Glacial Trail, Old Plank Road Trail and other facilities across the county.
2. Continue habitat restoration efforts in the Kankakee Sands Area preserves, Goodenow Grove Nature Preserve and Forked Creek Preserve.
3. Continue land management activities on the highest-quality natural areas and restoration sites throughout the forest preserve system.
4. Continue to support the Prairie People Volunteer program.
5. Continue to assist The Nature Foundation of Will County in building capacity and identifying projects, programs, events and exhibitions that it can support.



PHOTO: Kankakee Sands Preserve protects savanna and wetland habitat. A unique feature of the site is its sand dunes and savanna.

# Staff Roster

## Executive Director's Office

Ralph Schultz,  
*Executive Director*  
Tracy Chapman,  
*Deputy Director/Public  
Safety Administrator*  
Leisa Nevins

## Accounting and Finance

Lisa Lukasevich,  
*Director*  
Sheri Bembenek  
Mary Borgra  
Meredith Clavenna

## Human Resources

Donna Suca, *Director*  
Veronica Frausto  
Emily Kenny

## Information Technology

Denise Steffen,  
*Director*  
Adam DeRoss  
Omar Lopez  
Thomas Mancari Jr.

## Marketing and Communications

Laura Kiran,  
*Director*  
Cindy Cain  
Glenn Knoblock  
Katie McCollum  
Meghan McMahan  
Chad Merda  
Anthony Schalk  
Rose Scofield

## Planning and Land Preservation

Colleen Novander,  
*Director*  
Corinne Crawford  
Janice Kasprisin  
Matt Novander  
John O'Lear  
Megan Raimbault  
Matthew Ruhter  
John Stecyk  
Sara Wittchen

## Visitor Services

Lynn Kurczewski,  
*Director*  
Kylee Beckwith  
Bob Bryerton  
Michelle Cipiti  
Jerome Gabriel  
Jen Guest  
Amy Haller  
Anita Healy  
Marissa Jones  
Jenna Krukowski  
Alexis Lyons  
Suzy Lyttle  
Michael Manna

Jessica McQuown  
Jenna Newcomb  
Julie Panozzo  
David Piotrowski  
Jessica Prince-Sharrar  
Angela Rafac  
Tina Riley  
Sara Russell  
Brittany Schaller  
Scott Sobbe  
Jason Stevenson  
Barbara Sudsberry  
Alyssa Szymanski  
Kirsten Thalacker  
Mary Thomas  
Angela Trobaugh  
Heather Van Zyl  
Erin Ward  
Jessica Wolff  
Melissa Zanzola  
Janet Zavoral

## Conservation

Andrew Hawkins,  
*Director*  
Michelle Blackburn  
Rebecca Blankenship  
Allison Borecky  
Nicholas Budde  
Floyd Catchpole

Allen Hartmann  
Julianne Mason  
Karey O'Brein  
Jessica Quinn  
Joshua Rae  
David Robson  
Barbara Sherwood  
Judith Wallace

## Law Enforcement

Dave Barrios Jr.,  
*Director/Deputy Chief*  
James Pacetti,  
*Lieutenant*  
Jason Allbert  
Terence Bergin  
Steve Bettenhausen  
Gregory Bufford  
Antonio Camardo  
Morgan Carrier  
Thomas Cimbalista  
Lawrence Collins  
Justine Constantino  
Jesus Espinoza  
Mark Feijoo  
Guillermo Gamboa  
James Gerdich  
Jessica Glecier  
Phillip Glecier  
Bradley Greenup

PHOTO: Laura Kiran during our Make Trail Moments on the Old Plank event, which featured family-friendly games and activities for all ages as well as entertainment from Chicago's 103.5 KISS FM.







Robert Guerrieri  
 Mark Houlihan  
 Jeffrey Hughes  
 Kimberly Kaniewski  
 Eric Kobe  
 Dorota Lepionka  
 Richard Lewandowski  
 Darrell Mayle  
 Hugh McCorkle  
 Jeffrey McKenzie  
 Caitlin Mosier  
 David Neumann  
 Daniel Olszewski  
 Jeffrey Pogose  
 Dan Rankovich  
 Michael Reilly  
 Robert Reyes  
 Kelly Robertson  
 Terrence Shubert  
 Daniel Troike  
 Daniel Vargas  
 Nicole Veerman  
 Matthew Yates

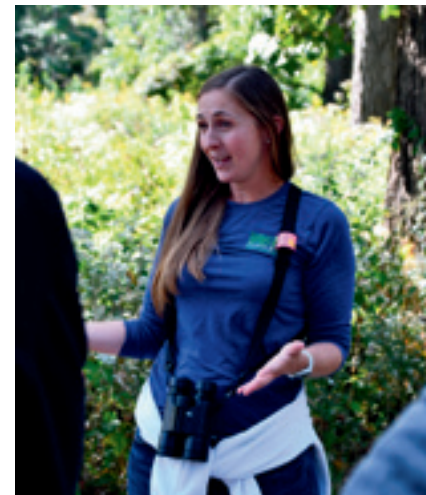
**Maintenance  
 and Operations**

John Fay,  
*Director*  
 Calvin Anderson  
 Tracy Bianco  
 Cole Biltgen  
 Elise Brazzale  
 Thomas Burns  
 Jason Buss  
 Scott Carevic  
 Josh Catlow

Rina Cheney  
 Anthony Congelosi  
 Steven Crobie  
 Gerald Dawson  
 Nathaniel Degnan  
 Paul Doran  
 Ian Eskridge  
 Cedric Foster  
 Terrence Garvey Jr.  
 Ben Gauchat  
 Jesus Gonzalez  
 Austin Gugliemucci  
 William Hibler  
 Shane Hondrombilas  
 Eric Hummitsch  
 Sean Johnson  
 Nicholas Kalcsits  
 Jason Kaphusman  
 Noah Kasmer  
 Brian Krabbe  
 Karl Krudup  
 Eric Latz  
 John Latz  
 Brian Mackey  
 Juan Martinez  
 Jace McWilliams  
 Christopher Moeller  
 Thomas Murray  
 Ryan Nichols  
 Adam Oestmann  
 Justin Parks  
 Daniel Parthun  
 Kimberly Pasch-  
 McQuen  
 Alex Pasteris

Denise Pollworth  
 William Prince Jr.  
 Michael Prybell  
 Bailey Rejzek  
 Isaiah Romo  
 Noah Schad  
 Jacob Shewmake  
 Kyle Siegel  
 Bryan Smith  
 Roy Smith  
 Steve Stronk  
 William Suca Jr.  
 Gabe Suhadolc  
 Collin Talkie  
 Richard Therkildsen  
 Charles Thomas III  
 Nicholas Vella  
 Thomas Watson  
 Jonathan Wychocki  
 Robert Zinkiewicz

**Retiree**  
 Edward McDermott



PHOTOS (from left):  
 Christopher Moeller  
 installing the Forest  
 Preserve's new trailhead  
 signs, Bob Bryerton and  
 Suzy Lyttle on the set of  
 November's episode of  
 our award-winning nature  
 show, "The Buzz," and  
 Jess McQuown during our  
 Pelican Watch event at  
 Four Rivers.

Photo credits: Glenn P. Knoblock,  
 Chad Merda, Amy Miller, JoAnne Saleme,  
 Anthony Schalk, Scott Seifrid









**PHOTO:** The views atop the bridge at Goodenow Grove Nature Preserve are amazing in any season. The bridge spans a 40-foot ravine and is 267 feet long.



**FOREST PRESERVE DISTRICT  
WILL COUNTY**

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[ReconnectWithNature.org](http://ReconnectWithNature.org)

