

Attachment 1



Forest Preserves of Cook County Conservation & Policy Council Meeting Minutes for February 9, 2023

Sand Ridge Nature Center ▪ [15891 Paxton Ave, South Holland, IL 60473](#)

Welcome and Call to Order. Chairperson Alan Bell called the meeting to order at 9:37 a.m. The following Council members and others attended:

Advisory Council Members

Alan Bell, Chairperson
Commissioner Josina Morita (remote)
Daisy Feidt
Hank Saunders (remote)
Maria Pesquiera
Mark Templeton, Vice-chairperson
Megan Bang
Mike DeSantiago (remote)
Ryen Nagel
Shelley Spencer, Secretary

Presenters

Arnold Randall, Forest Preserves
Beth Dunn, Chicago Botanic Garden
Cathy Geraghty, Forest Preserves
Chris Adas, Forest Preserves
Credell Walls, Forest Preserves
Eileen Figel, Forest Preserves
Jacqui Ulrich, Forest Preserves
Jen Baader, Chicago Zoological Society
Professor McClellan, Little Cal. Underground Railroad
Raquel Garcia-Alvarez, Forest Preserves
Rodney Harrington, Little Cal. Underground Railroad
Tom Shepherd, Little Calumet Underground Railroad

Laurel Ross did not attend.

Alan welcomed four new Council members: Daisy Feidt, Ryen Nagle, Megan Bang and Commissioner Josina Morita.

Megan explained that Chicago is her home and the home of her ancestors. Megan uses LaBagh Woods to develop outdoor learning.

Daisy is a regular user of the forest preserves and is very interested in equity and access issues. She is a person with a disability and she brings that lens to this work.

Ryen is a dean at Moraine Valley Community College which is surrounded by the forest preserves. Ryen looks forward to continuing Dr. Jenkins' work to connect two important resources—community colleges and the forest preserves.

Commissioner Josina Morita explained that her number one ask when she joined the board was to be appointed as the liaison to the Conservation and Policy Council. She previously served as a board member of MWRD and is an urban planner. She is a lover of the forest preserves and wants to make sure the preserves are accessible to everyone.

Commissioner Morita departed the meeting to attend a County Board meeting.

Cre Walls, the new Director of the Sand Ridge Nature Center, explained that the Sand Ridge campus includes 600 acres with an aquatic center, campground, and nature center. Cre's team partners with local organizations to host a range of events which engage the community. One example is the Little Calumet Underground Railroad network which hosts educational walks at the site.

Tom Shepherd, Professor McClellan, and Rodney Harrington explained that the Little Calumet Underground Railroad Network supports research and education related to the freedom seekers who passed through the area. The Forest Preserves sponsors four tours per year. The district pays for buses, insurance, and other services needed to run the events. Rodney Harrington's organization teaches youth about this history.

Professor McClellan explained that 3000 to 4500 freedom seekers came into this region. Five hundred to 800 walked right down the road adjacent to the Sand Ridge Nature Center. The site presents a significant opportunity for heritage tourism, and Professor McClellan suggests that the Forest Preserves create a countywide interpretation plan related to this history. He is specifically interested in the McCoy Homestead site in Sauk Woods which he believes should be on the listing of sites significant to the underground railroad. Professor McClellan also recommends installing a major monument at Beaubien to commemorate this historical search for freedom.

Approval of Minutes. A motion to approve the minutes of the 8.31.22 meeting was made by Mark Templeton with a second by Maria Pesqueira. The minutes were approved unanimously.

Public Comments. There were no public comments.

Chairman's report. Alan thanked Maria Pesqueira for serving on the Council and announced that she will be stepping down.

Maria stated that, when she joined the Council, the conversations about centering equity in the district's work were bold and radical. Then the pandemic hit and people really understood the importance of the preserves. Today there is a strong commitment to equity—including a commitment to review the names of all forest preserves sites with an equity lens. Maria stated, "So much has happened thanks to all the great work. It is my pleasure to have served. Truly it is an honor to be the stewards and the caretakers of these precious lands. Many peoples have been here before us. At this moment, this council is responsible for the caretaking of these lands."

Alan thanked Maria for her leadership and commitment to the Council.

General Superintendent's Report. Arnold thanked Maria for her work with the Council and welcomed the new members.

Arnold thanked Tom, Larry and Rodney for the important work they are doing to educate people about the underground railroad. Arnold stated that cultural programming is incorporated throughout the forest preserves—including the underground railroad and the stories of native people who have been here for

thousands of years. Sand Ridge has been a model of connecting with communities through this programming.

Arnold explained that the Council was established to guide implementation of the Next Century Conservation Plan. The district needs lots of different perspectives and the Council has been a very thoughtful body which has weighed in on important matters. Council meetings provide an opportunity to dive deeper into these topics in ways that can't always happen at board meetings.

Arnold thanked Benjamin Cox of Friends of the Forest Preserves, Openlands, the Zoo, the Garden, the League of Women Voters and all the organizations who worked hard to pass the referendum which had the support of 69% of voters—including 75% of voters within the City of Chicago.

Promoting Racial Equity, Diversity & Inclusion. Raquel Garcia-Alvarez explained that the district has restructured its REDI team to focus on implementing priority initiatives. (See Attachment 1.1)

The team is organized into six working groups as follows:



Jacqui Ulrich explained how the district is connecting more people to nature through programming and partnerships. The REDI work is now baked into her department's work; it is not an extra add-on. Specific activities include:

- Organizing the team into geographic zones to create stronger relationships with specific communities.
- Small grants to partners who want to host a public program or event at the preserves.
- Providing group transportation (via the Nature Express bus program) to get people to the preserves.
- Partnering with the Native American community to connect individual groups to local sites and programs. Jacqui indicated that her team has not been successful creating conversations with a broad coalition of Native American groups.

Alan thanked Jacqui for the scale of the work and the continuing efforts to elevate this work.

Shelley also thanked staff for their dedication to this work. Shelley explained, "This work that has been done on a shoestring with passion. We cannot overlook the work this team has done."

Daisy indicated that the geographic focus does not always work as well for the disability community.

Arnold explained that parks and recreation organizations across the country are talking about how to engage communities which have historically been excluded. He added that the Forest Preserves is committed to this, and it should just be part of who we are.

Megan thanked CEP for their work with Native people. She explained that Illinois has no recognized tribes which makes this a challenging environment. The Forest Preserves has a remarkable opportunity to make right many issues.

Raquel explained that the district is applying a REDI lens to all policies and hopes to create a policy for engaging Native Americans.

Alan suggested we develop a communications strategy. What are you going to say as you do outreach? How does that message change for different communities? How do you make the party feel you are being authentic and they are being heard?

Maria Pesqueira left the meeting.

The Forest Preserves' Land Acquisition Strategy. Chris Adas explained that the successful referendum will provide an additional \$7.3M per year to acquire more land. This will allow the district to acquire 2700 acres over the next 20 years which is significant, but less than 15% of the NCCP goal of 21,000 acres. Chris explained that this is a conservative estimate; if the district continues to successfully leverage its funding with grants, much more land will be acquired. (See Attachment 1.2)

The district continues to focus on acquisition opportunities in southeast Cook County. Using various grants, the district recently acquired about 700 acres.

Chris explained that the Forest Preserves will bank some portion of the annual allocation to build up the land acquisition fund so the district can pursue opportunities that were out of reach in past years.

Several questions were raised; Chris Adas and Chris Slattery responded as follows:

Are there specific criteria for what land the District will acquire? And are you applying a REDI lens?

Chris and Chris explained that the district completed a land acquisition plan in 2012 which identified specific opportunities. From a REDI standpoint, the district is focusing on southeast Cook County because this area is currently underserved. The district may develop a similar plan for the central/city zone. When staff evaluate properties, they assign extra points for underserved parts of the county. The southeast Cook County acquisition plan also incorporates various socio-economic factors. The district has not yet completed this deeper analysis for other underserved zones.

Is there a regular schedule for updating the districtwide acquisition plan?

The countywide land acquisition plan was last updated in 2012; there is not a regular cycle for doing these updates. It is an enormous undertaking to do this on a countywide basis, but staff hope this will get easier as technology improves.

What happens if there is an opportunity in an area that does not have a plan? We should not dismiss these opportunities.

A lot of this is opportunistic; it is based on what becomes available on the market. The District is also a co-founder of NeighborSpace, which protects community gardens within the City.

Has the district experienced opposition to acquisition efforts?

Some villages have opposed District efforts to acquire land because they want to see the land developed to provide jobs and tax revenues.

Regional Efforts to Protect Open Land. Cathy Geraghty presented an overview of the 30 X 30 initiative and local efforts to protect open land in the region. (See Attachment 1.3)

Cathy stated that, over the past 10 years, the Forest Preserves and partners have raised more than \$23 million in grants to acquire land.

America the Beautiful is a national movement to protect 30% of land and water resources by 2030. Cathy explained that Chicago Wilderness is focused on implementing this initiative within the Chicago region.

Chicago Wilderness developed a framework for Illinois, and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources will apply for the federal funding to implement the 30 X 30 initiative.

Rather than acquiring 30% more conservation land, Chicago Wilderness wants to add 30% more acres of healthy landscape. The concept includes:

- Asking farmers to adopt conservation-friendly practices to prevent runoff, make water cleaner, etc.
- Asking homeowners to add native plant gardens.
- Increasing the rate of acquisition by 30%. For example, if the Forest Preserves has been acquiring 200 acres of land per year, a 30% increase would be 60 additional acres per year for a total of 260 acres per year.

Cathy added that we also need to think more broadly about how 21,000 acres can be protected.

Council members discussed the need to identify other strategies and tools to protect land. For example, should the district pursue options on land that it can't afford now, but could acquire later?

Council members agreed to incorporate this discussion into the land use reform discussions at the next two meetings.

Engaging on Additional Topics. Eileen Figel explained that Alan had asked Council members to rank topics for future discussion. Alan asked Council members to think about how they will engage in topics that don't fit on future agendas.

Mike asked about the number of suicides at the preserves and the district's role in supporting suicide prevention efforts. Daisy added that a lot of work is being done on this and suggest connecting to the work being done around the state. Megan added that increasing people's time outdoors has very positive health benefits and it is important to frame this broadly around benefits, not just prevention. She also stated that digging into demographics and understanding patterns is important; general prevention efforts do not work.

Arnold and Eileen explained that Eileen, Mike DeSantiago, and Maria Pesqueira met with NAMI to explore suicide prevention and to develop strategies for supporting staff who discover the bodies of people who die by suicide. Arnold added that the district has also launched a special initiative to provide support and assistance for police officers.

Ryen asked if the Council should be discussing the pension. He noted that this was ranked as the lowest priority topic, but a lot of referendum money will go to the pension fund. It was noted that the CFO will give an update on the pension fund at the August Council meeting.

Partner Updates. The following updates were presented by partners:

- Openlands. Emily Reusswig advocated for connecting fragmented landscapes for biodiversity purposes.
- Zoo. Jen Baader invited new council members to tour the Zoo. She also reported that the Zoo is working with the Forest Preserves on interpretive signage. The Zoo is also undergoing a master planning process and welcomes suggestions for engaging Council and staff at upcoming town halls.
- Garden. Beth Dunn stated that the Garden hit over 1 million visits this past year—a return to pre-pandemic numbers. The orchid show opens on Saturday and runs through March 26.

Adjournment. Mark Templeton made a motion to adjourn; the motion was seconded by Shelley Spencer. The motion passed and the meeting was adjourned at 12:10 pm.

REDI: Next Steps & Community Engagement Strategies



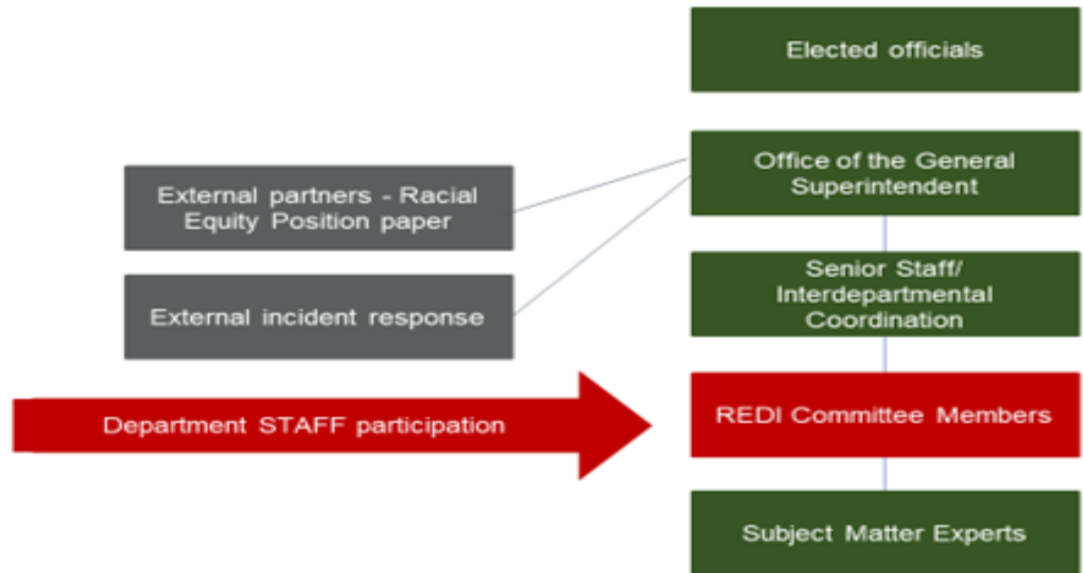
feel free

Mission

The REDI Committee’s mission is to support internal employees in practicing racial equity in the workplace and restructure internal processes to reflect the Forest Preserves’ values of equity and inclusion.

Vision

The REDI Committee envisions the Forest Preserves of Cook County as an agency that promotes inclusion through its public services, its collaborations with partners and volunteers, and through its internal operations and workplace culture. The REDI Committee will work to uphold these values and demonstrate respect for all people through its actions.



New REDI Structure



Two Strategies Community Engagement Strategies

STRATEGY 1: Make the Forest Preserves welcoming and accessible to the rich diversity of residents who live in Cook County.

- Connecting People to Nature Challenge
- Culturally relevant stories incorporated into signs/programs
- ADA Accessibility
- Site Names
- Language Access
- Land Acquisition – Southeast Cook County

STRATEGY 2: Build new bridges to engage County residents who have been historically excluded.

- Districtwide embedded intentional, equitable and inclusive community engagement
- Long term partnerships
- Subsidized transportation
- Co-create programs and explore other options with Native American community



General Headquarters
536 N. Hatten Ave.
River Forest, IL 60305

Phone 800.879.3666
Police 708.771.1000
Volunteer Hotline 773.631.1790

In case of emergency, call 911

STAY CONNECTED
Even when you can't be in the preserves, you can stay connected through our web page, blog, e-newsletter and social media. Find out about programs and events—even go behind the scenes!

[fydex.com](#) [fydex.com](#) [fydex.com](#) [fydex.com](#) [fydex.com](#) [fydex.com](#) [fydex.com](#)

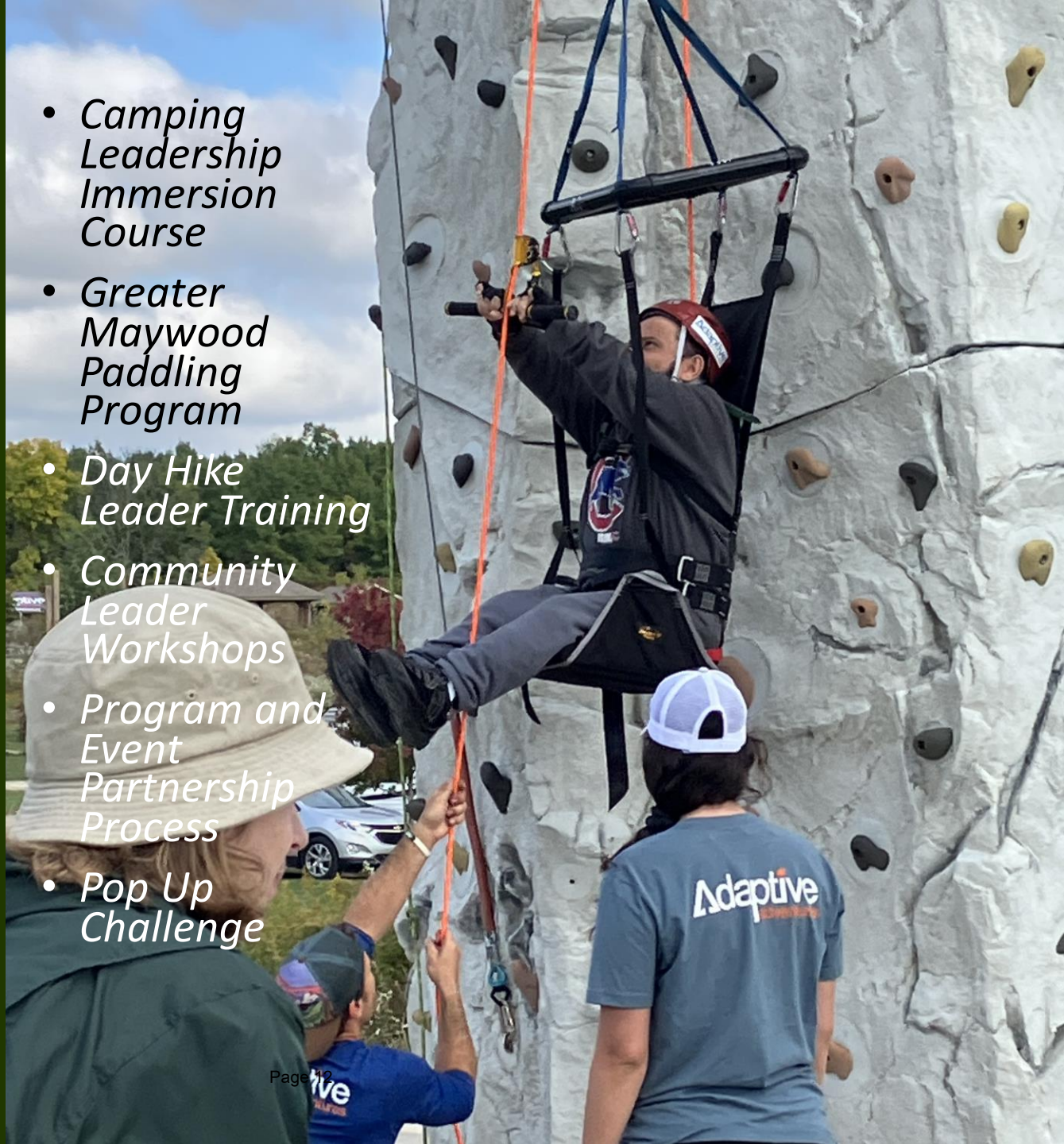
Page 11

WHILE YOU GO
Visit our trail closures page for all the latest information about trail and preserve closures, prescribed burns and other work.
[fydex.com/preserve-and-trail/closure-closures](#)

BEFORE YOU GO
Visit our trail closures page for all the latest information about trail and preserve closures, prescribed burns and other work.
fpdca.com/preserves-and-trails/trail-closures

Gear Libraries Community Leaders Partnerships

- *Camping Leadership Immersion Course*
- *Greater Maywood Paddling Program*
- *Day Hike Leader Training*
- *Community Leader Workshops*
- *Program and Event Partnership Process*
- *Pop Up Challenge*

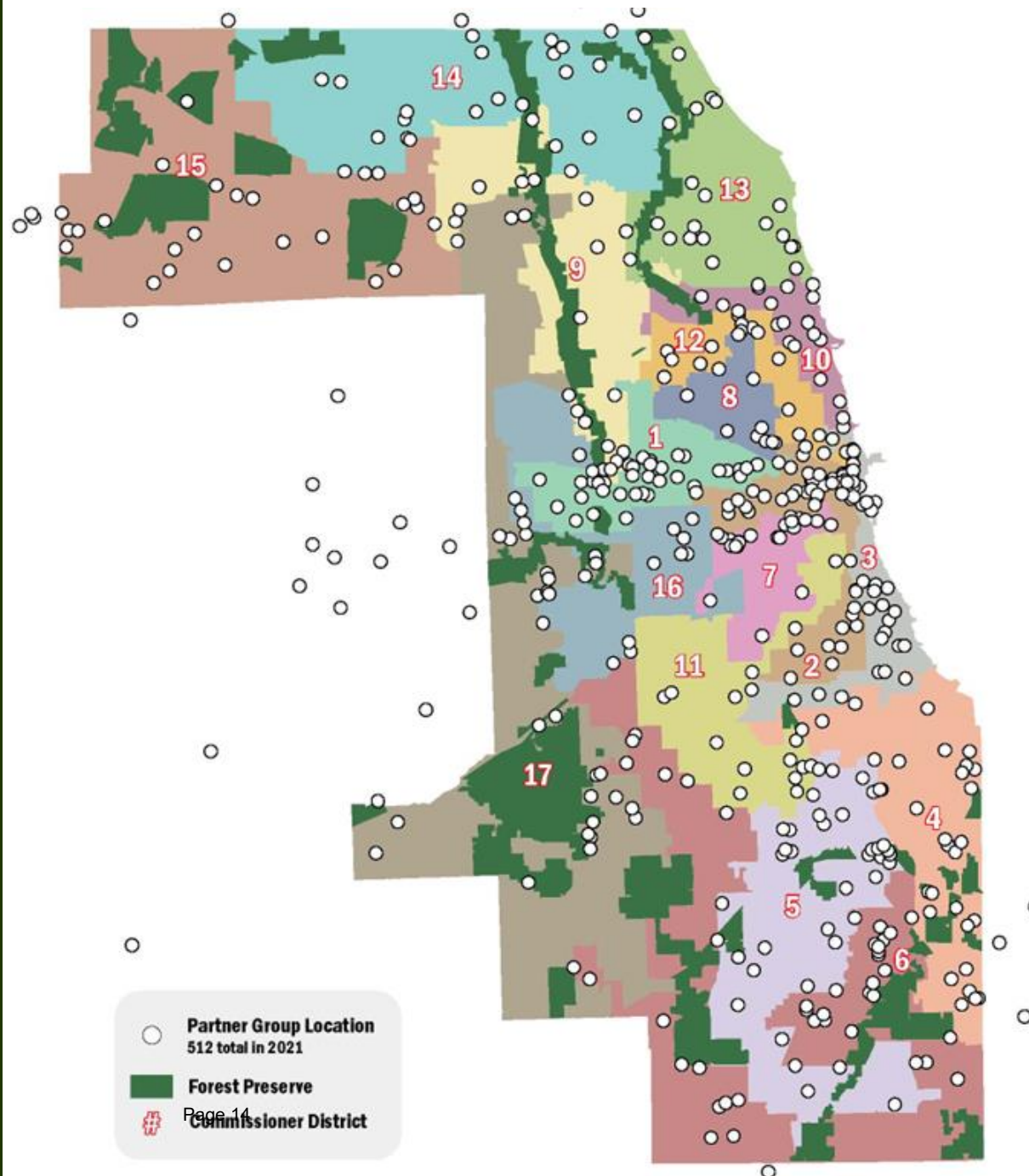


Site Specific

- *Beaubien Woods*
- *Challenge Sites*
 - *Sauk Trail Woods*
 - *Miller Meadow*
 - *Caldwell/Bunker Hill*
- *Eggers Grove*



CEP Partnerships 2021



More Connections to Communities

Define community engagement and outreach and specific roles at FPCC.

2023 and beyond:

- Contractual help to develop CEP team roles
- Contractual help to develop other department roles
- Eggers IDNR Grant work
- Challenge Site work continues with community liaison
- Choose Model
 - E.g. more reaching out or more community-led events
- Determine Community Liaison Department/Unit/Team
 - (positions, responsibilities, where it lives, etc.)

Transportation

Nature Express
Mighty Acorns
Shuttles



Native American Community

- American Indian Center
 - Mounds project
 - Annual Pow Wow – Schiller Woods
 - Solstice/Equinox Activities
- Trickster Gallery & Cultural Center
 - Programs at Rolling Knoll
 - Camp Site
- American Indian Health Services
 - Community Pow Wow- Busse
 - Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women Day of Remembrance Event
- Other
 - Columbia Woods Solstice/Equinox celebrations
 - Xochitl Quetzal Aztec Dance Ceremony

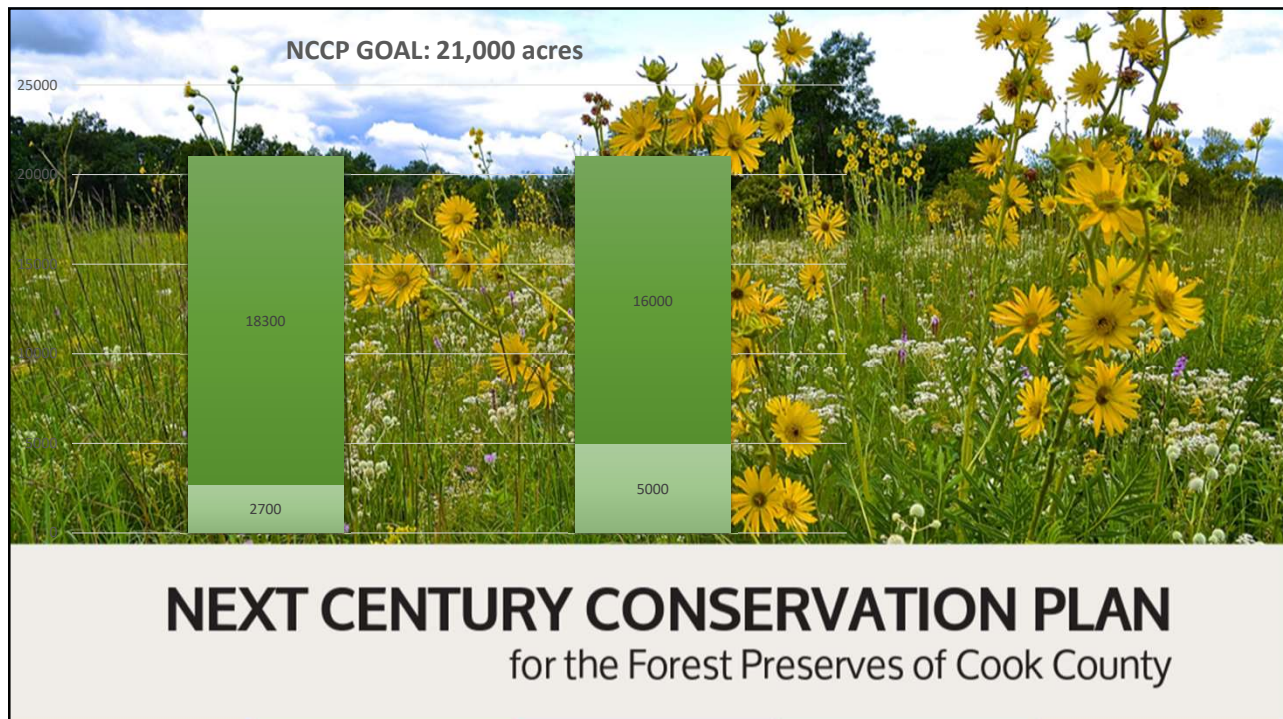


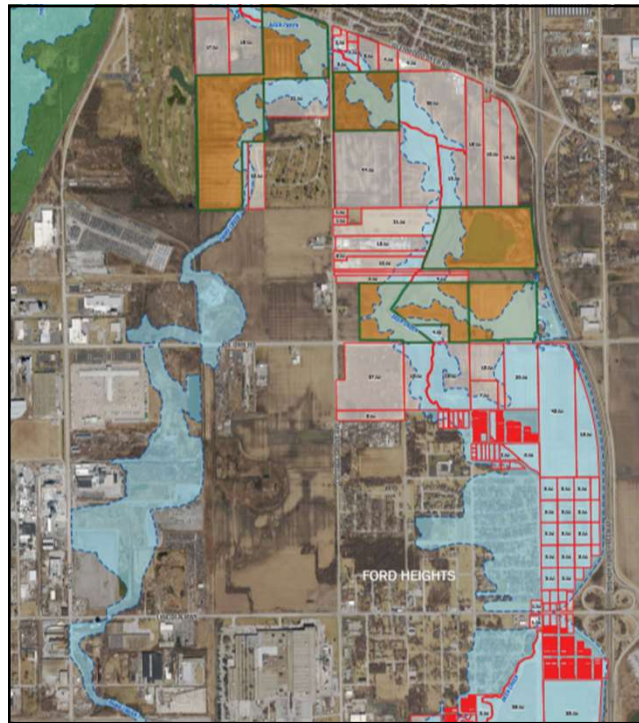


Attachment 1.2

Estimated acres to be acquired over 20 years, buildings demolished, trails built:							
Funding per yr	Avg purchase price per acre	Soft costs per acre	Per acre \$ for demo, site prep/trails	Total cost per acre	Avg acres acquired per year	# yrs	Estimated acres acquired
\$7,300,000	\$43,750	\$875	\$10,000	\$54,625	134	20	2,673

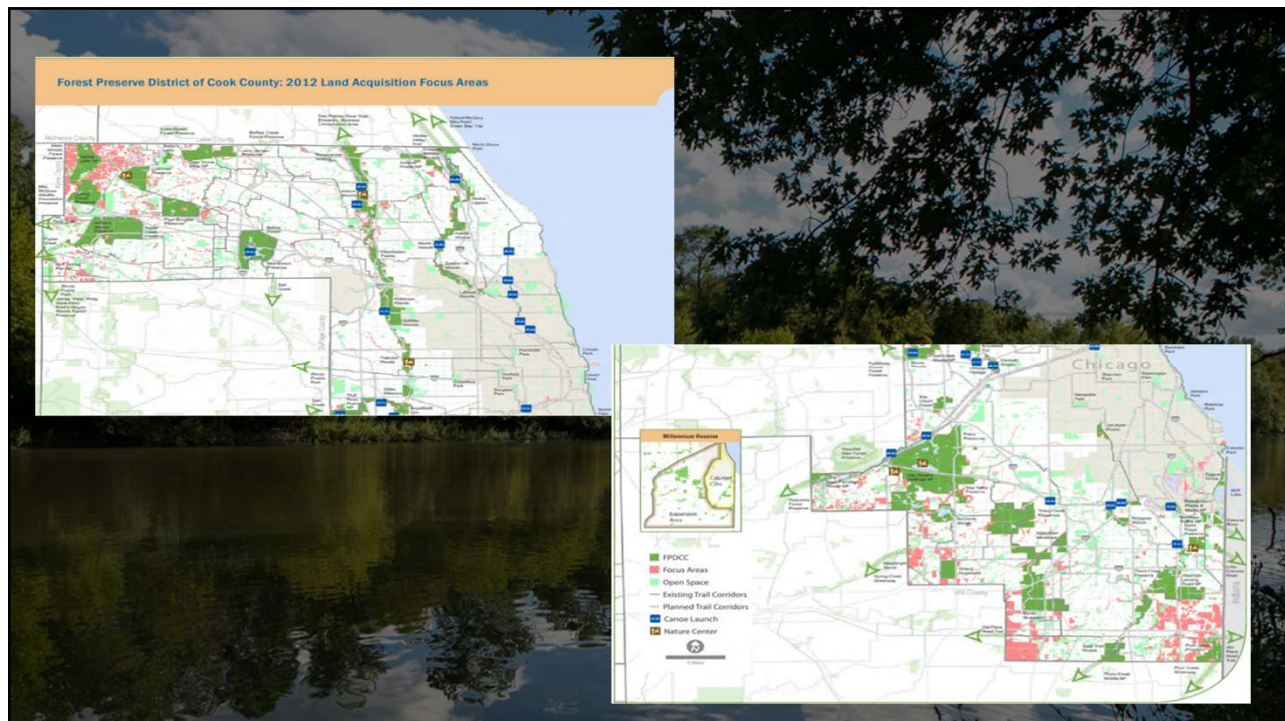
- Approximately 2600 acres to be acquired over 20 years at a total cost of \$54,625 per acre. Also includes demolition of existing structures and basic site development (access and mowed trail).
- At least 1,500 acres would be acquired in the SE Cook Land Acquisition Plan area with additional acreage added throughout the County as recommended in the LAAD Position Paper and identified in the 2012 FPCC Land Acquisition Plan and subsequent Land Acquisition Plans.





Deer Creek Corridor Acquisitions

- LWCF/OSLAD Phase I
 - \$1,150,000 (50% match)
 - 194 acres
- LWCF/OSLAD Phase II
 - \$946k (50% match)
 - 86 acres
- ICECF Phase III
 - \$794K (20% match)
 - \$10k for restoration
 - 70 acres
- ARPA Phase IV
 - \$7M (NO match)
 - \$1M site prep & restoration
 - \$500k soft costs
 - 350 acres
- Up to 700 acres being actively pursued





America the Beautiful & 30x30

A vibrant forest scene. The foreground is filled with numerous bright yellow wildflowers, likely Black-eyed Susans, with dark brown centers, growing among lush green leaves. In the background, several tall, slender tree trunks rise vertically, their upper branches and leaves forming a dense green canopy. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day, with some light filtering through the trees.

Chicago Wilderness & 30x30

Mobilizing a Green Region...



Chicago Wilderness Green Vision & 30x30

Green Vision:

8 million acres of vibrant
nature improving our
collective home

CW aligning to 30x30 goals



Protecting and restoring ecosystems is an important part of regional conservation, but alone it is not enough. To maximize biodiversity and climate resilience, these landscapes must be actively managed for health, vitality, and the ability to withstand changes to our climate. We are working to dramatically increase the acres of actively managed protected land in the four-state Chicago Wilderness region by 36% to **234,000 acres.**



Some Strategies for this Initiative:

- Develop a regional invasive species management plan.
- Educate private, public and corporate partners about invasives.
- Hold a symposium/roundtable series, beginning with one that focuses on diseases that threaten local wildlife.
- Continue collaborative volunteer training in Brush Pile Burning, Prescribed Fire, Chainsaw Safety, and Herbicide Application.
- Foster communication among regional land managers about
- potential climate change adaptation strategies.
- Work with bird data to identify trends and develop regional best management practices that support birds in decline.
- Continue to explore opportunities for data sharing across the four-state region.
- Develop a network of oak ecosystems that are protected and



Growing with
Agriculture

2

Farmers from Chicago Wilderness Alliance's four-state region contribute significantly to our states' economies and feed millions of people. They can increase crop yields and have a meaningful impact on regional climate resilience by using conservation-forward practices that restore habitat, reduce emissions, and protect biodiversity.



Healthy, ecologically valuable habitat isn't just for nature preserves. Opportunities to improve our quality of life by expanding natural habitats are bountiful throughout the Chicago Wilderness Alliance four-state region and are often found in unexpected places such as on roofs or school campuses, in utility rights-of-way or detention ponds, and even in our own backyards.

Chicago Wilderness Alliance is working to increase acres of protected lands and waters, which are essential to improving quality of life and building climate resiliency across the four-state region. In the same spirit as the national 30 by 30 initiative, increasing natural areas for landscape protection will provide the biodiversity needed to sustain healthy ecosystems that allow humans and wildlife to thrive.

Chicago Wilderness Illinois Portion

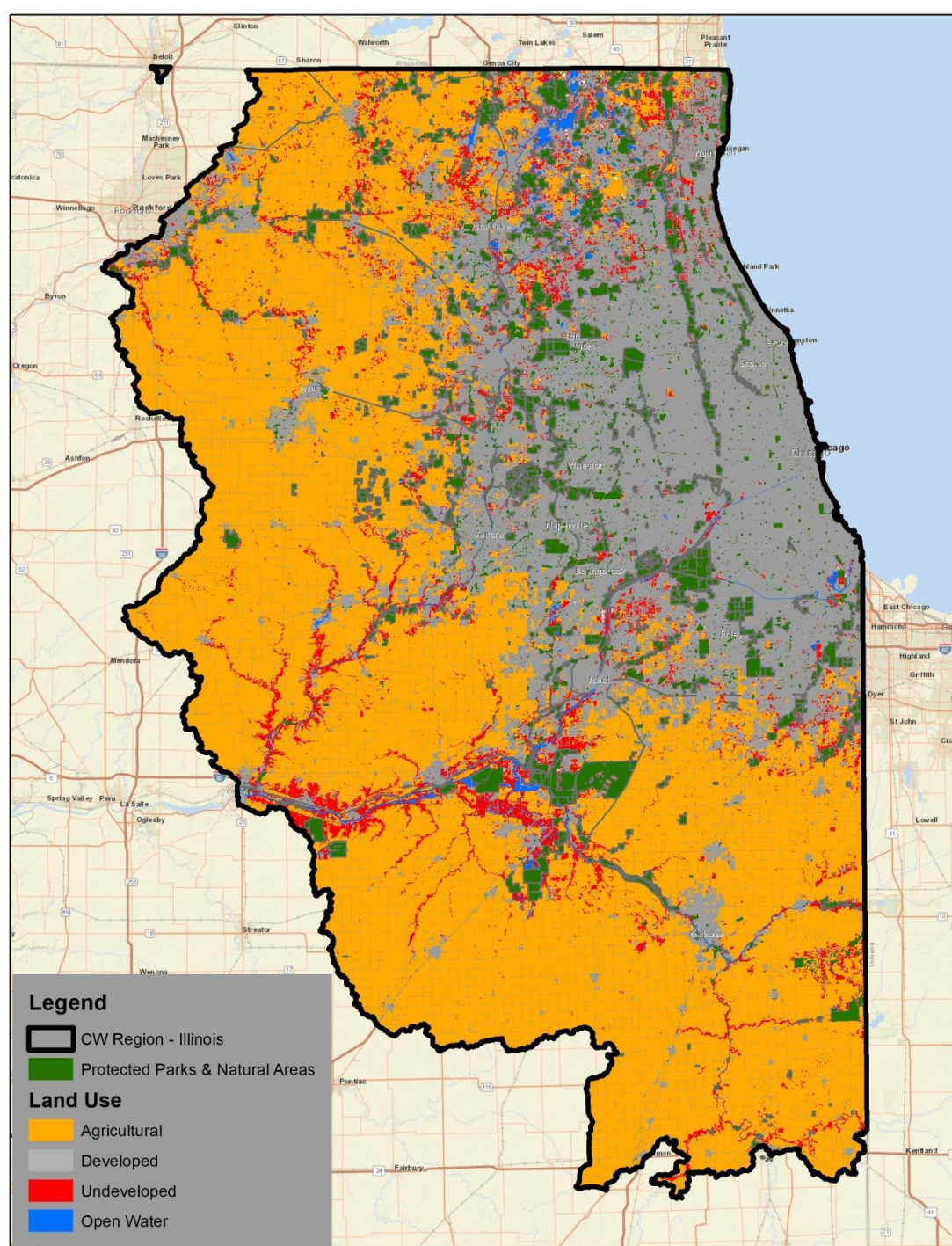
Total area: 4,770,000 acres

30% of total area: 1,431,000 acres

Conservation areas +
parks (current): 375,000 acres

Additional needed:
(w/protection only) **1,056,000 acres**

Additional needed **55,500 acres**
(w/*all* land types contributing)



CW-IL 30x30: 30% Across the Illinois Portion of the Chicago Wilderness Region

Landscape Type (Land Use)	IL Acreage in CW Region	30% of Land Type	CW Goal**	30x30 Opportunity in CW-IL
Conservation Land (currently protected)	312,000	93,600	1	93,600 acres under active restoration
Local Parkland	63,000	18,900	3, 5	18,900 acres managed for plants, wildlife, and people
Agricultural Land	2,690,000	807,000	2	807,000 acres in regenerative agriculture
Undeveloped Land* (for acquisition)	185,000	55,500	4, 5, 7	55,500 acres added to conservation lands and waters
Built Land	1,520,000	456,000	3, 5	456,000 acres in green infrastructure practices (e.g. native plantings in yards, campuses, ROWs, gardens, green roofs, etc.)
Chicago Wilderness Total	4,770,000	1,430,000	1-7	1.43 million acres in vibrant health, improving quality of life for all

... for all