

Report on the 13th Forest Preserve District of Cook County



Bunker Hill, 2022

**Cook County Forest Preserve
Commissioner Larry Suffredin**

October 2022



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Litigation
Real Estate

October 18, 2022

Dear Resident,

The Cook County Forest Preserve District is one of the largest Forest Preserve districts in the United States. Each year, hundreds of thousands of people visit the Preserves' thousands of acres of forests, grasslands, riparian, and marshland environments.

It is imperative to work together to keep this system functioning and accessible.

The purpose of this report is to review the activities of the Forest Preserves in the 13th District of Cook County and to conduct a satisfaction review for patrons of the Forest Preserve's picnic shelters in the 13th District. Since 2003, I have conducted this review to measure user satisfaction and identify areas for the Forest Preserve to improve.

I would like to thank Atour Sargon, my Deputy District Director and our Mikva Challenge summer intern, Danielle Savin for all of their hard work: visiting and photographing each of the shelters, crafting and distributing the questionnaire, evaluating the results and preparing the finished survey.

The Cook County Forest Preserve District is a great asset to the residents of Cook County, and I am committed to cultivating and building that asset on their behalf.

I hope you find this report informative and enjoyable.

Sincerely,

Larry Suffredin
Forest Preserve District of Cook County Commissioner, 13th District

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2022 Forest Preserve Permit Users Survey Summary Report

Purpose

To analyze data from event permits held during 2022 in the 13th District of the Forest Preserve District of Cook County (FPDCC) and survey the permit holders to measure user satisfaction and identify improvements.

Notes

1. Each percentage is rounded to the nearest .1%.
2. “±” followed by a number represents “standard deviation.” Standard deviation is a measure of the amount of variation or dispersion of a set of values.
3. Below is the scale that permit holders used when answering questions:
 - 1 Star - Poor
 - 2 Stars - Below Average
 - 3 Stars - Average
 - 4 Stars - Above Average
 - 5 Stars - Excellent

Summary Findings

Several highlights arose from the survey of permit holders.

1. As of September 26, 2022, the FPDCC sold 604 event permits for the 2022 Season.
2. Collectively, permit holders estimated more than 58,381 visitors attended their events.
3. The most common FPDCC site (per the survey results) was Bunker Hill, which had 38 events, accounting for 49.4% of events.
4. 34.6% of all users were first time users, many of which credited the pandemic for their use of Cook County Forest Preserves. 77.6 % of those first time users chose to have their event at the Cook County Forest Preserves because of the pandemic. This number is an increase from our 2021 survey results.
5. The most popular month for an event was July.
6. Permits were issued every day of the week, Monday through Sunday. Pre-Pandemic use was predominantly limited to Saturdays and Sundays.
7. Average event estimate attendance was approximately 120.
8. The most common event reason for the event was “family event” (66.7%).
9. According to the survey, a lack of adequate signage (using larger signs to identify the shelters and issues with the grass (not mowed/mowed grass not being removed) were the most common issues.

Analysis of 13th District Event Data

Overall, FPDCC issued 604 permits for events in the 13th District during the period surveyed (January 1, 2022 through November 1, 2022). Below is an analysis of data provided by District 13 Forest Preserve Survey results. 81 permit holders returned their survey which accounts for 13.4% of the permit holders. The survey was sent to 463 individual permit holders. Data below reflects responses to each question unless otherwise noted. Raw data provided by CCDFP was used at times to provide more detailed information. Please note that the number of responses are not uniform per question, as respondents did not always answer all of the questions in the survey.

Permits Issued by Preserve (77/81 Responses)

Bunker Hill was the most common preserve for an event (Based on Survey Respondent Results).

| Location (shelter) | Permits issued | Percent of permits issued |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Bunker Hill | 38 | 49.4% |
| Erickson Woods | 4 | 5.1% |
| Linne Woods | 14 | 18.2% |
| Miami Woods | 2 | 2.6% |
| St. Paul Woods | 10 | 13% |
| Turnbull Woods | 3 | 3.9% |
| Wayside Woods | 6 | 7.8% |
| Total | 77 | ~100.0% |

Permits issued by Site (Forest Preserve Raw Data used for this Question)

Bunker Hill, Linne Woods, and St. Paul Woods were the most popular sites. Permits calculated based off of 604 permit requests.

| Location | Permits issued | Percent of permits issued |
|-----------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Bunker Hill | 310 | 51.3% |
| Erickson Woods | 33 | 5.5% |
| Linne Woods | 99 | 16.4% |
| Miami Woods | 43 | 7.1% |
| St. Paul Woods | 73 | 12.1% |
| Turnbull Woods | 13 | 2.2% |
| Wayside Woods | 33 | 5.5% |
| Total | 604 | ~100% |

Permits Issued by Site and Shelter
(Forest Preserve Raw Data used for this Question)

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| Bunker Hill 01-Lrg Grove Shelter | 45 | 7.5% |
| Bunker Hill 02-Sm Grove Shelter | 37 | 6.1% |
| Bunker Hill 03-Lrg Grove Shelter | 48 | 7.9% |
| Bunker Hill 04-Lrg Grove Shelter | 46 | 7.6% |
| Bunker Hill 05-Lrg Grove Shelter | 49 | 8.1% |
| Bunker Hill 06-Lrg Grove Shelter | 41 | 6.8% |
| Bunker Hill 07-Lrg Grove Shelter | 38 | 6.3% |
| Bunker Hill Forest Area | 6 | 1.0 |
| Erickson Woods 01-Sm Grove Shelter | 33 | 5.5% |
| Linne 01-Lrg Grove Shelter | 46 | 7.6% |
| Linne 02-Sm Grove Shelter | 52 | 8.6% |
| Linne Forest Area | 1 | 0.2% |
| Miami 01-Sm Grove Shelter | 42 | 7.1% |
| Miami Forest Area | 1 | 0.2% |
| St. Paul 01-Lrg Grove Shelter | 16 | 2.6% |
| St. Paul 02-Sm Grove Shelter | 18 | 3.0% |
| St. Paul 03-Sm Grove Shelter | 13 | 2.2% |
| St. Paul 04-Lrg Grove Shelter | 17 | 2.8% |
| St. Paul Forest Area | 1 | 0.2% |
| St. Paul Large Event Area (1-2) | 4 | 0.7% |
| St. Paul Large Event Area (3-4) | 4 | 0.7% |
| Turnbull Woods 01 - Sm Grove Shelter | 13 | 2.2% |
| Wayside 01-Sm Grove Shelter | 33 | 5.5% |
| Total | 604 | ~100% |

Permits Issued by Month (Forest Preserve Raw Data used for this Question)

FPDCC issued the greatest number of permits for July for District 13 events.

| Month | Permits issued | Percent of permits issued |
|--------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| January | 1 | 0.2% |
| February | 1 | 0.2% |
| March | 2 | 0.3% |
| April | 18 | 3.0% |
| May | 84 | 13.9% |
| June | 122 | 20.2% |
| July | 151 | 25% |
| August | 109 | 18.1% |
| September | 92 | 15.2% |
| October | 22 | 3.6% |
| November | 2 | 0.3% |
| Total | 604 | 100% |

Most Popular Event Day (Forest Preserve Raw Data used for this Question)

The most popular days for Forest Preserve rentals in the 13th District were Saturday and Sunday.

| Date | Events held | Percent of events held |
|--------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| Sunday | 236 | 39.1% |
| Monday | 29 | 4.8% |
| Tuesday | 7 | 1.2% |
| Wednesday | 8 | 1.3% |
| Thursday | 9 | 1.5% |
| Friday | 24 | 4.0% |
| Saturday | 291 | 48.2% |
| Total | 604 | 100% |

Event Size (Forest Preserve Raw Data used for this Question)

Permit holders collectively estimated that 58,381 would attend their events, with each permit holder estimate averaging about 97 people.

The most common estimated sized events were between 50-74 people and 100+ people.

| Size of the event (people) | Permit holders who estimated their attendance within the range | Percent of permits issued |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1-24 | 23 | 3.8% |
| 25-49 | 100 | 16.6% |

| Size of the event (people) | Permit holders who estimated their attendance within the range | Percent of permits issued |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 50-74 | 178 | 29.5% |
| 75-100 | 128 | 21.2% |
| 100+ | 175 | 29% |
| Total | 604 | ~100% |

Event Type (Cook County Forest Preserve Survey Results)

The most common event was a “Family Event.”

| Event type | Permits issued | Percent of permits issued |
|-------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Corporate Event | 6 | 7.4% |
| Family | 54 | 66.7% |
| Community Event | 13 | 16.1% |
| Other | 9 | 11.1% |
| Total | 81 Responses | ~100% |

Analysis of 13th District Event Survey Data

FPDCC provided data to Commissioner Suffredin's office on each event permit in the Forest Preserves during 2022 in the 13th District. The Forest Preserves in the 13th District consist of Bunker Hill, Erickson Woods, Linne Woods, Miami Woods, St. Paul Woods, Turnbull Woods, and Wayside Woods.

Using a survey via email, Commissioner Suffredin's office used contact information from the data provided by the Forest Preserve to survey permit holders on their experience at the Forest Preserve during the 2022 Season.

Contacting Permit Holders

81 permit holders returned our survey. The response rate increased just slightly compared to 2021 our survey.

| Contact | Surveys | Percent of those surveyed |
|--------------|------------|---------------------------|
| Email | 81 | 13.4% |
| Total | 463 | 100% |

Permit Holder Sites

Bunker Hill was the most popular site amongst those who answered the survey.

| Preserve Name | Permits pulled | Percent of permits pulled |
|----------------|----------------|---------------------------|
| Bunker Hill | 38 | 49.4% |
| Erickson Woods | 4 | 5.2% |
| Linne Woods | 14 | 18.2 |
| Miami Woods | 2 | 2.6% |
| St. Paul Woods | 10 | 13% |
| Turnbull Woods | 3 | 3.9% |
| Wayside Woods | 6 | 7.8% |
| Total | 77 | ~100% |

First-Time Visitors v. Returning Visitors

About 35% of the people who returned surveys had never held an event at the Cook County Forest Preserve.

| Was your 2022 picnic your first time hosting a picnic at a Forest Preserve? | Count | Percent |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Yes | 28 | 34.6% |
| No | 53 | 65.4% |
| Total | 81 | 100% |

Pandemic

About 28% of the people who returned surveys said that the pandemic played a role in their decision to hold an event at a Cook County Forest Preserve.

| Did the pandemic play a role in your decision to host your event at the Forest Preserve? | Count | Percent |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| Yes | 22 | 27.9% |
| No | 57 | 72.1% |
| Total | 79 | 100% |

Overall Conditions of Preserve Visited

Respondents rated the overall grove conditions an average score of 4.4 out of 5.

| What was the overall condition of the Preserve you visited? (Please consider the condition of the grove shelter if you had one, was the grass mowed, was their trash or litter, was there graffiti, what was the condition of the grill, etc.) | Count | Percent |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| 1 | 1 | 1.2% |
| 2 | 4 | 4.9% |
| 3 | 6 | 7.4% |
| 4 | 21 | 25.9% |
| 5 | 49 | 60.5% |
| Total | 81 | ~100% |
| Average | 4.4 | |

Feedback will be discussed more in the individual sections, but the main complaints pertained to lack of signage, condition of grass, and parking directions/alternatives.

Landscaping Conditions

Respondents rated the grove shelter conditions on average 4.3% out of 5.

| Rate the condition of the surrounding landscaping. | Count | Percent |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| 1 | 1 | 2.5% |

| | | |
|----------------|------------|--------------|
| 2 | 3 | 3.7% |
| 3 | 8 | 9.9% |
| 4 | 20 | 24.7% |
| 5 | 48 | 59.3% |
| Total | 81 | ~100% |
| Average | 4.3 | |

There were complaints about the lack of mowing grass and leaving grass clippings behind made by respondents of the survey.

Picnic Tables

Respondents generally felt that there were enough picnic tables. The average rating of the picnic tables was 4.1 out of 5.

| Were there enough picnic tables at your picnic grove? | Count | Percent |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| Yes | 72 | 90% |
| No | 8 | 10% |
| Total | 80 | 100% |

| What was the condition of the picnic tables? | Count | Percent |
|-----------------------------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 2 | 3 | 3.7% |
| 3 | 15 | 18.5% |
| 4 | 35 | 43.2% |
| 5 | 28 | 34.6% |
| Total | 81 | ~100% |
| Average | 4.1 | |

Trash Cans

About one-quarter of permit holders did not think there were enough trash bins at their site.

| Were there enough trash receptacles at your grove? | Count | Percent |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| Yes | 61 | 75.3% |
| No | 20 | 24.7% |
| Total | 81 | 100.0% |

The main complaint about the trash bins was that they were too far away from the grove shelters.

Restrooms

People were generally fine with the amount of restrooms but some respondents stated that the restrooms were not clean and needed soap.

| Were there enough washrooms or comfort stations in the area? | Count | Percent |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Yes | 65 | 81.3% |
| No | 15 | 18.7% |
| Total | 80 | 100% |

| What was the cleanliness of the washrooms or comfort stations? | Count | Percent |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| 1 | 6 | 7.8% |
| 2 | 7 | 9.1% |
| 3 | 15 | 19.5% |
| 4 | 22 | 28.6% |
| 5 | 27 | 35.1% |
| Total | 77 | ~100% |
| Average | 3.7 | |

Parking

Respondents stated that they could have used more directions about parking and information regarding alternatives to parking.

| Was there enough parking near your picnic grove? | Count | Percent |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Yes | 75 | 92.6% |
| No | 6 | 7.4% |
| Total | 81 | 100% |

Water Pumps

There were few complaints about the water pump, as permit holders generally did not rely on them.

| Was there a water pump near your picnic grove? | Count | Percent |
|------------------------------------------------|-------|---------|
|------------------------------------------------|-------|---------|

| | | |
|--------------|-----------|---------------|
| Yes | 29 | 37.7% |
| No | 48 | 62.3% |
| Total | 77 | 100.0% |

People did not seem to rely on the water pump for their water sources.

| If the pump didn't work, was it a major problem for you? | Count | Percent |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| Yes | 7 | 12.1% |
| No | 51 | 87.9% |
| Total | 58 | 100.0% |

Permit Application Process

Most users applied online for a permit.

| Did you apply for your picnic permit in-person or over the internet? | Count | Percent |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| In Person | 6 | 7.5% |
| Internet | 74 | 92.5% |
| Total | 80 | 100% |

Those that applied in person, or had a question, found the Forest Preserve staff helpful. Others stated that they could use a contact point for questions they had.

| If you applied in person, did you find the Forest Preserve Staff helpful? | Count | Percent |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| Yes | 11 | 73.3% |
| No | 4 | 26.7% |
| Total | 15 | 100.0% |

The majority of people who applied online put “other” as the reason and most stated that they applied online.

| If you applied in person, why didn't you apply for your permit over the internet? | Count | Percent |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| I didn't know that I could | 2 | 16.7% |
| Due to FPDCC rules, I had to apply in person | 1 | 8.3% |
| I don't have internet access | 1 | 8.3% % |
| Other | 8 | 66.7% |
| Total | 12 | 100% |

Signage

Many people stated that the Grove signage should be bigger and more visible.

| Did the Preserve have adequate signage to direct you to parking, picnic groves, along the trails or inform you of Forest Preserve District rules and regulations? | Count | Percent |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| Yes | 75 | 92.6% |
| No | 6 | 7.4% |
| Total | 81 | 100% |

People consistently requested larger signs pointing them towards the grove and for the groves to be better marked with larger grove signs.

Additional Events

| Did you have a second event in 2022? | Count | Percent |
|---------------------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| Yes | 5 | 6.4% |
| No | 73 | 93.6% |
| Total | 78 | 100% |

Comments received from second time event users were generally positive but comments were also made about bathroom soap dispensers being broken, and lack of being able to speak with someone at the Forest Preserves leading up to the event.

Additional Analysis of Comments from Users of District 13 Cook County Forest Preserves

Conditions of Site

Overall Condition:

Permit holders were surveyed using a scale of 1 to 5. 1 was the lowest ranking and 5 was the highest. When surveyed about the condition, i.e. was the grass mowed, was there trash or litter, was there graffiti, what was the condition of the grill, etc., 61% of survey respondents rated their site a 5. About 26% gave the rating of 4, 7% gave a rating of 3, 5% gave a rating of 2 and 1% gave a 1.

Signage:

93% of those surveyed felt the signage was adequate to direct them to parking, picnic groves, to the trails, and to inform them of Forest Preserve District rules and regulations. 7% did not agree that the signage was suitable. Those who did not think the signage was suitable wanted larger Grove signage and signage more visible from the parking lot.

Trash:

75% of those surveyed noted that there were enough trash receptacles. 25% said there were not. Respondents commented about having garbage and recycling bins in the grove, rather than in the parking lot, to make it easier for cleanup.

Washrooms:

81% of all those surveyed responded that they felt there were enough washrooms or comfort stations for their event. Out of a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the most cleanly and 1 being the least, 35% of those who submitted a survey scored their comfort station or washroom a 5, the highest level cleanliness. 29% selected 4, the second highest level, 19% scored the washrooms a 3, 9% scored a 2 and 8% scored the washrooms a 1. Respondents commented about the lack of cleanliness in the portable and free standing washrooms.

Parking

Respondents stated that it would be better if the parking was reserved for guests of the event as guests had to park outside of the event location because parking spaces had been filled.

93% of those surveyed determined that there was adequate parking to accommodate their party. 7% did not feel like there was enough parking.

Water Pumps

38% of those responded that they had access to a water pump, 62% did not have access to a water pump. 88% of those who did not have a working water pump noted that the lack of a pump was not a major issue. 12% said that it was an issue.

Picnic Table Conditions:

On a scale of 1 to 5 ranking the condition of the picnic table, 35% of survey respondents rated the condition of the picnic tables a 5. 43% ranked the condition a 4, 18% rated the condition a 3, 4% gave a rating of 2, and 0 gave a rating of 1. 90% of those surveyed indicated that there were enough tables on site for their event. 10% said that there were not enough tables on site. Respondents commented that some picnic tables are in need of being replaced.

Internet/WiFi Access:

This year, we asked respondents if access to the internet/WiFi would benefit their experience at the Grove. 61% of those surveyed responded that this access would benefit their experience and 39% responded that it would not. Others commented that access to an electric outlet would be helpful.

Other Comments:

Respondents noted that graffiti needed to be painted over. Respondents also complained about members of the public using reserved spaces and picnic tables.

Recommendations

We propose the following recommendations:

1. Maintain and clean all public restrooms and portable washrooms on a regular basis but especially before a reserved event. Make sure washrooms are stocked with soap, hand sanitizer, toilet paper, and drying mechanism. Consider placing hand sanitizing stations in high volume areas and/or at the Grove Shelter.
2. Improve Grove signage around the Forest Preserves. Clearly state the Grove number in addition to signs directing residents towards the groves from the street. Consider sending map of Preserve and Grove ahead of event so users can review and contact the Forest Preserves with any questions ahead of scheduled event.
3. Consider a signage board or some mechanism to notify the public that a Grove is rented for a private event and the date/time of said reservation so members of the general public do not take the space and tables needed for a reserved event.
4. Regular mowing of grass and maintenance of the site is a key request of Forest Preserve users. Consider doing a check the day before any reserved event to ensure the site is mowed and grass clippings have been cleaned ahead of time.
5. Consider reserving some amount of parking for event users. Although not all grove parking sites are alike, perhaps a percentage of parking spaces can be allocated for event users or one spot for loading/unloading items being used for the event.
6. A long term consideration could be to upgrade the Grove sites to offer Internet/WiFi and outlets. These can be charged to the user as an add on item or can be offered universally in the Forest Preserves.