

# Report on the Forest Preserve District of Cook County

By Cook County Forest Preserve Commissioner

Larry Suffredin



# Introduction



**Larry Suffredin**

Cook County Forest Preserve  
Commissioner  
13th District

The Cook County Forest Preserve District is one of the largest County Forest Preserve systems in the United States. Each year, hundreds of thousands of people visit the Preserves' thousands of acres of forest, grasslands, riparian, and marshland environments. It is important that we all work together to help keep this system functioning and accessible to the many residents of this county.

The purpose of this report is to review some of 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. I have done this review every year since 2003. This review measures user satisfaction and identifies areas for the Forest Preserve to improve services.

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. Please feel free to contact my office with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Larry Suffredin".

The Forest Preserve District of Cook County (the District) issues permits both online and in-person for a wide range of activities: picnics, marathons, movie filming, overflow parking, concerts, etc. Our review of the District focuses on these sorts of permitted events. Many people use the District for activities which do not require a permit. This report does not analyze those activities.

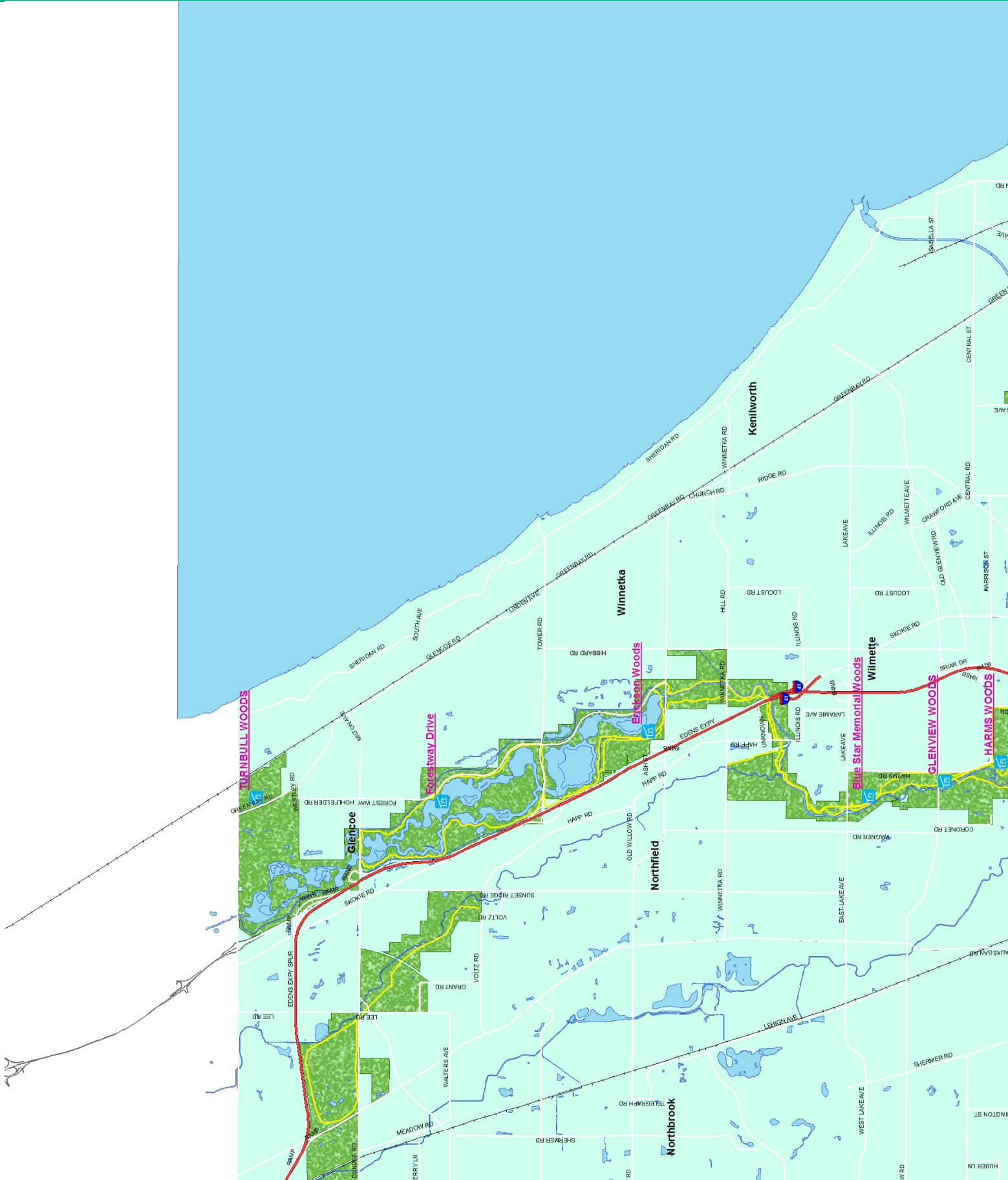
The data upon which this report is based comes from three sources. First, the District provided our office with data on permits issued for groves within 1 mile of the 13th District. This data includes the type of event and the number of expected attendees, and covers 2014-present. Using this data, we can develop a picture of the usage patterns and trends of the groves in the 13th District.

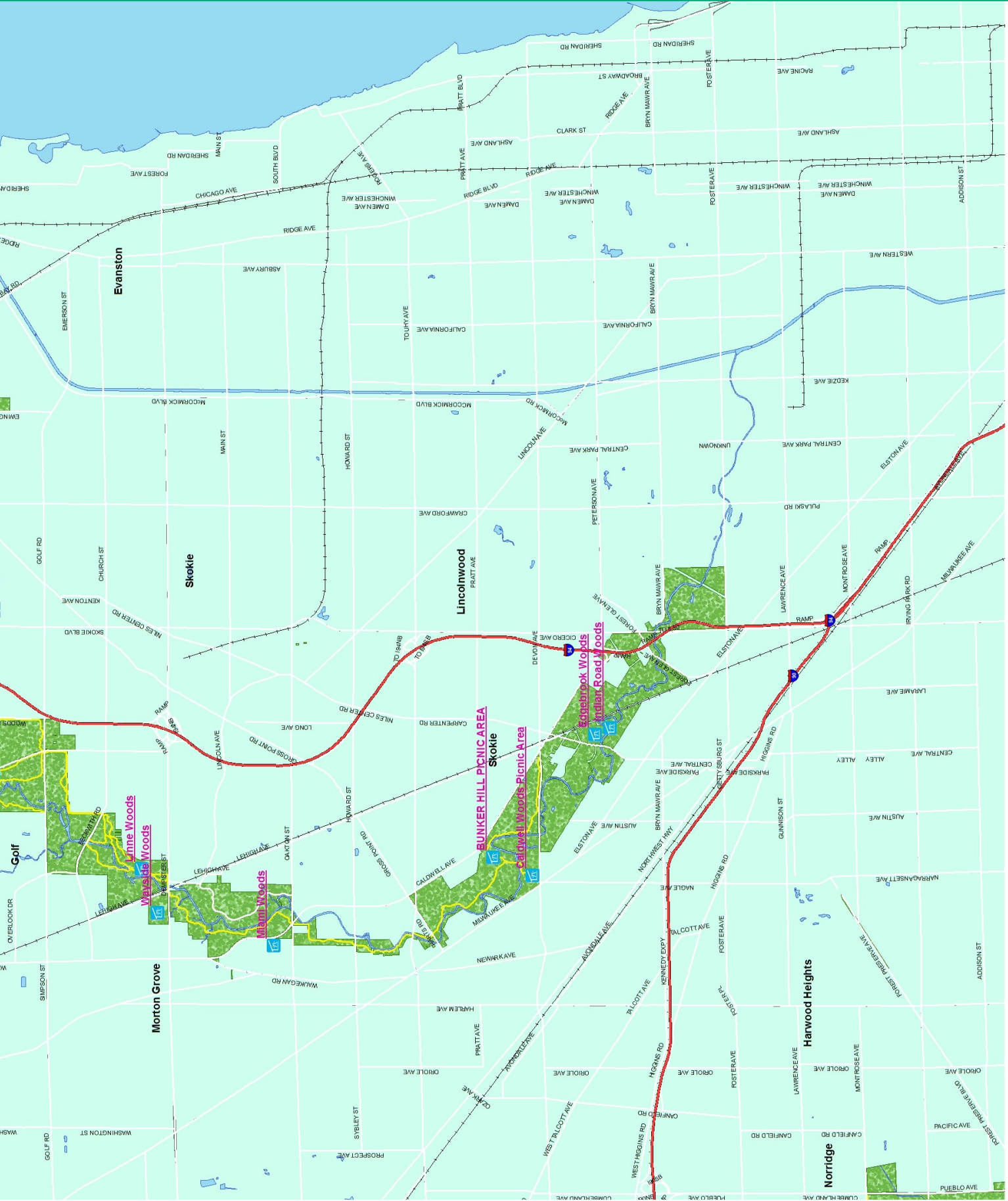
Second, our office conducted a telephone survey of permit-holders after they held their events. We asked about their satisfaction, and solicited ideas for improvements. These surveys provided the anecdotal evidence presented on pages 8 and 9.

Third, staff members conducted a brief, in-person examination of the groves in the 13th District, checking bathrooms, picnic shelters, and pumps for functionality and cleanliness.

We hope readers find this report informative and helpful in understanding the many accomplishments of the District, as well as the areas where the District can improve.

# Groves of the 13th District





Evanston

Skokie

Lincolnwood

Morton Grove

Harwood Heights

Norridge

Lynne Woods

Mausie Woods

Bunker Hill Picnic Area

Edgewater Woods Picnic Area

Caldwell Woods Picnic Area

Washington St

Simpson St

Prospect Ave

Washington St

Sydney St

Prospect Ave

Pratt Ave

Croile Ave

Pratt Ave

West Talcott Ave

West Higgins Rd

Canfield Rd

Postter Ave

Lawrence Ave

Montrose Ave

Oriole Ave

Pacific Ave

Oberlin

Simpson St

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# Usage statistics

The District provided our office with data on 2,228 permits issued between January 1st, 2014 and July 24th, 2016. We analyzed the data to look at the trend in District usage over the past 3 seasons.

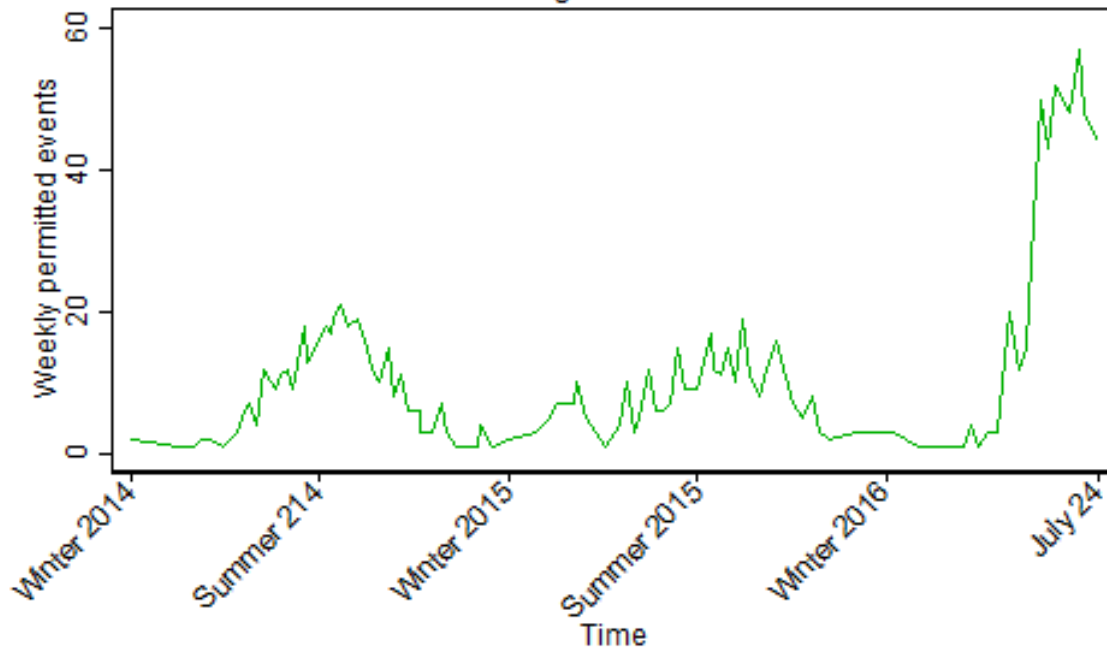
The table below shows a breakdown of the approximate attendance at permitted events, by the type of event. On the opposing page, figure 1 shows the number of permits issued by week during the past two and a half years. Figure 2 shows the approximate attendance to these permitted events, summed both by week (in green) and by season (in orange).

The District has experienced a significant increase in attendance compared to last season: during the summer of 2015, about 41,000 people attended permitted events in the District. So far in 2016, nearly 50,000 have attended permitted events in the District.

**Table 1 - Breakdown of Permits in 2016 by type of event**

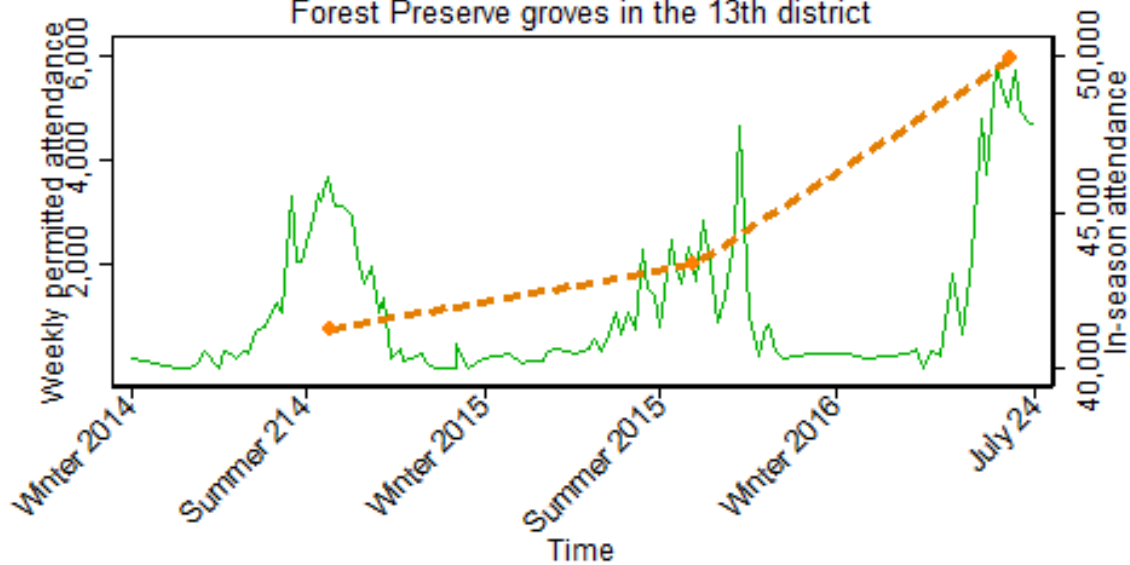
Type of event	Approximate attendance	Number of events	Average attendance
Athletic (Sporting) Event	9,075	15	605
CEP - Program Permit	75	1	75
Day Camp	1,350	9	150
Education Permit	180	2	90
FPCC Event	2,300	23	100
Filming (Student)	25	1	25
League Permit	1,350	15	90
Overflow Parking Booking	9,000	3	3,000
Picnic	45,724	462	99
Special Event	990	4	248
Vending Concessionaire	0	6	0
Volunteer Workday	75	4	19

Figure 1 - Number of weekly events  
Forest Preserve groves in the 13th district



Data provided by the Forest Preserves of Cook County

Figure 2 - Approximate attendance to permitted events  
Forest Preserve groves in the 13th district



Data provided by the Forest Preserves of Cook County

# Telephone Surveys

We conducted 47 surveys of people who booked picnic permits with the District during the month of July. We asked questions about picnic shelter amenities, about the process of booking a permit, and general questions about the experience. The empirical results are reported with margins of error in table 2.

Most respondents reported having good experiences. Among those were:

- Many respondents were celebrating birthdays, reunions, graduations, or other family events.
- About half of respondents said this was not the first time they had reserved a District picnic shelter.
- 84% of respondents said they would return to the District in the future.

A number of reoccurring complaints surfaced during our survey, including:

- District staff repeatedly failed to return voicemail messages or answer the phone.
- Permit holders had confrontations with people who were using their reserved picnic shelters, and refused to relocate, or left a mess behind them. In at least one instance, Forest Preserve Police were needed to solve the problem.
- Permit holders expected functional bathrooms with sinks, and instead found locked bathrooms, porta-potties, or nothing at all.
- Many people said that the bathroom was farther away than they had anticipated, and that caused problems for mobility-impaired guests. In some instances, permit holders had to drive elderly guests off-site to use a bathroom.
- Some respondents found the bathrooms in poor condition, unusably dirty, or out of toilet paper.



**Table 2 - Estimates of satisfaction based on survey results**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Percent agreeing</b>	<b>Margin of error</b>	<b>Estimated number of picnickers agreeing in 2016</b>	<b>Margin of error</b>
Percent booking permit in-person vs. online	44%	+/- 0.15%	20,000	+/- 6667
The online permitting process was smooth	73%	+/- 0.17%	32,885	+/- 7829
The District staff was friendly and helpful	88%	+/- 0.14%	39,375	+/- 6076
Median attendance at picnics	55			
The restrooms were open, clean, and stocked	64%	+/- 0.16%	28,750	+/- 7205
There was a place for me to wash my hands	74%	+/- 0.15%	33,088	+/- 6810
Hand sanitizer was provided	38%	+/- 0.17%	16,875	+/- 7702
There were enough picnic tables	100%		45,000	
The picnic tables were in good condition	81%	+/- 0.12%	36,628	+/- 5341
There were enough garbage cans	74%	+/- 0.14%	33,214	+/- 6106
There was enough parking	95%	+/- 0.06%	42,907	+/- 2890
I saw a bike rental kiosk	21%	+/- 0.13%	9,643	+/- 5698
I used, or I saw someone use a bike rental kiosk	3%	+/- 0.06%	1,324	+/- 2608
There was a water pump near our site	29%	+/- 0.14%	13,171	+/- 6395
Lack of water was a problem	15%	+/- 0.14%	6,667	+/- 6153
This was my first time booking a permit in the Forest preserve	51%	+/- 0.15%	23,000	+/- 6707
I will return again	84%	+/- 0.11%	38,000	+/- 4863

# Recommendations

We make the following recommendations:

1. When portable bathrooms are used, portable sinks, or hand-sanitizing stations should also used.
2. Post signage in every picnic shelter informing the public that a) permit holders have priority in using picnic shelters b) permits may be booked online or in-person, and c) there are opportunities to volunteer for the District.
3. The District should develop a policy on how to handle events held in rainy conditions.
4. The District should conduct a review of its telephone protocols, including the interaction between staff and customers, and prompt review of voicemail messages.
5. The District should ensure coordination between online permitting and the maintenance department. Closed bathrooms and water pumps should be noted on the website, and permit holders should be notified of any changes in conditions before their event.
6. The distance between each shelter and the nearest functional bathroom should be noted in the online permitting system. Availability of water should also be noted. A District policy on the distance between shelters and amenities should be developed.
7. Waste bins should be provided and allowed to be moved near the shelters so that guests do not need to walk to the parking lot to throw out trash.



Additional recommendations for pedestrians and bikers:

1. Install appropriate signage and pavement makings for a pedestrian crosswalk where the North Branch Bike Trail crosses Howard st.
2. Install signage directing bicyclists and pedestrians at the corner of Touhy Ave. and Riverside Dr.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to 13th District Staffers Thomas Mahoney and Karen Chavers, Forest Preserve District Manager of Permits Tracey Bishop, and Cook County Director of Performance Management Jeffrey Lewelling. Thanks also to our summer interns, Rob Ross and Janely Rios.



*North Branch Trail between Howard St. and Touhy Ave. 8/10/2016.*

## How to reserve permits in the Forest Preserve District

You can reserve picnic shelters in the Forest Preserves two ways:

Online at: <http://fpdcc.com/permits-rentals/>

In-person: **General Headquarters**, 536 N. Harlem Ave., River Forest, IL 6035

**Dan Ryan Visitor Center**, Western Ave. and 87th St. Chicago, IL 60620

## How to volunteer for the Forest Preserve District

You can find volunteer opportunities:

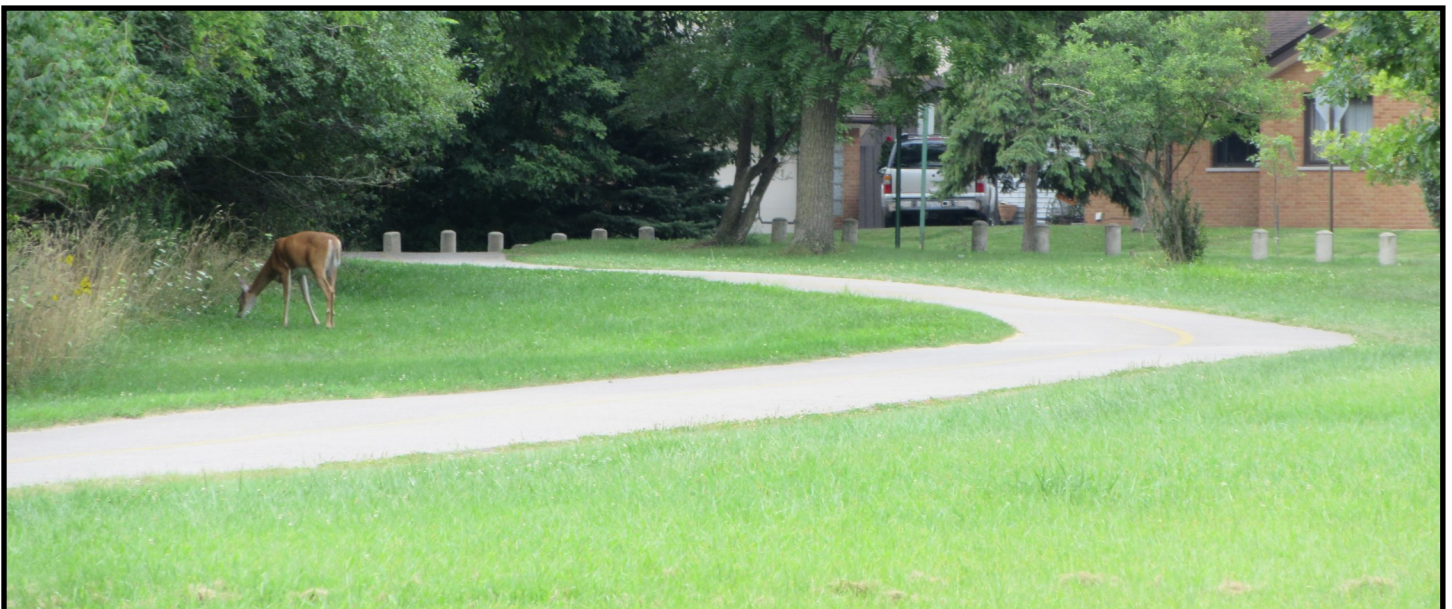
Online at: <http://fpdcc.com/volunteer/>

## How to contact Commissioner Larry Suffredin

Phone: (847) 864-1209 (phone)

Email: [Larry.suffredin@cookcountyl.gov](mailto:Larry.suffredin@cookcountyl.gov) Web: [www.suffredin.org](http://www.suffredin.org)

District 13 Office: 820 W. Davis Street Suite 104, Evanston, IL 60201



*North Branch Trail between Howard St. and Touhy Ave. 8/10/2016.*