

**Forest Preserves of Cook County
Conservation & Policy Council
June 23, 2015**

1:20 pm to 2:45 pm: Pre-meeting Visit to Galloping Hill/Spring Creek Forest Preserves

Meet at Penny Road Pond parking lot, 1 mile west of Route 59

[Map of Penny Road Pond](#)

3 pm to 5 pm: Council Meeting

Village of Barrington Hills ▪ 112 Algonquin Road, Barrington Hills, Illinois 60010-5199

[Map for Village Hall, Barrington Hills](#)

A G E N D A

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|---------|---|
| 3:00 pm | 1. Welcome & Introductions |
| | 2. Approval of minutes for 4.6.15 meeting of the council (See page 3.) |
| 3:15 pm | 3. Presentation by the People Committee (Cynthia Moreno and Rebecca Sanders) |
| | a. Setting context |
| | b. Top Priorities |
| | i. Baselines |
| | ii. Mileposts |
| | iii. 2016 budget |
| | iv. where we want to be in 2020 |
| | c. Key Questions: <i>How do we build on existing audiences and increase preserve participation? Who are our current users (picnickers, zorbers, etc.) and how engaged are they with the preserves? What else should we do to reach people in communities where we don't have a presence? How can we leverage partnerships with community organizations, institutions, and others without risking mission drift?</i> |
| 4:00 pm | 4. Presentation by the Economics Committee (Chris Adas and Rich Gamble) |
| | a. Setting context |
| | b. Top Priorities |

- i. Baselines
 - ii. Mileposts
 - iii. 2016 budget
 - iv. where we want to be in 2020
- c. Key Questions: What are the most important things we want to know?
How do we use the results from surveys and market research in the most efficient and effective manner, ensuring our decisions are data driven and focusing on our final goal—getting more people to use and value the forest preserves? How do we allocate limited resources for surveys and marketing to be as efficient and effective as possible?
- 4:45 pm 5. Request from Leadership Committee to amend language in section 4.3g of the plan as follows:
*Put in place a financial plan that will produce the ~~the \$40million~~ annual investment needed to ~~meet long-term restoration goals~~ **restore 30,000 acres and as well as the acquisition funds needed to expand the forest preserves to 90,000 acres in 25 years, and to meet the other goals outlined in the Next Century Conservation Plan.***
 - a. Early action seed fund? Communication strategy?
- 6. Updates on Early Action seed fund and communication strategy. (Cathy Geraghty)
- 5:00 pm 7. Adjourn

ATTACHMENTS

1. Minutes from 4/6/15 council meeting
2. Early Action seed fund
3. Revised Operating Guidelines
4. Media Clips

Attachment 1
The Forest Preserve District of Cook County
Conservation & Policy Council

Minutes for April 6, 2015 • Sagawau Environment Learning Center, 12545 W. 11th Street, Lemont

Call to Order. Council chair Wendy Paulson called the meeting to order at 3 pm. The following council members and others attended:

Advisory Council Members

Wendy Paulson, chair
Commissioner Robert Steele
Dr. Sylvia Jenkins
Falona Joy
Laurel Ross
Linda Mastandrea
Mark Templeton
Michael De Santiago
Robert Castaneda
Terry Guen

Forest Preserve Staff

Amanda Grant
Anthony Tindall
Arnold Randall
Cathy Geraghty
Chip O’Leary
Chris Adas
Cynthia Moreno
Dennis White
Eileen Figel
Erik Varela
John McCabe
Lisa Lee
Lydia Uhler
Mary Pat Cross
Stephen Hughes
Troy Alim
Troy Showerman

Partners

Andrew Szwak (Openlands)
Benjamin Cox (FOTFP)
Emily Harris (Harris Strategies)
Ginny Hotaling (CBG)
Gregory Mueller (CBG)
Jane Balaban (Steward)
Justin Pepper (Bobolink
Foundation)
Lenore Beyer-Clow (Openlands)
Richard Gamble (CZS)
Shelley Davis (FP Foundation)

Public Comments. There were no comments from the public.

Approval of minutes. A motion to approve the minutes of the January 20, 2015 meeting of the council was made by Laurel Ross and seconded by Mark Templeton; the minutes were approved by majority vote.

Presentation by the Nature Committee. Co-chair Jane Balaban explained that it is not enough to purchase and preserve the land; we must also repair the damage caused by encroaching development, suppression of fire, changes to water flow, and invasive species. Jane explained how, over the past 40 years, volunteers and staff have worked to restore and manage the land via controlled burns, removal of invasive plants and overgrowth, and collecting and spreading seeds. Jane stressed the importance of public involvement and support. Co-chair John McCabe discussed the current top priorities of the Nature Committee, including:

- Natural and Cultural Resource Management Plan
- Dedication of Illinois Nature Preserves
- Volunteer Engagement

- Conservation Corps

(Also see Attachment 1A.) Council members asked the co-chairs to clarify how sites will be prioritized, how the work will be sequenced, and what levels of expenditure will be required to meet restoration goals. Michael DeSantiago warned that the need to “restore plants” may not resonate with urban communities located far from the forest preserves. The council agreed that it is important to tailor messages for target audiences.

Council members also offered the following guidance:

- Messaging should stress that, once these sites are destroyed, we cannot get them back.
- This is a unique time; students understand the value of the environment. This presents an opportunity to create ambassadors via community groups, schools, etc.
- We need to get more people to the preserves. Council members need more information on accessibility of FPCC sites and programs to help spread the word.
- Explore giving virtual tours to learning groups, seniors, or other target audiences.
- Connect with groups (churches, synagogues, mosques, etc.) that are engaging people.
- Address the fears people have about the forest preserves.
- Provide diverse mentors who look like the kids we want to reach.
- Partner with city-based organizations to create demonstration sites in the city—especially in areas which are not close to preserves.
- The Conservation Corps should explore ways to address barriers to employment related to disabilities.
- Collaborate with workforce institutions to make sure kids in urban communities know about career opportunities.

Presentation by the Leadership Committee. Co-chairs Lenore Beyer-Clow and Troy Alim discussed the top priorities for the Leadership Committee, including:

- Establishing a structure and template to document needs and create a baseline which quantifies resources currently being invested by the FPCC and partners, including in-kind investments from stewards and other volunteers.
- Aligning the FPCC budget process with this structure in order to track the implementation of the Next Century Conservation Plan over time.

Council members urged the committee to look beyond tax revenues and explore creative ways to leverage resources, generate new revenue, and build new partnerships with IDNR, federal agencies, and others. Arnold Randall indicated that the forest preserves are exploring a wide range of non-tax revenues including increased revenues from concessions and selling wood from ash trees and buckthorn. However, Arnold cautioned that these non-tax revenues will never represent a majority of the FPCC budget.

Council members asked questions and offered suggestions as follows:

- What percentage increase in revenues over the current baseline is needed to successfully implement the plan? Lenore reported that the committee does not yet know this, but is working on it.
- Other counties have passed referenda to fund conservation work; is this option being considered? Arnold Randall responded that this has not happened anytime recently in Cook County, but we are currently exploring all options.
- Has FPCC considered establishing a revenue-generating branch?
- Can FPCC connect to other Great Lakes conservation programs for broader exposure?
- A large increase in revenues and volunteers is needed, and this will require a culture change. However, we should not shy away from this challenge.
- Explore a new category of open space that would also benefit the City of Chicago and see if we can partner with the City to raise resources together. Even if these sites don't represent ecological priorities, they may be a priority for connecting more people to the preserves.
- Understand trends; look at what has worked in the past and what can work again. Also be prepared for a longer ramp up period as we build the case, followed by more revenues in later years as people understand the value added.
- How does philanthropy factor in? Some don't like to give to government; how do we make the case?
- Consider going to corporations that are already engaged through workdays, etc., and ask if they will support Green Corps or other FPCC programs.
- City Year has successfully used AmeriCorps funding. Can FPCC use this funding source for the Conservation Corps?
- Create a structure to monitor and manage all FPCC outreach to avoid double-asking. Eileen Figel reported that the FPCC development committee, which includes the Forest Preserve Foundation, is doing this.

Finally, council members expressed concerns about having all the information they need to make a final budget recommendation in September. The council agreed to designate representatives to work with committee co-chairs to do a deeper dive on each priority area.

Election of Vice Chair and Secretary. A motion was made by Robert Steele and seconded by Laurel Ross to elect Falona Joy vice chair and Mark Templeton secretary. The motion was approved by majority vote.

Review and approval of amended operating guidelines. A motion was made by Robert Steele and seconded by Mark Templeton to approve the operating guidelines with the proposed amendment to the Conflict of Interest section to read as follows:

- A. No member of the Council shall derive any personal profit or gain, directly or indirectly, by reason of his or her participation with the Council. Each Council member shall disclose to the Council any personal interest which he or she may have – or thinks they may have – in any matter pending before the Council and shall refrain from participation in any decision on such matter.

Any member of the Council who is an officer, board member, a committee member or staff member of the Chicago Botanic Garden or the Chicago Zoological Society, or any organization that receives

more than \$1 million annually in funding from the Forest Preserves budget, shall identify his or her affiliation when discussing any Council action specifically directed to that agency, including the annual Forest Preserve budget recommendation.

Individual/group fieldtrips. Cathy Geraghty presented options for individual and/or group field trips. Council members agreed to help educate others about the forest preserves by curating a group visit to a specific site and/or program, including:

- Falona Joy offered to host a fieldtrip for Choose Chicago.
- Laurel Ross offered to host a fieldtrip for the Field Museum's action committee.
- Other council members will contact Eileen Figel with specific suggestions.

Adjournment. A motion was made by Robert Steele and seconded by Mark Templeton and the meeting was adjourned at 4:55 p.m.

ATTACHMENT 1A: NATURE COMMITTEE TOP PRIORITIES FOR 2016

Natural and Cultural Resources Master Plan

2014/2015 Baseline	2016 Mileposts	2016 Funding Needs	Where we want to be in 2020
•Evaluate and prioritize natural area sites and set restoration benchmarks	•Refine list of highest priority natural area sites •Evaluate cultural area sites	•\$500K continued work w/ PRI •\$10M for natural area restoration work	•3-5K additional acres will be under active restoration management

Illinois Nature Preserves Dedication

2014/2015 Baseline	2016 Mileposts	2016 Funding Needs	Where we want to be in 2020
•Submit one (1) site for Illinois Nature Preserves (INP) designation	•Submit three (3) sites for INP designation •Assess eligibility among priority sites	•Staff time	•Enroll 100% of all eligible sites identified in assessment for INP and/or Illinois Land and Water Reserves designation

Volunteer Engagement

2014/2015 Baseline	2016 Mileposts	2016 Funding Needs	Where we want to be in 2020
•6,000 individual volunteer visits (Centennial Volunteer Initiative) •2,500 active volunteers •76 site stewards and workday leaders (WDL) •4 courses offered (14 sessions)	•3,000 active volunteers •25 new certified volunteer stewards and WDL (96 total) •1 online course developed •5 courses offered (17 sessions)	•\$500K additional funds for volunteer program (\$200K annual, \$300K one time purchases)	•Engagement Plan implemented •5,000 active volunteers •100 new volunteer stewards & WDL (170 total) •10 courses offered (30 sessions)

Conservation Corps

2014/2015 Baseline	2016 Mileposts	2016 Funding Needs	Where we want to be in 2020
•Expansion strategy completed •55,000 service hours performed	•90,000 service hours performed •Contractor policy in place	•\$2.5M (\$800K - FPDCC, \$1.7M - Additional funds needed)	•150,000 service hours performed

Attachment 2: Early Action Seed Fund

NEXT CENTURY CONSERVATION PLAN LAUNCHING EARLY ACTION PROJECTS

The ambitious goals laid out in the Next Century Conservation Plan (NCCP) will take many years to fulfill and will require a fundamentally different level of collaboration between the forest preserves, other public agencies, advocates, volunteers and other partners. Far more can be accomplished through collaboration with many groups and by encouraging leadership among many organizations.

To build momentum and strengthen partnerships, an Early Action seed fund has been established. The fund is intended to empower the NCCP implementation committees to make small mini grants (up to \$10,000 per grant) to launch creative projects or initiatives which are highly visible and which can be completed quickly. Grants may be awarded to partners already engaged with a committee, or to new partners the committee seeks to engage.

The Early Action seed fund will:

- ✓ Generate momentum by launching small but highly visible projects.
- ✓ Strengthen and expand partnerships by support existing partners and engaging new partners.
- ✓ Leverage additional resources (both funding and in-kind services).
- ✓ Test new and creative techniques which, if successful, can then be scaled up.
- ✓ Generate public awareness of the effort and show that, this time, it is about getting things done.

Process

A streamlined approval process allows projects to launch quickly as follows:

1. When a committee seeks a partner to lead a priority action, the committee will issue a brief request for proposals.
2. Interested partners (including partners at the table and/or others who may have an interest and expertise to move a project forward) should submit a one page description outlining (i) the specific actions to be taken, (ii) how the proposed project advances the NCCP goals, (iii) who will be involved, and (iii) the desired results and how these results will be measured. A project budget should outline total project costs, including early action funds requested as well as any other funds or in-kind services to be provided. (As noted above, one goal of the seed fund is to leverage additional funding sources and in-kind services, therefore the provision of matching funds/resources is highly encouraged.)
3. Committees will review the proposals and may invite selected applicants to presents their proposal to the committee and receive feedback to refine the proposed project.
4. The committee votes “yes” or “no” to fund the project.
5. The project is launched and, upon completion, a short evaluation summarizing results is presented to the committee.

Attachment 3

Conservation and Policy Council

Operating Guidelines

As amended and approved 4.6.15.

GENERAL

The Next Century Conservation Plan (adopted February 18, 2014) of the Forest Preserves of Cook County called for creation of a Forest Preserves Conservation and Policy Council (Council) that consists of experts and leaders in the fields that impact the Forest Preserves' mission, services and policies.

The main charge of the Council is to advise the President, Board of Commissioners and General Superintendent on specific steps to implement the Next Century Conservation Plan's vision of a vibrant, ecologically healthy and welcoming forest preserves system that contributes to the quality of life and prosperity of Cook County over the long term.

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Conservation and Policy Council (Council) is to provide continuous conservation leadership and expertise to the President, Board of Commissioners, and General Superintendent of the Forest Preserves of Cook County, consistent with the vision, goals and priorities of the Next Century Conservation Plan adopted by the Forest Preserves of Cook County Board of Commissioners on February 18, 2014.

ONGOING TASKS

The Council shall do, but not be limited to, the following:

1. Develop and annually update a five-year strategic and financial plan to operationalize the Next Century Conservation Plan and annually recommend adoption of the updated strategic and financial plan to the General Superintendent, President, and Board of Commissioners;
2. Review and make recommendations to the General Superintendent, President and Board of Commissioners about the annual budget and its alignment with the strategic and financial plan;
3. Review and make recommendations to the General Superintendent, President and Board of Commissioners about conservation policies and practices;
4. Review and make recommendations to the General Superintendent, President and Board of commissioners about opportunities to maximize public and private financial resources to accomplish conservation goals and initiatives; and

5. Provide public recommendations, as needed, to improve the District's operations and conservation leadership.

GUIDELINES, PROCEDURES, and PRACTICES

MEMBERS

- A. General: The appointed Members shall receive no compensation for their service, but may be reimbursed for actual and necessary expenses while serving on the Council.
- B. Number of Members: There shall be eleven (11) Members of the Conservation Council.
 1. One Chairperson (1)
 2. One Ex-Officio Member of the Board of Commissioners appointed by the President (who shall be a voting member) (1)
 3. Nine Members (9)
- C. Officers: The Council shall contain three (3) Members that serve as Officers, which will include a Chairperson, a Vice-Chairperson, and a Secretary. The Chairperson shall be appointed by the President. The Vice Chairperson and Secretary are elected by the Council, and will serve one (1) year terms. Each of the three officers, respectively, shall be entitled to vote on all matters before the Council and may be appointed or re-elected to serve successive terms as officers.
- D. Duties of Officers (with support from forest preserves staff):
 1. The Chairperson shall:
 - a. Preside at all meetings, when present;
 - b. Execute all documents relating to Council policy or designate such responsibility as warranted;
 - c. Prepare the initial agenda for each meeting; and
 - d. Perform other agenda duties as directed by the Conservation Council.
 2. The Vice-Chairperson shall:
 - a. Act in the capacity of the Chairperson in the Chairperson's absence;
 - b. In the event the office of the Chairperson becomes vacant, the Vice Chairperson shall succeed to this office for the unexpired term or until the President brings forth another appointment; and
 - c. Perform other agenda duties as directed by the Chairperson or the Conservation Council.
 3. The Secretary shall:
 - a. Maintain the Council records, including notices for, and minutes of, meetings and hearings; the minutes must include: the date/time/place; absent/present members; and a summary of discussion, including votes. Final (not draft) minutes must be made available within seven days of approval; and

- b. Minutes must be approved within 30 days after an open meeting or at the second subsequent regular meeting, whichever is later.
- c. Perform other agenda duties as directed by the Conservation Council.

MEETINGS

- A. The President shall call the first meeting of the Conservation Council. Thereafter, the Members shall prescribe the times and places for their meetings and the manner in which regular and special meetings may be called.
- B. The Council shall meet as frequently as needed, however, no less than four (4) meetings shall be held annually.
- C. The Council may hold public hearings as it deems appropriate to the performance of any of its responsibilities.
- D. The Council shall comply with the Open Meetings Act.
 - 1. Any person who becomes an elected or appointed member of a public body subject to the Open Meetings Act after January 1, 2012, must complete the electronic training no later than the 90th day after taking the oath of office or, if not required to take an oath of office, after otherwise assuming responsibilities as a member of the public body.
 - 2. Elected or appointed members need not complete the electronic training on an annual basis thereafter unless they are also designated to receive training on compliance with the Open Meetings Act.
 - 3. The Public Access Counselor's Office's OMA electronic training is available free of charge at: http://foia.ilattorneygeneral.net/electronic_foia_training.aspx."
 - 4. If more than three (3) Council members meet (either in person, by phone or video-conference) at the same time to discuss the Council's business, the Open Meetings Act must be followed.
 - 5. The Council must provide a written notice at least 48 hours prior to the convening of a meeting. The "48-Hour Notice" must contain the time, date, location and, to the extent known, the agenda of the meeting.
- E. The Council shall be subject to the Local Records Act, as well as the Freedom of Information Act.
- F. The Council shall keep records of its meetings and activities that shall be posted on the Forest Preserve District of Cook County's website.

G. Public Comment

1. A total of up to 15 minutes will be allowed for public comment, immediately following introductions and attendance.
2. Speakers will be granted no more than three (3) minutes to address agenda items or to make general comments. At the discretion of the Chair, speaking time may be reduced to one (1) or two (2) minutes per speaker and the Chair may opt to move speakers to later slot on the agenda.
3. Speakers must sign in at least 15 minutes prior to the start of the meeting with a designated staff member.
4. The Chairperson may cut off a comment if it is irrelevant, repetitious, or disruptive.

VOTING PROCEDURES

- A. A majority (6) of the voting Members shall constitute a quorum. Recommendations of the Council shall require the affirmative vote of a majority of the voting members of the Council present and voting at the meeting at which the action is taken.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

- A. No member of the Council shall derive any personal profit or gain, directly or indirectly, by reason of his or her participation with the Council. Each Council member shall disclose to the Council any personal interest which he or she may have – or thinks they may have – in any matter pending before the Council and shall refrain from participation in any decision on such matter.

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ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CONSERVATION COUNCIL

- A. The Council shall submit to the General Superintendent, the Board of Commissioners and the President an annual report prior to the end of each calendar year.
- B. Included in the report shall be any recommendations for additional legislation or other action which may be necessary to carry out the mission, purpose and intent of the District with respect to conservation issues.

CHANGES TO OPERATING GUIDELINES

- A. The Council may make changes to these guidelines as it deems appropriate to the performance its responsibilities.

Attachment 4: Media Clips

WHIRLWIND TOUR OF CHICAGO'S FOREST PRESERVES LEAVES ME IN AWE

Jul 2, 2013 ▪ by Audrey Peterman

In June, celebrated National Parks explorer, author and open space advocate Audrey Peterman toured the Forest Preserves of Cook County before giving the keynote address at our Centennial Launch. The following is from her e-newsletter. (Subscribe at legacyontheland.com.)

I had the great privilege and pleasure of keynoting the Centennial Celebration of Cook County's Forest Preserve District, and sharing my vision of what their second century might be like. The



event took place in the grand Chicago Cultural Center, built close to the turn of the 20th Century to reflect the great city's standing and civic pride. I've been in Chicago since Monday, and employees of the preserve system have taken me around to about 10 of their properties and to visit many of their partners including the Brookfield Zoo and the Chicago Botanic Garden.

Exploring the Spring Creek Valley Preserve, almost 4000 acres of restored grasslands and prime bird watching territory. Terry Guen Photo.

When I mentioned Chicago and forests in the same sentence to my friends in South Florida, I mostly got the reaction, "Really? There's forests in Chicago?" Which was pretty much my own feeling before the preserve administrators contacted me to speak. It turns out that Cook County- of which Chicago is part – has the single largest amount of land that has been conserved in any county in America – a whopping 69 thousand acres!



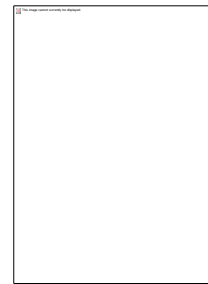
I've gone birding from Florida to Alaska, and saw my first bobolink at the Spring Creek Vallley Preserve. Smithsonian Photo.

Over the course of two days I got to go bird watching with my friend Wendy Paulson, (a prominent conservationist and member of the Preserves' Centennial Commission planning for the next 100 years) in a restored grassland where I saw my first bobolink, a transcontinental bird that flies up from South America, a grasshopper sparrow, a Savannah sparrow and multiple red-winged blackbirds that used to be common in South Florida, but which I haven't seen there in a while.

I got to visit the Crabtree Nature Center and walk among 200 year old oak trees and explore the most unique playground I have ever seen, built to stimulate children's imagination and desire to explore the forest. I got to explore a rare sand savannah in Powderhorn Lake with a team including two black women of Wild Indigo Outdoor Explorations, who are even more excited about nature than me, and come out the other side by a lake where people languidly boated and fished. My cup literally ran over with pleasure.

Her highly motivated staff thinks Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle, President of the Forest Preserve District, "walks on water."

In my presentation I was able to feed back to the leadership and approximately 400 people in attendance a very positive image of how they're carrying out their charge to protect the preserves and engage citizens with them. The President of the Preserve District, Toni Preckwinkle, is also president of the Cook County Board and since leadership starts at the top, I was able to commend her on the incredible job she is doing. The team below her including General Superintendent Arnold Randall and his deputy Mary Laraia, hold her in high esteem and I saw that filtered down in all the staff. People spoke happily about the creative ideas they were able to nurture and implement because they were given the freedom and autonomy to do so.



Dwight H. Perkins

I knew that the preserves were doing the right thing in terms of being inclusive because when I called people in my network in Chicago, I got glowing reviews. My friend Michael Howard, who mobilized his community to clean up mounds of toxic waste, remediated the land and founded the thriving Eden Place Nature Center said "Oh, we're already working with them and they're great partners." My friend Naomi Davis, founder of Blacks in Green (BIG) was equally laudatory. And the icing came when I prepared to call Rue Mapp, founder of Outdoor Afro in Oakland, California to see if she had any contacts in Chicago, and a message popped up on Facebook that Outdoor Afro Chicago was going bird watching with Wild Indigo as part of a partnership with the Forest Preserve.

I was able to compliment the team on living up to the illustrious legacy of the founders of the forest preserve system, architect Dwight Perkins and landscape architect Jens Jensen, who visualized the explosive growth of Chicago and began a campaign that identified and then worked to get the preserve system established. It took them 20 years and in a stroke of genius, to make certain the constitutionality of the preserves was forever established, leader Dwight

Perkins actually sued the preserve that he'd worked so hard to establish. When the judge ruled against him, affirming the constitutional standing of the system, Perkins had won the biggest victory.



Pioneering landscape architect Jens Jensen worked tirelessly to establish the Forest Preserve system. FPDCC Photo.

I affirmed to the gathering that the preserves should be treated as a treasure beyond compare, because you can't just go out and plant 200 year old trees. I emphasized the benefits of nature as a hedge against the impacts of climate change, and the potential that open space has as an economic engine. For example, the National Parks Conservation Association has established that every federal dollar spent on national parks returns approximately \$10 to nearby communities in the form of jobs in the tourism and visitor services industry. I underscored the health and wellness, emotional and spiritual benefits of a relationship with nature which the preserves provide in ample measure.



Expedition Denali is climbing the highest mountain on the North American continent June 8-29, and includes climbers from 19-year-old Tyrhee Moore to 57 year-old Stephen Shobe, who has already climbed four of the highest mountains on earth.

When I showed a silhouette of climbers on Expedition Denali and then in the next slide showed that the team is black, I heard a sharp expulsion of breath in the room, as this is not what the audience is conditioned to expect. I also pointed out that with the wide network of outdoor



leaders of color around the country, it's way past time to focus on how we can build on that instead of presenting diversity as a "challenge."

I'm with friends old and new at the Chicago Zoo, from left the Preserve System's General Superintendent Arnold Randall, Chicago Zoological Society President & CEO Stuart Strahl, Conservationist Jerry Adelman, President and CEO of Openlands, and our longtime friend and colleague Michael Howard, founder and Executive Director of Eden Place Nature Center.

Best of all, I got to reconnect with our longtime friend and partner, Dr. Stuart Strahl, former head of the Audubon Society's Everglades Restoration Office in Miami who gave Frank and me our first economic opportunity in this field by partnering with us and applying for grants and contracts to do the necessary work of engaging Americans of color in the restoration. I emphasized the great disparity in funding at the grassroots level, and how partnering with a large organization can make all the difference. Dr. Strahl is now serving as the President and CEO of the Chicago Zoological Society, and he hosted an elegant dinner for us at the zoo, with the incredible sight of a polar bear outside one window feasting on carrots and huge bones, while outside the other window we watched a herd of bison eating hay. I was able to use our partnership experience with Stuart as an example of what needs to happen.

I am wildly encouraged and enthused to see this wonderful accumulation of open lands in close proximity to a population of approximately 6 million people, all of whom have the capacity to treasure them and to be nurtured by them. Yay, Preserves!

Find out more about Audrey Peterman, including how to get her book, Our True Nature, at www.legacyontheland.com.

Birding in Lake Co. lifts economy: study

By [Genevieve Bookwalter](#) Chicago Tribune [contact the reporter](#)



The Illinois Ornithological Society braves the cold along the Illinois-Wisconsin border for the 14th annual Gull Frolic at Winthrop Harbor's yacht club Feb. 14, 2015. (Abel Uribe, Chicago Tribune)

A new study suggests birding is providing a modest economic boost for Lake County, prompting local officials to eye more habitat restoration and bird-watching opportunities.

The recent study out of [Lake Forest College](#) showed Lake County's savannas and lakefront are popular draws for regional bird watchers.



Gulls fly looking for food as dozens of members of the Illinois Ornithological Society gather for the 14th Annual Gull Frolic bird watching event at the Winthrop Harbor Yacht Club on Feb. 14. (Abel Uribe, Chicago Tribune)

"Lake County is more of a destination than I might have predicted," said Jeffrey Sundberg, an economics professor at Lake Forest College and lead researcher on the study, "Birding Economics: Activity and Preferences of Resident and Nonresident Birders in Lake County Forest Preserves."

The study listed Rollins Savanna and Edward L. Ryerson Conservation Area as the county's most popular birding preserves. Ft. Sheridan Forest Preserve is rivaling them for attention; the former military base sits along Lake Michigan and under a heavily-used hawk migration path, Sundberg said.

For the study, researchers surveyed 147 regional birders and examined more than a decade of comments on popular birding list serves and field trip notes. Of those surveyed, about half traveled from outside of Lake County. Ninety percent of those travelers spent money on gas, food and other amenities, and 30 percent of them spent \$10 to \$50, according to the study. Jim Anderson, director of natural resources for Lake County Forest Preserves, credited recent restoration projects, the county's proximity to Chicago and Lake Michigan and birding's growing popularity nationwide as reasons for the increased attention.

At Rollins Savanna, for example, forest preserve officials had native birds in mind when they restored the property to its native grassland after years of agricultural use, Anderson said. Now, birders can spot bobolinks, yellow-headed blackbirds and sandhill cranes among the grasses. "We have the diversity and habitat, and we also provide access so people can get in and see the birds," Anderson said.

His staff is studying other restoration opportunities.

gbookwalter@tribpub.com

Twitter: @GenevieveBook

Tree-clearing turns Chicago area's forest preserves into prairie preserves

By [Robert McCoppin](#) and [Sheryl DeVore](#) Chicago Tribune [contact the reporter](#)

Restoration in Chicago area turns forests into prairies.
Prairie restoration in Chicago area meant to save oak savannas.

The buzz of chain saws filled Potawatomi Woods this winter. Century-old trees cracked and fell to the ground. Contractors cleared 259 acres of mature ash, maples and sycamores.

With the spring thaw, parts of the forest preserve near northwest suburban Wheeling look like a muddy wasteland. Hundreds of tree trunks lay stacked like firewood. Stumps dot the landscape.

If the areas look devastated or ugly, Cook County Forest Preserve District officials say their work will eventually lead to a beautiful — and ecologically important — rebirth. The goal is to bring back the native habitat of grasses and sedges, red-headed woodpeckers and wildflowers.



Lake County forest district removes thousands of trees to grow more oaks

The project is part of a growing effort by conservationists in the Chicago area to cut down overcrowded woods into more open woodlands, savannas and meadows. In some cases, forest preserves are being transformed into prairie preserves. It's also an indication that, despite their names, forest preserve districts in the Chicago area are spending a good deal of their resources tearing down trees.

"Now, ironically, forest preserves have too many trees," said Benjamin Cox, executive director of the Chicago-based Friends of the Forest Preserves. "(Having) too many trees creates tons of shade, and prevents growth of the understory."

In Lake County, about 4,000 trees, many mature and healthy, have been felled from four preserves in the last three year in an effort to let in sunlight to grow more oak trees. Though pests have also been a major reason for tree removal — the Cook County forest district had to clear 9,000 trees because of the emerald ash borer, for example — the large-scale removal of trees to restore and preserve habitat marks a continuing evolution in conservation.

When Illinois lawmakers authorized the creation of forest preserve districts in 1913, the mission was exclusively to save forests. Land management meant planting more trees, preventing fires and otherwise largely leaving the preserves alone.

But fire suppression and preservation led to fast-growing trees like sugar maples and elms shading out other plants, primarily oak trees that had dominated the area's woodlands for thousands of years, said Robert Fahey, forest ecologist at the Morton Arboretum in Lisle.

Before Europeans settled the area, fires set by Native Americans and by lightning strikes "created a mosaic of prairies, savannas and woodlands," Fahey said, keeping the growth of other plants in check while allowing the fire-resistant oaks to thrive. But when the fires stopped, the ecosystem eventually got knocked off balance, with thickets of non-native species like buckthorn and honeysuckle spreading unchecked, naturalists say.



Driver Luis Garcia moves brush into the burn pile as workers cut down part of a Cook County Forest Preserve in Wheeling on Wednesday, Jan. 14, 2015. (Stacey Wescott, Chicago Tribune)

In recent decades, the removal of such invasive tress, often with the help of volunteers and controlled brush burns, have been common in forest preserves, though not without controversy. Protests led Cook and DuPage counties to ban such tactics in 1996. The bans were lifted in stages over 10 years, and some of those who raised red flags then have since been won over.

After his initial concerns were answered, Cook County Commissioner Peter Silvestri, for instance, now says he supports restoration.

Chip O'Leary, chief ecologist for the Cook County preserves, said restoration projects have prompted the renewal of plants and wildlife and have attracted greater diversity that's the hallmark of a healthy ecosystem. With the return of certain types of frogs and snakes, migratory and wetland birds and small mammals in Potawatomi Woods, he said, "it'll be a lot prettier place to be."

"If we let nature take its course," O'Leary said, "we would just end up with a monoculture of trees, with nothing underneath but mud and leaves."

Still, not everyone agrees with the approach.

Mark Spreyer is executive director of the Stillman Nature Center, a private, nonprofit center on a former farm in South Barrington that features woods and prairie. Spreyer led Chicago's peregrine falcon release program in the 1980s and has taught environmental biology at the College of Lake County.

He argues that it's unrealistic to try to recreate an idealized setting from 200 years ago when the environment has changed. He notes, for instance, that the federal map of what plants can live in different zones has been redrawn in recent years.

Some plants and animals thrive in the current conditions and will be harmed by attempts to destroy habitat and convert cool, tranquil forests to "hot, buggy" meadows, he said. His approach reflects the recent but controversial notion that "novel ecosystems" with non-native species have adapted to human intervention.

"The public prefers forests," he said, "but we're getting prairie shoved down our throats."

Yet restoration, including the clearing of existing trees, is solidly in the mainstream of land management. The U.S. Forest Service has its own program that includes thinning and burning woods in places like Mark Twain National Forest in Missouri and Arkansas. In Cook County, restoration projects are often carried out in consultation with state and federal authorities.

Naturalists argue that precisely because humans have carved up and altered natural areas so drastically, they require aggressive management to restore balance and diversity.

"People had understandable concerns when they saw so many trees coming down," Cook County forest district spokesman Don Parker said, "but once we've talked to them about what we're doing, people have been supportive of the work."

The Potawatomi Woods project is funded through \$1.7 million provided by the Illinois Tollway as compensation for the trees that had to be removed several years ago to widen the nearby Tri-State Tollway. By agreement, the money had to be spent in the area, near the Des Plaines River, though officials said restoration would have been done eventually, anyway.

For the first time, the forest agency plans to sell some of the wood as timber and firewood, hoping to earn \$235,000. More typically, such wood would be burned or chipped on site.

Similar tactics have been used with great success in other preserves, officials said. Prime examples are Deer Grove East near Palatine and Orland Grassland preserves, where the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers recently completed a \$12 million restoration of almost 1,000 acres. Both sites have attracted native grassland wildflowers, butterflies and breeding birds, including bobolinks, Henslow's sparrows and eastern meadowlarks.

The work in Cook County fits in with the Next Century Conservation Plan, which aims to restore 30,000 acres over 25 years. The work will cost an estimated \$40 million a year, though where most of the money will come from has not been identified.

Officials from other counties in the area are approaching restoration in their own ways.

In Lake County, the forest preserve district is thinning forests as part of a regional plan to grow new oak woodlands. The loss of oak woodlands that once dominated the area, and lack of young oak trees, is of particular concern to conservationists.

Other forest preserve districts in the area are pursuing ambitious restoration projects that do not involve wide-scale tree removal.

In DuPage County, work began this winter to remove a stand of invasive trees from Klein Fen, but the district is not generally removing large trees, said Scott Meister, assistant manager of natural resources. The district is doing other innovative restoration, Meister said, widening waterways like Spring Brook Creek No. 1 near Winfield, to better handle floods.

In Will County, the forest preserve district's largest restoration project at Hadley Valley in Joliet comes around a cost of \$10 million. That project involves planting more than 300,000 wetland plants and almost 34,000 trees and shrubs to convert farmland back to wetland and prairie.

Kane County has limited itself to clearing smaller invasive species. It is growing oak seedlings and planting them in former farm fields to recreate savannas.

Drew Ullberg, director of natural resources for the Forest Preserve District of Kane County, said he's awaiting the results of Lake County's woodland thinning.

"We're watching to see the ecological results and the public reaction," Ullberg said. "Not everybody's an ecologist. When you have the name 'forest preserve district,' people are really sensitive. 'Why are you cutting trees?' We hear that."

The McHenry County Conservation District got that reaction this spring after it cleared brush as part of a restoration program on Nippersink Creek. Ed Collins, director of land preservation and natural resources, wrote online that visitors tend to judge such a project prematurely by its cut stumps and empty space.

Over time, he wrote, sunlight and plantings will bring new generations of butterflies, oaks, and wildflowers, and transform the landscape "to a soft water color portrait of a sublime and very Midwestern landscape."

McCoppin is a Tribune reporter; DeVore is a freelance reporter. rmccoppin@tribpub.com, Twitter @RobertMcCoppin. Copyright © 2015, [Chicago Tribune](#)