

April 9, 2024

## **Memorandum**

To: Board of Commissioners

From: Nina Carmichael, Leadership in Conservation Fellow

Re: April Staff Reports

### **Executive Management (Lorrie Pearson, Michael Daab)**

- The first Quarterly Connections of 2024 was held at Homer Lake Forest Preserve. Staff were treated to a fish fry on a beautiful spring day. Thank you to HL Ops and Construction for all the food preparation, the Engagement Committee for organizing and putting on the event the event, and to the Sustainability Committee for supplying the dinnerware. The new organizational values were announced: Stewardship, Community, and Discovery.
- The Strategy Team met to discuss elements of the draft comprehensive plan before it is finalized for Board consideration.
- Michael Daab held the first planning meeting for the Forest Preserves' new Summer Splash event; a water-centric community summer event in place of the former Freedom Fest. Partners Mike Garthaus, our regional Fisheries Biologist from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, and Scott Hays from the Upper Sangamon River Conservancy were in attendance. Staff attendees included April Smysor, Nina Carmichael, Sue Gallo, Brock Martin, Jennifer Wick, John Bien, and Lisa Sprinkle. The event will be held on July 27<sup>th</sup> at Lake of the Woods Peninsula from 9 am-3 pm. The event will incorporate the Take Me Fishing program, and will bring new opportunities for visitors to learn about the fish of Lake of the Woods, paddling and boater safety, as well as food trucks. We look forward to wrapping up planning and sharing this exciting new event with the public.
- Lorrie attended a meet-and-greet with Suzi Wirtz, the new Executive Director of the IPRA, and area parks and recreation agencies. We discussed agency needs, including ensuring the interests of forest preserves and conservation districts are represented in IPRA educational offerings and considering offering more options for staff from all areas of our organizations.
- Lorrie spoke to the Rantoul Exchange Club on April 10, with approximately 25 attendees. She shared general information about the preserves and specifics about notable construction projects slated in 2024 and 2025 made possible through grant funding and upcoming events this summer.
- Kathryn and Lorrie discussed the next steps for integrating our organizational values into our work with Amber Johnson.
- With members of the Business and Finance Department, Lorrie participated in three demonstrations of potential new financial software.
- Lorrie attended training on organizational culture, successful referenda, and designing trails to respond to and mitigate climate change.

- As was the case with all supervisors, much of March was filled with preparing for and holding meetings with direct reports during the employee evaluation process.
- We continue to work with our I.T. consultant to get all files moved to cloud storage.
- A summary of progress made on 2024 Organizational Goals and Board Goals for the Executive Director is attached.

## CCFPD Fellow (Nina Carmichael)

- Completed the Volunteer Leadership Training through the Morton Arboretum
- Nina Carmichael and Sue Gallo Successfully completed a Beginners Chainsaw Safety Training, a field training program co-sponsored by the University of Illinois Extension Forestry Program and the Savanna Institute. The training, held at the 4-H campground at Allerton Park, provided participants with hands-on experience in the safe use of chainsaws, proper safety gear usage, and chainsaw cleaning/maintenance. The session culminated in a practical exercise where participants, under expert guidance, felled a tree to apply their newly acquired skills. Two Master Naturalist who regularly volunteer with us at the Forest Preserves were also in attendance.
- Attended the *Nurtured in Nature* BIPOC (Black Indigenous and People of Color) hiking event at Homer Lake on 04/07/24. 61 people registered, but the total attendance was 10 people, not including those coordinating or leading the event. I imagine the low attendance was due to the weather forecast and travel time/distance for Chicago registrants. Thankfully, the sun was out, and the rain and hail didn't sweep through until after the event was over. Promo footage was made during the event and will be used to advertise for the next event. Ultimately the intimacy of the group was wonderful and facilitated a first visit to our preserve for some University students.
- Nina was accepted into the University of Illinois Bird Anatomy Lab, which takes place on Wednesdays from 1 to 3 p.m. at the Natural History building on campus. Full preparation/participation cycles take two weeks before more specimens (window strike victims) are added. Nina will be attending these on an ongoing basis as able. While not directly related to the fellowship, this connection also serves as networking opportunity



toward potential programming partnerships with Graduate students and Bird strike protection efforts.

### **Efficiency Committee Updates**

- Working on cataloging our shared services and partnerships, categorized as long-standing (> one year) Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Intergovernmental Agreements, with other park districts, forest preserve districts, conservation districts, or municipal recreation agencies, with other units of local government, the State of Illinois, and interrelationships with non-profits.

### **Planning and Construction (Bridgette Moen)**

- Construction and Homer Lake Operations team hung sound baffles at the Salt Fork Center to reduce the echo effect. The baffles are working better than expected and a nice addition to the space.



- Mike Fry met with the Golf Course and Natural Resources staff regarding a prospective pond dredging project.
- Farnsworth Group has started surveying for the upcoming KRT work in Urbana and Vermilion County.
- At Middle Fork, the construction team and Middle Fork Operations staff have made significant progress on the campsite expansion. The campsites have been graded, and rock has been laid. The concrete trail has been mowed and staked out.



- Bridgette met with Engineering Resource Associates to discuss value engineering options for the Lake of the Woods Stream Barb project, including using more locally available rock, removing shrubs from the planting plan, and keeping the existing guardrail in place.
- Staff submitted a land donation request to the City of Urbana to acquire a vacant lot needed to connect the KRT. The City has sent a favorable reply and requested that the Forest Preserves' counsel prepare the documents.
- Sam presented the Comprehensive Plan recommendations to the Strategic Plan staff group for their review and feedback.
- Bridgette testified at the Village of Mahomet Planning and Zoning Committee meeting regarding a proposed commercial development on Lake of the Woods Road near Elks Lake. She urged the Village to thoroughly review stormwater calculations and plans to mitigate impacts on Elks Lake. She also advocated for dark sky lighting and native plants in the proposed dry detention basin.
- Bridgette ordered boat licenses for Lake of the Woods and Homer Lake.
- Sam has been engaging with the area Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) through a steering committee led by the Champaign County Regional Planning Commission. He submitted feedback proposing the plan include measurable objectives that encourage protecting and expanding natural areas alongside transportation projects.

## **Business and Finance (Brock Martin)**

- A group of folks from various departments successfully piloted a new process for requesting payments from vendors, which will soon be expanded to everyone.
- Created a secure submission folder for external users to submit W-9s and other sensitive information so there would be options outside of traditional mail and fax.
- 2023 audit fieldwork started on April 1, 2024.
- Ended use of temporary staff support for business office functions.
- Finalized Rates for 2023 submitted to the County Clerk.
- Began demos for potential financial software replacement.

## **Human Resources (Kathryn Glynn)**

- During the month of March, HR processed 22 hires and 4 terms.
- As of March 31<sup>st</sup>, our total headcount was 107 employees; including 53 FT, 21 PT, and 33 seasonal.
- There was one non-medical employee injury reported in March.
- Mary coordinated the 2024 annual fire extinguisher servicing for the Forest Preserves.
- The annual performance review process concluded on March 18<sup>th</sup>.
- HR coordinated a March Madness Basketball Tournament Challenge for staff. It was a slam dunk success that we'll remember until next year!

## Marketing (Lisa Sprinkle)

- Media this month included:
  - **Champaign Urban Spring Break ahead**  
<https://www.chambanamoms.com/2024/03/06/champaign-urbana-spring-break-ahead/>
  - **Registration open for Champaign County Forest Preserves 2024 summer camp lineup**  
<https://mahometdaily.com/registration-open-for-champaign-county-forest-preserve-2024-summer-camp-lineup/>
  - **Garden Speaker Series \ Consuming Empire: Colonial & Indigenous Agriculture and Exchange in Early America**  
<https://www.chambanamoms.com/events/garden-speaker-series-consuming-empire-colonial-indigenous-agriculture-and-exchange-in-early-america/>
  - **Museum of the Grand Prairie in Mahomet opens for spring**  
<https://www.wcia.com/news/local-news/museum-of-the-grand-prairie-in-mahomet-opens-for-spring/>
  - **Champaign County Forest Preserves offers a variety of outdoor activities to enjoy**  
<https://www.wcia.com/ciliving-tv/champaign-county-forest-preserve-offers-a-variety-of-outdoor-activities/>
  - **Go hunting for eggs at Champaign County Forest Preserve District**  
<https://www.chambanamoms.com/2024/03/31/eggs-champaign-county-forest-preserve-district/>
  - **Visit Museum of the Grand Prairie for hands-on family fun in Mahomet**  
<https://www.chambanamoms.com/2024/03/21/visit-museum-of-the-grand-prairie/>
- Social Media numbers for March

	FACEBOOK	+/-	INSTAGRAM	+/-
CCFPD	9,400	+177	3,800	+12
KRT	6,200	+206	175	+0
MGP	5,500	+11	1,400	+35
HLIC	3,800	+25		
GC	2,227	+0	392	+3
FPFF	771	+18		



- March Rental Info:

2024	2023	2022	March		2024	2023	2022
# Rentals	# Rentals	# Rentals	Preserve	Facility	\$	\$	\$
7	9	4	HL	Salt Fork Center	\$2,145.00	\$2,650.00	\$650.00
0	0	0	HL	Walnut Hill Shelter	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
0	0	0	LOW	Botanical Garden Weddings	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
1	5	6	LOW	Elks Lake Pavilion	\$540.00	\$2,200.00	\$1,900.00
2	3	2	LOW	Izaak Walton Cabin	\$640.00	\$360.00	\$240.00
15*	15	4	LOW	Lake of the Woods Pavilion	\$770.00	\$2,450.00	\$1,700.00
0	0	0	LOW	Lakeview Shelter	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
0	0	0	LOW	Riverview Retreat Center	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
0	0	0	LOW	Rotary Hill Shelter	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
0	0	0	LOW	Sycamore Hollow Shelter	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
2	0	1	MF	Activity Center	\$495.00	\$0.00	\$350.00
0	0	0	RB	River Bend Shelter	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
<b>27</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>17</b>		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$4,590.00</b>	<b>\$7,660.00</b>	<b>\$4,840.00</b>

\* Lake of the Woods Pavilion - early voting & election creates a higher # than usual.

- Lisa completed the 2023 Annual Report and posted it on the website:  
<https://ccfpd.org/champaign-county-forest-preserves/publications>
- Lisa developed the April/May Leaflet. It was mailed out and posted on the website:  
<https://ccfpd.org/champaign-county-forest-preserves/publications>
- Kristin attended Teacher Institute Day at the Salt Fork Center and took photos, documenting the activities and presentations that Museum and Education staff presented to/conducted with the Unit 4 educators. These photographs were used to create social media posts, letting the public know about Teacher Institute Day and the different lessons/activities that the Museum and Education staff offer for groups and classes. The photos were also shared with Museum and Education staff and the teachers who attended.
- Kristin updated monthly ads for the month of April.

- Lisa worked with a translator to develop a Spanish version of the boat waiver for Lake of the Woods.
- Lisa worked with Urbana Park District and Sweet Lemonade Photography to take new drone footage of the Kickapoo Rail Trail and photographs of KRT users for future marketing needs.
- Kristin developed the Tributary Newsletter (a bi-annual newsletter for Three Rivers Society Members) and sent it out via physical mail.
- Kristin completed a fully updated version of the staff orientation video for 2024 which is now broken into two short videos: part 1 provides an overview of the Forest Preserves, staff you should know, different departments, and all of the technical information that new staff need to know upon starting work at the preserves. Part 2 (Meet the Staff) includes staff discussing the preserves and departments more in-depth: Lorrie Pearson (Executive Director), Matt Kuntz, Rusty Maulding, and Skylar Smith (Site Superintendents), Kamryn Suttinger (Museum and Education Director), Sue Gallo (Volunteer Coordinator), and Chris Edmondson (Golf General Manager).
- Kristin helped place concrete eggs for the Champaign County Forest Preserves at Homer Lake, Sangamon River, River Bend, and Middle Fork River Forest Preserves, tracking locations and taking pictures of each egg. Kristin created a checklist for the egg hunt and posted that on ccfpd.org and on the preserve's social media profiles.



## Grants and Fundraising (Ryan Anderson)

**Three Rivers Event:** Our first Three Rivers Society event of the year will be held on April 25<sup>th</sup>. All Commissioners are invited to attend.



**Earth Day/Arbor Day:** Staff will produce an email campaign and social media content around Earth Day and Arbor Day. This campaign will provide updates on previous campaigns, share information about the trail improvements, and provide an opportunity for donors to support the trail campaign or the annual fund.

**Stable Roots Endowment:** Staff have prepared an email to our donors announcing the Stable Roots Endowment and a physical letter will go out to a select group without email. This communication will go out the week of this meeting. A further announcement will go out in the next Leaflet and finally on social media shortly after the leaflet.

### Fundraising Campaigns Progress as of 3/1/24:

Campaign	Raised	Left	Goal	%
Trail Improvements	\$150	\$99,850	\$75,000	0%

### Fundraising Trends (as of 3/1/2024)

#### *Donations 4-Year Summary*

4-year totals:	2021	2022	2023	2024 (YTD)
Total \$	\$209,832.74	\$207,053.66	\$221,362.35	\$47,903.46
Total \$ (adjusted)	\$174,725.10	\$175,731.78	\$195,050.45	\$42,902.46
# of donors (adjusted)	407	345	442	56
# of 1 <sup>st</sup> time donors	165	87	159	13

*"Adjusted" numbers have grants and bequests removed. Updates to Bloomerang have altered these figures.*



## Volunteer Coordinator (Sue Gallo)

- Created a procedure to more efficiently record volunteer service of regular volunteers who help at events without duplicating their hours while ensuring they are credited for their time.
- Met with Kamryn to learn about the current and potential future need for volunteer support and initiated a discussion on possible service-learning collaborations.
- Attended a webinar on Handling Difficult Personalities by Volunteer Fairfax and Making it to the Inbox in 2024: What's Changed by Constant Contact about Google, Yahoo and iPhone rules that limit reach of e-newsletters/marketing. I also attended a chainsaw training held by U of I Extension because volunteers can request to use chainsaws and other power tools when stewarding.
- Organized and set dates for volunteer events with St Joe-Ogden National Honors Society, Ratio, and Ryan Dallas. Thanks to Emily for organizing with the Champaign County Audubon.
- Attended three planning sessions - two Boneyard Community Day and one Summer Splash.
- Kudos to David, the Golf Course Committee, and the staff who hosted a well-planned, successful cleanup with approximately 50 volunteers! I assisted with publicity, photos, and tools. Volunteers from ROTC, PGN, and Audubon attended.
- Started annual trail steward update.
- We had 13 new applicants last month. (My onboarding rate for new volunteers has slowed, unfortunately.)
- The Eagle Scout bike repair station was installed! It was a lovely spring day, and the Scouts received tremendous positive feedback from passing trail users.



- Hosted a second stewarding event at Homer Lake with ten attendees. Thanks to volunteer Walt Hurley, who made the following graphics to help people visualize the impact of their efforts! (picture below)



## Lake of the Woods Golf Course (Chris Edmondson & Joie Torres)

- The weather was more typical for the average March this year, with widely varying temps and precipitation. The golf course reflects that in its daily play numbers. There were several days we were closed, but the good days were very good. For the month, we had 2,403 players. This is double the 5-year average of 1,225 and the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest total for March since 1997. Our revenues for the month were \$75,819, which is also double the 5-year average of \$36,464, and the highest since 2012.
- We hosted our annual volunteer clean-up day on Saturday, March 23<sup>rd</sup>. It was a brisk morning (temps in the 30s), but over 50 volunteers showed up to assist with the clean-up. Volunteers, including other department staff and their families, cleaned around the clubhouse and Pro Shop and picked up garbage and raked remaining leaves and sticks on the golf course into piles for the maintenance crew to collect. We are so thankful for the support we receive and appreciate the assistance in making the facility as aesthetically pleasing as possible.
- The golf simulators closed for the season on March 11<sup>th</sup>. This season (December 1, 2023 – March 11, 2024), the simulators generated \$18,788 in revenue, which more than paid for the new unit purchased in the fall, and does not take into account food and beverage purchases. Having two of the same units allowed us to increase league offerings, lessons, and fittings and enhanced the overall player experience.
- The weather also allowed our renovation project to be completed. Larry Denton, who completed our previous bunker project, reshaped some tee boxes and approaches. Hole #14 approach was regraded. Hole #7 tee box was rebuilt to accommodate three sets of tees. The hole #10 tee box had the broken and rotting railroad ties removed

from the back, and the area was regraded. Golf Course maintenance staff then laid sod and/or spread grass seed in these areas. We are hopeful that being able to complete this project early in the year will have minimal impact on play when outings and tournaments commence in late April and early May. Before and after pictures of the renovation on the #10 tee box follow.



- Seasonal hiring continued in March. We have currently filled all of our Cashier, Starter/Ranger, and Cart Attendant positions and are now focused on the Snack Bar and Beverage Cart positions, which will begin operation in mid-April.
- On March 13<sup>th</sup>, Chris completed his recertification in the Food Service Sanitation Manager course through Parkland College Continuing Education. This certification is valid for five years and is an operational requirement on-site. Jason Troyer was certified last fall, and David Sebestik is due for recertification and will be taking the course this summer.
- The maintenance crew is now in full swing, mowing and fertilizing the greens, tees, and fairways.
- This year's maintenance staff is filled! We now have 12 part-time seasonal, and we are excited to announce our full-time maintenance worker II Jameson Drinkwalter! Jameson has been a part-time seasonal helper for four seasons and brings a wealth of knowledge on irrigation systems, equipment use, and safety (setting heights and cuts on greens mowers), and is an overall asset to the leadership of the team. We are proud of Jameson and glad to have him on our team.



## Museum and Education Department (Kamryn Suttinger)

### Patrons Served

	In-Person Programming*	Online Programming*	Outreach**	MGP Visitation	HLIC Visitation
<b>Oct-23</b>	1253	0	57	829	194
<b>Nov-23</b>	952	0	18	566	103
<b>Dec-23</b>	711	0	0	90	57
<b>Jan-24</b>	86	0	0	0	109
<b>Feb-24</b>	157	0	25	0	126
<b>Mar-24</b>	244	0	30	717	191
<b>YTD</b>	<b>487</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>717</b>	<b>426</b>

\* Includes all youth and public program opportunities    \*\* Includes loan kits and tabling events

### Collections and Exhibits:

- Processing items approved for deaccessioning continues. LOW Operations staff helped dispose of many unsalvageable items from the Sangamon River shed. The Old Stone Fort Museum in Schoharie, New York, is interested in the cradle. Approximately 20 transferable objects are still without new homes. Out of 13 regional historical institutions contacted for potential transfer, two have shown interest, two have not responded, and nine have declined.
- Work in the tool wing, spearheaded by Rob Diehl, continues. Cleaning and inventory of the blacksmith shop in preparation for the exhibit is moving more quickly than expected. Three volunteers are working on the project, and Collections Coordinator Jessica Smith is also providing support.
- Collection Coordinator Jessica Smith is wrapping up our 2024 incoming loan renewals. Most incoming loans are currently on exhibit in the *History of Healing* exhibit, which continues to be popular with visitors.
- Madeleine Keenan, a Uni High graduate and history student at Yale, is our 2024 Smith intern. She officially accepted the position, and we are wrapping up the paperwork. She will begin on or about May 28 and will work on a component of the Doris Hoskins Archive.



### Youth Programs:

- The Youth Programs team hosted a second Unit 4 (Champaign) Teacher In-Service day at the Salt Fork Center in Homer Lake Forest Preserve. 30 teachers from the Champaign School District participated in hands-on activities specific to programs we offer, hike the trails at Homer Lake, and meet the staff. We got a lot of great feedback from the teachers and hope to continue partnering with them.
- Counselor-in-training (youth volunteers for summer camps) interviews have started. We already have a great interest from the county youth.
- We are doing interviews for our seasonal positions, Day Camp Educators and Seasonal Naturalist, and the year-round Education Program Specialist I and Interpretive Naturalist.
- The one-room schoolhouse has been opened and cleaned for the season; we have a large number of field trips scheduled this spring. Thank you to Christopher Clementz Construction for creating a mount for our new water pump. This will be used to show children how water was collected in the 1890s.

### Public Programs and Visitor Services:

- Members of the Public Programs Team met with Mike Daab and other CCFPD staff to further discuss and plan for the Summer Splash event. The IL Natural History Survey Traveling Science Center is being considered for booking.
- *Juanito's Tacos* has expressed interest in appearing as a food truck vendor for the upcoming CCFPD Summer Concerts and Summer Splash event.
- John discussed future endeavors with the Museum Docent Workshop/Training Program with Volunteer Coordinator Sue Gallo.
- On March 29, Jennifer Wick led a Woodcock walk at Buffalo Trace with a very successful turnout of 30 attendees. There seems to be a lot of excitement for this program, which brings in community members who otherwise wouldn't have visited Buffalo Trace/Lake of the Woods. Jennifer says, "It always makes me feel glad to enrich that first experience." The first Woodcock walk, held on March 12th, brought in 28 attendees, and everyone was able to hear and see the male birds perform their unique display.







- The Public Programs team hired Chelsea Prah! as the new Public Programs Manager. Chelsea is coming from the Urbana Park District, and her first day will be April 22<sup>nd</sup>.

### **Training/Professional Development:**

- Selena Gonzalez attended the PDRMA webinar, Mindful of Mental Health: Managing Stress and Anxiety in Children and Adolescents.

### **Natural Resources (Peter Goodspeed)**

- NR staff were busy in March conducting prescribed burns throughout most of the preserves. These burns achieved ecological management goals that include:
  - Removing leaf litter/grass duff layer
  - Returning nutrients to the soil
  - Controlling invasive plant species
  - Maintaining grassland and savanna ecosystems
  - Opening areas up for future management practices
  - Promoting overall biodiversity
- Prescribed burns were conducted in the following ecological management units:
  - River Bend FP – parking lot prairie, 9/11 Memorial Grove, Woodland CRP, between trail and sunset lake (38 acres)
  - Lake of the Woods FP – Stidham Woods savanna and prairie (23.4 acres)
  - Lake of the Woods FP – Buffalo Trace old field sites (37 acres)
  - Middle Fork River FP – Point Pleasant parking lot prairie and woods (42.5 acres)
  - Sangamon River FP – NW Prairie and riparian woodland CRP (39.4 acres)
  - Lake of the Woods FP – HQ west woods and pollinator meadow (8 acres)
  - Homer Lake FP – NW prairie complex west prairie restoration (18.2 acres)
  - Lake of the Woods FP – Buffalo Trace S47 prairie and Milestone prairie (35.1 acres)

- Since February, NR and Site Operations staff conducted ~20 burns, totaling ~380 acres.



- While the Illinois Department of Natural Resources is responsible for stocking the larger lakes, NR stocked the smaller ponds at Homer Lake FP (Collins Pond and Hidden Acres Pond) and Elks Lake at Lake of the Woods FP.
- NR staff removed more trees at Buffalo Trace in preparation of the constructed wetland project and the new trail resurfacing project for the OSLAD grant.
- Native ryegrass was planted in degraded areas where volunteers and staff previously cleared invasive shrubs at Homer Lake FP and River Bend FP.
- Staff members passed their Commercial Pesticide Applicator's License exams for General Standards and Rights-of-Way categories.
- NR staff attended the Quarterly Connection fish fry event at Homer Lake FP.
- NR welcomed its newest natural resources technician, Gage Zvonik, to the team.

## **Lake of the Woods (Rusty Maulding)**

- Botanical Garden and Operations staff wrapped up thorny tree removal at Buffalo Trace this summer in preparation for bike trail resurfacing through an OSLAD grant.
- Botanical Gardens staff seeded a predominantly dirt trail at Buffalo Trace after volunteers and staff cleared invasive shrubs and trees along the trail this winter which allows greater sunlight penetration and turfgrass growth. We are experimenting with buffalo grass in the sunniest parts of the trail to see how that fares compared to cool-season turfgrasses, more typically used. The buffalo grass is a warm-season turfgrass that requires less water, should better heal openings after being established, and will likely stay greener during the heat of the summer. Thank you, Natural Resources, for providing the seed.
- We received the new Can-Am UTV and are already putting it to work. It's proving to be most applicable to a small truck, a tool we did not have previously. As a bonus, the second shift is looking forward to using it as well, whereas before, they only used full-sized vehicles. We thank the Commissioners for supporting this right-sizing of our fleet.



- Michael and Brodie saw an opportunity for Operations (Ops) and Botanical Garden (BG) crews to work alongside another department's staff near the spillway at Lake of the Woods, and a callout for Head Quarters (HQ) staff volunteers was made. A total of 7 HQ, 7 BG, and 6 Ops staff worked for about 2 hours dragging honeysuckle branches that crews had cut earlier in the week to 3 burn piles. Field crews saw firsthand how engaged and supportive HQ staff is in the completion of the work, and HQ staff have a better appreciation for the physical nature of the work field crews complete daily. The shared experience was great for all who participated!
- Operations staff ground stumps from trees felled over the last six months in turf areas, hauled away shavings, and placed soil and turfgrass seed throughout Lake of the Woods and Sangamon River residence areas.



## Homer Lake (Skylar Smith)

- The aging water pressure tanks at the Walnut Hill shelter were replaced with one pressure tank capable of supplying pressure to both restrooms.
- Homer Lake operations hosted the first staff Quarterly Connections of 2024 on March 28 at the Salt Fork Center. The afternoon was spent having a fish fry and connecting with folks from all over the preserves. Special thanks to Roy for holding it down in the kitchen.
- The landscaping at the Salt Fork Center needs a facelift. Staff began the process of removing old landscaping with plans to implement new native pollinator patches.
- Homer Lake staff led two prescribed burns in March. One burn was in Flicker Woods and the other in Maple Sugar Grove. Both burns appear to have effectively set back invasive shrubs.

- The Salt Fork Center installed a new drinking fountain with a water bottle filler, replacing the original fountain installed when the building was constructed.
- The northeast corner of the preserve, near Homer Lake Road, was in bad shape following the wind storm last summer. Staff worked to clean up the windfall in that natural area, and plans are in place to restore the area with native plant species in the future.
- A small hole on the Flicker Woods trail turned out to be the result of a broken old field tile. Below the surface the hole was much larger than we originally thought. Staff was able to excavate the broken tile line and make a repair the same day, minimizing the trail closure.
- Invasive Bush Honeysuckle was cleared at the North Boat Ramp, Clarks Corner, and near the Salt Fork Center.
- Ethan Stites was hired as a part-time employee. He began work on Tuesday, April 9<sup>th</sup>.
- Skylar attended the 2-day Illinois Lakes Management Association conference in Urbana. The conference had speakers from both private and public sectors, talking about a wide range of topics from native pollinator patches to lake sediment reduction plans.
- The spring ephemerals paired with the nice weather has made for a noticeable increase of visitors coming out to the preserve recently.



## **Middle Fork (Matthew Kuntz)**

- Middle Fork staff have been assisting the Construction Department with the campground expansion project, part of the OSLAD Trail Development Grant we received. To date all but four of the sites have been built, but we are experiencing some delays with ordering of electrical components and park equipment.
- The campground has officially opened for the 2024 season. April is a soft open with no hosts, and they will start on the first of May. We booked several sites for the solar eclipse event.
- We would like to extend our thanks and appreciation to Ed Hutchinson, Maintenance Worker III, who has retired from the Forest Preserves. Mr. Hutchinson worked hard for 12 great years at Middle Fork and will be missed.
- We have been interviewing potential candidates for the open full-time position at Middle Fork. We hope to have someone in place by mid-April.
- Thanks to the District staff for a great Quarterly Connections at Homer Lake this spring.