

January 11, 2024

## **Memorandum**

To: Board of Commissioners

From: Nina Carmichael, Leadership in Conservation Fellow

Re: January staff reports

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

- Lorrie met with State Sen. Faraci and discussed the importance of grants and the possibility that state grants will not be as available in the future.
- The process to identify and implement organizational values has launched. All staff and the Board will participate in focus groups and several partners and volunteers will participate in one-on-one interviews. That information will inform an all-staff summit to arrive at the values and value statements. We can then incorporate those values into our policies and procedures and, ultimately, into our strategic planning process.
- As our current strategic plans run through 2024, we have begun planning for the process to develop our next strategic plan later this year, including attending various trainings prior to selecting a consultant to help us with this work.
- Mike Daab has been participating in Owner's Representative interviews for upcoming Kickapoo Rail Trail projects as well as interviews for the Assistant Director of Business and Finance.

### **CCFPD Fellow (Nina Carmichael)**

- Facilitated the first session of Crucial Conversations for cohort#2 (Selena Gonzales, Jennifer Wick, Patrick Ahasic, and John Bien) from the M&E department.
- Completed an intro chainsaw safety lesson with Peter
- Assisted on a 17-acre prescribed burn at Buffalo Trace.
- Created an assistive document for tracking labor allocation more accurately.

### **Efficiency Committee Updates**

- Currently identifying themes from the qualitative data provided in the Employee Engagement survey to both set goals for the Employee Engagement Committee and the Efficiency Committee by pulling out suggestions and points to add to the collective recommendation record.

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

- Planning coordinated with the Village of St. Joseph staff on a proposed entrance to a future development that will cross the Kickapoo Rail Trail. Village staff have suggested bidding the road and trail together so that the work is well coordinated, and the trail will not be disturbed by future construction. Staff are working with the Village on an Intergovernmental Agreement for a springtime board review.

- Bridgette sat for and passed the National Recreation and Park Association Certified Playground Safety Inspector exam.
- Solar-powered, dark sky-rated light bollards were purchased for the Middle Fork Forest Preserve Dark Skies Trail project.
- The renovations at Elks Lake are complete. The existing sink has been replaced with a kitchenette, including an ADA sink, ADA countertops, a new stove/hood, a freezer, and a refrigerator. The epoxy floors have been patched and repaired. Staff have explored several options for replacing flooring in the rental facilities, but the enclosed pavilions pose unique challenges. Construction staff have identified an in-house repair option for epoxy, with the intent of extending the life of the floor (epoxy is very durable but also expensive to replace). If the repaired epoxy at Elks Lake wears well, this could be a good option at other rental facilities, resulting in cost savings for flooring replacement over time and improved sustainability through reduction of material use/disposal.



- Construction assisted with the repair of the Botanical Gardens waterfall pump which recently failed.
- The storm shelter at Lake of the Woods was installed.
- Construction installed the posts and beams for the Hickory and Hawthorn shelters at Lake of the Woods. The steel roofs and furnishings will be installed as weather and time allow.

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

- Jessica Howard starts full-time work as the Assistant Business and Finance Director on January 16. Brock began work as the Business and Finance Director on January 8. Carron Johnson remains in a consulting role to assist with their training until early February.
- Carron completed end-of-year transfers and close-outs.
- The team is working on adding the new staff to the various accounts that we hold.
- We have begun testing the upgrade to our financial system.

## Human Resources (Kathryn Glynn, Mary Beck)

- Staff showed up and showed out this year by donating 369 pounds of food to the Eastern Illinois Foodbank. The food collection was a voluntary aspect of our most recent Quarterly Connections held in December.
- During the month of December, HR processed 1 hire and 12 terms.
- As of December 31<sup>st</sup>, our total headcount was 75 employees; including 47 FT, 17 PT, and 11 seasonal.
- There were 3 employee injuries reported in December, none of which required medical. Additionally, an incident occurred where a patron overheard another patron mention they were going to shoot a gun at Collins Pond. Staff called 911 to report the situation and fortunately, no further incidents transpired.
- Recruiting for key positions continues with some exciting progress. The new Collections Coordinator (formerly Registrar), Jessica Smith, begins January 15<sup>th</sup> and interviews for the newly created Donor Relationship Coordinator are underway.

## Marketing (Lisa Sprinkle)

- Media this month included:
  - **Just Askin | When Does Christmas Tree Recycling Start?**  
[https://www.news-gazette.com/opinion/columns/just-askin-when-does-christmas-tree-recycling-start/article\\_9f19e88d-2839-51ce-880f-478c51613c2a.html](https://www.news-gazette.com/opinion/columns/just-askin-when-does-christmas-tree-recycling-start/article_9f19e88d-2839-51ce-880f-478c51613c2a.html)
  - **Mahomet's Iconic Light Display Guide**  
<https://mahometdaily.com/mahomets-ionic-christmas-light-displays-guide/>
  - **Crafting Festive Memories with Champaign County Forest Preserves**  
<https://www.wcia.com/ciliving-tv/crafting-festive-memories-with-champaign-county-forest-preserve-district/>
  - **Champaign Urbana Area Christmas Tree Collections**  
<https://www.chambanamoms.com/2023/12/21/christmas-tree-collections-champaign-urbana-area/>
  - **How well do you remember 1973?**  
[https://www.news-gazette.com/opinion/columns/test-your-knowledge-a-flashback-to-1973/article\\_cdd5c2b3-1c32-5d1b-a16b-c5a31feb3a41.html](https://www.news-gazette.com/opinion/columns/test-your-knowledge-a-flashback-to-1973/article_cdd5c2b3-1c32-5d1b-a16b-c5a31feb3a41.html)
  - **Must-Do things over winter break in Champaign-Urbana**  
<https://www.chambanamoms.com/2023/12/12/winter-break-activities-champaign-urbana/>
  - **The best places for holiday photos around Champaign Urbana**  
<https://www.chambanamoms.com/2023/12/11/photos-holiday-champaign-urbana/>



2405 North Shore Drive  
Urbana, IL 61802-7221  
Phone: 217-328-3663  
Email: [marketing@eifoodbank.org](mailto:marketing@eifoodbank.org)  
[www.eifoodbank.org](http://www.eifoodbank.org)

January 3, 2024

Dear Friends at Champaign County Forest Preserve,

Thank you for your donation of 369 pounds of food to Eastern Illinois Foodbank, which was received on 12/8/2023.

Your donation was processed by our warehouse, sorted and made available to our network of food pantries throughout our 18-county service area who help feed more than 1 million individuals each year. Your donation will fill plates in eastern Illinois and help in the fight against hunger.

If you prefer to receive one donation receipt at the end of the year, please contact our Development Department at 217-328-3663. To stay updated on local hunger issues and Foodbank events, visit [www.eifoodbank.org](http://www.eifoodbank.org). Thank you again for your support!

Sincerely,



Kelly W. Daly  
President/CEO



- Social media followers update.

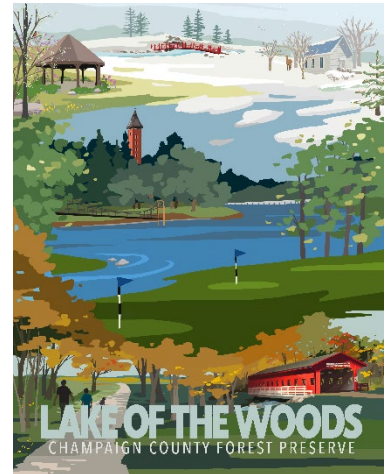
<b>Location</b>	<b>Facebook</b>	<b>+/-</b>	<b>Instagram</b>	<b>+/-</b>
CCFPD	9,031	+103	3,719	+15
KRT	5,825	+122	175	+1
MGP	5,468	+16	1,360	+5
HLIC	3,719	+16		
GC	2,215	+5	377	+0
FPPF	717	+13		

December Rental Info:

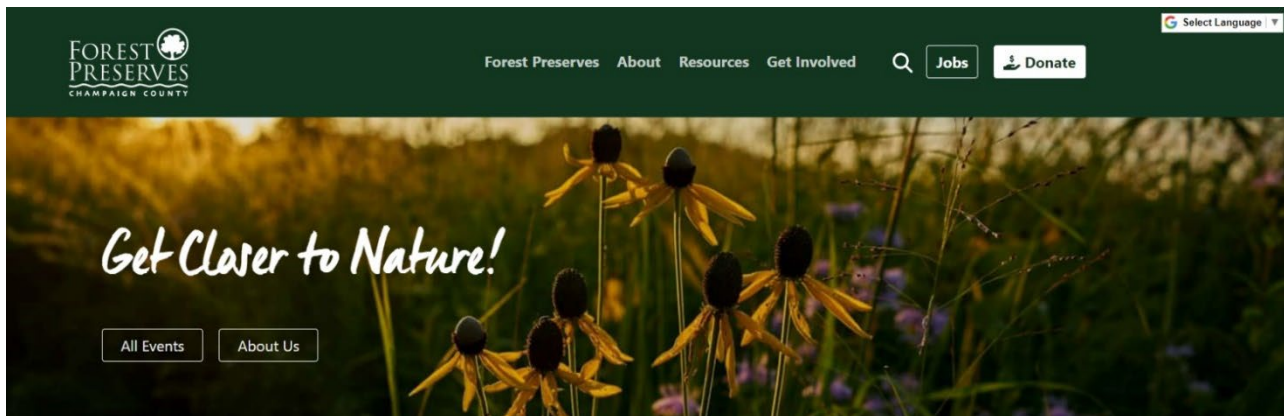
<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>December</b>		<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
<b># Rentals</b>	<b># Rentals</b>	<b>Preserve</b>	<b>Facility</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>\$</b>
4	6	HL	Salt Fork Center	\$950	\$1,950
*	0	HL	Walnut Hill Shelter	*	\$0
0	0	LOW	Botanical Garden Weddings	\$0	\$0
*	1	LOW	Elks Lake Pavilion	*	\$200
3	4	LOW	Izaak Walton Cabin	\$280	\$690
10	4	LOW	Lake of the Woods Pavilion	\$2,650	\$1,700
*	0	LOW	Lakeview Shelter	*	\$0
*	0	LOW	Riverview Retreat Center	*	\$0
*	0	LOW	Rotary Hill Shelter	*	\$0
*	0	LOW	Sycamore Hollow Shelter	*	\$0
0	0	MF	Activity Center	\$0	\$0
*	0	RB	River Bend Shelter	*	\$0
<b>17</b>	<b>15</b>		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$3,880</b>	<b>\$4,540</b>

\* Seasonal Rentals are now in effect **Note:** Elks Lake Pavilion was closed for rental during construction

- The new CCFPD.org website is live! We worked with Accuraty, LLC in Champaign to update the website. The Champaign County Forest Preserve District's website, [www.ccfpd.org](http://www.ccfpd.org), serves as a comprehensive online hub catering to nature enthusiasts, residents, and visitors in Champaign County. Designed with a focus on accessibility and community engagement, the website targets a diverse audience, including hikers, birdwatchers, and families seeking outdoor recreation.
- Worked with Marla Beyer to update the Lake of the Woods poster to remove the 75 years elements, making it a more compatible design with the other preserves, increasing the longevity of the poster. This design has been added to the Fine Art America website.



## Grants and Fundraising (Ryan Anderson)



- **Three Rivers Society Party:** The Foundation hosted the Three Rivers Event on Thursday, December 7, 6pm-8pm at the Salt Fork Center, Homer Lake Forest Preserve. The event went well and we currently have 27 households signed up for the Three Rivers Society for 2024.
- **Year-end Fundraising-** We had a busy December with \$43,102 raised in the last month of the year. We end the year with \$221,362.35 in revenue for the Foundation and a 55% donor retention rate, well over the national average of 40%. We are still seeing funds come in that were mailed before the last day of the year. These may continue to come in throughout January.

### Fundraising Campaigns Progress as of 1/4/24:

Campaign	Raised	Left	Goal	%
Dark Sky Trail	\$ 59,929	\$ 40,071	\$ 100,000	60%
Timberdoodle Trail	\$ 7,050	\$ 0	\$ 7,000	100%
Homer Lake Boat Launch	\$ 11,180	\$ 9,920	\$ 21,300	52%

### Fundraising Trends (as of 1/4/2024)

#### *Donations 4-Year Summary*

4-year totals:	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total \$	\$164,219.10	\$209,832.74	\$207,053.66	\$221,362.35
Total \$ (adjusted)	\$111,738.24	\$174,725.10	\$175,731.78	\$195,050.45
# of donors	351	450	358	442
# of 1 <sup>st</sup> time donors	134	165	87	159

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

#### *Adjusted Revenue by Month (Sep-Dec)*

	September	October	November	December
2020	\$3,356.50	\$4,330.77	\$6,638.56	\$46,930.98
2021	\$5,408.10	\$4,207.40	\$32,094.29	\$49,980.50
2022	\$16,357.80	\$9,057.12	\$24,138.46	\$66,198.52
2023	\$5,065.74	\$9,300.50	\$43,636.01	\$43,102.06

### Volunteer Coordinator (Sue Gallo)

- Received 5 new volunteer applicants in December.
- Volunteers hosted at all of the Night Lights evenings!
- Offering new small-group invasive events for December, January and February. December was cancelled due to no RSVPs, but January and February will run.
- Thanks to the NR team for making their annual Solstice invasive removal event friendly and productive! People stayed and socialized over cookies and hot chocolate for almost an hour. Many people choose to volunteer because they wish to be more social, and this event allowed volunteers to make an obvious environmental impact and make social connections.
- Our website's event calendar recruited at least two new volunteers to the Solstice invasive removal and at least one new volunteer for the upcoming January invasive removal.

- Personalized holiday cards were sent to volunteers. To date, feedback has been very positive and inspired at least one inactive volunteer to re-engage. Cards returned by the post office are helpful to update our volunteer records. Many thanks to Nina for helping get the cards addressed, Lisa for the layout, and Emily for taking the original photo!!
- 2023 service numbers are still being tracked down for entry, but at this point service hour totals seem to be very similar to last year's (over 6000 hours from regular volunteers and over 2000 hours from event volunteering).



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

- Unseasonably mild weather in December allowed us to remain open outdoors until December 22<sup>nd</sup>. We had 330 players for the month, to bring our 2023 season total to 40,352. This is the highest season player count total since 2005.
- Revenue for the month of December was \$56,212. The previous 5-year average, without the Anniversary Pass sale, was \$22,289. For the year, our total revenue ended at \$1,216,598. This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> time eclipsing the \$1 million mark, with the other being last season (\$1.23 M), which was an Anniversary Pass sale season.
- As mentioned, this is the middle of the 2023-2024 Anniversary Pass validity. We held our annual Platinum Pass “Black Friday” special once again (\$50 off a Platinum Pass if purchased before Christmas for the 2024 season). 72 Platinum Memberships were sold during the special for 2024. This is a strong start to our target goal of 100 total Platinum Passes being sold. The Platinum Pass is valid for the calendar year season and covers all green fees during regular play and leagues on both courses, preferred tee times up to 14 days in advance, locker rental, 10% in-stock merchandise discount, \$12 cart fees, and Hubie Cup tournament eligibility.
- The Golf Simulators opened for play on December 1<sup>st</sup>. Located in the Golf Course Clubhouse, the two Foresight Golf Simulators allow for play on 24 different courses and practice on a driving range and putting green. We will have a 2-person simulator golf league beginning in January and will be open daily to the public as well. All simulator usage requires an indoor time to be booked hourly by contacting the Pro Shop.
- From December 11-14, David and Jason taught a golf unit in the Rantoul Schools at Pleasant Acres Elementary. One of our departmental goals was to expand outreach in the county, and this was the first time we have taught in the Rantoul School District. It was part of the school's physical education program, and the response from the kids was very positive.
- Finally, we'd like to congratulate our Head Golf Professional, David Sebestik, on being named the News-Gazette High School boys golf coach of the year! David

dedicates his time outside of his work at the golf course to advancing youth golf in the area and this recognition goes to show a part of that effort. His Mahomet-Seymour team reached the State Finals this past season, finishing 7<sup>th</sup>. Also, one of our seasonal employees and a member of the Mahomet-Seymour golf team, Reis Claybrooke, was named the News-Gazette boys' player of the year for golf!

**Golf Course Operations:**

- The Golf Assistant and Equipment Technician are still working on spin grinding reels, changing bed knives, and sharpening rough mower blades.
- All flags, tee blocks, trash cans, and ball washers have been removed from the course for the winter and the course will be closed until March 1<sup>st</sup>.

**Museum and Education Department (Kamryn Suttinger)**

**Patrons Served**

	In-Person Programming*	Online Programming*	Outreach**	MGP Visitation	HLIC Visitation	
<b>Jan-23</b>	78	302	423	Closed		40
<b>Feb-23</b>	286	92	35	Closed		79
<b>Mar-23</b>	246	150	90	707		167
<b>Apr-23</b>	1312	0	219	830		274
<b>May-23</b>	1559	0	0	1282		355
<b>Jun-23</b>	892	0	0	1616		239
<b>Jul-23</b>	1197	0	0	1578		136
<b>Aug-23</b>	984	0	465	1215		153
<b>Sep-23</b>	603	0	240	867		216
<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>YTD</b>	<b>10,073</b>	<b>544</b>	<b>1,547</b>	<b>9,580</b>		<b>2,013</b>

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

**Collections and Exhibits:**

- Cathy Schneider held her third Animal Advocates open house with six people in attendance. Animal Advocates is a program that supports the educational animals housed at the Interpretive Center. All proceeds go toward the care and feeding of the animals.
- All artifacts from the Sangamon River shed have been relocated to Rankin. Hooray!
- Mark is continuing to work on placing deaccessioned items and waiting to hear back from multiple institutions. Several institutions have said no, since they are doing deaccessioning projects of their own. Disposal of non-salvageable deaccessions will begin in January.



- Rob is spearheading and planning an inventory and clean-up plan for the blacksmith shop section of the tool wing.
- Jessica Smith, the new Collections Coordinator, starts work on January 15<sup>th</sup>.

### **Youth Programs:**

- Educators hosted a field trip for 72 fourth-grade students from International Prep Academy, emphasizing local perspectives on immigrants who settled in Champaign County, complementing their broader lesson on immigrants and migrants in America.
- Selena hosted three library programs at Tolono Public Library, Goose Creek District Library, and Champaign Public Library that focused on diverse winter holiday traditions practiced throughout Champaign County.

### **Public Programs and Visitor Services:**

- Public Programs Manager, Pat Cain, accepted a job at the Urbana Free Library. His last day with the forest preserves was on Sunday, December 10. The vacant position is currently open for application.
- Public Program Specialist I, John Bien, was temporarily promoted from part-time to full-time employment due to Pat's departure. John has taken on some additional responsibilities which include supervising the museum's CRSAs and programming previously scheduled by Pat. These include special request programs, Martens Center programming, and more.
- John finished off the year's *Lincoln Lecture Series* which featured a great portrayal of Sojourner Truth by Patricia James Davis.
- Public Programs staff, now just Jennifer Wick and John Bien, hosted a slew of well-attended holiday programs, including To Grandmother's House We Go, Sip & Learn: Hot Cups of Culture, and Homer for the Holidays.
- Jennifer and John also worked on preparing and finalizing the public program offerings for March-May.

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

### **NR Volunteer Events & Programs**

- Staff hosted the annual Winter Solstice honeysuckle clearing event at Homer Lake FP – Maple Sugar Grove on December 21<sup>st</sup>. 17 volunteers and 10 preserve staff members participated in the event.



## NR Completed Field Tasks

- Favorable conditions allowed NR staff to conduct more prescribed burns at the following locations:
  - Homer Lake FP Middle Meadow wetland (2.5 acres).
  - Middle Fork River FP North Point Pleasant (40 acres).
  - Lake of the Woods FP Buffalo Trace Phase 4 prairie restoration (17 acres).
- Mowed final burn breaks at Sangamon River FP to prepare for spring prescribed burn season.
- Burned piles at Lake of the Woods FP – Buffalo Trace on in Phase 15 savanna restoration.
- Cut, stacked, and burned bush honeysuckle at:
  - Lake of the Woods FP – Buffalo Trace tree tunnel.
  - River Bend FP – north of the parking lot.
- Girdled and/or removed weedy trees for timber stand improvement at:
  - Lake of the Woods FP – North bike path.
  - Middle Fork River FP – Point Pleasant parking lot woods.



## NR Administrative Projects

- In December, the Preserve's sustainability master's project proposal was accepted by a group of graduate students with the University of Michigan School for Environment & Sustainability (SEAS). Four students and two faculty advisors with SEAS will be using remote sensing techniques to quantify the amount of carbon stored in ecosystems throughout the preserves.
- Met with Mike Daab, Bridgette, and a representative from CQI Consulting to discuss solar array projects at Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve.
- Served on an initial panel to interview several candidates for the Assistant Finance Director position.
- Completed and passed pesticide applicator license exams for general standards and rights-of-way.
- Completed virtual mapping software training for migrating from ArcMap to ArcGIS Pro.

## Lake of the Woods (Rusty Maulding)

- Night Lights was a huge success this year. We smashed our daily, weekend, and season attendance totals at 1220, 2205, and 6361 visitors, respectively. We also increased donations by \$1200 from last year. Milder temperatures over multiple weekends were key in encouraging turnout as was continuing to build awareness through marketing

efforts. It was a collaborative effort with Botanical Gardens, Operations, Public Programming, and volunteers coming together to provide a great family-friendly experience. We are already planning programming for next year and look forward to incorporating our new greenhouse and reimagined Discovery Garden spaces.



- Botanical Garden staff lead the way through several days of timber stand improvement along the north bike trail. Natural Resources joined in on the fun for a day and Operations staff chipped for several days trying to keep the felled material left behind in check. We are about ½ completed with TSI work in this area for the winter.
- Trail clearing at Buffalo Trace and River Bend is ongoing.
- Brodie Ziehr has been converting maintenance and inspection tracking of vehicles, equipment, and facilities to a digital database. He has simplified data entry as well as adjusted reporting to be more user-friendly. We plan to use the vehicle and equipment maintenance data gathered to ensure our parts and supplies mix best match our evolving fleet.
- Rusty Maulding has been assisting planning and construction with decisions regarding the Elks Lake Pavilion renovations as well as reviewing drawings and making adjustment recommendations for the new greenhouse.
- We are pleased to announce three new hires in operations! Josh Schneman will step into the Maintenance Worker II role left by Victor Yelaska and Ethan Trail and Avery Edwards have joined our team as Seasonal Maintenance Worker I.

## **Homer Lake (Skylar Smith)**

- Victor Yelaska joined the Homer Lake operations team in a Maintenance Worker II capacity. His experience with ecological restoration and construction makes him a great fit for the position.
- Invasive bush honeysuckle and autumn olive was removed from areas around shelters to enhance views of the lake.
- New picnic tables were assembled and placed at the Pollinator Point shelter.
- Minor repairs were made to the surface of the KRT and graffiti was removed from wooden fences.

- Operations staff assisted a local boy scout working towards his Eagle Scout rank by unearthing a 40-year-old time capsule at Clark’s Corner. He plans to build a display that will showcase its contents at the Interpretive Center.

## Middle Fork (Matthew Kuntz)

- Middle Fork staff have witnessed an influx of multiple waterfowl species coming through late this season, including; Ross's, speckled, and Canada Geese. We were also fortunate to see 10 Mute Swan at Willow Pond visiting for the new year.
- We are witnessing heavy beaver activity along the Middle Fork River corridor and around the North and South Waterfowl areas. Middle Fork staff have been removing felled trees along the waterfowl berms.
- Staff continue to tackle invasive species (honeysuckle, autumn olive, and specific tree species) along the Miners Trail.
- We are looking forward to starting the campground expansion project, part of the OSLAD trail development project. We are looking into fixtures for the new campsites and will start looking into materials brought in for building the sites.
- Due to the warmer weather, a few meteor showers, and a series of clear skies, we have had heavier-than-usual traffic throughout the preserve this winter.

## Equity in Action

- As part of the Strategic Outcome: Nurture a welcoming environment by embracing diversity, equity, and inclusion; those values will guide our decisions, policies, and practices. To promote the benefits of open space and access to nature for physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health, the Marketing Department worked with a local interpreter to translate the general brochure into Spanish!

