

March 7, 2024

Memorandum

To: Board of Commissioners

From: Nina Carmichael, Leadership in Conservation Fellow

Re: March staff reports

Executive Management (Lorrie Pearson, Michael Daab)

- Lorrie Pearson, Michael Daab, and Commissioners Knott, Hundley, and Goodman attended the IL Association of Park Districts Legislative Breakfast event at the Martens Center in Champaign on March 4th. Forest Preserve staff collaborated with Urbana Park District and Champaign Park District staff to share our gratitude and continuing need for granting opportunities from the State of Illinois. State Representative Brandun Schweizer and State Senators Paul Faraci and Chapin Rose were in attendance and offered remarks as well.
- Michael Daab and Sam Ihm met with a representative of PlacerAi, which is one option for us to track public use of the Forest Preserves and our amenities and facilities. We are excited about the prospect of obtaining anonymous GPS data, including many demographic data categories, in order to more accurately make decisions regarding marketing strategies, programming, and grant applications. We will continue to investigate additional vendors for these services to determine which offers the best combination of price and service.
- Additional Deputy Executive Director tasks in the past month included assisting in the Homer Lake Invasive Removal and other bid processes, coordinating with our legal representation on several agreements and contracts, meeting with neighboring landowners regarding boundaries and/or acquisition, assisting in summer program planning, and participating in various committees.
- Our solar consultant, CQI Associates, LLC (CQI), is creating a Request for Proposal (RFP) for the installation and maintenance of solar systems at Lake of the Woods at the following locations: Headquarters (roof-mount), Elks Lake Pavilion (roof-mount), Lake of the Woods Pavilion (roof-mount), Lake of the Woods Peninsula (ground-mount), Museum of the Grand Prairie (parking canopy), and Lake of the Woods maintenance sheds (roof mount). Public electric vehicle charging stations will be considered for these locations as well. CQI will issue the RFP and work with Forest Preserve staff to determine the best fit for development before asking the Board of Commissioners to approve the development and associated Power Purchase Agreement.
- Planning for our next Strategic Plan continues, with several staff attending a second workshop and working on drafting a scope of work for potential consultants to consider.
- Lorrie continued working with students at the University of Illinois, serving as an interview subject for several studies as they explored various career paths.
- Several staff (Angela Whitlock, Nina Carmichael, Lisa Sprinkle, Kristin Rose, Kamryn Suttinger, Marina Montez, Avery Edwards, and Jennifer Wick) attended the Executive Club of Champaign County's February luncheon at the iHotel as guests of Lorrie Pearson. Jennifer Roscoe was the featured speaker on the topic of Gaining Confidence with Public Speaking.

CCFPD Fellow (Nina Carmichael)

- Scheduling has begun for the next round of the crucial conversations discussion group, which includes Sam Ihm, Kristin Rose, Joie Torres, Jessica Smith, and Jessica Howard.
- Last fall, Nina worked with Healthy Champaign County to support their application for a Healing Illinois grant. The program, Nurtured in Nature, was selected for funding, and the Forest Preserve's involvement will include supporting two hikes led by Kameron Stanton and Chevon Linear, creators of Black People Outside, for two gatherings of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color at our preserves (Homer Lake and Buffalo Trace). This event is projected to bring between 50-70 people. This month Nina touched base with Tomas Delgado to go over the vision and next steps. More details to come.
- While finalizing the summary of the results from the 2023 Employee Engagement Survey, an issue with the document occurred, rendering it inaccessible. IT has been notified and is problem-solving.

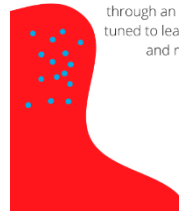


HEALING ILLINOIS



Healthy Champaign County has been awarded the 2024 Healing Illinois Grant from the Illinois Department of Human Services and administered by the United Way of Champaign County! The Healing Illinois program aims to build community-based, long-term racial healing and anti-racism resources and activities throughout Illinois.

Healthy Champaign County, with support from several partner organizations, will address the barriers between our community members of color and the natural areas of Champaign County through an effort we call "Nurtured in Nature." Please stay tuned to learn more about the nature-based events, activities, and resources we aim to build throughout 2024.



Efficiency Committee update:

- Nina has started compiling the final report, which is currently projected to be complete by May 2024.

Planning and Construction (Bridgette Moen)

- Bridgette attended the PDRMA Legal Update.
- Sam assisted Lake of the Woods Operations and Golf Course staff with bidding/procurement.
- Sam routed a draft of the Comprehensive Plan to staff and will incorporate those comments before bringing the document to the Board for review and approval.
- Bridgette worked through options for alternate paths forward on the Discovery Garden Greenhouse restroom/classroom facility.
- Mike Fry has been gathering material quotes for the Spillway Renovation project.
- Construction installed new ceiling fans at the Salt Fork Center as part of the sound and light improvements. Sound baffles will be installed later in the spring.
- Construction renovated the bathrooms at Elks Lake Pavilion, including replacing toilets, recoating the epoxy floors, installing new partitions, painting, and replacing the ceiling.

- Construction prepped the new directional signage for Lake of the Woods Operations.
- Construction assisted Golf Course staff in cleaning up a burn pile, which was a good opportunity for large equipment training.

Business and Finance (Brock Martin & Jessica Howard)

- April Smysor started as a Business and Finance Specialist on February 26th, and Megan McNellis, the new Donor Relationship Coordinator, will be joining us on March 18th.
- A CD from Iroquois Federal Bank matured. The principal and interest were withdrawn, and the funds were moved to the Illinois Fund for higher returns and increased liquidity.
- Began updating long-range projections (2025-2029) for funds available for capital projects.
- Began testing MSI 10 financial upgrade.
- The Smithsonian Institution funded the Smith Intern with \$12,500. This invoice has been submitted.
- Stable Roots endowment was created at Bank Champaign for the Foundation.

Human Resources (Kathryn Glynn, Mary Beck)

- During the month of February, HR processed 10 hires and 0 terms.
- As of February 29th, our total headcount was 87 employees; including 50 FT, 20 PT, and 17 seasonal.
- There were no employee injuries reported in February.
- The onset of warmer weather has prompted an early surge in hiring for seasonal positions, and this trend is steadily gaining momentum. The Finance department is now fully staffed, and the second and final round of interviews are being held for the Public Programs Manager. We expect to extend an offer soon. Both Natural Resources Technician positions have also been filled.
- Kathryn and Stacey Clementz represented the Forest Preserves at the Champaign Public Library's public job fair on February 20th. Hundreds of job seekers were in attendance to speak to over 20 local organizations.
- Mary submitted the OSHA 300 report for 2023.
- Mary submitted the annual payroll audit to PDRMA - PDRMA performs a payroll audit at the end of each coverage year to allocate the workers' compensation contribution among members properly.
- The annual performance review process is currently in progress throughout the organization and is scheduled to conclude on March 18th.



Marketing (Lisa Sprinkle)

Media this month included:

- **Rep. Miller Files New Legislation and Announces OSLAD Grants**
 - <https://eastcentralreporter.com/stories/654784873-rep-miller-files-new-legislation-and-announces-oslad-grants>
- **Champaign County Forest Preserve on outdoor activities**
 - <https://www.wcia.com/ciliving-tv/ciliving-stories/ciliving/champaign-county-forest-preserve-on-outdoor-activities/>
- **Champaign County's River Bend Forest Preserve Set for Expansion with IDNR Grant Funding**
 - <https://mahometdaily.com/champaign-countys-river-bend-forest-preserve-set-for-expansion-with-idnr-grant-funding/>
 - **April 8 total solar eclipse: The best places to stargaze near the path of totality**
<https://www.livescience.com/space/the-sun/april-8-total-solar-eclipse-the-best-places-to-stargaze-near-the-path-of-totality#:~:text=On%20April%208%2C%20International%20Dark,Geauga%20Observatory%20Park%20in%20Ohio>
- **Area History, Feb. 2, 2024**
 - https://www.news-gazette.com/news/local/history/area-history-feb-2-2024/article_042824af-9e24-5408-90c3-5a08dfa46078.html
- **Discover the sweet tradition of maple tapping at Homer Lake Forest Preserve**
 - <https://mahometdaily.com/discover-the-sweet-tradition-of-maple-tapping-at-homer-lake-forest-preserve/>
- **Summer Camp: Helping your kids have the best summer EVER in Champaign-Urbana**
 - <https://www.chambanamoms.com/champaign-urbana-summer-camps-for-kids/>
- **Inside Out | Meet the Champaign County Forest Preserve District's new collections coordinator**
 - https://www.news-gazette.com/news/local/parks-recreation/inside-out-meet-the-champaign-county-forest-preserve-districts-new-collections-coordinator/article_d24ee323-7009-513f-a62f-b82106120ab3.html
- **Don't Let Spring Break Break You: Keep the Family Busy with 50+ Thing to Do in Champaign-Urbana**
 - <https://www.chambanamoms.com/2024/02/25/more-than-fifty-things-to-do-spring-break-champaign-urbana/>
- **Celebrating Women's History Month as a community in Champaign-Urbana**
 - <https://www.chambanamoms.com/2024/02/26/womens-history-month-champaign-urbana/>

- February Social Media info:

	FACEBOOK	+/-	INSTAGRAM	+/-
CCFPD	9,223	+45	3,788	+33
KRT	5994	+0	175	+0
MGP	5,489	+11	1,365	+2
HLIC	3,775	+19		
GC	2,227	+3	389	+4
FPPF	753	+0		

- February Rental Info:

February							
2024	2023	2022	Preserve	Facility	2024	2023	2022
# Rentals	# Rentals	# Rentals			\$	\$	\$
3	5	3	HL	Salt Fork Center	770.00	1,600.00	\$750.00
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
2	5	5	LOW	Elks Lake Pavilion	540.00	2,350.00	\$1,750.00
1	3	4	LOW	Izaak Walton Cabin	160.00	720.00	\$540.00
4	7	2	LOW	Lake of the Woods Pavilion	990.00	2,950.00	\$650.00
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
0	0	0	MF	Activity Center	0.00	0.00	\$0.00
0	0	0	RB	River Bend Shelter	0.00	0.00	\$0.00
10	20	14		TOTAL	2,460.00	7,620.00	\$3,690.00

- Marketing Committee met on February 21 to discuss strategic planning for upcoming social media campaigns that illustrate the different departments of the Champaign County Forest Preserves and the staff within each department, different themes each month for the Forest Preserve's booth at the farmer's market, along with other updates that need to be made to media about the Forest Preserves.
- Lisa met with Chambanamoms to discuss the 2024 contract.
- Lisa and Kristin received training from website consultants on how to edit the ccfpd.org webpage.

- Kristin developed a tri-fold and other recruitment material that can be used for new employee recruitment and to market the forest preserves. This material was used at a community job fair at the Champaign Public Library on 2/20/24.
- Promoted new renovations to the Elks Lake Pavilion.
- Promoted the Snowflake Search on social media.
- Continued employee recruitment campaign on social media with posts for golf course and museum and education open positions.
- Promoted Black History Month by sharing social media posts from the MGP socials to the Forest Preserve’s social pages.
- Promoted volunteer events- invasive species removals.
- Updated print and online ads.
- Produced digital material to promote the \$2K match to raise funds for the Homer Lake Boat Launch. This campaign was successful, and we exceeded our goal.
- Kristin met with Sue Gallo and Ryan Anderson to discuss early planning, role allocation, and marketing tasks for the upcoming Pedal the Preserves event.

Grants and Fundraising (Ryan Anderson)

Three Rivers Event: Staff are exploring options for our first Three Rivers Society event in late March or early April. We hope to focus on education and are discussing options with the Museum and Education Department.

Stable Roots Endowment: The Foundation’s legal counsel completed their review of the Endowment Agreement. Brock has signed and finalized the Endowment Agreement at Bank Champaign. Kristin and Ryan are preparing a communication for existing donors to announce the endowment. Communication to the wider public will happen later in a couple months.

Fundraising Campaigns Progress as of 3/1/24:

Campaign	Raised	Left	Goal	%
Trail Improvements	\$150	\$99,850	\$100,000	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	\$40,395.12
Total \$ (adjusted)	\$174,725.10	\$175,731.78	\$195,050.45	\$35,395.12
# of donors (adjusted)	407	345	442	49
# of 1st time donors	165	87	159	10

“Adjusted” numbers have grants and bequests removed. Updates to Bloomerang have altered these figures.

Volunteer Coordinator (Sue Gallo)

- Updated our youth volunteering info and updated contact lists for schools – Thanks to Lisa for creating the new e-brochures!
- Attended meetings:
 - our first Boneyard Creek Community Day event meeting. The KRT by High Cross road will be a volunteer site! The event will be on Saturday, April 20. I am excited to officially connect the Forest Preserves and our volunteers with this large community and university service event!
 - with Peter and Emily to discuss goals for NR volunteering and assess whether we need to adjust our collaborative approach (goal: focus on prairie stewardship)
 - four Master Naturalist meetings (monthly advisory board, stewardship committee, new staff, and a problem-solving session)
 - Monthly CU Volunteer Coordinator working group meetings (via Zoom) have started up again
 - Pedal the Preserves planning meeting with Jen Gravley, Kristin Rose and Ryan Anderson
- Met and coordinated with Eagle Scouts to finalize their projects (bike repair station at Stidham Woods and bat “rocket” boxes).
- Attended Public Program Manager interview.
- Stewarded with HL restoration crew twice this month, introducing new volunteers to the group, connecting with the existing members and brainstorming possible additional groups.
- Hosted a Homer Lake stewardship event with 28 attendees – Thank you to Anna from NR for helping make this large group possible and to HL Ops staff for getting me access to hot water for volunteer hot chocolate etc. The event was attended by National Honors Society Students from Champaign Central, Master Naturalists, UIUC Society for Hispanic Professional Engineers, and new unaffiliated volunteers. For a lot of the volunteers this was their first time removing invasive plants, and it was fabulous to see how attentive the volunteers were to looking closely at the plants. Anna referred to it as combating ‘plant blindness’ a little bit at a time. See the attached photos to visualize the magnitude of the group’s accomplishment!



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

- The month of February was a roller coaster of weather, but mostly unseasonably warm. These conditions allowed us to open the 18 hole and par 3 courses for walk-ins on February 7th and golf carts became available for use on February 14th. This is the earliest recorded opening of the Golf Course in the last 25 years. This contributed to a record in players (845 players) for the month of February as well! The Golf Course has only opened 6 times during the month of February in the past 30 years.

- Revenues for the month were \$39,300 (as of 2/27/2024). This number is slightly above the 5-year average of \$37,821 and well above the average of seasons of non-Anniversary Pass sales of \$11,450.
- With the early opening of the course, we got a good jump on hiring seasonal positions for 2024. We've filled nearly all the Starter/Ranger, Golf Cart Attendant, and Pro Shop Cashier positions to start the season. We will open the Snack Bar and Beverage Cart positions for hire next month, as those will begin work in mid-April.
- Golf simulator play continued to be strong, even with the course being open outdoors. With the driving range remaining closed until we have more consistent weather, the simulators provide an opportunity to get swings in without playing the course. The Simulator League is in its final weeks, and the simulators will close for the season in mid-March.
- The Golf Committee met on February 20th to discuss arrangements for our annual Volunteer Clean-up Day. This year, we will be holding the event on Saturday, March 23rd, from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Volunteers are encouraged to assist with picking up branches, brush, and debris around the facility during this time. Staff will provide refreshments, and the course will be closed to play, allowing full access to volunteers.

Golf Course Maintenance:

- The maintenance crew set up the course in preparation for opening day.
- The crew has rolled the greens, tees, and fairways.
- Superintendent sprayed the green to control the *Poa annua* (Annual Bluegrass) seed heads. *Poa annua* is a pest that is very common on golf course putting greens. Best thing is to control and keep up with your applications. Once the seeds accrue it will slow down the green speed. Using growth regulars will suppress the seed heads and improve ball speed on the greens.
- Maintenance crew mowed the greens for the first time this year and have been cleaning up sticks and branches out on the course.
- The Assistant Superintendent has done a great job hiring seasonal Maintenance Workers. We will have a crew of 13 seasonal employees.

Museum and Education Department (Kamryn Suttinger)

Patrons Served

	In-Person Programming*	Online Programming*	Outreach**	MGP Visitation	HLIC Visitation
Oct-23	1253	0	57	829	194
Nov-23	952	0	18	566	103
Dec-23	711	0	0	90	57
Jan-24	86	0	0	0	109
Feb-24	120	0	25	0	126
YTD	206	0	25	0	235

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

Collections and Exhibits:

- The Smithsonian's National Museum of African American Culture and Heritage (NMAAHC) pre-screened 18 candidates for our Robert F. Smith Internship Project (which is processing the Lucy Gray subset of Hoskins archive). Intern selection will be completed on March 19, with scheduling finalized by April 5.
- The disposal process for deaccessioned objects from the permanent collection continues. Recycling of deaccessions identified as scrap metal is complete. Mark is coordinating a transfer of 18 objects (primarily agricultural implements) to the Historic Marbold Farmstead (Greenview, IL). Of the institutions offered deaccessioned objects, 8 have declined outright and 3 have not responded. Follow-up inquiries have been sent. Mark has also initiated discussions with colleagues in the museum field concerning the disposal of deaccessions.
- We are excited to welcome a new live animal to the Homer Lake Interpretive Center collection! The male eastern box turtle was remanded to the University of Illinois Wildlife Clinic for treatment in October 2023, given a clean bill of health, and joined Interpretive Center staff Jan 5, 2024. He has a calm demeanor and curious personality that will be a great fit for educational programming. He spent a month out of public view getting acclimated to his new surroundings and is now in the public area on exhibit. Please stop in to meet our new addition!



Youth Programs:

- We are almost full for field trips in April and May for both cultural and natural history.
- Summer camp registration opened on March 6. We have some exciting camp opportunities available this year. We will also be providing pop-up camp programming throughout the summer. These programs will be advertised two weeks ahead and be free to attend. These programs will give us the flexibility to work around the weather (ex: heat) and allow our day camp educators to help plan programs.
- Staff met with Kyle Sondgeroth, Teaching and Learning Coordinator for Unit 4 School District. The school district is updating their social science units to align with the new Common Core learning standards. We will be working with them to adapt our field trip offerings to better meet the needs of the new learning standards.

- A special thank you to Kiri Fagen-Ulmschneider from the CU Spinners and Weavers Guild, who came out to the museum to restore a table loom we use for educational programming and educate staff on its use. Kiri has put together instructions on how to use the loom and keep the loom in good condition for future programming. We are incredibly thankful for Kiri's knowledge and the resources of the CU Guild.

Public Programs and Visitor Services:

- The Snowflake Search ended with another successful season. Huge shoutout to Marketing and M&E staff for their tremendous help this season, and to all other staff who helped in some way.
- The Public Programs Team began initial discussions and planning for June-August public programs, and met with Mike Daab to discuss some new family-friendly summer programming at Lake of the Woods in partnership with the Upper Sangamon River Conservancy.
- Second-round interviews for the Public Program Manager position began.
- John Bien collaborated with Selena Gonzalez from the Youth Programs Team to restructure and revamp the Museum Docent Workshop & Training program.
- Planning for food trucks, a concert, and potential sponsors for Pedal the Preserves began. *Afro D & Global Soundwaves* have been secured as performers.
- Angela Whitlock suggested adding more geocaches to the Forest Preserves to highlight sustainability and Earth Day.
- The Public Programs Team discussed Dark Sky-related programs at Middle Fork; Kamryn Suttinger suggested a Dark Sky Series in relation to programming.

Training/Professional Development:

- Patrick Ahasic and Selena Gonzalez attended a training at Parkland Community College: Principles of Authentic Leadership.

Natural Resources (Peter Goodspeed)

NR Volunteer Events & Programs

- **02/19/2024:** NR hosted a volunteer woody invasive species removal event at Homer Lake FP
 - CCFP staff from other departments attended the event

- 30+ volunteers contributed their time and effort to clearing a highly visible area north of the Homer Lake Interpretive Center



- **02/21/2024:** Peter administered an annual volunteer herbicide training for CCFP volunteers and volunteers for partner agencies in the region.
 - 100 volunteers (including Nina Carmichael and Sue Gallo) attended the hybrid training either in-person or via Zoom.
 - Of the 100 volunteers, 57 individuals became certified to apply herbicide on CCFP properties for invasive species control efforts.

NR Staff Completed Field Tasks

- Staff continued to plant native seed in prepared restoration areas that include:
 - Middle Fork River FP burn pile prairie (2 acres)
 - Middle Fork River FP Sugar Creek prairie (2.7 acres)
 - Middle Fork River FP Conservation Reserve Program prairie (16-acre species enrichment)
 - Middle Fork River FP Baermann prairie disturbed area (7 acres)



- Spring prescribed burn season began early this year and the following ecological management units were burned:
 - Lake of the Woods FP Trillium Drive savanna (8 acres)
 - Sangamon River FP main prairie (44.5 acres)
 - Lake of the Woods FP Rayburn-Purnell Woods, North Bike Path woods, Hawthorn Hill woods (31.2 acres)



Lake of the Woods (Rusty Maulding)

- Botanical Garden and Operations staff worked with Natural Resources to clear thorny trees along the west side of Buffalo Trace Bike Trail in preparation for resurfacing as part of OSLAD grant work this summer. Doing this work now eliminates potential future damage from felling trees near the bike trail and removes hazards for pets, people and equipment on the trail.
- Operations and Botanical Garden staff began stacking fallen dead ash trees near the Story Walk Trail in an effort to tidy up the western main entrance to Lake of the Woods. We anticipate burning these piles in the next week or two. Natural Resources is planning to seed the disturbed areas yet this spring to diversify the limited vegetation mix currently established.
- Almost all staff attended the Homer Lake honeysuckle removal volunteer opportunity on President's Day. They enjoy clearing so much, they showed up early to do bonus clearing with Homer Lake staff.
- Michael Dale treated staff to a guided tour of Conservation District spaces (Heron County Park, Kennekuk County Park and Environmental Education Center as well as the Kickapoo Rail Trail Bridge) in Vermilion County, where he lives. It was great to see similar spaces to our own and how Vermilion County Conservation District maintains them. The views and our time spent together were pretty awesome too.
- Mulching utility areas has begun. We are reusing wood chips created from clearing projects to help control weeds and limit mower encroachment to signs, posts and other utility spaces.
- A total of 456 Christmas trees were recycled through chipping this year.

- Congratulations to Bryson and Connor for attaining their Illinois Pesticide Operators License.
- Michael, Bruce, Brodie, Josh and Rusty attended Level 1 and Level 2 Safety and Woods Worker Training (SAWW). They learned about general chainsaw operation, components and care, chainsaw safety, multiple felling techniques and how to approach moderate hazard situations. All participants practiced felling trees at the Warbler Ridge Conservation Area which is part of Grand Prairie Friends. They were great hosts!
- Operations staff relocated our wood-splitting station and reused the Fisherman's shelter to better protect the splits from rain. They also moved the burn pile to be situated further away from combustible materials and enlisted Construction staff to improve drainage in the space.



Homer Lake (Skylar Smith)

- Homer Lake Operations cleared invasive species along the roadsides between the Oak Ridge picnic area and the Salt Fork Center picnic area. This greatly improved visibility for drivers and pedestrians making their way around that curved section of road.
- The Salt Fork Center saw some improvements this month, as two new fans were installed, a damaged table was replaced, and the old table carts were replaced.
- Skylar and Roy both went to trainings this month, broadening their knowledge of park maintenance and natural resources.
- Safety improvements were made to 2 fishing docks at Homer Lake. New supports were installed under one after the old supports were damaged by ice. The other

had compromised boards replaced to ensure that visitors are safe while enjoying the lake.

- Potholes were patched on the gravel road leading to Hidden Acres. Invasive shrubs encroaching on the road were removed also.
- Two dead trees were removed near the Walnut Hill Shelter as well as one other leaning over the road near the Maple Grove.
- The landscaping at the entrance of Homer Lake and at the Interpretive Center was worked on by staff. Old vegetation was cut and hauled away. Wood chips produced by past tree removal projects were used to mulch those areas, greatly improving the appearance.

Middle Fork (Matthew Kuntz)

- It's great to see the warmer temperatures bring the public back to the preserves. We have seen great numbers using our trails and fishing our ponds over the last couple of weeks.
- Along with the construction crew, Middle Fork staff have started construction of the campground expansion, part of the OSLAD Dark Sky project.
- Middle Fork staff have been able to get in a couple of prescribed burns inside the preserve user areas. Most of these burns are turf conversion sites that will become new natural areas.
- Assistant Superintendent Jacob Pruiett attended the Tri-State Forestry Conference in northern Illinois at the beginning of March. Sessions included were floodplain timber management, soil management, and white oak management.
- We are currently receiving applications for our full-time position that will be open at the beginning of April. Ed Hutchinson, who has been a part of the Middle Fork staff for twelve years, will be retiring at the end of March. We wish him well and thank him for his passion and everything he has done here at the Forest Preserves.

Equity in Action

- Kristin Rose, Ryan Anderson, Nina Carmichael, and Jeremy Cagle attended the fifth and final session of the Equity Training for the Conservation Community facilitated by Porter McMullen Bushman entitled Inclusive Leadership Building Culturally Competent Organizations and Effectively Leading session. We evaluated different review areas and ideologies within the areas and applied them to our organizations and work, thinking of ideas on how we can break down barriers and increase equity and inclusion in our organization.