

February 7, 2024

Memorandum

To: Board of Commissioners

From: Nina Carmichael, Leadership in Conservation Fellow

Re: February Staff Reports

Executive Management (Lorrie Pearson, Michael Daab)

- We are so excited to have received an Open Space Land and Development (OSLAD) grant through the IL Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) and have been at work speaking to the media and potential project partners.
- All staff have been participating in the process of developing a set of values for the Forest Preserves through a combination of focus group work and all staff meetings. A subset of staff has focused on planning these events and refining the work done by all staff.



- With the values process underway, we are preparing to develop the Forest Preserves' next strategic plan. Lorrie is taking the lead on organizing this endeavor, convening a group of several department heads and Michael to participate in training and discussions to guide the process. Like with identifying organizational values, strategic planning will need the voices of all staff, and we are looking forward to charting our path together with the Board.
- Amber Lannert of Lunatic Kayak Rental informed us they won't be renewing their license agreement for canoe and kayak rental at Homer Lake in 2024 due to family commitments. This means canoe and kayak rentals at Homer will be discontinued until further notice.
- Additional Deputy Executive Director tasks in the past month included assisting in the Homer Lake Invasive Removal and other bid processes, navigating two days of ice storm-related closures for the Forest Preserves, assisting HR with the 2024 Coaching for Success employee evaluation process, coordinating with our legal representation on

several agreements and contracts pertaining to land use and acquisition, solar consultation, and the Owner's Representative contract for the KRT project. Michael also had a meeting with an associate from Champaign Park District to discuss potential partnerships.

- Several staff from multiple departments and two commissioners attended the 2024 Soaring to New Heights conference in Chicago, gaining insights on a broad array of topics from culture to maintenance, facility construction to marketing, and finance to artificial intelligence. Commissioners and the Executive Director met new State Representative Brandon Schweizer over the awards luncheon. Staff attendees: Bridgette Moen, Brock Martin, Kathryn Glynn, Kristin Rose, Lisa Sprinkle, Lorrie Pearson, Matt Kuntz, Michael Daab, and Rusty Maulding., Commissioner attendees: Andrew Kerins and Wendy Hundley.
- State Senator Paul Faraci contacted Lorrie to discuss the status of our \$50,000 grant for KRT expenses west of High Cross Road. The grant has been awarded and the requisite paperwork is being processed.
- Lorrie participated in the bi-monthly meeting with the executive directors of the Urbana and Champaign Park Districts, with the current discussion focus being the breakfast with area legislators scheduled for March 4. We have also committed to discussing leadership topics and books together to further our professional development and positive impact on our respective organizations.
- Lorrie attended the annual conference of the Illinois Association of Conservation Districts in Starved Rock to strengthen relationships with sister organizations throughout the state. She also attended the meeting of approximately 30 area women who are executive directors or other leaders in the community to welcome the new executive director of the Community Foundation of East Central Illinois (Allison Winters) to her role. The event serves to solidify and expand Lorrie's and the Forest Preserves' relationships in the community.



CCFPD Fellow (Nina Carmichael)

- Assisted NR staff (Tegan & Anna) with burn piles at River Bend Forest Preserve
- Continued facilitation of the crucial conversations and discussion group

- Compiled a CCFPD Committee Membership spreadsheet to track participants' terms of service and department representation and serve as a consolidated contact list between members.
 - Employee Engagement Committee
 - Sustainability Committee
 - Marketing Committee
 - Efficiency Committee
 - DEI Committee (Inactive due to restructuring)
- Wrapping up analysis with Ryan from over 250 open-ended responses from the Employee Engagement survey to be included in a summary report that will be sent out to all staff.
- Met with Marina, Selena, Stacey, Mark, Rusty, and Michael Dale to determine sign type, theme, topic, and placement for 8 interpretive signs to be placed in and around the greenhouse. The next step is to draft content designs with text and images for each sign for an initial review.

Efficiency Committee Updates

- Completed the cataloging and organizing of the employee recommendations for increased efficiency and accountability
- Compiled a list of possible research areas to focus on to better define the direction and scope of the committee
- Currently writing an update detailing the activities and findings from as employee liaison between September 2023 and February 2024.

Planning and Construction (Bridgette Moen)

- Rusty and Bridgette met with Farnsworth, the architect for the Discovery Greenhouse, to select finishes for the interior.
- Planning generated an additional Nature Center concept floorplan.
- Sam is developing the final layout/graphics for the Comprehensive Plan.
- Sam and Roy picked up the new light-duty truck for Homer Lake and delivered the hybrid SUV from Homer Lake to Headquarters.
- Construction installed additional outlets at the Izaak Walton Cabin so the space is more functional for renters.
- Construction ordered new bathroom partitions for Elks Lake Pavilion restrooms. The partitions are manufactured with a minimum of 30% post-consumer plastics and recycled content for shipping materials. The ceiling panels in the restrooms are also being replaced and are 100% post-consumer recycled plastic.
- The ADA lift at Headquarters was inspected.
- Mike Fry and Skylar met to discuss plans for the Salt Fork Center sound and light improvements.
- Benches were ordered for the Middle Fork Dark Skies Trail project.

- Construction staff attended an excavator/safe digging training hosted by JULIE (Joint Utility Locating Information for Excavators).

Business and Finance (Brock Martin, Jessica Howard)

- We are excited that both Brock and Jessica began full-time work with us last month.
- As her contract with us ends, we thank Carron Johnson for her assistance over the last year in helping to prepare the FY24 budget, finalizing audit work, and ensuring we met legal deadlines and paid our bills on time.
- The department is working on building its new team, closing out FY23, and preparing for the FY23 audit. Interviews are underway for the Business and Finance Specialist. That interview panel involved both Mary Beck and Lorrie Pearson.

Grants and Fundraising (Ryan Anderson)

- **2024 Fundraising Plan:** Staff are developing a Fundraising plan for 2024. This document will help organize our campaigns and goals for 2024. This is a living document for staff use.
- **Illinois Department of Natural Resources OLSAD:** The Forest Preserves have been awarded a 1.1 million dollar grant from the IDNR for land acquisition to expand River Bend Forest Preserve.
- **Dark Sky Designation:** Staff submitted our annual report to Dark Sky International to maintain Middle Fork River Forest Preserve’s Dark Sky Designation.

Fundraising Campaigns Progress as of 2/1/24:

Campaign	Raised	Left	Goal	%
Trail Improvements	\$100	\$99,900	\$100,000	0%
Dark Sky Trail	\$60,745	\$39,255	\$100,000	61%
Homer Lake Boat Launch	\$11,280	\$8,720	\$20,000	56%

Fundraising Trends (as of 2/1/2024)

Donations 4-Year Summary

4-year totals:	2021	2022	2023	2024 (ytd)
Total \$	\$209,832.74	\$207,053.66	\$221,362.35	\$15,310.06
Total \$ (adjusted)	\$174,725.10	\$175,731.78	\$195,050.45	\$10,310.06
# of donors (adjusted)	407	345	442	31
# of 1 st time donors	165	87	159	4

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

Human Resources (Kathryn Glynn, Mary Beck)

- During the month of January, HR processed 4 hires and 1 term.
- As of January 31st, our total headcount was 77 employees; including 50 FT, 17 PT, and 10 seasonal.
- There was 1 employee injury reported in January, a slip during the ice event, but luckily no medical was required.
- Recruiting for seasonal positions has begun. Megan McNellis starts on March 11th as the new Donor Relationship Coordinator. Interviews are underway for the Public Programs Manager and Business and Finance Specialist positions.
- Mary Beck has been assisting with the FPF Board meetings as we await the incoming Donor Relationship Coordinator.

Marketing (Lisa Sprinkle)

- Media this month included:
 - **Top Things to do in February in Champaign Urbana**
 - <https://www.chambanamoms.com/2024/01/29/february-champaign-urbana/>
 - **Weekender Jan 18-21**
 - <https://www.smilepolitely.com/culture/weekender-january-18-21/>
 - **There are good things about winter, right?**
 - <https://www.smilepolitely.com/splog/there-are-good-things-about-winter-right/>
 - **Inside Out | Exploring the world of fox snakes**
 - https://www.news-gazette.com/news/local/parks-recreation/inside-out-exploring-the-world-of-fox-snakes/article_c2a43e84-e909-5cc2-9bed-160dfd6f09ce.html
 - **Mahomet Volunteer event to help with invasive species removal**
 - <https://news.yahoo.com/mahomet-volunteer-event-help-invasive-152959218.html>
 - **Champaign County Forest Preserve District to buy more land near Mahomet**
 - https://www.news-gazette.com/news/local/parks-recreation/champaign-county-forest-preserve-district-to-buy-more-land-near-mahomet/article_eb4d8d59-3a7a-59b9-a039-9b6b587abb79.html
 - **Mahomet forest preserve to receive state funding for expansion**
 - <https://www.wcia.com/news/local-news/mahomet-forest-preserve-to-receive-state-funding-for-expansion/>
 - **Snowflake Search 2024 with the Champaign County Forest Preserve District**
 - <https://www.wcia.com/ciliving-tv/snowflake-search-2024-with-champaign-county-forest-preserves-district/>

- Social media followers update.

	FACEBOOK	+/-	INSTAGRAM	+/-
CCFPD	9,178	+147	3,755	+36
KRT	5994	+169	175	+1
MGP	5,478	+10	1,363	+3
HLIC	3,756	+37		
GC	2,224	+9	385	+8
FPPF	753	+36		

- December Rental Info:

2024	2023	2022	Location	JANUARY	2024	2023	2022
# Rentals	# Rentals	# Rentals	Preserve	Facility	\$	\$	\$
6	3	4	HL	Salt Fork Center	\$1,760.00	\$850.00	\$1,200.00
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
3	1	2	LOW	Elks Lake Pavilion	\$1,380.00	comp	\$450.00
3	2	1	LOW	Izaak Walton Cabin	\$480.00	\$480.00	\$270.00
5	4	5	LOW	Lake of the Woods Pavilion	\$1,595.00	\$1,250.00	\$1,250.00
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
1	0	0	MF	Activity Center	\$275.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
0	0	0	RB	River Bend Shelter	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
18	10	12		TOTAL	\$5,490.00	\$2,580.00	\$3,170.00

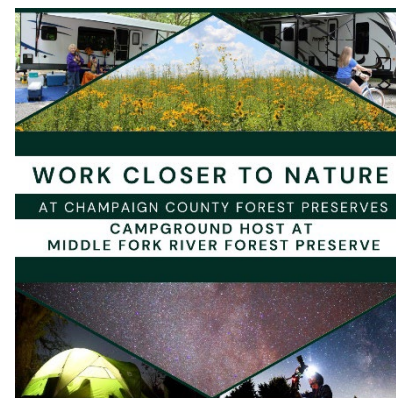
- The Marketing Committee met on January 17 to discuss the areas of improvement we will work on as part of the 2024 Organizational Objectives. These areas include:
 - Advertise Ourselves: Who we are, what we do, and why we do what we do
 - Highlight the forest preserves and the value they bring to the community
 - Increase our understanding of our audience base
 - Develop a Branding and Style Guide
- Worked on updates to the new website to enhance the user experience.
- Added a Splash page to the Kickapoo Rail Trail website, More Miles Coming Soon! <https://www.onekrt.org/>. Developing marketing materials to generate excitement about the upcoming construction/expansion!



- Kristin developed social media posts and content to advertise open positions within the forest preserves.

Forest Preserve Friends Foundation Marketing

- Kristin participated in second-round interviews for the Donor Relationship Coordinator Position.
- Kristin and Ryan Anderson met to discuss 2024 Marketing/Communications/Fundraising Plans.



- Kristin and Lisa with Forest Preserve Friends Foundation Marketing Committee on to brainstorm ideas on how to market for and raise funds for the upcoming trail improvements.
- Kristin has been working with the Forest Preserve Friends Foundation Marketing Committee and Board members to finalize the logo for the Forest Preserve Friends Foundation Stable Roots Endowment Fund.



Volunteer Coordinator (Sue Gallo)

- Volunteer engagement continued to grow last year with approximately 10,200 hours of service by roughly 1,240 volunteers (these values include Upper Sangamon River Conservancy service on Forest Preserve Property, which have been included in totals since at least 2019). We had 118 applicants, 40% of whom volunteered last year. That’s a significant decrease from the 60% of applicants the year prior. At least 25 service groups helped at the golf course, in the botanical garden, with programs, with trail maintenance and most of all with natural resource-related tasks. CCFPD staff hosted roughly 56 events that engaged volunteers last year, which was a big source of the growth in engagement.

Year	2023	2022	2021
Number of Volunteers	1240	1100	760
Number of Volunteers (without USRC)	1100	950	0
Hours of service	10200	9330	8100
Hours of service (without USRC)	9200	8300	7400
Number of service Groups	25	0	0
Number of service events	56	49	0

- Volunteer service brings new individuals to our forest preserves. Our staff endeavors to make the service opportunity educational in some respect, and we try to convey the magnitude of impact the volunteers have on our mission. Volunteer service meets our mission in far more aspects than just 10000 hours of labor.

January was mostly spent compiling these data, but additional items of note include:

- Continued to support two Eagle Scouts with their project and I am grateful to Peter for agreeing to support an additional Scout with their project.

- Both invasive removal events in January (1NR, 1VO were canceled due to weather)
- Started a remote volunteer manager training through Volunteer Pro taught by Tobi Johnson
- Attended a database optimization training session.

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

- With the course closed for outside play due to weather, staff focused on golf simulator play in January. With the addition of the new Foresight Golf Simulator, we were able to expand the 2-Person simulator league offering this year. We increased the number of teams to 16, up from 10 teams in 2023. Each team schedules a time on one of the simulators to complete their 9-hole round each week. This is a 10-week league, which will conclude the first week of March. There are weekly prizes along with a season-long points race for order of finish. League entry was \$400 per team, with fees going to cover weekly sim time and prize earnings. Golf simulator play also continued to be strong with public usage for practice and 9 and 18-hole rounds.
- David and Jason spent the week of January 8th - 12th teaching a golf unit to the PE classes at Lincoln Trail Elementary School in Mahomet. This included all PE classes throughout the day, running from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.



- Chris, David, and Jason attended the 2024 PGA Golf Merchandise Show in Orlando, FL, the week of January 22nd. The PGA Show is attended by most major golf companies and allows staff to meet with sales reps, test new equipment, and see new trends throughout the industry. The first day of the Show is Demo Day, held at Orange County National Golf Center. All companies in attendance have booths set up that allow you to try their products on a 600-yard, circular driving range. The following 3 days are held indoors at the Orange County Convention Center. Vendors set up booths and you can interact with sales reps from each company. Some of the things we accomplished while there include: ordering a new driving range ball picker, ordering new hitting mats for the Par 3 Course, meeting with Foresight about golf simulator technology and upgrades, visiting the ForeUp booth to view new upgrades to our point of sale software, looking for new ideas for golf scorecards, and exploring different ideas for Par 3 Course hole

signage. We also spoke with different vendors about new products and ideas for the Pro Shop that piqued our interest.

- While away at the Show, merchandise for the 2024 golf season was arriving at the Pro Shop. Staff is spending the final days of the month receiving and stocking new inventory for the upcoming golf season.

Golf Course Operation:

- The Golf Assistant and Equipment Manager are finishing up grinding reels and servicing equipment
- The crew routinely maintained the cleanliness of the parking lot, areas around the clubhouse, and out on the course.
- The crew will be removing trees on the right-side cart path on hole # 8.

Trainings & Certifications

- Joie Torres completed four trainings (1. Diversity for all employees 2. Grounds Maintenance Safety 3. New Employee Safety Orientation 4. Snow and Ice Removal Safety) through PDRMA.
- Completed required continuing education training through GCSAA (Golf Course Superintendent Association of America) to retain class A membership status.

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
YTD	10,073	544	1,547	9,580	2,013

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

Collections and Exhibits:

- Jessica Smith is quickly acclimating to her role as our new Collections Coordinator and is already proving a valuable member of the Museum and Education department team.
- Mike Williams began work as our Facilities Specialist, working at both the museum and interpretive center. He transferred over from LOW operations and is also proving a hugely welcome member of the team.



Rankin Center Collections storage

- The Sangamon Shed to Rankin Center artifact relocation project is officially complete! Collections staff are now focusing on the tool wing blacksmith shop in preparation for the exhibit. If you haven't been inside Rankin Center lately, visitors are welcome. We'd love to show you our work!
- Taylor Studios provided the design templates for the new tool wing exhibit. These templates will allow us to develop a final design at a level of professionalism and quality difficult to achieve in-house.
- The disposal process for deaccessioned objects from the collection continues. No disposal has occurred. Of the 14 institutions approached about potential transfers, seven have declined outright, one is considering a transfer, and six have not responded. Of those who declined, several are undergoing deaccessioning projects of their own or are not interested in the object or quality of an object we have to offer. Follow-ups are pending with those organizations who have not responded.
- Mark Hanson has renewed discussions with the Conservation Center in Chicago to address concerns raised by the Museum Advisory Committee about why the museum has not hired professional conservators to address collection condition issues on select artifacts.

Youth Programs:

- Late last year, Cathy Schneider and Patrick Ahasic wrote and submitted a grant proposal to EEAI. They just learned that their proposal was accepted and has been awarded \$350 for the purchase of technology to enhance their school program offerings. They plan to purchase two tablets to use initially for Bird ID during programming and will be working on ways to further apply that technology in the future.

- Staff have put together some amazing camp offerings for this summer. The information has been sent to Marketing to design the summer series flyer. Registration will open on March 6.

Public Programs and Visitor Services:

- The Snowflake Search Committee (SSC) worked to get the 2024 snowflake search started for the year. This year includes 20 newly painted snowflakes, and in place of the interpretive signs, we have developed digital content that patrons can access by scanning a QR code. (See example) This year's search really involved almost every department in some way, and the SSC is grateful to each person who contributed in some way!
- Jennifer Wick and John Bien met with staff at the Champaign Park District to discuss our existing programming partnership.
- The first round of interviews for the Public Programs Manager position will conclude in early February.

Natural Resources (Peter Goodspeed)

NR Completed Field Tasks

- Staff continued to clear invasive shrubs from forest understory sites at the following locations:
 - Homer Lake FP Timberdoodle Woods (2.5 acres)
 - Lake of the Woods FP Buffalo Trace tree tunnel (.5 acres)



- Volunteer brush piles were also ignited at:
 - River Bend FP
 - Homer Lake FP

- Native seeding projects were well underway in January. Staff hand spread purchased and collected native seed for new restoration and species enrichment projects in the following locations:
 - Middle Fork River FP Point Pleasant west old field corner (2.7 acres)
 - Middle Fork River FP 75th Anniversary Tree Grove understory turf conversion (.6 acres)
 - Kickapoo Rail Trail Ogden east prairie (1 acre)
 - Lake of the Woods FP Buffalo Trace south volunteer clearing native cover crop (4 acres)
 - Middle Fork River FP Baermann sand and gravel prairie (2.7 acres)



NR Administrative Projects (Peter)

- Met with professor Warren Lavey and a law student from UIUC to discuss pro bono work that will help with renewable energy projects throughout the preserves.
- Hosted the pre-bid meeting for the Homer Lake FP invasive tree and shrub removal project.
- Natural resources technician Eric Roth recently accepted a job with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) as a Soil Conservation Technician in Decatur, IL. Emily and Peter conducted virtual interviews with eight candidates to fill the two open NR technician positions in the department.

Lake of the Woods (Rusty Maulding)

- Night Lights decorations have been taken down, light strands fixed or discarded if there was too much critter damage, new accessories purchased and/or created, and everything stowed away for next year's program.
- Botanical Garden staff continue to work at trail edges, removing and killing invasives primarily within 20' of the trail edge to help open the spaces, improve the quality of the vegetation and habitat, and ease burdensome maintenance tasks during the growing season.
- Operations staff assisted with trail edge clearing and chipping or burning as appropriate as well as stump clearing from earlier felled trees.
- Operations staff, led by Josh Schneman, is nearing completion on rebuilding our 2001 Interstate car trailer that had a failing deck and other systems that needed attention. This includes stripping it down to the frame, priming and painting it, new wiring, lighting, decking, brakes, wheel bearings, and fenders.

- We received our storm shelter for the West Maintenance area that will benefit Natural Resources, Construction, Botanical Garden, and Operations staff. Thank you!

Homer Lake (Skylar Smith)

- Frozen ground allowed Homer Lake Operations to tackle some much-needed trail widening. The forestry mower was used to widen approximately 1 mile of the West Lake Trail.
- The forestry mower was also used to clear ½ mile of invasive shrubs near the road on the west side of the preserve. Mowing the invasive shrubs improves the ecosystem and makes it easier to spot deer, which enhances safety for drivers on County Road 2500 E.
- The flooring in the utility room at the Salt Fork Center has been failing for some time, due to heavy wear and tear from table and chair dollies. Homer Lake Operations staff worked hard to replace approximately 300 square feet of the floor with commercial-grade vinyl tiles. The end result looks fantastic and I am extremely proud and impressed by the Homer Lake crew's willingness to go above and beyond to complete this project.



- A new work truck was purchased from Northside Ford in Effingham for Homer Lake operations to replace the 2012 Ford Escape. The Escape is being sent to headquarters, where needs more suit the capabilities of that vehicle. This new F-150 is going to greatly enhance productivity and efficiency at Homer Lake.

Middle Fork (Matthew Kuntz)

- Middle Fork staff continues invasive removal throughout the preserves. We have recently started thinning hazardous or unwanted trees through the campground in February. Through this process, we hope to improve the ability to produce productive prescribed burns by opening the canopy and invigorating our spring ephemeral

propagation at the same time. Over the last few years, we have also introduced more native tree plantings through the campground timber areas.

- We received large amounts of precipitation at the end of January which regenerated our ponds from the previous year's drought.
- Middle Fork staff have been spreading prairie seeds in new no-mow areas throughout the preserve. This is part of our plans to reduce mowed areas and reintroduce native prairies in key areas at Middle Fork. To date, we have converted close to 2.5 acres of turf areas back to native plantings.

Equity in Action

- Kristin Rose, Ryan Anderson, Kathryn Glynn, and Cathy Schneider attended session #3 of the Equity Training for the Conservation Community 5-part series facilitated by Porter McMullen Bushman entitled *Visioning for Effective Allyship*.