

December 7, 2023

## **Memorandum**

To: Board of Commissioners

From: Nina Carmichael, Leadership in Conservation Fellow

Re: December staff reports

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

- Developing and balancing the 2024 Working Budget for the Forest Preserves.
- Michael has been talking to land owners, scheduling and attending site visits, evaluating appraisals, developing agreements, and speaking with legal counsel for the currently outstanding Open Space Land Acquisition and Development (OSLAD) grant application.
- Michael continues to complete Information Technology actions, including setting up cybersecurity training, the transition to a new phone system, and exploring the expansion of wi-fi at Forest Preserve facilities.
- Working with the hiring team to perform interviews, debrief sessions, and reference calls as we work to secure a new Director of Business and Finance and Assistant Director of Business and Finance.
- Other tasks over the past month have included: working to establish the 2025 rate and fee updates, upkeeping correspondence with employees, foundation members, and the public's requests for information.

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

- Joined the Marketing committee
- Began scheduling crucial conversations for another group of M&E staff (Selena Gonzales, Patrick Ahasic, Jennifer Wick, and John Bien).

### **Efficiency Committee Update**

- Identified two efficiency measures (administrative vs. board approval and regular schedule for updating agency materials) as key efficiencies for voting members of the committee to assess and weigh in on during our next meeting in January.
- Included an area to further capture employee suggestions on efficiency measures in the recently completed Employee Engagement Committee survey.
- Began organizing and categorizing the rolling recommendation list

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

- Sam continued to work on clarifying the new requirements of Public Act 103-0386 requiring signs along bicycle paths by reaching out to other Districts and PDRMA.
- Sam continued drafting/editing text and figures for the Comprehensive Plan.

- Bridgette reviewed the Certificates for Tax Exemption with the County Assessor's office and submitted exemption applications for the two parcels acquired in 2023 in the Village of Ogden.
- Bridgette updated the plans for the Homer Lake canoe launch project.
- Construction prepped materials for the Hickory and Hawthorn shelter at Lake of the Woods.
- Construction repainted the decorative signs on the Covered Bridge.
- Construction has started work on the Elks Lake renovation with Lake of the Woods Operations and has painted the interior.



- Construction prepped the site for the Lake of the Woods storm shelter near West Maintenance.
- Construction assisted with trenching new electric lines at the Botanical Gardens.

### **Business and Finance (Carron Johnson)**

- The next Business and Finance Director will join staff on January 8.
- Recruitment for the vacant Assistant Business and Finance Director is underway.
- Great strides have been made on completing the 2024 budget.
- End-of-year activities will be underway shortly.

### **Human Resources (Kathryn Glynn, Mary Beck)**

- During the month of November, HR processed 1 hire and 14 terms.
- As of November 30<sup>th</sup>, our total headcount was 87 employees; including 48 FT, 18 PT, and 21 seasonal.
- Mary attended PDRMA's Risk Management Institute in Tinley Park on November 17th. Sessions attended included: Mastering the five core capacities for safety excellence, How to De-escalate Conflict in Park and Rec, and Understanding Mental Health First Aid.
- Mary conducted a slip, trip, and fall self-assessment via a software platform provided by PDRMA. This assessment looks at building entrances/exits, danger signage, and exterior walkways where staff or patrons would congregate.
- Winter stocking caps were ordered and delivered for operations staff.



- The annual benefits Open Enrollment took place November 27<sup>th</sup> through December 8<sup>th</sup>.
- HR has completed the final policy changes for compliance with the Paid Leave for All Workers (PLAWA) law taking effect January 1, 2024.

## Marketing (Lisa Sprinkle)

Media this month included:

- **Tom Kacich | Dreaming big of rail trails in Piatt County and East Central Illinois**  
[https://www.news-gazette.com/opinion/columns/tom-kacich-dreaming-big-of-rail-trails-in-piatt-county-east-central-illinois/article\\_8f0dc773-5d7e-5726-8cd9-ccd314332660.html](https://www.news-gazette.com/opinion/columns/tom-kacich-dreaming-big-of-rail-trails-in-piatt-county-east-central-illinois/article_8f0dc773-5d7e-5726-8cd9-ccd314332660.html)
- **Champaign County Forest Preserve District brings Night Lights back to Lake of the Woods in Mahomet**  
<https://www.chambanamoms.com/2023/11/15/botanical-garden-at-lake-of-the-woods-to-illuminate-during-holidays/>
- **A Guide to Shopping Local 2023**  
<https://www.smilepolitely.com/culture/a-guide-to-shopping-local-2023/>
- **Galaxy Quest: Stargazers to get their own niche at Middle Fork River Forest Preserve**  
[https://www.news-gazette.com/news/local/parks-recreation/galaxy-quest-stargazers-to-get-their-own-niche-at-middle-fork/article\\_3aa765f5-89b8-5e9f-8017-4440be93bbe2.html](https://www.news-gazette.com/news/local/parks-recreation/galaxy-quest-stargazers-to-get-their-own-niche-at-middle-fork/article_3aa765f5-89b8-5e9f-8017-4440be93bbe2.html)
- **Champaign County Forest Preserves unveils plan for stargazing trail**  
<https://www.wcia.com/news/local-news/champaign-co-forest-preserve-district-unveils-plans-for-stargazing-trail/>
- **Funding Received to complete Kickapoo Rail Trail**  
<https://vermilioncountyfirst.com/2023/11/26/funding-received-to-complete-kickapoo-rail-trail/>
- **Kickapoo Rail Trail gets funding to complete construction**  
[https://www.wandtv.com/community/kickapoo-rail-trail-gets-funding-to-complete-construction/article\\_ac484e0e-8d31-11ee-8a40-077d0dbf04f9.html](https://www.wandtv.com/community/kickapoo-rail-trail-gets-funding-to-complete-construction/article_ac484e0e-8d31-11ee-8a40-077d0dbf04f9.html)

- **It's happening: Kickapoo Rail Trail finally to be completed**  
[https://www.news-gazette.com/newsletter/content/daily\\_headlines/its-happening-kickapoo-rail-trail-finally-to-be-completed/article\\_3dfbc444-8de7-55d9-a76f-73b553234601.html](https://www.news-gazette.com/newsletter/content/daily_headlines/its-happening-kickapoo-rail-trail-finally-to-be-completed/article_3dfbc444-8de7-55d9-a76f-73b553234601.html)
- **The Kickapoo Rail Trail now has the funding for completion**  
<https://www.smilepolitely.com/splog/the-kickapoo-rail-trail-now-has-the-funding-for-completion/>
- **Funding to complete KRT in 2025**  
[https://www.commercial-news.com/news/local\\_news/funding-received-to-complete-krt-in-2025/article\\_95e5b6c4-8d45-11ee-8b9d-6fdb57916100.html](https://www.commercial-news.com/news/local_news/funding-received-to-complete-krt-in-2025/article_95e5b6c4-8d45-11ee-8b9d-6fdb57916100.html)
- **KRT on track for 2-year completion**  
[Kickapoo Rail Trail on track for two-year completion with \\$11.2 million state grant. - IPM Newsroom](#)
- Social media followers update.

	FACEBOOK	+/-	INSTAGRAM	+/-
CCFPD	8,928	+63	3,704	+47
KRT	5,703	+62	175	+1
MGP	5,452	+6	1,355	+0
HLIC	3,703	+4		
GC	2,210	+1	377	+8
FPPF	704	+5		

- November Rental Info:

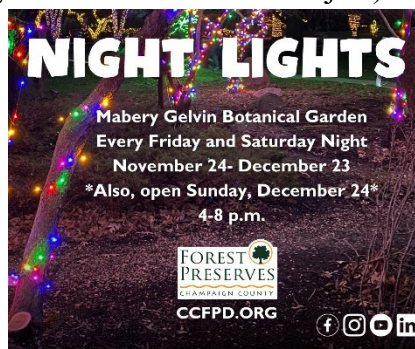


2023	2022	November		2023	2022
# Rentals	# Rentals	Preserve	Facility	\$	\$
9	7	HL	Salt Fork Center	\$2,450	\$1,450
0	0	HL	Walnut Hill Shelter	\$0	\$0
0	0	LOW	Botanical Garden Weddings	\$0	\$0
3	9	LOW	Elks Lake Pavilion	\$0	\$2,275
5	9	LOW	Izaak Walton Cabin	\$1,280	\$1,730
8	14 *	LOW	Lake of the Woods Pavilion	\$3,025	\$1,275
0	0	LOW	Lakeview Shelter	\$0	\$0
0	0	LOW	Riverview Retreat Center	\$0	\$0
0	0	LOW	Rotary Hill Shelter	\$0	\$0
0	0	LOW	Sycamore Hollow Shelter	\$0	\$0
3	1	MF	Activity Center	\$1,025	\$525
0	0	RB	River Bend Shelter	\$0	\$0
<b>28</b>	<b>26</b>		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$7,780</b>	<b>\$7,255</b>

\* 9 are early voting/election

**Note:** Seasonal rentals are now in effect and Elks Lake Pavilion is closed for construction

- In steps to be compliant with the Local Records Act and Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), we finalized a contract with Civic Plus to archive the Forest Preserves' 13 social media accounts. We no longer actively use the X (Twitter) accounts, so we will archive them this month, and then delete them.
- The updated CCFPD.org website page goes live on Friday, December 15.
- Updated print and digital ads to promote Night Lights and Middle Fork River Forest Preserve (to draw attention to the Dark Sky Trail and Amenities Project).



- Generated three video testimonials/appeals for Giving Tuesday to raise funds for the Dark Sky Trail and Amenities Project. One video features David Leake, another features Rachel Voss, and the third features Gabe Difanis. These videos have been posted to social media and have also been included in email appeals which I worked with Ryan Anderson on as part of a Giving Tuesday campaign to raise funds for the Middle Fork River Forest Preserve: Dark Sky Trail and Amenities. View the videos on you tube: <https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLBXYnv3F9VHjQOQpNE9WO53L1abi8STGA&si=OhIK7Pg8klRB5Un0>
- Marketing materials (event flyer, Facebook event page and graphic, and event flyer) were generated for the “75 Trees for 75 Years” tree planting event, Nov. 4<sup>th</sup>. Photos from the event were posted to social media.
- Other social media, event promotion, and marketing material highlights: new story walk for Nov-Dec, Timberdoodle Area enhancement (‘thank you’ to volunteers, ICECF, FPFF, and donors).
- Kristin developed marketing materials for Three River’s Society Year-End Event coming up on Dec. 7<sup>th</sup>, including pins for 2024, additional event invites to extend to more donors, and a reminder to RSVP.
- The Marketing Committee began discussing strategic goals for 2024 based on data review and analysis from the comprehensive plan.
- Kristin met with the Fundraising Committee to review Giving Tuesday campaign materials and get feedback to make improvements.
- Kristin worked with the Snowflake Search Committee to prepare new materials for the Snowflake Search coming up in January.
- Kristin attended a class at Parkland to get certified to use the Forest Preserves drone for marketing purposes.



## **Grants and Fundraising (Ryan Anderson)**

**Three Rivers Society Party** was held on Thursday, December 7, 6 pm-8 pm at the Salt Fork Center, Homer Lake Forest Preserve. We currently have 8 donors renewed for the Three Rivers Society.

**Giving Tuesday:** We received \$10,413 on 11/28. This includes \$8,031 for Dark Skies. We are still seeing gifts come in online and have just begun receiving checks from the Nature’s Appeal. The Foundation and the Preserves were also featured on WCIA last night to discuss our Giving Tuesday efforts.

- **Fundraising Campaigns Progress as of 11/30/23:**

Campaign	Raised	Left	Goal	%
<b>Dark Sky Trail</b>	\$ 47,818	\$ 52,182	\$ 100,000.00	47%
Timberdoodle Trail	\$ 7,050	\$ 0	\$ 7,000.00	100%
<b>Homer Lake Boat Launch</b>	\$ 8,580.00	\$ 11,420.00	\$ 20,000.00	42%

**Fundraising Trends (as of 11/30/2023)**

*Donations 4-Year Summary*

4-year totals:	2020	2021	2022	2023 (YTD)
<b>Total \$</b>	\$164,219.10	\$209,832.74	\$207,053.66	\$166,138
<b>Total \$ (adjusted)</b>	\$111,738.24	\$174,725.10	\$175,731.78	\$147,280.12
<b># of donors (adjusted)</b>	341	407	345	345
<b># of 1<sup>st</sup> time donors</b>	134	165	87	144

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

*Adjusted Revenue by Month (Aug-Nov)*

	August	September	October	November
<b>2020</b>	\$1,615.92	\$3,356.50	\$4,330.77	\$6,638.56
<b>2021</b>	\$6,061.91	\$5,408.10	\$4,207.40	\$32,094.29
<b>2022</b>	\$4,799.53	\$16,357.80	\$9,057.12	\$24,138.46
<b>2023</b>	\$45,040.94	\$5,065.74	\$9,300.50	\$38,967.74

## **Volunteer Coordinator (Sue Gallo)**

### November Activities

- Updated Volunteer Covid-19 policy
- Updated one-time volunteer waivers
  - Added a tick, plant, and lightning safety information step to volunteer waivers  
Previously, safety was only communicated verbally by staff.
  - Added optional demographic questions that previously were only asked of 'regular/ongoing' volunteer applicants. This change will help us get more accurate view as we now have more annual one-time event volunteers than annual regular volunteer applicants.
- Hosted Delta Sigma Theta Sorority KRT clean up
- Big thanks to the Golf course crew for hosting Nick McDuffie's youth baseball team to 'shag' (collect) balls from the woods around the driving range on short notice!

- Lots of youth engagement this month with writing recommendation letters, supervising a prospective Eagle Scout Project, and onboarding many Central High School Students who are volunteering with Night Lights, To Grandmother's House We Go, and Homer for the Holidays. Engaging youth volunteers can be tremendously impactful but is far more time-consuming than adult volunteers!
- Created a link that connects directly to the landing page, as well as a thank you message for prospective occasional volunteers who receive the event volunteer newsletter, The link can be accessed here: <https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/sl/ddBm8Eq/volunteer>
- There were 15 new applicants in November, 5 adult, and 10 youth applicants (all for a single event).

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

- The first 3 weeks of November were quite mild and allowed us to have strong play numbers for the month. We had 1610 players, besting the 5-year average of 1082. This number was achieved while being closed outdoors for the final full week of the month due to precipitation and cold temperatures. These play numbers bring our total for the season to over 40,000 rounds. We have not reached the 40,000-round mark since 2005.
- Our revenue for the month of November was \$37,227. Comparing this to the past 5 seasons in which we did not offer the Anniversary Pass (every other year sale), we were \$5,000 above the average of those November. As mentioned, this is the middle of the previous 2-year Anniversary Pass sale, so we are currently only offering the Platinum Passes for the 2024 season (full 1-year season pass with enhanced benefits – 2-week tee-time booking window, covers league play green fees, reduced cart fee, 10% merchandise discount, complimentary locker rental). As we have done for several years now, we offer a \$50 discount on a Platinum Pass for the next season, if purchased prior to December 23<sup>rd</sup>. This sale begins annually on Black Friday.
- Staff spent much of November setting up the Clubhouse for the golf simulator season. We have recently purchased a second Foresight “Sim-in-a-Box” unit. We will now have 2 of the same model simulators, which will allow us to operate more efficiently and expand our winter league play for more participants. These simulators are operated by a launch monitor system, so each shot is more accurate and essentially eliminates the chances of a misread. The previous simulators from TruGolf were operated with a system of sensors, overhead lights, and microphones. All these things were factored into each swing to produce the results of the shot. There were numerous errors,





hardware and software issues that caused staff to spend a lot of time trying to diagnose and repair, while not being able to offer time to patrons. The new simulators should alleviate most of these issues. We will be charging by the hour on the simulators this season, and a reservation will be required. As with the prior simulators, we sold the remaining TruGolf model through Facebook Marketplace last month, to offset some of the cost of upgrading to the Foresight Simulator. The Golf Simulators will open for play on December 1<sup>st</sup>. (A photo is attached of the Clubhouse with the Sims setup for play).

- Staff has continued to meet with merchandise vendors to prepare orders for the 2024 season. Many items currently in the shop have been reduced via a “Yellow Tag” sale to lower inventory prior to next season.
- The Golf Committee met on November 7<sup>th</sup>. Staff presented a season recap and took questions from the committee while looking ahead to course projects, as well as volunteer and fundraising opportunities in 2024.

**Golf Course Operation:**

- Seasonal part-time help is done for the season.
- The irrigation system has been blown out and the pump station has been winterized.
- Snow mold has been sprayed on the greens for cold weather fungicide protection.
- All equipment is currently being serviced for next season.

**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	54
<b>YTD</b>	<b>9362</b>	<b>544</b>	<b>1547</b>	<b>9490</b>	<b>1907</b>

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

**Collections and Exhibits:**

- Only two heat tent loads of artifacts remain at the Sangamon River shed to relocate to the Rankin Center.

- The process for deaccessioned artifacts previously approved by the board has begun. Since the board's approval of the November request to deaccession memo and a board request for updates concerning the disposition of deaccessioned objects, the following progress has occurred:
  - Deaccessioned items at the Museum and Sangamon shed are being sorted and crosschecked for disposal. Separate areas are designated for items appropriate to scrap, burn, and transfer.
  - Mark has begun contacting organizations from the initial list of candidates about transferring items. This includes the Old Stone Fort Museum in Schoharie, NY, about a deaccessioned cradle which originated in Schoharie, NY. As of 12/08/23 there have been no responses from those contacted.
  - Deaccessioned objects fit for transfer (39 in total) have been compiled into a single document. Mark also compiled an initial list of 10 regional organizations as possible candidates for those objects. This list will grow as necessary.
  - As of 12/08/23 Witnessed destruction via burning or scrap recycling has not begun.
- Mark Hanson is working with PastPerfect Software to begin transitioning from PastPerfect 5 to Past Perfect online as part of the Forest Preserves migration to the cloud.
- 2nd interviews for the Collections Coordinator position are complete.

### **Youth Programs**

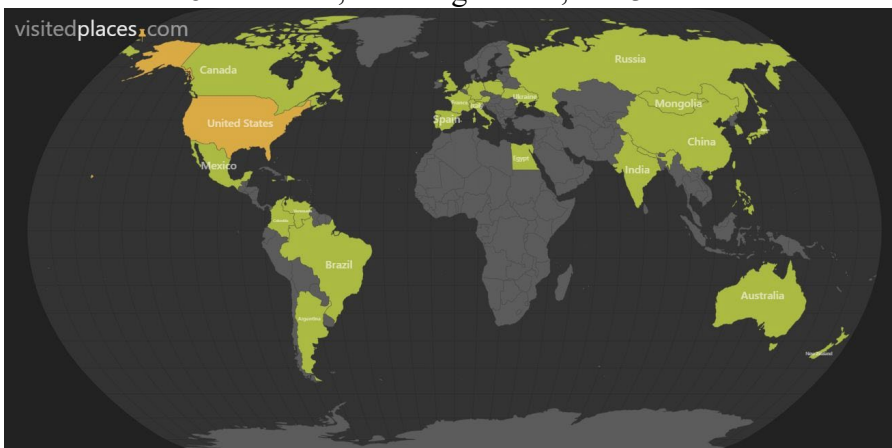
- Staff created a Native American preschool program and taught the program to 2 to 5-year-olds at La Petite Academy in Champaign.
- Julia Freeman, Seasonal Naturalist, had her last day on Nov. 17. She was a tremendous asset. She helped with school programs and summer camps and helped add new ideas to our existing programs. She also created a mural that staff and community members colored. It is on display at the Homer Lake Interpretive Center.



- Staff saw 60- 2<sup>nd</sup> graders from Stratton on Plant and Animal Relationships. This program not only aligned with their science curriculum but was part of their second-grade showcase.

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

- We hosted the third annual UIUC Owl Night at Homer Lake with students in Natural Resources and Environmental Science at the U of I. The event drew over 140 attendees!
- Promotion for Dec-Feb programs is underway.
- With one month remaining in the year, MGP's 2024 visitors have included individuals from at least 48 US States, Washington DC, and 32 countries.



- Other programming highlights include the continuation of annual programs such as the Lincoln Lecture Series, Walk with a Naturalist, To Grandmother's House We Go!, as well as the addition of new programs, including Hot Cups of Culture and the invitation of local high school choir groups to sing carols during Night Lights evenings.

### **Training and Development**

- Patrick Ahasic attended two U of I Extension webinars: one on Winter Tree ID and the other on oaks of Illinois.

- Cathy Schneider attended Wild Illinois at Starved Rock; this is part of the IL. Department of Natural Resources ENTICE workshops.

## Natural Resources (Peter Goodspeed)

### NR Volunteer Events & Programs

- On November 4<sup>th</sup>, NR hosted a 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary tree planting at Middle Fork River FP.
  - NR staff, Forest Preserve staff from other departments, and 50 volunteers participated.
  - Participants planted and installed deer exclosures around 75 container trees and shrubs throughout a 0.7-acre turf conversion near Sugar Creek shelter.
  - NR staff will also be seeding the ground layer around the trees with seeds from native grasses and forbs to complete the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Grove.



### NR Completed Field Tasks

- Fall Prescribed Fire Season: NR and Site Operations staff completed six prescribed burns this fall, a total of 153.8 acres, and ignited several large burn piles created by volunteers and staff. These burns included:
  - Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve
    - Buffalo Trace Phases 2 and 3 prairie restoration units (6 acres).
    - Buffalo Trace Phase 15 savanna restoration burn pile ignition.
  - Homer Lake Forest Preserve
    - Flicker Woods buffer (9 acres).
    - Windsong Prairie & Timberdoodle Woods (27.3 acres).
    - Inner West Lake Trail edge woodland unit (13.5 acres).
    - Volunteer burn pile ignition below the spillway.
  - Middle Fork River Forest Preserve
    - Point Pleasant savanna restoration unit, Oak Island, and part of the main wetland (26 acres).



- North Waterfowl savanna, Kettlemarsh prairie, CRP prairie (72 acres).
  - River Bend Forest Preserve
    - Volunteer burn pile ignition along the lake edge.
- Prescribed fire personnel achievements:
  - Nina Carmichael and Skylar Smith completed a prescribed burn training field day on 11/04/2023 to become a Certified Wildland Firefighter Type 2.
  - Emily Williams and Tyler Courson recently became Certified Illinois Prescribed Burn Managers.
- In addition to the 75 container trees planted at Middle Fork River FP, the NR team planted and fenced 10 honorary/memorial trees throughout the preserves.
- Eric aided Homer Lake site operations with hazardous tree removal and oversaw the implementation of a hazardous tree removal project by contractors at Lake of the Woods FP along the north bike path.
- Anna led efforts to finish milling and weighing all the collected native seed from this fall. NR staff and volunteers collected 400 lbs. of native seed from 141 different plant species. This seed will be planted in prairie and savanna restorations at Middle Fork River FP and Homer Lake FP this fall and winter.



- With recent precipitation and high humidity, NR staff has shifted from prescribed burning to mechanical clearing of invasive brush with chainsaws and brush cutters. Once the ground dries out or freezes, heavy equipment will be utilized.

### **NR Administrative Projects**

- Attended a client fair to solicit master's students from the University of Michigan School for Environment & Sustainability (SEAS) to do work on a sustainability practicum quantifying carbon storage of preserved ecosystems.
- Received conceptual design for the constructed smart wetland at Buffalo Trace.
- Onboarded Tegan Flowers, the department's new seasonal technician, who will be working with NR for the remainder of the year.
- Worked on the proposal for dedicating high quality sites at Homer Lake FP as an Illinois Nature Preserve.
- Updated and executed prescribed burn plans

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

- Night Lights is now in full swing. We have 100,000 lights on display that include newly added sections of the Botanical Gardens. A big thank you to the Forest Preserve Friends Foundation for helping fund the extension of the electrical infrastructure to light this year's expansion as well as next year's planned expansion.
- Copper Creek Contractors donated a small shed recently that we've incorporated into the Night Lights display. We plan to utilize the shed for volunteer tools and supply storage moving forward.



- Timber stand improvement and honeysuckle removal have begun again in earnest. Michael Dale is running point on this work as botanical gardens and operations crews continue to restore high visibility areas of Lake of the Woods and River Bend preserves.
- Operations crews have been removing failing trees over the past month and have almost completed the work identified in October.



- The snow plow and emergency lights have been installed on the new F250 purchased this summer as part of snow preparation.
- Mulching and blowing of leaves is largely complete, though some additional spot cleanup will likely occur in December.
- We have had some significant repairs for facilities and equipment, which have dwindled our budget. The skid steer had seals put in both drive motors, the furnaces at Lake of the Woods and Elks Lake Pavilions had to be replaced due to failing heat exchangers identified during regular service, the well for the botanical gardens required the magnetic starter replaced and there was a failure at the waterfall control panel for the pumps that needs repair. The skid steer repairs had been known but were managed for several years and were made in anticipation of heavy use of the equipment and the desire to avoid

failure during a project. The heaters were 25 years old and had been planned for in the 5-year capital plan – they just didn't hold out as long as we had hoped. The well was likely rodent damage, and the cause of the control panel failure is unknown.

- Victor Yelaska has transferred to Homer Lake to be closer to his home. He will remain in the same role, just at a different location. Victor has been instrumental in many of the improvements as well as general upkeep at Lake of the Woods. His love of the outdoors and the preserves shines through every day. He has helped on projects at every department with a smile on his face and a peanut butter and jelly sandwich in his lunch bag. We wish him all the best.

## Homer Lake (Skylar Smith)

- Favorable weather conditions allowed Homer Lake Operations to accomplish a considerable amount of tree work with the rented boom lift. Many hazards related to dead trees and dead branches hanging in user areas were removed. Big thank you to the Natural Resources crew for assisting Homer Lake Operations with this project.



- Homer Lake Operations successfully conducted a 10-acre prescribed burn in the Flicker Woods area. We also successfully burned along the West Lake Trail, where trail widening by invasive species removal has been ongoing for over a year.
- A group of volunteers from the University of Illinois Outdoor Adventure Club removed invasive honeysuckle along 1000 ft. of the Oak Ridge trail on Sunday, November 12.
- Skylar attended the KRT at Sleepy Creek event on Wednesday, November 8. It was great to see so many folks from the community come out to show support for the trail.

## Middle Fork (Matthew Kuntz)

- Staff have removed hazardous trees from the campground and other user areas throughout the preserve.
- Staff met with the Planning Department in late November to discuss the Dark Sky Trail OSLAD project. We're looking forward to this opportunity and can't wait to get started!
- Winter prairie seeding sites are still being prepped. Most of these are turf conversion sites throughout the preserve user areas totaling close to 3 acres.



- Middle Fork was able to assist our Natural Resources dept. with some fall-prescribed burns.
- We are still seeing high visitation, mostly on weekends, with dark sky guests in the preserve this fall.

## **Equity in Action**

- Catherine Schneider, Nina Carmichael, Patrick Ahasic, Jeremy Cagle, Ryan Anderson, and Kathryn Glynn attended the second of a 5-part training series specifically geared for the Conservation Community entitled *Why Diversity Equity and Inclusion is Vital to Conservation Goals*. The group participated during the 2-hour workshop on the topic of understanding privilege and microaggressions followed by a 1-hour discussion on reflections and observations as it applies to our organization.