

EFFICIENCY REPORT FOR THE CHAMPAIGN COUNTY
FOREST PRESERVE DISTRICT

APPROVED BY THE CHAMPAIGN COUNTY FOREST
PRESERVES DISTRICT'S COMMITTEE ON LOCAL
GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY ON SEPTEMBER 17, 2024



Champaign County Forest Preserve District Mission and Values

Executive Summary

The decennial efficiency report is a comprehensive public document that provides a transparent overview of the internal and external operations and services that make up the Champaign County Forest Preserve District. It covers

An overview of the district, shared services and partnerships, benefits and services, current efficient operations and opportunities for increased efficiency.

About us

The Champaign County Forest Preserve District is a local, property tax-supported government agency charged with the stewardship of seven forest preserves covering over 4,000 acres in Champaign County, Illinois. The Forest Preserve District, which covers all but seven sections of Champaign County, was established by referendum in 1935.

Park Districts and Forest Preserve Districts both play crucial roles in preserving natural areas and providing recreational opportunities but have distinct purposes and functions. While all seven of our preserves have land set aside for human recreation and enjoyment our designation as a Forest Preserve District highlights our commitment to protecting, restoring, and preserving biodiversity of natural habitat for native species and wildlife, by adhering to the statutes of the Downstate Forest Preserve District Act.

Mission

To protect Champaign County's natural and cultural resources and inspire people to care for, enjoy, and explore their natural world.

Values

Stewardship: We act thoughtfully and responsibly to care for one another and nurture the financial, natural, and cultural resources entrusted to us.

Community: We respect and trust our colleagues and community and work to earn their trust. We foster a welcoming and collaborative environment, embracing differences and new ideas.

Discovery: We encourage curiosity, self-reflection, learning, and growth. We inspire wonder and awe through exploration of the world around us.

I. Purpose

The Champaign County Forest Preserve District formed its Committee on Local Government Efficiency on May 18, 2023, to study efficiencies and report recommendations regarding those efficiencies and increased accountability pursuant to 50 ILCS 70/1, *et seq.* (the “Committee” or “Efficiency Committee”).

II. Committee Membership

The 2023-2024 Decennial Committee on Local Government for the Champaign County Forest Preserve District consists of the following individuals:

MEMBER & TITLE	
WILLIAM GOODMAN	COMMISSIONER
WENDY HUNDLEY	COMMISSIONER
ANDREW KERINS	COMMISSIONER
GREG KNOTT	COMMISSIONER
MARK TOALSON	COMMISSIONER
LORRIE PEARSON	EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
ROBERT BAIRD	RESIDENT MEMBER
JENNIFER SHELBY	RESIDENT MEMBER
NINA CARMICHAEL	STAFF LIASON (NON-VOTING)

Note: Previous members included Commissioners Sarah Livesay and Bobbie Herakovich.

III. Committee Meetings

The Committee met as follows:

Date	Location	Time
Thursday, September 21, 2023	Golf Course Clubhouse, Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve, 405 N. Lake of the Woods Road, Mahomet, Illinois	5:45 P.M.
Thursday, February 15, 2024	Museum of the Grand Prairie Classroom, 900 N. Lombard, Mahomet, Illinois	5:45 P.M.
Thursday, May 16, 2024	Golf Course Clubhouse, Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve, 405 N. Lake of the Woods Road, Mahomet, Illinois	5:45 P.M.
Thursday, August 15, 2024 (rescheduled September 19, 2024)	Douglass Branch Library, 504 E Grove Street, Champaign, Illinois	5:45 P.M.

Thursday, September 19, 2024	Museum of the Grand Prairie Classroom, 900 N. Lombard, Mahomet, Illinois	5:45 P.M.
Thursday, October 17, 2024	Museum of the Grand Prairie Classroom, 900 N. Lombard, Mahomet, Illinois	6:00 P.M.

Note: The meeting originally scheduled for Thursday, January 18, 2024, was rescheduled to February 15th and a location change was made for the August 15th meeting.

The minutes of these meetings are available on the Forest Preserve District’s website [here](#) or upon request from its administrative office hq@ccfpd.org

IV. General Overview of Governing Statutes, Ordinances, Rules, Procedures, Powers, Jurisdiction

The Champaign County Forest Preserve District was established by a referendum initiated and approved by the voters of the Forest Preserve District in 1935. The first preserve opened in May 1948. All Illinois Forest Preserve districts, including the Champaign County Forest Preserve District, are governed by the Downstate Forest Preserve District Act Code, 70 ILCS 805/0.01 *et seq.*

A separate and distinct taxing body dedicated to conservation, education, and recreation within the local community, operating apart from general-purpose governments, is an invaluable benefit to the community for many reasons, as detailed in this report.

- **Appointed, Non-Partisan, Non-Compensated Board.** The Forest Preserve District is governed by a board of five commissioners. Commissioners must reside within Champaign County and are appointed by the County Executive, approved by the County Board, and serve up to two five-year terms.

- **Accessible and Focused Representation.** Having a dedicated board to oversee these essential facilities, programs, and services provides the community with increased access to their elected representatives and allows those appointed representatives to remain focused solely on those facilities, programs, and services. This is contrasted with general-purpose governments, where elected representatives are responsible for broad oversight on a wide range of issues. This special purpose benefit is particularly advantageous when it comes to budget and finance oversight.

- **Increased Transparency.** Having a dedicated unit of local government to provide access and services to education and recreation within protected natural areas also improves the relationship between the preserve district and its residents because of the transparency and openness related to the board and preserve district operations. Having a detailed agenda and action items allows taxpayers to be better informed about the inner workings of their local government. When individual units of government are responsible for providing specified services like forest preserve districts, transparency is increased because action items and budget procedures are more detailed. Additionally, these items and budgetary decisions are subject to more scrutiny by local officials than with larger, multi-purpose governments with many departments.
- **Protection of Revenues.** Because the Forest Preserve District is a separate unit of local government, the generated revenue on its behalf can only be used for Forest Preserve District purposes. Input from residents provides a level of agency and assurance that community monies are sustainably reinvested back into the community in tailored and contextually specific ways in contrast to “general-purpose governments” like cities, villages, and counties that provide an array of services such as fire, police, public works, economic development, etc., that operate with limited input.
- **Protection of Assets.** Forest Preserves and other real property owned by the Champaign Forest Preserve District are held in trust for the residents of the Forest Preserve District and, subject to very limited exceptions, can only be sold or transferred if residents approve of the sale or transfer by a referendum. This is contrasted with general-purpose units of government, which have the authority to sell or dispose of property by a vote of the governing board.
- **Providing the Community More with Less.** The Preserve District does more with much fewer funding options. Unlike other units of local government that receive direct state funding and income, sales, use, hotel/motel, motor fuel, and other numerous taxes, the Preserve District’s only tax revenues come from the Personal Property Replacement Tax (PPRT) and a modest portion of a resident’s overall property tax bill. In fact, the Forest Preserve District’s share is approximately 1% of a household’s property tax bill.

As part of good governance and implementing best practices in the management of day-to-day operations, the Forest Preserve District has also adopted the following ordinances, rules, policies, and procedures:

- Personnel Policies Manual
- Safety and Risk Management Policies
- Ordinance Book of Rules & Regulations
- Golf Policies
- Grant Policy & Procedure
- Housing Policy
- COVID-19 policy
- Climate Change Commitment
- Environmental Assessment Report
- Investment Policy
- Museum and Education Department Staff Training Manual
- Volunteer Policy and Procedure Manual
- Purchasing Policy
- Sustainable Purchasing & Procurement Procedures
- Strategic Plan 2015-2019
- Strategic Plan 2020-2024
- Financial Policies & Procedures [here]
- 2040 Comprehensive Plan
- Annual Report 2023
- District Audits (ACFR)

V. List of Shared Services and Partnerships

The Champaign Forest Preserve District works diligently to provide the best possible programs, services, and facilities to our community at the least possible cost. One of the many ways the Preserve District achieves this goal is by partnering with neighboring park districts, school districts, other units of local government within or near the community, the State, non-profit organizations, and for-profit corporations. Below is a comprehensive list of the current partnerships, agreements, and other relationships that assist the Preserve District's mission of delivering the best possible services at the least possible cost to our community.

1. Other intergovernmental agreements with other forest preserve districts, park districts, conservation districts, or municipal recreation agencies

- Urbana Park District (UPD)
 - Host location for select education programming
 - Shared employee training
- Champaign Park District (CPD)
 - Host location for select education programming

- Shared employee training

University of Illinois and University of Illinois Extension

- East Central Illinois Master Naturalists
- Illinois Natural History Survey (special use permits)
- Welcome Week (bringing visitors/expanding reach/visibility)
- Public libraries throughout the county
 - Host location for select education programming
 - Partnership with Mahomet Public Library on StoryWalk® at Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve

2. Intergovernmental agreements with other units of local government

- 2024, Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DECO) awarded \$11,200,000.00 for KRT construction and engineering costs (“project costs”).
- 2022, Kickapoo Rail Trail- Acquisition and Development of KRT
 - Vermillion County Conservation District (VCCD)
 - Urbana Park District (UPD)
 - City of Ogden
 - City of Saint Joseph
- 2020, Champaign County Referendum tax levy
- 2006-2017, City of Champaign (Tax Increment Redevelopment [Financing] District) Overlapping Taxing Districts of the Downtown Core Area.
- 2012, Sangamon Valley Public Water District-Permanent Sanitary Sewer Easement.
- 2015, Village of Mahomet for joint sponsored application to for the Illinois Department of Transportation’s (IDOT) Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program grant for the amount of \$366,278.46 to be applied toward the Route 47 Bicycle/Pedestrian Multipurpose Pathway Project

3. Intergovernmental Agreements with the State of Illinois

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources leads a joint fishery program in which it manages the sport fish populations at several of the preserves.

4. Partnerships or Agreements with Athletic or Similar Affiliate Organizations that Operate Sports or Other Leagues

The Lake of the Woods Golf Course is an active member of the United States Golf Association (USGA) and the Chicago District Golf Association (CDGA). We host the Professional Golfers’ Association (PGA) Junior League for ages 8-12 and coach local teens attending Mahomet-Seymour High School.

5. Partnerships with For-Profit Organizations

We do not have direct partnerships with any for-profit organizations now.

6. Informal Cooperation with Other Units of Local Government and non-profits, Which Saves Taxpayer Dollars by Eliminating Redundancy

Below are examples of informal or verbal agreements that demonstrate intergovernmental or other cooperation that results in savings to taxpayers and/or increased accessibility to resources and knowledge. For example, an agency may share staff, artifact loans, equipment, meeting/conference space etc.

- Champaign County Historical Archives
- Illinois State Museum
- Illinois State University
- The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
- The University of Michigan
- Upper Sangamon River Conservancy
- United Way
- AmeriCorps
- Champaign County Farm Bureau
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife
- The Wetland Initiative
- Healthy Champaign County
- Black People Outside (B.P.O.)
 - Nurtured in Nature, a nature-based wellness program designed to address themes of public health and racialized healing through hiking, fostering community and adventure for those unfamiliar with Champaign County's natural areas. Funded by the Illinois Department of Human Services' Healing Illinois Grant awarded to Healthy Champaign County to strengthen ties between the forest preserves and BIPOC community

VI. Other Examples of Efficient Operations

Use of Volunteers. One way the Preserve District reduces the burden on taxpayers is through engagement and utilization of volunteers. Last year, 1,240 individuals volunteered 10,200 hours of service to the Forest Preserve District. These values include volunteer events facilitated by a partnering organization, the Upper Sangamon River Conservancy (USRC) on Forest Preserve property. Not only is the utilization of volunteers an efficient way to deliver services, but it provides people of all ages with valuable transferable skills. The training and experience gained here can be applied to their future personal and professional endeavors.

Joint Purchasing. We continually look for opportunities but have not yet identified appropriate joint purchases.

Grants. The Forest Preserve District utilizes grants to fund the many projects we have throughout our preserves for both short and long-term projects.

Some of our current grantors include the: Smithsonian, Illinois Historical Commission (IHC), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program (ITEP), Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and Clean River Recycling Solutions.

The 5-year total for grant dollars received to date is \$2,668,103.95. Note that we have several awarded grants for which we haven't received the funds yet, totaling \$12,485,553.

Collaboration with Other Preserve/Conservation Districts on Best Practices.

Because Forest Preserve Districts are not in competition with one another, they are more willing than the private sector to problem solve challenges and share best practices with one another. This mutually beneficial dynamic helps to avoid unnecessary costs and deliver services more effectively and efficiently.

Reliance on Non-Tax Revenue. Unlike most local governments that rely on a wide range of sales, use, and income taxes, the Forest Preserve District is not permitted to assess these types of taxes. Additionally, although the Forest Preserve District is an economic engine for the community and generates revenue for the state and our community through hotel/motel, sales, and motor fuel taxes, our District does not receive any of these revenues. Also, unlike Illinois cities, villages, counties, and school districts that received billions of dollars in direct financial assistance from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), our District did not receive any such direct federal aid. Park District also does not receive state funding under the Local Government Distributive Fund (LGDF) or General State Aid (GSA) that these same cities, villages, counties, and school districts receive through the State budget.

Instead, the Forest Preserve District provides programming, facility rentals, and services to the community with a very modest amount of property taxes and from non-tax sources such as grants, private donations, and user fees.

VII. Transparency to the Community

The following information about the Forest Preserve District may be obtained by citizens in the location listed.

Document	Location(s) Available (website, administrative offices, county clerk, state website, etc.)
ADA Transition Plan	Website/Administrative Office
Agenda and minutes	Website/ Administrative Office
Annual District Tax Levy Ordinances	Website/Administrative Office
Comptroller's Annual Finance Reports	Website/Administrative Office
*Capital Improvement Plans	Website/Administrative Office
Conduct Ordinances	Website/Administrative Office

Strategic Plans	Website/Administrative Office
2024 Budget and Appropriation Ordinance	Website/Administrative Office
2024 Management Plan and Budget	Website/Administrative Office

**The Capital Improvement Plans are included in the 2024 Management Plan and Budget on pages 17&18. [OBJ]*

The Forest Preserve District offers residents many opportunities to provide feedback. These include:

Board Meetings—The board of commissioners meets on the third Thursday of each month at 6 p.m. Meeting locations vary throughout the county to increase accessibility. The annual meeting schedule is made available to the public on our website [here](#). Residents may provide public comment at every meeting.

- The Champaign County Forest Preserve District’s annual Budget and Appropriation Ordinance is available in tentative form at least 30 days prior to its adoption at an open meeting of the forest preserve district board. Also, at least one public hearing is held prior to final action, and notice of the hearing is published in the newspaper at least one week before.
- The annual property tax levy is approved at an open meeting of the Champaign County Forest Preserve District board in accordance with the Open Meetings Act. Prior to adopting this annual tax levy, the Forest Preserve District follows all public notice and hearing requirements under the Truth in Taxation Law.
- Residents may contact or request information from the Forest Preserve District by phone at 217-586-3360 or email at HQ@ccfpd.org

Committees and Boards with Community Representation

- Champaign County Forest Preserve District’s Decennial Committee on Local Government Efficiency 2023-2024
- Golf Committee
- Forest Preserve Friends Foundation
- Kickapoo Rail Trail Steering Committee

Community surveys and other resident surveys in the past 5 years

- 2019, Strategic Plan 2019 Public Input Survey
- 2022, Champaign County Forest Preserve District: Diversity and Accessibility Initiative Report by Hannah Caraway
- 2022, Connecting All Colors of Champaign County Forest Preserve District facilitated by Tomas Delgado
- 2022, Champaign County Forest Preserve District’s 2020 Tax Referendum technical report

- 2023, Countywide Needs Assessment Survey for the Champaign County Forest Preserve District by aQity Research & Insights

Public hearings or similar meetings where community input was obtained in the past 5 years. The annual public hearings for levies and budgets have been held as required.

Social Media. The Champaign County Forest Preserve District maintains an active presence on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube and our website. We utilize these platforms to provide information to the public, expand our reach, and broaden our network for partnerships. Common content includes restoration project updates, outdoor health and safety tips, employment and volunteer opportunities, upcoming event details, and striking images of flora and fauna found on the preserves we manage.

VIII. District Awards and Recognition

The Champaign Forest Preserve District's achievements have been recognized in numerous ways.

- Frequent recipient of the people's choice awards through the News-Gazette
- American Alliance of Museums (AAM) Accreditation of the Museum of the Grand Prairie
- Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting by the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada (GFOA) for our comprehensive annual financial report for fiscal years 2017-2021.
- 2018, Middle Fork Forest Preserve received the first International Dark Sky Park in U.S. State of Illinois Designation by the International Dark Sky Places (IDSP).

Continuing Education for Staff

- Champaign County Forest Preserve is committed to providing continuous opportunities to develop personally and professionally. Staff attend continuing education to ensure efficient and effective means and methods for being implemented to best serve the land we manage and the diverse populations we serve. Training, Certification, and Licensing are offered through various organizations such as:
 - National Parks and Recreation Association (NRPA)
 - Illinois Parks and Recreation Association (IRPA)
 - Illinois Association of Park Districts (IAPD)

- Illinois Arborist Association (IAA)
- Chicago Wilderness
- National Association of Interpreters (NAI)
- Environmental Education Association of Illinois (EEAOI)
- Center for Diversity of the Environment (CDE)
- Illinois Department of Natural Resource (IDNR)
- North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE)
- University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC)
- Morton Arboretum
- Northern Illinois University's Civic Leadership Academy
- International City/County Management Association
- Illinois City/County Management Association
- Park District Risk Management Agency (PDRMA)

All Staff Credentials and Training

- First Aid CPR/AED/First Aid Certified for Infants, Adults, and Children
- Annual Sexual Harassment Training through PDRMA
- Cyber Safety Training

IX. Benefits and Services

The Forest Preserve District plays a vital role in sustainable living in various ways by creating pathways to connect people to nature, improve public health, establishing and maintaining native ecological biodiversity, supporting environmental stewardship, and providing critical spaces for recreation, education, social interaction, and economic benefits by improving local property values. Our Forest Preserves' impact extends beyond Champaign County's residents, remaining a public and welcoming entity to visitors from all over!

1. Facilities

The Preserve District offered the following facilities to the community last year:

 **Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve**

Main Entrance	109 S Lake of the Woods Rd, Mahomet, IL 61853
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Peninsula Entrance	101 N Lake of the Woods Rd, Mahomet, IL 61853
Golf Course Entrance	405 N Lake of the Woods Rd, Mahomet, IL 61853
Museum of the Grand Prairie (Route 47 Entrance)	950 N Lombard, Mahomet, IL 61853
Buffalo Trace East Parking Lot	775 N Lombard, Mahomet, IL 61853
Buffalo Trace West Parking Lot	1000 N Crowley Rd, Mahomet, IL 61853
Riverview Retreat Center	428 CR 2500 N, Mahomet, IL 61853
Stidham Woods Entrance	1920 East Golf Drive, Mahomet, IL 61853
Prairieview/Fogel Road Parking Lot	1125 N Prairieview Rd, Mahomet, IL 61853

- **Attractions:**
 - Lake of the Woods Golf course
 - Covered Bridge
 - Buffalo Trace
 - Museum of the Grand Prairie
 - Mabery Gelvin Botanical Garden
 - Rayburn-Purnell Woods Trail
 - Hi-Tower and Carillon
 - **Pavilions/Rental Facilities:**
 - Elks Lake Pavilion
 - Izaak Walton Cabin
 - Riverview Retreat Center
 - Sycamore Hollow Shelter
 - Lakeview Shelter
 - Mabery Gelvin Botanical Garden
 - Rotary Hill
 - Open-air shelters
 - **Recreational Activities:**
 - Hiking
 - Biking

- Fishing
- Birding
- Boating (including paddle boat rentals)
- Picnicking
- Cross-country skiing
- Golfing (including foot golf and indoor simulators)

 **Homer Lake Forest Preserve**

Main Entrance	2573 S. Homer Lake Road, Homer, IL 61849
Collins Pond Parking Lot	2500 County Road 1200 North, Homer, IL 61849
North Entrance	2450 County Road 1350 North, Homer, IL 61849
Sylvester Woods Entrance	1174 County Road 2400 East, Homer, IL 61849

- Colin’s Pond
- Sylvester Woods
- Hidden Acres
- **Rental Facilities:**
 - Salt Fork Center
 - Walnut Hill Shelter
- **Recreational Activities:**
 - Nature’s Playscape
 - Hiking
 - Biking
 - Fishing
 - Birding
 - Boating
 - Picnicking
 - Sledding
- Homer Lake Interpretive Center

 **Middle Fork Forest Preserve**

Main Entrance	3485 County Road 2700 East, Penfield, IL 61862
Maintenance Entrance	3433 County Road 2700 East, Penfield, IL 61862

- North Waterfowl area
- Harry L Swartz Campground
- Dark Sky Trail and Amenities
- Point Pleasant

- **Recreational Activities:**
 - Camping
 - Fishing
 - Walking/Hiking
 - Biking
 - Birding
 - Volleyball
 - Swimming (Willow Pond)
 - Dark Sky viewing/astronomy
 - Picnicking

- **Pavilions/Rentals:**
 - Activity Center
 - Campsites

 **Kickapoo Rail Trail (KRT)**

Multiple entrances between Urbana and Oakwood, Illinois

Activities/Attractions:

- Biking
- Running
- Walking



River Bend Forest Preserve

Main Entrance | 1602 W. Mid-America Road, Mahomet, IL 61853

- **Rental Facilities:**
 - Riverbend Pavilion: Lake View
- **Activities/Attractions:**
 - Hiking
 - Fishing
 - Birding
 - Boating
 - Picnicking
-



Sangamon River Forest Preserve

Main Entrance | 2797 County Road 600 East, Fisher, IL 61843

Residence | 2799 County Road 600 East, Fisher, IL 61843

- **Activities/Attractions:**
 - Hiking
 - River Fishing
 - Birding
 - Canoe/Kayaking
 - Picnicking



Heron View Forest Preserve

Main Entrance | 401 County Road 2650 North, Mahomet, IL 61853

- **Activities/Attractions:**
 - Hiking
 - Birding
 - Photography

Programs

The Preserve District offers various programming and resources to the community on and off-site. The following table includes the annual totals for the sessions held and the number of participants in their respective programmatic categories.

Program Categories:

Program Type	Number of Sessions	Number of Participants
School Programs	87	4447
Summer Camps	17	234
Outreach kits Workshops	18	1547
In-person Public Programs	73	4370
Not in-person Public Programs	5	545
Special Requests	46	728
Interpretive Center Visitation	227	2013
Museum Visitation	301	9490

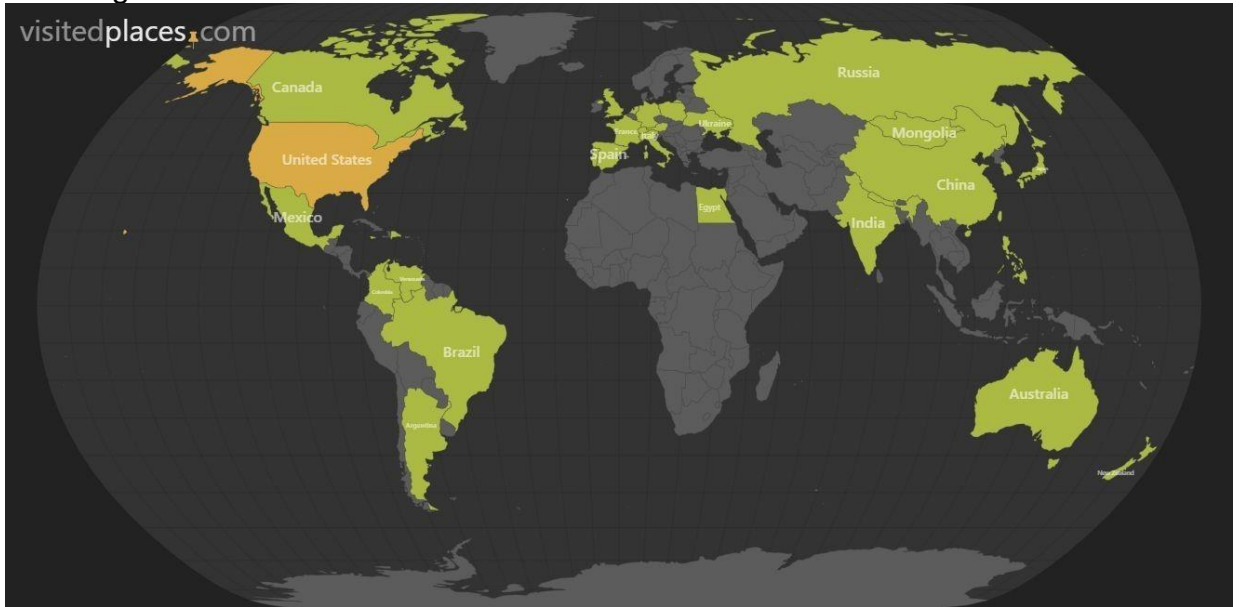
Note: 1. Visitation numbers are listed as days open in place of the number of sessions held. 2. Youth Programs serve preschool through High School (ages 3-18). 3. Outreach Traveling Discovery Kits and Workshops are used for Youth and Public programming and can be checked out for personal use by patrons.

At-Home Learning Opportunities:

Historical Resources & Kits	Environmental Resources & Kits
Illinois Native American Discovery Kit	Bird Adaptation
Life on the Grand Prairie	IDNR Field Trip Pack
Civil Rights	Insect Backpacks
Old Fashioned Games	Pocket Camcorders
Civil War: Gone for a Soldier	Water Quality Loan Box
1968	IDNR Reptiles and Amphibians Field Pack
Women's Rights	
Wagon's Ho	

Supplemental Ed. videos are available on YouTube channels @ccfpd and @museumofthegrandprairie

- As of November 2023, the Museum of the Grand Prairie’s 2023 annual visitors have included individuals from at least 32 countries, 48 U.S. States, and Washington DC.



Other Benefits

While the Forest Preserve District is a special purpose district, its impact on the community is both multi-faceted and far-reaching. For example, the Preserve District’s natural areas, programming, and other opportunities improve the community’s overall physical and mental health and wellness, thereby reducing healthcare costs and crime rates. Offering safe, convenient, and affordable options for visitors and participants of all ages. Our preserves provide *space to host and train for sport and recreational activities, beautiful backdrops for photoshoots, and some of life’s most meaningful and precious unions like weddings, baby showers, funerals etc.*) The Preserve District’s open space and plantings help improve air and water quality and mitigate flooding.

X. Recommendations for Increased Accountability and Efficiency

1. Intergovernmental Fees and Charges

One opportunity for efficiency would be the elimination of fees and charges assessed by other units of government. By way of example, below are amounts that other units of local government charge the Preserve District even though the Preserve District’s taxpayers are also taxpayers of these other units of local government. Such fees and charges, and the bureaucracy that accompanies them, inhibit the park district’s ability to deliver programs, facilities, and services at the least possible cost.

Other units of local government should recognize that intergovernmental fees often lead to inefficiency in the expenditure of taxpayer dollars through extra bureaucracy and administrative costs. In many cases, the unit of government assessing the fee ultimately benefits from the project or event, meaning it can recoup its costs through the extra sales tax or other revenue that will be generated. Where such fees are absolutely necessary, general-purpose units of government should offset the fee by crediting the district for all benefits they will receive from a project, event, or property. For example, open space that is protected and maintained by the Preserve District helps mitigate stormwater management costs, so assessing stormwater management fees in the Preserve District not only leads to inefficiency but is also shortsighted.

Governmental units should be discouraged or prohibited from charging more than their out-of-pocket costs associated with the activities covered by a fee that is assessed to another unit of local government with the same taxpayers. Put another way, one unit of local government should not profit by taxing another. Eliminating local permit fees is a way to reduce administrative costs without impacting overall public revenue. Local government best serves the people when it cooperates and works together. Some communities recognize this and do not charge fees to other units. All communities should be encouraged to follow that model to receive the best results for local taxpayers and to promote governmental efficiency.

Examples of fees charged to the Forest Preserves by Other Units of Government:

- Special Use Permit fees for Kickapoo Rail Trail use in unincorporated Champaign County.
- Stormwater Management
- State and Local Liquor Licenses
- Illinois State Police Background Checks
- Building Permits
- Police Protection Fees for Special Events
- Health Department Inspections

2. Inefficiency of Other Governments

None have been identified at this time.

3. Unfunded Mandates

Unfunded state mandates are another cost driver. While the Preserve District recognizes that there are benefits to some of these mandates, modifications could help alleviate some of the burden to the preserve district.

- a. **Prevailing Wage.** One way to reduce the burden on local government staff is to limit the prevailing wage requirement to larger capital contracts. This would free up tracking of the paperwork on small repairs and projects. One reason for creating a threshold requirement is the cost of the administrative burden relative to the cost of the actual project. For example, eliminating the prevailing wage on

smaller projects, e.g., those less than \$50,000, will result in more local bids and decrease the overall cost for these smaller public works projects.

- b. **Newspaper Publication.** The newspaper is no longer the most effective way to provide notice. Websites are cheaper and reach more people. Permitting the forest preserve district to post the information on its website in lieu of newspaper publications would reduce costs. We budgeted \$4,500 for the FY24 budget for Advertising in the News-Gazette, where all our bids get posted. FY23 total is \$11,356.48, and the total for bids and public notice is \$1,968.67.

4. Recommendations for Increased Transparency and Efficiency

- The Forest Preserve District is transparent in its operations. The following are opportunities for increased transparency:
 - Revise select policies for clarity
 - Increased avenues for relaying what we are currently working on
- Further exploration of technology use toward Improving the use of technology to reduce manual processes and review the efficacy and efficiency of both new and existing processes.
- Increase partnerships and collaboration with local entities to meet shared goals for the ever-evolving and diverse needs of the community.
- Continue to develop robust recognition and benefit offerings to our employees that communicate our sincere gratitude for everything they do and showcase we are committed to ensuring they feel valued and appreciated throughout their career with us.

5. Energy Efficient Projects and Partnerships that offer savings

- In December 2023, the Preserve's sustainability master's project proposal was accepted by a group of graduate students at the University of Michigan School for Environment & Sustainability (SEAS). Four students and two faculty advisors with SEAS will use remote sensing techniques to quantify the amount of carbon stored in ecosystems throughout the preserves.
- We have an agreement for consulting services through CQI Associates to conduct a solar photovoltaic energy feasibility study to determine the feasibility of installing on-site solar energy to provide all or a portion of the electricity consumed at the Champaign County Forest Preserve District. CQI is also our broker for energy purchases for our Ameren accounts, where they have helped us to secure 100% renewable electricity at better rates than the local Chamber of Commerce utility pool.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife
 - Provides the Forest Preserve with surplus federal funds from wetland installation initiatives for private landowners toward public lands. These funds have been used to expand and improve wetland habitat through actions like modifying tiling for increased water retention.
- The Wetland Initiative

- Provided free engineering work for the creation of a smart wetland. One acre (about half the area of a Manhattan city block) of smart wetland can clean 90% of nitrate runoff from a 100-acre plot.
- Climate Change Commitment Resolution
- Sustainable Purchasing policy
- Renew Climate Change Report
- Utility aggregation and collaboration

XI. OTHER

Equity and Belonging (DEI)

The Champaign County Forest Preserve District is dedicated to fostering, cultivating, and preserving a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion by encouraging frequent cross-departmental and organization-wide opportunities for input for significant decision-making and being realistic about the areas we are less resourced in to then tap into partnerships.

Implemented Efficiencies

- Website: The Forest Preserves of Champaign County added a Web Accessibility check through <https://accessible.com/>, which has a selection of automatic modifications to improve and enhance the viewer's experience and navigation. These include seizure-safe, vision-impaired, ADHD-friendly, Cognitive Disability, keyboard navigation, language translation, and blind user modes.
- The Forest Preserve utilizes Sourcewell, a cooperative purchasing organization that streamlines the procurement process for public agencies by developing requests for proposals (RFPs) and Invitations for Bids (IFBs) for national competitive solicitations that meet or exceed local requirements. This allows us to expand and diversify bid possibilities and decrease the workload for our staff in this area.
- Performed an update to our equipment inventory list to maximize and centralize the list for equipment exchange and reservation across preserves. Site visitation and orientation are expected to take place next year to cross-train and familiarize staff with the tools available.
- Right-sizing the operations fleet at Lake of the Woods by outfitting and configuring our existing equipment to meet fuel efficiency and utility needs.
- Transitioning all work productivity software and storage to be entirely cloud-based. This change accounts for an annual savings of \$7,000 and increased accessibility for all staff.
- Utilization of a values and efficiency rubric to focus on internal planning and purchasing decisions

Dated: September 17, 2024

Signed: *William G. Goodwin* [CHAIR'S SIGNATURE]

QR Code 



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