

Looking back at 20 years of getting things done

Friends of the Forest Preserves is a community of doers – simply put, we get things done. As we celebrate our 20-year anniversary in 2018, it’s truly remarkable to look back on how much this community has accomplished since its founding in 1998. We – the volunteers, staff, board members, partners, supporters, and funders – together have created this incredible track record. Let’s take a moment to celebrate with a look back over the headlines that have graced the pages of *Friends News*.

Four campaigns launched — May 1999

Campaigns on land acquisition, habitat restoration, bird conservation, and trails kicked off the Friends community’s track record of action. Often it starts with advocacy in an effort to move the forest preserve administration in a better direction.

Stroger announces reforms — April 2003

Advocacy was again the focus. The lead story reported that Forest Preserve Board President John Stroger had announced a series of reforms, that had long been urged by the Friends community. The Forest Preserve District would create the Resource Management Department, add ecological restoration to its budget, and privatize its golf courses. There were also stories in this issue about a new focus from the Board of Commissioners on how the District was being run and the Friends’ two-year study. Created in partnership with Friends of the Parks, Audubon–Chicago Region, and the Sierra Club, the study was a major catalyst for these reforms. It also cemented the reputation of Friends and further set the foundation for our future work.

Friends growing with new executive director — June 2004

After receiving official non-profit status in early 2004, the Friends community’s leaders hired Benjamin Cox as the organization’s first employee and executive director. Another piece in this issue reported on the updated Land Policy that Friends worked on with partners and commissioners. The strengthened policy, which hadn’t been updated since the 1960s, won approval later that year.

District takes stand against encroachment — October 2004

As the story goes, Friends was founded in the living room of Barbara and George Birmingham, long-time stewards of Theodore Stone Woods. They spent years urging the District to do something about “Apathy Canyon,” an ever-growing erosion gully formed by years of stormwater dumping. The District solicited a proposal from a major engineering firm, but their solution was expensive and would damage the prairie. So Friends asked law and engineering students for help. In 2006 their design was implemented and it solved the problem.



Daniel Suarez

Master steward John Balaban leads a plant identification workshop. Volunteer stewardship is essential work to ensure healthy nature is here for all of us to enjoy.

Land policy prevails at Potawatomi Prairie — March 2005

Advocacy to fend off land grabs has long been required of the Friends community. An attempt to grab some land for a hotel in Wheeling was just another in a long series – it was defeated. Previous issues had discussed Dominican University’s attempts to grab land for an entrance – it was

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News from around the Preserves

1 REI renting boats in preserves

Recreational Equipment, Inc., is providing boat, canoe, and kayak rentals along with retail sales and classes at Saganashkee Slough in the Palos region and other waterways in the preserves. The partnership with the Forest Preserves of Cook County involves an initial payment of \$1,500 from REI for each of the first three years of the contract and then a percentage of sales for each subsequent year.

2 River friends helping turtles, fish

Friends of the Chicago River has received a \$150,000 grant to improve habitat and help repopulation efforts for at-risk native turtle species. FOCR and the District will collaborate to restore 40 acres of shoreline habitat at Wampum Lake and Chipilly Woods, where turtles are impacted by habitat loss and degradation.

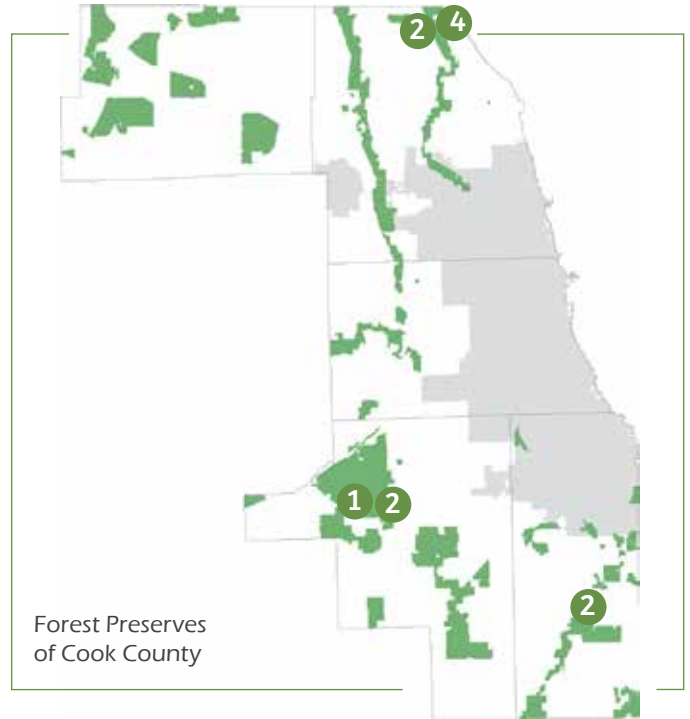
Another grant of \$240,000, secured in partnership the District and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, will reconnect Mill Creek with the Cal-Sag Channel in an effort to improve fish passage and breeding in Mill Creek. The work will take place at the junction of the two waterways within McClaughrey Springs Woods.

3 New policy to help police dogs in retirement

Police dogs will have secure retirements thanks to a recent policy addition by the District. Any cadaver-search dog that reaches 9 years or older, that is unable to perform its duties due to medical or other reasons, or that exceeds the recommended number of handlers can now retire and have its ownership transferred to its current or former handler or to any organization or individual qualified to care for dogs with law-enforcement training. The District will set aside \$3,500 to reimburse up to 50 percent of veterinary care for the lifetime of the dog.

4 Deer fencing to help protect Garden holdings

The Chicago Botanic Garden will install fence extensions along the banks of the Skokie River on the south side of



Dundee Road in an effort to keep deer out. The extension will be woven wire fabric that is 8 feet tall, designed to reduce deer intrusion into the Garden from the Skokie Lagoons across shallow water. The plan is to better protect the Garden's world-class plant collections, research plots, and managed natural areas.

5 Nature Rx: walk in woods better than sidewalk

A study conducted with support from the District and Northwestern University builds the case for nature prescriptions, in which doctors recommend to patients to get outdoors and connect to nature. "Walking Green: Developing an Evidence Base for Nature Prescriptions in the Forest Preserves" demonstrates that the benefits of exercising in nature exceed those of an equivalent amount of exercise in other places, such as suburban sidewalks. The study also shows that there are significant mental health benefits including improved mood, reduced anxiety, and reductions in perceived stress that can be gained from taking a 50-minute walk on a trail.

Ride with us

Please join us on our annual North Branch Trail Bike Ride on August 12! We'll explore the beautiful variety of habitats found along the Chicago River, from Bunker Hill Forest Preserve north to Harms Woods. You'll encounter prairies, wetlands, and woodlands as we wind our way up to Harms Flatwoods, recently honored with the designation as an Illinois Nature Preserve. Discover what makes these preserves so important for wildlife and people alike! *Please register for this free event at fotfp.org.*



Part 2 of 2: Trails are the great connector

By Douglas Chien, Advocates' Network Manager

The last newsletter discussed trails; for all their promise, there are some perils. Unofficial trails aren't always well designed and often just follow animal paths or convenient routes without concern for erosion or sensitive habitat. Thankfully solutions are being found and implemented. There are hundreds of miles of unofficial trails to be grappled with, and budget constraints on the Forest Preserves of Cook County mean the work is slow.

Many of the unofficial trails seem to have existed since long before the land was a forest preserve. They often cause ecological damage with soil eroding into waterways and sensitive plant populations getting trampled. At LaBagh Woods on the north side of Chicago, Friends worked with the FPCC to fix unofficial trails. Solutions included: regrading slopes; installing check steps, rock armoring, and water bars; using cut brush to obscure spider trails; and rerouting.

The average forest preserve user does not differentiate between official and unofficial trails. People will use the most obvious and convenient route. We believe that improving or rerouting trails that are causing damage, not only fixes the ecological problems, but also provides a better user experience. Most people will stay on the path of least resistance, especially if it is an enjoyable one.

In Riverside, working with local community members, we requested permission to perform maintenance on a 900-foot-long segment of an unofficial trail that connects a sidewalk and an intersection with a bus stop. We also re-



Volunteers Jeff Skrentny and Radhika Miraglia assess an unofficial trail at LaBagh Woods, where the Friends community has come together to remediate problems.

quested that it become an official trail. While we received the OK to conduct maintenance, the trail will remain unofficial for now. Current court precedent involving liability concerns is presenting hurdles for trail recognition. Riverside resident Randy Brockway reports that neighbors continue to frequent the trail, but thankfully the maintenance has prevented spider trails from appearing.

Fortunately, the FPCC is beginning to grapple with these challenges from unofficial trails. The critical first step was the creation of a Trail Master Plan and Policy in 2014, which includes an official process for handling trail requests and standards for a range of trails, including footpaths. But there is much more to do.

New staff support ever-expanding conservation programming

Melissa Horther Program Coordinator

Melissa joined Friends in 2015 as a career immersion intern in the District's Resource Management Department. After the internship she was hired as conservation program assistant working with the Forest Preserves of Cook County and conservation corps partners.



In this role she discovered her love for planning conservation programs and had the opportunity to manage the Forest Preserve Experience summer program in 2017. In February 2018 she was promoted to the program coordinator position helping to develop, manage, and promote our conservation corps programs. Melissa has a degree in biological science from DePaul University.

Hillary Peters North Branch Crew Manager

Hillary Peters was born and raised in the northern suburbs. Her love for the outdoors brought her to Northern Michigan University as a student studying environmental science. After receiving her degree, she came back to Illinois to work at the Chicago Botanic Garden.



She learned about Illinois's diverse landscape which captured her heart and sparked a career in restoration. She has led crews for a private restoration company and has also worked as a utility forester. Hillary is excited to be the crew manager of the North Branch Conservation Corps Crew and is looking forward to serving in this key role in the Friends community.

9th Annual Friends Photo Contest Winners



(Left page clockwise from top) **First Place:** Sagawau Canyon, Sagawau Nature Preserve, Bud Dyke; **Third Place:** Blue Morpho, Chicago Botanic Garden, Janet Huagen; **Second Place:** Island of mist and fog, Busse Woods, Michelle Puszka; **Runner-up:** Green frog eye to eye, Crabtree Nature Center, Edward Boe. (Right page left to right from top left) **Best Flora:** Prairie lilies, Wolf Road Prairie, Fidencio Marbella; **Best Fauna:** Chipper chewing, Crabtree Nature Center, Michelle Puszka; **Runner-up:** The big guy, Tampier North, Joseph Baranowski. **Best People in the Preserves:** Contemplation, Chicago Botanic Garden, Linda Abrams; **Runners-up:** Last snow, Bunker Hill Forest Preserve, Joel Porterfield; Getting ready to sip some nectar, Deer Grove West, Sarah Fallon; Prairie Indian plantain seeds, Burnham Prairie, Chris Benda; Common Yellowthroat with snack, Poplar Creek Prairie, Lisa Musgrave.



Thank you to everyone who submitted a photo. If you'd like to enter the 10th Annual Photo Contest, visit us online at fotfp.org/photo-contest for the rules.



Centennial Volunteers, a program focused on recruiting and training the next generation of ecological stewards, helps steward LaBagh Woods on the north side of Chicago, removing invasive brush to help restore health to the woods.

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defeated. The August 2005 issue focused on a steel mill's attempt to grab land at Whistler Woods in Riverdale — defeated.

In 2006 there was a push to expand the dam at Busse Woods for flood mitigation — the Friends community, again looking to students, proposed an alternate plan that was better for the woods and the surrounding community. Once again our plan prevailed. The Spring 2007 issue reported on the expansion of the I-294 tollway that took forest preserve land, but was heavily mitigated by the community's advocacy. Summer 2008 focused on the proposal to expand Quentin Road, an issue that still persists but has taken a dramatic new direction in recent years thanks to our efforts. The Fall 2009 issue reported on a land grab attempt by the village of Hinsdale for soccer fields — also defeated.

Steele lifts moratorium — Fall 2006

President Bobbie Steele finally ended the moratorium on volunteer restoration that had lingered for 10-years. Born out of politics and pressure, the moratorium was a big reason for the founding of Friends.



Friends community members tour Camp Sagavau, Cook County's Grand Canyon. Engagement is vital to ensure people love, enjoy, and protect the preserves.

Help arrives for Kickapoo Prairie — Fall 2007

A running theme in many issues of *Friends News* has been the Friends community's long-term investment in stewardship of the Calumet Region preserves, where the volunteer group had been snuffed out by the moratorium and other bureaucratic difficulties. We have fostered leaders for new volunteer groups, garnered funding to hire restoration contractors, and found support for adult and high-school conservation corps work in the region. Kickapoo Prairie, and many preserves in the region, are much healthier now due to our years of effort.

Separate board now — Winter 2008

In partnership with the Civic Federation, Friends announced a push to separate the Forest Preserve Board of Commissioners from the county board. The effort gained support from state legislators and made great progress toward approval. Then, President Toni Preckwinkle won



This young fisherman caught a fish and learned a lesson about an invasive species, the round goby. The mission of the preserves is to hold natural lands together with their plants and animals for the education, pleasure, and recreation of the public.

election and Friends decided to “wait and see” how things progressed before continuing to work on this major reform.

Quinn gives Friends hero award — Winter 2009

Lieutenant Governor Pat Quinn honored Friends with an Environmental Hero Award in recognition of the Friends community's work to protect the forest preserves.

High school interns give 11,000 hours of service — Fall 2009

Begun in 2007 with a fall program for adults, the Friends community's ecological work expanded to include a complementary high school conservation corps program in the summer of 2009. Since then, we have engaged more than 1,250 conservation corps members — who have contributed tens of thousands of hours of service to the preserves.

Communicating with candidates — Summer 2010

The February 2010 primary election indicated a new



Stephen Packard

“Dedicated volunteers who are empowered to take on real responsibility can be the first line of defense against the innumerable threats facing our fragile ecosystems,” said Cecil Hynds-Riddle of their rescue of blue spotted salamanders at Somme Woods.

day on the horizon for the forest preserves as voters nominated Toni Preckwinkle to be the democratic candidate, and eventual winner, for the board president. Friends collaborated with our partners to create a position paper on key forest preserve issues to educate all of the candidates for the board. It helped guide the administration as it forged a new direction for the District.

The next issue of *Friends News*, published in the Winter of 2011, reported on President Preckwinkle’s appointment of new General Superintendent Arnold Randall. The Spring 2011 issue featured a positive report on her first 100 days and the Fall 2012 issue noted that “2 years in, the ship is turning” with more lauding of Preckwinkle’s and Randall’s good work. Randall has said that much credit is due to the advocacy and efforts of the Friends community.

Friends lauds Next Century Plan — Summer 2014

Led by the District and Openlands, many Friends community members helped in the creation of the Next Century Conservation Plan, which celebrates the 100-year anniversary of the forest preserves, while setting ambitious goals for the next 25 years. Friends community members serve on the council that guides the plan and the four committees focused on the four parts of the plan, and Friends Executive Director Benjamin Cox is the co-chair of the steering committee.

Success: Trail expansion under construction — Fall 2014

Harkening back to one of the original four campaigns, the Friends community scores a huge advocacy win with the expansion of the Salt Creek Trail to fill a critical gap in the system. Following this piece are more articles

focused on trails, including conservation corps crews conducting trail work, the filling of another gap in the Salt Creek Trail, and a renewed policy and advocacy focus on trails, especially unpaved footpaths.

Recruiting the next generation of stewards — Fall 2014

The Fall 2014 issue also celebrated the launch of the Centennial Volunteers program with many of our closest partners. The program has brought many new leaders, stronger volunteer groups, and thousands of volunteers to preserves along the Chicago and Calumet rivers.

And now what ...

The Friends community continues to grow with 2,000 members, thousands of supporters, including more than 10,000 social media connections, new stewards and stewardship sites, 30 year-round adult conservation corps members, two summer high-school programs that employ more than 200 each year, and an exciting soon-to-be-announced initiative!

Thank you to each and every one of you for all that you do for the Friends community and the forest preserves.



Chris Weber



Laura Baighusen

(Top) Anna Carvlin volunteers at a restoration day at Whistler Woods near Riverdale. People caring for and enjoying nature is what the Friends community is all about. (Bottom) Conservation corps crew members test water quality. The Friends community has employed more than 1,250 paid members since 2007.



Friends of the Forest Preserves
 411 S. Wells St., Suite 300
 Chicago, IL 60607

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Welcome to all our new members. Thank you for joining this community as we celebrate our 20th anniversary. We are stronger together!



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Busse Woods Night Ride & Paddle
Save-the-Date!

Saturday, August 25
 Busse Woods Boating Center
 Elk Grove Village, IL
 Ticket from \$5 - \$69

fotfp.org/events

4th Annual **Busse Woods Night Ride & Paddle**

FRIENDS OF THE FOREST PRESERVES PRESENTS

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 SEPTEMBER 29TH : LABAGH WOODS

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