

Friends NEWS

Benjamin Cox, editor • benjamin@fotfp.org | Volume 23, Issue 1 • Cook County, Illinois • Winter 2023



Voters deliver landslide victory for forest preserve referendum

By Benjamin Cox, Executive Director

We won and we won big!

Voters in Cook County passed a referendum in support of the forest preserves with a resounding 69 percent of the vote in November. “Yes” votes in the city were at 75 percent, with every ward and township in the county voting in support of the ballot initiative. As it turns out, a voter doesn’t have to live near a forest preserve to know they are important and deserve increased resources.

The win brings \$43 million annually—\$1 billion over the next 25 years—in new funding to conservation in Cook County in perpetuity. It means increased funding for land acquisition, restoration, engagement programming, jobs for teens and adults, and capital improvements; it provides more support for the Brookfield Zoo and Chicago Botanic Garden, and it solves the Forest Preserves of Cook County’s pension problem.

And the campaign made an even bigger impact.

Friends of the Forest Preserves, along with local and national partners, united a coalition of 167 organizations that signed on in support of the campaign. Resounding support came from across the spectrum, ranging from local theater and community groups to large cultural institutions and conservation organizations of all sizes. Supporters included recreation groups, health focused organizations, corporations, and unions.

People of all political persuasions voted “yes” because they love and value nature.

Another significant achievement is that we elevated the status of the forest preserves in people’s minds. The campaign garnered more than 60 pieces on television, radio, and print. Civic leaders along with staff and volunteers raised more than \$3.1 million for



The Friends community is all about bringing people together to help the preserves. This group of volunteers and staff from Friends of the Forest Preserves, Greencorps Chicago, Audubon Great Lakes, and The Field Museum came together to process seeds at Whistler Woods in Riverdale. Friends, together with local and national partners, led a coalition of 167 organizations to win an historic referendum campaign for the forest preserves of Cook County.

the campaign, with more than 80 percent of those funds spent on direct voter communication. We had no opposition.

Finally, this win had regional, statewide, and national significance. The nearly 70,000 acres of preserves in Cook County are the greatest amount of conservation land in the closest proximity to the largest population of people in the country—more than 5 million people in Cook County and 10 million in the region. While the preserves would rank in the mid-40s on a list of 63 national parks in size, there are many parks that dwarf the preserves in size. But they’re too far away for many people to enjoy.

These lands are significant. They are important to the plants and animals that find refuge in the preserves and they are incredibly important to the people that use and benefit from them.

This win was years in the making, and it couldn’t have been possible without the support of all of you who protect, promote, and care for the forest preserves in Cook County. Thank you.

Presence of carnivorous flying insects indicate clean water

By Janet Haugen, Volunteer Dragonfly Monitor

The first time I actually noticed a dragonfly was when my son and I visited a forest preserve, looking for things to photograph with our new point-and-shoot cameras. In a field we came upon a red dragonfly perched on a stalk and, nearby, a blue damselfly perched on another stalk.

I was surprised that they stayed so calm when we came close to them, and I was impressed with their beauty and bright color. After that, I began looking for dragonflies, and later volunteered to monitor them.

I've monitored dragonflies for about 10 years at the Deer Grove East Forest Preserve in Cook County, near Palatine, and at two other natural areas in Lake County. I also look for them at any other outdoor space I visit.

We monitor dragons and damsels for two reasons. The first is simple: they're out during the day and they are easy to see. The second is the important one: dragonflies and damselflies tell us about outdoor water quality. Females lay eggs over water, and larvae spend more time under water than they do as adults flying in the air.

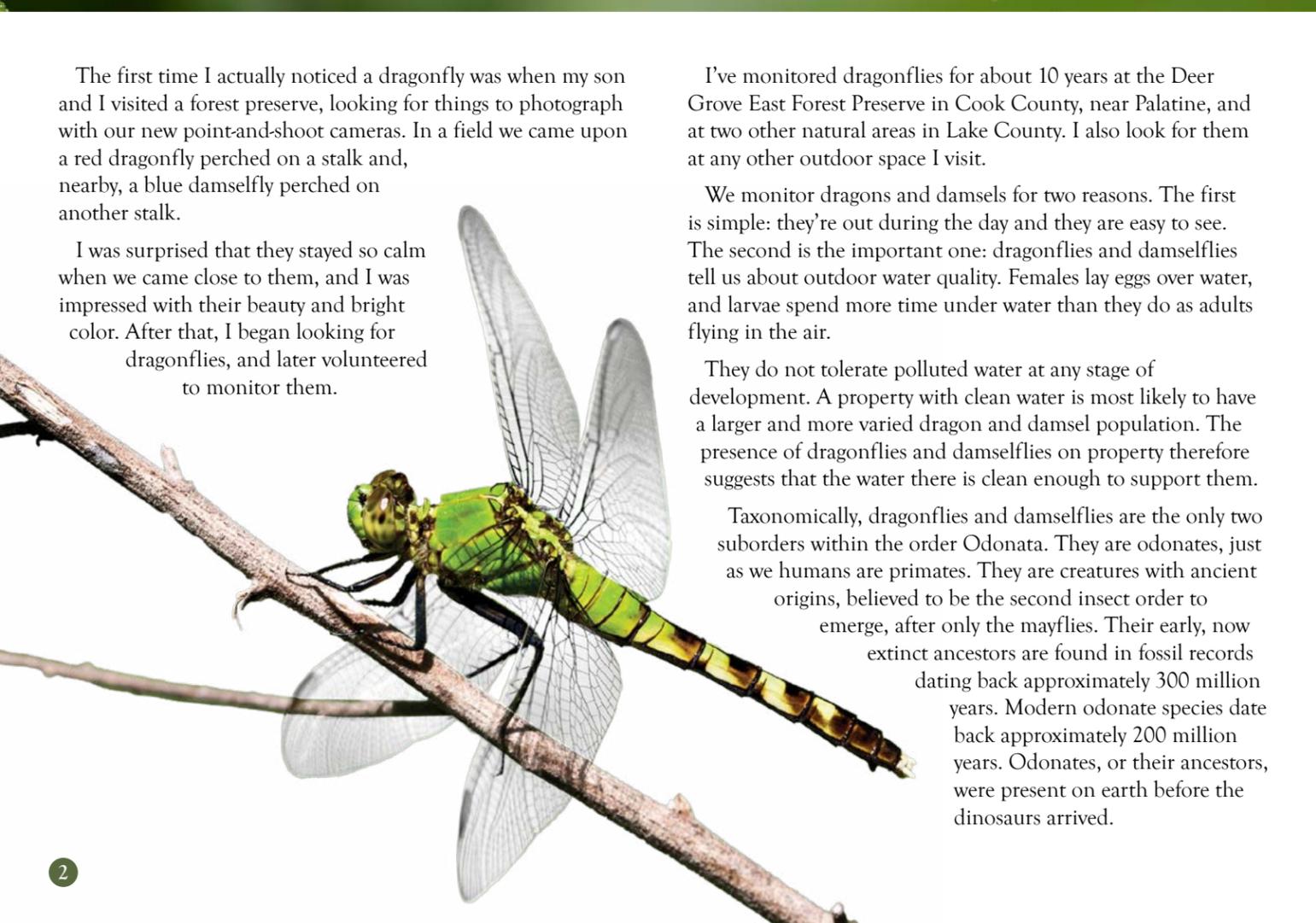
They do not tolerate polluted water at any stage of development. A property with clean water is most likely to have a larger and more varied dragon and damsel population. The presence of dragonflies and damselflies on property therefore suggests that the water there is clean enough to support them.

Taxonomically, dragonflies and damselflies are the only two suborders within the order Odonata. They are odonates, just as we humans are primates. They are creatures with ancient origins, believed to be the second insect order to emerge, after only the mayflies. Their early, now extinct ancestors are found in fossil records dating back approximately 300 million years. Modern odonate species date back approximately 200 million years. Odonates, or their ancestors, were present on earth before the dinosaurs arrived.

Dragonflies and damselflies are carnivorous and are fierce predators. They primarily eat other insects but are also known to consume invertebrates and even small creatures such as tadpoles.

From a human point of view, odonates are entirely beneficial insects: They don't bite or sting or spread disease—but they do eat a lot of mosquitoes!

As a monitor, I love to see and photograph dragons and damsels because they are varied and beautiful. I am also very pleased to find that their presence indicates that Deer Grove Forest Preserve, and other nearby sites, have clean enough water that it allows wildlife to proliferate.



There are lots of opportunities to volunteer with the Forest Preserves of Cook County as a community scientist, including as a dragonfly and damselfly monitor. Please visit fpdcc.com/volunteer/community-science or scan the QR code to find out more.



Opposite, top: Skimming Bluet, male, Deer Grove East
Opposite, bottom: Eastern Pondhawk, female, Deer Grove East
Top: Ruby Meadowhawk, Deer Grove East
Left: Shadow Darner, Crabtree Nature Center
Below: Eastern Amberwing, Deer Grove East
All photos by Janet Haugen



2021 Annual Report

It might be a bit odd to see an annual report for 2021 in early 2023. But the last three years have been anything but normal. We hope to get at least closer to normal in 2023 and report on 2022 later this year.

Year two of the pandemic brought COVID-19 vaccines and the opportunity to get back together in person, while still relying heavily on digital options to continue to provide safe and comfortable alternatives as needed.

Friends of the Forest Preserves leaned into online offerings in a big way in 2020 and continued to do so in 2021. We were also very happy to be able to get back to in-person events and to expand our engagement programming to bring new people out to the preserves to enjoy all of their wonders.

We tried a new approach, which seems to be working exceedingly well: ask folks what they want in their communities and then engage some local leaders to help spread the word. With the help of Community Leaders (to whom we offer a small stipend to compensate them for their valuable time and efforts) we were able to reach farther into communities in the Calumet region such as Riverdale.

Among the new programs we tried out were Family Game Day, Family Craft Day, and Wellness Wednesdays, which included activities such as yoga, “Stretch and Walk,” and “Paint and Sip.” We also continued our highly successful webinar series Hidden Life of the Forest Preserves and our Photo Contest celebration online.

At the same time, we continued to recruit and engage people as volunteers and leaders for restoration work at sites along the North Branch of the Chicago River, south in the Calumet region, as well as northwest in the Spring Creek region.

We’re proud to say that we held 105 events with 1,498 attendees. We supported 208 volunteer stewardship days with 2,562 attendees contributing 11,479 hours worth a whopping \$343,796. And we helped 19

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Yakeara Gibson and Valeria Zalas make seed bombs for Kid Fest at Waukegan Lake in Thornton as part of the Beaubien Woods Youth Corps summer program. Photo by Melissa Agarwal.



Youth in and around the Altgeld Gardens and Golden Gate community on Chicago's south side participated in the Beaubien Woods Youth Corps, which launched in 2021 as a paid summer job program. This summer marks the third year of this successful program. Photo by Melissa Agarwal.



Palos Crew members assist with a prescribed burn at Cap Sauer's Holding Nature Preserve in Palos Park. Prescribed fire is a vital tool to help restore healthy nature. It can kill invasive plants, release nutrients into the soil, help plants grow sooner in the springtime, and start seed germination for some species. Photo by Ebony Taylor.



In 2021 volunteers joined forces with Barrington Greenway Initiative partners, including Friends, to plant over 17,000 native sedges in Spring Creek Forest Preserve. This partnership helped forge the way to forming the Barrington Greenway Initiative Crew which currently works throughout the Barrington area in the far northwest part of Cook County and in Lake County. Photo by Peter Whitney.

Friends of the Forest Preserves proudly supported

208 volunteer stewardship days

with **2,562** attendees

contributing **11,479** hours

worth **\$343,796**

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leaders to engage with essential FPCC volunteer skills training and to advance along the Path to Stewardship (leadership certification).

We were also very happy to return to in-person programming for our teen summer conservation corps programs, while also bringing on a new program, the Beaubien Woods Youth Corps. We employed 179 youth in our summer programs in 2021.

BWYC was designed specifically to engage youth from the neighboring Altgeld Gardens and Golden Gate communities on Chicago's Far South Side with the hope of making the preserve feel more welcoming for the youth and their families.

Behind-the-scenes work on the referendum in support of the forest preserves in Cook County began in earnest in 2021. We began coalition building and fundraising, and we did a lot of work to ensure that the Forest Preserve Board of Commissioners voted to put the initiative on the ballot. We are very proud to be able to say that the commissioners voted unanimously, twice even (an election law technicality required this), in support of the measure.

On the surface, this might seem like an obvious choice for elected officials in charge of this local government. But voting for a tax increase is never easy, and they needed to know that the community supported this. Polling made it clear that voters were behind this measure. And our coalition of supporters, led by this Friends of the Forest Preserves community, gave the commissioners the extra comfort they needed to know that we would win with a strong campaign.

With all things considered, Friends adult conservation corps crews and other staff all got back to work as normally as we could considering the rolling waves of challenges brought by the pandemic. Internally, Friends staff focused on expanding our knowledge and working on diversity, equity, and inclusion with a monthly training led by outside consultants. We remain committed to ensuring that the field of conservation is inclusive for everyone in Cook County, because the preserves belong to all of us.



One of the first companies to come out after Friends' Corporate Team Building Day program resumed in 2021, was First Industrial Realty Trust who joined the Palos Crew in removing invasive species at Sundown Meadow in Countryside. Photo by Ilana Federman.

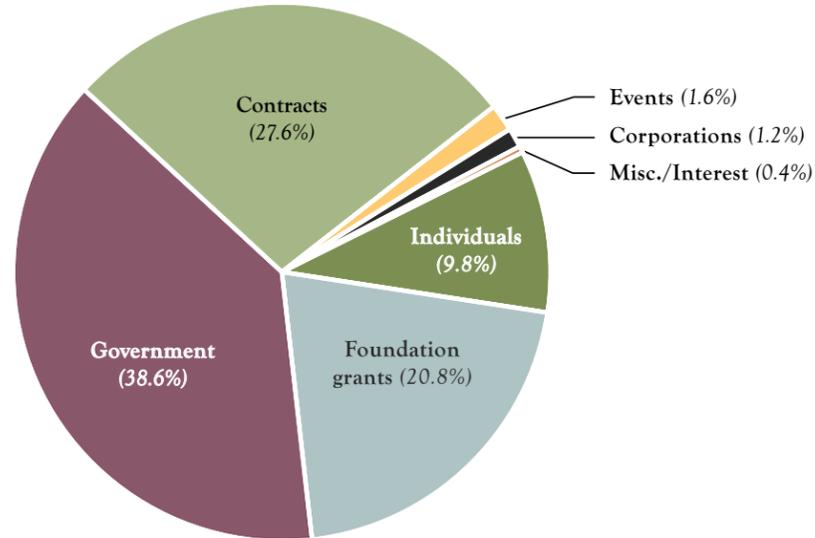


The North Branch Crew, along with the North Branch Field Organizer, enjoyed the opportunity to participate in a prescribed burn at Kloempken Prairie in Des Plaines, a bit further from their usual stomping grounds along the North Branch of the Chicago River. Photo by Hillary Peters.

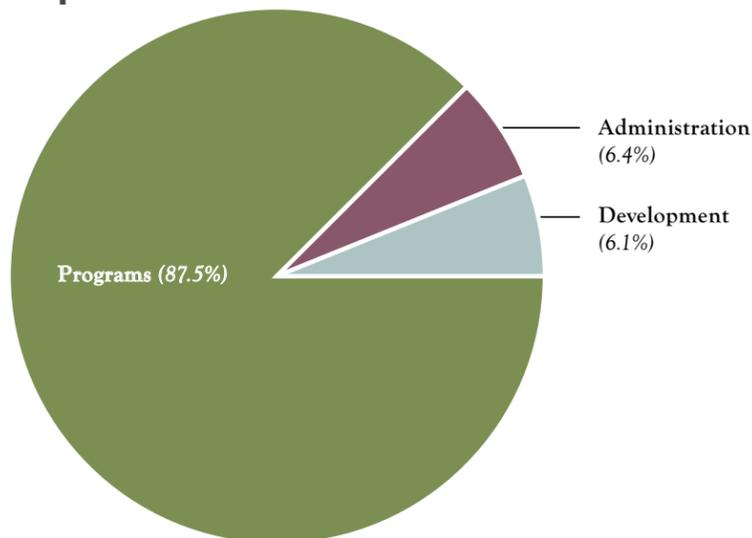


Community members eager to spend more time outside, enjoy Paint and Sip at Whistler Woods in Riverdale, which launched in 2021. Combining art with the forest preserves proved to be an inspired idea with people of all ages enjoying the opportunity to connect with people, nature, and their creative selves. Photo by Gloria Orozco.

2021 Revenue



2021 Expenses



Revenue	2021	2020
Individuals	374,838	285,853
Foundations	799,323	915,388
Government	1,485,377	456,228
Contracts	1,062,190	1,009,188
Events	62,862	10,460
Corporations	45,290	12,552
Misc/Interest	14,413	10,646
TOTAL	3,844,293	2,700,315

Expenses	2021	2020
Programs	2,714,334	2,672,344
Administration	197,273	166,241
Development	189,133	145,420
TOTAL	3,100,740	2,984,005

Assets	2021	2020
Net Assets at beginning of year	903,518	1,187,208
Net Assets at end of year	1,647,071	903,518
Change in Net Assets	743,553	(283,690)

Current Board Members

- Ed Woodbury, Chair
- Justin Martin, Treasurer
- Margaret A. Frisbie, Secretary
- Corryn Antonizio
- Kathleen Bruch
- Walter Burlack
- Cory Chaplin
- José H. Colón
- Dr. Charles D. Dillon, M.D.
- Thomas Greenhaw, Jr.
- Barbara C. Hill
- Dr. Akilah R. Martin, Ph.D.
- Dr. Ronald M. Milnarik, D.D.S.
- Kelly O'Brien
- Derk Osenberg
- Ryan Wilson

Current Staff

- Benjamin Cox, Executive Director
- Sydney Armstead, Engagement Manager
- Alejandra Bravo, Development Manager
- Jillian DiCarlo, Finance and Administration Director
- Brenda Elmore, Production Manager
- Ilana Federman, Associate Director of Development and Communications
- Frances Kane, Grants Manager
- Shirley Konwent, Human Resources Generalist
- Hannah Miller, Program Manager
- Radhika Miraglia, Program Director
- Gloria Orozco, Senior Field Organizer
- Derek Ziomber, Field Organizer

Crew Managers: Greg Franzen, Elyse Leannais, Amy McReynolds

Assistant Crew Managers: Mary Charalab, Hailey Machnikowski, Paul Roots, David Tijerina

Restoration Technician I: Martika Lopez, Alex Robledo, Megan Theisen

Restoration Technician II: Soren Hirschberg

Crew Members: Danay Barrera, Pieter Bonin, Joseph Dalcerro, Tim Husemoller, Sophie Mandile, Ruben Nicolaescu, Melanie O'Brien, Josh Scarbrough, Kiara Taylor, Jeremy Whisenton



Friends of the Forest Preserves
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Chicago, IL 60607



Thanks to your ongoing support, the Friends community has been hard at work for 25 years protecting, promoting, and caring for our forest preserves. Help us start the year strong with a generous donation to ensure the forest preserves are here for us now and generations to come. Visit fotfp.org, scan the QR code, or mail a check to the address above. Thank you!



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Save the Dates!

FRIDAY
6.09.23

Friends Golf Outing
George Dunne National Golf Course,
Oak Forest

SATURDAY
9.30.23

7th Annual Beer in the Woods
LaBagh Woods, Chicago

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"Coyote," at LaBagh Woods in Chicago by Steven Bayer