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# Friends NEWS

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## Communicating with candidates

After the November election, we know for sure that the Forest Preserve District of Cook County Board will have a new President and two new Commissioners and there are a few other commissioner districts in play. In preparation, Friends of the Forest Preserves' Executive Director Benjamin Cox is partnering with the heads of Audubon-Chicago Region, Friends of the Chicago River, Friends of the Parks, Openlands, and Sierra Club-Illinois Chapter, to deliver a Green Paper on Key Conservation Policy Issues to all candidates. The full policy paper can be found at [www.fotfp.org/advocate/issue-watch](http://www.fotfp.org/advocate/issue-watch), and here is a summary of its recommendations.

### 1 LAND POLICY

Since the preserves were founded in 1913, neighboring businesses and government entities have eyed forest preserve land as an "easy" option for their development aims. In almost all cases they should find alternatives.

### 2 LAND ACQUISITION

The District has never pursued funding to implement its own acclaimed land acquisition plan from 1994. Achieving the District's goal of 75,000 acres will require about \$350 million (\$50,000 per acre/7,000 acres). To get there, the District should recommit itself to the acquisition plan, update it, and identify a mix of funding sources: bond referendum, pursuit of grants and land donations, and advocacy for new state and federal conservation funding.

### 3 RESTORATION

"Let nature take its course," as it turns out, does not work in highly altered urban and suburban environments, so land restoration is required for the health of our forest preserves. The General Superintendent and the President must take the lead in advancing the cause of restoration beyond the reach of politics and inertia, and take advantage of not-for-profit partnerships eager and skilled in undertaking restoration.

### 4 SUPERINTENDENT RUNS DAY-TO-DAY OPERATIONS

The General Superintendent needs to be empowered with full control of the day to day operations of the District, including a full human resources department, a regular annual review process for each and every employee, and the ability to hire and fire employees based on merit.

### 5 YOUTH PROGRAMMING

The District offers unique venues for environmental education throughout the county, especially for schoolchildren. Good partnerships already exist but are at risk because most initiative and funding come from outside the District. District staff and resources should play equal roles in these partnerships.

### 6 PARTNERSHIPS

Not-for-profit organizations have played a significant role in leveraging resources for the forest preserves. Such partnerships are often grudgingly accepted by District staff and so poorly staffed that progress is discouraged, rather than facilitated. Leadership from the President and the General Superintendent should help the District fully leverage its external partnerships to foster more public involvement and respect for the District.



Chicago Conservation Leadership Corps interns, a Friends and Student Conservation Association program, carry a log to be used for trail work. The Green Paper on Key Conservation Policy Issues recommends that the District fully leverage its external partnerships to foster more public involvement and respect for the District.

## INSIDE

## News from around the District

### 1 Administrative Hearings court to hear forest preserve violations

The Cook County Department of Administrative Hearings has set up a court to hear violations of Forest Preserve District of Cook County ordinances beginning in August. In the past, when forest preserve police officers have written tickets, the cases were thrown out of court because they were sometimes seen as minor offenses that wasted judges' time. Now, this new court will hear the violations, utilizing lawyers and judges who have an interest in conservation law and protecting the preserves. The expected outcome is that the District ordinances will be more strictly enforced with penalties and fines.

### 2 Army Corps installing carp barriers in preserves

In an effort to further prevent the Asian carp from migrating from the Des Plaines River into the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal and then on to Lake Michigan, Commissioners have authorized the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to construct a 7-mile wire mesh barrier along the recently opened Centennial Trail.

### 3 River Road expansion to take more than 2 acres of preserve land

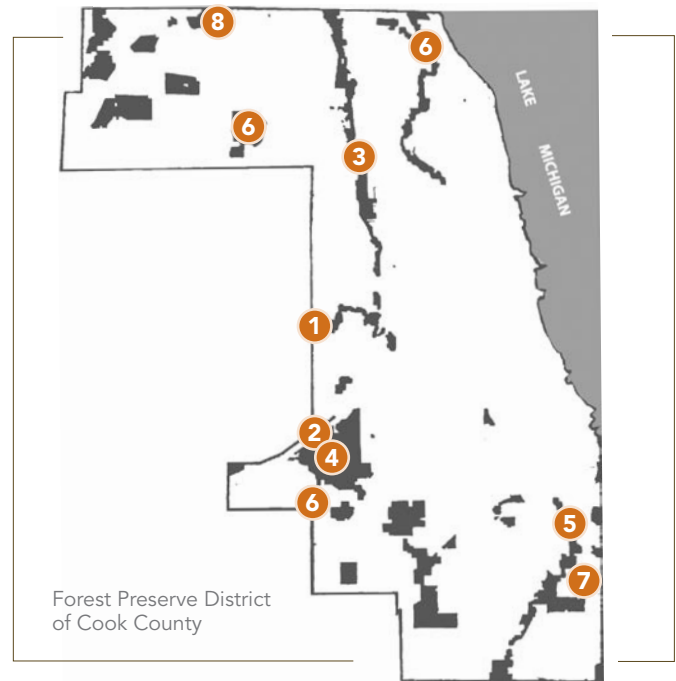
Despite objections by Friends of the Forest Preserves and other conservation organizations, Commissioners approved a request in March by the Village of Des Plaines and the Illinois Department of Transportation for 2.233 acres of forest preserve land. Citing safety issues, Commissioners approved the request in a nine to six vote, with two absent, to allow expansion of the road opposite the casino under construction in Des Plaines. The District will receive funds for tree mitigation and two acres of land in exchange for the easements, which we say isn't enough.

### 4 New Sagawau, Schoolhouse centers open

The new \$8.7-million Sagawau Environmental Learning Center near Lemont opened in April and the \$11.4-million Little Red Schoolhouse Nature Center opened in July. Sagawau has a ski-lodge feel, with displays, expanded classroom space, and cross-country ski rental facilities. The Schoolhouse includes a children's interactive area, multimedia room, and a large area for exhibits, many of which are from the original building that is still in place.

### 5 Dolton Avenue Prairie acquired

More than 24 acres of land were added in April when the District acquired the Dolton Avenue



Prairie in Thornton for \$256,000. The prairie is an Illinois Natural Areas Inventory Site, a significant example of the native Illinois landscape, and contains a remnant wet mesic prairie.

### 6 District hosts high school bass fishing tournaments

Busse Reservoir, Skokie Lagoons, and Tampier Lake were home to three Illinois High School Association Bass Fishing Sectionals in April. More than 160 students from 30 high schools competed, with nine teams advancing to the statewide meet. Reports were that very large bass were caught and the tournaments were a great success.

### 7 Thorn Creek Trail extended

The Lan-Oak Park District in Lansing is extending the Burnham Greenway Bicycle Trail south through the village and into Indiana. A spur off the trail will extend to the District's Thorn Creek Trail. A 1.5-mile portion of the spur trail will be constructed by the park district on forest preserve property. Lan-Oak will pay for the extension and upon completion, the trail will become the property of the Forest Preserve District.

### 8 Deer Grove expansion begins

In May, the District added four parcels of land totaling 1.79 acres for \$300,000 to expand Deer Grove East near Palatine. The District is planning to acquire more than six acres at this preserve, which harbors more than 250 feet of Salt Creek and its banks along that stretch, as well as a restorable oak woodland community.

## Board separation – “wait and see”

The sponsors of legislation to separate the Forest Preserve District and Cook County boards put the legislation on pause this spring after being asked to do so by Alderman Toni Preckwinkle, a candidate for Cook County Board President.

Friends of the Forest Preserves and its 15 coalition partner organizations mobilized their members and supporters, and we all worked hard this spring to get the legislation passed in Springfield. All indications were that the legislation was on track to pass, thanks to

**Friends is committed to seeing this legislation through – no matter how long it takes.**

the calls, letters, visits, and press generated by everyone’s efforts – along with important behind-the-scenes work of many. All that

work is deeply appreciated and will be influential in the long run.

Bill sponsors Senator Don Harmon and Representative Elaine Nekritz agreed to the Alderman’s request. Ms. Preckwinkle wants a chance, if elected, to improve District operations before the boards are separated. She has indicated to Friends that she is not opposed to the idea for the long term but believes that she can do good in the short term. She has an impressive record, and her belief is not unreasonable.

Friends has known from the beginning that passing this monumental legislation would be a difficult task, and we are committed to seeing it through – no matter how long it takes. We feel that this is an essential better-government reform that is the only method for removing the conflict of interest for elected officials running the County and the Forest Preserve District.

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## Round Two: A Great Success

For the second year Friends of the Forest Preserves’ golf outing was a great success. This year 54 golfers had a great time enjoying beautiful weather, golf and the benefits of Cook County’s forest preserve legacy, at George Dunne National, one of 10 of the Forest Preserve District of Cook County’s premier golf courses. At the end of a day of relaxing golf and delicious food, Friends raised nearly \$14,000.

Many thanks to Forest Preserve Commissioner Larry Suffredin for contributing to the event and joining in for a round of golf.

As with all wonderful events, the Friends golf outing was created by a team of hardworking folks. On behalf of the golf committee, board of directors, staff and overall membership of Friends of the Forest Preserve, many thanks to event chairman Dr. John Ross and the committee—Carl Birkelbach, Jack Bone, Chris Brown, José



*Forest Preserve District of Cook County Commissioner Larry Suffredin (center) is joined by Friends’ Board Member Jeremy Hojnicky (left) and Friends’ Member and Hole Sponsor Thomas Jacobs (right) at Friends’ 2nd Annual Golf Outing, which raised nearly \$14,000 this year.*

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Colón, Benjamin Cox, Kevin Flynn, Stephen Schlegel, James Stonebridge, and Brent Young.

In addition, thanks to all of our generous business partners who provided sponsorships and underwriting support: Beverly Bank and Trust Company;

Birkelbach Investment Securities, Inc.; Black Diamond Capital Group, LLC.; Bone Roofing Supply, Inc.; Conservation Land Stewardship, Inc.; Jack DerKacy–New York Life Agent; George W. Dunne National Golf Course; Matthew Filosa–Morgan Stanley Smith Barney; Integrated Respiratory Solutions; Klees Golf Shop; Thomas Jacobs–Northwestern Mutual Financial Network; Nuveen Investments; Stephen J. Schlegel, Ltd.; James J. Stead, Jr.; Kevin Sheehan; James Stonebridge–Peak 6 Investments, LP; and The Sutton Place Hotel.

Mark your calendar for next year’s golf outing which will take place on June 8, 2011.

If you would like to receive information about our annual golf outing or other Friends events or become more involved by serving on a planning committee or as a volunteer, please contact Keith Williams at: (312) 356.9990 or email [keithw@fotfp.org](mailto:keithw@fotfp.org).

# Friends of the Forest Preserves 2009 Annual Report



Highlights from the 2009 and 2010 photo content winners include: (left) Best Flora 2010 – Kevin Wolz, buttonbush, Hidden Pond near Hickory Hills; (center) Runner Up Winner 2010 – Darlene Grossman, Harms Woods near Glenview; (right) Best Fauna 2009 – Halloween Pennant Dragonfly at Somme Prairie Grove by Lisa Culp

Despite the horrendous economic challenges that faced the world, 2009 was another year of expansion and growth for Friends of the Forest Preserves. Friends employed more than 80 people through its internship programs, kicked off our Nature Guide program, and continued the push for board separation. Here are the highlights from 2009:

- Friends ramps up the efforts to pass legislation to separate the Cook County and Forest Preserve District boards. The legislation advances in the Illinois Senate and is passed out of committee.
- Friends helps finally end a land grab at Potawatomi Prairie near Wheeling where a hotel wanted to put a detention pond on forest preserve land. In order to earn “green credits” with the Village of Wheeling, the hotel will improve the site with a trail, canoe launch, and prairie restoration.
- Illegal dumping at Miller Meadow Forest Preserve near Maywood is stopped. Now Friends is pushing for restoration of the site.
- The Chicago Conservation Leadership Corps launches, in partnership with the Student Conservation Association. The 56 high school interns and 11 adult leaders, all paid, provide 11,000 hours of service at five sites throughout the District on projects including trail work, mulching trees, erosion control in a stream channel, and removing invasive species.
- Friends continues its nationally recognized Urban Restoration and Prescribed Fire Internship Program. To date, seven of the 16 participating interns have continued working in the conservation field.
- Friends is awarded \$61,000 from the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation to help restore the extremely high-quality wet prairie at Zander Woods near Lansing.
- Friends trains volunteers to serve as volunteer Nature Guides. Each guide develops their own guided tour for specific preserves based on extensive research and a passion for conservation.
- In a year when many non-profits remain flat or decrease

in fundraising revenue and participation, Friends increases in almost every measure of success. In 2009, total membership grows by 14 percent to 1,639.

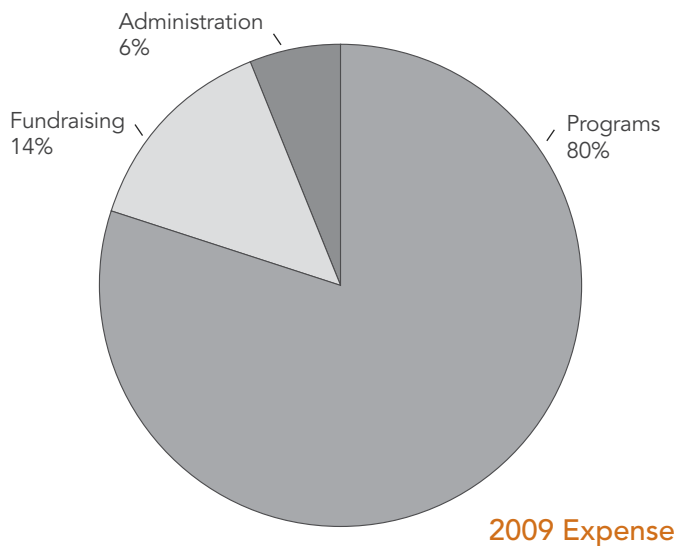
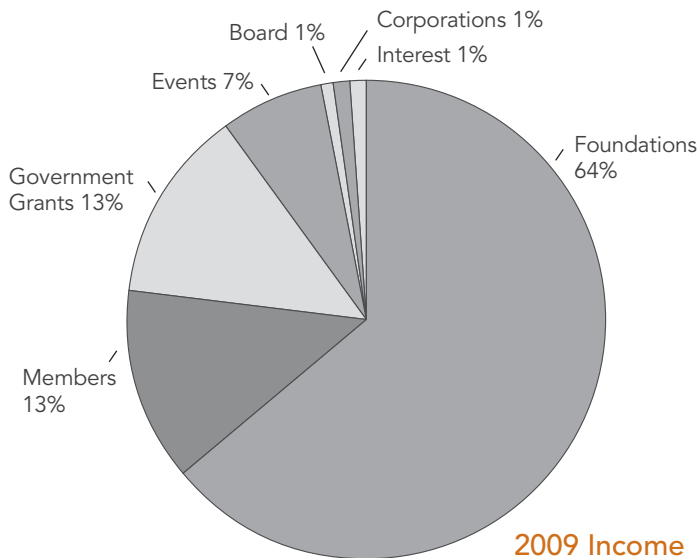
- Ignite the Night and Nature Guide tour participation increase. Ignite the Night’s growing popularity and the First Annual Golf Outing help Friends more than double event revenue.

We do not take this show of support lightly. We appreciate your loyal dedication as a vote of confidence in the work we do and as a demonstration of the forest preserves’ value in our community. We intend to earn that confidence every single day.

Once again Friends has the pleasure of thanking its foundation funders for their support in 2009: The Alphawood Foundation, Boeing, The Field Foundation of Illinois, The Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, and The U.S. Forest Service.

Thank you for all that you do for Friends!

# 2009 Financial Report



Income (Listed in \$ dollars)	2009	2008
Foundations	374,626	130,500
Government Contracts	n/a	76,967
Government Grants	77,500	62,730
Members	75,975	73,132
Events	40,056	17,536
Board	7,770	7,504
Corporations	3,000	5,000
Interest	3,123	2,407
Miscellaneous Revenue	65	n/a

Total \$582,115 (2009) / \$367,926 (2008)

Expense	2009	2008
Programs	471,091	326,962
Administration	35,682	29,662
Fundraising	81,247	11,302
Total	\$588,020	\$367,926

Assets	2009	2008
Net Assets at beginning of 2009	284,114	n/a
Net Assets at end of 2009	278,209	n/a
Change in Net Assets	(\$5,905)	n/a

## Friends Board of Directors

**Carl Birkelbach**, *President* – President, Chairman and CEO, Birkelbach Investment Securities, Inc.

**Stephen Schlegel**, *Vice President* – Attorney, Stephen J. Schlegel Ltd.

**Jay Readey**, *Treasurer* – President, Neighborscapes

**Margaret Frisbie**, *Secretary* – Executive Director, Friends of the Chicago River

**Barbara Birmingham** – Regional Steward, Des Plaines Region, FPDCC

**Jose Colon** – Commercial Agent, Jameson Real Estate

**Rosalyn Ford** – Account Executive, Equinix

**Barbara Hill** – Political Chair, Sierra Club – Illinois Chapter

**Jeremy Hojnicky** – Attorney, Schiff Hardin, LLP

**Charles Kierscht** – Former Chairman and CEO, Kemper Financial Services

**Dr. Michael Lee** – Surgeon, Northwestern Memorial Hospital

**Akilah Martin** – Environmental faculty, DePaul University

**Ronald Milnarik, DDS** – Clinical Assistant Professor of Endodontics, University of Illinois at Chicago

**Stephen Packard** – Director, Audubon-Chicago Region

**Ginger Underwood** – Board member, Friends of the Spring Creek Forest Preserves

## Friends Staff

**Benjamin Cox** – *Executive Director*

**Alice Brandon** – *Conservation Director*

**Rachel Fasiang** – *Development Associate*

**Mary Kaiser** – *Development Manager*

**Jean Sellar** – *Restoration Programs Director*

**Keith Williams** – *Events Manager*

# Board Adopts Four-Year Strategic Plan 2010-2013

Founded in 1998 as a small grassroots organization, Friends has since grown in size and influence. While that growth is gratifying, Friends intends to be a force for as long as the forest preserves of Cook County exist, so we know we must plan wisely for a long and strong future.

Therefore, Friends of the Forest Preserves' Board of Directors has adopted a strategic plan to guide the development of the organization over the next four years. Members have played a key role in providing input used in creating this plan through their practical feedback via the members survey conducted last fall (see article page 7). In addition, members have accelerated the organization's success. Four years ago, Friends had 250 members. Today, more than 1,900 citizens are members, a growth rate of 500 percent! This participation has helped create the vital organization that thrives today and has made us ready to take on the next four years.

Cook County Forest Preserve District Mission: "...to acquire... and hold lands... for the purpose of protecting and preserving the flora, fauna, and scenic beauties within such district, and to restore, restock, protect and preserve the natural forests and lands together with their flora and fauna, as nearly as may be, in their natural state and condition, for the purpose of the education, pleasure, and recreation of the public."

## Friends of the Forest Preserves Strategic Plan 2010-2013 Summary

### Mission

Friends of the Forest Preserves works to preserve, protect, and restore the forest preserves of Cook County for the benefit of people and nature.

### Vision

For Friends of the Forest Preserves to be recognized as the leader in supporting the preservation, protection, and restoration of the forest preserves of Cook County.

For Friends to foster partnerships that establish the forest preserves as the model for the coexistence of people and nature in metropolitan communities.

### Four-Year Goals and Supporting Objectives

**Goal I – Policy: Successfully advocate for fulfillment of the Forest Preserve District of Cook County's mission.**

1. Be a respected partner and friend to the Forest Preserve District of Cook County.
2. Support policy and budgetary decisions to ensure the district's mission is being met.
3. Build, lead, and support strong coalitions to assure powerful and collaborative efforts by many partner organizations and individuals.
4. Engage in advocacy on issues that advance Friends' and the District's mission.

**Goal II – Program: Inspire greater public appreciation and promote volunteerism for the forest preserves.**

1. Continue to support and facilitate the important work of volunteer groups and individuals.
2. Implement education and outreach campaigns to engage the public.
3. Create and implement a marketing and communications plan.

**Goal III – Management: Increase Friends' organizational capacity to accomplish its mission and employ best practices in nonprofit management.**

1. Ensure adequate core budget to meet organizational objectives.
2. Strengthen internal operations, staff capacity, and Board of Directors' capacity.
3. Secure long-term funding for youth programs.
4. Measure the outcome of Friends' work.

## Members give practical advice

Before the board began planning for the future, it took measurements of the present. In Fall 2009, Friends surveyed all members, and a full 33 percent responded. The short but pithy survey asked members about their use of the forest preserves, their two most important issues, their reasons for joining, and the best ways that Friends can help both members and the forest preserves in the years to come.

The messages that came through in this survey, and that Friends has incorporated into its immediate and long-term planning, can be summarized in a few simple statements:

- More people need to know about Friends.
- Keep up the good work.
- Continue working with politicians to help ensure they do the right thing.
- We want more: tell us more, keep us informed, get us together more, everywhere.

The results on major issues facing the forest preserves were surprising in their clarity. Good governance (52 percent) and the health of nature (48 percent) are the top two issues that members want Friends to address. Interestingly, supporting good

governance was members' No. 1 reason for joining, with 65 percent wanting to support advocacy and policy work, fight land grabs, and guard against poor decisions by politicians. In the strategic plan, (see article page 6) its major goals align with these priorities exactly. In addition, the goal to increase organizational capacity will help Friends communicate with and gather its members more often throughout the city and suburbs.

Members also care deeply about the forest preserves and were candid in providing practical advice. About 90 percent of respondents visit the forest preserves at least once a year; 77 percent visit three times or more. And for 26 percent, "or more" means more than 30 times a year! On almost every survey was a handwritten note with a word of advice or appreciation. One member visits Saganaskee Slough most often for, as she writes, "sunsets." How lucky we are to live in a major metropolitan area yet still are able to witness a beautiful sunset, surrounded by nature.

Many thanks to those who responded to this important survey. Friends has its work cut out for it and is fortunate to have such honest

and committed people on the team. Anytime you would like to provide feedback, please feel free to call 312-356-9990, or write Mary Kaiser at [maryk@fotfp.org](mailto:maryk@fotfp.org).

As the annual report in this newsletter shows, members provide 13 percent of the income to make our core work possible, such as policy work that foundations and government often do not support. Many organizations say this, but for Friends it's really true – we cannot do it without you.

“Keep up the great work, especially advocacy – preserving and expanding our green space is tremendously important – even to folks who don't know it.”

“We love our forest preserve and are thankful that Friends supports a resource that we cherish.”

– Member Comments



## Time to Renew!

Spring and summer is the time that Friends reminds (and reminds, and reminds) all its current members to renew. If you have done so recently, thank you! If you haven't had the chance yet, please put down this newsletter, fire up your nearest web-enabled device (laptop, desktop, smartphone, etc.), and go to [www.fotfp.org](http://www.fotfp.org) "Donate Now" to renew your membership right now. Renew with \$40 or more to get this exclusive pocket field guide created just for Friends, laminated and just the right size for a pocket or backpack on your next trip to your favorite preserve.

Renew now at [www.fotfp.org](http://www.fotfp.org) with \$40 or more to get the exclusive pocket field guide: *Common Species in the Forest Preserves of Cook County* featuring 116 species you might encounter on your next walk or picnic.



Friends of the Forest Preserves  
28 E. Jackson Blvd., Suite 1102  
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*Join Friends at the bonfire on September 25*

## Save the Date!

### Ignite the Night Saturday, September 25

Spring Creek Forest Preserve (near Barrington Hills)  
5 to 10 p.m.

This is not your average fundraiser. Plan to join Friends for this special night in the fall, with cook-out supper, dancing to live music, a roaring bonfire, and horse-drawn wagon rides in the beautiful Spring Creek preserve in Barrington Hills. The forest preserves usually close at sun-down, but not for us, not tonight. Leave the tux and high heels at home, and plan on a good time! Tickets will be \$45 for adults, \$25 for teens, and just \$5 for kids. If you'd like to make reservations, call Keith Williams at (312) 356-9990 or visit us at [www.fotfp.org](http://www.fotfp.org).