



# Friends NEWS

Benjamin Cox, editor • benjamin@fotfp.org • Volume 19, Issue 2 • Cook County, Illinois • Fall 2019

## President Preckwinkle declines to move referendum, for now

Thanks to you, Forest Preserves of Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle and the 17 Commissioners know that our constituency is strong. The Friends community helped lead a coalition of conservation partners in Cook County in an effort to secure the funding the Forest Preserves of Cook County needs to protect nature for people and wildlife. Our ask to the Board was to include a referendum on the March ballot, allowing the people to vote for healthy forests and prairies, clean water, and vibrant open spaces so close to home.

Many, many of you reached out to your Commission-

ers to demonstrate your strong support of the preserves, and they told us that they got the message loud and clear. Thanks to each and every one of you who called or sent an email. And a special thanks to those who trekked downtown early on a Tuesday morning to testify before the Board Members in person. A diverse group of people, from horseback riders to school children and business people to people impacted by the Conservation Corps, shared their personal stories about how the preserves make their lives better every day.

**Preckwinkle continued on page 7**

## It wasn't about the money, it was about believing in her



*Evelyn Barker is the mother of Annicka Barker, a crew member of this year's Forest Preserve Experience. She sent this wonderful letter about their experience. FPE engages 14- to 19-year-old residents of the Cook County Housing Authority in a five-week paid summer job program.*

Reflecting back on these past five weeks as a parent brings memories to me as well as pride. I am so proud of my daughter as she was selected as the nicest crew member of the Friends of the Forest Preserves summer workers.

Annicka Barker is my daughter and her shared experiences educated me too as neither of us were outdoor persons and we had no knowledge of what the forest preserves in Cook County were for.

We learned first off that the forest preserves in Cook County are the largest in the United States of America. We also learned about invasive species or plants that inhabit the forest and choke out the life of other plants which are good for us.

These plants or invasive species would take over the forest and affect it so that it damaged the ecological system as we have grown to depend on.

**Annicka continued on page 6**

## News from around the preserves

### 1 Harms Woods 25th FPCC Nature Preserve

Harms Woods near Glenview is now an Illinois Nature Preserve, which provides the highest level of protection for land in the state. The Forest Preserves of Cook County has a goal to dedicate 20,000 acres as Illinois Nature Preserves or Land and Water Reserves by 2025. The FPCC now has approximately 9,860 acres protected as INP land.

Harms Woods is approximately 170 acres and sits along the North Branch of the Chicago River with high quality oak woodlands, upland forest, and floodplain. Volunteers and FPCC staff began ecological management of the site in the 1980s. Leaders John and Jane Balaban lead a vibrant community of volunteers there and are known throughout the region as ecological experts.

### 2 11 acres purchased near Spring Creek; Horizon fight finally over

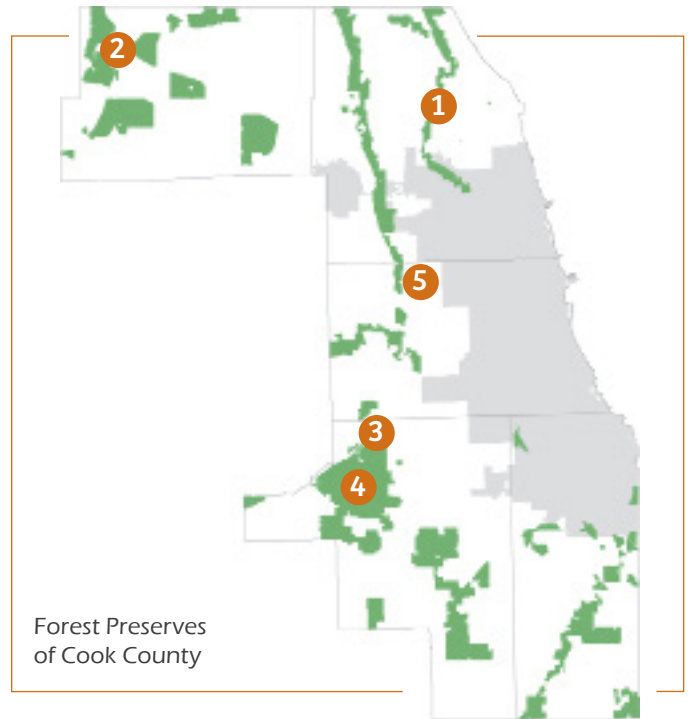
The Spring Creek preserves in the northwest section of Cook County will grow by 10.72 acres with the acquisition of land adjacent to the Spring Lake Preserve. The \$820,000 purchase will help strengthen a connection to the 400-plus acre Horizon Farms, which was purchased by the FPCC in 2013 and has been in a legal challenge ever since. Reports suggest that the battle is finally over and the land will be open to the public once again, as a forest preserve, in the near future.

### 3 Mile Long Bridge construction will close trail for 5 years

The Mile Long Bridge in the southern portion of I-294 is being rebuilt and will require the closure of a 1.5-mile-long portion of the John Husar I&M Canal Trail east of Willow Springs Road for approximately five years. Impacts to land owned or leased by the FPCC will require granting a 15.246-acre permanent easement and a .499-acre temporary easement. Most of the easement represents land that has long been used by the Tollway, but was never put in writing.

Nearly \$1 million will be generated by the agreement. The funds will be used for ecological restoration, trail and parking enhancements, as well as improvements to trailhead amenities, including restroom renovations, signage, patching non-impacted areas of the trail, and ADA enhancements.

The Tollway will also provide in-kind contributions including vegetation management of the impacted portion of the trail, temporary signs on the trail and on-street directional signage, and rehabilitation of the trail after the project is complete.



### 4 CAMBr, FPCC memorialize agreement

Chicago Area Mountain Bikers and the FPCC are engaging in an agreement to continue their more than 20-year partnership to clear, manage, and maintain multi-use natural surface single-track trails in the Palos region of the forest preserves in southwest Cook County. Projects undertaken by CAMBr, a non-profit organization, provide a system for ensuring sustainable use by mountain bike riders and improve the FPCC's single-track trail system by training, certifying, and empowering volunteer leaders and communities to steward the trails. All trail projects require FPCC approval and the FPCC will provide in-kind assistance, such as stone and other materials and limited storage space for tools and equipment.

### 5 FPCC budget proposal flat for 2020

FPCC Board President Toni Preckwinkle and Superintendent Arnold Randall are presenting a status quo budget for 2020. While taking the minimum increase allowed by law that accounts for inflation, the budget otherwise holds steady as the FPCC prepares itself for future budget issues as the pension gap continues to rise and capital needs continue to grow. Leadership has repeatedly stated that program and service cuts are likely in the coming years without new sources of revenue.

At \$124.6 million dollars, the budget reflects an increase of 3.8 percent over last year. The Corporate Budget request, which funds the day-to-day operations, is \$63.5 million and includes budgeting to employ 535 full-time and 99 seasonal and part-time staff in 2020 for nearly 70,000 acres of land. Both funding and staff are low in comparison to similar agencies in the region.

# Moments of wonder sparked through engagement

By Radhika Miraglia, Advocacy and Engagement Director

“If you just stand still, the bee will leave you alone,” I heard a young girl whisper to herself. Her arms remained rigid by her side as she watched the bee fly around her and away, her expression filled with more wonder than fear. The advice, given by Conservation Corps crew member Cinnamon Hoskins, was working.

Friends plans on sparking many more moments of wonder like these by thoughtfully expanding our community engagement efforts. We believe (and research shows) that people will only protect what they love, what they understand. And so, Friends will be taking a deeper dive



Bob Lee

Every member of the North Branch Conservation Corps crew used the word “community” to describe their crew and where they work. The crew works hand-in-hand with volunteers in preserves along the North Branch of the Chicago River.

into helping people fall in love with their forest preserves. For some, it will develop through the hard work of removing buckthorn and sowing native seed; for others it will grow from the solace felt on a short walk along a stream. Many others will require repeated visits – with relatable role models – to even start feeling comfortable in the woods. This was our motivation during the recent field trip to Beaubien Woods, where Friends crew members led summer campers, ranging from 6 years old to 17 years old, with Girls, Inc. Chicago on a nature walk. For many, this was their first time in the preserves. Crew members led small groups on an exploration to find different types of plants and animals that call Beaubien Woods home. Within just a few minutes, everyone forgot how uncomfortably hot and nervous they were and focused on the beauty of the flowers, toads, birds, trees – and cool people who knew a lot about nature – with whom they were spending time.

As Friends embarks on the expansion of our ‘engagement’ efforts, it is imperative that we understand what motivates (or prevents) people from venturing into local natural areas. Each individual experiences nature in their own way and through a different lens, and we must do the hard work of being patient, listening to, and embracing this diversity in order to build a strong base of support for the preserves.

Research shows that a perceived lack of safety, lack of transportation, and simple lack of awareness are major barriers to visiting the preserves – and Friends is taking a deep look at how to overcome these issues. But we’re not done listening. Nuances exist that can only be understood by taking more time to get to know people on an individual basis. For example, there are people in Cook County who already deeply value nature, but don’t feel that their local green spaces are meant for them to enjoy. They hesitate to go on a bird walk because they’re intimidated by the expertise in the group, or they choose not to follow their curiosity about trees, volunteering, or canoeing because they don’t see others who look like them doing the same.

“Friends will use its strength in working at a grassroots level to lift people up and into the preserves so that everyone can enjoy the many different benefits of being outside,” says Benjamin Cox, Executive Director. “We aim to connect people with a greater diversity of education, recreation, and volunteer opportunities in order to welcome more people into the Friends community.”

Once people enjoy positive experiences in the preserves, the effect on society snowballs – often in unexpected ways. Last year, when I was the North Branch Field Organizer, I met Ozakh Ahmed at a Blue Star Memorial Woods Centennial Volunteer workday. In the past, Ozakh had volunteered on field trips with her high school. After returning home from college, Ozakh felt the same joy from helping the preserves resurface as she volunteered at Blue Star and other preserves again and again. But her positive impact did not stop there. Ozakh is the Lead Program Facilitator for Girls Inc, Chicago, an organization that “inspires all girls to be strong, smart and bold.” This summer she reached out to Friends to coordinate an experience in the preserves for the girls in their summer camp program, based in the city’s south side. “I knew that, in an effort to facilitate a deeper understanding of what it

Engagement continued on page 6

## Friends of the Forest Preserves 2018 Annual Report



Kim Munroe

*A letter from Board Chair Stephen Schlegel and Executive Director Benjamin Cox*

It has been a year of awards and expansion for Friends.

Together with our partners who run conservation corps programs, Friends received the 2018 Innovation in Conservation Award—Conservation Corps from the National Recreation and Park Association and a 2019 George B. Rabb Force of Nature Award from Chicago Wilderness. The Chicago Audubon Society awarded Friends with the Protector of the Environment—Political Advocacy award and the Forest Preserve Experience Program was the recipient of the 2018 Nan McKay and Associates Resident Service Honorable Mention.

The FPE program, which engages high school students who are residents or voucher holders of the Housing Authority of Cook County, grew by 25 percent to 112 participants and 26 leaders this summer. The Friends community is proud to be able to engage so many young people and introduce them to the wonders of nature in the forest preserves—while also paying them \$10 per hour, 25 hours per week, for five weeks. Whether or not these young people go into careers in conservation, it can be as-

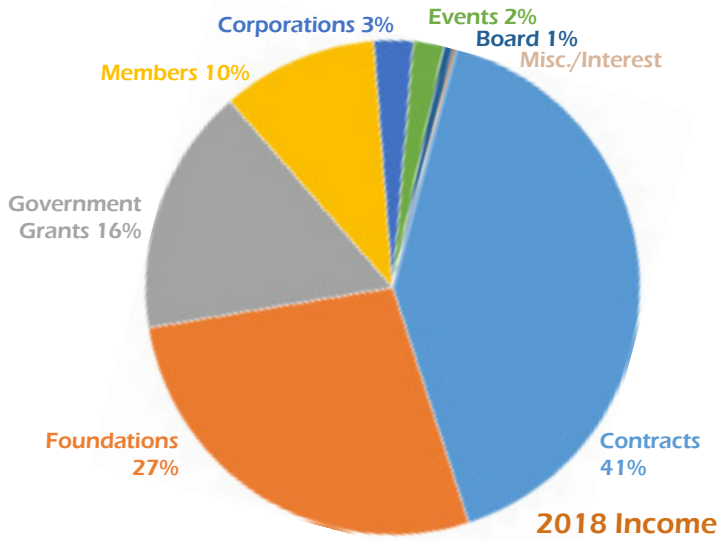
sured that they will have a life-long love of nature and will be advocates for the preserves.

Our efforts, with our partners Friends of the Chicago River and the Forest Preserves of Cook County, to engage more volunteer leaders and grow strong volunteer communities also expanded this year with the addition of another full-time field organizer for the Spring Creek preserves and a part-time staff person for the Poplar Creek preserves. Strong support from individuals and foundations have made it possible to help grow and fortify these efforts.

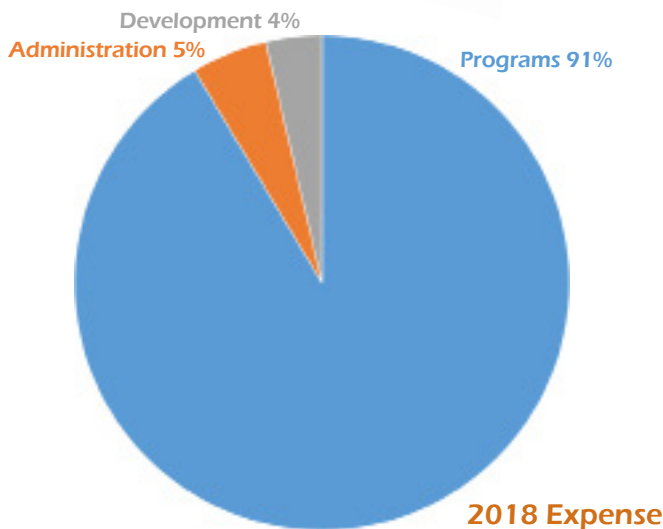
Friends is also extremely proud to have begun working in the violence prevention arena by engaging with Chicago CRED. While our current work together is ending, new opportunities are likely just around the corner.

Long-term relationship building, combined with a strong track record of getting things done, put Friends in the lead of the coalition to secure additional resources for the forest preserves in Cook County. While efforts for a referendum on next year's ballot are currently on hold, Friends is pivoting with its partners to go downstate and do the work necessary to help the preserves. None of this would be possible without your support and involvement.

# Friends of the Forest Preserves 2018 Annual Report



2018 Income



2018 Expense

Income	2017	2018
Contracts	613,094	1,103,151
Foundations	903,833	738,615
Government grants	203,300	436,675
Members	235,510	275,164
Corporations	117,253	69,365
Events	32,267	53,427
Board	28,860	17,485
Misc./Interest	5,185	4,641
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,139,302</b>	<b>\$2,698,523</b>

Expense	2017	2018
Programs	1,523,896	2,544,044
Administration	144,260	137,607
Development	84,511	101,634
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,752,667</b>	<b>\$2,783,285</b>

Assets	2017	2018
Net Assets at beginning year	720,212	1,106,847
Net Assets at end year	1,106,847	1,022,085
<b>Change in Net Assets</b>	<b>\$386,635</b>	<b>(\$84,762)</b>

## Board of Directors

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## Staff

Benjamin Cox—Executive Director | Melissa Agarwal—Program Manager | LaQuay Boone—Employment Counselor | Jillian DiCarlo—Finance and Administration Director | Ilana Federman—Outreach Manager | Radhika Miraglia—Advocacy and Engagement Director | Zach Taylor—Conservation Director  
 Centennial Volunteers Field Organizers: Gloria Orozco Soto, Peter Whitney, Derek Ziomber  
 Conservation Corps Managers: Brenda Elmore (Senior Crew Manager), Tim DiCarlo, Xochitl Lopez, Hillary Peters, BreShaun Spikes, Bettina Tousignant, Dowan Triche | Assistant Managers: Robert Abraham, Dean Garber, Aaron Jones, Hannah O’Sullivan, Laura Roncal, Ebony Hughes Taylor, Stephan Vandenbroucke  
 Crew Members: Anthony Bennett, Emanuel Black, Lee Carroll, Shaquille Clayton, Dawson Cox, Kevin Dennis, Joshua Dyer, Corey Hill, Cinnamon Hoskins, Kat Jodlowski, Freddie Jones, Brian Kolasa, Amber Kunz, Devonta Mason, Jelani McCollum, Danny Medina, Semaj Moody, Alex Noe, Marcell Oliver, Graciela Olmedo, Troy Rudy, Sophia Shukin, Jermaine Smith, Terrell Tabor, Jon Richard Williams, Lance Williams



Renee Lynn Photography

## Beer in the Woods smashing success, again

The Third Annual Beer in the Woods raised more than \$25,000 to help fund Friends’ advocacy work, conservation corps programs, and community outreach. Nearly 500 attendees enjoyed beer, cider, and activities on September 28 at LaBagh Woods. We’re so grateful for our enthusiastic attendees, the participating breweries and exhibitors, and all of our sponsors. Without them, this event would not be possible and certainly wouldn’t be as much fun. If you’d like to learn more about upcoming events, please visit [fotfp.org](http://fotfp.org). Save the date, Beer in the Woods will be on September 26, 2020. You won’t want to miss it!

### Annicka continued from page 1

My daughter also taught me that in order to get rid of these species of plants her job entailed but was not limited to: coming to work, doing morning warm up exercises, which she said were fun and informative, and then they were given protective gear such as: hard hats, gloves, boots, and goggles to prepare them to engage these species for removal.

All in all they learned to use tools called loppers and bow saws. I asked her what were those?

“Mom, they’re tools we use to cut stuff down with. To cut the plants that need to be removed. Keeping the forests preserved is our responsibility Mom,” she said. “We need it and it needs us.”

I am so grateful for this opportunity for my daughter and the other young people involved. In our area where we live, gun violence is present everyday and going outside is deadly so we don’t.

This allowed her and I and her sister to see a different world. A different avenue to keep busy and out of trouble and to view the beauty of just having a good day outside.

The best part of this program is that it takes at risk young people and takes them away from danger and presents them with learning opportunities. Work experience, good ethics, team building exercises, and teaches them about getting up early, and being on time and how

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**Keeping the forests preserved is our responsibility Mom. We need it and it needs us.**

**– Annicka Barker, FPE Crew Member**

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to earn more than a fair wage all while having fun.

I’m so grateful and so is she. It wasn’t about the money as much as it was giving her a job and a T-shirt and believing in her enough to say you’re worthy of hiring. She beamed with excitement and never complained to

me about the extraordinary heat or her being tired. She rather explained to me the hiking trips and the canoeing trip she witnessed. She laughed and laughed about funny things her supervisors

or her co-workers did instead of complaining.

It’s all coming to an end soon but what she will take away from this is discipline and pride as she enters high school this fall.

She will take the hiking experience as she walks the halls of the building. She will take the time management as she begins her day in the morning and moves from class to class. She will also take hard work ethics and drive with her as she has learned that you must work hard to achieve and that it will pay off in the end.

Her values and skills were reinforced through this program. It’s a very worthwhile adventure and endeavor. We appreciate you investing in our youth. Especially in at risk areas. An opportunity we might not otherwise readily be offered.

Thank you for the opportunity and your belief in my daughter. We hope to see you again next year.

### Engagement continued from page 3

means to take care of our community, it would be essential for the girls to experience the depth and beauty of our forest preserves,” says Ozakh. “Seeing the tadpoles, the green, the purple, the blue for the first time again through the eyes of our young girls was like taking a breath of fresh

air.” And for at least one of those little girls, being close to a bee became not so scary after all.

We will rely heavily on new ideas and perspectives from the Friends community to help achieve our goals for community engagement. Please reach out to me at [radhika@fotfp.org](mailto:radhika@fotfp.org) or stop by and say hello at an upcoming event.

# Violence trauma victims benefit from conservation jobs

By BreShaun Spikes, Crew Manager

Chicago CRED's (Creating Real Economic Destiny) mission: Our singular purpose is to achieve a transformative reduction in Chicago gun violence. Friends and CRED have been working together for a year to employ men who are violence trauma victims. While our work together is ending in January, the impact will live on in the preserves and the people the program engaged.

For many of the CRED South crew members, working for Friends of the Forest Preserves is their very first introduction to the incredible world of conservation. Many of them have visited forest preserves on the south side, but have never dared to voyage past the mowed picnic areas.

Experiencing restoration hands on with Friends has undoubtedly put to the test their willingness to learn, adapt, and venture outside of their comfort zones. Whether it's hauling and burning brush, manually pulling droves of weeds, or trail walking and learning about spring flowers, CRED South members have experienced a wide variety of what conservation work has to offer, and the wonders of what lies right beyond the mowed edge.

Rolling ridges of woodland and sprawling prairies are a lot different than the urban concrete-stricken city blocks they are used to, and like with most people, new experiences come with their own new challenges to tackle.

Working in the element of ever-changing Chicago-land weather, avoiding the seemingly sentient thorns of multiflora rose, and adjusting to an entirely new work environment are just a few challenges they have met and grown accustomed to. But despite the challenges faced, experiencing the members' burgeoning interest in nature itself, makes a monumental difference and continues to make it all worthwhile.

The job is different than most jobs they're used to, for a lot of reasons. Many of them have never worked outdoors. Some have shared that in previous work environments they've never even been acknowledged for the work they do, nor supported in the same way that Friends does. Some feel that most jobs have not cared about them as individuals or about their professional journey. It's nice to have them finally feel encouraged. Even if they don't choose con-



For CRED conservation corps crew members, being out in the forest preserves provides them the opportunity to have dreams again, even if only for eight hours a day.

servation as a career choice in the end, it's important for them to understand that they are an integral part of society.

For many of the crew members, their attention has always been hyper focused on day-to-day survival, inevitably forgetting what it means and feels like to dream or even thrive. Being out in the preserves, in the serenity of a remnant prairie, the awe-inspiring calm of a lake or the wise majesty of hundred year old bur oaks, they are able to explore the possibility of having dreams again, even if only for eight hours a day.

Although many challenges have been faced, the innumerable, even if small, positive seeds that Friends is planting in the crew members of CRED South have the potential to grow exponentially, adding to the forest preserve of dreams that lives in each of us.

## Preckwinkle continued from page 1

Unfortunately, at this time the effort is not advancing. With significant tax increases likely in the city of Chicago and Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker's proposed constitutional amendment for a "fair tax" system, President Preckwinkle does not think this is the time to move forward with a referendum for the FPCC.

Please know that this effort is not over. Our coalition is already putting together a strategy to secure additional resources for the preserves with a focus on Springfield.

We will ask you to raise your voice again over the next year. Thank you for all that you do for the forest preserves. Please continue your good work in support of the preserves—it truly does make a difference.



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To connect, email Ilana at [ilana@fotfp.org](mailto:ilana@fotfp.org) or give us a call at 312-356-9990

We'd *love to hear* from *you!*