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2019 Annual Report

Our community remains strong through challenges of 2020

One of the minor benefits of this very challenging COVID-19 world we are living in is the strength and resiliency of the Friends community. The pivots to keep our good work moving forward have been impressive to behold.

By all accounts, the preserves have experienced an unprecedented number of visitors this year.

And while that brings some challenges, it also tells us that without a doubt our cherished woodlands, wetlands, rivers, lakes, prairies, and savannas that make up the forest preserves are an essential part of what makes Cook County an amazing place to call home.

With nearly 70,000 acres of land, the preserves hold possibly the largest amount of conservation land so close to such a large population center anywhere in North America and potentially the world. The preserves are vitally important for people and nature. As a member of our community, one of the best things you can do is to share this information with everyone you know.

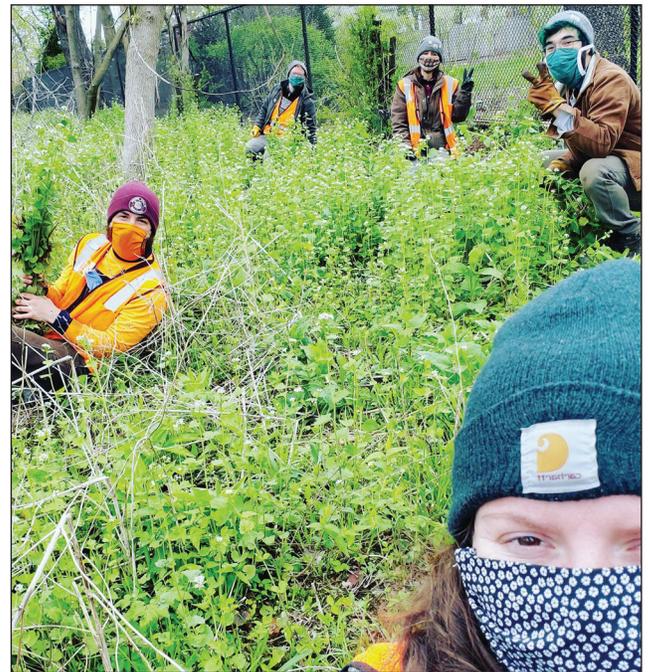
Comparisons help folks understand the significance of the preserves that harbor more than 100 threatened and endangered species, 300 miles of marked trails, 297 picnic groves, 40 fishing lakes, five campgrounds, and much more. If the preserves were a national park, they would rank 47th by size. Combined, they would cover nearly half of the area of the City of Chicago. And, they are some of the most ecologically diverse lands in North America.

At 15,000 acres, the Palos preserves are as large as one of the newest national parks (formerly a national lakeshore), the Indiana Dunes. They are impressive and among the things that make Chicago great: our architecture; Lake Michigan and our free and open lakefront; the museums and culture; sports teams; and amazing cuisine.

But, we digress.

Our community of more than 2,200 members, thousands of volunteers, more than 1,500 conservation corps alumni, and

2019 Annual Report continued on page 6



TOP: COVID-19 kept Conservation Corps crews inside and focused on training and enrichment for nearly two months. Once the “all clear” was given, crews were back to work removing weeds and following strict health and safety protocols. The North Branch crew was happy to return to field work in May at Watersmeet Woods in Northfield.



LEFT: Friends advocated hard to keep our summer teen programs going this year despite COVID-19. Both summer programs were a success, with one—the Forest Preserve Experience—re-invented as an online format. FPE remained focused on key goals and created opportunities for participants, like Aniya, to spend time outside every day.

News from around the preserves

1 \$25 million coming to preserves via county highway department over next five years

Improvements identified in the Forest Preserves of Cook County's five-year Capital Improvement Plan will be funded with up to \$25 million provided through the Cook County Department of Highways and Transportation Rebuild Illinois capital bill. Funding from the Motor fuel tax will cover improvements to parking lots, sidewalks, driveways, engineering, resurfacing and repaving; upgrades for the Americans with Disabilities Act; and pedestrian safety.

2 Beaubien Woods Youth Corps delayed but not stopped by COVID-19

The FPCC and the Friends community are collaborating on a new paid employment program for teenagers from neighborhoods near Beaubien Woods Forest Preserve on Chicago's far south side. Participants will lead education and recreation activities highlighting the unique ecological assets of Beaubien Woods and the Calumet River. Due to COVID-19, summer 2020 was deferred and program capacity will be doubled for summer 2021. The Friends community has been working with partners and volunteers at Beaubien Woods since 2005.

3 Wetland bank will restore portion of Paul Douglas

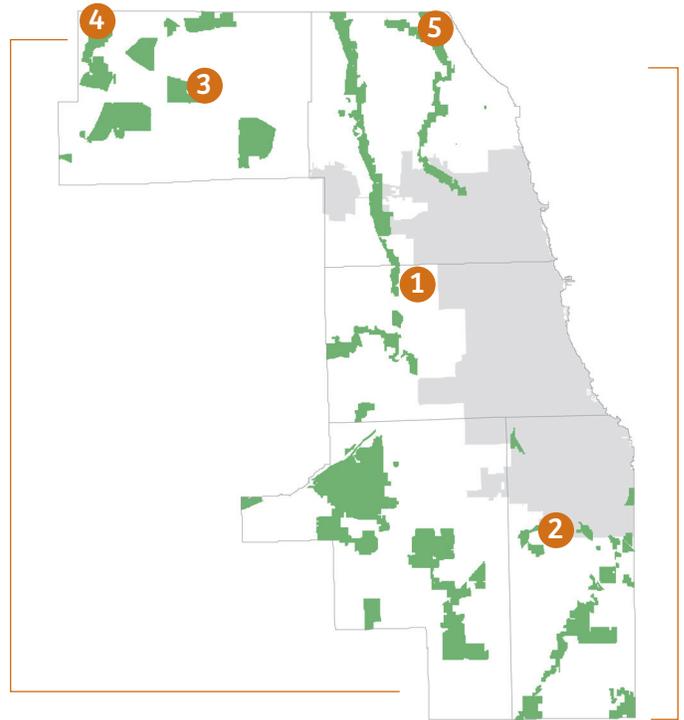
An innovative restoration approach is being implemented in the northwest suburbs. A wetlands restoration project at Paul Douglas Forest Preserve, near Hoffman Estates, will be designated as a mitigation bank. This project matches restoration needs with mitigation needs by brokering funding between government agencies and other land owners. Work will benefit wildlife, restore native vegetation to a degraded portion of the preserve, and support long-term maintenance.

4 Friends joins Barrington Greenway Initiative

The Friends community officially joined a partnership for cooperative restoration and management of natural areas in northwest Cook, southwest Lake, and eastern McHenry counties. Friends joins the Lake County Forest Preserve District, Citizens for Conservation, the Bobolink Foundation, the McHenry County Conservation District, and Audubon Great Lakes in efforts to coordinate restoration and management, share information, secure grants, and implement common management objectives.

5 Chicago Botanic Garden to collect fees

The Chicago Botanic Garden, part of the FPCC in the far northeast portion of the county, plans to add a yet-to-be-determined admission fee in addition to the existing parking fee. Visitors who arrive via trails will still be able



to access the 385 acres for free. Current plans more than likely include discounts for Cook County residents and will include 52 free days per year. Over one million people drive to explore the Chicago Botanic Garden's 27 gardens and four natural areas annually.

First of four position papers approved by Commissioners

Racial equity, diversity and inclusion are the focus of the first of four papers being presented by the Conservation and Policy Council to the FPCC's Board of Commissioners. Authored by a mix of FPCC staff, volunteers, and partner staff members, the position paper "Moving Toward Racial Equity" recognizes that the forest preserves exist within a pervasive culture of structural racism and outlines a set of principles and recommendations to meet the FPCC's conservation mission in the most equitable way.

The Council hopes that this paper, over two years in the making, can help guide the forest preserves staff, the Board of Commissioners, partners, and supporters as they respond to calls for racial justice and equity today and well into the future. Friends' Advocacy and Engagement Director Radhika Miraglia was among the FPCC staff, volunteers, and partners consulted for content.

Papers and reports such as these have been produced by various FPCC advisory councils since the inception of the preserves over 100 years ago. Historically they have served for many decades as important signposts and guidance for forest preserve leadership.

Resilient people in face of environmental injustices make Calumet strong

By Gloria Orozco, Calumet Field Organizer

When asked why I love working in the Calumet region, I could have said that it's because of its unique ecology of marsh, prairie, and oak savanna still thriving through the industrialization of the area. Or because there is significant biodiversity and a great variety of endangered and threatened species of plants and animals. Or even maybe because the Calumet region is situated within the Mississippi flyway, one of the most important flyways for migratory birds in the United States. They are all treasures that we need to take care of and restore for fauna and flora.

Though all of this is true, I'm most fascinated by the resilience of its people and the environmental injustices they deal with. Still today, they are disproportionately affected by poor air quality, industrial runoff into their waters, and higher rates of COVID-19. Communities here find themselves constantly advocating for healthy neighborhoods, as the Calumet region continues to be a potential destination for polluting and hazardous industries, including most recently, a metal shredder. I am inspired by their resilience as they fight for their natural spaces, and for accessibility.

Altgeld Gardens, the community next door to Beaubien Woods, is public housing on the far southeast side of Chicago. Local activists and residents call it "the Toxic Doughnut." This community sits in the middle of a ring of brownfields, landfills, and Superfund sites including steel mills, a sewage treatment plant, two chemical plants, and a chemical incinerator. As Calumet Field Organizer, one of my initial goals was to increase use and involvement in the forest preserves by local communities. However, as I learned more and more about the communities we want to involve, I questioned my efforts.



Partnerships and collaborations in the Calumet region are vital to bringing organizations and community stakeholders together to plan and take action. Girls Inc., an organization focused on uplifting girls ages 6-18, has become a strong ally with regular volunteer groups at Beaubien Woods on the far south side of Chicago.



Gloria Orozco has worked in the conservation field for more than a decade. As the Calumet Field Organizer, she advocates for the health of the community as well as the preserves.

How can I come into local communities to ask for their help to restore the forest preserves when they are dealing with so much already?

The Calumet region forest preserves bring so much value to these communities, especially in these times. They serve as a sanctuary for stressed parents, a world to explore for kids who spend their days indoors and watching screens, and a breath of fresh air in an area with high air pollution. I love to visit the sites and see cyclists pass me by on the Major Taylor Trail in Whistler Woods or the walkers and runners at Kickapoo Woods as they do their third lap around the mile-long looped trail. As I hike the sites, I begin to think, "What can WE do for these communities? How can WE be a resource to help advocate for their health and for the well-being of the forest preserves?"

We are still learning and we understand that there are many issues to consider. There is mistrust from communities often left out of the planning process when they are presented with plan after plan of how to make their neighborhoods "better." Partnerships and collaborations in the region have been a huge game changer, bringing organizations and community stakeholders together to plan and take action. As an organization, Friends is trying to provide an opportunity for folks to voice their opinions. And we are invested in learning more ways to better serve our communities. Equitable programming, job opportunities and training, and grants for resources the community requests are just some of the ways we try to do our part.

I'm inspired each and every day because, though these communities were clearly handed the worst of situations, community members still have a deep connection and love for their neighborhoods and natural spaces. I invite you to come out and experience the uniqueness of the natural areas and community in the Calumet region. You will be surprised at the warmth of the people you meet and the richness of the ecology found here.

To learn more about volunteer opportunities in the Calumet region, please email Gloria at gloria@fotfp.org. Or visit fotfp.org/volunteer.

11th Annual Photo Contest Winners

Thank you to everyone who submitted photos! The winning photographs illustrate the diversity of beauty, life, and activities found throughout the forest preserves. We are currently accepting submissions for the 12th Annual Photo Contest. Inspire others to fall in love with the forest preserves by submitting your photos. Please visit fotfp.org/photo-contest for more information.



FIRST PLACE: Wood duck at Cranberry Slough Nature Preserve by John Blough



SECOND PLACE: Best friend silhouette at Busse Woods by Julio Guerrero



THIRD PLACE: Painted lady on ironweed at McCormick Woods by Fedencio Marbella



BEST FAUNA: Eyes and claws (snapping turtle) at Rolling Knolls Forest Preserve by Gary Henle



2019 RUNNER UP: Young photographer Adeline with rare cardinal flowers at McCormick Woods by Patrick Callaghan



BEST LANDSCAPE: Sedge meadow at Spring Lake by Ken DeMuth



2019 RUNNER UP: Sleepy orange sulphur at Deer Grove East by Janet Haugen



BEST PEOPLE IN PRESERVES: Enter an Adventure at River Trail Nature Center by Michelle Puszka



2019 RUNNER UP: "Vogue" at Deer Grove Forest Preserve by Michelle Puszka



2019 RUNNER UP: Springtime raccoon at Catherine Chevalier Woods by Kaitlin Klingbeil



2019 RUNNER UP: Ice on pond at Chicago Botanic Garden by David Cohen



2019 RUNNER UP: Row, Row, Row Your Boat at Busse Woods by Julio Guerrero

2019 Annual Report continued from page 1...

more than 10,000 social media followers is strong and resilient. COVID-19 initially put volunteer work on hold, but as restrictions were slowly rolled back, folks immediately resumed solo and small group work to catch up on essential weed removal during the critical spring season. Restrictions have been lifted even further and groups of up to 25 are now engaging in seed collection and brush removal.

Despite restrictions of volunteer recruitment, Field Organizers focused on webinars to educate, engage, and grow our community. Four hundred forty people participated in a five-part series of programs (still available on our YouTube channel). With such a large county, it's often difficult to engage large groups of people. Adding virtual education was and will continue to be an excellent way to connect, grow, and strengthen our community.

Our 25 member adult Conservation Corps Team remained indoors for two months during restrictions, shifting to the essential training and

learning aspects of their work, then resuming field work when permitted. Friends staff put together an excellent, widely recognized, and extensive protocol to keep crew members safe and healthy. Volunteer stewardship sites and other restoration areas depend on crews' contributions. And those teams wasted no time in catching up on deferred weed treatment on hold since the spring.

None of this would have been possible without the strong support of our funders and partners. They, like us, understood the importance of keeping everyone employed and working during this challenging time.

Our advocacy role allowed us to continue our high school summer conservation corps programs. COVID-19 and funding almost stopped them both, but with determination, we ensured that both programs ran again this year.

Our Forest Preserve Experience program, run in partnership with the Forest Preserves of Cook County and the Housing Authority of Cook County, and supported by the Forest Preserve Foundation and the Christopher Family Foundation, shifted to an all online format to address transportation and facility safety concerns. We knew that going virtual could still achieve most of our goals for program members (who all live in HACC facilities or whose families are voucher holders), including environmental and conservation education, teaching essential job skills, providing a real income for a summer job, and more.

And we implemented our Chicago Conservation Corps Program, run in partnership with the Student Conservation Association and the FPCC, at five nature centers. High school participants received a real hourly wage and

gained essential work experience while focusing on projects ranging from trail work to invasive brush removal, and beyond.

Adhering to strict safety precautions kept safe our 183 members and leaders in these two award-winning programs.

This year has also been extraordinary due to the impact of the modern civil rights movement. The events and organizing around Black Lives Matter brings to the forefront the inequities of racism - not only in our personal lives, but in the work we do - no matter what sector we are in. Acknowledging the issue is an important first step. Acting in a way that brings meaningful change is the next. Providing equitable access to nature and fostering program engage-

ment in traditionally underserved communities is not new for us. And we can do more. We must integrate the beautiful diversity of Cook County's people into the fight for a healthy planet - and forest preserves. Friends values access to healthy nature as a human

right, and we consider our commitment to unite people - stated in our mission - to be the essence of our work. Friends stands with the Black Lives Matter movement and all those who are fighting for a more equitable and just society.

This year we have toiled in the discomfort of the realities we must face head-on.

According to our 2019-2023 strategic plan, 2020 included staff training and an interrogation of our organization to identify and manage biases in our daily operations. We began Implicit Bias training for staff, searching for and articulating our voice in a relevant, thoughtful, and productive way, while developing plans for a long term, deep dive into finding our niche to fight inequalities in the communities we cherish. Our social media channels amplified black and brown voices on topics related to our preserves, and leadership initiated a staff Women of Color action group.

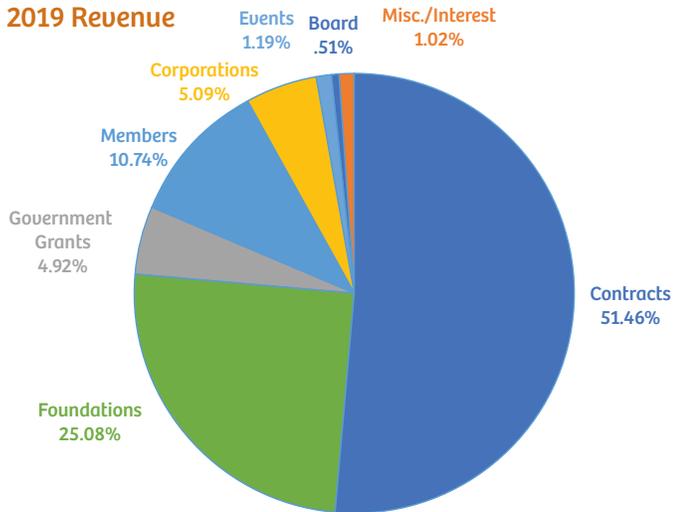
If all else were stripped away, the Friends community would focus on its core advocacy work - and COVID-19 restrictions have had little impact on that. We continue to work with our partners, FPCC staff and elected officials to pursue the goals laid out in the Next Century Conservation Plan. We are also serving on committees drafting position papers on Volunteering; Recreation, Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion; and Land Acquisition. And, we continue our fight to protect Deer Grove, the nation's first forest preserve, from an overbuilt Quentin Road.

People make our community strong. We all love nature, and work hard to help everyone know that people are nature. Thank you for being a part of our community.

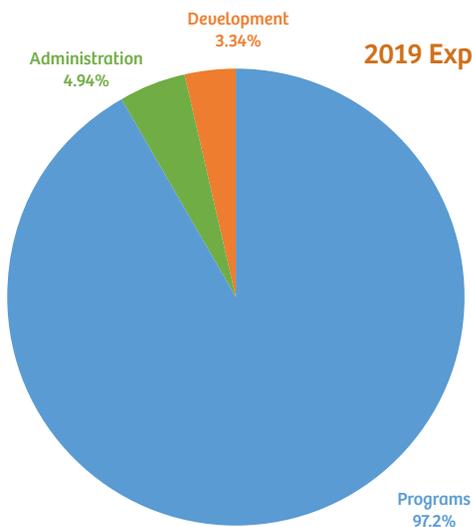
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Friends of the Forest Preserves 2019 Annual Report

2019 Revenue



2019 Expense



Income	2018	2019
Contracts	1,103,151	1,754,593
Foundations	738,615	855,174
Government grants	436,675	167,729
Members	275,164	366,011
Corporations	69,365	173,388
Events	53,427	40,549
Board	17,485	17,410
Misc./Interest	4,641	34,617

Total 2018: \$2,698,523 | 2019: \$3,409,471

Expense	2018	2019
Programs	2,544,044	2,975,795
Administration	137,607	160,215
Development	101,634	108,338
Total	\$2,783,285	\$3,244,348

Assets	2018	2019
Net Assets at beginning year	1,106,847	1,022,085
Net Assets at end year	1,022,085	1,187,208
Change in Net Assets	(\$84,762)	\$165,123

Board of Directors

Stephen J. Schlegel—Chair; Attorney, Stephen J. Schlegel Ltd.
 Ed Woodbury—Vice-Chair; President, McCaffery Interests, Inc.
 Matt Haas—Treasurer; Chief Operating Officer, Pegasus Partners Ltd. | Founder, Friends of Busse Woods
 Margaret A. Frisbie—Secretary; Executive Director, Friends of the Chicago River
 Corryn Antonizio—Sustainability & Social Champion, RTC Industries, Inc.
 Kathleen Bruch—President, Atrium Landscape
 Walter Burlack—Director of Partnerships, Renewable Manufacturing Gateway
 José H. Colón—Senior Associate, Jameson Real Estate
 Dr. Charles D. Dillon, M.D.—Assistant Professor of Medicine, Northwestern University | Attending Physician, Northwestern Memorial Hospital
 Thomas Greenhaw, Jr.—Founder and CEO, Cashier Live

Diana Helt—Project Manager, Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital | Grants and Program Evaluation Director, Great Lakes Adaptive Sports Association
 Barbara C. Hill—Political Chair, Sierra Club Illinois Chapter
 Dr. Akilah R. Martin, Ph.D.—Interdisciplinary Planner, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
 Justin Martin—Senior Vice President, Fifth Third Bank
 Dr. Ronald M. Milnarik, D.D.S.—Clinical Assistant Professor of Endodontics, University of Illinois at Chicago College of Dentistry
 Derk Osenberg—Senior Director of Sales, Americas, Truvalue Labs
 Stephenie Presseller—Sustainability Manager, Moraine Valley Community College
 David W. South—Senior Manager of Sustainability, West Monroe Partners
 Ryan Wilson—Manager of Water Resources, Metropolitan Planning Council
 Ted Wolff—Owner, Wolff Landscape Architecture

Staff

Benjamin Cox—Executive Director | Alejandra Bravo - Development Associate | Jillian DiCarlo—Finance and Administration Director | Ilana Federman—Outreach Manager | Melissa Horther—Program Manager | Radhika Miraglia—Advocacy and Engagement Director Zach Taylor—Conservation Director

Field Organizers: Maya Dutta, Gloria Orozco Soto, Peter Whitney, Derek Ziomber | Conservation Corps Managers: Brenda Elmore (Senior Crew Manager), Tim DiCarlo,

Xochitl Lopez, Hillary Peters, Bettina Tousignant, Stephan Vandenbroucke | Assistant Managers: Lee Carroll, Dean Garber, Ebony Hughes Taylor, Graciela Olmedo, Hannah O'Sullivan | Crew Managers: Xochitl Lopez, Hillary Peters, Bettina Tousignant | Crew Members: Mary Charalab, Kevin Dennis, Nicholas Hall-Skank, Ivan Puente, Carmina Reyes, Angelica Sanchez, Sophie Shukin, Justin Southward, Jon "Shaleek" Williams Restoration Technicians: Brian Kolasa, Amber Kunz, B. Dawson Cox, Katherine Jodlowski, Lance Williams, Pat Williams



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