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## Saving Salamanders at Somme Woods

By Cecil Hynds-Riddle, Centennial Volunteer

Cecil Hynds-Riddle is a community organizer, nature lover, and Habitat 2030 volunteer. A recent transplant from Texas, she loves discovering new preserves and getting to know members of Chicago’s impressive restoration community.

On my first ever restoration workday on a frigid January afternoon, I learned that blue-spotted salamanders could be found at Somme Woods, so I volunteered to be the “micro-steward” for amphibians. You see, when I was a kid, I spent long afternoons down in “the creek.” Really, it was a drainage ditch in a low-income East Dallas neighborhood, but there were frogs in there. In the spring, the ground would be covered in juvenile toads so small that your eye had trouble making them out, but so numerous that the earth looked to be writhing.

Last year, I lived in western Massachusetts where for 25 years volunteers have rescued spotted salamanders from a busy road that cuts straight through their migration path. I went out on cold and rainy nights in April when these amusing black and yellow critters migrate from their upland forest to an ephemeral pool below. I scooped up dozens of salamanders from the road and taught other volunteers to rescue them too.



Tina Onderdonk

Cecil Hynds-Riddle shows off one of the salamanders she and fellow volunteers helped save at Somme Woods earlier this year.

So when Stephen Packard—steward of Somme Prairie Grove and member of Friends’ board of directors—and I were finishing a walk through Somme Woods in March, and we discovered 87 dead salamanders lying on the pavement, desiccated from contact with mislaid road salt, I knew I had to do something. More salamanders would come along, night after night, on their way to the ephemeral pool—a small, temporary body of water that forms by melting snow and spring rains and lasts until higher temperatures dry it up. Ephemeral pools, by their very impermanence, provide the perfect, fishless habitat for blue-spotted salamanders to mate and lay their eggs.

But, how could we remove the salt?

I put out the call on the Habitat 2030 Facebook page, “Help us save Somme salamanders.” The next morning, a group of volunteers and I arrived, brooms and dustpans in tow, to do our best to remove the salt. Perhaps it was futile, but what else could we do?

As I continued counting the dead, one caught my eye. It was still whole and glossy, though unmoving. Out of morbid curiosity I prodded at it, and its foot twitched. I jumped back, tears welling in my eyes. I snatched it up in an oak leaf and ran like mad to release it into the pool.

Continued on page 6



Stephen Packard

En route to its mating place, this blue-spotted salamander was killed by exposure to salt on the pavement.

## News from around the District

### 1 Camping returns to Cook preserves

Campgrounds are now available to families, groups, and individuals at five sites throughout the forest preserves. Tent, cabin, bunkhouse, or RV facilities are available at Camp Reinberg near Palatine, Camp Dan Beard near Northbrook, Camp Bullfrog Lake near Willow Springs, Camp Sullivan near Oak Forest, and Camp Shabbona Woods near South Holland.

### 2 Commissioner Gorman leaves office

Forest Preserves Commissioner Elizabeth Ann Doody Gorman resigned her office in July after winning election just last year. The former Cook County Republican committee chairperson is taking a position with a major Fortune 100 Chicago corporation as director of government affairs. Palos Township Republican Committeeman Sean Morrison was elected as Gorman's replacement to the 17th District seat.

### 3 Natural and cultural plan adopted

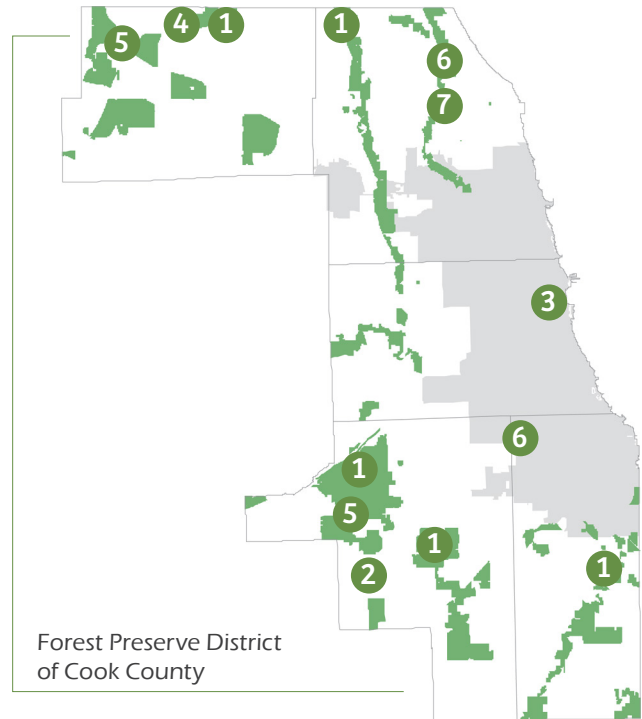
After a year and a half of research and writing, the Forest Preserve District adopted the Natural and Cultural Resources Master Plan as part of its centennial celebration. The plan will help guide the pursuit of ambitious goals in the Next Century Conservation Plan, including the restoration of 30,000 acres within 25 years. Friends has pushed for such a plan for many years, knowing that without a game plan, it is difficult to move forward together as a community caring for the preserves.

### 4 Deer Grove West to receive major makeover

The first forest preserve in the nation will receive \$3 million worth of "vitamins and physical therapy" over the next few years thanks to Openlands, Forest Preserves of Cook County, the Army Corps of Engineers, and others. The restoration will benefit about 238 acres. Deer Grove West is home to the first 500 acres of forest preserve land, acquired in 1916. The site, which has been expanded to 1,800 acres, includes rolling upland forest interspersed with wooded ravines, wetlands, and meadows. But this former prairie grove has been degraded by brush and other invasives. Many of the wetlands have been unnaturally drained. Openlands led the successful restoration of Deer Grove East over the past five years.

### 5 186 acres added to holdings

The Palos Region of the Forest Preserves grew by 162.64 acres this year. This parcel of land near McCarthy Slough in the Cap Sauers holdings was purchased from the Catholic Church for \$5 million and includes one of the larger



mature oak woodlands not already District holdings, as well as a diverse habitat mixture of wetlands, lakes, and open fields.

A connection from the nearly 4,000-acre Spring Creek Preserve to the District's largest purchase of land since the 1960s, the 400-acre Horizon Farm, has been made with the purchase of 24 acres near Barrington Hills. The \$2.16 million dollar purchase provides a greenway connection for wildlife and will make a trail connection possible, too.

### 6 Bike rental now available

Dan Ryan Woods, Skokie Lagoons, Blue Star Memorial Woods, Miami Woods, Chicago Botanic Garden, and Caldwell Woods have bicycle rental available. The concession contract with Bike and Roll Inc. will run for 36 months to start.

### 7 Harms Flatwoods gains Nature Preserve status

The 107-acre Harms Flatwoods near Skokie has been nominated by the District for Illinois Nature Preserve status. A "flatwoods" is relatively flat and clay, which results in water frequently being ponded on the surface during spring. Restoration management began at the site in the 1980s, been primarily conducted by volunteer stewards in partnership with forest preserve staff. The site has an excellent tree canopy made up mostly of white, swamp, bur, and red oaks with an excellent diversity of understory flowering plants and grasses. Though remaining a forest preserve, the site will benefit from increased protection.



# “What a relief!” One volunteer shares her experience



Chris Weber

Anna participates in a Centennial Volunteers workday this past winter at one of the sites along the Calumet River, Whistler Woods.

By Anna Carvlin, Centennial Volunteer

When I recently discovered the restoration cleanups hosted by Friends of the Forest Preserves happening near my hometown of Blue Island, I was really relieved. I had recently moved back to the South Side from New Mexico and really needed opportunities to be lost in nature. While living in Santa Fe, I drank it down daily with views of stunning mountainscapes and on weekends with long and arduous hikes at national parks. While the bright

sun, high altitude, and dryness may be unforgiving there, the beauty of the landscape is unique and stunning.

Back here in the Midwest, I quench my thirst for non-human-made surroundings with regular treks to the many forest preserves surrounding Chicago—something I rarely, if ever, did as a youth. Growing up in Dolton, Riverdale, and Blue Island, I had never once entered into Kickapoo Woods or Whistler Woods.

Chicago is an excellent place to find like-minded people or for participating in arts and culture, but the ubiquitous concrete, freight trains, and industrialization can drag a person into the doldrums, especially in winter. I feel lucky that as an adult, I've been introduced to a unique forested landscape—my new backyard—working with a community of people who care about sustaining our unbuilt-upon terrain.

I'm soaking up a ton: learning the difference between oaks and cottonwood (now extremely obvious to me); hearing woodpeckers and owls search for food or communicate to each other; and meeting people who are working toward a healthier urban dwelling. Whistler and Kickapoo are stunning in a not-so-cliché way, and volunteers are spending precious Saturdays to enhance and maintain these woods. I may not be lost in wilderness here on the South Side, but I found a much-needed respite from the concrete as well as great people wanting the same.

## Become a micro-steward

By Josh Coles, Centennial Volunteers Field Organizer

A volunteer steward is an expert on a site, has a great number of responsibilities, and is an inspiration and mentor to those of us who are helping nature.

Becoming a steward is a long and rewarding process in which we have the pleasure of helping guide interested individuals. However, becoming a steward can be daunting at first. There are so many plants to learn; so many concepts to become familiar with; so many organizational techniques to master.

This is where the concept of micro-stewardship comes in. A micro-steward is able to choose one aspect of the stewardship process, become a master in it, then teach others. For instance, at Somme East, we have micro-

stewards for trail maintenance, seed collecting, amphibian monitoring, endangered plant monitoring, and many more.

Our goal is to build a community of micro-stewards who care for one or more sites and exchange ideas, teach others, and engage more potential leaders and stewards.

With this concept, it is less likely that individuals will get overwhelmed as they contribute and learn. Interested? You might become an expert before you know it.



Daniel Suarez

Expert volunteer and micro-steward John Balaban leads a plant identification workshop.

To learn more or to become a micro-steward, email [Josh@fotfp.org](mailto:Josh@fotfp.org) to start the process!



# Friends of the Forest Preserves 2014 Annual Report

*Letter from Charles Kierscht, Chair, and Benjamin Cox, President*

Together, at Friends of the Forest Preserves, we endeavor to protect the forest preserves of Cook County in ways that will stand the test of time.

A century ago this year, civic visionaries recognized the importance of conserving the mosaic of landscapes in our region. But in the decades between then and now, much of the land has been abused, neglected, or forgotten. Friends has spent the better part of the last 20 years working to reverse and prevent those missteps so that the preserves will be here for another century to come. This past year, we continued our holistic approach of protection, restoration, and promotion to ensure that we continued to advance our mission.

In 2014, Friends family grew to a greater number of members, volunteers, and interns than ever before—more than 3,000 individuals. This has enabled us to enter 2015 better positioned to advocate for the preserves, to restore a variety of landscapes to their natural and healthy states, and to inspire greater investment in and appreciation of our unique urban wilderness.

More than 80 percent of the annual budget was dedicated to on-the-ground programs last year. As a result, we were able to employ more than 100 young men and women as conservation corps interns, providing many of them with not only their first meaningful connection to nature but with job training and professional development opportunities. And, to the benefit of this movement as a whole, those internships are fostering a more diverse and inclusive environmental base — one that is rooted firmly in our local communities.

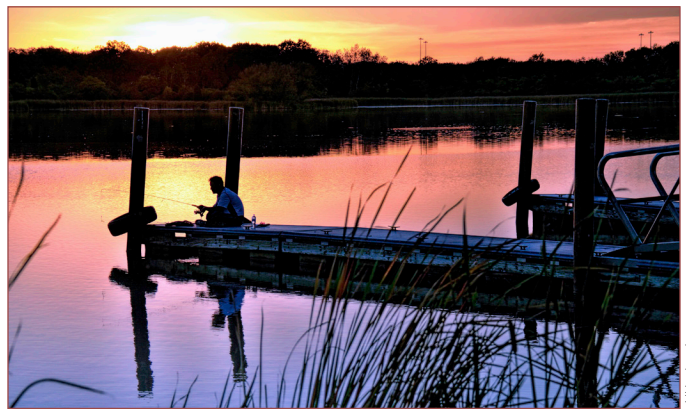
We also launched the Centennial Volunteers program in partnership with Friends of the Chicago River, Audubon Chicago Region, and the Forest Preserves of Cook County. Attracting more than 1,500 volunteers, the movement has logged thousands of hours of restoration work in five special sites along the Chicago and Calumet Rivers (see page 3).

Friends staff and volunteers served in key advocacy roles, assisting in the development of the Next Century Conservation Plan. Forest Preserve District leaders President Tony Preckwinkle and General Superintendent Arnold Randall have on many occasions praised Friends for pushing the District to improve operations and develop a strong plan in partnership with organizations such as ours and volunteers to ensure the preserves thrive for the next 100 years.

Thank you for your commitment to Friends. We look forward to continuing our work together in 2015 and beyond to continue to improve the preserves.



Edward Boe

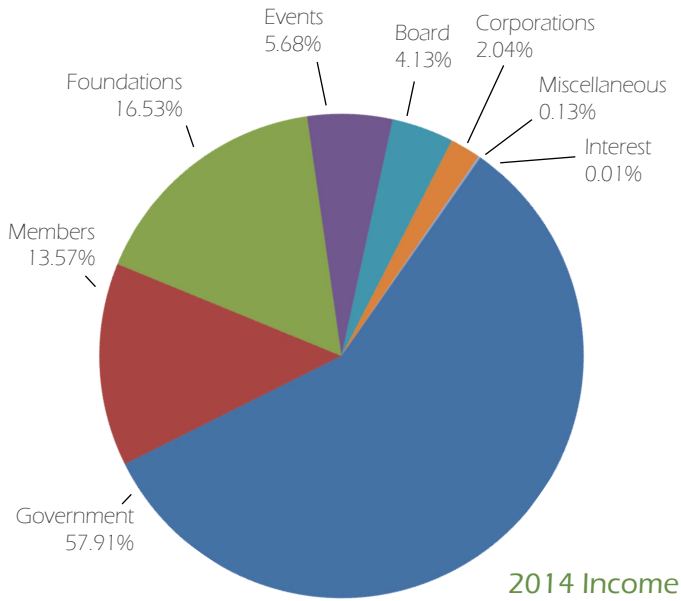


Wesley Iversen

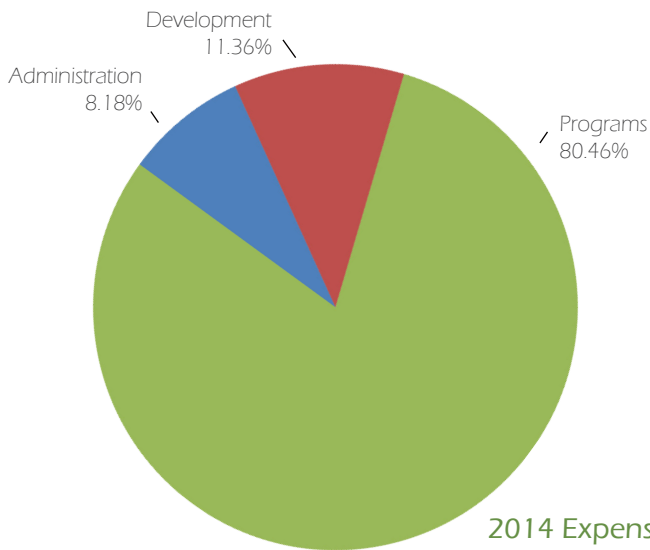


Daiva Gylus

# Friends of the Forest Preserves 2014 Annual Report



2014 Income



2014 Expense

Income	2014	2013
Government	640,739	1,196,128
Foundations	182,843	172,000
Members	150,100	149,085
Events	62,822	37,009
Board	45,715	31,207
Miscellaneous	1,470	1,884
Corporate	22,570	1,000
Interest	145	206
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,106,404</b>	<b>\$1,588,519</b>

Expense	2014	2013
Programs	867,626	1,318,825
Development	122,521	45,532
Administration	88,230	127,729
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,078,377</b>	<b>\$1,492,086</b>

Assets	2014	2013
Net Assets at beginning year	305,666	209,233
Net Assets at end year	333,693	305,666
<b>Change in Net Assets</b>	<b>\$28,027</b>	<b>\$96,433</b>

## Board of Directors

- Charles Kierscht, Chair—Kemper Financial Services
- Stephen Schlegel, Vice President—Stephen J. Schlegel Ltd.
- Matt Haas, Treasurer—Pegasus Partners Ltd.
- Margaret Frisbie, Secretary—Friends of the Chicago River
- Barbara Birmingham—Co-Steward, Theodore Stone Forest Preserve
- Susan Brice—Bryan Cave LLP
- Walter Burlack—Renewable Manufacturing Gateway
- José Colón—Jameson Real Estate
- Charles Dillon—Northwestern University and Memorial Hospital
- Maria Hibbs—MPH Social Strategies
- Barbara Hill—Political Chair, Sierra Club Illinois Chapter
- Akilah Martin—DePaul University
- Ron Milnarik—University of Illinois at Chicago College of Dentistry
- Michael Mulcahy—Vedder Price

- Stephen Packard—North Branch Restoration Project
- David South—West Monroe Partners
- Ted Wolff—Wolff Landscape Architecture
- Ed Woodbury—McCaffery Interests, Inc.

## Friends Staff

- Catie Boehmer—Development Manager
- Douglas Chien—Advocates' Network Manager
- Josh Coles—Centennial Volunteers Field Organizer - North
- Benjamin Cox—President & CEO
- Brenda Elmore—Calumet Conservation Corps Crew Leader
- Daiva Gylys—Internship Program Coordinator
- Zachary Taylor—Conservation Director
- Jennie van den Boogaard—Development & Communications Coordinator
- Chris Weber—Centennial Volunteers Field Organizer - South



# Swing for Sustainability

On Friday, June 5, Friends held its 5th annual Swing for Sustainability Open at the world-class George W. Dunne National Golf Course in Oak Forest. Dozens of supporters, including Commissioner Jeffrey Tobolski, came out to enjoy a day at the preserve's premier course, which included a hole-in-one challenge, raffle prizes, and dinner and drinks. The event raised nearly \$10,000 in support of Friends' efforts to protect, restore, and promote the forest preserves of Cook County.

We'd like to say a huge "thank you!" to all the golfers and sponsors who made the day a success. To learn more about next year's outing, contact Catie Boehmer at [development@fotfp.org](mailto:development@fotfp.org).



Jennie van den Boogaard



Lisa Culp

One of the more than 100 salamanders rescued from salt exposure by volunteers at Somme Woods.

Continued from page 1

"Change of plans!" I called out. "Some of them are still alive!" That day we saved 57 live salamanders and after a couple weeks of repeated rescue missions, our count rose upwards of 100.

John McCabe, Director of Resource Management for of the Cook County Forest Preserves, called in a street sweeper to suck all the salt off the pavement. Spring rains and a late snow helped dissolve the remaining salt, and several log flipping expeditions near the ephemeral pool have turned up a healthy population of blue-spotted salamanders passing their spring siesta while eating worms and pill bugs, and hiding from us.

There are many things we learned from this tragedy turned triumph. Chief among them is this: 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.

We are the ones who couldn't keep ourselves out of woods and prairies if we tried, and we are tied to an amaz-

ing community of nature nerds who can't resist a good fight for their favorite places. Empower us to do more than we ever thought ourselves capable of, and we will lovingly restore and protect every scrap of green space and each forgotten creature.



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." — Cecil Hynds-Riddle*



## New Conservation Director



Jennie van den Boogaard

Zach Taylor is the newest member of Friends' circle of members, volunteers, and staff.

Growing up in Chicago's western suburbs, he fondly remembers visits to Wolf Road Prairie where his fifth grade teacher encouraged

him to take a bite of a wild onion and explained the importance of protecting prairie habitat.

As a student at Lyons Township High School, he ran the Salt Creek Trail with his wrestling club and biked all over the forest preserve paths with his friends.

"There is no way I would be connected with the preserves without these experiences. It was these recreational

and educational opportunities that facilitated my discovery of the quiet, unique, and fabulous places that lie within the preserves."

Our new Conservation Director is highly regarded for his recent work with Chicago's GreenCorps, leading its conservation programs. He also has experience across the country, including with AmeriCorps, helping to build sections of the Appalachian Trail in Maine and on timber stand improvement in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

"When I returned home to Chicago in 2009, I was excited to find such an active and welcoming community of stewards, scientists, educators, and forward thinkers. As Conservation Director, I will continue to support our community and help partnerships and ideas foster healthy, safe, diverse, and protected forest preserves."

## Get outside with us!



Douglas Chien

### Free tours led by master naturalist and long-time Friends partner John Elliott:

#### Shoe Factory Hill Sunset Tour - 6 p.m. Friday, Sept. 11

Forest preserves close at dusk but we have permission for participants to stay late. Watch the sun set from atop a glacial kame, and tour a large prairie restoration.

#### Dam #1 Fall Color Walk - 1 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 11

Venture to Wheeling for a leisurely walk around this woodland as we take in the fall colors, and check out the results of a major restoration of the preserve.

Sign up for any tour at [www.fotfp.org/events!](http://www.fotfp.org/events!)

### Want to make a preserve your own? Get started on the path to stewardship:

The Path to Stewardship is open to any volunteer wanting to increase a dedication to restoring healthy nature. Field experience, classes, and mentoring give you the qualifications you need to become a leader.

Cook County is the birthplace of the now-global movement of volunteer stewards. Individuals from all walks of life restore the health of our woodlands, wetlands, and grasslands. Dedicated people are the key to healthy forest preserves!

Want to learn more? Visit [www.fpdcc.com](http://www.fpdcc.com) or contact Friends' Advocates' Network Manager at (312) 356-9990 or [doug@fotfp.org](mailto:doug@fotfp.org)



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## Save the Date

### Crystal Leaf Awards

Second Annual

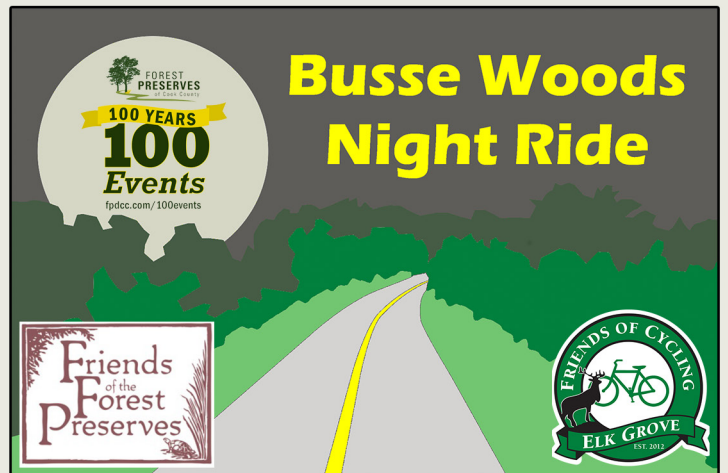
Hilton Hotel Chicago

6 to 9 p.m. Thursday, October 22

*Honoring*

Dean Fischer, West Monroe Partners

Cook County Commissioner Larry Suffredin



### Join us for our first ever after-dark bike ride September 25

Explore the expansive Busse Woods preserve on the eight-mile bike trail that winds through meadows, woods, and along the shore of the 640-acre lake.

Admission includes drinks and snacks, beer by New Belgium Brewing, live music, a bonfire, and more!

**Tickets available at [fotfp.org/event/night-ride](http://fotfp.org/event/night-ride)**