



NEWS

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Cook County, Illinois

Fall 2009

Conflict of interest threatens preserve

Nearly 90 people turned out for a high-energy rally organized by Friends of the Forest Preserves at the County Building on October 10. They asked commissioners to oppose a proposed 30-acre land grab of the Bemis Woods preserve by the Village of Hinsdale.

State Representative Elaine Nekritz (D-57th), the chief sponsor of the Illinois House bill to create a separate elected board of forest preserve commissioners, spoke to the crowd about the need to separate the Cook County and forest preserve boards in order to stop land grabs and improve overall forest preserve governance. Joining the rally held before the October Forest Preserve District of Cook County board meeting were supporters from the Bird Conservation Network, The Civic Federation,

Friends of the Parks, the Illinois Chapter of the Sierra Club, Chicago Area Mountain Bikers, Openlands, and the Salt Creek Greenway Association joined by equestrians, paddlers, hikers, restoration volunteers, and voters.

Commissioners voted nine to four (one voted present and three were absent) to continue negotiations with Hinsdale on an intergovernmental agreement. Hinsdale wants the land for soccer and baseball fields.

Friends has been working for years to educate the commissioners about their statutory duty to protect the forest preserves. Friends worked with them to pass a stronger land policy to prevent the sale or transfer of non-surplus land just a few years ago. On a regular basis, commissioners are confronted with conflicts of interest as a result of their dual roles as county and forest preserve commissioners.

At the same meeting, commissioners voted eight to five (with one voting present and three absent) to allow the Village of Westchester to construct water mains through Wolf Road Prairie, a rare black soil prairie remnant, and its adjacent buffer land in order to service proposed golf course and condo developments. This would damage land where millions of dollars have been spent on man-



John O'Connell

State Representative Elaine Nekritz (D-57th), chief sponsor of the Illinois House bill to create a separate elected board of forest preserve commissioners, stands with conservation leaders and nearly 90 supporters at a rally against a proposed 30-acre land grab.

agement and acquisition, and disturb important habitat. It would also make nearby property that the District and the State are trying to acquire for conservation more desirable to developers.

"At the time when county needs tax revenues and jobs ... rather than raising taxes, we should consider supporting private investment of capital," said sponsor Commissioner Anthony Peraica (R-16th), "that would create both temporary construction and permanent service jobs."

Many commissioners spoke in support of development and job creation as well as allowing Hinsdale control of "underutilized" land. As a County Commissioner, creating jobs and revenue is paramount. But, as a Forest Preserve Commissioner, the highest priority must be protecting the preserves for nature and people. Friends firmly believes that separating the boards would remove this conflict.

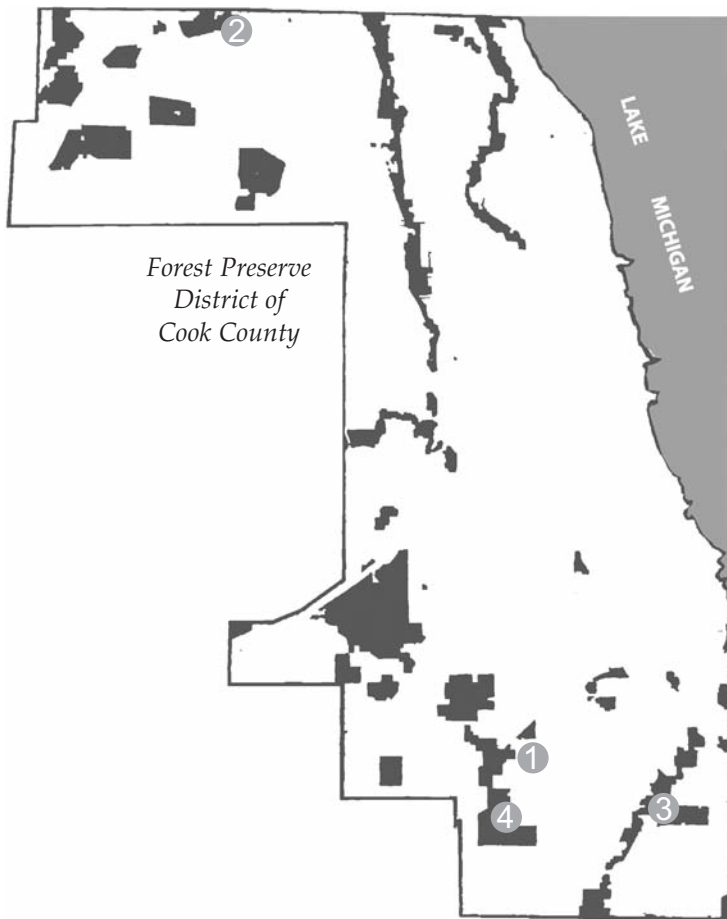
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Friends is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and all donations are greatly appreciated, put to good use and tax deductible.

News from around the District



① District acquiring 176 acres near Oak Forest

The District will acquire two parcels adjacent to Oak Forest Hospital totaling 176.307 acres. Nearly three years ago commissioners voted to transfer \$13.3 million from the Forest Preserve District's budget to Cook County. Friends fought for an agreement that required Cook County to transfer land of equal value to the District. However, the value of the land has been set at \$15 million and the District will now have to pay the difference of \$1.78 million for the property.

Commissioners move on; Reyes, Gainer join board

Commissioner Roberto Maldonado (D-8th) resigned his position in July in order to move to the Chicago City Council as the Alderman for the 26th Ward. Edwin Reyes was selected by Democratic committeemen on the northwest side of Chicago to fill the vacancy. Earlier this year Commissioner Mike Quigley (D-10th) became the U.S. Representative for the 5th congressional district. Bridget Gainer was selected by Democratic committeemen to fill the vacancy.

Suffredin amendment to Land Policy passes

Commissioner Larry Suffredin's amendment to

strengthen the Forest Preserve District of Cook County's Land Use Policy was approved at the September Board of Commissioners meeting. The policy defends against requests for use or ownership of District land and the amendment requires additional reports and committee recommendations before such a request can come to the full board for consideration.

FPDCC Police certified in ATVs, mountain bikes

The Forest Preserve District Police now have 44 officers trained to use all-terrain vehicles and 40 officers trained to use mountain bicycles for patrolling the District's trails. Good trail design coupled with enforcement of trail laws are the two essential elements needed to control illegal and destructive misuse of District trails and lands.

② Deer Grove Trail to be extended

The Village of Palatine will pay the cost of designing and constructing a 250-foot long trail spur that will be constructed on the east side of Deer Grove Forest Preserve to connect the existing multi-use trail to the northwest corner of Dundee and Hicks Roads.

③ Friends wins \$61,000 grant for Zander

Friends has been awarded \$61,000 from the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation to remove invasive species from the extremely high-quality wet prairie at Zander Woods near Lansing over a two year period. The area is a rare example of a wet sand prairie and harbors state-threatened plants and animals.

④ Audubon brings \$88,310 to Tinley Preserves

The National Audubon Society will add to the habitat improvements being implemented at the Tinley Creek Wetlands/Bartel Grassland complex near Matteson. The goal of this project is to remove invasive species, restore hydrology, and plant native species to enhance 249 acres of grassland habitat and restore a small remnant prairie. The work is funded by a \$88,310 grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act Program, and carried out in partnership with the FPDCC, Openlands, and the Bartel Volunteers.

District bond rating improved

Fitch Ratings has upgraded the rating of the Forest Preserve District's bonds, totaling nearly \$115 million in debt, from "A+" to "AA-" with an outlook of stable. The upgrade is based on the District's improved financial performance, management initiatives, and low debt levels.

Intern alumnus leading high school program

Not everyone starts smiling when asked about their job. But Sam Vergara sure does when he's asked about managing the new Chicago Conservation Leadership Corps.

"I had an amazing experience with the CCLC," he said.

Sam was hired by our partner, the Student Conservation Association, last spring to work with Friends' Conservation Director Alice Brandon. They brought the SCA's winning model of youth conservation to the Forest Preserve District of Cook County. Sam and Alice had just four months to recruit and hire 56 interns and 11 adult crew leaders, organize educational programs, and coordinate with the District to find conservation projects the interns could tackle.

A lifetime of experience prepared him for the challenge. Although Sam grew up in Chicago's Little Village, an



Alice Brandon

Sam Vergara survived our Prescribed Fire Internship and was hired to coordinate our new high school internship program.

inner-city neighborhood with virtually no green space, he was introduced to nature through scouting. Scout camp in Michigan fed his love of the outdoors. He became an Eagle Scout, and then a camp counselor.

Sam decided to pursue a career working outdoors. A friend and intern alumnus referred him to the first Friends/SCA program, the Prescribed Fire Internship, where he learned the methods of ecological conservation. This knowledge, combined with years of experience working with youth,

made him an ideal program leader.

"If you have a great cause and are passionate about it, people can really see your excitement and get on board," he said. Sam and Alice are already working to expand next summer's program.

Survey: paved trails excellent, unpaved need work

Two interns. One summer. More than 300 miles of trails.

After receiving training in the field from Friends' staff and attending a trail building and maintenance seminar, two intrepid interns conducted a comprehensive survey of the Forest Preserve District of Cook County's trail system this summer. Jack Klees and Erin Lahti, both of Chicago, braved rain, heat, mud, and mosquitoes to document the condition of every official trail.

They found that the District's paved trail system is in excellent condition overall. The District repaved more than 100 miles of trail over the past few years, and, aside from a few small areas of damage, the entire length is highly rideable.

Conditions on the unpaved trails are more variable, with 64 percent rated to be in fair or better condition. Others suffer from serious erosion, obstruction, or drainage problems.

The most extensive problems were found on the following trails: the North Branch Unpaved Trail from Volz Road to Somme Woods in Northbrook; the Thorn Creek Unpaved Trail near Lansing; the Palos Unpaved



Friends interns Erin Lahti and Jack Klees surveyed more than 300 miles of the Forest Preserve District of Cook County's trail system this summer. The paved trails are in excellent condition, but the unpaved trails need work. Poor drainage is the most common problem.

Trail along the Cal-Sag Channel; and the Des Plaines Unpaved Trail, especially the south portion between North and Lawrence Avenues.

The trails report will be used by Friends' trails task-force, which is working to make a recommendation for a new trail policy for the District and it will be given to the District in order to help staff improve problem areas.

Friends thanks the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation for funding the internship. For more information about the survey, please contact Benjamin Cox at (312) 356-9990 or benjamin@fotfp.org.

Friends and the Student Conservation Association's new Chicago Conservation Leadership Corps brought 56 high school students and 11 crew leaders to five sites throughout the Forest Preserve District for seven weeks this summer.



High school interns give 11,000 hours of service

What the interns liked best about the program:

"Realizing how much work we did at the end."

- Briant Holloway

"The feeling that I have done something good for our world."

- Kerona Belcher

"Learning conservation techniques and putting them to use in a positive way."

- Sarah Grueneberg

"Being able to do meaningful work and having a blast with AWESOME people."

- Francesca Voci

This summer, the brand-new Chicago Conservation Leadership Corps brought the energy and passion of 56 high-school students to the Forest Preserve District of Cook County. For seven weeks, the interns and their 11 adult crew leaders removed invasive species and improved trails at forest preserves near Chicago, Calumet City, Lemont, Willow Springs, and Northbrook.

In return for their service, the students received stipends of \$1,925, got to learn about environmental careers at weekly workshops, and had a lot of fun.

The program is another example of the highly successful partnership between Friends and the Student Conservation Association to introduce diverse students to conservation work while restoring Cook County's degrading natural lands.

Staff at forest preserve nature centers welcomed the interns and designed projects for them.

"With the assistance of our 12 interns and two crew leaders, many large-scale projects were accomplished at Sand Ridge Nature Center this summer that would have been impossible with our small staff alone," said Jim Carpenter, Director of the Sand Ridge Nature Center.

This program is a win for everyone involved. It increases the District's ability to get work done while getting a new generation involved in the effort to restore the forest preserves. The partners plan to expand the program next year. Many thanks to the funders that made the program possible: Wal-Mart, the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation, the Sustain our Great Lakes Program, Boeing, and SAP.



More than 11,000 hours of service were given at Sand Ridge, Little Red School House, Camp Sagawau, and River Trail Nature Centers, along with Dan Ryan Woods. Each of the five teams worked on a range of projects including trail work, mulching trees, erosion control in a stream channel, and removing invasive species such as purple loosestrife and buckthorn.



Ignite the Night was more fun and a bigger success than ever. Many thanks go to the donors, raffle contributors, and many great volunteers that made it all happen.



Jim Root

Thank you for making Ignite the Night a raging success

It was Friends' biggest, best fall festival ever. More than 300 guests came out to enjoy dinner, music, dancing, and a great bonfire on October 10. The event also featured fun and educational activities for nature lovers of all ages, including stargazing, nature walks, and horse-drawn wagon rides that toured a natural area under restoration.

The third annual Ignite the Night was made possible through the hard work of a spectacular committee. **Many, many thanks are due to the donors, raffle contributors, and especially all of the volunteers who made the event a huge success!**

Friends would also like to thank the many generous sponsors who helped make the event possible: **The Barrington-Countryside Park District, The Riding Club of Barrington Hills, The Goose Island Beer Company, Pizzo and Associates, Lori and Jason Elder, Jan-Dirk Lueders, and Paul Stahlberg.**



Above and below: Anthony Tortoriello



Friends launches new website

When volunteers from the Taproot Foundation arrived to remake the Friends of the Forest Preserves' website, they were presented with a long wish list.

The website would have to: communicate the full range of Friends' programs – concisely; be easy to navigate so visitors can find resources like volunteer opportunities and Friends comprehensive reports on the state of the forest preserves; and show the forest preserves' beauty through pictures.

The talented volunteers exceeded these expectations with a beautifully designed website to be unveiled in November.

The new site features an "advocacy" section to update members and advocates on current policy issues facing the preserves and an "enjoy now" section with Friends' recommendations for enjoying nature and recreation in the preserves.

Two teams of volunteers worked to bring the project to completion. Friends thanks Dana Abrams, Beth Dethlefsen, Julie Ferguson, Kathleen Gabriel, Patrick Kelly, Jessica Smith, and Mickey Stafne for their work on brand strategy, messaging, and design.

The website team worked through the summer to



Volunteers from the Taproot Foundation exceeded expectations when designing Friends' new website to be unveiled in November.

create a dazzling site. Thank you to Traci Hailpern, Brian Keiffer, John Lysing, Tiesha Miller, and Jackie Schwartz for creating a powerful web presence for Friends. The new site can be seen at www.fotfp.org.

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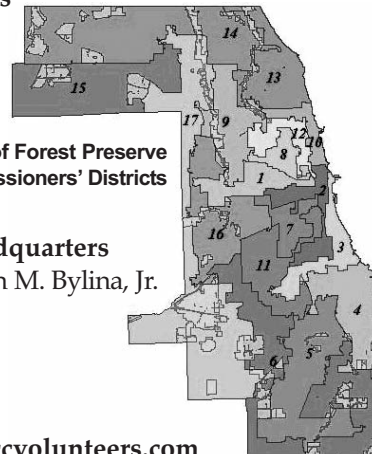
Contact your officials

If you have kudos or concerns, please send them to your Forest Preserve District of Cook County Commissioner. *They enjoy hearing from you!*

You may write President Todd Stroger and all of the Commissioners at their downtown address:

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Map of Forest Preserve Commissioners' Districts



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Enter Friends' photo contest

Winning photographs of 2nd annual contest to be exhibited

Attention photographers! Showcase your work while helping to communicate the beauty and value of the Forest Preserves of Cook County by entering Friends' second annual photo contest.

This year, winning entries will be shown in a special exhibition thanks to the generous sponsorship of Franklin Framing, a full-service picture framing salon and art gallery in the heart of Blue Island's historic downtown.

Ten winners will receive Friends hats and calendars and \$25 gift certificates from Franklin Framing in Blue Island. The grand prize winning entry will be printed and framed. Winning photographs will be



shown at the exhibition in February and displayed on Friends' website.

Professionals and amateurs are encouraged to submit images of feature landscapes, flora, wildlife, recreation, or education.

Rules:

1. Photographs must be taken in a Cook County Forest Preserve.
2. Invasive species must not be prominent in the photograph.
3. Submit entries via email to: benjamin@fotfp.org. If files are large, please email them individually.
4. Each photographer may enter a maximum of five photographs.
5. **The entry deadline for the contest is January 15.**



Bob Callebert

Last year's first place winner was Bob Callebert of Des Plaines with his winter photo of Spring Creek Nature Preserve. Enter your photo for a chance to win a spot in an art show at Franklin Framing in Blue Island.