

Strategic Plan 2025-2029

January 2025

Strategic Plan Purpose

This strategic plan is the result of input from many stakeholders, within and outside of Friends of the Forest Preserves. It does not represent a change in direction; instead, it reflects our ambition to build and expand upon what's working to ensure a long and thriving future for the forest preserves in Cook County. The strategy outlined aims to:

- Clarify for our board, staff, and stakeholders our priorities for the organization's next chapter, so that we might focus our energy and resources appropriately.
- Set ambitious, but realistic goals around which we will galvanize our community.
- Communicate our work to those outside our organization and continue to hear feedback and evolve.

This plan is not meant to be a rigid script, but rather a framework that will guide us.



Thank You

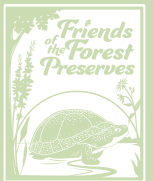
We are grateful to our community members who generously offered input into this plan. In addition, we are very thankful to our board and staff for deep engagement in this process.

Task Force:

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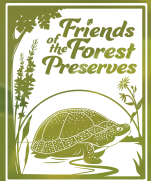
Mission:

Friends of the Forest Preserves unites people to protect, promote, and care for the forest preserves in Cook County.



Vision:

Land, water, and life thrive in the forest preserves.



Values:

- 1) Community focus is the foundation of our work. Our community includes Friends members, volunteers, partners, and staff, along with forest preserve advocates, users, and FPCC staff and leaders.
- 2) Healthy forest preserves are essential to the quality of life in our region; they enhance our physical, mental, and economic well being.
- 3) We have a shared responsibility to carry on the legacy of healthy natural areas for future generations.
- 4) Access to healthy nature is a human right.
- 5) Hands-on service empowers people with the skills, knowledge, and inspiration to care for and connect with nature.
- 6) Sound science and local knowledge are necessary for the sustainable management of public lands.
- 7) The strongest positive impact is made by thinking globally and acting locally.
- 8) Intentional focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion is key to a strong and sustainable community.
- 9) Strategic practices, collaborative spirit, and grassroots action form our foundation.
- 10) A strong and healthy professional culture sustains the vitality of our organization.

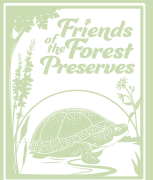


Value Proposition

Friends is an independent nonprofit organization that works in a highly collaborative manner uniting people to bring resources, advice, and people to help protect, promote, and care for the forest preserves in Cook County. We are the FPCC's best friend, bringing help and resources to the table, while challenging them when needed.

Friends makes an impact by:

- Bringing a wide variety of expertise, resources, advice, and millions of dollars to benefit the forest preserves.
- Leading the way toward inclusivity in the forest preserves in Cook County.
- Delivering innovative programs that engage thousands of participants from communities throughout the county and build local relationships through community organizing.
- Organizing communities to provide key advocacy work, such as the highly successful 2022 Vote Yes for Clean Air, Clean Water, and Wildlife Referendum Campaign.
- Stacking resources, from donors to volunteers to contractors, to accelerate on-the-ground restoration.



People + Programs = Advocacy and Action

We expand and engage
the Friends community...
(who)

- Members
- Volunteers
- Partners
- Families, youth,
and adults



Through meaningful and
inclusive experiences that...
(how)

- Ecological restoration
- Outdoor recreation
- Health and wellness
- Arts and culture
- Job training
- Communications
- Community input
and evaluation



Create and support a diverse
network of advocates to...
(why)

- Love
- Vote for
- Protect
- Promote
- and Care For

*the forest preserves
in Cook County*



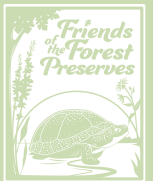
Programs

Workforce development

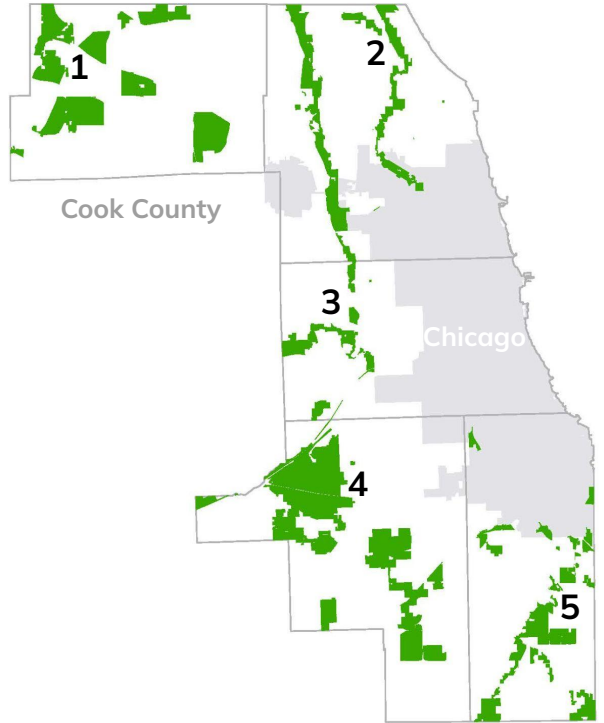
- Adult crews: year round, paid job training and skills certification, focused on ecological restoration
- Youth crews: 5-6 week paid summer high school program focused on environmental education, belonging, and action
- Engagement crew: year-round, paid training and skills certification focused on interpretation and programming

Community engagement

- Field organizers: full-time positions focused on finding new forest preserve volunteers
- Community leaders: volunteers, provided a stipend, who are connectors in their communities
- Advocacy corps: all-volunteer program focused on connecting with elected officials and FP staff on key issues and concerns



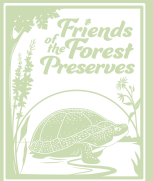
Where We Work



Forest Preserves of Cook County

Founded in 1914, 70,000 acres, first, oldest, largest

- 1) Northwest Region - Barrington Greenway Initiative Conservation Corps adult crew; Northwest Field Organizer; engagement programs
- 2) North Region - North Branch Conservation Corps adult crew; engagement programs
- 3) West Region - expansion planned for Des Plaines Conservation Corps adult crew
- 4) Southwest Region - Palos Conservation Corps adult crew; engagement programs
- 5) South Region - Calumet Conservation Corps adult crew; Engagement Corps crew; Forest Preserve Experience youth program; Beaubien Youth Outdoor Ambassadors youth program; South Field Organizer; engagement and community leader programs



Strategic Initiatives

Over the next five years

PROTECT

1. Volunteer Advocacy Corps
2. Enduring Legacy of Advocacy and Action

PROMOTE

3. Engagement Corps Expansion
4. Community Leader Expansion

CARE FOR

5. Conservation Corps: All Five Regions
6. Conservation Corps: Advanced Crews
7. Field Organizer Program Expansion
8. Ecological Restoration for Wildlife
9. Large-Scale Restoration Projects

Organizational Development

10. Working Reserve Fund; Fundraise for Growth; Seed Endowment
11. Expand Board
12. Improve Communications



Protect

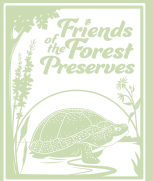
Broad advocacy for the forest preserves in Cook County

Initiative: Diverse community members and youth are empowered to respond to issues on the ground, recommend policy, monitor budgets and spending, and advise their commissioners.

We will:

- Develop and support an all-volunteer Advocacy Corps
- Invest in new staff position to expand advocacy efforts and ensure an enduring legacy of action

Note on how we do advocacy: We serve on FPCC committees, offer the community's perspective on challenges such as land use issues, inappropriate recreational activities, and deployment of FPCC staffing and funding.



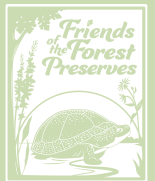
Promote

A diverse community engaged with the forest preserves

Initiative: Welcome everyone through programs informed by partnerships with local leaders, program evaluation, and cross-sector goals. Integrate benefits such as physical and mental health, job security, and cultural relevance into all Friends' programs.

We will:

- Implement the Engagement Corps program in the Calumet and Palos regions
- Replicate the community leader program to all five regions



Care for

Improved ecological health for the forest preserves

Initiative: Strengthened coordination of stakeholders, activities, and resources extends biodiversity of plants and animals to all regions of the preserves.

We will:

- ③ Expand from four to five adult Conservation Corps crews to include the Des Plaines region; add advanced crews in the Calumet and Palos regions to provide additional resources for the preserves and additional training and certification for corps members.
- ③ Grow the field organizer program from two to five positions to expand ecological stewardship volunteer communities across the county.
- ③ Foster partnerships to develop projects in the preserves that improve habitat for animals and incorporate research on the connection between plants, animals, and climate change.



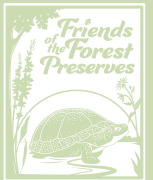
Organizational Development

Continue to build a strong and healthy organization

Initiatives: Evolve from an organization to an institution through fiscal growth, enduring governance, and salient messaging.

We will:

- Establish \$1M Working Reserve Fund; fundraise for growth; seed an endowment
- Expand board of directors
- Improve communications and storytelling



Outcomes

By 2029 our efforts will:

Protect: A larger and stronger network of advocates have the knowledge, tools, and support they need to voice their perspectives.

Promote: A greater diversity of people in Cook County value the forest preserves.

Care for: Biodiversity recovery efforts are more strategically aligned across stakeholders.

Organizational Development: A reinforced institutional footing grounds new partnerships and draws in communities and funders for long-term growth at multiple scales.

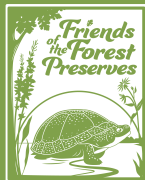




Initiatives Timeline

GROUP	MILESTONE	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Advocacy Corps	Invest in new advocacy staff	Protect				
	First Advocacy Corps Launched		Protect			
Engagement Corps	Engagement Corps launched in Calumet	Promote				
	Engagement Corps expansion to Palos				Promote	
Conservation Corps (currently in 4 regions)	Conservation Corps expansion to all five regions (adding Des Plaines)			Care For		
	First Advanced Crew launched in Palos				Care For	
	Second Advanced Crew launched in Calumet					Care For
Field Organizer Program (currently in 2 regions)	Field Organizer launched in Palos		Care For			
	Field Organizer launched in Des Plaines			Care For		
	Field Organizer launched North Branch				Care For	
Wildlife	Invest in wildlife research	Care For				
Large-Scale Restoration	Large-Scale Restoration project begins		Care For			
Communications	Invest in media relations (via contractor)	Organizational Development				
	Hire Communications Director		Organizational Development			
	Adopt Communications / Institutional Marketing Plan			Organizational Development		
Major Gifts & Fundraising	Grow prospect pipeline	Organizational Development	Organizational Development			
	Invest in additional development support		Organizational Development	Organizational Development		
	Campaign Feasibility Study, planning, and prep		Organizational Development	Organizational Development	Organizational Development	
	30th Anniversary Campaign			Organizational Development	Organizational Development	Organizational Development

Protect	Protect
Promote	Promote
Care For	Care For
Organizational Development	Organizational Development





Initiatives Numbers

GROUP	NEW RESOURCES REQUIRED	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Advocacy Corps	Invest in new advocacy staff	40,000	100,000	100,000	100,000	100,000
	First Advocacy Corps launched		10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000
Engagement Corps	Engagement Corps launched in Calumet				450,000	450,000
	Engagement Corps expansion to Palos			450,000	450,000	450,000
Conservation Corps	Conservation Corps expansion to all five regions (adding Des Plaines)				350,000	350,000
	First Advanced Crew launched in Palos					350,000
	Second Advanced Crew launched in Calumet			150,000	150,000	150,000
Field Organizer Program	Field Organizer launched in Palos			100,000	100,000	100,000
	Field Organizer launched in Des Plaines		100,000	100,000	100,000	100,000
	Field Organizer launched North Branch				100,000	100,000
Wildlife Research	Invest in wildlife research	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000
Large-Scale Restoration	Large-Scale Restoration project begins					
Communications	Invest in media relations (via contractor)	10,000	10,000	5,000		
	Hire Communications Director			75,000	150,000	150,000
	Communications / Institutional Marketing Plan adopted					
Major Gifts & Fundraising	Grow prospect pipeline					
	Invest in additional development support		100,000	100,000	100,000	100,000
	Campaign Feasibility Study and planning			75,000		
	Campaign planning and prep				75,000	75,000
	30th Anniversary					
	Total new funding required	\$100,000	\$370,000	\$1,215,000	\$2,185,000	\$2,535,000

New funding required over 5 years:

\$6.5 MILLION





Guiding Principles

- 1 A \$1M operating reserve fund will be established before utilizing unrestricted funds to advance any strategic initiatives or seed the endowment.
- 2 At least two-years of funding must be in place prior to launching a new Corps or Field Organizer Program.
- 3 While a timeline with goals and priorities has been established, initiatives may happen sooner or later depending on funding opportunities.
- 4 Large-scale restoration work and internal capacity growth will be dependent on availability of additional funding.





Managing risk via intentional growth

Supported by major gifts
and incremental growth

	New Resources Required	Notes
Advocacy	\$480,000	Long-term commitment
Wildlife Research	\$250,000	Can scale up or down
Engagement Corps - Calumet	\$900,000	To continue past NOAA funding
Communications	\$400,000	Can scale up or down
Development	\$625,000	To grow ability to raise money
Total	\$2,655,000	

Contingent Upon
Campaign
(or other Significant
Revenue Sources)

	New Resources Required	
Engagement Corps - Palos	\$1,350,000	\$450,000 per year for 3 years
Conservation Corps - Des Plaines	\$700,000	\$150,000 per year for 3 years
Advanced Crews - Palos and Calumet	\$800,000	\$350,000 per crew per year
Field Organizer - Palos	\$300,000	\$100,000 per year
Field Organizer - Des Plaines	\$400,000	\$100,000 per year
Field Organizer - North Branch	\$200,000	\$100,000 per year
Total	\$3,750,000	





Track record of growth

FOTFP Income and Expense Growth





Thank you!

