

Forest Preserve District of DuPage County

2021 Year in Review



Forest Preserve District of DuPage County

Board of Commissioners



Daniel Hebreard
President – Woodridge

The Forest Preserve District of DuPage County is governed by a seven-member board of commissioners, one commissioner elected from each of the six voting districts and a president elected by the county at large. Normally, commission meetings are at 8 a.m. on the first and third Tuesdays of the month; planning sessions, 8 a.m. on the second and fourth Tuesdays. At both the board hears public comments and staff reports, discusses business, and votes on agenda items. Links to agendas, minutes, live streams of ongoing meetings, and recordings of previous meetings are at dupageforest.org under “Our Board.”

For the safety of visitors as well as staff, board of commissioners meetings were online throughout 2021, but viewers could link to live video at facebook.com/dupageforest and from dupageforest.org.



Marsha Murphy
Bloomingdale – District 1



Tina Tyson-Dunne
Lombard – District 2



Linda Painter
Hinsdale – District 3



Jeff Gahr
Wheaton – District 4



Barbara O'Meara
Naperville – District 5



Al Murphy
West Chicago – District 6

From the President

I am pleased to present the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County's 2021 year in review, which highlights the successful and wonderful things the agency accomplished over the past year. This was the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the Forest Preserve District was still able to offer a variety of programs, events, and recreational experiences to county residents. General forest preserve attendance remained high with over 6 million visitors (compared to 4.6 million in 2019), permit sales increased, and golf course revenues exceeded expenditures. These statistics demonstrated that people not only reconnected with nature during the pandemic but also made it an important part of their lives.

The Forest Preserve District also continued its commitment to maintain and improve the land entrusted in its care and to restore areas for the benefit of the county's flora, fauna, and scenic beauty. As the largest landowner in the county, we take this responsibility seriously. Drive through the preserves and you'll see staff and volunteers working on several restoration projects, some that will take years to complete. Many projects initiated in 2021 will continue into 2022 and, when completed, will restore over 1,000 acres of open spaces.

The Forest Preserve District also took steps toward implementing its 2019 master plan, including reaching out to the public for opinions on certified master-plan projects at Willowbrook Wildlife Center, Blackwell, Waterfall Glen, and Greene Valley.

Of course our continued commitment to you, our taxpayers, is to ensure we offer services and programs at a great value. Our financial health is as important as that of nature's. For every dollar you pay in real estate taxes, only two cents go to the Forest Preserve District. This is a great value considering those two cents support 26,000 acres, 60 forest preserves, 145 miles of trails, 30 lakes, 45 miles of rivers and streams, six education centers, three golf preserves, and hundreds of recreational programs.

As you read through this report, I hope you'll enjoy learning about the projects and programs that make the Forest Preserve District a leader in conservation, sustainability, and education. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us if you have any questions, and we'll see you on the trails!



Daniel Hebreard
President, Forest Preserve District of DuPage County

Our Mission

To acquire and hold lands for the purpose of preserving the flora, fauna and scenic beauty for the education, pleasure and recreation of DuPage County citizens

Where to Visit Us

Headquarters

3S580 Naperville Road
Wheaton • 630-933-7200
TTY 800-526-0857
forest@dupageforest.org

Education Centers

Danada Equestrian Center
3S507 Naperville Road
Wheaton • 630-668-6012

Fullersburg Woods
Nature Education Center
3609 Spring Road
Oak Brook • 630-850-8110

Kline Creek Farm
1N600 County Farm Road
West Chicago • 630-876-5900

Mayslake Peabody Estate
1717 W. 31st St.
Oak Brook • 630-206-9566

St. James Farm
2S541 Winfield Road
Warrenville • 630-580-7025

Willowbrook Wildlife Center
525 S. Park Blvd.
Glen Ellyn • 630-942-6200

Golf Courses

The Preserve at Oak Meadows
900 N. Wood Dale Road
Addison • 630-595-0071

Maple Meadows Golf Course
272 S. Addison Road
Wood Dale • 630-616-8424

Green Meadows Golf Course
18W201 W. 63rd St.
Westmont • 630-810-5330

Partner Sites

Bartlett Nature Center
Bartlett • 847-608-3120

Danada House
Wheaton • 630-668-5392

Fischer Farm
Bensenville • 630-766-7015

Graue Mill and Museum
Oak Brook • 630-655-2090

Lyman Woods Nature Center
Downers Grove • 630-963-9388

Online

dupageforest.org
@dupageforest



I usually end up at Herrick Lake Forest Preserve in Wheaton. We have lots of memories of that place, from romantic dates to family picnics.

— Melvin Godson

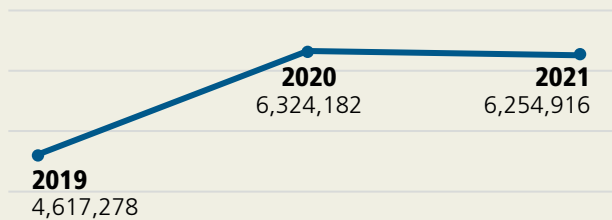


By the Numbers

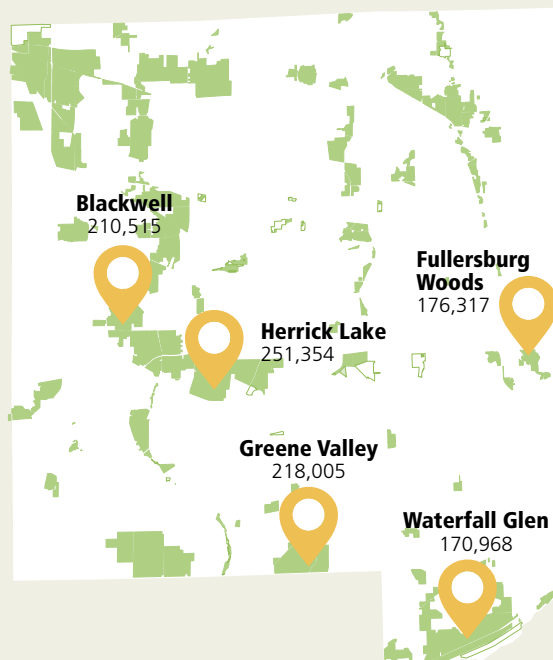
The surge in visitation to DuPage forest preserves that began at the start of the pandemic showed no signs of slowing down in 2021. More than 6.2 million people visited DuPage forest preserves in 2021 compared to 4.6 million just two years earlier. But forest preserve fans continued to have their favorites: The top five most attended preserves accounted for over 1 million of those visits.

Across the agency, though, numbers tell the story of how DuPage forest preserves remained popular throughout the year.

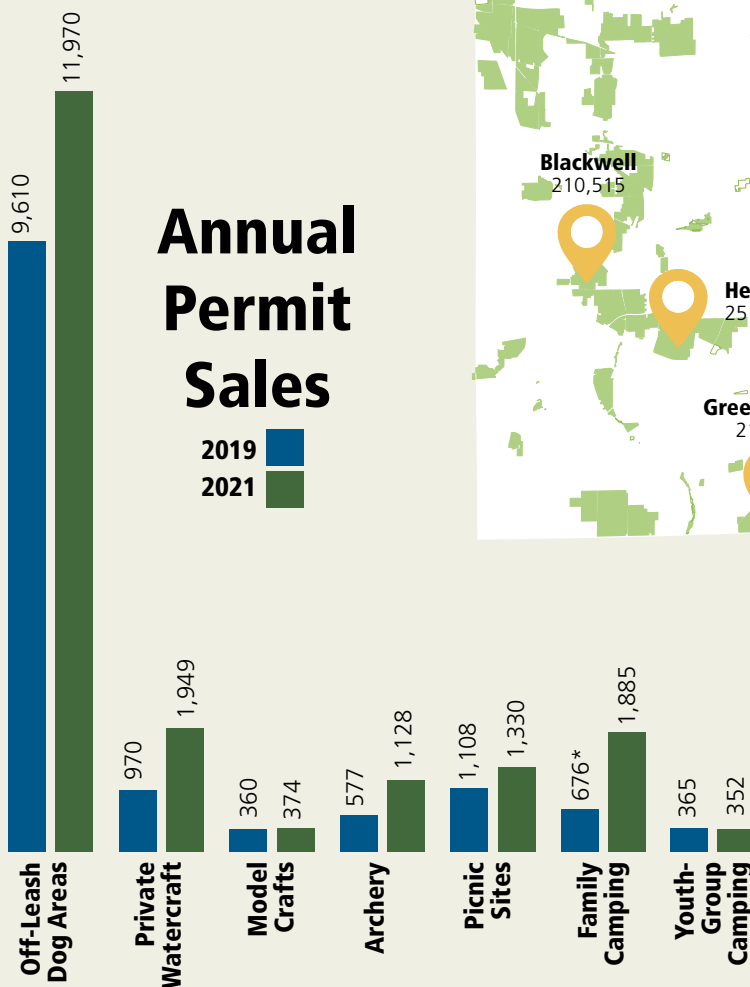
Overall Visitation



Top 5 Most Visited Forest Preserves



Annual Permit Sales



*Closed for part of 2019 for stream restoration work



8,332
Boat Rentals



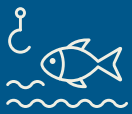
1,431
Snow Tube Rentals



170
Snowshoe Rentals



709
@ Summer Camps



200
@ Special Needs
Adventure Day



221
@ Archery Open House



22
Have It at Herrick Events



FORE! The Preserve at Oak Meadows
Maple Meadows Green Meadows

97,000
Rounds

\$182K
Merch Sales

\$5.6M
Total Revenue



NATIVE PLANT SALE

753 Orders

11,319 Plants Sold, Bringing Native
Species Into DuPage Backyards

\$81,211 Net Sales

100% Online Orders With
Contactless Curbside Pickups



TREES, STREAMS, AND ROADS

5,000

Stock of Native Trees and Shrubs
for Future Planting

900

Trees and Shrubs Planted

2,100

Trees Pruned

300

Acres Mowed

18

Miles of Resurfaced Trails

300

Tons of Debris Removed
From Waterways

1.1 Million

Square Feet Sealcoated



We've always taken advantage of the forest preserves ... as places to relax, hike, watch for wildlife, and look at trees, wildflowers, and other plants.

— Lisa and Rick Hootman



108,664

Page Views



66.6%

Mobile



33.4%

Desktop or Tablet



24.8K Followers



5,357 Followers



7,232 Followers



38,465 Views



33.5K
E-News Subscribers



934 Online Chats



38 News Releases



Each time I visit, I see and enjoy something different. Many times I encounter other people who will share the path, and it is always a pleasure to stop and chat with visitors.

— Marian Pezdek





260/36
Full-Time/Part-Time
Employees



1,000
Regular Volunteers



100
Seasonal Employees



3,300
Event Group Volunteers



3,274
Job Applications



5,506
Law Enforcement Calls



Safety First

DuPage forest preserves are patrolled 365 days a year by a department of well-trained sworn officers, who respond effectively to the needs of those who visit the county's forest preserves. The department is the first forest preserve or park district agency to receive accreditation by the Commission for Accreditation of Law Enforcement Agencies.

Last fall Forest Preserve District police along with area police, fire, and emergency responders conducted a search-and-rescue training exercise at Blackwell Forest Preserve. The exercise allowed rescuers to practice how to respond if a tornado touched down near the forest preserve while visitors were staying at the family campground. It helped agencies better prepare for a large-scale emergency response and determine how they can best work together for a safe and successful operation. Partner agencies included Warrenville Fire, Milton Township Community Emergency Response Team, DuPage County sheriff's police, and the American Red Cross.

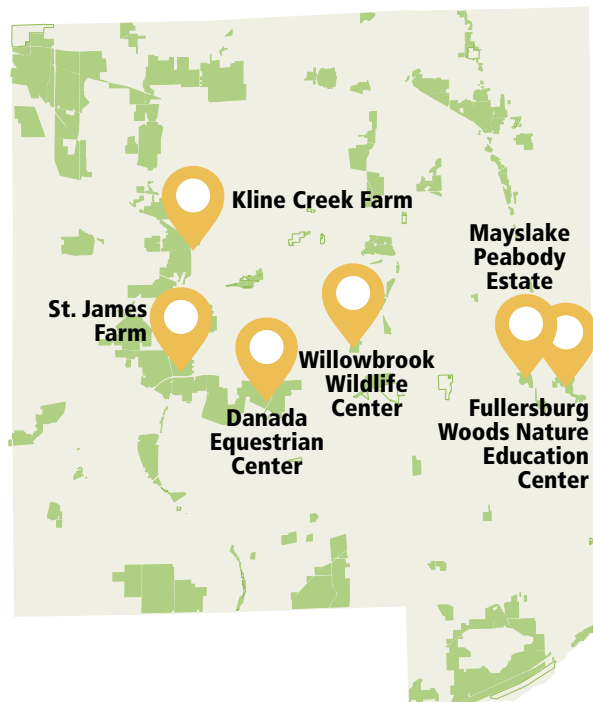
Special Destinations

In addition to trails, picnicking, fishing, and open natural areas, the Forest Preserve District offers six special destinations within the preserves, each with its own distinct exhibits and buildings, which focus on the county's natural or cultural history. Each has scheduled programs for kids, families, and adults as well as activities and points of interest for casual visitors.

The year saw a mix of operational adjustments. Because of continued health and safety concerns, centers opened with modified hours and offerings.

Willowbrook Wildlife Center in particular, with a surge in admissions over the past two years, converted its visitor center space into treatment areas, requiring public access to remain closed. A new center is part of the Forest Preserve District's 2019 master plan, and in 2021 the District undertook a multitiered outreach effort to gain additional opinions about the site's redevelopment.

When complete, the center will include a 16,850-square-foot addition for exhibits, learning labs, and a rehabilitation clinic. For the permanently disabled animals that live at the center, new enclosures will create more naturalized habitats. The Forest Preserve District is also working toward making Willowbrook a net-zero carbon emissions site.



Our favorite preserve is St. James Farm. With kids, it is the perfect distance to walk a big or small loop based on their energy levels. They love seeing different parts of the preserve, too.

— Nick and Melanie Papineau



WILLOWBROOK WILDLIFE CENTER STATS

11,521

Animals Admitted

219

Unique Species

7

Threatened or
Endangered Species

3

First-Time Species

71.4%

Release Rate
After 24 Hours

16,183

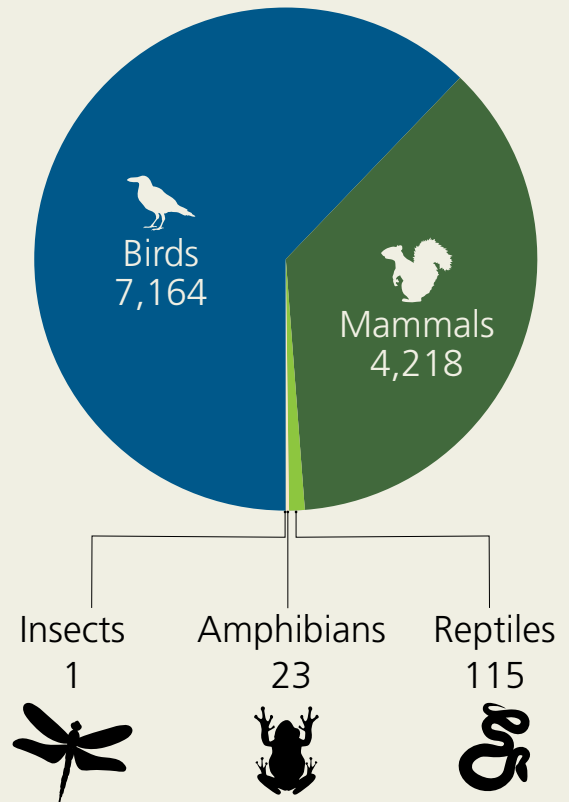
Phone Calls

33

Agencies Supported



Admissions by Species Group



Danada Equestrian Center

- 170,722 visitors to the equestrian center grounds
- Reintroduction of horse-drawn wagon rides
- Introduction of equine trail sports program
- Shared obstacle course playdates with St. James Farm
- Continued onsite hay program with 250,000 pounds of hay custom baled during the year



Fullersburg Woods Nature Education Center

- 175,718 visitors to the surrounding forest preserve
- Reopened nature education center with limited hours after being closed to the public for most of 2020
- Major exterior renovations completed by Forest Preserve District staff



Kline Creek Farm

- 32,310 visitors
- First year planted and harvested all crops with the help of staff, volunteers, horses, and visitors and without powered mechanical assistance
- Rebuilt lower barn for milking demonstrations May – October, including opportunities for visitors to assist



Mayslake Peabody Estate

- 52,332 visitors to the forest preserve grounds
- Site of 2021 Native Plant Sale
- Restoration of 1920s walnut entryway staircase
- Reopened Mayslake Hall June 15, welcoming 749 visitors throughout the remainder of the year



St. James Farm

- Renovation of 150-person picnic pavilion, adding a grill patio, benches, and artificial turf game courts
- Indoor riding arena used by 156 equestrians
- 183,987 visitors to the forest preserve grounds
- Site of 40 special events, including weddings, scholastic cross-country meets, and picnics



Timber Ridge Streambank

In late spring the District stabilized the streambank in three key areas along the West Branch DuPage River in Timber Ridge Forest Preserve.

The work excavated an eroded streambank and installed rock bank protection, granite cobble and stone, and wetland plants. This project will protect the Forest Preserve District's 2011 investment into a 1-mile stretch of the West Branch DuPage River Trail that was threatened with instability due to significant flooding events that occurred over the past 10 years.



York Woods Intersection

The village of Oak Brook and the Forest Preserve District worked cooperatively to improve bicycle, pedestrian, and vehicular traffic at the intersection of York and Harger roads adjacent to York Woods Forest Preserve.

The project eliminated the need to use the Roosevelt Road interchange to access Harger Road from northbound York Road. It also made it easier and safer to access York Woods via the Salt Creek Greenway Trail by creating a trail underpass below Harger Road.

Blackwell Launch

The Forest Preserve District installed a dock with a transfer platform and handrails at Silver Lake at Blackwell Forest Preserve that meets ADA requirements and will allow individuals of all ages and abilities to launch a kayak without assistance.

The \$75,650 project was funded in part by \$15,000 in private donations through the nonprofit Friends of the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County, which identified the dock as a priority project. The remainder was funded through the Forest Preserve District's yearly appropriated construction and development funds.



Spring Brook Creek and Wetland Restoration

Although the restoration of 5,500 feet of Spring Brook within Blackwell Forest Preserve wrapped up in 2020, in 2021 crews installed over 60,000 individual plants at the site, an addition to the 30,000 installed in 2020. Crews also worked to control invasive plants and to seed with native species.

During the last week of June, 4 inches of rain fell, testing the capacity and strength of the newly built stream. During the storms, water within the stream slowly rose and spilled into the adjacent wetlands and floodplain. As waters receded, it was evident the stream and surrounding floodplain performed as designed.



West Branch Mega Project

2021 marked the final year for the West Branch Forest Preserve Mega Project. The project began in 2013 for wetland mitigation for the O'Hare International Airport expansion.

The 350-acre site now contains 153 acres of wetland, 1.5 miles of restored streambanks and beds, and over 275 acres of grassland and prairie habitat in former agricultural fields. In addition to providing healthier habitat for native wildlife, the preserve now also receives and stores stormwater, a benefit to neighboring residents.



Continued Success at Urban Stream Research Center

The Urban Stream Research Center at Blackwell Forest Preserve is the only facility of its kind in Illinois. Forest Preserve District ecologists have been raising and releasing freshwater mussels – the most imperiled animals on the planet – there since 2012.

In 2021 ecologists released 495 mussels at three sites. The first release was in the Lake Michigan watershed in collaboration with the nonprofit Urban Rivers, whose mission is to create new habitats along the North Branch of the Chicago River. The second release was in the Fox River watershed in partnership with the Forest Preserve District of Kane County, and the third was in the Des Plaines River watershed in DuPage. The center also released 366 giant floater mussels into the recently restored Spring Brook at St. James Farm Forest Preserve.

Because of its aquatic-centered operation, the center is also home to the Forest Preserve District's Hine's emerald dragonfly rearing program. Since 2016 the District has reared 256 larvae and 1,466 eggs of this federally endangered insect. From this, over 150 adults and 30 larvae have been released into Illinois habitats. Because Hine's emerald dragonflies in the wild need devil crayfish to create appropriate habitat, the center has reared 336 of these crustaceans since 2018.

To showcase its efforts, in 2021 the center – normally not open to the public – welcomed 110 visitors to a special open house.



Green Initiatives

Whether by restoring woodlands, wetlands, and prairies; helping protect threatened or endangered wildlife; or running a fleet on alternative fuels, the Forest Preserve District has been doing things “green” for quite a while. As part of its master plan, the District prioritized green initiatives, such as solar power and increased sustainability, to reduce its carbon footprint, reliance on fossil fuels, and energy costs and to improve the environment and quality of life for all living things. In 2021 it further committed to adopting new operational strategies to support the environment.

The Preserve at Oak Meadows Clubhouse

The doors opened at the new clubhouse at The Preserve at Oak Meadows this year. The one-story, 18,000-square-foot building has environmentally friendly features, such as a green roof, native landscaping with pollinator-friendly plants, sustainably sourced wood, and energy-efficient building systems. It also features a restaurant with indoor and outdoor seating areas, a multipurpose event room, a pro shop, locker rooms, and office space.

Once fully open, the clubhouse will accommodate up to 120 people for dining and 200 for special events.



Blackwell Solar Project

With a pledge from gracious donors in 2021, the Forest Preserve District began planning for the installation of a solar array on the fleet building at Blackwell Forest Preserve. The 330-kilowatt array will be able to annually produce 384 megawatt-hours of electricity, offsetting 100% of the building’s electrical-energy consumption. It will not only save taxpayers an estimated \$22,000 each year but also reduce greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to 272 metric tons of carbon dioxide. The Forest Preserve District will also be able to sell an additional 29,000 kilowatt-hours to ComEd each year with the company’s net-metering program.

A Commitment to Alternative Fuels

Over the past 20 years the Forest Preserve District has created a fleet of vehicles and equipment (including tractors and lawn mowers) that runs on alternative fuels or hybrid technology. This has lowered fuel expenditures, reduced tailpipe emissions, and lengthened the lifespan of the equipment.

In 2021, 95% of the Forest Preserve District’s 172 vehicles ran on alternative fuels — propane, natural gas, electric, hybrid, biodiesel, or ethanol. By not relying on conventional gas and diesel fuels, the Forest Preserve District prevented the release of 427 megatons of greenhouse gas emissions.



Green at the Golf Preserve

In 2021 the Forest Preserve District had its first full season with its solar-powered cart storage building at The Preserve at Oak Meadows, the first of its kind in the nation. During the year the system generated 54,000 kilowatt-hours of electricity, enough to power the golf preserve’s fleet of 75 golf carts for the entire season. This prevented the release of 84,000 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions, the equivalent of carbon sequestered by 633 tree seedlings over 10 years.

Financial Stewardship

Tax Dollars at Work

For Every
\$1
in Property Taxes



2¢



Go to DuPage
Forest Preserves

Estimated Annual Property Taxes

Paid to the Forest Preserve District for the Next Five Years

Market Home Value

\$300,000	\$500,000	\$750,000
\$120	\$199	\$299

**Annual Taxes
Paid to the District**

The Forest Preserve District follows sound management principles in its commitment to the planning and use of financial resources. It maintains a AAA rating from Standard and Poor's based on strong financial operations, fiscally responsible reserves, and disciplined budgeting practices. This superior credit rating has also enabled the Forest Preserve District to attain successful bond sales over the agency's history.

In fall 2021 the board of commissioners authorized the issuance of bonds to be used to finance land acquisitions and capital projects. The Forest Preserve District will be able to undertake these projects without raising property taxes. These projects include the construction of a new Willowbrook Wildlife Center, renovations at Mayslake Hall, and the construction of a new parking lot at Waterfall Glen. Funding will also be used to proactively pursue the acquisition of additional open spaces throughout the county.

For 2021, operating expenditures are estimated to come in 3% under budget, or just over \$1.05 million. Golf operations are estimated to come in \$2.15 million under budget excluding transfers and depreciation. Capital expenditures across the Forest Preserve District are projected to come in \$1.11 million under budget, or about 7%. Forest Preserve District staff actively manage capital projects to ensure an efficient and cost-effective execution of each project and asset purchase.

Forest Preserve District revenues are funded in three major sources: property taxes, other revenues, and fund balance and transfers. Property taxes are the most reliable revenues source, providing the critical funding for operations. Other revenues include program revenues, golf course revenues, donations, investment returns, and grants. Fund balance and transfers account for the significant capital funding needs for projects and capital asset purchases.

When I walk with volunteer partners it's just not my "eyes and ears" at work. Nature has been there well before we came, and it's our obligation to preserve and revere.

— Ratindra Das



Awards

Spring Brook Restoration Project

The Spring Brook creek and wetland restoration project, which improved habitat and water quality at Blackwell Forest Preserve, received a Chicago Wilderness Force of Nature Award on Dec. 8. Work involved meandering the creek, creating 21 new acres of wetlands and 23 acres of prairie, removing a dam so fish could swim freely, reducing flooding along service roads in the preserve, and moving the West Branch DuPage River Trail out of the floodplain.

Springbrook Prairie Trail

The Forest Preserve District received a grant to construct a 0.25-mile-long multipurpose trail along the east side of Naperville-Plainfield Road that will link trails with an underpass below Naperville-Plainfield Road. This will give nearby residents safer access to Springbrook Prairie, the Southern DuPage Regional Trail, and thousands of acres of open space. Construction should be completed by summer of 2023.

DuPage Hundred Club Award of Valor

Officer Brian Philips received the award of valor from the DuPage Hundred Club on Oct. 27, one of only two individuals in the county to receive the award. Philips removed a young man from a vehicle engulfed in flames on 79th Street adjacent to Greene Valley Forest Preserve at 11:45 p.m. on May 18. He arrived on scene attempting to extinguish the fire but when unsuccessful then put his own health and safety at risk to remove the man from the vehicle.

Financial Achievement

The Government Finance Officers Association awarded the Forest Preserve District its Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting, the 31st consecutive year the Forest Preserve District has received this distinction. The program encourages agencies and professionals to prepare comprehensive annual financial reports that evidence the spirit of transparency and full disclosure. Participation in and recognition by the GFOA award program exemplify the Forest Preserve District's commitment to sound financial practices and stewardship for the residents of DuPage County.



Award-Winning Mayslake Volunteer

Longtime Mayslake Forest Preserve volunteer steward Conrad Fialkowski received a Chicago Wilderness Force of Nature Award on Dec. 8. Fialkowski has lead at least 540 volunteers on over 22,000 hours of restoration work. At the site the number of native plant species has increased from about a dozen in 1985 to well over 200 today – a huge accomplishment born of his research, trial and error, and sweat equity.

The Friends

The Friends of the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County is a 501(c)(3) organization that helps the community support the Forest Preserve District's mission through philanthropic giving. In 2021, 898 donors gave \$211,759.85, many in support of several key projects.

Adopt an Animal at Willowbrook Wildlife Center — Over \$19,100 helped fund wildlife rehabilitation services, food, and supplies for treating wild animals.

ADA-Accessible Pier — Donors provided \$15,000 to help install an ADA-accessible pier to accommodate kayaks and canoes at Blackwell Forest Preserve.

Night for Nature Event — Thanks to 127 generous donors, this virtual event raised \$9,295 for wildlife. The Wheaton Lions Club in particular sponsored the event's duck race along Spring Brook.

Game Fish Stocking — Domtar Corporation presented \$2,500 to stock native game fish at a forest preserve lake and to support native wildlife rehabilitation at Willowbrook Wildlife Center.

Giving Tuesday — On Nov. 30, the Friends accepted a dollar-for-dollar matching grant challenge — up to \$3,000 — from one of its directors, who is also a volunteer. The fundraiser garnered \$12,733.32 in one-day gifts from 81 donors.

Green Energy Endowment — Established in 2021, this endowment will help fund green energy investments at Forest Preserve District facilities. Six people contributed to the new fund, including a major commitment by Ann Boisclair and Jeffrey Jens to support the installation of solar panels at the Forest Preserve District's fleet building.

Adopt a Blanding's Turtle Program and Breakfast with the Blanding's Turtles and Friends — One corporation and 24 people donated to the conservation of the state-endangered Blanding's turtle. The Friends also joined the Forest Preserve District and partner agency the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum for a virtual "Breakfast With the Blanding's Turtles," which showcased the District's captive-rearing head-start program.

Mayslake Hall Staircase Restoration — Donors, volunteers, and staff gathered in person to see the intricately detailed staircase and learn about its restoration process. A private donation and other funds from the Friends helped make the restoration possible after a pandemic-related delay.

To find out how to support this philanthropic arm of the Forest Preserve District, visit dupageforest.org/friends.



Our forest preserves are a treasure in our DuPage backyards. It's such a worthwhile mission, and I am grateful to serve with the Friends board as well as with District staff and volunteers, who do such amazing work.

— Diane Addante, Friends Board Chair





**Forest Preserve District
of DuPage County**

35580 Naperville Road
Wheaton, IL 60189

PRSRT STD
U.S. Postage
PAID
Carol Stream, IL
Permit No. 96

please deliver to current resident

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