



2026

Forest Preserve District of DuPage County

Strategic Plan

DRAFT



Forest Preserve District of DuPage County



Table of Contents

3	Executive Summary
4	Mission, Vision, and Purpose
5	Guiding Principles
6	Strategic Priorities
10	Implementation and Accountability
11	Planning Process Overview
12	Appendix A
13	Appendix B

A close-up photograph of a small bird, likely a yellow warbler, perched on a thick, textured tree branch. The bird has bright yellow plumage on its head and neck, with grey and white streaked wings and back. It is facing left, looking slightly upwards. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue-grey sky.

Executive Summary

About This Strategic Plan

This strategic plan outlines the future direction of the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County and establishes priorities to guide how we make decisions, invest agency resources, and work day-to-day. It combines ideas and suggestions from staff, executive leadership, the Board of Commissioners, and stakeholders with an analysis of current conditions and future opportunities. It identifies what we need to focus on to ensure our conservation efforts continue to have a positive effect on the environment and how we can continue to operate efficiently while responsibly serving county residents.



Mission, Vision, and Purpose

Our Foundation

An agency's mission, vision, and purpose statements define the foundation of its work.

The Forest Preserve District's mission is stated in the Illinois Downstate Forest Preserve Act and defines our core responsibility and legal purpose. Our vision describes the future we strive to achieve, and our purpose explains why our work matters and how it benefits the community.

Together, these three statements ensure our decisions and actions remain grounded in our mission of conservation and create long-term public value.

Mission

Our mission, as mandated by the Downstate Forest Preserve District Act (70 ILCS 805), is "to acquire and hold lands containing forests, prairies, wetlands, and associated plant communities or lands capable of being restored to such natural conditions for the purpose of protecting and preserving the flora, fauna, and scenic beauty for the education, pleasure, and recreation of its citizens."

Vision

We will build a future where thriving habitats, resilient ecosystems, and welcoming places connect people to nature.

Purpose

We preserve, protect, and restore natural areas to improve and sustain the quality of life for the plants, animals, and residents of DuPage County.



Guiding Principles

How We Work

Our guiding principles define the values and standards that shape how we carry out our work. They establish expectations for collaboration, accountability, service, stewardship, and decision-making. They support consistent behavior across our organization and reinforce public trust by ensuring we work thoughtfully, professionally, and responsibly.

Collaboration

We foster strong relationships and value diverse perspectives, insights, and expertise because we know we can achieve more and be more effective as a group than as individuals.

Innovation and Continuous Improvement

We boldly explore new methods, strategies, and ideas and continuously evaluate, learn, and improve. Innovation strengthens our organization and ensures we can move our mission forward in a changing world.

Trust

We build trust by being open and honest, holding ourselves and one another accountable, and creating welcoming environments where we treat ourselves and others with respect. Confidence in how we steward public lands and resources is essential.

Community-Centered Service

We serve thoughtfully and apply best practices in all our fields of expertise to increase engagement and trust through excellent community-centered service.

Safety and Well-Being

We prioritize safety and well-being in everything we do by providing secure, well-maintained, accessible, and inviting environments for all.

Stewardship and Sustainability

We pursue excellence, promote environmentally responsible practices, manage our finances, and invest in our employees so we can better care for the natural resources entrusted to us — now and for future generations.

Creating Connections

We promote programs, projects, and services that link people, nature, places, history, and stewardship to deepen everyone's understanding of the importance of conservation. These meaningful connections foster belonging, strengthen relationships, and enhance the quality of life.



Strategic Priorities

The Forest Preserve District has five strategic priorities that will shape its future and guide how it will decide to allocate resources, time, and effort. Each is of equal importance and has goals and strategies that define how we will respond to emerging conditions and maintain strong performance over time.





Mission Focus and Public Value

Goal

Maintain strong public support by ensuring activities and investments in resources consistently deliver meaningful mission-related outcomes and conservation impact.

Why This Matters

Public value is created when conservation-, education-, and recreation-driven efforts and strategic resource management combine to connect residents to the landscape and its history. We will ensure all activities and investments reinforce our mission of conservation and support long-term ecological health while keeping public lands and programs safe and well-managed. When making decisions, we will place ecological protections, responsible stewardship, and measurable outcomes (improvements in biodiversity, water quality, habitat health, etc.) over activities driven by convenience or routine practice. By aligning investments with our mission, maintaining disciplined management, and demonstrating clear conservation-driven outcomes, we will sustain public trust and long-term community support.

Strategy 1

Focus resources on conservation and ecological protections instead of development pressures, trend-driven programs, or partnerships that do not directly advance conservation priorities.

Strategy 2

Maintain and optimize existing lands, habitats, and facilities before expanding infrastructure or investing in underused assets.

Strategy 3

Demonstrate measurable conservation outcomes by communicating and engaging openly with the public and using education, interpretation, and storytelling to build understanding, trust, and support.

Strategy 4

Prioritize the acquisition of high-quality lands that promote ecological connectivity, biodiversity, and long-term stewardship over opportunistic or nonstrategic acquisitions.



Governance and Institutional Credibility

Goal

Ensure disciplined governance, clear policy direction, and transparent community engagement to strengthen institutional credibility and public trust.

Why This Matters

Stronger disciplined governance and transparency efforts reinforce public trust and ensure effective operations over time. We will continue to use consistent practices and up-to-date policies to guide decision-making across the organization. Decisions will rely on professional expertise, adopted plans, and long-term priorities rather than reactive responses.

Strategy 1

Prioritize actions and decisions grounded in professional expertise, adopted strategic and master plans, and planning cycles over ad hoc or reactive choices.

Strategy 2

Align Board of Commissioners policies, ordinances, and planning frameworks to reduce fragmented or inconsistent governance.

Strategy 3

Promote long-term institutional credibility and organizational performance rather than short-term popularity or expedient outcomes.

Strategy 4

Prioritize transparent, proactive public engagement and long-term public value over decisions driven by short-term preferences or limited interests.



Financial Capacity and Resource Management

Goal

Protect the Forest Preserve District's financial capacity by responsibly managing resources, modernizing procurement operations, and ensuring expenditures support strategic priorities.

Why This Matters

Careful planning, responsible procurements, and diversified funding protect financial stability and maintain flexibility to meet future needs. We will manage financial resources with discipline and align spending with long-term priorities. Investments will focus on efficiency, sustainability, and measurable values while limiting programs and assets that weaken our financial capacity.

Strategy 1

Prioritize long-term financial sustainability, disciplined financial planning, and an adherence to adopted financial policies over short-term spending pressures or reactive financial decisions.

Strategy 2

Intentionally limit marginal programs, nonessential asset investments, and subsidies that do not align with strategic priorities or strengthen our financial capacity.

Strategy 3

Prioritize competitive procurement practices, shared services, and benchmarking over convenience-based purchasing decisions or a reliance on past approaches.

Strategy 4

Align investments with external funding opportunities and strategic partnerships before increasing reliance on internal financial resources.



Workforce and Organizational Resilience

Goal

Invest in employees, attract mission-driven talent, engage volunteers, and cultivate leadership and workforce practices that strengthen performance and connections to the Forest Preserve District's broader impact on conservation.

Why This Matters

Investing in workforce development and meaningful volunteer engagement will strengthen our organizational capabilities. We will align staffing, program commitments, and operational expectations with available capacity rather than demand-driven expansion. Clear connections between individual contributions and conservation-related outcomes will strengthen shared purpose, accountability, and long-term organizational resilience.

Strategy 1

Prioritize professional development across the workforce, leadership development, succession planning, competitive compensation, meaningful volunteer engagement, and a supportive culture over short-term staffing fixes or legacy norms.

Strategy 2

Strengthen a culture of collaboration and integrity, ensuring employees and volunteers understand how their contributions support our conservation efforts and affect the community. Limit unnecessary procedures, complacency, and organizational inertia that weaken performance.

Strategy 3

Align staffing, employee and volunteer engagement, program commitments, and operational expectations with sustainable workforce capacity rather than demand-driven expansion.





Conservation, Sustainability, and Environmental Impact

Goal

Strengthen ecosystem resilience and capacity to adapt to an evolving environment through conservation, restoration, species rehabilitation and recovery, and sustainable operations.

Why This Matters

We will direct investments toward conservation, restoration, species recovery, and practices that strengthen ecological resilience. Decisions will prioritize biodiversity, habitat health, and environmental responsibility over short-term pressures. By adopting emerging technologies and strengthening partnerships, we will be able to adapt to changing conditions and sustain healthy ecosystems.

Strategy 1

Prioritize biodiversity improvement, habitat restoration, species rehabilitation and recovery efforts and air and water quality enhancements over infrastructure expansion or recreational convenience.

Strategy 2

Prioritize the strategic expansion of green energy, environmentally responsible technologies, and sustainable land management practices over lower-cost or easier-to-implement conventional alternatives. This will reduce our impact on the environment and lessen long-term operational demands.

Strategy 3

Promote collaboration to test, implement, and share emerging practices that deliver measurable conservation outcomes rather than relying solely on isolated approaches.



Implementation and Accountability

Turning Strategy Into Action

This strategic plan establishes the long-term direction the Forest Preserve District will take, but achieving its goals will require ongoing commitment, coordination, and accountability.

Each year, departments will identify actions that support the plan's strategic pillars and will incorporate them into their work plans. We'll monitor our progress through established performance measures, regular reporting, and periodic reviews. This will allow the District to evaluate results, respond to changing needs and new opportunities, and ensure the plan remains relevant and effective. We will also regularly communicate the plan's progress, accomplishments, and conservation-related outcomes. This will reinforce our commitment to transparency and help the public better understand the effects of the District's work, maintaining trust in our stewardship of public lands and resources.

Implementation Stream





Planning Process Overview

How We Developed This Plan

To develop this plan we used a structured process that analyzed current conditions, reviewed organizational strengths and challenges, and gathered opinions and suggestions from staff, volunteers, and leadership. We relied on strategic analyses, long-range planning, and other tools to identify risks, opportunities, and priorities and to ensure the plan reflects present realities and future needs.



Appendix A

Strategic Decision Framework

The strategic decision framework establishes the principles we will use to evaluate investments, programs, and operational decisions. It ensures our choices align with our mission, reflect long-term priorities, and support the responsible stewardship of public resources. By applying consistent decision-making standards, we strengthen accountability, ensure our resources align with our priorities, and focus on activities that have meaningful conservation-related impacts and public value.

Mission Alignment First

All investments, programs, and partnerships prioritize advancing the Forest Preserve District's conservation mission and ecological stewardship.

Long-Term Outcomes Over Short-Term Pressures

Decisions prioritize long-term ecological health, financial sustainability, and institutional credibility over short-term gains or pressures.

Evidence-Based Decisions

Decisions are guided by science, performance metrics, financial analysis, and verified data.

Responsible Resource Stewardship

Resources are invested thoughtfully by prioritizing maintenance, efficiency and responsible use of public assets.

Organizational Discipline

The District operates within a realistic capacity, prioritizing safety, efficiency, accountability, and sustainable workloads.

Innovation With Accountability

Encourage testing of new methods, technologies, and partnerships that improve conservation outcomes while maintaining fiscal and operational discipline.



Appendix B

SWOT Summary

Understanding Our Strategic Environment

Planning for the future requires that we understand our strengths and conditions that influence success. This “SWOT” analysis (an acronym for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) identified internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats. It identified a strong organizational culture, trusted programs, a stable infrastructure, and public support as key strengths that position us for continued impact. At the same time, capacity limitations, an evolving workforce conditions, and increasing operational demands highlight the importance of disciplined planning and resource management.

External conditions also present meaningful opportunities, including growing public engagement, expanding partnerships, favorable policy conditions, and advances in technology and research. However, environmental risks, economic uncertainty, workforce challenges, and rising public expectations reinforce the need for adaptability and responsible long-term planning. These insights helped shape the strategic pillars and ensure that the plan reflects both current realities and future needs.