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Friends NEWS

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Restoration, water, roads, cops are hot issues for this term

The newly-elected President and all Commissioners, along with the brand-new General Superintendent, have challenging forest preserve issues ahead. Friends has some recommendations about what they should do.

55,000 acres hoping for restored health

Recommendation: Restoring all 55,000 acres must be the top goal.

Without healthy prairies, savannas, woodlands and wetlands, there is no forest preserve, just a bunch of land. Former General Superintendent Steven Bylina made great progress on his “housekeeping” priorities like cleaning up the picnic groves and improving facilities. But he was only beginning to gain momentum on the burn program and other priorities for the 55,000 natural acres that are the heart and soul of the District.

Contract restoration funding is one of Bylina’s biggest legacies, but there is a long way to go to make this funding most effective. While staffing of restoration technicians had been improving, other needs started to bleed this crucial resource away. Infighting among staff continued to bedevil the District’s important program of partnerships with volunteer groups and partner organizations.

Friends says big challenges awaiting the new administration include: a) improving the Volunteer Resources program; b) hiring a larger staff of restoration technicians; c) expanding collaboration with partner agencies like Friends, Audubon, Openlands and others; and d) upgrading the deer management program.

Stormwater policy

Recommendation: Pass it now.

Responsible development includes provisions for stormwater and flooding. Much of Cook County does not include stormwater provisions and, with very little green space remaining, there is less and less area for rain to infiltrate the ground. The result is increased flooding in this county and downstream. Estimates suggest that the Forest Preserve District now provides as much as 80 percent of the stormwater storage capacity in the

county. Nearly two years ago, District staff presented a draft stormwater management policy to be tested for a year before being presented to the Board for approval. It has worked well. But the policy met resistance from suburban officials and the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District, who claim that it would hurt development. We’ve heard this before. The reality is that similar policies have been in place in individual suburbs and in Lake County for some time now, and quality development still thrives in these areas. The policy does not forbid conveyance of stormwater onto the preserves; it just says that it must be done in a responsible way that does not damage them. Friends says the policy should be approved as presented, as soon as possible.

Miller Meadow clean-up

Recommendation: Any widening of Quentin Road would badly damage the preserve. From a conservation perspective, the first choice is to close this road as a through street. But if it must be widened, limit it to three lanes.

The first-ever forest preserve in the nation, Deer Grove near Palatine, is bisected from north to south by two-lane Quentin Road. The Cook County Highway Department recommends that the road be expanded to five lanes. This would require paving over seven acres of forest preserveland, increasing damage to wetlands, trees and habitat. Friends works with a coalition called Build Quentin Right that has offered an alternative to the Highway Department’s myopic plan. *Continued on page 2*



Board President Toni Preckwinkle honors outgoing General Superintendent Steven Bylina, Jr. for his fine work on behalf of the forest preserves.

INSIDE

News from around the District

1 District bond rating upgraded again

Two bond rating agencies have yet again upgraded the rating on the Forest Preserve District's approximately \$115 million in outstanding unlimited tax general obligation bonds. The rating changes reflect positively on the District's efforts to match its expenses to anticipated revenues while ensuring that the corporate fund balance remains at or above the levels required by its Fund Balance Policy.

2 Sustainability doctrine released

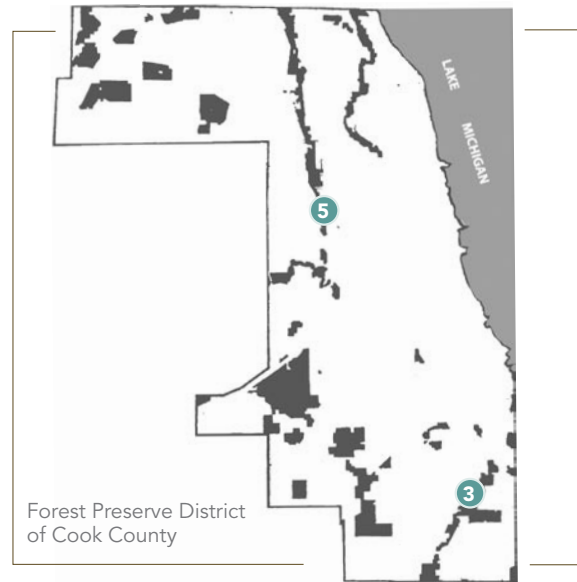
The District, in partnership with the University of Chicago and the Conservation Design Forum, released a draft of its Sustainability Doctrine. This document represents the culmination of input by many "environmentally astute organizations and citizens," such as Friends. The doctrine will guide District decisions on projects, programs, operations and policy within the District, challenging it to become the most sustainable in the nation and a model for urban conservation for preserves worldwide.

3 \$37,000 in new funds for Zander Woods

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service awarded an additional \$37,000 to the District from the Northeast Illinois Wetlands Restoration Fund to restore approximately four acres of sedge meadow by disabling drain tiles and removing invasive plant species at Zander Woods. The project will improve habitat for grassland birds such as the eastern meadowlark and bobolink, and wetland birds such as the Virginia rail.

4 District creates Urban Youth Forester Program

In an effort to fill the gap between programs for 4th-6th graders and high school students, Commissioners approved a resolution creating a summer Urban Youth Forester Program primarily for 7th and 8th grade students. The program will be modeled after the successful Mighty Acorns and high school programs, utilizing volunteers to teach students about the forest preserves and involve them in restoration.



5 Disabled dams to benefit wildlife

Three dams along the Des Plaines River will be disabled, or notched, to eliminate a proven public safety hazard and help restore the ecosystem. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources are working with the District to implement the project, which will also help moderate the effects of flooding in communities along the Des Plaines River.

6 Further protection for 600 acres of wetlands

To further its mission of preserving and protecting plants and animals that inhabit its waters, the District has proposed to officially classify about 600 acres of wetlands, marshes, sloughs and small ponds. Once classified as Illinois Nature Preserve Commission Land and Water Reserve, Nature Preserve Buffer, or Forest Preserve District Wildlife Refuge, fishing and boating would not be allowed in these areas. The District hopes to reduce the damage to native plants and animals caused by trampling vegetation, disturbing bird-nesting activities, destroying reptile and amphibian habitat and wildlife deaths due to discarded fishing line. The District's 45 designated stocked fishing areas, which cover 1,800 acres, would not be affected.

... issues for this term *Continued from page 1*

The alternate plan used a progressive road design method to include stakeholder input. Friends says if the road must be widened, then expand it to only three lanes to alleviate safety issues. In addition, include a multi-use trail for local and long-distance non-automobile commuters.

Forest preserve police

Recommendation: Maintain the Forest Preserve Police force.

Combining the Forest Preserve Police with the Cook County Sheriff's Police is a perennial issue. As is often the case in politics, this is about money and power. According

to Sheriff Tom Dart's spokesman, "We aren't saying we can take over the conservation end of things. We are saying we can take over the police end of things." But the whole point of the Forest Preserve Police is that they do both. They have received specialized conservation training in recent years and are doing a much better job than ever before. A merger doesn't make sense practically or financially. Friends says we concur with the Commissioners: "I'm concerned if anyone else would do it, they wouldn't have the same level of dedication," said Commissioner Peter Silvestri (R-9th). Commissioner Edwin Reyes (D-8th) said, "Any notion of turning it over to anyone else would be misguided."

New leadership for the forest preserves

President Toni Preckwinkle made some strong commitments as a candidate. She promised to end patronage, clean house and make the District more efficient and effective. She has been very open to input from Friends, a dramatic change from the previous administration.



New General Superintendent
Arnold Randall

In her first week, she appointed two new leaders to the Forest Preserve District. The new General Superintendent, Arnold Randall, has a strong background in civic efforts. He knows he'll have a conservation learning curve and has promised to work closely with Friends and other conservation organizations. Assistant Superintendent Mary Laraia has a long record of championing good causes since her involvement with Friends of the Parks. We wish them well and promise to help them head off pressures that any administration has

to face. We'll report in more detail on how it's going in our next issue.

Thank you, Steve Bylina

Outgoing Superintendent Steven Bylina, Jr. led a substantial turnaround for the District as its leader since 2003. At that time, \$15 million was missing from the District's coffers, grass wasn't being mowed, garbage wasn't being removed, picnic pavilions were crumbling, and conservation programs were in disarray.

There's still a long way to go, but Bylina did as much as possible given patronage limitations and a largely un-supportive president. Along with re-establishing regular maintenance, Bylina saw through the landmark Land Policy and Ordinance, dramatically improved resources for ecological restoration, established a fund balance and self-insurance fund, increased land acquisition, rebuilt picnic shelters and refurbished four of six nature centers, and professionalized the police department.

Bylina was honored by a standing ovation at his final meeting as Superintendent. Friends thanks him and wishes him well.

Contact your officials

With four new Forest Preserve District elected officials, it is a good time to publish their contact information. Friends doesn't often ask our members to call on their commissioners, but when we do, it is usually really important.

You may write President Toni Preckwinkle and all of the Commissioners at their downtown address:

118 N. Clark St., Room 567, Chicago, IL 60602
phone: (312) 603-6400; fax: (312) 603-4397

Forest Preserve District Headquarters
General Superintendent: Arnold Randall

536 N. Harlem Ave., River Forest, IL 60305
phone: (708) 771-1511; fax: (708) 771-1181
www.fpdcc.com www.fpdccvolunteers.org

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To receive Action Alerts by email Please register at www.fotfp.org

To find your commissioner and district:

City of Chicago residents can visit:
www.chicagoelections.com/voterinfo.php

Suburban residents can visit:
www.cookcountyclerk.com/elections/voterprofile/Pages/default.aspx

Or just call Friends at (312) 356-9990 and we'll be glad to help.

Forest Preserve District Commissioners

- 1st District** Earlean Collins (D)
(312) 603-4566 earlean.collins@cookcountyil.gov
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(312) 603-3019 robert.steele@cookcountyil.gov
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- 6th District** Joan Patricia Murphy (D)
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- 10th District** Bridget Gainer (D)
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- 12th District** John A. Fritchey (D)
(312) 603-6380 commish@fritchey.com
- 13th District** Larry Suffredin (D)
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- 14th District** Gregg Goslin (R)
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- 15th District** Tim Schneider (R)
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- 16th District** Jeffrey Tobolski (D)
(312) 603-6384 jeffrey.tobolski@cookcountyil.gov
- 17th District** Elizabeth Ann Doody Gorman (R)
(312) 603-4215 liz@lizgorman.com

Resources leveraged for habitat restoration and frogs

Friends is developing a reputation as an organization able to get much larger results than one would expect given the size of the organization. It does so in Cook County forest preserve politics, thanks to our members' involvement, which even occasionally gets Executive Director Benjamin Cox on the evening news.



Soil block installation at Salt Creek Nature Preserve.

But it is not enough to keep the Commissioners' attention focused. What good would it be to have 68,000 acres if it were all buckthorn thicket? Instead we should have oak trees and trilliums, spring peeper frogs and great blue herons. An important part of Friends' mission is to restore forest preserves back to health. It does this through on the ground natural restoration projects in the preserves themselves – both protecting high-quality lands where they still exist and restoring additional wetlands, prairies and woodlands acre by acre.

Friends does not do it alone. Instead, it leverages grants and others' expertise and effort to make the maximum impact. Projects are chosen to turn a reasonable amount of restoration money and elbow grease into impressive ecological gains.

To do this, Friends serves as leader and manager of specific restoration projects. First, Alice Brandon and Jean Sellar (Friends' staff restoration experts) obtain grants and contracts from government or foundation funders and secure the matching commitment of volunteer time, supplies and equipment or even cash. Next, they assemble a team with District staff and scientists to create the project restoration plan. Then they drive implementation: managing and monitoring the work of District staff, volunteer stewardship groups, interns and outside contractors. Finally, they monitor and report back on the results of the restoration work.

Friends has great news to report on three long-term restoration projects. It is exciting to witness the wildlife already returning to these areas.

At **Beaubien Woods** near the far south side of Chicago, staff are reporting an incredible jump in species richness and abundance. An onslaught of invasive plants had threatened to shade out rare prairie plants before the project began in 2007. Since then, the project team, which includes contractors and volunteers organized by The Field Museum, has removed invasive buckthorn and garlic mustard, spread native plant seed and conducted a prescribed burn, restoring eight acres of prairie back to health. Already native flowers and grasses are returning, even species considered "conservative" (those that only grow in near-perfect conditions), and the site has earned a very high "mean C" score, indicating lush biodiversity. This site's dedicated volunteer group, led by Site Steward Laurel Ross, partnered with Friends to provide the in-kind match for the grant.

Another three-year project has restored the hydrology of ten wetlands at **Salt Creek Nature Preserve**. Now, water remains in these wetlands long enough in the spring for frogs and salamanders to be able to reproduce. More than 50 years ago, before anyone knew better, drainage ditches were dug to drain these wetlands. The wetlands then dried up early in the summer, too soon for successful frog and salamander reproduction, so their populations were dwindling. The project team installed soil blocks at ten small, isolated wetlands to keep spring rains from draining too quickly into the ditches. It worked, and the soil blocks held up even through heavy flooding earlier this summer. Staff was delighted to notice more frogs than usual when out evaluating the project in late summer. Dedicated volunteers, including Site Stewards Jennifer and Ed Hammer, were instrumental in the project's success, with volunteers contributing the in-kind match.

The last project, at **Zander Woods** near Thornton, is well underway and will be completed in 2011. This extremely sensitive site is home to many unique and rare species including lilies, fringed gentian and royal fern. *Continued on next page*



A restored savanna at the magical Zander Woods.

Fall internship program strikes again

Friends' Restoration and Prescribed Fire Internship Program returned last fall for a fourth year. This internship program is unique because of its intense level of training in conservation practices. Fully 70 percent of the adult participants go on to pursue another conservation-related internship, degree or career. In the meantime, they get an amazing amount of work done for the forest preserves, contributing 1,400 hours of service.

This highly motivated five-member crew consisted of adult Crew Leaders from our summer high school program, a seasoned forest preserve volunteer, and a former high school student from the 2009 summer program. The paid internship was offered in partnership with the Student Conservation Association, and it gave participants the skills necessary to pursue a long-term career in conservation and related fields. Interns were certified in herbicide application, wildland firefighting and chainsaw use, all essential certifications for land management jobs.



Interns Patrick Small, Whitney Behr, Cornelius Tripp and Briant Holloway work together to plant native sedges in the wetland restoration project at Deer Grove East Forest Preserve.



Interns Briant Holloway, Patrick Small, Cornelius Tripp, Whitney Behr and Brian Mann out sampling insects in the prairie at Sagawau Environmental Learning Center.

This year's team of interns worked on a massive five-year wetland restoration project at Deer Grove East Forest Preserve near Palatine. This was an ideal partnership, because Openlands, a non-profit organization, needed the helping hands at the Deer Grove East project, and Friends needed additional funding support to conduct its fall internship program this year. From September through November, the interns planted native seedlings, removed invasive species and assisted with prescribed burns. Stantec, the environmental consulting company that oversaw the project for Openlands, mentored the interns.

The program was made possible by the generous support of the U.S. Forest Service, Forest Preserve District of Cook County, Openlands and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Chicago District.

Resources leveraged for habitat restoration and frogs *Continued from page 4*

Invasive plants such as glossy buckthorn had suddenly intruded into the area and were growing among these species. There was an immediate threat to the beauty and quality of the site that, at this early stage, could be addressed for a relatively low cost – far lower than if the invasives were to fully take hold – and protect one of the jewels in the forest preserve system. The restoration plan called for labor-intensive handwork by professionals to rid the area of the invasives while

not harming the native plants. After two years of this intensive removal, the native orchids and lilies again have the right conditions to thrive.

Friends would like to thank its funders for their support: The Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and The Conservation Fund's Northeastern Illinois Wetlands Conservation Account.

Thank you for helping Ignite the Night

Once again, the annual Ignite the Night fundraiser was a great success, raising nearly \$9,000. On September 25th more than 300 nature lovers of all ages came out to enjoy a huge bonfire with dinner, music and dancing at the Spring Creek Forest Preserve near Barrington Hills. The event featured

More than 300 nature lovers of all ages came out to enjoy a huge bonfire with dinner, music.

fun activities such as stargazing, nature walks, skunk-petting (yes) and popular preserve tours in horse-drawn wagons.

Friends would like to thank all the generous sponsors, donors and raffle contributors for their efforts to make this event so enjoyable:

The Barrington-Countryside Park District, The Riding Club of Barrington Hills, The Goose Island Beer Company, David and Laurie Proctor, Carl and Lynda Birkelbach and Jason Elder and Family.

Celebrating its 4th year, Ignite the Night would not be possible without the literally dozens of outstanding committee members and volunteers, led by Friends' board member Ginger Underwood. To each of you, we'd like to say thank you for your hard work, dedication and commitment in support of Friends' mission.



Ignite the Night's blazing bonfire is stoked all night by the amazing John Yepelli.

Events Manager to bring more fun for Friends

Last year when Friends surveyed its members, one message we heard loud and clear was that members wanted to get together more often, and all over the county. Luckily, our growth has been so bountiful that we are now able to begin hosting a variety of fun special events. The Board has endorsed the idea while charging us with making sure we could pay for any new expenses.

Enter Keith Williams, Friends' new Event Manager. Keith has broad experience in creative event planning for non-profits (and for his extremely large family), from large fundraising events to casual get-togethers. Since joining Friends in June, he helped coordinate the annual Golf Outing, Ignite the Night, and the well-attended Fall Preserve Tours. All the while, he has been busy brainstorming and planning for next year, suggesting new events to reach even more



Friends' new Event Manager, Keith Williams

members – and encourage new folks to join.

We're excited about this opportunity, and we know we will need your help. The approach for next year is experimental. After you attend one or even a few of these events, we hope you will give us

your honest feedback. There are also many more ways in which you can help, such as:

- Host your own third party event, such as a cocktail party
- Join one of the event planning committees
- Help identify donor, sponsorship and underwriting opportunities
- Volunteer at an event
- Train to become a Nature Guide tour host for Friends' preserve tours
- Creatively offer your goods and services.
- Please bring someone!

And remember, simply attending and sharing in on the fun will help to raise much needed funds for Friends' work on behalf of the forest preserves we all enjoy.

Friends' happenings in 2011 – save the dates!

April 9th Friends Perennial

Enjoy a fun and elegant evening with dinner, drinks and dancing at the Garfield Park Conservatory.
\$150 per guest

Spring Forest Preserve Tours – dates and locations to be announced. Watch your e-mail!

June 15th 3rd Annual Golf Outing

This event boasts an exciting day of golf at the Forest Preserve District of Cook County's premier course, George Dunne National Golf Course.
\$250 per golfer

June 25th Summer Fest

Our first annual summertime picnic fun festival for the family, celebrating the 95th anniversary of the first forest preserve land purchased in Cook County.
\$50 adults, \$25 children

Fall Forest Preserve Tours – dates and locations to be announced. Watch your e-mail!

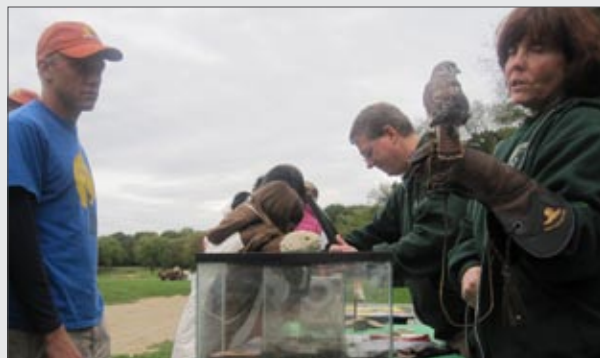
October 1st 5th Annual Ignite the Night

A nighttime fall festival with fun for all, featuring its signature bonfire and gorgeous setting.
\$45 per person, \$25 teens, \$5 children

December 3rd The return of the Annual Holiday Party

Celebrate the joy of the holiday season with a fun evening out on the town with Friends.
\$50 per guest

Contact Keith Williams at 312.356.9990 or keithw@fotfp.org with questions, your email address for event announcements, or for sponsorship, donation and underwriting opportunities.





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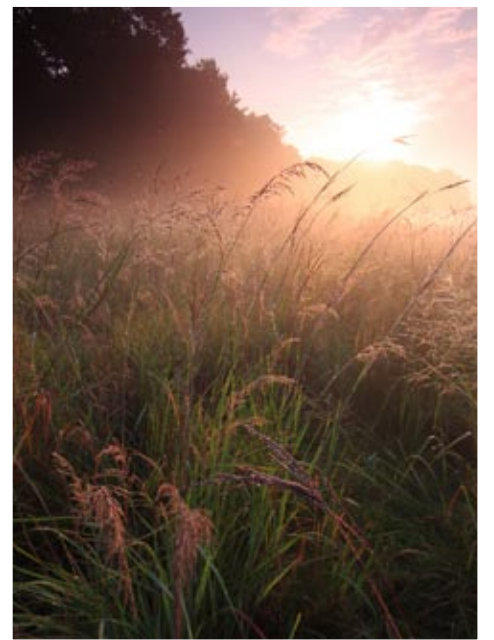
Printed with vegetable ink on recycled paper with 50% post-consumer content.

Attention photographers

Showcase your work and share the beauty of the Forest Preserves of Cook County by entering Friends' Third Annual Photo Contest. Professionals and amateurs are encouraged to submit images of feature landscapes, flora, wildlife, recreation or education. Ten winners will receive Friends hats and calendars. Friends will use the winning photos in communications pieces and on its website.

RULES

1. Photographs must be taken in a forest preserve in Cook County.
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. Please identify the forest preserve.
5. Each photographer may enter a maximum of five photographs.
6. The entry deadline for the contest is extended to February 15, 2011.



2010's first place winner, Bob Callebert, took this photo in Kloempken Prairie near Des Plaines. See the full color version at www.fotfp.org/getinvolved/photo-contest/.