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Honoring Deshawn Johnson

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of Deshawn Johnson, a former long-time Friends conservation corps crew member. Mother's Day brought the worst news for two Chicago moms. Deshawn and his friend Breyon Cowans were shot and killed while sitting at a traffic light in the early morning of May 14. These horrific murders sadly have become commonplace in Chicago. Deshawn was truly an extraordinary person whose goal in life was always to #Dobetter. In Deshawn's memory, we challenge the Chicago community to take action and do better.

Deshawn was born to Sheila Johnson and Ronald Jones Jr. on October 18, 1993. He was just 23 years old. Since he was a child, Deshawn had always been a smart, bright, and loving person. He was an excellent student who was always at the top of his class from his elementary school years to Devry University, where he graduated with Cum Laude honors and a degree in engineering. He helped pay for college by working full time in the conservation field and had just began his career as an environmental engineer. While his main focus was science he also had a passion for fashion and music. He was a unique, funny, and a bright



spot in the community. His presence will be deeply missed.

The Friends community is discussing the possibility of starting a scholarship fund, planting a memorial tree, and other avenues to honor Deshawn and his work to improve the forest preserves and his community. Please reach out with any thoughts that you might have on how to honor Deshawn. Next steps will be shared via social media, email and the next issue of this newsletter.

Taking a leap of faith



Adam walked and hitchhiked across the country, eventually hiking the Pacific Coast Trail. The skills he learned as a Boy Scout, and his work with Friends, prepared him for this life-changing journey.

By Adam Medel, Conservation Corps Crew Member

It started as this far-out idea to leave behind everything I was normally accustomed to. To take a leap of faith on an unpredictable adventure into the unknown, fitting only what I would need in a backpack in order to wander freely around the country to see what could be seen. I would oftentimes find my imagination playing with this idea, and I began talking about it and telling people I wanted to do this. A lot of the people I talked with didn't take me very seriously and many just brushed it off or told me I was going to die along the way. It was one of those crazy ideas I never thought I would actually follow through with, but then it grew and became real.

When I left for this trip I didn't have a concrete plan other than simply heading west. But I hitchhiked all the way across the country to Los Angeles and I eventually hiked the Pacific Coast Trail north to San Francisco. This mode
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News from around the District

1 Summer conservation corps programming underway

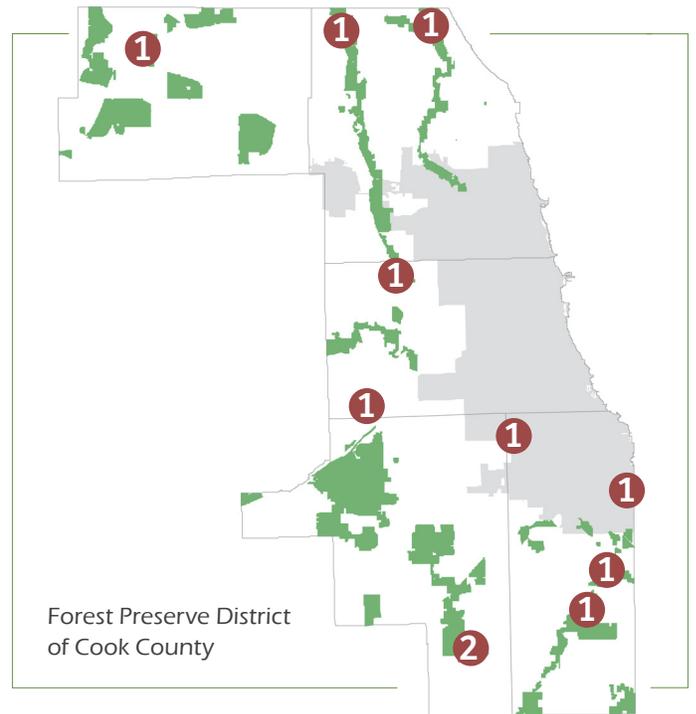
Friends of the Forest Preserves and its partners are fielding 11 high school crews through two conservation corps programs this summer. The Chicago Conservation Leadership Corps, run in partnership with the Student Conservation Association and the Forest Preserves of Cook County, employs 88 members and 24 leaders at eight sites full time for six weeks. The Forest Preserve Experience, a partnership with the Cook County Housing Authority and the FPCC, employs 51 high school members and 11 leaders part time for 5 weeks. The Friends community has now engaged more than 925 *paid* (at least minimum wage) conservation corps members since 2007.

2 Jens Jensen, Harms Flatwoods, Bobolink Meadow earn new status from Nature Preserves Commission

One of the key goals of the Next Century Conservation Plan is to dedicate 20,000 acres with the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission by 2025. Dedication provides a high level of protection for land in Illinois and is granted only to natural areas of high ecological quality.

A 220-acre portion of the Jens Jensen Preserve near Palatine is now an Illinois Land and Water Reserve as recognized by the INPC. The site includes remnant woods, restored prairie, and wetlands that harbor more than 200 species including some that are listed as threatened and endangered. The site was greatly improved thanks to volunteers and Openlands, which led a nearly \$5 million wetlands mitigation project funded as a result of the O'Hare Airport expansion.

Harms Flatwoods is now a dedicated Illinois Nature Preserve, which is the highest level of protection given by the INPC and is granted only to natural areas of exceptional



ecological quality. The 102-acre preserve near Skokie consists of high-quality northern flatwoods and mesic upland forest, including four species of oak trees. The site supports a diverse community of native plants and wildlife, including two species listed as threatened or endangered in Illinois. The preserve has benefited greatly from volunteer efforts provided by the North Branch Restoration Project, including leadership by site steward Neil Peck.

The 918-acre Bobolink Meadow near Tinley Park is now recognized as an Illinois Land and Water Reserve by the INPC. The site supports 468 plant species and 142 bird species, five of which are listed as threatened or endangered in Illinois.

Some 8,800 acres of FPCC land are dedicated by the INPC.

Golf outing exceeds fundraising goal by 30%

More than 60 golfers came together for Friends seventh Swing for Sustainability outing, raising over \$13,000 to support our community's work to protect, restore, and expand the forest preserves in Cook County. Many thanks to our sponsors, including Long Drive Sponsor (and Friends newest board member) Kathy Bruch, President of Atrium Landscape. Hole sponsors are: Bone Roofing; Cloud of Shame—Tony Wiltgen; FPCC Commissioner John Daley; FPCC Commissioner Jeffrey Tobolski; Friends Board Chair Stephen Schlegel; Friends Board Member Ted Wolff; Friends Board Member Ed Woodbury; Klees Golf Shop; Matthew Filosa—Morgan Stanley; MB Financial; Pendo Advisors; West Monroe Partners; and Billy Casper Golf, which also sponsored the signs for the day. Thanks to our Golf Ball sponsor Pat Flood—Quarter 20. And thanks to our donors: FPCC Commissioner Bridget Gainer; Tighe, Kress & Orr, Tom Jacobs; Palmer Printing; and Chris Wilmes.



Ivana Federman

Kathy Bruch (third from left), President of Atrium Landscape, with Katie Hlis, Mike Hlis, and Dennis Jarrad. They joined more than 60 golfers at the 7th Swing for Sustainability, which raised more than \$13,000.

Continued from page 1

of transportation really allowed me to have a genuine experience at the places I visited along the way compared to driving along the interstate and going to tourist spots. My mind has been spiritually awakened and opened to the wonders of nature and the interconnectedness of all things.

I made my way across the Mississippi River, through the Great Plains, the Rocky Mountains, the Southwest Deserts, and finally I reached the Pacific Ocean and the Coastal Mountains. Along the way I made some awesome and awful realizations within myself and the world in which we live. What really stood out to me is how mindless human behavior is destroying our planet's natural areas. I returned home with a strong passion to protect our land and to bring awareness of our current situation to the people in my community.

Before leaving for my adventure to the West Coast I was a Conservation Corps Crew Member with Friends. During my time from September 2015 thru August 2016 I gained incredible knowledge about the ecosystem. I was also given further insight on the condition of our natural land and the tools and knowledge to fight to restore our land. Often while out in the field I would hear stories about "out west" and how it is a completely different, wild world. This is what really sparked my interest to venture to the West Coast and see what it was all about.

My entire life prepared me for the physical and mental challenges I faced while living on the road. From when I was 8 years old until I was 16 I had been an active member of the Boy Scouts and I would go on camping trips with the troop as often as twice a month. This is where I developed my outdoor survival skills and mind set and gained a passion for taking on extreme adventures and a love for nature. Over the years I have kept myself physically active through sports like wrestling

My mind has been spiritually awakened and opened to the wonders of nature and the interconnectedness of all things.

and have pushed my body to extreme limits by living a very active lifestyle. Before leaving for my trip I would spend entire days walking around the Palos trails with a pack on in order to be comfortable walking 20 to 30 miles a day. I sharpened my mind by reading many books and watching videos on wilderness survival. Studying an atlas gave me a better understanding of the obstacles I was going to face and routes to take.

After all this planning, what I came to realize is that you can only prepare so much before you just need to do it. Learning to be innovative and intuitive, and staying in the moment and on your toes, is key to traveling on the road because it is very



Adam visited a 9/11 memorial at Pepperdine University in Malibu, California. Adam's journey across the country helped him to discover his calling: to be a leader in conservation.

easy to get yourself stuck in a tricky situation. My experience has taught me to surrender to the flow of the universe and to just let things happen. It is truly amazing how everything can come together once you put yourself out there and trust that everything will turn out alright. This, along with listening to my heart and inner voice, is what made the trip possible.

Life on the road is full of unexpected discoveries and each day you wake up not knowing what to expect, where you will end up, or who you might meet. One day you could be walking along a dark highway winding along the Coastal Mountains, struggling to take another step, thinking that this could be the end, and wishing you never left home. And the next you might meet a tourist from Germany whipping around the curves of this lonely highway who feeds you and drives you to amazing places and you feel like you're exactly where you need to be.

What I came to realize on my adventure is that for too long people have believed their actions had no side effects. They take what they consume from the Earth for granted. People are stuck in this modern way of living that they were born into. But we can see the world around us begin to crumble and decay. I found that it has become very difficult to actually go into the wild because everywhere the land is divided by roads or has been developed. Few are aware of our current situation, and we need to come together to open their eyes.

I believe the cause of these problems is our loss of connection to nature and to each other. I discovered it is my calling to be a leader in conservation and show people the beauty of the world by letting this feeling of love radiate from inside and shine into everything I do and into everyone around me. To infect the world with love and open people up to the interconnectedness of everything and to return to nature once again. Returning to Friends on a Conservation Corps Crew is the perfect opportunity to set the ball rolling and move towards my goal. Friends will supply me with the knowledge and experience to be a strong leader in the environmental field and will connect me with other people who share the same vision. I am beyond grateful that I was able to have this mind-blowing experience and to be able to return to work with Friends.

8th Annual Friends Photo Contest Winners



(Left page clockwise from top) **First Place:** Acorn Weevil, Deer Grove Forest Preserve, Edward Boe; **Second Place:** Dragonfly, LaBagh Woods, Catherine Krasner; **Third Place:** Fungus on Dead Wood, Schiller Woods, Andrea Baldi. (Right page left to right from top left) **Best People in the Preserves:** After the Burn, Wolf Road Prairie, Tyrone Murdo; **Best Flora:** Desmodium Glutinosum in Flower and in Fruit, Zander Woods, Chris Benda; **Best Fauna:** Blue Grey Gnatcatcher, Busse Woods, Janet Haugen; **Runners-up:** Emerging Hepatica, Black Partridge Woods, Katherine Onderdonk; Roadside Coyote, Busse Woods, Edward Streibig; Monarch, Salt Creek Woods, Fidencio Marbella; Dead Wood, Deer Grove East, Sarah Fallon; Sunset, Saganashkee Slough, Robert Schwaan; and Green Heron, Eggers Grove, Catherine Krasner.





New staff bring new perspectives

Michael Raczyla, Crew Manager

Michael is leading and inspiring the new Fox River Conservation Corps Crew in restoring the health of the forest preserve lands. Michael was born in Chicago and raised in the northwest suburbs where he spent much of his free time enjoying nature in the forest preserves in Cook County. After a career change in 2007, Michael started teaching environmental education at Fox River Country Day School in Elgin while also learning about conservation and ecological restoration. Honing his restoration skills in the contractor world, he moved on to lead crews for the Chicago Park District while working with volunteer groups, the Student Conservation Association, and Greencorps.

Fatimah Al-nurridin, Field Organizer

Fatimah has joined Friends as the Centennial Volunteers Program Field Organizer for the south side preserves. She is a proud native of the Calumet Region and studied fiber arts at Chicago State University, developing an eye

for beauty, craftsmanship, and harmony. Having experienced the healing powers of the forest preserves firsthand, Fatimah now works to bring others into nature to find peace, beauty, and community. She is a skillful community organizer and a passionate advocate for mental and physical health. Fatimah has two children and a 6-year-old grandson, who often join her on volunteer days in the woods.

Bill Ritzenthaler, Crew Manager

Bill is leading the Conservation Corps Roving Crew as the Crew Manager. Bill was born and raised in the west suburb of Berwyn. After graduating from Loyola University Chicago in 2014, he gained experience in conservation and environmental restoration by joining the AmeriCorps Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa as a member and a leader. After two years, he wanted to come back to the Chicagoland area to work where he grew up and be part of restoring the forest preserves.

Friends Photo Contest now offering cash prizes!

Photo contest submissions are due by August 31st, and the first place winner will receive a \$350 prize (visit fotfp.org for info on additional prizes). Please send your photographs of the beauty that surrounds us in the forest preserves in Cook County.

Amateurs and professionals are encouraged to submit images featuring landscapes, plants, wildlife, recreation, people, or education. We are especially interested in shots of people and animals. Take a look at previous years' winners to avoid duplication.

Rules: Photos must be taken in a forest preserve in Cook County; invasive species must not be prominent; each photographer may submit up to five entries; by submitting entries photographers consent to allowing Friends to use their photos on our website, in publications, and in other materials. Friends will not share photos with other entities unless permission is granted in advance by the photographer.

Submit entries via email to: ilana@fotfp.org.



FRIENDS OF THE FOREST PRESERVES PRESENTS



BEER IN THE WOODS

SEPTEMBER 30TH : LABAGH WOODS

**VISIT:
FOTFP.ORG**





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And, if you've already renewed — THANK YOU!



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3rd Annual

Busse Woods Night Ride

Saturday, Sept. 9, 6pm - 11pm

Ride the Busse Woods Trail After Dark!

Your one chance to explore the forest preserves at night!

In Partnership with:

