

Doesn't grow on trees

Chicago Sun-Times, March 11, 2001, Letter to the Editor

News that the Forest Preserve District of Cook County added \$ 6 million to its deficit in 1999 shocked us. That year the district's Conservation Department had no superintendent, no assistant superintendent and no land manager. The district acquired no land but sold a chunk of its holdings to Rosemont, against the recommendation of its advisory committee. The backlog in deferred maintenance worsened.

Yet somehow the district leaked money in 1999. The money went neither to the Conservation Department (which spent \$ 142,000 less than in 1998) nor to Forestry. These two departments are the most professional, the least patronage-laden and the smallest. They also are the most central to the district's mission of acquiring and holding land for conservation and recreation.

The district has been spending money in all the wrong places. It's time to focus the resources on the district's real job. Just as school reform needs to keep budget cuts from hurting the kids, cuts at the Forest Preserve District cannot be allowed to hurt its priceless lands.

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