

## Environmentalists praise forest budget

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Environmental groups that last month blasted Cook County President John Stroger's management of the forest preserves applauded him Friday for his proposed 2003 budget, saying it makes great strides toward improving the district.

"This is a revolutionary budget, and you deserve to be congratulated for making some very hard decisions," Debra Shore of Friends of the Forest Preserves told commissioners at the first public hearing on the budget.

The \$141.7 million budget is 4.7 percent smaller than that for the current year and provides for 400 fewer jobs.

Laurence Msall, president of the Civic Federation, a tax watchdog group, hailed Stroger for "taking bold and innovative steps" to fix the district's financial problems and restructure the operation. But Msall said the district should have a separate board of commissioners who could focus solely on its activities.

County Commissioner John Daley said that next year commissioners would convene as the Forest Preserve District Board on separate days from the County Board meetings to give the operation more attention.