

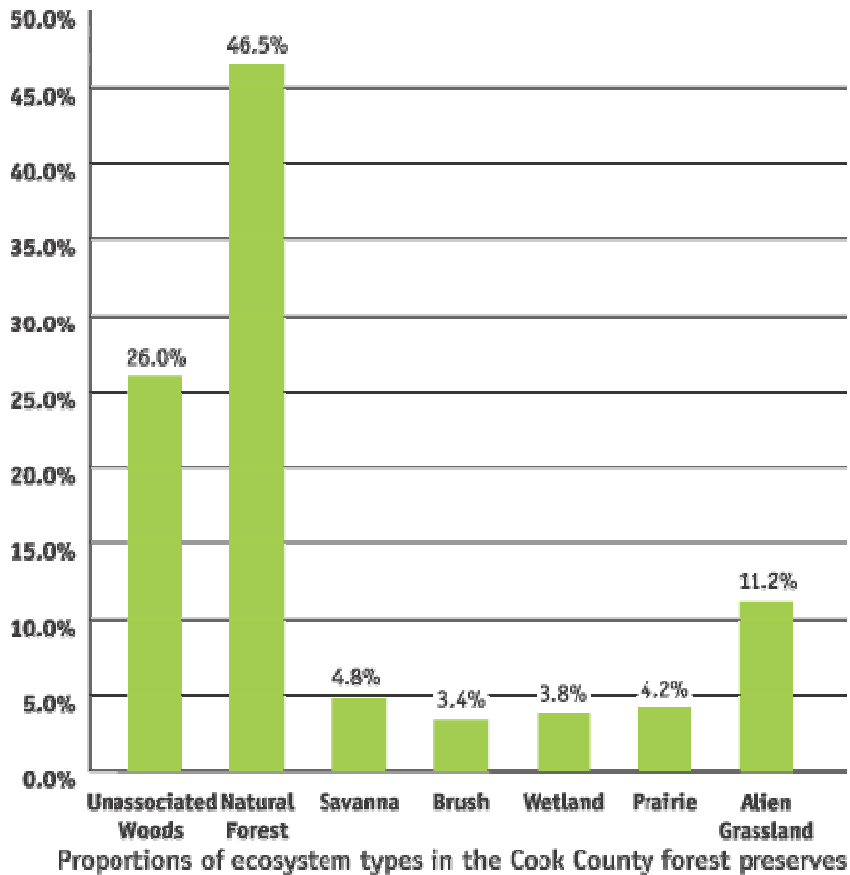
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Since 1997, due to lack of habitat management, most of the high-quality natural lands in the Cook County forest preserves have lost approximately 10 percent of their ecological value, according to a report issued in February by Friends of the Forest Preserves and Friends of the Parks.

Concerned that the district has lost its commitment to its core mission of land protection and restoration, these groups — together with the Sierra Club and the National Audubon Society — conducted a first-of-its-kind scientific "land audit" of the fifty-five thousand acres of land managed as "natural" by Cook County. More than eighty professional and volunteer scientists participated.

At eighty-seven randomly selected sites throughout the preserves, volunteers working in pairs surveyed trees, saplings, and ground layer grasses and flowers. The data indicate that 68 percent of the land is in poor shape. In the various woodland communities surveyed, the average amount of bare ground per plot was 57 to 70 percent. The wildflowers were largely gone. Yet, healthy woodlands shouldn't have more than 10 to 15 percent bare ground, according to the region's ecologists.

Respondents to a user survey identified deterioration of habitat and the need to acquire land as the most serious problems facing the district. "The district's natural lands are its most vital — and valuable — assets," said Barbara Hill, board member of Friends of the Forest Preserves. "Yet the district has allowed these priceless lands to degrade and decay."



Among the report's major recommendations: land acquisition must be a priority; the management of the natural areas needs to be dramatically increased; and the district needs increased involvement by the public in its decision-making process. To read the full text, see [www.fotp.org/downloads/FPDCC%20study%20Phase%20I-web.pdf](http://www.fotp.org/downloads/FPDCC%20study%20Phase%20I-web.pdf) (pdf, 1.5MB).

Friends of the Forest Preserves and Friends of the Parks also announced that they plan to issue a second part of the report addressing the district's budget and organizational structure in the next few months.