

## Forest crime rates low

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On April 14, an alarming pair of incidents in south suburban forest preserves raised warning flags about the safety of the forest preserve system.

On that day, a Country Club Hills man was stabbed to death as he walked on a forest preserve path in Flossmoor. The same day, a 10-year old boy was pulled off his bicycle in North Creek Meadow near Lansing, dragged into the woods and threatened with sexual assault. The boy was able to fight off his assailant and escape.

Such incidents are disturbing, but forest preserve police officials and the executive director of the Friends of the Forest Preserves told the Daily Southtown last week that the forests are for the most part safe and largely reflect the conditions of the areas surrounding them.

Forest Preserve Police Chief Richard Waszak noted that the forests have more than 40 million visitors a year. But in the 12-month period ending last October, there were only 234 arrests for criminal activity. "(Visitors) must feel safe, and they must be enjoying themselves, or they wouldn't be here," Waszak said.

Benjamin Cox, executive director of the Friends of the Forest Preserves, echoed that sentiment. "The preserves are just another part of our community," Cox said. "You'd have a much better chance of having a problem someplace much more urban."

The key to avoiding crime anywhere, whether it's a forest preserve or somewhere else, is common sense. If visitors use forest preserves at times when others are using them and remain aware of their surroundings, the chances of becoming a crime victim are small.