



*Nature is
essential*





2020 was unlike any other in the history of your Champaign County forest preserves. As it was for all of us.

In the middle of March 2020 we learned we would be closing up the museum, the interpretive center, the campground, the golf course, and many of the other attractions that residents and visitors have come to love. We all assumed these closures would be short-lived and that we would resume normal operations long before the spring wildflowers reached full bloom. When it became clear that the COVID-19 pandemic would be with us for a while, like you, we shifted gears and figured out how to adapt.

We learned so much about what we could still provide in a shuttered environment to serve the residents of Champaign County. In fact, by going virtual with programs, events, and educational activities, our reach expanded well beyond the county borders. It was not uncommon to see individuals from other states and other countries tuning into our environmental and cultural programs online!

Throughout the year we were able to keep all the preserves open for outdoor recreational activities that could be conducted safely – like hiking, bicycling, dog walking, fishing, and kayaking. With so many other entertainment options closed, you

took advantage of the benefits of nature and visited us – many of you for the first time! We could not be more delighted that we were able to continue serving your needs during this time. You proved that Nature is Essential, indeed!

The year 2020 was a historic one for the Forest Preserve District for another, very exciting, reason. In November, Champaign County voters approved an increase to the property tax limiting rate that supports your preserves. This was the first voter-approved tax increase for the District since we opened our doors in 1948! The new funds will help to maintain and restore the buildings, facilities, and infrastructure of our oldest sites – Homer Lake, Lake of the Woods, and Middle Fork River primarily. Already, just a few months into 2021, work has begun on roads and roofs across the District. We cannot thank you enough for your tremendous support and for putting us on much better financial footing as we look to the future of your forest preserves.

Sincerely,

Mary Ellen Wuellner

Executive Director

Champaign County Forest Preserves *by the* Numbers

7 preserves	1 International Dark Sky Park	2 dams	1 natural playscape
1 regional bike trail		9 bridges	10.4 miles of roadway
1 golf course	45.5 miles of trail	11 rental facilities	
1 museum	7 playgrounds	19 open air shelters	
1 nature center	10 lakes/ponds	1 botanical garden	

Board of Commissioners



Andrew Kerins
President
2012-2025
Reappointed 2020



Sarah Livesay
Vice President
2013-2023
Reappointed 2018



Bill Goodman
Treasurer
2016-2021



Scott Hays
Secretary
2017-2022



Bobbie Herakovich
Asst. Secretary/Treasurer
2014-2024
Reappointed 2019

VOTE YES for your Forests

YOUR health and well-being are worth it.

YESTOFORESTS.ORG

Paid for by YES to Forests Committee



The referendum was approved by **58%** of voters.



On November 3, voters approved a limiting rate increase for the Champaign County Forest Preserve District. This was the first voter-approved tax increase since we opened the first preserve in 1948!

Voters approved a 1.6 cent increase in the Forest Preserves' limiting rate, increasing the Champaign County Forest Preserve District's annual revenue by more than \$695,000.



CHAMPAIGN COUNTY FOREST PRESERVE DISTRICT



REFERENDUM 2020

BALLOT LANGUAGE

Shall the limiting rate under the Property Tax Extension Limitation Law for the Champaign County Forest Preserve District, Champaign County, Illinois, be increased by an additional amount equal to 0.0160% above the limiting rate for levy year 2019 for forest preserve purposes and be equal to 0.1033% of the equalized assessed value of the taxable property therein for levy year 2020?

If approved, the owner of a \$100,000 home would pay an additional \$5.33/year - 45¢ a month



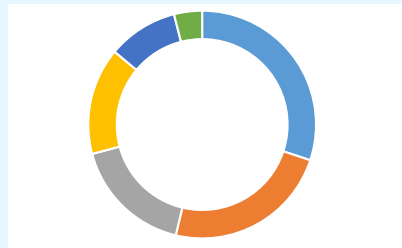
- Restore Middle Fork's Willow Pond
- Improve the Homer Lake Interpretive Center
- Replace the roof on the covered bridge at Lake of the Woods
- Repair the dam & spillway at Lake of the Woods and Homer Lake
- Improve bike paths and trails
- Upgrade public restrooms
- Create more nature and history connections through children's programming



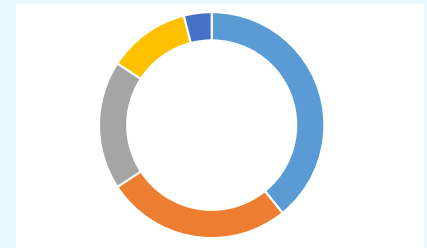
- Forego much needed repairs across all sites
- Close unsafe and deteriorating facilities and structures
- Cut some programs and events, and raise fees on others
- Delay restroom, trail, and playground updates indefinitely
- Shrink the budget for equipments, staffing, and technology needs



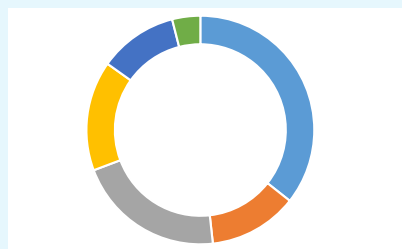
Business and Finance supports District sites and departments by coordinating many District administrative functions including preparing and managing the District budget, District cash management and investing, purchasing and payroll processing, internal control and accounting for all district transactions, providing current information technology, preparing District financial ordinances and other administrative legal transactions, and managing the annual audit preparations and response. The Business and Finance goal is to provide a high level of internal customer service to keep field and frontline staff as free as possible to care for District resources and engage visitors in the District's natural and cultural treasures.



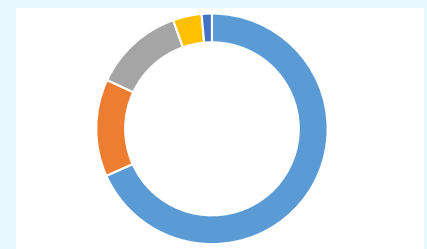
Function	Amount	Percentage
Recreation	\$1,864,763	30%
Capital Program	\$1,467,001	24%
Administration	\$1,061,387	17%
Natural Resources	\$942,604	15%
Cultural Resources	\$618,452	10%
Debt Service	\$246,808	4%
<i>Total</i>	\$6,201,015	



Type	Amount	Percentage
Wages & Salary	\$2,429,902	39%
Capital Projects and Equipment	\$1,649,975	27%
Other Operating	\$1,140,788	18%
Employee Benefits	\$733,542	12%
Debt Service	\$246,808	4%
<i>Total</i>	\$6,201,015	



Function	Amount	Percentage
Recreation	\$2,169,480	36%
Capital Program	\$768,034	13%
Administration	\$1,280,798	21%
Natural Resources	\$947,567	16%
Cultural Resources	\$680,499	11%
Debt Service	\$242,664	4%
<i>Total</i>	\$6,089,042	

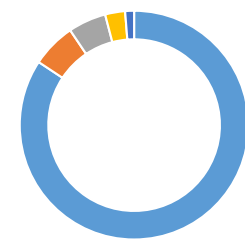


Type	Amount	Percentage
Taxes	\$4,159,982	68%
User Fees	\$830,111	14%
Grants & Donations	\$767,880	13%
Merchandise Sales	\$243,987	4%
Other	\$87,083	1%
<i>Total</i>	\$6,089,043	

COVID IMPACT SUMMARY

Despite COVID-19's substantial impact on closing facilities and limiting public services, total 2020 operating revenues were 98% of budget. However several user fee revenues declined substantially, including events and programs (-80%), facility rentals (-70%), museum store sales (-74%) and camping (-24%). After an initial precipitous drop in the spring the Lake of the Woods Golf Course rebounded successfully increasing its revenues by 5%. Property taxes revenues came in as expected.

2020 operating expenses came in nearly 12% under budget. Utilities were down 18%, employee compensation by 11%, and professional services by 26% particularly driven by reductions in conferences, travel, and golf marketing. The timing of COVID-19 enabled staff to postpone much of the recreation season hiring and to avoid layoffs or furloughs in full-time personnel.



Category	Amount	Percentage
Golf	\$905,399	84%
Camping	\$67,329	6%
Farm	\$57,550	5%
Rentals	\$30,320	3%
Events & Programs	\$13,500	1%
<i>Total</i>	\$1,074,098	





Old Homer expansion

The District closed on a new 15.58 acre parcel to expand Old Homer Park in January. This parcel contains Salt Fork River frontage of existing floodplain forest along with a 12-acre field that the Natural Resources Department has now planted with over 3,400 trees and 1,200 plants for pollinators and other wildlife. The site was purchased with a combination of funding from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation's (ICECF) land acquisition grant program and money we have received for improving habitat in the Salt Fork River watershed from the IL Department of Natural Resources. ICECF is also contributing \$10,000 toward the restoration of the site, which will primarily be used toward the purchase of the aforementioned plant materials.

Updates & Improvements



Heron View Forest Preserve

The 98-acre Heron View Forest Preserve is Champaign County Forest Preserve District's newest preserve, and fourth along the Sangamon River. The land was purchased with a combination of grants and donations, and is situated north of Mahomet approximately halfway between Lake of the Woods and Sangamon River Forest Preserves. The Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation granted a majority of the funding for the land, and a donation made by Shawn Tabeling and Brian Keigher of Hidden River Development, LLC., which is developing home sites east of the preserve, provided the balance needed for the land purchase.

The remaining upland forest area has a good canopy of oak and hickory trees, but the understory needs restoration due to invasion by non-native shrubs like bush honeysuckle, privet, and Japanese barberry. The purchase grant included nearly \$10,000 to kick-start that management over the next year.



Rankin Collection Center

The Rankin Collections Center replaced a dilapidated structure to add over 2,000 square feet of conditioned collections processing and storage space to the Museum. Collections processing features include a washer/dryer, a utility sink, and pest control heat tents. The Rankin Center will hold oversized artifacts such as: agricultural implements, animal husbandry equipment, furniture and furnishings, electrical appliances, architectural elements, and various tools and machinery.



Lake of the Woods Peninsula

The Lake of the Woods Accessibility Improvements Project added over 1,000 square feet of shelter space with great views of the lake to replace the Swiss Valley Shelter. The project also includes 1/5 mile of accessible paths, five new accessible picnic areas equipped with tables and grills, and four accessible parking spaces. The original boathouse, constructed 45 years ago, was replaced with a new building that is more accessible to the public and functional for staff. Adjacent to the boathouse is a fully accessible canoe and kayak launch, the first of its kind in the region.



Point Pleasant Wetland

Restoration of Middle Fork River's Point Pleasant Wetland consisted of the installation of a water control structure that allows the District to maintain optimal conditions for wetland species. Completed in late winter Point Pleasant has already seen the return of migrating waterfowl.



Mission Statement

To preserve and enhance our natural and cultural resources by supporting and fostering conservation, education, and recreational programs for the benefit of Champaign County.



An investment in nature: By seeking private gifts, corporate donations, and foundation grants, we support and promote the mission and goals of the Champaign County Forest Preserve District.

Total Funds Raised in 2020: \$163,894.49
Number of Donations: 509

Number of Donors: 348
Donor Retention Rate: 40%

2020 Fundraising Projects



Lake of the Woods Peninsula Project: \$12,588

At Lake of the Woods, the foundation raised funds for the development of a new fully accessible picnic and recreation area. With donors' support of this new accessible area, we can together expand the access and enjoyment of nature to ALL members of our community regardless of physical ability.

Buffalo Trace \$15,090

Thanks to a grant from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation, your donations in support of a Buffalo Trace restoration project will be triple-matched this year.

Unrestricted Gifts \$45,467

Your unrestricted donations provide flexibility to the foundation in supporting the greatest needs of the Champaign County Forest Preserve District.

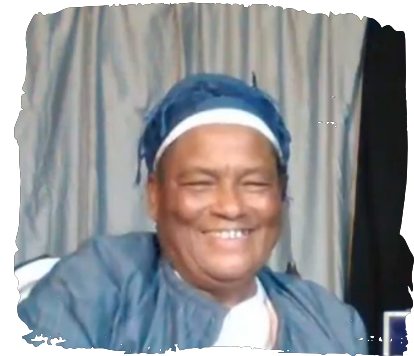
2020 Grants



Illinois Clean Energy
Community Foundation
Heron View Forest Preserve
Purchase of land \$442,975



The Nature Conservancy
All Preserves
Volunteer supplies for invasive
species removal \$1,151



Illinois Humanities
Museum of the
Grand Prairie
History Brought to Life:
Ann Bradford Stokes \$500

2020 Year in Review

Grant Coordination

The following table outlines the grants awarded to the District in 2020 and the project and location assisted with the grant funding.

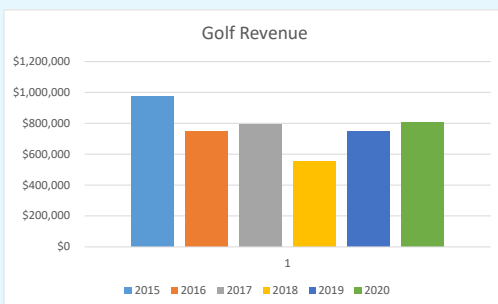
Grant Agency	Location	Project	Amount
Meijer, Inc	Homer Lake Forest Preserve	Purchase of binoculars for interpretive center bird viewing room	\$500
Community Foundation of East Central Illinois	Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve	Accessibility project on peninsula	\$5,500
Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation	Lake of the Woods	Buffalo Trace restoration	\$27,000
Park District Risk Management Association	Homer Lake Interpretive Center	Homer Lake van garage	\$2,000
Illinois Humanities	Museum of the Grand Prairie	Equipment for virtual tours	\$5,000
Grants to cover expenses incurred due to COVID			
Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity	CCFPD	Reimbursement for COVID-related expenses	\$8,628
The Nature Conservancy	CCFPD	Purchase of equipment and seed needed in response to COVID	\$3,400
Illinois Humanities	Museum of the Grand Prairie	Reimbursement of lost revenue during COVID-19	\$5,000



Promote *Healthy* Lifestyles Through *Recreation*

This is the main goal of the golf course at all times, and was especially true in 2020. The golf course became a place that people could safely participate in a recreational activity during COVID-19. Golf Course staff took every precaution to ensure the safety and enjoyment of the game for patrons of all ages and abilities.

The ability to play golf, participate in a league or clinic, take a golf lesson, or hit range balls was vital to the mental health of many in the community. With so many activities shut down or unavailable, we were happy to provide a recreational outlet for people during this difficult time.



Year	Rounds	Revenue
2015	26,953	\$971,392
2016	24,978	\$747,289
2017	26,144	\$791,182
2018	20,430	\$686,427
2019	28,458	\$1,005,861
2020	33,620	\$911,273

Highest player total since 2009 (33,620)

Golf produced increased revenue (\$805,235 in 2020 as compared to \$745,858 in 2019 and \$554,081 in 2018), despite being shut down from March 26th through April 30th, and extremely limited playability in May (Twosomes only and no golf carts allowed).

The highest driving range revenue was also recorded in 2020. Improvements to the range included new hitting mats, sponsorship targets, yardage markers, and a broken down car that creates a target for golfers on the driving range.



Updates Include...

2020 Renovations and Updates at the golf course.



The men's and women's locker rooms were completely renovated.



A Tee Sponsorship Program was created in 2020 with 13 of the 18 holes sponsored by the end of the year. The companies pay \$2,000 for a 3-year sponsorship that includes a landscaped tee box area with signage.



Hole 1 bunker

Bunker renovation project began with ten bunkers being restored on the front 9.

Golf is a game of social distancing and can be continued in a safe manner, even during a pandemic. We were able to offer some programs in the second half of the year that allowed people to get out, be active, and learn about the game of golf in a safe environment.

GOLF COURSE RULES Restore Illinois - Phase 3

- No congregating in groups larger than 10
- No handshakes
- Maintain social distancing between players on the course and patrons in the Pro Shop/ Snack Bar area.

PLAY IT SAFE



Changes due to COVID-19

Per the Illinois Department of Health (IDPH), we closed all golf facilities from March 26th through April 30th. Per the IDPH and Illinois PGA, we were allowed to reopen on

May 1st, for walking twosomes only, with 15 minute intervals for tee times. On May 29th, we returned to foursomes with 10 minute intervals (we went to 12 minutes for pace of play and safety), but individuals could only ride in carts by themselves, unless they were with family or household members. This restriction was lifted at the beginning of July.

- Numerous golf outings, tournaments, lessons, clinics, and programs were canceled in 2020 due to the varied restrictions.
- Staff created new methods of operation for shotgun outings and tournaments by adjusting tee times and navigating gathering limitations.

Appreciation for Grand Prairie Heritage

Through the Museum of the Grand Prairie (MGP) and Homer Lake Interpretive Center (HLIC) we foster knowledge of and appreciation for the Grand Prairie landscape and heritage in everything we do both on and off site, and online.

In October 2020 the museum was voted Best Museum in the News-Gazette's 2020 People's Choice Award contest. In December, the museum won the gold medal for the Illini Radio Group's 2020 Best of CU, as Best Museum. Both of these awards are chosen by the community.

From telling the story of the evolution of the landscape to considering varying perspectives, to stewarding our collections to tell the story, we communicate the mission of the Forest Preserve District throughout the six forest preserves. This year we accomplished this through the Woman Suffrage and Earth Day exhibits, various Lecture Series, Zoom and Online programming on a variety of topics (Woman Suffrage, Lincoln, Bats, Ticks and Mosquito's)... as well as our online events (Prairie Stories, Harvest Fest, and Grandmother's House) and camp/activity kits in a bag (Homer for the Holidays, Wildlife Biologist, Old Time Toys).



2020 Exhibits



Homer Lake Interpretive Center

Our One true Home: The 50th Anniversary of Earth Day. Includes a physical exhibit and series of 7 videos online

Museum of the Grand Prairie

How Long Must Women Wait? Woman Suffrage and Women's Rights in Champaign County. Physical exhibit and series of Facebook Posts and videos online.

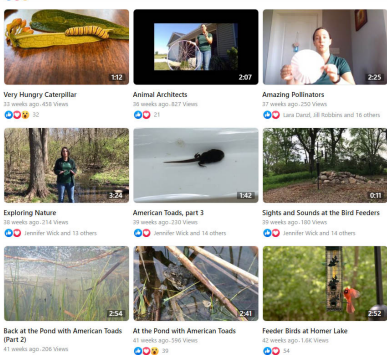
The mission of the Museum and Education Department is to collect, preserve and interpret the natural and cultural history of Champaign County and east-central Illinois. We strive to meet this through exhibits, public programs, school programs, outreach efforts and care for our collections.



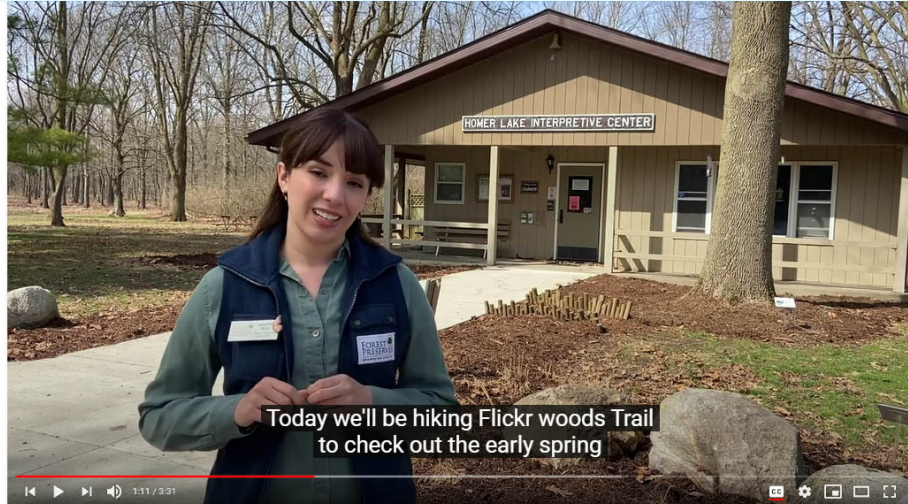
Adapting to the Times

When in-person programming had to be canceled in March of 2020, the Museum and Education staff still found ways to reach out to the community. We expanded our virtual and social media presence as an alternative form of outreach. District staff adjusted and adapted during the ongoing pandemic to continue providing fun recreational outlets for our community while adhering to guidelines and recommendations from local health organizations and the Restore Illinois Plan.

The loss of revenue was not insurmountable, because most of the District's programs are offered free of charge or at very low cost. However, we heard from families that children eagerly missed the learning opportunities that come from access to nature or guided exploration of the museum. You can't put a price on the experiences they missed but we must not overlook its intrinsic value.



Social Media



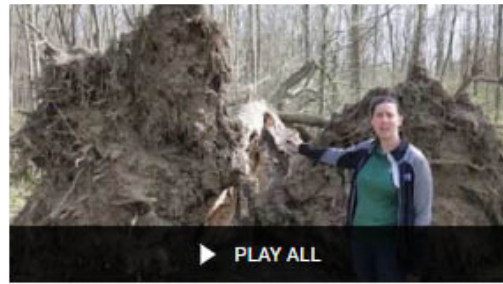
Virtual Tours

SCAVENGER HUNT

Try to find the following items around here in nature. Please remember to leave everything where you found it.

 Flower	 Chewed Leaf	 Animal Prints
 Smooth Rock	 Nest in a tree	 Ant
 Squirrel	 Bird	 Seed

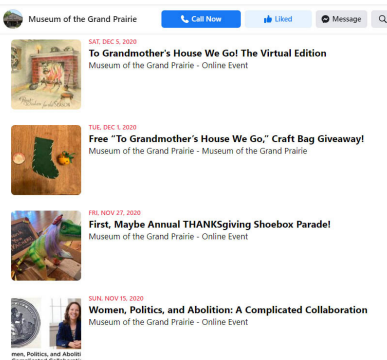
Self Guided Activities



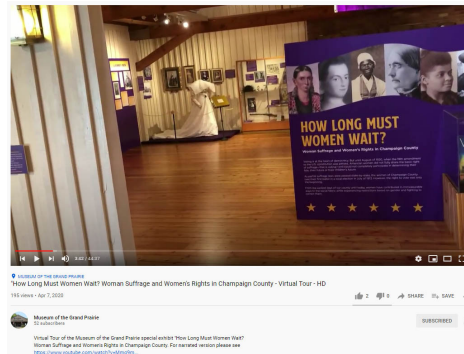
School Program Video



Virtual Hikes/StoryWalks



Virtual Programs



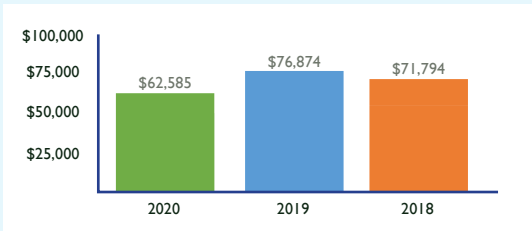
Video Exhibits



Camp in a bag



Harry L. Swartz Campground



Campground revenue decreased significantly during the 2020 camping season. The pandemic affected the campground in many ways including visitation numbers, new rules and regulations, staff and maintenance challenges.

Although camping revenue was down 20%, the good news is that mid-week camping numbers were up!

Changes due to COVID-19

Middle Fork staff instituted several new regulations during the camping season working with the CUPHD, IDPH, and CDC mandatory guidelines. Some of these new rules included keeping the campground at half capacity, reducing the maximum stay to two nights, and allowing a maximum of ten people per site.

Following directives from the Governor’s office, the campground lost two months of operation and revenue at the beginning of the season in April and May. May is typically one of the busiest months of the year. Despite these closures, the campground did quite well. One factor that kept revenues a little higher than expected is an increase in weekday (Sun-Thur) camping. Dark Sky viewing influenced higher weekday numbers in 2020 with many sky watching events occurring over the summer.



Three new shelters were installed at the Middle Fork River Forest Preserve in 2020. These shelters replaced several that were lost in 2019 due to storm damage. These shelters with their unique designs and accessibility improvements will help increase user activity throughout the preserve areas. Newer amenities have been added to these sites, like hard surfacing under all shelters, and fully accessible walkways.



CAMPGROUND RULES

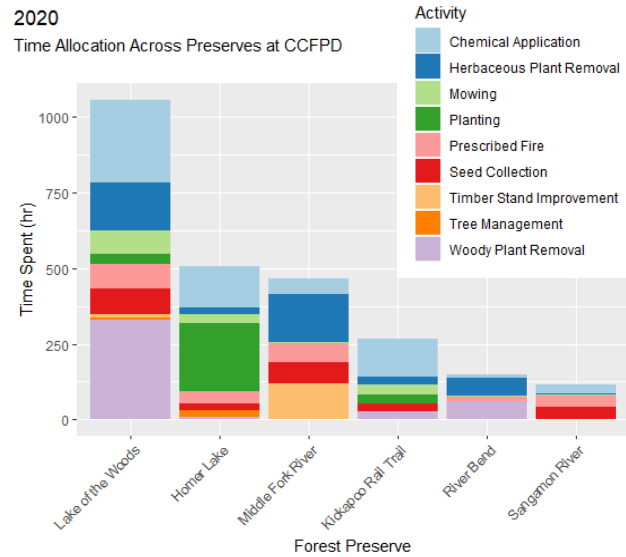
DURING COVID-19

- 🔒 **ONLINE RESERVATIONS ONLY**
- 🔒 **2-Night Maximum Stay**
- 🔒 **Only 10 people allowed in a campsite**
- 🔒 **Swimming Beach will remain closed**

FOREST PRESERVES
CHAMPAIGN COUNTY
ccfpd.org

Major Accomplishments

- Planted 40 acres to prairie on previously prepped sites.
- Planted 3,400 bare root seedling trees.
- Planted and fenced 100 container trees and shrubs.
- Planted 1,225 herbaceous plant plugs.
- Cleared and treated 18 acres of woody invasive shrubs for future planting.
- Hand pulled and removed herbaceous plants throughout 357 acres.
- Conducted prescribed burns on 27 different ecological units, totaling 440 acres.
- Collected and processed over 900 ounces of pure native seed of 75 species from 100 different plant populations, worth over \$22,836.
- Hosted 9 volunteer events for a total of 107 people, who contributed 246 hours of service



Through science-based resource management practices, the Champaign County Forest Preserve District is dedicated to promoting native biodiversity for future generations. The protection and restoration of native ecosystems including prairies, woodlands, and wetlands, is important to the many organisms that inhabit them. Natural resources projects are primarily focused on invasive species removal and control, and the reintroduction of native plants to degraded landscapes.

Connect Land, Connect People

Changes made to accommodate COVID-19 including onboarding trail steward volunteers individually, outdoors, as they apply rather than as a group.

68 new volunteers applied for regular volunteerism and approximately 66% of these folks are actively engaged and gave time in 2020. 138 regular volunteers (new and returning) gave time last year and 175 additional volunteers were recorded for event volunteering. The majority of both of these volunteer groups gave their time to stewarding land or trails.

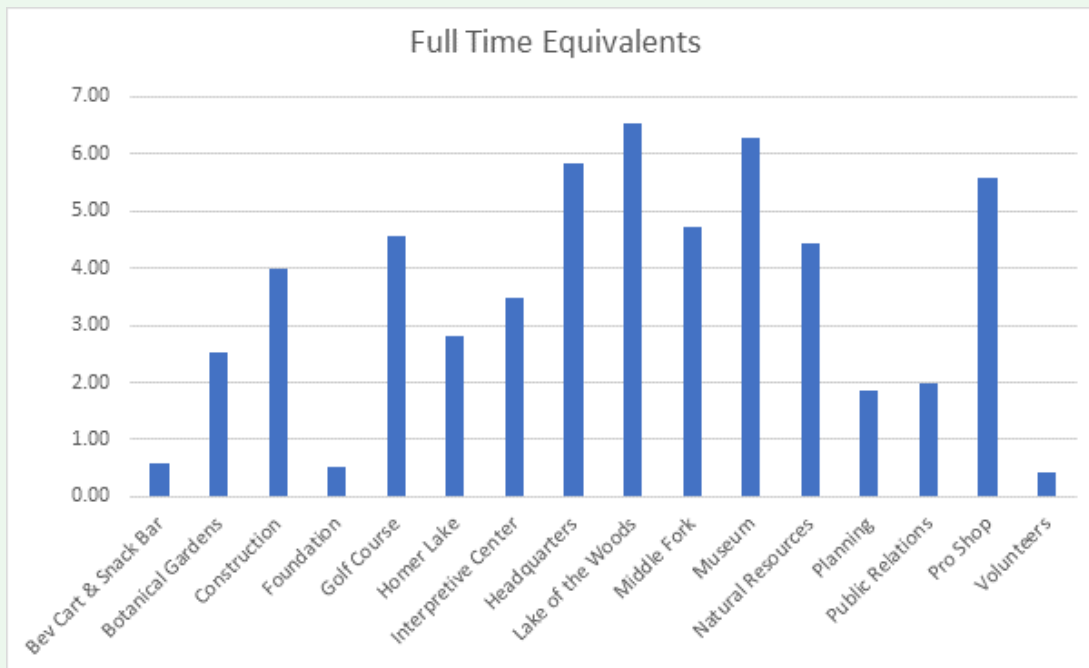
A garlic mustard identification and removal video was made by education staff. The Natural Resources staff created maps and engaged in a media blitz to educate individuals to remove garlic mustard in our Forest Preserves. This effort was positively received by the public.



“ We have a conservation responsibility to Champaign County taxpayers”

The District had 5,600 hours of recorded volunteer time in 2020! This is equivalent to 2.7 full time staff positions. These volunteers act as temporary or part-time assistance in changing areas of need, without the HR expense or the salary. Partnerships with the East Central Illinois Master Naturalists, The Stewardship Network and the Upper Sangamon River Conservancy provide volunteers for the Forest Preserve District who are particularly skilled, thus requiring less staff supervision. These volunteers allow us to better steward the land and deliver enhanced services to the public, with fewer tax dollars.

Human Resources



Total Number of Employees

- 42 Full-time Employees
- 21 Part-time Employees
- 45 Seasonal
- 1 Intern



Public open space is considered essential, and outdoor activity is specifically permitted as part of Governor Pritzker’s Executive Orders:

“Individuals may leave their residence ... to engage in outdoor activity, provided the individuals comply with Social Distancing Requirements ... such as, by way of example and without limitation, walking, hiking, running, or biking. Individuals may go to public parks and open outdoor recreation areas.”

– Executive Order 2010-10

SEE WHAT'S HAPPENING ONLINE!

www.ccfpd.org

FACEBOOK/CCFPD INSTAGRAM/CHAMPAIGNFORESTS
 TWITTER/CHAMPCOFORESTS YOUTUBE/CCFPD

Messages were two-fold; we encouraged people to get outside and enjoy the preserves while staying distanced, masked, and safe. (We also promoted our social media accounts!)



We saw our social media numbers SPROUT in 2020!

	FACEBOOK	INSTAGRAM	TWITTER
CCFPD	4,987 +1,485	2,175 +960	536 +23
KRT	3,100 +402	81 +81	126 +7
MGP	3,995 +1,095	1,139 +333	231 +54
HLIC	1,869 +763	N/A	N/A
GC	1,160 +340	294 +71	81 +26
FPPF	312		

Abbreviations
 CCFPD - Champaign County Forest Preserve District GC - Lake of the Woods Golf Course
 KRT - Kickapoo Rail Trail FPPF - Forest Preserve Friends Foundation.
 MGP - Museum of the Grand Prairie
 HLIC - Homer Lake Interpretive Center



We received 74 photos from 28 photographers as part of the first Annual CCFPD Photo Contest. The 13 winning photos are showcased in the 2021 Forest Preserve District wall calendar.



EGGSTRAVAGANZA was back for the third year! These giant eggs were placed throughout Lake of the Woods, Homer Lake and Middle Fork River Forest Preserves from March–May, giving visitors a reason to get outside while socially distanced, search for the eggs and find new parts of the preserves!

<p>DO</p> <p>Recreate On Your Own</p> <p>Please help us keep the forest preserves and trails open</p>	<p>DON'T</p> <p>Gather in Groups</p> <p>Please help us keep the forest preserves and trails open</p>
<p>DO</p> <p>Come early on a weekday</p> <p>Please help us keep the forest preserves and trails open</p>	<p>DON'T</p> <p>Visit on weekends at noon</p> <p>Please help us keep the forest preserves and trails open</p>

#ChampaignForests

More than
720 acres of
restored
prairie!



PROTECTING NATURE. CREATING CONNECTIONS.



Supported by the Forest Preserve Friends Foundation



Mission

Protect Champaign County's natural and cultural resources, and inspire people to care for, enjoy, and explore their natural world.

Vision

Protecting Nature.
Creating Connections.

