

Champaign County Forest Preserve District

2017 Annual Report
February 15, 2018

Champaign County Forest Preserve District

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Natural Resources

Department Details

The Natural Resources Department is based at Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve in Mahomet and operates at all Champaign County Forest Preserve sites. The department is comprised of four full-time staff members: the Director of Natural Resources, a Natural Resource Specialist, and two Natural Resources Technicians. The director allots a majority of work time to administrative duties, including partnerships with local service groups and volunteers, agencies, and non-profits organizations. The specialist serves as a field supervisor, ensuring high quality ecological restoration, and also providing administrative assistance to the director as needed. The technicians are primarily responsible for field work. Staff education and experience in fields such as forestry, wildlife biology, parks and recreation, and human dimensions of natural resources contribute to dynamic decision-making regarding best management practices for the conservation and restoration of ecologically and culturally important natural areas of Champaign County.

In addition to the full time staff, the Natural Resources Department regularly fills a part time position. This position may be a seasonal worker or intern, or hired primarily to manage a special project. Past special projects have included mapping, assessment of sustainable practices, and tree inventories. For 2018 the department has requested an additional seasonal position to be funded in part by the Forest Preserve Friends Foundation.

Minor annual activities include: managing research requests requiring access to District sites; development of education materials; managing the Honorary and Memorial Tree program; leading coordination of hazardous and other tree removal; participating as a sponsor / leader with the East Central Illinois Master Naturalists; and working with volunteers, schools and the public to promote effective stewardship of Champaign County green space.

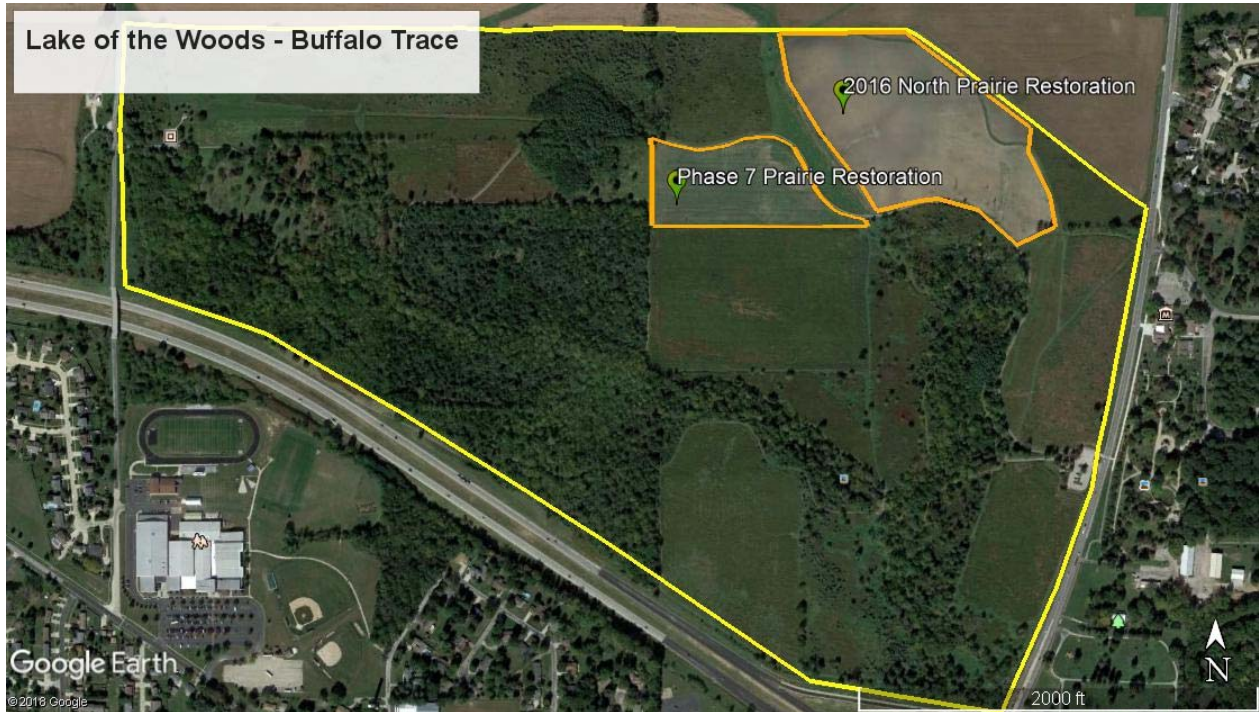
At least once a year, the Natural Resources Department contracts with a company or individual to complete arborist work, seed collection or other specialized work.

2017 Year in Review – Natural Resources

Ecosystem Restoration

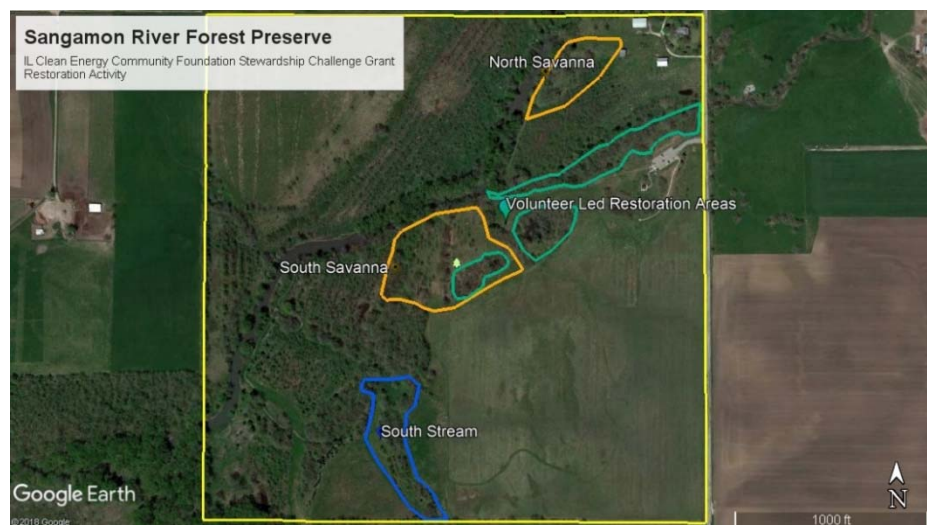
Our primary restoration site in 2017 was an eight acre area in the center of Buffalo Trace, known as Phase 7. The site was sprayed with herbicide to eliminate the established weeds, and then

planted with a cover crop of millet over the summer to limit new weed establishment and prevent erosion. Seed for the site was collected from CCFPD prairies throughout the fall, and has been mixed with additional purchased seed. A prescribed fire in November helped to prepare the site for planting by increasing the amount of open soil available for seed contact. The field will be planted by utilizing staff and volunteers to hand broadcast the seed in February of 2018.



The seed mix for Phase 7, like the 2016 North Prairie restoration project, will be comprised of low stature species, offering a contrast in wildlife habitat to the tallgrass dominated prairies currently existing at the site. The North Prairie planting was likely negatively affected by the moderate-to-severe drought that occurred through the summer and fall of 2017. This will lead to slower overall development of the prairie, and may result in a need for overseeding in a future year. The prairie will be monitored to determine the extent of damage caused by the drought.

We continue to restore savanna and



wetland/stream areas at Sangamon River Forest Preserve, as part of the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation's 2015 Community Stewardship Challenge Grant Program, through invasive species removal, prescribed burning, and native plant seeding.

The emerald ash borer infestation has dictated that we redirect many hours that may have been used for invasive tree and brush removal in our natural areas to the removal of ash trees in our user areas. In late 2017, Natural Resources partnered with Lake of the Woods Operations to remove eighteen ash trees, and several more dying or dead trees of various species. Hazard Tree Removal funds were used to contract the cutting down of difficult trees at the Golf Course, along the North Trail at Lake of the Woods, and Homer Lake in the fall. Earlier in 2017, NR staff dedicated some time to removing invasive woody plants at each of the preserves, including site preparation for the Kickapoo Rail Trail Grand Opening.

Working with Volunteers

We routinely utilize volunteers to aid staff in invasive plant management. In January, CCFPD teamed up with partner organizations through the Headwaters Invasive Plant Partnership (HIPP) to get volunteers certified to manage invasive plants with herbicide under Illinois Pesticide Act rules. Urbana Park District, Champaign Park District, Kickapoo State Park, and University of Illinois staff helped with the January 2017 training, which had record attendance with 68 volunteers present, and 55 of those seeking certification to work on CCFPD lands. This was a significant increase over the 34 volunteers certified to apply herbicide in the previous year. Volunteers from Red Bison and the Wildlife Society from the UI have been active in invasive plant management and trash removal at the KRT in Urbana. Two work days were held at the KRT in 2017, and additional training and equipment were provided by NR staff at these events. We also worked with University of Illinois Extension Forestry to offer chainsaw training to several of our volunteers, and they have used these skills at River Bend and Sangamon River Forest Preserves for invasive brush removal.

2018 Looking Ahead – Natural Resources

We submitted an application for a new Illinois Clean Energy Foundation Stewardship Challenge Grant to help in the restoration of Point Pleasant at the Middle Fork River Forest Preserve in 2018 and 2019. The grant will require volunteer input in the management at the site, and funds raised will help pay for the creation of desired hydrology conditions to maximize the ability of the wetland to support wildlife and filter water.

2018 will include more ash tree removal, and we will also use our newly purchased skid-steer with forestry mower to increase our acreage of woodlands under a restoration management regime.

Phase II of KRT will require us to work within the Village of St. Joseph to clear the way for trail construction. Some of the tree removal will be contracted out to a professional with appropriate equipment to address areas where neighboring property infrastructure is a concern.

Weed management will be accelerated on Phase I of the KRT now that construction has been completed. We will work with partners, including Red Bison, IDOT, and trail stewards, to help in our efforts, but NR staff will also need to spend considerable time on site to control aggressive invasive plants like garlic mustard, teasel, Canada thistle, and sweet clover, among others, as the primary land manager.

Working with Volunteers

Volunteer steward recruitment and training will be a priority once again in 2018. In addition to our recurring workdays revolving around invasive plant management and seed collection, we will seek to increase volunteer involvement in early reporting of new invasive plant infestations and the planting aspect of the ecological restoration process.

2018 Natural Resources Department Challenges

The biggest challenge facing the Natural Resources Department in 2018 is staffing. Newer land acquisitions requiring NR management, including now full control of management along Phase I of the KRT, mean that we will be attempting to manage significantly more acres with the same level of staffing within the department. NR also lost a significant amount of field experience and institutional knowledge due to staff turnover in the latter half of 2017. New staff will need to spend much of 2018 learning about District lands, management techniques, and equipment operation. Fortunately, newer staff is also bringing in some fresh energy and knowledge that will benefit the department in the long run. Specifically, new NR Specialist Peter Goodspeed has ArcGIS mapping experience and skills that will be helpful across the District.

Museum and Education

Department Details

The Museum and Education (ME) Department's mission statement, aligned with that of the District, is "to collect, preserve and interpret the natural and cultural history of Champaign County and east central Illinois." The Department consists of two interpretive facilities, the Museum of the Grand Prairie and the Homer Lake Interpretive Center. The Museum cares for 25,000 objects in its permanent collections, while its education collections are used throughout the preserves. Staff works throughout the preserves with offices located at the Museum, Interpretive Center and Middle Fork River Forest Preserve. The ME Department enjoys the assistance of over 3,000 volunteer hours each year. Each day we bring people closer to their natural and cultural heritage, build lifetime memories, and increase awareness of the District.

The Department is committed to following recognized best practices in its field. The Museum of the Grand Prairie has been accredited by the American Alliance of Museums since 1972, and the Department regularly references best practices from organizations such as the National Association for Interpretation, the National Association for Museum Exhibitions, and the National Park Service. Staff also maintains professional certifications and regularly attends professional development in their subject areas. In addition, school programs are aligned to the latest state and national learning standards.

The Department provides integrated interpretation across disciplines, as guided by the Interpretive Plan, to tell a cohesive and compelling story of the Grand Prairie region. A unified mission and vision that incorporates natural and cultural history enables us to collaborate closely among staff, sharing expertise. The Department also routinely partners with like-minded organizations. These efforts have strengthened exhibits and programs throughout the department and expanded the District's reach into the community. These include:

- Exhibits at the Museum and Interpretive Center that include permanent, annual, and special exhibits.
- Programs for schools and homeschoolers offered throughout the year. Teacher workshops are offered routinely.
- Public programs for all ages conducted throughout the year at District sites and offsite.
- Summer camps conducted each June-July. A recent new addition includes the Native American Camp.

- A Trailside Interpretive Plan (completed in 2011), guides the development of trailside exhibits throughout the District.

2017 Year in Review – Museum and Education

In 2017, the Museum & Education Department (ME) served 34,471 people from all walks of life. Each day we brought people closer to their natural and cultural heritage, built lifetime memories, and increased awareness of the District through our programs, exhibits, interpretive signage, collections, outreach materials, online initiatives and more.

The ME Department is guided by the Interpretive Plan (2016), and the Collections Policy and Plan (2017) and Trailside Interpretive Plan (2017) which are keyed to the District’s Strategic Plan. We hope to develop a comprehensive Departmental Strategic Plan, covering long term goals for programs, exhibits, and other interpretive instruments within the next year. In 2017, the ME Department focused on training, new programming, outreach materials and exhibits on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, detailed in a January 2018 memo to the board.

Audience and Programs

In 2017, the ME Department taught 11,812 schoolchildren and began thirteen new educational programs in addition to the more than sixty we already offered (serving an additional 7,352 adults and children). More than 14,979 people visited our facilities, the Museum of the Grand Prairie (MGP) and the Homer Lake Interpretive Center (HLIC).

New public programs offered in 2017 included: Party Like its 1900!, a Botanical Illustration Class, A Mischievous Kid’s Guide to Life, More than Meets the Eye-Full Day Camp, Make Ice Cream with New Friends-Welcoming Week Program, a Welcoming Week Interactive Activity at the HLIC, and a lecture by Mark Hanson as part of our World War I series, “Turned Loose, Chanute Field and World War I Pilot Training.” We had two great programs pass their ten year anniversary this year too: Take Me Fishing and the Lincoln Lecture Series.

New school programs included a women’s rights program at University High School, a newly revised Immigration Program that incorporates the Botanical Garden, and a program, “From the Civil War to Civil Rights”, which focuses on local African American history in the context of the national scene. Staff developed a new checkout kit for teachers on women’s history. In an effort to make accounting for our school programs more efficient, we started using the District’s ActiveNet reservation system for keeping track of school programs.

Exhibits

The MGP developed the following exhibits in 2017: *Horses and Tractors*, *Barbed Wire*, *Learning to Fly*, and an offsite exhibit at Parkland College, *Moving on: African American Firsts in Champaign County*. The HLIC developed the following exhibits this year, *A Birds Eye View*, *The Kickapoo Rail Trail Kids corner*, *Great Blue Heron*, and *Monarch Butterflies*. Trailside Interpretive Signs completed this year included four at the Kickapoo Rail Trail covering the following topics: Frogs, Eagles, Prairie, Salt Fork River, and Fulls Siding. Tree signs have been completed for the Botanical Garden and self-guided trail brochures were updated last year.

Collections

The Department revised, and the Board approved, the Collections Policy and Plan in 2017. This plan calls for the Homer Lake collections records to be added to the department's database of collections. This effort will be undertaken in 2018.

In August 2017, Christa Deacy-Quinn, an expert in pest management, consulted with museum collection staff about the collection of large artifacts stored temporarily at Sangamon River Shed. This temporary storage arrangement was intended to be short-lived, while the District constructed a suitable facility with state Public Museum Capital Grant funds adjacent to the museum. The \$238,000 grant was frozen by the state in 2015 leaving our collection of over-sized artifacts with no permanent home. Collections staff has been working with Jon Hasselbring and the Construction crew to provide more suitable storage in the basement of Headquarters as we work toward a more permanent solution.

We have begun using our freezer for collections care, and are making significant progress on processing the Doris Hoskins and Chanute Collections. In addition, we had a collections intern who processed all of our East Frisian materials, including 30 oral histories.

Facilities

Facilities improvements at the HLIC this year included the road and parking lot being chipped & sealed as well as having a new outdoor banner stand installed. At the MGP, the back sidewalk was mudjacked to address an accessibility issue, plantings around the back entrance were improved, new steel doors were installed at the emergency exits, crash bars were installed on newly refinished front back doors, the chimney was tuckpointed, and gutters were installed.

Gift Shop

The museum gift shop completed its transition to the ActiveNet Point-of-Sale system this year. We cleared much of our back stock with a 50 percent off clearance sale, had our first ever social media promotion (20 percent off if someone liked us), and are working towards a policy for making employee discounts permanent.

Promotion

The ME Department has ramped up its use of social media this year: HLIC has 224 likes; MGP has 1,224 likes on Facebook. MGP has 212 Instagram and 278 Twitter followers. In addition, we have expanded flyer distribution and created new banners for our entrances. Significant changes have been made to the department web pages in concert with the CCFPD web page.

Volunteers and New Staff

The ME Department welcomed Pat Cain (MGP-Public Programs), Marina Montez Ellis (MGP-Garden Programs) and Jennifer Wick (HLIC-Public Programs) to the permanent staff in 2017.

Volunteers clocked 2,100 hours with our department this year, with volunteers even leading our semi-annual volunteer luncheon. Most of our volunteers have made a smooth transition to the use of the District's volunteer database, Volgisitics. We have had the help of 4 unpaid interns and three regular volunteers to accomplish collections work this year. More than 100 hours were put in by Frog Call Volunteers. Madeleine Garvey received the IPRA/IAPD Community Service award for her 15 years of volunteer and intern service to the department.

Professional Development

As always, the ME Department has had many opportunities for professional development and service. David Evans and Jennifer Wick completed the NAI Certified Interpretive Guide program this year. Stacey Clementz played a major role in the Midwest Environmental Education Conference and won a \$1000 scholarship to the international North American Association for Environmental Education Conference. Katie Riopelle presented a paper at the American Alliance of Museums Annual Conference on making programs more accessible.

Grants and Donations

Donations at the door at HLIC were \$252 this year; donations at the door of the MGP totaled \$3,970. A total of 1,300 lbs of birdseed were donated to HLIC; \$742 was given to the animal advocates program. We continue to receive donations to the Education fund, which allows us to provide low-cost programs to low-income school districts, and in-kind donations from Meijer and IGA.

2018 Looking Ahead – Museum and Education

In 2018, the Museum of the Grand Prairie celebrates its 50th anniversary and will be celebrating all year long with dedicated programs and a grand re-opening on May 7, with an exhibit entitled, *1968: A Time for Every Purpose*. At Homer Lake, the annual exhibit, *From Rail to Trail*, will be about the history of the Kickapoo Rail Trail area. Smaller exhibits at MGP include three detailing

the local history surrounding World War I, while the HLIC is currently hosting a Smithsonian poster exhibit about African American history entitled *A Place for All People*.

At the ME Department's annual retreat, we set goals for the upcoming year. The goals for 2018 are: to inventory and assess the Education collection for everyone's use, to recruit 20 new volunteers, to cross-train between HLIC and MGP staff, to document past programs and exhibits more systematically, and to continue to increase the use of social media for publicity.

Capital improvements to the Museum in the next few years will include replacement of the *Blacksmithing on the Prairie* exhibit and renovation of the Discovery Room, as well as the installation of new energy-efficient windows. The museum will continue to be challenged by the grants frozen under the State of Illinois' Public Museum Capital Grant program which keeps us from rebuilding Large Artifact Storage. Artifacts will be moved this year from the Sangamon shed to a prepared space at Headquarters, but this is only a stop-gap measure.

The HLIC may require carpet replacement in the main part of the building. A long-term need is to replace or substantially renovate the HLIC to adequately accommodate visitor, program, exhibit and staff needs. The current facility, originally constructed as a residential unit, has long been inadequate for today's staffing and educational uses.

In 2022, the Museum of the Grand Prairie will undergo another accreditation review by the American Alliance of Museums. At that time, we plan to incorporate the Homer Lake Interpretive Center into the accreditation review.

Many exciting opportunities await us in the next five to ten years. We will continue planning for long-term growth at the Homer Lake Interpretive Center and its programs, see growth in the Museum's school and summer camp programs, develop interpretation along the Kickapoo Rail Trail as construction allows, among other opportunities.

Lake of the Woods, River Bend, and Sangamon River Operations

Department Details

The Lake of the Woods Operations Department is responsible for the maintenance, service, and general upkeep of the facilities and public grounds throughout the Lake of the Woods, River Bend, and Sangamon River Forest Preserves.

Originating in 1948, Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve is the oldest preserve within the Champaign County Forest Preserve District. Consisting of 900 acres, Lake of the Woods provides a number of recreational opportunities, natural resources experiences, and educational activities. The Operations Department inspects, services and maintains the following amenities: Lake of the Woods Pavilion (200 capacity enclosed rental facility); Elk's Lake Pavilion (200 capacity enclosed facility); Izaak Walton Cabin (32 capacity enclosed rental facility); River View Retreat Center – located at 428 Country Rd 2500 N, approximately 2 miles north of Lake of the Woods (35 capacity enclosed rental facility w/kitchen); Swiss Valley Shelter (90 capacity rental facility); Rotary Hill shelter (116 capacity rental facility w/kitchen); Sycamore Hollow shelter (60 capacity rental facility w/kitchen); HI Tower Bell Carillon; twelve landscaped areas, including Mabery Gelvin Botanical Garden, the Mindy Harrington Memorial Garden, and the Discovery Garden and greenhouse; six restroom facilities, including the Rayburn-Purnell restroom/bridal dressing room and Buffalo Trace restroom; five open-air shelters (Mahomet Rotary, Peninsula, Old Hickory, Fisherman, Hawthorn, and Rayburn-Purnell); four playgrounds; four volleyball sand pits; two fishing piers; and nine and a quarter miles of bike paths and nature/multi-use trails.

Developed in 2001, the River Bend Forest Preserve is a 280-acre site, containing two lakes totaling 130 acres, 2.5 miles of forest along the Sangamon River as well as a one mile nature trail and 1.2 mile multipurpose trail. Amenities include: an open-air shelter; restroom facility; Possibility Pier; and the nature/multi-use trails.

Purchased in 2007, Sangamon River Forest Preserve provides a 160-acre area for a variety of natural resource related activities. In addition, it includes the historic residence built in 1919. Amenities include: an open-air shelter; accessible prairie overlook; restroom facility; and 2.25 mile trail system.

2017 Year in Review – LOW/RB/SR Operations

Over the past year, the department concentrated on aspects of the *2015 – 2019 Strategic Plan*, specifically focusing on internal business and learning growth perspectives. Staff was challenged to be more innovative, improve efficiency, increase their job knowledge, and advance their leadership skills. The following are some noteworthy examples of their 2017 accomplishments:

- Over the past couple of years, staff has worked diligently to restore the Mabery Gelvin Botanical Garden. Michael Dale has incorporated community involvement throughout this process. These efforts were a major contributing factor in the endowment the District received in September to provide on-going revenue for plant materials and non-infrastructure improvements to the Garden.
- Doug Sanders attended a special two-day *Playground Maintenance Technician Training* at the Great Lakes Training Institute. This was a comprehensive program for managing safe playgrounds. As a follow-up to the training, Sanders also became a voting member of the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM International), the governing body for playground standards.
- Seasonal staff Hannah Ericson and Allison Woodcock had a record year for paddle boat rentals. The majority of their success was attributed to their excellent customer service. Their record sales of \$7,920 exceeded the five year average goal of \$6,538. Boat rentals were canceled the last two weekends of the season due to low water levels.
- The Operations and NR staff cooperatively worked in the removal of 20 unhealthy ash and pine trees at LOW. This process consisted of utilizing a 65' lift to remove trees near buildings and powerlines. By completing this project in-house the project savings was estimated at \$16,200. Staff also used this project to train each other in chainsaw safety and proper pruning techniques.
- Michael Dale and staff completed over 3,000 linear feet of edging around the beds in the Botanical Garden. By utilizing repurposed paver bricks, staff was able to complete this project with minimal expense. This will improve the aesthetics of the landscaped beds and will reduce labor in the future by



creating a barrier between the turf and mulch. An online estimating application projected this task to cost approximately \$30,000, had outside labor and materials been needed.

- After numerous years of electrical issues in the Botanical Garden, Ameren Illinois installed a new three phase line in September. This new line provides electrical service to the Rayburn-Purnell well house that supplies water for filling the pond and irrigation system.

2018 Looking Ahead – LOW/RB/SR Operations

Being the oldest preserve within the District, Lake of the Woods has a number of infrastructure related issues that require continuous repair. Even with an annual maintenance plan the upkeep exceeds the resources allocated within the department's operating budget. Among the more prominent areas in need of restoration or replacement are the dam/spillway, the Botanical Garden waterfall and pond area, and the rental boat dock. The pond and waterfall project is scheduled for repair and restoration beginning in 2018, while an engineering study will provide options for addressing the dam and spillway deterioration. It will be a challenge for Operations staff to balance their participation in these projects with our normal workload.

Middle Fork River Forest Preserve Operations

Department Details

The Middle Fork River Forest Preserve consists of more than 1,700 acres, making up almost half of the District's holdings in Champaign County. Within its boundaries are two waterfowl management areas that were built in cooperation with Ducks Unlimited and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. The North Waterfowl area has a viewing platform with parking located on the west side of the waterfowl area and a trail running along the berm and outlying areas. The South Waterfowl area, which is more secluded, lies due east and south of the North Waterfowl location, containing a maintenance drive for staff or special use permit holders. Both Waterfowl areas are closed to the public for several months in the spring for waterfowl nesting. A newer addition to the preserve, the Point Pleasant wetland area sits at the southernmost area of the preserve.

Four miles of the Middle Fork River runs through the middle of the preserve, feeding the waterfowl areas seasonally, and hosting kayaks and canoes.

Within the main user areas of the preserve are three ponds, Willow Pond, Cypress Pond, and Emerald Pond. Surrounding each body of water are shelter areas and open mowed areas for the public. The Harry L. Swartz Campground is located in the center of the preserve. The only campground owned by the District, it consists of 50 electric sites, 12 primitive sites soon to be upgraded with full electric capability, and 10 overflow sites. Two group camp areas, Bur Oak Group Area, and Indian Ridge Group Area, sit on each end of the campground. These group sites are typically used by larger groups such as Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops. Facilities include a shower house (seasonal), the campground host office, trail heads and shelter areas for the public, and four restroom facilities. The swimming beach is also located directly inside the campground at Willow Pond, with swimming open to the public from May through September.

Middle Fork features a fully-enclosed rental pavilion, the Activity Center, located at the east end of Willow Pond. This building is available all year and maintained by department staff. Sugar Creek shelter is an open-air shelter located due south of the Cypress Pond area and is available on a first-come, first-served basis.

Duties and responsibilities of Middle Fork staff include routine maintenance throughout the preserve user areas and properties. Also, full-time staff handles campground reservations throughout the year using the Reservation Friend software, which was first implemented in 2009, making the campground reservation and booking process much more efficient for staff and campground users. This software gives the camper the ability to make reservations online, an expectation in today's camping industry. Staff will also assist the campground naturalist (a seasonal employee hired by the education staff) prepare and set up for programs as requested. Other duties and responsibilities include: mowing, trimming, and pesticide application in user areas throughout the preserve; trash collection, campground and user area grill clean up; tree maintenance, hazardous removals, new plantings; landscaping throughout the user area; administration of campground reservation software – bookings, cancellations, money transfers; patrolling the campground; and enforcing campground ordinances and policies.

Staff is in constant contact with the visitors and users of the Middle Fork River Forest Preserve allowing us to educate our users on the District's mission of recreation, education, and conservation. With such a vast area to manage, staff continues to grow a great bond with our neighbors. We also strive to develop a great relationship with campground users and daily visitors, holding to our conservation values while providing excellence in parks and recreation.

2017 Year in Review – Middle Fork River Forest Preserve

Over the past year, the Middle Fork River Forest Preserve has continued to work in the advancement of the mission set forth as part of the Champaign County Forest Preserve District. With its diverse and complex natural areas including wetlands, waterfowl nesting areas, and high quality timber and prairie parcels, we offer many ways for the public to explore and understand what the District has to offer.

The Harry L. Swartz Campground, our primary revenue producer at Middle Fork, continues to see success as we offer a unique camping experience that other campgrounds do not. Also, we are finding that more visitors are coming from all over the country to stay with us, while still a fan favorite with our county and state guests.

We made great strides in 2017, from improving ADA user access to building a new trail system at the Pt. Pleasant Wetland area. Significant staff resources were spent last year implementing a unique and exciting project - our International Dark Sky designation process. The Dark Sky Park project allowed us to invest in the replacement of outdated, inefficient lighting structures to improve our user areas with the proper lighting, and improve our energy efficiency with new LED fixtures. We were able to complete the first phase of this project, and hope to complete the project

in the coming year. Phase II of our electrical infrastructure, replacing out of date transformers and electrical line, was also completed. This included adding a meter to the Activity Center, improving safety and adding the ability to track our power use.

Other projects include reconstructing our Activity Center entrance and walkway, bringing the area into conformance with ADA specifications. An ADA parking area was included in this project, with new sidewalk and entrance ramp. Also, the Pt. Pleasant Trail system was constructed on the south end of the preserve. This system includes several interpretive signs, a new parking area, and an observation area for the Pt. Pleasant Wetland. Parking lots were also added inside the campground user areas, to alleviate issues with cars parked along the road due to insufficient parking options. The shoreline restoration project was completed in the fall, where cattails were dug out of Cypress and Emerald Ponds, clearing the shoreline areas for recreational use.

2018 Looking Ahead – Middle Fork River Forest Preserve

We look to complete several phased projects in the coming year at Middle Fork. Phase III of the electrical infrastructure replacement is planned to commence in the early spring before the camping season begins. This project will include replacing the out of date transformers and underground electrical wire primarily in the campground area. We will also be adding 50 amp electrical service to our existing primitive sites, adding twelve more electrical sites to the campground. This upgrade will help relieve fully booked weekends, and help us meet campground code requirements.

Another project we look to complete will be our lighting replacement for Dark Sky Park compliance. This will include replacement of most of our roadway lights, entry sign lights, and other small fixtures that remain on our inventory. In late January 2018, we applied for Dark Sky Park status, the first in Illinois, and should hear whether our designation has been approved early in the year.

A challenging yet very important project is the Pt. Pleasant Wetland Restoration Project. Teaming with the Natural Resources and Planning Departments, we look to restore this wetland area to its natural state as an important habitat for waterfowl and other wetland species. In 2018, we plan to start the engineering phase of this project, which will provide specifications for restoring the natural reservoir of water in the lower section of property, while not interrupting the flow of water from our neighboring landowners.

Homer Lake & Kickapoo Rail Trail Operations

Department Details

Homer Lake Operations staff is responsible for the general maintenance, service, and upkeep of the District's facilities, grounds and waters at Homer Lake, Collins Pond (28 acres with 5 acre pond), Hidden Acres (28 acres with a 1 acre pond), Sylvester Woods (7 acres), Old Homer Park (16 acres), and the Kickapoo Rail Trail (12.5 linear miles containing approximately 250 acres). Normal recurring duties include: opening and closing of the park and facilities; trash pickup and removal; mowing, trimming, spraying of common areas and trails; maintenance of landscape areas, shrub beds, and prairie plots; tree planting, pruning and removal; trail maintenance and development; snow and ice removal on roads and sidewalks; janitorial duties at rental facilities, pit toilets, and maintenance building; Special Use Permit and special program preparation and clean up; monthly playground and facility inspections; vehicle equipment service and maintenance; providing excellent customer service to patrons; responding to requests from patrons and volunteers; and coordination of preserve services for events sponsored by public service organizations.

Homer Lake has been managed by the District since 1971, although the District did not take ownership until 1992 when the land was acquired from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. The main Homer Lake preserve site contains 828 acres of forest, wetland and prairie, as well as an 80-acre lake and its more than 5 miles of shoreline. Homer Lake Forest Preserve features the following amenities: Homer Lake Interpretive Center; Salt Fork Center rental facility (115 capacity) which has historically been one of the most rented facilities in the District; Salt Fork Center Amphitheater – used mainly for weddings and photography; Walnut Hill shelter rental facility (60 capacity), an open-air shelter with indoor rest rooms; Walnut Hill playground and sand volleyball court; the park residence; Homer Lake (80-acre lake with a watershed of 7.5 square miles; IDNR stocks the lake annually); Oak Ridge picnic area, which has 2 small shelters open to the public; a public access shoreline and boat launch (newly naturalized and re-opened); the very popular Natural Playscape and stream; an observation tower overlooking a prairie restoration site; a Lincoln wayside exhibit; a 900 foot dam and spillway; one and half miles of Salt Fork River frontage; eight rest rooms; four boat ramps; five fishing piers; ten picnic areas with tables, grills and benches; ten plus miles of hiking/multi-use trails with one interpretive trail system; six trail bridges; and one sled hill.

2017 Year in Review – Homer Lake Operations

Homer Lake has a unique role in fulfilling the mission of the Forest Preserve as you look across the District's holdings and what each one has to offer visitors. When the park opened in 1971 the Board of Commissioners envisioned Homer Lake as primarily a conservation area, and it still serves that role today. Much restoration has occurred in the 47 year history as what was once agricultural land has been gradually returned to forest and prairie. The lake was one of the largest in Champaign County, and it continues to provide excellent fishing opportunities as it is widely known for its bass fishing. It also offers two species of fish that are somewhat uncommon, saugeye and northern pike. It is very fitting that Homer Lake has been the home of the environmental and natural history component of the Education Department since its inception, and we were the first park in the county to offer a natural playscape which has now become our most visited user area. The Salt Fork Center continues to be one of the most popular rental facilities in the district for the past 20 years. Another area that has historical significance is Old Homer Park which was the most popular recreation area in central Illinois during the early 1900s. Three other parcels - Collins Pond, Hidden Acres and Sylvester Woods - remain undeveloped and offer a more passive and private outdoor experience.

The highlight of 2017 was obviously the grand opening of the Kickapoo Rail Trail. The 6.7 mile linear parkway is both exciting and challenging as we learn about the maintenance challenges that it will present. The late opening turned out to be beneficial in terms of giving us a chance to experience some of the maintenance issues that might develop in the first full season of operation.

Another very nice improvement was getting the roads seal coated as well as the parking lot at the Natural Playscape and Sail Boat Launch. Finishing these parking areas with the addition of the handicapped parking was an accomplishment many years in the waiting. Visitors of all ages and abilities can now safely get to the playscape or to the preserve's accessible fishing piers.

2018 Looking Ahead – Homer Lake Operations

We are looking forward to 2018 and the inherent challenges that will come. The addition of the KRT and the first full season of operation is probably the biggest concern looking forward, but having adequate staffing is also critical to how we're able to achieve or at least maintain the standards that we expect and the tax payers deserve.

Golf Course Maintenance

Department Details

The Golf Course Maintenance (GCM) department is housed at the east maintenance complex of the Lake of the Woods Preserve. The duties and responsibilities of the department include the general maintenance, service, and upkeep of the District's 18-hole municipal golf course, a 9-hole par-3 course, driving range, and support equipment. In 2014, staff introduced a Footgolf course that shares the par-3 course.

2017 Year in Review – Golf Course Maintenance

Over the past year, staff has continued to address items outlined in the *2014 National Golf Foundation Survey*. As it pertains to the maintenance staff, these efforts have focused on the physical condition of the course and the supporting amenities. The following are some noteworthy examples of our efforts to improve the overall golf program in 2017.

- In May, Michael Dale and staff added landscape plantings and hardscapes throughout the beds around the Pro Shop and the entrance drive. A recommendation resulting from the Audubon International Re-Certification Site Visit included adding a variety of plants that would attract native birds and butterflies. Throughout the holiday season festive decorations were also added to these areas.
- Staff assisted the NR and LOW-Operations departments in the removal and cleanup of 17 ash trees located next to the Pro Shop, in the parking lot island, and throughout the course. Downing's Tree Removal was also contracted to remove a large maple tree near the Rotary Hill restroom and three sycamore trees along fairway #2 and Lake of the Woods Road.
- Bunker renovation continues to be a high priority. Over time, dirt and debris accumulate in the sand, reducing the ability for water to filter through the bunkers properly. This past year staff renovated nine bunkers. This involved removal of existing sand, repairing drain tile where necessary, and refilling with new sand. This will continue to be an ongoing maintenance priority for GC grounds staff.
- In 2004, Lake of the Woods Golf Course became a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary. To maintain this certification staff continues to document their environmental efforts in six categories: environmental planning, wildlife and habitat management,

outreach and education, chemical reduction and safety, water conservation, and water quality management.

- Zach West Douglas was promoted to assistant superintendent in May 2017. Zach brings to the department an associates degree in golf course management from Danville Community College. Prior to his appointment he had been a seasonal worker for four seasons. Zach is competent in the operation of equipment, knowledgeable in irrigation repairs, and maintains his Illinois Pesticide Operator's License. He is currently assisting Darin Weasel in the service and repair of equipment in preparation for the 2018 season.

2018 Looking Forward – Golf Course Maintenance

Initially, the biggest challenge facing the department is the vacancy of the department head. Currently, Doug Sanders, LOW site superintendent, is overseeing the daily operations of the maintenance department. With the help of Darin Weasel and Zach West-Douglas, assistant superintendents, the daily operational tasks are on track and seasonal duties are being scheduled accordingly. Applicants for the Golf Course Superintendent position are now being sought in hopes that a candidate can be identified and hired prior to the start of the outdoor golf season.

There are two capital projects scheduled in 2018 – repairs to the pump house and the removal of two bunkers at holes #4 and #14. From a long-term perspective, the replacement of the 30 year old irrigation system is the biggest concern. Over the past three years this system has averaged \$6,564 annually in repair costs. Replacement of the irrigation system is estimated at more than \$1 million.

Golf Course Pro Shop

Department Details

Each year the Pro Shop collects green fees and related purchases for an average of 25,000 rounds of golf including 5,000 rounds on the nine-hole Par 3 course. Merchandise sales run year-round even when the golf course is closed. The official “season” for season pass holders is March 1 through November 30. Men’s and women’s golf associations operate annually from April to September each Wednesday. Staff also coordinates approximately twenty golf outings and eight tournaments annually. A full service snack bar is available for golfers and other visitors, and beverage cart service is an additional amenity on the course.

Included in the Pro Shop is a six-figure golf merchandise operation. Both full-time staff and the assistant golf professional are involved with inventory purchasing and receiving, invoice management, inventory control, special orders, and product display and rotation.

We offer an extensive lesson program throughout the season that covers juniors and adults. Customers have the option to choose a group program such as “Get Golf Ready” or an individual lesson from our golf professionals. Additionally, our staff conducts community outreach programs for juniors by attending PE classes and participating in after-school programs in the Mahomet area. The Golf Course also performs all types of club repair from reshafting to simple grip installation to cover all our customers’ needs.

The Golf Course has an all grass tee driving range with synthetic mats, two practice putting greens, and one pitching and bunker green. These practice areas are open to the public and free of charge to whoever wants to improve their game.

In 2014 the Golf Course added foot golf to its recreation menu. The nine-hole foot golf course is located along the Par 3 executive course.

Indoor practice and play are also available year round in the clubhouse with the addition of two indoor golf simulators. Staff coordinates a winter league made up of 52 players by scheduling tee times and completing weekly results. Food and beverage also sees a spike due the increased activity in the winter months.

2017 Year in Review – Golf Course Pro Shop

Staffing Changes

2017 was a year of change for the staff at the golf course. In June, Dave Huber retired as Golf Professional after 27 years at Lake of the Woods. In preparation for Dave’s retirement, Chris

Edmondson was promoted from Assistant Manager to General Manager in May. Former part-time employee, Nick Berger was hired as Assistant Golf Professional in late May, after completing his Bachelor’s degree work at McKendree University. Lastly, Mahomet native David Sebestik was hired as the new Head Golf Professional in June. David was previously an Assistant Golf Professional here and left to pursue another opportunity in Nashville, Tennessee. David’s experience and knowledge in the golf business, along with his local ties and familiarity with the course and patrons, makes him a great addition to our staff.

Play by the Numbers

CCFPD GOLF PLAYER BREAKDOWN									
2017	DESCRIPTIONS:								
	18 HOLE PAID	18 HOLE COUPON	PAR 3 PAID	SEASON PASS	GOLF CARD	RAIN CKS REDM	PGA & OTHER	TOTAL 18 HOLE	TOTAL PLAYERS
JANUARY	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
FEBRUARY	319	2	49	267	4	0	31	623	672
MARCH	295	10	13	397	8	2	58	770	783
APRIL	803	23	111	840	14	19	559	2258	2369
MAY	1190	45	131	1042	16	11	393	2697	2828
JUNE	1824	60	293	1096	41	18	692	3731	4024
JULY	2019	78	313	1185	30	15	677	4004	4317
AUGUST	2098	36	352	1324	54	17	578	4107	4459
SEPTEMBER	1690	40	215	1048	9	5	637	3429	3644
OCTOBER	882	24	76	570	12	5	447	1940	2016
NOVEMBER	277	1	20	268	0	2	119	606	687
DECEMBER	162	0	16	114	0	0	53	329	345
TOTALS	11559	319	1589	8151	188	94	4244	24494	26144

Play in 2017 was up from previous seasons. Eighteen-hole play increased by 1,000 players from 2016. This can be attributed to increased marketing efforts, new programs, and an earlier start to the season. We opened for play on February 15th, much earlier than normal. The weather took a negative turn and was very poor in March. However, we had a great summer, averaging more than 4,000 players per month.

New Programs

With the addition of David Sebestik, we instituted several new programs aimed at increasing play among youth, women, and families. The first of these programs was Ladies Golf and Yoga. This was an eight week class in which the women would receive a one hour golf lesson from David,

followed by an hour yoga class led by a certified yoga instructor. Second, we created a Parent-Child golf league, which was a 9-hole event held on our Par 3 course each Sunday night throughout the summer. We had on average 24-30 participants each week. We also instituted the “Hubie Cup”. This is a yearlong event, in which individuals accumulate points for playing in our tournaments, associations, and events. Named in honor of Dave Huber, the inaugural “Hubie Cup” tournament was held the first weekend of October and consisted of two 12-man teams of the top 24 point-getters from the 2017 season. This new initiative was extremely well-received and increased participation in our events, men’s association, and weekend tournaments.

Tournaments and Outings

2017 Outing	# of Players	Total Revenue	Merchandise
New Horizon Church	42	\$2,049.50	\$336.00
IL American Water	24	\$1,104.00	\$250.00
Pasfield Reciprocal Group	31	\$899.00	\$0.00
Carle EMS	37	\$2,489.00	\$736.00
Blair Group	24	\$720.00	\$0.00
Slumberland	15	\$472.77	\$142.77
Bulldog Open	108	\$5,066.00	\$864.00
Golden Glove Grasshoppers	33	\$882.75	\$0.00
Mahomet Rotary/Don Willi	28	\$1,476.00	\$255.00
Farnsworth Group	31	\$1,560.00	\$413.00
Horace Mann Group	16	\$500.00	\$50.00
Champaign Rotary	55	\$2,205.00	\$390.00
Champaign Cty Farm Bureau	60	\$2,700.00	\$480.00
Champ Cty Middle School Tourney	19	\$228.00	\$0.00
TC Grasshoppers	37	\$832.25	\$0.00
American Public Works	40	\$2,550.00	\$620.00
Mahomet Christian Church	79	\$2,765.00	\$0.00
Piatt County FS	24	\$720.00	\$0.00
Mahomet Chamber of Commerce	85	\$4,089.50	\$680.00
Jason Smitley Memorial Outing	108	\$3,240.00	\$300.00
IHSA Boys 2A Regional	51	\$1,020.00	\$0.00
Mahomet Lions Club	86	\$3,268.00	\$688.00
2017 Totals	1033	\$40,836.77	\$6,204.77
2016 Totals (for comparison)	755	\$31,272.21	\$4,502.51
Difference	278	\$9,564.56	\$1,702.26
2017 Tournament	# of Players	Total Revenue	
2-Person Season Opener	110	\$5,500.00	
Naughtin Open	43	\$3,010.00	
Parent-Child	42	\$1,680.00	
Junior Open	46	\$760.00	
Club Championship	15	\$300.00	
Big Merchandise Scramble (1)	78	\$7,020.00	
Big Merchandise Scramble (2)	108	\$9,720.00	
Better Ball	96	\$4,800.00	
2017 Totals	538	\$32,790.00	
2016 Totals (for comparison)	581	\$35,240.00	

Our outing play increased from 18 outings in 2016 to 22 outings in 2017. As noted in the chart above, this was an increase of nearly 300 players and \$10,000 of revenue.

Golf Simulators

Golf simulators have really gained in popularity in the past couple years and ours here are no exception. We have two TruGolf Simulators located in our Clubhouse, which are available for play beginning each year on November 1. We have had both simulators full most days, with play running from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 or 7:00 p.m. (and in some cases even later). We also had our 12 week, 2-person simulator league once again this season. The league season begins the week following Thanksgiving. With increased advertising and word of mouth, we had 26 teams register to play in the league. Fourteen teams was the previous high amount. Our simulator revenue for 2017 was \$11,640, an increase of \$4,582 over 2016.

2018 Looking Forward – Golf Course Pro Shop

We are excited and energized by the prospects moving forward at the golf course. The District will be hiring a new Golf Course Superintendent, whom we are eager to meet and get to work with.

We have moved forward with some on-course and Pro Shop projects that, while seemingly minimal, will enhance the customer experience at Lake of the Woods. We have ordered new scorecards, with a fresh picture, updated Chicago District Golf Association (CDGA) yardages and ratings, and sponsor information (we have retained the same scorecard sponsors for the past three seasons). Our new golf pencils are also sponsored and we have added erasers (at a minimal cost) to appease some customer requests. We also purchased four range targets. These targets are 4 ft. in diameter and are covered with a sponsor's logo. They make a noise when they are hit and will enhance the range experience, since currently there are no targets to hit at on our driving range.

The staff is also working to increase our outreach in the community, especially targeting youth. David will be spending a week in late February at Lincoln Trail Elementary School, teaching the basics of the game of golf to PE classes. Later in the spring, David and Nick will be involved with the BLAST Program. This program brings various specialties into the schools for students to learn about new and



different activities and opportunities available to them outside of school. We have also purchased specialty golf equipment from SNAG Golf. This equipment is designed for children to get involved in the game of golf, while having a lot of fun doing it. Large plastic clubs, tennis balls, Velcro targets, and Velcro suits for kids to hit at, are just some of the things that can be done with the SNAG gear. (Pictured above.) This equipment will be used in all of the above mentioned outreach venues, as well as in our junior clinics and camp.

Our mission is to always try and attract new players to Lake of the Woods and increase play numbers and revenue. In 2018, we are going to add a new golf league. This will be a 2-man league on Monday nights. We have had several requests for team events, so this league has already sparked a lot of interest. Along the lines of increasing traffic, we are looking to increase our golf outing numbers. The player count and total amount of outings increased last season, so we are working to keep that trend going. We are going to offer flexible pricing for golf outings, dependent on time and day of the event. This will allow us to more readily compete for golf outing business with area courses. We have already scheduled three new golf outings for the 2018 season (Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Carpenters Union, and Restoration Urban Ministries).

David, Nick, and I are looking forward to continuing to grow the game of golf among all ages and genders and continue the upward trend of players and revenue that we saw in 2017.

Planning

Department Details

Project planning begins by reviewing previous studies, inventories, plans, and specifications; field verifying existing dimensions and elevations, then creating accurate as-built drawings; evaluating life expectancy and existing conditions of facilities, infrastructure, equipment, and building materials; developing a project scope and budget with contractors, consultants, staff, and public, as applicable; researching building codes, local ordinances, zoning requirements, safety considerations, energy efficient systems, environmentally conscious building materials, and ways to minimize the impact on natural resources.

Conceptual drawings and preliminary estimates are created and reviewed with the Construction Department, then presented to appropriate staff for discussion. The Planning Department takes comments and questions into consideration, and revises concepts and estimates as necessary.

Concept drawings are developed into detailed working construction documents, with dimensions, scales, and elevations. The planning and construction departments perform site visits to verify design accuracy. Project scope and specifications are precisely defined per construction industry standards and recommendations from industry leading manufacturers. This ensures durable, high-quality construction, and provides a fair and equal bidding process.

Projects are either completed in-house or advertised for public bid. If the latter is required, then bidding documents and draft contracts are prepared and issued to interested local contractors. A project schedule is determined in coordination with department heads and site superintendents to ensure that there are no conflicts with special events or facility rentals. The Planning Department reviews construction in progress and completes a punch list at project completion. The planning director coordinates payment schedule with the director of finance.

2017 Year in Review – Planning

The Planning Department operates out of District Headquarters at Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve in Mahomet, and coordinates projects with all CCFPD departments and sites. We are comprised of two full-time staff members: the Planning Director and the Special Projects Assistant. Staff background is multifaceted, drawing on experience from the operations and maintenance side of facility management, as well as architectural design and oversight of large

scale construction projects for public agencies. This positions the department to successfully plan and manage a wide array of projects.

Capital Projects Status

The following table outlines some of the capital projects that the Planning and Construction staff designed, implemented, or assisted in implementing during 2017. More detail about these projects is provided within the relevant department narratives.

Site or Dept	Project Description	Status
PN	Building Code Improvements	Completed (2016 Carry Over)
CCFPD	Trail & Sidewalk Repair Projects	*Sidewalks Completed (2016 Carry Over)
MF	Pt. Pleasant Trail Improvements	Completed (2016 Carry Over)
MF	Expand Campground Parking	Completed
PN	Building Code Improvements	Completed
LOW/MF	Concrete Surfacing Projects	Completed
LOW	HVAC Replacements	Completed
M&ED	Replace Gutters & Chimney	Completed
MF	Lighting Replacements	Completed
MF	Pond Shoreline Restorations	Completed
HL	Road Sealcoating	Completed
MF	Elec. Infrastructure Repairs (PH II)	Completed
M&ED	Replace Discovery Area Exhibits	Underway

*Trail repairs are ongoing and will continue between capital projects as time allows

2017 Grant / Donation Projects

Site	Project Description	Status
LOW	RT 47 Multipurpose Path	Completed (awaiting final billing)
KRT	Asphalt Upgrade in SJO	Completed

KRT	PH 1 - Construction	Completed (awaiting final change order)
KRT	Signage & Node Construction	Signage Completed (node in 2018)
KRT	PH 2A / 2B Engineering	Underway
MF	Shower House Sidewalks	Carryover to 2018
HL/MF/SR	Signage, Benches, Boot Brush, and Solar Light	Signage, Benches, Boot Brush Ordered, Solar Light Research Ongoing

Capital Equipment

The Planning Department collaborated with site superintendents and department heads on several large and small equipment purchases in 2017, including a replacement tractor for Middle Fork operations, a replacement truck for the Construction Department, a new drone for the District, and new tables and chairs for Elks Lake Pavilion.

Planning oversees the District’s fleet of traffic and trail counters. One year of data has been collected at main entrances and trails throughout the District. Data will be analyzed and shared with District staff and the Board of Commissioners.

Professional Inspections and Surveys

The Homer Lake Dam Road Bridge inspection was completed in March of 2017. This bridge and roadway is inspected every two years by the Champaign County Highway Department. No deficiencies were noted in this inspection.

ADA Improvements

Improved access to buildings, shelters, trails, campgrounds, and natural areas throughout the District is a constant goal of the Planning Department. The Planning Director is the District’s Accessibility Coordinator and liaison to patrons for accessibility matters.

Several capital projects in 2017 focused directly on accessibility improvements. New accessible doors and hardware were installed at the Museum’s main entrances and emergency egress locations. Deteriorating concrete was removed from the public entrance to CCFPD Headquarters and the HI Tower plaza, and then re-poured to meet accessibility code standards. The Middle Fork Activity Center ramp was also removed and re-poured for code compliance. Improvements were made to the Pt. Pleasant trail to provide access over low lying surface drainage from adjacent agricultural fields. Mud jacking was completed in several locations at Lake of the Woods to repair concrete walks that had settled beyond limits set forth in accessibility codes.

Continuing Education

In 2017 the Planning Director attended the Illinois Association of Conservation District Conference at Starved Rock State Park, the International Trails Symposium in Dayton, OH, and a Designing for Bicycle Safety Course provided by IDOT and the Federal Highway Administration.

The Planning Director is a licensed architect in the state of Illinois. Licensing credentials are maintained through continuing education seminars, meetings, and webinars sponsored by the American Institute of Architects (AIA) throughout the year.

2018 Looking Ahead – Planning

The Planning Department will continue its goal of satisfaction in Capital Projects throughout the District. 2018 stands to be a big year for capital projects, with the Botanical Garden Pond & Waterfall rebuild, Headquarters reroof, Phase 3 of Middle Fork electrical infrastructure improvements, Golf Course Pump House repairs, Lake of the Woods Sealcoating, and Phase 2A of the Kickapoo Rail Trail.

Planning will collaborate with engineers on the design of Phase 2B of the Kickapoo Rail Trail, Spillway and Stream Barb Improvements at Lake of the Woods, and Middle Fork's Pt. Pleasant Wetland.

In 2018, the Planning Department will continue renovations to existing District facilities, based on applicable building and life-safety codes. We will maintain focus on exit door and hardware replacements, exit and emergency light installations, and fire exit plans.

We will continue to work closely with the Construction Department to deliver projects that are completed ahead of schedule, under budget, and in coordination with appropriate department operations and activities. We will continue to research high quality, low maintenance, and environmentally friendly products for facility improvements. We will seek opportunities to improve sustainability and building technology throughout the district, such as LED lighting, high efficiency HVAC systems, and alternative energy.

Construction

Department Details

The Construction Department responsibilities include all aspects of construction services. Drawing on our years of experience as skilled tradesmen, we have capabilities to complete projects from new construction to minor repairs. Some examples of the scope of our work include: Replacement of district sidewalks, trail repairs, and door and window installations.

The Construction Department has an inventory of hand and power tools typically used by professional contractors. Additionally, we have an array of metal working equipment.

The Construction Department draws on its experience to assist other departments in the planning, estimating, and feasibility of future projects. Working with the Planning Director, we assist with specifications, and on site monitoring of contracted work.

2017 Year in Review – Construction

In 2017 the Construction Department was involved in a variety of different projects. We are very proud of the work we do. Furthermore, it is rewarding to know our work makes patron's experiences better. Some accomplishments in 2017;

- Middle Fork expanded parking lots near shower house
- Remove and replace deteriorating Headquarter sidewalks
- Built and installed Dark Skies lights/poles at Middle Fork
- NFPA Life Safety, and Electric Code training (Department Average over 90% on course work)
- ADA and life safety code improvements at MGP
- Energy efficient upgrades to Golf Course residence
- As a Department had zero accidents

2018 Looking Ahead – Construction

2018 Will be an exciting year for the Construction Department. We will continue to look for ways to improve efficiency and performance. We have a full list of projects, and welcome the opportunity to move forward with them. The Botanical Garden pond and waterfall will be the

most ambitious project we undertake. Our goal is to complete as many capital projects prior to July when we mobilize for it. We will work with site Superintendents to keep moving forward. Additionally, we will pursue trainings and methods to improve our skills and benefit the District.

Challenges

As a department, we face many challenges. Weather, time, and manpower are just a few. We have an excellent relationship with other Departments, and working with them, we believe we can overcome anything. One of our goals is to further the mission of the District. The challenges we face will never keep us from doing that.

Business and Finance

Department Details

Annually, the Business and Finance Department prepares the District's tax levy and budget appropriation ordinances and the working budget, as well as working with our auditors to prepare the District's annual audit.

On a weekly basis Business and Finance monitors District funds and bank/investment accounts, transferring funds as needed to District checking to make weekly payroll and vendor payments. State and federal payroll taxes are transferred biweekly when payroll is processed. Sales taxes and Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund (IMRF) pension contributions are calculated and transferred monthly. Bank accounts are monitored on a daily basis as well as being reconciled at the close of each month. Summarized and detailed budget reports are provided to each department monthly as well. Fund projections are updated regularly.

In addition, Business and Finance coordinates the annual budget preparation process, maintains and implements the District's financial policies; manages investments and district indebtedness, making bond payments, coordinating bond issues with financial and legal counsel, reporting financials; and maintains appropriate internal financial controls to meet audit standards and ensure prudent handling of District funds.

The department provides a variety of accounts payable services to District departments and also provides support to departments for information technology services, including software and hardware purchasing, maintaining the District's internal Voice over IP network, and providing a common shared network for departments to provide information and collaborate on cross-department projects. The District vendor for IT services is MicroSystems International located in Champaign.

The Risk Management staff within the department manages the reporting of District accidents and incidents, unemployment and worker's compensation cases, and risk preventive field reviews. Other risk management support at the District includes fire extinguisher annual servicing, alarm system checks, first aid kit supplies, CDL testing/tracking, alcohol servers training (golf course staff), driver review/abstracts, criminal background checks and state police sex offender checks and public health reviews.

The Business and Finance department provides other services to the District and the public, including: maintaining the District's asset inventory; arranging and providing support for Board and Foundation meetings, including minutes, agenda and official record keeping; responding to legal requirements including providing the Public Funds Statement and Open Meetings Act Compensation reports; providing the list of staff / Board members required to file Economic Interest Statements; preparing the annual Prevailing Wage Ordinance; maintaining the District's retention schedule; and administering District farm leases, including the Conservation Reserve Program.

2017 Year in Review – Business and Finance

- Managed 2017 operating budget to more than meet the required 2017 savings target of \$95,385. On a cash basis, with accrued expenses yet to be paid, the 2017 District operational profit was \$359,799. Wage and benefit savings from vacancies are the primary reason for savings as collections for operational revenues were 99.8% of the 2017 budget.
- Expended 54.7% of the capital budget at 12/31/17 in large part because of completed but unbilled construction for the Kickapoo Rail Trail and delayed land acquisition. Similarly, budgeted capital revenues for 2017 were 70% collected with yet to be reimbursed construction engineering costs a major factor.
- Advocated and secured initial Board approval of process for optimizing the use of District reserves to address unmet District capital needs.
- Advocated and secured \$45,000 additional pension payment toward full funding of the District pension plan for employees.
- Streamlined and simplified 2018 budget format.
- Provided “subsidization” reports for primary sites and functions, comparing the amount of property tax dollars supporting each site or function, in addition to regularly provided management reports for District compensation, savings and projections.
- Secured unmodified 2016 audit opinions for both the District and Forest Preserve Friends Foundation. Initiated development of Foundation financial procedures to address audit improvement recommendations.
- Fully addressed two Sikich 2016 audit improvement recommendations and made substantial progress on two others.
- Met legal requirements and secured Board approval for 2018 tax levy, budget and appropriation, and 2017 Prevailing Wage ordinances.
- Increased United Way employee participation from six to fourteen employees.
- Paid \$2,896,353 in 2017 wages and benefits (cash basis).

- Processed 2,635 in District and Foundation purchasing transactions, costing a total \$2,071,049.
- Received 26 risk management reports for accidents, incidents and workers compensation. Only one incident, lightning strike at the Pro Shop, required reporting to PDRMA. In 2016, we received 24 accidents, incidents and workers compensation reports, with two incidents reported to PDRMA.

2018 Looking Ahead – Business and Finance

- Finish updating and secure Board approval for remaining District Financial Policies. Support update of District Personnel Policies through timely review and comment on drafts. (Strategic Plan items)
- Collate and formalize administrative procedures in an electronic procedural manual.
- Secure a clean, unmodified 2017 audit, including submitting comprehensive financial report to the Government Finance Officers Association for certificate of achievement program.
- Conduct successful 2018 PDRMA Field Review, maintaining PDRMA accreditation.
- Coordinate the development and implementation of a District Crisis (Disaster Recovery) Plan.
- Evaluate current budget process against GFOA budget practices and implement for 2019 budget to the extent Board approval and District readiness make implementation feasible.
- Continue to ensure that all District financial and legal obligations continue to be met in a timely and optimal manner, including obtaining a successful 2017 District audit, optimizing District property tax revenues through the tax levy and securing approval of the 2018 bond ordinance.
- Seek and secure District Auditor for 2018 to 2020 audits.
- Ensure bills and payroll are timely and accurate and that purchasing procedures are followed.

Grants Coordination

Department Details

Although not currently a stand-alone department, a grants coordination function was added to the District in 2008 to address the growing need for revenue to meet facility and programming needs. Prior to 2008, District staff members had been submitting grant applications on an as-needed, project-by-project basis. Hiring a grants coordinator in 2008 centralized that function under Business and Finance, alleviating the time burden on planning, education, and operations staff and allowing the District to seek out and receive more federal, state, and private funding opportunities than it otherwise could. In 2012, the District's deputy director assumed grants coordination responsibilities and some of the grant work was again decentralized and returned to relevant departments.

Grant and Fundraising Priorities

Two documents guide much of the grant and fundraising priorities for the District. The master plan and the strategic plan provide the framework for the pursuit of grant funding in the areas of land acquisition, museum support, educational programming, and natural resources management. Most environmental and natural resource granting agencies require applicants to demonstrate that a project is listed in or at least referenced by context within a master plan. Therefore, a periodic review of master planning documents is critical to ensuring that we can identify funding as the District's long-term goals and priorities change.

While the master plan provides the broad context for grant planning, the District's strategic plan, annual updates to the strategic plan, and the annual budget process are the principal resources that guide yearly grant decisions as well as the fundraising priorities of the Forest Preserve Friends Foundation. Many of the large land acquisition and capital projects undertaken by the District in recent years were funded, at least in part, with grants and private donations. The Kickapoo Rail Trail acquisition and construction is an excellent example of a recent project that has been funded, nearly entirely, by federal and state grants coupled with financial contributions from dedicated individuals, businesses, and organizations within the local community.

2017 Year in Review – Grants Coordination

The following table outlines the grants awarded to the District in 2017 and the project and location to be covered by the grant funding. Grants marked with an asterisk (*) were awarded to the Friends Foundation as the District's 501(c)(3) non-profit partner.

Grant Agency	Location	Project	Amount
IL Clean Energy Community Foundation*	Sangamon River Forest Preserve	Trailhead sign; boot brush station; walkway lighting	\$5,000
IL Clean Energy Community Foundation*	Homer Lake's Hidden Acres	Trailhead sign; boot brush station; benches	\$3,850
IL Clean Energy Community Foundation*	Middle Fork's Patton Woods	Interpretive sign	\$750
IL Clean Energy Community Foundation*	Middle Fork's Point Pleasant	Trailhead sign; boot brush station; benches	\$3,850
Community Foundation of East Central IL, Access to Recreation Fund	Middle Fork River Forest Preserve	Accessible walkway from campground to swim beach and showerhouse	\$4,800
PeopleForBikes*	Kickapoo Rail Trail	Ribbon-cutting expenses	\$250
Community Foundation of East Central IL	Middle Fork River Forest Preserve	Dark skies preserve project	\$5,000

Also in 2017, we submitted an Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program (ITEP) grant application to the Illinois Department of Transportation in the amount of \$225,520 for Kickapoo Rail Trail amenities. These amenities include wayfinding and directional signage, bike racks, surface parking to serve trail users in St. Joseph, and landscaping. Award announcements are expected in April or May.

2018 Looking Ahead – Grants Coordination

The year 2018 will bring more changes to the grant coordination function at the District. A part-time grants coordinator position has been created to fill the role vacated with the promotion of the deputy director to executive director. The hiring process will begin this spring with an expectation of having someone on board by the summer of 2018.

For 2018 and 2019, grants will be investigated to address the following high priority and high cost projects:

- Point Pleasant wetland hydrology improvements and restoration work
- Improvements to spillway and stream barb at Lake of the Woods, potentially as part of a future OSLAD grant that could include river access and shelter improvements or shelter relocation
- Willow Pond and swim beach improvements at Middle Fork
- Kickapoo Rail Trail, Phase 2

At this time, the OSLAD program, as well as all other state of Illinois' grant programs, are not available for new applications. State-funded grants were frozen by the legislature in 2015 in the midst of Illinois' budget impasse and have yet to be reinstated. Some observers believe that OSLAD is the most likely program to return, but no official decision for 2018 has yet been released.

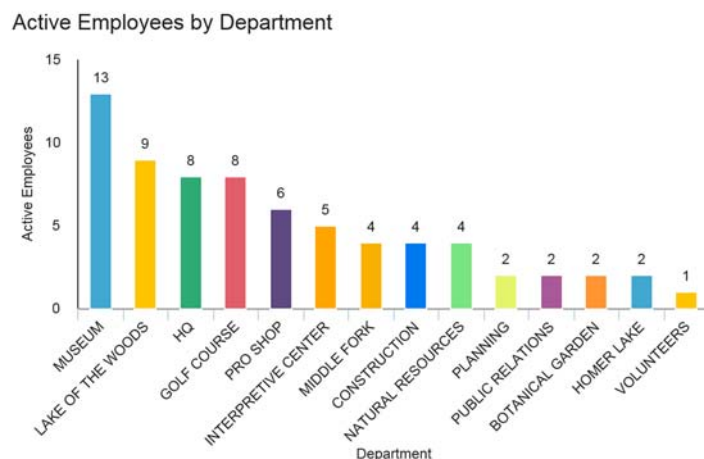
Human Resources

Department Details

As part of the District’s administrative team, Human Resources is responsible for the management of the District’s personnel policies, procedures, and programs. The department consists of one full-time staff member, the Human Resources Generalist, with additional support as needed from the HR Assistant/Risk Management Coordinator. The HR Generalist is responsible for a myriad of tasks including, but not limited to:

- recruiting and staffing logistics;
- employee orientation, training, and development;
- performance management;
- compensation and benefits administration;
- employee relations;
- policy development and documentation; and
- ensuring compliance with all applicable federal, state, and local regulations.

In addition, Human Resources supervises the Volunteer Department. Human Resources is based at the District Headquarters in Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve, but provides support to staff throughout the District. This includes 38 full time positions as well as a number of part-time and seasonal staff. The total employee headcount varies throughout the year, depending on the number of active seasonal employees. As of December 31, 2016, there were 70 employees on the District’s payroll as shown below.



2017 Year in Review – Human Resources

New Applicant Tracking System

In 2017, Human Resources recommended that the District begin using a new applicant tracking system (Paylocity Recruiting/Onboarding) which was integrated with our existing time and attendance system. The benefits of the new system included a more streamlined job application to reduce applicant drop-off and also eliminated the need for Human Resources staff to manually enter employee information from the application system to the payroll system.

Hiring by the Numbers

Using the new online application system, Human Resources facilitated 32 job postings for various positions within the District during 2017. Approximately 69% of the job postings during 2017 were for seasonal positions. The remaining postings were for full-time and part-time vacancies.

2017 Applications and Hiring by Unit

Unit	Total Job Postings	Applications Received	Employees Hired
Administration	2	77	2
Construction	1	8	1
Golf Course (inc. Pro Shop)	9	119	26
Homer Lake	1	31	2
Interpretive Center	5	57	4
Lake of the Woods Operations	5	100	10
Middle Fork	3	21	4
Museum	3	77	4
Natural Resources	3	94	3
Total	32	584*	56

*This reflects the actual number of applications, not individual applicants, received. Some applicants may apply to multiple jobs.

2017 Applications by Gender

Female	189
Male	288
No Response	107

2017 Applications by Ethnicity

American Indian	3
Asian or Pacific Islander	4
Black/African American	15
Hispanic/Latino	14
White	397
Two or more races	13
Chose not to identify	138

Employee Engagement Survey

As part of the District's strategic plan, Human Resources is responsible for assessing employee satisfaction to maintain a positive work culture and employee morale. In conjunction with this initiative, an employee survey was conducted in July to assess climate, culture, and employee engagement. The survey was sent to all full-time and part-time staff as well as any seasonal employee who had worked at least one full season with the District. A total of 58 survey responses were received. Based on the results of this survey, employee engagement (an employee's emotional commitment to the organization) appears to be strong with approximately 95% of employees stating that they are proud to work at the District, enjoy the work that they perform on a day-to-day basis, and believe that the District has a positive impact in the community. There were a few areas of concern noted in the survey: employee retention/opportunities for advancement; inadequate staffing levels for the work that needs to be done; dissatisfaction with compensation; and communication between administration and departmental staff. Human Resources will continue to examine these issues to determine if future improvements in these areas are possible and needed to enhance the employee experience.

2018 Looking Ahead – Human Resources

Human Resources has started two large projects that will be completed (or close to completed) during 2018. Revisions to the District's personnel policy manual, last fully reviewed in 2006, were identified as a goal for Human Resources in the District's strategic plan and, as a best practice, should be reviewed every three years. It is anticipated that approximately 75% of the District's personnel policies will be reviewed and revised over the course of the year. All policy updates will include a review by staff as well as legal counsel before Board approval. These updates will also be in accordance with the PDRMA Loss Control Review that the District will undergo this year. In addition, Human Resources is also in the process updating all job descriptions within the District, which was last started in 2015. This will be a collaborative process between Human Resources and the department staff. The revisions will include standardizing and reformatting the existing job descriptions and ensuring that all jobs include ADA compliant language.

Because of the large number of seasonal positions within the District, Human Resources and supervisory staff spend a significant amount of time onboarding and training new employees each year. Human Resources will be working on various tools to streamline and enhance the employee onboarding experience. This may include such things as new hire checklists for both new employees and supervisors, improvements to the orientation process, and on-demand video training for various topics.

In the past, we have relied heavily on word of mouth and returning seasonal employees to fill many of our vacant positions. However, given the demand for quality workers and an unemployment rate of only 4.2% in Champaign County, we may need to widen our recruitment sources or look for other creative solutions to fill vacant positions throughout the District, especially those positions that have been hard to fill in the past. Human Resources will assist departments in exploring new ways to promote positions using social media, expanding recruitment to reach a more diverse audience, and utilizing employment advertising to targeted groups when appropriate.

As the District looks to improve the cultural competency of our educational programming, Human Resources hopes to build upon these efforts to increase awareness of diversity, equity, and inclusion principles in our hiring and employment processes as well. During 2018, Human Resources plans to begin to introduce these concepts to staff and to explore ways in which we may expand the diversity of our workforce.

Marketing

Department Details

The Marketing Department creates all of the District publications and promotional pieces, handles customer inquiries and rentals, communicates with the media, coordinates preserve grand openings and District special events, cultivates partnership opportunities, and oversees our website.

The District creates and maintains brochures for each preserve, annual fees, weddings, The Mabery Gelvin Botanical Garden, Museum of the Grand Prairie, Homer Lake Interpretive Center, Homer Lake Natural Playscape, Middle Fork Campground, and a District-wide brochure.

The Leaflet, the District's quarterly newsletter is mailed to more than 4,000 households. An online version of *The Leaflet* is also developed monthly and contains information that is happening throughout the current month.

The District uses Instagram, Facebook and Twitter as avenues to promote public events, programs, summer camps, and current news from various departments. We also appear once a month on WICA's CiLiving. These appearances are another way to promote public events, programs, summer camps, and current District news.

The most common method for promoting the District's activities is through printed advertisements. General ads for the District and Lake of the Woods Golf Course are submitted to several annual publications, while custom ads are designed for newspapers and specialty publications (golf, wedding, and park districts) to promote programs, lectures, open houses, and grand openings. More than 50% of the marketing budget is spent on print advertising.

Monthly sandwich boards inserts are developed for public programs, educational programs, and summer camps. These are displayed at the Museum of the Grand Prairie and the Homer Lake Interpretive Center. Copies of these are posted around in rental facilities throughout the preserves and kiosks at Homer Lake.

The Marketing Department provides substantial support to the District's Citizen Advisory Committee's considerable outreach efforts. We are also responsible for maintenance and updates to the CCFPD public website.

2017 Year in Review - Marketing

Facility Rentals

The customer service assistant's main responsibility is to coordinate all rental requests. The District maintains thirteen rental facilities at three preserves that can accommodate small groups up to groups of 200. Wedding facilities are also available at the Mabery Gelvin Botanical Garden and Salt Fork Center at Homer Lake.

CCFPD Annual Rental Comparisons			
as of 01/01/2018		2016	2017
LOW	LOW PvlN	41	56
	Weddings	10	13
	Elks Lake PvlN	39	42
	Weddings	13	8
	Izaak Walton	33	35
	Weddings	4	
	Riverview Retreat Ctr	15	20
	Weddings	1	
	Rotary Hill	20	25
	Swiss Valley	28	24
	Sycamore Hollow	10	12
	TOTAL	214	235

CCFPD Annual Rental Comparisons			
		2016	2017
HL	Salt Fork Ctr	60	55
	Weddings	13	10
	WHS	32	27
	TOTAL	105	92
MF	Activity Ctr	33	32
	Weddings	5	4
	TOTAL	38	36
Botanical Garden		8	9
Totals	Subtotal	311	328
	Wedding	54	44
		365	372
	Grand	530	528

2017 Highlights

- Highlights from 2017 include developing all the marketing pieces for the Kickapoo Rail Trail grand opening in August. We designed four interpretive signs, two trailhead signs, and a brochure for trail users.
- The sign committee completed a double sign on the Collins Pond restoration project and redesigned the Patton Woods sign.
- The Museum of the Grand Prairie and Homer Lake Interpretive Center tri-fold brochures were updated to beautiful full color brochures.
- The Citizen's Advisory Committee participated in nine Market on the Square Saturdays. They continued working on the Dark Sky Park application for Middle Fork River Forest Preserve.
- Continued to work with local media to promote the District and the exciting programs and projects going on throughout the preserves.
- We increased our social media contacts across all locations and platforms.

	CCFPD	Golf Course	MGP	HLIC	KRT
FB	+219	+201	+426	+83	+488
Instagram	+99	+81	+99		
Twitter	+6	+50			+14

2018 Looking Ahead - Marketing

- The main brochure for CCFPD will be updated in early 2018.
- Promotion of Middle Fork River Forest Preserve’s designation as a Dark Sky Park.
- In June/July we will run a 6-week marketing campaign featuring one of our preserves each week. Promotions will include a Facebook/Instagram post, MTD back of the bus ads (2 busses for each preserve for a total of 12 busses).
- Working with Five Foot Productions to develop an introductory video for CCFPD as a whole and 6 2-minute videos for all preserves.
- Promoting the Kickapoo Rail Trail as a Charity Running Partner for the Christie Clinic Illinois Marathon. This will be a challenge to get people to become part of the Run for the Trail team.
- Promotion of Vanishing Acts and the Museum of the Grand Prairie’s 50th Anniversary.

Volunteers

Department Details

The Volunteer Department secures and coordinates individual volunteers, large and small volunteer groups, community service workers, scouting projects, and visiting groups to support the District mission and operations. In many cases, department supervisors and staff oversee the volunteers on the day of volunteering efforts. Over the past few years, large numbers of volunteers have come from Lincoln’s Challenge, the East Central Illinois Master Naturalist chapter, Fraternities and Sororities, and our own Citizens Advisory Committee.

The Volunteer Coordinator keeps statistics on volunteerism with the District, acts as a liaison between the District and the Champaign County Master Naturalist program, and promotes and advertises District volunteer opportunities within the community.

2017 Year in Review – Volunteers

The following table provides an overview of the volunteer hours for 2017, broken down by department, site, or assignment.

Department/Activity	# of Volunteer Hours
Administration	101
Board of Commissioners	862
District Events (River to Rail, Ride the Depot, etc.)	84
Forest Preserve Friends Foundation	184.5
Freedom Fest	502.25
Middle Fork Lincolns Challenge	546
Misc. Grounds Help/Projects	145
Misc. Natural Resources	547
Museum and Education	2,100
Trail Stewards	264.5
Wildlife Monitoring	68.5
TOTAL VOLUNTEER HOURS (2017)	5,404.75

This 2017 total is down by a little over 1,000 hours from 2016; however, much of the difference is likely due to underreporting as we are working to get volunteers accustomed to our online reporting process.