



**2024**  
**ANNUAL REPORT**

# Letter from the Executive Director



It is my privilege to share the **2024 Annual Report**, which offers a snapshot of the achievements that highlight our continued commitment to conserving the natural and cultural treasures of Champaign County.

This past year, we embraced our newly defined core values—Stewardship, Community, and Discovery—and infused them into every aspect of our mission. These values guide our efforts to strengthen the connection between people and the environment.

In 2024, we completed several notable capital projects to enhance accessibility, sustainability, and the overall visitor experience. At Lake of the Woods, we replaced the Hawthorn Hill and Hickory Shelters with fully accessible structures, and repaved 2.2 miles of the bike trail.

Middle Fork River saw the completion of the Dark Sky Trail project, which features a new picnic shelter, observatory, parking lot, accessible trail system, and

eleven additional campsites. This initiative highlights our commitment to both discovery and conservation.

At Homer Lake, accessibility and visitor convenience were enhanced with the installation of a kayak launch and the addition of an automatic gate improved safety and security.

Also improving cherished community spaces, Elks Lake Pavilion underwent a significant renovation, including installing Wi-Fi, new lighting and floors, and an accessible kitchen. The Salt Fork Center received sound baffles and new ceiling fans. These updates enhance the user experience when renting our facilities.

As we reflect on these accomplishments, we remain grateful for your support and partnership. Together, we look forward to fostering stewardship, building community, and inspiring discovery for years to come.

- Lorrie

## Capital Projects



### Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve (LOW)

- Four air conditioning and four heating units were replaced at the Museum of the Grand Prairie. The new units replaced furnaces from 2010 and air conditioning units installed between 1996-2013.
- Elks Lake Pavilion Renovation was completed by the Construction Department, which included floor repairs, bathroom renovation, interior painting, new lighting, and a new, accessible kitchen.
- The Hawthorn Hill and Hickory Shelters were removed and replaced by the Construction Department. The Hickory Shelter was replaced in its former location and the former Hawthorn Shelter was reconstructed near the Spillway. The new shelters are fully accessible.
- An automatic entrance gate was installed at the Golf Course.
- 2.2 miles of Lake of the Woods Bike Trail were milled and repaved. The Buffalo Trace parking lot associated with the Bike Path was extended by the Construction Department and paved by a contractor.

- A new emergency storm shelter for staff was installed with the site preparation completed by the Construction Department.

### Homer Lake Forest Preserve

- The Construction Department installed sound baffles and replaced ceiling fans at the Salt Fork Center.
- An automatic entrance gate was added.
- An accessible kayak launch, parking area, and sidewalk at the North Boat Launch area were installed.

### Middle Fork River Forest Preserve

- With the assistance of Operations, the Construction Department built a new picnic shelter, observatory, parking lot, and accessible concrete path for the Dark Sky Trail project. A contractor built a one-mile aggregate trail.

### Forest Preserves

- The Planning Department completed the Comprehensive Plan.

For more information scan or visit: [bit.ly/4OYxfYS](https://bit.ly/4OYxfYS)



TOTAL FUNDS raised in 2024

**\$294,946**

**329** Donors

**125** First time donors

**46%** Donor retention rate

The Forest Preserve Friends Foundation, in partnership with Watson's Shack and Rail, hosted the inaugural **Whiskey Hike** at Buffalo Trace in Lake of the Woods on October 20, 2024. This unique fundraiser allowed attendees to enjoy samples of 5 different whiskeys and a scenic hike along the recently resurfaced trail, all while supporting the conservation of Champaign County Forests Preserves.

The event had **178** attendees with gross revenue of

**\$9,864.50**



**GRANTS**  
 awarded in 2024

The **Forest Preserves** were awarded **one grant** for land acquisition

**\$1,125,000**

The **Foundation** was awarded **two grants** used for Volunteer Resources and Sensory Kits

**\$3,122.39**

# LAKE OF THE WOODS Golf Course



Total Revenue  
**\$1,476,863**

Total Rounds  
**42,769** { 18-Hole Course **36,922**  
 Par 3 Course **5,847**

**\$43,675**  
 Driving Range Revenue

**\$35,509**  
 Par 3 Revenue

**\$1,612**  
 Foot Golf Revenue

**\$19,204** Simulator Play Revenue

*Simulators were open January 2 - March 10 and November 17 - December 23*

**2024 Youth Golf Programs**

**2 Schools**  
 Rantoul and Mahomet  
**Approx. 900**  
 students taught

# VOLUNTEERS

In 2024, the Forest Preserves were the grateful beneficiary of at least:

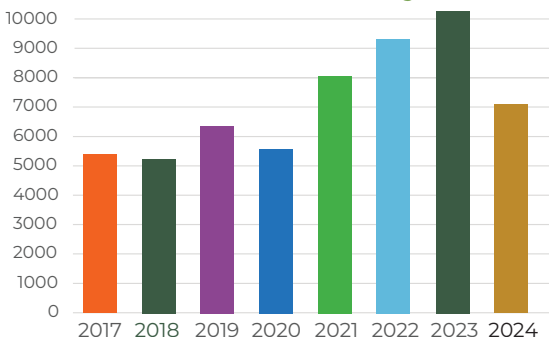
**7,027** VOLUNTEER HOURS

**20**  
 SERVICE GROUPS

**51**  
 VOLUNTEER EVENTS

**672**  
 VOLUNTEERS

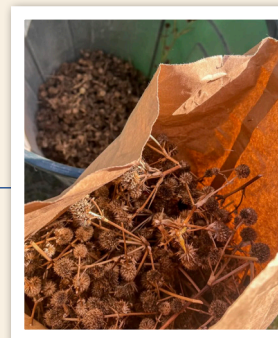
Volunteer Hours by Year



# NATURAL RESOURCES



**5,633.17** OZ. SEED COLLECTED



**140** SPECIES COLLECTED

**VOLUNTEER EVENTS** **20**

## INVASIVE REMOVALS

**32.54** WOODY REMOVAL ACRES **235** HERBACEOUS REMOVAL ACRES

**VOLUNTEERS** **231**



**17** NUMBER OF BURNS

**VOLUNTEER TIME (HRS.)** **483**

**334.87** ACRES PRESCRIBED FIRE



**63.5** PLANTED ACRES

## HARRY L. SWARTZ CAMPGROUND at Middle Fork River Forest Preserve

**Total Revenue for 2024** **\$141,883**  
*(including campstore)*

This year has been fantastic for the campground, with **2,200 reservations** made! Thank you for your continued support!

Some major updates were completed this year as part of the **OSLAD Dark Sky Trail** project. Highlights include:

**Grant-Funded:** 67% of the project was supported by a combination of grant funds (\$294,000) and private donations (\$100,000).

**Campground Expansion:** We added 11 new sites, including double sites, to better accommodate stargazing visitors.

**Multi-Use Trail:** This new trail provides visitors with more opportunities for hiking and exploring the beauty of the dark sky area.

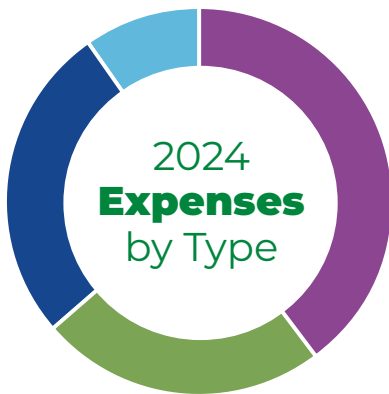
**Natural Playground Area:** A new, nature-inspired play area is in development for families to enjoy.

# Museum and Education VISITATION

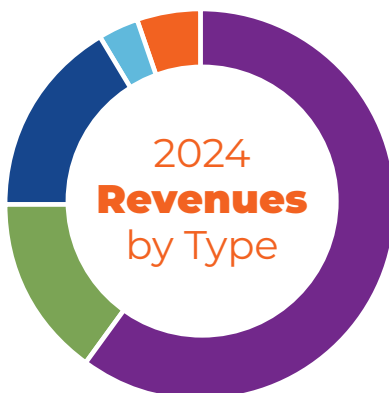
MUSEUM OF THE GRAND PRAIRIE	<b>10,877</b> visitors
HOMER LAKE INTERPRETIVE CENTER	<b>2,103</b> visitors
SCHOOL PROGRAMS	<b>4,642</b> participants
SUMMER CAMP PARTICIPANTS (an additional <b>96</b> attended pop-up programs created and facilitated by day camp educators)	<b>192</b> participants
SUMMER SPLASH	<b>600</b> participants
PUBLIC PROGRAMS	<b>5,677</b> participants



# FOREST PRESERVE FINANCIALS



- Wages & Salary: \$3,808,903
- Other Operating: \$2,296,677
- Projects & Equipment: \$2,559,044
- Benefits: \$918,044



- Taxes: \$5,972,482
- User Fees: \$1,491,167
- Grants & Donations: \$1,622,748
- Merchandise: \$349,267
- Other: \$498,030

# Environmental Stewardship Recognition for Lake of the Woods Golf Course

Lake of the Woods Golf Course has retained its prestigious designation as a **“Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary”** through Audubon International’s Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses. This certification highlights the course’s commitment to environmental excellence in areas such as wildlife and habitat management, water conservation, and chemical safety.

Originally certified in 2004, the golf course undergoes recertification every three years, demonstrating consistent dedication to sustainable practices. “Lake of the Woods Golf Course has shown a strong commitment to its environmental program and provides a sanctuary for wildlife on the property,” said Christine Kane, CEO of Audubon International.

As one of over 900 golf courses worldwide holding this certification, Lake of the Woods continues to exemplify environmental responsibility while enhancing the natural beauty and ecological value of its grounds.

