

2025

ANNUAL  
REPORT



# Letter from the Executive Director

**In 2025, the Champaign County Forest Preserve District made meaningful progress** caring for our land, strengthening community connections, and expanding

opportunities to learn and explore. Guided by our shared values of Stewardship, Community, and Discovery, we continued to invest thoughtfully in places that help people connect with nature and with one another.

A key milestone this year was the completion of our 2025–2027 Strategic Plan, which provides a clear, responsible roadmap for the years ahead. Shaped by the Comprehensive Plan, a plan which was recognized statewide with a Planning and Analysis Merit Award from the Illinois Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects—an affirmation of our commitment to thoughtful planning and long-term conservation.

Across our preserves, stewardship took shape through restoration and construction projects that balanced care for the land with visitor access and safety. From the restored

Spillway at Lake of the Woods to new amenities at Buffalo Trace, Homer Lake, and the Museum of the Grand Prairie, these improvements reflect our dedication to environmental responsibility, accessibility, and meaningful visitor experiences.

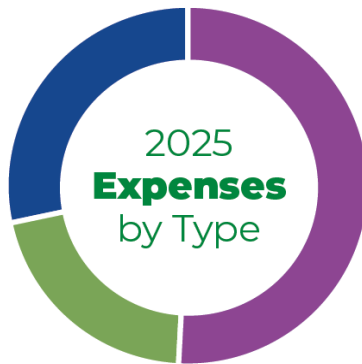
Discovery also expanded as we prepared new places and pathways for exploration. At Oxbow Ridge, future public access took important steps forward, while progress on the Kickapoo Rail Trail continued to bring us closer to a more connected regional trail system—complete with inclusive features like a solar-powered wheelchair charging station.

None of this work happens alone. It is made possible by the dedication of our staff, the support of our partners, and the continued trust of our community. Together, we are protecting the natural beauty and cultural heritage of Champaign County while creating spaces where everyone feels welcome to explore, learn, and belong.

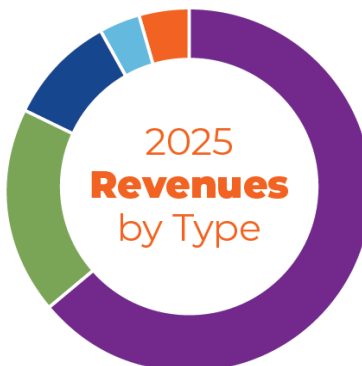
Thank you for being part of the Forest Preserves.

- Lorrie

## Forest Preserve FINANCIALS



- Personnel: \$4,997,266
- Other Operating: \$2,031,351
- Projects & Equipment: \$2,775,685



- Taxes: \$6,150,179
- User Fees: \$1,782,074
- Grants & Donations: \$925,491
- Merchandise: \$354,540
- Other: \$410,349

# CAPITAL PROJECTS

## FOREST PRESERVES

- Won a **Planning and Analysis Merit Award** for the Comprehensive Plan from the Illinois Chapter of American Society of Landscape Architects.

## HOMER LAKE

- **North Boat Ramp** – Staff gave the site an enormous facelift, including an accessible launch and aggregate path, a stone fishing dock, native landscaping, a kayak rental station, and new, simpler regulatory signage.

## LAKE OF THE WOODS

- **Spillway** - Construction worked all summer to complete this project, which included removing sheet piling, clearing vegetation, grading the site and removing debris, installing geotextile fabric, rock, and seed, and arranging rock in a series of pools to help slow water down in overflow events. Several sites lent equipment to Construction staff, who recycled over 47,000 lbs of steel and 240,000 lbs of concrete as part of this project alone.
  - Construction moved over 1.5 million pounds of excavated soil between Spillway and Oxbow Ridge. Most of this soil was used to form a berm on the golf course driving range and build up the area at Buffalo Trace that is now the Buffalo Trace overlook.
  - Between Oxbow Ridge demo, and spillway demo, Construction recycled over 86,000 lbs of metal. This put over \$6,000 back in the budget and has even greater environmental ramifications.
- **Buffalo Trace** – OSLAD work continued, including an overlook, a new entrance sign and fitness station at Route 47, and expanded parking at Crowley Road.
- **Museum of the Grand Prairie** – Construction completed the transformation of the “tool wing” into the Changing Landscapes Exhibit. Clerestory windows were sealed, insulated, and covered, LED lighting was added, and the entire space was redone.

## MIDDLE FORK RIVER

- **Dark Sky Trail** – Most of the final touches were completed, including the new Dark Sky campsites, the aggregate trail, an outdoor sundial, plus new entrance, trailhead, and wayfinding signs.

## RIVER BEND

- The Forest Preserves’ newest property, **Oxbow Ridge**, underwent a transformation. Construction staff removed all the structures, the well was sealed, and staff developed a trail plan.

## KICKAPOO RAIL TRAIL

- Planning finalized the construction documents, bid the project, received Board approval, and began work on tree removal, the trailhead, and the first **new stretch of trail** since 2022. The groundwork was laid for 75% of the remaining trail to be built in 2026.
- Construction also installed a **solar-powered wheelchair charging station** near St. Joseph.



Kayak rental station



Spillway



Buffalo Trace overlook



Wheelchair charging station

# Natural Resources



## NATIVE SEED

Native seed collected

- 2,848.2 ounces
- 35 species

Native seeds received by NR via donation

- 2174.3 ounces
- 77 species

New Prairie Acres Planted: 7.7

Existing Prairie Acres Overseeded: 42.2

## VOLUNTEER EVENTS

Volunteer Events: 15

Total Volunteers: 286

Volunteer Hours: 578

## INVASIVE REMOVALS

Woody Removal (hand cutting and forestry mulching): 58.4 acres

Herbaceous Vegetation:

- Mechanical (ie. hand pulling and spading): 239.3 acres
- Chemical Treatment: 432.1 acres

## PRESCRIBED BURNING

Number of burns: 12

Acres burned: 124.1

# VOLUNTEERS

5,399  
Volunteer  
Hours

19  
EVENTS

24  
SERVICE GROUPS

724  
VOLUNTEERS



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



**\$156,766**

Total Revenue  
for 2025

**11 NEW CAMP SITES**  
to better accommodate  
stargazing visitors

**Dark Sky Trail**  
Ribbon Cutting

# LAKE OF THE WOODS Golf Course

**TOTAL ROUNDS**  
**46,544** { 18-Hole Rounds: **39,037**  
 Par 3 Rounds: **7,507**

**TOTAL REVENUE** **\$1,397,723**

**\$56,765** **\$41,700**  
 Driving Range Income Par 3 Income



## Youth Served by Golf Programs

Junior Golf Camp - **25**

Junior Golf Clinics - **39**

PGA Junior Academy - **40**

PGA Junior League - **10**

Mahomet-Seymour  
(Lincoln Trail) - **800**

Judah Christian - **100**

Rantoul (Pleasant Acres  
Elementary) - **150**

Mahomet-Seymour Junior and  
Senior High Golf Teams - **30**



## Museum & Education Visitation

Museum of the Grand Prairie

**11,554**

Visitors

Homer Lake Interpretive Center

**1,910**

Visitors

School Programs

**5,948**

Participants

Summer Camps

**227**

Participants

Summer Splash

**757**

Participants

Public Programs

**95**

Total Programs

Public Programs

**6,665**

Participants

# Forest Preserve Friends Foundation

**\$345,588**

TOTAL FUNDS RAISED  
IN 2025



\$106,338 Unrestricted  
\$239,250 Restricted

**346**

**TOTAL  
DONORS**



**196** FIRST TIME  
DONORS

**43%** RETENTION  
RATE

**58**

**HOUSEHOLDS  
2025**

**31**

**HOUSEHOLDS  
2024**

**35**

**HOUSEHOLDS  
2023**