

The Leaflet

JUNE - JULY 2025

Rooted in Stewardship: A Highlight on Homer Lake

Champaign County Forest Preserves offer more than scenic trails. They connect us to nature, to our community, and to a shared responsibility for the land we all cherish. At Homer Lake Forest Preserve, that connection is deepening through restoration efforts and plans to expand environmental education for the future.

Thanks to our supporters, the Forest Preserve Friends Foundation is advancing work that restores habitats and inspires generations. The efforts taking place at Homer Lake today are setting the stage for a renewed and reimagined future—

one where the land is healthier, learning is more immersive, and access to nature is more inclusive than ever before.

Inside, read why longtime visitors Irene and Clark Bullard chose to give—and how their story reflects a shared vision for conservation in Champaign County.



FOREST PRESERVES
CHAMPAIGN COUNTY

Why We Give:

THE BULLARD FAMILY'S STORY

"We've been visiting the local preserves for more than 50 years. We have always appreciated the foresight of the Forest Preserves' founders and hoped that our generation will be as kind to the future as they have been to ours."

Recently we've seen major improvements at the preserves, reflecting the Forest Preserves' bold new Comprehensive Plan and vision for 2040. This new plan, responding to an exhaustive survey of county residents, calls for expanding our existing preserves. We applaud the commitment of the district's commissioners and staff to acquiring and protecting new natural areas and managing habitats for native plants and wildlife.

Please consider joining us in building a bigger and better system of forest preserves."

~ Irene and Clark Bullard

With the support like that of the Bullards, the Foundation is helping to advance invasive species removal in the woodlands at Homer Lake. This important work reopens space for native trees and plants and renews the health of the landscape for people and wildlife alike. It's an act of stewardship rooted in long-term thinking, and it's only the beginning.

The Forest Preserve's 2040 Comprehensive Plan calls for expanding both habitat protection and environmental education across the county. That vision is abundantly clear throughout the various preserves, but especially at Homer Lake, where restoration efforts are preparing the way for something even more transformative.

"Our reason for giving is simple. Only 1% of Champaign County is protected natural habitat, and the Forest Preserve District has the power to change that."

A NEW CHAPTER AT HOMER LAKE

A cornerstone of the Forest Preserves' Comprehensive Plan is the reimagining of the Homer Lake Interpretive Center. This beloved site has long served as a gateway to nature for families, students, and lifelong learners. With your support over the next two years, it will evolve into a larger, modern and interactive nature center.

One that is better equipped to serve our community with the space, tools and experiences to meet the growing demand for environmental education in our community.

For fifty years, the Homer Lake Interpretive Center has been a place where children spot a painted turtle for the first time, where families share stories around touch-and-feel exhibits, and where learners of all ages explore our region's natural history. As our programs grow and community needs





GROWING A LEGACY OF STEWARDSHIP:

The Stable Roots Endowment Fund

Just as native plants and trees rely on strong root systems to thrive, so do our preserves. The Forest Preserves depends on strong financial roots to sustain its mission over time. With that in mind, the Stable Roots Endowment Fund was created to ensure lasting stewardship of Champaign County's natural spaces.

Endowment funds provide a permanent, growing source of support. They help us plan with confidence, respond to emerging needs, and maintain our preserves with care, no matter what challenges arise. Through the Stable Roots Endowment Fund, the Forest Preserve Friends Foundation is building long-term sustainability into everything we do, ensuring that vital efforts—like habitat restoration, trail maintenance, and environmental education—can continue year after year.

Every contribution to the Stable Roots Endowment Fund is a gift that grows over time. It is a promise to protect what we've built, to care for what we've been given, and to ensure that future generations inherit thriving, healthy preserves.

TO LEARN MORE about how to support the Stable Roots Endowment Fund, visit our website or scan the QR code.

SCAN ME



evolve, we have a unique opportunity to create something more impactful: a vibrant, inclusive space that inspires curiosity and deepens connections to the natural world.

This new chapter isn't just about updating a building. It's about creating a welcoming place where wonder begins and where the seeds of stewardship are planted for generations to come. This is your opportunity to build something truly special: a nature center that meets today's needs and inspires tomorrow's conservationists. Stay tuned for updates on this project and how you can be part of making it happen.



PROGRAMS & EVENTS

See the full program descriptions online at champaignforests.org

June 2025

Wednesday, June 4 **FREE**

EAST CENTRAL ILLINOIS FROGWATCH VOLUNTEER FIELD TRAINING

*Salt Fork Center, Homer Lake
Forest Preserve, 7-8:30 PM*

Are you interested in learning about frog monitoring and identifying frogs by their calls? This training session is a collaboration with the University of Illinois Extension, and is perfect for new, prospective, and returning volunteers. Open to ages 16+. Ages 12 to 15 accompanied by a guardian.

Saturday, June 7 **FREE**

SUMMER CONCERT SERIES: CANDY FOSTER AND SHADES OF BLUE

Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve, 5-7 PM

Monday, June 9 **FREE**

HOMES ACROSS HISTORY: THE FIRST ILLINOISANS

*Museum of the Grand Prairie, Lake of the
Woods Forest Preserve, 10:30-11:30 AM*

NO REGISTRATION REQUIRED. All ages welcomed, but ideal for younger audiences. Children must be accompanied by an adult.

JUNE - AUGUST **FREE**

SUMMER ARTIFACT SHOWCASES

*Museum of the Grand Prairie,
Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve*

Stay tuned on our social media for updates! From mid-June to mid-August, we will provide weekly updates.

Tuesday, June 10 **FREE**

GROWING UP IN THE PRESERVES: ANIMAL ADAPTATIONS

*Natural Playscape, Homer Lake Forest
Preserve, 10-11 AM*

This program is for preschoolers ages 2-6 along with their grown-ups to learn as we play outside in nature! NO REGISTRATION REQUIRED. Groups with 5 or more preschoolers, please contact Morgan Duerksen-Balk before June 3.

Saturday, June 14 **FREE**

OUTSIDE IN CHAMPAIGN FORESTS

*Lake of the Woods Forest Preserves,
10-11:30 AM*

Head OUTside in Champaign Forests, every second Saturday of the month where nature and community come together. Trail locations vary. For more info, email Chelsea at cprahl@ccfpd.org to receive location updates and monthly reminders!

Saturday, June 14

FUN WITH FOSSILS!

*Museum of the Grand Prairie, Lake of
the Woods Forest Preserve, 3-4 PM*

Recommended for ages 9+. Registered children must be accompanied by an adult. \$5 per child. Register by June 9 at champaignforests.org.

Monday, June 16 **FREE**

WALK WITH A NATURALIST

*Stidham Woods, Lake of the Woods
Forest Preserve, 6-7 PM*

Join Master Naturalists from the University of Illinois Extension to explore the beauty of the Champaign County Preserves! Meet at the Stidham Woods parking lot at Prairie View Road and Fogel Road - 1125 North Prairieview Rd. Mahomet. NO REGISTRATION REQUIRED.

Saturday, June 21 

**WONDERS OF THE WETLAND
WITH DOUG MILLS**

*Interpretive Center, Homer Lake
Forest Preserve, 10 AM - 12 PM*

Program will include a brief presentation followed by a walk to the wetland for observations and further discussion. NO REGISTRATION REQUIRED.

Saturday, June 21 

DARK SKY SERIES: SKYWATCH

*Dark Sky Trail, Middle Fork River
Forest Preserve, 8-11 PM*

Park at the Activity Center, then follow the signs to walk a scenic half mile to the Observatory. Meet at the Observatory at 8 PM for an exciting presentation about the dynamic field of astronomical research and discovery. No rain/cloud date. NO REGISTRATION REQUIRED.

Saturday, June 28 

TAKE ME FISHING

*Walnut Hill Shelter, Homer Lake
Forest Preserve, 9-11 AM*

Participants 15 and under do not require a fishing license. All fishing is catch-and-release. Adult supervision of children 15 and under is required. NO REGISTRATION REQUIRED.

Sunday, June 29 

**SUMMER CONCERT SERIES:
PAINKILLERS BLUES BAND**

Homer Lake Forest Preserve, 5-7 PM

Food from local food trucks and beverages will be available for purchase.

Escape Room in a Bag 

**Secret of the Timberdoodle:
Escape-on-the-Go Challenge**

Ages 7+. Children must be accompanied by an adult. Call the Homer Lake Interpretive Center at (217) 896-2455 or visit the Interpretive Center during our open hours (Tues-Fri 1-5 PM, Sat 10 AM-4 PM) to reserve a time slot.

July 2025

Wednesday, July 2

**CULTURAL COLORS:
RED, WHITE, & BLUE DAISIES**

*Museum of the Grand Prairie, Lake of the
Woods Forest Preserve, 3-4 PM*

Recommended for ages 6+. \$3 per child. Children must be accompanied by an adult. Children must be registered by June 25.

Monday, July 7 

**HOMES ACROSS HISTORY: EARLY
SETTLERS OF CHAMPAIGN COUNTY**

*Museum of the Grand Prairie, Lake of the
Woods Forest Preserve, 10:30-11:30 AM*
NO REGISTRATION REQUIRED. All ages welcomed, but ideal for younger audiences. Children must be accompanied by an adult.

Tuesday, July 8 

**GROWING UP IN THE PRESERVES:
FEATHERED FRIENDS**

*Natural Playscape, Homer Lake Forest
Preserve, 10-11 AM*

This program is for preschoolers ages 2-6 along with their grown-ups to learn as we play outside in nature. NO REGISTRATION REQUIRED. Groups with 5 or more preschoolers, please contact Morgan Duerksen-Balk before July 1.

Saturday, July 12 

OUTSIDE IN CHAMPAIGN FORESTS

Homer Lake Forest Preserves, 10-11:30 AM

Head OUTside in Champaign Forests, every second Saturday of the month where nature and community come together. Trail locations vary. For more info, email Chelsea at cprahl@ccfpd.org to receive location updates and monthly reminders!

Wednesday, July 16 **FREE**

**CONSERVATION IN ACTION SERIES:
TOM DUNCANSON**

Museum of the Grand Prairie, Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve, 6-7:30 PM

Tom Duncanson is a researcher on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Meetings who works to facilitate public understanding of these important negotiations. Come to learn and ask questions, and leave with the courage to take action. NO REGISTRATION REQUIRED.

Saturday, July 19 **FREE**

**SUMMER CONCERT SERIES:
BIG DADDY PRIDE**

Middle Fork River Forest Preserve, 5-7 PM

Food from local food trucks and beverages will be available for purchase.

Tuesday, July 22 **FREE**

WALK WITH A NATURALIST

Walnut Hill Shelter, Homer Lake Forest Preserve, 6-7 PM

Join Master Naturalists from the University of Illinois Extension to explore the beauty of the Champaign County Preserves!. Park and meet at the Walnut Hill Shelter, 1245 Flicker Drive, Homer. NO REGISTRATION REQUIRED.



Register here for programs

Scan the QR Code or go to champaignforests.org.

Programs may be altered or canceled due to weather.



Saturday, July 26 **Free**

SUMMER SPLASH!

Peninsula, Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve, 9 AM - 2 PM



Join us for a fun-filled day at Lake of the Woods! Hosted by the Forest Preserves in collaboration with the Upper Sangamon River Conservancy, Summer Splash offers a variety of activities for the whole family. Enjoy fishing, canoeing, kayaking, pedal boats, educational exhibits, live music, and more—all for free, with no registration required! Savor delicious food from local food trucks while you soak up the summer vibes. Check out the exciting activities planned for the event below. A detailed schedule will be available on our website closer to the event date. Please note, there is no rain date.

TAKE ME FISHING

9 AM - 2 PM

Cane poles and bait will be available, catch-and-release fishing, adult supervision required for children 15 and under. Prizes will be awarded throughout the day!

FREE CANOE, KAYAK, AND PEDAL BOATS

9 AM - 2 PM

Take a spin out on the lake anytime during the event! The Upper Sangamon River Conservancy will offer paddling and safety lessons.

ILLINOIS NATURAL HISTORY SURVEY TRAVELING SCIENCE CENTER

9 AM - 2 PM

Come and check out a 320-square-foot mobile classroom! Examine engaging exhibits on biodiversity and natural resources.

POND DISCOVERY

10:30 AM - 2 PM

Get up close and personal with some real live tiny aquatic creatures that live in ponds and lakes in the Forest Preserves.

OCCASIONAL CAJUN BAND

12 PM - 2 PM

Enjoy traditional Cajun, Creole, and Zydeco music from the Urbana-based band known for its lively and danceable rhythms.



BUFFALO TRACE WHISKEY HIKE

A whiskey-tasting fundraiser benefitting your local forest preserves!

OCTOBER 2025

Buffalo Trace, Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve



WHISKEY HIKE

Coming October 2025

This popular fundraising event is coming back for year 2! Join us for a hike through the Buffalo Trace Prairie, complete with whiskey tastings to celebrate the mighty oaks that are a keystone species in our woodland and savanna ecosystems.

You don't want to miss this one so, stay tuned for the official date!

Interested in sponsoring an upcoming event or supporting the work being done in Champaign County's Forests? Contact Jenna Phillips at jphillips@ccfpd.org to learn more about how your gift can make an impact.