



CHAMPAIGN COUNTY
Forest Preserves



2040

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

From the Executive Director

*The prairie at Middle Fork River Forest Preserve.
Photo by Forest Preserves staff, 2022.*

Focusing the Forest Preserves to Help People and Nature Thrive

When the Forest Preserves set out to create a plan that would guide the organization into the future, it was an exercise in asking, “What is the most good we can do for Champaign County?” To answer this, we did not simply ask ourselves – we asked what taxpayers wanted to see, in a process that was, well, comprehensive. The opinions provided by the public are the foundation of this plan, shaping what the Forest Preserves will be doing for the next decade-plus.

The Forest Preserves connect people with their natural world by immersing them in all the adventures it offers – from restoring natural landscapes, to offering recreation for people of all abilities and interests, to providing education that creates life-long nature and culture enthusiasts. While we provide daily enriching experiences to visitors, we are also thinking long-term. The Forest Preserves exist to ensure future generations can enjoy nature, too. The Comprehensive Plan ensures the decisions that guide the Forest Preserves through 2040 are publicly supported, research-informed, and strategically aligned.

As stewards of the county’s natural areas, the Forest Preserves play a vital role. Research shows time in nature is crucial to human wellbeing. The recommendations in this plan make sure we keep protecting the nature we have, adding more, and finding more ways to connect people to nature.

Our work is important and pressing. With environmental issues at the forefront of public awareness, this plan acknowledges the Forest Preserves can, do, and will continue to influence the local experiences of these critical issues. Nature is one of the most powerful tools we have for managing climate change, and the 2040 Comprehensive Plan sets out to make the most of this potential.

From protecting more nature, to reaching more of the county with our services, to making sure we are always growing within our means, the Forest Preserves have many important issues to balance. Everything we do is about enhancing peoples’ connection to nature. The 2040 Comprehensive Plan and its recommendations provide a framework for making decisions that ensure taxpayers’ investments in nature are well spent, and that nature is protected for future generations of Champaign County residents.

Implementing this plan will require a coordinated, collaborative effort. With your support, the Forest Preserves will achieve these recommendations and ensure nature becomes a more prominent part of people’s lives.

Lorrie Pearson

Executive Director



Executive Summary

*The night sky at Middle Fork River Forest Preserve
Photo by M. Vishwakarma, 2021.*

UNDERSTANDING THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

A comprehensive plan is a document to guide the growth and development of an organization over a longer time span than staff typically consider in their daily work. Its research-based, long-term vision spans multiple shorter-term, more specific strategic plans, and helps ensure the organization meets present and future needs. The Forest Preserves' last organization-wide plan was their 2010 Master Plan.

In 2021, the Forest Preserves embarked on a comprehensive planning process to help guide their decision-making for the next 10 to 20 years. In this process, the Forest Preserves sought feedback from hundreds of community members and dozens of internal stakeholders. Alongside their feedback, staff assessed the state of the Forest Preserves: their services, facilities and finances, in context with their history, trends, and the state of other forest preserve and conservation districts. Through this analysis, the Forest Preserves determined six key areas that will be a focus for success within the organization. The 2040 Comprehensive Plan delivers these recommendations, which will help address the needs identified throughout the Forest Preserves' detailed process of research, input-gathering, and analysis.

UNDERSTANDING THE FOREST PRESERVES

Chapter 1: A bird's-eye View

Forest preserve and conservation districts in Illinois are local taxing districts charged with protecting and providing public access to nature for "education, pleasure, and recreation." Together, Illinois' 19 forest preserve and conservation districts manage over 233,000 acres. As of 2024, Champaign County Forest Preserves own over 4,000 acres. Their growth has been gradual except for surges in the 1970s and 1990s. Since 2001, the Forest Preserves have added three preserves and the Kickapoo Rail Trail.

The three-pronged mission of the Forest Preserves includes conservation, recreation, and education. Conservation is led by the Natural Resources Department, which is committed to restoring native ecosystems. Trails are the hallmark amenity of the Preserves' expansive recreation repertoire, and the Museum and Education Department is primarily responsible for education within the preserves and throughout the community.

Among other Illinois forest preserve and conservation districts, Champaign County Forest Preserves rank in the lower one-third in acres owned relative to both county size and population. Less than 1% of Champaign County is protected natural area, of which the Forest Preserves own about three-quarters. The lack of nature in Champaign County is not unique, as just 4.1% of Illinois is protected natural area. Restoring nature brings manifold benefits, from preserving biodiversity, to improving resilience to climate change, supporting human health, and benefiting the economy. Public feedback and state and national direction support an expanded role for public landholding agencies through land acquisition, climate change adaptation, education, expanded trails, and more equitable service provision.

Chapter 2: Community Profile

Understanding demographic dynamics helps the Forest Preserves anticipate changes in demand and identify potential gaps in service provision. Champaign County is younger than average but aging. The county has a higher-than-average poverty rate. The proportion of White-only residents decreased from 2010 to 2020. The Forest Preserves receive a significantly lower proportion of visitors from minority racial and ethnic backgrounds compared to the county average. The Forest Preserves should remain attuned to the changing needs of residents and ensure their services are equitably distributed.

Chapter 3: Community Input

To inform the recommendations of this plan, the Forest Preserves gathered input from 602 people through in-person discussions, internal surveys, and a statistically representative, county-wide survey. Participants included community members, Board Commissioners, staff, and members of the Citizens Engagement Committee and Forest Preserve Friends Foundation.

The county-wide survey found the Forest Preserves are highly regarded in the community but have opportunities for improvement. Major themes from the feedback where all groups aligned include praise for land stewardship, concerns over a lack of public awareness, and the need to remain financially sustainable. All groups highly value the Forest Preserves' natural areas and trails as well as the Forest Preserves' role in protecting and restoring land; these are top reasons people visit, and buying and restoring more land are their top future spending priorities. All surveys indicated a lack of public awareness and the need to expand the Forest Preserves' reach beyond their traditional user base. In particular, Forest Preserves programs are highly regarded but do not reach most, and Forest Preserves visitors tend to be significantly whiter and wealthier than the county at-large. Internal stakeholders were concerned about the Forest Preserves' financial outlook - this was also a concern but less of a priority among public survey respondents.

Chapter 4: Inventory of Facilities

To help the Forest Preserves balance resources among their maintenance obligations, infrastructure upgrades, and improvements for educational and recreational opportunities, the Forest Preserves inventoried each property. Report cards grade the state of facilities and structures, and several important improvements and necessary plans are identified. This

inventory complements the shorter-term, 5-year capital planning process by providing a bigger-picture view of the state of infrastructure and improvements to consider at the Forest Preserves.

Chapter 5: Finances

Financial health is imperative to a tax-funded, public-serving organization like the Forest Preserves. Compared to districts of similar sizes, the Forest Preserves' operating and capital expenses appear typical. Their operating expenses have consistently risen since 2007, including a large uptick since 2019 reflecting continued investment in staffing. Their capital expenses as a proportion of all expenses have also risen recently, reflecting the Forest Preserves' expanded capacity to provide services and maintain facilities due to the 2020 referendum.

Chapter 6: Recommendations

The recommendations reflect areas where public feedback, internal surveys, and background research aligned to clearly indicate a direction that would benefit the Forest Preserves. This plan recommends the Preserves:

- Create a programming plan & improve the nature education space
- Expand trails & outdoor recreation opportunities
- Evaluate & maintain facilities & infrastructure
- Increase engagement
- Lead on climate & conservation
- Provide more land for conservation & recreation

These six recommendations will ensure Forest Preserves achieve their mission and provide the best possible value to the taxpayers of Champaign County well into the future.

Acknowledgements

This plan, adopted in June 2024, was made possible with help from Commissioners, staff, and community members who provided comments, direction, and input. The Forest Preserves thanks the agencies who provided data, including the Forest Preserve Districts of Byron, DeKalb, Kendall, Rock Island, and Vermilion Counties; and the Champaign County Regional Planning Commission. Special thanks to Marla Beyer whose artwork was adapted for some of the illustrations.

AUTHORS

Sam Ihm, Planner
Bridgette Moen, Planning Director
Michael Daab, Deputy Executive Director
Lorrie Pearson, Executive Director

COMMISSIONERS

William Goodman
Bobbie Herakovich
Wendy Hundley
Andrew Kerins
Greg Knott

Table of Contents

	Introduction	1
1	A Bird's-eye View	3
2	Community Profile	33
3	Community Input	39
4	Inventory of Facilities	51
5	Finances	77
6	Recommendations	83
	Appendix	115

*Monarchs visit
New England
Aster. Photo by C.
Hendrickson, 2021.*

Introduction

Since 1948, the Forest Preserves have stewarded vital resources to bring Champaign County residents closer to nature. The Forest Preserves have consistently provided in-demand opportunities and new ways to connect with nature according to three pillars: conservation, recreation, and education. Three-quarters of a century after their founding, the pillars remain the same and the Forest Preserves remain an integral part of Champaign County. The role of the Forest Preserves will only become more important in the coming years. The demands of an increasingly complex world make it more difficult for nature to thrive and for humans to connect with nature, yet nature provides enduring solutions to so many of today's problems. To continue expanding their influence amid these challenges, the Forest Preserves created this plan. The 2040 Comprehensive Plan encapsulates the essential details of the organization and helps maximize its impact over the coming decade-plus.

This plan is the result of years of research, input-gathering, and analysis. It details the Forest Preserves' work, puts it into context with broader trends and other forest preserve districts' work, then takes readers through a robust public input process. The information gathered for and presented in these background chapters forms the basis of the plan's recommendations. The six recommendations are the culmination of the 2040 Comprehensive Plan. Drawing directly from the background research and input themes, they provide a framework to address the deficiencies and leverage the strengths of the organization. The Comprehensive Plan sets a data-driven path for the Forest Preserves to meet community needs, weather the challenges ahead, and thrive into the future.

What is a Comprehensive Plan?

A comprehensive plan is a document to guide the growth and development of an organization over a longer time span than staff typically consider in their daily work. A comprehensive plan helps an organization evaluate itself and set goals for the future. Detailed analysis of existing conditions and any relevant context, combined with public input often in the form of a needs assessment survey, inform the goals the plan sets. For example, a comprehensive plan may identify the need for a new facility, but not the amount of square feet required. Strategic plans covering 3- to 5-year spans typically follow with more specific objectives, which dictate annual

budget initiatives. Staff regularly reference their comprehensive plans to demonstrate how projects and decisions further the demonstrated interests of the organization. In this way, a comprehensive plan is a guidepost directing staff's daily work toward goals the organization has agreed are important.

The 2040 Comprehensive Plan's long-term vision both strengthens and gives meaning to the Forest Preserves' daily efforts, helping ensure the Preserves meet the needs of today and tomorrow to leave a positive legacy long into the future.

Planning Process from Research to Action





A Bird's-eye View

Evaluating the Forest Preserves' growth, role, & context

*A dickcissel on its perch.
Photo by J. Dunn, 2023.*

A Bird's-eye View

This section contextualizes the Champaign County Forest Preserves with an overview of their history, impact, and a summary of relevant local, state, and national plans and public opinion that orients readers to the rest of the plan. The section is organized according to the three pillars of the Forest Preserves' mission: conservation, recreation, and education.



How the Forest Preserves Came to Be

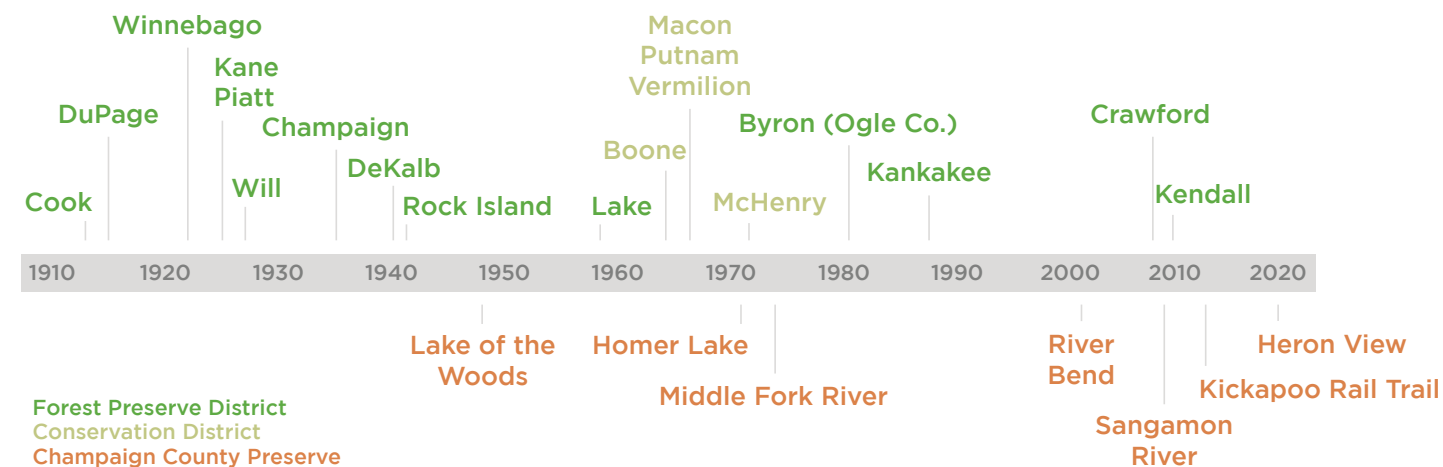
Cook County established the first forest preserve district in 1914 after decades of planning and organizing by visionary advocates. The legislation this advocacy produced, the Cook County Forest Preserve District Act of 1914¹ and the Downstate Forest Preserves Act of 1915,² allowed Illinois counties to create forest preserve districts. By 1927, DuPage, Winnebago, Kane, Piatt, and Will had all formed theirs, and Champaign County followed in 1935.

Work on what would become the Champaign County Forest Preserve District began two decades before the first preserve opened in 1948. Volunteers in the 1920s formed the Forest Preserve Association but lost steam. That effort was revived in the next decade by the Champaign County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC), who inspired the Izaak Walton League – then a budding conservation organization, which has since shaped environmental policy in America – to push for

a county-wide referendum in 1935 to establish the Champaign County Forest Preserve District.³ The effects of the Great Depression made a tax increase unpopular with many voters, but the referendum passed by 22 votes to create the state's seventh forest preserve district. The Forest Preserves did not begin growing in earnest for more than a decade, due at first to lingering opposition and financial stress and then World War II.

In 1948, the Forest Preserves acquired a property in an ideal location for a county park, accessible by major roads and with rolling terrain and woods along the Sangamon River. A lot has changed since Lake of the Woods' days as a swimming destination – the Forest Preserves have grown steadily, adding new preserves and expanding existing ones. The oldest preserve had more than tripled its original size when the newest preserve, Heron View, opened in 2021.

Forest Preserve District, Conservation District, & Champaign Co. Preserve Foundings



WHAT IS A FOREST PRESERVE DISTRICT?

In Illinois, a forest preserve districtⁱ is a government agency supported by local property taxes. Illinois' Downstate Forest Preserves Act authorizes forest preserve districts to acquire, protect, preserve, and restore lands "in their natural state and condition, for the purpose of education, pleasure, and recreation of the public."⁴ Forest preserve districts are considered "special districts," or local government bodies created by constituents via referendum to meet a local need. Illinois has more special districts than any other state, and they provide services like parks, schools, sanitation, and libraries.

HAVING PUBLIC LAND FOR PUBLIC ACCESS TO THE GREAT OUTDOORS IS AN AWESOME PART OF OUR DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM.

- COMMUNITY MEMBER

The services provided by forest preserve districts in Illinois may be captured by city, county, or state governments elsewhere. Some states have special districts similar to forest preserve districts, like Ohio's Metroparks. Of the 102 counties in Illinois, only 14 have forest preserve districts. Five counties have conservation districts, which are slightly less autonomous special districts similar to forest preserve districts that work more closely with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Counties with forest preserve or conservation districts tend to be more metropolitan.⁵ Together, Illinois' forest preserve and conservation districts manage over 233,000 acres.

FOREST PRESERVE DISTRICTS AND PARK DISTRICTS

People often confuse forest preserve districts with park districts. Both entities' missions generally coalesce around providing people with outdoor experiences. It is common for park districts to have grassy open space for recreation and less natural area compared to forest preserve districts. Notably, park districts locallyⁱⁱ and across the US are restoring more habitat and waterways and using more native plants.⁶ Park districts also commonly offer more active recreational opportunities such as sports facilities, leagues, and lessons. Locally, the Forest Preserves and the park districts balance one another's services.

According to the Forest Preserves of Cook County, the distinction between park and forest preserve districts has existed from their conception:

The forest preserves idea differed from other county parks of the early 20th century by emphasizing the preservation of space in its natural, undeveloped state... The forest preserves were to be natural areas and to provide citizens with a different kind of enjoyment: the scenic beauty provided by nature.⁷

The Champaign County Forest Preserves offer residents a unique service by protecting and restoring natural areas that may have otherwise been developed. Through these properties the Forest Preserves provide experiences unavailable elsewhere which allow people to explore wilder nature in Champaign County.

ⁱ Despite the Prairie State having been two-thirds prairie, legislators named its nature protection agencies "forest preserve districts," possibly due to the negative historical perception of prairies.⁸

ⁱⁱ Five percent of Champaign Park District land is natural area, but all 4 parks with natural areas were built after 2000. One of Urbana's most popular parks, Meadowbrook Park, is 62% natural area.⁹

How the Preserves Have Grown

LAND ACQUISITION HISTORY

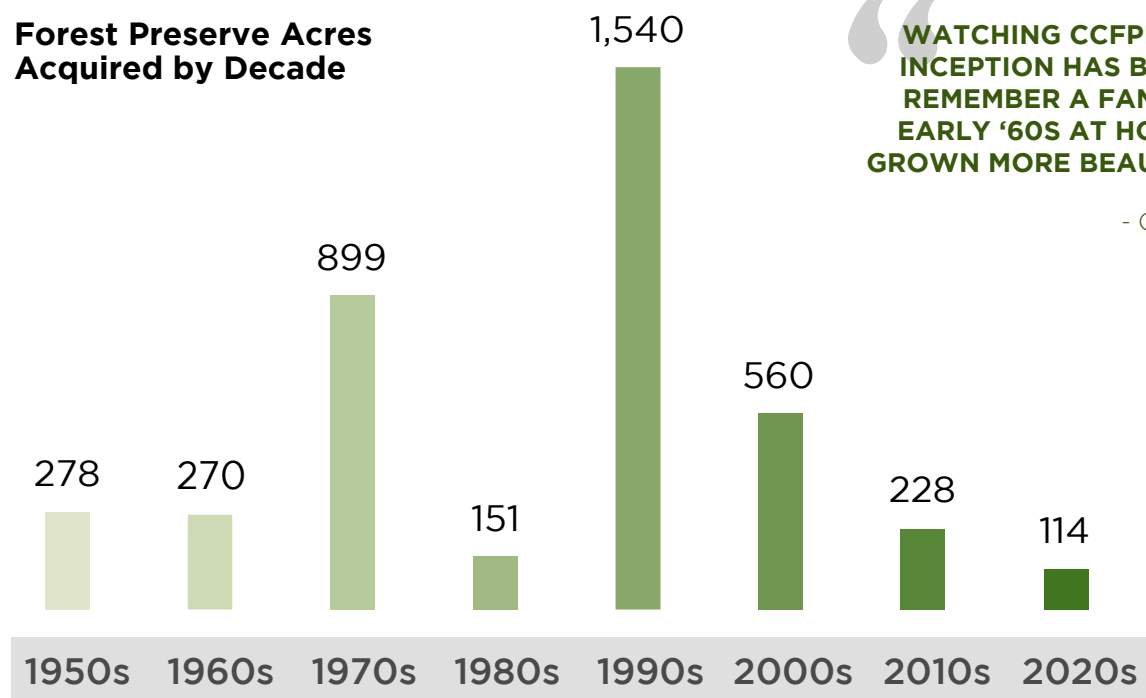
Today's forest preserves are the result of both incremental growth and major defining additions. The Forest Preserves have expanded through a variety of acquisition types, including large land donations as well as purchases of small parcels adjacent to existing preserves. Slow growth over the first few decades was followed by surges in the 1970s and the 1990s. Since then, the Forest Preserves have added four preserves but relatively little acreage. Each addition into public ownership provides tremendous benefits to Champaign County and all of its living things.

The three largest preserves, Middle Fork (1,712 acres), Lake of the Woods (874), and Homer Lake (764), all experienced major growth spurts in the 20th century. Lake of the Woods grew mostly from the 1940s through the 1970s with three separate acquisitions of over 100 acres as well as a handful of smaller parcels. In

1992, nearly 90% of what is now Homer Lake Forest Preserve was purchased from the Illinois Department of Conservation (now the Illinois Department of Natural Resources). The next year, Middle Fork River Forest Preserve more than doubled in size when the Forest Preserves added 828 acres. By 1993, the three forest preserves had grown to over 3,000 acres.

Since 2001, the Forest Preserves have opened three preserves and the Kickapoo Rail Trail. Limited financial and staff resources during the 2000s and 2010s strained the Forest Preserves' ability to manage and improve existing properties. The 2020 referendum brought increased property tax revenue that has allowed the Forest Preserves to address a backlog of deferred maintenance and begin to plan for future land acquisitions. See [Recommendations](#) for more discussion of land acquisition.

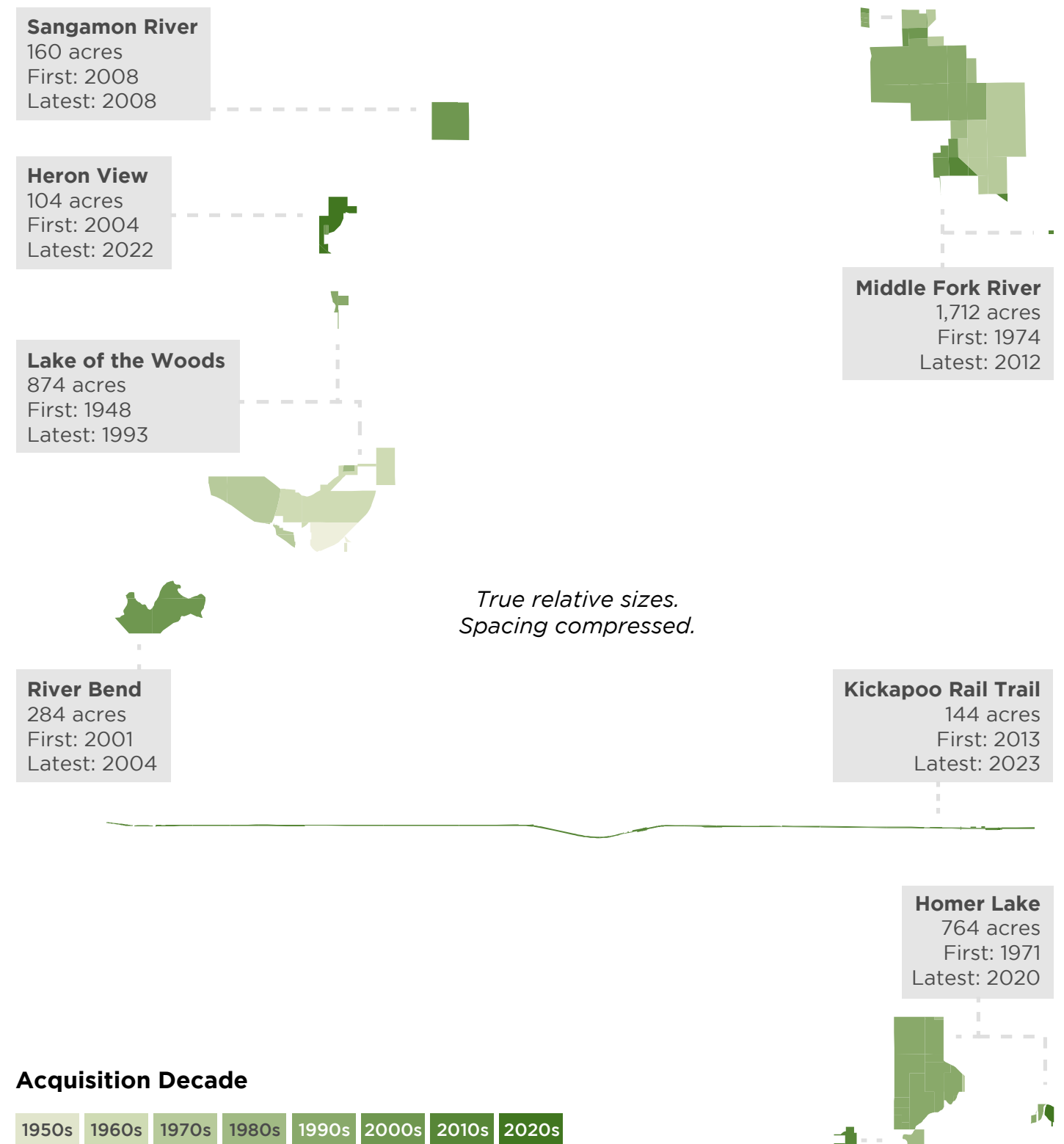
Forest Preserve Acres Acquired by Decade



“WATCHING CCFPD GROW SINCE ITS INCEPTION HAS BEEN SUCH A JOY! I REMEMBER A FAMILY PICNIC IN THE EARLY '60S AT HOMER LAKE. IT HAS GROWN MORE BEAUTIFUL OVER TIME!”

- COMMUNITY MEMBER

GROWTH OF THE PRESERVES BY DECADE



The Three Pillars

CONSERVATION, RECREATION, & EDUCATION

The Champaign County Forest Preserves own and manage six preserves and the Kickapoo Rail Trail totaling over 4,000 acres. The preserves offer respite for people and wildlife, opportunities for recreation, and educational spaces where the Forest Preserves promote their message of connecting with nature. These three aspects – conservation, recreation, and education – are the pillars of the Forest Preserves’ mission. See [Appendix A](#) for the Forest Preserves’ organizational chart.

“EXCELLENT ORGANIZATION WITH A RELEVANT MISSION AND GREAT USE OF OUR TAX DOLLARS!

- COMMUNITY MEMBER

MISSION, VISION, & VALUES

The 2010 Master Plan (see [p. 25](#)) summarized the Forest Preserves’ historical mission:

The Forest Preserve District has had a three-pronged mission since it opened its first preserve in 1948, which is to provide for the citizens and guests of Champaign County: 1) the conservation of the county’s natural and cultural resources, 2) educational opportunities designed to increase the community’s knowledge and appreciation of these resources, and 3) recreational opportunities consistent with conserving the natural qualities other Forest Preserve’s resource base.

In 2024, for the first time, the Forest Preserves defined their organizational values to inform how the mission and vision are achieved. Today, the Forest Preserves’ guiding statements are:

MISSION

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

VISION

Protecting Nature. Creating Connections.

VALUES

Stewardship: We act thoughtfully and responsibly to care for one another and nurture the financial, natural, and cultural resources entrusted to us.

Community: We respect and trust our colleagues and community and work to earn their trust. We foster a welcoming and collaborative environment, embracing differences and new ideas.

Discovery: We encourage curiosity, self-discovery, learning, and growth. We inspire wonder and awe through exploration of the world around us.

CONSERVATION: COLLABORATIVE MANAGEMENT THROUGHOUT THE PRESERVES

Conservation has been a pillar of the Forest Preserves’ mission since their founding but has become more of a focus over time. Protecting and restoring native ecosystems provides cultural value directly to the citizens of Champaign County. Native landscapes restored to pre-settlement conditions embody Champaign County’s natural and cultural history and provide green, wild spaces for passive recreation. With a few exceptions made for educational purposes or cultural value, Forest Preserve staff focus on restoring and maintaining native habitat and biodiversity according to pre-settlement conditions throughout all six forest preserves and the Kickapoo Rail Trail.

Managing complex terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems across seven large properties with limited time, staff, and resources poses logistical challenges. Led by the Natural Resources Department, and in collaboration with Site Operations departments, a systems approach enables the Forest Preserves to optimize output and implement manageable projects. Aided by mapping software and other digital tools, the small Natural Resources Department works strategically to lead the restoration and maintenance of biodiverse native habitat throughout the preserves using the most up-to-date management practices.

Behind habitat loss, the proliferation of invasive species is the greatest driver of biodiversity loss in the Midwest. Because of this, the Natural Resources Department spends the vast majority of its time and resources on

integrated pest management (IPM) practices – mechanical, chemical, and cultural methods that control invasive plant species and prevent re-invasion. The department prioritizes sites of highest ecological quality, using natural processes and low-impact control methods (like prescribed fire and hand-pulling weeds) to maintain high species richness. For low-quality, highly degraded ecosystems, the department focuses on restoring structure, function, and natural processes before biodiversity. This includes systematic mechanical and chemical control of invasive plants, reestablishment of native vegetation, and prescribed fire.

Ecological monitoring, or repeatedly measuring conditions over time, is an important component of tracking changes to natural areas. Two methods staff use to monitor changes in ecosystems are photo monitoring and transects, or walking through natural areas and recording occurrences of native plant species. The department uses ecological monitoring to calculate an area’s floristic quality index (FQI), which conveys relative ecological quality.

The work of the Natural Resources and Site Operations Departments, as well as significant contributions by our volunteers, is integral to the Forest Preserves’ mission. Restoring some of Champaign County’s native landscapes and managing them for biodiversity brings manifold benefits to residents of all species, and the department’s approach ensures the preserves will continue to provide the greatest possible benefit into the future.

MANAGING NATURAL ECOSYSTEMS TO REDUCE CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS

Natural areas store carbon in plant biomass and soil, provide resistance to flood and drought, clean the air and water, and regulate temperature – in addition to providing and increasing the quality of habitat. The Forest Preserves’ Climate Commitment (2022) states that while climate change poses a direct threat to forests, wetlands, and prairies, “forest preserve lands, programs, and management practices can also help to reduce climate change impacts ... If managed to their full potential, natural ecosystems could offset over 20% of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions each year.”¹⁰ The Forest Preserves’ 4,000+ acres help protect all residents from the effects of climate change. See [p. 23-24](#) for more on the importance of nature.

“CCFPD PROVIDES THE TYPE OF TRAILS AND HIGH-QUALITY NATURAL AREAS THAT CAN'T BE FOUND ELSEWHERE IN THE COUNTY OR NEARBY.”

- COMMUNITY MEMBER

THE THREE PILLARS: CONSERVATION, RECREATION, & EDUCATION

RECREATION: AMENITIES THROUGHOUT THE PRESERVES

Each preserve has its own character and unique array of amenities. Recreating in or near nature adds further benefits to physical activity; Parks and Recreation Magazine called spending time in nature “upstream preventative care” because of the way it underpins health.¹¹ This section describes some of the flagship amenities and the graphic below shows a more complete list.

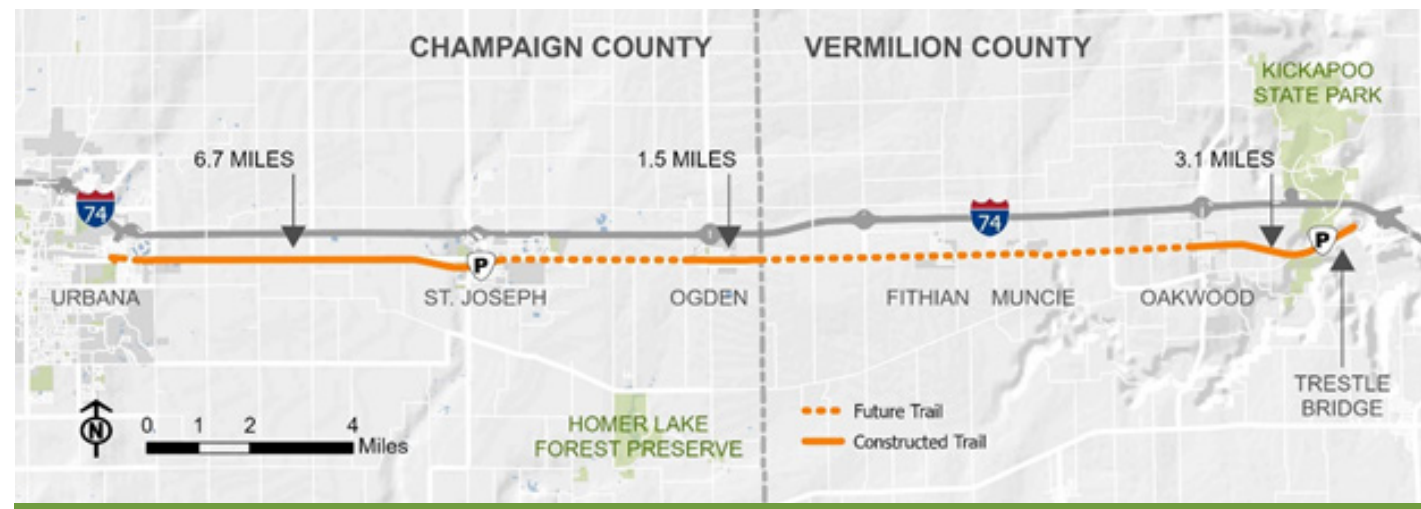
“WONDERFUL PRESERVES, LOTS OF VARIED ACTIVITIES... EACH PRESERVE SEEMS TO HAVE ITS OWN ‘PERSONALITY’.”

- COMMUNITY MEMBER

Preserve	Accessible Facilities	Accessible Parking	Boat Ramps	Boat Rentals	Campground	Education Facility	Education Programs	Fishing (*Accessible Pier)	Golf	Interpretive Signs	Paddling (*Kayak launch)	Play Area	Rental Facilities	Restrooms	Swim Beach	Shelters- Picnic Tables, & Grills	Trails- Hiking	Trails- Paved/Multi-use	Volleyball (Sand)
Heron View																			
Homer Lake	•	•	•			•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Kickapoo Rail Trail		•																	
Lake of the Woods	•	•	•	•		•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Middle Fork River	•	•			•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
River Bend	•	•	•			•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Sangamon River	•	•				•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

TRAILS

The Forest Preserves have over 46 miles of trails, including mowed and maintained walking trails through diverse ecosystems at every preserve, as well as over 14 miles designed to accommodate bikes and wheelchair users across 4 preserves and the Kickapoo Rail Trail. Trails are the most popular amenity at the Forest Preserves according to results from the 2022 Needs Assessment Survey. Trail development is a complex negotiation considering demand, habitat encroachment, and accessibility.



The Kickapoo Rail Trail as constructed and planned (2024)

Kickapoo Rail Trail

In addition to their six preserves, the Forest Preserves operate a large portion of the Kickapoo Rail Trail (KRT). The long-distance, off-street, multi-use trail offers a convenient recreation option for cyclists, walkers, and runners. St. Joseph is the busiest section of the KRT in Champaign County and receives about 3,000 users per month during the summer. Forest Preserve staff manage the 139 acres adjacent to the trail as they would a preserve, with a commitment to restoring biodiverse native ecosystems. As of 2024, 11.3 of the originally planned 24.5 miles of trail have been completed, and the Forest Preserves secured grant funding to complete the remaining 13.2 miles.

The trail is jointly managed by the Forest Preserves, the Urbana Park District and the Vermilion County Conservation District. As the original trail is completed, partners in Urbana and Champaign will steward the extension westward. Planning is also underway for future connections to other regional trails. The Forest Preserves have provided this amenity to taxpayers at minimal cost, having secured grant or private funding for 100% of the trail.

The KRT makes active travel easier, safer, and more enjoyable, while bringing health, social, environmental, and economic benefits to residents and the region. The Forest Preserves are excited to complete the originally planned trail and help coordinate future expansions that extend the impact of the Kickapoo Rail Trail in Champaign County and beyond.

Lake of the Woods Bike Path

One of the many trails traversing the preserves is the 3.2-mile Lake of the Woods Bike Path. The 10-foot-wide multi-use asphalt path spans much of the preserve, from its western end at Buffalo Trace Prairie, across Route 47 and past the Botanical Garden, through the woods along the Sangamon River and to its eastern endpoint at Stidham Woods. The path connects with several miles of other trails and is linked to a growing network of in-town and regional trails, including the Lake of the Woods Road Path that takes users to downtown Mahomet. The Forest Preserves recently secured grant funding to renovate three different portions of the path.



THE THREE PILLARS: CONSERVATION, RECREATION, & EDUCATION
RECREATION AMENITIES CONTINUED

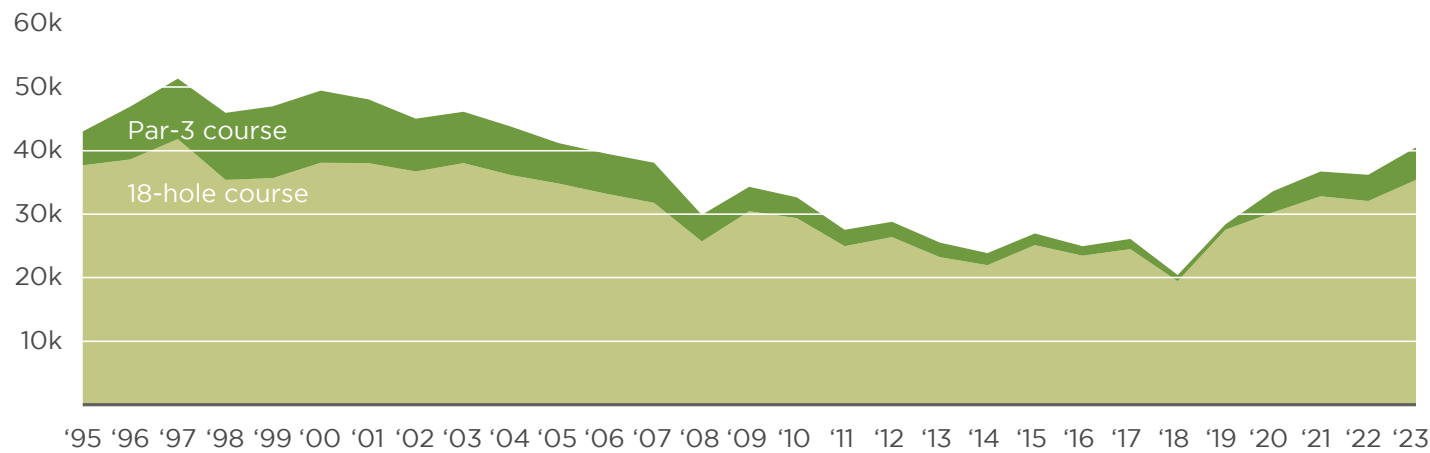
FLAGSHIP AMENITIES

Lake of the Woods Golf Course

One of the Forest Preserves' first major projects was to create the Golf Course. In 1951, when the Forest Preserves were just three years old, they opened Hartwell C. Howard Lake of the Woods Golf Course. Howard, among several other donors, helped bring to fruition the vision for a golf course in a natural setting. Over 70 years later, the course, designed by nationally known architect Robert Bruce Harris, remains a popular and affordable recreational attraction for the Forest Preserve District. The course offers an 18-hole, 5,000 to 6,500-yard regulation course accommodating all ages and skill levels. The course provides excellent value with its great upkeep, affordable rates, and beautiful surroundings. A variety of other activities attract visitors, such as the 9-hole par 3 course, driving range, golf simulators, lessons for all ages, and foot golf. Play at the Golf Course has steadily rebounded in recent years after a long decline.

A Certified Audubon Sanctuary, Lake of the Woods Golf Course is committed to a high standard of environmental management, an example of how the Forest Preserve pillars work cohesively.

Rounds of Golf Played Per Year, 1995 to 2023



Rounds played in 2018 were less than half of peak play in 1997, but since 2019, golf has consistently rebounded and it exceeded 40,000 rounds in 2023.

Mabery Gelvin Botanical Garden

The Mabery Gelvin Botanical Garden, one of the Forest Preserves' most popular attractions, has evolved from a small group of plantings outside the museum to the eight acres it covers today. The area was named after Forest Preserves founder H.I. Gelvin's late wife after a major renovation in 1974. The setting for dozens of weddings each year, it showcases a diversity of flora and several attractions, including the gazebo; the red bridge, pond, and waterfall (renovated in 2019); a guided nature trail with interpretive signs; the award-winning, ADA-accessible Miriam Davies Enabling Garden; and the former Hensley Town Hall, built in 1895 and moved to the Gardens in 1982, which now hosts educational programming as the Historic One-Room Schoolhouse. Grant funding will also help the Preserves renovate the Discovery Garden and Greenhouse to provide even more ways to connect to nature.

The Botanical Garden has been the subject of several master plans and studies from the past few decades. Several recommend a complete redesign of the site. None of these master plans are currently being followed because of their drastic nature.



The dark sky at Middle Fork. Photo by M. Vishwakarma, 2023.

Harry L. Swartz Campground

The Harry L. Swartz Campground at Middle Fork River Forest Preserve, open April through October, offers over 50 sites in a forested setting among large oaks, hickories, hackberries, and wildflowers. Campers are within a short walk of the swimming beach, shower house, and several hiking trails ranging from prairie and wetland to forested river walks. The campground hosts naturalist programs most weekends during the summer that are free for all ages. The campground is named in honor of a past president of the Forest Preserves who helped focus the organization's efforts on preserving natural areas around the Middle Fork River. Grant funding from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources will help enhance Middle Fork's International Dark Sky Park experience, including the addition of ADA-accessible dark sky campsites uncovered by trees. Middle Fork attracts thousands of visitors from around the county, country, and even internationally for stargazing as it is the only internationally certified Dark Sky Park in Illinois.

THE DARK SKY PARK AT MIDDLE FORK WAS A STANDOUT ACHIEVEMENT AS IT IS THE FIRST PARK IN ILLINOIS TO DO THIS.

- COMMUNITY MEMBER

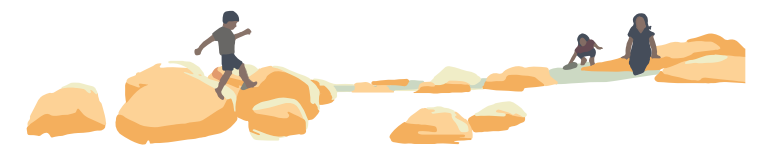
ADDITIONAL AMENITIES

The preserves also offer fishing, paddling, and affordably priced rental facilities. Paddling has grown in popularity in recent years and there are launches at Homer Lake, Lake of the Woods, and River Bend. Rental facilities throughout Lake of the Woods, Homer Lake, and Middle Fork River allow patrons to commune in a natural setting. These rentals can be gateways to visitors discovering more of the preserves.

THE FACILITIES ARE GREAT! MY DAUGHTER LOVES THE NATURE PLAYGROUND AT HOMER LAKE.

- COMMUNITY MEMBER

Another unique amenity is the Natural Playscape at Homer Lake Forest Preserve, a playground designed with natural materials and running water to provide kids an immersive way to connect with nature. Nature-based play supports child physical,⁵⁰ cognitive,⁵¹ social,⁵² and emotional⁵³ development; enhances creativity and problem-solving,^{54,55} and improves risk management.⁵⁶



THE THREE PILLARS: CONSERVATION, RECREATION, & EDUCATION

EDUCATION: COLLECTIONS & PROGRAMS

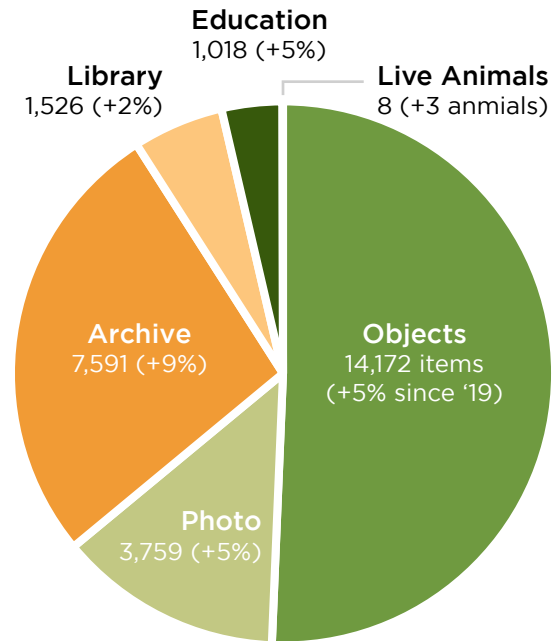
The Museum and Education Department is the primary provider of education at the Forest Preserves. Information is also shared through interpretive signage, and other departments and volunteers (see p. 17) contributing to public education in various ways. The mission of the Museum and Education Department is to collect, preserve and interpret the natural and cultural history of Champaign County and East Central Illinois for all generations, which it does primarily through school programs, summer camps, public programs, exhibits, and collections. The department serves over 20,000 people each year from all walks of life, including the general public, educators, and students (public, private, and homeschool). Museum and Education Department staff work from the Museum of the Grand Prairie and the Homer Lake Interpretive Center.

The department is guided by its Strategic Institutional Plan (2021) and several sub-plans for areas like interpretive signs, exhibits, collections, and facilities management. The Strategic Institutional Plan calls for the creation of a programming plan (see graphic on p. 16) and an inclusion plan.

“BEYOND MAINTAINING HABITAT... CITIZENS CAN HIKE, FISH, CAMP, BIKE, ETC. IN ADDITION, PUBLIC PROGRAMMING HELPS EDUCATE ON VARIOUS TOPICS. CCFPD DOES A GOOD JOB OF BALANCING CONSERVATION AND EDUCATION.”

- COMMUNITY MEMBER

Collections by Type (and Growth 2019-2023)



COLLECTIONS

The Forest Preserves' collections span over 28,000 records. The majority of the collection is located at the Museum of the Grand Prairie, with a subset located at the Homer Lake Interpretive Center. The Museum was founded in 1968 and has been accredited by the American Alliance of Museums since 1973, making it a unique asset to the Forest Preserves. In addition to exhibiting artifacts, Forest Preserve staff use artifacts to support exhibits and programs. The Museum is dedicated to preserving and sharing the cultural and natural history of Champaign County. Collections increased slightly but remained relatively stable since 2019. The department focuses on quality over quantity, only adding artifacts with meaningful local connections. As of July 2023, 2,800 artifacts, or 12% of collections, were on exhibit.

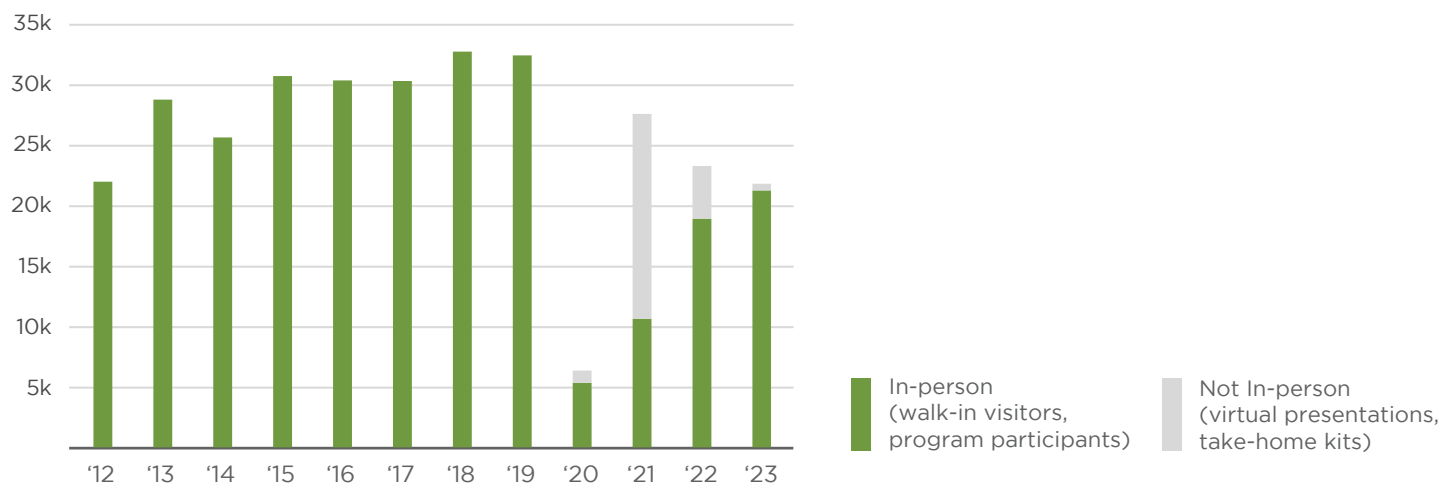
PROGRAMS

Public programs, school programs, and summer youth opportunities through the Museum and Education Department deliver hands-on experiences with the history and environment of Champaign County and East-central Illinois. Thoughtful programs facilitated by knowledgeable guides provide positive experiences that encourage participants to connect with nature and history. The Museum and Education Department's programs include onsite and offsite programs for schools and for the public. Programs are held at several facilities throughout the preserves but nearly half take place at either the Museum or the Interpretive Center. Programs reached over 10,000 people in 2023, but participation remains below pre-pandemic levels. See [Recommendations](#) for a more detailed analysis of programs.

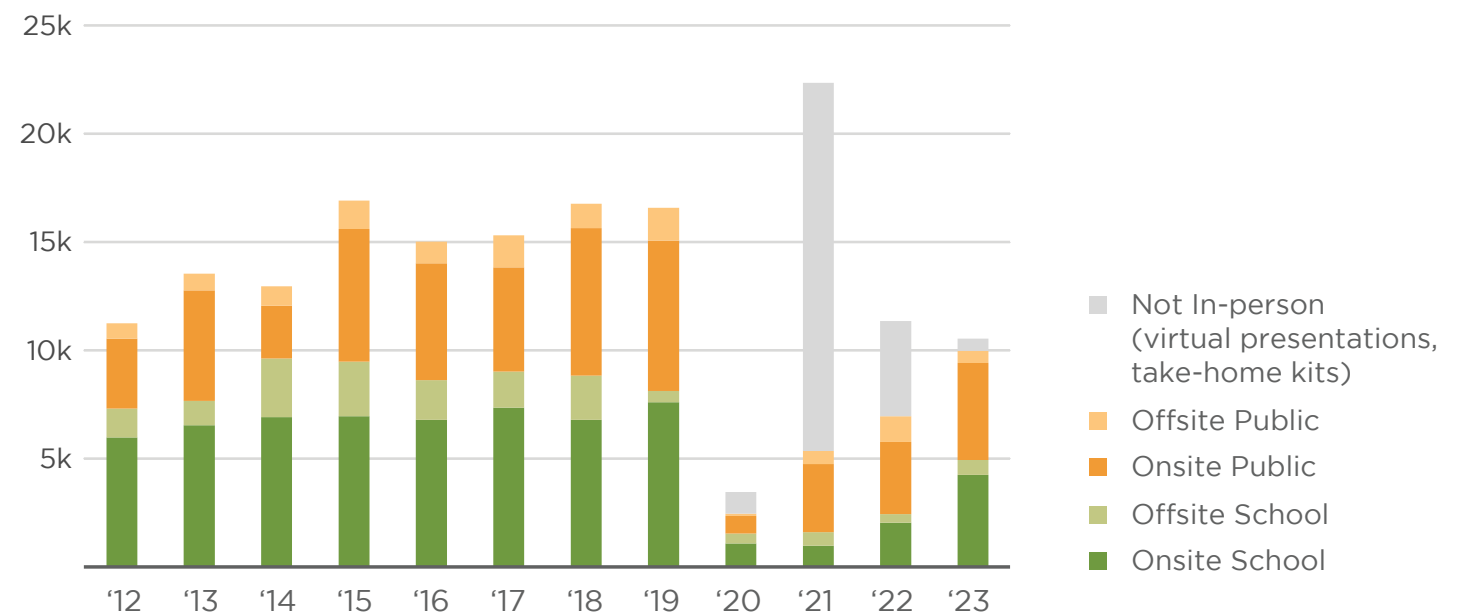
Programming Goals from the Museum & Education Strategic Institutional Plan (2021)

- Create new programs
- Expand program locations
- Expand self-guided opportunities
- Attract a more diverse audience

People Reached by Museum & Education



Participants by Program Type



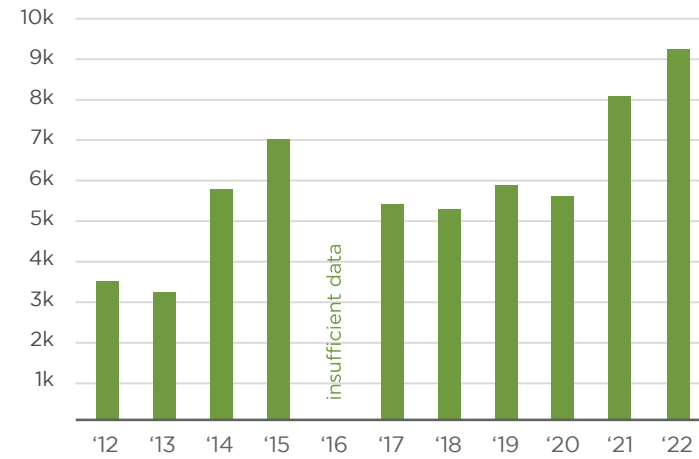
THE THREE PILLARS: CONSERVATION, RECREATION, & EDUCATION

VOLUNTEERS

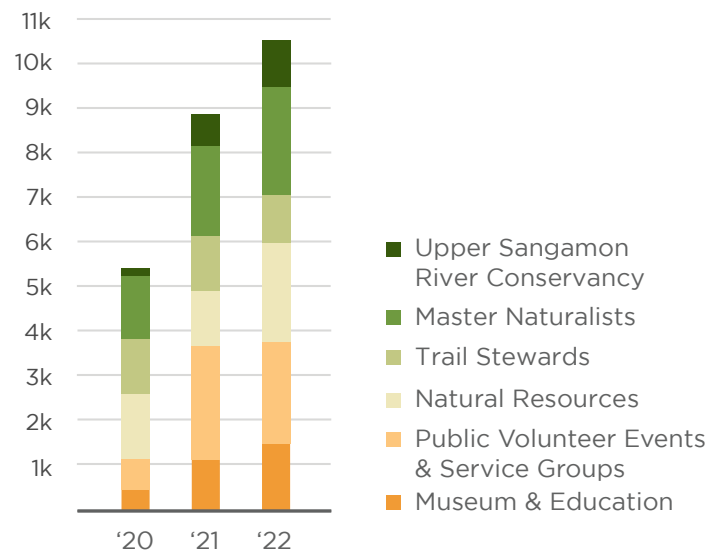
Volunteers help the Forest Preserves with every pillar of their mission. Volunteers contribute to conservation through tasks such as restoration and invasive species removal; they support recreation through trail maintenance; and they further public education by tabling at events and advocating on social media. Natural Resources staff estimate volunteers' work has pushed the department 20 years ahead of its restoration schedule for Lake of the Woods' Buffalo Trace Prairie. Volunteers' work is directed or delegated by the Forest Preserves' part-time Volunteer Coordinator. Before the pandemic, volunteers consistently contributed about 5,000 hours per year. From 2019 to 2022, volunteer hours increased over 50%.

The volunteer program is an important aspect of the Forest Preserves' outreach; staff educate the volunteers who work alongside them, and volunteers help to educate others. Many service group and event volunteers are introduced to the Forest Preserves' locations, services, and mission through their volunteering. Regular volunteers learn skills like plant identification that help them succeed in their role and that can be applied outside their volunteer work. As a result of investing their time with the Forest Preserves, volunteers can become better stewards of natural areas and unofficial ambassadors for the Forest Preserves.

Forest Preserves Volunteer Hours



Forest Preserves Volunteer Hours by Affiliation



Several different volunteer groups help the Forest Preserves meet their mission, and engagement has increased over time. Master Naturalists have averaged over 1,900 hours per year since 2012 and gave over 2,400 hours in 2022. Members of the Upper Sangamon River Conservancy gave over 1,000 in 2022, up from 150 just two years prior.

Totals are higher in the second graphic because some volunteers affiliated with multiple groups are double-counted.

[THE FOREST PRESERVES HAVE] A STRONG COMMITMENT TO PROMOTING VOLUNTEERISM AND A PHILOSOPHY OF VOLUNTEER EMPOWERMENT.

- COMMUNITY MEMBER

Volunteers from the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority at a KRT Cleanup event. Photo by Forest Preserve staff, 2023.



THE THREE PILLARS: CONSERVATION, RECREATION, & EDUCATION

BALANCING CONSERVATION & RECREATION

Per their mission, the Forest Preserves protect and restore natural areas for human and non-human purposes. Balancing these can be a challenge; surveys consistently show people want more trails and natural areas, but since trails can degrade habitat these desires can be at odds. The Forest Preserves balance conservation and recreation for the greatest benefit to people and wildlife.

Early on, the Forest Preserves developed many of their spaces with a focus on recreation. Lake of the Woods is the most developed of the preserves with the Museum, Botanical Garden, Golf Course, pavilions, bell tower, and historic bridges. These amenities offer ways for people of all comfort levels to be in or near nature. The variety at Lake of the Woods attracts many visitors - and it opens up the space for other preserves to remain more primitive. Every preserve offers opportunities for recreation, but the contrast between Lake of the Woods and recent acquisitions, like the more rustic Heron View Forest Preserve, reflects how the Forest Preserves have evolved while meeting the varied needs of the county. The Forest Preserves look to leverage the unique character of each preserve while protecting natural areas and offering a variety of ways for people to experience nature.

COMPARING CONSERVATION AND RECREATION WITH OTHER DISTRICTS

The Forest Preserves gathered data from the other 18 forest preserve and conservation districts in Illinois to see how Champaign County compares. While the Forest Preserves provide essential services on a large scale, their share of county land is just over 0.6%. Among the 19 forest preserve and conservation districts, Champaign County ranks 9th in acres owned but 14th relative to county size. Their acres per 1,000 residents ranks 13th. They are in the top half of counties in population which yields a lower ratio. However, 6 of the 7 counties with higher populations also have a higher acres per 1,000 ranking.



Champaign County and the Most Similar Forest Preserve Districts

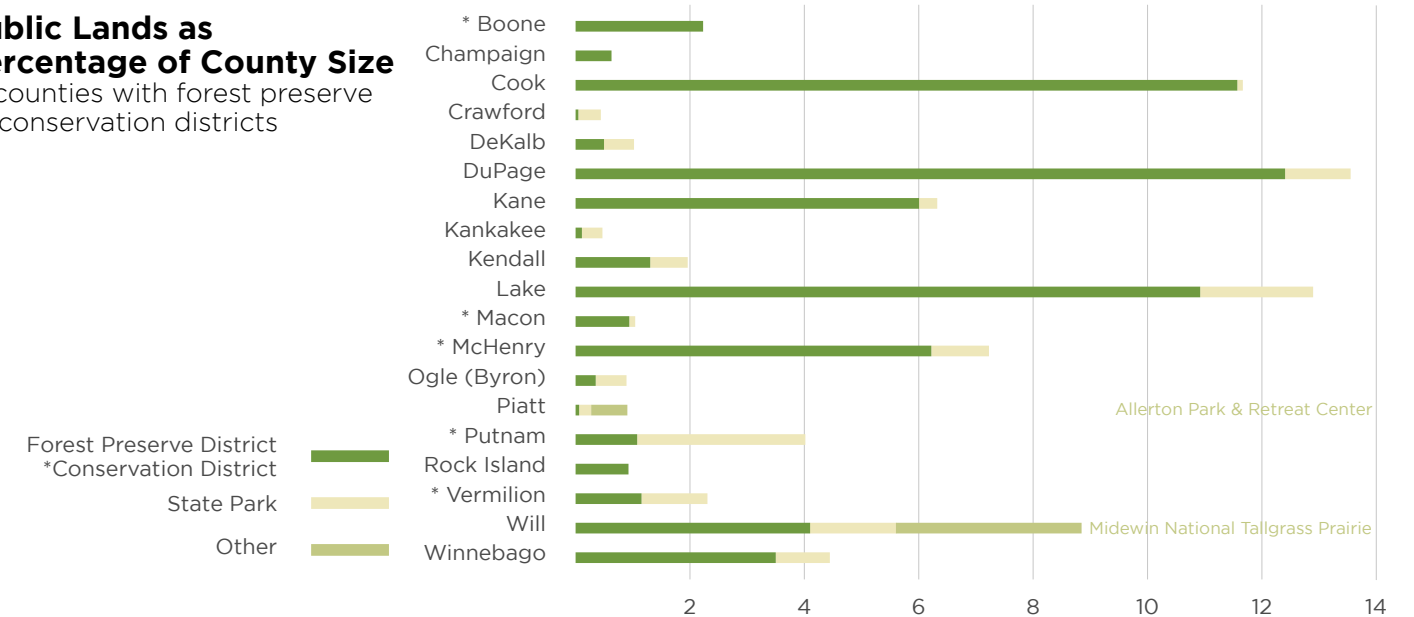
District (Founded)	County Pop.	County Size	Acres Managed	Ac./1k Residents	Ac./Sq. Mi.
Champaign (1935)	209,689	996 sq. mi.	4,041	19.3	4.1
DeKalb (1940)	104,897	631	2,000	19.1	3.2
Kendall (2006)	128,990	320	2,663	20.6	8.3
Rock Island (1941)	141,879	428	2,529	17.8	5.9

Source: Illinois Forest Preserve and Conservation District Database (Champaign County Forest Preserves, 2024)

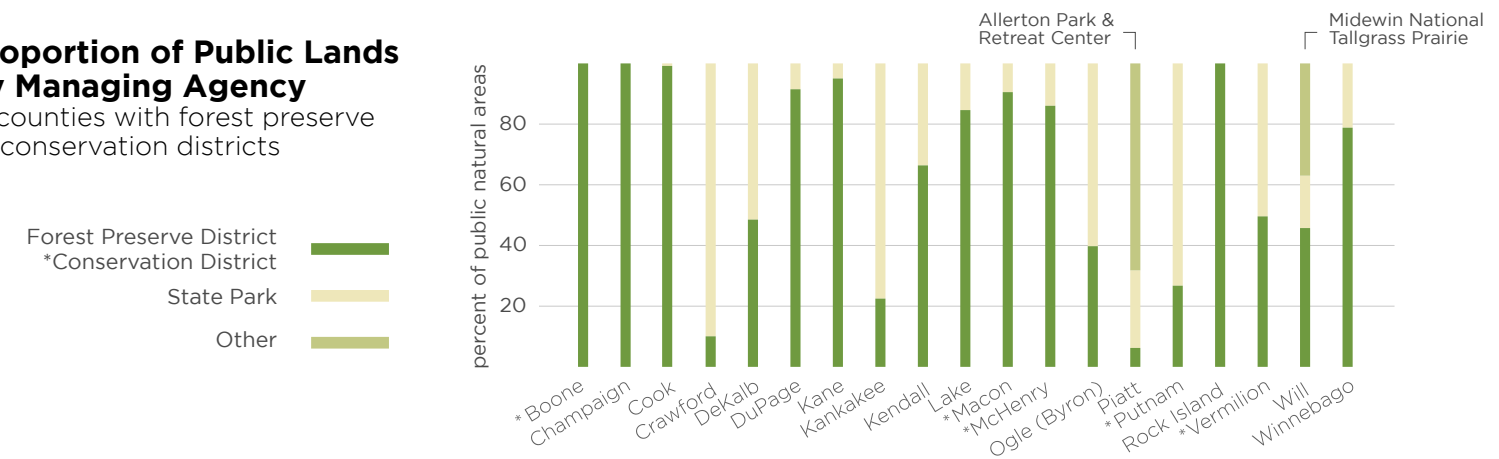
Less than 1% OF CHAMPAIGN COUNTY IS PROTECTED NATURAL AREA,

a significantly lower proportion than the national and state averages. Illinois itself has a relatively low percentage of protected natural areasⁱⁱⁱ (4.1% as of 2021¹²). As the figures below illustrate, while forest preserve and conservation districts own relatively small portions of their counties' land areas, their lands comprise a significant proportion of their counties' natural areas. **In Champaign County, the Forest Preserves own about three-quarters of the protected natural areas and over half of all parkland.**

Public Lands as Percentage of County Size in counties with forest preserve or conservation districts

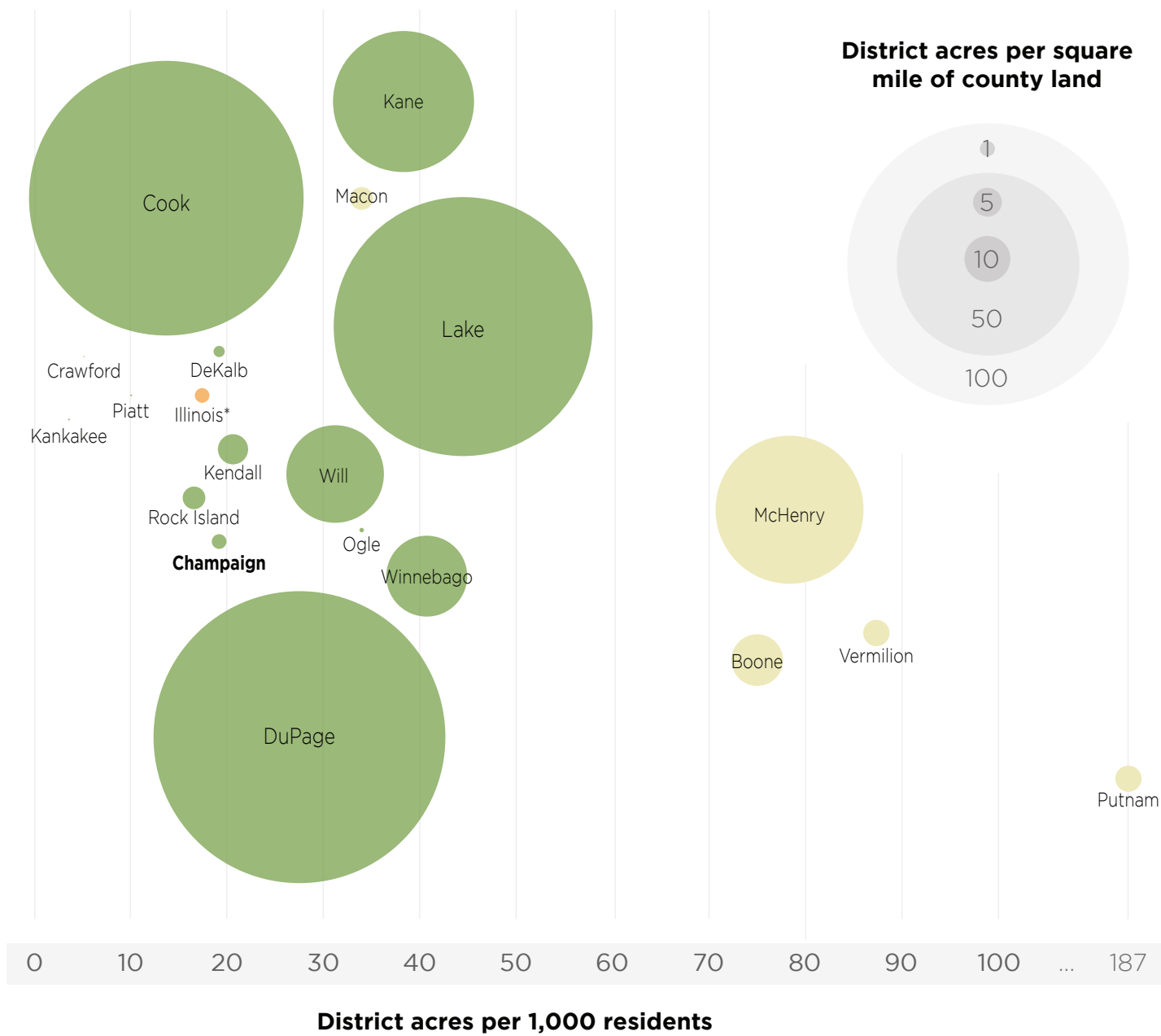


Proportion of Public Lands by Managing Agency in counties with forest preserve or conservation districts



ⁱⁱⁱ Natural areas are lands whose primary function is nature. (Forest Preserve lands are 87% natural area.) This plan uses Champaign County Regional Planning Commission data on "Protected Natural Lands" to generate statistics on natural areas for Champaign County. Municipal parks (0.23% the county) are excluded from these statistics because they are not primarily natural area, although a more precise count would include the natural areas in municipal parks.

MEASURING CONSERVATION & RECREATION District Acreages Relative to County Size & Population (Below) and Other Districts (Right)



- Forest preserve district
- Conservation district
- Illinois aggregate (all FPD and CD acres over IL population)

The graphic on p. 21 illustrates two different ways to measure forest preserve districts' services. The size of circles shows acreage relative to county size, which is a proxy for the amount of land in conservation. The x-axis shows acres per 1,000 residents, a common measure of access to parks for recreation. In both categories, Champaign County ranks in the bottom third. It ranks 9th of 19 in acreage (shown in the graphic on right).

Forest preserve and conservation district lands comprise about one-quarter of Illinois' protected lands. The Forest Preserves of Cook County's 70,000 acres are 30% of the 233,000 acres owned by Illinois forest preserve and conservation districts. Together, forest preserve and conservation districts protect 0.63% of Illinois lands.¹³

By law, Cook County is allowed to acquire up to 75,000 acres and all other forest preserve districts are allowed 55,000.¹⁴ Cook is the only one approaching its limit.

“**MY FAVORITE PART OF THE PRESERVES ARE ALL THE PRAIRIES AND WOODLANDS! I THINK THEY DO A GREAT JOB OF KEEPING THE PLACE CLEAN AND BRINGING BACK HISTORIC ECOSYSTEMS.**

- COMMUNITY MEMBER

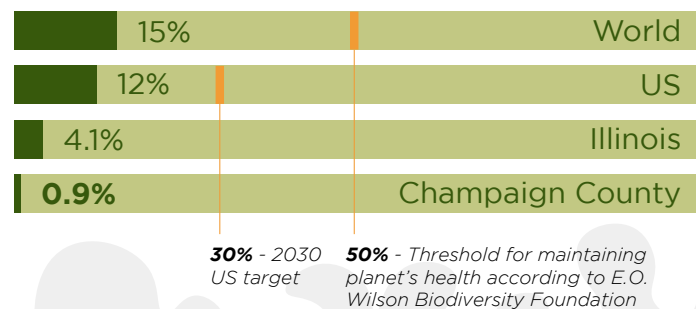


The Need for (More) Nature

Before it was an intensively developed agricultural landscape, Central Illinois was a “lush tallgrass prairie ecosystem supporting countless species of flora and fauna.”¹⁵ The fertile prairie soils that supported those flora and fauna would become “the most valuable natural resource in central Illinois” for agriculture.¹⁶ In 1820, prairie comprised an estimated 92.5% of Champaign County, or 592,300 acres.¹⁷ By 1976, only one acre remained.¹⁸ The modern landscape is largely unchanged from that created by settlers in the 1800s; less than 1% of Champaign County is protected natural area.^{iv}

Natural areas are fundamental to wellbeing and resilience for all living things, from providing habitat, to helping address climate change causes and effects, and supporting human mental, physical, and social health. Biodiversity is both inherently valuable and it promotes ecosystem services that protect humans from climate change effects.^{19,20} Natural areas store carbon in plant biomass and soil, provide resistance to flood and drought, clean the air and water, and regulate temperature.^v Natural areas also benefit human health: Parks and Recreation Magazine called spending time in nature “upstream preventative care” because of the way it underpins health,²¹ and many scientists believe being in nature supports fundamental body-regulating processes.^{vi} Natural areas can be large preserves, smaller installations of green infrastructure, and even private yards with native landscaping.

How Much Land is Protected?

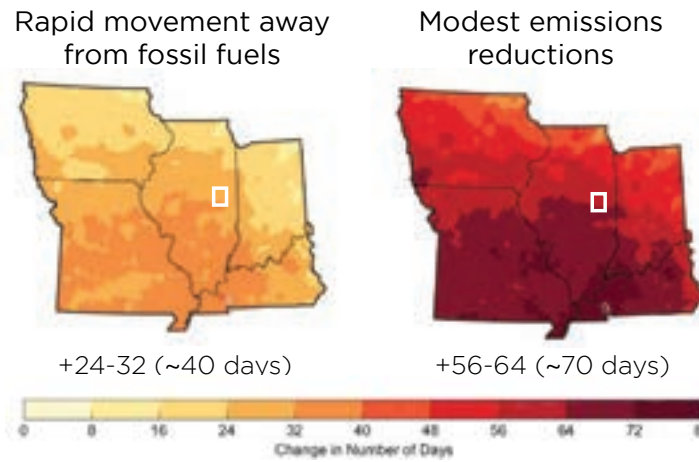


The loss of natural areas throughout the county decimated biodiversity, stripped humans of valuable climate change management tools, and created a human environment with unprecedentedly little nature. Agricultural development altered 95% of the first-order streams with headwaters in Champaign County, damaging aquatic ecosystems, increasing flooding and erosion risk,²² and depriving the region of the prairie's carbon sink, increasing atmospheric temperatures.²³ Based on the importance of biodiversity and natural areas to human and planetary health, there is a strong case for re-naturing to better balance the built and natural environments.

Environmental risks are perceived by global leaders to be the five most critical long-term threats to the world as well as the most potentially damaging to people and planet.²⁴ Climate action failure is the clear top perceived threat, followed by extreme weather and biodiversity loss. In Illinois, climate change is expected to continue to bring hotter average temperatures, longer droughts, and more heavy rain events.²⁵ According to the US Climate Vulnerability Index, Illinois ranks 11th of the 50 states in estimated deaths from climate disasters.²⁶ The top perceived threats of climate action failure, extreme weather, and biodiversity loss are related and reinforcing, but nature-based solutions can help address them simultaneously by providing climate action that dampens extreme weather while supporting biodiversity. Scientists estimate expanded and well-managed natural areas could offset one-fifth of US emissions²⁷ and provide one-third of the mitigation required to limit warming.^{28,29}

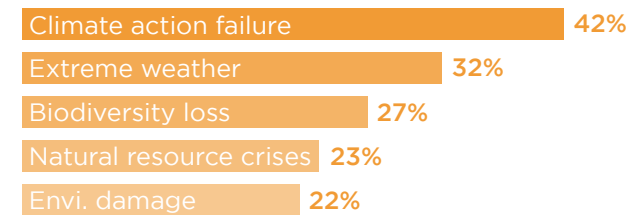
Left: Current totals of protected natural areas reveal significant county and state progress is needed to contribute to the White House's initiative to protect 30% of US lands and waters by 2030.

Changes in “Very Hot” Days by 2100



The Nature Conservancy's 2021 report used data from 32 global models to predict changes by 2100. Its two emissions scenarios predict one to two more months of 95+ degree days. Well-managed natural areas would help mitigate these changes.

Critical Threats for the Next 5-10 Years According to Global Leaders



Environmental issues are the top five perceived global threats for the next 5-10 years, according to the World Economic Forum's 2022 survey of 12,000 leaders from 124 countries.

- iv Local natural area loss parallels the global trend; humans have altered 97.2% of ecosystems in the last 500 years.³⁵
- v The global value of ecosystem services was estimated in 2015 to be \$29 trillion,³⁶ including thousands of dollars per acre from wetlands.³⁷
- vi Much of the existing research on the benefits of time in nature was summarized by Univ. of Illinois Professor Ming Kuo in a 2011 report for the National Recreation and Parks Association.³⁸
- vii This is an identical proportion to the 0.63% of land Illinois' 19 forest preserve and conservation districts protect.

The White House's initiative to protect 30% of US lands and waters by 2030 reflects the urgency communicated by global leaders. As of 2021, about 12% of US lands and 23% of waters were protected,³⁰ compared to about 15% globally.³¹ Locally, Champaign County's 0.9% protected natural area and Illinois' 4.1%³² fall drastically below targets. Illinois ranks 48th in percentage of protected natural area.³³ For Illinois to achieve 5% protected natural area as a state, its forest preserve and conservation districts would have to double in acreage.³⁴

Recommendations in The Nature Conservancy's *Assessment of the Impacts of Climate Change in Illinois* include conserving, restoring, expanding, and connecting natural ecosystems, specifically restoring wetlands along waterways and prairie at landscape scales. The *Champaign County Regional Environment Framework* (2014) recommends expanding protected natural areas within Champaign County. These recommendations align with the Forest Preserves' work and illustrate the importance of the Forest Preserves as the main source of nature in Champaign County. The Forest Preserves' 4,041 acres represent most of Champaign County's green space but just 0.63% of the land.^{vii}

Nature has the unique ability to concurrently address several of today's most pressing problems. The modern landscape's lack of nature carries consequences for all living things, including the loss of all of nature's benefits. Consensus from global leaders, national direction, and local recommendations align to indicate a greater role for nature. The Forest Preserves are one of the only organizations in Champaign County that can provide and expand the essential public services nature offers. These services – preserving biodiversity, managing climate change, and providing a nurturing human environment – will enable humans and non-humans to thrive and weather the problems of the present and future.

Existing Plans and Updates

FOREST PRESERVES MASTER PLAN (2010)

The last comprehensive plan was approved in 2010. Many of the goals in this plan have been either completed or seen significant progress. A portion of the initiatives have not been completed, not because of a lack of effort or resource allocation, but because the intent of the goal has evolved in the lifespan of the plan. Below is a summary of the most notable recommendations and the progress the Forest Preserves has made. As applicable, some of the ongoing initiatives in the 2010 plan have been incorporated into the current plan recommendations.

NOTABLE RECOMMENDATIONS

PROGRESS AS OF 2024

Land Acquisition

- Acquire land near River Bend
- Acquire land within Salt Fork watershed
- Acquire land adjacent to Middle Fork and along the Middle Fork River
- Assess Kaskaskia and Embarras watersheds for acquisitions

- Some small acquisitions completed, but land acquisition - especially in areas adjacent to preserves and near waterways - remains a recommendation

Museum & Education

- As outlined in the Interpretive Plan, interpret “natural” and “cultural” histories together
- Assess potential expansion of Museum
- Provide sufficient and adequate storage for Museum collection and potential additions

- Department reorganized to unify “natural” and “cultural” divisions
- No longer in plans to expand Museum
- Met primary objectives with additions of Education Center Classroom and Rankin Collections Care Center

Natural Areas Restoration

- Continue restoring Sangamon River’s landscape and ecosystems to presettlement conditions
- Continue ecosystem and natural area restoration within the forest preserves
- Prepare resource management plans for each of the preserves

- All specific restoration initiatives completed or in progress
- Management plans in draft

Outreach

- Look for opportunities to broaden our audience base and the media forms we use to communicate with them.
- Expand presence through partnerships, especially in urban areas (consider transportation).

- Increased social media presence but remains a recommendation
- Remains relevant - will reevaluate as part of recommendation

Homer Lake Forest Preserve

- Develop the county’s first natural playscape

- Playscape installed 2011

Lake of the Woods Golf Course

- Replace the irrigation system
- Address issues with sand bunkers

- Irrigation system mostly complete. Final phases are included in the Capital Plan
- Renovation of sand bunkers is completed

Mabery Gelvin Botanical Garden

- Create a plan for the Botanical Garden area addressing “the leaking pond, deteriorating waterfall, irrigation line replacement, new walkway design and an energy-efficient greenhouse.”

- Pond, waterfall, and greenhouse projects completed



Right: Photo by S. Schleef, 2021.

EXISTING PLANS AND UPDATES

RELEVANT LOCAL PLANS

Several local plans reference the Forest Preserves' properties and trails. The following organizations recognize the preserves' value to the community and seek to create regional connections.

VILLAGE OF MAHOMET, COMPREHENSIVE PLAN (2016)³⁹

The Village of Mahomet is a key partner of the Champaign County Forest Preserves. Its 2016 *Comprehensive Plan* states that the Sangamon River and the preserves are “perhaps the most influential elements in defining Mahomet’s character as a community.”

Relevant Excerpts

“Establish a joint marketing campaign between the Champaign County Forest Preserve District and Mahomet-area businesses.

“Partner with the Champaign County Forest Preserve to better align and market existing passive and active recreation amenities.

“Create a continuous trail along the Sangamon River, linking to the River Bend Forest Preserve, Sangamon River Greenway, Barber Park, and Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve.

“Explore the potential for boat/canoe/kayak access [on the Sangamon River].

The plan also discusses expanding walking and biking trails to complement Forest Preserves properties. The Sangamon River Walk is a potential trail along a nearly contiguous band of publicly owned land that the Village hopes could connect River Bend Forest Preserve to Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve. The Village’s multi-purpose path between US Route 150 and the east Lake of the Woods entrance has been completed since the plan was published.

CHAMPAIGN COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION, GREENWAYS AND TRAILS PLAN (2014)⁴⁰

The “Future Conditions” section of the *Greenways and Trails Plan* notes several connections of the Kickapoo Rail Trail (KRT). The St. Joseph section from Main St to the Salt Fork River was completed in 2017. Some sections, like CR 1600 E (High Cross Rd) in Urbana to CR 2650 E in Ogden and CR 2650 E Ogden to CR 2800 E (county line), are expected to be completed shortly after this plan is published. The plan also lists with medium priority 3.33 miles of side paths along US Route 150 in Mahomet and 1.42 miles of multi-use paths along Route 150 in Champaign. The plan positions trails like the KRT as conduits to conserve environmentally sensitive areas such as wetlands. The *Greenways and Trails Plan* includes several paths that would connect to forest preserves. The plan also notes several shorter connections, some complete as of 2024, that make Lake of the Woods more accessible throughout Mahomet.

Planned Connections to Preserves

Homer Lake Forest Preserve

Old Homer Park to Homer / 1.08 mi / Medium priority
 Homer Lake Forest Preserve to Old Homer Park / 1.12 mi / Medium priority
 Homer Lake Forest Preserve to Urbana / 9.36 mi / Medium priority

Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve

IL 47 Paths to Lake of the Woods Path / 1.67 mi / Complete

Middle Fork River Forest Preserve

County Hwy. 9 to US 136 / 5.2 mi. / Medium priority
 County Hwy. 22 to Ludlow limits / 8.81 mi. / Medium priority

River Bend Forest Preserve

Riverbluff Path to River Bend Forest Preserve / 0.32 mi / Medium priority
 Harris Trail to River Bend Forest Preserve / 2.33 mi / Medium priority
 Mid America Road to River Bend Forest Preserve Path / 1.47 mi / Low priority

CHAMPAIGN COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION, REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL FRAMEWORK (2020)⁴¹

The *Regional Environmental Framework*, also written by the Champaign County Regional Planning Commission, details environmental conditions to facilitate their consideration in development planning. The plan recommends expanding protected natural areas within Champaign County and offers several strategies to help reintegrate nature.

KICKAPOO RAIL TRAIL IN OTHER PLANS

Local and state plans from several agencies discuss establishing new segments of the Kickapoo Rail Trail in Champaign County. Plans involve local cities and park districts as well as the Champaign County Regional Planning Commission, which has published two studies evaluating the feasibility of extending the KRT. The Illinois Department of Transportation has also issued guidance, recommending a regional trail corridor be completed between Danville, Urbana-Champaign, and Bloomington-Normal. The progress of the KRT represents significant headway in creating the connection from Danville to Urbana-Champaign.

Plans Discussing the Kickapoo Rail Trail

Municipal Plans

City of Champaign Trails Plan (2011)
 City of Urbana Bicycle Master Plan (2016)
 City of Urbana Bicycle Wayfinding Plan (2020)
 City of Urbana Pedestrian Master Plan (2020)
 Urbana Park District Trails Master Plan (2016)
 Urbana Park District Strategic Plan (2020)

Champaign County Regional Planning Commission

Champaign-Urbana Long Range Transportation Plan (2011)
 Champaign County Greenways and Trails Plan (2014)
 Kickapoo Rail Trail Connectivity Study (2018)
 Kickapoo Rail Trail Extension Study (2020)

State Plans

Illinois Department of Transportation Bike Transportation Plan (2014)

EXISTING PLANS AND UPDATES

STATE AND NATIONAL GUIDANCE

ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES, STATEWIDE COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN (2021)⁴²

The SCORP is a statewide plan by the Department of Natural Resources that presents recreational resources, an assessment of outdoor recreation supply, examination of outdoor recreation activities, and attitudes toward recreation in Illinois. Based on its findings, the SCORP produces recommendations for conservation agencies across the state, summarized in the graphic to the right.

Recommendations for Conservation Agencies

Improving Health and Wellness

- Promote health benefits of nature-based activities to strengthen connections
- Plan for “active transportation” for safer and easier travel to parks
- Develop more programs for social interaction

Access to Parks and Recreation

- Acquire land for natural resource preservation and outdoor recreation
- Develop trail plans

Natural Resources and Conservation Mgmt.

- Take care of aging infrastructure
- Work toward equitable access to trails, greenways, parks, and natural areas
- Design communication campaigns to educate the public on the environment

Funding

- Identify and purchase land and water for preservation
- Partner and collaborate with public, private, and philanthropic agencies to achieve land acquisition and natural resource preservation goals
- Bolster support by demonstrating the economic, environmental, community/social, and health impacts and value parks have for their communities

Plan Implementation

- State aligns grant criteria with priorities such as land acquisition

ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES, ILLINOIS COMPREHENSIVE WILDLIFE CONSERVATION PLAN & STRATEGY (2005)⁴³

The Department of Natural Resources developed the CWCP as a condition of receiving federal conservation and restoration funding. The plan promotes conservation actions to protect threatened and endangered species and their habitats. It outlines strategies for addressing challenges to natural areas statewide, including:

- Purchase/protect grasslands of at least 80 acres;
- Emphasize ecological connectivity among forests and other habitat patches;
- Emphasize restoring floodplains and riparian corridors;
- Protect, enhance and restore aquatic habitats where priorities have been identified (sections of the Sangamon River and Middle Fork of the Vermilion in Champaign County);
- Acquire land where existing SGCN (Species of Greatest Conservation Need) populations are declining and require protection, enhancement, and restoration;
- Acquire and protect existing wetlands or restorable wetlands; and
- Increase access to open lands and waters within and near urban areas for wildlife-related recreation.

ILLINOIS ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY, STATE OF ILLINOIS PRIORITY CLIMATE ACTION PLAN (2024)⁴⁴

Illinois' *Priority Climate Action Plan (2024)* includes the Natural Carbon Storage Initiative, which emphasizes natural carbon storage for climate change mitigation. The initiative and its incentives will target private and urban landowners. Its explicit integration of natural areas restoration, recreational opportunities, and climate resilience is an important private-sector complement to the work of public landholding bodies like forest preserve and conservation districts.

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY, ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE IN ILLINOIS (2021)⁴⁵

The Nature Conservancy's *Assessment of the Impacts of Climate Change in Illinois* recommends conserving, restoring, expanding, and connecting natural ecosystems, specifically restoring wetlands along waterways and prairie at landscape scales. These recommendations align with the Forest Preserves' work and have implications for their role as the climate changes in Champaign County. See [p. 24](#) for more discussion of this report.

THE WHITE HOUSE, EXECUTIVE ORDER: CONSERVING AND RESTORING AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL (2021)⁴⁶

In 2021, the White House introduced a national initiative to conserve at least 30 percent of our lands and waters by 2030. A follow-up report outlined strategies for agencies including:

- Conserving and restoring wildlife migration corridors through incentives and local collaboration; and
- Prioritizing conservation and outdoor recreation in land and water management planning.

A kayaker enjoys Homer Lake at sunset. Photo by A. Sobh, 2023.



EXISTING PLANS AND UPDATES

PUBLIC OPINION OF PARKS AND RECREATION

THEMES FROM STATE AND NATIONAL SURVEYS

Findings from recent National Recreation and Parks Association reports⁴⁷ and the *Illinois Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (2021)* highlight the assets and challenges of parks and recreation agencies. Parks and recreation services are economically, socially, environmentally vital.⁴⁸ During the pandemic, these ideas became increasingly mainstream. However, the disparity between White and non-White people's attitudes toward their local facilities signifies the need to make parks services, facilities, and agencies more equitable.

Compared to those identifying as white, non-white and/or Hispanic people consistently report feeling their local parks and facilities are:

- less easily accessible;
- less safe and welcoming; and
- less inclusive to people of all ages, incomes, races, ethnicities, abilities, gender identities, expressions, and sexual orientations.

According to Illinois residents in a 2020 survey,⁴⁹ developing more inclusive and ADA-accessible programs and facilities ranked as the fourth-highest funding priority for their local agencies. The top three were:

- Maintaining existing areas;
- Providing educational programs; and
- Improving existing natural areas.

US residents surveyed strongly support parks and recreation agencies and want them to help their communities adapt to climate change and make equity a priority. Illinoisans also want their agencies to acquire land for trails, wildlife protection, and natural areas.

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC OPINION SURVEYS

Nationwide, residents highly value their local parks and recreation agencies and the work they do. However, these services are unequally distributed. In addition to wanting their agencies to continue providing vital services through trails, land acquisition, natural areas provision, and climate change management, residents would like to see their local parks and recreation agencies prioritize racial equity.





Community Profile

Champaign County demographics & trends

*Attendees await the Grand Opening of the Kickapoo Rail Trail.
Photo by Forest Preserve staff, 2017.*

Community Profile

This section presents, analyzes, and summarizes key metrics to evaluate demographic changes in Champaign County. Population trends help inform how the Forest Preserves provides their services.

POPULATION

Champaign County's population has grown steadily since 1900, from around 50,000 to just over 200,000 today. The first preserve, Lake of the Woods, opened in 1948 during the peak of the county's growth.

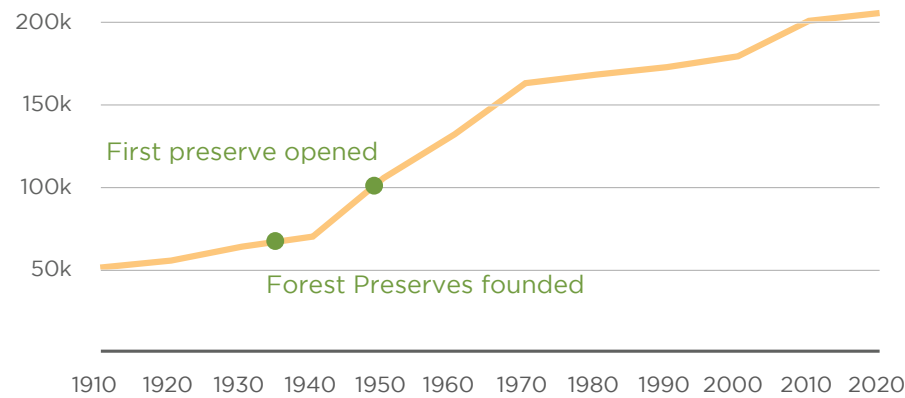
Like many places, Champaign County grew fastest during the post-war boom, expanding by over 50% from 1940 to 1950 and maintaining about 25% growth for the next two decades. According to Census data, the county population has never decreased from one decade to the next.

Municipality Populations

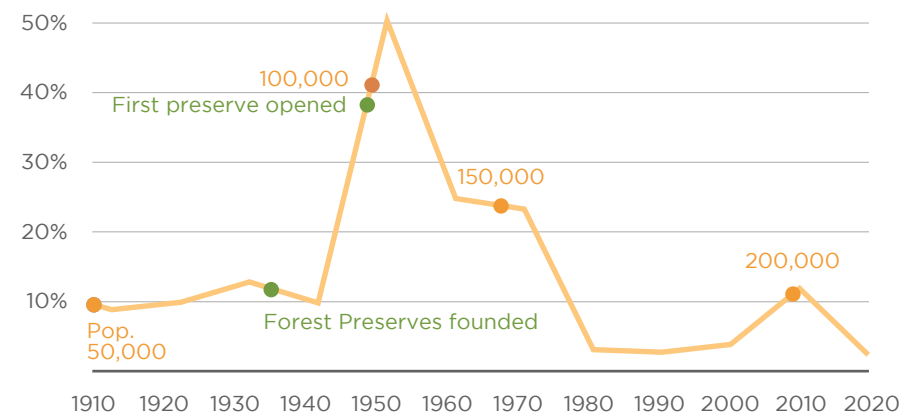
Municipality	2020 Pop.	Change
Champaign	88,302	8%
Urbana	38,336	-8%
Rantoul	12,371	0%
Mahomet	9,434	23%
Savoy	8,857	18%
St. Joseph	3,810	-4%
Tolono	3,604	4%
Fisher	2,062	9%
Philo	1,392	-5%
Sidney	1,208	-2%
Homer	1,073	-11%
Thomasboro	1,034	-9%
Gifford	911	-7%
Ogden	729	-11%
Pesotum	550	0%
Sadorus	402	-3%
Bondville	388	-14%
Broadlands	316	-10%
Ludlow	308	-20%
Royal	293	0%
Ivesdale	265	-1%
Longview	112	-37%
Foosland	75	-35%
Champ. Co.	205,865	2.38%
Illinois	12,812,508	-0.14%

Source: 2020 Census Redistricting Data Summary Files

Champaign County Population Over Time



Population Growth Over Previous Decade

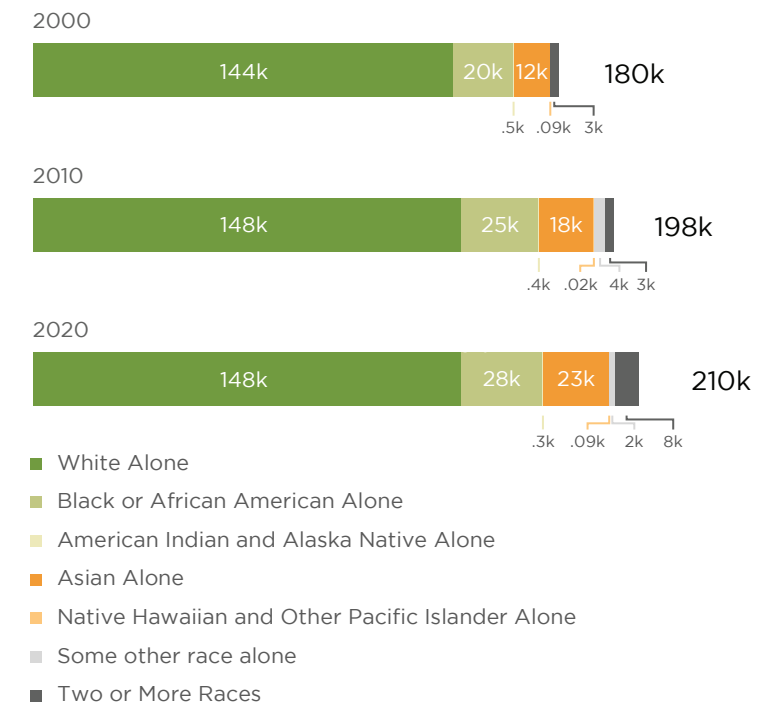


From 2010 to 2020, growth was slower than in any other 10-year period, but the county still gained 5,000 residents. Champaign grew more than any county outside Chicagoland and was one of only 15 counties in Illinois to grow from 2010 to 2020. Still, within Champaign County, 18 of 23 municipalities shrank, and only Champaign (+7,207), Mahomet (+2,176), and Savoy (+1,577) grew by more than 200.

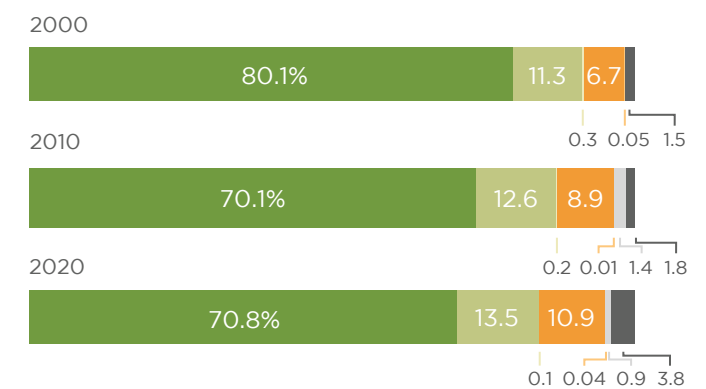
RACE & ETHNICITY

The heavy majority of Champaign County identifies as white alone. However, that majority shrunk from 80% to just over 70% from 2000 to 2020. The population of people identifying as White alone remained relatively stable during that time, while the Black, Asian, and multiracial populations all grew significantly.

Population Count by Race



Population Proportions by Race



Population Proportion by Race, Changes from 2000-2020



By percentage, the multiracial population grew the most, nearly tripling since 2000. By count, the Asian population grew the most, from 12,000 to 23,000. The Black population also grew by 8,000, about 40%, from 2000 to 2020.

See p. 101 for discussion of racial and ethnic demographics and Forest Preserve visitation.

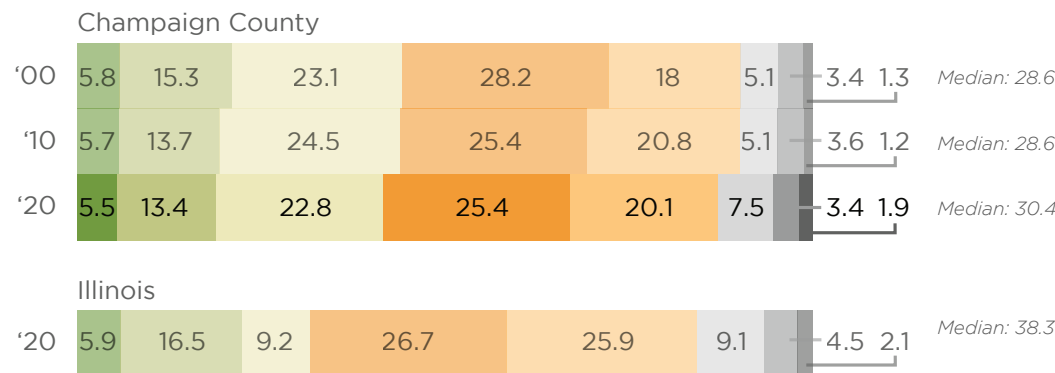
AGE

Champaign County skews young but its proportion of older residents is increasing. The median age of 30.4 in 2020 was nearly 8 years younger than the Illinois median. Much more of Champaign County – 67.1% versus 58.3% for the state as a whole – was under 45 in 2020. Champaign County’s young population is anchored more by students as opposed to families with children. 22.8% of the county was 18 to 24 in 2020 compared to just 9.2% of Illinois, but more of the state was under 18.

While Champaign County’s population remains younger than average, the dynamics are shifting. The three youngest age ranges,

Population by Age Group

■ < 5 ■ 5-17 ■ 18-24 ■ 25-44 ■ 45-64 ■ 65-74 ■ 75-84 ■ 85+



including people from birth to 24, all shrank in proportion to the total population compared to 2010. The proportion of people aged 25 to 44 stayed the same as in 2010 but was still nearly 3% down from 2000. This supports the idea that campus was undercounted when students returned home during the pandemic.

Meanwhile, those 65 and older comprised 2% more of the population than in years past, including 2.4% share increase among people 65 to 74, the largest growth of any age group. The only other group in Champaign County to gain in proportion in 2020 was people 85 and older.

Younger & Older Populations in Champaign County

	0-44	65+
2000	72.4%	9.8%
2010	69.3%	9.9%
2020	67.1%	11.8%

Sources: ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2000 Census of Population and Housing

LANGUAGE

Nearly one in five Champaign County residents speaks a language other than English at home. The county’s bigger cities generally have highest concentration of non-English speakers. In 4 of the 5 largest cities, over 11.8% of the population speaks a language other than English at home.

However, the county’s concentration of non-English speakers is well below the state’s. Only Urbana’s rate is above the state average. In 18 of the 19 smallest municipalities, over 96% of the population speaks English at home.

Speaking a Language Other Than English at Home - Highest Rates

City (Size Rank)	% Pop.
Urbana (2)	24.2
Champaign (1)	22.7
Savoy (5)	20.4
Rantoul (3)	11.8
Champaign County	17.4
Illinois	23.0

Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2016-2020

INCOME & POVERTY

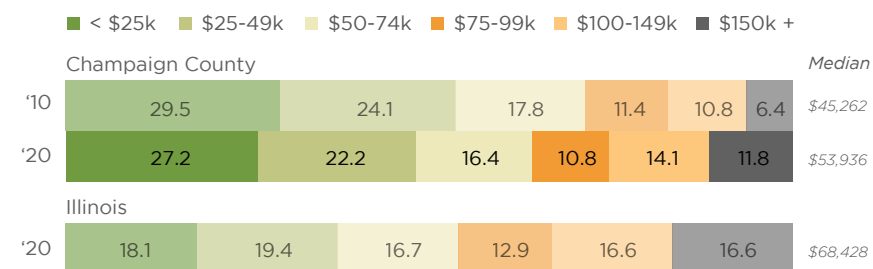
From 2010 to 2020, Champaign County’s median income increased from over \$45,000 to just under \$54,000 (IL: \$68,428). While wealth increased during that time, it became less evenly distributed.

Lower income categories comprised 4.2% less of county households and 8.7% more households earned over \$100,000 than in 2010. However, more households earned under \$25,000 than earned over \$100,000, and the proportion earning between \$25,000

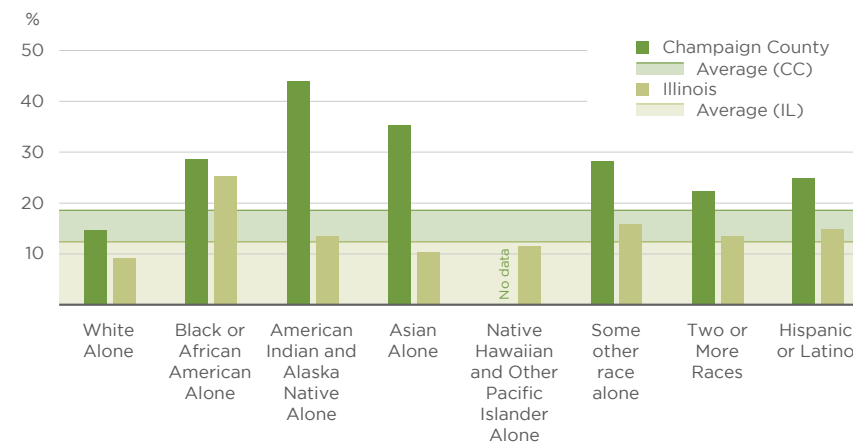
and \$100,000 shrank by almost 4%. With this shrinking of middle incomes, those on the extremes – under \$25,000 and above \$100,000 – comprised over half of all households in 2020.

Champaign County’s poverty rate dropped from 21.3% in 2010 to 19.1% in 2020. However, it was still well above the state’s 12%, and every race and ethnicity measured had a higher poverty rate in Champaign County compared to the state average.

Median Income - Percentage of Households



Poverty Rate by Race & Ethnicity



COMMUNITY PROFILE SUMMARY

Trends show Champaign County continuing to diversify. The Forest Preserves should ensure they meet the changing needs of the county and provide their services equitably.

The poverty rate in the county is relatively high, and wealth inequality increased sharply from 2010 to 2020. The Forest Preserves should take these factors into consideration when setting rates and creating fee structures for paid services.

Champaign County is disproportionately young but the older generation is increasing relative to the whole. The Forest Preserves should remain aware of this shift when planning amenities and programming.

Illinois officials have expressed doubt in Census totals, claiming populations were undercounted in 2020 due to the pandemic.



Community Input

Feedback methods & results

Photo by Forest Preserve staff, 2023.

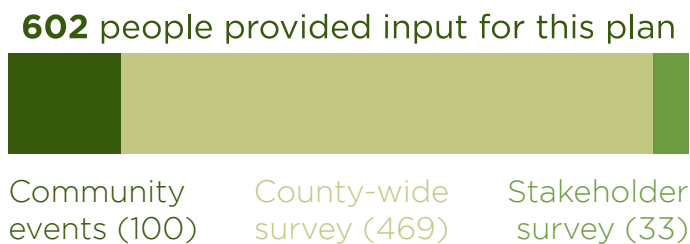
Community Input

Gathering input is vital to creating a plan that responds to and anticipates community needs. To maximize the impact of the Comprehensive Plan, staff gathered feedback through: conversations with residents at farmers markets and street fairs in Champaign, Mahomet, Rantoul, and Urbana; detailed surveys of staff, board members, and other key stakeholders; and a county-wide, generalizable needs assessment survey. This variety of feedback gives the Forest Preserves a more complete picture of participation and attitudes than ever. The input gathered, alongside other background research and analysis of existing conditions, informs the [recommendations](#) of the 2040 Comprehensive Plan.

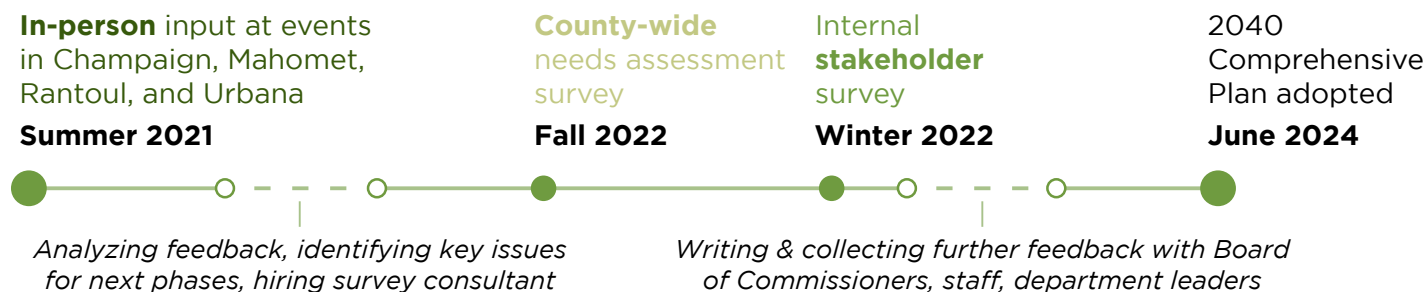


Overview

The Forest Preserves heard from hundreds of people and analyzed their input extensively. Below is a brief description of each phase of input gathering followed by abbreviated results. See [Appendix N-O](#) for methods, [P-U](#) for full stakeholder survey results, and [AJ](#) for the complete county-wide survey.



Community Input Timeline



IN-PERSON INPUT AT COMMUNITY EVENTS

The Forest Preserves began gathering input for the Comprehensive Plan in summer 2021. Rather than hosting an event specific to the Forest Preserves, staff attended farmers markets and street festivals to reach a broader sample of the population. Staff asked attendees about their favorite preserves, what improvements were important to them, and how the Forest Preserves could serve them better. This less formal research was not representative of the whole community but it helped direct the next phases of input, including what topics to explore in greater detail with the needs assessment survey.

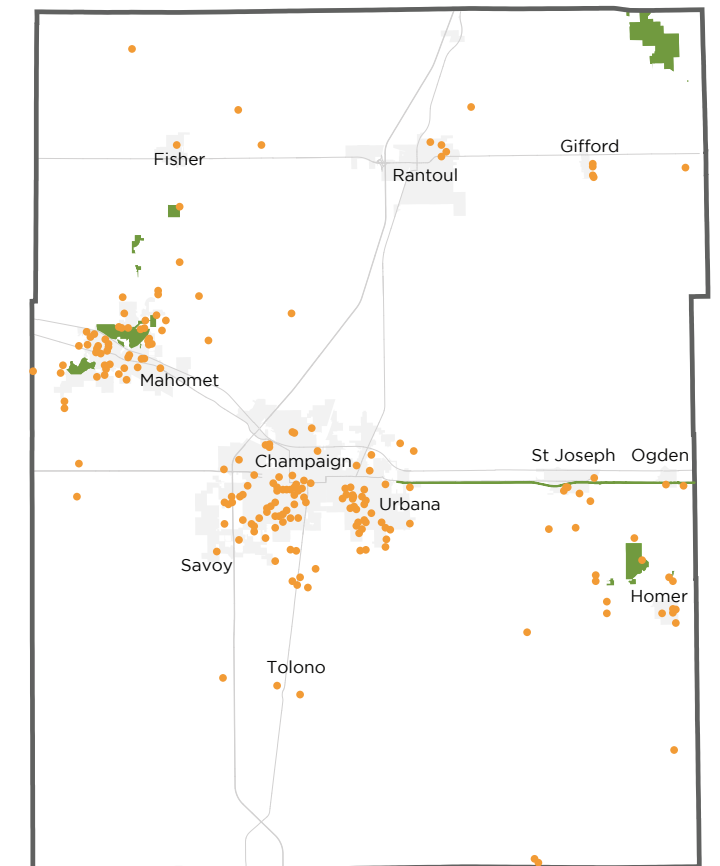
INTERNAL STAKEHOLDER SURVEYS

Staff gathered input internally through a SWOT analysis and two-part visioning activity. SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) is a tool commonly used by organizations to assess and plan for the future. The visioning activity asked participants to imagine up to three lofty 50-year goals for the Forest Preserves, then explain any steps that could be taken in the next 10-years to make progress toward each 50-year goal. As the Forest Preserves' most invested members, the Board of Commissioners, staff, the Forest Preserve Friends Foundation (Foundation), and the Citizens Engagement Committee (formerly Citizens Advisory Committee, or CAC - now CEC) were all offered this survey as an opportunity to provide detailed feedback to help guide the Forest Preserves.

COUNTY-WIDE NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY

As a taxpayer-funded agency, the Forest Preserves strive to represent the desires of residents. Needs assessment surveys are standard practice for agencies to understand public opinion. aQity Research and Insights, Inc. surveyed 469 Champaign County residents to understand their views of the Forest Preserves. Because of the demographics of survey respondents, the survey results are mostly representative of the county, although responses are slightly biased toward users. This survey provides an important update as the Forest Preserves last conducted a needs assessment survey in 2014.

Distribution of Responses to County-wide Survey



The survey conducted by aQity Research and Insights, Inc. sampled from throughout the county and weighted the results to match Census data.

Community Input Results

IN-PERSON INPUT AT COMMUNITY EVENTS

When asked in which of fifteen areas they would allocate their tax dollars, participants' top five responses were more natural areas restoration, new and improved trails, acquiring new land and preserves, extending the Kickapoo Rail Trail, and adding new kids' play areas. Adding natural areas, trails, and lands are consistent responses across all the input gathered for this plan.

'Trails' was the most mentioned topic among free-responses, and adding or improving trails ranked third of fifteen improvements participants could choose from. This feedback aligns with other public feedback from the needs assessment survey, where residents expressed trails were the number one reason they visit. Outdoor Recreation was the most-mentioned category with many comments relating to water activities. Land Preservation and Stewardship were the second and third most common categories. Comments on these top categories were overwhelmingly positive. There are several barriers which keep residents from visiting preserves, including lack of awareness and transportation issues. These issues were also reflected in the needs assessment survey results.

Staff gather feedback at Rantoul Freedom Fridays in July 2021. Photo by Forest Preserve staff.

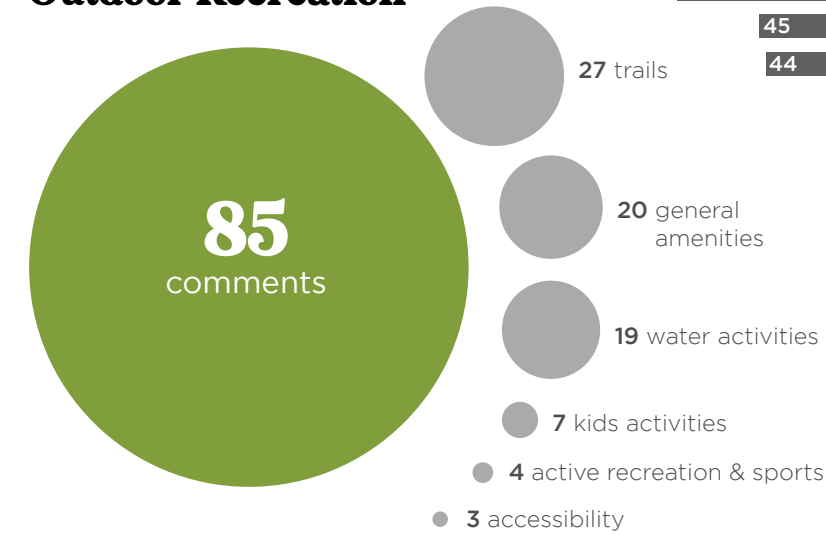


For a colorblind-friendly version of this graphic, see [Appendix P](#).

"Why do (or don't) you visit?"

Free-response comments by category and sentiment
Single comments removed

Outdoor Recreation

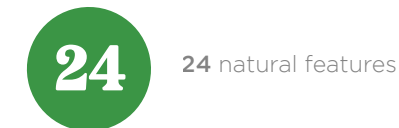


"How would you spend your tax dollars?"

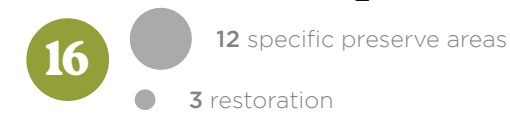
Total votes from all events



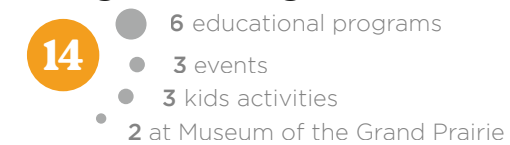
Land Preservation



Land Stewardship



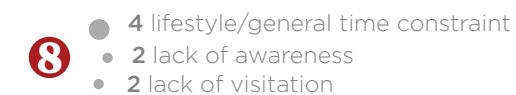
Programming



Facilities & Infrastructure



Barriers to Visitation



Source: Community events input

Community Input Results

INTERNAL STAKEHOLDER SURVEYS

SWOT ANALYSIS

Finances and Land Preservation, or the Forest Preserves' ability to manage land, were the top two categories overall and top-five for each group – Board, staff, and CEC/Foundation. Within the Finance category, comments leaned negative; the majority of respondents were concerned about the impacts of market forces on revenues and expenses (although it is worth noting this survey took place during a period of rapid inflation). Land Stewardship, or the way the Preserves manage land, was also a top-five category for Board and staff responses, which applauded that the Preserves protect land and offer a variety of natural areas. Comments about the land categories were mostly positive. In the community events input, these were also the second and third most commonly mentioned categories.

Outside the top categories, the most commonly mentioned narrower topics were concerns over a difficulty prioritizing efforts as an organization (Weakness: Mission & Vision; mentioned almost exclusively by staff); that there is a lack of public awareness (Weakness: Outreach); that the preserves are too sparsely distributed (Weakness: Accessibility); and that there are opportunities to expand partnerships with other organizations (Opportunity: Outreach).

VISIONING

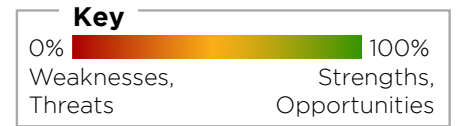
There was no consensus on a 50-year goal among all groups. Survey respondents from the Board of Commissioners and staff both reported they would like to see the Forest Preserves eliminate their carbon footprint in the next 50 years. Staff and CEC/Foundation members said they would like to see the Preserves expand their acreage – most commonly they stated it should double. Board members also said they would like to see the nature center established. Nearly half of staff reported they would like the Forest Preserves to be recognized as a regional leader in conservation.

Among proposed 10-year steps to achieve these goals, the Facilities & Infrastructure category was the most commonly mentioned, mostly as it related to carbon footprint goals. Several Board and staff members stated the Preserves should develop carbon footprint reduction plans. Facilities & Infrastructure was a top-3 category for all groups. Several staff said the Preserves should increase the scale of their ecosystem restoration in order to be recognized as a conservation leader.

For a colorblind-friendly version of this graphic, see [Appendix Q](#).

"Evaluate the Forest Preserves' Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats."

Comments by category and sentiment. Comments with 1-2 occurrences removed.



Source: Internal stakeholder surveys

Community Input Results

COUNTY-WIDE NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY

Nearly two-thirds of survey respondents expressed high satisfaction with the Forest Preserves. Esteem ratings were higher than all other local government agencies and exceeded other counties' ratings of their own forest preserve and conservation districts from previous aQity surveys. Over half of respondents expressed complete satisfaction with the overall experience, upkeep, accessibility, and safety when visiting a Forest Preserve location. 84% of respondents said they had visited a preserve in the last two years, with Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve the most-visited location (70%) followed by Homer Lake Forest Preserve (49%). Almost three-quarters of respondents believed the Forest Preserves provide good value for the taxes they collect (half said 'excellent value'). People said they most liked that properties were well-maintained, that the Forest Preserves provide access to nature, and that they provide trails for walking and biking.

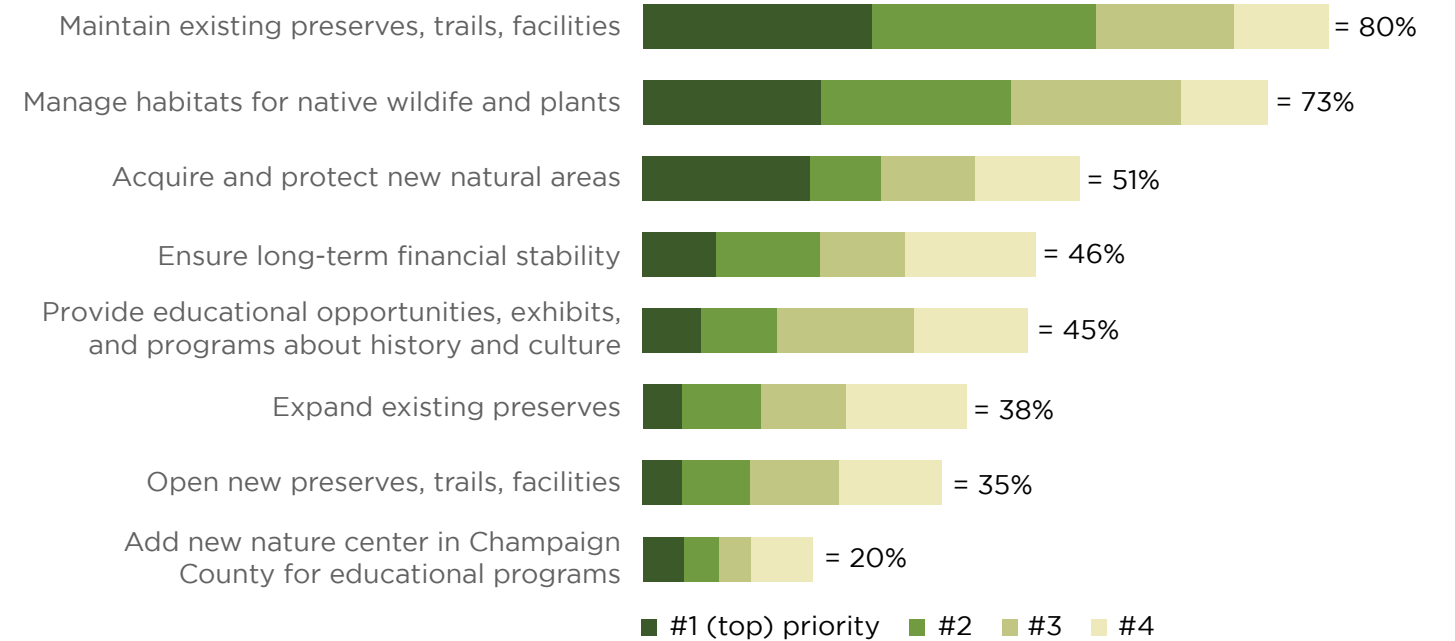
Top suggestions for improvement among open-ended responses included trail maintenance and wayfinding improvements, as well as the Forest Preserves providing more information about their offerings. Regarding specific prospective improvements, respondents placed the most importance on the further development of trails: enhancing them, expanding them, and improving their accessibility. Trails are the main draw to the preserves, as more than four out of five reported they walk or hike during their visits. Likewise, four in five residents wanted it to be a top priority for the Forest Preserves to maintain their existing preserves, trails, and facilities. About three in four said managing habitats should be a top priority, and more than half ranked acquiring and protecting new natural areas in their top four.

Weaknesses/Improvements Sought for the Forest Preserves



Above: County-wide survey (2023) results show most respondents had no suggestions for improvement, but among those offered, better trails and outreach were the top concerns.

Top Priorities/Opportunities for the Forest Preserves



Above: Respondents to the county-wide survey (2023) indicate their top priorities among a list of eight strategic objectives.

Just under half of county-wide survey respondents wanted the Forest Preserves to prioritize ensuring long-term financial stability (46%) and providing educational opportunities (45%). Regarding education, three in five who attended Forest Preserves programming and exhibits were highly satisfied, but two-thirds of respondents were uninterested in participating and over half were unaware or had not participated. In the past two years, 28% of survey respondents reported they had visited Homer Lake Interpretive Center, with 29% having visited at least once every three months. Among this small core of frequent visitors representing about 8% of respondents, 90% were highly satisfied with the programs at the Interpretive Center.

Due to limited staff and program space at the Homer Lake Interpretive Center,^{viii} this survey included a series of questions to evaluate attitudes toward a potential new facility. One in five residents felt adding a new nature center should be a top-four priority, but this ranked last among the eight strategic objectives tested.^{ix} In another question, updating the Interpretive Center or adding a new nature center ranked in the middle of eleven prospective improvements, behind outdoor recreation amenities but ahead of improvements to other facilities.

viii Residents were not informed of the existing facility's limitations in the survey.

ix African Americans were the most likely group to rank "Add new nature center" as their #1 priority (15% vs. 5% overall), a top-four priority (45% vs. 20%), and rate it as important (7.2/10 versus 6.3/10).

Community Input Results

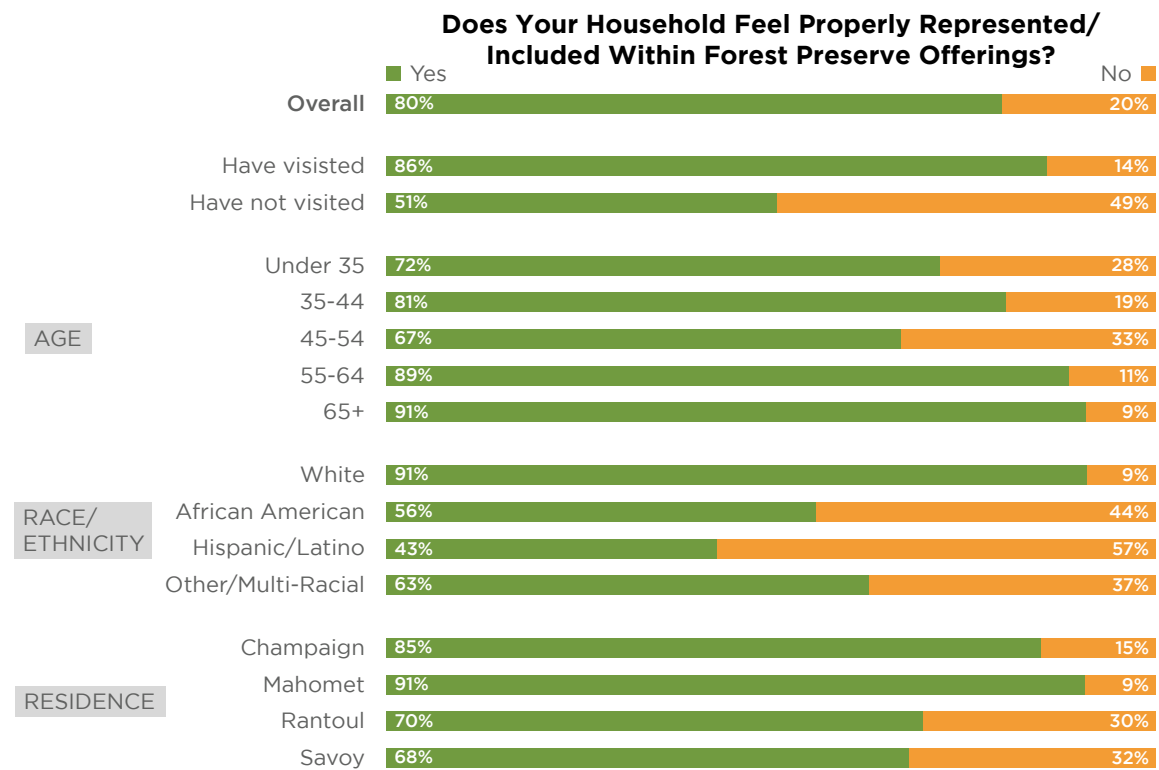
COUNTY-WIDE SURVEY CONTINUED

Conservation and environmental topics (19%) were the most suggested for programs at a potential new nature center, followed by a variety of other nature education ideas. People were most interested in a new facility offering program and activity space, especially outdoors (62% interested and the top priority for 26%). Live animal exhibits were the #2 priority overall (the top priority for 13%). Spaces for adults, children, and teens all drew interest from at least one-third of respondents.

Among locations for a new nature center, residents preferred renovating the existing facility (42%) to building a new facility (37% - with 18%, especially younger residents, preferring Homer Lake, and 19% preferring a location elsewhere). Two in five believed the Forest Preserves should not build a new nature center at all. Residents reported they rarely traveled to nature centers in other counties. Nearly two-thirds of residents said they would

be willing to travel up to a half hour to visit a new Forest Preserve nature center, but 11% reported they would not visit regardless of travel time.

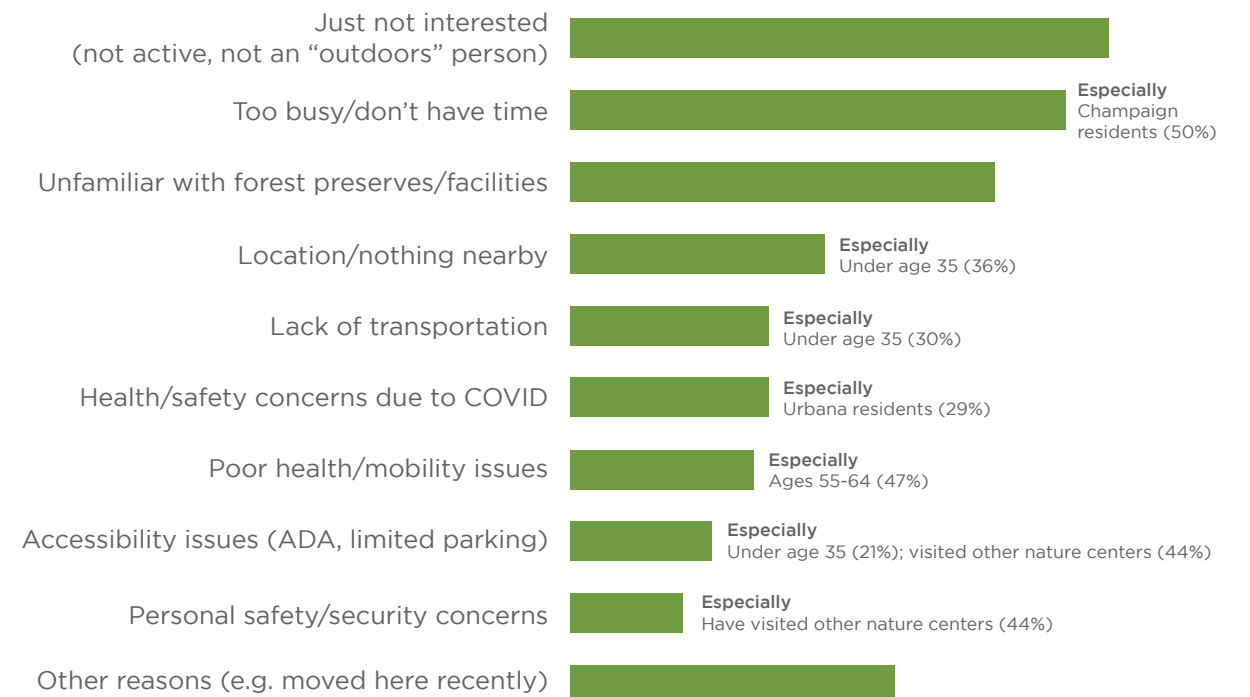
Despite the Forest Preserves' high esteem ratings, one in five respondents felt unrepresented according to a wide range of reasons, including a lack of outreach or a lack of culturally appropriate programming. Groups who rated the Forest Preserves less favorably included Hispanics/Latinos, African Americans, and lower-income residents. These groups also tended to visit less often; 39% of African Americans and 30% of those making under \$35,000 per year said they had not visited in the past two years, both well above the 16% county average. The top reasons county-wide for someone not having visited the Forest Preserves were lack of interest (38%), lack of time (35%), and unfamiliarity (30%).



Left: The results of a question from the 2023 county-wide survey illustrate demographic disparities in whether people feel the Forest Preserves represent them.

Reasons for Not Using/Visiting Forest Preserve Sites

46 responses



Right: Responses to the 2023 county-wide survey indicate the variety of barriers to visitation.

While lack of interest or time are largely insurmountable barriers, the Forest Preserves have an opportunity to reach the nearly one-third of residents who are unfamiliar. Among those who said they were familiar with the Forest Preserves, most received their information from the website (59%, with 33% stating it was their preferred source), followed by social media (41%; 22% preferred), then word-of-mouth (32%; 8%). Those under 35 received information via social media (57%) and word-of-mouth (44%) significantly more than average. They also visited the Forest Preserves significantly less often than the county average (31% reported not having visited in the last two years vs. the 16%

average), presenting an opportunity to reach them via their preferred methods. Older adults said they used the Leaflet more often (46% vs. 23% average), suggesting the Forest Preserves develop different strategies to engage younger versus older audiences. Additional outreach strategies could be developed to address the disparities of representation among non-white residents, as well as to promote awareness of offerings, such as programming, and the excellent value and stewardship the Forest Preserves represent.

See [Recommendations](#) for more implications of these findings and [Appendix AJ](#) for the full report from aQity Research and Insights, Inc.

Inventory of Facilities

Evaluating facility conditions throughout the preserves

Looking west from the Botanical Garden to the Museum. Photo by R. Gupta, 2019.

Inventory of Facilities

Introduction

With 7 preserves on over 4,000 acres of land and an abundance of built, bought, and natural assets, the Forest Preserves must balance resources for ongoing maintenance and new improvements along with those needed to provide educational opportunities and outdoor recreation. In this section, a summary of each preserve outlining its history, character, and recent improvements sets the stage for considering the improvements and plans needed over the next 25 years.

As a part of the annual budget process, the Forest Preserves update their 5-year capital plan to prioritize spending needs. While the capital plan is a crucial document in balancing the budget and short-term planning, it is not an effective tool in capturing projects that are on the horizon but not currently funded or fully planned. This chapter identifies long-term needs through an examination of each preserve, including its defining characteristics and the state of its facilities and structures.

Facility Report Cards

This chapter contains facility report cards following an introduction to each preserve. These help illustrate the overall state of facilities and structures throughout the preserves, including their use, size, age, and condition. The “score” was calculated by considering accessibility concerns highlighted in the Forest Preserves’ ADA Transition Plan, how well the facility maximizes occupancy, the age of the roof, and the average age of heating and cooling systems.

40

acres of roads & parking

46

miles of trails
14 paved

577

acres of waters

55

miles of shoreline

40 buildings on 138,760 sq ft
26 shelters on 14,050 sq ft
16 restrooms on 6,540 sq ft
79 roofs covering 166,756 sq ft



107 HVAC units

11 passenger vehicles
16 utility vehicles
27 boats

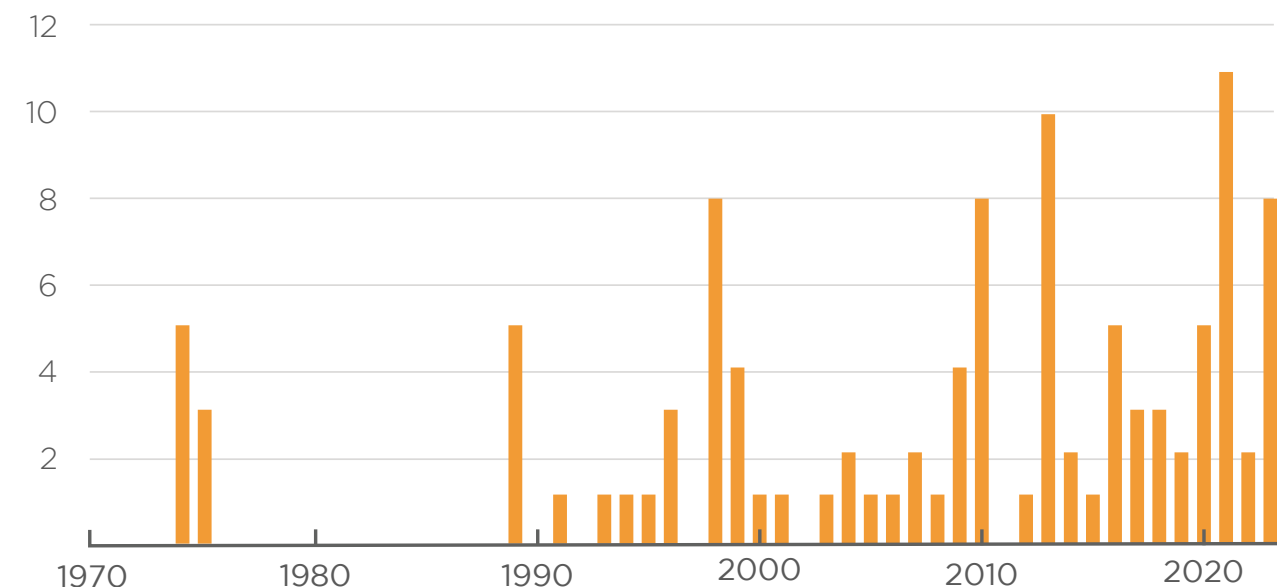
65 golf carts
77 pieces of small equipment
141 pieces of large equipment

HVAC & ROOF INVENTORY

HVAC & Roof Counts and Replacement Costs

	Heating & Cooling Units	Roofs
Count	107 <i>70 at Lake of the Woods 23 at Middle Fork River 12 at Homer Lake 2 at Sangamon River</i>	166,756 sq. ft. <i>103,456 at Lake of the Woods 30,010 at Middle Fork River 18,770 at Homer Lake 9,830 at Sangamon River 4,690 at River Bend</i>
Median Installation Date	2010 <i>Ranges from 1970s to 2022</i>	2003 <i>Ranges from 1960s to 2022</i>
Median Replacement Date	2028 <i>Average lifespan 18 years</i>	2032 <i>Average lifespan 40 years for steel 40 years for composite 20 years for asphalt 15 years for flat</i>
Cost to Replace All	\$855,500	\$1,719,254
Cost to Replace All Due Over the Next 10 Years	\$59,000/year <i>for 10 years, accounting for projected inflation</i>	\$73,000/year <i>for 10 years, accounting for projected inflation</i>

HVAC Units Installed by Year



Heron View



Located near Mahomet, Heron View Forest Preserve is the most recent addition to the Forest Preserves. The first acquisition was in 2020 with a small addition in 2022. Currently 104 acres, the preserve was second-growth floodplain forest prior to its establishment. Development at Heron View is limited; there is access for hiking, but no facilities. The Hazen Bridge, listed on the State Historic Register, spans the Sangamon River but is currently inaccessible to visitors. The preserve is home to diverse natural areas, including floodplain forests with abundant spring ephemeral species, a major draw to the site.

Recent improvements include the construction of a rustic trail and parking area.

PROPOSED STUDIES & IMPROVEMENTS

- Improved river access
- Improved parking



0.1

acres of parking

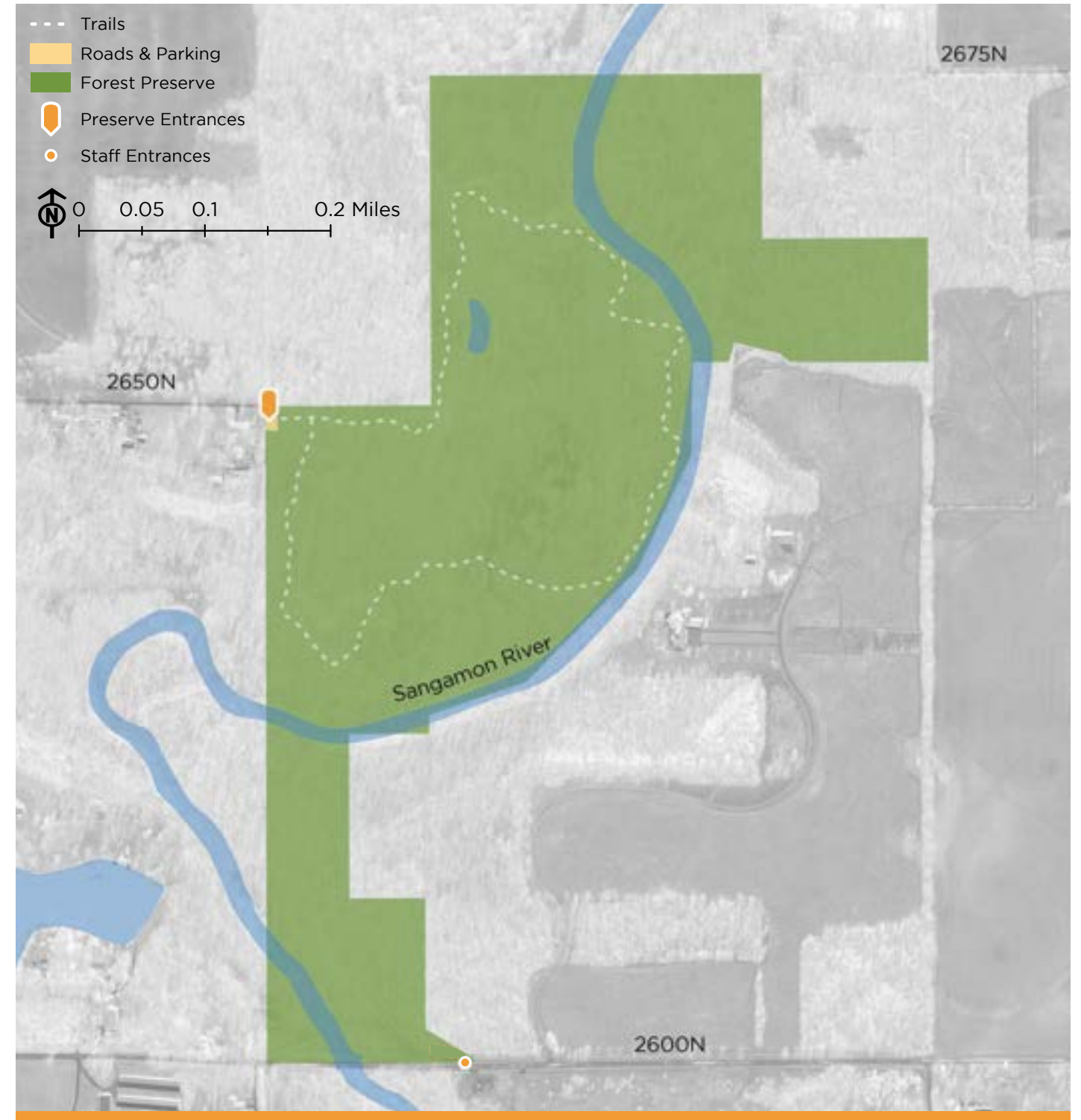
1.3 miles of trails

0 paved

6 acres of waters

2 miles of shoreline

0 buildings
0 shelters
0 restrooms



Homer Lake

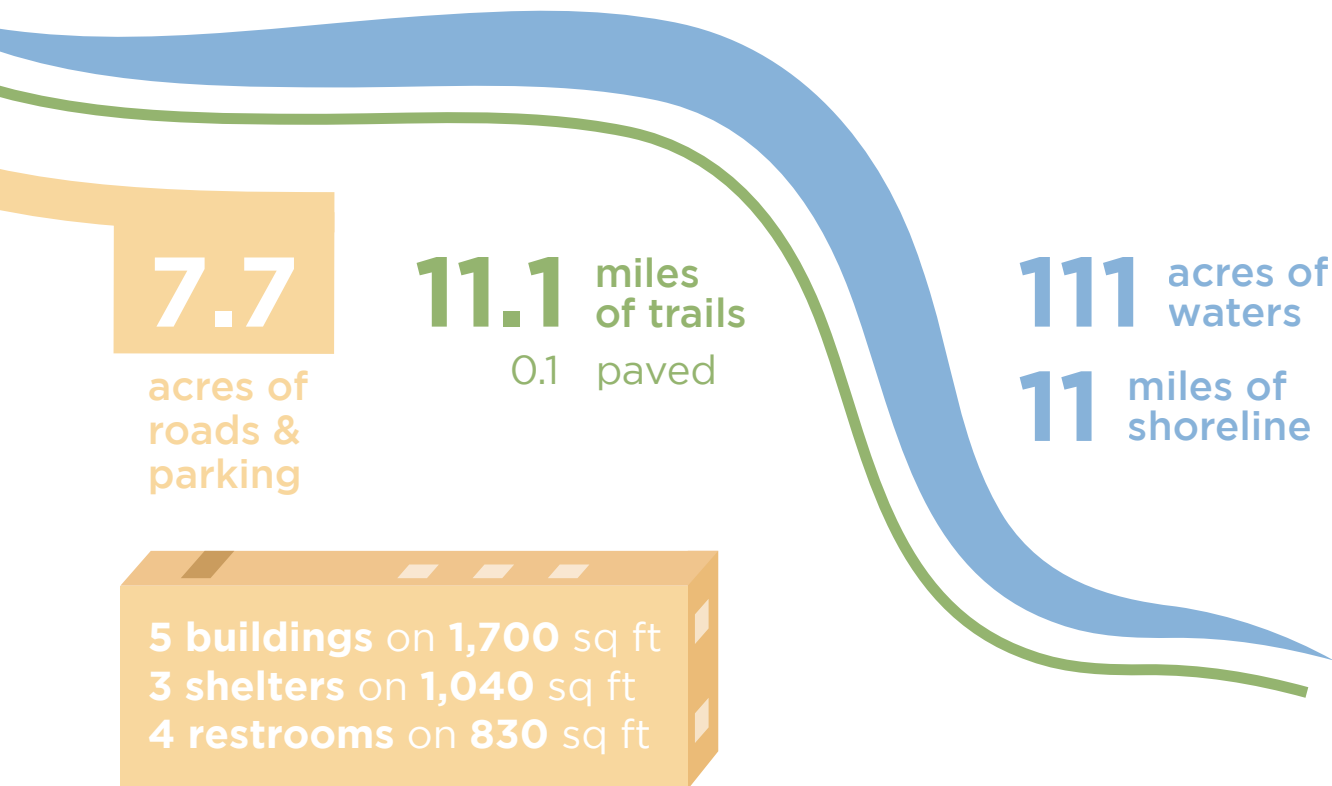
Located near Homer, Homer Lake Forest Preserve was the second preserve to open to the public in the county. First acquired by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) in 1971, the preserve was operated by the Forest Preserves and subsequently acquired in 1992. Currently 764 acres, the preserve was primarily an agricultural site prior to its establishment. The IDNR constructed the now iconic lake and planted hundreds of trees in rows with the intention of using the site as a state tree nursery. The preserve straddles 2.3 miles of the Salt Fork River. Homer Lake offers amenities such as the Homer Lake Interpretive Center, nature playscape, and the Salt Fork Center rental facility. The scenic lake views and paddling activities are popular draws. The preserve is home to diverse natural areas, including prairie restorations, wetlands, and higher-quality woodlands.

Recent improvements include replacement of the observation tower with an open-air shelter, construction of a maintenance cold storage facility, and upgrades to the Salt Fork Center. Current projects include the addition of an accessible kayak launch near the existing North Boat Launch.

See [p. 75-76](#) for facility report cards.

PROPOSED STUDIES & IMPROVEMENTS

- Homer Lake shoreline stabilization and water depth improvements
- Consideration of the Homer Lake Interpretive Center in context of holistic planning of education space
- Improved pedestrian connections near South Homer Lake Road



Kickapoo Rail Trail

Starting in Urbana and terminating west of Danville, the Kickapoo Rail Trail (KRT) is a linear preserve owned by the Forest Preserves, Vermilion County Conservation District, and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. The Champaign County Design and Conservation Foundation (CCDC) acquired the land from CSX Rail in 2013 and coordinated with local leaders to preserve the rail right-of-way for natural areas and outdoor recreation. Currently 144 acres, the preserve was primarily rail line and natural area prior to its establishment. The site comprises a 10-foot multi-use trail with rest nodes, linear stretches of prairie, and localized tree cover.

Recent improvements include the construction of trail in the Village of Ogden. Current projects include the design and construction of the remaining sections of trail in Vermilion and Champaign counties and a trailhead in Urbana.

PROPOSED STUDIES & IMPROVEMENTS

- Kickapoo Rail Trail master plan



0.2

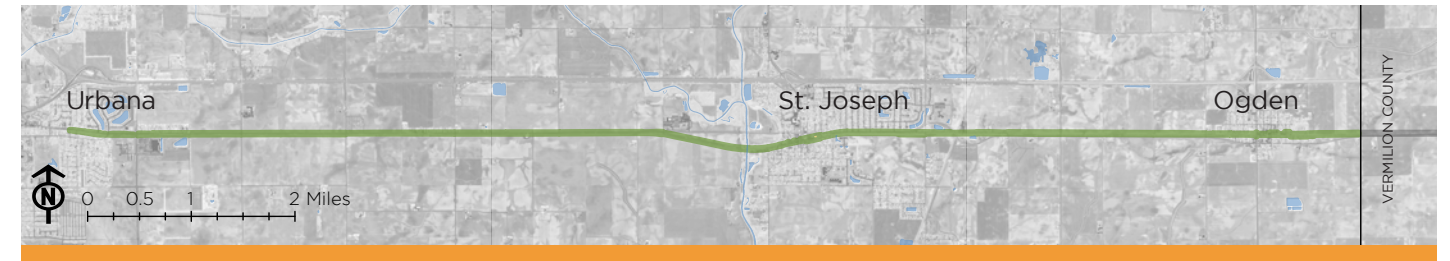
acres of parking

8.5 miles of trails
all paved

0.2 acres of waters

0.1 miles of shoreline

0 buildings
0 shelters
0 restrooms



Below: The Kickapoo Rail Trail meanders to its terminus in St. Joseph. The remaining sections of the originally planned trail, including from St. Joseph eastward to Ogden are expected to be completed by 2026.



Lake of the Woods



Located in Mahomet, Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve was the first preserve to be established, with its initial acquisition dating back to 1948. Currently 874 acres, the preserve was primarily an agricultural site prior to its establishment. The preserve straddles 1.7 miles of the Sangamon River. Although natural areas have expanded over the years, in comparison to other preserves, Lake of the Woods is the most park-like with several rental facilities, a paved bike path, staff offices, the Audubon-certified Hartwell C. Howard Lake of the Woods Golf Course, Mabery Gelvin Botanical Garden, and two man-made lakes. The preserve is home to diverse natural areas, including a few pre-settlement open woodlands, the Buffalo Trace Prairie restoration, and forested floodplains.

Recent improvements include replacement of small shelters throughout the preserve, accessibility improvements at the Peninsula, construction of an artifact storage wing at the Museum of the Grand Prairie, and several facility roof and HVAC replacements. Current projects include renovating the Lake of the Woods Bike Path and reconstruction of the greenhouse at the Discovery Garden.

See [p. 69-73](#) for facility report cards.

Lake of the Woods Golf Course

The Golf Course spans 160 acres and features four buildings and one shelter covering 22,000 square feet. The Forest Preserves have replaced a lot of aging infrastructure at the Golf Course since 2020, but more is nearing the end of its useful lifespan, including the Maintenance Building. See [p. 13](#) for more information on the Golf Course.

20.7

acres of roads & parking

9.7 miles of trails

3.6 paved

60 acres of waters

10 miles of shoreline

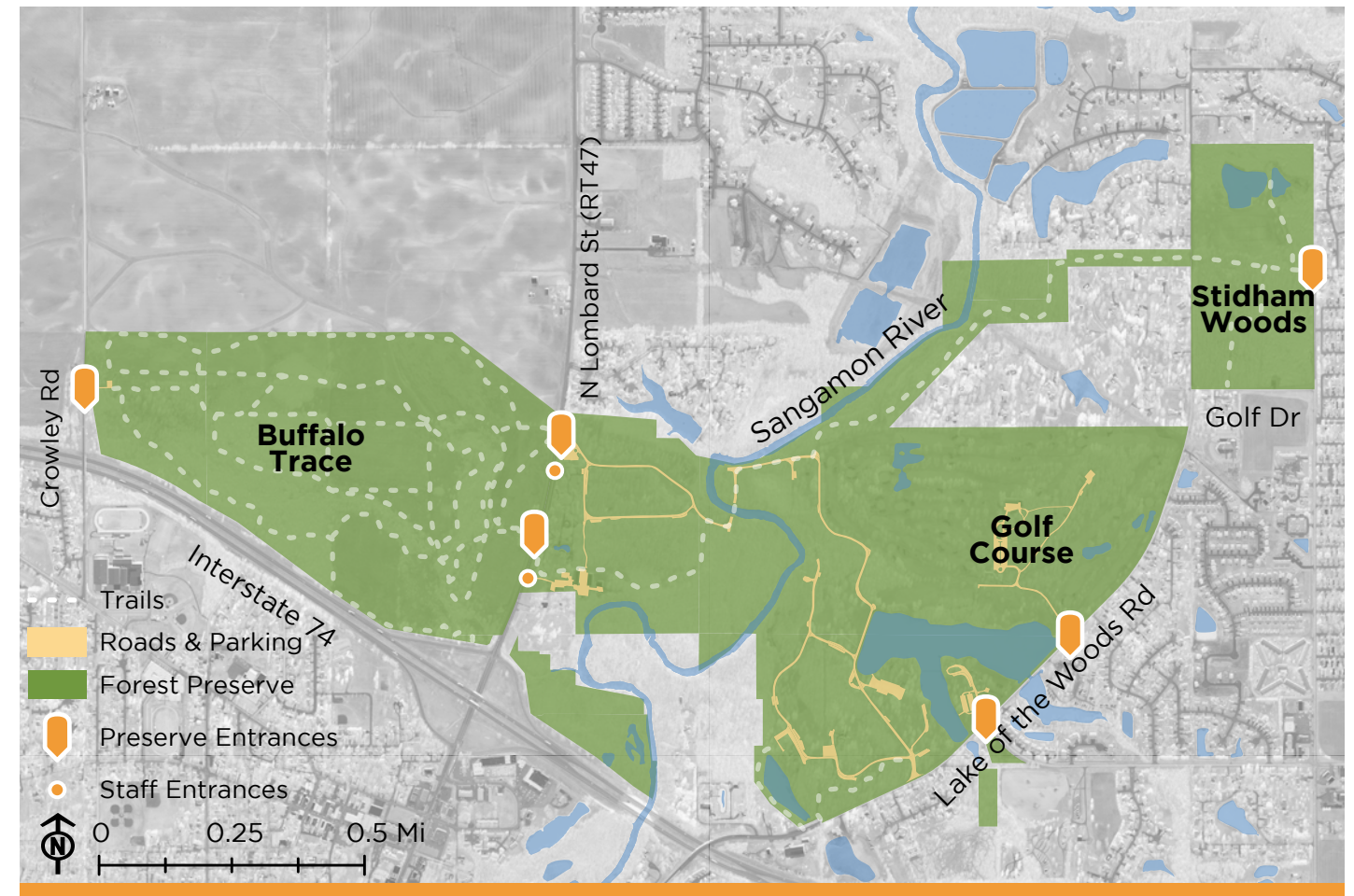
24 buildings on 86,810 sq ft
11 shelters on 7,350 sq ft
6 restrooms on 4,490 sq ft

PROPOSED STUDIES & IMPROVEMENTS

- Connection of the Lake of the Woods Bike Trail to the Mahomet Bike Trail via Lake of the Woods Rd
- Separation of pedestrian and vehicular traffic along Trillium Rd
- Sustainability and accessibility improvements at the Museum of the Grand Prairie
- Increased trail connectivity on the west side of the preserve
- Water line and septic system upgrades
- Lake of the Woods and Elks Lake shoreline stabilization
- Study of rental facility utilization and potential upgrades
- Botanical Gardens design improvements
- Continued modernization and renewal of Golf Course facilities and infrastructure



1.5 Mi ▲





Middle Fork River

Located near Penfield, Middle Fork River Forest Preserve is the largest preserve in the county. The first acquisition was in 1974 but several large tracts were purchased in subsequent decades. Currently 1,712 acres, the preserve was a mix of agricultural production and wooded areas prior to its establishment. There are three constructed ponds at Middle Fork River - two primarily for fishing activities, and one for public swimming, the only public beach in the county. The preserve straddles 4.7 miles of the Middle Fork of the Vermilion River. Middle Fork River offers amenities such as the Harry L. Swartz Campground, Willow Pond swimming beach, and Activity Center rental facility. Middle Fork River is the first International Dark Sky Park and has become a regional draw for stargazing. The preserve is home to diverse natural areas, including

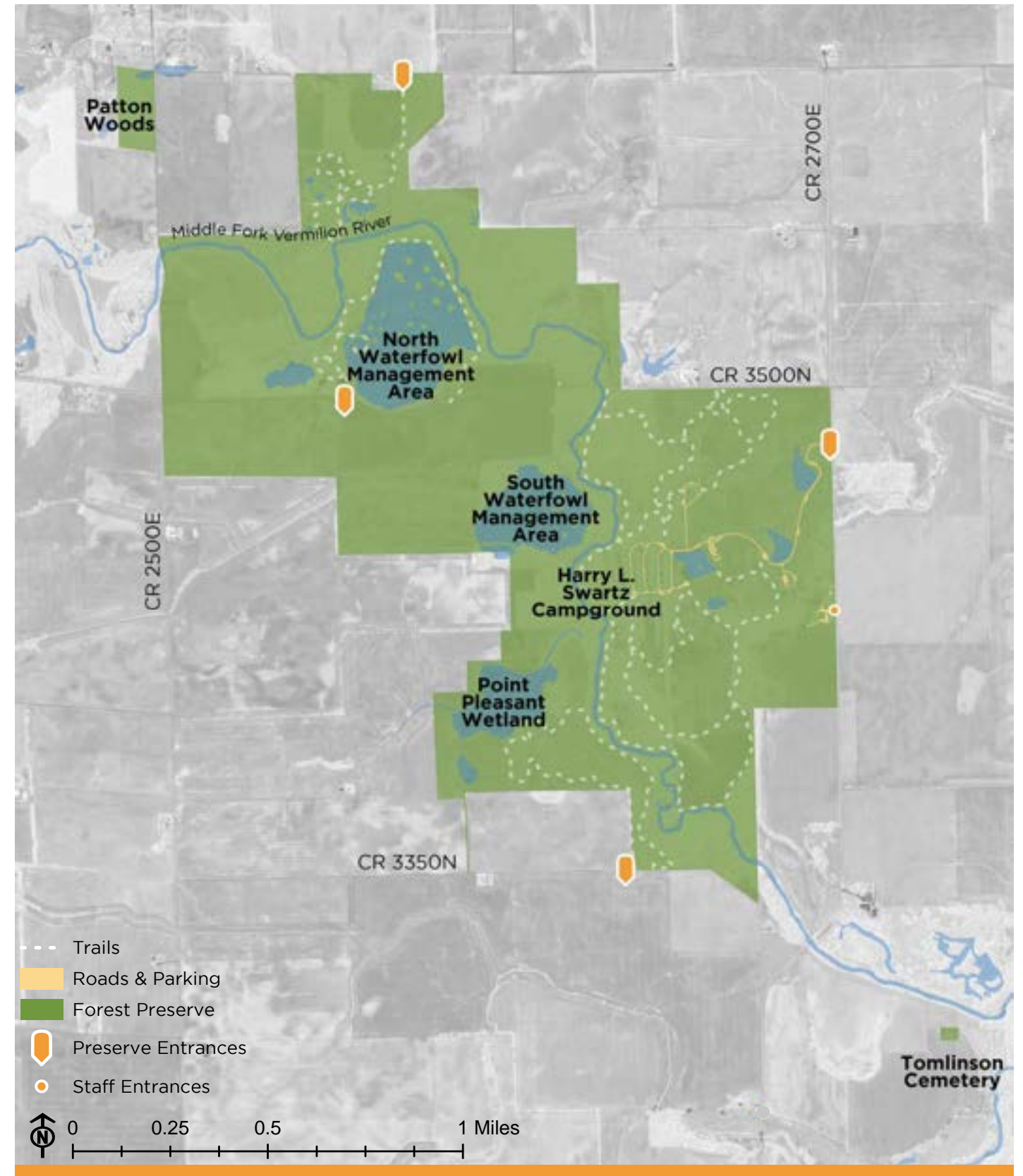
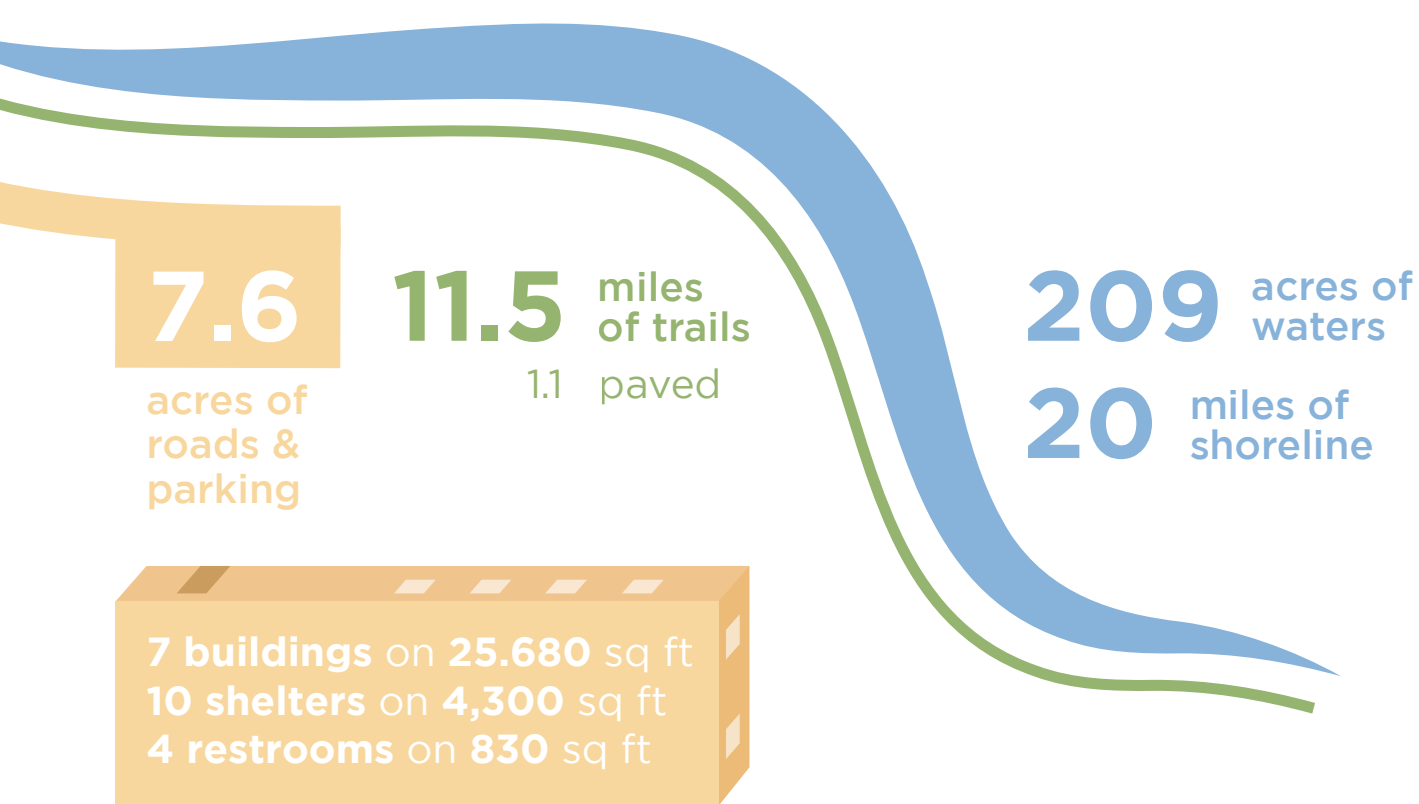
floodplain forests, prairie restorations, and waterfowl management areas.

Recent improvements include renovation of the Activity Center kitchen, reconstruction of Willow Pond, and replacement of several open-air shelters. Current projects include the construction of a new trail for dark sky viewing, a new play area, and campground expansion.

See [p. 74](#) for facility report cards.

PROPOSED STUDIES & IMPROVEMENTS

- Trail utilization and master planning
- Septic system studies
- Waterfowl Management Area water control structure studies



River Bend

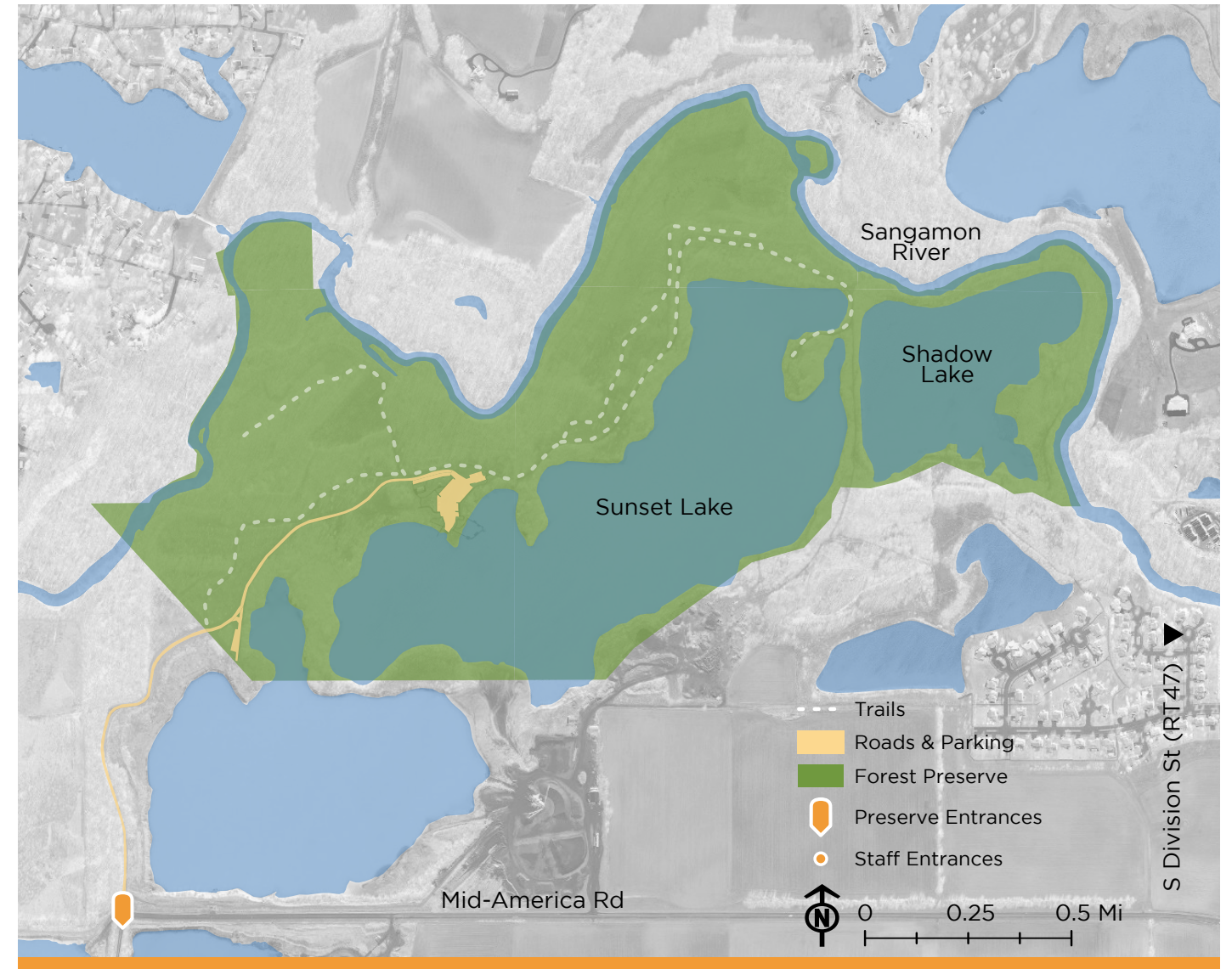
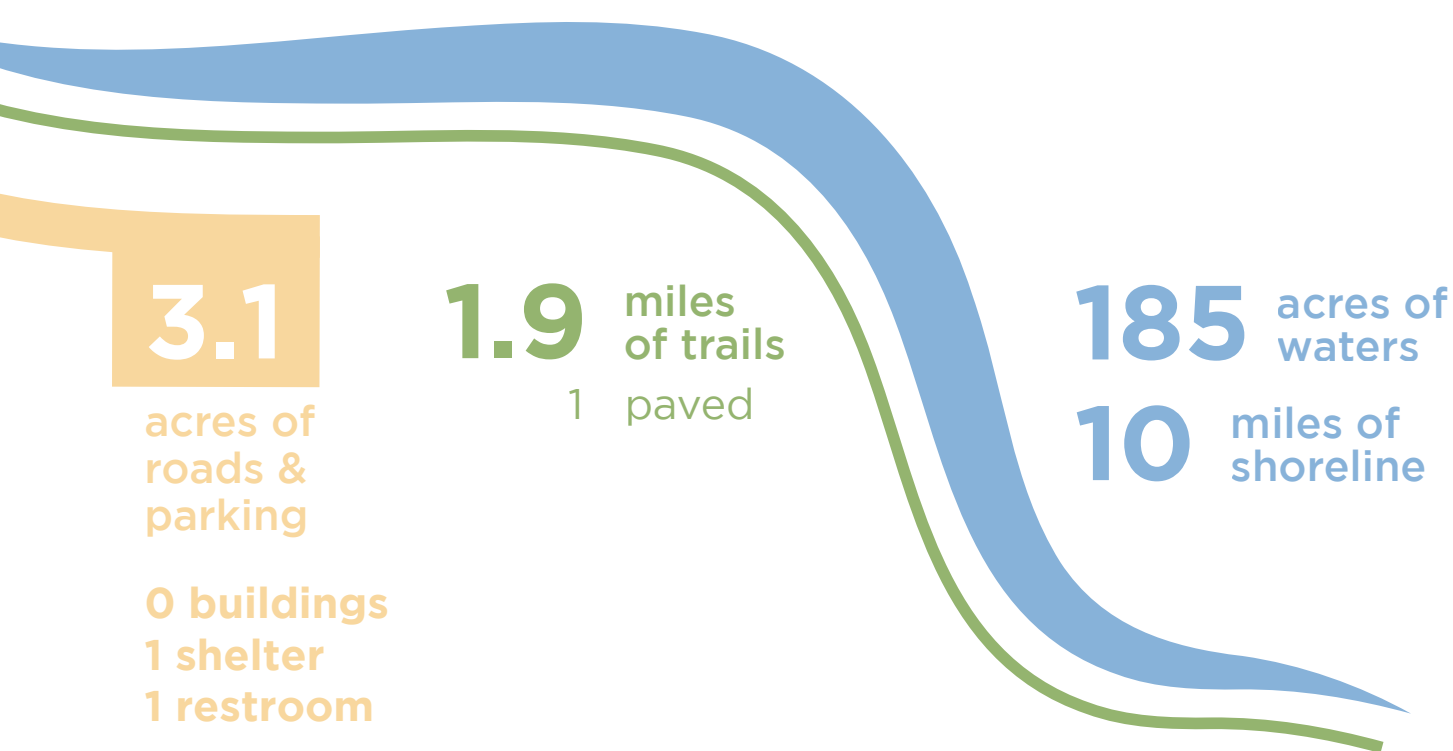


Located near Mahomet, River Bend Forest Preserve is well known for its deep-water lakes and opportunities for paddling and fishing. The first acquisition was in 2001. Currently 284 acres, the preserve was a sand and gravel mining operation prior to its establishment. Amenities at River Bend include an accessible fishing dock, boat launch, restrooms, gravel and rustic trails, and an open-air pavilion. Land use at River Bend is restricted by a conservation easement. Natural areas at River Bend are primarily wooded.

Recent improvements include the construction of an accessible fishing dock.

PROPOSED STUDIES & IMPROVEMENTS

- Improved river access
- Expanded acreage



Sangamon River



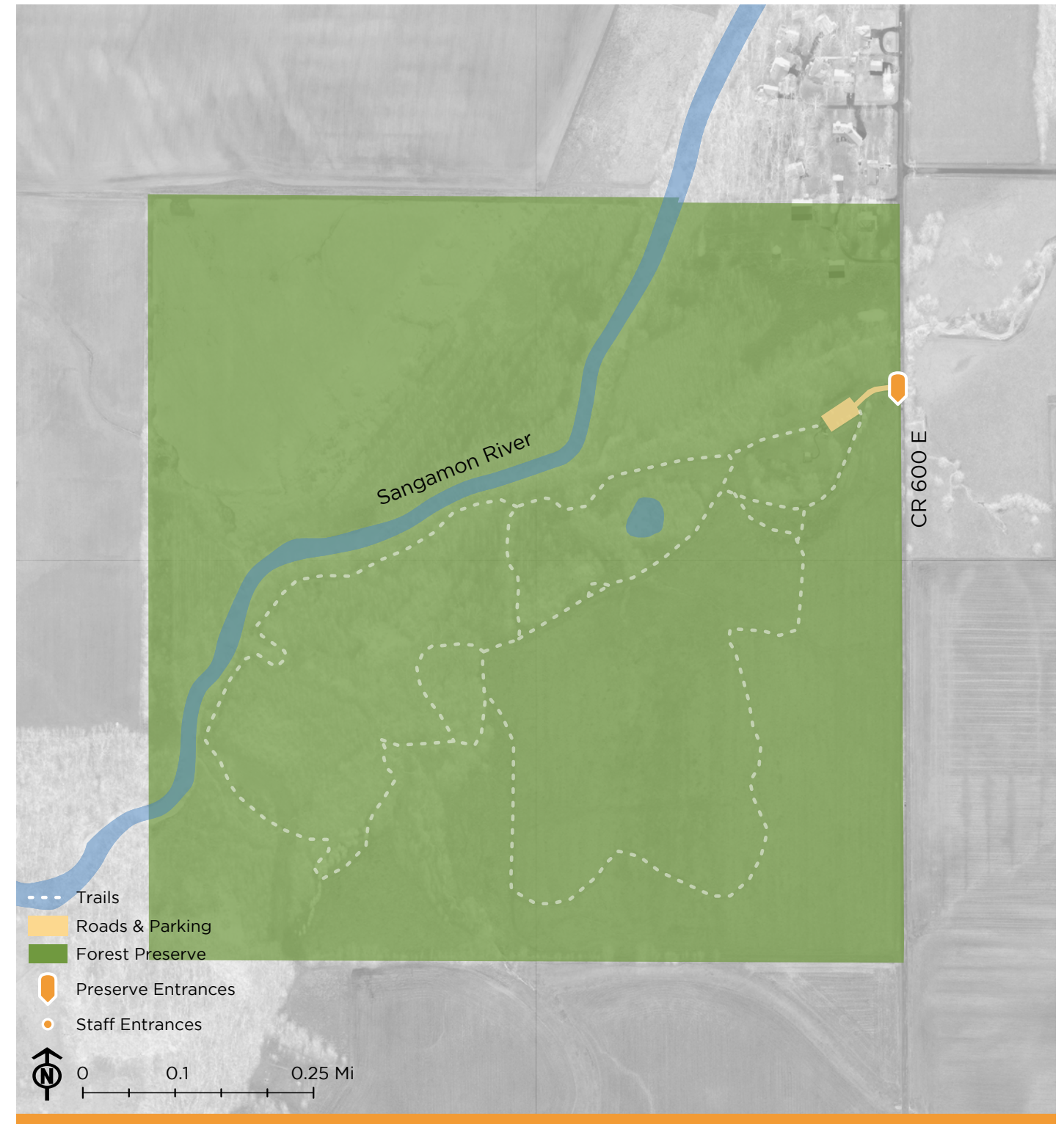
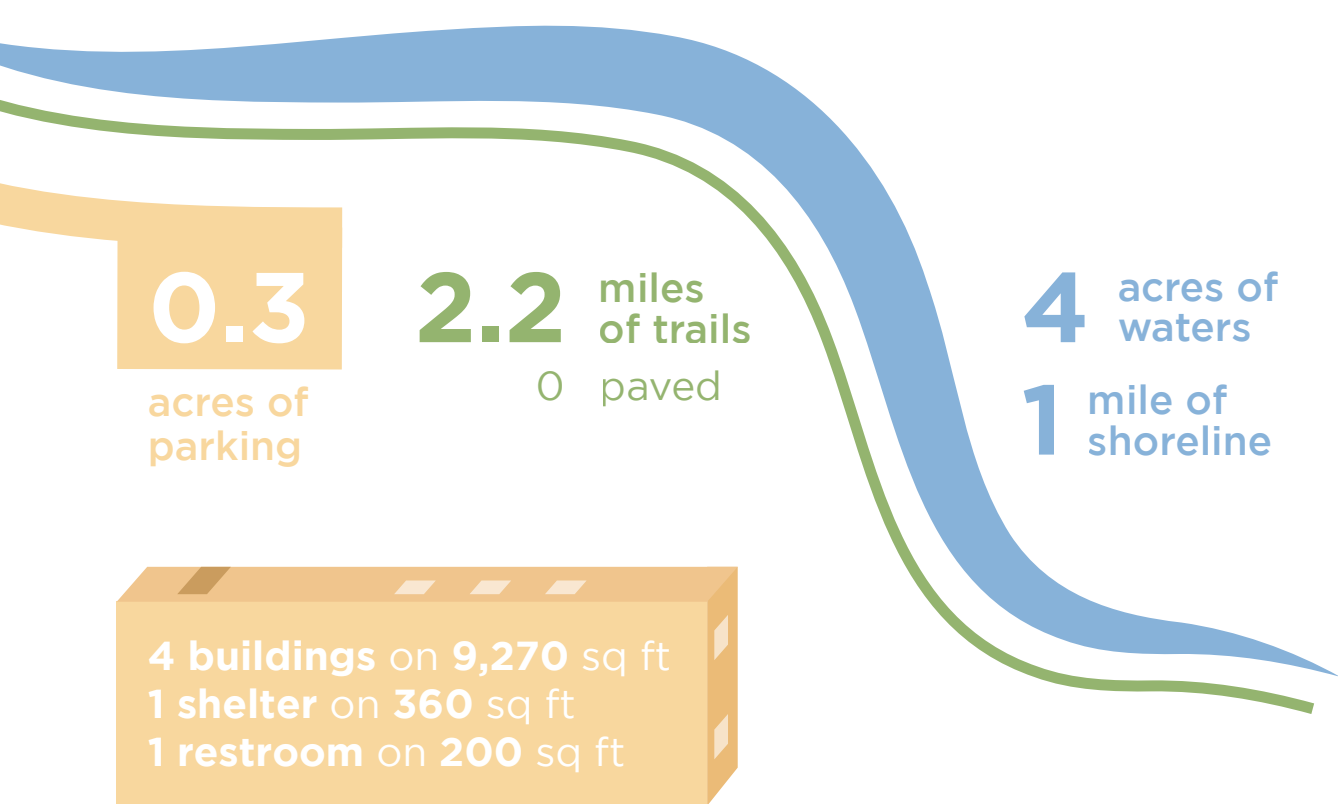
Located near Fisher, Sangamon River Forest Preserve is well known for its oak savanna ecosystem. The preserve was acquired in 2008 and straddles 0.6 miles of the Sangamon River. Currently 160 acres, the preserve was primarily agricultural production prior to its establishment. Over one-third of its acreage is enrolled in the USDA's Conservation Reserve Program to create a riparian forest buffer along the Sangamon River that enhances water quality and wildlife habitat. While the preserve is primarily natural areas restoration, there is a small developed area with parking, an

open-air shelter, and restrooms. The rustic trail which winds through the preserve is a popular draw during summer months with peak prairie blooms. Despite its small size, the preserve is home to diverse natural areas, including floodplain forests and prairie restorations.

See [p. 74](#) for facility report cards.

PROPOSED STUDIES & IMPROVEMENTS

Development of this preserve is limited and there are no current plans to expand amenities.



Facility Report Cards

LAKE OF THE WOODS

“HI” TOWER

870 square feet 1966

Bell tower with a publicly accessible observation deck

D Accessibility

A Occupancy

D Roof

N/A Heating and Cooling

Updates needed include roof replacement and handrail repairs. ADA improvements study needed.

D



HEADQUARTERS

5,560 square feet 1966

Administrative staff offices, significant addition constructed in 1999

B Accessibility

B Occupancy

A Roof

C Heating and Cooling

Several HVAC units in need of replacement. Smaller updates such as carpet replacement and deck replacement needed.

B



ELKS LAKE PAVILION

5,700 square feet 1953

Enclosed rental facility overlooking Elks Lake

A Accessibility

C Occupancy

A Roof

B Heating and Cooling

Recent updates include kitchen expansion, flooring refinishing, and bathroom renovations.

B



COVERED BRIDGE

5,400 square feet 1965

Wooden vehicular and pedestrian bridge crossing the Sangamon River

A Accessibility

A Occupancy

A Roof

N/A Heating and Cooling

No significant updates anticipated as roof and sheathing were recently replaced and the exterior and structure were recently painted.

A



CHAPTER 4: INVENTORY OF FACILITIES

LAKE OF THE WOODS

GOLF COURSE CLUBHOUSE

4,800 square feet 1975

Public facility with rental space, restrooms, and snack bar for golfers

B Accessibility

B Occupancy

D Roof

A Heating and Cooling

Roof in need of replacement. Cosmetic updates should be considered for more dated areas of building.

C



GOLF COURSE MAINTENANCE

5,700 square feet 1960

Staff offices, fleet parking, and interior workspace

B Accessibility

B Occupancy

F Roof

F Heating and Cooling

Given age and condition of facility, demolition and replacement should be considered to better suit operational needs.

F



GOLF COURSE PROSHOP

5,000 square feet 1965

Public storefront, staff offices, and residence

A Accessibility

B Occupancy

B Roof

B Heating and Cooling

Carpet and some windows recently replaced. Generally good condition, some cosmetic updates should be considered.

B



GOLF COURSE CART BARN

5,800 square feet 2007

Storage facility for rental golf carts

A Accessibility

B Occupancy

A Roof

N/A Heating and Cooling

No major updates planned or recommended for this structure.

A



LAKE OF THE WOODS

HENSLEY TOWN HALL

640 square feet 1892

One room schoolhouse relocated to Lake of the Woods in 1983

B Accessibility

D Occupancy

A Roof

N/A Heating and Cooling

Entrance ramps and stairs in need of replacement.

C



IZAAK WALTON CABIN

1,900 square feet 1964

Small rental space overlooking the Sangamon River

C Accessibility

D Occupancy

A Roof

A Heating and Cooling

Exterior deck in need of replacement. Interior updates and cosmetic improvements should be considered.

C



LAKE OF THE WOODS PAVILION

5,850 square feet 1951

Enclosed rental facility overlooking the main lake at Lake of the Woods

B Accessibility

C Occupancy

B Roof

B Heating and Cooling

Cosmetic interior updates and significant restroom renovation needed. Additions such as kitchen space should be considered.

C



SYCAMORE SHELTER

950 square feet 1975

Public rental facility

C Accessibility

F Occupancy

B Roof

N/A Heating and Cooling

Due to low utilization of space, proximity to floodplain, and need of deferred maintenance, demolition should be considered.

F



FACILITY REPORT CARDS

LAKE OF THE WOODS

MUSEUM OF THE GRAND PRAIRIE

7,500 square feet 1968

Public museum with extensive exhibits and a gift shop

B Accessibility

C Occupancy

A Roof

C Heating and Cooling

Several HVAC units and both ADA lifts in need of replacement. Exterior siding in need of repair or replacement.

C



MUSEUM ANNEX

2,400 square feet 1963

Former residence converted to office space

C Accessibility

B Occupancy

A Roof

C Heating and Cooling

Interior cosmetic upgrades needed. Consideration of more significant renovation to better fit staff usage should be considered.

C



MUSEUM EDUCATION CENTER

4,160 square feet 2013

Classroom space and small artifact storage

A Accessibility

F Occupancy

B Roof

B Heating and Cooling

No significant physical improvements needed. Opportunities to increase usage of space should be considered.

C



MUSEUM RANKIN CENTER

2,300 square feet 2020

Large artifact storage and processing area

A Accessibility

B Occupancy

A Roof

A Heating and Cooling

No major updates planned or recommended for this structure.

A



LAKE OF THE WOODS

RIVERVIEW RETREAT CENTER

1,800 square feet 1953

Cabin like rental facility located at a satellite property north of Lake of the Woods

C Accessibility

F Occupancy

F Roof

D Heating and Cooling

Due to low utilization of space and need of deferred maintenance, demolition should be considered.

F



ROTARY HILL PAVILION

2,700 square feet 1977

Partially enclosed rental facility within the Golf Course, often used for golf outings

B Accessibility

F Occupancy

D Roof

N/A Heating and Cooling

With recent cosmetic upgrades, facility generally suitable for its usage. Roof in need of replacement.

F



NATURAL RESOURCES OFFICES & STORAGE

3,000 square feet 1980

Staff offices, fleet parking, and interior workspace

B Accessibility

B Occupancy

D Roof

B Heating and Cooling

Facility in need of a new roof and renovations. Long term use should be further studied.

C



WEST MAINTENANCE OFFICES & SHOP

9,000 square feet 1989

Staff offices, fleet parking, and interior workspace

B Accessibility

B Occupancy

B Roof

D Heating and Cooling

Roof scheduled to be replaced. Other renovations should be considered.

C



FACILITY REPORT CARDS

MIDDLE FORK RIVER

SHOWER HOUSE

1,850 square feet 1981

Public restroom and shower facility for campers

A Accessibility

A Occupancy

A Roof

N/A Heating and Cooling

Cosmetic and plumbing upgrades recently completed.

A



RESIDENCE

3,000 square feet 2008

Single-family housing for staff

B Accessibility

A Occupancy

B Roof

C Heating and Cooling

Bathroom recently renovated. Mechanical units aging.

B



ACTIVITY CENTER

3,400 square feet 1985

Staff offices, fleet parking, and interior workspace

B Accessibility

F Occupancy

B Roof

A Heating and Cooling

Kitchen recently expanded, upgraded, and brought to ADA standards.

C



SANGAMON RIVER

RESIDENCE

1,800 square feet 1919

Single-family housing for staff

D Accessibility

A Occupancy

B Roof

A Heating and Cooling

Recent upgrades include new carpeting, attic insulation, bathroom renovations, and interior painting.

B



HOMER LAKE

INTERPRETIVE CENTER

2,500 square feet 1975
Public nature center and staff offices

- B** Accessibility
- B** Occupancy
- A** Roof
- D** Heating and Cooling

C

Facility being studied to determine its long term usage in relation to programming and staff needs.



SALT FORK CENTER

2,900 square feet 1997
Indoor rental facility overlooking Homer Lake

- B** Accessibility
- C** Occupancy
- F** Roof
- C** Heating and Cooling

F

Roof and mechanical units in need of replacement. Cosmetic upgrades should be considered.



WALNUT HILL SHELTER

5,700 square feet 1975
Semi-enclosed rental facility overlooking Homer Lake

- A** Accessibility
- C** Occupancy
- A** Roof
- B** Heating and Cooling

B

Recent moderate updates include kitchen expansion and flooring replacement. Bathrooms in need of significant renovation.



MAINTENANCE FACILITY

6,800 square feet 1975
Staff offices, fleet parking, and interior workspace

- B** Accessibility
- B** Occupancy
- A** Roof
- C** Heating and Cooling

B

Mechanical upgrades needed, but facility overall in good condition.



FACILITY REPORT CARDS

HOMER LAKE

RESIDENCE

3,000 square feet 1975
Single-family housing for staff

- B** Accessibility
- A** Occupancy
- D** Roof
- F** Heating and Cooling

D

Some mechanical units recently replaced, but others aging. Roof in need of replacement.



*A Great Blue Heron hunting on Homer Lake.
Photo by J. Bobbitt, 2022.*



Finances

Contextualizing the Forest Preserves' financial performance through key indicators & comparisons to other districts

A gray treefrog at Point Pleasant, Middle Fork River Forest Preserve. Photo by D. Mills, 2019.

Finances

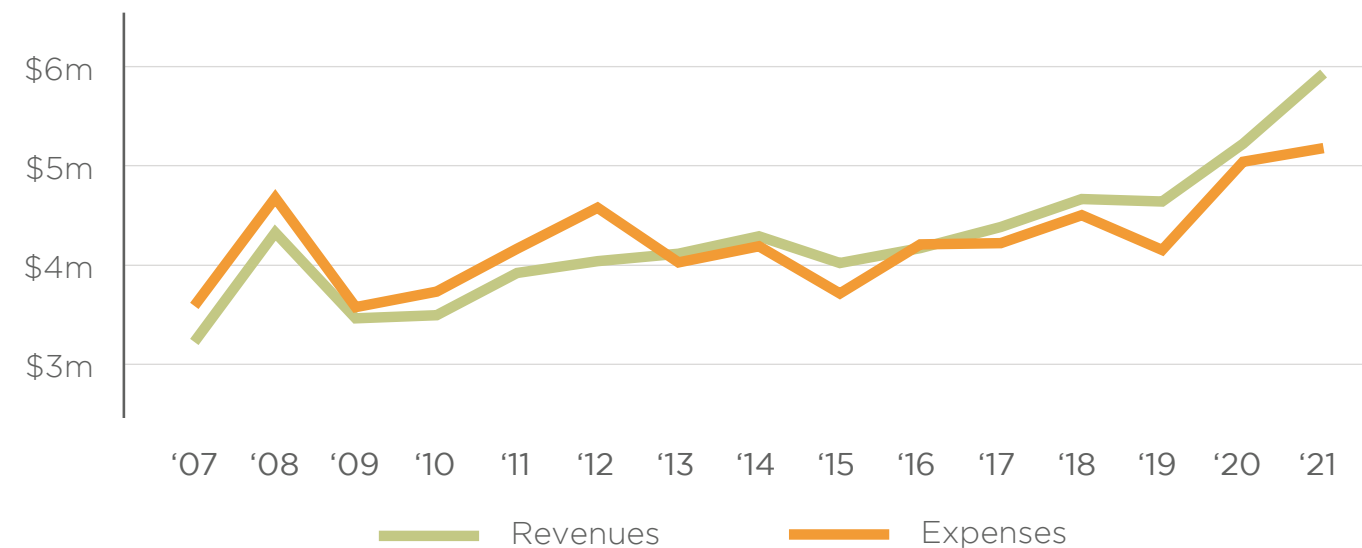
Positive financial performance is crucial to the Forest Preserves' ability to provide public services and operate as an employer. The Comprehensive Plan analyzes performance across key financial indicators and compares the Champaign County Forest Preserves to similar forest preserve districts to contextualize their long-term financial outlook.

OVERVIEW OF REVENUES AND EXPENSES

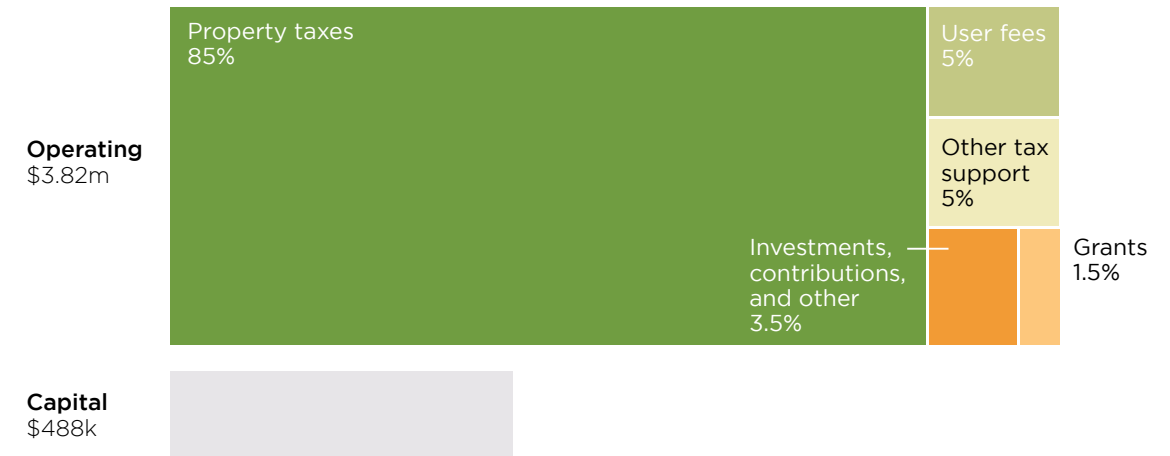
The Forest Preserves are primarily supported by property tax revenues, receiving about \$1 for every \$100 in property taxes paid by Champaign County residents. A 2020 referendum increased the amount of property tax revenue the Forest Preserves receive. From 2007 to 2021, property taxes comprised an average of 85% of annual operating revenues. Over that period, combined capital and operating expenses averaged about \$4.3 million per year.

The Forest Preserves are also supported by the Forest Preserve Friends Foundation, a non-profit that generates grant support through charitable contributions and fosters relationships with other agencies to make Forest Preserves projects possible.

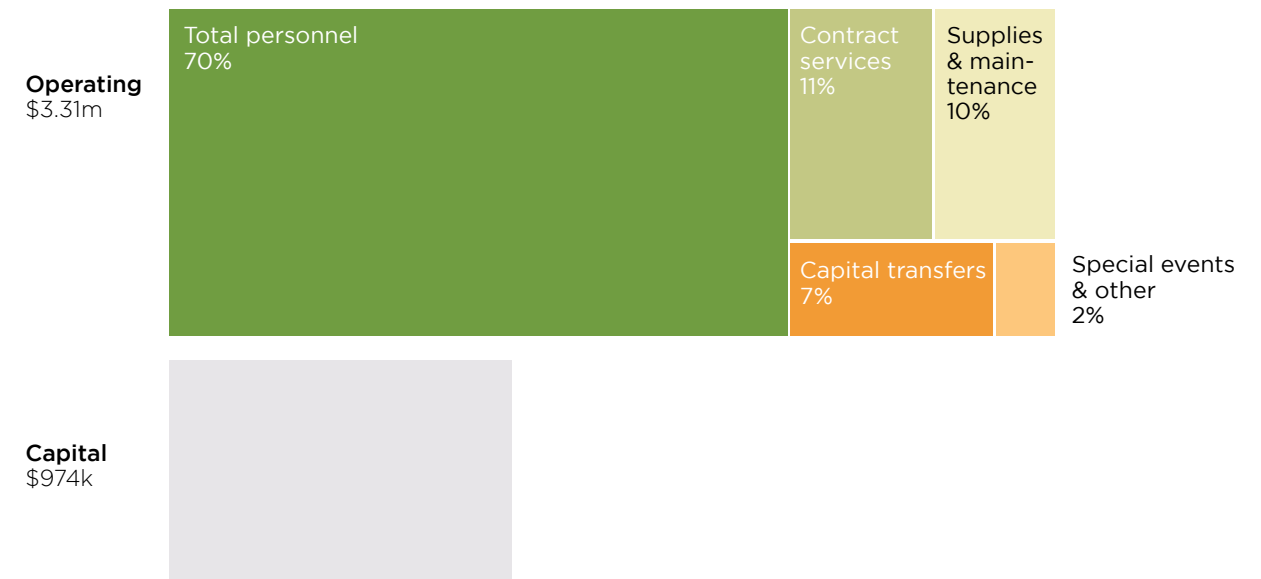
Total Revenues and Expenses



Revenues Average Annual Value 2007-2021



Expenses Average Annual Value 2007-2021



In addition to general revenues and expenses, operating and capital expenses are useful metrics for evaluating trends in financial performance over time. Operating expenses refers to costs to keep the business running, like salaries, wages, employee benefits, supplies, legal fees, contracted services, and utility payments. Capital expenses are long-term investments important to the organization's growth, such as land acquisition, replacing vehicles and other capital equipment, restoring prairies and woodlands, and rehabilitating aging buildings. The following sections evaluate the Forest Preserves' performance as an organization and alongside similar districts.



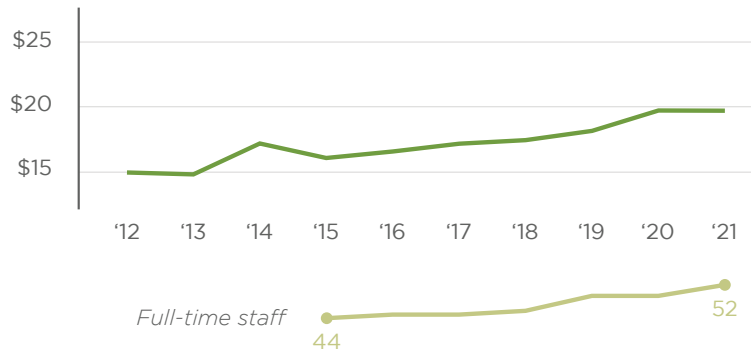
BENCHMARKING FINANCE TRENDS WITH SIMILAR FOREST PRESERVE DISTRICTS

Since most states (and most counties in Illinois) do not have forest preserve districts, the data for comparison are hard to come by. Staff gathered key budget reporting metrics from the three forest preserve districts most like the Forest Preserves based on county population, county size, and acres managed. The performance of districts with similar capacities helps contextualize the Forest Preserves' finances. DeKalb, Kendall, and Rock Island Forest Preserve Districts all manage within 1.3 acres per 1,000 residents and 4.2 acres per square mile of county land, relatively small differences given the variation among districts in Illinois.

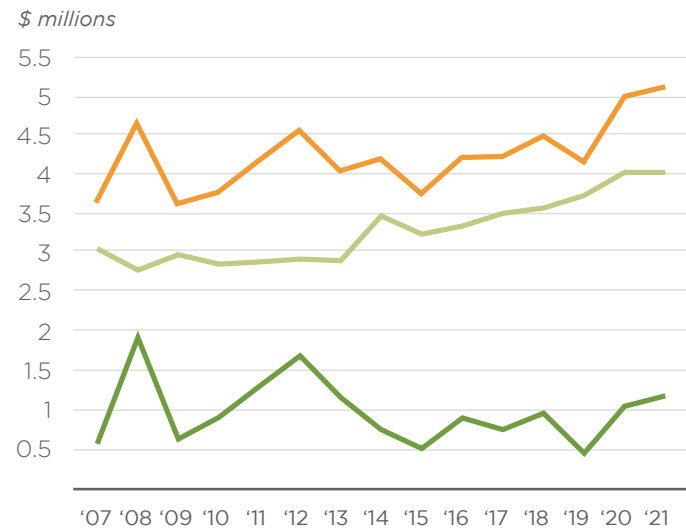
METRICS GIVE A SNAPSHOT OF FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

Staff measured the Forest Preserves' operating and capital expenses before comparing these metrics to similar districts. The Forest Preserves' operating expenses have risen steadily over the better part of the last decade, largely due to the growth in full-time staff and efforts to establish more competitive wages. Capital expenses have been more volatile - it is common for capital to fluctuate year-to-year - but rose from 2019 to 2021.

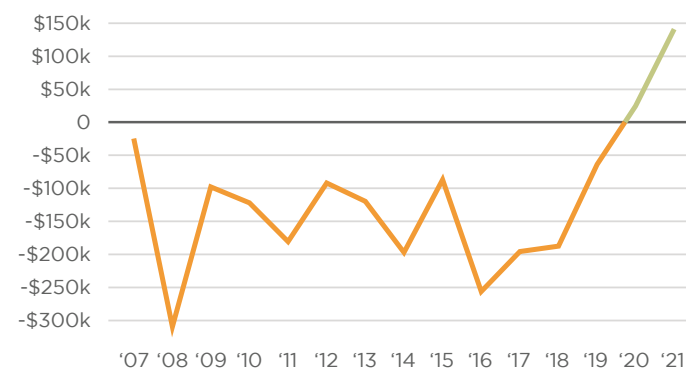
Operating Expenses Per Capita



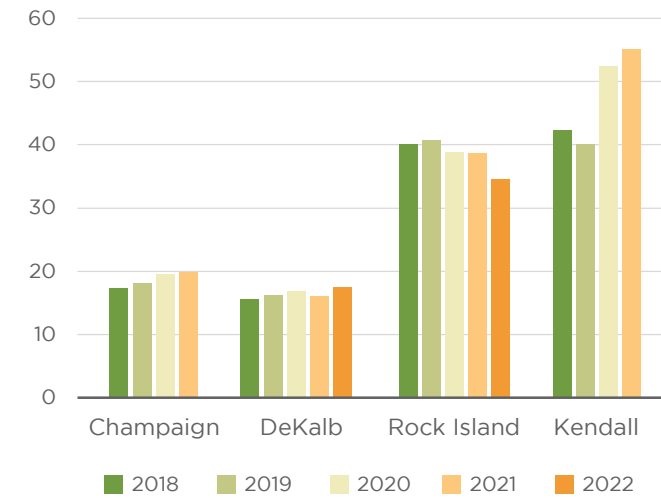
Operating, Capital, and Total Expenses



Golf Course Net Profits



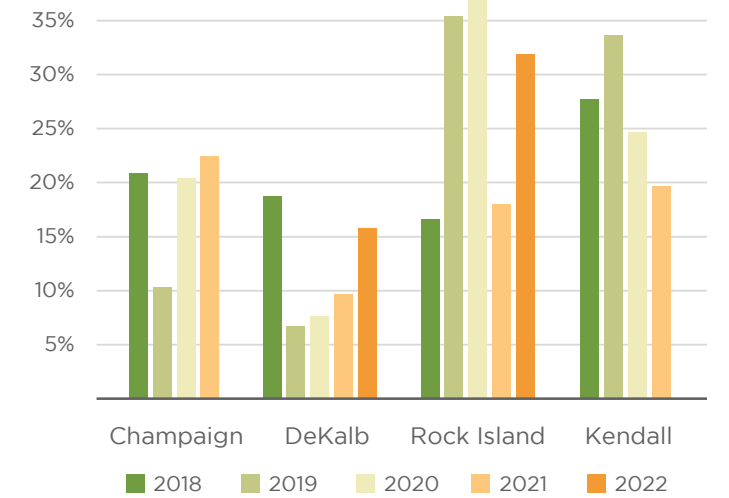
Operating Expenses Per Capita Comparison



Relative to similar districts, the Forest Preserves' operating expenses per capita are low, similar to DeKalb's but about half the annual spending per capita of Rock Island and Kendall. Champaign's pattern shows steady slight annual growth, a trend that has continued since 2013 which reflects continued additions of staff and increases in median wages. Kendall County Forest Preserve District's costs rose dramatically, while Rock Island is the only county whose operating expenses per capita fell from 2018 to 2022.

The Forest Preserves' capital expenses show a general upward trend as increased property tax revenue from the 2020 referendum has

Capital as % of Total Expenses Comparison



allowed the Forest Preserves to invest in infrastructure improvements as well as new projects. This trend continued in 2022 and 2023. Capital expenses are more variable year-to-year due to the relative size of projects by year and the availability of grant funding.

The Forest Preserves' use of grant funding has minimized the overall costs of these infrastructure improvements, as referendum funds have helped provide matching funds. Since 2000, the Forest Preserves have added four new preserves with grants and donations covering 88% of acquisition costs. The Kickapoo Rail Trail has been nearly fully funded through grants and donations.

GOLF COURSE FINANCES

The Lake of the Woods Golf Course operates with its own proprietary fund that is intended to be self-supporting. The Golf Course has increased its annual net profits every year since 2016. As a result, the course has become more self-sustaining by covering operating and capital expenses.

FINANCES SUMMARY

The Forest Preserves' performance is typical for a district its size given the results from a small sample of comparison districts. Operating expenses continue a slow rise reflecting continued investment in staffing, while the increase in capital expenses relative to operating expenses reflects the Forest Preserves' expanded capacity to provide services and maintain facilities due to the 2020 referendum.

Recommendations

Well-supported, strategic directions to guide the Forest Preserves through 2040

*Bluebells in springtime at Heron View Forest Preserve.
Photo by M. Nguyen, 2023*

Recommendations

INTRODUCTION: A PATH TO 2040

The implications of all the context laid out in this plan are encompassed in the recommendations that follow. Recommendations are broad directions for the Forest Preserves to pursue in order to better meet the needs of the public. They are flexible and adaptive goals with objectives that provide guidance without being overly prescriptive. More specific objectives follow in strategic plans, which then inform annual budgets. There is a through-line from these recommendations to staff's daily work, ensuring the Forest Preserves are always moving forward in a direction the public supports. This section lays a path for the Forest Preserves to continue connecting Champaign County residents more and more to the nature around them for the next decade-plus.

These recommendations emerged from the background sections' robust research and input, then were refined and verified by staff and the Board of Commissioners. Staff conducted input at several community events in 2021, used that input to inform a community-wide survey in 2022, then solicited input from internal stakeholders including staff and Board members. Staff analyzed this input alongside analysis of existing conditions and trends and determined several potential directions for the Forest Preserves. Staff presented these directions and their supporting evidence (see [Appendix B-M](#)) to the Board of Commissioners, which expressed its support.

Achieving these objectives will help the Forest Preserves fulfill their mission and expand their impact by providing public services better and to more people.

By 2040, the Forest Preserves will:

- Create a plan to improve and expand programming and provide staff and visitors a better space;
- Offer an increasing variety of enriching, comfortable, adventurous, and accessible experiences with nature to the whole county;
- Ensure these and other existing and future investments are worthwhile and do not spread their resources too thinly
- Increase engagement among new and existing audiences;
- Continue their conservation efforts and explore new ways to lead the county in stemming the causes and dampening the effects of climate change; and
- Buy and restore more land to provide more benefits to people and planet.



IMPLEMENTATION

Recommendations will be enacted through several 3- to 5-year strategic plans. The recommendations themselves are intentionally broad to create a flexible platform for defining ways to achieve the recommendations in forthcoming strategic planning processes. Each recommendation contains "guidelines for implementation," which are ideas to help address each recommendation by responding to the plan's feedback and analysis. These ideas are a starting point for implementation and should be considered during strategic planning processes. Because the 2040 Comprehensive Plan's recommendations are not overly prescriptive, the initiatives in each strategic plan will reflect present, context-sensitive interpretations of the recommendations and their supporting data.

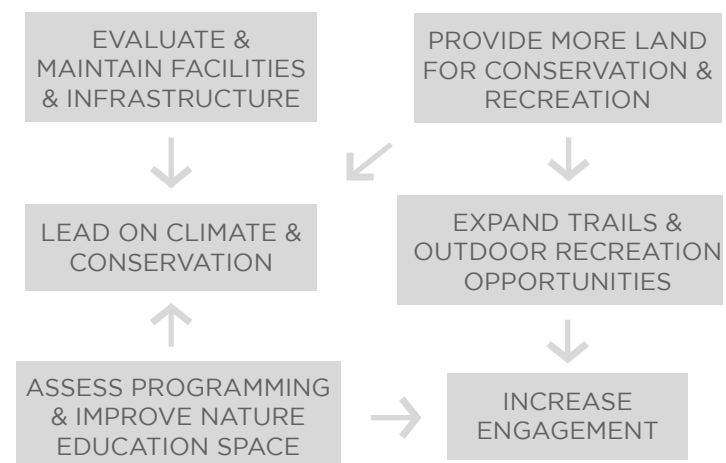
The Board of Commissioners expressed support for all six recommendations, but their individual rankings of the recommendations indicated no consensus. Therefore, the recommendations are not ranked in the Comprehensive Plan and will be prioritized in strategic plans to follow according to pressing needs and the availability of resources.

To ensure the Forest Preserves make progress toward this plan's recommendations, each strategic plan will include implementation tables. As shown below, the tables will include strategies for each recommendation, actions to achieve the strategy, the department(s) responsible, the timeline for completion, and metrics to measure whether the action was successful.

Moving from plan (to Plan) to Action



Synergies Among 2040 Recommendations



Department

Who is responsible?

Timeline

When will it be done?

Measurement

How will we know it was successful?

Recommendation

Create a programming plan & improve the nature education space

Nature-related education is in demand throughout Champaign County and across the state. High satisfaction ratings of Forest Preserve programs but participation by only a small core of users indicates an opportunity to engage new users through programs. While in-person program participation at the Forest Preserves has increased each year since the pandemic, it has not returned to pre-pandemic levels. Comparisons with other districts suggest the Forest Preserves could expand their reach by providing more offsite programming, particularly at schools (see [p. 91](#)). Further assessment of programming is needed. This assessment will provide the basis for a programming plan – also recommended by the Museum and Education Strategic Institutional Plan (2021) - to help the Forest Preserves provide high-quality programs to as many people as possible.

The Forest Preserves are uniquely positioned to offer high-quality nature-related programming, which is otherwise somewhat limited in Champaign County. However, the Forest Preserves' primary environmental education facility, the Homer Lake Interpretive Center, is not optimal for daily staff operations, programs, animal exhibits and care, or the experience of walk-in visitors. Walk-in visitation to the Interpretive Center continues a long, slow decline, and the use of the Interpretive Center for programming remains well below its pre-pandemic average. The Forest Preserves should evaluate the impact of the current state of the Interpretive Center on programming and visitation. In the context of lower overall visitation post-pandemic, diversified programming locations, and the Interpretive Center's decline in visitation, the Forest Preserves should assess the specific needs for a new facility and how this facility can best support the department's ability to offer high-quality, in-demand programming and connect people with nature.

For context, see [p. 15-16, 29, 31, 48-49](#), & [Appendix C-D](#).

GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

CREATE A PROGRAMMING PLAN & IMPROVE THE NATURE EDUCATION SPACE

Explore low-cost ways to increase programming reach.

Assess program attendance trends, including:

- Demographic patterns or disproportionate participation by certain audiences;
- Programs, times, and locations that are particularly well or poorly attended.

Assess local programming context for opportunities to offer in-demand programs.

- Survey East-Central Illinois agencies' offerings;
- Survey Illinois forest preserve and conservation districts' offerings.

Create a programming plan that reflects the findings of the above assessments:

- Leverage core programs, or offerings no one else in the county can provide at the same level;
- Leverage or develop in-demand programs based on local programming context;
- Develop and promote programs for audiences underrepresented in program attendance;
- Collaborate with Marketing to promote programs and maximize messaging opportunities in programming.

Establish standard methods and metrics for data collection and analysis, including program attendance, satisfaction, and program participants per staff-person.

Update the Museum and Education Strategic Institutional Plan (2021) upon the upcoming completion of the new strategic plan to incorporate the programming plan and analysis.

Secure grant funding for improving the nature education space to increase the Museum and Education Department's ability to provide high-quality programs.



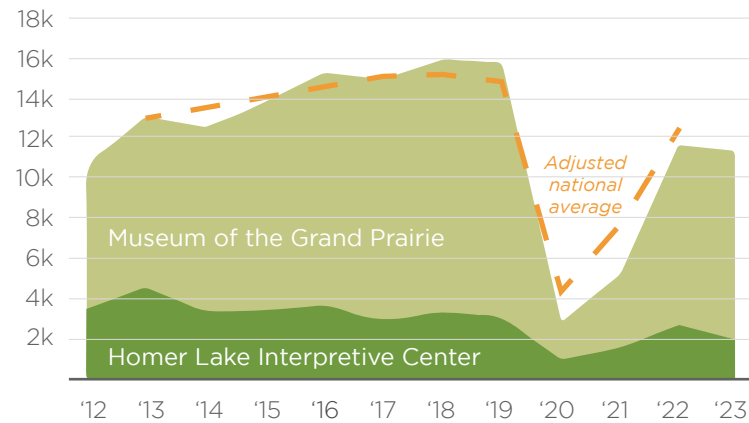
CREATE A PROGRAMMING PLAN & IMPROVE THE NATURE EDUCATION SPACE

ADDITIONAL CONTEXT: PROGRAMMING TRENDS

VISITATION AND PROGRAM PARTICIPATION: PANDEMIC IMPACTS

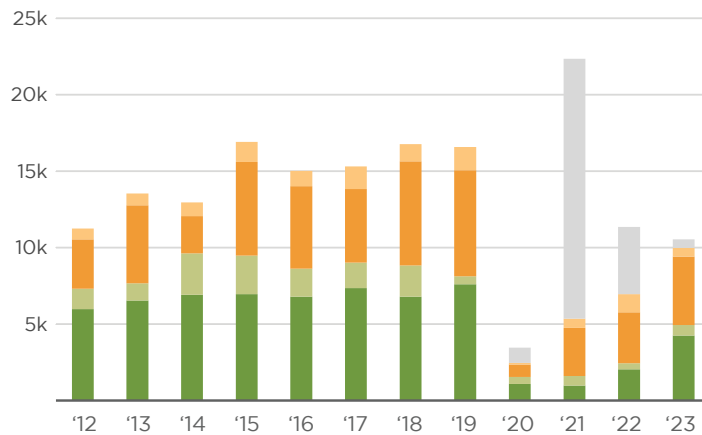
Walk-in visitation to Forest Preserve education facilities has followed national average trends both before and after the pandemic.⁵⁷ However, Museum visitation was growing through 2019 while Interpretive Center visitation has been falling since 2013. From 2020 to 2022, walk-in visitation to the Interpretive Center and the Museum quadrupled, but they seem to have plateaued. In 2023, the Interpretive Center lost about one-third of walk-ins from 2022, while Museum visitation remained the same. In '22 and '23, walk-in visitation to education facilities sat just below three-quarters of its '17-'19 average.

Walk-in Visitation to Education Facilities

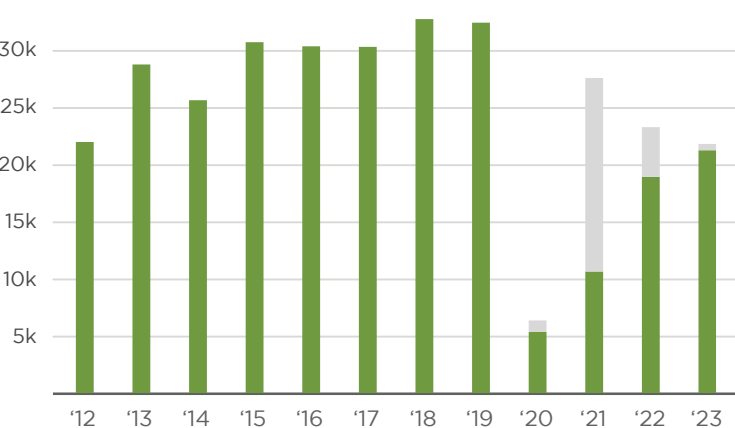


Program participation in 2023 was only 62% of its 2017-2019 average but it more than doubled from '20 to '21, then grew by 30% in '22 and another 44% in '23.

Participants by Program Type



People Reached (All Dept. Activities)

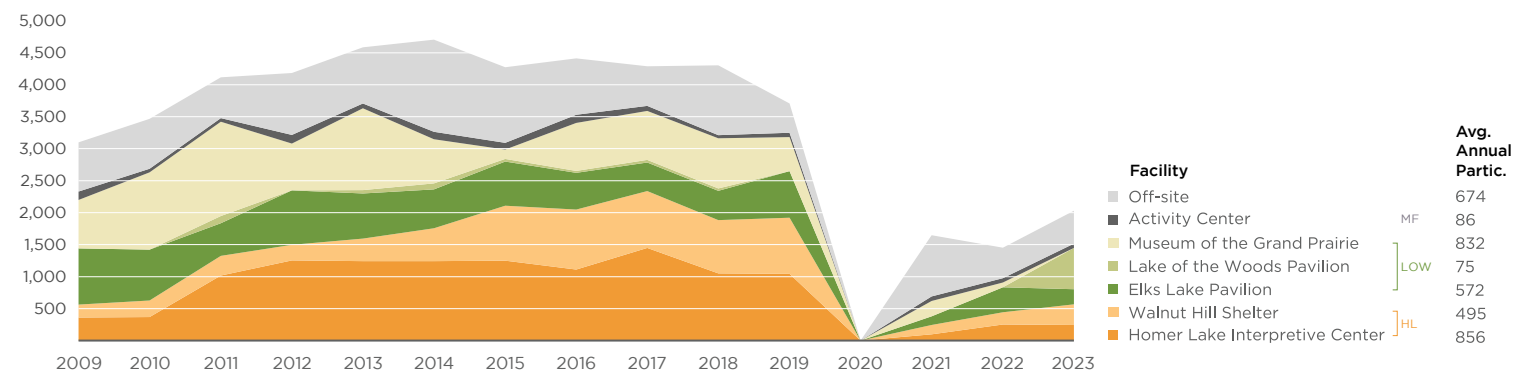


Programming's growth since the pandemic crash has helped the Museum and Education Department continue to grow its post-pandemic reach. During the pandemic (mostly in 2021), the department supplemented by providing virtual programs, take-home kits, and a higher proportion of offsite programming. The department has mostly tapered these activities back to pre-pandemic levels in favor of returning to in-person programs.

INTERNAL TRENDS IN PROGRAM TYPES AND LOCATIONS

Environmental education school programs are offered throughout the year at several locations. The Homer Lake Interpretive Center has hosted the most annual programs and participants since 2009, but the Interpretive Center's proportion of programming has dropped to less than half of its pre-pandemic average of 28%. Post-pandemic, environmental education school programming locations are relatively evenly split among Elks Lake Pavilion (15%), Lake of the Woods Pavilion (13%), Walnut Hill Shelter (13%), and the Interpretive Center (12%).

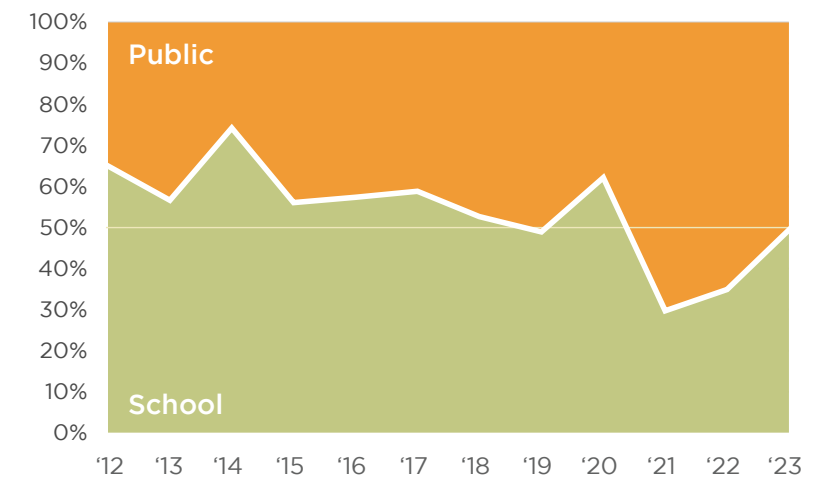
Environmental Education Program Participants by Facility



From 2021 to 2023 the Forest Preserves also offered programs at Homer Lake's Salt Fork Center, the Lake of the Woods Golf Course, and Rayburn-Purnell Woods at Lake of the Woods.

The Forest Preserves have offered a relatively consistent ratio of onsite-to-offsite and public-to-school programs. In general, the Forest Preserves have offered more school programming than public programming. The proportion of programs that are public programs spiked during the pandemic but is trending toward its pre-pandemic balance. Offsite programming represented between 12% and 28% of all programs each year from 2012 to 2023.^{ix} In 2023, 13% of programs were offsite, the lowest number since 2019.

Proportion of Public and School Programs



^{ix} Since 2021, 38% of environmental programming has taken place offsite, although the proportion offsite has decreased each year and returned to its pre-pandemic average in 2023.

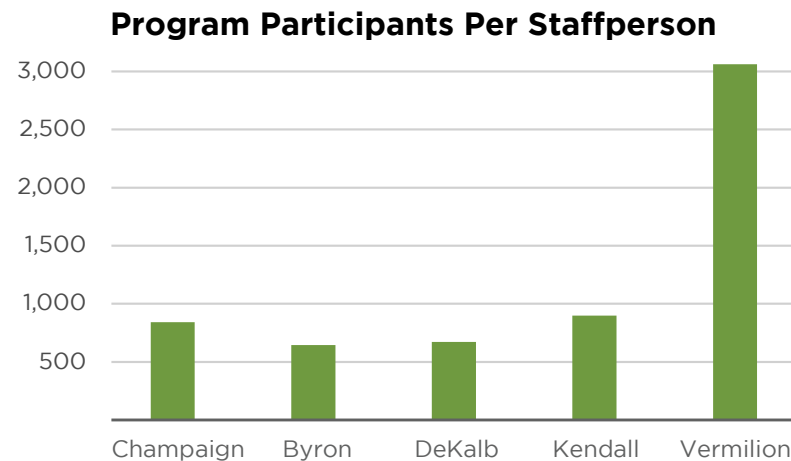
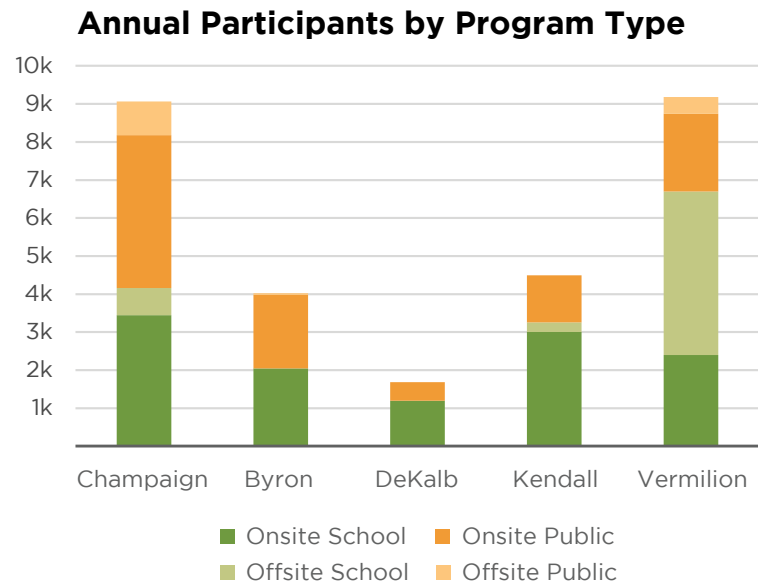
CREATE A PROGRAMMING PLAN & IMPROVE NATURE EDUCATION SPACE

ADDITIONAL CONTEXT: PROGRAMMING TRENDS
CONTINUED

COMPARISONS WITH OTHER FOREST PRESERVE AND CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Among the comparison districts,^x the Forest Preserves and the Vermilion County Conservation District (VCCD) receive the most annual program participants, but VCCD operates with fewer staff. VCCD is the outlier in terms of participants per staff person, and the main difference appears to be that VCCD offers the highest proportion of offsite school programming among the districts. At VCCD, a traveling naturalist visits multiple schools per week, reaching 4,000 students per year.

Increasing the proportion of offsite school programming may help expand the Forest Preserves' reach. Increasing offsite programming in general may help reach new communities as well. Further assessment is needed to understand how the Forest Preserves can expand the reach of programming and how these actions will affect staffing and space needs. To assess themselves, the Forest Preserves can evaluate the efforts of Vermilion County Conservation District.



^x To create a benchmark for program provision, staff contacted the comparison districts discussed in the Finance chapter and some additional forest preserve and conservation districts, which self-reported their most recent annual data. Champaign County's data is the average of 2017-2023 except 2020 to correct for COVID.



SELECTED COUNTY-WIDE SURVEY COMMENTS:
PROGRAMMING

I WOULD LOVE TO SEE MORE PROGRAMS FOR KIDS SPECIFICALLY AT LAKE OF THE WOODS. WAYS TO GET KIDS OUTSIDE!

- COMMUNITY MEMBER



A child shows off her catch at a Take Me Fishing event. Photo by Forest Preserve staff.

I WOULD REALLY LOVE TO SEE MORE EDUCATIONAL OUTDOOR EVENTS FOR ADULTS LIKE TREE WALKS. ALSO, SOCIAL ACTIVITIES AROUND MUSEUM EVENTS FOR ADULTS.

- COMMUNITY MEMBER

PROVIDE PROGRAMMING AND RESOURCES THAT ARE ACCESSIBLE AND RESPONSIVE TO DIVERSE CULTURES AND COMMUNITIES IN THE DISTRICT (E.G., A LOT OF THE PROGRAMMING HAPPENS IN PRIMARILY WHITE, WEALTHY COMMUNITIES). HOW CAN PROGRAMMING BE RESPONSIVE TO THE FULL CHAMPAIGN COUNTY DISTRICT?

- COMMUNITY MEMBER

THERE NEEDS TO BE MORE AWARENESS IN SCHOOLS AND OFFERINGS FOR SCHOOLS TO ATTEND SPECIAL EVENTS.

- COMMUNITY MEMBER

I WISH CCFPD WOULD COORDINATE AND WORK MORE CLOSELY WITH OTHER TAXING BODIES... I WOULD LOVE TO SEE SHARED USE AND USING THE PARKS AS LEARNING AS A KEY PART OF THE MISSION OF THOSE ORGANIZATIONS.

- COMMUNITY MEMBER

THE FOREST PRESERVE NEEDS TO DO A BETTER JOB OF PROMOTING AWARENESS OF ECOLOGY AND IMPORTANCE OF OUR NATURAL AREAS IN REVERSING CLIMATE CHANGE, STOPPING THE POLLUTION OF OUR WATERWAYS, THE DELIVERY OF ECOSYSTEM SERVICES, AND THE PRESERVATION OF WILDLIFE... THE FOREST PRESERVE ALSO HAS THE RESPONSIBILITY TO EDUCATE PEOPLE ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR OWN NATIVE ECOSYSTEMS.

- COMMUNITY MEMBER

Recommendation

Expand trails & outdoor recreation opportunities

Trails – from accessible paved trails, to walking and hiking paths, to the Kickapoo Rail Trail – are the main draw to the preserves. Maintaining trails, adding more, connecting them, and making them more accessible are all extremely important to the public. Other outdoor amenities also attract visitors to the preserves. Visitors want to see the Forest Preserves maintain their amenities and add more opportunities to connect with nature, including kids’ play areas and water activities. Expanding recreation also means making these opportunities available to everyone through inclusive and ADA-accessible spaces and activities.

Recreation in nature provides potent health benefits in addition to the benefits of physical activity.⁶⁰ By providing more and better outdoor recreation opportunities, the Forest Preserves support the wellbeing of residents.

For context, see p. [11-14](#), [23](#), [27-31](#), [43-44](#), [47](#), & [Appendix E-F](#).

“ I WOULD APPRECIATE A MORE COMPREHENSIVE RESOURCE THAT OUTLINES THE HIKING TRAILS, THAT INCLUDES MAPS, DISTANCES, AND LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY.

- COMMUNITY MEMBER



“ I THINK HANDICAP ACCESSIBLE AREAS SHOULD INCREASE SO THAT MORE PEOPLE COULD ENJOY OUR BEAUTIFUL PARKS.

- COMMUNITY MEMBER

“ I'D LIKE FOR THERE TO BE MORE SPACES WHERE TODDLERS CAN SAFELY PLAY IN NATURE. I'D LIKE FOR THERE TO BE MORE LOCATIONS OFFERING THE (WILD-ISH) NATURE PLAY AREA LIKE ANITAS PURVES OFFERS, WITH TREE SHADE FOR THE SUMMER DAYS. I'D ALSO LIKE FOR THERE TO BE MORE TODDLER ACTIVITIES LATER IN THE DAY, FOR WORKING PARENTS TO BE ABLE TO BRING THEIR KIDS FOR AFTER-WORK PLAY.

- COMMUNITY MEMBER

THE PRESERVES OFFER

46 miles of trails

&

577 acres of public waters



GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

EXPAND TRAILS & OUTDOOR RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

Promote existing trail system and other outdoor recreation opportunities to encourage their use and increase usability by:

- Publishing information on existing trails and outdoor recreation opportunities;
 - Add trails to the Hike App;
- Developing and implementing wayfinding standards;
- Evaluating and promoting the health benefits of outdoor recreation.

Create new opportunities for trails and other nature-compatible outdoor recreation:

- Survey residents, including visitors and non-visitors, to identify unmet needs;
- Allocate an appropriate portion of newly acquired land to recreation.

Plan for regional trail and outdoor recreation opportunities:

- Develop a Forest Preserve trails master plan;
 - Coordinate with partners such as the Champaign County Regional Planning Commission, municipalities, and non-profit groups such as the Trails of the Grand Prairie;
- Develop a Kickapoo Rail Trail master plan;
- Develop a Forest Preserve waterways plan;
- Develop an iterative plan for gradual design improvements to the Botanical Garden that minimizes impacts to visitation.



Recommendation Evaluate & maintain facilities & infrastructure

The upkeep of facilities and preserves is fundamental to the visitor experience. Due to financial limitations, the Forest Preserves' approach to maintenance has been somewhat reactive, which created a decades-long backlog in maintenance and replacement schedules. Increased funding from the 2020 referendum has allowed the Forest Preserves to catch up on past-due maintenance and begin to approach it more proactively. Visitors today are highly satisfied with the upkeep of facilities and preserves and four in five survey respondents would like maintenance to continue to be a top priority. A parallel focus on maintaining financial stability, a top priority for nearly half of respondents, will allow the Forest Preserves to grow sustainably while maintaining their properties and facilities. The Forest Preserves should continually refocus on their long-term financial outlook as they grow to ensure they can keep pace with maintenance obligations while providing excellent services to the public.

For context, see p. [31](#), [45](#), [47-48](#), [53-76](#), [79-82](#), & [Appendix G](#).

The Forest Preserves own or manage...

577 acres of waters

55 miles of shoreline

46 miles of trails

40 buildings covering **138,760** sq ft

26 shelters covering **14,050** sq ft

16 restrooms covering **6,540** sq ft

79 roofs covering **166,756** sq ft



1 mobile home

11 passenger vehicles

17 utility vehicles

20 trucks

27 boats

35 mowers

65 golf carts

77 pieces of small equipment

plows, attachments, & hand equipment

121 pieces of large equipment

tractors, trailers, & machinery

40 acres of roads & parking

107 HVAC units

“ **IT WOULD BE NICE TO HAVE UPGRADED FACILITIES (RESTROOMS) ON SOME OF THE OLDER PAVILIONS.** ”

- COMMUNITY MEMBER

GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

EVALUATE & MAINTAIN FACILITIES & INFRASTRUCTURE

Continually evaluate costs, revenues, conditions, and use of facilities.

- Evaluate existing facilities to determine capital investment needed, revenue generation potential, and benefit to operations or the public;
- Consider ways to increase use of underutilized facilities;
- Include sustainability improvements as feasible for facilities during renovations or upgrades.

Create a working inventory of sites, facility, and fleet conditions to aid in day-to-day and long-term decision-making.

- Critically review fleet needs on an ongoing basis to ensure staff are able to operate efficiently;
- Modernize existing facility and fleet documents to an editable format.

Establish a benchmark levels of developed and undeveloped land.

- Study existing balance of developed (areas with amenities, facilities, and infrastructure) and undeveloped land (natural areas and water bodies);
- Identify areas that may be developed but underused, as well as areas that are in high demand by visitors but may lack necessary infrastructure.
 - Consider conducting observational occupancy studies and collecting site-specific input.

Assess non-routine infrastructure needs.

- Identify and set aside funds for high-cost, non-routine infrastructure failures (e.g. dredging, shoreline stabilization, parking lot milling);
- Explore options to remove non-critical, aging infrastructure.

Explore ways to diversify funding sources, including grants, funding partnerships, private donations, and other creative mechanisms to address future maintenance obligations and high demand for services.



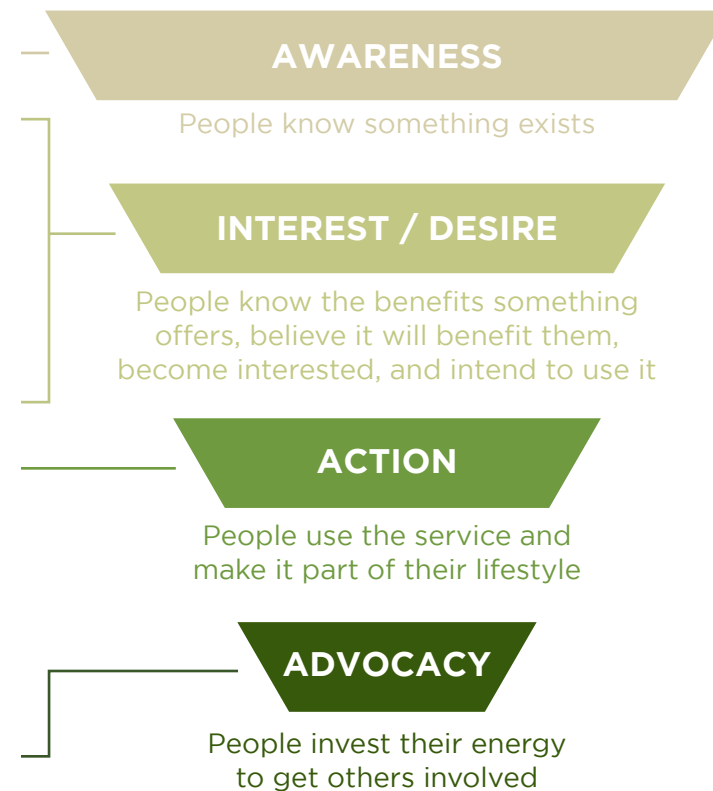
Recommendation

Increase engagement

Stakeholders and the general public agree that expanding public awareness is a major opportunity. Residents hold the Forest Preserves in high esteem, and most are aware of the existence of the Forest Preserves, but many remain unaware of specific Forest Preserves offerings. Low familiarity with the Forest Preserves' programs, which receive high satisfaction ratings, indicates the need to promote them more broadly. Suggested improvements and free-response comments from the stakeholder and county-wide surveys echo that people know about the Preserves but want to know more about what the Forest Preserves do and how they can be more involved. County-wide survey results show demographic disparities in visitation, satisfaction, and feelings of representation. Together, these themes indicate the need for the Forest Preserves to develop outreach strategies tailored to different audiences – including non-users – designed to meet them where they are, deliver information relevant to them, and move them through the next levels of engagement with the Forest Preserves.

For context, see p. [17](#), [29](#), [31-32](#), [43](#), [45](#), [48-50](#), & [Appendix H-I](#).

Engagement Funnel



Adapted from the commonly used sales funnel, the engagement funnel above shows how the Forest Preserves can move patrons through sequential tiers of engagement with marketing.

IT IS HARD TO FIND INFORMATION ABOUT THEIR PROGRAMS.

- COMMUNITY MEMBER

I DO NOT KNOW WHERE MOST OF THE PARKS ARE OR WHAT THEY OFFER.

- COMMUNITY MEMBER

NEED TO BLOW [THEIR] OWN HORN MORE - PEOPLE SHOULD KNOW ALL OF THE ACTIVITIES, PROGRAMS AND FAMILY LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES THAT CCFPD OFFERS.

- COMMUNITY MEMBER

GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

INCREASE ENGAGEMENT

Assess target audiences:

- Current users (e.g. frequent visitors, once-in-a-while visitors, online followers, online advocates);
- Non-users (especially those unfamiliar with the Forest Preserves).
- Establish baseline visitation statistics.

Assess current communications:

- Brand identity elements – use of voice, messaging, visuals, online presence, and other marketing materials;
- Outreach elements – use of media, events/programs, and personnel.

Update the Forest Preserves' vision to an aspirational statement describing what specifically the mission will achieve.

Based on the above assessments, create a marketing & branding strategy to (a) establish a uniform look and messaging across media and materials, and (b) increase and maintain engagement with target audiences:

- Establish outreach methods and messaging to move target audiences to the next tiers of engagement;
- Maximize non-Marketing (e.g. education, events, volunteer, recreation) activities for delivering messaging and moving patrons to the next tiers of engagement;
- Communicate Forest Preserves' mission, vision, and values.

INCREASE ENGAGEMENT

**ADDITIONAL CONTEXT:
THE NEED FOR A CLEAR,
LONG-TERM ‘VISION’**

In the stakeholder SWOT survey, the Forest Preserves’ “mission/vision” was the most commonly mentioned weakness. Respondents expressed that resources were spread too thinly among diverse missions and that a lack of prioritization exacerbated this issue. While the mission describes the Forest Preserves’ work with conservation, recreation, and education, the vision of “Protecting Nature. Creating Connections.” does not clearly express what the mission is meant to achieve. Without a long-term vision, the scope of the organization’s goals is limited. A more detailed and focused vision statement would help the Forest Preserves balance and unify their three pillars, prioritize their work, and enable more ambitious goal-setting to achieve greater impact. This statement would guide the marketing strategy and the implementation of all other recommendations.

In addition to a vision statement, it may be useful to draft a more detailed document describing the roles of conservation, recreation, and education and how these pillars support one another.

See [p. 9](#) for mission, vision, & values.

MISSION

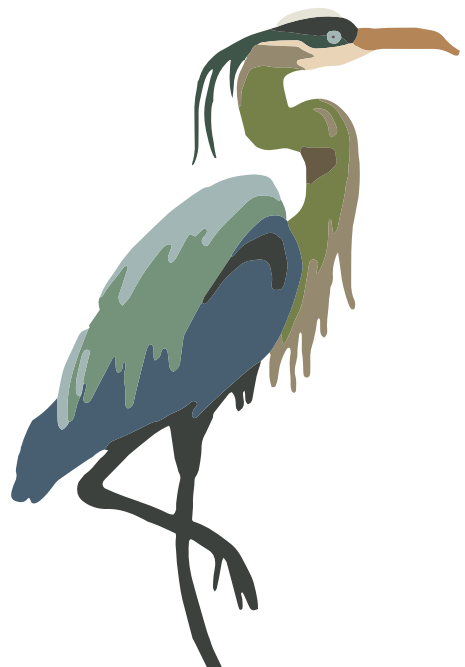
What an organization does

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

VISION

What the mission achieves

Protecting Nature.
Creating Connections.



**ADDITIONAL CONTEXT:
VOLUNTEERS’ ROLE IN
OUTREACH**

Volunteering acquaints people with the Preserves and can turn them into advocates. Partnerships with outside organizations such as the Upper Sangamon River Conservancy and Master Naturalists help create advocates for the Preserves and should be considered part of the strategy for increasing engagement. Additionally, as the number of volunteers has increased, the demand on staff has increased. The Forest Preserves should explore how to best leverage their strong volunteer base as an arm of their outreach strategy.

“VERY HARD TO VOLUNTEER DURING THE WEEK. COULD USE SOME FAMILY-ORIENTED VOLUNTEER WORK.

- COMMUNITY MEMBER

“MORE OPTIONS FOR VOLUNTEERS? COULD VOLUNTEERS ‘ADOPT A PARK’ OF THEIR OWN?”

- COMMUNITY MEMBER

“I’VE BEEN A VOLUNTEER AT SEVERAL EVENTS [AND] MANY CHILDREN AND FAMILIES DO NOT KNOW ABOUT OUR PRESERVES, HOW TO GET INVOLVED, AND HOW TO GET THERE. WHEN WE SHOW PICTURES, EXPLAIN EVENTS, AND TALK ABOUT OUR PROGRAMS THE CHILDREN AND PARENTS ARE EXCITED BUT DON’T KNOW WHERE THEY FIT IN.

- COMMUNITY MEMBER

A volunteer welcomes paddle boat users back to the dock. Photo by Forest Preserve staff, 2023.



INCREASE ENGAGEMENT

ADDITIONAL CONTEXT: RACIAL DISPARITIES IN VISITATION & SELF-REPORTED REPRESENTATION

The Forest Preserves must ensure all residents are provided the opportunity to connect with nature. According to the county-wide survey, a significantly lower proportion of Black and Hispanic/Latino residents had visited the preserves and reported feeling represented by Forest Preserve offerings compared to White residents (see table below). These results indicate opportunities for the Forest Preserves to increase engagement by addressing racial equity concerns.

Suggestions for Increasing BIPOC Engagement
Third-party Assessments of DEI at the Forest Preserves (2022)

- Improved transportation to/from the preserves
- More relevant programming, including for:
 - People with limited experience in nature
 - Families and large groups
 - Identity-specific (e.g. multilingual, women of color birdwatchers, BIPOC teens, etc.)
- Improved information-sharing, including:
 - Brochures in other languages
 - Partnerships with community organizations
- Explicitly inclusive spaces, materials, and services

“WE ENJOY NATURAL SPACES WHEN POSSIBLE, BUT SOMETIMES FEEL UNSAFE AND THREATENED BY OTHER PATRONS AS A POC.
 - COMMUNITY MEMBER

“IT STRUGGLES TO SERVE THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY/ALL RESIDENTS
 - COMMUNITY MEMBER

“OTHER THAN [THE COUNTY-WIDE SURVEY], THERE IS LITTLE INPUT THAT HAS EVER BEEN ASKED IN MY 18 YEARS LIVING HERE.
 - COMMUNITY MEMBER

Two third-party reports on diversity, equity, & inclusion at the Forest Preserves explored reasons for low engagement among non-White residents and offer potential avenues for increased engagement (see [Appendix V-W](#)). In the third-party reports as well as the county-wide needs assessment survey, the top barriers to visitation included lack of familiarity and lack of proximity or transportation. Suggestions for improvement are summarized above right.

The Forest Preserves must make an intentional effort to address historical inequities and engage non-White residents. The Forest Preserves can use the findings of these reports and collaborate with community members to develop and refine outreach efforts that welcome a more diverse user base.

Racial Disparities in Visitation and Feelings of Representation

% of Respondents by Race/Ethnicity

County-wide Needs Assessment Survey (2023)	White	Black	Hispanic/Latino
Visited Preserve or Facility from 2020 to 2022	90	59	68
Feels Represented by Forest Preserve Offerings	91	56	43

SELECTED COUNTY-WIDE SURVEY COMMENTS: BARRIERS TO ACCESSING THE PRESERVES

“THE MAJORITY OF FUN AND ENGROSSING NATURAL AREAS ARE FAR AWAY FROM CHAMPAIGN URBANA CITY CENTERS.
 - COMMUNITY MEMBER

“I HAVE MOBILITY ISSUES AND DON'T DRIVE MYSELF, SO I CAN'T USE THE AREAS SUCCESSFULLY.
 - COMMUNITY MEMBER



Volunteers receive training during an Indigenous Peoples' Day event at Lake of the Woods' Buffalo Trace Prairie. Photo by Forest Preserve staff, 2023.

“THERE IS NOT MUCH NEAR CAMPUS FOR STUDENTS.
 - COMMUNITY MEMBER

“CHILDREN WHO DO NOT HAVE TRANSPORTATION TO CFP SITES ARE NOT ABLE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE. PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION TO CCFPD LOCATIONS WOULD BE MORE INCLUSIVE.
 - COMMUNITY MEMBER

“THE PRESERVES ARE VERY FAR APART. THIS IS NOT A PROBLEM IN ITSELF, BUT AS FAR AS I CAN TELL THEY ARE NOT REACHABLE BY ANY MEANS OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION. IN SHORT, IF YOU DON'T HAVE A CAR, YOU'RE SUNK.
 - COMMUNITY MEMBER

Recommendation Lead on climate & conservation

Responses across several sources show people view the Forest Preserves and forest preserve districts in general as leaders in conservation. Within the Forest Preserves, across Champaign County, and across the nation, people want their local districts to continue doing what they are best known for: protecting lands, restoring natural areas, and managing habitats. An overwhelming majority of US residents also believes their local park and recreation agency should use their land to protect against climate change. Finally, there is significant county- and state-level demand for conservation and sustainability programming.

Navigating the challenges posed by climate change and the nature-depleted environment requires a multifaceted approach that may also include adapting Forest Preserves operations to changing conditions. Entrusted with the stewardship of public lands and seen as an authority on sustainability, the Forest Preserves are naturally positioned to help lead the county's climate and conservation efforts.

For context, see p. [23-24](#), [29-32](#), [45](#), & [Appendix J-L](#).

WE WANT CONTINUED COMMITMENT TO MAINTAINING OUR NATURAL RESOURCES IN CHAMPAIGN COUNTY!

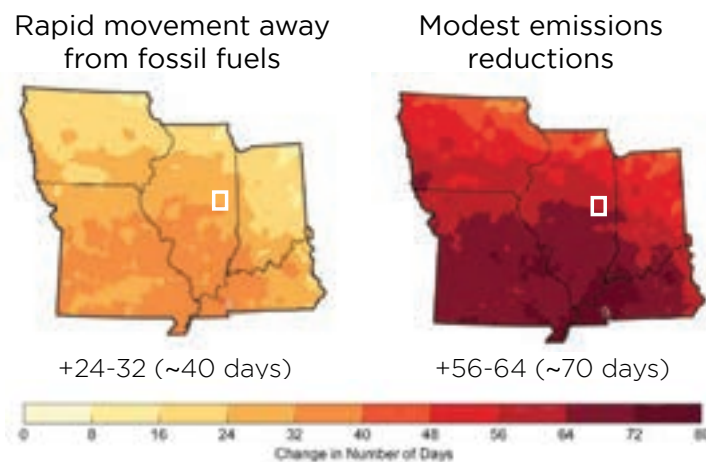
- COMMUNITY MEMBER



“ I WOULD LOVE TO SEE CONTINUED/ INCREASED PUBLIC EDUCATION ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS OF RESTORING AND MAINTAINING NATURAL AREAS AND WAYS THEY CAN HELP.

- COMMUNITY MEMBER

Changes in “Very Hot” Days by 2100



The Nature Conservancy's Assessment of the Impacts of Climate Change in Illinois (2021) used data from 32 global models to predict changes by 2100. Its two emissions scenarios predict one to two more months of 95+ degree days. Well-managed natural areas would help mitigate these changes.

GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

LEAD ON CLIMATE & CONSERVATION

Evaluate operations, improvements, programs, the visitor experience, and natural areas to adapt to changing climate conditions.

Include natural areas plans in site plans for each preserve.

Measure the impacts of Forest Preserve operations (e.g. contributions from commuting, fleet vehicles, buildings, etc.) and natural areas (e.g. reduction of carbon, flooding, heat, and pollution) to aid in emissions reduction and related communications.

- Identify external funding and expertise.

Continually evaluate and operationalize the Climate Commitment by:

- Enhancing ecosystem services in the forest preserves;
- Reducing carbon footprint.

Expand education related to sustainability, conservation, and environmentalism.

Advocate for the expansion of natural areas throughout Champaign County:

- Coordinate with local agencies to incorporate expanding natural areas into plans;
- Contribute to county-level plans for strategically expanding natural areas;
- Identify projects, partners, and funding opportunities for green infrastructure throughout county;
- Explore opportunities to acquire land close to population centers.

LEAD ON CLIMATE & CONSERVATION

ADDITIONAL CONTEXT: EVALUATING THE FOREST PRESERVES' ROLE IN EXPANDING NATURE THROUGHOUT THE COUNTY

Climate change is expected to continue to bring hotter average temperatures, longer droughts, and more heavy rain events to Illinois. Natural landscapes and ecosystems support wellbeing and resilience, including helping address climate change causes and effects, but the past two centuries of development have stripped humans of this tool by relegating nature to the fringes. Less than 1% of Champaign County today is protected natural area.

Illinois law states forest preserve districts can acquire, protect, preserve, and restore lands “in their natural state and condition, for the purpose of education, pleasure, and recreation of the public.” This law, written in 1914, did not anticipate the critical role nature would play in protecting residents from climate change. However, the Climate Commitment passed by Board resolution in 2022 acknowledges the role nature and the Forest Preserves can play in addressing climate change causes and effects.

Enduring climate change solutions address the underlying causes of climate change. Reestablishing nature is an infrastructural solution that would help maximize the built environment’s ability to weather climate changes and to stem future human-induced change. This solution would have the added benefit of restoring biodiversity, which is inextricably tied to human wellbeing. Should the Preserves take a more active role in balancing the built environment, and what does that look like?

Given the expected impacts of climate change, nature’s ability to address them, the relative lack of nature in Champaign County, and the Forest Preserves’ authority to provide nature for the public good, the Forest Preserves should evaluate their role in buffering the community from the effects of climate change and rebalancing the landscape through conservation. The Forest Preserves should establish a path forward that acknowledges their capacity while maximizing their impact. This evaluation may dovetail with updating the Forest Preserves’ vision and developing the land acquisition guidance.

“**THE FOREST PRESERVE NEEDS TO DO A BETTER JOB OF PROMOTING AWARENESS OF ECOLOGY AND IMPORTANCE OF OUR NATURAL AREAS IN REVERSING CLIMATE CHANGE, STOPPING THE POLLUTION OF OUR WATERWAYS, THE DELIVERY OF ECOSYSTEM SERVICES, AND THE PRESERVATION OF WILDLIFE: INSECTS, FISH, BIRDS, ETC.**

- COMMUNITY MEMBER

CLIMATE COMMITMENT (2022)

The Forest Preserves’ commitment is to enhance ecosystems and acquire land for maximum sequestration and resilience to climate changes, reduce its own emissions to near-zero by 2050, and help improve public understanding of climate change.



*A dragonfly atop curled dock.
Photo by C. Hendrickson, 2023.*

Recommendation

Provide more land for conservation & recreation

Residents agree land acquisition should be a top priority for Illinois park agencies and the Champaign County Forest Preserves in particular. Land acquisition also supports achieving several other recommendations, such as leading on climate and conservation, expanding trails and outdoor recreation, and increasing engagement.

“**THERE HAS NOT BEEN THE STRONG PROACTIVE POLICY OF LAND ACQUISITION THAT IS NEEDED TO MEET CONSERVATION GOALS.**

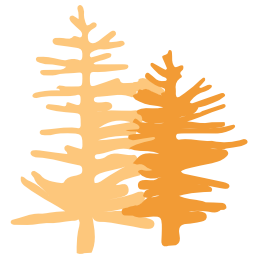
- COMMUNITY MEMBER

“**MORE PRESERVES ARE WARRANTED IN THE SOUTHERN HALF OF CHAMPAIGN COUNTY.**

- COMMUNITY MEMBER

As of 2024, Champaign County ranks in the bottom third of nineteen Illinois forest preserve and conservation districts in acreage relative to both county population and county size. Most Champaign County residents surveyed ranked acquiring and protecting new natural areas among their top priorities. Three-quarters of Illinois residents surveyed said they supported land acquisition for the purposes of protecting nature and for outdoor recreation. Further support for land acquisition comes from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources' *Illinois Wildlife Action Plan* (2005), the Champaign County Regional Planning Commission's *Regional Environmental Framework* (2020), and The Nature Conservancy's *Assessment of the Impacts of Climate Change in Illinois*,⁵⁸ and the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency's *State of Illinois Priority Climate Action Plan* (2024). There is also national direction from the White House initiative to protect 30% of US lands and waters by 2030. Just over 4% of Illinois is protected natural area.

For context, see p. [19-24](#), [28-32](#), [43-45](#), [48](#), & [Appendix M](#).



GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

PROVIDE MORE LAND FOR CONSERVATION & RECREATION

Complete and operationalize guidance for making decisions regarding land acquisition opportunities.

Evaluate land acquisition scenarios; determine the most appropriate long-term goal for strategic land acquisition.

- Consider public demand; contributions to climate change adaptation and mitigation; performance alongside other forest preserve and conservation districts; state and national goals; and balancing funding and resources with other recommendations.
- Seek out relationships with landowners, nonprofit agencies, and other potential partners to avail the Forest Preserves of future acquisition opportunities.

Identify and set aside funds in annual budgets and 5-year capital plans for acquisition opportunities and associated operational costs.

Maximize grant opportunities such as Land and Water Conservation Fund and Open Space Land Acquisition and Development to minimize the cost of acquisitions to Champaign County taxpayers.

DEVELOPING A LAND ACQUISITION STRATEGY

Proactively planning for land acquisition will prepare the Forest Preserves to act when suitable opportunities arise to expand existing preserves or add new ones. To navigate the competitive market, the Forest Preserves must be prepared to evaluate opportunities and make decisions quickly. In 2022, the Forest Preserves began drafting a land acquisition strategy to establish a standard process of review and direction to guide decision-making on potential future acquisitions. By acquiring land for preserves, the Forest Preserves can support ecosystems, improve residents' health and access to nature, and bolster climate change adaptation and mitigation. A formal land acquisition strategy will help guide and expedite the Forest Preserves' decision-making and ensure public funds are invested wisely for the greatest possible impact.



PROVIDE MORE LAND FOR CONSERVATION & RECREATION

LAND ACQUISITION SCENARIOS

Existing (2024)

Acres: **4,041**
 Acres Per 1,000: **19.3**
 % County Land: **0.63%**

SCENARIOS

This plan presents three scenarios to help inform the Forest Preserves' approach to land acquisition, using the metrics of Acres Per 1,000 Residents and the Percentage of County Land Owned.

ASSUMPTIONS

- Champaign County population grows by 9.4% (IDPH⁵⁹ projected rate)
- Other districts grow at their historical average rates

DISCUSSION

The Forest Preserves grew more slowly than their average in the past 25 years. Resuming a pace closer to their historical average would help the Preserves gain ground among other districts, although they will likely still rank low in 2050. The Forest Preserves must grow to bring their Acres Per 1,000 Residents closer to the statewide average. With higher growth, the Preserves could approach 1% of County Land Owned. Of 19 districts, 11 own 1% or more of their county's land, with an average of 3.4%.

Maintenance (+9.4%): 152 acres per decade

Acres by 2050: **4,421**
 Acres Per 1,000: **19.3**
 % County Land: **0.69%**

In the **Maintenance Scenario**, the Forest Preserves expands acreage by 9.4% to maintain pace with projected population growth and reach a total of 4,421 acres by 2050.

Advantages

- Low cost and staff time requirement

Disadvantages

- Does not address public demand
- Makes minimal progress toward conservation goals and climate change mitigation
- Likely drops Champaign County further below statewide averages

Historical Rate (+32.5%): 525 acres per decade

Acres by 2050: **5,353**
 Acres Per 1,000: **23.3**
 % County Land: **0.84%**

In the **Historical Rate Scenario**, the Forest Preserves expands acreage by 32.5%, equivalent to their historical average rate, to a total of 5,353 acres by 2050.

Advantages

- Addresses public demand
- Contributes to conservation goals and climate change mitigation

Disadvantages

- Requires increased funds for acquisition, development, and maintenance
- Maintains below state average rate of expansion

Higher Growth (+50%): 808 acres per decade

Acres by 2050: **6,062**
 Acres Per 1,000: **26.4**
 % County Land: **0.95%**

In the **Higher Growth Scenario**, the Forest Preserves expands acreage by 50%, an ambitious but not unprecedented rate, to a total of 6,062 acres by 2050. In the 1970s and 1990s, the Preserves expanded at a faster rate than 50% when it added Homer Lake and Middle Fork River Forest Preserves.

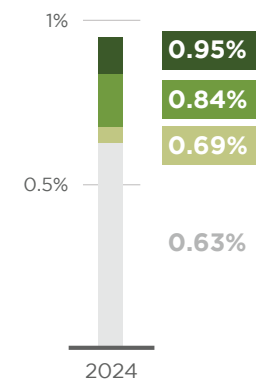
Advantages

- Addresses public demand
- Most significantly contributes to conservation goals and climate change mitigation
- Brings Champaign County's Acres Per 1,000 Residents closer to statewide average, even assuming other districts grow significantly

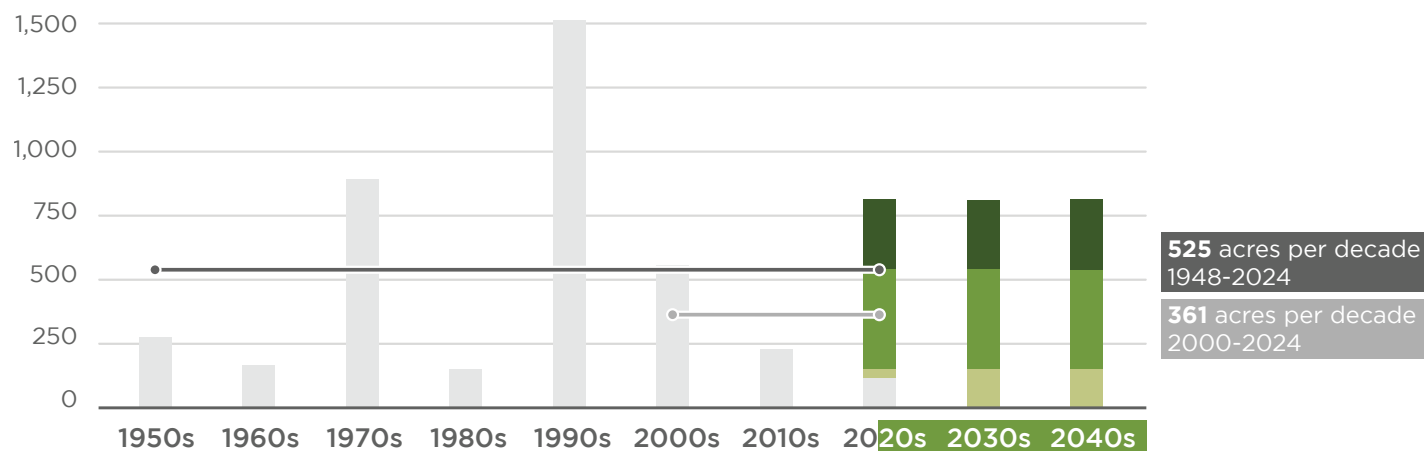
Disadvantages

- May be difficult to identify acquisition opportunities
- Requires increased funds for acquisition, development, and maintenance

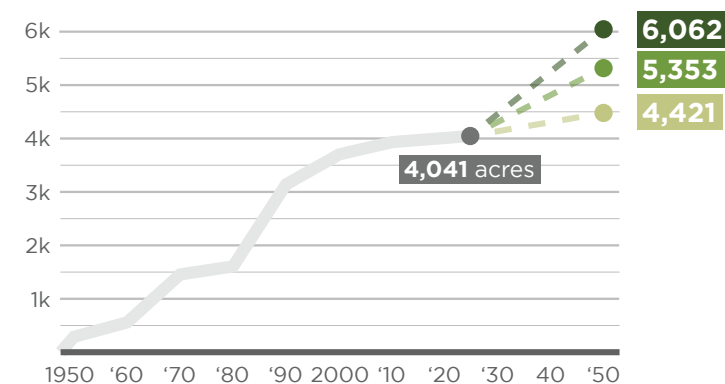
County Land Owned



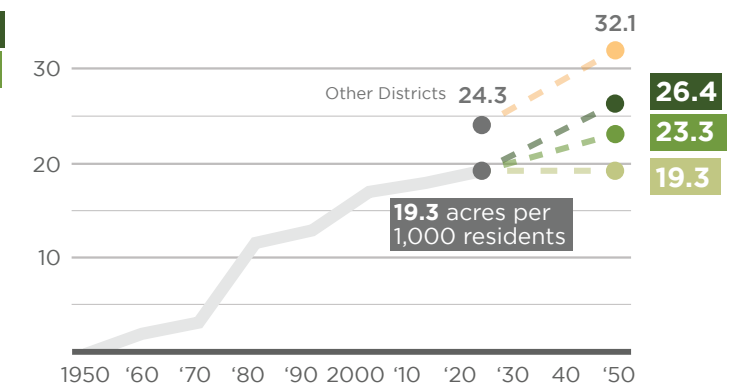
Acres Acquired by Decade with Three Future Growth Scenarios



Acres Over Time



Acres Per 1,000 Residents Over Time



References

- 1** Illinois University Library. (2021, March 5). Illinois Forest Preserves: Forest Preserve District List and Links - Links to County Forest Preserve Districts, information on the preserve system. (Braxton). Retrieved from Illinois Library: <https://guides.library.illinois.edu/ilforestpreserves/illinoisforestpreservedistricts>
- 2** Openlands Project. (2006). Forest Preserve and Conservation Districts in Northeastern Illinois: Meeting the Challenges of the 21st Century. Chicago: Openlands.
- 3** Champaign County Forest Preserve District. (2010). Master Plan.
- 4** Illinois General Assembly. (N.D.). Special Districts: Downstate Forest Preserve District Act. Retrieved from Illinois Compiled Statutes: <https://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/ilcs3.asp?ActID=875&ChapterID=15>
- 5** Illinois Department of Natural Resources. (2014). 2015-2019 Illinois Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan.
- 6** Cranz, G., & Boland, M. (2003). The Ecological Park as an Emerging Type. *Places*, 44-47. Retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/68v5m7k2>
- 7** Forest Preserves of Cook County. (2015). Plans. Retrieved from Forest Preserves of Cook County: <https://fpdcc.com/downloads/plans/FPCC-Natural-Cultural-Resources-Master-Plan-3-9-15-012219.pdf>
- 8** Urban, M. A. (2005). An uninhabited waste: Transforming the Grand Prairie in nineteenth century Illinois, USA. *Journal of Historical Geography*, 31(4): 647-665.
- 9** Stodolska, M., Shinew, K., Camarillo, L. (2017). Urbana Park District Study Report: Increasing Involvement among Underrepresented Groups in Parks and Recreation Programs. https://www.urbanaparks.org/assets/1/6/UPD_Final_Report.pdf
- 10** Fargione, J., Bassett, S., & Boucher, T. e. (2018). Natural Climate Solutions for the United States. *Sci Adv*. doi:10.1126/sciadv.aat1869
- 11** National Recreation and Parks Association. (2023, January). Parks and Recreation Magazine: January 2023. Retrieved from National Recreation and Parks Association: <https://ezine.nrpa.org/nrpa/ParksRecreationMagazine/january-2023/index.php#/p/38>
- 12** Holman, D. (2021, May 19). I-View Illinois Protected Lands. Illinois: Prairie State Conservation Coalition. Retrieved from <https://pscc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=fb8dbaacc7b04c7fa12e850b9e7141ab>
- 13** See 19.
- 14** See 2.
- 15** See 8.
- 16** See 8.
- 17** Champaign County Regional Planning Commission. (2020). Regional Environmental Framework. Retrieved from https://ccrpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Final-REF-Report-11.25.2020_updated.pdf
- 18** See 8.
- 19** Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning. (2022). Recommendation: Plan for climate resilience. Retrieved from <https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/2050/environment/climate-resilience>
- 20** Diaz, S., Fargione, J., Chapin III, F. S., & Tilman, D. (2006). Biodiversity Loss Threatens Human Well-Being. *PLOS Biology*. doi:10.1371/journal.pbio.0040277
- 21** See 11.
- 22** Mattingly, R., Herricks, E., Johnston, D. (1993). Channelization and levee construction in Illinois: Review and implications for management. *Environmental Management*. doi.org/10.1007/BF02393899
- 23** Purakayastha, T., Huggins, D., & Smith, J. (2005). Carbon Sequestration in Native Prairie, Perennial Grass, No-Till, and Cultivated Palouse Silt Loam. *Soil Science Society of America Journal*, 72: 534-540. Retrieved from <https://www.ars.usda.gov/ARUserFiles/20902500/DavidHuggins/CarbonSequestrationinNativePrairie.pdf>
- 24** World Economic Forum; Marsh McLennan; SK Group; Zurich Insurance Group. (2022). The Global Risks Report. World Economic Forum. Retrieved from https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_The_Global_Risks_Report_2022.pdf
- 25** Wuebbles, D., Angel, J., Petersen, K., & Lemke, A. M. (2021). An Assessment of the Impacts of Climate Change in Illinois. Chicago: The Nature Conservancy.
- 26** Environmental Defense Fund. *The US Climate Vulnerability Index*. (2024). <https://climatevulnerabilityindex.org/>
- 27** Fargione, J., Bassett, S., & Boucher, T. e. (2018). Natural Climate Solutions for the United States. *Sci Adv*. doi:10.1126/sciadv.aat1869
- 28** UN Climate Action Summit. (2019). The Nature-Based Solutions for Climate Manifesto. UN Climate Action Summit 2019. United Nations Environment Programme. Retrieved from <https://wedocs.unep.org/xmlui/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/29705/190825NBSMani>
- 29** Roe, S., Streck, C., Beach, R., & Busch, J. e. (2021). Land-based measures to mitigate climate change: Potential and feasibility by country. *Global Change Biology*. doi:10.1111/gcb.15873
- 30** White House. (2021). FACT SHEET: President Biden to Take Action to Uphold Commitment to Restore Balance on Public Lands and Waters, Invest in Clean Energy Future. Retrieved from US Department of the Interior: <https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/fact-sheet-president-biden-take-action-uphold-commitment-restore-balance-public-lands>
- 31** EO Wilson Biodiversity Foundation. (2023). Why Half? Retrieved from EO Wilson Biodiversity Foundation: Half Earth Project: <https://eowilsonfoundation.org/what-is-the-half-earth-project/why-half/>
- 32** See 19.
- 33** US Geological Survey. (2020). Protected Areas Database of the United States. US Geological Survey. Retrieved from <https://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/2013/3086/>
- 34** See 19.
- 35** Science Alert (2021). Plumptre, Andrew. Only 3% of Earth's Land Ecosystems Remain Intact, But All Is Not Lost. <https://www.sciencealert.com/only-3-of-earth-s-land-ecosystems-remain-intact-but-all-is-not-lost>
- 36** Balasubramanian, M. (2019). Economic value of regulating ecosystem services: a comprehensive at the global level review. *Environmental Monitoring and Assessment*. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10661-019-7758-8>. doi: 10.1007/s10661-019-7758-8.

[Continued]

References

- 37** Adusumilli, N. (2015). Valuation of Ecosystem Services from Wetlands Mitigation in the United States. *Ecosystem Function and Land Use Change*, 4(1), 182-196. <https://www.mdpi.com/2073-445X/4/1/182>. doi: 10.3390/land4010182
- Prato, T., Hey, D. (2007). Economic Analysis of Wetland Restoration Along the Illinois River. *Journal of the American Water Resources Association*. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1752-1688.2006.tb03828.x>. doi: 10.1111/j.1752-1688.2006.tb03828.x
- Kozak, J., Lant, C., Shaikh, S., Wang, G. (2011). *Applied Geography*, 31 (1), 303-311. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0143622810000755>. doi: 10.1016/j.apgeog.2010.07.001.
- 38** Kuo, M. (2010). Parks and Other Green Environments: Essential Components of a Healthy Human Habitat. National Recreation and Park Association, Research Series. https://www.nrpa.org/UPLOADEDFILES/NRPA.ORG/PUBLICATIONS_AND_RESEARCH/RESEARCH/PAPERS/MINGKUO-RESEARCH-PAPER.PDF
- 39** Houseal Lavigne Associates. (2016). Comprehensive Plan. Retrieved from Village of Mahomet Illinois: https://www.mahomet-il.gov/vertical/Sites/%7B8D137460-5EE3-4B54-9DFO-146867CF080D%7D/uploads/Mahomet_Comprehensive_Plan_-_ADOPTED_2016.pdf
- 40** Champaign County Regional Planning Commission. (2014). Active Choices: Champaign County Greenways & Trails Plan. Retrieved from Champaign County Regional Planning Commission: <https://ccrpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/greenways-2014-plan-plan-only.pdf>
- 41** Champaign County Regional Planning Commission. (2020). Regional Environmental Framework. Retrieved from https://ccrpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Final-REF-Report-11.25.2020_updated.pdf
- 42** Illinois Department of Natural Resources. (2021). Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) 2021-2025. Springfield: Illinois Department of Natural Resources.
- 43** Illinois Department of Natural Resources. (2005). The Illinois Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plan & Strategy. <https://dnr.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/dnr/conservation/iwap/documents/illinoiswcwp.pdf>
- 44** Illinois Environmental Protection Agency. (2024), State of Illinois Priority Climate Action Plan. <https://epa.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/epa/topics/climate/documents/Illinois%20Priority%20Climate%20Action%20Plan.pdf>
- 45** See 32.
- 46** See 36.
- 47** National Recreation and Park Association. (2022). The Economic Impact of Local Parks: An Examination of the Economic Impacts of Operations and Capital Spending by Local Park and Recreation Agencies on the US Economy. National Recreation and Park Association. Retrieved from RPA, The Economic Impact of Local Parks (2022); National Recreation and Park Association. (2023). 2022 Engagement with Parks Report. Retrieved from <https://www.nrpa.org/>
- 48** See 52 (1)
- 49** See 48.
- 50** Jacobi-Vessels, J. (2013). Discovering Nature: The Benefits of Teaching Outside of the Classroom. *Dimensions of Early Childhood*, 4-10. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1044065>
- 51** Michigan State University Extension. (2016, December). Cognitive Development and Sensory Play. Retrieved from Michigan State University Extension: https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/cognitive_development_and_sensory_play
- 52** Dewar, G. (2022). 12 benefits of outdoor play (and tips for helping kids reap these benefits). Retrieved from Parenting Science: <https://parentingscience.com/benefits-of-outdoor-play/>
- 53** See 14.
- 54** Kellert, S. (2014). Nature and Childhood Development. In S. Kellert, *Designing and Understanding the Human-Nature Connection* (pp. 63-89). Washington DC: Island Press.
- 55** Hyndman, B., Benson, A., Ullah, S., & Telford, A. (2014). Evaluating the effects of the Lunchtime ENjoyment Activity and Play (LEAP) school playground intervention on children's quality of life, enjoyment, and participation in physical activity. *BMC Public Health*. Retrieved from <https://bmcpublihealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1471-2458-14-164>
- 56** Sando, O., Kleppe, R., & Hansen Sandseter, E. (2021). Risky Play and Children's Well-Being, Involvement and Physical Activity. *Child Indicators Research*, 1435-1451. Retrieved from <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12187-021-09804-5>
- 57** American Association for State and Local History. (2023). 2023 National Visitation Report. American Association for State and Local History. Retrieved from <https://www.aaslh.org/2023-national-visitation-report/>
- 58** See 25.
- 59** Illinois Department of Public Health Office of Policy, Planning and Statistics Division of Health Data and Policy. (2019). Population Projections: Illinois, Chicago and Illinois Counties by Age and Sex: July 1, 2015 to July 1, 2030 (2019 Edition). Retrieved from <https://dph.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/idph/files/publications/population-projections-report-2010-2030.pdf>.
- 60** See 37.

Appendix

 2040

A long-exposure shot of the night sky near the entrance of Middle Fork River Forest Preserve. Photo by J. Bobbitt, 2022

Appendix

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Forest Preserves Organizational Chart

Support for Recommendations

- Glossary of Data Sources
- Create a programming plan & improve the nature education space
- Expand trails & outdoor recreation opportunities
- Evaluate & maintain facilities & infrastructure
- Increase engagement
- Lead on climate & conservation
- Provide more land for conservation & recreation

Community Input

- Methods
- Additional Graphics

Third-party Assessments of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Illinois Forest Preserve and Conservation District Data

- Database
- Additional Comparison Graphics
- Natural Areas Statistics

Additional Maps

- Population Tract Density and Proximity to Preserves
- Areas Within 15- and 20-minute Drives to Forest Preserves
- 2020 Referendum Results by Precinct
- 2020 Referendum Results Change from 2008
- Funds Donated to the Forest Preserves by Zip Code, July 2016 to July 2021
- Forest Preserve Volunteers by Zip Code, 2019 to 2021

2023 Needs Assessment Survey

[A](#)

[B](#)

[C-D](#)

[E-F](#)

[G](#)

[H-I](#)

[J-L](#)

[M](#)

[N-O](#)

[P-U](#)

[V-W](#)

[X-Y](#)

[Z-AB](#)

[AC](#)

[AD](#)

[AE](#)

[AF](#)

[AG](#)

[AH](#)

[AI](#)

[AJ](#)

FOREST PRESERVES ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



SUPPORT FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

GLOSSARY OF DATA SOURCES

Source	Details
Informal in-person	Informal in-person input staff gathered at community events in summer 2021 Questions: “What would you spend your tax dollars on?” [choose up to 5]; “Why do you visit the preserves?” [free response]
Stakeholder surveys	Internal Stakeholder Surveys of Staff, Board, and CAC/Foundation conducted at the end of 2022; Includes SWOT and Visioning feedback
County-wide survey	Statistically valid, representative survey of 469 respondents in Champaign County conducted by aQity Research and Insights, Inc. from late 2022 to early 2023
State-wide survey	Statistically valid, representative survey of 2,700 respondents across Illinois conducted by aQity Research and Insights, Inc. in 2020
National survey	Statistically valid, representative survey of 1,000 respondents across the US conducted by Wakefield Research in May 2022
Forest Preserves policy	Policies adopted by the Forest Preserves Board of Commissioners
Literature review	Reviews of academic and scientific literature

SUPPORT FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

CREATE A PROGRAMMING PLAN & IMPROVE THE NATURE EDUCATION SPACE

THEME: CREATE A PROGRAMMING PLAN

Source	Support
County-wide survey	Of 8 potential Forest Preserves priorities, “Provide educational opportunities, exhibits, and programs about history and nature” ranked #5 (45% put it in their top 4) Homer Lake Interpretive Center program users are 90% highly satisfied, but 94% of survey respondents said they had not participated or were unaware <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 28% said they visited HLIC in last 2 years* • *Visitation data suggests closer to 1.5% of the county visits HLIC per year. This discrepancy is due HLIC users’ overrepresentation in the survey sample Forest Preserves-wide, 53-54% of program users are highly satisfied, but 51-52% of respondents said they had not participated or were unaware <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exhibit users are 59% highly satisfied, but 41% unaware/have not used When asked what they thought the Forest Preserves did well, the #6 comment was education and programming
State-wide survey	Of 9 potential funding priorities, “Provide environmental/conservation programs” ranked #2 “Educational activities needed” ranked #2 of 9 concerns regarding park visitation (62% agree)
Forest Preserves policy	The Climate Change Commitment, adopted in 2022, resolves the Forest Preserves act as a source of education to foster engagement and action on climate change
Literature Review	An analysis of 7 studies found focusing on local environmental issues in environmental education programs encourages intergenerational learning (Duvall & Zint, 2007). In an analysis of over 50 years of studies, researchers found environmental education significantly improved intentions and self-reported behavior regarding the environment (van de Wetering et al., 2022).

SUPPORT FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

CREATE A PROGRAMMING PLAN & IMPROVE THE NATURE EDUCATION SPACE

CONTINUED

THEME: IMPROVE NATURE EDUCATION SPACE

Source	Support
County-wide survey	Of 11 potential improvements, “Update or add a nature center” ranked #6 (37% high importance) More respondents favored renovation of the existing facility (42%) over building a new nature center (37% -- 18% HL, 19% elsewhere), but respondents were not informed of the spatial limitations at HLIC
Literature review	See above

References for “Assess Programming & Improve Nature Education Space”

Judith van de Wetering, Patty Leijten, Jenna Spitzer, Sander Thomaes (2022) Does environmental education benefit environmental outcomes in children and adolescents? A meta-analysis. Journal of Environmental Psychology. Volume 81. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2022.101782>.

Edward Boyes & Martin Stanisstreet (2012) Environmental Education for Behaviour Change: Which actions should be targeted?, International Journal of Science Education, 34:10, 1591-1614, DOI: 10.1080/09500693.2011.584079

SUPPORT FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

EXPAND TRAILS & OUTDOOR RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

THEME: EXPAND/IMPROVE TRAILS

Source	Support
Informal in-person	When asked why they visit, “Trails” was the #1 answer Of 15 potential improvements, “New/improved trails” ranked #3, and “Extending the Kickapoo Rail Trail” ranked #4
County-wide survey	Of 8 potential Forest Preserves priorities, “Maintain existing preserves, trails, facilities” ranked #1, with 80% ranking it in their top 4, 53% in their top 2, and 27% #1 In “Importance,” the 3 trails categories ranked 1, 2, and 3 out of 11 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Add more trails” was #1 (58% high importance; avg. rating 7.5/10) • “Add/connect longer trails” #2 (53%; 7.2/10) • “Add more paved trails for [accessibility]” #3 (42%; 6.9/10) 80% said they walked or hiked when visiting the Forest Preserves, making it the most common activity When asked what the Forest Preserves could do better, the top comment was trail improvements, including maintenance and upkeep ‘Guided hiking/walking trails’ was a top suggestion for the new nature center
State-wide survey	81% of Illinoisans surveyed said they wanted more trails

SUPPORT FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

EXPAND TRAILS & OUTDOOR RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES CONTINUED

THEME: EXPAND OUTDOOR RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

Source	Support
Informal in-person	<p>“[Outdoor recreation] amenities” and “Water activities” (half said swimming, and several also mentioned kayaking/canoeing) were the #3 and #4 reasons people said they visited</p> <p>Of 15 potential improvements, “New kids’ play areas” ranked #5</p>
County-wide survey	<p>In “Importance,” the #4 and #5 answers were “Add outdoor nature-based play areas for children” (39% high importance; avg. rating 6.6/10), and “More opportunities for kayaking, canoeing, rowing, etc.” (41%; 6.5/10)</p> <p>39% report doing some kind of water activity (fishing 24%, boating 23%, swimming 4%) when visiting</p> <p>When asked where they would like to see the Forest Preserves acquire land, “Waterways” was the #1 answer (60% of respondents)</p> <p>“Outdoor space” was the #1 priority amenity for a new nature center</p>
State-wide survey	<p>“Use a playground” rated #1 of 20 activities in frequency and importance</p> <p>“Inclusive/ADA programs/facilities” rated #1 of 16 priorities for facilities</p> <p>Nearly 3 in 5 agreed “Increased accessibility” was a concern for park visitation</p> <p>91% said outdoor recreation areas and facilities are important for health</p>

SUPPORT FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

EVALUATE & MAINTAIN FACILITIES & INFRASTRUCTURE

THEME: PROACTIVELY MAINTAIN FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Source	Support
Informal in-person	<p>Of 15 potential improvements, “Sustainability improvements (replacing roofs, resurfacing roads, etc.)” ranked #6, and “Maintaining existing infrastructure” ranked #7</p>
County-wide survey	<p>Of 8 potential Forest Preserves priorities, “Maintain existing preserves, trails, facilities” ranked #1, with 80% ranking it in their top 4, 53% in their top 2, and 27% #1</p> <p>When asked what the Forest Preserves could do better, the #3 comment was “Better upkeep”</p> <p>74% reported high satisfaction with “Cleanliness, maintenance, and upkeep”; in an open-ended format, 45% noted preserves and facilities were clean and well-maintained</p>
State-wide survey	<p>Of 9 potential state funding priorities, “Maintain existing park/recreation areas” ranked #1 by a significant margin</p> <p>The #1 concern regarding park visitation was that facilities are clean, with 71% saying they agreed</p>

THEME: FOCUS ON LONG-TERM FINANCIAL STABILITY

Source	Support
Stakeholder surveys	<p>In SWOT analyses, “Finances” was the #2 overall category due to concerns over funding sources and market forces, although there is some recency bias in comments referring to inflation, which every group mentioned at least once</p>
County-wide survey	<p>Of 8 potential Forest Preserves priorities, “Ensure long-term financial sustainability” ranked #4 (46% put it in their top 4)</p> <p>58% said the Forest Preserves provides great or excellent value (only 9% said poor value)</p>

SUPPORT FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

INCREASE ENGAGEMENT

THEME: INCREASE PUBLIC AWARENESS

Source	Support
Stakeholder surveys	In SWOT analyses, the #2 Weakness and the #5 most common comment overall was “Lack of public awareness”; “Expand public awareness” tied for the #2 Opportunity
County-wide survey	<p>When asked how the Forest Preserves could improve, “Better outreach/ promotion/ more info of offerings, events, value” was tied for the #1 suggestion</p> <p>Most are familiar with the Forest Preserves - only about 5% of those surveyed were unfamiliar</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 84% visited 2020-2022; 30% of those 16% of nonusers said unfamiliarity was a reason they do not visit <p>... but many are unfamiliar with specific offerings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over 50% of respondents were unaware of or had never used programming Less than 6% of survey respondents had participated in HLIC programming, although 90% of users were highly satisfied; 72% had not visited HLIC from 2020 to 2022 Many open-ended comments from multiple county-wide survey questions as well as stakeholder feedback refer to a lack of information <p>Residents overestimate taxes paid to the Preserves (6% avg. vs. 1% actual)</p>

SUPPORT FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

INCREASE ENGAGEMENT CONTINUED

THEME: REPRESENT DIVERSITY OF COUNTY IN STAFF/VISITORS

Source	Support
Stakeholder surveys	<p>In SWOT analyses, a top Weakness (#6 of 33) was “Staff diversity (lack of)”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Every stakeholder group had multiple people mention this
County-wide survey	<p>White residents report visiting at a 90% rate compared with 61% for Black residents, and Hispanic residents report just 68% compared with non-Hispanics’ 84%</p> <p>20% of survey respondents, including 14% of current users, say they do not feel represented</p> <p>African Americans, Hispanics, and people making under \$35,000 annually all report lower than average satisfaction ratings with the Forest Preserves</p> <p>When asked where they would like to see the Forest Preserves acquire land, 47% of non-users said “Close to urban areas” compared to 27% overall</p> <p>People 65+ are significantly more satisfied than people under 45</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> With the organization overall (by -1.5 points on a 10-point scale) With their experience in the preserves (by -1/10) With programs (by 2/10), exhibits, self-guided activities, and special events (1.5) In terms of whether they feel represented (91% vs. ~75%)
National survey	73% of US adults surveyed said they believe equity should be a high priority for their local parks and recreation agency
Literature review	“Research has repeatedly demonstrated that low-income and minority communities have less access than more affluent populations to parks, tree canopy, and other green resources, despite the potential benefits such resources provide.” (Rigolon 2013)

SUPPORT FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

LEAD ON CLIMATE & CONSERVATION

THEME: CONTINUE CONSERVATION WORK

Source	Support
Informal in-person	Of 15 potential improvements, “Natural areas restoration” ranked #1, and “Natural features” was the #2 answer to “Why do you visit?”
Stakeholder surveys	In SWOT analyses, the #3 most prevalent topic was Land Preservation, whose top comment was “Natural areas (variety)”
County-wide survey	<p>Of 8 potential Forest Preserves priorities, “Manage habitats for native wildlife and plants” ranked #2, with 73% ranking it in their top 4</p> <p>Of 8 potential Forest Preserves priorities, “Provide educational opportunities, exhibits, and programs about history and nature” ranked #5, with 45% ranking it in their top 4</p> <p>The #4 category of things people said they liked about the Forest Preserves was that the Forest Preserves protects wildlife and native plants (17%)</p> <p>The #1 educational programming request for a new nature center was sustainability and conservation topics</p>
State-wide survey	<p>80% of Illinoisans surveyed said they wanted to see more wildlife protected</p> <p>78% of residents surveyed want to see “more natural areas, particularly undisturbed prairies, forests, and wetlands” acquired and protected</p> <p>Of 9 potential state funding priorities, “Provide environmental/conservation programs” ranked #2</p>
Forest Preserves policy	The Forest Preserves’ Climate Change Commitment, adopted in 2022, resolves the Forest Preserves to mitigate its impact, enhance ecosystems, and educate for engagement
Literature review	Referring to valuable themes for future comprehensive plans: “In the classic environmental worldview, nature (as epitomized by pristine national parks and wilderness areas) is perceived as separate and apart from cities and the built environment. In the 21st century, human impacts on climate, natural landscapes, and ecosystems have rendered this worldview obsolete.”; “The comprehensive plan can specify a range of established and emerging applications to create a communitywide, multi-functional green infrastructure network.” (Rouse, 2022)

SUPPORT FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

LEAD ON CLIMATE & CONSERVATION CONTINUED

THEME: MANAGE LANDS FOR CLIMATE RESILIENCE

Source	Support
Informal in-person	Of 15 potential improvements, “Natural areas restoration” ranked #1, and “Natural features” was the #2 answer to “Why do you visit?”
Stakeholder surveys	Expanding natural land management practices was the most commonly offered idea for how the Forest Preserves can improve over the next 10 years
National survey	90% of Americans surveyed thought their local agency should use parks to minimize impacts of flooding and extreme temperatures
Forest Preserves policy	The Forest Preserves’ Climate Change Commitment, adopted in 2022, resolves the Forest Preserves to mitigate its impact, enhance ecosystems, and educate for engagement
Literature review	<p>Research abounds regarding natural landforms’ and ecosystems’ abilities to reduce temperatures, filter air and water, reduce flooding, support a healthy water cycle, and provide a variety of other ecosystem services important to humans and our ability to adapt to and mitigate climate change. A Texas study found “one acre of prairie would increase the infiltration capacity of undeveloped land by 3.52 inches in a 100-year flood event” (Katy Prairie Conservancy, 2018). Another study evaluated the mitigation potential of land management strategies and found “forests and other ecosystems” comprise 50% of cost-effective mitigation potential (Roe et al., 2021).</p> <p>Nature-based solutions designed to adapt to climate change can improve biodiversity, which itself can help mitigate further climate change. Biodiverse ecosystems more effectively perform the services we need for climate change: “Biodiversity has well-established or putative effects on a number of ecosystem services mediated by ecosystem processes [including] regulation of climatic conditions suitable to humans and the animals and plants they consider important” (Diaz et al. 2006).</p>

SUPPORT FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

LEAD ON CLIMATE & CONSERVATION CONTINUED

THEME: REDUCE CARBON FOOTPRINT

Source	Support
Stakeholder surveys	“Reducing the Forest Preserves’ carbon footprint” was tied for the #1 goal stakeholders offered for the Forest Preserves
Forest Preserves policy	The Climate Change Commitment, adopted in 2022, resolves the Forest Preserves to reduce emissions each year, reaching near-zero net greenhouse gas emissions by 2050
Literature review	“Envisioning change” and identifying challenges and solutions helps to build public support in transitioning to clean energy policy and messaging at the municipal scale. (Skill et al. 2021)

References for “Lead on Climate & Conservation”

Diaz, S., Fargione, J., Chapin III, F. S., & Tilman, D. (2006, August 15). Biodiversity Loss Threatens Human Well-Being. *PLOS Biology*, 4(8), e277. 10.1371/journal.pbio.0040277

Natural solutions to flooding — KPC. (2018). Katy Prairie Conservancy. Retrieved February 14, 2022, from <https://www.katyprairie.org/natural-solutions-to-flooding>

Roe, S., Streck, C., Beach, R., Busch, J., Chapman, M., Daioglou, V., Depperman, A., Doelman, J., Emmet-Booth, J., Engelmann, J., Fricko, O., Frischmann, C., Funk, J., Grassi, G., Griscom, B., Havlik, P., Hanssen, S., Humpenoder, F., Landholm, D., Lawrence, D. (2021, October 11). Land-based measures to mitigate climate change: Potential and feasibility by country. *Global Change Biology*, 27(23), 6025-6058. 10.1111/gcb.15873

Skill et al. Running on renewables: Building local support for 100% net-renewable electricity resolutions at the municipal scale in the United States. (2021). *Energy Research & Social Science* 75.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2021.101995>

SUPPORT FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

PROVIDE MORE LAND FOR CONSERVATION & RECREATION

Source	Support
Informal in-person	Of 15 potential improvements, “Acquiring new land/preserves” was the #2 priority
Stakeholder surveys	<p>“Acreage increased” was tied for the #1 goal stakeholders offered for the Forest Preserves, and in SWOT analyses, the #2 Opportunity was “Land acquisition”</p> <p>Non-users were nearly double as likely to rate “acquire and protect new natural areas” their #1 priority (33% vs. 18%)</p>
County-wide survey	<p>Of 8 potential Forest Preserves priorities, “Acquire/protect new natural areas” ranked #2, with 51% ranking it in their top 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Expand existing preserves” ranked #6/8 (38% top 4) • “Open new preserves, trails, facilities” ranked #7/8 (35% top 4) <p>When asked how the Forest Preserves could improve, “More efforts to protect land and habitats” was one of the top suggestions</p>
State-wide survey	<p>78% of Illinois residents surveyed said they wanted to see “more natural areas, particularly undisturbed prairies, forests, and wetlands” acquired and protected</p> <p>73% of Illinois supports land acquisition for outdoor recreation</p>

COMMUNITY INPUT: METHODS

IN-PERSON AT COMMUNITY EVENTS

Staff attended several community events and approached attendees to describe the comprehensive planning process before asking them to participate in two activities. 76 completed activity one and 64 completed activity two. About 100 participated overall.

In activity one, participants were asked how they would spend their tax dollars. Given five paperclips representing their tax dollars, they were asked to place their paperclips in up to five (with repeats allowed) of the 15 boxes labeled with possible improvements the Forest Preserves could make.

In activity two, staff asked participants whether and why they visit the preserves via open-ended responses on two sides of a postcard. The first side asked participants what their favorite preserve was and why. This was targeted to regular visitors. The second side asked participants to fill in the blank: "I would visit the preserves more if _____".



Above: Two of the boxes where participants placed their paperclips in activity one.

Below: Completed open-ended feedback cards from activity two.

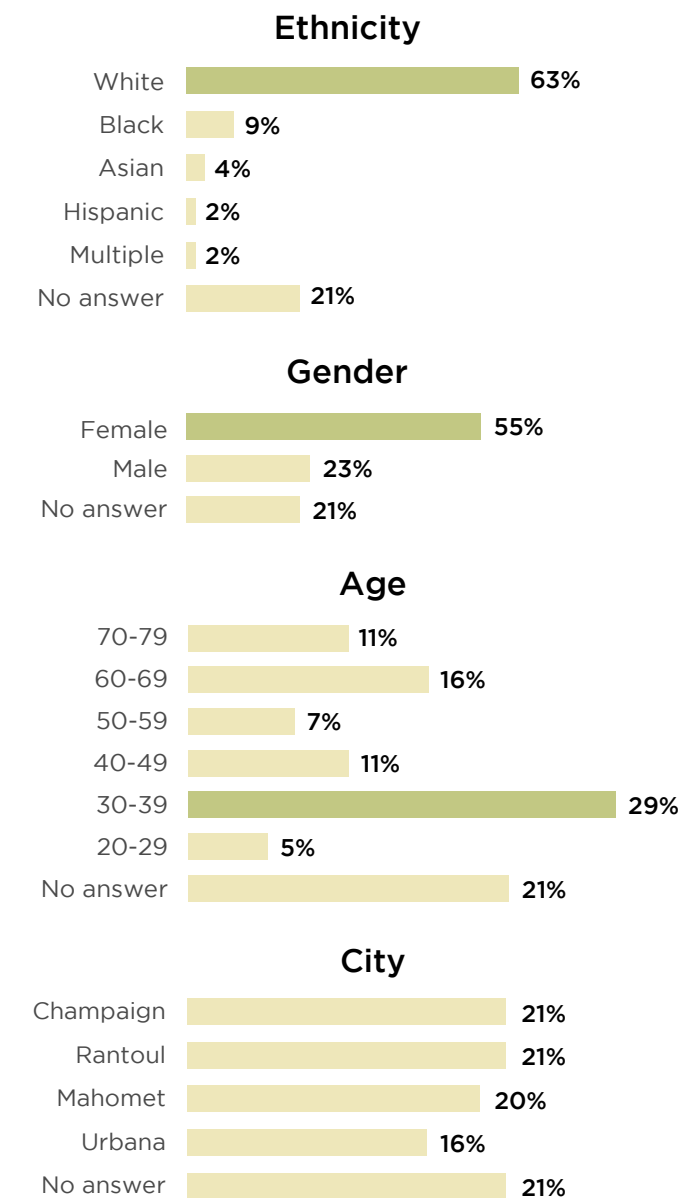


Coding Community Events Input Responses

To quantify the feedback, staff input each response into a spreadsheet and categorized every idea expressed. The coding process involved identifying key words and phrases (the "codes") in each response, categorizing these codes, and generating themes that account for the sentiments of most responses.

Community Events Respondent Demographics

Demographics of the 64 participants who provided them are summarized below.



COMMUNITY INPUT: METHODS

INTERNAL STAKEHOLDER SURVEYS

Feedback was given in free-response form and the worksheet was the same for all groups. Altogether, 21 staff, 5 Board members, 3 CAC members, and 2 Foundation members completed the survey and provided over 750 unique responses. These results are not representative of all opinions but they contain important information, especially where repeated ideas became themes and where those themes were shared across many groups.

Coding Internal Stakeholder Survey Responses

Staff analyzed coded results by stakeholder group and also as a whole. See p. 46 for comment categories by frequency and sentiment. In addition to the coding process explained in the In-person Input section, the following points help explain how Internal Stakeholder Survey results are presented:

- Staff kept a consistent set of categories across all SWOT questions. This allowed staff to compare the positivity (or sentiment) of the categories. For example, "Finances" came up in all categories but most often under Threats, which is why the category shows up redder in the illustration.
- In the Visioning section, each participant's 50-year goals were grouped into subcategories which themselves are presented as "goals." In this way, the "goals" presented are more like themes than verbatim responses.

COUNTY-WIDE NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY

The Forest Preserves contracted with aQity Research and Insights, Inc. to conduct a statistically representative county-wide survey. aQity sent postcards inviting a random sample of households to complete the survey by mail, online, or by phone. 469 residents completed the survey. aQity weighted the results to reflect US Census data for full-time Champaign County residents, meaning the demographic makeup of people who completed the survey is the same as the County in terms of household income, age, gender, race and ethnicity, and presence of children under 18 in the household.

Random sampling and weighting allow staff to assume that the results, within a certain margin, represent the opinions of people across the county. An online panel of residents who have opted-in to complete surveys on a range of topics and did not know this survey was about the Forest Preserves comprises 36% of responses, ensuring non-users are represented in the sample. Given the relatively low response rates for mailed invitations, there may be some bias toward more frequent users in the survey results, although aQity was confident in the accuracy of the results.

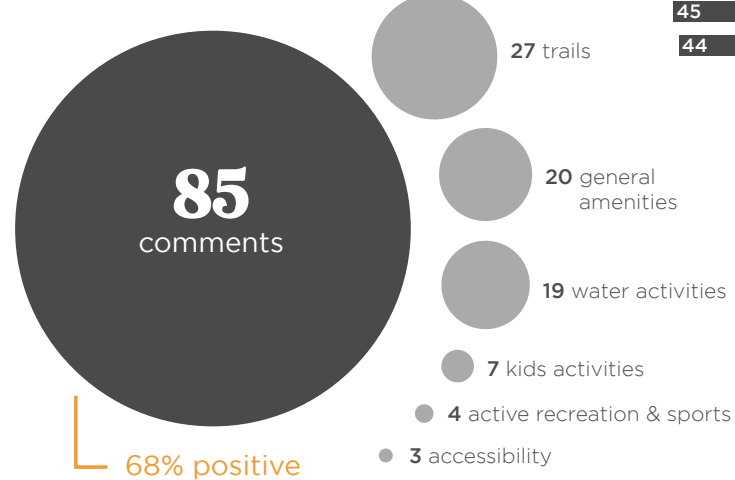
COMMUNITY INPUT: ADDITIONAL GRAPHICS

GRAPHICS LABELED INSTEAD OF COLOR-CODED: COMMUNITY EVENTS INPUT

"Why do (or don't) you visit?"

Free-response comments by category and sentiment
Single comments removed

Outdoor Recreation



"How would you spend your tax dollars?"

Total votes from all events



Land Preservation



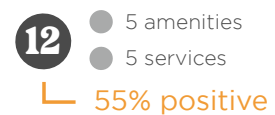
Land Stewardship



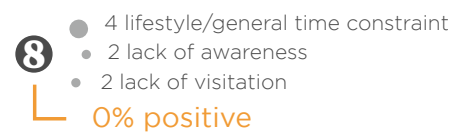
Programming



Facilities & Infrastructure



Barriers to Visitation



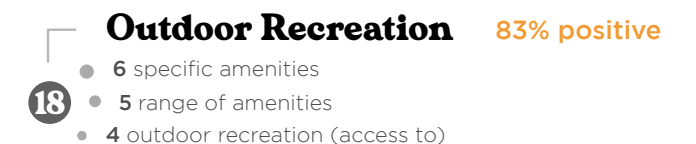
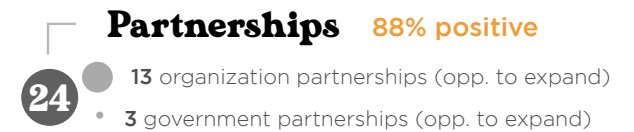
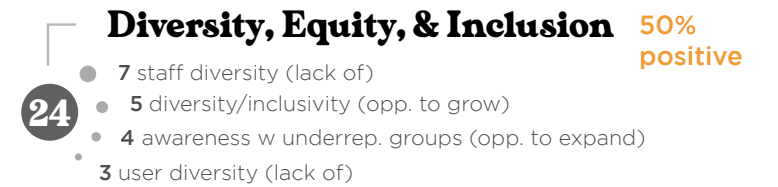
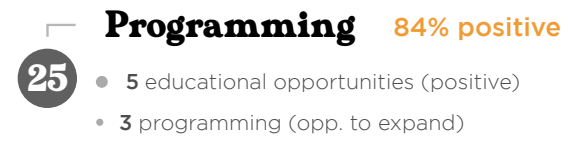
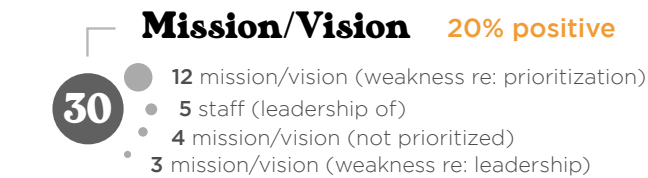
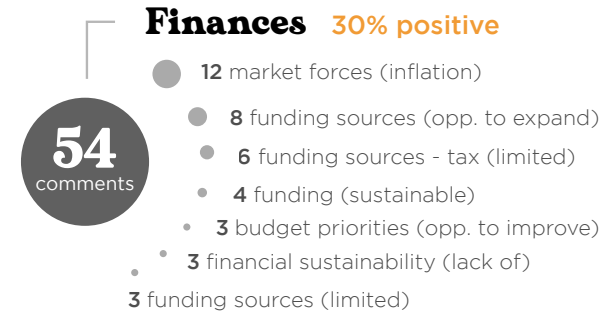
Source: Community events input

COMMUNITY INPUT: ADDITIONAL GRAPHICS

GRAPHICS LABELED INSTEAD OF COLOR-CODED: INTERNAL STAKEHOLDER SWOT

"Evaluate the Forest Preserves' Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats."





Comments by category and sentiment. Comments with 1-2 occurrences removed.










Source: Internal stakeholder surveys




COMMUNITY INPUT: ADDITIONAL GRAPHICS

INTERNAL STAKEHOLDER INPUT: TOP SWOT CATEGORIES & SUBCATEGORIES

Board		
Count	Category	Repeated Subcategories
21	Organizational Culture 	Staff (org. asset); Staffing, pay, and retention (issues); Mgmt./leadership (pos.); Staff (leadership of)
9	Finances 	Market forces (inflation); Fin. sustainability (lack of)
9	Land Preservation 	Natural areas (variety of)
7	Facilities & Infrastructure	Infrastructure (aging)
6	Land Stewardship 	Land management (positive)
6	Organizational Support	Allied agency (support of); Community support
6	Programming	Programming (opportunities to expand)
5	Partnerships	Organizational partnerships (opp. to expand); Governmental partnerships (opp. to expand)
4	Outdoor Recreation Amenities	Specific amenities
3	Outreach	[None repeated]
3	Accessibility	Geographic accessibility (lack of)
2	Climate Change & Envi. Sust.	Climate change (effects of)
2	Community Support	[None repeated]
2	Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion	Staff/user diversity (lack of)
1	Mission & Vision	[None repeated]

CAC & Foundation		
Count	Category	Repeated Subcategories
11	Organizational Culture 	Staff (organizational asset); Staff (leadership of)
11	Finances 	Market forces (inflation); Funding (sustainable); Funding sources (opp. to expand)
10	Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion	General (Opp. to grow); User div. (lack of); Pub. awr. underrep. groups (opp. to expand)
10	Organizational Support	Community support; Support from leadership
9	Land Preservation 	Land acquisition (lack of; opportunities to expand); Natural areas (variety of)
7	Outreach	Public awareness (opp. to expand)
7	Climate Change & Envi. Sust.	Climate change (effects of - threat); Environmental sustainability (opp. to promote)
6	Programming	[None repeated]
6	Land Stewardship	[None repeated]
4	Accessibility	Geographic distribution of resources (lack of)
4	Partnerships	[None repeated]
3	Outdoor Recreation Amenities	[None repeated]
2	Mission & Vision	Mission/vision (not prioritized)
2	Organizational Support	Support from leadership
1	Facilities & Infrastructure	[None repeated]

Staff		
Count	Category	Top Subcategories
85	Organizational Culture 	21 Staffing, pay, and retention (issues) 10 Interdepartmental cohesion (lack of) 8 Staff (organizational asset) 7 Management & leadership (positive) 6 Management & leadership (top-heavy) 5 Workplace culture (positive)
35	Land Preservation 	12 Land holdings (positive) 11 Natural areas (variety of)
34	Land Stewardship 	8 Land management (positive)
33	Finances 	8 Market forces (inflation) 6 Funding sources (opp. to expand)
27	Mission & Vision	12 Mission/vision (lack of prioritization) 5 Staff (leadership of)
21	Accessibility	9 Geog. distribution of resources (lack of)
20	Outreach	10 Public awareness (lack of) 5 Public awareness (opp. to expand)
15	Partnerships	9 Organization partnerships (opp. to expand)
14	Facilities & Infrastructure	8 Infrastructure (general)
14	Organizational Support	- None with 5+ mentions
13	Programming	- None with 5+ mentions
12	Climate Change & Environmental Sustainability	5 Climate change (threats to natural areas) 5 Environmental sustainability (pub. support)
12	Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion	5 Staff diversity (lack of)
11	Outdoor Recreation Amenities	- None with 5+ mentions
4	Community Support	- None with 5+ mentions

 Top 5 category for all groups
 Top 5 category for 2 groups
 Subcategory mentioned by majority of people all 3 groups

COMMUNITY INPUT: ADDITIONAL GRAPHICS

INTERNAL STAKEHOLDER INPUT: VISIONING THEMES

By 2073...	In 10 years, we could...
<p>1 The amount of land owned by the Forest Preserves has doubled (or more) in quantity.</p> <p>2 The Preserves have eliminated their carbon footprint.</p> <p>3 All residents have access to Forest Preserves properties and programs.</p> <p>4 The Forest Preserves are a regional leader in conservation education and practices.</p> <p>5 Staff and users represent the demographics of the county.</p> <p>6 Forest Preserves facilities, infrastructure, and amenities are of a high quality.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase land acquisition funding Develop more robust land acquisition planning Identify incentives for landowners to sell or donate land Decrease carbon footprints of facilities and fleet Establish recurrent budget for energy efficiency/energy generation efforts Acquire property adjacent to population centers Increase transportation options to preserves Expand programming near population centers Improve land management practices/planning Expand natural areas for habitat Increase programming in sustainability/conservation Increase natural resources staff for expanded conservation efforts Offer low-barrier opportunities to participate in programs Identify strategies to ensure people of various races and ethnicities feel welcome Improve internet access to facilities Secure funding for a new nature center Complete large infrastructure projects such as the KRT.

INTERNALSTAKEHOLDER INPUT: TOP VISIONING CATEGORIES & SUBCATEGORIES

	50-year Goals	10-year Steps	Top Goals & Steps Categories	
Board	Count			
	<p>3 Nature center established</p> <p>3 Carbon footprint eliminated 🏞️</p>	<p>6 Secure funding for nature center</p> <p>3 Develop carbon footprint reduction plans</p>	<p>21 Facilities & Infrastructure 🏞️🏞️</p> <p>4 Organizational Culture</p> <p>3 Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion</p> <p><i>Of 34 total ideas</i></p>	
Staff	<p>9 Recognized as conservation leader</p> <p>8 Acreage increased 🏞️</p> <p>8 Carbon footprint eliminated 🏞️</p>	<p>13 Expand land mgmt. practices</p> <p>4 Expand Natural Resources dept.</p> <p>8 Increase land acquisition funding</p> <p>4 Identify potential lands to buy</p> <p>4 Develop carbon footprint reduction plans</p>	<p>33 Land Preservation 🏞️</p> <p>32 Land Stewardship</p> <p>29 Facilities & Infrastructure 🏞️🏞️</p> <p><i>Of 151 total ideas</i></p>	
	CAC & Foundation	<p>3 Acreage increased 🏞️</p>	<p>[No consensus steps]</p>	<p>17 Land Preservation 🏞️</p> <p>6 Climate Chg./ Envi. Stewardship</p> <p>4 Facilities & Infrastructure 🏞️🏞️</p> <p><i>Of 36 total ideas</i></p>

Top goal for all groups
 Top goal for 2 groups

COMMUNITY INPUT: ADDITIONAL GRAPHICS

COMMUNITY EVENTS & INTERNAL STAKEHOLDER INPUT: THEMES

Community Events Themes	Internal Stakeholder Themes
<p>Overall, patrons are satisfied with the maintenance of District facilities and preserves and find value in services such as facility rentals, but they also identified desired infrastructure improvements such as more accessible trails.</p> <p>Natural areas restoration is vital to the character and value of the preserves and supports both healthy ecological function and passive outdoor recreation such as bird-watching and fishing.</p> <p>There are several barriers which keep residents from visiting preserves, including an overall lack of awareness of the District, transportation, and busy lifestyles which do not allow time for outdoor recreation.</p> <p>Patrons enjoy existing cultural and natural programming offerings and have an interest in updated facilities and expansion of special events.</p> <p>Compatible outdoor recreation activities such as kayaking, biking, jogging, and swimming, are a primary driver for visitation. There is a general satisfaction of recreational amenities, but there is demand for more, especially trails and water activities.</p>	<p>The District has traditionally maximized limited financial resources, but even with expanded revenues from the referendum and large grants, concerns over aging infrastructure alongside external forces such as inflation and the instability of funding sources suggest the District should remain focused on long-term financial sustainability.</p> <p>Stakeholders appreciate our role as land owners, including the variety of natural areas we steward, and think we should acquire additional land,...</p> <p>(continued below)</p> <p>Stakeholders are concerned about the negative effects of climate change on preserves and programs, but also recognize that District lands provide ecosystem services and there are opportunities to expand this positive impact.</p> <p>Stakeholders note a lack of public awareness of the District and an opportunity to appeal to a wider audience through increased outreach by building relationships with local organizations and leveraging existing partnerships such as the volunteer base, the Foundation, and the CAC.</p> <p>Stakeholders appreciate the variety of programs offered by the District, but see opportunities to expand educational opportunities.</p> <p>Stakeholders find our mission valuable, but its potential is limited by a lack of specificity and there are concerns this affects our prioritization.</p> <p>District staff and its supporters are an integral asset and ensure the organization serves the community well; cultivating and maintaining this organizational culture will require leadership and investment in staff.</p> <p>Lack of staff diversity is a concern among stakeholders; there are opportunities to expand the impact CCFPD has by increasing the diversity of the staff to more closely represent the people of the County.</p>

THIRD-PARTY ASSESSMENTS OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

SUMMARY: BIPOC FOCUS GROUP, TOMAS DELGADO (FACILITATOR) (2022)

In Spring 2022, the Forest Preserve Friends Foundation set out to raise funds to engage underrepresented communities of Champaign County. In partnership with the Forest Preserves' Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee, the Foundation, and staff aim to increase awareness and participation from communities historically underserved by the Forest Preserves. Despite previous efforts, the Forest Preserves & Foundation still note low participation from BIPOC community members through park visitation and programming across all 7 preserves. A focus group was developed and facilitated by Tomas Delgado and attended by 16 participants on June 14, 2022 at Homer Lake Forest Preserve in an effort to better understand the perception of the Forest Preserves by BIPOC community members, learn what barriers prevent BIPOC communities from accessing Forest Preserves resources, and gain insight into methods to address inequities through a BIPOC focus group. Participant demographics included:

- Racial or Ethnic Identity: (13) Black or African American, (2) Hispanic or Latinx, (2) Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander Asian, (2) Native American or Indigenous, (5) White or Caucasian, (1) Other/Bi-racial
- Age: (2) 18-29 years old, (11) 30-39 years old, (1) 40-49 years old, (2) 60-69 years old
- Sex: 12 Female, 4 Male
- Continued aspects of identity: (1) Veteran, (2) Immigrant/New American/First Generation, (6) LGBTQ, (1) Disabled, (7) None of these apply to me

Area of improvement: Outreach

- Increasing the number of community touch-points to strengthen diverse age and racial representation
- Create ways in which participants could maintain their engagement with the Forest Preserves (e.g. volunteer opportunities,

Citizens Advisory Committee, instructions to contribute public input at Forest Preserves Board Meetings)

When asked what barriers exist between participants accessing Forest Preserves parks and/or programs and parks over half of the participants responded that they were unsure of where they were or that they even existed, followed by time, transportation, and safety respectively. This comes as no surprise given that the same percentage of participants proclaimed that they either don't, or only somewhat, feel supported to visit Forest Preserves locations as BIPOC members of this region.

Facilitator Summary: How to increase BIPOC engagement

Focus group participants emphasized the need for the Forest Preserves to generate and communicate a plan of action for better serving BIPOC communities

- Create Identity-specific programming (e.g. "BIPOC teen program," "women of color birdwatchers," "multilingual programs," etc.)
- Members emphasized the need for an explicit commitment to BIPOC accessibility on signage, in program design, and access (e.g. bus/shuttle transportation to and from preserves, standardized multilingual signage, and disability accessibility measures, print mailers in addition to online marketing, culturally-responsive promotional materials, free and reduced program costs, and specific types of welcome signage "You as a BIPOC are welcome here.").
- Programs for adults with limited previous experience in nature. Forest Preserves staff and program coordinators should be aware of reasonable fears BIPOC visitors may have related to histories of racism and racialized violence and seek to generate more explicitly inclusive spaces, programs, and services.

THIRD-PARTY ASSESSMENTS OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

SUMMARY: DIVERSITY AND ACCESSIBILITY REPORT, HANNAH CARAWAY, UIUC COMMUNITY-ACADEMIC SCHOLAR (2022)

Hannah Caraway, a Community-Academic Scholar from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign conducted a community-based participatory research project that focused on improving the health of disadvantaged citizens of Champaign County through access to and awareness of Forest Preserves natural and other resources. More specifically, Caraway focused on identifying barriers that attribute to disadvantaged communities from assessing the Forest Preserves' resources and collecting recommendations for the Forest Preserves to use in the development of future Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility initiatives.

Caraway identified community organizations that served disadvantaged citizens in the greater C-U area and requested a 1:1 meeting with organizational leaders. Only 4 (bolded below) of the 24 organizations contacted participated in the interview process.

- Stone Creek Church
- **The Chapel of St. John the Divine**
- The UU Church of Urbana-Champaign
- Big Brothers Big Sisters
- Apostolic Life
- Mahomed United Methodist Church
- Champaign United Way
- Don Moyer Boys and Girls Club
- New American Welcome Center
- United Garden Hills Neighborhood Association
- Asian American Association
- Korean Church of Champaign-Urbana
- New Life Korean Church
- **Champaign Chinese Christian Church**
- Illini Chinese Christian Fellowship
- Korean Jesus Love Church
- Salem Baptist Church
- New Foundation Missionary Baptist Church
- Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church
- Champaign County Black Chamber of Congress
- Iglesias El Shaddai Champaign
- **Latino Partnership of Champaign County**
- La Casa Cultural Latina
- **United Way of Champaign County**

Questions encompassed the organization's demographic makeup, involvement with nature, and preferred usage of park space.

Common Themes:

- Forest Preserves locations are too far and/or difficult to get to via public transportation from C-U area
- There were no significant partnerships or interactions between these organizations and the Forest Preserves
- Lack of visibility and knowledge about the Champaign County Forest Preserve District's resources
- Each demographic holds specific cultural ties to nature and the natural world that are reflected in their lifestyles, values, and/or religious practices.

Recommendations:

- Run a shuttle between local YMCAs once a month or more and rotate preserves
- Print brochures & information in Mandarin, French, and Spanish in addition to English. the Champaign Chinese Christian Church and the Latino Partnership of Champaign County stated that language barriers are decreasing the accessibility of Champaign County Forest Preserve District properties for the communities that they serve.
- Create brochures that include preserves, activities, and size indications
- Increase programming for families and large group sizes. This means creating quality public resources that can be used by a wide range of age groups, in order to fit the needs of families and diverse groups who visit the Forest Preserve properties
- Increase transportation opportunities to Forest Preserves sites from Champaign
- Establish rapport with community organizations and their participants to solidify connections and expand awareness of what we offer
- Partner with community organizations to develop increased avenues for visitation and utilization

IL FOREST PRESERVE & CONSERVATION DISTRICT DATA

FOREST PRESERVE & CONSERVATION DISTRICT DATABASE

^County	CD	FP/CD Founded	Population	FP Acres	FP Acres per 1000	County Land Sq Mi	FP Acres Per Sq Mi	FP Sq Mi	FP Sq Mi/ County Sq Mi	FP as Pct Cty Land	State* Parks Acres	State* Parks Sq Mi	State Parks* Sq Mi/ Cty Land Sq Mi	State Parks* as Pct Cty Land	FPs plus SPs* as Pct Cty Land	FPs as prop. of public land	
BOONE*	Y	1964	53,544	4,000.0	74.7	280.72	14.25	6.25	0.02	2.2	0.0	0.0	0.00	0.0	2.23	100.0%	
ROCK ISLAND	N	1941	141,879	2,529.0	17.8	427.64	5.91	3.952	0.01	0.9	0.0	0.0	0.00	0.0	0.92	100.0%	
CHAMPAIGN	N	1935	209,689	4,041.0	19.3	996.27	4.06	6.25	0.01	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.00	0.0	0.63	100.0%	
COOK	N	1914	5,150,233	70,000.0	13.6	945.33	74.05	109.375	0.12	11.6	580	0.9	0.00	0.1	11.67	99.2%	
KANE	N	1925	532,403	20,000.0	37.6	520.06	38.46	31.25	0.06	6.0	1030	1.6	0.00	0.3	6.32	95.1%	
DUPAGE	N	1915	922,921	26,000.0	28.2	327.5	79.39	40.625	0.12	12.4	2402	3.8	0.01	1.1	13.55	91.5%	
MACON*	Y	1966	104,009	3,490.0	33.6	580.69	6.01	5.453	0.01	0.9	365	0.6	0.00	0.1	1.04	90.5%	
MCHENRY*	Y	1971	307,774	24,000.0	78.0	603.17	39.79	37.5	0.06	6.2	3900	6.1	0.01	1.0	7.23	86.0%	
LAKE	N	1958	696,535	31,000.0	44.5	443.67	69.87	48.438	0.11	10.9	5607	8.8	0.02	2.0	12.89	84.7%	
WINNEBAGO	N	1922	282,572	11,500.0	40.7	513.36	22.40	17.969	0.04	3.5	3092	4.8	0.01	0.9	4.44	78.8%	
KENDALL	N	2006	128,990	2,663.0	20.6	320.34	8.31	4.161	0.01	1.3	1350	2.1	0.01	0.7	1.96	66.4%	
VERMILION*	Y	1966	75,758	6,600.0	87.1	898.37	7.35	10.313	0.01	1.1	6646	10.4	0.01	1.2	2.30	49.8%	
DEKALB	N	1940	104,897	1,849.0	17.6	631.31	2.93	3.125	0.00	0.5	2120	3.3	0.01	0.5	1.02	48.5%	
WILL **	N	1927	690,743	21,966.0	31.8	836.91	26.25	34.322	0.04	4.1	25647	40.1	0.05	4.8	8.89	46.1%	
OGLE	N	1980	50,643	1,708.0	33.7	758.57	2.25	2.669	0.00	0.4	2592	4.1	0.01	0.5	0.89	39.7%	
PUTNAM*	Y	1966	5,739	1,100.0	191.7	160.16	6.87	1.719	0.01	1.1	3015	4.7	0.03	2.9	4.01	26.7%	
KANKAKEE	N	1987	109,862	465.0	4.2	676.56	0.69	0.727	0.00	0.1	1600	2.5	0.00	0.4	0.48	22.5%	
CRAWFORD	N	2008	18,667	126.0	6.7	443.63	0.28	0.197	0.00	0.0	1129	1.8	0.00	0.4	0.44	10.0%	
PIATT ***	N	1925	16,344	166.0	10.2	439.2	0.38	0.259	0.00	0.1	2444.0	3.8	0.01	0.9	0.93	6.4%	

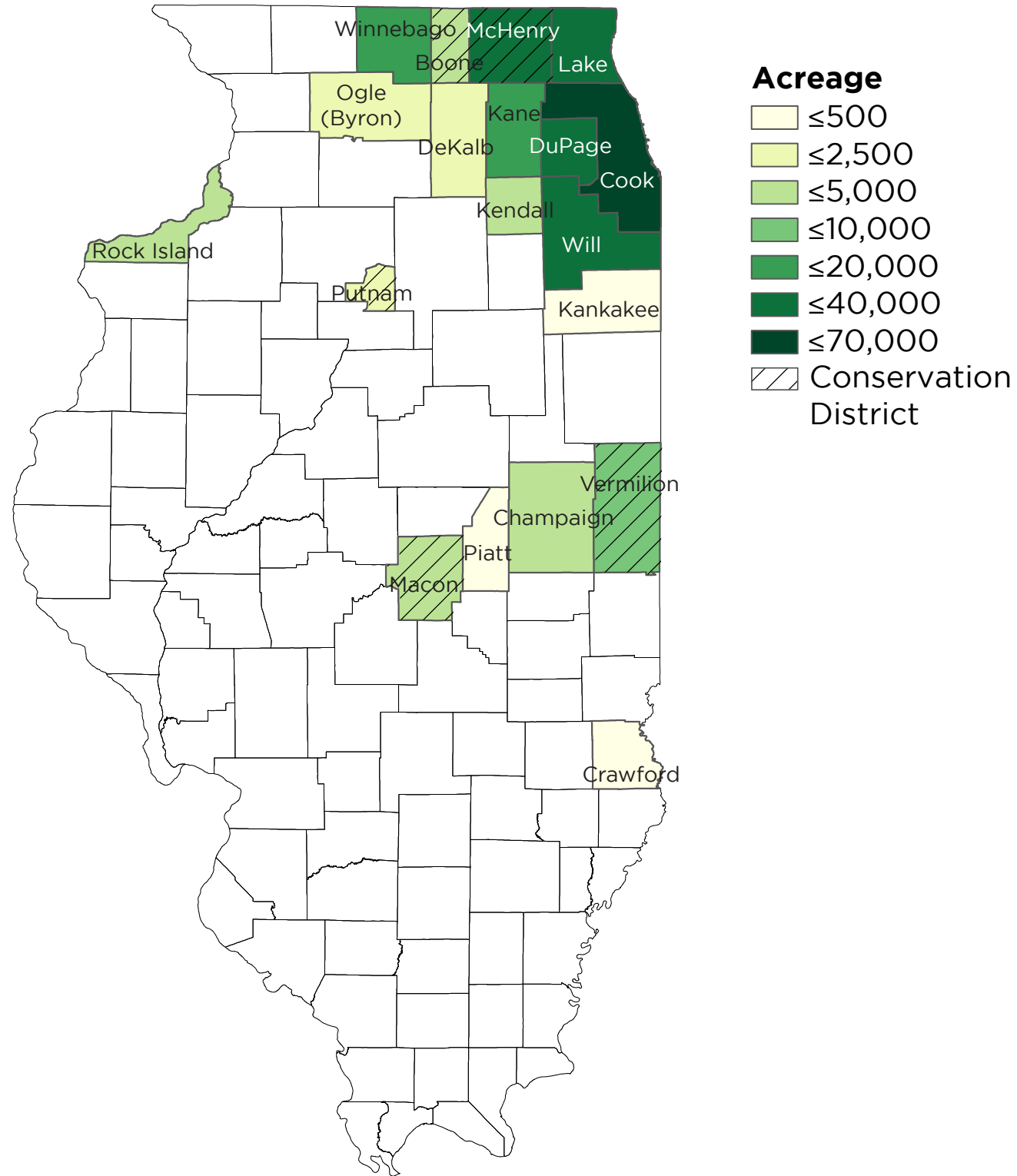
*Conservation District

** Includes USFS-owned 18,226-acre Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie in Will County

*** Includes University of Illinois-owned 1,804-acre Allerton Park and Retreat Center

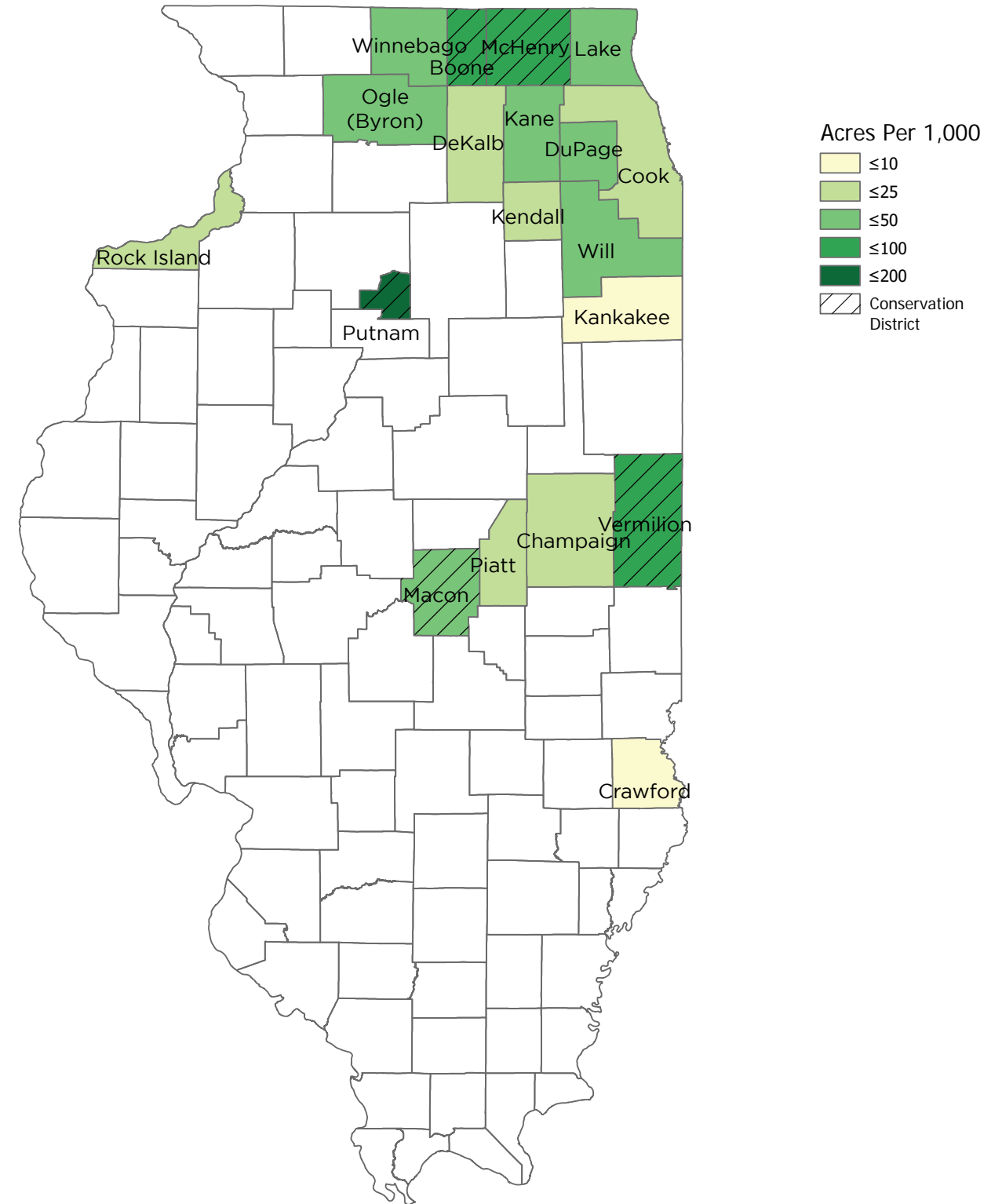
IL FOREST PRESERVE & CONSERVATION DISTRICT DATA

ACRES OWNED: ILLINOIS FOREST PRESERVE AND CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

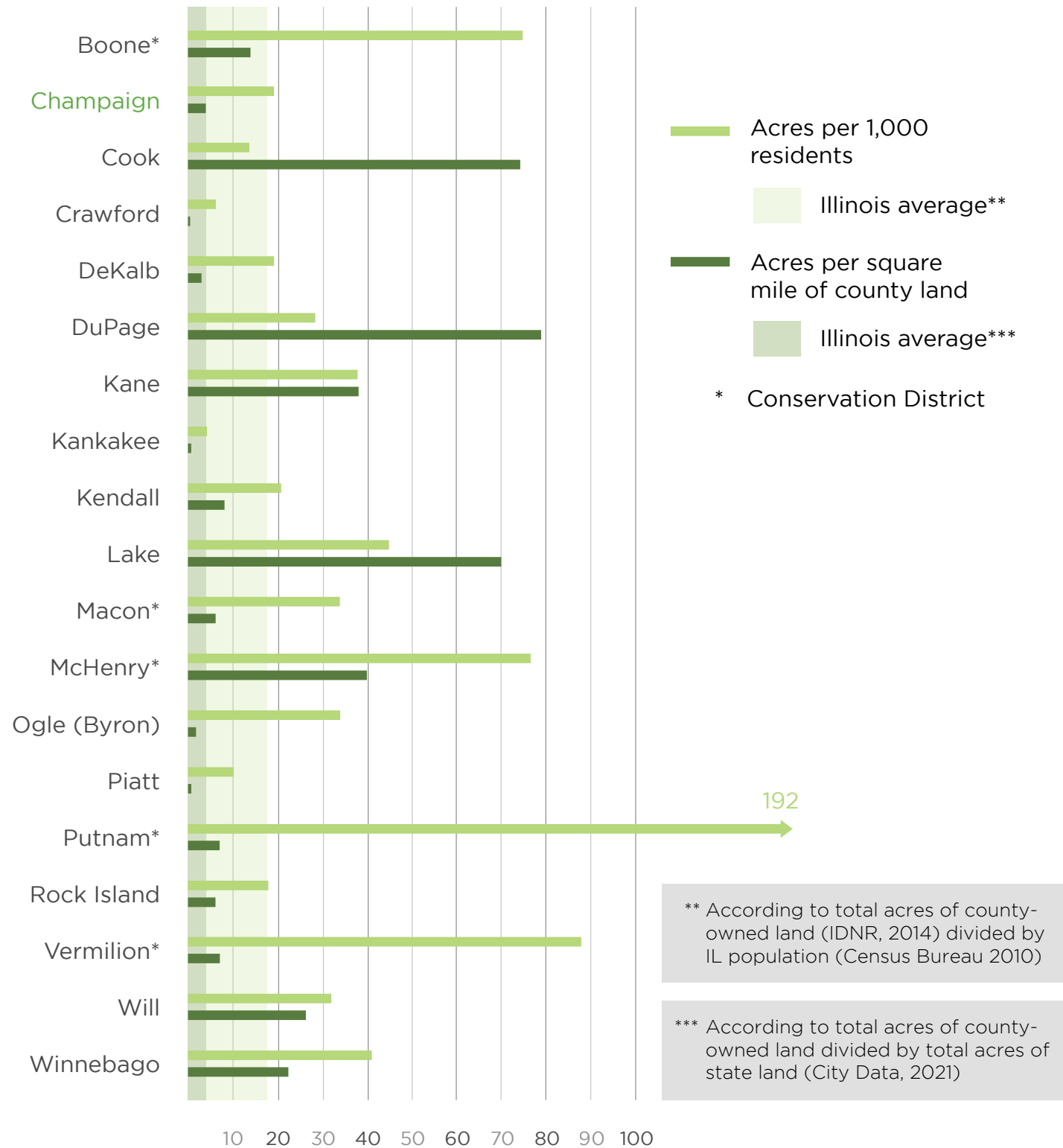


IL FOREST PRESERVE & CONSERVATION DISTRICT DATA

ACRES PER 1,000 RESIDENTS: ILLINOIS FOREST PRESERVE AND CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

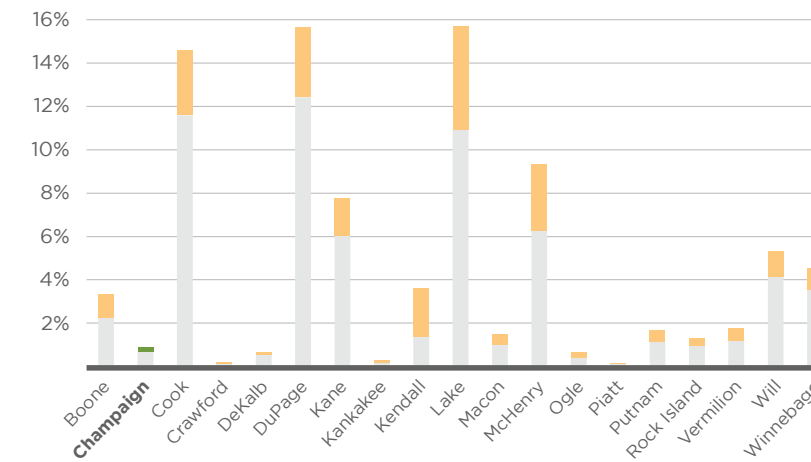


IL FOREST PRESERVE & CONSERVATION DISTRICT DATA ACRES PER COUNTY POPULATION AND LAND SIZE

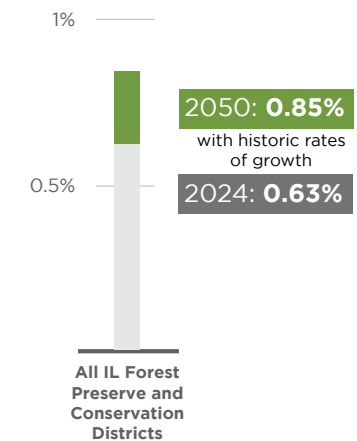


IL FOREST PRESERVE & CONSERVATION DISTRICT DATA NATURAL AREAS STATISTICS

County Land Owned by Forest Preserve and Conservation Districts with 2050 Projections % County Land - All Districts



State Land Owned by Forest Preserve and Conservation Districts



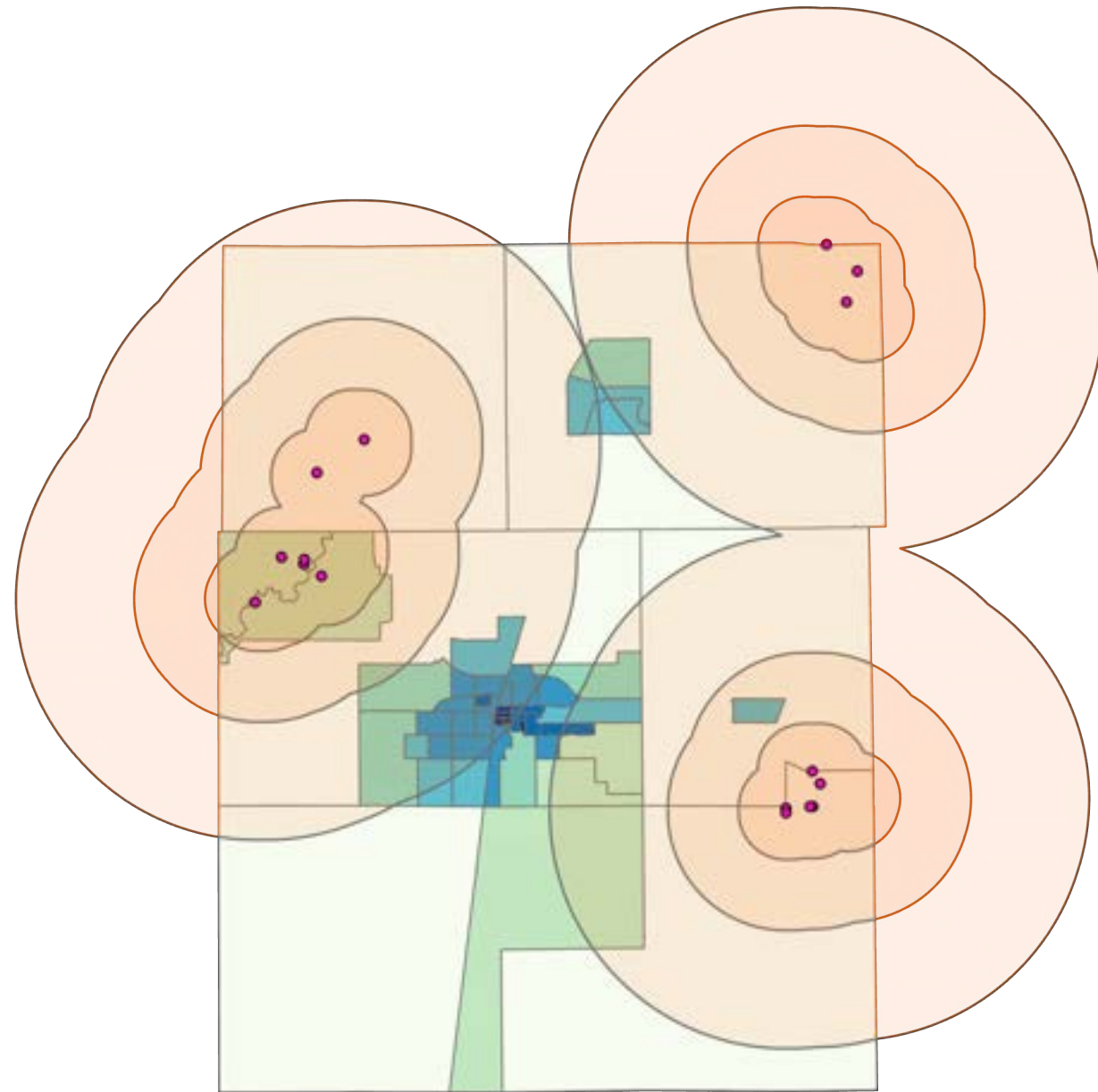
Protected Natural Areas: Champaign County & the Forest Preserves

	Protected Natural Lands - Public	Protected Natural Lands - Private	Municipal Parks	All Parkland/ Green Space	Protected
County Acres	5,484	201	1,487	7,173	5,686
Percentage of County	0.86%	0.03%	0.23%	1.12%	0.89%
Forest Preserves Acreage	4,041			4,041	100%
Forest Preserves Share of County	74%			56%	71%

Sources: Holman, 2021; Champaign County Regional Planning Commission, 2014

ADDITIONAL MAPS

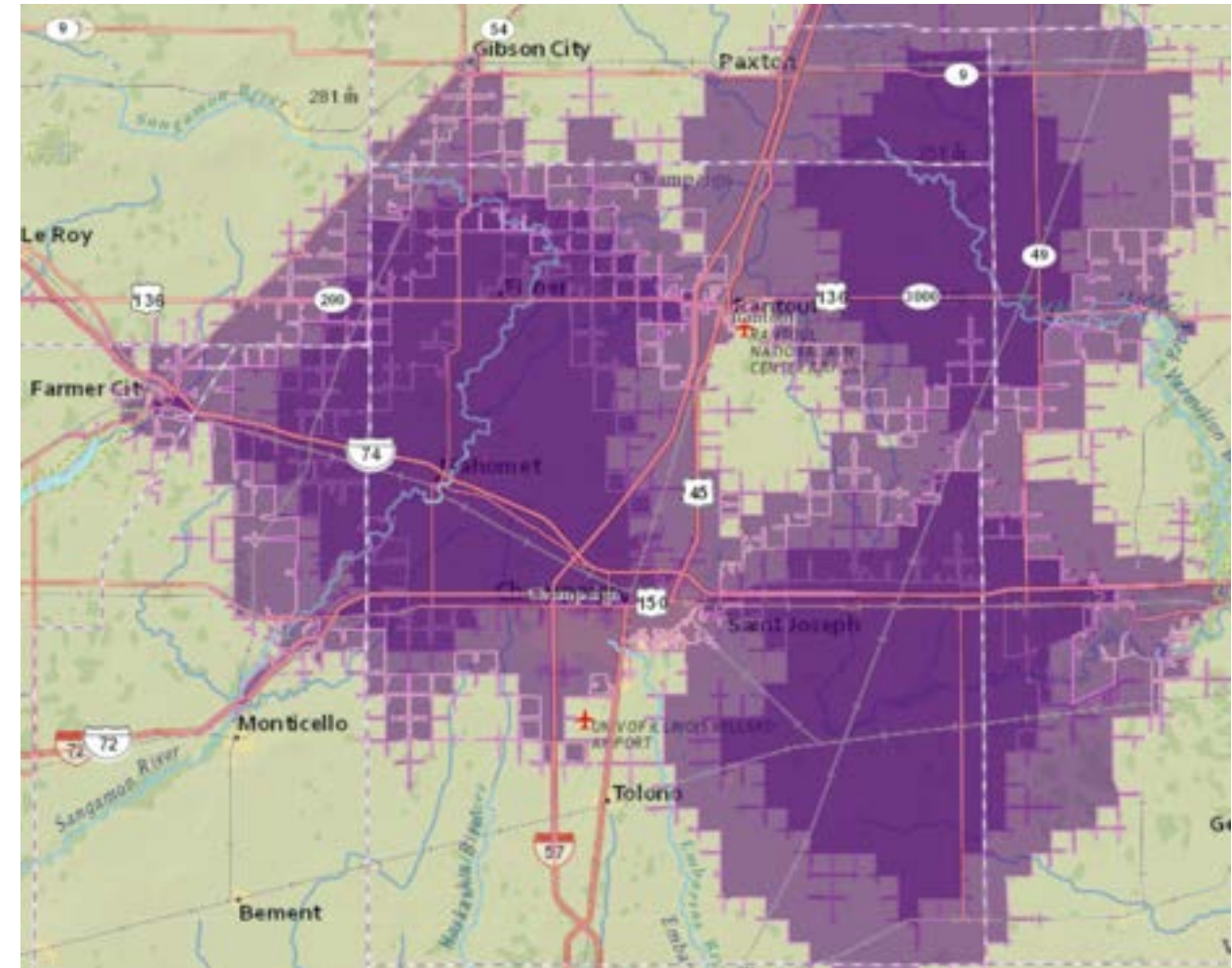
POPULATION TRACT DENSITY AND PROXIMITY TO PRESERVES



- Preserve Entrances
 - CCFPDPreserves_Buffer_10mi
 - CCFPDPreserves_Buffer_5mi
 - CCFPDPreserves_Buffer_2mi
- ChmCo_tracts
- PopSqMi
- ≤50.000000
 - ≤100.000000
 - ≤500.000000
 - ≤1000.000000
 - ≤2000.000000
 - ≤5000.000000
 - ≤10000.000000
 - ≤55000.000000

ADDITIONAL MAPS

AREAS WITHIN 15- AND 20-MINUTE DRIVES TO FOREST PRESERVES



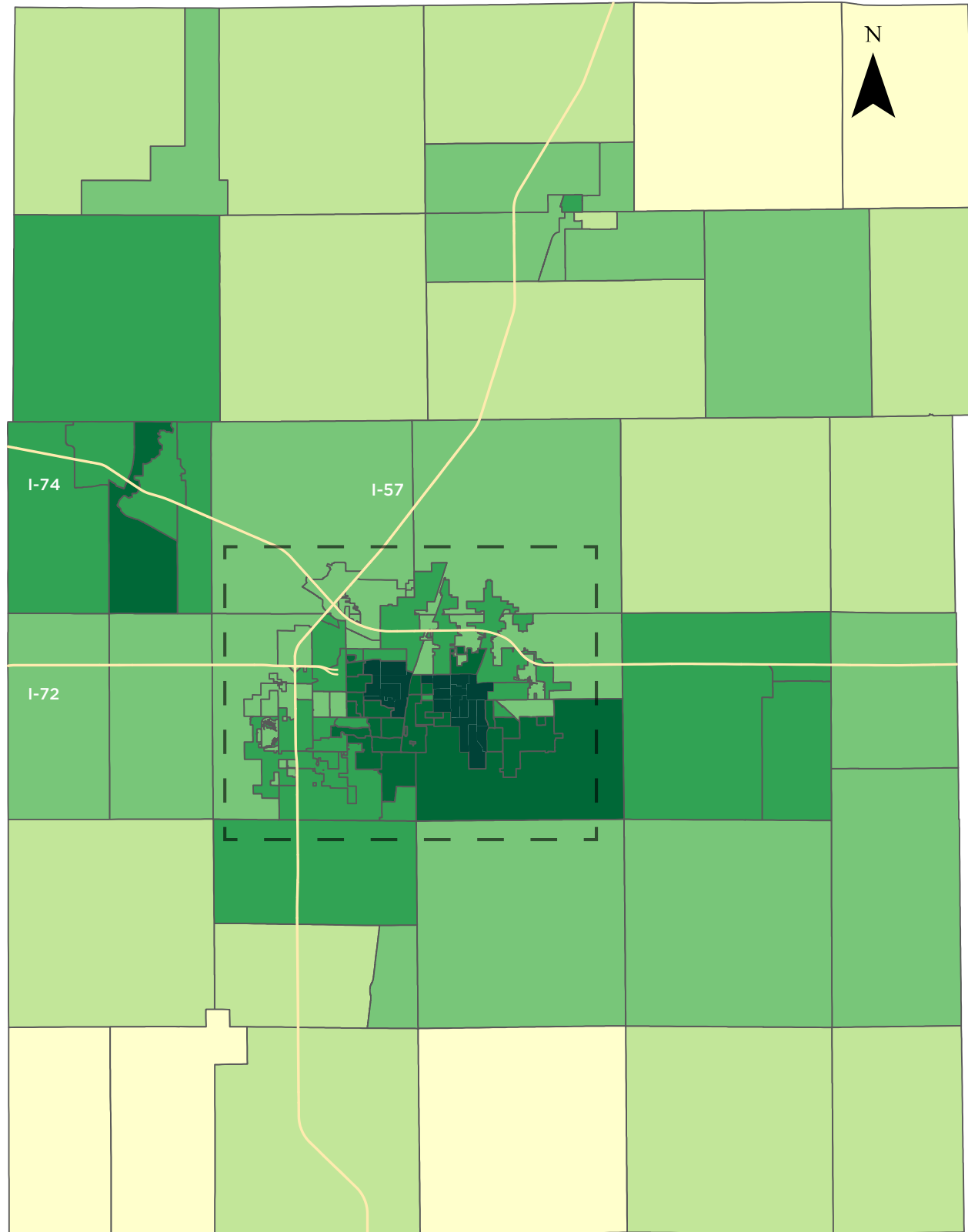
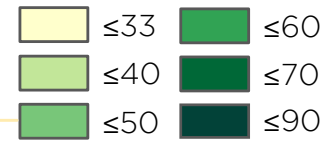
DRIVING TIME TO A FOREST PRESERVE

- 15 minutes
- 20 minutes

ADDITIONAL MAPS

2020 REFERENDUM RESULTS: PERCENT "YES" BY PRECINCT

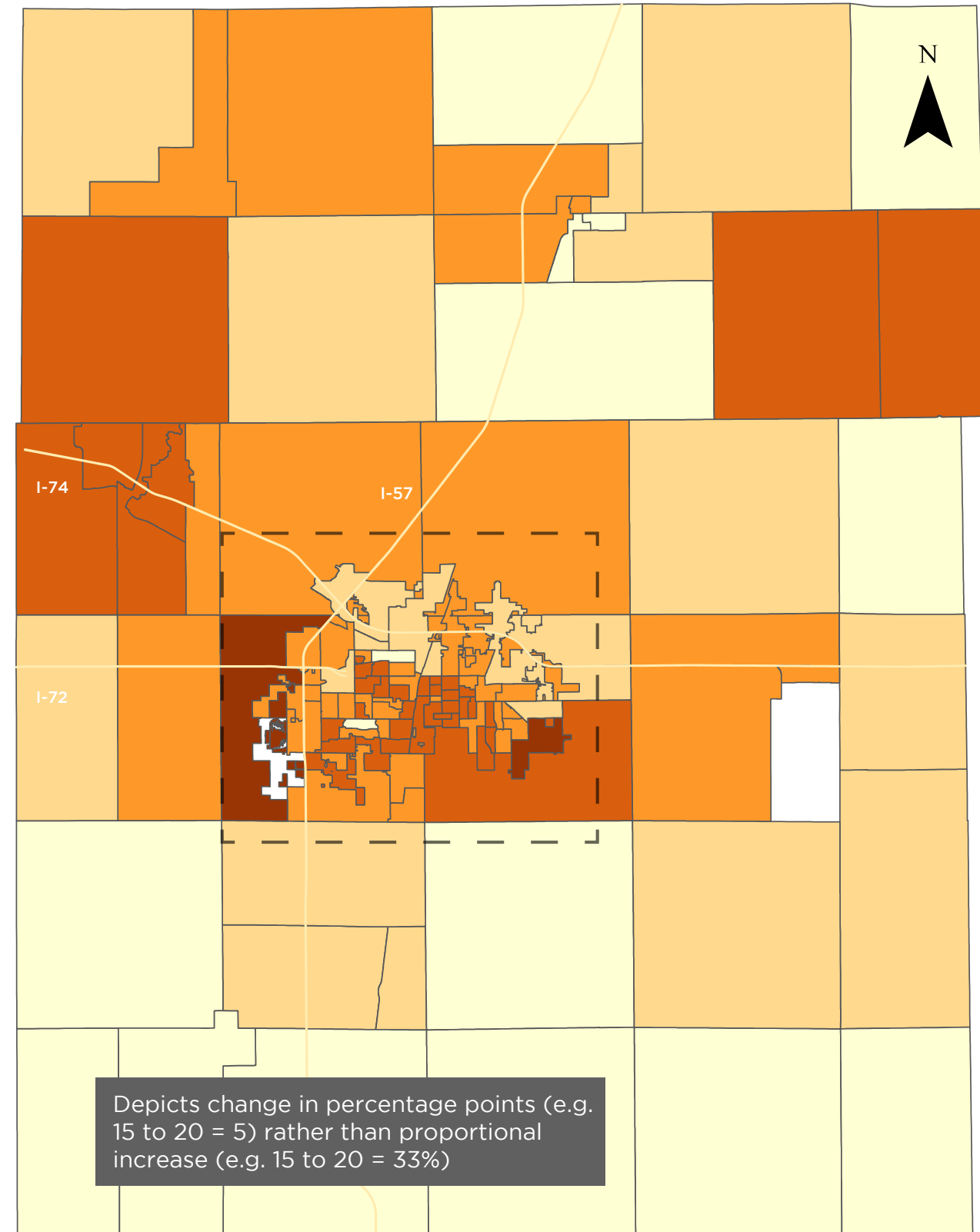
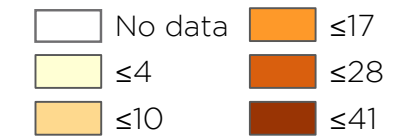
Percent "Yes"



ADDITIONAL MAPS

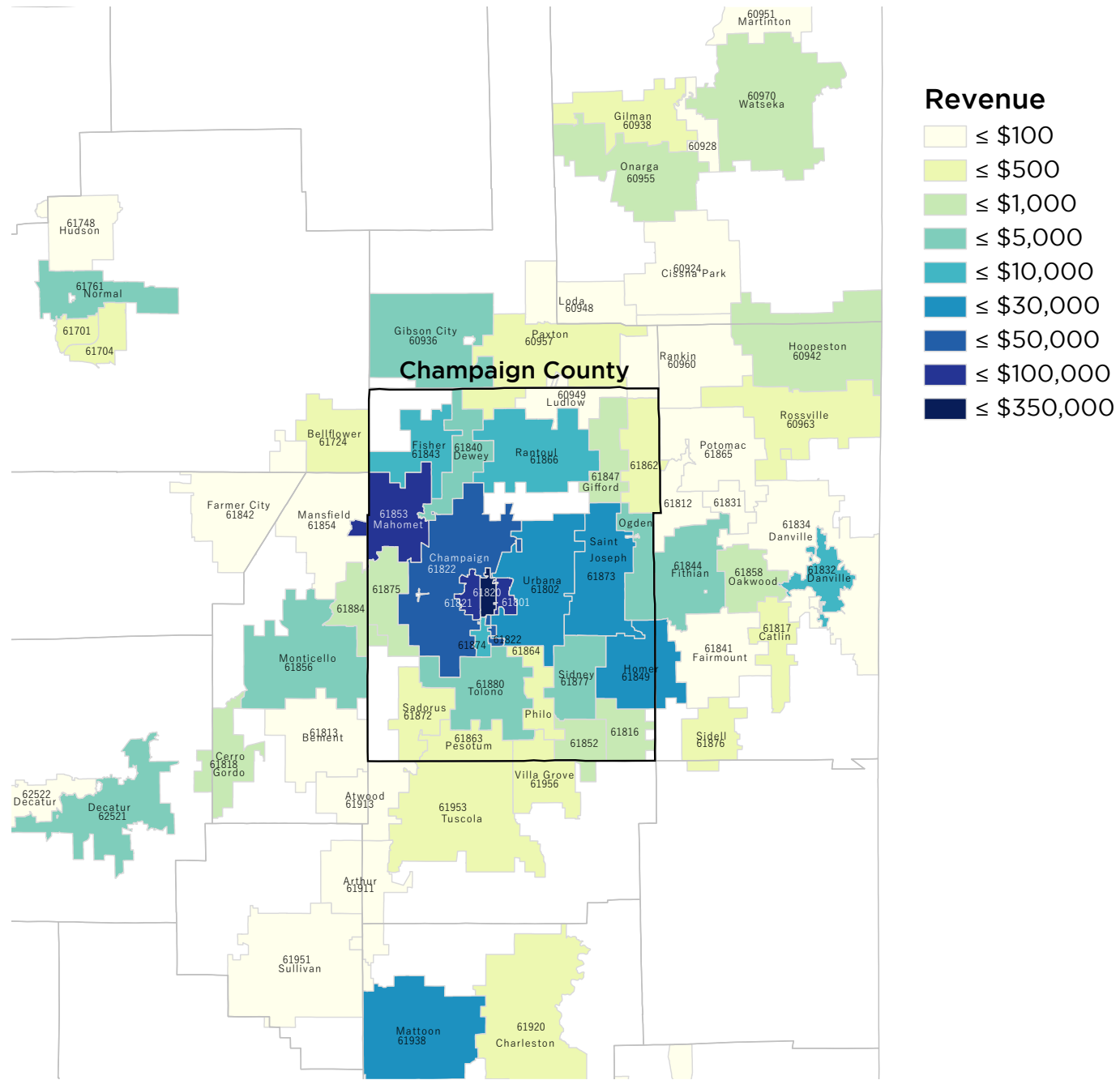
2020 REFERENDUM RESULTS: CHANGE IN "YES" VOTES, 2008 TO 2020

Change



ADDITIONAL MAPS

FUNDS DONATED TO THE FOREST PRESERVES BY ZIP CODE, JULY 2016 TO JULY 2021



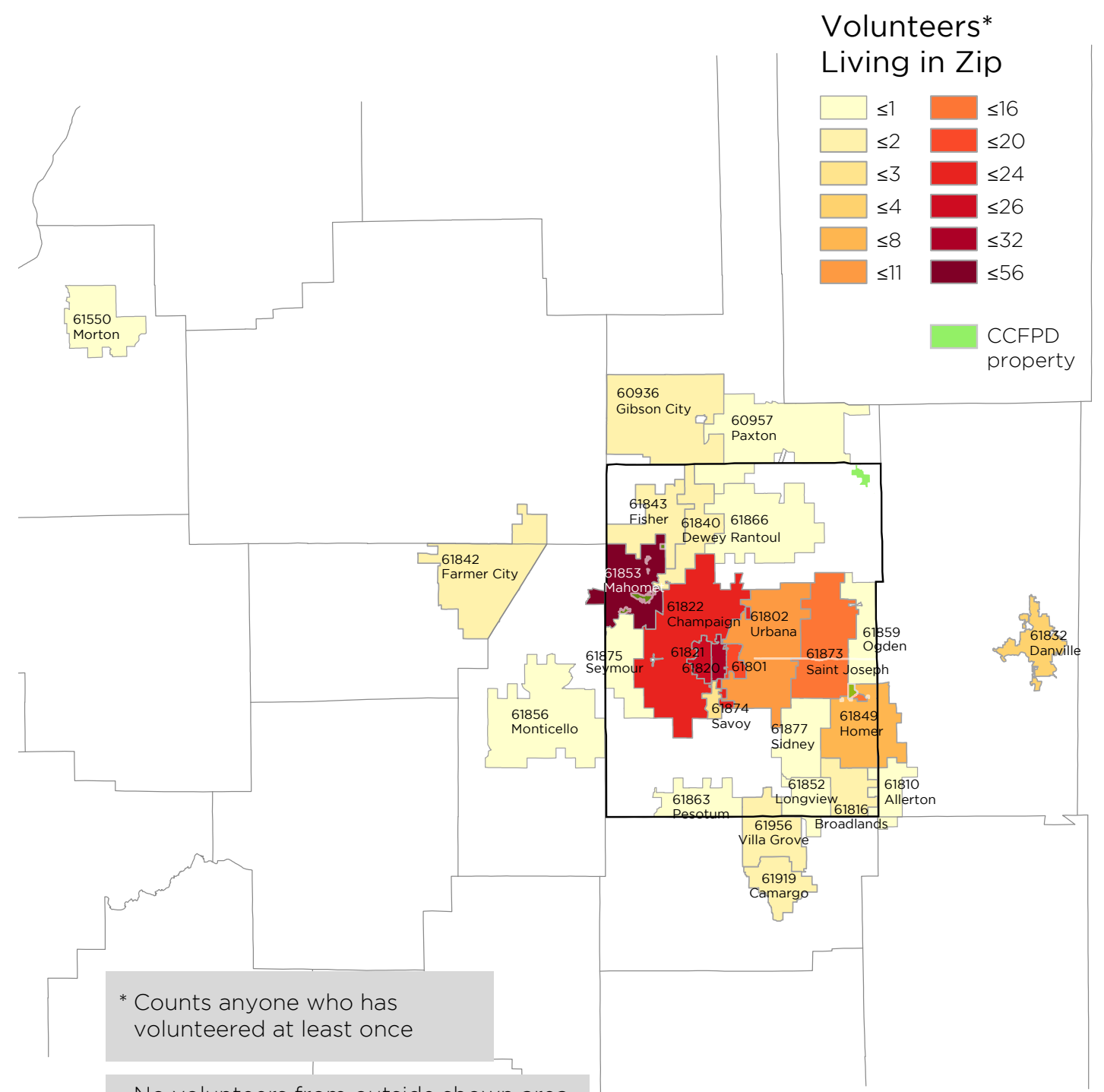
88% of donated funds from Champaign County

93% of all donated funds from Illinois

95% of Illinois donated funds from Champaign County

ADDITIONAL MAPS

FOREST PRESERVE VOLUNTEERS BY ZIP CODE, 2019 TO 2021



* Counts anyone who has volunteered at least once

No volunteers from outside shown area

96% of all volunteers from Champaign County

2023 NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY
AQITY RESEARCH & INSIGHTS, INC.

[PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK]

COUNTYWIDE SURVEY FOR THE CHAMPAIGN COUNTY FOREST PRESERVE DISTRICT

JANUARY 2023

aQity Research & Insights

Evanston, IL

Table of Contents

SECTION	PAGE
Methods	3
Sample Demographics	4
Executive Summary	6
Detailed Findings:	
I. Overall Opinions About the CCFPD	16
II. CCFPD Usage, Visits and Satisfaction	28
III. Usage/Satisfaction with Homer Lake Interpretive Center	43
IV. CCFPD Initiatives and Priorities	48
V. Usage/Visits to other Area Nature Centers	57
VI. Sources of CCFPD Information	60
VII. Assessment of District's DEI Efforts	62
VIII. Potential New CCFPD Nature Center	67
APPENDIX	73
Survey Topline Results (questionnaire with overall frequency of responses)	74
Sample postcard invitation for survey recruitment	81

Research Methods

- These findings are based on a random sample of n=469 Champaign County residents, excluding those in student housing* at University of Illinois-Urbana. This is slightly short of our initial goal of n=500 respondents, due to low response rates and delays in mail delivery of survey invitations.
- Data collection took place September 29, 2022 through January 4, 2023. Survey respondents were recruited three ways when asked to complete the online survey:

n=169 are members of third-party online panels live in Champaign County. As opt-in panel respondents, they were not aware of the survey topic nor that it was sponsored by the Champaign County Forest Preserve District prior to respondent. As a result, both CCFPD users and non-users are represented within this sample.

An additional n=133 responded to the survey via email invitation using a list of CCFPD users and patrons.

The remaining n=167 responded to postcard invitations that aQity mailed to a random sample of over 15,000 households in the county. This invitation informed residents that the survey was sponsored by the CCFPD to help the District better understand how it can serve local residents. The low response rate to these mailings (1.1%) along with mail delivery delays, especially during the Thanksgiving and year-end holidays, extended the data collection phase.

- This random household sample was weighted to match US Census data for Champaign County by region, age, gender, race and ethnicity, household income, and percentage of households with children. Assuming no sample bias, the margin of error is +/- 4.5% (at the 95% confidence level)*.
- Throughout the report, statistically meaningful differences (at the 95% confidence level) are identified. If responses from a demographic group are not reported, this means that the response from that segment was generally in line with the overall result.

* In addition to sampling error, question wording, respondent error, and practical difficulties in conducting surveys may introduce error or bias in any opinion poll.

Methods: Sample Demographics

Gender*

Male	47%
Female	51%
Prefer to self-describe	2%

Age*

Under 35	23%
35-44	20%
45-54	16%
55-64	18%
65+	23%
<i>Mean (average)</i>	<i>49.3 years old</i>

Children in Household*

Yes	22%
No	78%

Length of Residence in Area

Less than 5 years	22%
5-10 years	14%
11-19 years	13%
20-29 years	17%
30-44 years	20%
<i>Mean (average)</i>	<i>22.6 years</i>

Race*

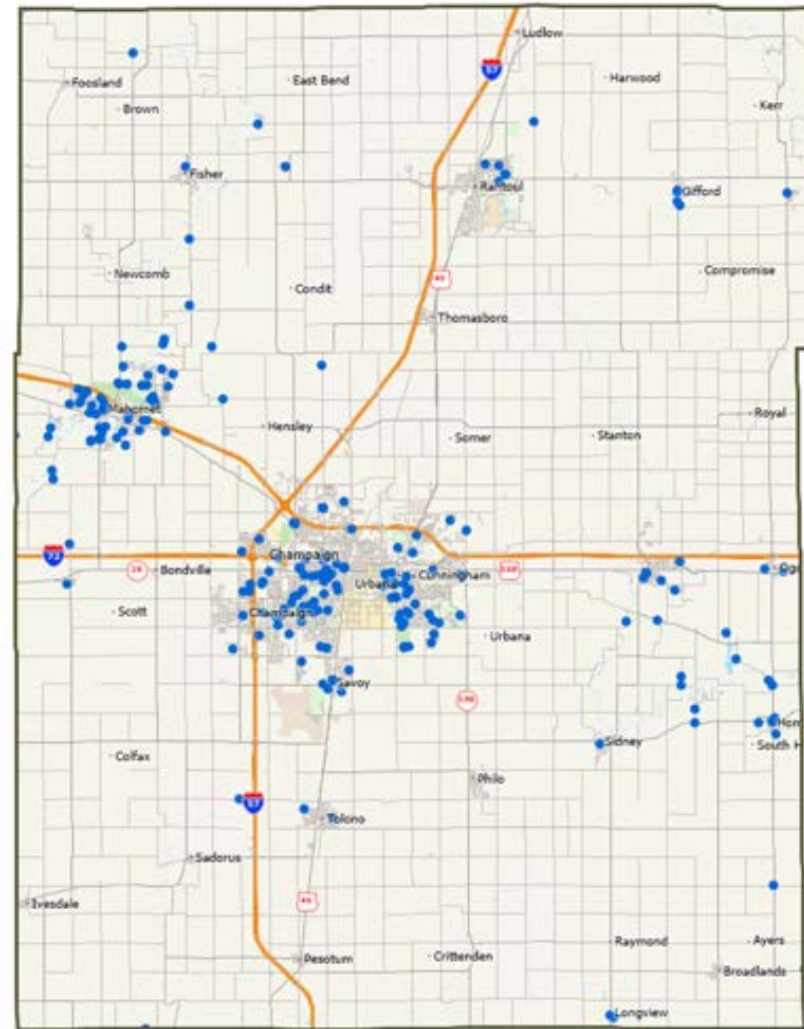
White only	66%
African American only	13%
Other/Multiracial	21%

Ethnicity*

Hispanic/Latino	6%
Not Hispanic/Latino	94%

Methods: Sample Demographics

Region* (based on residence and zip code)	
Champaign (city)	45%
Urbana	21
Mahomet	5
Rantoul	7
St. Joseph	2
Savoy	5
All other areas	15



Executive Summary: Key Findings

Key Findings: Overall Opinions of the CCFPD

Residents Countywide Hold the CCFPD in Favorable Esteem

- Among local agencies tested, the District receives the highest overall esteem ratings. < pg. 17 >
 - On a 0-10 scale, 75% give the CCFPD favorable scores, including 49% who are extremely favorable (ratings of 9+ on a 0-10 scale).*
 - By comparison, only 7% have a negative opinion of the District, and one in five (18%) are neutral.
 - Its average 0-10 rating is 7.7 – considered very positive.
 - Most (86%) are familiar enough with the District to offer an esteem score (in line with 85% to 90% familiar with other agencies tested).
- Local park districts/departments are held in similarly strong regard (average 7.5 rating, with 78% giving favorable scores).
- Other local agencies (Champaign County government, local school districts and local village/city governments) are held in neutral to somewhat favorable regard. They average scores of 5.4 to 5.9 (on the 0-10 scale).
- The CCFPD's strong scores are significantly stronger than statewide and downstate benchmarks for other forest preserve/conservation districts. < pg. 18 >
- Its highest ratings tend to come from men, the oldest (ages 65+) and long-term residents, white residents, and recent CCFPD users/visitors. < pg. 19 >
 - Conversely, lower ratings (still favorable) come from women, ages 35-44, Urbana households, African Americans, lower-income residents, and non-District users. However, no subgroup rates the District below 5.7 on average (still considered neutral to somewhat positive).

Key Findings: Perceived Strengths and Improvements Sought from the CCFPD

Top CCFPD Strengths Include Well-maintained Properties, Accessibility to Natural Areas, and Trails

- In an open-ended format, most residents (82%) are able to mention something they like or a strength of the CCFPD. Top responses are:
 - Clean and well-kept preserves and facilities (45% of respondents)
 - Easy access to natural areas, green spaces, etc. (32%)
 - Walking and biking trails (23%).
- Nearly one in five (17%) also value the District's efforts to protect wildlife, habitats, and prairies.

< pp. 20-22 >

Far Fewer Can Identify Weaknesses or Dislikes of the CCFPD

- About three in five respondents are unable to mention anything negative about the District, including 41% who report nothing at all that they dislike. The remaining 39% offer scattered issues or improvements they would like to see, most often:
 - Trail improvements (14% -- better maintained, more guides/signs/maps)
 - More information and communications about CCFPD preserves, facilities, and programs (14%)
 - Better upkeep (12% -- less litter, more garbage cans, etc.)
 - Longer hours (10%)
 - More efforts to protect land and habitats (10%).

< pp. 23-25 >

Key Findings: Estimates of CCFPD's Share of Property Taxes, and Overall Value Assessment

Residents Tend to Overestimate the District's Share of Local Property Taxes

- On average, they believe that 6.6% of their property tax revenues go to the CCFPD – much higher than the District's actual 1% share. < pg. 26 >
- Those who give the District lower esteem scores also tend to overestimate its share of property taxes (namely women, lower-income households, non-CCFPD users, African Americans).
- Overall, 21% correctly estimate that the District's share is 1%, and nearly half (46%) believe it is within one percent of that amount (estimating 0% to 2% total).

When Informed that the District's Share of Property Taxes is Actually 1%, Most Rate the CCFD a Good Value Overall.

- On a 0-10 scale, 71% rate its value favorably (scores of 6 or higher), including half (50%) who rate in an excellent value (scores of 9 or 10). < pg. 27 >
- By comparison, only 9% believe the District represents a poor value, and the remaining 20% deem it an average value.
- The highest value ratings come from recent CCFPD users, white adults, and those ages 65+.
- Lower than average scores (still positive) come from the youngest adults (under age 45), Urbana residents, African Americans, and non-District visitors.

Key Findings: CCFPD Usage and Satisfaction

Most respondents (84%) report visiting a CCFPD preserve or facility in the past two years

- Most often, these residents report going to: < pg. 29 >
 - Lake of the Woods (70%) and/or Museum of the Grand Prairie (26%)
 - Homer Lake (49%) and/or the Interpretive Center (28%)
 - Kickapoo Rail Trail (36%)
 - Middle Fork (34%)
 - River Bend (27%)
 - Mabery Gelvin Botanical Garden (26%)

- Among recent visitors, satisfaction with their experience and these locations is very high. Their satisfaction scores average 7.7 or higher (on a 0-10 scale), and roughly half (47%+) are completely satisfied with:
 - The overall experience (59%) < pp. 30-31 >
 - The cleanliness, maintenance, and upkeep of these locations (58%)
 - Overall accessibility (57%)
 - Safety (54%)
 - The level of service from District staff (47%).

- The relatively few expressing lower satisfaction (scores from 0-6) give very scattered reasons. The most frequent concern: < pp. 32-35 >
 - Lake of the Woods (n=7, most often lack of amenities)
 - Administrative issues (n=7, very scattered feedback)
 - Kickapoo Rail Trail (n=6, usually faster completion of improvements, more trails or paved sections)
 - Homer Lake (n=6, including more or improved trails nearby)
 - Middle Fork (n=6, scattered comments)

Key Findings: Activities and Satisfaction While Visiting District Properties

Recent users report a wide range of activities when visiting the preserves

- Recent users most often report taking advantage of CCFPD trails, usually without pets (81%), thought about a third (36%) also hike with pets. Another 63% enjoy passive relaxation activities such as enjoying nature, reading, etc. *< pp. 36-37 >*
 - About two in five report having gatherings with family or friends (41%) and/or picnics at these locations (40%). A third (34%) go for photography.
 - Overall, 39% also report at least one water-related activity including fishing (24%), boating (23%), or swimming (4%).

- Most are satisfied (83%) with self-guided activities at these locations.

Satisfaction is also strong with CCFPD special events, exhibits, and programs, but awareness is low.

- Many (41%+) remain unfamiliar with or have never used these CCFPD activities or offerings. However, substantial interest in these options exists, most often for: *< pg. 40 >*
 - Special events (56% express interest), especially women and multi-racial adults
 - Environmental education programs (37%), especially women and white adults
 - Exhibits (35%), especially ages 45-54 and Hispanic/Latino residents
 - Cultural/historical educational programs (35%), especially women.

Key Findings: Visits and Satisfaction with Homer Lake Interpretive Center, and Reasons for Non-Usage of CCFPD Locations Overall

Visitors to Homer Lake Interpretive Center are Likewise Very Happy with that Facility

- Most report reading the exhibits (61%), and nearly half (45%) also visit the live animals at the Center. Both experiences garner very positive satisfaction ratings (7.9 and 8.0 respectively, on a 0-10 scale). < pp. 44-47 >
- While only 18% report attending a class at Homer Lake, these experiences generate the strongest satisfaction ratings by far, with 96% satisfied (including 78% *extremely* satisfied).
 - Communicating these programs more broadly and increasing awareness throughout the District – especially among non-user groups – is a clear opportunity.

Non-users of any CCFPD Location Tend to be Simply Uninterested, Too Busy, or Are Unaware of District Locations

- Very few attribute their non-usage to something negative about the District (e.g., nothing is nearby, lack of accessibility, safety concerns – cited by 18% or fewer). Most are simply not interested or too busy. < pg. 42 >

Key Findings: Priorities for CCFPD Initiatives and Improvements

Maintaining Existing District Properties is a Top Priority, But Better/More Trails Generates Strong Interest

- Most residents feel the District's top priorities should be maintaining existing assets (vs. land acquisition or expansion) and protecting natural habitats. < pp. 49-51 >
 - Roughly three out of four feel these two goals represent the top priorities for the District (highest top four rankings). Just behind these are:
 - Acquiring and protecting new natural areas (51% top four priorities)
 - Ensuring long-term financial stability (46%)
 - Providing educational opportunities, exhibits, and programs (45%)
 - Ranking least important are:
 - Expanding existing preserves (38% top four)
 - Opening new preserves, trails, or facilities (35%)
 - Adding a new nature center for educational programs (20%)
- Among specific improvements, enhanced and expanded trails are clearly of greatest interest. < pp. 52 >
 - On a 0-10 scale, residents place the most importance on:
 - Adding more trails (average 7.5 on a 0-10 scale)
 - Trail connectivity in the County (7.2)
 - More paved trails for those with walkers, wheelchairs, etc. (6.9)
 - Adding an outdoor nature-based play area is considered at least somewhat important (6.6) on average, followed closely by more opportunities for kayaking, canoeing or row boating (6.5).
 - Residents are more divided on the importance of updating or adding a nature center for educational programs (6.3).

Key Findings: Priorities for a Potential New Nature Center, and Sources of CCFPD Information

While an Expanded or New Nature Center Ranks Lowest on District Priorities, a Majority Still Feel it is Somewhat Important

- Nearly three out of five residents (59%) place at least some importance on having a new or updated nature center in the County (with 20% rating it “extremely” important). Those who tend to feel this way are African Americans, Rantoul residents *, and adults ages 45-54. < pp. 52-59 >
- If a new nature center were to be built, respondents most often favor renovating or adding to the existing Homer Lake facility (42%). The rest are evenly divided between: < pg. 72 >
 - Building a new facility elsewhere in the County (19%) or at Homer Lake (18%)
 - Not building a new facility at all (21%).
- Residents most often seek outdoor program and activity space at a potential new facility. Beyond that, a wide range of other features are suggested (e.g., live animal exhibits, indoor program areas, space for adults and children, outdoor exhibits, etc.). < pp. 68-71 >
 - Many also volunteer that any new facility should focus on environmentalism, conservation, and sustainability.

The District Website Is the Top Source for CCFPD Information, With Social Media Ranking 2nd (especially among younger residents)

- Overall, 59% report going to the CCFPD website when seeking information about the preserves, events, programs, etc., and a third (33%) say it is their preferred source for this information. < pg. 61 >
- Two in five (41%) look to social media for information (including 57% of those under age 35), and one in five (22%) prefer it over all other sources.
 - Word of mouth (32%) is also a frequent response and is also cited more often than average by residents under age 35 (44%).
 - “The Leaflet” (printed or digital version) is mostly used by older adults (ages 65+).

Key Findings: CCFPD Efforts on DEI Initiatives, and Usage of Other Local Nature Centers

Most Feel Represented and Included in CCFPD Programs and Activities, But One in Five Do Not

- Those least likely to feel included or represented are non-visitors, persons of color (especially those of Hispanic/Latino ethnicity), and more middle-aged residents (45-54). < pp. 63-66 >
- When asked why they feel this way, these respondents give a wide range of reasons, most often citing:
 - A lack of awareness and/or limited or no outreach and communication on the District, its preserves or activities
 - Issues or disagreements with specific CCFPD policies (more likely from current users who do not feel they are heard or represented in those decisions)
 - Not having any preserves or facilities close to where they live (less equity)
 - Lack of programs or exhibits focusing on other ethnicities, cultures, or feeling uncomfortable as a lone person of color when visiting a preserve or facility

Aside From the Purves Nature Center, Most Other Nature Facilities in the Area Are Unknown and Seldom Used

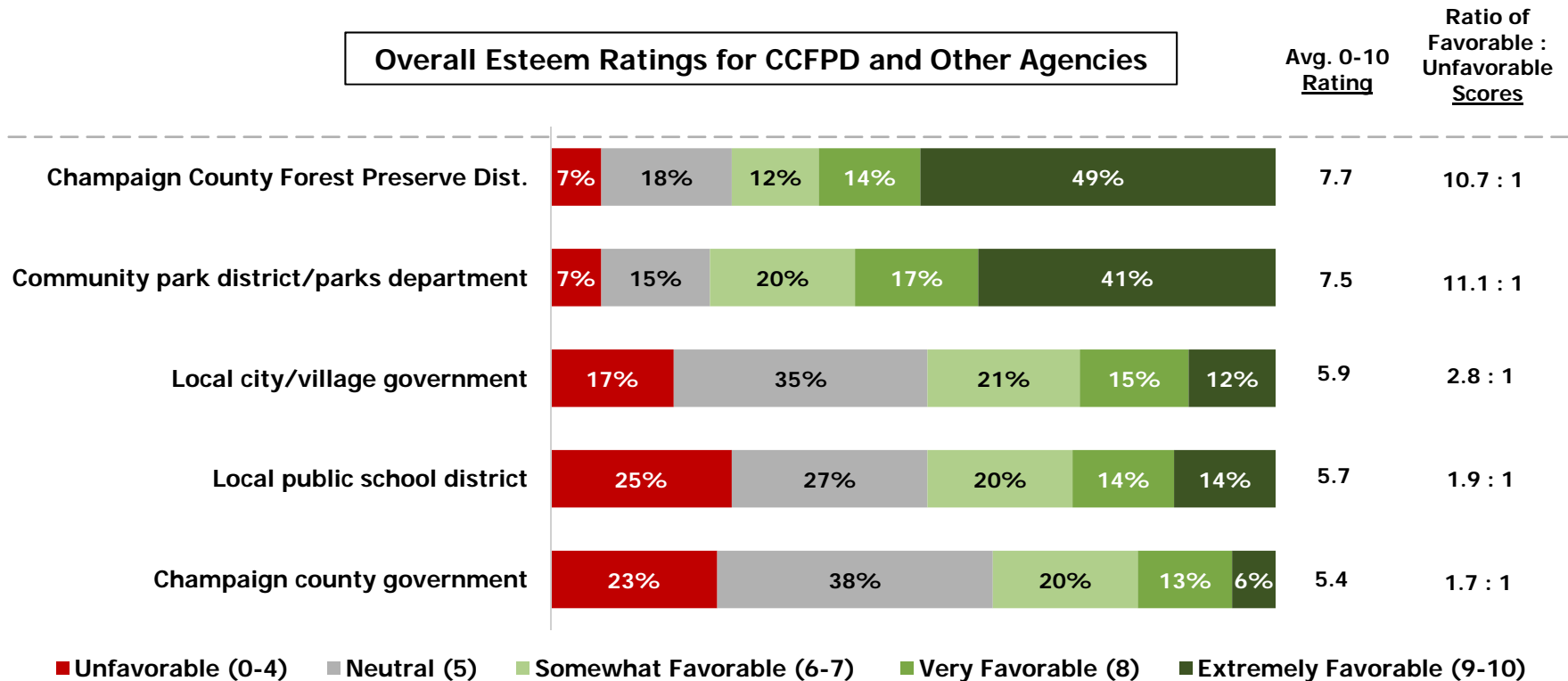
- Just over half (54%) report visiting the Anita Purves Nature Center at some time (especially the oldest adults). < pp. 58-59 >
- All other nature centers are unknown to a majority of residents, and no more than 20% have ever visited these locations:
 - Kennekuk Environmental Education Center (20% visited, 54% unfamiliar/unaware)
 - Rock Springs Nature Center (11% visited, 61% unfamiliar)
 - Douglas-Hart Nature Center (11% visited, 64% unfamiliar)
 - Sugar Grove Nature Center (12%, 66% unfamiliar)
- As with Homer Lake Interpretive Center, past visitors to each of these locations are generally older residents (ages 65+).

I. Overall Opinions About CCFPD

Respondents countywide hold the CCFPD in very strong regard. Three-quarters have a favorable opinion of the District, including nearly half (49%) who give it the highest ratings (on a 0-10 scale).

- Compared to other local agencies, only community park districts/departments receive comparable ratings as the CCFPD. All others are rated lower (neutral to slightly favorable, on average).
- Another 14% of the sample were not familiar enough with the District to offer a rating (especially residents under 35, those who moved to the County within the past five years, and lower income households) This is consistent with levels of unfamiliarity with the other agencies tested (all within the 10% to 15% range).

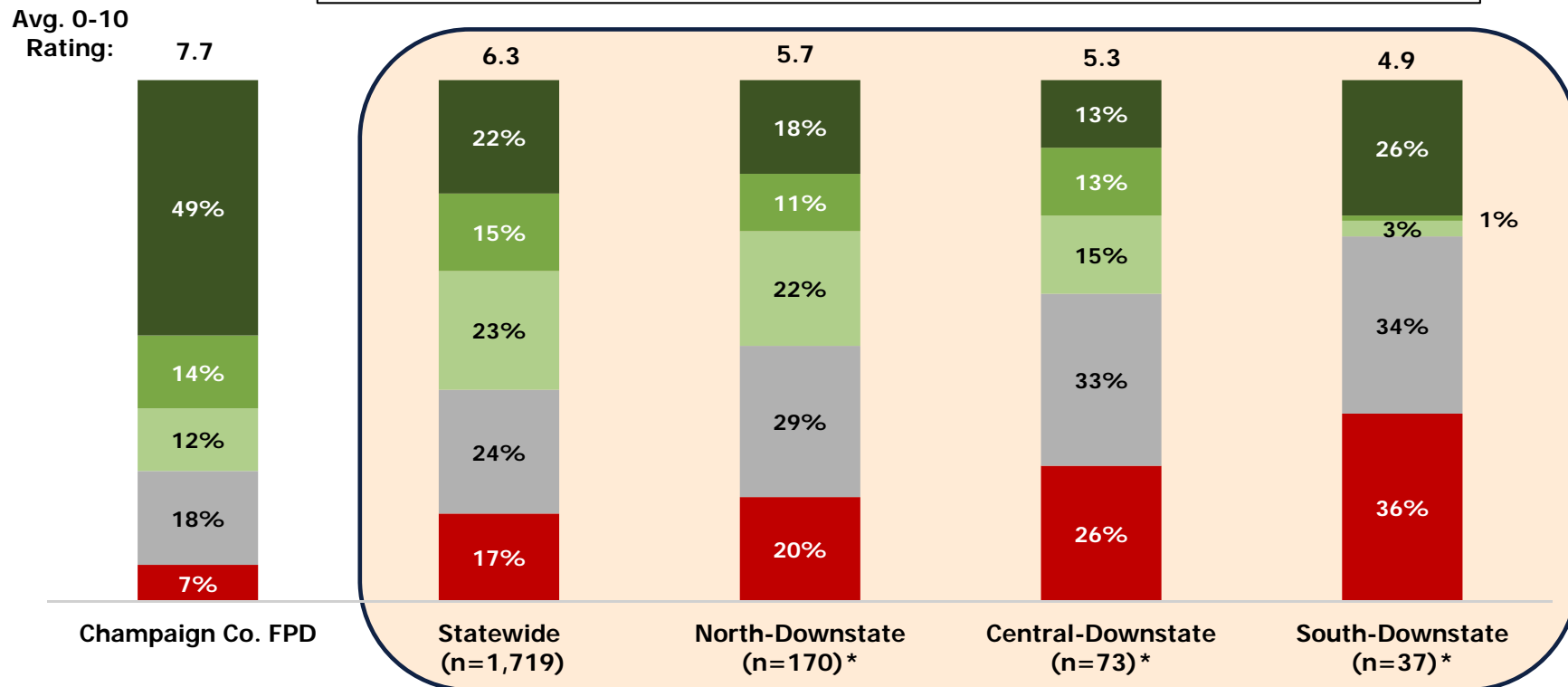
Overall Esteem Ratings for CCFPD and Other Agencies



The CCFPD’s overall ratings are significantly higher compared to countywide forest preserve and conservation districts statewide, and across downstate (more comparable) counties with these agencies.

- These benchmark regions have much higher proportions of “neutral” ratings (“5” on a 0-10 scale), suggesting lower levels of awareness (no strong opinions either way) with those agencies.

CCFPD Esteem Ratings vs. Forest Preserve/Conservation District Benchmarks
(among respondents able to rate their local agency)



■ Unfavorable (0-4) ■ Neutral (5) ■ Somewhat Favorable (6-7) ■ Very Favorable (8) ■ Extremely Favorable (9-10)

* North—Downstate includes agencies in Boone, DeKalb, Kankakee, Kendall, Rock Island, and Winnebago counties. Central-Downstate includes Champaign, Macon, and Vermillion counties. South-Downstate includes St. Clair County.

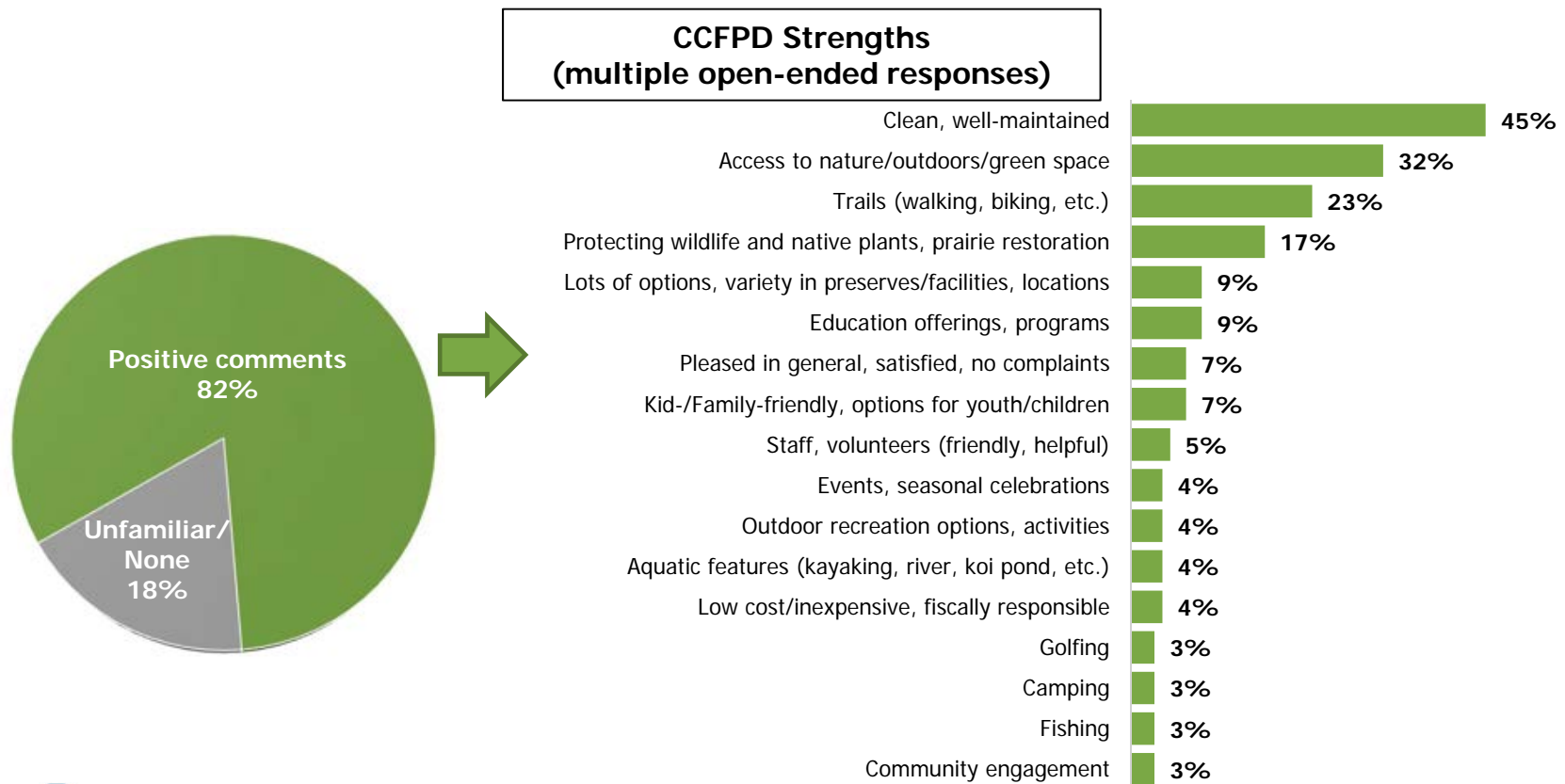
The CCFPD receives its highest scores from the oldest and most long-term County residents, those in Champaign and Mahomet, and men.

- Lower than average scores tend to come from newer area residents, ages 35-54, Urbana residents, women, African Americans, and lower income households. However, **all of these groups still give the District favorable esteem ratings overall** (5.7 or higher).
 - The lowest ratings are from non-CCFPD visitors in the past two years (5.7 – still positive, above a neutral 5.0 score).
- Among the other local agencies tested, esteem ratings tend to increase with household income.

	More Likely to Give Lower than Average Ratings (less favorable)	More Likely to Give Higher than Average Ratings (more favorable)
Champaign County Forest Preserve District (avg. = 7.7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Women (7.2) - Ages 35-44 (6.7), 45-54 (7.1) - Urbana residents (6.4) - Lived in County <5 yrs. (7.4), 5-10 yrs. (6.9) - African Americans (5.9) - HH income <\$35K (6.7) - Non-CCFPD users (5.7) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Men (8.6) - Ages 65+ (8.6) - Champaign (8.0) and Mahomet residents (8.6) - Lived in County 45+ yrs. (8.2) - White adults (8.1) - HH income \$75K-\$149.9K (8.4) - CCFPD users (7.9)
Local park district/parks department (7.5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rantoul residents (5.9) - HH income \$50K-\$74.9K (7.0) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Champaign residents (8.0) - HH income \$150K+ (8.4)
Local village/city government (5.9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rantoul residents (5.1) - HH income <\$35K (5.4), \$50K-\$74.9K (5.4) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Champaign residents (6.3) - HH income \$75K-\$149.9K (6.4)
Local public school district (5.7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Urbana residents (4.9) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mahomet residents (6.9) or unincorporated areas (6.8)
Champaign County government (5.4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mahomet (4.9) and St. Joseph residents (4.8) - HH income \$50K-\$74.9K (4.9) - Lived in County 20-29 yrs. (4.7) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Champaign residents (5.8) - HH income \$75K-\$149.9K (5.8)

Most (82%) are able to offer something positive about the District as a strength, and nearly half of those comments cite the well-maintained preserves and facilities. Another one-third of this feedback recognizes the easy access to open space and natural areas.

- About one in four (23%) enjoy walking, running, or biking on the CCFPD trails, and 17% appreciate the District's efforts to protect open space and restore habitats for native species.
- Other reasons vary and are mentioned by fewer than 10% of residents (e.g., variety of preserves/facilities, educational opportunities, being family-friendly, etc.).



Sample Verbatim Responses: Positive comments about the CCFPD

Clean, well-maintained (45%)

"There are great parks to visit, and they are always well-maintained. Great places for a walk in nature."

"The Forest Preserve District takes care of great spaces in the county. They provide great resources to visitors; I'm planning to volunteer with them."

"Maintaining our parks and keeping them beautiful and safe."

"I think they do a good job of maintenance the nature centers and trails, as well as making sure the wildlife is safe and thriving in the right areas."

"The CCFPD takes care of its parks and facilities within the confines of its budget."

"High level of consistent maintenance on trails and buildings."

"Keeping the preserve clean of trash and debris."

"The CCFPD does a good job at maintaining recreational facilities around the county. I also appreciate their efforts to perform ecological restoration."

"I believe the CCFPD does a terrific job of managing the properties under its care. I particularly value the attempts to restore areas by removing invasive species and reintroducing native plants and trees."

"Keeps the forest preserve well kept and clean for people, but also respects the wildlife within."

Access to nature/outdoors/green space (32%)

"I appreciate how the forest preserve has made very nice areas that they maintain for the public to enjoy."

"High quality parks for being in farmland/prairie. There are so many options within a 25-minute drive from Champaign."

"Accessible natural areas that are well-maintained and provide a variety of activities such as hiking, picnics, and so on."

"Provides green space with multiple uses. Beyond maintaining habitat for plant and animal species, citizens can hike, fish, camp, bike, etc. In addition, public programming helps educate on various topics. CCFPD does a good job of balancing conservation and education."

"The forest preserve has some wonderful natural areas and a history of holding a strong land ethic. They have also had a strong commitment to promoting volunteerism and a philosophy of volunteer empowerment. In an era where other organizations have been turning natural areas into opportunities to promote big business and profiteering, CCFPD has put the people and the care of the land first. I appreciate its commitment to keeping big business out of and away from the forest preserve and for discouraging the encroachment of development along our waterways and other high quality natural areas."

"The forest preserve parks all provide us with peaceful getaways from the busy lives we all live. The hiking trails are beautifully maintained, and the parks all have tables for picnics. The parks are now attracting people from many countries and all colors. Especially nice to see more black families."

"Provides the public (with) open forested acres, (and) conservation of natural resources and wildlife."

"Responsible care for wildlife, creates exceptional opportunities to enjoy nature."

"We just went to Lake of the Woods this afternoon and we sure enjoyed the beautiful sceneries and the well-maintained grounds there."

"CCFPD is a resource for all who care about nature. I have not mentioned all the benefits, there are so many more. The thoughtful decisions about how to make the preserves natural and welcoming to all those who visit. The staff."

Sample Verbatim Responses: Positive comments about the CCFPD (cont'd)

Trails (23%)

"I appreciate the hiking trails being well maintained. Lately, I'm excited that the CCFPD is beginning to build canoe and kayak launches!"

"Bike trails are great and all the trails. Restoring native ecosystems as best you can is great!"

"I run the through the Buffalo's Trace/Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve at least 5 days a week. I love how well the preserve is maintained"

"Biking and hiking trails. Especially trails at River Bend and paved bike trail from Crowley Road to Fogel Road."

"We enjoy walking and biking on the trails in and around Mahomet, the occasional picnic, and botanical gardens. My kids love any excuse to be near the river."

"They take good care of the landscaping and have lots of trails to explore."

Protecting native plants and wildlife, prairie restoration (17%)

"Developing prairie and natural woodlands. Also, camping and Dark Skies at Middlefork."

"Establishment of natural areas promoting native species conservation. Restoration of degraded lands (and) emphasizing local biodiversity."

"Protects nature and gives people the opportunity to experience it. Restoring the natural landscapes that have been ruined is so important for human health, climate change, and of course habitat/wildlife/biodiversity."

"That land and ecosystem are preserved while providing the public the opportunity to visit and interact with them."

"Fine balance between maintaining health of natural areas and important service to the public."

"Acquires and protects beautiful natural areas and important wildlife habitats from development."

Variety, lots of options (9%)

"We like having different options in different areas. I wish we took advantage of them more."

"There are a lot of different options, parks, and services offered. I love the plethora of parks in the area and the size of them; [wonderful] to visit different parks."

"Provides public outdoor space of various kinds serving range of interests. Has an educational component Dark Sky sight."

"I love that we have a variety of places to visit with great hiking trails that are kept as natural as possible."

"Acquiring a diverse range of new property. And managing all that property. Don't know how you do it with the staffing you have."

Educational offerings & programs (9%)

"They present a strong history of education for forest preservation, and they provide a place for child field trips."

"High quality educational programs and providing space for the community."

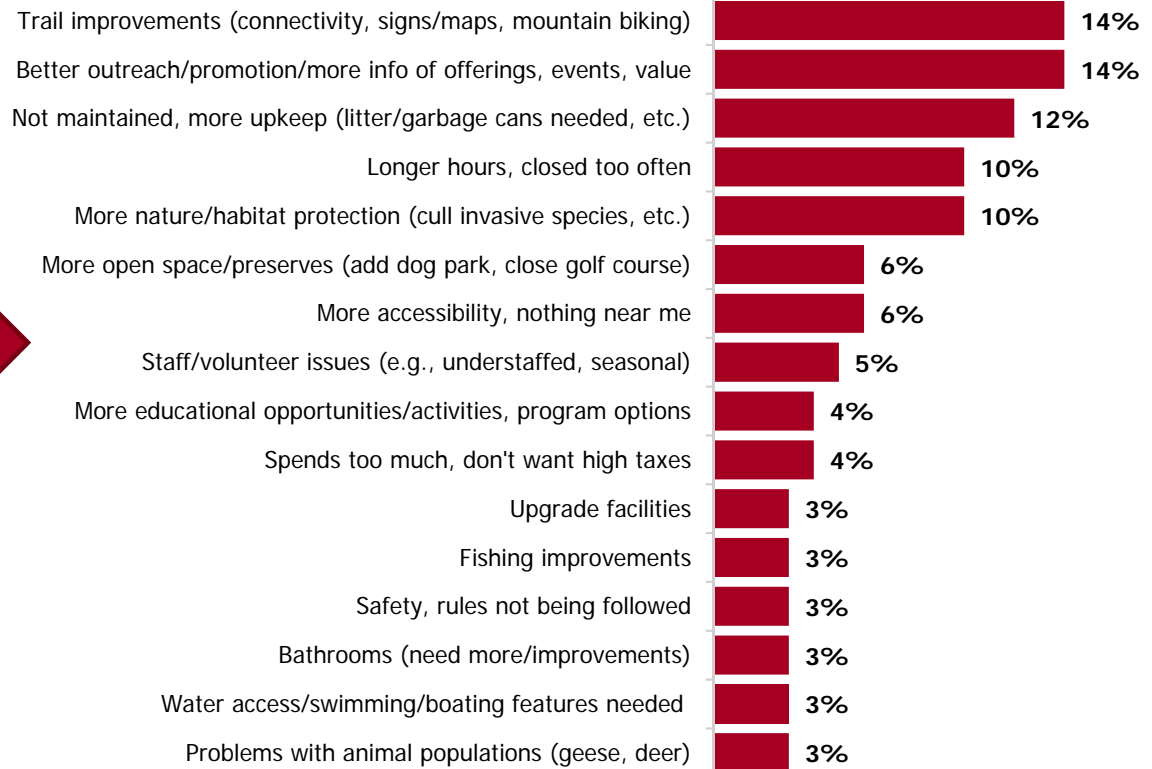
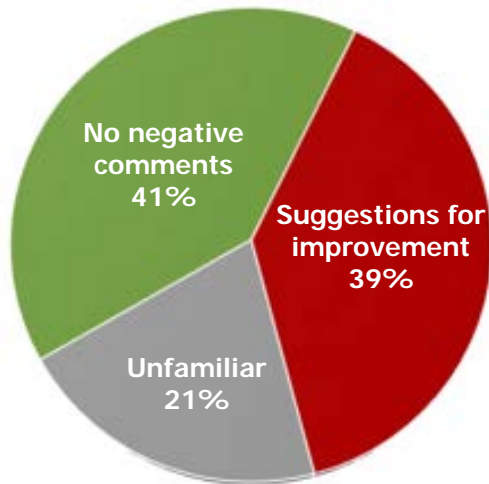
"Offering programs for the community, including schools. Providing educational opportunities to learn about nature and history."

"Maintains beautiful forest preserves and provides many educational and interactive programs for all age groups."

When asked about what the CCFPD could improve, most residents are unable to offer any suggestions or weaknesses. In fact, a slightly plurality said there is nothing they dislike (41%) vs. those who cite a weakness or needed improvement (39%).

- Those who did have negative comments usually focus on trails improvements (more upkeep, more trail information/maps) and/or more communication about District locations, events, programs, etc. (both 14%). Nearly as many also seek improved maintenance and upkeep (12%), longer hours (10%), and continued efforts to protect natural spaces (10%).

**CCFPD Weaknesses/Improvements Sought
(multiple open-ended responses)**



Sample Verbatim Responses: Negative comments about the CCFPD

Trail improvements (14%)

"(They should) Separate bike trails from walking trails."

"Improve backcountry trails at Homer Lake Preserve (wet, muddy areas on several trails; need more gravel or other treatments)."

"There are no mountain bike trails. Very limited options of activities for cyclists."

"I think some of the locations do this very well (like Homer Lake), but I would appreciate a more comprehensive resource that outlines the hiking trails. That includes maps, distances, and level of difficulty."

"Directional and distance signage for hiking trails could be better, along with a posted overall map of the trails at the trailheads."

"I, along with many others, use the walking/bike path year-round. In the winter the path is not cleaned of ice and snow which makes it very difficult and dangerous to use. Please start clearing the path so it can be used year-round."

"Lake of the Woods could benefit from clearer signage/more available maps. We got lost on a walk despite being fairly experienced hikers and trying to carefully read and interpret signs."

"I would LOVE paved walking paths. There are paths through the woods and a road to walk on, but paved walking paths would be great."

"I always wish there were more large hiking trails. Maps and online information is a bit sparse/poorly dispersed as well."

"I wish there were easier access to some of the trails at River Bend. Sometimes the grass trails are flooded and standing water causes off trail diversions in thick weeds. This is difficult with bicycles."

Better outreach/marketing/promotion, spread awareness of CCFPD (14%)

"Improvement in getting information out to the community. I realize it is a complicated effort to include underprivileged communities, and transportation. I've been a volunteer at several events such as C-U Days at Douglas Park and the Jettie Rhodes celebration. Many children and families do not know about our preserves, how to get involved, and how to get there. When we show pictures, explain events, and talk about our programs the children and parents are excited but don't know where they fit in. I'd say CCFPD should concentrate on diversity and inclusion. CCFPD has excelled in every other way."

"Does not integrate other entities, such as schools and park districts."

"Market or share information about all of the land/forest preserve assets that exist in the county."

"It definitely doesn't publicize itself well. There are people who are against any use of their taxes where they can't see how they benefit. It wouldn't hurt to put signs up that say, 'This is brought to you courtesy of your tax dollars going to...'"

"More news about what is happening at the CCFPD sites would be good. Make yourselves more well known!"

"I do not know enough about them. They could advertise more."

"Advocate for itself, not that they should have an ad on TV all the time, but a little self promotion would be okay."

"PR, I didn't know there was a Forest Preserve District separate from the Park District."

Sample Verbatim Responses: Negative comments about the CCFPD (cont'd)

Better upkeep/maintenance (12%)

"Need for garbage cans so people can throw away dog waste and families in parking areas can use."

"I'd like to see a few more garbage cans. I pick up trash, but trash cans are sometimes hard to locate."

"I understand that this would take a lot of manpower, but I would like year-round maintenance of single track trails like the one west of the shelter and Riverbend, and the newer trails in the woods at Buffalo Trace. Also, year-round maintained access to the north and east sides of Shadow Lake."

"Clearing snow and ice from paved trails for winter running."

"[Doesn't] properly maintain the existing facilities but keeps adding new stuff instead."

Longer hours, closed too often (10%)

"Closes too early."

"To strict with daily closing hours."

"I would like to see extended hours."

"The hours they are open."

"Your winter hours are ridiculous. Still can enjoy all the seasons in any park. Moving the closing time to as early as 5 pm is one of the strangest and ridiculous things I've come across."

"Sometimes the interior closures seem to last longer than required."

Do more to protect nature/habitats/wildlife (10%)

"Doesn't seem to be open to alternative methods of caring for the land such as techniques to lower or eliminate the use of pesticides/herbicides."

"Mismanagement of the natural areas, especially invasive species growth and neglected areas that used to be prairies."

"We want continued commitment to maintaining our natural resources in Champaign County!!"

"Invasive species control. Especially Japanese honeysuckle which they planted to provide nitrogen to saplings, now overgrown areas are impassable to people and barren of any other plant life. Also, Russian olive is out of control. Should push for legislation to control what nurseries are selling as they will expand beyond someone's landscaping. Example: look what pythons have done to the Everglades. I have witnessed a person releasing caged something into the pond at Homer Lake."

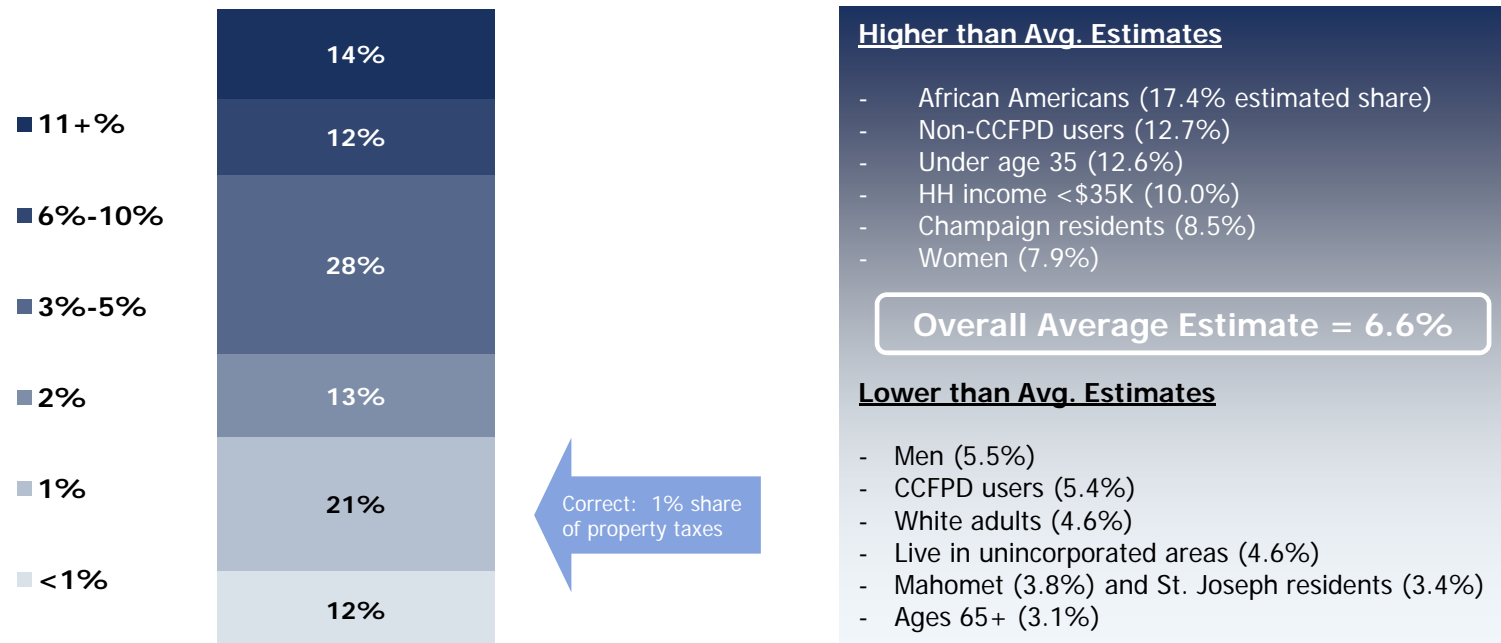
"Wilder areas/properties are too much curated, changing them to parks. I'm hoping they don't add many more amenities especially at Homer Lake. Maintain current trails, not add more, for instance. I understand removal of invasives, but it seems to be losing its natural wildness. Attracting wildlife will keep attracting people who respect that attribute."

"I prefer the forest preserves be more wild."

On average, county residents believe that the District receives 6.6% of their property taxes (well above the actual 1% going to the CCFPD). One in five correctly estimated that share of property taxes, and another 25% were within a percent (estimated 2% share or less).

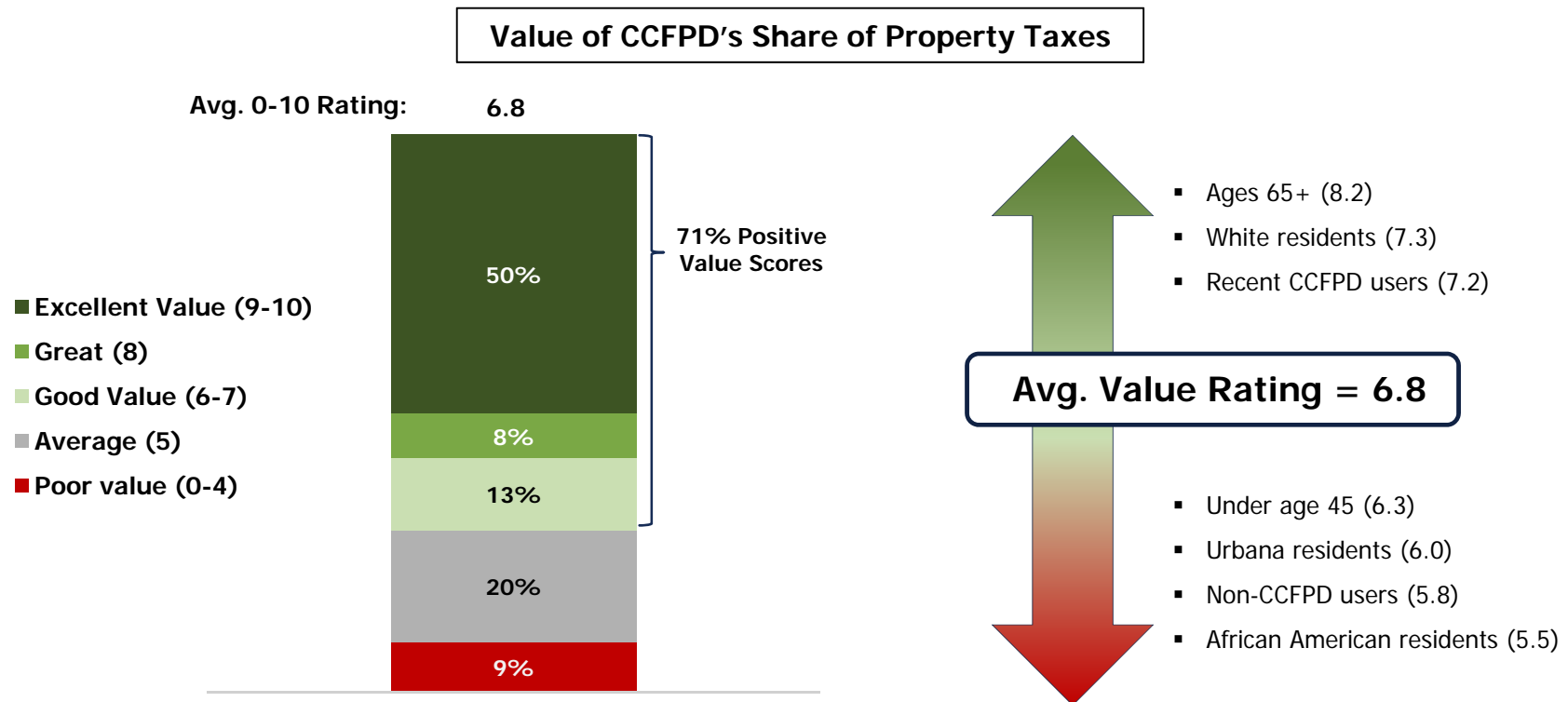
- Higher than average ratings tend to come from younger and lower income adults, non-CCFPD users, women, and African Americans. Note that most of these profiles reflect those giving the District lower than average scores (with the exception of Champaign residents, who tended to be more favorable than average – see page 19).
- The oldest adults (ages 65+) and residents of Mahomet and/or St. Joseph come closer to estimating the CCFPD's actual share of property taxes.

Estimated CCFPD Share of Property Taxes



When informed that the District actually receives 1% of their property taxes, a majority of respondents feel that this represents at least a good value (71%), including half (50% overall) who rate it an “excellent” value.

- By comparison, only 9% rate this a “poor” value, with the rest scoring it (20%) at “average value”.
- The highest value ratings tend to come from CCFPD users and (as a result) the oldest adults and white residents. Non-users (who also tend to be younger, African American, and/or Urbana households) tend to give lower than average – **yet still above “average”** – value scores.

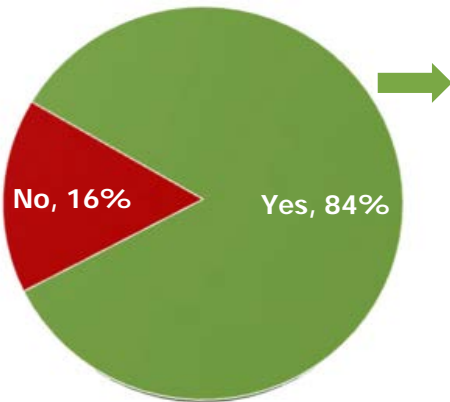


II. CCFPD Usage, Visits and Satisfaction

The vast majority of respondents (84%) report that they or a household member has been to a CCFPD site or facility in the past two years. Most often, they have been to Lake of the Woods, and nearly half (49%) report going to Homer Lake Forest Preserve.

- Roughly a third also report going to the Kickapoo Rail Trail and the Middlefork River Preserve.
- Among District facilities, about one in four residents report going to multiple locations, including the Interpretive Center and Nature Playscape area at Homer Lake, the Mabery Gelvin Botanical Garden, and Museum of the Grand Prairie (26%).
- Self-reported visitation is lowest among younger and newer residents, those with children, African Americans, and lower-income households.

Visited CCFPD Preserve/Trail/Facility in Past Two Years?



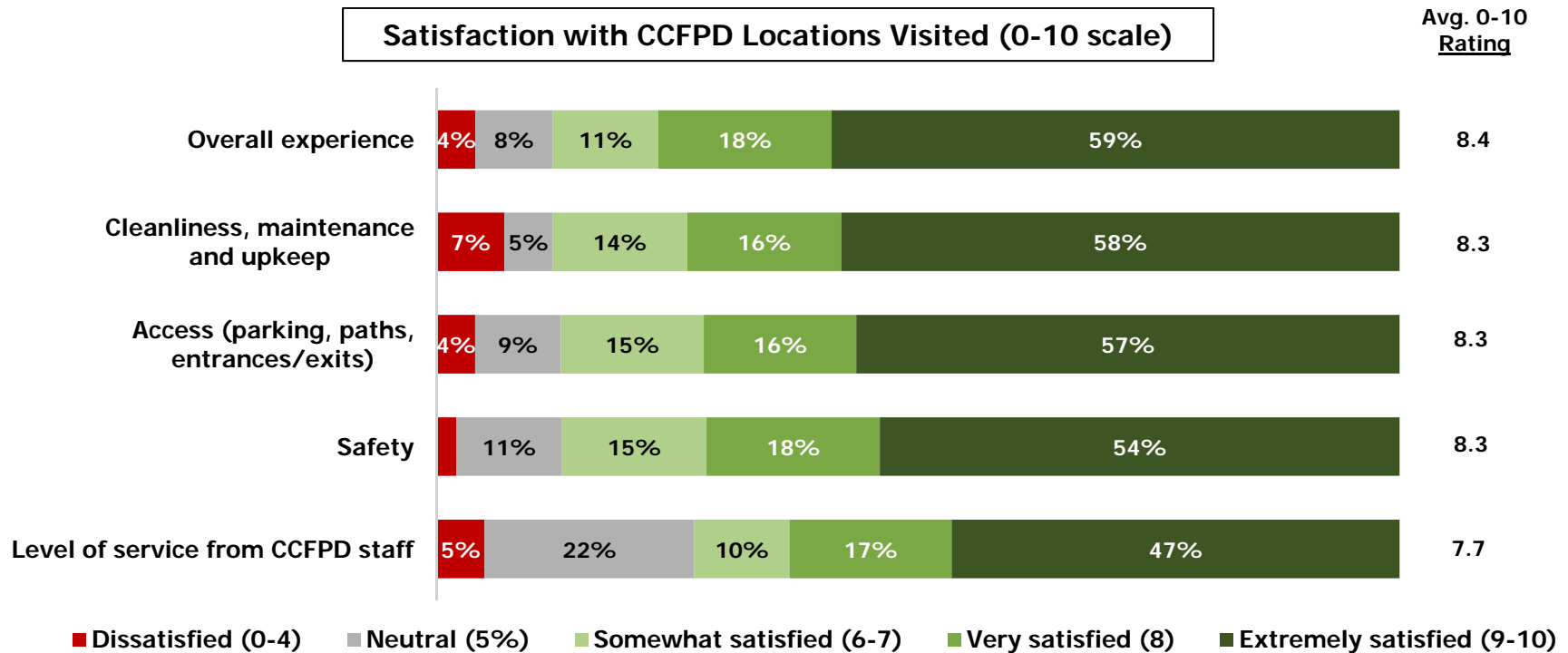
Especially:

- Urbana residents (31% have not visited)
- Lived in the County <5 yrs. (29%)
- Women (20%, vs. 12% of men)
- Under age 35 (31%)
- Households with children (23%)
- African Americans (39%)
- HH income <\$35K (30%)

Forest Preserves (FP)/open spaces/trails (NET 83%)	
Lake of the Woods FP	70%
Homer Lake FP	49%
Kickapoo Rail Trail	36%
Middle Fork River FP	34%
River Bend FP	27%
Sangamon River FP	21%
Heron View FP	10%
CCFPD Facilities (NET 60%)	
Homer Lake Interpretive Center	28%
Mabery Gelvin Botanical Garden	26%
Museum of the Grand Prairie	26%
Nature Playscape playground at Homer Lake	23%
Lake of the Woods Golf Course	14%
Harry L. Swartz Campground	6%

Among recent visitors, satisfaction with District preserves and facilities is very high. Most (54%+) are “extremely satisfied” overall, and with the upkeep and maintenance of these locations, accessibility, and overall safety.

- CCFPD staff also get very positive scores (74% favorable, including 47% who are “extremely satisfied”. Their slightly lower average rating is due to a large percentage of “neutral” scores (suggesting that many who visit the preserves have not interacted with staff and therefore cannot offer a score).



As with the District’s overall esteem ratings, higher than average satisfaction scores from users tend to come from older adults (ages 65+) and long-term County residents. Those living in Mahomet tend to give higher ratings on overall safety and service from District staff.

- Conversely, younger adults tend to give lower than average scores. Scattered responses also come from different demographics on specific attributes (e.g., women are less satisfied with staff service, lower income adults give lower than average scores on accessibility, etc.).
- However, all subgroups (including those giving lower than average ratings) remain at least somewhat to very satisfied with their CCFPD experience (average ratings of 6.4 or higher).

	Lower than Avg. Ratings	Higher than Avg. Ratings
Overall experience (avg. rating = 8.4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ages 35-44 (7.8) - Households with children (7.8) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ages 65+ (8.9) - No children in household (8.8)
Cleanliness, maintenance and upkeep (8.3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ages 35-44 (7.6), 45-54 (7.9) - Lived in County 5-10 yrs. (7.9) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ages 65+ (8.9) - Lived in County 45+ yrs. (8.8)
Access – parking, paths, entrances/exits (8.3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ages 35-44 (7.6) - Households with children (7.9) - HH income <\$35K (8.0) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ages 65+ (8.6) - No children in household (8.4) - HH income \$150K+ (8.9) - Unincorporated areas (8.7)
Safety (8.3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ages 35-44 (7.9) - St. Joseph and Savoy residents (7.5) - Lived in County 11-19 yrs. (7.8) - Children in household (7.9) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ages 65+ (8.7) - Mahomet residents (8.9) - Lived in County 45+ yrs. (8.8) - No children in household (8.4)
Level of service provided by CCFPD staff (7.7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ages 35-64 (7.3) - Women (7.4) - Lived in County 5-10 yrs. (7.0) - Rantoul residents (6.4) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ages 65+ (8.4) - Men (8.0) - Mahomet residents (8.5) - Lived in County 45+ yrs. (8.3)

Overall, recent visitors who tended to give lower satisfaction ratings (0-6) on any of the attributes tested were asked to identify why and with which locations (in an open-ended format).

- Among the n=46 respondents offering reasons, the issues are varied and spread across multiple District locations. The verbatim responses are below and on the next few pages.

Lake of the Woods (n=7)

"The littering at Lake of the Woods seems outrageous."

"There were not enough benches."

"Lake of the Woods -- Too many off leash dogs and dog feces. There is a stench on the trails from the feces especially after a rain. The noise level from the interstate and Highway 47 is high especially since the tree removal."

"Lake of the Woods gets the lion's share of funds."

"Lake of the Woods needs more gatherings."

"They closed the tower to the public."

"It's such a small area and not much to do."

Kickapoo Rail Trail (n=6)

"Wish there was more funding directed to speeding up completion of the Kickapoo Rail Trail."

"The Rail Trail should have been completed 30 years ago. Most money is being wasted by unreasonable ADA grant requirements. If the rail bed could support the weight of an entire railroad train, why can't it support a bicycle? Should have paved it over with asphalt and completed it decades ago for a tenth of current cost. I have seen many rail-to-trail projects completed this way – for example, the Taylorville route."

"Kickapoo needs more trails."

"Kickapoo Rail Trail needs to be paved all the way."

"Kickapoo Rail Trail because it doesn't seem to be a safe place to go alone."

"Kickapoo Rail Trail (no specifics)."

Verbatim Responses: Reasons for Low Satisfaction With CCFPD Sites Visited (cont'd)

Homer Lake (n=6)

"The large, enclosed pavilion at Homer Lake needs to be cleaned. Within the last six months, I was at a meeting there. The basics were done - garbage was taken out, things were in order. But around the faucets in the bathroom there was gunk and around where the floor and wall meet was dirty. Cobwebs in the meeting room, windows were dirty. It had a rustic look but not in a good way. The cleanliness has slipped in the last few years."

"Security at Collins Pond."

"Homer (is) too noisy."

"Homer Lake -- heard so much about the children nature space. Made a special trip to use it, only to find it had been shut down for months at that time. Ruined an outing and a day trip."

"Homer Lake hiking trails seem to always be wet or underwater. Again, it would be nice to see more mountain bike options within the county."

"Hiking trails at Homer Lake and Interpretive Center."

Middlefork (n=6)

"Middlefork looked in desperate needs of dredging the lake a few years ago. Not sure it if got taken care of."

"Middlefork is the only one I use. I want to campgrounds like they used to be."

"Middlefork River (no specifics)."

"Middlefork Preserve. Mostly unable to be visited in any manner. Why preserve it but never let anyone see it?"

"Middlefork (is) dark and camper-centric."

"Marking of the trail at Middlefork. Access to the water at Middlefork."

Buffalo Trace (n=3)

"Buffalo Trace. It's becoming a running trail for the Mahomet High School."

"The bathrooms at Buffalo Trace are usually smelly."

"Buffalo Trace -- too many off leash dogs and dog feces. There is a stench on the trails from the feces especially after a rain."

Verbatim Responses: Reasons for Low Satisfaction With CCFPD Sites Visited (cont'd)

Riverbend Bend(n=3)

"Riverbend has a dog problem – needs more trash cans and bags for dog poop. This is my favorite place, but it's like the park service drives briefly around in a truck, changes a garbage bag, and drives off. Don't let it get trashed out. Sometimes I go around the lake in my kayak with a hand-grabber and trash bag, picking up the crap left by fishing. Why???"

"I feel like Riverbend doesn't always feel really accessible or safe."

"I have not visited all, but probably River Bend. Just my personal preference – I don't like the quarry lake. Feels very manmade, altered, and the trail feels confined on the bluff. Just not my personal preference. Prefer the wooded trails (paved for multiuse if possible)."

Golf Course (n=3)

"The Champaign County Golf Course. The golf course superintendent harassed and lied to my husband."

"Golf course. Have never used it. How many people do use it? What ecological or leisure or economic impact does it have?"

"The golf course conditions are below par."

Museum of the Grand Prairie (n=1)

"The museum...you destroyed it, and the front desk person was terrible."

Verbatim Responses: Reasons for Low Satisfaction With CCFPD Sites Visited (cont'd)

Admin/Staff/Management Issues (n=7)

"The hours."

"The Board."

"In general, it would be nice if it were a bit easier to find trail maps."

"(Would like an) off-leash dog option."

"Crime rates."

"Some of the drive-ability options."

"I love the International Dark Sky Park (at the waterfowl viewing area). However, I end up being so unhappy when I go there and there will be people with the lights of their cars on. wtf! I do not feel safe asking them to turn their lights off. Perhaps some reflective signs might be in order there around the parking lot?"

Trails/Properties in General (n=4)

"Some trails need to be mowed regularly."

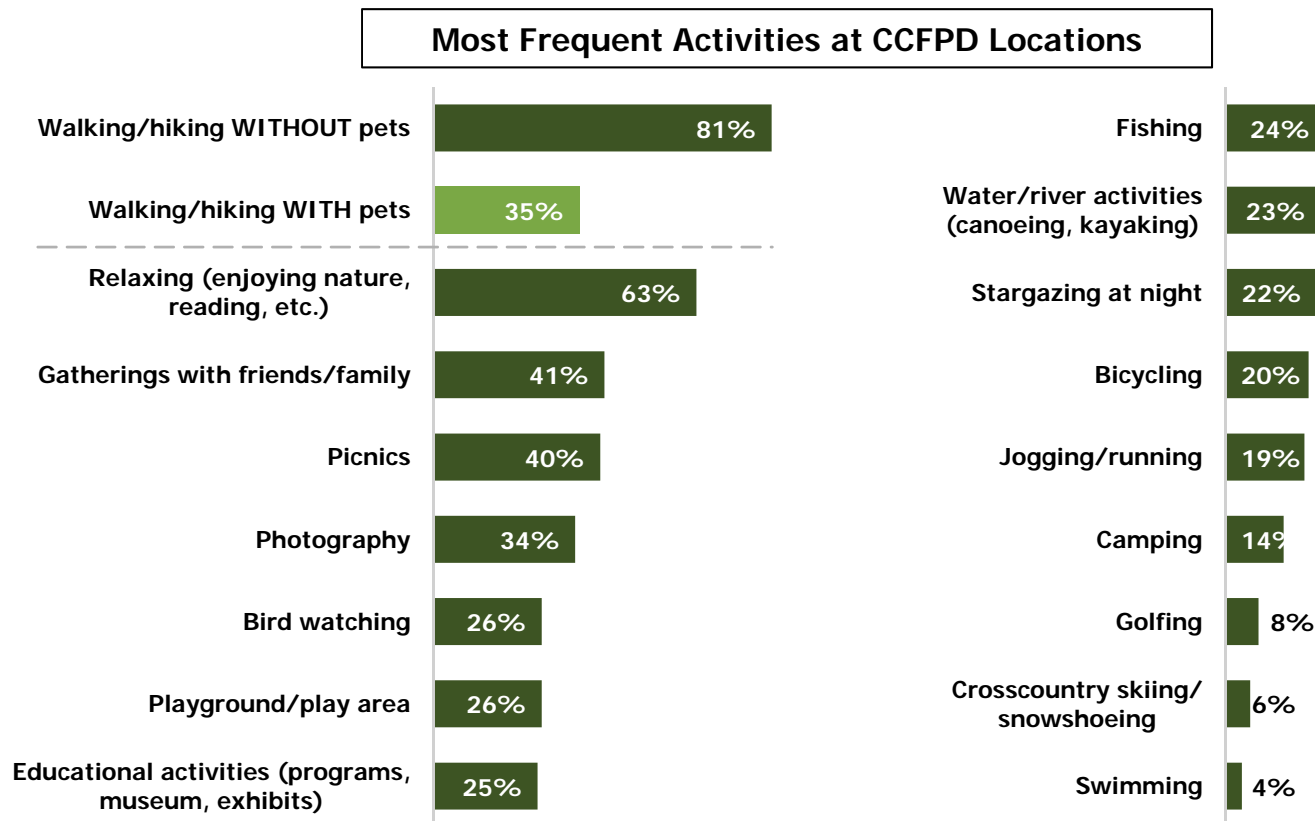
"Some trails could be a bit clearer."

"More longer trails needed."

"Bathrooms. Not always fully stocked."

Most recent visitors report walking and hiking through the CCFPD preserves during these visits (usually without pets, but just over a third bring a pet), and nearly two-thirds also go to simply relax at these locations.

- About two in five report attending group events or gatherings at a preserve in the past two years (41%) or picnicking (40%). The rest cite a variety of both passive and active activities.
- One out of four (25%) took advantage of educational offerings, either self-guided exhibits and/or programs).



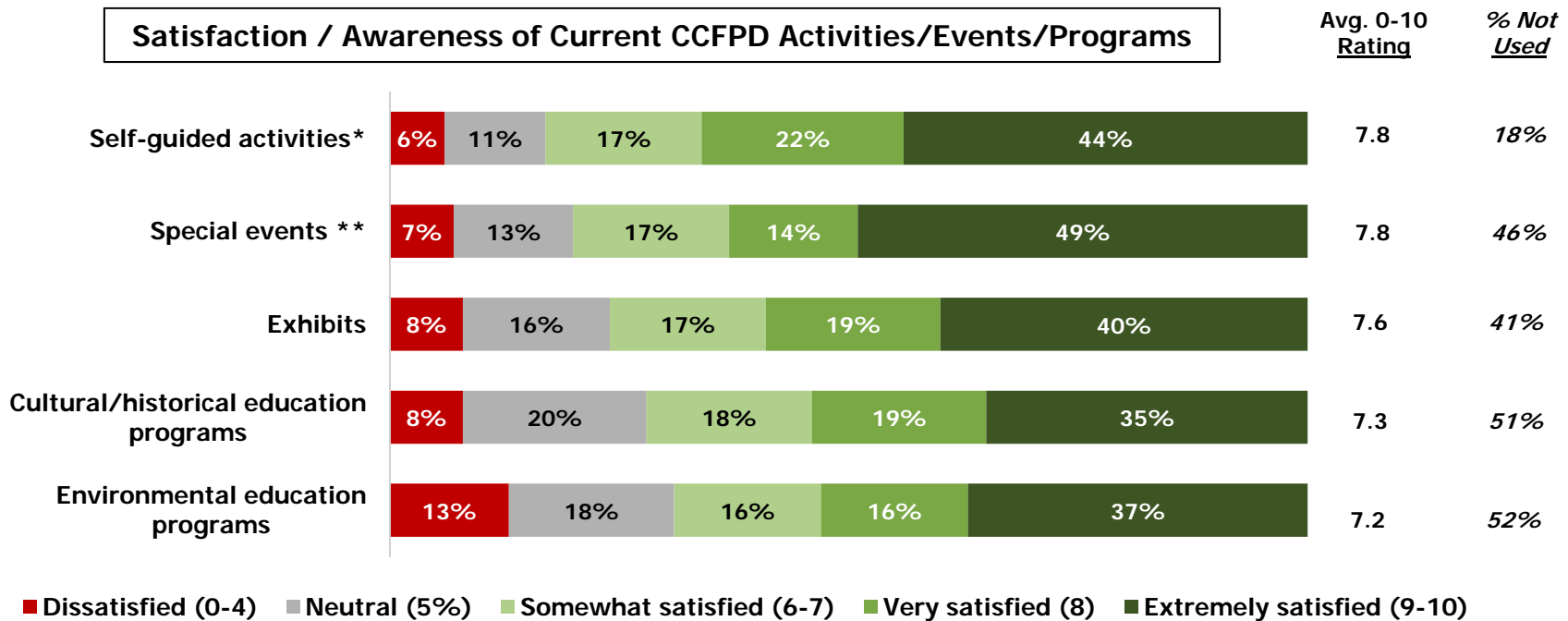
Any statistically meaningful differences by type of activity reported at a CCFPD location are shown below. Most of these are driven by one's age and where they live.

	Mentioned Most Often By:
Walking/hiking WITHOUT pets (81%)	- HH income \$75K-\$149.9K (90%)
Walking/hiking WITH pets (35%)	< no meaningful differences >
Relaxing (63%)	- Rantoul residents (90%) - HH income \$35k-\$49.9K (89%)
Gathering with friends/family (41%)	- Lived in County 45+ yrs. (57%) - HH income \$35K-\$49.9K (61%)
Picnics (40%)	- Lived in County 45+ yrs. (55%) - Other/multi-racial adults (59%)
Photography (34%)	< no meaningful differences >
Bird watching (26%)	- White adults (33%) - Ages 65+ (36%)
Using playgrounds/play areas (26%)	- Ages 35-44 (48%) - Households with children (54%)
Educational opportunities/activities (25%)	< no meaningful differences >
Fishing (24%)	- Households with children (36%) - Other/multi-racial adults (43%)

	Mentioned Most Often By:
Water/River activities (23%)	< no meaningful differences >
Stargazing at night (22%)	< no meaningful differences >
Bicycling (20%)	- Mahomet residents (57%) - White adults (25%)
Jogging/Running (19%)	- Mahomet residents (37%) - Under age 35 (37%) - HH income \$150K+ (36%)
Campaign (14%)	- Women (21%, vs. 8% of men) - White adults (17%)
Golfing (8%)	- Mahomet residents (25%) - Ages 65+ (17%)
Cross country skiing/snow shoeing (6%)	- Mahomet residents (14%) - Ages 65+ (12%)
Swimming (4%)	< no meaningful differences >

Recent visitors also express strong satisfaction with the activities offered at CCFPD locations (averaging scores of 7.2 or higher on a 0-10 scale). However, with the exception of self-guided activities, roughly half are unfamiliar with the programs and events tested.

- Most recent visitors (82%) were able to rate self guided activities and give these the strongest scores overall.
- The District’s special events receive equally positive ratings, but nearly half (46%) are unaware of these offerings.
- Educational programs generate lower (still very positive) scores but remain unknown to a slightly majority of visitors.



Q13. Similarly, please rate your satisfaction with the following offerings from the Champaign County Forest Preserves that you have experienced in the past two years. If you have not used or are unfamiliar any offering below, please select the “Not Used/Unfamiliar” option.

* Using signage, brochures, or other resources without staff present

** Concerts, Night Lights in the Garden, Freedom Fest, etc.

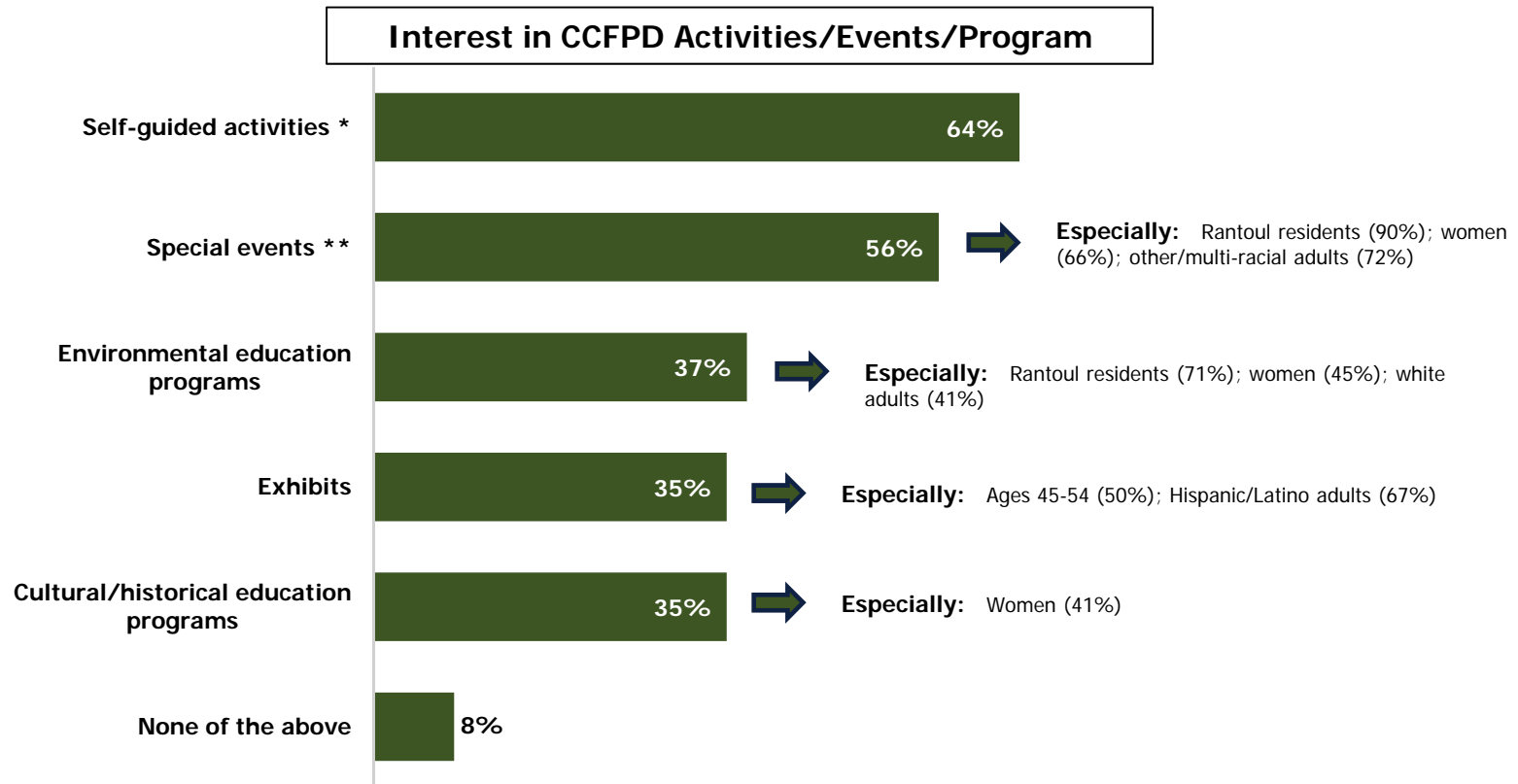
As with the esteem and other scores, those who are most satisfied with their experience participating in CCFPD activities and events tend to be the oldest and most long-term County residents.

➤ Newer and younger participants tend to give lower – but still very positive – satisfaction ratings on average.

	Lower than Avg. Satisfaction Ratings	Higher than Avg. Satisfaction Ratings
Self-guided activities (avg. rating = 7.8)	- Ages 35-44 (7.1)	- Ages 65+ (8.5)
Special events (7.8)	- Under age 35 (7.5), 35-44 (7.4) - Households with children (7.0)	- Ages 65+ (8.9) - No children in household (8.0)
Exhibits (7.6)	- Under age 35 (6.9) - Households with children (6.8)	- Ages 65+ (8.3) - No children in household (7.8)
Cultural/historical education programs (7.3)	- Lived in County 5-19 yrs. (6.2)	- Lived in County 45+ yrs. (8.2) - Ages 65+ (8.3)
Environmental education programs (7.2)	- Lived in County 5-9 yrs. (6.4), 20-29 yrs. (6.4) - HH income <\$35K (6.2), \$50K-\$74.9K (6.4)	- Lived in County 45+ yrs. (8.1) - HH income \$75K-\$149.9K (7.9) - Ages 65+ (8.3)

When asked about one’s interest in participating in these types of activities, most express a willingness to engage with self-guided tours and/or special events. About a third are interested in at least one of the other activities tested.

- Overall interest is generally consistent across all demographic groups. The few meaningful differences suggest slightly stronger interest in specific programs or events among women and residents of color (non-white adults).



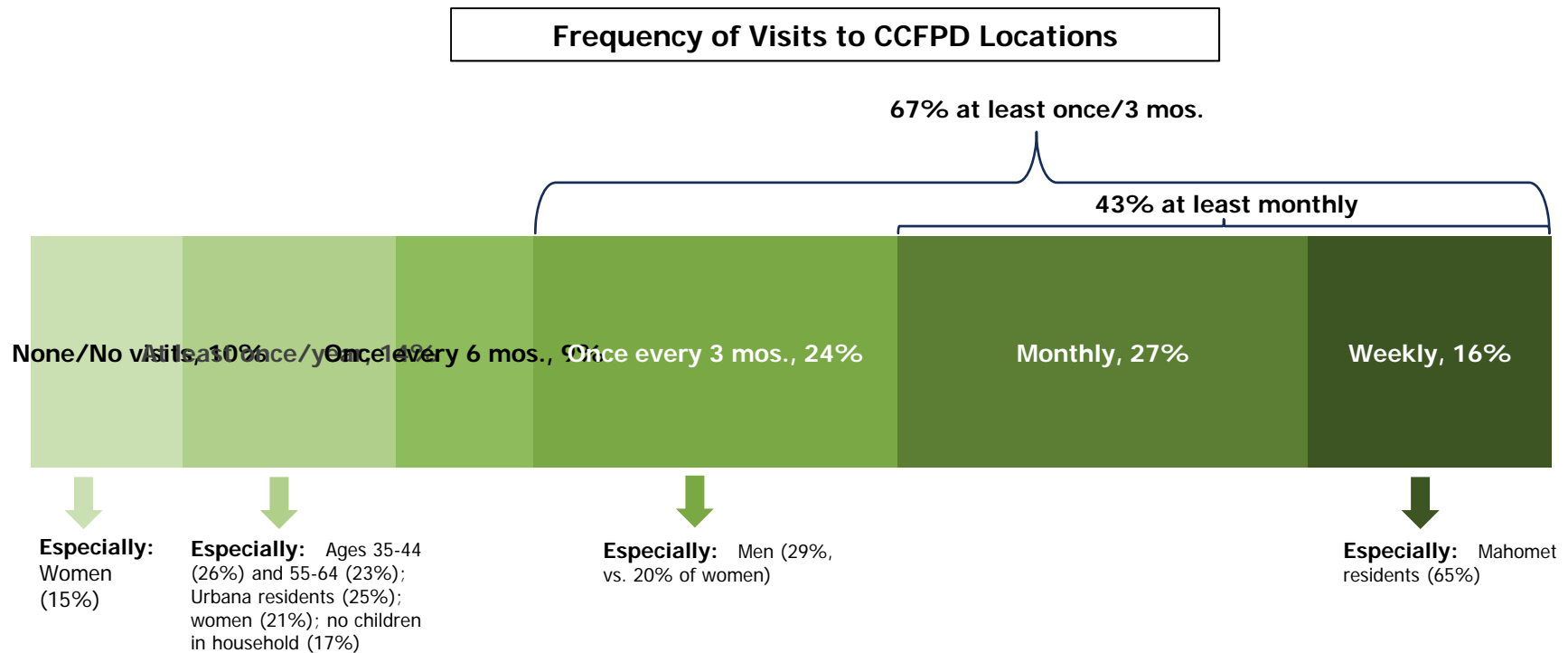
Q14. Please select the types of activities that are or would be of greatest interest to you or your household.

* Using signage, brochures, or other resources without staff present

** Concerts, Night Lights in the Garden, Freedom Fest, etc.

When recent visitors were asked how often they have used a District location in the past year, most (67%) report doing so at least one every three months, including 16% who said they visit at least weekly.

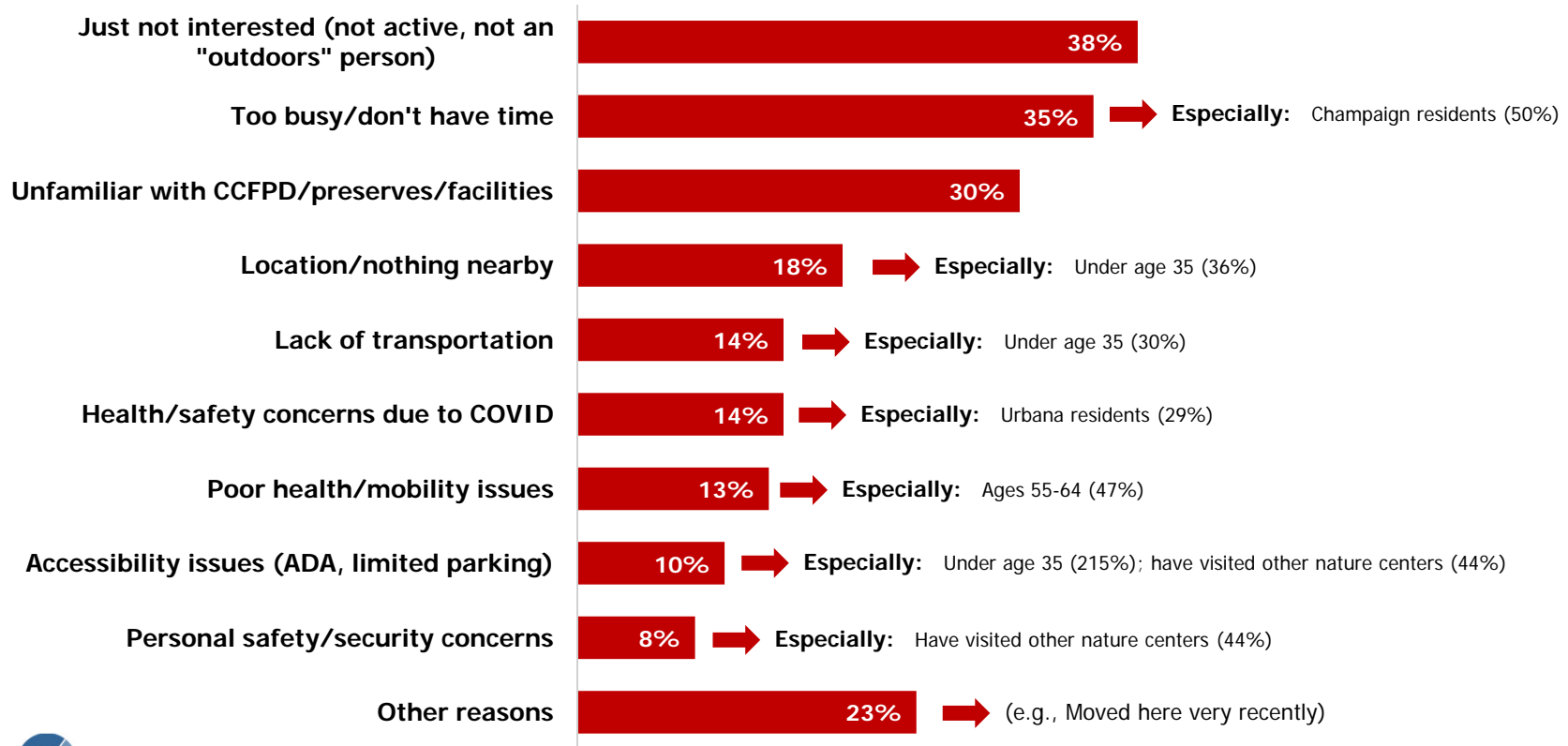
➤ Mahomet residents report using these locations most often, followed by men.



Those who have not been to a District preserve or facility in the past two years most often cite lifestyle as a barrier (just not interested, schedule is too busy), though nearly as many (30% overall) remain unfamiliar with the District and its properties/locations/offerings.

- This lack of awareness is generally consistent by subgroup and region (no clear, meaningful differences).
- Younger residents cite a lack of proximity and/or transportation among reasons for non-usage.

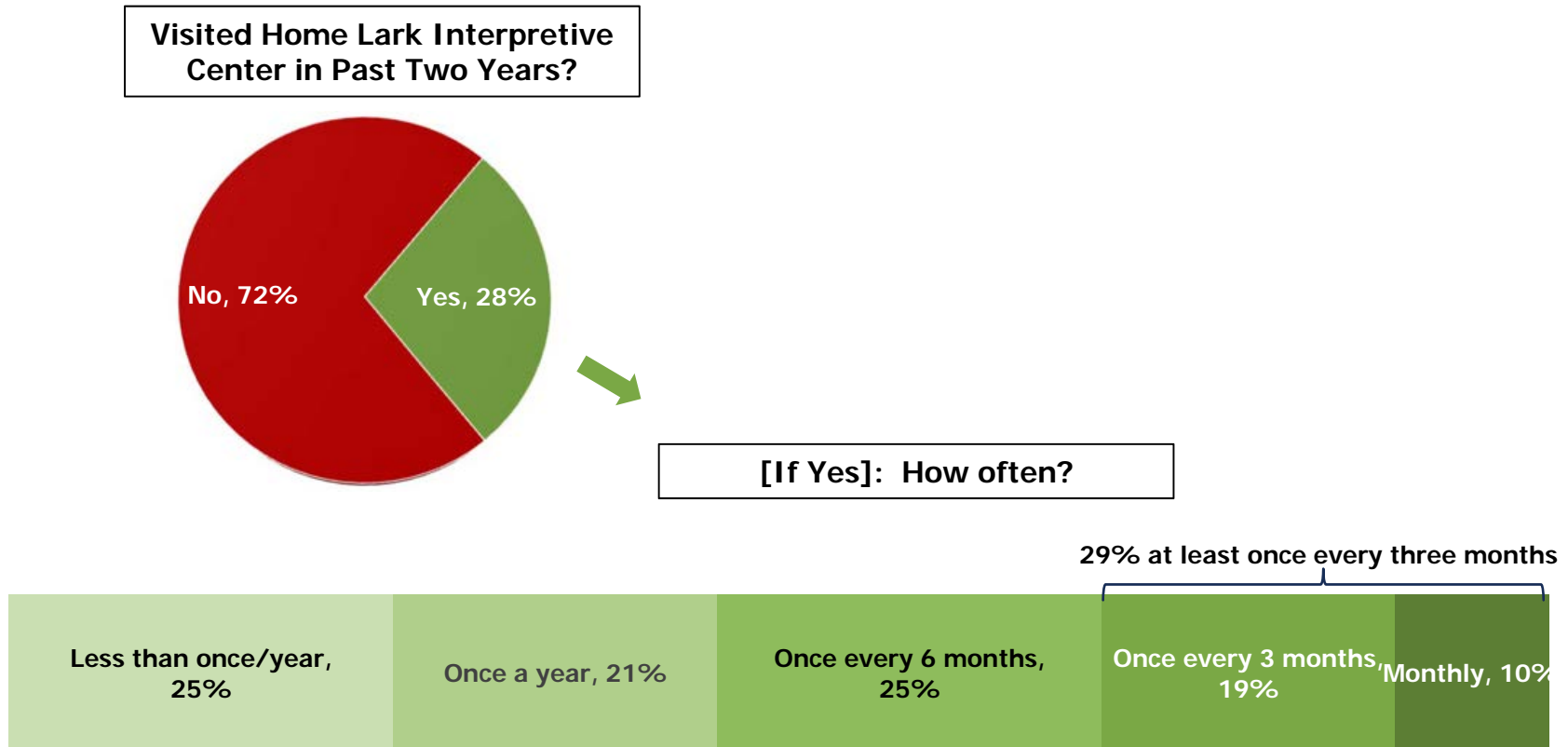
Reasons for Not Using/Visiting CCFPD Sites (n=46, multiple responses)



III. Usage/Satisfaction with Homer Lake Interpretive Center

As reported, just over one out of four respondents (28%) said that they or someone in their household visited the Interpretive Center at the Homer Lake Preserve in the past two years.

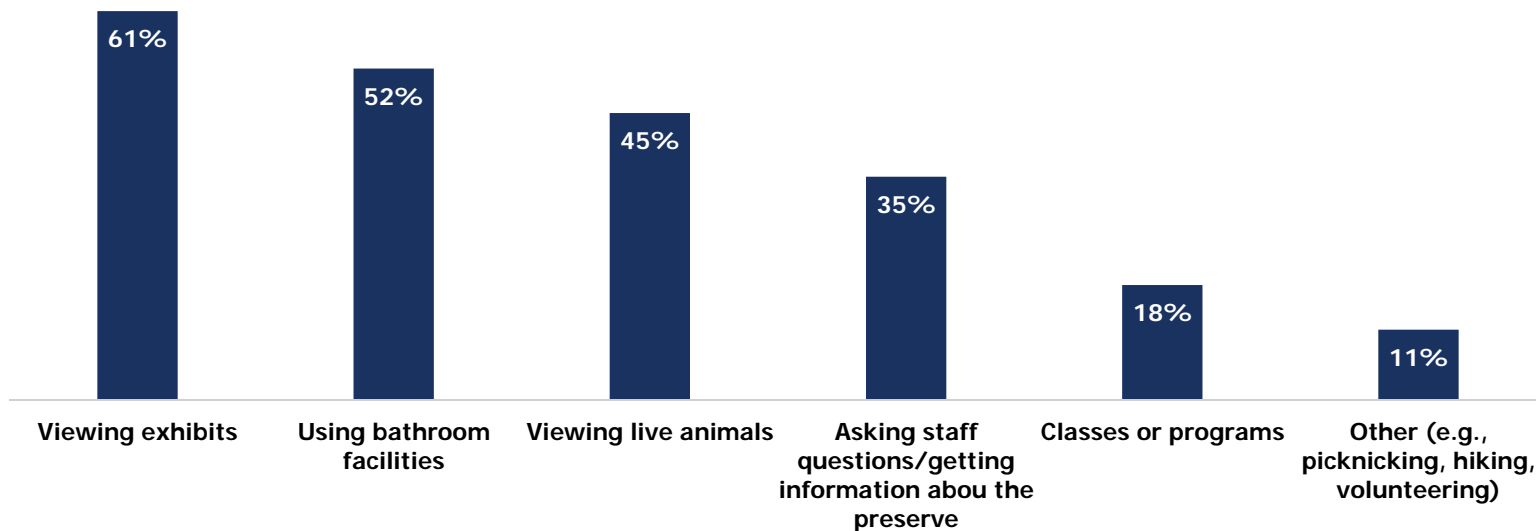
- Among these visitors, 29% said they visit at least once every three months (including 10% who go monthly). Another 46% report that they visit at least once (21%) or twice (25%) a year.



Most recent visitors of the Interpretive Center report viewing the exhibits (61%), and nearly half (45%) also viewed the live animals.

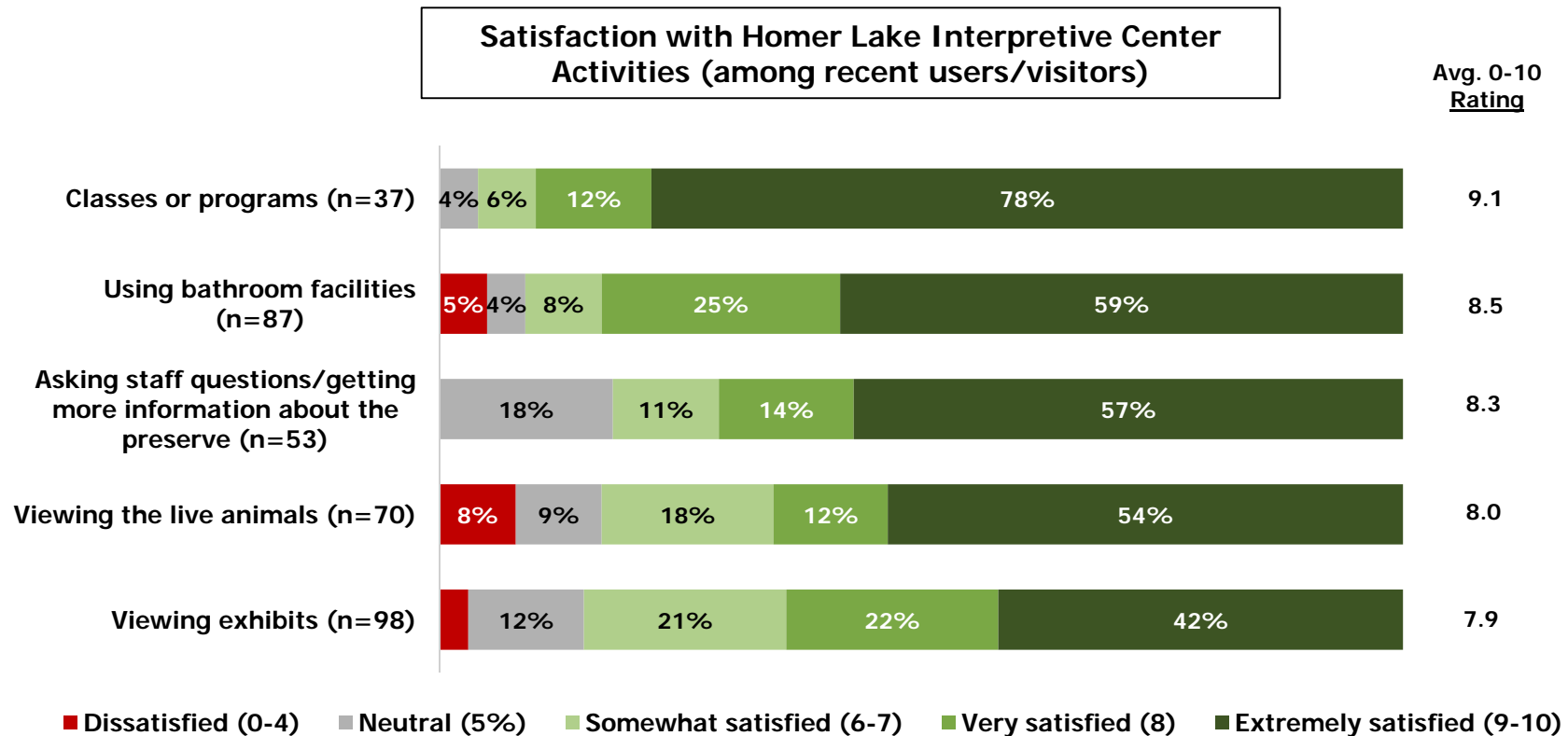
- The oldest (ages 65+) and most long-term County residents (45+ years) are most inclined to view the exhibits. Those age 45-54 are least likely to do so.
- Nearly one in five (18%) report taking a class or program at the facility (including 26% of those who report visiting other nature centers in the area, e.g., Purves Nature Center, Kennekuk Environmental Center, etc.).

Activities During Homer Lake Interpretive Center Visits (n=149)



Satisfaction with activities at the Interpretive Center is very strong, especially from the relatively few who attended (and are able to rate) the classes and programs held at this facility.

- These ratings are on par with or exceed the satisfaction scores given to other attributes when respondents report recent visits to CCFPD preserves and facilities.



The strong scores for the Interpretive Center are generally consistent across visitor segments, though the live animals generate stronger satisfaction among white residents than persons of color.

➤ Women tend to give higher scores to the exhibits than men (still very favorable).

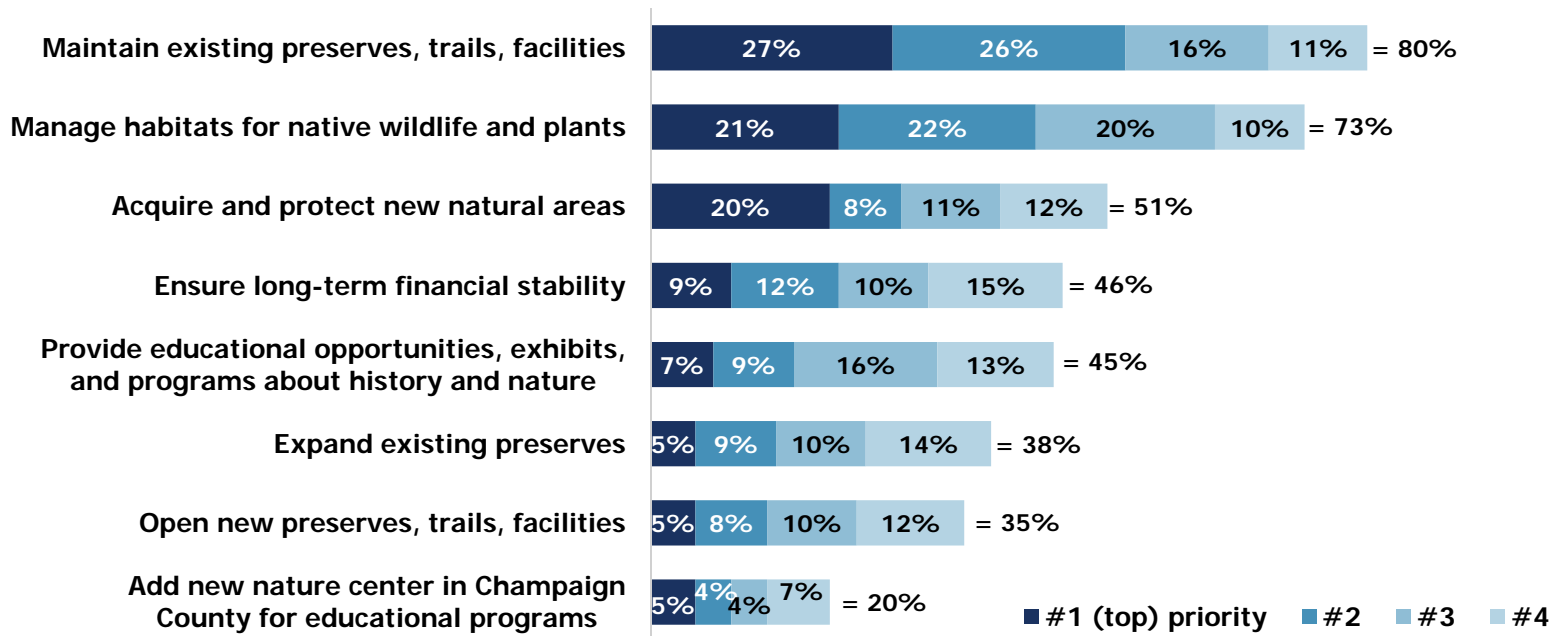
	Lower than Avg. Satisfaction Ratings	Higher than Avg. Satisfaction Ratings
Classes and programs (avg. 9.1)	<i>< no statistically meaningful differences ></i>	
Using bathroom facilities (8.5)	- Under age 45 (7.6)	- Ages 55-64 (9.5), 65+ (9.0)
Asking staff questions/getting more information (8.3)	<i>< no statistically meaningful differences ></i>	
Viewing the live animals (8.0)	- African American (5.0) and other/multi-racial adults (6.2)	- White adults (8.7)
Viewing exhibits (7.9)	- Men (7.4)	- Women (8.7) - HH income \$150K+ (8.9)

IV. CCFPD Initiatives and Priorities

Among the eight strategic objectives tested for the District, residents place the highest priority on maintaining existing preserves and facilities, followed closely by managing wildlife and plant habitats.

- Roughly half also include acquisition and protection of new natural areas, demonstrating long-term financial stability, and offering educational opportunities about history and nature as top-four priorities.
 - Of these, acquiring/protecting new areas is clearly more of a top/#1 priority over financial stability or education efforts.
- Of the objectives tested, building a new nature center for educational programs is deemed least important overall.

**Top Priorities/Opportunities for CCFPD
(ranked #1 through #4)**



Middle-aged to older residents tend to rank “maintaining existing preserves, trails and facilities”, “managing habitats”, and “long-term financial stability” among the most important CCFPD objectives.

- White adults are also most interested in continued management of wildlife and plant habitats. Acquisition and protection of new natural areas tends to be especially important to younger and more recent residents.

	Most Likely to Rate #1 (top) Priority	Most Likely to Include Among Top 4 Priorities
Maintain existing preserves, trails, facilities	<p><u>27% Overall</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ages 65+ (38%) - CCFPD users (29%, vs. 12% of non-visitors) - Hispanic/Latino adults (28%) - HH income \$75K-\$149.9K (34%) 	<p><u>80% Overall</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rantoul residents (100% of n=8) - White adults (85%) - Ages 45-54 (90%)
Manage habitats for native wildlife and plants	<p><u>21% Overall</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - White adults (25%) 	<p><u>73% Overall</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Urbana (83%) and St. Joseph residents (96%) - Ages 55-64 (83%) - Men (80%, vs. 69% of women) - White adults (79%) - Lived in County 30-44 yrs. (81%) - HH income \$75K-\$149.9K (81%)
Acquire and protect new natural areas	<p><u>20% Overall</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lived in County <5 yrs. (32%) - No children in household (23%, vs. 12% of HH with children) - Non-CCFPD users (33%, vs. 18% of visitors) 	<p><u>51% Overall</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ages 35-44 (64%)
Ensure long-term financial stability	<p><u>9% Overall</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ages 45-54 (19%), 65+ (15%) - Lived in County 20-29 yrs. (19%) - CCFPD users (10%, vs. 1% of non-users) - HH income \$50K-\$74.9K (17%) - Hispanic residents (22%) 	<p><u>46% Overall</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ages 45-54 (62%), 65+ (68%) - Lived in County 45+ yrs. (60%) - No children in household (49%) - Unincorporated area (63%) - HH income \$75K-\$149.9K (63%)

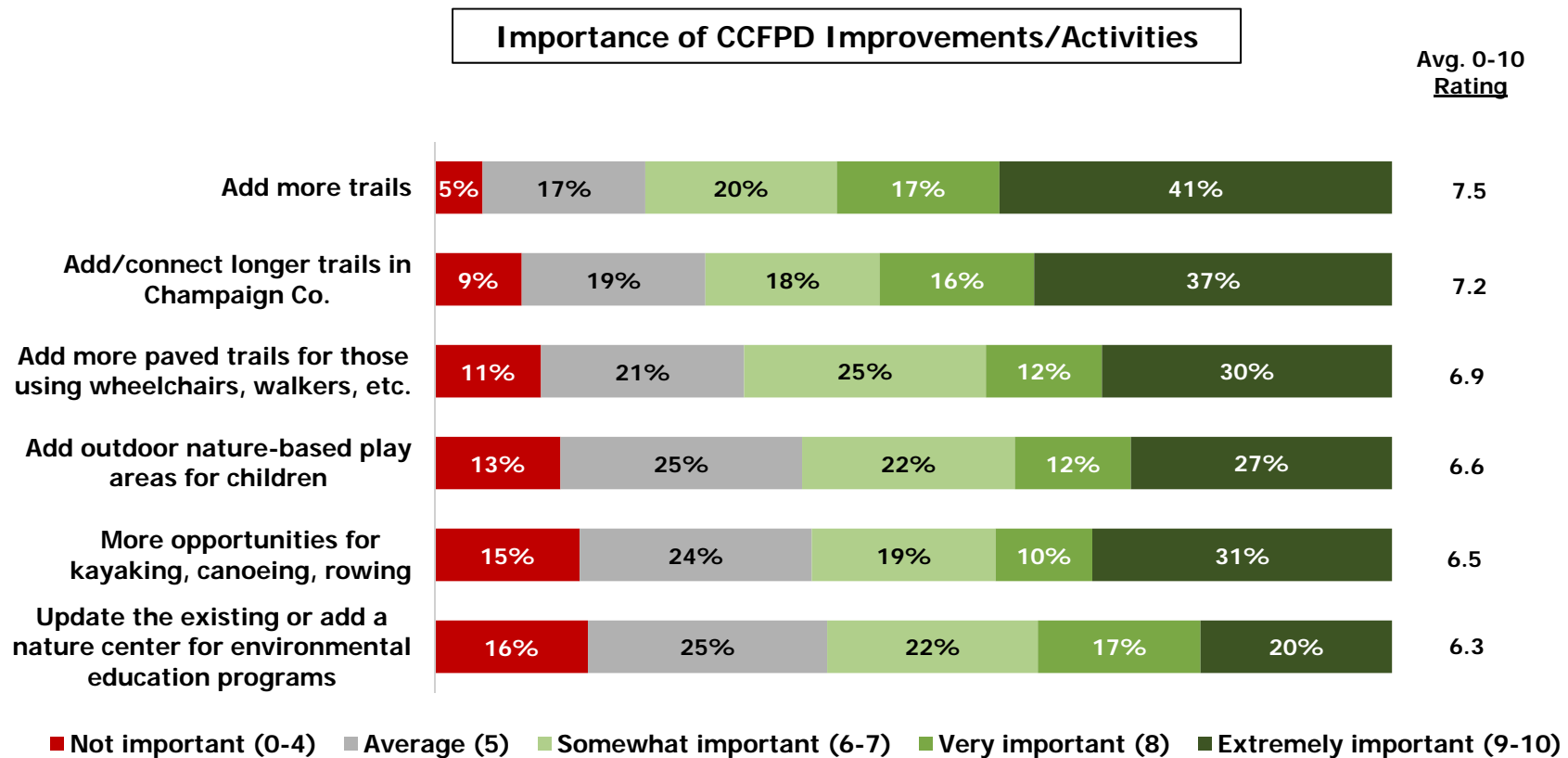
Among the second tier set of priorities, African Americans tend to be more interested in educational opportunities (along with women) and adding a new nature center (along with adults ages 45-54).

➤ People of color also tend to place higher priority on opening new preserves and facilities. Younger adults are more interested in expanding existing CCFPD sites.

	Most Likely to Rate #1 (top) Priority	Most Likely to Include Among Top 4 Priorities
Provide education opportunities, exhibits, programs about history and nature	<p><u>7% Overall</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ages 35-44 (12%) - Urbana residents (13%) - Women (11%, vs. 3% of men) - Lived in County 30-44 yrs. (15%) - HH income \$35K-\$49.9K (13%) 	<p><u>45% Overall</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Women (52%, vs. 38% of men) - African American adults (65%)
Expand existing preserves	<p><u>5% Overall</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - St. Joseph residents (23%) - Men (8%, vs. 3% of women) - Under age 35 (12%) 	<p><u>38% Overall</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ages 35-44 (52%) - HH income \$150K+ (51%)
Open new preserves, trails, facilities	<p><u>5% Overall</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Champaign residents (11%) - Households with children (12%) - African Americans (16%) - HH income <\$35K (11%) 	<p><u>35% Overall</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Under age 35 (47%) - Other/multi-racial adults (50%) - HH income \$150K+ (51%)
Add a new nature center in Champaign County for educational programs	<p><u>5% Overall</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ages 45-54 (11%) - Lived in County 5-10 yrs. (10%) - African American adults (15%) - HH income \$150K+ (9%) 	<p><u>20% Overall</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ages 45-54 (34%) - Households with children (34%, vs. 15% of HHs without children) - Lived in County 11-19 yrs. (35%) - African American adults (45%)

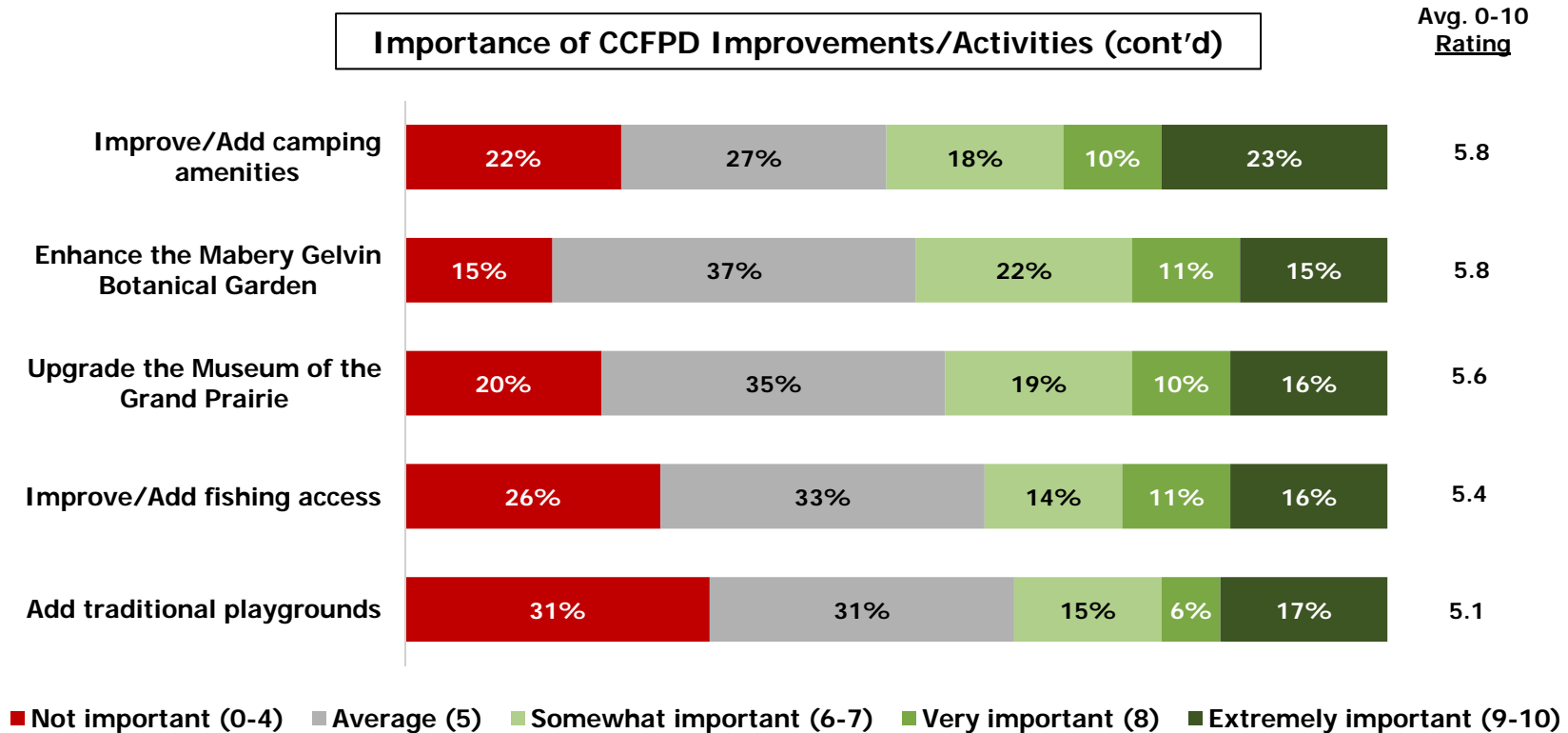
From a list of eleven more specific District improvements, the top tier (based on importance) are listed below. It is clear that projects related to trails (additional routes, greater connectivity, expanded paved paths) are what residents care about most.

- A clear majority (at least 59%) are also interested in outdoor nature-based play areas for children, expanded options for paddle craft activities, and an expanded or new nature center for programming. These round out the “top tier” priorities for the CCFPD.



The remaining initiatives tested tend to be in the “average” to less than “somewhat important” range (with mean scores between 5.1 and 5.8).

- While nature-based play areas are deemed somewhat important (ranking 4th overall; see previous page), traditional playground equipment is of far less interest (lowest importance overall).
- Note the significant number of “average” responses for these items (reflecting a greater sense of ambivalence).



Among the top-tier improvements, current CCFPD users are most interested in added and greater trail connectivity (along with higher income households). As seen in other questions, African Americans tend to place greater importance on a new or updated nature center.

- Most of these improvements generate strong importance ratings (6.0 or higher) from all groups. The biggest exception is for a new or modernized nature center (closer to neutral ratings from Mahomet residents, white adults, and both the youngest and oldest respondents).

	Less Important than Avg.	More Important than Avg.
Add more trails (avg. importance = 7.5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Non-CCFPD users (6.4) - HH income \$75K-\$149.9K (7.1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CCFPD users (7.7) - HH income \$150K+ (8.1)
Add/Connect longer trails (7.2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Under age 35 (6.8), ages 65+ (6.9) - Households with children (6.7) - Non-CCFPD users (5.6) - HH income \$35K-\$49.9K (6.9), \$75K-\$149.9K (6.9) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ages 45-54 (7.8) - No children in household (7.3) - CCFPD users (7.5) - HH income \$150K+ (8.2)
Add more paved trails for those using wheelchairs, walkers (6.9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mahomet residents (6.1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rantoul residents (8.4)
Add outdoor nature-based play areas for children (6.6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No children in household (6.4) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Households with children (7.1)
More opportunities for kayaking, canoeing, rowing (6.5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - White adults (6.1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Other/multi-racial adults (7.6)
Update the existing or add a nature center for environmental programs (6.3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mahomet residents (5.2) - Under age 35 (5.9), ages 65+ (5.8) - White adults (5.9) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rantoul residents (8.5) - Ages 45-54 (7.0) - African American adults (7.2)

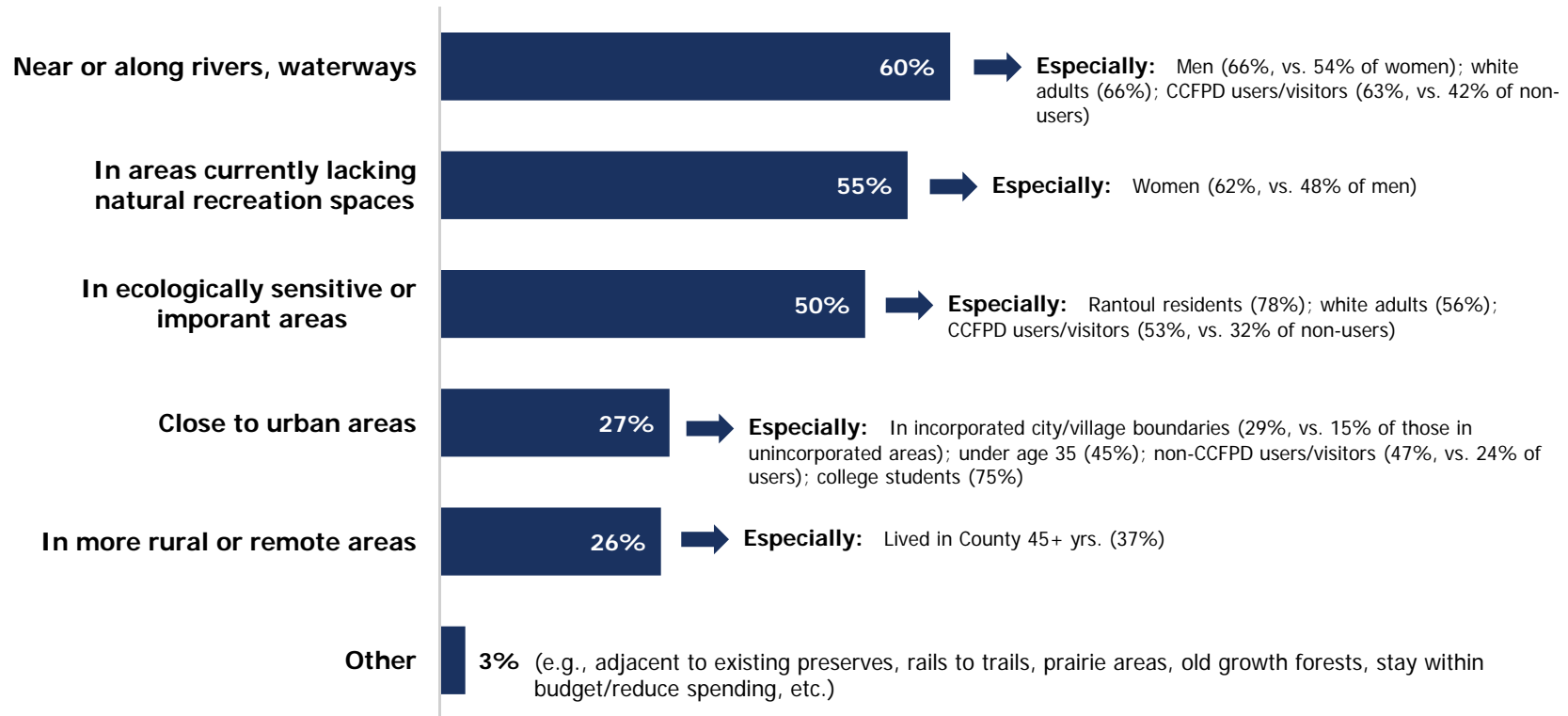
The second-tier opportunities generate strong scores from some groups, mostly non-white adults and middle-income households.

	Less Important than Avg.	More Important than Avg.
Improve/Add camping amenities (5.8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ages 65+ (4.9) - Unincorporated areas (4.7) and Mahomet residents (4.5) - White adults (5.4) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Other/multi-racial adults (6.7)
Enhance the Mabery Gelvin Botanical Garden (5.8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - White adults (5.5) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Other/multi-racial adults (6.8) - HH income \$35K-\$49.9K (6.6)
Upgrade the Museum of the Grand Prairie (5.6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mahomet (4.9), Savoy (4.6) and St. Joseph residents (4.8) - HH income \$150K+ (5.1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rantoul residents (8.2) - HH income \$50K-\$74.9K (6.5) - Ages 45-54 (6.5)
Improve/Add fishing access (5.4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - White adults (4.9) - Urbana (4.5) and Mahomet residents (4.3) - Ages 65+ (4.7) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Other/multi-racial adults (6.3)
Add traditional playgrounds (5.1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ages 55+ (4.5) - White adults (4.4) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ages 35-44 (6.0) - African American (6.3) and other/multi-racial adults (6.6)

Most residents feel that any new lands acquired by the District should be located near or along waterways, in areas countywide not currently served by the CCFPD, and/or in locations with critical ecological features.

- While protecting lands close to urban areas is important to a quarter of residents overall (27%), it is cited by nearly half (47%) of non-CCFPD users or visitors.

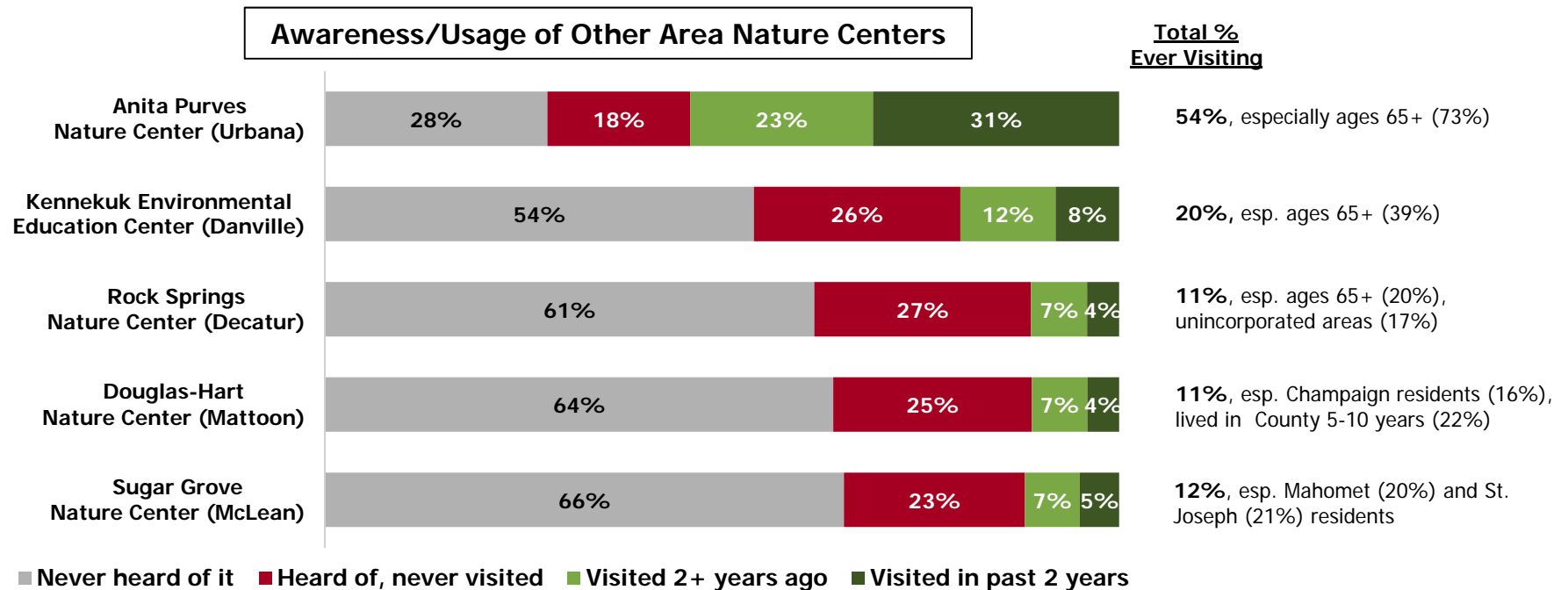
**Preferred Location(s) for Potential New CCFPD Land Acquisitions
(multiple responses)**



V. Usage/Visits to Other Area Nature Centers

Among other nearby nature facilities, only the Anita Purves Center in Urbana is relatively well-known (72% are familiar) and somewhat well-attended. A majority (54%) report visiting this facility at one time, including 31% who did so in the past two years.

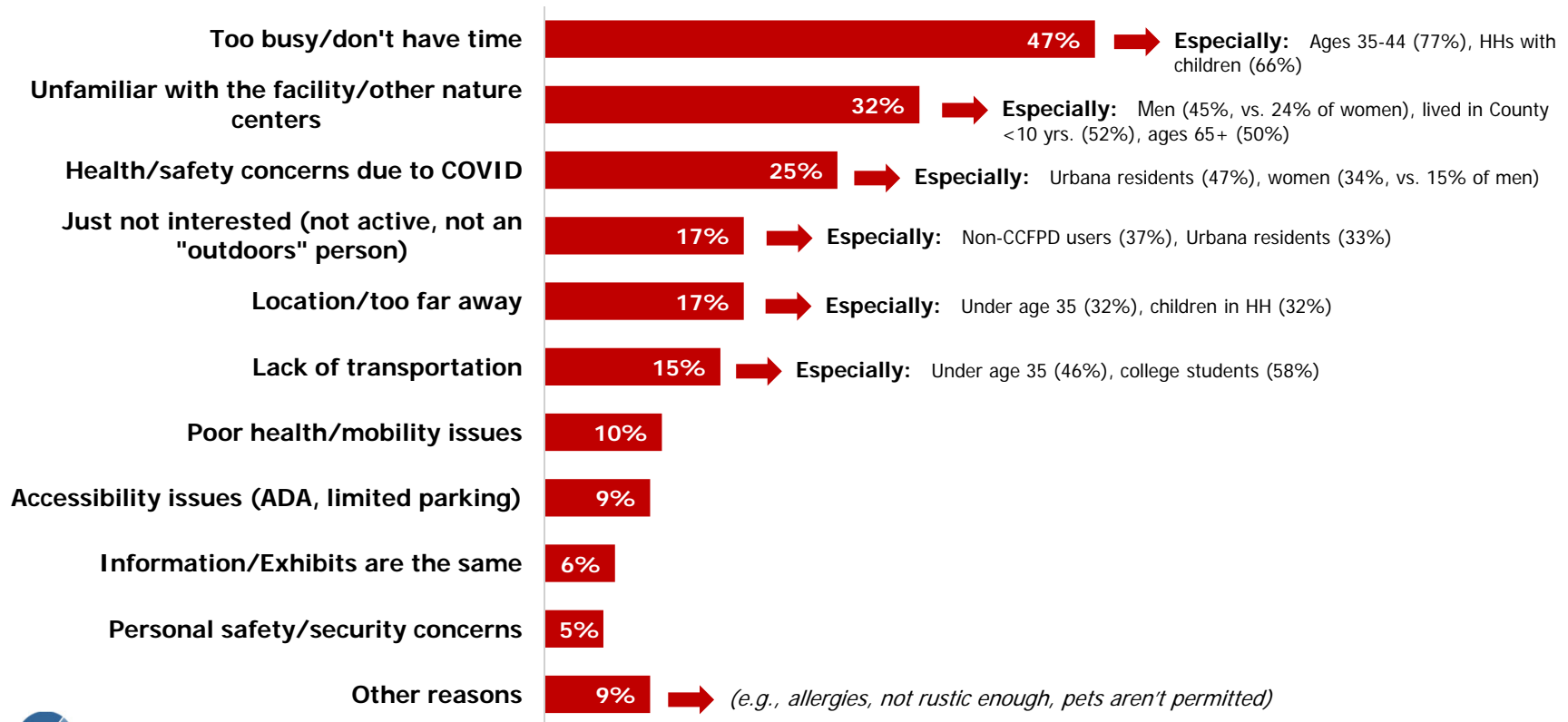
- Residents are far less familiar with other nature centers in the area. One in five (20%) report visiting the Kennekuk Environmental Education Center in Danville, but only 8% report a recent visit in the past two years.
- About half as many respondents (11% to 12% overall) report ever visiting the three remaining facilities tested.
- A few volunteer other outdoor areas that they have visited (most often Forest Glen Preserve, Allerton Park, Funks Grove Nature Preserve, Turkey Run State Park, Ballard Nature Center — mentioned by at most five or six respondents each).



Non-visitors to area nature centers (including Homer Lake Interpretive Center) cite similar reasons for not using these facilities as non-CCFPD users in general (see page 42).

- Nearly half (47%) are too busy, and a third (32%) are unaware of these facilities (consistent with 30% of non-CCFPD users unfamiliar with the District's preserves).

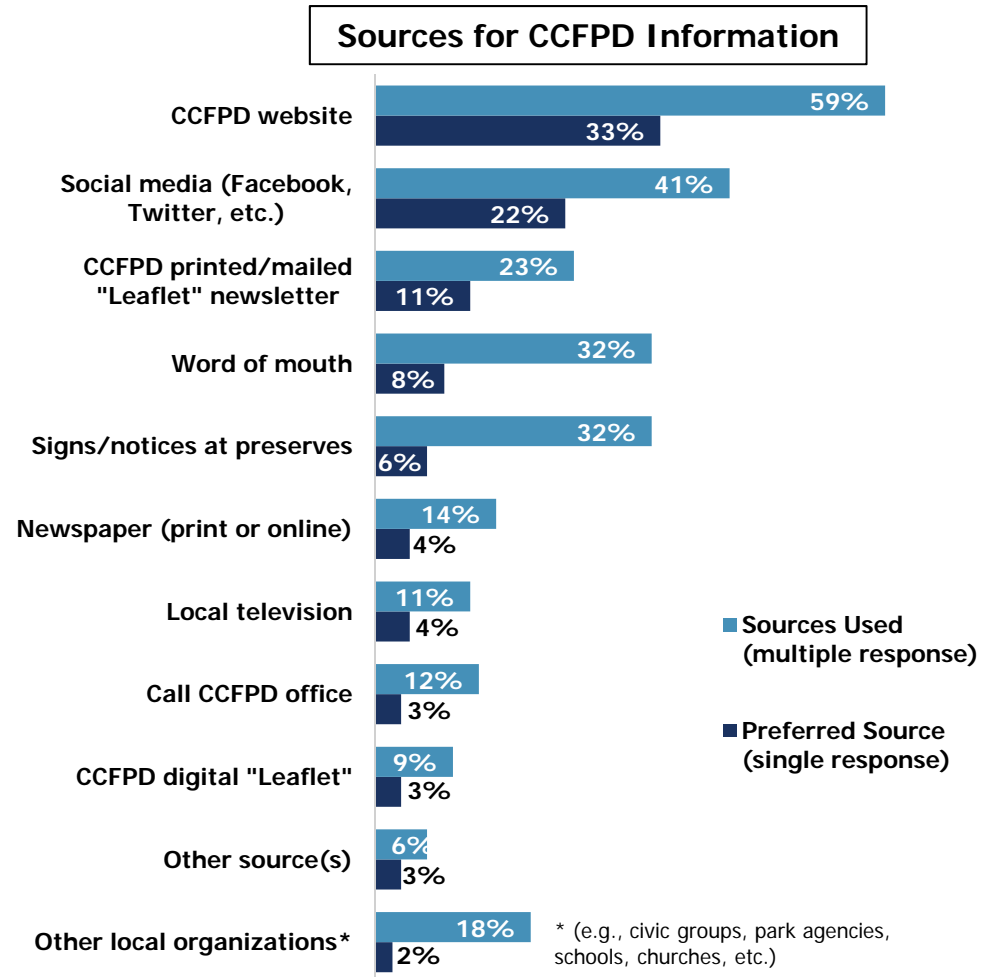
Reasons for Not Using/Visiting Other Area Nature Centers (n=199, multiple responses)



VI. Sources of CCFPD Information

Most often, County residents access the District website for information about the preserves, programs, activities etc. Social media ranks as the #2 source overall and is the top source among those under age 35 (at 57% usage for CCFPD information).

- Note that the youngest residents (under age 35) tend to use non-CCFPD sources for information, especially:
 - Again, social media (57% vs. 41% overall)
 - Word of mouth (44%, vs. 32% overall)
 - Other organizations (27%, vs. 18% overall).
- Conversely, the oldest adults (ages 65+) are most inclined to reference the "Leaflet" as a source, including:
 - The printed/mailed newsletter (46%, vs. 23% overall)
 - The digital version (18% vs. 9% overall).

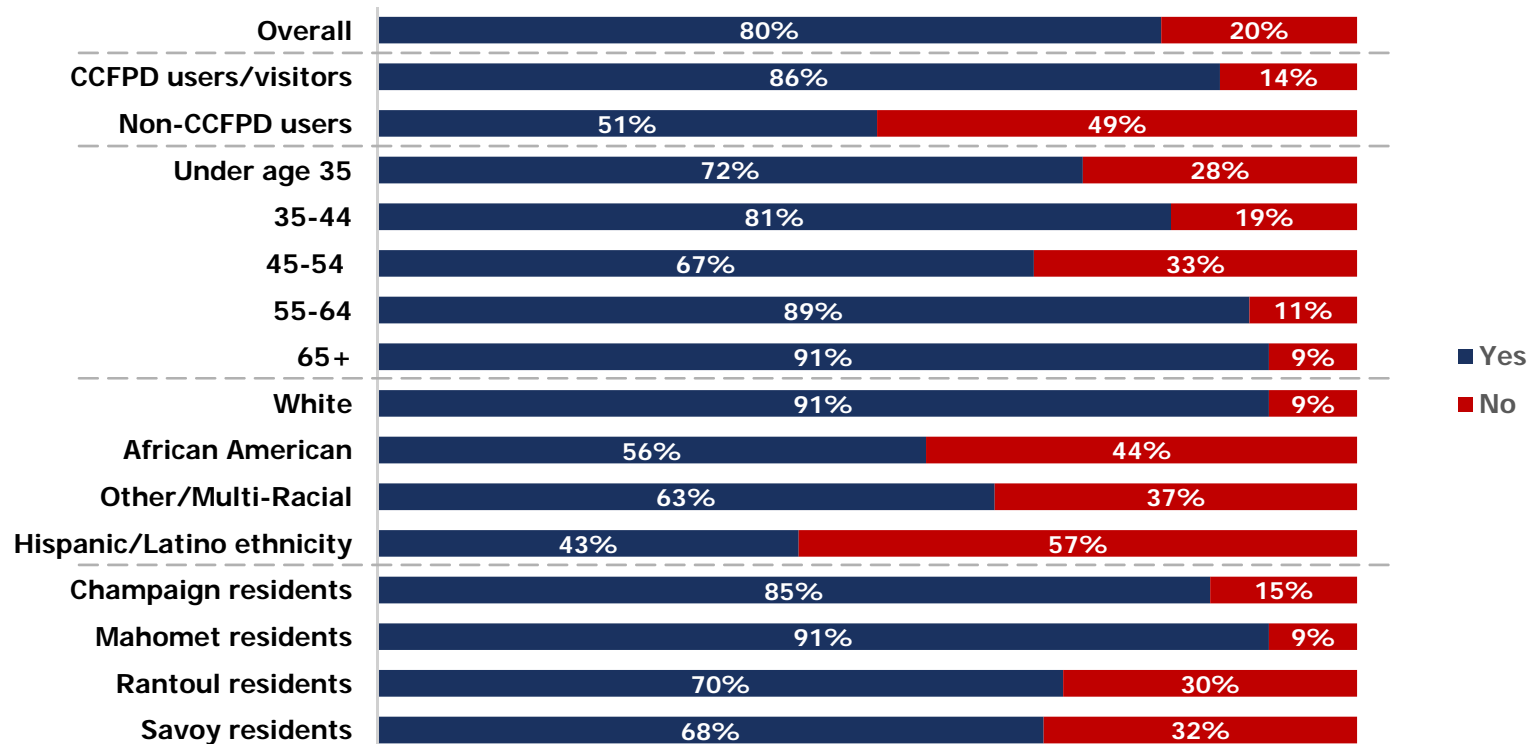


VII. Assessment of District DEI Efforts

Overall, four out of five residents (80%) feel adequality included and represented by the CCFPD and its programs, facilities, and services. Still, one in five (20%) feel more can be done.

- Those most favorable toward the District's DEI efforts are current users, older adults, white residents, and residents of Champaign and Mahomet. Non-CCFPD users are evenly divided (49% feel not represented or included), and others who tend to disagree skew toward younger adults, persons of color, and those in Rantoul and Savoy (small n of cases).
- Note that one in seven current users (14%) still feels underrepresented.

Does Your Household Feel Properly Represented/Included Within CCFPD Offerings?



Those who do not feel included or represented by the CCFPD give a wide range of responses, usually covering disagreement with District policies, lack of awareness/information, living far away from the preserves, and/or limited racial/ethnic/cultural inclusion.

➤ All of the verbatim responses provided on this topic are below and on the following pages.

No Response/No Answer (n=13)

Disagree with CCFPD Policies/Initiatives (n=5)

"Because you do exactly as you please. Most of the purpose of this survey is to see if you have enough support to buy more."

"People should go outside where they are. You do not need someone to build a place for them to go. The people at the park district seem to be like minded. You make your living off of everyone in the county so of course you want more parks - more parks, more employees, more money. There are enough parks. Until the Lake of the Woods is as crowded every day as it is on 4th July, you do not need another park."

"Some people just want to be left alone. Stop expanding and stop shoving stupid political messages down our throat. COVID signs in the middle of the forest? Seriously? During the pandemic, some people just want to walk in the woods and connect with nature and you can't get away from the COVID messaging ANYWHERE. Totally ruined it for me!!! Just maintain the existing trails, stop expanding, and leave us alone, and put the museum back the way it used to be."

"We appreciate old trees, regardless of their status as native or otherwise. The notion that beautiful non-native spruce in an extremely picturesque setting can be burned up by a mishandled prairie burn with little regard for those trees, or consequences for those involved in the burn, is extremely unsettling. The idea that the lives of insects and small animals are seen as collateral damage vs. prairie burns goes against a broader view of caring for wildlife even though management via fire has been the norm for a very long time. We feel that while some areas require burns to ward off invasive plants, it is NOT a practice that should be ubiquitous and that there should be some kind of intermediate technique used to preserve the aforementioned vulnerable wildlife. For instance, swallowtail butterflies and praying mantises overwinter in chrysalises and obviously cannot move when fires threaten them. I don't think many people would advocate for the indiscriminate killing of either of these. I know this position is not a popular one, but that does not mean it is something to be dismissed out of hand."

"Too many politics."

"(I want the) walking paths cleared."

Verbatim Responses: Reasons for Not Feeling Represented/Included in CCFPD Offerings (cont'd)

Unaware of CCFPD/Lack of Communication (n=5)

"There needs to be more awareness in schools and offerings for schools to attend special events."

"Not familiar."

"Don't know anything about that."

"My family is not necessarily aware of this program and would feel more represented if there was more awareness."

"Didn't even know it existed."

Location/Too Far Away (n=5)

"The majority of fun and encompassing natural areas are far away from the Champaign-Urbana city centers."

"None near me."

"There is not much near campus for students."

"It would be nice to have more around where I live."

"(I live) further away."

Race/Ethnicity/Cultural Responses (n=4)

"There is no discussion about African Americans."

"I live in an area occupied mostly by minorities."

"CCFPD (and other organizations as well) seem only to look at geological/plant/glacial history and settler history. But others lived here first; we killed/moved them."

"We enjoy natural spaces, when possible, but sometimes feel unsafe and threatened by other patrons as a person of color."

Verbatim Responses: Reasons for Not Feeling Represented/Included in CCFPD Offerings (cont'd)

More for Adults (n=2)

"Too much geared towards kids and not towards adults."

"I would really love to see more educational outdoor events for adults, like tree walks. Also, social activities around museum events for adults."

LGBTQ+ Responses (n=2)

"More LGBT-friendly events and representation."

"No LGBTQIA+ activities, events, or banners for pride."

Other varied comments (n=7)

"I've never seen the Board."

"I have mobility issues and don't drive myself, so I can't use the areas successfully."

"I do not understand how I am being represented."

"Lack of diversity."

"No attempts have been made to make safe access to the Forest Preserve but have otherwise been added for communities with more affluent residents. The tax dollars are spent to increase availability to residents with higher incomes and households like mine are not even considered at all."

"Most of the offerings are of little interest to my family. Other than this survey, there is little input that has ever been asked in my 18 years living here."

"I don't own property alone, and I don't use this service."

VIII. Potential New CCFPD Nature Center

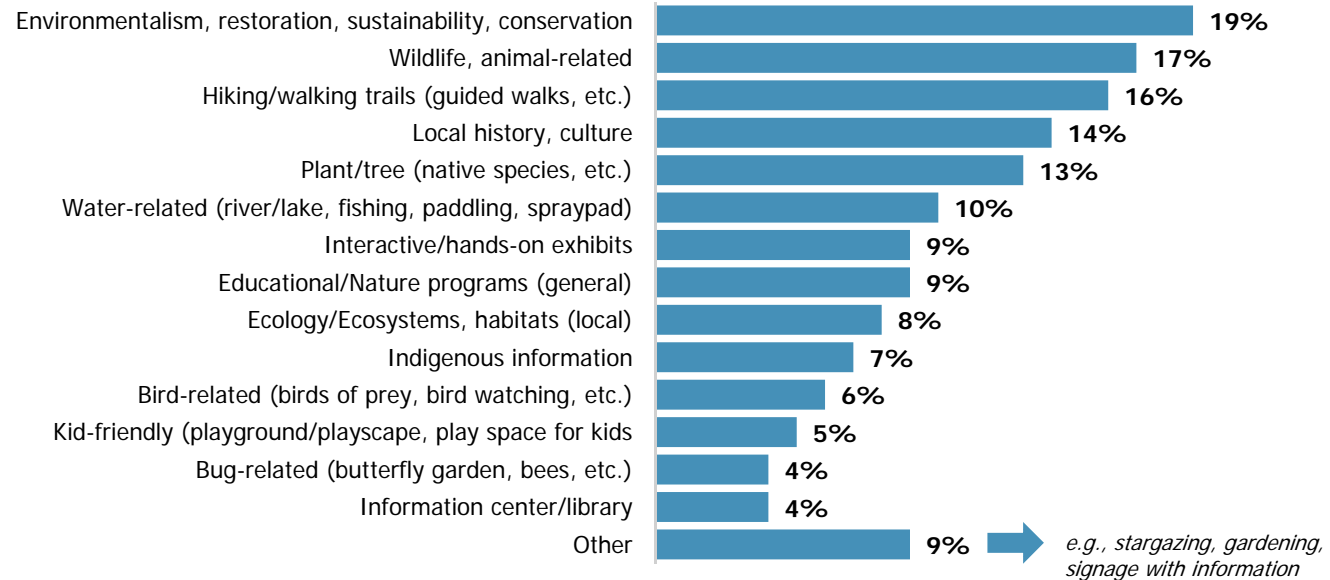
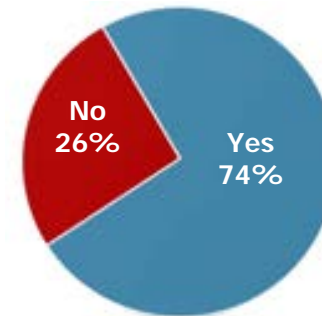
Virtually all suggestions for a possible new nature center involve educational components, most often that it be focused on the environment and sustainability (19%).

➤ Other educational opportunities (cited by 8% or more) include:

- Wildlife exhibits
- Guided hikes
- Local Champaign County history
- Plant and tree info/identification
- Interactive/hands-on exhibits
- Ecosystems and habitats.

➤ One in four (26%) did not have any suggestions for a new nature center (likely indicating less strong interest or need).

Any suggestions for a new nature center?



Sample Verbatim Responses: Suggested amenities for a new nature center

Environmentalism, restoration, sustainability, conservation, being "green" (19%)

"How to manage invasive plants and critters with techniques besides chemicals and burns, and compare the results between techniques."

"Exhibits about how to be more sustainable at home and in personal life. How to respect nature. How to better understand what happens to our garbage, used clothes, appliances, etc. How to use and reuse. How our behavior affects the natural community, meaning plants, bugs, and wildlife. How our farming community can create more sustainable farming practices. Understanding climate change."

"The effects of climate change and all human made change (what putting garbage in river does, herbicides and pesticides washing into natural areas, problems with invasives, what dog poop does to natural environment, what individuals can do to mitigate climate change)."

"Educating the public on coexisting peacefully with wildlife in the preserves and in residential communities."

Wildlife, animal-related (17%)

"I would like to see information about native wildlife and education about the proper care of natural areas in the urban areas."

"Injured wildlife rehab center."

"I would like to see more on the work that the program has done to preserve wildlife and protect the environment, as well as more information on the local wildlife."

"Information and programs on wildlife and outdoor skills."

Hiking/walking trails (16%)

"Guided nature walks."

"Dog friendly hiking trails. Guided night hikes."

"Trails with signage about tree and other species."

Local history, culture (14%)

"County history - how it was settled, how the land was converted to farmland."

"The settling and growth of our town – or any of the county's towns. Would love something in each of the towns and work in conjunction with some town representatives."

"More topics regarding the history of Champaign County and it's early settlers and indigenous communities."

Plants/trees (native species, etc.) (13%)

"Native plants and trees, traditional use of prairie burns, native fauna and migration patterns, compare land use 200 years ago and now, geology of the Mahomet aquifer."

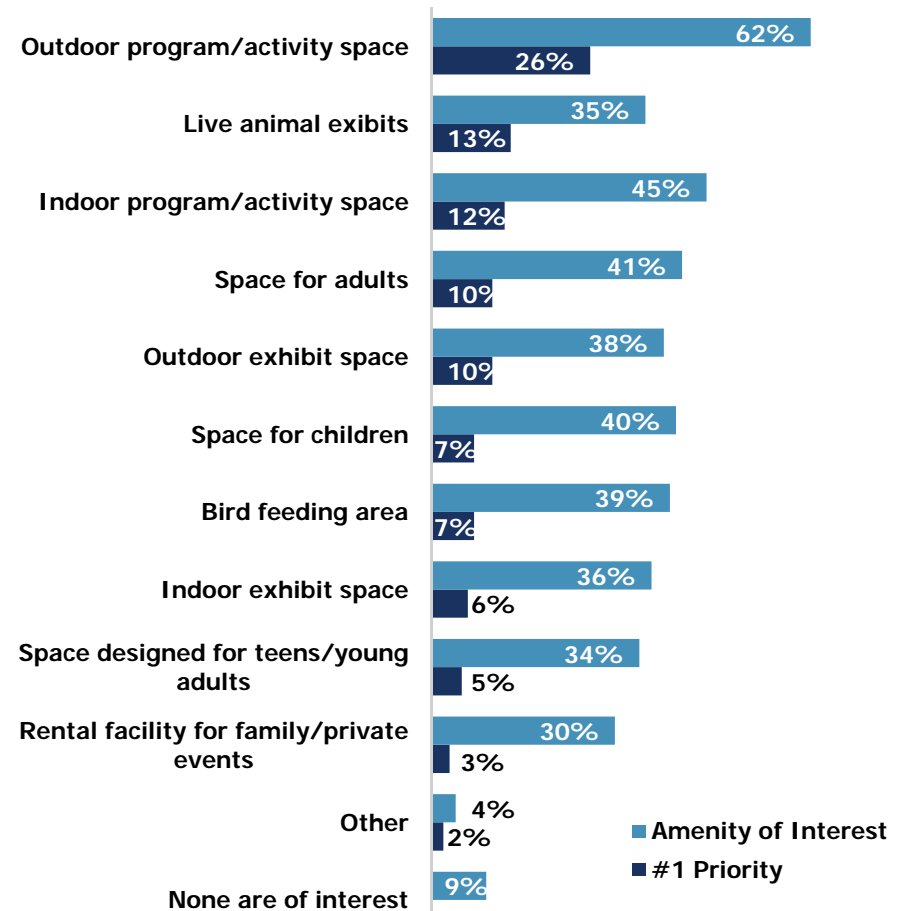
"Tree, grass, and plant identification for the average person. Classes that strengthen the average person's knowledge of the natural world."

"Botanical exhibits and nature trip with guides."

From a set of amenities for a potential new CCFPD nature center, residents voice the strongest support for outdoor activity space (clearly edging out indoor activity space, which is also a top-three preference).

- The remaining features are initially of interest to roughly a third to nearly one half of respondents, but the next highest #1 rankings are for live animals and indoor program space.
 - For example, space for both adults (41%) and children (40%) receive virtually identical levels of initial support, but when asked for a top priority the adult space option has a slight edge (10%, vs. 7% respectively).
 - Note also that while 39% would like a new facility to include a bird feeding area, this ranks further down with only 7% saying it is the #1 top priority.
- Given equal preferences for indoor and outdoor spaces and exhibits, and for age-specific spaces, the results indicate that providing program areas that can be adaptable to different uses and age groups will be key for any new facility.

Interest and Priorities for New Nature Center Amenities



Among the top priorities (#1/most important responses), significant differences emerge for some of the amenities tested.

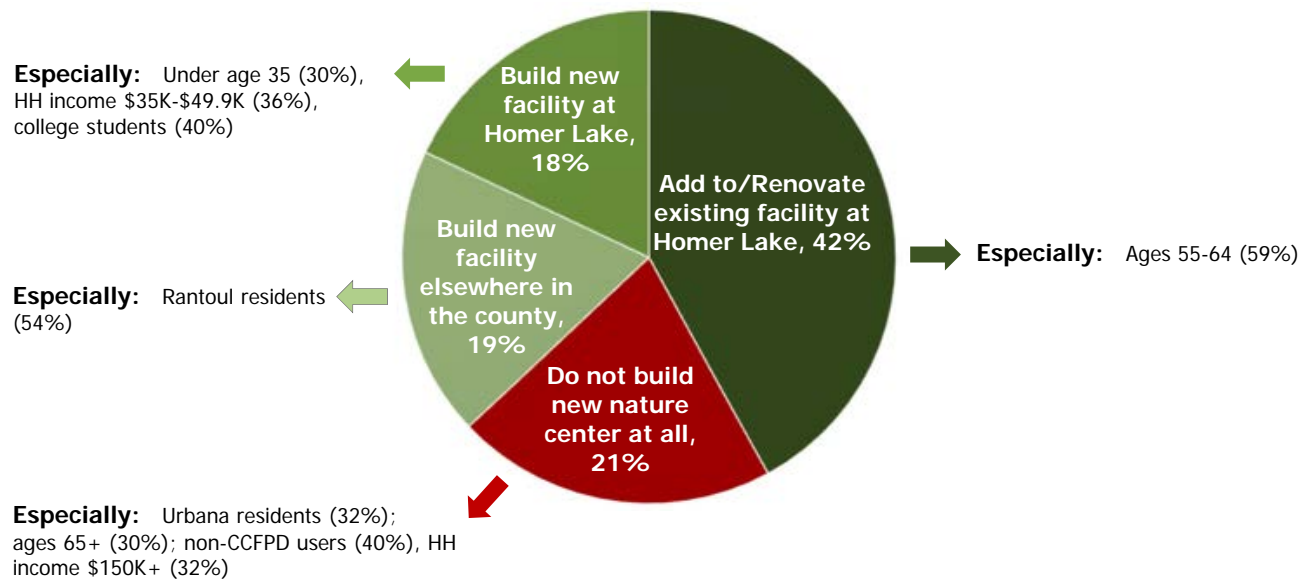
- Indoor program space is especially important to those in Champaign, mid- to upper-income households, and African Americans.
- Space for adults specifically is of greatest interest among younger respondents and Urbana residents – and likewise might differentiate this new facility from other area nature centers (among non-visitors to those facilities). The oldest adults (ages 65+) would like some space reserved for children.

	Less Important than Avg.
Outdoor programming/activity space (26%)	- Past visitors to other area nature centers (34%)
Live animal exhibits (13%)	< no statistically meaningful differences >
Indoor program/activity space (12%)	- Champaign residents (18%) - African American adults (27%) - HH income \$75K-\$149.9K (18%)
Space designed for adults (10%)	- Urbana residents (17%) - Under age 35 (16%) - HH income \$35K-\$49.9K (22%) - Non-visitors to other nature centers (14%)
Outdoor exhibit space (10%)	< no statistically meaningful differences >
Space designed for children (7%)	- White adults (10%) - Ages 65+ (15%)
Bird feeding area (7%)	< no statistically meaningful differences >
Indoor exhibit space (6%)	< no statistically meaningful differences >
Space designed for teens/young adults (5%)	- Under age 35 (14%), college students (26%)
Rental facility for family/private events (3%)	- Ages 55-64 (9%)

A plurality (42%) would like to see a new CCFPD nature center incorporated or remodeled as part of the existing Homer Lake facility. The rest are evenly divided between building a brand-new facility at Homer Lake, elsewhere in the County, or nowhere at all (no new facility).

- The youngest adults tend to favor a new nature center at Homer Lake, while more middle-aged residents would like to see the existing facility at that location expanded or remodeled. Older residents tend to oppose any new nature center (along with wealthiest residents and those in Urbana).
- Those most in favor of a new facility elsewhere in the County tend to be Rantoul residents. When asked where the new facility should be, the Champaign-Urbana area was the top choice (33%, followed by generally “populated areas” at 10%).
- In a separate question, 28% would want a new facility within 20 minutes of driving time of their home, and another 34% would be willing to drive up to a half an hour to this location. Relatively fewer (27%) would be willing to travel more than 30 minutes, and 11% say they wouldn’t visit regardless of where a new nature center might be built.

Preferred Location for New CCFPD Nature Center



APPENDICES



2022 Community Survey

(Conducted Oct. – Dec., 2022; based on n=469 cases)

1. Do you live...

Within the village or city limits	88%
In an unincorporated area	12%

2. How many years have you lived in Champaign County?

Less than 5 years	22%
5-10 years	14%
11-19 years	13%
20-29 years	17%
30-44 years	20%
45+ years	15%
Mean	22.6 years
Median	20 years

3. Please rate your overall opinion of each group or agency listed below.

A. Champaign County Forest Preserve District

Excellent (9-10)	49%
Somewhat like (6-8)	26%
Neutral (5)	18%
Dislike (0-4)	7%
Unfamiliar	14%

B. Champaign County government

Excellent (9-10)	6%
Somewhat like (6-8)	33%
Neutral (5)	38%
Dislike (0-4)	23%
Unfamiliar	10%

C. Local city or village government

Excellent (9-10)	12%
Somewhat like (6-8)	36%
Neutral (5)	35%
Dislike (0-4)	17%
Unfamiliar	11%

D. Local public school district

Excellent (9-10)	14%
Somewhat like (6-8)	34%
Neutral (5)	27%
Dislike (0-4)	25%
Unfamiliar	15%

E. Community park district or parks department

Excellent (9-10)	41%
Somewhat like (6-8)	38%
Neutral (5)	15%
Dislike (0-4)	7%
Unfamiliar	10%

4. Please describe what you like most about the Champaign County Forest Preserve District, or what the Forest Preserve District does particularly well.

Coding of open-ended questions in progress; results will be included in final report

5. Please describe what you dislike most about the Champaign County Forest Preserve District, or what the Forest Preserve District could do better.

Coding of open-ended questions in progress; results will be included in final report

6. Thinking about current real estate taxes, about what percent would you say goes to the Champaign County Forest Preserve District?

Less than 1%	12%
1%	21%
2%	12%
3%-5%	28%
6%-10%	12%
11%+	14%
Mean	6.6%
Median	3%

8. Which Champaign Co. Forest Preserves or facilities have you or a member of your household visited in the past two years (since the beginning of 2020)?

Forest preserves/open space/trails	83%
Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve	70%
Homer Lake Forest Preserve	49%
Kickapoo Rail Trail	36%
Middle Fork River Forest Preserve	34%
River Bend Forest Preserve	27%
Sangamon River Forest Preserve	21%
Heron View Forest Preserve	10%

Facilities	60%
Homer Lake Interpretive Center	28%
Mabery Gelvin Botanical Garden	26%
Museum of the Grand Prairie	26%
Natural Playscape playground at Homer Lake	23%
Lake of the Woods Golf Course	14%
Harry L. Swartz Campground	6%
Haven't visited any preserves/facilities	16%

9. Thinking about the Champaign County Forest Preserves and facilities that you have visited in the past two years, how would you rate them on:

A. Overall experience and satisfaction level	
Completely satisfied (9-10)	59%
Somewhat satisfied (6-8)	30%
Neutral (5)	7%
Dissatisfied (0-4)	4%
B. Cleanliness, maintenance, and upkeep	
Completely satisfied (9-10)	58%
Somewhat satisfied (6-8)	30%
Neutral (5)	5%
Dissatisfied (0-4)	7%
C. Safety	
Completely satisfied (9-10)	54%
Somewhat satisfied (6-8)	33%
Neutral (5)	11%
Dissatisfied (0-4)	2%
D. Access (parking, paths, entrances/exits)	
Completely satisfied (9-10)	57%
Somewhat satisfied (6-8)	31%
Neutral (5)	9%
Dissatisfied (0-4)	4%
E. Level of service provided by Forest Preserve staff	
Completely satisfied (9-10)	47%
Somewhat satisfied (6-8)	27%
Neutral (5)	22%
Dissatisfied (0-4)	5%

10. With which Champaign County Forest Preserves or facilities are you least satisfied, and why?

Coding of open-ended questions in progress; results will be included in final report

11. In what types of activities do you participate when visiting Champaign County Forest Preserves or facilities?

Walking or hiking (no pets)	81%
Relaxing (<i>enjoying nature, reading, etc.</i>)	63%
Gathering with friends/family (<i>reunions, cookouts, informal gatherings, etc.</i>)	41%
Picnics	40%
Walking or hiking with pets	35%
Photography	34%
Bird watching	26%
Using playgrounds/play areas	26%
Educational opportunities and activities (<i>programs, museums, exhibits, etc.</i>)	25%
Fishing	24%
Water/river activities (<i>canoeing, kayaking, etc.</i>)	23%
Star gazing at night	22%
Bicycling	20%
Jogging/running	19%
Camping	14%
Golfing	8%
Cross country skiing and/or snow shoeing	6%
Swimming	4%
Other exercise activities	2%
Other	5%

12. In the past 12 months, how often have you been to a Champaign County Forest Preserve location or facility?

At least weekly	16%
At least monthly	27%
At least once every three months	24%
Once every six months	9%
At least once a year	14%
Less than once a year	6%
Never	4%

13. Please rate your satisfaction with the following offerings from the Champaign County Forest Preserves that you have experienced in the past two years.

A. Environmental education programs	
Completely satisfied (9-10)	37%
Somewhat satisfied (6-8)	32%
Neutral (5)	18%
Dissatisfied (0-4)	13%
Unfamiliar/ Haven't used	52%
B. Cultural/Historical education programs	
Completely satisfied (9-10)	35%
Somewhat satisfied (6-8)	37%
Neutral (5)	20%
Dissatisfied (0-4)	8%
Unfamiliar/ Haven't used	51%
C. Exhibits	
Completely satisfied (9-10)	40%
Somewhat satisfied (6-8)	36%
Neutral (5)	16%
Dissatisfied (0-4)	8%
Unfamiliar/ Haven't used	41%
D. Self-guided activities (using signage, brochures, or other resources without staff present)	
Completely satisfied (9-10)	44%
Somewhat satisfied (6-8)	39%
Neutral (5)	11%
Dissatisfied (0-4)	6%
Unfamiliar/ Haven't used	18%
E. Special events (concerts, Night Lights in the Garden, Freedom Fest, etc.)	
Completely satisfied (9-10)	49%
Somewhat satisfied (6-8)	31%
Neutral (5)	14%
Dissatisfied (0-4)	7%
Unfamiliar/ Haven't used	46%

14. Please select the types of activities that are or would be of greatest interest to you or your household.

Self-guided activities (using signage, brochures, or other resources without staff present)	64%
Special events (concerts, Night Lights in the Garden, Freedom Fest, etc.)	56%
Environmental education programs	37%
Exhibits	35%
Cultural/historical education programs	35%
None of the above	8%

15. Thinking specifically about the Homer Lake Interpretive Center, how often do you typically visit that facility in a year?

IF VISITED IN Q8 - n=149

At least monthly	10%
At least once every three months	19%
Once every six months	24%
At least once a year	21%
Less than once a year	25%

16. In what types of activities do you participate when visiting the Homer Lake Interpretive Center?

Viewing exhibits	61%
Using the bathroom facilities	52%
Viewing the live animals	45%
Asking staff questions/getting more information about the preserve	35%
Classes or programs	18%
Other	11%

17. How satisfied are you with those activities at the Homer Lake Interpretive Center?

A. Classes or programs	
Completely satisfied (9-10)	78%
Somewhat satisfied (6-8)	18%
Neutral (5)	4%
Dissatisfied (0-4)	0%
B. Viewing exhibits	
Completely satisfied (9-10)	42%
Somewhat satisfied (6-8)	43%
Neutral (5)	12%
Dissatisfied (0-4)	3%
C. Viewing the live animals	
Completely satisfied (9-10)	54%
Somewhat satisfied (6-8)	30%
Neutral (5)	9%
Dissatisfied (0-4)	8%
D. Asking staff questions/getting more information about the preserve	
Completely satisfied (9-10)	57%
Somewhat satisfied (6-8)	25%
Neutral (5)	18%
Dissatisfied (0-4)	0%
E. Using the bathroom facilities	
Completely satisfied (9-10)	59%
Somewhat satisfied (6-8)	32%
Neutral (5)	4%
Dissatisfied (0-4)	5%

18. If you have not used or visited any Champaign County Forest Preserves or facilities in the past two years, why not?

Just not interested (not very active, not an "outdoors" person)	38%
Too busy/Don't have time	35%
Unfamiliar with the preserves or facilities	30%
Location/nothing close to where I live	18%
Lack of transportation	14%
Health/safety concerns due to COVID-19	14%
Poor health, mobility issues	13%
Accessibility issues (limited/lack of parking, ADA accessibility)	10%
Personal safety/security concerns	8%
Other reason	23%

19. Rank order the top priorities that you think are most important for the Forest Preserve District to pursue.

	Top 4	#1
Maintain existing preserves, trails, and facilities	80%	27%
Manage habitats for native wildlife and plants	74%	21%
Acquire and protect new natural areas	51%	20%
Ensure long-term financial stability	46%	9%
Provide educational opportunities, exhibits, and programs about history and nature	45%	7%
Expand existing preserves	38%	5%
Open new preserves, trails, and facilities	36%	5%
Add a new nature center in Champaign County for educational programs	19%	5%

20. How important is each activity or improvement that the Champaign County Forest Preserve District might provide?

	Top 2 Box*
Add more trails in natural settings	41%
Add or connect longer trails in Champaign County	37%
More opportunities for kayaking, canoeing, rowing, etc.	31%
Add more paved trails for those using wheelchairs, walkers, etc.	30%
Add outdoor nature-based play areas for children	27%
Improve/Add camping amenities	23%
Update the existing or add a nature center for environmental education programs	20%
Add traditional playgrounds	17%
Upgrade the Museum of the Grand Prairie	16%
Improve/Add fishing access	16%
Enhance the Mabery Gelvin Botanical Garden	15%

* Scores of 9-10 on a 0-10 scale

21. Thinking about the services, facilities, programs, and opportunities that the District provides, how would you rate the overall value of your property taxes that go to the Forest Preserve District given its roughly 1% share of your property taxes?

Excellent value (9-10)	50%
Good value (6-8)	21%
Average value (5)	20%
Poor value (0-4)	9%

22. If the Forest Preserve District were to buy additional land, where should new preserves be located?

Near or along rivers and waterways	60%
In areas currently lacking natural recreation spaces	55%
In ecologically sensitive or important areas	50%
Close to urban areas	27%
In more rural or remote areas	26%
Other	3%

23. Do you feel your household is properly represented and included within the Forest Preserve District and its offerings?

Yes	80%
No	20%

23A. Why don't you feel your household is properly represented or included? [ASKED IF Q23=NO]

Coding of open-ended questions in progress; results will be included in final report

24. In general, from what sources do you get information about the Champaign County Forest Preserve District?

Forest Preserve District's website	59%
Social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, etc.	41%
Signs or notices in the preserves	32%
Rely on word of mouth from family, friends, or neighbors	32%
Forest Preserve District's printed/mailed "Leaflet" newsletter	23%
Other organizations (<i>civic groups, local park agencies, schools, church, etc.</i>)	18%
Local newspaper (print or online)	14%
Call the Forest Preserve District	12%
Local television	11%
Forest Preserve District's digital "Leaflet" newsletter	9%
Other source	6%

25. Please indicate which one is your preferred source for information about the Forest Preserve District.

Forest Preserve District's website	33%
Social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, etc.	22%
Forest Preserve District's printed/mailed "Leaflet" newsletter	11%
Rely on word of mouth from family, friends, or neighbors	8%
Signs or notices in the preserves	6%
Local newspaper (print or online)	4%
Local television	4%
Forest Preserve District's digital "Leaflet" newsletter	3%
Call the Forest Preserve District	3%
Other organizations (<i>civic groups, local park agencies, schools, church, etc.</i>)	2%
Other source	3%

26. Which other nature centers or similar facilities have you or someone in your household visited or heard of?

A. Anita Purves Nature Center (Urbana)

Visited in past 2 years	31%
Visited over 2 years ago	23%
Heard of it but never visited	18%
Never heard of it	28%

B. Kennekuk Environmental Education Center (Danville)

Visited in past 2 years	8%
Visited over 2 years ago	12%
Heard of it but never visited	26%
Never heard of it	54%

C. Sugar Grove Nature Center (McLean)

Visited in past 2 years	5%
Visited over 2 years ago	7%
Heard of it but never visited	23%
Never heard of it	66%

D. Rock Springs Nature Center (Decatur)

Visited in past 2 years	4%
Visited over 2 years ago	7%
Heard of it but never visited	27%
Never heard of it	61%

E. Douglas-Hart Nature Center (Mattoon)

Visited in past 2 years	4%
Visited over 2 years ago	7%
Heard of it but never visited	25%
Never heard of it	64%

27. Why have you not used or visited any nature centers or similar facilities in the past two years?

Too busy/Don't have time	47%
Unfamiliar with the area nature centers or similar facilities	32%
Health/safety concerns due to COVID-19	25%
Just not interested (not active, not an "outdoors/nature" person)	17%
Location/nothing close to where I live	17%
Lack of transportation	15%
Poor health, mobility issues	10%
Accessibility issues (limited/lack of parking, ADA accessibility)	9%
Exhibits, information, or programs don't change, have already seen it	6%
Personal safety/security concerns	5%
A feeling of not being welcome at these locations	1%
Dislike these types of facilities, had a bad experience	0%
Poor quality/condition of these facilities	0%
Other reason	8%

28. If a new nature center were built in Champaign County, what specific topics, exhibits, programs, etc. would you like to see offered?

Coding of open-ended questions in progress; results will be included in final report

29. If the Champaign County Forest Preserve District were to build a new nature center in the County, which of the following would you most like that facility to offer?

Outdoor program/activity space	62%
Indoor program/activity space	45%
Space designed for adults	41%
Space designed for children	40%
Bird feeding area	39%
Outdoor exhibit space	38%
Indoor exhibit space	36%
Live animal exhibits	35%
Space designed for teens/young adults	34%
Rental facility for family or private events	30%
Other	4%
None of these are of interest	9%

30. Which one of those nature center features is of greatest interest to your household?

Outdoor program/activity space	26%
Live animal exhibits	13%
Indoor program/activity space	12%
Space designed for adults	10%
Outdoor exhibit space	10%
Space designed for children	7%
Bird feeding area	7%
Indoor exhibit space	6%
Space designed for teens/young adults	5%
Rental facility for family or private events	3%
Other	2%

31. the Champaign County Forest Preserve District were to build a new nature center in the county, they should:

Add to/Renovate the existing facility at Homer Lake	42%
They should not build a new nature center at all	21%
Build a new facility somewhere else in the county	19%
Build a new facility at Homer Lake	18%

32. If the Champaign County Forest Preserve District were to build a new nature center in the County, how long would you be willing to travel to the new facility?

More than 45 minutes	9%
No more than 45 minutes	18%
No more than 30 minutes	34%
No more than 20 minutes	18%
No more than 10 minutes	10%
Would never visit, not interested	11%

Demographics

33. Please indicate your gender.

Male	47%
Female	51%
Prefer to self-describe	2%

34. In what year were you born? (Age shown)

Under 35	23%
35-44	20%
45-54	16%
55-64	18%
Over 65	23%
Mean	49.3 years old
Median	49 years old

35. Are you of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin?

Yes	6%
No	94%

36. Which of the following identifies your race?

White	67%
Black or African American	14%
Asian	12%
American Indian or Alaska Native	2%
Other	8%

37. Including yourself, how many people live in your household?

Live alone	23%
2 people	43%
3-4 people	30%
5+ people	4%

38. Are there any children under 18 in your household?

Yes	22%
No	78%

39. Are you a full-time college student?

Yes	9%
No	91%

40. Please indicate your total household income in 2021, before taxes.

Under \$35,000	28%
Between \$35,000 and \$49,999	16%
Between \$50,000 and \$74,999	17%
Between \$75,000 and \$99,999	11%
Between \$100,000 and \$149,999	15%
Between \$150,000 and \$199,999	7%
\$200,000 or more	6%

41. Aside from your previous feedback, what else can the Forest Preserve District do to better serve you or your household?

Coding of open-ended questions in progress; results will be included in final report

Share your thoughts on how the Forest Preserve District can best serve you!



Take a quick survey to share your opinions:
 Website: www.arisurvey.com/s3/CCFPD
 Password: **<PIN>**
See reverse side for more information.

aQity Research & Insights, Inc.
 1330-B Sherman Ave.
 Evanston, IL 60201



[LastName] Household
 or Current Resident
 Address1



The Champaign County Forest Preserve District wants to understand how it can better serve residents like you!

The Forest Preserve District is conducting a brief survey to understand the types of recreational activities, programs, and improvements that matter most to residents like you.

Whether or not you use the Champaign County Forest Preserves, this is your chance to voice your opinions!

This anonymous survey only takes about 10 minutes to complete, and we ask that a household adult complete the brief online survey **in the next few days**. Please use the website and password below to access the website (or scan the QR code to the right):



Website: www.arisurvey.com/s3/CCFPD
 Password: **<PIN>**

Please be sure to enter this website exactly as written (including www.) into your browser's address bar – not in a general Internet search.

Thank you very much for sharing your opinions!

aQity Research & Insights (an independent research firm) has been asked to conduct this survey. If you wish to complete the survey by mail or phone, please call toll-free 866-900-8555 or contact us at aQity@aQityResearch.com.