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DeKalb County Government
Sycamore, Illinois

**Forest Preserve District Committee Minutes
August 19, 2014**

The DeKalb County Forest Preserve District Committee met Tuesday August 19, 2014 at 6:00 pm in the Conference Room East of the Administration Bldg. In attendance were committee members: Ms. Fauci, Mr. Jones, Mr. Gudmunson and Ms. Haji-Sheikh. Mr. Brown and Mr. Cribben arrived after the call to order. Ms. DeFauw was absent. Superintendent Hannan was also in attendance. Guests included County Board members Diane Leifheit and Mark Pietrowski and community member Michael Haji-Sheikh.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Fauci called for a motion to approve the minutes of the June 17, 2014 meeting. Mr. Gudmunson moved to approve the minutes, seconded by Ms. Haji-Sheikh and the motion passed unanimously.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Ms. Fauci noted that there would not be a need for Executive Session this evening and so called for a motion to approve an amended agenda. Ms. Haji-Sheikh moved to approve the agenda, seconded by Mr. Jones and the motion passed unanimously.

MONTHLY REPORTS

Mr. Hannan began by noting that this month's packets contain information on the Sycamore Alumni Cross Country Run at Afton. He commented that Sycamore team practices and has held several Conference Invitational at the Afton Preserve over the years. He noted that the good rains and weather have also made this year's prairie blooms at Afton and the other Preserves very beautiful this Summer.

He then reported on the Genoa to Russell Woods Trail. He reminded the Committee that the District had donated \$5,000.00 to the project to go along with the Com Ed Green Region Grant the City of Genoa was awarded. He noted to the Committee where the trail construction is along with photos.

Mr. Hannan then commented on the large turnout of over 100 people for the recent Chief Shabbona historic sign dedication at Chief Shabbona Forest Preserve. He noted that former County Board member Denny Sands was very instrumental in getting the event coordinated. He then directed the Committee to photos in the monthly packet of the ceremony and noted there was a very nice news article done by the Midweek. The District also received a thank you letter from the current Chief of the Potawatomi Tribal Council.

He noted that there have been 6 week long summer camps at the NREC in Russell Woods this year with a variety of environmental themes and offerings.

Mr. Hannan also noted that the Blanding's turtle has been located. It had taken long trip (for a turtle) from Afton preserve east to a farm pond a couple miles away.

He closed by noting that the next public star party held by the Northwest Suburban astronomers will be held September 13, 2014 at the Afton Preserves.

Attached to minutes

FY2015 BUDGET

Mr. Hannan noted that this is the first draft of the budget for the Committee to review and that a final vote is not taken on the budget until the November meeting. He highlighted the budget information letter in the report that outlines what the Forest Preserve mission, land preservation and management, maintenance, environmental education, volunteers and activities. He also noted the budget calendar and procedures and commented that less than 1% of citizen's property tax bill helps fund the Forest Preserve District. He then pointed out the budget line items, projected revenues, projected expenses and past expenses.

He noted that there revenue source to be received from Waste Management for land conservation/management and environmental education. He commented that this revenue may have several possible future uses such as helping fund restoration of the Evergreen Village property or along the Kishwaukee River if the property is transferred to the District.

Mr. Hannan then discussed the history of Peggy Doty and Connie Handel and the University of Illinois Extension Service partnership with the forest preserve district.. He noted that over the past few of years, Ms. Doty has gone from being devoted solely to DeKalb County to now having her work duties also in Ogle and Boone counties. He noted that part of the Waste Management revenue could be used for outdoor education to fill the gap left by her realignment by the University of Illinois and expand programs.

He noted a chart of what is spent by other Forest Preserve Districts on outdoor education programs and noted that DeKalb County Forest Preserve District is at the far bottom. One proposal is to use the money for a supplemental staff member, hired by U of I Extension to assist in expanding outdoor education activities and opportunities and have the Resource Center open on weekends when more people could utilize the Center.

Ms. Haji-Sheikh asked if Ms. Doty would have further reductions in her time with the District. Mr. Hannan noted that he does not anticipate that, but her extra duties do not allow her to do everything she had previously done for DeKalb County.

Mr. Brown asked how other forest preserve districts fund these activities. Ms. Fauci noted that some counties have several full time and part time staff assigned to these

activities. Ms. Haji-Sheikh asked what we would consider our current staffing level to be for these activities. Mr. Hannan responded that the District through the U of I Extension partnership has approximately 1.5 current staff all through U of I Extension. DeKalb County and other county Forest Preserve and Conservation District's fund these programs with tax dollars, program fees and donations.

Mr. Hannan noted that another possible use of the funds for environmental education relates to a group called Adventure Works of DeKalb County, who use the preserves extensively. This group helps at-risk kids teaching individual, family and group counseling through adventure and outdoor classrooms. Over the years they have not only used the Preserves as teaching sites, but have also assisted with volunteer projects. He noted that a portion of the Waste Management revenue could be directed to assist these 2 environmental education providers with their activities and programs as well. *Note: see attached letters from Peggy Doty and Adventure Works*

He noted that the total property tax dollar amount proposed in the FY 2015 budget is the same as 2014. IMRF and Tort Fund totals have not yet been received from IMRF and the auditors as of our meeting but will be at the September meeting. He commented that the General Fund is also capped at 6% which is 2 ½ % less than last year.

Ms. Fauci asked if extra staff would be able to allow for expanded programming. She noted that expansion of programming also expands revenue as the camps and activities do have fees attached.

Mr. Hannan commented that outdoor education is becoming increasingly a priority component with forest preserve district's in Illinois along with schools, universities and parents looking for ways to get adults and children outdoors, exercising and learning about their environment and create a balance from too much videos, television, etc.

Mr. Brown asked for clarification of the .06% tax rate and why general fund revenues are lower than last year. Mr. Hannan responded that the reduction in the general fund is due to the EAV (Estimated Assessed Value) having gone down for the past few years. Current FY 2014 general fund revenue is 6.7% less than FY 2013 general fund revenue. FY 2015 is projected at being 2.5% less revenue in the general fund.

Ms. Fauci asked the Committee to please review the budget and to ask questions.

Mr. Jones asked if the general fund rate is capped at .06% by State statute and also asked what the dollar amount is that was lost. Mr. Hannan noted .06% is the general fund tax rate cap and because of the declining EAV and the general fund dollar amount was \$74,000 less this fiscal year than in 2013 and projected another \$26,000.00 less in FY 2015.

Mr. Brown asked if there had been any movement on cooperative agreement regarding the future Evergreen Village land improvement project. Mr. Hannan responded that nothing yet as relocation and clean-up is in progress.

Mr. Hannan closed by noting that some members may not have received the recent FY 2013 audit document and asked that they let him know if they need that.

Ms. Fauci began by commending Mr. Hannan, Chief Shabbona Preserve Manager Carl Kuhn, forest preserve staff, Denny Sands and Prairie Band Potawatomi tribal council members on the Chief Shabbona sign dedication ceremony and noted that the attendance was great for the local history event.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS

She then noted that she has been volunteering as a land steward in the South Branch Prairie area and that work there has been very good. Mr. Hannan noted that though the gates may be closed, you can walk back to the Hoppe Farmstead, Miller – Ellwood cabin and South Branch Prairie area. Ms. Fauci commented that though the work has only been progressing for the past three years, the results are spectacular with very beautiful and rare species on display. She noted that this has been a cooperative project with the Wetland Reserve Program with USDA/NRCS.

Mr. Hannan reported that the training Mr. Roloff did at the South Branch Prairie brought USDA/ NRCS land management staff from all over the Midwest and as far as Nebraska to learn about prairie and wetland restoration at the South Branch Prairie . *See monthly Natural Resource Management report for more details.*

Ms. Fauci asked how Mr. Roloff is doing with the proposed oak recovery acorn collection project to mitigate the effects of the Emerald Ash Borer. Mr. Cribben added a question as to whether he had any central collection point identified. Mr. Hannan noted he would ask Mr. Roloff for a report on the activities.

Ms. Haji-Sheikh then noted that she and her husband wanted to discuss some concerns brought up by residents living around the NIU Campus lagoon area. She noted she had been contacted recently about activities happening at the lagoon. After investigating, she discovered that there were pesticide application activities being done at the site using toxic substances. The individuals applying the pesticides said they are doing it to reduce algae growth.

Ms. Haji-Sheikh noted that no one in the area was informed of the project and noted that the pesticide that is being used carries a caution that it should not be used near fish nor with aerators. She is concerned given that the lagoon does feed into the Kishwaukee River. She also added that there was a very strong and pervasive smell that accompanied the pesticide application.

She reported that she was shocked that no one had contacted the District even though it is her understanding that the forest preserves were in charge of the waterways. She also added that she had been told by an anonymous source that the South lagoon at the University is constantly being treated for algae as well.

Ms. Fauci noted that all Kishwaukee River waterways would actually not fall into the District's responsibility, but that she should contact the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency.

Ms. Haji-Sheikh added that she also wanted to discuss a series of "improvements" being proposed for the lagoon area that would change the existing flood plain significantly. She noted that the University essentially wants to take an area and make it into a detention pond to pull run off from the nearby farms and to reduce the stress on the FEMA floodplain area.

Ms. Fauci noted that this does seem to affect areas that were in the Greenways and Trails Plan that the county has been involved in. Ms. Haji-Sheikh noted that she felt this was changing that plan substantially without discussion nor notification. Ms. Fauci noted that in this instance, the proper body to go to with these concerns would be DSATS.

Ms. Haji-Sheikh also added that they also seem to want to add roads and housing in the FEMA floodplain area at the back 40. Ms. Fauci asked if they knew if the Army Corps of Engineers had any involvement. Ms. Haji-Sheikh responded that they seem to "sort of" be involved. She went on to add that there were plans for a trail underpass under rail road tracks along the river near Lincoln highway.

Mr. Jones asked if the smell of the pesticide has subsided. Ms. Haji-Sheikh noted that it did go away, but that it took about a week. Mr. Jones also commented the runoff also comes from streets, parking lots, lawns, etc.

Ms. Fauci clarified that the Committee would not actually have any clear role regarding these two actions but noted that it was good to have the information shared publicly. She noted that the Greenways and Trails Plan was just that, a plan with flexibility that might have modifications as time progressed.

Mr. Brown noted that he wanted to discuss a topic related to the recent discussions on environmental education. He noted that he had recently had an opportunity to visit Yosemite and commented on how the National Park Service stressed the importance of outdoor education to empower the general public to appreciate, care for and value public land. He closed by saying he hoped to re-visit the park again when he had more time and also hoped the other Committee members could see the area as well.

Mr. Hannan commented that local citizen and fisherman Jim Dionosopoulos reported a friend who caught a Muskie in the Kishwaukee River near Knute Olson Preserve. To his knowledge, that is the first ever he has heard of a Muskie being caught in the Kishwaukee River.

Ms. Fauci noted that she had recently gotten a batch of Marsh Milkweed (a favorite of Monarch butterflies) and has been distributing it to friends to encourage butterfly habitat and other pollinators.

Ms. Haji-Sheikh noted that she had recently seen a very good program dealing with the declining pollinator and bee populations.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Jones moved to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Gudmunson. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Julia Fauci, Chairperson
Forest Preserve District Committee
JF:kjr



**Public Star Party
September 13, 2014
Afton Forest Preserve**



The Northwest Suburban Astronomers (NSA), in cooperation with the DeKalb County Forest Preserve District, will be hosting a public star party on Saturday, September 13th at Afton Forest Preserve (north entrance) in DeKalb County, Illinois. Look at stars, galaxies, nebulae and star clusters with the help of NSA member telescopes. Observing highlights will be the planets Mars and Saturn (early in the evening), globular clusters M15 and M22, open cluster M11, the Swan Nebula (M17), the Lagoon Nebula (M8) and the Andromeda Galaxy (M31) (late in the evening) among others. A waning gibbous moon will rise at 10:08 p.m. CDT.

Dress for a chilly evening and bring a flashlight covered with red plastic or cellophane (red light preserves your night vision), also insect repellent if needed. Please arrive around 7:30 p.m. (sunset is at 7:08 p.m. CDT) or come early and picnic or hike the trails. You are welcome to bring your own telescope or binoculars. In the event of inclement weather the event will be canceled. There is no cost to attend and no registration is required.

Afton Forest Preserve is located at 13600 Crego Road, DeKalb, Illinois (approximately 1 mile east of Illinois Route 23 and 1 mile south of Perry Road). Please park in the main parking lot and walk to the west where we will be set up.

<http://www.dekalbcounty.org/ForestPreserve/>
<http://www.nsaclub.org/>

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Founded in 2010, Adventure Works strives to make use of the natural environment as a means to a healthy way of living for at-risk youth. Our mission is to **“assist youth in overcoming challenges and becoming healthy adults through adventure-based counseling.”** The use of the natural environment is reflected in the very definition of the work we do:

“Adventure therapy (AT) ... is the prescriptive use of adventure experiences provided by mental health professionals, often **conducted in natural settings** that kinesthetically engage clients on cognitive, affective, and behavioral levels.”

- Gass, Gillis, and Russell, Adventure Therapy Theory, Research and Practice Text, 2012

DeKalb County Forest Preserves certainly assist us in reaching our goals. Since our first youth outing in November 2010 our program uses the forest preserves four to five days per week. Our youth are making survival shelters, building creative river crossings, taking hikes and orienteering through the woods, playing games, building fires, cooking, and many more activities within the preserves. All of these activities assist us in obtaining our clients’ mental health goals.

Within the adventure therapy and outdoor behavioral healthcare field of practice there are two essential components that demand our attention to the environment: environmental education and environmental stewardship. Our educational component include the incorporation of the Leave No Trace Seven Principles, which are integrated in every group we run. The stewardship component includes a programmatic goal of teaching the youth to give back. To meet this goal, our youth and Adventure Works volunteers have participated in prairie restoration, tree planting, clean-up days, as well as most recently writing a youth-led grant to purchase supplies for the installation of several benches this summer.

The biggest impact of our efforts to education and assist youth in becoming good stewards of the environment comes through the consistency in which we expose, educate, and reinforce these principles. The average young person is in our service for six to nine months, but many have a one to two year “length of stay.” This allows Adventure Works staff to teach and reinforce the information 2-3 hours per week, year-round for up to two years.

The long term, consistent exposure to these ideas contributes greatly to healthy living and helps to form life-long positive habits of environmental responsibility. I look forward to many years of teaching and helping to develop environmental stewards in our County, which is just “good medicine” for our vulnerable youth.

August 19, 2014

Terry and Committee,

As we continue to conduct business as usual it has gotten more difficult over the last three years with the reorganization of the University of Illinois Extension. I now cover DeKalb, Boone, and Ogle County. I am enjoying all the amazing new opportunities that have come with the job description change however it has made it difficult to keep up with the educational services we offer our DeKalb County youth. In the past, we have had as many as two full time and three part time people at the Natural Resources Education Center in Russell Woods Forest Preserve.

For many years we have been working, all but summer camp season, with just Connie Handel and myself for environmental education. Though we are getting by there is so much more we could offer through the center. There is such a need for help that if it continues we will have to stop taking so many students during field study seasons as we cannot keep up with demand. Connie already has to turn people down for our classroom recycling program because she can only be so many places by herself. That said we are still averaging somewhere around 4800 kid visits annually. A kid visit could be one hour or we may have them for the whole day. Either way that is a large number. We are gearing up to meet the needs of the new Common Core and new science requirements which will draw many new teachers for field studies once we let them know of our ability to serve that particular need. Teachers often want to pack the buses and bring out three classrooms and without a third staff member that means Connie and I each take a class and a half to do activities. The quality of the program gets thinner the higher the number of young participants, as you can well imagine.

In addition, there are many janitorial and minor building items that we just can't do anymore. In the past I was able to help get quotes for repairs, repair toilets, paint walls in and outside, etc. I spoke with Terry about having forest preserve staff take back the entire building up keep so we can be comfortable asking for tasks to be completed.

I am so grateful for our partnership and in light of education funding I know we could do so much more with the programming for DeKalb County. A new person on board could not only help with those things stated but also help with designing public relations material, design new mini exhibits, help with social media and add new programming for the general public. We could finally become a destination not only an educational field study space.

If anyone wants to talk to me about this matter I would be more than happy to sit down and discuss how we could utilize the much needed addition of a new position.

Best Regards,

Peggy