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DeKalb County Government
Sycamore, Illinois

**Forest Preserve District Committee Minutes
March 18, 2014**

The DeKalb County Forest Preserve District Committee met Tuesday March 18, 2014 at 6:00 pm at Conference Room of the Administration Center. In attendance were committee members: Ms. Fauci, Ms. DeFauw, Mr. Jones, Mr. Cribben, Ms. Haji-Sheikh and Mr. Brown. Mr. Gudmunson was absent. Superintendent Hannan was also in attendance.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Fauci called for a motion to approve the minutes of the February 18, 2014 meeting. Ms. DeFauw moved to approve the minutes, seconded by Ms. Haji-Sheikh and the motion passed unanimously.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Ms. Fauci called for a motion to approve the agenda. Mr. Brown moved to approve the agenda, seconded by Ms. DeFauw and the motion passed unanimously.

2013 BUDGET AMENDMENTS AND TRANSFERS:

Mr. Hannan noted that in the packet is the documentation of the FY 2013 year end budget amendments and transfers and balance the line items in the forest preserve budget. These have been reviewed and approved by the Auditors and Finance Director. Some highlights include the Capitol and Contractual Services section for the expansion of the wetland bank at Afton South Prairie. The “ mitigation banking instrument” has been sent to the Army Corp of Engineers for approval. Ms. Fauci asked how much money the wetland bank has brought to the Forest Preserve District. Mr. Hannan replied that it is over \$1,000,000.00 and has been instrumental in helping the District to pay for past land acquisition grant match funds, wetland bank land, design, construction, maintenance and management, trees, prairie and wetland seed, equipment, etc.

Other budget line items in the Commodities and Services section contains information on sandblasting and painting of the shelter houses at MacQueen and Shabbona preserves, toilet re-hab at Afton and garbage disposal for the remnants of the old garage at MacQueen. There are also funds used for contracting the removal of invasive species (honeysuckle and buckthorn) at County Farm Woods, Nehring and Sannauk

The NREC (Natural Resource Education Center) revenue from program fees and donations and Summer Camps. This is generally about \$25,000.00 per year on average based on usage. There is a reserve fund line to cover expenses in years when they do not achieve the \$25,000.00 expected.

Ms. Haji-Sheikh asked if this then zeros out the budget. Mr. Hannan replied that it does any additional funds go into reserve fund balances..

Mr. Cribben then asked what the NREC acronym stood for. Mr. Hannan replied that it is the Natural Education Resources Center at Russell Woods. Ms. Fauci then related some of the history of how the Center came to be.

Mr. Jones noted that in the past, some of the funding for the NREC came from local school districts, but that now those funds are wholly gone. Mr. Hannan commented that after the school districts pulled out, the Forest Preserve purchased the NREC building for \$1.00 and then partnered with other County agencies and the University of Illinois extension to start programs again the Center.

Mr. Brown noted that Mr. Hannan leveraged those partnerships to take advantage of the U of I matching funds that were more available at that time. Ms. Fauci noted that many surrounding Forest preserves have much more extensive educational programs and facilities. Mr. Brown asked if the District always has just enough to cover the expenses for all needed projects, etc. Mr. Hannan noted that if there are funds that are not used, the money goes into a reserve fund.

Mr. Cribben asked if there were any other places in the agenda where fiscal matters would be discussed as he wants to discuss the landfill expansion fees and how it might be a funding source for the jail expansion and the how the identified \$100,000.00 in fees the District will benefit from will be used.

Ms. Fauci noted that this issue can be taken up during the Committee Members Comments.

Mr. Jones moved to approve the 2013 Budget Amendments and Transfers, seconded by Mr. Cribben and the motion passed unanimously.

BIKE FRIENDLY RESOLUTION:

Ms. Haji-Sheikh began by noting that she is proposing a bike friendly program which would be an extension of similar ideas and plan from the DeKalb County Greenways and Trails Plan document, but expanding on those concepts. She notes that Bike Friendly Community identification can have award tie-ins as well benefits of safety, educational opportunity and connectedness.

She notes that this resolution will help with community safety, encourage healthy lifestyles and ease traffic congestion in addition to improving tourism opportunities. The resolution can also assist with creating wildlife corridors and noted that there may also be grants at play (such as those related to the trail project along the Kishwaukee at NIU).

Ms. Fauci noted that the regional Planning Commission will be setting aside a portion of their meetings each month for discussion of trail planning and use. This Committee is one place where all the municipalities regularly come together and can discuss how to maximize opportunities and funding resources.

Ms. Haji-Sheikh noted that she has held discussions with the Mayor of DeKalb and the DeKalb Police Chief and City Planners, the DeKalb Library and Park District and will begin moving out to other organizations soon to promote this program. She notes that other organizations are working on connections of existing bike routes to allow for more bike and other (walking, running, etc.) traffic.

After meeting with the County Administrator to discuss how to best centralize communications on this program, he recommended that it be taken up in the Forest Preserve Committee primarily – but that Planning and Zoning will have an actionable item on it as well.

Ms. Haji-Sheikh noted that there would be “PedalPal” stickers made available to local businesses to call out that the business is “Bike Friendly” and would be a place where cyclists could ask for assistance, water, directions, etc.

A website has also been developed (funded privately by Ms. Fauci) that could promote businesses that display the sticker and remind citizens of the advantages of bike friendliness.

Ms. Fauci noted that the idea is that this program be fully self-sufficient with very little if any tax dollar involvement.

Mr. Jones asked if this was just adopting a philosophical support for bike friendliness as an extension of the County commitment to Greenways and Trails Plan and not any kind of actual change to the Greenways and Trails Plan document.

Ms. Fauci clarified that the principle action of this program is to establish a place during the Regional Planning Committee meetings to discuss concepts and directions to promote bike friendliness and trail planning.

Mr. Brown asked if this program would somehow diminish the Forest Preserve Districts role as a leader in bike related issues. Ms. Fauci noted that the District has held that role informally for some time. She noted that the inclusion of the Regional Planning Commission simply recognizes that some issues may extend beyond what the District has control of (such as road resurfacing for bike lanes).

Ms. Haji Sheikh noted that there are several problematic spots for bikers such as the corner of Peace Rd and Pleasant St. where a lack of intergovernmental communication in the past made the intersection difficult for bike usage. Ms. Fauci noted that items like that might actually fall also into the DeKalb Sycamore Area Transportation Study, the Federal study to require planning for situations that cross between urban areas. Ms. Fauci noted

that the bike friendliness initiatives will reach farther than the urban areas into the smaller and more remote parts of the County that could benefit from shared communication and opportunities. Ms. Haji-Sheikh reiterated that if any costs were to arise from the program, they would have to be individually considered and approved.

Mr. Jones moved to adopt the Bike Friendly Resolution, seconded by Ms. DeFauw and the motion passed unanimously.

IDNR REPORT ON CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE CONTROL ACTIVITIES:

Mr. Frank Ostling, a wildlife biologist with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources addressed the Committee to report on the current IDNR efforts to manage CWD in DeKalb County.

Mr. Ostling began by noting that the culling activities occur on property the State owns or where they have been granted specific access. They generally begin their program in January, after the end of the public hunting season, and continue through March. This year the activities were again focused in Potawatomi Preserve and the IDNR Kishwaukee Fish and Wildlife area that adjoins it. There was 1 positive test found to date this year in the Kishwaukee F&WA.

He noted that bow hunters in the Kishwaukee area are required to have tissue samples taken on their kills during the hunting season. This provides additional data to the IDNR regarding the prevalence rate of the disease, but unfortunately cooperation with this requirement is not always the best. Firearm hunters are asked to voluntarily provide samples.

Mr. Cribben asked where the tissue sample is taken from. Mr. Ostling replied they take tissue from the brain and lymph nodes. Mr. Cribben commented that some hunters are beginning to believe that CWD is a genetic disorder and that a solution might lie in genetic testing and treatment. Mr. Ostling noted that the disease is not genetically dependent but rather driven by the exchange of prions, even if a resistance was seen to develop in the affected animals it might simply prolong their ability to spread the disease across the landscape as the disease has proven to be 100% fatal once contracted.

Ms. Fauci noted that she had received a recent email from resident and Board member Jeff Metzger asking if the winter weather reduced the deer population and if so, did that help to reduce the concentration of the disease. Mr. Ostling responded that while the harvest this year was down 15% to 20% (similar to reductions in other Midwestern states) that doesn't necessarily mean the herds were reduced. The brutality of the weather this year also reduced the number of hunters out and that might also account for the overall reduction of the harvest. Deer also tend to hunker down in weather like this to conserve their energy resources. This lack of movement could also have contributed to the reduction. While this can vary greatly from woodlot to woodlot, aerial herd count surveys of the County actually look almost the same over a 2 year period.

Mr. Ostling reported that the disease has spread to Will and Jo Davies Counties and has also been seen in LaSalle. Ms. Fauci asked if DeKalb was still a central spot for the disease. Mr. Ostling replied that the highest prevalence rates currently exist along the Boone/Winnebago county line and extends south into northwest DeKalb county.

Ms. Haji-Sheikh asked what the IDNR looks for when determining which animals to cull. Mr. Ostling replied that they cannot make any determinations on a simple visual, as animals with the disease have a period where they look perfectly healthy – so they must take a random sampling. He noted there are two methods of approach IDNR uses to address the disease. The first is disease management and the second is disease surveillance. Management primarily works to reduce herd density where prevalence rates indicate a higher rate of the disease is present, while surveillance relates to where there is a lighter degree of disease existence. If a positive sample appears in a new location, they may look to collect additional samples from the surrounding area to better understand the rate at which the disease is present. Once a positive is located, additional sampling may be necessary.

Ms. Haji-Sheikh asked what happens to the animals that test negative. Mr. Ostling replied that there is a food processing plant in Rockford that prepares the food for the Northern Illinois Food Bank once it has been fully tested and cleared.

If a hunter has a positive sample, they ask them to confirm the location of where the deer was taken and then offer to dispose of the meat and will reimburse them up to \$75 in processing costs if incurred as well as offering a free hunting permit for the next year.

He noted that the Center for Disease Control recommends that meat that tests positive for CWD not be eaten. However, he noted that people make varied decisions on that.

Ms. Haji-Sheikh asked how long it takes for the test results to be known. Mr. Ostling said it tends to be 2 to 3 weeks (though the Northern areas tend to be done first). He reminded the Committee that since there is no specific preclusion against eating the meat-the testing is not done for food safety purposes.

Mr. Brown asked if the primary objective was containment, not elimination off the disease. Mr. Ostling replied that elimination of the disease is not realistic. The efforts of the IDNR can point to low prevalence rates and that the spread of the disease remains slow. They would like to believe that in time, further research may afford better options (inoculations, etc.).

Ms. Fauci asked what they have heard from Wisconsin where containment efforts were stopped. Mr. Ostling replied that their prevalence rates have been rising.

Ms. Haji-Sheikh asked if CWD was a single species prion. Mr. Ostling replied that it can affect white tailed deer, mule deer, elk and moose, and there are other variants that affect mink and sheep as well. He noted that there is no current proof that the disease can be

contracted by humans, the more disease that spreads across the landscape the greater the possibility of a jump between species.

Ms. Fauci asked if there were a vector animal identified that might transmit to humans. Mr. Ostling replied there was no indication that there was.

Ms. Fauci reminded the Committee that it has generally handled approval for the IDNR activities on District land by an annual consensus. Since the program has been done very safely and does seem to be effective, this has always seemed to prove adequate.

Mr. Ostling noted that they are in their 12th year with the program and safety for County residents and visitors is their first and foremost concern. Ms. DeFauw noted that she recalled they always alert the County Sheriff when they will be conducting their activities. Mr. Ostling noted that they always keep the Sheriff's and the land owners well informed.

Mr. Cribben asked if they use helicopters for aerial surveillance only or if they ever herd the deer. Mr. Ostling replied that they do not and that the aerial surveys only begin after 4 to 5 inches of snow are on the ground and during daylight hours. The IDNR culling happens at night and well after the helicopters have finished their work for the day.

Mr. Ostling thanked the Committee for having him here to give his report and noted that he would be happy to speak to anyone about the program and the IDNR's efforts.

Ms. Fauci thanks Mr. Ostling for his time and asked how the winter had effected other wildlife. Mr. Ostling replied that while it was brutal, the nesting season is actually the most dangerous time. A winter like this won't make it easy, but disruptions during nesting season can have the greater toll.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS:

Mr. Hannan began by addressing Mr. Cribben's earlier questions regarding the host fee agreement with the County. He noted that years ago discussions on this went back to conversations he held with former County Administrator Ray Bockman. Mr. Bockman had asked what the District would be interested in. He had noted that since Waste Management called themselves "an environmental service company" that perhaps there might be some interest in funding environmental education and natural resource programs.

These discussions were also occurring when the U of I was in the throes of their budget reductions and difficulties and there was some doubt about the future of natural resource center staff employment with the U of I Extension. One thought was that funds might be used to offset resource center staff wages and benefits if staff positions were moved over to the County.

Mr. Hannan also looked at other forest preserve district in Illinois educational program resources and facilities and noted that DeKalb was at the low end and resources might be

helpful in expanding opportunities for the residents. He noted that another offer had been for the District to take over the landfill after its future closure, but that will have to be decided well into the future..

Mr. Jones asked where the \$100,000.00 for the District was coming from. Mr. Hannan noted that the intention was to earmark the money from landfill funds to the forest preserve district. Mr. Cribben then noted that this was money that could not then be re-routed to support the jail expansion. Mr. Jones asked if, in theory, the District could elect to give the money over for jail expansion. Ms. Fauci noted that the Host Fee agreement was negotiated they were in a very advantageous position and re-opening it to re-allocate money might not have a good result.

Mr. Brown noted that back when the U of I was doing their matching funds process, there was a letter from the U of I dean of the College of Agriculture expressing concern that some entities were taking advantage of the agreements. A decision was made by the Forest Preserve District to be extremely transparent and the District became a model for the way U of I wanted to deal with other Counties.

Ms. Fauci noted that her feelings were very strong that environmental education is critical to the County and to the Forest Preserve mission and she hoped that the other Commissioners would fight to retain the \$100,000.00 for the District.

Ms. DeFauw noted that Ms. Doty and her staff are extraordinarily stretched with what they can accomplish at the NREC.

Ms. Haji-Sheikh noted that if the landfill expansion could be shown to have this educational aspect, it might help in defusing some off the issues that have come up.

Ms. Fauci noted that the Committee can certainly continue discussions on this. Mr. Jones noted that what the jail expansion needs far exceeds what \$100,000.00 could accomplish.

Ms. Fauci then closed by noting that she would be drafting a letter to the Cook County Forest Preserve District in November to commemorate its 100th anniversary.

GENERAL DISCUSSION:

Mr. Hannan noted that there was a report in the monthly packets on the Maple Syrup event at the NREC as well as other activities that have occurred. He commented that he and the staff would be starting prairie burns as soon as weather permitted. He went on to note the birding information in the packet and bird watching is very popular in the U.S. and that a great many participants use the Preserves for that activity. He noted that there had been Sandhill Cranes and a Bald Eagle spotted in Afton recently.

Resident grade school student Hunter Swanson from Genoa will be heading to Springfield to receive an award for his Miller-Ellwood cabin history project.

He noted that the Shabbona to Chief Shabbona to Shabbona lake to Shabbona School and Village of Shabbona trail discussions are continuing and that he recently received a letter

from the Clean Energy Foundation that images of the Prairie Oaks preserve would be used in their new brochure. He noted that the Northern Illinois Trail Runners want to hold a fundraiser and assist the Kishwaukee Sunrise Rotary fundraising for the trail from Genoa to Russell Woods and west. The annual “Hustle at Russell” Trail Run and Walk to support St. Mary’s school that will be held on Saturday, April 12, 2014.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Jones moved to adjourn, seconded by Ms. Haji-Sheikh. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Julia Fauci, Chairperson
Forest Preserve District Committee
JF:kjr