

# STRATEGIC PLAN 2020 - 2024

Champaign County Forest Preserve District



## INTRODUCTION

Through a series of meetings and discussions beginning in autumn 2018, the Champaign County Forest Preserve District undertook a participatory strategic planning process which included board, staff, and the public. This new five-year plan builds on the work done by the District in 2014 when the 2015-2019 Strategic Plan was developed through an intensive, facilitator-led process.

Strategic planning is an organizational management activity that is used to set priorities, focus energy and resources, ensure that staff and other stakeholders are working toward common goals, and establish agreement around intended outcomes and results. A good strategic plan should serve as a road map that shapes and guides what an organization is, who it serves, what it does, and why it does it, with a focus on the future.

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 of the District's resource base.

Over the years, the District's mission has remained substantially the same. Our goal is still to provide exceptional experiences in nature for our county's residents and visitors. Our six preserves – Homer Lake, Lake of the Woods, Middle Fork River, River Bend, Sangamon River, and the Kickapoo Rail Trail – belong to you, the residents of Champaign County. This plan is our promise to you to protect them, and the natural and cultural resources located within them, to the best of our abilities.



## VISION

**Protecting Nature. Creating Connections.**

## MISSION

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

## OUTCOMES [defining and expanding on the [vision](#)]

**Environmental  
Benefits**

**Connection to  
Nature**

**Appreciation for  
Grand Prairie  
Heritage**

**Organizational  
Excellence**



*Environmental benefits for the community and planet*

- Large, landscape scale preserves
- Ecosystem services for the community and the planet
- Diverse habitats for wildlife
- Clean air and clean water



*Connection to nature*

- People of all ages, abilities, cultures, and ethnicities connect to the natural world
- Outdoor recreation at Champaign County's forest preserves offers a deeper immersion into the natural world
- Ecosystems support human existence and quality of life



## *Knowledge of and appreciation for the Grand Prairie landscape and heritage*

- The story and evolution of the Grand Prairie landscape is interwoven with the stories of those who resided here throughout time; stories are told with both perspectives taken into account
- Thorough research, culturally sensitive interpretation, consideration of varying perspectives, and extensive outreach will govern our natural and cultural education efforts
- Throughout the district, we share the story of Champaign County through a variety of interpretive media, but with one consistent message
- Our museum collections afford greater discovery, communication, and interpretation of our natural and cultural heritage



## *Organizational excellence*

- We have a conservation responsibility to Champaign County taxpayers
- We are a sustainable, ethical organization that lives within our financial means; we are good stewards of the community's trust
- We are innovative and seek opportunities to partner with other organizations to advance common goals
- Our organization reflects the changing composition of our Champaign County community
- Our human capital is our strongest organizational asset



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES [defining and articulating the mission]

Protect Conserve Preserve Steward	Connect Land Connect People	Educate Inspire Lead	Promote Healthy Lifestyles through Recreation	Achieve Organizational Excellence
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### *Protect | Conserve | Preserve | Steward*

- Acquire land through a proactive, yet strategic, planning process
- Care for existing land by employing science-based land management practices
- Research, evaluate, and expand efforts to protect and promote resilient ecosystems so that they may continue to support biodiversity under the threat of changing climate conditions
- Broaden and expand land stewardship through volunteer programming and the use of available technology
- Maintain our existing infrastructure and improve facilities to meet community needs
- Use best industry practices to guide the care of our natural and cultural history collections



### *Connect Land | Connect People*

- Deepen connections to Champaign County's forest preserves through an array of recreational, educational, and cultural experiences
- Pursue cultural competency in both our internal and external endeavors as an organization
- Nurture a welcoming environment by embracing diversity, equity, and inclusion; those values will guide our decisions, policies, and practices
- Provide information to the public about conservation efforts at Champaign County's forest preserves
- Identify and pursue projects that enhance regional connectivity of open space, trails
- Investigate and pursue all available resources to ensure public awareness of sites, facilities, programs
- Evaluate and adjust services as necessary to meet evolving community interests and needs



### ***Educate | Inspire | Lead***

- Provide positive learning experiences for people of all ages and abilities, following best practices, most current research, and innovative interpretive and educational techniques
- Interpret the interrelationship between the natural and cultural history of the Grand Prairie Region by highlighting the connections between plants, animals, and people
- Inspire visitors to make a connection between their own personal history and the history of the community and local environment through District collections, exhibits, and programs
- Invite visitors to enjoy recreational and educational experiences to inspire their engagement in conservation, preservation, and stewardship of natural and cultural resources
- Partner with community organizations to expand programming that reaches underserved audiences
- Provide leadership in educational, fact-based messaging to involve the public in climate resiliency efforts



### ***Promote Healthy Lifestyles through Recreation***

- Promote outdoor recreation that is compatible with our land management practices and natural beauty of the land
- Provide accessible recreation options and remove barriers to participation so that all individuals can experience nature, regardless of capability
- Promote the benefits of open space and access to nature for physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health
- Develop recreation options that reflect diverse cultural relationships to the land



### ***Achieve Organizational Excellence***

- Increase financial resources to optimize the organizational mission
- Hire and retain high quality staff
- Pursue budget and audit excellence through government finance certification processes
- Invest in capacity to meet growing technology demands

- Enhance employee satisfaction, skills, and productivity through relevant and enriching training opportunities
- Support the employee experience through competitive pay and benefits, a safe and healthy working environment, and meaningful recognition initiatives
- Foster and facilitate active and transparent communication among staff at all levels and between the organization and the public at large
- Demonstrate environmental leadership; reduce our impact on the environment by implementing sustainable practices; balance financial resources with environmental stewardship goals

