2012 Annual Report
From the President

On behalf of the Board of Commissioners and Champaign County Forest Preserve District (CCFPD) staff, I am pleased to present you with the 2012 Annual Report. This report provides an update on the District’s projects and programs and highlights the Forest Preserve District’s finances for the fiscal year.

We had a very successful 2012. The CCFPD had the opportunity to develop, protect and enhance many places and programs throughout Champaign County. Three of our largest projects are the Museum of the Grand Prairie Education Center, Possibility Pier at River Bend and Homer Lake Natural Playscape. These are now completed and being enjoyed by many users.

Conservation of natural areas and land acquisition remained a high priority for the District in 2012. We restored several acres of prairie, planted many trees, and continued to manage our lands using the best management practices. We added two small parcels of pristine land near our Middle Fork River and Homer Lake Forest Preserves. Much of our success is from the many grants and donations we received.

We are looking forward to even more successes in 2013 and 2014. You will notice improvements and upgrades at our facilities and sites. Including a brand new golf simulator at Lake of the Woods, new exhibits at the Homer Lake Interpretive Center and the Museum of the Grand Prairie, upgrades at our Middle Fork Campground, and the ever changing landscape in the Mabery Gelvin Botanical Garden. I look forward to another great year and hope to see you on the trails.

Sincerely,
Dr. Chris White
President
Champaign County Forest Preserve District

From the Executive Director

It is easy to compile an Annual Report. You simply look back over the year and highlight your accomplishments. More difficult to highlight, however, are the unique and positive experiences that people have because of these great accomplishments. Much of what the Forest Preserve District offers turns into a treasured lifelong memory for those who visit our sites.

We have fostered strong friendships between young children attending educational programs. We have been inspired by people who use our trails daily as part of their cardiac rehabilitation program. We have witnessed the complete awe of a child standing among the chorus of thousands of frogs. And we cherish when friends share their stories of wildlife they have encountered. All of these were unplanned events that centered on CCFPD opportunities.

There is no doubt that 2012 was a year of great accomplishments for us. We will continue to provide high quality areas, programs and facilities for you and your family to enjoy so that you may make your own memories.

Sincerely,
Daniel J. Olson
Executive Director
Champaign County Forest Preserve District
New multi-purpose bike trail at Lake of the Woods
The Forest Preserve District and the Village of Mahomet completed the first stage of a multi-purpose path to link the north and south parts of the community. When the bridge portion is completed by IDOT, the path will provide safe crossing of I-74 and connect Barber Park to Lake of the Woods.

Possibility Pier at River Bend completed
The 420-foot universally accessible fishing pier provides unique on-the-water fishing, picnicking, and wildlife viewing opportunities while creating a completely accessible “water trail” across one of the most picturesque lakes in Champaign County.

Natural Playscape at Homer Lake opening
Homer Lake’s newest feature opened this past summer, to the enjoyment of many. It is the first of its kind in Champaign County, and includes the popular Crawdad Creek, Stump Jump, Boulder Bluff, and more! Bronze leaves honor donors who support this fabulous project connecting kids to nature.

Golf Simulator available at Lake of the Woods Golf Course
Lake of the Woods Golf Course purchased a TruGolf Simulator in October 2012. The TruGolf simulator has a highly accurate swing analyzer which gives feedback to improve your golf game. Players can choose to practice on the range, chip and putt, or play 9 or 18 holes on over 20 world class courses.

Museum of the Grand Prairie Education Center opening
A $500,000 Illinois Public Museum Capital Grant provided a portion of the funding for the construction of the new Education Center. Linking the existing museum building to the annex offices, the new addition provides much-needed classroom space, a state-of-the-art collections processing and storage area, and public restroom facilities.

Land Acquisitions
- Sylvester Woods adds six acres to Homer Lake preserve.
- Five acres added to Middle Fork River preserve along the river.
**Natural Resources**

A Schoolyard Habitat Action Grant in the amount of $994 from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) helped to fund the purchase of native prairie forbs and grasses, as well as native trees and shrubs for the landscape surrounding the Natural Playscape at Homer Lake.

Funding provided by the Metropolitan Mayor’s Caucus in the amount of $6,263 allowed for the development of an Emerald Ash Borer management plan and a stem-by-stem inventory of trees located in the user areas of all preserves.

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**Museum and Education**

A grant in the amount of $5,978 from the National Endowment for the Humanities allowed museum staff to purchase storage shelving components and supplies for packing and storing artifacts in the new collections room at the Museum of the Grand Prairie.

An IDNR Public Museum Capital Grant in the amount of $57,571 will fund the upcoming renovation of the main gallery in the museum. “The Grand Prairie Story” will occupy the space currently containing “Prairie Stories” and will expand upon that theme to match the expanded museum vision.

A $2,000 IDNR Wildlife Preservation Grant will be used to create a new “Prairies” exhibit at the Homer Lake Interpretive Center.

A grant of $5,000 from the Illinois Humanities Council will fund a community forum in 2013 focusing on issues related to children and nature-deficit disorder. Funds will cover a portion of the cost of the forum’s keynote speaker, Richard Louv, whose book Last Child in the Woods brought national attention to this growing concern.

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**Sites and Facilities**

A Recreational Trails Program grant of $614,275 secured from IDNR will be used toward the acquisition of the Kickapoo Rail-Trail. All necessary funding has now been secured for the trail acquisition with the closing anticipated in 2013.

The Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation and the Forest Preserve Friends Foundation each donated $17,500 to acquire a five-acre addition to the Middle Fork River Forest Preserve. The acreage is critical to the continued protection of the Middle Fork River and several rare aquatic plant and animal species.
It’s amazing to see how volunteers can impact an organization! In 2012, individuals and groups volunteered for more than 3,466 hours between April and December. Of those 3,466 hours, Trail Stewards spent 257 removing litter, pruning overgrowth and removing invasive species from CCFPD’s 33.84 miles of trails. Volunteers at the Museum of the Grand Prairie volunteered 2,416 hours of their time!

Several volunteer projects were completed by groups and individuals this year. Catholic Heart Work Camp spent four days this summer painting the museum. Another CHWC group spent four days at Homer Lake cutting honeysuckle, scraping and painting railings, and cleaning out gutters. We also had groups from U of I come out in December to clean up Stidham Woods. Alternative Spring Break sent members to clean up litter, and a group of NRES grad students cut honeysuckle. Kyle Appelquist completed his Eagle Scout Project with CCFPD. He organized a project to install bike racks at Buffalo Trace, and was able to get donated labor and materials to complete the project. The new bike racks look great, and I am sure will be well used.

This is only a small summary of the things volunteers have done for us in the past year. In reality, volunteers are involved in every aspect of CCFPD, and it seems that no amount of words could adequately sum up the impact they have had on our success.

Staff Transitions

Many changes have taken place over the last 18 months at the District!

Retirements
• Jerry Pagac as Executive Director after six years with the District.
• Cheryl Kennedy as Director of the Museum of the Grand Prairie after 35 years with the museum.
• Chuck Woollen from the Lake of the Woods Golf Course where he spent 30 years as a maintenance worker III.
• Andee Chestnut, Public Relations Director after 20 years of service.
• Charlsie Tice had 25 years of service at the Museum of the Grand Prairie.

Promotions
• Dan Olson stepped in as the new Executive Director.
• Mary Ellen Wuellner is the new Deputy Executive Director.
• Mike Daab was promoted to Natural Resources Director.
• Clint Schaffer moved to the Lake of the Woods Golf Course as Assistant Golf Director.

New Hires
• Lisa Sprinkle joined the Marketing team as Marketing Coordinator.
• Taylor Dunne and Jacob Pruiett joined the Natural Resource Department as Natural Resource Technicians.
• Kelsey Hieke became the new Volunteer Coordinator.
• Megan McKenna started as the Administrative Assistant/Marketing Coordinator.
• Doug Sanders was hired as the new Site Superintendent for Lake of the Woods/River Bend/Sangamon River.
• Tammy Bruehl joined the operations staff for Lake of the Woods/River Bend/Sangamon River as a maintenance worker I.
• Katie Riopelle was hired as the Public Programs/Visitor Services Coordinator and Valerie Hall started as the new Education Program Specialist for the Museum of the Grand Prairie.
• Gretchen Winkler and Barbara Cressman started as Customer Service/Retail Associates at the Museum of the Grand Prairie.
• Clint Stigall joined the Construction Department as a Construction Worker II.
• Betty Strom was hired as the Purchasing Assistant.
Lake of the Woods Golf Course

We had great weather in 2012 and our overall play increased by 1,566 rounds over the previous year. Revenue increased over $63,000.00 for a 9.3% rise. We had 257 more players in our outings, which increased the outing revenue more than $2,900.00. 2012 Tournament totals were up with 613 players and $30,395.00 in tournament revenue. Late in October we installed the first indoor golf simulator ever at Lake of the Woods Golf Course. Simulator usage has steadily increased as the year ended.

Museum & Education Department

By the Numbers

Visitation at the Homer Lake Interpretive Center (HLIC) was at an all-time high for 2012, with record numbers visiting the center between March and May, and overall visitation topping 2,500 for the year. The increase in visitors was due in part to enhanced promotional efforts, as well as the intrigue of the Natural Playscape, which really took shape in the spring of 2012. Of the total attendance, 86% were from Champaign County, 9% from other Illinois counties, and 4% from other states and countries.

At the Museum of the Grand Prairie (MGP), visitation totaled 7,283 visitors. These visitors spent $8,352.60 at the gift shop. Donations at both facilities totaled $3,711.

In 2012, the Museum and Education staff reached 7,841 students through a mix of on-site and in-school programming, while another 6,376 individuals attended public programs at all district sites. Combining those numbers with facility visitation, the department reached more than 24,000 people in 2012!

Programming Highlights

Self-guided programming was enhanced in 2012 through the addition of new geocache and letterbox trails at Homer Lake. GPS units are now available for visitor use at the HLIC. Homer Lake was also designated as an IDNR Access to Fishing site; visitors can borrow fishing equipment for the day and a basic tackle packet to try their luck.

At the MGP, new educational programs included African-Americans in Champaign County and Famous Women, Near and Far for gradeschool audiences, while website additions on Oral Histories and Writing Historic Tales will extend the reach of exhibits and programs.

Collections

In 2012, the HLIC began to catalog its biofacts (biological artifacts) while the MGP began a re-inventory process, completed once every ten years. More than 23,000 items are being counted, having their condition checked and, for the first time, barcodes are being added to the artifacts to aid in all future inventories.

Middle Fork Campground

Despite an incredibly dry year in central Illinois and above average temperatures, the campground located at the Middle Fork River Forest Preserve had higher than expected numbers, keeping on track with the five year average. Numbers have continued to grow each year at the campground, with advanced reservations and longer stays increasing more than we have seen in the past.

Many improvements

• Online reservation system – The ability for users to make their reservations online has improved efficiencies with bookings and other campground management practices. It is more convenient for the user to make reservations and easier for the staff to manage reservations more efficiently.

• Campground host cabin - Located inside the campground, the host cabin increases staff reliability for camper and visitor needs. The cabin houses our campground naturalist, whose weekend environmental education sessions each weekend throughout the summer months has become one of the most requested activities in the campground.

With hiking, fishing, weekend educational sessions and so many other activities to be enjoyed by children and adults, the Harry L. Swartz campground at the Middle Fork River Forest Preserve continues to be a popular destination for campers and all visitors.
The Natural Resources Department got an early start on ecological restoration in 2012. Most of the nearly 40 acres of planned prairie restoration sites were planted within the first week of the year. Planting sites included the northwest corner of Homer Lake Forest Preserve, an additional 7 acres in the heart of Buffalo Trace in Mahomet, and several smaller sites at the Sangamon River Forest Preserve.

The Collins Pond area of Homer Lake Forest Preserve was the focus of much of the NR department’s efforts in 2012. Staff removed invasive bush honeysuckle and thinned sugar maple and black cherry trees in order to protect the high quality oak-hickory woodland on site. Reed canarygrass was reduced at the pond shoreline and adjacent open areas, and preparation continues to replace the invasive species with native plants in coming years. A 3.2 acre area south of the parking lot that just years ago was a jungle of invasive shrubs has been planted with a mix of native tree and shrub species. Additional native woodland plant species seed was added to the more mature lines of trees framing the site. Finally, several young several oak and hickory species of different sizes were planted at the site.

The unprecedented warm spring seemed to give invasive plants an unneeded boost, and so much time was spent mowing, spraying, and pulling weeds in 2012. Over six tons of garlic mustard were removed from CCFPD natural areas.

Prescribed burning was utilized on over 300 acres in 2012, with most success occurring in the spring.
In 2012 the District received $4,978,557 in revenues, 64% of which came from property and replacement tax revenues. The District expended $5,250,228 of its funds, with capital projects at 31% being the largest share. The District expended $271,738 more than it gained in revenues, which was a planned fund balance reduction due to the Museum of the Grand Prairie addition.

Major expenditures for 2012 included:

- $991,607 to build the Education & Collections Center at the Museum of the Grand Prairie
- $78,498 to purchase 12 acres for Homer Lake and Middle Fork Preserves
- $68,250 to complete the River Bend Pier Project
- $52,067 to complete the Natural Playscape at Homer Lake