

The Leaflet



Grant Awarded to Enhance Stargazing Amenities at the International Dark Sky Park



RIVER TO RAIL RIDE SEPTEMBER 10, 2022 • KENNEKUK COUNTY PARK

Ride the Kickapoo Rail Trail with three SAG-supported routes: 63-mile, 37-mile, and a 30-mile out and back. An additional 7.5-mile route will stay inside Kennekuk County Park. Registration opens at 7AM ~ Hideaway Shelter, Kennekuk County Park. More information can be found at www.RivertoRailRide2022.eventbrite.com or call 217-442-1691. **All proceeds to benefit the Kickapoo Rail Trail**

The Champaign County Forest Preserve District (CCFPD) was awarded \$294,000 in grant funding by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) Open Space Land Acquisition and Development (OSLAD) Grant Program to support the construction of a dark sky trail and amenities at Middle Fork River Forest Preserve in Penfield, Illinois.

Middle Fork is the largest preserve in Champaign County and is a popular camping and hiking destination. It also boasts some of darkest skies in the county, making conditions optimal for stargazing, and in 2018, was recognized as an International Dark Sky Park, the first and only in Illinois. Since then, Middle Fork's visitation has significantly increased, and the park later won Visit Champaign County's 2021 Tourism Impact Award for its expanding role in local astro-tourism.

Champaign County Forest Preserve District staff have collaborated with local stargazing enthusiasts to make Middle Fork River Forest Preserve a stargazing destination. Champaign-Urbana Astronomical Society (CUAS) Founder David Leake said CUAS is "excited to work with the Champaign County Forest Preserve District to expand the dark sky adventure at the Middle Fork River Forest Preserve."

The grant from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources will help CCFPD continue to leverage the Middle Fork's unique assets. Plans include constructing a dark sky trail with dark-sky-friendly lighting, trail nodes for stargazing, an observatory where visitors can set up their own telescopes, an open-air shelter, a small parking lot, expanded campgrounds, and a nature play area. In addition to enhancing its stargazing amenities, the award will help Champaign County Forest Preserve District

meet the high demand for hiking trails and improve ADA accessibility. Construction is anticipated to start in 2023.

"We are thrilled to receive this grant and enhance the experience we offer visitors to our dark sky preserve. Middle Fork River Forest Preserve is the ideal place to marvel at the night sky, and these improvements will make stargazing and our preserve more accessible to everyone," said Lorrie Pearson, Executive Director.

The Champaign County Forest Preserve District strives to connect people with their natural world. Funding from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources Open Space Land Acquisition and Development Grant Program will help the District make Middle Fork River Forest Preserve's dark sky viewing experience more accessible and enjoyable.

PROGRAMS & VIRTUAL EVENTS

See the full program descriptions online, ccfpd.org

● AUGUST ●

Friday, August 12
WALK WITH A NATURALIST
Interpretive Center, Homer Lake Forest Preserve, 10-11:30 a.m.

All ages. Children must be accompanied by an adult. FREE. Space is limited; registration required by August 11 at ccfpd.org.

Saturday, August 13
COMMUNITY CONVERSATION: EXPLORING LOCAL AFRICAN AMERICAN ORAL HISTORIES FROM THE DORIS HOSKINS COLLECTION
Champaign Public Library - Douglass Branch, 504 E. Grove St., Champaign, IL 61820, 2-3:30 p.m. FREE.

Sunday, August 14
CCFPD SUMMER CONCERT SERIES
SUMMER GARDEN CONCERT: THE HOOD FAMILY BAND
Mabery Gelvin Botanical Garden, Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve, 5-7 p.m. FREE.

Friday, August 19
HOMESCHOOLERS CREATE REPURPOSED MASTERPIECES FOR EARTH DAY IS EVERY DAY
Museum of the Grand Prairie, Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve, 10-11:30 a.m.
Kids aged 5-14 with an adult can register. Registration required by August 15 at ccfpd.org. \$3 per child, space is limited.

Saturday, August 20
KIDS CREATE REPURPOSED MASTERPIECES FOR EARTH DAY IS EVERY DAY
Museum of the Grand Prairie, Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve, 1-2:30 p.m.
Kids aged 5-14 with an adult can register. Registration required by August 15 at ccfpd.org. \$3 per child, space is limited.

Tuesday, August 23
SPECIAL EXHIBIT SPEAKER SERIES "THEY NEVER ASK YOU! THEY JUST TELL YOU AFTER IT'S DONE:" STERILIZATION ABUSE & HISTORIES OF RESISTANCE
Online Event, Streaming on the Museum of the Grand Prairie Facebook & YouTube pages, 7 p.m.
This program is supported in part by our friends at Illinois Humanities. FREE.

Wednesday, August 24
BATS AT THE BRIDGE
Museum of the Grand Prairie Education Center, Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve, 7-8:30 p.m.
Recommended for ages 6 and up. Children must be accompanied by an adult. FREE. Space is limited; registration required by August 23 at ccfpd.org.

Friday, August 26
SUNSET PADDLE
Walnut Hill Boat Launch, Homer Lake Forest Preserve, 6-8 p.m.
All equipment will be provided; please wear close-toed shoes and bring something to drink. Ages 13 and up; adults must accompany participants under 18. \$16 per canoe; each canoe seats 2-3 people. If you wish to bring your own canoe or kayak, contact jwick@ccfpd.org to receive a discounted fee. Space is limited. Registration required by August 24 at ccfpd.org.

Saturday, August 27
CCFPD SUMMER CONCERT SERIES
MUSIC AT MIDDLE FORK: ONE FOOT IN
Sugar Creek Shelter, Middle Fork River Forest Preserve, 5-7 p.m.
FREE. Programs may be altered or cancelled due to weather.

● SEPTEMBER ●

Thursday, September 1 - Friday, September 30
STORYWALK®: WATER ROLLS, WATER RISES (El Agua Rueda, el Agua Sube)
Timberdoodle Trail, Homer Lake Forest Preserve, Daily During Preserve Open Hours
Visit any time during preserve open hours. FREE. All ages.

Saturday, September 10
WELCOME TO THE PRAIRIE
Museum of the Grand Prairie, Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.
All ages. FREE. This event was formerly known as Prairie Stories.

Thursday, September 22
EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT BLOODSUCKERS WITHOUT A BACKBONE: MOSQUITOES & TICKS
Salt Fork Center, Homer Lake Forest Preserve, 6:30-8 p.m.
Program will have indoor and outdoor components. Recommended for ages 6 and up. Children must be accompanied by an adult. FREE. Space is limited; registration required by September 21 at ccfpd.org.

Thursday, September 22
SPECIAL EXHIBIT SPEAKER SERIES
HISTORY OF THE C-U PUBLIC HEALTH DISTRICT
Online Event, Streaming on the Museum of the Grand Prairie Facebook & YouTube pages, 7-8 p.m. FREE.

Friday, September 23-Friday October 14
TAKE A CHILD OUTSIDE WEEK
TRAIL TRACKDOWN
Site-wide, Homer Lake Forest Preserve, Daily During Preserve Open Hours
Take a Child Outside (TACO) week is September 24-30th, and we have a challenge that will get you outside and exploring at Homer Lake Forest Preserve. A special trail map will be available for pickup in the brochure holders at the Interpretive Center. This trail trackdown will take you all over the preserve, including Collins Pond and Hidden Acres. Trail markers will be placed along the trails, and a punch card will be included to help you track your adventure. Bring the completed punch card in to the Interpretive Center during open hours for a prize! This self-guided activity will be set up beginning on September 23 through October 14. Visit any time during preserve open hours. FREE. All Ages.

Saturday, September 24, 2022- Saturday, April 8, 2023
WONDERS OF THE WETLAND: THIRTY-TWO PHOTOS IN CELEBRATION OF THE HOMER LAKE WETLAND EXHIBIT OPENING
Interpretive Center, Homer Lake Forest Preserve, During Regular Open Hours
The Homer Lake wetland was nonexistent sixteen years ago and bears testimony to the vision, planning and hard work of CCFPD staff as well as the resiliency of nature as it now thrives with an astounding diversity of life. In this exhibit, Doug Mills shares his photos, along with accompanying video and website, to reveal some of the beauty and intricacy of the lives of the creatures that now depend on this habitat.

Doug Mills is an East Central Illinois Master Naturalist who enjoys photography as a means to capture and share glimpses of the goodness, truth and beauty in the amazing world around us.

Saturday, September 24
TAKE A CHILD OUTSIDE WEEK! Harvest the Garden
Museum of the Grand Prairie Discovery Garden, 10-11 a.m.
A scavenger hunt, games and some corn-based food samples will be enjoyed! \$5 per child with adult. Registration required by September 20 at ccfpd.org. Space is limited.

Saturday, September 24
STARWATCH
North Waterfowl Management Area, Middle Fork River Forest Preserve, 7:30 p.m.-12 a.m.
FREE. All ages. Register by September 23 at ccfpd.org to receive updates.

*In the event of inclement weather/overcast skies, the event may be cancelled. Cancellation notices will be made on the 217-351-2567 number answering machine and on our Facebook pages, AT LEAST two hours prior to the program start time, and registered participants will be notified via email.

Friday, September 30
HEALING HEARTS COMMUNITY COLLAGE OPENING
Museum of the Grand Prairie, 5:30-7 p.m.
Join us for the opening of the Healing Hearts Community Collage with artist Cindy Sampson and Champaign County Community Member Contributors.

Friday, September 30
WALK WITH A NATURALIST
Interpretive Center, Homer Lake Forest Preserve, 6:30-8 p.m.
All ages. FREE. Space is limited; registration required by September 29 at ccfpd.org. Children must be accompanied by an adult. All attendees (adults and children) must register in advance.

NEW SUPERINTENDENTS



Rusty Maulding started as the Lake of the Woods Site Superintendent in April. Rusty joins the CCFPD team with over 25 years' experience in landscaping and horticulture, as well as 20 years of complex project management and supervisory experience. Rusty has always had a passion for green spaces, a passion which led to the establishment of Nature's View, Inc.—the landscaping business he's owned and operated with his spouse—in 2011. In addition to being a successful business owner, Rusty also brings multiple years' experience serving on various community boards and advisory committees, including serving as president of the Illinois Landscape Contractors Association from 2015-2016. Over the past 15 years Rusty has deepened his understanding and appreciation for native plants and looks forward to using his knowledge to improve the health of the natural areas entrusted to the stewardship of the CCFPD team. Rusty earned his Bachelor of Science in Ornamental Horticulture from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.



Capital Projects 2022

As work winds down on early summer work at the forest preserves, new projects are starting to take shape. The renovation of Willow Pond at the Middle Fork River Forest Preserve is wrapping up, new water fountains have



been installed at Middle Fork, and roads at the Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve have been resurfaced. Currently, a new stretch of the Kickapoo Rail Trail is being constructed in Ogden. Although it will not immediately connect to existing trail, the 1.5 mile trail will provide recreational and safe pedestrian transportation opportunities to Ogden residents. Staff are working towards securing funding to complete the gap between St. Joseph and Ogden.



Skylar Smith joined the District as our new Homer Lake Site Superintendent in June. Skylar earned his B.S. in Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 2016 and, since that time, he was employed full-time with U.S. Geological Survey as a Hydrologic Technician. Skylar also worked as a seasonal maintenance employee for Homer Lake each summer from 2013-2016 and is warmly remembered by current and past staff members alike. An avid outdoorsman and Central Illinois native, Skylar loves visiting national, state, and local parks and preserves throughout the country, hiking, kayaking, and generally spending as much of his free time in natural spaces as possible! Skylar's enthusiasm for the District's mission is palpable and we couldn't be more thrilled to have him join the team!