

February 8, 2021

MEMORANDUM

To: Board of Commissioners
From: Lisa Sprinkle, Marketing Coordinator
Re: February Staff Report

Executive Director (Mary Ellen Wuellner)

- Along with several other staff, I attended the 2021 IPRA/IAPD conference which was held virtually this year. Sessions that I attended included:
 - Exploring Intersections of Leisure Behaviors and Black Individuals/Families in Rural Illinois
 - Legal/Legislative, Parts I and II
 - Identifying and Avoiding Ethical Violations That Could Cost You Plenty
 - Emergency Written Policies Every Agency Should Have and the Action Steps Those Policies Should Contain
 - Equity and Evaluation
- Champaign County First met in January to review its highest priority infrastructure, tourism, and economic development projects. The group would typically be planning its visits to Springfield and Washington DC this time of year to seek support from state and federal legislators for these priority initiatives. Those visits will happen virtually in 2021. The Kickapoo Rail Trail continues to make the list in all categories.
- The IPRA Forest Preserve and Conservation District Task Force is likely to shift to a standing committee with the end-goal of establishing a new section dedicated to forest preserve and conservation professionals. The primary focus will continue to be assisting IPRA develop training, mentoring, and professional development tools targeted to individuals employed at the state's forest preserve and conservation districts.
- The Friends Foundation is planning a tree giveaway on Saturday, April 24, sandwiched between Earth Day and Arbor Day this year. Staff reserved 100 of three native tree species from the Living Lands & Waters nonprofit for the giveaway. Trees will be targeted first to Foundation donors and those who supported Yes To Forests campaign efforts – donors, volunteers, and those who displayed campaign signs. Any trees not spoken for would be available to the general public. More information to come in future weeks.
- The 2021 Legislative Breakfast will take place on Monday, March 8, and will be held virtually. Topics identified for the speakers to address include continued funding for the OSLAD grant program and COVID's impacts on park, recreation, and conservation agencies. Andrew Kerins has agreed to speak on behalf of the Forest Preserve District. If you have not done so already, let me know if you would like to attend.

Planning and Construction Department (Mike Daab and Mike Fry)

- Mike Fry passed his Certified Parks and Recreation Professional (CPRP) recertification exam.
- Construction Department staff have kept busy cleaning, organizing, and painting in the shop. The whole department is also participating in the United Way Equity Challenge.
- The General contractor has substantially completed the Rankin Collections Center, and the CCFPD Construction Dept. is working on Owner items.
- Staff attended the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy webinar on rails with trails. Planning staff also attended the annual IPRA conference, including several great sessions on comprehensive

planning, sustainability teams, legal issues with park use, and engaging the public in a productive manner.

- Mike Daab spoke to the Mahomet Rotary Club about the Upper Sangamon River Conservancy and the river more generally, including information about CCFPD properties along the corridor.
- Staff is submitting a letter of interest for the Ford Wind Conservation Grant that is being offered by Apex Clean Energy. The initiative aims to award funds to a conservation organization working to enhance and conserve natural ecosystems that provide habitat for plants and wildlife in central Illinois. At least \$120,000 would be awarded to enhance grassland habitat in Ford County or the surrounding region. CCFPD is a natural fit to help Apex Clean Energy meet its conservation goals. If approved, CCFPD would have four years to acquire and restore land contiguous to or nearby the Middle Fork River Forest Preserve. We have identified the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation and IL Department of Natural Resources as additional possible contributing entities. Letters of interest have a postmark deadline of February 15. Five applicants will be invited to submit a full application. The timeline for grant application and award has not yet been announced.

Business and Finance (John Baker)

- Worked toward implementing the Board's program budget model, including:
 - Revising the 2021 budget to incorporate the District Capital Program as a sixth program area, clarifying the purposes and difference between functional and program areas, and reporting staffing for each department.
 - Working with HR and Paylocity to identify and implement an efficient time-keeping method to track employee hours worked by the program budget areas.
 - Working with Eastern Illinois Electric about metering at the Middle Fork River Forest Preserve. EIE billing and usage data for Middle Fork does not track the campground or Activity Center separately from the Middle Fork residence and maintenance office. Middle Fork is the only preserve where utilities are not separately metered. EIE provided a quote of \$12,350 (with a 26 week lead time for the unit) to purchase and install the meter. Staff are investigating other options.
 - Updating the 2021 Chart of Accounts (COA) in the District's financial system to routinize program budget tracking and reporting. All revenue and expense accounts are now updated to the new codes. This includes merging of the historical financial transactions from each prior to its corresponding new code.
 - Updating COA codes for the District's PCard system and for payroll tracking. Began updating codes for accounts payable spreadsheets as well.
 - Discussing COA changes with department heads at the February Risk Management meeting.
- Filed the 2021 budget and appropriation ordinances with the County Clerk and posted on the website.
- Met with the District's Information Technology meeting to kick off the new year, including discussion of the 2021 budget and prioritizing tasks for the new year. Furat Ibrahim, the District's IT support contractor met with the group to answer questions and begin implementation of the 2021 plan. Priorities include network security, systematized cloud backups, and upgrading all District computers, laptops, and touchpads to an Office 365 standard.

- Met with the District Sustainability Committee, the IPRA Finance Committee and attended the Soaring to New Heights Conference, webinars for internal audit and ethics, and transformative leadership.
- Met with golf management and Mike Daab about annual golf turf maintenance needs, vendor discounts, preventing artificially dividing purchases, and District purchasing policies generally.
- Met with CliftonLarsonAllen auditors about new governmental accounting standards for the 2020 audit, District staffing and Chart of Accounts changes during the past year, and the audit status. With other pressing business and finance priorities and the Chart of Accounts changes, the internal preparations for the audit are about one month behind past preparations for mid-February.
- Prepared and began reviewing Business and Finance Section job analysis questionnaires for the District's compensation study.
- Appreciated Soaring to New Heights sessions on cyber liability, equity in revenue, and refreshing strategic plans. The cyber threats session provided step by step actions to take toward securing a District's IT network, discussion of increasing sophistication in cyberthreats, and actions to take when a security breach occurs. The social equity in revenue session focused on social equity in cost recovery, including discussion of the pandemic's impact on park and recreation programs, and the underlying principles behind establishing equitable fees. Without mentioning it explicitly, this session laid out the principles behind program budgeting. The session on refreshing strategic plans considered revising strategic plans in light of the pandemic's impact on districts, practical steps to operationalize strategic plans, and methods for engaging employees in revising and implementing strategic plans.
- Received notification from IMRF that the District's employer reserve increased by 15% in 2020. On January 1, CCFPD had an IMRF reserve of \$3,453,041 and at year end the balance had increased to \$3,967,621. In the past two years the District pension reserves held at IMRF have increased more than 75%. 2020 investment performance is the primary driver behind the increase.
- Issued 1099s to District independent contractors who received \$600 or more.

Human Resources (Dara Edgington)

- 2020 W-2s and 1095-Cs were received and distributed to all staff.
- Seasonal recruiting has begun for 2021 with seasonal positions for the golf course, natural resources, and campground now posted. The District is also currently hiring for two full-time positions: the Assistant Golf Course Superintendent (which has been vacant and on hold since July 2020) and the newly expanded Maintenance Worker II position for the Homer Lake Forest Preserve.
- Dara has been working with Parkland's Community Education Training team to identify a trainer and develop a customized Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training course for the District. A training overview was provided for a panel of DEI committee members on January 29th.
- Mary and Dara are both participating in United Way's 21-Week Equity Challenge and have completed the first three weeks' worth of material.
- Mary has requested and received quotes for the annual District fire extinguisher servicing.
- Dara attended the UI's virtual job fair on February 2nd, targeted towards students looking for part-time work throughout the spring and summer.

- Dara attended the Central Illinois Human Resources Group’s monthly meeting: Maintaining Genuine Communication While Using Technology in Organizations.

Marketing (Lisa Sprinkle)

- Media coverage last month included:

Here are two ways to craft with the Museum of the Grand Prairie

http://www.smilepolitely.com/splog/here_are_two_ways_to_craft_with_the_museum_of_the_grand_prairie_on_february/

Champaign County has a new forest preserve

https://www.smilepolitely.com/splog/champaign_county_has_a_new_forest_preserve/

Champaign County Forest Preserve announces Heron View Forest Preserve

<https://mahometdaily.com/champaign-county-forest-preserve-announces-heron-view-forest-preserve/>

Forecast: Cloudy with a chance of wooden snowflakes

https://www.news-gazette.com/opinion/columns/name-dropping-forecast-cloudy-with-a-chance-of-wooden-snowflakes/article_9dfad9d4-a3aa-52d3-8067-123751949aa3.html

Snowflake search lights up winter at Champaign County forest preserves

<https://www.chambanamoms.com/2021/01/25/snowflake-search-champaign-urbana/>

Museum offers free craft bags celebrating MLK

<https://www.wcia.com/news/museum-offers-free-craft-bags-honoring-mlk/>

Valentines, Lincoln’s birthday, Maple Sugar Days just a few of the many activities with Champaign County Forest Preserve District

<https://www.wcia.com/ciliving-tv/valentines-lincolns-birthday-maple-sugar-days-just-a-few-of-the-many-activities-with-champaign-county-forest-preserve-district/>

Restoration plan happening at forest preserve

<https://www.wcia.com/news/restoration-plan-happening-at-forest-preserve/>

Winter guide released with Champaign County Forest Preserve District

<https://www.wcia.com/ciliving-tv/winter-guide-released-with-champaign-county-forest-preserve-district/>

- Lisa attended the virtual IPRA/IAPD Soaring to New Heights annual meeting the last week of January. Sessions included:
 - Reflecting Your Diverse Community: Equity in Marketing
 - App-a-licious
 - Enhancing Programs with Low or No Cost Technology: Interactive Trivia Game Show
- Lisa attended a webinar: Website Design with Scott Clanin of Clanin Marketing to see if it is time to update the District’s site. Although the website is nearing the end of its lifespan it is not yet due for complete replacement.
- Social media numbers continue to increase.

	FACEBOOK	+/-	INSTAGRAM	+/-	TWITTER	+/-
CCFPD	5,068	+81	2,253	+78	539	+3
KRT	3,123	+23	82	+1	126	
MGP	4,121	+126	1,153	+14	236	+5
HLIC	1,918	+49				
GC	1,626	+16	301	+7	82	-5
FPPF	331	+19				

- Lisa is participating in United Way's 21-Week Equity Challenge and has completed the first three weeks of material.

Volunteer Coordinator (Sue Gallo)

- Sue generated reports of volunteer numbers and hours for each department and sent them out for consideration in each department's compensation studies and annual reporting. Additionally, she worked on streamlining the database and made small adjustments to the structure to better support future data reporting.
- Sue updated the volunteer application to clearly articulate why we are interested in gathering demographic information and to allow for more inclusive reporting of demographic information.
- Sue is exploring the potential of using ActiveNet for one-time event volunteering and met with Angie and Stacey to learn more about the system's strengths and weaknesses.
- Cathy and Sue met to learn more about the CIT program needs for 2021 and to start work on a youth volunteering brochure similar to one the Ed department made in 2019. The Volunteer committee will meet this month to discuss this further.
- Lisa is helping Sue get feedback from the CAC about the impact of newsletters, birthday cards and holiday cards.
- Sue is working with NR to organize an Earth Day clean up and invasives removal along the KRT.
- Lastly, Sue contacted all Trail Stewards from the past two years to thank them and determine their interest in continuing their trail stewardship. Almost all our trails have regular stewards, and this past month Sue worked with Mary, Peter, and Mike to include the unmaintained trails in Buffalo Trace in the trail stewardship program.

Grants and Development Specialist (Ryan Anderson)

Grant Applications

- People For Bikes - \$8,400
 - This grant is for bike racks and fix-it stations on the KRT near St. Joe
- Looking For Lincoln - \$100
 - Grant to bring in a first-person interpreter of Mary Todd Lincoln

Grant Reports

- Illinois Humanities Road Scholar Grant Final Report
 - This grant provided funds to bring in the speaker Marlene Rivero for the *History Brought to Life: Ann Bradford Stokes* program
- Local Cure Reimbursement
 - This grant reimburses COVID-related costs for the District
- Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation Community Stewardship Grant - Buffalo Trace 3x Match
 - This report for Buffalo Trace requests partial payment for the matching funds raised on Giving Tuesday

Natural Resources (Peter Goodspeed)

- In January, Natural Resources staff seeded the 15-acre floodplain forest restoration project at the newly acquired property next to Old Homer Park. The seed consisted of a custom ordered woodland seed mix and seed that was collected, milled, and cleaned by NR staff.

- NR staff spent considerable time this month clearing woody invasive species using chainsaws, brush cutters and heavy equipment. Depending on the site, woody brush was cut and left onsite, mulched or burned. Clearing was done at the following locations:

Preserve	Target species	Acreage	Location
Lake of the Woods	Honeysuckle	3.5	Buffalo Trace south of "tree tunnel"
Lake of the Woods	Callery pear, honeysuckle	1.3	North of John Potts Drive
Lake of the Woods	Autumn olive	13.9	Buffalo Trace south tree planting
Lake of the Woods	Honeysuckle, callery pear, honey locust	2.4	Entrance woods
Lake of the Woods	Autumn olive	1.5	Stidham savanna
Kickapoo Rail Trail	Autumn olive, honeysuckle	4	Between Ogden and county line
Middle Fork River	Honeysuckle, autumn olive, honey locust	13	Between Odle woods and county line



- New NR staff completed testing for the Illinois Commercial Pesticide Applicator's License. Each staff member passed the exam and is now certified for general application and rights-of-way.
- New NR staff participated in a pipeline and excavator safety training.

Lake of the Woods Golf Course (Chris Edmondson and Joie Torres)

- Despite the somewhat mild weather in January, the golf course was closed to play, mostly due to ground conditions (frozen greens, sporadic snow and ice cover on the course). The staff shifted focus to the Anniversary Pass sale, merchandise and food & beverage inventory, updating 2021 Outing and Tournament schedules and calendars, and general cleaning and prep of the facility for the 2021 season.
- We also began to see an increase in Simulator play, especially once the single user limitation was lifted mid-January. We are now allowed to have up to four players use the simulator at one time under Phase 4 COVID guidelines. The Simulator remains open for business 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. daily, and will be available through the end of February.
- As mentioned, we continued the sale of the 5-day and 7-day Anniversary passes in January. We sold 107 more of these 2-year passes, which brought our total sold to 937. The sale will conclude the first week of February, and we believe that we will sell close to our target goal of 1,000. The passes sold so far are nearly a 50-50 split, with a few more 5-day passes sold over 7-day. Customers always have the option to upgrade to the next level at any time (5-day to 7-day; 7-day to Platinum). Our total revenue for the month of January was \$41,652.80, with \$32,288 being attributed to Season Pass Sales.

- One project was completed and another one begun at the course by Mike Fry and the construction crew in January. They installed a dark sky light to the north end of the parking lot near the cart shed. This will increase visibility for patrons and employees during late evening cart return and for employees who are cleaning, while also improving security.
- Construction also began on the Par 3 Course patio renovation. Once completed (projected to be April), there will be a new concrete patio, open-air shelter and picnic tables. With the rehab of the Par 3 and increased play, we felt it was important to have a small pavilion for people to sit under while their children, family members, or friends played the course or participated in lesson programs. This will provide shade from the summer heat and protection from mildly inclement weather. Pictures of both projects have been attached.



- All cashiers, snack bar and beverage cart staff are required to have BASSET Certification (Beverage Alcohol Sellers and Servers Training) within 30 days of employment. This is a 3-year certification, which takes approximately 4 hours to complete online. David, Jason, and Josh all recertified or became certified in January.



- David and Chris began reaching out to past seasonal employees who may consider returning to determine what positions will need filled for the 2021 golf season. HR posted seasonal positions on the CCFPD website in mid-January and we have started to receive and review applications.
- Installation of drainage tile on hole # 6 has been completed. We ran a 100 foot drainage tile, filled in with small stones and top it off with 6 inch stone for better drainage.
- The maintenance crew serviced all 60 golf carts and replace new windshields. All large maintenance equipment has also been serviced. Crew members are currently spin grinding the reels, sharpening bedknives, and sharpening rough mowers' rotary blades.

Museum and Education Department (Barb Garvey and Pam Leiter)

- Barb Garvey, Mark Hanson and George Groschen have been facilitating the work of Stealth Mode and its subcontractors at the Rankin Center. This month the sprinkler system was installed, the electricity was supplied to the building, the floor was epoxied, and the security and fire systems were finalized. The building is at punch list stage.

- Mark Hanson and Jennifer Grove are working on interior plans for the Rankin Center, both in terms of outfitting it with appropriate equipment and moving artifacts into the space.
- Barb Garvey and Pam Leiter worked together on an annual report which also served as an annual accomplishments list for our staff, something we do in advance of our annual retreat. This year's retreat also looked at the Museum and Education Department strategic plan, which is nearing completion.
- Pat Cain, Angela Whitlock and Mel Wiegel have been working on transitioning the Museum store from Activenet to Helcim for the point of sale system. Inventory and accounting for auditing purposes was difficult in the Activenet POS.
- The Museum of the Grand Prairie (MGP) received several awards from the Illinois Association of Museums for 2020. A Superior Achievement Award was given to the exhibit, *How Long Must Women Wait: Woman Suffrage and Women's Rights in Champaign County*; Awards of Excellence were given to the museum for its COVID Response: *Connection, Community and Care* and for Special Projects: *The Sisterhood Mural*, and an Award of Merit was given for *Soloists for Suffrage*.
- Darlene DuFrain (volunteer) and Angela Whitlock (staff) are working on transcribing the Charles Bowen and Louise Carter Busey letters from the collection. Angela is also helping out in the Finance Department.
- Most loan renewals (of artifacts) for the year, for the Woman Suffrage Exhibit and permanent exhibits, have been completed.
- This year 23 accessions were added to the Permanent Collection. One was a Museum Purchase; five were CCFPD or Museum and Education Department generated, and 17 were donations from the general public. Eight were accessions related to the exhibit on woman suffrage; two were accessions related to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Eleven incoming loans were executed for the woman suffrage exhibit. It is important to note that ten offers of objects (including a huge offer of hundreds of coffee cans and another dozens of radios) for the collections were declined.
- Mark Hanson has completed his rehousing of Elizabeth Hanson's archive regarding Tomlinson Cemetery; has completed his finding aid of the files and shared them with the Citizens Advisory Committee.
- Emma Olson, intern, continues to transcribe the East Frisian oral histories.
- Staff have been doing COVID-phase-related research, planning, discussions, on short and longer-range plans, including discussions on timing/considerations for reopening the Interpretive Center on a limited basis to the public, and outdoor in-person programming considerations for spring and summer
- In an effort to reach all audiences, staff have also been working on remote summer activities for those who may not yet be vaccinated, or not yet feel comfortable with in-person programming.
- 2021 planning for next steps on the new Homer Lake Center began this month. Barb Garvey, Pam Leiter and Mary Ellen Wuellner met with the Forest Preserve Friends Foundation president, and staff met to start outlining 2021 goals. Pam sent an update to members of the public who participated in the public input sessions last year.
- The Museum of the Grand Prairie and the Homer Lake Interpretive Center (HLIC) participated in the Champaign County Museums Network's Virtual Visit Challenge, which included trivia questions from all Network member institutions.

- Pam will be working with three UIUC School of Social Work students February through April. Students will create a multi-media and/or audio-visual piece narrating the impacts that COVID-19 has had on the Interpretive Center.
- Barb Garvey submitted updates for the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area's new *Looking for Lincoln* website for Mahomet and Champaign-Urbana. This entailed writing the script and taking photographs of the attractions.
- Barb Garvey is organizing the Lincoln Legacy Committee's (Champaign County) first Zoom meeting. She has consulted with Barbara Wysocki on the future direction of the Committee.
- George Groschen is installing additional shelving in the Curator/Registrar office, converting fluorescent to LED lights in the Lincoln Exhibit, and beginning work on a chair rail for the Education Room.
- The Snowflake Search is on at District sites, January 21 through February 28. Pat Cain organized the painting, siting and hanging of the snowflakes with District staff. Jennifer Wick, Cathy Schneider & Pat wrote interpretation to go along with the snowflakes, and are promoting this activity. Cathy also developed a couple videos to share on social media.
- Department staff completed the February/March public program offerings; we are planning two months at a time due to the pandemic. April/May public program planning is underway and slated to be completed the first week of March.
- Jennifer Wick did a virtual program for the Tolono Library about animal tracking, and Jennifer/Stacey co-taught two *Meet the Critters Virtually!* public programs. Recording: <https://youtu.be/4FD7BqGiPXU>
- On Tuesday, January 19 Pat Cain, Barb Garvey and Katie Snyder hosted a *Mornings with the Museum: The Wonders of Winter* online event/program.
- On Thursday, January 14 Pat Cain hosted a lecture/film by Dr. Michael P. Ward, on *How-To Design a Garden for Birds* as part of the annual Garden Lecture Series. Ward is an Associate Professor in the University of Illinois' Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences and an Avian Ecologist at the Illinois Natural History Survey. The online talk brought in over 100 individuals.
- Barb Garvey gave a talk, virtually as part of the Special Exhibit Speaker Series, *19 Suffragists, 19 Historic Homes*, on January 28. There were consistently more than 50 viewers for the talk.
- Planning for the next kit for schools is well underway. Stacey is continuing her partnership with the Urbana Park District and Sarah Kaper of Ag in the Classroom on these. The kits are for second graders on Changing Landforms and will be available to schools mid to late March.
- Stacey has also done extensive research and developed several in-person summer nature day camp scenarios. The plan is to make a decision about camps and seasonal hiring at the end of March.
- Cathy Schneider continues working on revising educational animal policies and care manual and ideas for expanding the Animal Advocates donation program.
- Pam Leiter wrote an Inside Out article for the News-Gazette on *Chickadees in Winter*, https://www.news-gazette.com/news/local/parks-recreation/inside-out-check-out-the-cool-lives-of-chickadees/article_67bab991-850a-5284-b2bf-1621865a6631.html
- The Daily Illini wrote a cover story on the Woman Suffrage exhibit and the 19 Suffragists Lecture, entitled *How Long Must Women Wait: 19 Suffragists, 19 Historic Homes* on February 2.
- Pam made a connection with Healthy Champaign County; they are very interested in promoting anything that gets people outside and moving or that is healthy food-related.

- Katie Snyder attended IAM's Museum People Wednesday Check-in talking about *Pass It Down*, a digital story telling experience.
- Many staff in the department got their first round of COVID vaccinations the first week of February by virtue of being education staff.
- Pam updated the new hire staff orientation video for the HR department.
- Saw-whet owls are present once again this year at Homer Lake; one person reported finding three! We put a small sign at the location to encourage appropriate owl-viewing etiquette.
- HLIC Facebook stats, Jan 1-31: Average Daily Organic Reach: 1,825 (Sum: 56,563); Average Daily Page Engaged Users: 47 (Sum: 1,462)
- MGP Facebook states, Jan 1-31: Average Daily Organic Reach 5611 (Sum 173,948); Average Daily Page Engaged Users: 132 (Sum: 4093)



Lake of the Woods (Doug Sanders)

- The annual Christmas tree recycling lot closed on January 17th. This year we collected 744 trees and a few new ornaments. Staff chipped the majority of these trees into a compose pile and have removed the lot's signs and fencing.
- Staff assisted the construction department in the demolition and cleanup efforts of Swiss Valley Shelter.
- In preparation for the 2021 garden wedding season, 260 Hercules folding chairs and a 5'x 10' Interstate trailer were purchased in January. The chairs have arrived and the trailer is scheduled to arrive in late April. The trailer will be used to transport and store the folding chairs along with other wedding amenities.
- All full-time staff in the department attended two webinar trainings this past month. The first training, offered by Paradigm Liaison Services, was for pipeline operators/excavators. This training discussed safety protocols and damage prevention. The second training, *Keep Fit, Keep Safe for Maintenance Staff*, was offered by PDRMA and explored stretching and strengthening exercises and ways to help reverse the impacts of aging.
- Garden staff are busy in the greenhouse with plant propagation for the spring plantings. In addition, they are developing a tropical plant bed and a miniature beach house for sand toy storage. Photos and more info on these two items will be forthcoming next month.
- Staff continue to perform service and repair of equipment. This is part of the department's annual preventive maintenance program. They have also started giving the shop a deep cleaning.

Middle Fork River (Matt Kuntz)

- Middle Fork staff continues to work on two different land restoration projects. One is located on the northern edge of the preserve near the Miner's Trail (Odle) timber. Approximately 15.57 acres have been cleared of invasive honeysuckle and autumn olive, including dozens of unwanted tree species, mostly honey locust populations. The second area is informally known as the Shower House Prairie located just south of the main user area of the campground at the head of the South Loop corridor. This is a prairie restoration area consisting of a 2-acre remnant

overgrown with honey locust and black cherry. All trees have been removed in the first phase of this project.

- Some budgeted small equipment has been ordered and delivered this year. Also, maintenance staff is working on infrastructure repair and improvement in preparation for the upcoming season.
- Middle Fork has seen some challenging weather over the past month. We have had several instances of heavy ice accumulation, which caused some tree damage throughout the preserve and its user areas.

Homer Lake (Brian Taylor)

- We had an unusual surge in visitation after someone discovered a pair of Northern Saw-Whet owls roosting along the Oak Ridge trail. The parking lot near the trail entrance was full on a couple of Saturday mornings which made me curious as to what was going on until I received an email from a disgruntled bird watcher about the behavior of others disturbing the roosting site of the owls. This is the first time I have ever seen this much interest over a migratory bird.
- We are researching and getting price quotes on a new utility vehicle and meeting with contractors about projects scheduled for this year. We always prefer to test drive equipment so we can make the best decision. This process takes some time as we wait for vendors to deliver equipment.
- We have been very fortunate so far this winter not to have plowed snow even though we had several limbs down after the ice storm.

Kickapoo Rail Trail

- Preliminary plans for KRT amenities have been reviewed in-house and routed to the KRT Steering Committee and the Village of St. Joseph mayor and staff.
- Staff attended a meeting with Farnsworth, IDNR, Urbana Park District, and CC Chamber of Commerce to develop a plan for the Glover Crossing. Farnsworth will finalize the design of the railroad crossing and will use Union Pacific's normal process to submit the plans for UPRR review. If we receive a denial, the trail partners will seek assistance from the Surface Transportation Board and our state and federal legislators.

District Cultural Competency Initiatives

- The New American Welcome Center Advisory Board met for the first time since 2019, and the Welcoming Plan Steering Committee will start meeting again in February. Pam Leiter is a member of these committees. Katie Snyder attended the NAWC meeting as well.
- Katie developed and assembled activities in a bag, and a free-child sized mask for Martin Luther King Day. These were distributed from the Museum and given to DREAAM to mark the event.
- On Monday, January 18, in honor of Martin Luther King Day, the museum replayed a program from 2019, *Civil Rights in Champaign County: A Panel Discussion from the Past*, featuring Candy Foster, Izona Burgess and Stan West speaking about their experiences during the 1968 era.
- Pat Cain continues his work on the Masters in History from ISU. This semester's class is entitled, *History of Human Rights, Immigration, Forced Migration and Refugees*.
- Barb Garvey and Mary Ellen Wuellner attended a We CU organizational meeting as part of the CCFPD participation in the Interdisciplinary Health Sciences Institute and the Center for Social and Behavioral Science, Community-Academic Scholars (CAS) Initiative project we submitted.

The title of our student project is: *Improving Health and Access for Disadvantaged Communities to Champaign County Forest Preserves*.

- Katie and Mary Ellen regularly attend Champaign County Community Coalition meetings; this month Katie also attended the Race Relations Sub Committee meeting.
- Katie is working on the details of an upcoming art show *Pandemics are a Portal to Change* with Urbana Arts and Culture and the Krannert Art Museum. Katie watched “Mother Nature: Black Girl Genius Takes Center Stage”; the moderator, Blair Ebony Smith is one of our partners with the upcoming *Pandemics are a Portal to Change* project.
- Mark Hanson helped an Eater Junior High School class (Rantoul) with a project on the Tuskegee Airmen.
- As noted in the departmental reports, many staff members are participating in the United Way’s 21-Week Equity Challenge. A series of short videos, articles, or resources are sent each week to participants. Participants can invest as much or as little time with the materials as your schedule allows, although the recommendation is at least 15 minutes per week. We have also set up a Slack channel to post comments or share thoughts with each other about the materials in the challenge that week.