

April 7, 2014

**MEMORANDUM**

To: Board of Commissioners

From: Lisa Sprinkle

Re: April Staff Report

**Executive Director (Dan Olson)**

- This month we welcome two new full-time employees to the CCFPD family. Jan Minks Runion has been hired as the new Human Resources Generalist, and Susan Voskuil is the new Education Program Specialist. Additionally, most seasonal staff have been hired for the year.
- I gave a presentation for the Earth Team Series at the Urbana Presbyterian Church, to approximately 30 people on the impact of the Champaign County Land Resource Management Plan on the CCFPD
- This month's meetings included an interview and discussion with the Cook County Forest Preserve District Foundation Executive Director, the Champaign County Farm Bureau, Village of Mahomet administrators and staff, several vendors, some long time volunteers, The Land Conservation Foundation, PDRMA representatives, and the County Environment and Land Use meeting.
- You should have all received the invitation to the annual IAPD Legislative Conference in Springfield on Wednesday, April 30<sup>th</sup>. If you are interested in attending, please let Mary Beck know.
- Staff organized a tour of the Kickapoo Rail Trail on April 12 that included a few stops along the rail. Twenty individuals attended.
- I received a quick update on the public survey. They had received 500 of the 600 surveys necessary for our contract. They are still on the timeline to present to us in May. As a reminder, the Board has two Strategic Planning workshops scheduled for May. The first is scheduled for 5:00 on Monday May 12 and the second is scheduled for 5:00 on Thursday May 29<sup>th</sup>. Both will be held at the Museum.
- There is a need for executive session.

**Deputy Director/Grants (Mary Ellen Wuellner)**

- I have been working with the District's marketing staff on our sponsor table for the April 15<sup>th</sup> Illinois Bike Summit. As of April 7<sup>th</sup>, more than 225 cycling advocates, transportation planners, park and recreation professionals, and other interested individuals from around the Midwest have signed up to attend the day-long event at the I Hotel.
- A letter of intent was sent to the Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust to determine our eligibility for botanical garden grant funding. The agency supports "the advancement of research in ornamental horticulture and the creation, development, preservation, and maintenance of gardens accessible to the public for educational purposes." Although based in northern California, the trust has supported gardens throughout the country.
- I have been doing additional research into grant-making foundations that provide funding for botanical garden projects. I have identified five potential funders that have made grants in the past to Illinois' organizations and will send proposals to those that are currently accepting them.

- A grant application was also submitted to the Illinois Department of Public Health for the purchase of an AED for the Homer Lake Interpretive Center.

### **Administration (John Baker)**

- Received the tax levy extension from the County Clerk for a total of \$3,265,480 after applying the tax caps. The property tax extension is \$8,575 more than the total property tax budget for 2014.
- Hosted March 19 benefits meeting with representatives from Barham Benefit Group and GIS to review District benefits and introduce new benefit options for employees: long and short term disabilities, vision insurance, and additional life insurance. Thirty-two of thirty-four employees signed up for one or more of these options. GIS held a March 24 webinar for employees who were not able to attend the initial session. During the enrollment period, answered questions and met with employees about the benefits package related to their particular circumstances.
- Continued to work with Commerce Bank to establish the purchasing card program, providing District logo for cards, District vendor information, chart of accounts and card restrictions.
- John, Dan and Mary Ellen participated in interviews and reference checks for the Human Resources Generalist candidates.
- Met with Kerri Smales of Busey Cash Management about setting up a Kickapoo Trail account to receive, manage, and account for donations made through the Forest Preserve Friends, Vermilion County Conservation, and Champaign Conservation and Design Consortium Foundations.
- Worked with Furat Ibrahim to move the District servers to a new computer closet constructed by Kyle Welborn and Clint Stigall. The humidity level in the prior location in the basement was problematic for our computer equipment.
- Finished spring seasonal hiring for the District.
- Filed W2 and 1099 information electronically with the Internal Revenue Service and Illinois Department of Revenue.
- Finalizing the contract with Euroclydon Construction. The contract execution is pending receipt of a certificate of insurance that meets District insurance levels.

### **Marketing (Lisa Sprinkle)**

- Kickapoo Rail Trail and River to Rail Ride marketing materials and giveaways are ready for the Illinois Bike Summit on April 15.
- Registered CAC to host a booth at the Urbana's Farmers Market once a month, May – October 2014.
- Developed several banners for upcoming events during the summer months.
- Sent our sponsorship letters and thank you's for Freedom Fest 2014.
- Began a 6-month ad campaign with Chambanamoms.com.
- Completed two award applications for the National Association of County Parks and Recreational Officials (NACPRO) – Park and Recreation Areas or Facilities for the Homer Lake Natural Playscape and an Outstanding Volunteer for Bob Espeseth.
- Completed an award application for the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) – Facility or Park Design Award for the Homer Lake Natural Playscape.

### **Planning and Special Projects Assistant (Sally Prunty and Tom Pike)**

- Working on District Facilities map updates.
- Received bids on Gasoline and Diesel Fuel vendors. Wrote a proposal on the four years contract on gasoline and diesel contract for the Board meeting.
- Researched skylights information for Middle Fork River shower house.
- We have met with the contractor for the Museum Exhibit Project to review construction processes and scheduling issues, and to answer any questions he may have.
- We met this month to discuss the scope and parameters of the Museum Roof Project. We have completed the specifications for the project, which are currently being reviewed by staff.
- Met with Matt Kuntz, Mary Ellen Wuellner, Andy Little and Bryan Stevens at Middle Fork to discuss the proposed accessible trail on the Weber property at Middle Fork. We agreed on the location for the trail and for the accessible overlook as well.
- Completed survey from the Office of Recreation and Park Resources at the University of Illinois.
- Researched location of north boundary for Sangamon River Forest Preserve, in response to a question from the adjacent landowner.
- Researched paperwork on past land acquisitions.

### **Construction (Bryan Stevens)**

- Started repairs to Sugar Creek Shelter at Middle Fork River Forest Preserve.
- Constructing new office and computer storage closet.
- Repaired roof on the Maintenance Facility at Middle Fork River Forest Preserve.

### **Museum and Education Department (Barb Garvey)**

- The Museum of the Grand Prairie opened its special exhibit for 2014, “Home Grown: Gardening Yesterday and Today” on March 9 with an accompanying lecture by Sandy Mason entitled, “Gardening Yesterday and Today: this is not your Grandmother’s Garden.” We had a great audience of 53 people with over 80 in attendance that day. Other garden lectures by John Marlin and Lesley Deem brought in 30 and 35 people each in February, respectively.
- The Interpretive Center featured its first annual exhibit opening day with the 2014 special exhibit, *Passenger Pigeons: The Blue Meteor*. The exhibit opened the first Saturday in April and runs through Dec 31. Visitors can add their own touch to the exhibit by writing a ‘promise to nature’ on a pigeon silhouette and hanging it in the ‘sky.’
- A group from Lincoln’s Challenge and scout Pack #244 from Sidell helped spruce up outside the Interpretive Center on March 28. They raked leaves, and spread mulch and pea gravel.
- The Department hosted our second spring Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon and Workshop; 12 volunteers attended.
- The “Maple Sugar Day” programs were once again in demand with 11 attending one session in February and 31 attending a session in March. The “Create Your Own Dinosaur Habitat” program continues to be popular this year, with 24 people attending.
- In April, education staff will implement the second half of the two-part program funded by the Education Fund in the 2013-2014 school year. Entitled *Exploring Your Own Backyard*, it consists of an in-class program focusing on the history and nature

surrounding the school sites. Participating schools include Ludlow, Thomasboro, Nothview and Broadmeadow.

- We were approached by C-U Public Health, who is going to be sponsoring a walking challenge April through June called Women Out Walking (WOW). Staff or volunteers will provide guided hike(s) to participants.
- New artists in the Museum consignment shop for March through May are Fred Delcomyn, photographer and Deborah Fell, quilt artist. Both artists will be featured in this year's Boneyard Arts Festival celebrations at the museum.
- Pam Leiter attended the National Association for Interpretation's Region 5 conference in Rockford IL.
- Stacey Clementz attended the Prairie Research Institute's Prairie Lightning Symposium.
- With 43 applicants from 10 states, the Museum of the Grand Prairie has chosen Susan Voskuil to fill the position of Education Program Specialist I. Susan has a Master's Degree in Historical Administration from the Eastern Illinois University Program and has been leading education programs at the Gaston County Museum in Dallas, North Carolina.
- The Museum of the Grand Prairie was featured in a blog post in the Midwest Wanderer <http://midwestwanderer.com/museum-of-the-grand-prairie-lincoln-and-life-in-central-illinois/> and also on the blog of the Utah State Museum Association <https://www.utahmuseums.org/blog/history-museums-can-be-fun> The title of the article, "History Museums can be fun!" says it all, except that the author favorably compares the museum to the Indianapolis Children's museum, at least in terms of the fun factor. Speaking of blogs, the "mystery artifacts" from the museum's own blog can be seen in a special new display case at the museum. Another display features new acquisitions to the museum collection.

### **Lake of the Woods Golf Course (Dave Torrens and Dave Huber)**

- Tom Pike met with contractors to receive quotes for the golf parking lot seal coat project. We received four quotes. This project should be complete in May.
- Golf maintenance seasonal crew is slowly returning. Seven of the nine seasonals will return from last year. This helps with training and knowledge of our daily duties and scheduling.
- The course was open for play Friday March 21<sup>st</sup> and we are ahead of last year for every month through March.
- Most of the merchandise for 2014 has been received, priced and displayed.
- The simulators are slowing down now that we are open outside but they still are getting some play.
- James Helbling is entered in a PAT (Playing Ability Test) 36 hole tournament on April 29<sup>th</sup> at Red Tail Run Golf Course in Decatur. This is one of the first steps in completing the current PGA training program.
- Chris Edmondson has been busy booking outings, the following is a list of the past month's bookings:
  - Mahomet Rotary – May 15 (72 players)
  - John Kempen Group – June 29 (40 players – NEW)
  - IL Grain & Feed Assoc – July 24 (40 players – NEW)
  - Champaign County Girls HS Tourney – September 9 (32 players – NEW)

- Mahomet Chamber – September 11 (72 players)
- Girls IHSA Regional – October 8 (60 players)
- We've also begun getting registrations for the Season Opener April 26<sup>th</sup> & 27<sup>th</sup>, and both the Youth and Adult Golf Clinics/Lessons, as well as Association memberships.

### **Natural Resources (Mike Daab)**

- The Natural Resources crew spread prairie seed and installed erosion control blankets along the new sidewalk at the Sangamon River Forest Preserve.
- We were able to conduct quite a few prescribed burns this spring. So far, 286 acres have been burned, with burn units ranging in size from 75 acres to under 2 acres.
- We have been clearing invasive trees and shrubs throughout the winter of 2013-2014. Approximately 45 acres were managed, and several projects continued in areas where removal had begun in past years, including Stidham Woods, Potts Drive, the Lake of the Woods main entrance area, and River Bend. New projects were started at Buffalo Trace and Middle Fork this year.
- Mike presented information about CCFPD and spring ephemeral wildflowers at the March 15 Volunteer Trail Stewards meeting.

### **Lake of the Woods, River Bend, Sangamon River and Botanical Gardens Operations (Doug Sanders & Larry Beckett)**

- Garrett Prince, PDRMA's risk management consultant, met with Doug Sanders on March 25<sup>th</sup> for LOW's site review. Later this summer a PDRMA representative will return to evaluate staff working in the field.
- Staff attended the PDRMA "Ergonomic Approach to Injury Prevention" workshop. This was comprised of a morning session of classroom discussions and afternoon application. Since the training, the OPS department has instituted a five minute stretching program to their morning staff meeting.
- On March 25<sup>th</sup>, 1155 pounds (1524 fish) of rainbow trout were stocked in Lake of the Woods for the 2014 spring trout fishing season.
- Staff have been working along the inside of the rock wall surrounding the Botanical Garden Pond. The repair work is intended to help secure the wall and stabilize it from moving and/or collapsing until donations are acquired for pond replacement/renovation.

### **Homer Lake (Brian Taylor)**

- We took advantage of a few dry days and conducted some prescribed burns.
- We assisted the interpretive staff in preparing for their volunteer work day.
- I enjoyed speaking with the U of I class, Learning in Community, that is doing a needs assessment study on the Interpretive Center.
- Roy and I attended the Kickapoo Trail meet and greet. It was good to see so many familiar faces of those who have been involved in this effort over the years, and it was exciting to see how much support and interest there is in the project.
- Fishing has been picking up, but catching has been slow as a result of the water temperature being in the mid-forties.
- We have been conducting annual safety trainings for seasonal employees.

### **Middle Fork River (Matt Kuntz)**

- Now that weather is starting to clear, staff has started repairing roads throughout the preserve. We have had road damage due to the winter and will have to repair sections of the campground roads.
- We are starting to plan to lay gravel at the Odle Property to start construction of the ADA section of the trail.
- Staff attended training days focused on work site safety and OSHA training.
- Staff assisted Natural Resources with spring prescribed burning.

### **Volunteers (Pat Simpson)**

- On March 15, a Steward Training Workshop was held. Forty people attended and 13 other individuals committed to continuing on as stewards, but could not attend the workshop. The first half of the program covered the basics of stewardship' the second half of the program was devoted to spring ephemerals. Mike Daab prepared and presented a great program on the woodland wildflowers.
- Over thirty letters were sent out to Mahomet community groups and religious organizations seeking volunteers for the annual Freedom Fest event. Follow up phone calls are planned for April.
- I have created a Volunteer Announcement List. This list will allow me to send out regular announcements about upcoming volunteer opportunities in the District to our email list of approximately 175 volunteers.
- Progress on the comprehensive volunteer database continues. With the cooperation of Mike Daab, Barb Garvey, and Pam Leiter, we have generated a volunteer list that covers all major volunteer activities in the District. I will maintain this list into the near future. Relatedly, we are updating all essential paperwork on current volunteers, including emergency contact and waiver/release forms.
- **An initial "Save the Date" email has been sent out to volunteers on the May 17 Volunteer Recognition Event. I am also happy to report that Brian Stearns has agreed to present his photos of the bird life of Middle Fork at this event.**
- In response to feedback from the volunteer survey posted in early 2014 (16 surveys returned), we have implemented the following:
  - volunteers who identified themselves as Trail Stewards requested group work days and events. With the help of a longstanding volunteer, we have started an experimental Trail Steward Hiking Club. Veteran stewards will lead hikes of the trails they maintain. A couple volunteering to lead a hike at Buffalo Trace is also going to lead a hike as part of the District's contribution to the Champaign County Public Health District's fitness walking program for women. Other hikes are being led by CCFPD staff.
  - In addition, all stewards were sent email contact info for all trail stewards by the trails the individuals maintain. Stewards were encouraged to "partner" with other stewards maintaining the same or a nearby trail by scheduling to meet on the same work day.
- Trail stewards requested receiving more feedback on their Trail Steward Reports. It has long been the custom to send these reports to the appropriate site supervisor. In addition,

as appropriate, I now send the reporting steward a copy of responses from site supervisors.

- Two survey respondents also suggested that they wanted to be asked to volunteer more in the District! The announcements list is one approach to addressing this request.
- Upcoming group work days include the following groups:
  - Mahomet Boy Scout Troop (Apr. 12)
  - Homer Boy Scout Troop (Apr. 12)
  - Veterans Club of the University of Illinois (Apr. 26)
  - Leaping Lizards 4-H Club (May 3)
  - Natural Playscape Stewards (May 3)
- The monthly newspaper for people 50 and above, *Prime Life Times*, has recently published a brief article I wrote on the mental and physical health benefits of being in nature and volunteering. The article closes with a “pitch” to volunteer at the District.