

April 6, 2015

**MEMORANDUM**

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

**Executive Director (Dan Olson)**

- Much of the past month has been capital project related. I have spent quite a bit of time with Jonathan getting him up to speed on the needs of the District. This effort has reminded me of the talent of the staff we have at all levels. Internally, we have the ability to create great things and the staff is willing to take on very large and technical projects.
- Ken Konsis asked that I present rail trail information to all of the Vermilion County Conservation District staff. It was a very good session with several questions pertaining to operations and construction of the trail.
- KRT Engineering meetings continue with Fehr Graham, IDNR, and VCCD. We have been concentrating on bringing some of the construction costs down by taking a different look at the design. As of right now, we believe there will be some cost savings. Likewise, the KRT is a very big topic at the Foundation meetings and fundraising subcommittee meetings. A corporate sponsor came forward with a significant donation this month.
- The District is currently selling equipment. In July of 2006, the District moved to selling surplus on eBay instead of the traditional on site auctioneers. Mary Beck has been the purveyor of eBay items once supervisors submit sale items for consideration. Since we began this process, we have had a total of 413 transactions for a sales amount of \$218,925.07. Some of the more memorable items sold include outhouses, a large RV bus, and pallets of bricks. Vehicles and large equipment have been the high dollar items that have sold.

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

- A \$25,000 corporate contribution to the Kickapoo Rail Trail project was received during the last month. The local business asked for the donation not to be widely publicized to prevent an outpouring of similar requests to its leadership. However, we will be listing the company alongside the names of the other businesses that have donated to date.
- Planning for two upcoming events is well underway. The Used Bike Sale, hosted by Champaign Cycle, is scheduled for May 2 with used bicycles being accepted at two locations, Cycles Plus in Danville until April 22 and Champaign Cycle until April 29. Also, registration for the River to Rail Ride 2015, scheduled for September 19, is now online and open to cyclists. Routes may be tweaked slightly, but distances (15, 31, and 62) will remain substantially the same.
- *Wild Birds and More Store* will now be offering 10% off birdseed to all customers who donate the seed to the Homer Lake Interpretive Center. The store, located on Marketview Drive in Champaign, has previously offered the promotion for one month in the spring and fall migration seasons. The store is now extending the offer on a year-round basis.
- In early April, I interviewed intern candidates to help with donor development projects. The intern will be assisting with donor stewardship, follow-up, reporting, and tracking donations.

**Administration (John Baker)**

- Received the tax levy extension from the County Clerk for a total of \$3,359,197 after applying the tax caps. The property tax extension is \$2,590 more than the total property tax budget for 2014.

- Finalized audit preparations for Sikich field work that began April 6.
- IMRF reported that the tentative employer pension contribution rate for 2015 is 11.45%. This is a slight increase from the 11.21% rate for 2015.
- Moved District e-mail hosting from Dreamhost to Microsystems, our current information technology support vendor. The new system provides and synchronizes web, desktop, and mobile e-mail and will be managed by a responsive and timely vendor.
- Coordinated District participation in PDRMA supervisor safety training hosted at the Champaign Park District.

### **Human Resources (Jan Runion)**

- Updated office guidelines and staff responsibilities for headquarters.
- Created an employee exit interview form to be used for full time and part time staff, as outlined by the Strategic Plan.
- Continue to work on compensation strategies and policy.
- Attended a webinar on pay for performance practices.
- Attended the legislative breakfast in Urbana with other staff and Board members.
- Interviewed candidates for the Assistant Site Superintendent position at Lake of the Woods.
- Attended a webinar on ACA compliance.
- Updated, reviewed and revised new employee orientation with Mary Beck.
- Continue to monitor FMLA absences for employees.

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

- Sponsorship letters have been sent out for Freedom Fest.
- 2014 Annual Financial Report is finished and currently being printed for distribution.
- Finalized MediaUSA contract to exclusively promote the Lake of the Woods Golf Course on interactive touchscreen kiosks in Hilton Garden Inns, Homewood Suites, Wyndham Gardens and Home 2 for the next year.

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

- Natural Resources staff attended the 2015 Midwest Fire Conference: Keeping Fire Working for the Land. The conference was organized by the Tallgrass Prairie and Oak Savanna Fire Science Consortium and held in Dubuque, IA. All staff enjoyed the sessions and the chance to discuss issues with fellow land managers and academics. Mike helped facilitate a rapid fire exchange of ideas session, and has written an article about the conference for the first issue of the Midwest Invasive Plant Network newsletter, which is to be published in April.
- As a direct result of collaboration at the Midwest Fire Conference, Mike coordinated with Urbana and Champaign Park District personnel to organize a meeting for our regional prescribed fire volunteers, which was held on March 5 at Elks Lake Pavilion.
- Two savanna project areas were planted with a mix of over 100 species at Homer Lake. Additional seed was also spread over some previous plantings at Buffalo Trace in order to increase native plant cover.
- We bid farewell to Katie Smith, NR Technician at CCFPD since August 2013. Katie will be missed, and the University of Illinois Committee on Natural Areas have secured a great fit for their efforts.
- Mike has been conducting interviews for the vacant NR Technician position.
- Mike attended the Society for Ecological Restoration, Midwest-Great Lakes Chapter Meeting at the Chicago Botanic Garden. The highlight of the trip was a field trip to a Cook County Forest Preserve District site led by Stephen Packard, who (with others) wrote the book on restoration of Midwest ecosystems.

- Natural Resources staff worked to remove invasive bush honeysuckle and other species in order to improve our oak woodlands on approximately 50 acres over the winter of 2014-2015. Some highlights include expanding from the existing high quality Flicker Woods area at Homer Lake, opening up the woodland area along the newly established Odle Trail at Middle Fork, and the removal of young sugar maples at Sylvester Woods.
- We had our most productive prescribed fire season yet in spring 2015. So far for the year we have burned approximately 877 acres across all five Preserves.

Preserve	Acres Burned
Middle Fork River Forest Preserve	595
Homer Lake Forest Preserve	96
Sangamon River Forest Preserve	94
Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve	90
River Bend Forest Preserve	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>877</b>



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

- The Museum of the Grand Prairie had a grand opening of its new permanent exhibit, *The Grand Prairie Story*, on March 15, 2015, from 1:00 to 5:00! This multimedia exhibit begins with the glaciers and tells the story of the area from prehistory to the present. Nearly 200 people attended the opening!



- Artifacts were returned from the Tarble Arts Center at Eastern Illinois University where MGP pieces were included in an exhibit, *Early American Folk Art in East Central Illinois*.



- The Ford's Theatre project *Remembering Lincoln*, a digital archive commemorating Lincoln's assassination and death, went live in March. As a project partner, The Museum of the Grand Prairie contributed substantially through its own collection as well as that of a local collector <http://rememberinglincoln.fords.org/>



- The 2015 annual exhibit at the Interpretive Center, *This Living Soil*, celebrates the International Year of Soils. It features a 3-D underground diorama showing creatures of the soil, a video, worm viewer, and more! It opened April 4. This will be the 2<sup>nd</sup> special annual exhibit at the HLIC!

- Summer camp registration opened March 1, and recruitment for Counselors in Training volunteers has begun.
- Snow and cold temperatures forced the postponement of three programs in February, two Garden Lectures and the first of two Maple Sugar Days. The second Maple Sugar Day had a fine turnout with 32 people!
- Chelsey Walsh completed the Organization and Effective Communications trainings through EAP.
- Stacey Clementz represented CCFPD for the 4<sup>th</sup> year as a guest judge for the Next Generation Science and Engineering Fair for K-8<sup>th</sup> grade students. She is also co-presented a session in March at the National Science Teachers Association Conference in Chicago about the CCFPD and Champaign School District's partnership.
- The HLIC served once again this year as the warm-up spot for St Joseph's Illini Chill bicycle ride on Feb 21.
- The 2015 annual exhibit at the Interpretive Center, *This Living Soil*, officially opened April 4! It celebrates the International Year of Soils, and features a 3-D underground diorama showing creatures of the soil, a video, worm viewer, and more!
- The ME Department will submit an application this month to the Illinois Humanities Council to host the new Smithsonian/Museum on Main Street exhibit called *Water: Resource for Life* for the 2016-17 Illinois tour. This exhibit explores the many ways in which water is significant within human experience. The 2016 annual exhibits at the Museum and Interpretive Center will align with this theme.
- The ME Department held a successful Volunteer Appreciation Workshop and Luncheon, 13 volunteers attended. Volunteers got a guided tour of the new *Grand Prairie Story* exhibit.
- Staff completed updates to a Scout Brochure with new expanded programming for both Boy and Girl Scouts.
- The Cougars and Bobcats of Illinois lecture was very popular, with 43 participants attending!
- Katie Riopelle was invited to speak at the March 28th, Allerton Mansion, Piatt County Master Gardeners "Gardener's Day" Her topic was 'Backyard Tapping', as in maple sugar.
- Stacey Clementz was elected for a 2-year term as President of the Environmental Education Association of Illinois. She takes office on May 1.
- Pam Leiter attended the National Association for Interpretation regional conference at Turkey Run State Park.
- Emily Henson attended Illinois DNR workshop: *Scat, Tracks, and Habitats* at Sugar Grove Nature Center.
- Susan Voskuil attended a workshop at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library on the use of Common Core in the history classroom and how libraries and museums fit.
- The ME Department conducting seasonal interviews this month.
- The educators have already seen 1,547 students this year, through school programs, after school programs, and outreach kits and the field trip season has barely begun!

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

- The annual Christmas tree recycling lot was cleaned up on March 18<sup>th</sup>. Approximately 300 trees were converted to mulch.
- On March 25, Doug Sanders attended PRMA's "Core 6 – A Supervisor's Role in Coaching Injury Prevention" training. This training was an extension of the hands on training staff attended last fall at Elk's Lake Pavilion and the West Maintenance Building.
- Staff continue their efforts in the greenhouse with potting of plants and seed germination. They have also started general cleanup throughout the garden in preparation for "Best of

Class” and seasonal weddings. Kim Delong and Tina Mink met with Museum staff to coordinate this year’s Discovery Garden plans with education programs.

- General grounds cleanup at LOW, RBFP, and SRFP has started for the spring/summer season. To-date this has consisted of removal of winter signage, turf and road repair, and the collection of branches, limbs, and ground trash.

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

- We took advantage of a few dry days and conducted some prescribed burns. We have burned approximately 96 acres so far.
- We assisted the interpretive staff in preparing for their volunteer work day. We also assembled several plastic benches for the outdoor classroom.
- Roy and I attended a PDRMA training at Champaign Park District.
- Fishing has been picking up but catching has been slow as a result of the water temperature being in the mid-forties. I’ve had one report of a fisherman catching a few nice size bass. I expected to see some winter kill after the ice melted, but it wasn’t as bad as anticipated.
- When the frost finally left, we discovered several areas of roadway that will need some repair this spring and summer.

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

- Middle Fork staff was able to assist the Natural Resources Department with prescribed burns this spring. Andy Little was also able to assist at Homer Lake for prescribed burns due to staff shortages at HL that day.
- The campground is now officially open for 2015. Our new campground host will be arriving at the end of April to begin their summer duties.
- The Planning Director and I will be meeting with a consultant to discuss our road repairs budgeted for this summer. The discussion will focus mainly on the campground roads and the damage they have sustained over the past few years.
- Staff is underway prepping user areas and the campground for the upcoming season.
- The new hybrid car has been delivered to Middle Fork.

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

- Rob Kanter was contacted and agreed to be the guest speaker at the June & Volunteer/Donor Recognition Event. His topic will be “Finding Nature in Your Own Backyard.”
- A steward training was held on Mar. 14 with approximately 25 people in attendance. One portion of the training was given over to an open discussion of issues and problems pertaining to stewardship on CCFPD sites. Ideas were generated for future trainings combining a hike with information about the flora and fauna in our preserves. This session was followed by a presentation from Mike Daab about the various ongoing restoration projects going on in the preserves. The day closed with a hike through Buffalo Trace led by Mike Daab in which both invasives and native plants were identified.
- The first data sheets were submitted for the Frog Survey Citizen Science Project. Surveying was hampered by cold weather, but on a rare warm day or two near the end of the month, spring peepers and western chorus frogs were heard in several different sites. I also worked with Chelsey Walsh in providing info to Mary Ellen Wuellner for the preparation of a grant for our Frog Survey Project. The grant will mainly cover the expenses associated with data entry.

- Letters were sent out to a roster of individuals who had previously volunteered for Freedom Fest in 2014. These individuals were asked if they would volunteer again 2015.
- Contact was made with the University of Illinois' U-Intern Program which provides undergraduate and graduate interns over the summer to non-profit organizations. Based on three separate "job postings" which we supplied, strong candidates emerged for positions as a Fundraising Assistant, a Human Resources Assistant, and an Assistant to the Museum. Mary Ellen Wuellner, Jan Runion, and Barb Garvey interviewed candidates for their respective positions in early April.
- I developed a staff training on volunteers for the Museum and Education Department and delivered the training on Mar. 30. The training focused on the issue of how to engage, motivate, and retain volunteers.
- I attended the regular East Central Illinois Master Naturalist Advisory Board Meeting on Mar. 16 at the U of I Extension Office. Also, on Mar. 26, I attended the Master Naturalist's annual Recognition Dinner.