

December 6, 2014

MEMORANDUM

To: Board of Commissioners

From: Lisa Sprinkle, Marketing Coordinator

Re: December Staff Report

Executive Director (Dan Olson)

- Interviews for the Planning Director position will continue over the next two weeks. We have five good candidates with a variety of experience.
- Meetings of note since the last report include: Golf Marketing, Health Care, staff evaluations, Risk Management, State of Illinois Attraction Sign Program, Foundation meeting, Donor meeting, Citizen's Advisory Committee, Vermilion County Conservation District, 2015 Budget, KRT engineering, 2015 Capital Projects.
- The Citizen Advisory Committee met this month and one of the action items was to choose a chair and a Secretary of the Committee. For 2015 the new Chair will be Wendy Harris, and Debbie Insana has agreed to stay on another year as Secretary. This month we say goodbye and thank you to Mark Schoeffmann and Nancy Snellen for many years of service to the CAC.
- We have formed a new Safety Committee for the District. Five individuals (Mary Beck, Tom Pike, Pam Leiter, Andy Little, and Mike Fry) have agreed to a two year service to the Committee. They have a list of initial goals and will have their first organizational meeting in Jan. 2015. I would like to thank these individuals for volunteering their efforts.

Deputy Director/Grants (Mary Ellen Wuellner)

- The Forest Preserve Friends Foundation's first #Giving Tuesday effort resulted in a nice return for the Kickapoo Rail Trail. Nineteen donors gave a total of \$3,020 during the one-day event.
- The Kickapoo Rail Trail fundraising team received a pledge of \$10,000 from Watchfire Sign Company in Danville. The company specializes in digital billboards that display changing messages. The pledge will be made over three years.
- The Foundation also received its final deliverables from the UI Students Consulting for Non-profit Organizations (SCNO). The group studied the Foundation's fundraising efforts for the Botanical Garden and gave its recommendations for how to attract more donors and increase giving amounts. The Foundation board will be reviewing the group's report at its January meeting.
- Dan and I have been working with Fehr Graham engineers on cost updates for the Kickapoo Rail Trail. Cost estimates have risen by nearly \$1 million for phase I construction, which includes 3.3 miles in Vermilion County and 6.7 miles in Champaign County. The cost increase is more than \$630,000 for the Champaign County section alone. The increase is attributed primarily to IDOT's requirement that excavated soil from rail corridors that is removed from the site must be disposed of as if it contains contaminants. Engineers are now working to determine whether more soil can be re-used in the trail design.

Administration (John Baker)

- The District received a 25% rate increase for our 2015 health insurance. This quote is for the Health Alliance HMO plan which the District currently provides for employees. Jan and I met several times with health brokers to consider options for reducing these costs. The Local

Government Plan quoted District rates that are 42% higher than our 2014 employee premium. PDRMA's health insurance is also far more expensive and does not cover the network used by the majority of District employees.

- Increased 2015 health insurance costs are projected to total \$61,776. Because the 2015 draft budget included a ten percent projected increase, staff needed to come up with an additional \$37,112 in either budget reductions or new revenues to balance District operating budgets.
- Reviewed IMRF projected balance for 2014 and cash flow for 2015 to determine to what extent the District could afford to make an additional pension contribution for employees. Budget savings will allow for a \$25,000 contribution this year.
- Filed tax levy ordinance #14-3 with County Clerk. Distributed budget and appropriation ordinance #14-5 for public review throughout Champaign County.
- With Matt Deering and PDRMA's Steve Kleinman, reviewed the Paylocity contract for new HR and PR services. Submitted necessary information to Paylocity for "go live" early in 2015. Contract negotiations are expected to be completed and the contract executed by the December Board meeting.
- Applied for property tax exemptions for the Kickapoo Rail Trail parcels. In 2013 as provided in the CSX purchase agreement, the District paid \$5,206 in property taxes for these parcels.
- Set up electronic payment for December 15 debt service payment for the 2011 bond issue. \$198,875 will be paid December 15 to Amalgamated Bank of Chicago.
- The Middle Fork farm produced 1200 bushels of soybeans on 72 acres this year for total revenue of \$19,030. With corn revenue of \$32,175 the farm generated \$51,206 on \$24,221 in expenses. Even with corn and soybean prices well below recent years, the District still generated a good return on its investment in the Middle Fork farm.
- Proposed a 2015 budget to the Forest Preserve Friends Foundation, including fundraising targets for the Kickapoo Rail Trail development. and Botanic Garden pond and waterfall replacement. The budget will be discussed at the December 9 FFFF meeting.
- Completed all staff evaluations and 2015 employee goal setting.

Human Resources (Jan Runion)

- John Baker and I met with Employee Benefit Specialists regarding our health insurance and ACA.
- John Baker and I attended the IAPD Legal Symposium in Chicago.
- Attended a webcast on Assessing Service Awards. And participated in a webinar on ACA Reporting Regulations.
- Dan Olson, Mary Ellen Wuellner and I conducted 6 phone interviews for the Planning Director position.

Marketing (Lisa Sprinkle)

- Working with the golf course to promote the sale of 2015 season passes at 2014 prices through Dec. 31. Radio advertisements are running on Mix 94.5, ESPN radio and WHMS/WDWS throughout December. A digital billboard ad is running through Dec. 28. Purchased the Countdown Counter on the WICD website through Dec. 31. Promoting on the Discounts & Deals section of the Visit Champaign County website.
- Sent out an email blast encouraging people to purchase Christmas presents at the Museum of the Grand Prairie and Lake of the Woods Golf Course.

- Interviewing for the Marketing Specialist position continues. We interviewed five potential candidates and brought two back for 2nd interviews.
- The 2015 Nature's Appeal has been mailed.

Construction (Mike Fry)

- Constructed glass “store front” cabinets for the Museum of the Grand Prairie.
- Formed concrete for ADA grills in Lake of the Woods.
- Removed old roof, and built new roof for wishing well and assembled tables for the Botanical Gardens.
- Repaired entry doors at Lake of the Woods Pavilion and Elks Lake Pavilion.
- Assisted the Lake of the Woods operations department with repair of water main near Elks Lake Pavilion.
- Removed temporary, and built permanent entry stoop by mechanical room at the Museum of the Grand Prairie.

Museum and Education Department (Barb Garvey and Pam Leiter)

- The Homer Lake Interpretive Center completed a new permanent exhibit this month, entitled *A Land Shaped by Ice & Fire: The Grand Prairie*. This multi-media exhibit introduces the Grand Prairie ecosystem and ties in with the existing 3-d diorama. It is part of the Museum and Education Department Exhibit plan developed in 2012.
- The Museum of the Grand Prairie and several other museums are partnering with Ford's Theatre in a digital archiving project entitled, *Remembering Lincoln*. In honor of the 150th anniversary of Lincoln's assassination (April 2015), this digital archive is meant to serve as a resource about local history regarding that event.
- MGP educators saw all Mahomet 3rd grade students for the First Illinoisan program, a program on Native Americans in east-central Illinois. In addition, the second session of the Mahomet after-school program BLAST began with Susan Voskuil presenting History's Mysteries, a new program which involves students in local history by using a variety of investigative techniques to unravel a narrative. Barb Garvey gave talks at Bridlebrook and Clark-Lindsey on Victory Gardens. Katie Riopelle offered a new program, A Little History, for preschoolers.
- With the help of volunteer Jill Robbins, a letterbox is now located inside the Interpretive Center. The Interpretive Center now has packets of milkweed seeds available for free to visitors. Sugar Grove Nature Center and the Urbana Park District both toured the Natural Playscape this month.



- Kaitlyn Riopelle, Public Program/Visitor Services Coordinator, will take the role of President of the Museums at the Crossroads Consortium in 2015/2016.
- Barb Oehlschlaeger-Garvey took an online class, “Project Management for History Professionals” offered by American Association for State and Local History.
- Emily Henson attended a Leadership and Teambuilding Workshop (Skillpath).
- Pam Leiter met with the East Central Illinois Master Naturalist Board to discuss future program ideas.
- The MGP has begun a multiyear project to convert over to energy efficient lighting. LED lighting yields practically no ultraviolet light, therefore is a good choice for protecting collections, as well as saving energy.
- The MGP replaced its hobodataloggers for monitoring temperature and humidity in the galleries/storage areas.

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

- Golf maintenance staff winterized the irrigation system.
- Staff started winter service on the equipment. The golf cars are washed and stored for next year.
- With the help of Brad Nelson, the new NR tech, staff cleaned up the trees removed during the Game of Logging training.
- We had play through November 12 with one additional day on November 30 due to weather.
- Chris Edmondson and Dave Huber met with John Baker and Lisa Sprinkle regarding new marketing efforts as suggested in the NFG study. We started a Season Pass sales promotion through email for the month of December as well as recorded a new radio commercial. News Channel 15 will run a countdown clock on their homepage telling viewers how much time is remaining to get the discounted price. We have sold ten 2015 season passes as of Dec. 9.
- As suggested in the NGF golf report to lower ending inventory, we attended the offsite Balmoral Golf sale. We grossed \$1,688 over the 3 day sale.
- Ten teams are registered for the winter simulator league; the league fees total \$1,500 plus the weekly game day fees and food/beverage sales.

Natural Resources (Mike Daab)

- NR staff have begun winter clearing projects – the process of removing invasive woody plants from natural areas, as well as other general timber stand improvement. The focus of efforts so far has been Homer Lake. The north east corner work included mowing down bush honeysuckle and autumn olive along the lake shore as well removing some larger black cherry, mulberry, and Osage orange trees in the savanna restoration area. The NR crew is also working at Sylvester Woods to remove primarily honeysuckle along the west edge, and sugar maple further into site, per the Sylvester Woods Management Plan.
- NR staff cut sections of downed trees for use in an exhibit at the Museum of the Grand Prairie.
- Mike has been helping with interviews for the Marketing Assistant position.
- Mike continues involvement with several partner groups. An update of recent work with partners includes:

- **Midwest Invasive Plant Network** (Board Member):
 - Developed a survey as part of involvement in the Membership Committee of the MIPN Board. The results show current members are satisfied with the value of membership, and also gave us insight into ways to improve membership value and recruit new members.
 - We are in search of a new Executive Director, as well as a new home for the organization. The organization is currently hosted by Purdue University, but has been notified that the relationship will not continue in the long term. Mike initiated contact between the MIPN Board President and staff at the Illinois Natural History Survey to explore the potential to host the award-winning organization locally.

- **Upper Sangamon River Conservancy** (Board Member)
 - We are exploring 2015 projects, which may include a second annual fishing event at River Bend and the construction and placement of wood duck boxes at Lake of the Woods.
 - As part of the River Trails Committee, we continue working with the Village of Mahomet on securing grants for a trail that will eventually connect Lake of the Woods and River Bend Forest Preserve through Barber Park and the Village-owned Sangamon Greenway. A grant application for a canoe launch is currently submitted to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

- **Illinois Invasive Plant Species Council** (Member)
 - We continue evaluating plant species for potential addition to the Illinois Exotic Weed Act. Plant invasiveness is determined by several factors, and a heavy emphasis is placed on scientific literature. A vote for proposal to add to the Exotic Weed Act includes input from natural areas managers as well as those in the horticultural industry.

- **Invasive Plant Task Force** (Chair)
 - Our main focus of the last several months has been organizing the current task force, which has operated as a sub-committee of the East Central Illinois Master Naturalist Advisory Board since 2009, into a federally recognized Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA). Formation of a CWMA has several advantages, including access to funding, improved control efforts across boundaries, shared resources, and building community awareness.
 - We are finalizing plans for invasive plant and herbicide application training for volunteers to be hosted at Elks Lake Pavilion on January 24, 2015.

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

- Illini FS/John's Petroleum have completed the installation of the new fuel pumps at the west maintenance fuel depot. Doug Sanders has met with each department head, distributed new keys, and trained staff on refueling procedures. (2014 Capital Equipment)
- With the assistance of the construction department, staff repaired a waterline break beneath a section of the road near Elk's Lake Pavilion. The leak was reported by a park visitor the afternoon prior to the Annual Turkey Trot Event. Event went on as scheduled.

- Bed weights, snow plows, and the salt spreader have been installed on winter plowing equipment. Each unit has gone through a winter inspection checklist for proper operation and safety. In addition, snow poles have been placed along roads, parking lots, and sidewalks, plexiglass has been installed in the Hi-Tower windows, and winter “Caution” signs have been posted.
- The majority of fall cleanup has been completed by the garden staff and they continue to work in the Greenhouse. They have installed new benches to add additional growing/storage space and performed a few minor electrical repairs (i.e. replaced outlet and fan motor). They are currently transplanting rooted cuttings, working on Hyper-Tufa projects for the Discovery Garden, and bringing in the remaining tropical plants.

Homer Lake (Brian Taylor)

- We had four trumpeter swans stop by the lake this year.
- Most of the maintenance activities have been focused on getting buildings, grounds and equipment ready for winter.
- Roy and Devyn have been doing some ADA related projects. They recently assembled a handicap accessible picnic table for Salt Fork Center.
- We installed boulders around the parking lot at the Sylvester Woods expansion.
- The Natural Resources crew has been removing exotics on the north end of the lake along Homer Lake road. The neighbors have been very complimentary during the restoration process as their view of the lake has been greatly improved.

Middle Fork River (Matt Kuntz)

- Staff attended an active shooter training held by Forest Preserve staff in Mahomet.
- Mike Daab and Matt met with a local contractor to discuss the Willow Pond study. We discussed several different scenarios with construction time frames, movement of materials, and environmental impact. More research is needed before any recommendation will be proposed.
- Work continues with capital project research for 2015
- Application are starting to come in for our vacant campground host position.
- As of December 1, the campground is closed for the winter, re-opening April 1, 2015.

Volunteers (Pat Simpson)

- On Nov. 1, 2014 a Trail Steward Training was held at Lake of the Woods Pavilion. The early morning session entailed training new stewards from the East Central Illinois Master Naturalist Program (ECIMN) about the basics of trail maintenance. Mike Daab followed with a presentation on invasives and also on CCFPD’s upcoming plans for prairie maintenance and restoration. Finally, a Yellowstone National Park Ranger and current Ph. D. student in geology at the University of Illinois discussed recent and ongoing basic research at Yellowstone and the light this stream of research sheds on all eco-systems. Twenty-eight people attended.
- On Nov. 8, 2014 I attended the Annual Meeting of the ECIMN at the Salt Fork Center, Homer Lake. Rob Kanter was the keynote speaker at the meeting. His presentation was titled

“Discovering Nature in Your Own Backyard” and he opened his talk with pictures of the two whooping cranes that have been seen at Middle Fork Forest Preserve.

- After the ECIMN Annual Meeting, I met up with Champaign Cub Scout Troop, Number 98, and “supervised” the planting of two native trees just off Flicker Woods Trail. I offered a short educational overview of the importance of trees in our eco-system and read a poem about trees (not Joyce Kilmer!) before the planting. The boys who attended were working on their Conservation Badges.
- On Nov. 17, 2014 I attended the ECIMN Advisory Board Meeting. As Chair of the Publications Committee, I reported on the current status of draft ash borer reports covering numerous small localities in Champaign and adjacent counties. The reports were put together by Carl Altstetter (himself a member of the CCFPD’s CAC) and received the unanimous approval of the Advisory Board at this meeting.
- I was out of the office the week of Thanksgiving and will also be out of the office from Dec. 22, 2014 through Jan. 5, 2015. Through such breaks I will avoid going over 1000 work hours in 2014.

Special Projects (Tom Pike)

- Researched the purchase of two new kayaks, a one-person and a 2-person. Sent information to Doug Sanders.
- Getting quotes on having an engineer inspect Swiss Valley Shelter.
- Working on contractors list for future capital project bids and/or RFPs.