

February 9, 2015

MEMORANDUM

To: Board of Commissioners

From: Lisa Sprinkle, Marketing Coordinator

Re: February Staff Report

Executive Director (Dan Olson)

- An amendment to the Local Records Act this year mandates that every unit of local government is required to, “post a mechanism, such as a uniform single email address, on its Internet website for members of the public to electronically communicate with elected officials”. Therefore, a paragraph about the Board of Commissioners and the contact email address (commissioners@ccfpd.org) has been placed on our website as required. It can be found at our “About the District” drop down menu, in with the general information. You may also use this email address to give to others to contact you. The email will be checked almost daily by CCFPD staff and forwarded to the appropriate person for response.
- I presented to the Urbana Exchange Club on “What’s New for 2015” at the District. I emphasized the new exhibits at the Museum and HLIC, the fundraising efforts for the Garden and the KRT, as well as several other items.
- Staff has spent a lot of time implementing the new Paylocity payroll system. This is an incredibly powerful tool that will provide better tracking of personnel time. For the individual employee, it has a web based clock in system, an automated time off request function, as well as information about their accumulated time. Other benefits include that it will allow us to track hours of work for the new ACA regulations, coding of hours to specific projects, decrease the amount of time it takes to process payroll since a paper system is no longer needed, and require fewer trips to headquarters to turn in timecards.
- The annual Legislative Awareness Breakfast for our region will be held on Monday March 9th. It will be hosted by the Urbana Park District at the Planning and Operations facility starting at 8:30 a.m. There is a cost associated for breakfast that the District has covered in the past.
- The Citizen’s Advisory Committee meeting that was re-scheduled for Feb. had to be cancelled again due to weather.
- I am happy to announce that we have hired Mr. Jonathan Hasselbring as the Planning Director. Jon is a licensed architect currently living in Chicago and will begin work with us on March 2.
- Matt Kuntz suggested that the CCFPD recognize the incredible commitment that our local IDNR Conservation Police Officer has to the District and to the region. The suggestion was supported by other staff members that have had similar positive experiences working with one officer in particular. We have drafted a letter of recognition to be sent to the officer and his supervisors on behalf of the staff and Commissioners. We are humbled by the amount of time and effort officers put into protecting our resources. Additionally, over the past several years, the staff has greatly appreciated the professionalism and the open communication from our local officer.

Deputy Director/Grants (Mary Ellen Wuellner)

- I will be assisting Doug Sanders with the recruitment process for the Assistant Site Superintendent – Maintenance over the next several weeks. The response to the job advertisement was good, and there appear to be a number of well-qualified candidates in the initial pool.
- I submitted a grant application in late January on behalf of the Vermilion County Conservation Foundation to the A.L. Webster Foundation for Kickapoo Rail Trail funding. The Webster Foundation is located in Danville. No specific dollar amount was requested as

this is the procedure for the first step in a two-step process. A preliminary decision is expected within 60 days.

- Several Forest Preserve Friends Foundation board members and I have been making Rail Trail fundraising visits to local businesses to solicit leadership gifts for the project. In the last few weeks, we have called on Human Kinetics Publishers, Carle Hospital Foundation (our second visit), and The Andersons. Meetings are always positive as community interest in the trail is clearly very high. But as yet, sizable donations from these and other local companies remain elusive.

Administration (John Baker)

- Received notification that the Consumer Price Index for calculating the 2015 pay 2016 tax levy is 0.8%. This CPI increase is the second lowest applied to the District since tax caps went into effect in 1996. Existing property tax rates for 2015 pay 2016 are capped at no more than a 0.8% increase more than 2014 property taxes paid in 2015, thereby capping the District's revenue increase for its current tax base to approximately \$25,000. Property taxes for new construction in 2015 will be added later and hopefully will compensate for the small increase in the tax cap.
- Moved forward with implementing the Paylocity payroll system, including:
- Redrafted and secured approval of the Forest Preserve Friends Foundation 2015 budget based on input from Dan Noel, Meredith Mills and District staff. This included significantly streamlining the Foundation Chart of Accounts and establishing fundraising targets for the first time.
- Prepared, reviewed and posted 2014 W2s for District employees. Vendor 1099s are in process and will be mailed in late February.
- Received verification of the District's tax levy totals from the County Clerk.
- Verified accuracy of District tax exempt properties. We also received property assessment notices for the Kickapoo Rail Trail parcels. These parcels are pending tax-exemption from the Illinois Department of Revenue.
- With Jan, Lisa, and Adrienne met with Microsystems Incorporated, District IT services provider, on 2015 technology improvements.
- Met multiple times on the Golf budget and revised the draft working budget for the Board. Researched e-mail marketing opportunities and costs for East Central Illinois golfers and turned this information over to the golf marketing committee.
- Imported the approved Working Budget into our 2015 General Ledger and distributed to District supervisors
- Prepared initial 2015 projections by month for each fund to check cash flow and ensure District maintains an adequate reserve throughout 2015. Initiated tracking of 2015 under and over budget line items.

Human Resources (Jan Runion)

- Compiled information for uploading into new Payroll/HR System; multiple trainings on Paylocity system and working with supervisors on developing process for Time and Attendance.
- Offered Jonathan Hasselbring Planning Director position.
- Reviewed and corrected medical elections in system for employees.
- Attended the Central Illinois Human Resource Group luncheon on Change Management.
- Attended the Small Business Association conference on The Affordable Care Act.
- Met with members of the Compensation Committee to work on and develop the 2016 Compensation Policy.
- Attended IPRA conference in Chicago with Dan Olson, Brian Taylor, Pat Simpson, Matt Kuntz and Lisa Sprinkle.

Marketing (Lisa Sprinkle)

- We entered four marketing pieces in the Agency Showcase at the IPRA Annual Meeting – Marketing Campaign, Print Communication, Large Format Ad, and Logo. The Marketing Campaign finished 7th out of 27 and the Print Communications finished 11th out of 33.
- Developed new rate cards and outing brochures for the golf course.
- The new Maple Syrup Root Beer from the Homer Soda Co is now available for purchase. The Homer Soda Co. is donating \$1.25 of every case of soda sold back to the Homer Lake Interpretive Center.



Construction (Mike Fry)

- Removed old tiles and installed new ceiling tiles in Natural Resources building
- Moved artifacts in museum for continuation of floor refinishing
- Built and installed barn style doors in grain elevator exhibit
- Built new office and bathroom, with emergency eyewash/chemical station, and storage loft in West Maintenance for Ops/Botanical Garden expansion

Museum and Education Department (Barb Garvey and Pam Leiter)

- The Homer Lake Interpretive Center's (HLIC) 2015 annual exhibit, set to open in April, will celebrate the International Year of Soils. This will be the 2nd special annual exhibit at the HLIC. Our first annual exhibit last year, on passenger pigeons, was very well received. More than 160 people contributed a 'promise to nature' to the exhibit in 2014.
- The Museum of the Grand Prairie's new permanent exhibit, The Grand Prairie Story, will open on Sunday March 15th at 1:00 p.m. There will be a ribbon cutting at 1:30 followed by a program with tours of the exhibit, and first person interpreters, volunteers from the CU Theatre company.
- The MGP placed an outreach exhibit at Parkland College on African American Music in Champaign County. It will be in the D wing from February 2 through March 2, 2015.
- January's *School's Out: Arctic Illinois* program at the HLIC was a great success, with 94 people attending! The first ever *School's Out: This History Is Yours* (on African American History in Champaign County) at the museum brought out 70 people. The School's Out programs were featured on Chambanamoms.com. *This History is Yours* was covered on the front page of the Mahomet Citizen.
- This year, the Department is partnering with Natural Resources and the Volunteer Coordinator to reinstitute the Frog Call Survey citizen science program at our sites. Over 40 people attended! Chelsey Walsh, Katie Smith and Pat Simpson co-taught the training on Feb 7.
- A parent shared a nice note about the Nature of Winter school program in early February: *"Let me just say how much Amara loved the trip! She got in the car at pickup and said 'I just need a moment to think. I'm so excited, I just don't know where to begin...' We heard several times about the fox and deer, and how she 'just needs to get back' to visit again and take us with her. She said she would teach us all about it."*
- The Museum of the Grand Prairie hosted the annual retreat on January 9 of the Museums of the Crossroads Consortium, led by Katie Riopelle, current President of the organization.



- Stacey Clementz & Susan Voskuil hosted a booth at the Urbana School District Expo – to showcase loan materials, school programs, as well as the CCFPD in general. They also presented two mini-sessions, The Teacher’s Toolbox, where they delved further into the resources the District provides teachers.



- Susan Voskuil attended a workshop at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum on Education Programs and the Common Core in the context of Museums.
- Pam Leiter hosted a booth at the Expo at the Illini Union put on by the UIUC student organization, Students for Environmental Concerns. Seasonal jobs and volunteer opportunities were featured.
- Pam Leiter & Chelsey Walsh attended a meeting of the ECIMN Programs Committee
- Chelsey Walsh attended several professional development opportunities: *Science Standards & Nature Play: Diverse Approaches to Enhancing Environmental Education* workshop at the Chicago Botanical Garden, *Application of Herbicide to Control Invasive Plants on Public Land* at Lake of the Woods, and the *Wild Things Conference* in Chicago.
- Many members of the Museum and Education Department staff attended a webinar entitled *Training Museum Volunteers* offered by the American Alliance of Museums.
- Emily Henson completed the online IDNR ENTICE workshop, *Illinois Woodlands*.
- Pam attended the *2015 C-U Immigration Forum Retreat* at the University YMCA on Feb 7th. CUIF’s goal is to “make Champaign-Urbana the most immigrant friendly community in Illinois.”
- There was excitement among birders about an appearance by a common redpoll at the HLIC’s feeders. Other winter visitors, pine siskins and tree sparrows, seem more common this year as well. We continue to receive donations of birdseed and cracked corn, which has attracted a family of deer to the viewing window, to the delight of visitors and Facebook users.
- Stacey Clementz presented at a U of I NRES class on environmental education and how to prepare themselves for a career in EE.



Natural Resources (Mike Daab)

- Katie Smith, along with Chelsey Walsh and Pat Simpson, helped organize and teach Frog Call Survey training for volunteers on Saturday, February 7. The program was well attended, and is a welcome return for many volunteers who previously enjoyed this popular citizen science volunteer opportunity.
- Approximately 6 acres of savanna has been planted at Homer Lake Forest Preserve.
- Woodland seed has been spread throughout the District, particularly in areas that have been cleared of invasive woody species over the past several years.
- NR staff continues our winter work of clearing invasive woody species. So far for the winter of 2014-2015, we have released an additional 30+ acres of woodlands from encroachment or dominance of bush honeysuckle, autumn olive, sugar maple, etc.
- We very much appreciate the assistance of Grand Prairie Friends’ interns Jeff Peyton and Brody Dunn. They supplied over 50 hours' worth of service to CCFPD, including weed

pulling at Lake of the Woods and helping to transplant native prairie plants from the Highway 150 construction project.

Special Projects (Tom Pike)

- Organized all departments' lists of janitorial supplies that are needed and sent it out to six vendors.
- Went to two Safety Committee meetings.
- Started researching other places that have some type of Emergency Plan.
- Renewed paperwork on the District radio license.
- Updated facilities inventory.
- Researched fireproof filing cabinets for Headquarters.

February 9, 2015

MEMORANDUM

From: Doug Sanders, Site Superintendent

To: Board of Commissioners

Re: L.O.W. Operations/Maintenance and Botanical Gardens Overview

Who We Are

The Operations/Maintenance (OPS) and Botanical Gardens (BG) department is housed at the west maintenance complex of the Lake of the Woods Preserve. Located directly south of the Mabery Gelvin Botanical Garden each division performs their daily operations out of individual offices. The OPS staff works out of a 9,307 square foot building shared with the Construction department and the BG staff operates out of a 2,880 square foot building shared with the Natural Resource department. The west maintenance complex also consists of a 6,095 square foot cold-storage shed which is used to store vehicles and large equipment. This building is utilized by the OPS/BG, and Construction departments. In addition, there is a 3,298 square foot cold-storage shed located at the Sangamon River Forest Preserve residence that is utilized to store seasonal equipment, supplies, and other miscellaneous items.

The OPS staff is comprised of a site superintendent, three full-time Maintenance Worker II's, and one part-time staff member. In addition, throughout the year there are a number of seasonal workers that assist the full-time staff in their daily operations. The BG staff consists of the BG supervisor, two part-time staff members, and a number of seasonal workers.

Departmental Overview

Duties and Responsibilities

The duties and responsibilities of the department include the general maintenance, service, and upkeep of the District's facilities, vehicles, equipment, and grounds at the LOW, RB, and SR preserves. This also includes the facility and grounds at the Riverview Retreat Center. Normal recurring duties include:

- Opening and closing procedures of grounds and facilities;
- Trash pick-up and grill clean up;
- Mowing, trimming, and weed control of common areas and trails;
- Seasonal planning, development, and upkeep of the Botanical Garden;
- Tree pruning and removal;
- Trail maintenance and development;
- Snow and ice removal on roads and sidewalks;
- Janitorial duties at facilities, open shelters, restrooms, and office buildings;
- Rental facility and *Special Use Permit* preparation and clean-up (seven facilities);
- Oversight of garden weddings;
- Administration of boat rental program;
- Monthly playground and facility inspections; and
- Vehicle service and maintenance (21 vehicles).

Jurisdiction

The jurisdiction of the department entails the facilities and grounds within the Lake of the Woods, River Bend, and Sangamon River preserves. This excludes areas and programs maintained by the Golf Course, Museum of the Grand Prairie, and Natural Resource departments. The department does provide assistance in these areas when requested by department personnel.

Lake of the Woods

Originating in 1948, Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve is the oldest preserve within the Champaign County Forest Preserve District. It consists of 900 acres that provide a number of natural resources, educational opportunities, and recreational activities. The OPS department inspects, services, and upkeep the following amenities:

- Lake of the Woods Pavilion (200 capacity enclosed rental facility)
- Elk's Lake Pavilion (200 capacity enclosed rental facility)
- Izaak Walton Cabin (32 capacity enclosed rental facility)
- *River View Retreat Center (35 capacity enclosed rental facility w/kitchen)
- Swiss Valley Shelter (90 capacity open-air rental facility)
- Rotary Hill Shelter (116 capacity open-air rental facility w/kitchen)
- Sycamore Hollow Shelter (60 capacity open-air rental facility)
- HI-Tower Bell Carillon
- 6 restroom facilities, including the Rayburn-Purnell RR/Bridal Dressing Room and Buffalo Trace RR
- 5 small open-air shelters (Peninsula, Old Hickory, Fisherman, Hawthorn, Rayburn-Purnell, and Mahomet Rotary)
- 4 playgrounds
- 4 volleyball sand pits
- 4 fishing piers
- 9.25 miles of bike paths and nature/multi-use trails

*River View Retreat Center is located at 428 Country Rd 2500 N, approximately 2 miles north of LOW.

Mabery Gelvin Botanical Garden

Within Lake of the Woods is the Mabery Gelvin Botanical Garden (BG), located along IL Rt. 47, adjacent to the Museum of the Grand Prairie. This 10-acre site was dedicated to the wife of H.I. Gelvin and in 2014 marked its 40th Anniversary. The BG is made up of a number of flower beds and landscaped areas with a garden pond and 12-foot waterfall as its focal point. Other structures include the award winning Miriam Davies Memorial Enabling Garden with an extensive arbor and water feature, a 24-foot octagonal gazebo, a 25' x 60' greenhouse adjacent to a 3,200 sq. ft. Discovery Garden, and an historic one-room School House maintained by the Museum. A section of the 3.5-mile Lake of the Woods bike trail runs through and adjacent to the south end of the BG. Features of the BG include:

- An All-American Selection garden
- Xeric garden
- Prairie Sampler garden

- Perennial beds displaying native hybrids of selected prairie plants
- Many diverse plantings of perennial beds, shrub beds, and annual floral displays

In conjunction with the Garden Clubs of Illinois and the Mahomet Garden Club, the BG staff assists in maintaining the Illinois Blue Star Marker landscape site located at the Buffalo Trace east parking lot.

River Bend

Developed in 2001, the River Bend Forest Preserve is a 280-acre site, containing 130 acres of lake water, 2.5 miles of forest along the Sangamon River as well as a 1-mile nature trail and 1.2-mile multi-purpose trail. Amenities maintained by the department include:

- River Bend open shelter
- 1 restroom facility
- Possibility Pier
- 2.2 miles of nature/multi-use trails

Sangamon River

Purchased in 2007, Sangamon River Forest Preserve provides a 160-acre area for a variety of natural resource activities. In addition, it includes the historic residence that was built in 1919. The department cares for the following amenities:

- Sangamon River open shelter
- 1 restroom facility
- 2.3 miles of nature/multi-use trails
- Canoe launch along Sangamon River and Wildcat Slough
- 450' accessible trail with shade structure
- Residence
- Storage Shed
- Historic Barn
- Wooden Crib Style Barn

Affiliation with District Staff and General Public

In relation to the District's mission to provide conservation, educational, and recreational experiences for the county, the OPS/BG staff supports the District's staff in their daily functions. This support comes in the form of providing general housekeeping of offices and common areas, facility maintenance, and special requests.

Since the OPS/BG staff works throughout the grounds and patrols the parks during opening and closing procedures, they are often the District's frontline responders to the general public's needs and questions.

2014 Accomplishments

Adverse Weather

According to the Illinois State Water Survey, the winter of 2013-2014 brought the area a total accumulation of 43.4 inches of snow (annual average 23.2 inches). From January 5 through January 7, 2014, the Champaign-Urbana area experienced an unheard of weather phenomenon known as a "Polar-Vortex. Temperatures reached a low of -13 degrees with a high of -3 degrees

with a maximum wind speed recorded at 53 mph, resulting in wind chills of -40 degrees. Throughout the entire winter staff braved the adverse weather conditions and kept Lake of the Woods, River Bend and the Sangamon River Forest Preserves safely open for District staff and visitors. January 17, 2014 was declared “Site Operations Day” by the Board of Commissioners.

Enabling Garden

As part of the 2014 capital projects, a replacement water feature and new landscaping were installed at the Miriam Davies Memorial Enabling Garden. Additional work was completed which consisted of painting the patio trellis, flower boxes, and entry bridge. As an extension of this project staff is in the process of fixing the sun dial, repairing the digital message repeater, reopening the nature trail adjacent to the Enabling Garden, and giving the wishing well a facelift.

Revenue and Expenditures

The department continually strives to improve the quality of the rental areas and the level of customer service at Lake of the Woods. With the assistance of the marketing coordinator and the reservations coordinator these efforts have shown a steady increase in revenue for facility, boat, and wedding rentals. As noted in the below table and chart there has been an approximate 20 percent annual increase in revenue each year for the past two years. In addition, the operating budgets for the OPS/BG divisions have been reduced by 6.3 percent in these two years—approximately \$28,000.

	Facilities Rental	Boat Rentals	Wedding Rentals	Year-End Rental Revenue
2012	\$41,526	\$2,604	\$5,958	\$50,088
2013	\$48,631	\$7,147	\$5,703	\$61,481
2014	\$60,010	\$6,900	\$5,984	\$72,894

2015 Departmental Restructuring

In 2015, the operations and botanical garden divisions will undergo a department restructure. Each division currently specializes in specific areas but also share a number of common duties. Through consolidating the two branches into a single entity called the “Maintenance Department” staff will become better equipped and capable to meet their role within CCFPD’s mission. Areas of improvement include:

- ◆ Equipment/tools: Scheduled service and maintenance, shared usage
- ◆ Facilities: More efficient utilization of storage and work areas
- ◆ Staffing: Specialized workforce and shared personnel
- ◆ Training: Increased regularity and standards among staff
- ◆ Finances: Shared resources and combined budgeting
- ◆ Schedules: Flexibility and availability

Staff currently assigned to Botanical Garden responsibilities will relocate into the west maintenance building to join the rest of the operations staff currently housed there. As noted above, this will allow for the department to share resources more efficiently and better address

the operational needs of Lake of the Woods, River Bend, and Sangamon River. To accommodate the additional staff, Construction staff is assisting with the construction of an additional office and ADA compliant restroom within the west maintenance building. In addition, a loft has been installed in the west maintenance shed to create the necessary storage space.

One full-time staff position has been added to the department, an assistant site superintendent for maintenance. Efforts are currently underway to hire for this position. With the elimination of the garden supervisor position, Larry Beckett has accepted a lateral assignment to the position of assistant site superintendent for grounds. All remaining staff currently assigned to operations and garden duties will continue in their existing Maintenance Worker II or Maintenance Worker I roles, but duties will be assigned to projects based on the prioritized needs of the preserves. A March 4, 2015 goal is projected for the completion of the staffing changes and building improvements.

February 10, 2015

MEMORANDUM

From: Brian Taylor, Homer Lake Site Superintendent

To: Board of Commissioners

Re: Summary of Homer Lake Operations

Facilities and Staff

Homer Lake Operations and Maintenance department is located on the north east side of the park just off South Homer Lake road. The facility is a 5,848 square foot metal shed that houses all the maintenance equipment, vehicles, work areas and offices for the staff. The residence of the site superintendent is located adjacent to the maintenance facility and is 600 feet east of the main entrance to the park. The maintenance drive separates the house property from the maintenance facility. The location of the house allows the site superintendent/resident guard to monitor traffic and provides easy access for park visitors should they need assistance.

The staff consists of a full-time site superintendent and a full-time assistant site superintendent and three seasonal employees. Brian Taylor has served as Site Superintendent for twenty-four years, and Assistant Site Superintendent Roy Woodmansee has twenty-three years of service. We also have three seasonals, Joe Hopper has been with us for eight seasons, and Devyn Roy and Skylar Smith will begin their third season this year.

Duties and Responsibilities

The staff is responsible for the general maintenance, service and upkeep of the District's facilities, grounds and waters at Homer Lake, Collins Pond, Old Homer Park, Sylvester Woods, and recently acquired Kickapoo Rail Trail. Normal recurring duties include:

- Opening and closing of the park and facilities
- Trash pick up and removal
- Mowing, trimming, weed control of common areas and trails
- Maintenance of landscape areas, shrub beds, flower beds, and prairie plots
- Tree planting, pruning and removal
- Trail maintenance and development
- Snow and ice removal on roads and sidewalks
- Janitorial duties at rental facilities, pit toilets, and maintenance building
- Rental facility, Special Use Permit and special program preparation and clean up
- Monthly playground and facility inspections
- Vehicle and equipment service and maintenance

Equipment

- Vehicles – Ford Escape hybrid, Ford F - 250, Ford F - 450 dump bed and snow plow
- Mowers – Kubota 6ft mower, John Deere 6ft mower, 3 point bush hog mower
- Tractors – Kubota 31hp general utility, John Deere Backhoe
- Implements – 5 ft tiller, box scraper, gill, turf aerator, grader blade, brush grapple
- Utility Vehicles – 2 Kubota RTV's with dump beds
- Skid Steer – Bob Cat with forestry mulcher, brush mower, and loader bucket
- Trailers – 3 equipment trailers for mowers, tractors, and skid steer

- Patrol Boat – 14ft flat bottom with 25hp outboard motor

Scope of Responsibilities

Homer Lake

Homer Lake Forest Preserve has been managed by the District since 1971 but was not under District ownership until 1992 when the IDNR transferred the title. The preserve consists of an 828-acre tract and an 80-acre lake with more than 5 miles of shoreline. The staff maintains, services, and inspects the following park features:

- Homer Lake Interpretive Center
- Salt Fork Center rental facility (115 capacity) - 1999 Award of Excellence from IDNR Best Facility Award - Most rented facility in the District
- Salt Fork Center amphitheater – Used mainly for weddings and photography
- Walnut Hill Shelter rental facility (60 capacity) - Open air with indoor rest rooms
- Walnut Hill playground and sand volleyball court
- Park residence – 1,465 square feet constructed in late 70's
- Homer Lake – 80 acres of water, IDNR manages and stocks fish annually
- Oak Ridge picnic area has 2 small shelters open to the public
- Sail Boat Launch shelter open to the public
- Sail Boat Launch concrete boardwalk (300')
- Natural Playscape & Stream (2013 IPRA Best Facility Award)
- Observation Tower overlooking a prairie restoration site
- Lincoln wayside exhibit
- 900 foot dam and spillway – constructed in 1968, annual inspections for PDRMA,
- 1.5 miles of Salt Fork River frontage
- 3 rest room facilities
- 5 fishing piers and 4 boat ramps
- 10 picnic areas with tables, grills and benches
- 10 plus miles of hiking / multi use trails with 1 interpretive trail system
- 4 trail bridges
- 1 sled hill
- 4 swinging benches

Collins Pond

This 28 acre parcel and three acre pond was purchased by the District in 1974. It has one of the oldest oak and hickory woodlands in the area with an excellent variety of native woodland plants. This park area is approximately 3 miles south of Homer Lake and it offers a more secluded outdoor experience.

- 0.62 mile trail
- 3 picnic tables
- 1 grill

Old Homer Park

This old historic park site was donated to the District in 1998. It is reported to be a 15 acre tract with Salt Fork River frontage located 2 miles south east of Homer Lake. State Route 49 runs thru the property. Old Homer Park operated from about 1905 to 1929 and it was one of the largest

recreation areas in central Illinois. Most of the acreage is in the flood plain so very little has been done in terms of providing amenities for visitors. An Eagle Scout installed an information display and a bench near the old bird bath which is the only remaining historical artifact from the park's existence. With financial assistance and historical research provided by the Homer Historical Society, a very nice interpretive sign was installed in 2014, at which time the scout sign was removed due to significant deterioration.

Sylvester Woods (2013)

This 6.7 acre parcel is located 2 miles west of Homer Lake. The property is a very high quality natural area that borders the Salt Fork River. This summer we installed a beautiful maintenance free sign that recognizes the Sylvester family as the original owners since 1854.

Sylvester Woods Expansion/Rishel Property (2014)

This 28 acre property is located less than 1/4 mile north of Sylvester Woods and is adjacent to Sylvester along a portion of its perimeter. This area is predominately in the flood plain as it borders the Salt Fork River. The upland portion of the property has a small pond, and we installed a small parking area this past fall.

Kickapoo Rail Trail (2013)

The acquisition of the 24.5 mile CSX rail corridor from Urbana to Danville was finally completed in October after nearly two decades. The Forest Preserve will manage 12.7 miles of this 175 acre linear parkway that begins just east of Urbana and ends at the Vermilion County line. When developed the 10 foot wide crushed limestone path will provide a variety of recreational and educational opportunities. Construction of the first 6 mile section from Urbana to St. Joseph may begin in 2016, if the private funding needed for grant match can be raised.

Public Service Responsibilities / Activities

The Homer Lake staff provides excellent public service to our visitors and we respond to a variety of requests from the public, rental groups, and volunteers. The following list is representative of the additional public service activities:

- The Emergency Management Agency held their annual search and rescue training
- U of I held concrete canoe races which drew over 600 people from all over the United States (2014)
- Champanamoms voted Homer Lake as the #1 place to take children (2014)
- Trail Stewards - assisting them with trail issues
- Take Me Fishing - assisting the Interpretive staff
- Canoe Programs - assisting the Interpretive staff
- Audubon Programs & Bird Counts
- U of I Natural History Survey long term studies
- Bass Tournaments
- Catfish Tournaments
- U of I crew team
- Special Use Permits – walk and run events, Search and Rescue events, several school related events, Cardboard Boat Race, car shows, bike rides

2014 Accomplishments and the Year Ahead

The second year of the Natural Playscape being open was a great success based on the number of visitors coming to experience this new feature. In 2014 we made additional improvements. The installation of the snorkel wells allowed us to relocate the two pumps, so that stream flow was improved and the pumps were much easier to maintain. We can now pull the pumps out of the lake by standing on the shoreline instead of wading out into the lake. This was also the first season that the stream flow switch was in service. It worked very well at reducing algae growth in the stream since it was able to dry out during periods of low visitation.

We installed three trail interpretive signs and a new historical interpretive display at Old Homer Park. The Homer Historical Society was very pleased with the sign and the stamped concrete that it was mounted on.

The new HVAC system was installed at the Homer Lake Interpretive Center. The new system will eliminate the condensation problem that occurred, and it will be much more efficient to operate.

2015

The Sail Boat Boardwalk project is scheduled for this year, and it couldn't be better timing. The concrete walkway has several large cracks and some sections have become tripping hazards. The railroad ties that were installed in the seventies were used as a barrier for the lake and as a base for the board walk, but they are no longer stable. We plan to have an outside contractor install sheet piling to prevent wave action from eroding the base material underneath the new concrete board walk that the construction crew will install.

The construction crew will also be pouring a concrete parking area at the Salt Fork Center. This will be located at the rear of building so that ADA requirements can be satisfied.

February 9, 2015

MEMORANDUM

To: Board of Commissioners

From: Matthew Kuntz, Site Superintendent

Re: Middle Fork River Forest Preserve 2014 Annual Report

Background

The Middle Fork River Forest Preserve consists of 1,702 acres in northeast Champaign County, approximately five miles north of Penfield. The preserve contains a mix of hardwood forests, mixed lowland and upland prairies, and waterfowl management areas. Within the user areas of the preserve is a 65 site campground holding electric and non-electric camping, two group areas for larger camping groups, swim beach, four miles of the Middle Fork River, an enclosed rental building used for multiple applications, and three ponds for recreational use. Camping is available to the public all year, with its busiest time running May through October.

Staff and Responsibilities

Staffing at the Middle Fork River Forest Preserve consists of three full-time employees, site superintendent Matthew Kuntz, assistant site Superintendent Andy Little, and Ed Hutchinson, a Maintenance Worker II. We typically employ three seasonal positions helping with day to day operations and a campground host who runs daily office operations for the campground.

Responsibilities in general include grounds maintenance and general upkeep of all user areas and properties owned by the district. Along with the campground host, full-time staff maintains a campground reservation system used by staff and public. Other duties include management of waterfowl areas, wetlands, river corridors, and trails.

2014 Year in Review

2014 once again was a successful year for the Middle Fork River Forest Preserve. Keeping up with others in the industry, our campground was packed all year with full capacity bookings on most weekends. For the Memorial Day weekend, we were forced to turn away up to 40 campers due to a fully booked holiday. We also noticed a larger number of visitors coming out of the Chicago and Indianapolis areas. The District's campground naturalist, Christy Wallace, had another successful summer with education programs held at our preserve. Middle Fork hosted the first annual River to Rail Ride, a bicycle ride from our preserve to Kickapoo State Park to help raise funds for the rail trail. The event exceeded expectations, with more than 180 riders attending.

Several capital improvements were accomplished in 2014. The shower house roof and skylights were replaced in early fall. An addition to the superintendent's residence was added mid-summer using a contracted crew to pour the foundation and complete the exterior work, while our construction crew finished the interior work. In early spring, construction of an accessible trail located at the Odle Property began. This project included a new parking lot, five interpretive signs along the trail, and construction of the ADA section of the trail to fulfill OSLAD requirements.

During the summer of 2014 an engineering firm completed a study of Willow Pond, our largest pond which holds the swim beach located inside the campground area. Noticing that the pond experiences significant water loss creating algae growth and public health concerns, the engineering firm assessed the condition of Willow Pond and provided a strategy towards solving these problems. Hey and Associates provided an outlook of the health of Willow Pond and presented several different recommendations on how to alleviate the problems we face with the pond.

Smaller projects completed in 2014 include the purchase of a shower tower located at the swim beach area. This tower will reduce stresses put on the shower house by the public and will be more accessible to swim beach users. Several other small ADA issues were addressed throughout the user areas. 2014 was the first year Middle Fork purchased firewood for resale at the campground. This was incredibly successful and relieved significant months of staff time, which allowed higher priority tasks to be completed.

The Year Ahead: 2015

In the upcoming year, we have several important goals. One project with the highest of priorities will be the Willow Pond renovation. Mike Daab and I have been working on this project since late December following some guidelines given to us by the engineering study noted above. This project involves draining the pond completely, digging out dredge materials to the recommended depth, installing a new floor for the pond, and refilling. Other tasks will involve re-stocking fish population, and developing new habitat in and around the pond. With the project timeline unknown, we may be without a swim beach and pond from four weeks to three months.

Another fully accessible trail will be built on the southernmost section of the Middle Fork River Forest Preserve. What is usually referred to as the Weber Property, an ADA trail spanning nearly a mile will be constructed with an accessible platform overlooking the Point Pleasant wetland, a “destination point” as required by IDNR OSLAD criteria. This trail somewhat mimics the ADA trail located at the northern most section of Middle Fork. Interpretive signage and a parking area will also be part of the project.

Other improvements tasked for 2015 will be sealcoating of our roads primarily inside the campground area. With the winter of 2013/2014, the camping roads were significantly damaged with constant plowing and the freeze thaw process. Also, shower house renovation will be looked at this summer, with fixes focusing on the improvement of shower stalls.

The Future

Many opportunities are possible with the Middle Fork River Forest Preserve. I have always looked at it as an “open canvas” in order to create an incredible destination point for the public. The Harry L. Swartz Campground has significant expansion potential, primarily dealing with more electric sites and cabins. I will be researching this subject heavily this year in hopes of seeing expansion within the next three years. Typical rehab will continually be on the agenda for the next five years when dealing with shelter replacement, creating more accessible user areas, and rental building rehab. Other projects on my five-year plan include a bridge spanning Sugar Creek for maintenance personnel accessing the preserve in a much more efficient manner. Our maintenance facility will need to be addressed soon with capacity and efficiency issues.