

July 7, 2014

MEMORANDUM

To: Board of Commissioners

From: Lisa Sprinkle

Re: July Staff Report

Executive Director (Dan Olson)

- We had a very quick but good visit with the Governor and the IDNR Director, Marc Miller, as they came to discuss recent land purchases in the state and their support for the Kickapoo Rail Trail. Part of that announcement was the IDNR purchase of 1.3 miles of the trail from Kickapoo State Park up to and including the trestle bridge over the Middle Fork River. Ken Konsis and I did some follow up interviews about the timeline for building the trail. Media coverage of the event was fair. Thank you to the staff – some of them came back early from trips – for helping with the event. We owe a very big thank you to Tim Bartlett, Derek Liebert, and Corky Emberson from the Urbana Park District for coming together at the last minute to provide us with a beautiful location for the event.
- We had a very busy 4th of July weekend. The campground was full, and each site (50 sites plus overflow) had an average of at least three people, but several sites had more. Freedom Fest gate totals were almost 4,800 people. This is a conservative number because several people were in Lake of the Woods prior to taking admission. We had 4,582 participants in 2011, 3,770 in 2012, 4,866 in 2013, and 4,795 in 2014. More than 490 volunteer hours put in for the effort. Homer Lake, River Bend and Sangamon River were all filled with individuals enjoying the long weekend.
- We had the privilege to host Shatterglass Studios at Lake of the Woods (and other areas) during their filming of the independent film “Food”. For a little less than a week, we allowed them full access to the Natural Resources and Botanical Gardens office and shop area as they filmed in nearby locations. The building was turned into actor dressing rooms, costume and makeup location and production crew staging area. A few “stars” were seen on location.
- Most supervisors have completed their mid-year evaluations of staff. This process was designed to use the Nov. annual evaluations as a starting point to examine goal completion and improvements.
- We have considerable “outside” interest in fundraising for the Kickapoo Rail Trail. (By “outside”, I am referring to groups other than the CCFPD, VCCD and CCDC). This is not uncommon on very large projects such as the trail. In many cases, these groups will reach audiences that we may not have. We have already had successful major appeals done by local cycling businesses. One that is in the works is the local chapter of the Sierra Club will be hosting the following:
- SAVE-THE-DATE for the Sierra Club's upcoming fundraiser for the Kickapoo Rail-to-Trail. In case you haven't heard, an old rail line from Urbana to Vermilion County fairgrounds will soon be converted into a recreational path for walkers,

runners, and bicyclists. But before this conversion can be completed, lots of money needs to be raised. Please join us from **6:30-8pm on Thursday, August 28 at Sleepy Creek Vineyards** (between C-U and Danville). This event will be limited to 75 people and we will start taking reservations in late July - stay tuned for that email, which will have more details about the event, cost, and how to RSVP.

- I have attached a copy of the article from NRPA's Parks & Recreation magazine on our natural playscape. As you may recall Dina Izenstark presented her findings to the board several months back.

Deputy Director/Grants (Mary Ellen Wuellner)

- A grant application was submitted to The Nature Conservancy and Illinois Nature Preserves Commission for tools and equipment to support the District's trail steward program. Through their Volunteer Stewardship Network, the two agencies make annual awards to organizations that implement volunteer-run programs to maintain public lands. As in past years, our request included hand saws, safety wear, herbicide applicators, and prescribed burn equipment.
- I participated in the July 4th parade and used the occasion to raise awareness of the Kickapoo Rail Trail. Two banners that indicated the trail would be "coming soon" were displayed on a bike trailer hauled by a member of the Champaign County Bikes organization.
- Jan Runion and I conducted a first round of interviews for the Construction Manager position. We had a large pool of high quality candidates and are working to narrow down the field to hold a second set of interviews.
- Fundraising efforts continue for both the Botanical Garden pond/waterfall and the Kickapoo Rail Trail. Donation totals for both projects remain at approximately the same level as last month. Conversations are underway with several major donors, so next month's board report will hopefully contain some significant monetary progress.

Administration (John Baker)

- On June 26, we received the updated preliminary audited financial statements from Sikich for all funds including the Forest Preserve Friends Foundation, as well as Sikich' findings and recommendations regarding the District's internal financial controls. Dan and I continue the financial statement review against District records for any errors or missed information. We are also preparing the Management Discussion and Analysis section of the audit report. The final audit is not expected to be presented until the August 21 Board meeting. Note: The Illinois Comptroller's Office approved the District's request for a two month audit filing extension.
- Finalized and advertised the Willow Pond Request for Qualifications.
- Finalized contract with Harris Computers for the MSI HR module and the Purchasing Card interface. The PCard interface will allow for automated upload of PCard purchasing data into the Accounts Payable module. MSI HR was installed June 20. Jan and Mary are reviewing the system to prepare for migration of employee data from the Payroll module. Jan and I are discussing more clearly defining employee position types in the new system.
- Reviewed request for purchasing through National Intergovernmental Purchasing Alliance.

- Reviewed bank collateralization requirements with Busey Bank to insure District funds are secure.
- Prepared compensation scenarios to consider accurate placement of employees within their pay ranges, and according to their years of experience. Met with Compensation Committee for further clarification on parameters for compensation scenarios.
- Prepared and advertised the District's 2013 Public Funds Statement.
- Betty and I participated in our first Procurement Card webinar for two hours of training on the new system.
- Discussed District training and organizational needs with Perspectives, Ltd. Jan and I will discuss this further with them in preparation for 2015 budgeting. Perspectives is the District's employee assistance program provider

Marketing (Lisa Sprinkle)

- Joe Barlow from CiLiving did an "On The Spot" segment on Lake of the Woods which aired on Thur. July 3 and featured interviews from Larry Beckett, Valerie Hall, and Doug Sanders in addition to two families in the preserve that day.
- Freedom Fest was well attended this year. The gate take was \$4755.
- Eastern Illinois Electrical Coop asked me to write a one page article for their member newsletter in August on Middle Fork River Forest Preserve.

Construction (Bryan Stevens)

- Painting restrooms at Elks Lake and Lake of the Woods Pavilions.
- Painting handrails at the Museum of the Grand Prairie.
- Completing construction of the ADA trail and parking lot on the Odle property at the Middle Fork River Forest Preserve.
- Assisted OPS staff with the set up for Freedom Fest.

Museum and Education Department (Barb Garvey)

- The contractor's obligation to the building phase of the Grand Prairie Story exhibit is essentially complete.
- The new interpretive sign at Old Homer Park is now installed, with many thanks to the Homer Lake Ops and Construction departments. This sign was funded by the Homer Historical Society; we are in the process of planning a dedication with them, slated for sometime later this summer.
- The Homer Lake Interpretive Center has a new Kids Corner exhibit; titled 'Milkweeds for Monarchs'.
- Summer camps, school programs, library programs, and special request programs have been going strong this year. Museum Mondays have really taken off as well, with a total of 253 participants in June as compared to last year's 35.
- A second year of Archaeology camp met with interest equal to last year. Responses included: "The topic was something of TOP LEVEL excitement" and "Heck, yes, we will do it again!!! Wish it was all summer long."
- A videographer from the Land of Lincoln Tourism Bureau visited and filmed the majority of the *Champaign County's Lincoln* exhibit for inclusion in a promotional video highlighting

day trips in Eastern Illinois. The video will be showcased on the Land of Lincoln Tourism Bureau's website.

- Valerie Hall, Curator, received a scholarship to attend the Association of Midwest Museum's conference in St. Louis in mid-July.

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

- Illinois Foot Golf Association representative Carlos Stremi completed the foot golf course layout on Wednesday June 18th. We have a scorecard completed. Merchandise and accessory items are under review.
- Junior Golf Clinic and the Adult "Get Golf Ready" classes have been extended one extra week to July 8th due to a rain out on June 10th - this will overlap the Junior Golf Camp that starts July 7th.
- We conducted DEMO Day promotions where golfers can try out all the latest equipment with three different golf companies, Cleveland, Cobra, and Mizuno golf during the month of June.
- Outing activities for June include: June 9th - McLean County Seniors - 165 players; June 10th - Carle EMS - 42; June 13th - Mid Central Carpenters Union - 252; June 19th - Mahomet Rotary Club - 52; June 27th - Larry Harvey Memorial Outing - 54.
- Golf maintenance - continues with course maintenance during this unusually cool weather. Bunker maintenance and irrigation repair continue. The construction department installed the bio-swale sign.



Natural Resources (Mike Daab)

- Our busiest time of year for weed management continued through June and into July. Mowing, spraying, and pulling at all Preserves continues.
- We thank Phil Hult and the Grand Prairie Friends interns for the time they spent pulling wild parsnip and sweet clover at Buffalo Trace.
- We are thankful for volunteers Jeff Miller and Bob Feller joining Diane and Ed Wilhite in combating invasive bush honeysuckle at River Bend Forest Preserve. Jeff and Bob are our first volunteers to go after the shrub with a brushcutter and herbicide, and they are making great progress.
- Nathan, Kate, and Jacob attended the Oak Woodlands and Barrens Workshop in Vienna, IL, July 10-11.
- Mike helped organize and participated in the Upper Sangamon River Conservancy's Introduction to Fishing the Sangamon River event on June 21. USRC volunteer Bart Duesdieker led a great program that included information on safety, equipment, and strategy. IL Department of Natural Resources biologist Trent Thomas participated and brought live fish from the river for show, including walleye and long-nosed gar.
- The Natural Resources Department has spent considerable time relocating, and arranging for relocation of, prairie and wetland plants from the Kickapoo Rail Trail corridor in advance of a road improvement project on US 150 between Urbana and St. Joseph. So far, plants have

been relocated to several locations, including Homer Lake Forest Preserve, the Tomlinson Cemetery addition, Lake of the Woods, several Grand Prairie Friends sites, University of Illinois Natural Areas, Champaign Park District, and the St. Joseph Wetland. Thanks to Steve Buck and Nate Beccue of U of I Natural Areas for their assistance on this project.

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

- Weddings, facility events, and boat rentals are going well this year. As of the end of May we have achieved 48 percent of our projected revenue. Last year we were at 46 percent during the same time period.
- With the assistance of the construction department several improvements have been made over the past few months (i.e. painting of Lake of the Woods and Elks Lake Pavilions bathrooms, painting of the Botanical Garden Bridge, repairs to the waterfall and pond, and installation of a boat house cash register). We are hoping these upgrades will not only provide patrons with a safe environment but also increase the aesthetics of the locations.
- For the past couple of weeks staff has focused on Freedom Fest preparations. Along with normal duties, this has consisted of grounds maintenance (i.e. mowing, trimming, mulching), cleaning of vehicles, painting, fence repairs, checking personal protective equipment, placement of road barricades, safety tape and signage, and training staff.
- Seasonal staff performed trail maintenance at Buffalo Trace. This involved trimming limbs/brush, filling erosion areas with dirt, gravel, and mulch, and replacement of broken five mile markers.
- Due to a water main leak, staff replaced a 40 foot section of the irrigation line east of the Rayburn-Purnell Shelter. This water line feeds the Botanical Garden's sprinkler system.
- Staff attended fire extinguisher and tornado simulator training that was put on by Cornbelt Fire Department.
- The Botanical Garden staff has finished planting all of the seasonal planting within flower beds and landscape areas. Due to the generous rain fall they have also been dealing with excessive weeding.
- Plant ID and general purpose signage has been installed in the Discovery Garden. Thanks to the Education Department for its help with this project.

Homer Lake (Brian Taylor)

- The Information display at Old Homer Park was installed by the construction crew and we landscaped boulders around it. The stamped concrete is very attractive and fitting for the time period that the park was in operation. (See picture)
- We had to replace one of the pumps at the Natural Playscape. During the process we were being supervised and questioned by a group of 5 year olds. We were glad that they were so understanding,



because when the water stops flowing things can get a little intense.

- The PDRMA review went very well even though there were a few items that needed some attention. The sail boat boardwalk continues to be a concern that they would like for us to address.
- Roy and I attended Governor Quinn's press conference at Crystal Lake Park on Saturday afternoon after another successful Take Me Fishing event that morning.

Middle Fork River (Matt Kuntz)

- We have hired our new Maintenance II employee at Middle Fork. Ed Hutchinson accepted the position in late June and will be a great full-time addition to the District work force.
- I have met with the contractor for the house addition and he has started ordering supplies and laying out foundation measurements for the build. Due to excessive rain he has been delayed with his original time frame.
- We have received the bench and interpretive sign for the ADA trail at the Odle property. Additional projects to finish up include parking blocks, signage placement, and bench installation.
- The campground continues to be a very busy place this summer. It is very interesting to see more and more out of state campers each weekend, and a large demographic of campers this summer coming from the Chicago and Indianapolis regions.

Volunteers (Pat Simpson)

- Freedom Fest preparations continued apace. A training workshop for new volunteers was held and packets of training materials for volunteers who could not attend this training were sent out. As of this date and with the help of members of the Board of Commissioners and the Citizen Advisory Committee, it appears that all volunteer positions have been filled. In addition, I will work with a team of five from the Mahomet Vineyard Church on clean-up on July 5.
- I met with Manuel Colon of the University of Illinois Department of Natural Resources to discuss volunteer and internship possibilities.
- The subject of internships has begun to be discussed by Jan Runion, Mary Beck, and myself. Seeking input from legal counsel and from PDRMA, we are in the process of clarifying distinctions between internships and volunteers, as well as identifying staff areas of responsibility with regard to the two groups.
- The second trail steward hike was held June 20 at 7:30 am at River Bend Preserve. Two of our long-time trail stewards, Dianne and Ed Wilhite, led the hike and another longtime trail steward, Eileen Borgia, organized it. This is the second hike of what we hope will be an ongoing series. We started the hikes in an attempt to address the survey feedback we received indicating that stewards would like to be engaged in more social group activities.
- Arrangements were made to have two crews from the Catholic Heart Work Camps volunteer for us the week of July 7 through 10. One crew will move materials from a Museum of the Grand Prairie storage area; another crew will paint plant boxes, arbors and related items in

the Enabling Garden. Barb Garvey has kindly stepped forward to attend an orientation for these crews on July 6 at St. Thomas More School.

Special Projects (Tom Pike).

- Finding land acquisitions and easements the district has made and signed Along with filing land acquisitions I am also going to put them on the computer network so they will be backed up off site.
- Began researching Joint Purchasing for municipalities.