

Note: These minutes are not official until approved by the Forest Preserve District Committee at a subsequent meeting. Please refer to the meeting minutes when these minutes are approved to obtain any changes to these minutes.

DeKalb County Government
Sycamore, Illinois

**Forest Preserve District Committee Minutes
April 26, 2016**

The DeKalb County Forest Preserve District Committee met Tuesday April 26, 2016 at 6:00 pm in the maintenance building of Afton Forest Preserve. In attendance were committee members: Ms. Turner, Ms. Polanco, Mr. Brown, Mr. Metzger and Superintendent Hannan. Mr. Bagby arrived after the meeting was called to order and Mr. Emerson and Ms. Haji-Sheikh were absent. Guests included Mary Kay Knudsen, District Natural Resource Manager Mr. Roloff, District Restoration Ecologist/Maintenance employee Josh Clark and Peggy Doty Director of the NREC.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Turner called for a motion to approve the minutes of the March 23, 2016 meeting. Mr. Metzger moved to approve the minutes, seconded by Ms. Polanco and the motion passed unanimously.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Ms. Turner called for a motion to approve the agenda. Ms. Polanco moved to approve the agenda, seconded by Mr. Brown and the motion passed unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mr. Hannan noted that there may be some future discussions regarding horses at Chief Shabbona Preserve. He will likely be bringing this to the attention of the trail rider groups for resolution.

Mr. Bagby arrived.

Mr. Hannan continued that it should be noted that there are many groups who want to use the preserves for recreational activities that may not be compatible with conservation areas, *to paraphrase from the February letter (as stated on the next page) by Mr. Hannan:* As a forest preserve district we try to be consistent with the forest preserve mission statement. The Forest Preserve mission statement by Illinois Statute is “to acquire, preserve and restore land, as nearly as may be, in their natural state and condition, and for the purpose of the education, and recreation of the public”.

Forest Preserves support native Illinois plant and wildlife ecosystems. Forest Preserves are designed to conserve energy, protect and restore sustainable landscapes, improve habitat diversity, clean our air and water, reduce soil erosion, re-charge groundwater and help in flood control.

The District has many requests for recreational uses in our forest preserves including: picnic areas, shelter houses, open play fields and play grounds, dog areas, snowmobile areas, bird watching, nature photography, open play fields, hiking, high school and college cross county running training sites, biking, cross-country skiing, snow biking, wheelchair accessibility, sledding, camping, paint ball, frisbee golf, a.t.v. and dirt bike use, alcohol use, model airplanes, drones, geocaching, canoeing /kayaking, hunting, fishing, archery, ice skating , ice fishing, etc. Some of these are compatible recreational uses, some are not or have to be restricted or regulated to some degree.

The Forest Preserve District evaluates allowing certain types of activities such as: potential impact on the habitat, land management and maintenance, public safety, land classification (recreational, forest, prairie, wetland, historic site) We are doing the best we can at all forest preserves to offer a balance of compatible recreational uses while protecting the landscape and natural resource value in our beautiful forest preserves.

Therefore the District often has to make decisions, like denying or limiting access, to minimize conflict in recreational, natural resource / habitat areas. To this end, he has given a letter from last February to the Forest Preserve Committee members that was sent to a representative of the trail riders group. Mr. Metzger noted that he thinks the letter Mr. Hannan has sent to the Committee should be sent to the Board as a whole as well.

MONTHLY REPORTS AND ACTIVITIES

Mr. Hannan noted that Mr. Clark and Mr. Roloff were in attendance to discuss the burn season and the stream bank stabilization project at the South Branch Prairie.

Mr. Roloff reported that they have had the best burn season they have ever had. The Illinois Burn Council (a body that encourages fire as a management tool). He noted that they have done 150 acres of prescribed fire this season. This compares to their highest previous count of 121 acres and 60 acres last year. He noted that the additional trained staff and the new fire control equipment they have purchased has been a tremendous help and added to the safety of controlled burning. He added that DeKalb County actually has a much more complex burn process than some other areas due to the amenities in the preserves (buildings, roads, playgrounds, shelters, people areas, etc.).

Mr. Roloff also noted that they had the assistance of volunteer Ryan Hannan and noted that he proved to be a very proficient, experienced and trained burn professional. He also noted in the photos how the new foam sprayer is used to control small fires that may catch in the upper tree branches and to control fire lines. Mr. Roloff also reported that the Army Corp of Engineers, Fish and Wildlife Service and the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency called the Afton Wetland bank one of the finest wetland banks in the Midwest. The staff will be performing maintenance work this spring on the some wetland areas to repair some bank erosion and other issues.

There have been several volunteer activities this year. The South East Asian Leadership Program assisted again this year. The students in the program learn about government and the intricacies of running the preserves and then perform a volunteer activity.

Last Saturday, 25 to 26 people assisted with tree planting at Afton. There will be almost 1000 trees planted this year. NIU also sent a group to assist with planting and there was also assistance from the Adventure Works, one member of which is an ex-Marine who had served in Afghanistan.

Mr. Roloff commented that he has a marsh area on his property where he can cultivate plants to be used in the Preserve marsh areas. Recently, he and Josh Clark and Land Steward volunteers dug out 275 mud clumps that were used for a stream bank stabilization project along the Kishwaukee River at the South Branch Prairie. Mr. Roloff then showed the Committee a photo of two Sand Hill cranes that he is hoping will nest here. Unfortunately, the cranes were then scared off by an off-leash dog.

Mr. Roloff notes that he and the staff are also working on a stream bank restoration project at the South Branch Prairie. He noted that the District had received assistance from the Natural Resources Conservation Service and a \$4,000 grant from the Illinois Smallmouth Bass Alliance for a “stone toe” rip-rap construction to help keep the banks from sloughing off into the river and the river from undercutting the bank. He added that the mud clump sedges harvested from his marsh were planted by forest preserve staff the volunteer Land Stewards in this erosion control and water improvement / fish habitat project.

Mr. Clark noted that they have built and planted propagation boxes and given some to the District Stewards to assist in growing the plants until they can be deployed in the Preserves. The Stewards have also built bird boxes and performed other critical projects for the District. Mr. Roloff commented on how valuable the Stewards are as a supplement to the small District staff.

Mr. Hannan commented that in other Spring cleanup projects, The DeKalb Kishwaukee Kiwanis as well as the Sycamore Lions Club have assisted with trail cleanups this year. BioLife Plasma also sent volunteers to assist with tree planting at Nehring Preserve. All of these groups, along with the efforts of other volunteers have made a major difference in the condition of the Preserves.

PDRMA (Park District Risk Management Agency) has been focusing all aspects of staff and visitor forest preserve safety and recently on the playground safety at all Preserves. New playground mulch was recently placed in all of the playground areas. Mr. Hannan commented on how well PDRMA responded following last year’s barn and equipment fire at Afton. They paid all the replacement costs of the barn repairs as well as the replacement costs for many pieces of large and small equipment lost in the fire.

Mr. Hannan commented that local bird artist and bird expert Pete Olson will be doing his annual Spring bird migration walk/talk this Sunday at the Afton Preserve and on Mother’s day at the Sannauk Preserve. He noted that additional information is available on the County web site. He commented that 172 different bird species have been documented at Afton alone. Mr. Clark showed a photo of a rare Stilt seen at the Afton wetlands and noted that a Wild Turkey had also been recently sighted at Afton.

Mrs. Turner noted that she had done a presentation on the new Sycamore Preserve for the full County Board. Mr. Roloff and Mr. Clark have planted 110 trees at the Sycamore Forest Preserve site along the river and noted the area is being prepared for the path that will connect the Preserve to the Great Western Trail. Mr. Hannan noted that the District will be contracting an engineer for the Preserve roads and parking and bid preparation. The Highway Department will help with bid letting and asphalt work supervision.
(attached is an update of the work in progress at the Sycamore Forest Preserve)

Mr. Hannan noted that Preserve monthly shelter house, camping and visitor use figures and reports can be found in the Committee packets.

Mr. Hannan then recognized Peggy Doty and asked her to report on NREC activities. Ms. Doty noted that this has been a very busy season. One additional issue that has arisen is that the State is requiring implementation of the New Generation Science Standards by 2017. She noted that she and the NREC staff are working to develop some assistance to schools as there currently is no assistance available. There was a recent roundtable held that also pulled in representatives from the Brookfield Zoo, the Cosley Zoo, several Forest preserves and Park Districts met to discuss what assistance they could provide to this initiative.

Ms. Doty noted that she has also currently working with 15 Master Naturalists and has also provided “I Think Green” training for volunteers who will work with children at the NREC and camps. She commented that it is critical to teach the message of why the environment and environmental activities are critical. Ms. Doty also recently held classes for 2nd graders. She commented to the Committee that they can come out at any time to see what the NREC does.

She reported that, unfortunately, the NREC/ U of I Extension has lost another full time staff member due to the State budget situation. She noted that given the large number of children who attend the camps, and their often special needs, they have a great need for support from the volunteers and the community.

Ms. Knudsen asked how someone can volunteer to assist with the camps. Ms. Doty noted that anyone interested could contact either her or Connie Handel.

Ms. Doty noted that Mr. Roloff had also recently spoken to Ms. Turner’s grade school class and brought mussel shells, eggs and other items that the students found fascinating. The students are also looking forward to seeing the locally filmed forest preserve film about the forest preserve prairie burn process.

Mr. Hannan commented that he had recently attended a “Green Drinks” event at The Forge in Sycamore as guest speaker on the forest preserve district. The local organization meets nationally in communities to discuss local conservation and environmental activities. Mr. Roloff and Ms. Doty also attended. Mr. Roloff brought mussel shell samples and discussed the reproductive cycles of the mussels and the quality of the

Kishwaukee River. Ms. Doty did an overview of the educational activities being performed through the District. Mr. Hannan commented that 30 people attended the Green Drinks Event.

Mr. Roloff commented that they get many requests for tours, talks and activities. One group that has been coming to the Preserves since the 1990's is Kelly High School from Chicago. He noted that many of the students have never seen open, green space.

Ms. Doty noted that there will be a Mother's day flower walk at Russell Woods. Brian Hale and Karen Metz will be leading that activity.

Mr. Clark has also started a Forest Preserve Facebook page and has put a few images of the recent burns on it. Mr. Metzger noted that he would like to see more short videos of tours or activities done at the Preserves. Mr. Clark commented that he has posted some forest hiking photos from Chief Shabbona forest preserve recently.

Mr. Hannan noted for the Committee that the Afton Preserve and the Afton South Prairie consists of 320 acres of land and the original site was purchased in 1973. It was a farm that had been homesteaded in the 1800's by the McGirr family. The farmhouse was originally built in 1902 and boasted the first indoor plumbing in the County gravity fed by the water tower. Over many years, land has been added and the Preserve has be restored into many diverse prairie, wetland and wooded habitats and has recreational and educational opportunities.

Mr. Roloff told the story of asking visitors how many trees in the 1800 era they think were between DeKalb and Waterman. He then noted that in 1992 local resident Fred Walker, who farmed just north of Route 23, showed diaries from his great grandmother who noted that there was only one tree visible between DeKalb and Waterman. Mr. Roloff located the tree and discovered it is a Hawthorn. This illustrates that the entire area was prairie when the original settlers came to DeKalb County.

Ms. Knudsen asked about the sedge mud clumps that were used at the South Branch Prairie project. She was curious as to what they purpose was. Mr. Roloff noted that they provide habitat, stabilize the soil and also allow for the growth of native wetland plant species.

Mr. Hannan commented that Mr. Clark and staff has really improved the buildings and grounds and maintenance facilities for the Southern and Central Preserves. He has been cleaning out the buildings and recycling unneeded materials, updating shop equipment, road improvements, adding new signage, and other maintenance improvements. He noted that Bill Prain and other staff manage the buildings and grounds facilities for the Northern Preserves (monthly maintenance and project reports are included in the monthly packets along with the natural resource management reports).

Mr. Clark noted that he performs about 50/50 time in natural resource management and maintenance activities. Mr. Roloff noted to the Committee that Mr. Clark came to the

District in 2015 with a great background in Natural Resource Management and Maintenance experience having worked at the Nachusa Grasslands, Kane County Forest Preserves and the St. Charles and DeKalb Park District's.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS

Chairman Turner asked if there were any Committee member comments. Hearing none, she asked for a motion to Adjourn.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Bagby moved to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Metzger. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anita Turner", written in a cursive style.

Anita Turner, Chairperson
Forest Preserve District Committee
AT:kjr



This new Forest Preserve (former Evergreen Village mobile home park) will be named *Sycamore Forest Preserve* to honor the Sycamore community and named after the Sycamore tree that grows in floodplain areas. “Kishwaukee” is a Potawatomi word meaning “big tree” or “sycamore”. The east branch of the south branch of the Kishwaukee River flows northwest through this site.

Land improvements include:

2015

Mow future picnic areas and litter clean up. **Completed**

2 herbicide treatments and weeds mowed on 30 acre former N.W. floodplain farmed area and plant wetland and prairie seed mix in winter 2015-2016. **Completed**

Phase 1 Environmental Survey completed to assure no contamination issues. **Completed**

2016 - 2017

Work on connecting the Great Western Trail to ***Sycamore Forest Preserve***. **Stone Prairie path almost completed connecting Sycamore Forest Preserve to the Great Western Trail.**

R.R. Right of Way underbrush cleared in N.E. corner of Sycamore Forest Preserve for trail connection into Sycamore Forest Preserve. Working on easement for access to Stone Prairie path as part of Great Western Trail.

Remove dead trees and small “clumps” of trees in picnic areas and trim lower branches of trees to open up the view through the picnic areas. In the future plant Sycamore and Swamp White Oak trees in picnic areas. **Dead trees and other trees removed and stumps grinded, tree branches and suckers trimmed from 8 ft. down. Underbrush removed on R.R. Right of Way in N.E. corner for trail access to Stone Prairie path. 125 Sycamore Trees and Swamp White Oaks planted along river. 6 tree stumps left for wildlife wood carvings (great blue heron wood carving completed with kingfisher, owl and other bird carvings planned).**

Mow future picnic areas and litter clean up. Forest Preserve staff weekly mowing and cleaned up litter and old grounding posts, metal, rocks, concrete blocks, and other debris left in future picnic areas. Sycamore scouts also helped clean up litter. Brush pile in N.E. corner will be burned soon.

Develop picnic areas and green spaces. Construct 2 open air shelters. Picnic areas will be in mowed green spaces. Shelter house structures should be delivered in the next week or 2. Bid specs have been mailed to 4 contractors for shelter house construction including concrete floors, should have bids by end of the month. Building permit and shelters planned completion by August 1st. Picnic tables, Kiosk and other signage including "Sycamore Forest Preserve" entrance sign ordered and have been delivered. Old cable and electrical wires removed from poles. Bid specs mailed to 2 electrical contractors for 4 safety lights on poles and electrical underground to trailhead picnic shelter and new electrical panel and breaker box. 2 gates ordered to close off north area of preserve at night or as needed.

Improve parking areas near RT. 64 and develop trailhead near east parking area. Since this project is in the floodplain a Storm Water Management Plan and Building Permit is required by DeKalb County Planning and Zoning Dept. I have met with 2 firms to give quotes on the Storm Water Management Plan and they are also preparing bid documents for the 3" of new asphalt on the road, parking and trail areas. The DeKalb County Highway Dept. will have the bid openings and supervise the asphalt work. Hopefully this contracted asphalt work will begin in August after shelters and underground electrical are completed. Boulders ordered to place around road and parking areas to keep vehicles off green spaces.

Improve access road to pond for fishing and picnic areas (see above)

Develop hiking and cross-country ski trails. (will be done in the prairie habitat areas in 2016)

Signs have been posted on site with project work and timelines.

Plan on **Sycamore Forest Preserve** area open to public in late 2016 or Spring 2017

I hope we can open Sycamore Forest Preserve this Fall.

Terry Hannan