

**FOREST PRESERVE DISTRICT COMMITTEE
MINUTES
January 15, 2013**

The DeKalb County Forest Preserve District Committee met Tuesday January 15, 2013 at 6:00 pm at the Administration Bldg, Conference East. In attendance were committee members: Ms. Fauci, Mr. Cribben, Mr. Jones, Mr. Gudmunson, Ms. DeFauw and Superintendent Hannan. Ms. Haji-Sheikh and Mr. Brown were absent. Guests were Frank Ostling and Tom Micetich from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Fauci asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the November 20, 2012 meeting. Ms. DeFauw moved approval of the minutes, seconded by Ms. Fullerton and the motion passed unanimously. Ms. Fauci noted that the approval could only be done by Committee members who had been on the Committee during the prior year.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Ms. Fauci began by noting that it appears no Executive Session will actually be needed tonight, but there is a need to add an introduction of the new Committee members so the Agenda will be amended to reflect that. She then asked for an approval of the evening's amended agenda. Mr. Tracy moved to approve the amended agenda, seconded by Ms. DeFauw and the motion passed unanimously.

INTRODUCTION OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Ms. Fauci began by welcoming new members Mr. Jones, Mr. Brown, Mr. Cribben and Ms. Haji-Sheikh. She commented that Mr. Gudmunson is a returning Committee member from past years and Ms. DeFauw returns to the Committee from prior years. She concluded by noting that she is now crossing 10 years of County service and time with the Preserves. She feels her interests were fueled by growing up in an area that had many Forest Preserves.

MONTHLY REPORTS

Mr. Hannan began by adding his welcome to the new Committee and noting that this is and has always been a very good and constructive Committee during his years with the County and many great accomplishments and additions have been made over the years.

He then noted that each month, all monthly activities, projects, natural resource management and usage reports will be included in the Committee packets that come from the Board office.

In response to questions from new Committee members, a PowerPoint presentation will be made to the full County Board tomorrow night explaining the mission, management maintenance education and recreation, funding, and operations of the District. Additionally, time permitting, he also has a movie made by local cinematographer Tim Murray about the annual controlled burns done by his staff.

He noted that last month, a Committee member asked if there would be a continuation of the IDNR's Chronic Wasting Disease control program. At that time, he had responded that the program at the time was in some question due to reductions in funding and retirements that had reduced IDNR staff. However, IDNR representatives Frank Ostling and Tom Micetich are here tonight to discuss the program and their plans for 2013.

Mr. Hannan then noted to the Committee that they will be receiving reports and packets through the year from PDRMA, the Risk Management agency contracted by the County to handle their District's insurance and risk management needs. He commented that the organization has been extremely helpful with staff education and training support.

He presented the Committee with the 2013 schedule from the Northwest Suburban Astronomers, an organization that holds both public and private viewing events at the Afton and Potawatomi Woods Preserves. He commented that the organization prizes Afton and Potawatomi Woods for its convenience and dark skies making viewing very enjoyable.

Ms. Fauci then asked the Committee members to introduce themselves.

Ms. DeFauw began by commenting that she had grown up in Chicago and benefitted from the Preserves that were available to her and her family. She noted that she came to understand the value of Preserves for mental, spiritual and economic as well as physical benefit.

Mr. Gudmunson noted that he had grown up not very far from the Sannauk Preserve and had fond childhood memories at Sannauk. He remembered many family gatherings held there as well. He commented that he has served on the Forest Preserve Committee for 8 of his 10 years as a County Board member and was actively involved with the last Afton acquisition and the beginnings of the Prairie Oaks acquisition. He noted that he is pleased that the section of the Afton addition nearest to Little Rock Creek may be an addition to the District's Wetland Bank. Mr. Hannan added that an application has been made to the Army Corps of Engineers and that COE review of the application is expected to occur this year.

Ms. Fauci noted that the Wetland Bank is one of many sources of revenue used by the District to supplement and enhance the basic funding it receives from taxes.

Mr. Cribben noted that this is his first election to the County Board and is very interested in the Forest Preserve organization and operations. Mr. Hannan noted that he hoped all of his questions would be addressed at tomorrow's meeting.

Mr. Jones commented that this was also his first year on the Board but that he is a lifelong Sycamore resident still living in the home he grew up in. He has also been a past member of the Farm Bureau Board.

IDNR CWD UPDATE AND PROGRAM

Ms. Fauci turned the floor over to Mr. Ostling and Mr. Micetich to discuss the program. Mr. Ostling opened by noting that they began working in the Potawatomi Preserve in 2004. He commented that the DeKalb County properties have been extremely valuable to the IDNR since Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) was discovered in the Illinois deer population in 2002. The IDNR is also able to utilize the State property adjacent to Potawatomi and near MacQueen as well.

The cause of the disease (formal name Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy) is a prion primarily transmitted through direct contact. Once a prion is acquired there is no vaccine, no natural resistance that can be gained and no cure. It is a death sentence for the infected animal. In a strange way, any potential ability to acquire an at least short term resistance to the disease would be a dis-advantage as it would allow infected animals to persist on the landscape longer.

In 2012, the IDNR discovered an adult male deer in a highly emaciated condition. They euthanized the animal and took lymph node and brain stem samples. The samples came back positive for CWD. Mr. Ostling added that while this particular deer had an emaciated appearance – appearance alone is not a good indicator of CWD. He noted that animals with no visible symptoms can still be positive carriers.

In 2004, the IDNR began a program of nighttime sharpshooting campaign to both test for the progress of the disease as well as reduce the populations to try to contain transmission. He noted that the activities do involve bait, but that they are done after the hunting seasons have concluded. The IDNR works with private landowners as well to obtain permission to cull deer on their properties.

Mr. Ostling noted that the IDNR did take several budget and retirement hits this year and therefore the campaigns for 2013 may be shortened. They anticipate that they will conclude the campaigns in March.

He went on to note that Northwest DeKalb County has a continually increasing prevalence rate that is of concern to the IDNR. They have tried to obtain cooperation and partnership with the hunters and landowners in that area without success. There are many large, privately owned grounds and the IDNR are routinely denied access. The prevalence rate for 2012 in NW DeKalb County areas was 12% as opposed to 2% in other northern Illinois areas.

Other areas of the County have stable to declining rates, but the Northwest DeKalb County shows increases similar to those experienced in Wisconsin after it suspended its CWD eradication efforts.

He noted that all samples taken from the animals culled in the campaigns are processed through a lab in Rock Cut State Park. Deer that are determined to be free of the disease are processed and the meat is given to local food banks. Deer with positive results are disposed of in crematoriums.

Ms. Fauci commented that at a recent statewide Forest preserve meeting, Brent Manning (formerly of the IDNR and currently the Director of the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County) spoke at length about how critical DeKalb County is to preventing a greater spread of the disease across the State.

Mr. Jones asked why the landowners are so resistant to cooperating with the IDNR. Mr. Micetich replied that many believe the disease does not exist in their herds, but without testing have no way to corroborate that belief.

Mr. Hannan commented that 93% of the wooded land in northern DeKalb County is not used for the CWD campaigns and the IDNR has worked very hard to discuss their work and to be as transparent as possible about their activities.

Mr. Jones asked how long an animal can last after catching the disease. Mr. Micetich said they could live up to a year or so and are contagious during that time. He went on to add that the prions are exceedingly aggressive and hard to remove from soil and water. Mr. Ostling added that prions from blood drops can eventually percolate through the soil – they never dissipate completely.

Mr. Hannan commented that the gates are locked when the IDNR campaign is underway and they also alert the County Sheriff and local law enforcement. Mr. Micetich added that they also tend to try to limit their outings to 2 per week Monday through Thursday.

Mr. Gudmunson asked if a 12% prevalence rate is high. Mr. Micetich responded that 12% is one of the highest identified. Mr. Gudmunson then asked if a wolf or coyote eats infected meat – can they carry the disease. Mr. Micetich responded that they can't say absolutely "yes" or "no" to that question at this time.

Mr. Ostling noted that the IDNR website has a large amount of information on their activities and are always available to answer questions as needed.

Mr. Jones asked what criteria are used by the sharpshooters in selecting the animals to cull. Mr. Ostling responded that they generally take the largest first as they tend to be more likely to be infected. Fawns are generally less likely to be infected.

Mr. Jones asked how many sharpshooters go out during each campaign. Mr. Ostling replied that there are usually 2 to 4 per night and that they have never had a problem with that approach. Mr. Jones then asked how many animals are culled on average each night. Mr. Ostling replied that the deer are becoming somewhat less available as they seem to have figured out the pattern. Also, colder weather with more snow encourages the deer to come out to the bait.

Mr. Ostling then went on to note that all deer culled are removed from the hunting site that night. They do not leave the carcasses unattended. Mr. Cribben asked what guns are used. Mr. Ostling notes that there are many used, but mostly center fire .308's and

30.06's. He noted that they also drive through and make sure the preserves are clear before beginning each evening's campaign.

Mr. Gudmunson asked if the sharpshooters used lights at the campaign site. Mr. Micetich responded that they use a scope light (if needed) and lighted retical scopes. With snow cover, seldom is a light needed.

Mr. Ostling then commented that they often get accused of activities that are not theirs. In the same areas, there can be independent shooters, coyote hunters and municipal shooters. This is why the IDNR gives a detailed list of their times and locations to the police and Forest preserve Districts to assure transparency.

Ms. Fauci noted that in the past the Committee has, by consensus, agreed to grant permission to the IDNR to continue their activities in the Preserves. Mr. Ostling then handed their contact cards out to the Committee in the event anyone has any additional questions or concerns.

Mr. Jones asked if coyote populations are increasing or decreasing. Mr. Ostling responded that the packs tend to self-regulate. There have been some trapping and relocation efforts, but that rarely works. The coyotes are a very mobile animal, so better public information and awareness tend to work better.

He noted that coyotes are classic opportunists and are thriving. Mr. Micetich noted that he recalls seeing his first coyote prior to the 1970's. Now their mobility has them appearing in many locations and are even affecting some deer populations in the Southeast County as well.

Ms. Fauci then thanks the gentlemen for their time and information.

SOMONAUK TO SANNAUK TRAIL

Mr. Hannan passed out a map illustrating possible trail locations. He noted that in 2012, the Committee had settled on one trail proposal that passed through Mr. Dewey's property along S. County Line Rd.. At that time there were also discussions regarding conversations of renting a portion of the corridor.

Mr. Hannan then noted that he and past FP Committee had met with the Somonauk's mayor as well as Mr. Dewey for the proposed 1.5 mile (2.8 acre) trail corridor.

There were also discussions regarding other trail route options along the South County line. The only downside is that using Rte. 34 requires extensive and potentially expensive work with the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) that may make that approach prohibitive. Past experiences with IDOT have shown that their requirements are often quite onerous. Mr. Hannan then noted that the Village of Somonauk has the right of way on the South County line.

Mr. Hannan noted that he is bringing this to the new Committee because there may now be additional trail options. Mr. Jones asked what he meant by “trail” as far as composition. Mr. Hannan responded that it would likely be a limestone trail, not asphalt as that is a very expensive material to use. He added that the County Highway Department may assist with grading, leveling and hauling to help reduce the costs.

After reviewing the map proposals, Mr. Jones asked about one spot where the trail appears to run directly in front of a residence. Mr. Hannan noted that it could end up going around the property private property,

Mr. Jones asked if anyone had discussed this with the resident. Mr. Hannan responded that Becky Morphey from the Village will be speaking with them in the upcoming weeks.

Ms. Fauci noted that the goal is to establish the trail for residents between the Village and the Preserve. She noted that the project has great cooperation from the municipalities involved to help with security, maintenance, etc.

Mr. Jones asked about the viability of some of the other adjacent properties. The Committee then discussed the sentiments and concerns of some of the landowners who surround this area.

Mr. Gudmunson commented that there might be issues regarding the trail being too close to actively farmed properties. Mr. Hannan noted that there are many trails in the County that are adjacent to agricultural lands.

Mr. Gudmunson then commented that he believed it would be easier and safer for the local police to monitor the trail if it ran along Rte. 34, but did note that there could be ravines and topological issues that might arise.

Ms. Fauci noted that the District always wants to work with willing landowners/sellers.

Mr. Hannan then noted that he has made some overtures to IDOT and continues to ask if there are ways to work with them, but also minimize the extensive engineering costs and requirements.

Ms. Fauci commented that perhaps the County could donate the engineering work.

Mr. Gudmunson noted that some of the adjacent farmers have concerns about litter and other issues the trail might cause. He also reiterated that the local police would feel much safer patrolling along Rte. 34 rather than a more remote trail. Ms. Fauci commented that they had similar issues when they created the Dresser Road path and resolutions were found. Most litter comes from cars and other sources rather than trail users.

Mr. Jones asked what actions need to be taken by the Committee at this time. Mr. Hannan responded that this project is planned for 2013 and the Committee has time to discuss and consider all possible options.

Ms. Fauci noted that the Greenways and Trails plan for the County that was completed in 2006, had this trail as a part of it. That inclusion will assist with obtaining grants and other assistance on the costs.

Mr. Jones asked what funds will be available for the project. Mr. Hannan responded that he currently has just under \$10,000.00 from an old land/cash policy and \$10,000 budgeted for this byear. The Village of Somonauk is seeking a DeKalb County Community Foundation grant to assist with the costs. He added that past trails have also had partnerships with several local municipalities and local service organizations. Land donations have also been utilized on prior trails.

Mr. Hannan recalled that on the DeKalb/Sycamore Trail was a very involved project due to the need to work with IDOT. But at least that project was 90% grant funded, making the extra expenses required by IDOT less painful. He noted that he will report back what he hears from IDOT regarding this project, as well as the conversations with Mr. Dewey and the Village of Somonauk.

Mr. Jones asked f2013 was a target year to complete the project. Mr. Hannan responded that while he and the Village of Somonauk are hopeful it could be completed in 2013.

Mr. Hannan commented that the Genoa to Kingston trail corridor is coming along well. The Kishwaukee Sunrise Rotary is helping to do a mile of that trail. In the past, this organization has provided upwards of \$40,000.00 for shelters, trails and other support to the District.

TRAIL CLEARING IN DEKALB

Ms. Fauci began by noting that Commonwealth Edison had conducted a clearing of the easement areas under their high transmission wires this past fall that run along the DeKalb Nature Trail. This has caused a great deal of discussion regarding how the area, that runs along the popular DeKalb Park District Nature Trail, can be restored. Mr. Hannan noted that the clearing of the large growth, non-native plants that had been in the area can now be replaced with native prairie plants and low growing trees and shrubs like serviceberry, hazelnut, wild plum, redbud and others.

Mr. Hannan noted that the Forest Preserve would like to partner on the restoration of the Trail that borders County Farm Woods Forest Preserve donating shrubs and prairie seeds, labor and general know-how. He has spoken to the neighbors in the area and they appear to be accepting of this. Currently the District has volunteers and the Kishwaukee Sunrise Rotary is offering assistance as well.

He commented that the FP District will be removing non-native buckthorn and honeysuckle in the County Farm Woods understory. This forest management will “open up” areas to light and improve the forest environment.

Mr. Hannan noted that he will continue to work with the neighbors to keep communications open.

He then asked the Committee if they approved of his pursuing these efforts if the Commonwealth Edison and the Park District want to move forward with tis plan and all agreed.

FLEX PLAN PARTICIPATION FOR FOREST PRESERVE EMPLOYEES

As per Gary Hanson request, Mr. Hannan noted that just like the County, the Forest Preserve District must vote to allow participation in the County Flexible Spending Plan participation for Forest Preserve’s eligible staff.

Mr. Jones moved to allow eligible Forest Preserve employees to participate in County sponsored Flexible Spending programs, seconded by Ms. DeFauw. The motion passed unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Gudmunson moved to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Jones. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Julia Fauci, Chairperson
Forest Preserve District Committee
JF:kjr