

*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 15, 2014**

The DeKalb County Forest Preserve District Committee met Tuesday April 15, 2014 at 6:00 pm at Conference Room of the Administration Center. In attendance were committee members: Ms. Fauci, Ms. DeFauw, Mr. Jones, Mr. Cribben, Ms. Haji-Sheikh, Mr. Brown and Mr. Gudmunson. Superintendent Hannan was also in attendance. Guests included members of the DeKalb County Trail Riders-President Frankie Benson, Vice President Jan Knudson and member Bob Knudson.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Ms. Fauci called for a motion to approve the minutes of the March 18, 2014 meeting. Ms. DeFauw moved to approve the minutes, seconded by Mr. Gudmunson and the motion passed unanimously.

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Ms. Fauci called for a motion to approve the agenda. Mr. Brown moved to approve the agenda, seconded by Ms. Haji-Sheikh and the motion passed unanimously.

**MONTHLY REPORTS**

Mr. Hannan noted that this month's packets contain the monthly use figures, as well as a list of maintenance and projects. He noted that prairie and woodland management burns have begun and he passed out a few photos of the staff at work on the burns. He noted that they had done a number of the preserves so far. He reminded the Committee that signs are always posted in the burn areas to tell preserve visitors what is happening and why and who to call if they have questions or concerns.

He then shared a photo of the recent April "blood moon eclipse" that was taken by Ms. Doty of the NREC.

Mr. Hannan reported that the Natural Resources report was also included in the packets. He then noted that he had recently received complaints again about off-leash dogs in the preserves. He reminded the Committee that while there are off-leash areas designated in the preserves, that does not apply during grassland bird nesting seasons. He commented that he has received complaints about preserve visitors disregarding the leash requirements from dog owners and others. One resident even sent photos of 4 to 5 off leash dogs brought to the preserve by one person.

He noted that Lake County Preserves has good information about why leash requirements encourage safety for the dogs, people and for wildlife in the preserves. Mr. Hannan will look to incorporate a similar statement for use in DeKalb County preserves. ( attached)

He commented that there has been a number of people bitten, people bothered and cars scratched by uncontrolled dogs over the past years. Mr. Hannan noted that one citizen said he would be emailing several County Board members about this issue.

Ms. Fauci commented that she knew the citizen and that he and his wife are avid birders at Afton and that he had shown her photos of off-leash dogs in that preserve. She remarked that birding is becoming more prevalent and so disrupting nesting season has a very detrimental effect.

Ms. Fauci asked if Mr. Hannan as Superintendent could elect to ban all dogs from the Preserves. Mr. Hannan noted that it would require a change in the Ordinance. Mr. Hannan responded that coyotes are a part of the natural wildlife cycle.

Mr. Jones asked if the burning activities were done for the year. Mr. Hannan noted that most prairies and woodlands are burned on a 2- 3 year cycle.

Mr. Jones asked for an update on the floodplain house removal on Thompson Road. Mr. Hannan noted that the house, outbuildings and bridge have been removed by Planning and Zoning Department. A recent NIU Cares activity was also held there to help with cleanup of the brush and debris on the site. Planning, Zoning and Building Director Paul Miller is working with IEMA and a contractor on the completion of the cleanup project. After completion, the property will be transferred to the Forest preserve. After that the DeKalb County Community Gardens group will begin the transformation of the site into a “ Forest Garden” .

Mr. Jones asked about the fence on the Thompson Road property. He commented that the fence appeared to have a lot of rotted sections. Mr. Hannan noted that they will keep the chain link section, but will dispose of the wood and wire sections .

Mr. Gudmunson asked where the area was located. Mr. Jones showed him the area on a County map.

### **PRESENTATION BY DEKALB COUNTY TRAIL RIDERS**

Ms. Fauci invited the members of the DeKalb County Trail Riders to speak to the Committee. Ms. Benson introduced herself and Ms. Knudson and noted to the Committee that they are an equestrian advocacy group working currently on gaining trail access to the Shabbona Lake State Park. She noted that they are making inroads on that project and are also completing a 501c3 designation so that individuals can make charitable donations to assist in purchases of materials and equipment.

Ms. Haji-Sheikh asked how long the organization had been in existence. Ms., Benson responded that they were roughly three years old. She noted that they had asked to speak to the Committee this evening about access in DeKalb County preserves. She opened by noting that the majority of the Preserves are too small for trail rides. However, there are

members interested in expanding access to the Chief Shabbona preserve. She noted that local residents in that area feel they have had trail access they had enjoyed restricted lately and that they are being restricted to gravel road. She noted that these residents have expressed a desire to partner with the Preserves to assist in maintaining the trails and keeping them in good shape.

Another Preserve they would like to see expanded access in would be Potawatomi Woods. She noted that there is currently about a quarter of a mile of trail there but some of the trail is floodplain and usually wet and muddy. Mr. Hannan noted that Potawatomi Woods is a 300 acre preserve and a majority of the land is floodplain. Ms. Benson noted that they would also like to partner with the County in this Preserve to expand trail access in less wet areas. She noted that Illinois has the second largest population of horses in the Country next to Kentucky. She commented that the group currently has about 30 members so far and their primary focus is to retain and expand trail access whenever possible.

Ms. Knudson added that when the “no horses allowed” signs were placed in the Chief Shabbona preserve, herself and another local horse rider were unhappy. She commented that the area had a long history of rider access going back at least 50 years. She remarked that there was agreement that riders should avoid trail areas when they are too wet and can be damaged, but noted that really every visitor (runners, walkers, birders etc.) should not use trails areas when they are wet and muddy. She noted that the gravel road trail is appreciated, but the riders really want to return to accessing the grass and deer trails they had previously utilized. She feels that as taxpayers, they have a right to access Preserve lands for their activities. She noted that she understands there might be a concern about out-of-area people trailering in their horses, but that she felt this would not be an issue as the area is simply not large enough to encourage that. She believes the majority of individuals using the trails would be locals. She closed by asking the Preserve to please reconsider the gravel road restrictions to horses at Chief Shabbona preserve.

Ms. Fauci asked how much distance or acreage a horse needs to get to a good gallop. Ms. Knudson responded that the majority of their riders don't get into a lot of running or trotting and primarily walk. Ms. Haji-Sheikh asked if there were areas where they could need to dis-mount and lead their horses. Ms. Knudson noted there were some areas requiring that. She added that for any of their members that might want to trot their horses they really can't on the gravel without possibly hurting the horses' hooves.

Mr. Hannan thanked the visitors for bringing their concerns to the Committee and then gave a response he had prepared ( attached) . Following that statement, he noted that he had spoken with the park manager of the Chief Shabbona preserve, Carl Kuhn about the issue. He noted that Carl and he had concurred that the gravel trails seem very adequate to the riders needs and would eliminate any potential damage to hiking trails. He noted that there had also been past incidents of vandalism by off trail riders (painted arrows and signs calling out the informal trail areas), turf damage, and safety concerns from other Preserve visitors. However, he noted that the primary focus is the mission of Forest Preserves to protect and preserve natural resources.

He added that there are many individuals with recreational “wants” such as ATV riders, paintball players, dirt bikers, alcohol use, dogs off leash, etc. and these are not compatible with the forest preserve mission. He noted that having the gravel trail is a good compromise. The gravel road trail is parallel to the hiking trail, less than 200 ft. from the hiking trail, still goes through the same forest environment and would separate equestrian use from hikers, dog walkers, birders etc. Ms. Knudson asked if Mr. Hannan would consider opening any of the deer trails. Mr. Hannan responded that he would meet with the group members. He also commented that in past Committee meetings he and the Committee had agreed to work to connect the existing east /west section of the very south end of the hiking trail to connect to the State Park to any new horse trails the group could get opened at the State Park.

Ms. Benson reiterated that the group members would be more than willing to pay a bridle tax as well as participate in helping keep the trails clean and in good shape. She noted that she would also like to see the Preserves post signs restricting access to areas when they are too wet to be used for riding. She closed by saying that while they agreed the gravel trails are good, that the removal of access to the grass trails was considered a loss.

Ms. Haji-Sheikh noted that there may be a benefit to assessing a license fee to people using the trails. Ms. Knudson responded that was what she had meant when she referred to a bridle tax earlier.

Ms. Fauci asked where the majority of the horses in the area are kept. Ms. Knudson responded that most local horses are kept at their farms and not at formal stables.

Ms. Benson and Ms. Knudson thanked the Committee for their time and consideration of their requests.

#### **COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS**

Ms. Haji-Sheikh opened by noting that the Bike Friendly Community project is progressing and she hopes to see more approvals of project aspects at tomorrow night’s County Board meeting.

Ms. Fauci remarked that Ms. Haji-Sheikh has been appointed to the Regional Planning Commission. She noted that she is planning to present action able items to the Commission (bike friendly resolution, the bike friendly sticker project ( PedalPal) , etc.) and will also participate in the round table discussions held by the Commission.

Mr. Brown asked if the Great Western Trail is accessible for horses. Mr. Hannan noted that it is, but only on the shoulders of the trail.

Ms. Fauci then presented materials from other Forest Preserve Districts that helped their residents understand land restorations. She also shared with the Committee an early journal memory of going to Cook County Forest Preserves areas as a child and the impact that had on her early life. Ms. DeFauw noted that nature journals are a great resource for children.

Mr. Hannan noted that the 1860's Shabbona schoolhouse that was recently moved by Resource Bank and now part of the Shabbona Resource Bank has notes on the schoolroom walls referencing visits by the teachers and children to Chief Shabbona Forest Preserve.

Mr. Hannan commented that he had recently met with the Shabbona Trail Group working to build a trail connecting the Village of Shabbona, Lions Park , Indian Creek High School, Chief Shabbona Forest Preserve and Shabbona Lake State Park. This is still in the planning stages but coming together.

Mr. Jones asked if it was common for Forest preserves to restrict horses to gravel trails. Mr. Hannan noted that other forest preserve districts have equestrian trails. Larger forest preserve districts like Du Page, Lake, Cook, McHenry, Winnebago and Kane have their own police forces , larger staff and much larger preserves with long distance trails to allow more equestrian access because they have resources to manage the activity. Mr. Gudmunson noted that there would have to be a lot of brush cutting and maintenance to allow access to the deer trails the group had referenced.

Ms. DeFauw noted that she concurred that recreational activities must be secondary to preservation. While all residents may be tax payers, their recreational desires often do not work in concert with preservation. She noted that this is the reason for the restrictions, not that the Committee dislikes horses in any way. Mr. Hannan commented that handling the horse droppings on trails and parking lots is another consideration. The example of dog owners picking up after their dogs is not very good. Ms. Fauci remarked about a contact she had with a Preserve visitor who was shooting birds with a B-B gun. When she noted to the man that was not an allowed activity, he simply went a bit farther down the trail and started shooting again.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

Mr. Gudmunson moved to adjourn, seconded by Ms. Haji-Sheikh. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Julia Fauci, Chairperson  
Forest Preserve District Committee  
JF:kjr

# ***DeKalb County Forest Preserve District***

***200 N. Main St. Sycamore, Illinois 60178***

***Phone (815) 895-7191    [www.dekalbcounty.org](http://www.dekalbcounty.org)    Fax (815) 895-1686***

Leashing your dog while in preserves protects your pet, other trail users and our wildlife. By limiting your dog's leeway you'll keep them from harm. Off leash dogs are easily distracted and could chase people, and wildlife, run into traffic, into poison ivy or tick infested brush.

Wildlife that fall prey to dogs are removed from the food chain, which means less food for wildlife. Even without direct contact, a dog's scent causes defensive reactions in wildlife. This drains the wild animal's energy, putting it at risk for malnutrition and predation.

Most of all, leashing your dog demonstrates respect for other preserve visitors. Many people do not welcome advances by unfamiliar dogs. You may know your dog is friendly but others don't.

April, 2014

Denver Sears  
8086 KaneRd  
Waterman, IL

Dear Committee Members

I have recently learned that there have been "No Horses Allowed" signs placed at Chief Shabbona Forest Preserve. I have lived and farmed close to the forest preserve since 1964. In all these years, local riders have been able to ride on the road and on the trails in Chief Shabbona Forest Preserve. My daughter, who rode horses in the late 70s and 80s often rode there and was never asked to leave by the superintendent or the local caretaker. In fact, Mr. Nolan, the caretaker there for many years, was known to be friendly to the people riding through.

I find it sad that a long history of horseback riding in the forest preserve has suddenly stopped. It seems to me that more and more restrictions are applied to an area that is supported by taxpayers.

I hope that the board will reconsider this latest restriction. Horses and horseback riding have always been a part of the local culture and it is wrong to arbitrarily restrict horses because a few people don't like them.

Sincerely,

Denver Sears

( Note: Horses are allowed on gravel road...T.H. )

I have talked with Carl Kuhn the park manager at Chief Shabbona Forest Preserve and we concurred that allowing horses to ride through Chief Shabbona Forest Preserve on the gravel road is OK. I assume that you ride on township roads to get to Chief Shabbona Forest Preserve so riding on the forest preserve road would be about the same, although with less traffic, slower speed limit, less noise and a forest to enjoy along the way. Horses on the hiking trails through the forest would be a problem. At forest preserves we have experienced trail damage ( and turf damage in picnic areas , sledding hills, and off trail damage in habitat areas) from horse hooves esp. when there are wet or muddy conditions, the large horse droppings on trails and parking lots are unpleasant for visitors and forest preserve staff. Safety of other trail users is another consideration as the forest trails at Chief Shabbona Forest Preserve are not very wide for someone on a horse and a hiker to pass by each other. Sharing trails with other users like dog walkers could be of concern, we try to have dog walkers always have their dogs on leash so other trail users and wildlife are protected from aggressive dogs, we have had mixed results with people respecting our " on leash " policy.

Protecting natural resources is the main mission of forest preserve districts in Illinois, the DeKalb County Forest Preserve District carries out a broad range of ecological restoration and management activities intended to address our core mission: " to preserve, protect and restore the flora, fauna and natural beauties, as near as may be, in their natural state and condition, for the education and recreation of our citizens". Recreation is part of the forest preserve mission; however offering passive recreation opportunities that do not negatively affect the natural resources, buildings or grounds is the intent. Other forest preserve district's to our east have much larger forest preserve acreage and much larger budgets to help establish, maintain and manage long distance trails and parking/trailer areas for equestrian use. If DeKalb County Forest Preserve District had the large areas, staff and resources I think there could be more places for equestrian use (like Kane, Winnebago, DuPage, Lake, Cook and McHenry County Forest Preserve District's) and be compatible with the forest preserve district mission.

A few years ago, the forest preserve committee and DCTRA talked and it was generally agreed that DeKalb County Forest Preserves do not have the large size areas that support long distance trails and that efforts were being made by the DCTRA to hopefully get a long distance equestrian trail approved at Shabbona Lake State Park . If that was approved, the forest preserve district could then connect a short trail for horse use from the south end of the forest preserve road west to the State Park. Has any progress been made with the Shabbona Lake State Park talks?

I hope this helps everyone understand the mission of forest preserve district's in Illinois. The District has many different recreational wants from the public and with the forest preserve district mission statement in mind, we try to do the best we can for the well - being of the forest, prairie & wetland landscapes we preserve and manage and the people who visit these wonderful places.

Sincerely,  
Terry Hannan, Supt.  
DeKalb County Forest Preserve District