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DeKalb County Government
Sycamore, Illinois

**Forest Preserve District Committee Minutes
August 25, 2015**

The DeKalb County Forest Preserve District Committee met Tuesday August 25, 2015 at 6:00 pm at the Hoppe Heritage Farmstead and South Branch Prairie/1815 Miller-Ellwood Cabin. In attendance were committee members: Mr. Brown, Ms. Turner, Ms. Polanco, Mr. Emerson, new member Mr. Bagby, Superintendent Hannan, District Natural resource Manager Mr. Roloff, NREC Director Peggy Doty and new District Restoration Ecologist /Maintenance employee Josh Clark. Mr. Metzger and Ms. Haji-Sheikh were absent. Guests included County Board member Maureen Little and Rhonda Gillespie of the Daily Chronicle.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Turner called for a motion to approve the minutes of the July 28, 2015 meeting. Mr. Emerson 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. Mr. Bagby moved to approve the agenda, seconded by Mr. Brown and the motion passed unanimously.

MONTHLY REPORTS AND ACTIVITIES

Mr. Hannan began with a review of the monthly reports and handed out the monthly activities report to the Committee. He noted that three miles of the Peace Road trail have now been resurfaced once the weather got dry enough for the work to be completed. Mr. Roloff attended a recent pollinator's conference that discussed the critical importance of pollinators and what can be done to help their habitat in a time of decline.

Mr. Hannan commented that four years ago, Michael Haines had petitioned to have an unnamed creek that ran through his property named for his father. The creek flows through Mr. Haines property and also through Prairie Oaks Forest Preserve. There is also a bench at the Hoppe Farmstead dedicated to Michael's brother who has passed.

Mr. Hannan noted that the Natural Resources report from Mr. Roloff contains updates for the Committee and commented on why the meeting is being held at this location tonight. He noted that one of the major upcoming projects for the District in the coming year will be the Evergreen Village 30 acre floodplain restoration project, 20 acre green space area and connecting the Great Western Trail to the site. . This area contains a significant flood plain area very similar to the 55 acre flood plain that was restored into prairie and

wetlands at the South Branch Prairie site. He encouraged the Committee to look around at what had been accomplished with the restoration of this area and to note what will be possible for the Evergreen Village location once the work begins.

Mr. Roloff and Mr. Hannan then introduced Josh Clark, the recently hired Restoration Ecologist/Maintenance person for the District. Mr. Clark noted that he had grown up in Yorkville and Hinckley and attended Western Illinois University with a major in Parks and Recreation/Natural Resource Management. He commented that he had worked for the Oswego Park District, Kane County Forest Preserve District, at the Nachusa Grasslands then on to the St. Charles Park District and DeKalb Park District prior to joining the Forest Preserve District. He notes that his experiences have given him a wide variety of experience in parks maintenance and forest, prairie and wetland management.

Mr. Roloff commented that he could not say enough about Mr. Clark's knowledge and expertise that he has brought to the District. Mr. Brown asked if Mr. Clark had been at the Nachusa when the bison were returned there. Mr. Clark noted that he was not, but had done quite a bit of preparation work for their arrival. He further commented that he had met his wife while they were both employed there and now have a five year old son.

Mr. Roloff then discussed the progression of the natural resources work that was done at the South Branch Prairie area. Mr. Hannan commented that when the Hoppe Farm was first purchased, the area was in extremely rough condition with much garbage, dilapidated buildings and debris. It took a lot of time and effort for the cleanup and is now a very beautiful site. He noted that this area also has potential additional future acres that will have a first right of refusal option for the District.

Mr. Roloff commented that the South Branch has been one of the most successful projects he has had the pleasure of working on. He noted that it was an intensely hands-on experience for the four years the prairie has been establishing itself. Last year, soil scientists from across the country held a training at this site and there has been quite a bit of training held by scientists and students from NIU and Kishwaukee College as well. He noted the NRCS was a partner in this project.

He stated that this was an ideal site for the NRCS wetland reserve program and that, while the prairie now has over 120 species of plants, they have been continuing to improve the plant diversity by adding "plugs" of some rare conservation species that are hard to grown from seed.

Mr. Roloff noted that the area is an upland prairie that gradually transitions to a wet prairie, a sedge meadow and then to marshland. Everything that has been planted was specifically selected for their particular environments. He noted that on the other side of the river there are groves of trees. These follow the historical pattern of the 15 groves that mostly grew alongside the east and north banks of the river and larger streams. These areas were prized by the native Indians as these were areas that were safe from the prairie fires. He noted that Indians also used fire to manage the areas and to manage where local deer, elk and bison herds would graze.

He pointed out that there is a mile and a quarter of the Kishwaukee river running through the South Branch Prairie and also adjoining nearby Russell Woods and the Natural Resources Education Center (NREC).

Mr. Roloff recalled that a few years ago, an Open Lands grant paid for a mussel specialist to survey the river. They discovered at that time that the Kishwaukee is one of the most species-rich mussel stream in Northern Illinois. There were about 25 species of mussel in pioneer times, and Mr. Roloff noted that 16 species have been found in the river recently. He brought examples of the mussel shells for the Committee to view, including the White Heel-splitter, the Wabash pig toe, the Pimpleback, the Pocketbook, the Mucket, the Fat Mucket, the Wabash Pigtoe, the Fluted Shell the Three-ridge, the Black Sandshell, the Spike, the Cylindrical Papershell, the Giant Floater, and the Slipper Shell. He noted that the Slipper Shell and the Spike are likely not found live species in the river any longer. This may have been the result of a hog effluent spill that happened in the 1980's.

Mr. Roloff commented that the life cycle of the mussel is an extremely interesting one. The male and female of the species never actually meet. The male releases his sperm into the water, where hopefully it is intercepted by a female who accepts it. The female then attached the spits the larvae into the gills of specific species of fish that then provide nourishment for the larvae for a month or two until they ultimately fall to the river bed wherever the fish happens to be. He noted that their existence is a wonder given the precarious and chance filled nature of their reproduction.

Mr. Roloff then turned to the flowers that have taken up residence in the area. In a walk just prior to the meeting, Mr. Roloff, Mr. Clark and Committee Secretary Ms. Romano gathered samples randomly from areas around the meeting site. Mr. Roloff noted that there was Bee Balm, Big Bluestem Grass, False Astor, Sweet Black-eyed susan and Canada wild rye among many others.

Additional species found in the other areas were Bush Clover, Goldenrod, Indian Grass, Panic Grass, Cardinal Flower (which is a cousin of Great Blue Lobelia) Marsh Milkweed and Prairie Blazing Star. He noted that there was a Monarch butterfly larvae on the milkweed.

From the sedge meadow area, Mr. Roloff located Hop Sedge (and noted there are over 130 species of this genus in Illinois). Great Angelica (which he noted is a biannual which starts as a rosette, then grows tall and blooms the second year but dies off in early June). Narrow Leaf Cattail was also located and he noted that when cattail is identified, they remove it as it is a very aggressive plant that if left unchecked can reduce the occurrence of other native species. He also pointed out Sweet Flag, (which had once been used as a natural cure for lung ailments), Pickerel Weed, Arrowhead plant and Water Plantain. He noted that the area contained approximately seven acres of marsh, and forty-plus acres of sedge meadow, wet prairie and upland prairie.

Mr. Hannan then noted that the Miller-Ellwood cabin which overlooks the prairie had actually been located inside the Ellwood home a mile south of its present location. Once it was discovered, the District was approached to provide assistance and support for the restoration of the cabin. They acquired a log cabin “mentor”, Tim Kilby who led the group through the dismantling, moving and restoration of the cabin. He noted that every log had to be tagged so it could be properly recreated at the new site. A slab was poured for the foundation and then a natural environment was created around the cabin. The oak floors and doors were last year’s project and the windows will be coming along in the future. Mr. Hannan commented that the cabin is already being used. The Nelson family held a reunion at the location, and the Ney Grange uses it for meetings. It is also used by Ms. Doty of the NREC for classes.

Ms. Doty then began her report on the NREC camp activities for the summer. She noted that they hold approximately six camps per year and all are thematic, day only camps, not residential. She commented that they had a great year this year and here was a large amount of enthusiasm from the campers and their parents.

The NREC tries to take only about twenty kids per camp as the goal of the camps is not only recreational, but educational as well. She noted that there are very few traditional toys available to the campers during their recess breaks. This helps to encourage them to be creative with their time.

Ms. Doty noted that 135 children attended the camps this past summer. The cost for the camps is roughly \$100.00 for the week (\$20 per day for education and recreation). They held river camps again, which is one of the more popular activities and this year also did a pioneer camp.

Ms. Doty noted that she is working with the Michelle Donahoe of the Sycamore History Museum to discuss how human intervention and involvement impacts the land. Ms. Doty commented that she also does three Master Naturalist programs as part of her duties as an employee of the University of Illinois. She noted that these program are valuable as they train community members who can then become volunteer resources to the parks and Forest Preserves. She noted that they are currently taking a brief break to allow for the membership to realign after some recent changes. However, there will be volunteer opportunities through the NREC and they will also be holding some presentations on naturally dying yarn. She noted that the range of colors that can be achieved using natural materials is actually quite amazing.

Ms. Doty noted that Mr. Hannan had brought in a college intern, Kylie Ocker to assist at the NREC this year and that she had worked with the young woman on prior camps and found her to be an invaluable resource. She then recounted an incident where the intern found a garter snake in the Miller-Ellwood cabin and brought it back to the resource center. It turned out the snake was pregnant and opted to give birth just when Ms. Doty’s rather squeamish supervisor happened to be in attendance.

Ms. Doty noted that her colleague Connie Handel will soon be starting a high school environmentalists club and that Kylie's work at the Center is really giving them the opportunity to stretch the staff time and offer more programs.

Ms. Doty noted that she will also be holding a class on home schooling soon and is also working on several presentations for adult members of the community as well. She has recently acquired a grant for a presentation on phosphorus and is researching options for anonymous testing of nitrogen and phosphorus levels in local soils. If the testing protocols are identified, they would then build an app to assist farms with using best practices to manage the levels in the soils.

Ms. Doty closed by noting that she has also taken up a hobby of raising Monarch butterflies and this has greatly increased her awareness of the threats facing them and the pollinator colonies. She invited any of the Committee members to contact her at any times with questions or concerns and to attend the NREC events whenever possible. She promised to do her best to available, even though she is still covering a three county area for the University of Illinois Extension.

FY2016 BUDGET

Mr. Hannan noted that the budget workbooks will be sent out 9-2-15 to County Board members, but the Committee will need to vote to place the budget on file.

Mr. Hannan presented a draft of the resolution and ordinance to place the budget on file and noted that there is no change to the total amount of tax dollar in FY 2016. He noted to the Committee that they still have 3 months to review the budget and that the final vote will occur at the November meeting. He noted that budget narrative he has been working on reflects the District job position description changes to meet current needs. He noted that it had been 25 to 30 years since job descriptions had been reviewed and is necessary now due to several staff changes and retirements that have recently occurred and the increase in lands acquisitions and buildings and grounds maintained and managed by the Forest Preserve District.

Ms. Turner asked for a motion to place the budget on file.

Mr. Emerson moved to place the budget on file, seconded by Ms. Polanco and the motion passed unanimously.

REPLACEMENT OF VICE CHAIR

Ms. Turner noted that with the resignation of former Committee member Riley Oncken, there is a vacancy for a vice chair. She reminded the Committee that the position must be filled by someone from the Republican members and noted that there are three individuals eligible, Mr. Emerson, Mr. Metzger and Mr. Bagby.

Ms. Turner asked if anyone wished to discuss this.

Following a brief discussion, Mr. Bagby moved to nominate Mr. Emerson for the position, seconded by Mr. Brown and the motion passed unanimously.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS

Mr. Brown asked for clarification of the relationship between the County and the Forest Preserve levies. Mr. Hannan commented that the Forest Preserve is a separate levy and has kept their levy rate low as it is less than 1% of a homeowners property tax.

Ms. Turner then recognized County Board member Maureen Little who noted that she was visiting the Committee after a contact by new Kingston Park District members. She noted that the Kingston Park board had not had new representative for the past 10 years and that the new Board is extremely enthusiastic. She noted that they have been considering several plans and are looking to improve the electrical system and wells and also the creation of a new boat ramp. In addition, they would also like to put in bathrooms, clear trees and purchase a thirty six acre tract of land near the railroad tracks. She noted that they have some money to work with, but are seeking guidance on how to write and acquire grants to assist with their plans. Mr. Hannan noted that if Ms. Little will send him the Board president's name and e-mail address, he will be happy to share information on granting agencies and opportunities.

Mr. Bagby then commented that when he had served on the Board previously, he had been very excited by what was being done by the Forest Preserve District. He noted that he had recently visited Prairie Oaks Preserve and was very pleased to see all the conservation work continuing.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Ms. Turner then asked for a motion to enter Executive Session. Mr. Bagby moved to take the Committee into Executive Session, seconded by Ms. Polanco. A roll call vote was held with 5 Committee members voting in the affirmative, none in the negative and two absent.

Following the Executive Session, Mr. Emerson moved to return the Committee to public session, seconded by Mr. Bagby. A roll call vote was held with 5 Committee members voting in the affirmative, none in the negative and 2 absent.

Following the move from Executive Session, Mr. Emerson moved to approve the purchase of a 1.57 acre parcel for \$23,000.00 (pending a review of any environmental issues on the land), seconded by Mr. Brown and the motion passed unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Respectfully submitted,



Anita Turner, Chairperson
Forest Preserve District Committee
AT:kjr