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DeKalb County Government
Sycamore, Illinois

**Forest Preserve District Committee Minutes
December 22, 2015**

The DeKalb County Forest Preserve District Committee met Tuesday December 22, 2015 at 6:00 pm at Gathertorium of the County Administration Building. In attendance were committee members: Ms. Turner, Mr. Emerson, Mr. Metzger, Ms. Polanco, Mr. Brown, Mr. Bagby and Superintendent Hannan, Ms. Haji-Sheikh was absent. Guests included Mr. Frank Ostling, Wildlife Biologist from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), Peggy Doty, University of Illinois Outdoor Education and Natural Resources Education Center. Coordinator, and Mr. Jerry Augsburg, former DeKalb County Board member and local outdoorsman.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Turner called for a motion to approve the minutes of the November 24, 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. Metzger moved to approve the agenda, seconded by Mr. Bagby and the motion passed unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mr. Augsburg noted that he was very pleased to be here at the first DeKalb County meeting he has attended since leaving the Board in 2012.

MONTHLY REPORTS AND ACTIVITIES

Mr. Hannan noted that the minutes and monthly reports are included in the Board Packets. These include the maintenance and activity reports and a continuation of local photographer Tom Robbins monthly photo chronicle of Prairie Oaks Forest Preserve. He also added that local resident Alice Paulson will be donating some historic kitchen utensils for the Miller –Ellwood cabin and may also donate an arrowhead collection. The District may partner with the Joiner history room or the County to find a most appropriate display space for the arrowhead collection. Mr. Hannan then reported that the District had successfully completed a Forest Preserve District Safety Manual and received a \$500.00 cash reward from PDRMA in recognition of the Forest Preserve District's commitment to safety and loss prevention.

He noted that the annual MS150 bike ride will again be held this June with rest stop at Merritt Prairie Forest Preserve and other sites in the County. He also met recently with County Highway Engineer Nathan Schwartz at the former Evergreen Village site to discuss getting a bid specs on 2016 new asphalt for the parking area and trail sections.

The County Planning, Zoning and Building office has also approved 2 open air shelters on the property and the use of boulders to keep cars contained to the parking areas. He noted that it has been too wet to do the prairie planting in the 30 acre NW area of the site, but hope to get that seeding done once the area dries out.

Mr. Hannan then closed by noting that the District is on track to hopefully complete the Conro and Christenson closings (Prairie Oaks forest preserve addition) before the end of the year.

IMRF PAYMENT

Mr. Hannan began by reminding the Committee that the Forest Preserve District is fully funded with the Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund. County Finance Director Peter Stefan has recommended that the District pay IMRF from forest preserve reserves due to investment and interest advantages.

Mr. Metzger asked what the amount of the payment would be. Mr. Hannan responded that it would be \$250,000.00.

Mr. Metzger moved approval of a budget amendment to move the payment from the Forest Preserve reserve fund to IMRF, seconded by Mr. Bagby. A roll call votes was held with 6 members voting in the affirmative, none in the negative and the motion passed unanimously.

ANNUAL CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE UPDATE

Mr. Hannan commented that he had inviting people who had expressed questions or concerns about the IDNR / CWD management program to tonight's meeting. He noted that local hunter and outdoorsman Jerry Augsburger is in attendance. Mr. Hannan commented that would be presenting some of the concerns and questions to Mr. Frank Ostling IDNR Wildlife Biologist during his presentation.

Mr. Hannan then introduced Mr. Ostling to the Committee and noted that he has been making this annual presentation annually for the more than 10 years about the CWD management program.

Mr. Ostling thanked the Committee for their time and noted that DeKalb is one of three counties he works in for the IDNR. He noted that he would be asking the Committee for permission to continue deer management culling activities at night when preserves are closed to the public in three areas this year, Potawatomi Woods, South Branch Prairie site and the MacQueen Preserve between mid- January and March.

He noted that the purpose of the culling is to control the white tail deer population as a way to manage the spread of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). He will also be working in coordination with staff at the Shabbona Lake State Park.

He reported that there were 8 positive CWD results found in samples taken last year in DeKalb County. They will be focusing on the northwestern area of DeKalb County along the borders of Boone, Ogle and Winnebago counties as these have been high incident areas or "hot spots" for the disease. In Northwest DeKalb County and Northeast

Ogle County the disease rate is about 14%. They hope that by reducing the deer populations in these areas after the conclusion of the public archery and firearm hunting seasons, they can reduce the disease prevalence rates in these areas.

He noted that this is the 13th year for the management program and he then handed out data to the Committee that shows a comparison of the results of disease tracking in Illinois versus Wisconsin who suspended their active CWD management activities several years ago. He commented that Wisconsin has seen steady increases in their disease prevalence rates for CWD while Illinois has been far more successful in controlling the disease.

Mr. Metzger thanked Mr. Ostling for returning to provide this information and asked about the size of the total sample of deer from which the 8 positive results were obtained. Mr. Ostling responded that approximately 87 total samples came from the sharpshooting activities, so the percentage was approximately 10% positive from the sample group.

Mr. Metzger asked if 8 positives was a normal figure. Mr. Ostling noted that 8 is actually at the higher end of the overall positive figures. He noted that in past years the results have been as low as 1 and as high as a previous 8. However, he noted that along with the number, you also have to look at the concentration of the positive results. The 8 came primarily from an area that is near several large privately held areas where samples cannot be taken. Mr. Hannan then presented the Committee with a map showing the disease hot spot areas that are of greatest concern. Mr. Hannan commented that the IDNR conducts their forest preserve management activities on about 400 acres, less than 5% of the total wooded acres in DeKalb County, the majority of wooded acres are privately held (there are about 8,000 wooded acres in unincorporated DeKalb County). IDNR has averaged culling about 10 deer per year total from the 3 forest preserve sites.

Mr. Ostling commented that there have been rumors regarding what happens to the carcasses of the animals that are culled. He noted that the IDNR is committed to the safe removal of all carcasses and these are then taken to a testing site at Rock Cut State Park. At this facility, along with the CWD testing, they are also doing other research on genetic resistance and other possible disease management efforts.

All processed product from the carcasses is quarantined until testing is completed. Product from deer that test positive is taken to crematorium to be thoroughly destroyed. Meat from deer that test negative is donated to local food banks. He added that the antlers of any deer taken by the IDNR are disposed of and are not collected by IDNR staff as some rumors have claimed.

Mr. Bagby asked if there is any correlation between the male or female population regarding the number of deer taken from either group and the results. Mr. Ostling noted that he did not have a breakdown by gender as the IDNR focuses the culling activities on adult animals rather than on gender.

However, he did note that in Wisconsin prevalence rates of infection are higher in males rather than females. Mr. Ostling also noted that they also tend to see prevalence patterns along river tributaries in greater areas than females would tend to roam.

Mr. Ostling reminded the Committee that once an animal is infected, there is no cure and the animal is and remains infectious up to and even after their death. Ms. Doty noted that the clay soils in many areas often hold the prions for a longer period allowing them to bind to plants. Mr. Ostling agreed the prions are extremely long lived and that does add to their danger for disease transmission.

Mr. Hannan noted that he had been asked what would happen if Illinois opted to follow the Wisconsin model and cease all culling activities. Mr. Ostling responded that you would only have to look to Wisconsin for the answer. Illinois and Wisconsin were both at about a 1% disease prevalence rate. When Wisconsin stopped culling practices they have areas that range from a low of 5% to a high as great as 25% or more of the herd infected in SW Wisconsin. Unfortunately, their management choices impact Northern Illinois as the state borders have several deer cross over points.

Mr. Emerson commented that he has hunters from his District that are not supportive of the management activities and feel that it reduces what game hunting opportunities they have to begin with.

Mr. Ostling responded that there are residents who are unhappy with the program, but the overall effect of the statewide deer herd by stopping or cutting back the management activities would be far greater and more damaging. Mr. Brown asked if Wisconsin does anything to manage the disease. Mr. Ostling responded that they only do observation using samples voluntarily provided by hunters. However, there are few hunters who voluntarily provide the samples and generally not from the areas of greatest concern. In short, observation isn't doing anything to manage the disease. The activities of the IDNR, even if distasteful to some, have yielded positive results. Mr. Brown noted that he has observed more deer around his urban area and wondered if the IDNR were seeing deer migrate to more urban locations. Mr. Ostling noted that they do not have the resources to do fly over counts of urban areas as they tend to concentrate their aerial surveys on information they receive on population movements observed by local hunters. These locations tend to have the largest populations and are therefore the areas the IDNR feels they need to focus herd reduction. He added that if any of the Committee members ever have any questions or concerns, he can be contacted at any time. He added that the IDNR website also has a very large amount of information and data on the disease and the management efforts.

Ms. Doty passed on a question she had been asked by a local citizen. They asked if every hunter were to voluntarily agree to have their deer tested, would that be enough to remove the need for the IDNR culling activities. Mr. Ostling noted that unfortunately, even 100% participation would not yield sufficient data, but it would be extremely helpful.

He then described the grid system the IDNR uses and noted that if they could get more testing participation it could certainly have an impact on disease reduction. Ms. Doty then asked how hunters could get samples to the IDNR. Mr. Ostling replied that they have drop off locations for the materials needed to perform the testing. He also noted that the IDNR will work with hunters to salvage antlers or other items for mounting.

Mr. Ostling noted that they do have mandatory required testing for animals taken by archery or bow hunters due to the greater length of their season and the areas they cover.

Mr. Ostling added that if they find an area on the grid that has not had a positive result in 5 years, they will leave that area and move to other areas. He noted that they also had figures this year indicating that there were approximately 10,000 more deer were taken by hunters during the 7 day firearm season in 2015 than in 2014 and that overall the amount of deer taken by hunters has remained stable despite the IDNR / CWD program culling activities. He noted that some years have seen slight reductions, but for the most part additional deer hunting opportunities IDNR has implemented have kept the hunter harvested deer numbers up. He noted the economic impact of deer hunting in Illinois is hundreds of millions of dollars and the IDNR is trying to preserve the hunting opportunities in all areas of the State.

Mr. Hannan commented that another question he has heard is that the IDNR is given additional money to conduct the hunts. Mr. Ostling responded that these rumors result from the fact that since the majority of activities occur at night, this can sometimes result in overtime pay- but not to a volume that would offer any incentive. He noted that this also takes staff away from their families and is not an attractive job activity.

Mr. Hannan then noted that he was asked about the Potawatomi Woods forest preserve area that a person saw what they believed to be a wolf footprint and wondered if the IDNR had released wolves to reduce the deer herds. Mr. Ostling noted that they have no such activities and that if wolves are here they have likely migrated down from Wisconsin. He added that natural migration has also resulted in the sighting of cougars that have come from as far west as the Dakotas.

Mr. Hannan then asked Mr. Augsburger to make any comments he would like to from the perspective of a hunter.

Mr. Augsburger noted that he has, in the recent past, attended meetings of hunting groups vigorously opposed to the IDNR / CWD activities. But when things get too vocal, he asks them if they would rather have the conditions that the Wisconsin hunters have where chronic wasting disease is on the rise. He noted that the Wisconsin group made the issue highly political rather than scientific and forced their legislators to end the Wisconsin DNR / CWD management program. These actions have directly created the elevated prevalence disease rates they are now seeing in Wisconsin.

Mr. Hannan noted that he had also been asked if the IDNR was in collusion with the auto insurance industry to reduce the herds to reduce deer/vehicle crashes. Mr. Ostling noted that there is not and never has been collusion of that kind. That rumor likely started because one of the members of a state task force on the CWD program was a member of the insurance industry. But that relationship never entered into their work on the task force in any way.

Mr. Bagby asked if deer that are struck by vehicles are tested. Mr. Ostling replied that they can be if the IDNR is notified and can get to the carcass while it is still viable for testing. He noted that he has also received questions from individuals who see deer being disposed of in "shallow dug pits" in fields. He noted that these could be Department of Transportation (IDOT) employees who are disposing road kill deer.

Mr. Augsburger commented that as a hunter, he is extremely supportive of the IDNR CWD management activities and hopes they can continue their work.

Mr. Ostling commented that there will always be individuals who will simply never be convinced about the IDNR /CWD management work. He noted that is why the IDNR is extremely aggressive about getting out as much information as possible to explain their activities and programs. He noted that he hoped more people would look at Wisconsin as an example of curtailing or reducing the management efforts. He noted that often the human relations issues prove even more challenging than the disease management itself.

He noted that citizens of the central and southern areas of Illinois are far more supportive of the IDNR as they want their efforts successful in keeping the disease from spreading out into their areas of the State.

Mr. Augsburger commented on the rumors that the IDNR activities are causing severe reductions in the deer herds. He noted that just because individuals do not see the deer frequently, that is not a measure of proof. If they were to set up remote trail cameras, they would see that the deer are out there. However, he did note that another aspect of this may be that many current hunters started at a time when there were larger deer populations or many deer are in more secluded areas and private hunting areas not available to the general public to see deer.

Mr. Ostling noted that the difference of the costs involved in the management program versus the overall revenue enjoyed by the state from deer hunting is vast. He noted a great deal of that revenue often comes from individuals from other states who come to Illinois because of its reputation for abundant deer hunting opportunities. Ms. Doty asked when the IDNR stops its activities annually. Mr. Ostling responded that the time for the program runs approximately 10 weeks and ends in March.

Mr. Brown commented that he had recently met a man from the state of Mississippi who commented that he travels to western Illinois to hunt deer. Mr. Augsburger agreed that Illinois has been a popular deer hunting place for several years and that has been enhanced by many outdoor / nature television programs that advertise Illinois as a destination area for trophy deer hunting.

Ms. Doty noted to Mr. Ostling that the South Branch area is used by hikers and they have had a lot of activities by preserve visitors in that area due to the warmer than usual weather. She commented that Mr. Ostling and his team may want to be aware of that when they set up for their work.

Ms. Turner asked if the Committee was in consensus to allow the IDNR to conduct management activities on the specified forest preserve areas. The Committee agreed to unanimous consensus to continue the CWD management program.

Mr. Hannan noted that the IDNR works closely with District staff and also the local Sheriff's office and other law enforcement to make sure everyone is aware of where and when they are conducting their activities and to be sure the areas are secured from the public. Mr. Ostling left a number of informational papers for the Committee and others to take with them. Attached is one of the informational news articles from the *Wisconsin Journal Sentinel* called "Follow Illinois, not Wisconsin to slow spreading CWD", also you can Google: "Preventive Veterinary Medicine, The importance of localized culling in stabilizing chronic wasting disease prevalence in white-tailed deer populations" by: Illinois Natural History Survey, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Department of Animal Sciences, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, and the IDNR website CWD information

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS

Mr. Brown noted that he was recently at the Loyola Medical Center. While there he was chatting with a physician who commented that she could travel from the Loyola campus all the way to Sycamore via the bike trails in Cook, DuPage, Kane and DeKalb Counties and ultimately the Great Western Trail. She described Sycamore as a "Norman Rockwell" town. He commented that she would be very pleased with the plans for the trail connection and land improvements being done with the former Evergreen Village property.

Ms. Doty commented that her office is once again at the Natural Resource Center at Russell Woods and she is very pleased not only to no longer have the commute to Ogle County she has had and also to be able to spend more time here in the County.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Emerson moved to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Brown. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,



Anita Turner, Chairperson
Forest Preserve District Committee
AT:kjr

Follow Illinois, not Wisconsin, to slow spreading CWD

By Paul A. Smith of the Journal Sentinel

Aug. 19, 2015

As chronic wasting disease continues its spread in white-tailed deer across the state and continent, two things are becoming clear: First, if you're a Wisconsin hunter, your odds of killing a CWD-positive deer are steadily increasing.

And second, when natural resource agencies consider strategies to deal with CWD discoveries in their states, the example provided by Illinois — not Wisconsin — is the top choice.

Data from the last year show the prevalence of CWD in Illinois has remained relatively low and stable, at slightly more than 1%, while in Wisconsin, the disease has continued to increase to about 6%.

The states share a border but not CWD management strategies.

Since the disease was discovered in both states in 2002, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources has worked to decrease deer numbers in areas CWD is present. The effort has included sharpshooters and increased hunting permits.

Although the Wisconsin DNR initially attempted to eradicate the disease with aggressive measures, including sharpshooters and longer hunting seasons, it now uses only monitoring and surveillance.

Rates of the disease have increased substantially since Wisconsin abandoned targeted deer reduction efforts.

The difference in CWD prevalence rates in the two states is due mostly to management strategy, according to University of Illinois researchers Jan Novakofski and Michelle Green.

The pair published a 2013 paper titled, "The Importance of Localized Culling in Stabilizing Chronic Wasting Disease Prevalence in White-Tailed Deer Populations" in Preventive Veterinary Medicine.

Novakofski said after Wisconsin officials changed their strategy, the CWD prevalence rates increased and are still increasing.

Meanwhile, Illinois has remained committed to reducing deer in areas with known CWD-positive animals. The IDNR also is testing deer for CWD in a wide area, hoping to find any new disease sites.

For the sampling year ending June 30, the CWD prevalence rate in Illinois was 1.2%, according to Paul Shelton, forest wildlife manager for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

"This is a very challenging issue," Shelton said. "We can't declare victory, but we can say that the work we've been doing has helped keep the rates lower than they otherwise would be."

Chronic wasting disease is a spongiform encephalopathy similar to mad cow disease and scrapie. It is caused by an abnormal prion and can take years to develop but is always fatal. It was first discovered in captive mule deer in Wyoming in the 1960s and has since spread to at least 22 states.

Much has been learned in recent years about prion diseases. In the case of CWD, it is now known the prion is found in muscle tissue as well as plants.

The disease is contagious and found in deer, elk and moose. It has not been linked to human disease, but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends not eating the meat from CWD-positive animals.

The Wisconsin Division of Public Health recommends that venison from deer harvested from CWD affected areas not be consumed or distributed until test results are negative.

As the disease continues to spread in Wisconsin, more hunters will have to confront decisions about testing.

"I know it's coming," said Ralph Fritsch, 69, of Townsend, who hunts deer in Oconto County and has served on wildlife panels for the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation and Wisconsin Conservation Congress. "Maybe not in my lifetime, but it's coming. It concerns me, absolutely. I wish there was more being done to prevent its spread in Wisconsin."

This year marks an unhappy milestone in Wisconsin's CWD history. For the first time, more than half of the state — 38 counties — is classified as "CWD-affected" going into the fall hunting season.

Baiting and feeding of deer is prohibited in the 38 counties.

Among all deer sampled statewide in Wisconsin in 2014, 331 of 5,460 tested positive for CWD, for a prevalence rate of 6%.

But the rates are much higher in areas where the disease has been detected for more than a decade.

Since 2002, CWD prevalence in the DNR's western monitoring area has shown an overall increasing trend in all sex and age classes, according to the agency.

During the past 13 years, prevalence in adult males has risen from 8% to 10% to over 25% and in adult females from about 3 to 4% to more than 10%. During that same time, CWD rates in yearling males have increased from 2% to 8% and in yearling females from 2% to 7%, according to DNR statistics.

In an area of Iowa County, near the site the disease was discovered in 2002 in Wisconsin, the CWD-positive rate of adult male deer is nearly 40%.

As new CWD "sparks" are found in wild deer or at captive facilities — an Eau Claire County deer farm is the most recent to have a CWD-positive animal — the disease is no longer a local or regional issue.

The experiences of Wisconsin and Illinois over the last 13 years are informing resource managers in other states. The success at keeping prevalence rates relatively low and stable in Illinois have impressed wildlife biologists across the nation.

"You've got to admire Illinois' commitment to it," said Chad Stewart, deer management specialist for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

Chronic wasting disease was detected at a captive facility in Michigan in 2008. And this year, the first wild deer in Michigan with CWD were found in a suburb of East Lansing.

The response? Michigan officials are using sharpshooters to cull deer in the area, as well as issuing more permits to hunters and landowners. They are performing CWD tests on all deer killed in the reduction effort as well as car-killed deer in the vicinity.

"This is as complex a management issue as you're likely to find," said Shelton of the Illinois DNR. "It requires working with landowners, hunters, legislators and others. But if we're going to have a chance at some level of success, we've decided to keep on this path."