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DeKalb County Government
Sycamore, Illinois

**Forest Preserve District Committee Minutes
January 27, 2015**

The DeKalb County Forest Preserve District Committee met Tuesday January 27, 2015 at 6:00 pm in the Gathertorium of the DeKalb County Legislative Center. In attendance were committee members: Mr. Brown, Mr. Metzger, Mr. Oncken, Ms. Polanco, Ms. Turner and Superintendent Hannan. Mr. Emerson and Ms. Haji-Sheikh were absent. Guests included County Board member Dan Cribben, Peggy Doty from the NREC, Natural Resource Manager Al Roloff, Frank Ostling, IDNR Wildlife Biologist and local citizen Larry Creekmur.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Turner called for a motion to approve the minutes of the November 18, 2014 meeting. Mr. Oncken moved to approve the minutes, seconded by Ms. Polanco and the motion passed unanimously.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Ms. Turner noted that the agenda would be amended to move item #6, the report from the IDNR on Chronic Wasting Disease program to the first item. She then called for a motion to approve an amended agenda. Mr. Metzger moved to approve the agenda, seconded by Mr. Brown and the motion passed unanimously.

IDNR WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE REPORT

Mr. Hannan introduced IDNR wildlife biologist, Mr. Frank Ostling. Mr. Ostling thanked the Committee for the opportunity for the last 8 years to conduct the CWD management program and to come and discuss the CWD management program. He noted that he was here not only to discuss the program, but also to answer any questions the Committee or visitors may have and finally to request permission to once again partner with the County to conduct herd management activities in some of the County Preserves. He noted that Potawatomi Woods and MacQueen were again selected, but noted that they would also like to add Knute Olson Preserve as well this year. The site was being added as it was in a 2 mile buffer zone around a recent positive CWD result for the disease that had occurred in a deer found in Kingston.

Mr. Hannan asked Mr. Ostling to begin with a general overview of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) for the newer members of the Committee. Mr. Ostling responded that CWD is a disease similar to Mad Cow Disease, with the formal name Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy. The disease is caused by a prion and is spread by an exchange of bodily fluids between the deer population. He noted that the disease is currently incurable, but an infected animal can remain alive and viable and continue spreading the disease for some time before they succumb to it. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) has, for the past years, asked hunters to

voluntarily submit to free cooperative tests on animals they have harvested so they can understand the level of prevalence of the disease on the landscape.

Then, once the general hunting season is over, the IDNR seeks access to public and private lands to collect additional deer samples to be tested for the disease. They also fly over the county to survey deer population size and movement.

He noted that northwest DeKalb County is of great importance to the program due to the large number of private landowners who have ample tracts of land which the deer use for safe habitat. Infection rates in these areas approach 20% in adult males and the disease appears to be very persistent and hearty. The IDNR seeks to keep deer herd sizes small to try to contain and minimize the spread of the disease. These herd management efforts have shown success over the years.

Mr. Metzger asked how the deer come into first contact with the disease. Mr. Ostling responded that Illinois CWD likely originated in Wisconsin, though the disease itself traces back to 1967 in Colorado. The disease stayed at a low prevalence rate for years after it first reached the wild population. However, in recent years its prevalence rate has been expanding with some areas in Wyoming showing an almost 50% prevalence rate.

There is a supposition that the interstate transport of domestic deer across state lines may have contributed to that spread.

Mr. Metzger asked if the animal must be destroyed to collect an accurate test for the disease. Mr. Ostling responded that it must be. He then noted that the IDNR puts extensive information on the IDNR website regarding testing being done and the outcomes.

Mr. Metzger then asked about the part of the program related to management of the herd sizes. Mr. Ostling noted that herd density has a direct correlation to the potential for spread of the disease. He remarked that the drive to keep herd density managed and the prevalence rates lowered is a primary focus for the IDNR as, as he had previously noted, there is no treatment, vaccine or cure for the disease.

Mr. Oncken asked how many samples did the IDNR intend to take from the County this year. Mr. Ostling noted that they will likely take 15 to 20 samples from the Kishwaukee Fish and Wildlife area, 8 to 10 samples from Potawatomi Woods and an overall sample of 30 to 35 across sites. He noted that they will expect 2 to 3 positives from the Kishwaukee area and some positives from Potawatomi Woods as well.

Mr. Oncken asked if the amount they take poses any danger to herd size and opportunities for local hunters. He noted that the Committee will hear some anecdotal beliefs expressed that herd size is diminishing, though it does not appear statistics support that belief.

Ms. Doty asked if the IDNR members had been approached by local hunters who feel the deer are being “taken away” from them by the IDNR sharpshooters. Mr. Ostling noted again that they only do their harvesting activities after the deer season for private citizens has ended – so the local hunters always have the first opportunities. He commented that though the program has had some element of controversy, there is clear evidence that the program is an appropriate form of wildlife management and is actually good for the herd in the long run. He noted that the IDNR simply cannot afford to do nothing and run the risk of the disease running rampant through the population and expanding to other areas of the State.

Mr. Creekmur asked what is happening in the West, in states that have adopted some of these same management practices. He also asked about the possibility of the prion spreading through vegetation. And finally, he asked what percentage of the State overall is infected.

Mr. Ostling replied that approximately 1 to 2% of the overall state population is infected, but in areas like northwest DeKalb County that rate can be as high as 20% among adult males. Mr. Creekmur asked if the harvesting activities of the IDNR are actually only monitoring and not actually controlling outbreak. He asked what is happening on the side of developing some prevention. Mr. Ostling noted that there is some promising research into a vaccine, but then there are challenges regarding how to distribute vaccines if they can be developed. As to the question of the possible spread of the prions, he noted that there are many theories on how they survive and are spread. He noted there are also issues related to how long they can exist in the environment on vegetation or in the soil itself. He noted that soil type may play a factor as well. Unfortunately, prion research is really in its infancy at this time. However, he did note that the majority of epidemiologists will say that any disease left unchecked will spread sufficiently that it could potentially jump species. He noted that this is a persistent disease and of great concern.

Mr. Metzger noted that he would like more information regarding the consequences that might occur of the IDNR partnership is not approved this year. Mr. Oncken responded that it seems clear that doing nothing to management the herds seems to guarantee the disease will spread. He also noted that the program has been running for several years now, since 2004, and it has shown positive effects.

Mr. Oncken moved to approve the IDNR’s use of Forest Preserve properties for CWD program activities, seconded by Mr. Brown. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Hannan commented that past Committee member and local outdoorsman Jerry Augsburger had heard comments from many areas that do not yet have the disease were very supportive of the IDNR activities. He noted that Mr. Ostling had responded to Mr. Augsburger’s (when he was on the forest preserve committee) questions from local hunters to dispel a lot of the mis-information regarding the CWD management program. He also commented that the meat from animals harvested, if found clear of the disease, is donated by the IDNR to local food banks.

Mr. Hannan then commented that he does have some concerns regarding activities in the Knute Olson preserve due to that area having a closer residential population density than the other areas. Mr. Ostling noted that they work very carefully to mark the properties when the activities

are taking place and have a safe area to work in when the preserves are closed (at night) as well as to notify local law enforcement when and where biologists will be in the field.

Mr. Brown asked if local citizens or law enforcement should also alert the IDNR when a carcass is found. Mr. Ostling noted that can be helpful in the winter as the tissues may be better preserved and less effected by predation.

Ms. Turner thanked Mr. Ostling for his presentation. Mr. Ostling closed by inviting any of the Committee members to contact him if they had any questions or concerns.

FOREST PRESERVE DISTRICT POWERPOINT PRESENTATION

Mr. Hannan then presented a very detailed PowerPoint presentation to introduce the new Committee members to the many locations, projects and maintenance and management activities that occur in the Preserves through the year.

Following the presentation, Mr. Roloff spoke briefly on the recent mussels survey that was being conducted over the past few years in the Kishwaukee River. He noted that one area in the County north of Sycamore was found to be extremely rich in both quantity and diversity of species adding that the South Branch of the Kishwaukee River is a high quality natural resource.

Ms. Doty then gave a presentation on the Natural Education Resources Center (NREC). She noted that many of the students attending the many camps and workshops held at the NREC have also found rare and interesting mussel species even before the official surveys began. Ms. Doty then reviewed the history of the consortium that was created to utilize an old science station that had been used previously by local school districts and that became the NREC after the districts sold the building to the Forest Preserve. She commented that the building was originally donated by Sears and Roebuck. She noted that this “temporary” building now houses many educational outreach programs in partnership with the University of Illinois Extension, Soil and Water, the Forest Preserve, Local AG and Solid Waste.

She then did a short video presentation highlighting the NREC activities through the year. She noted that all activities are structured, primarily, to introduce local students, their parents and other resident to concepts like maple syruping and wildlife maintenance. She noted that the NREC also partners with local schools, colleges and universities. The camps serve hundreds of local students and, by extension, their families. The NREC also conducts recycling programs for local schools introducing the student to everything from basic sorting t being a conscientious consumer.

Ms. Doty noted that Connie Handel conducts the recycling programs for over 3,000 students between January and March. In addition, she also works with handicapped students to assist them in developing life skills.

She reminded the Committee that following restructuring of the U of I Extension, she now is responsible for activities in Boone, DeKalb and Ogle counties. Recently, she has been developing more adult programs with topics like large predators and alien invasive plant species.

She noted that the large predator presentation has had the potential for some controversy, but that she works to keep the focus of the presentations on scientifically grounded and sound information. She is also in charge of the Master Naturalist programs and notes that she has had great success partnering with Mr. Roloff and the Preserves. She commented that this group is already a great resource for the County. She noted that she is also developing programs related to clean, safe water resources and "I Think Green" concepts related to insects and worms. Ms. Doty also noted that all programs at the NREC or other areas must meet stringent University and State requirements. Over all the programs reach about 5,000 students annually in Dekalb County.

Ms. Doty closed by asking the Committee if they had any questions and noted that she is always happy to respond to any inquiries or concerns the Committee members may have.

Mr. Metzger noted that he is extremely happy to see the program moving forward after the U of I restructuring occurred. Mr. Brown also commended Ms. Doty on the positive publicity Ms. Doty does that really encourages interest in the NREC and other Preserve activities.

MONTHLY REPORTS AND ACTIVITIES

Mr. Hannan noted that since this had been a rather long meeting, he would just do a brief overview for the Committee on the other monthly reports that will be included in their monthly packets.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Ms. Turner then asked for a motion to enter Executive Session. Mr. Metzger moved to take the Committee into Executive session, seconded by Mr. Oncken. A roll call vote was held and the motion passed with 5 Committee members voting in the affirmative, none in the negative and 2 absent.

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

ADJOURNMENT

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

Respectfully submitted,

Anita Turner, Chairperson
Forest Preserve District Committee
AT:kjr