

*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  
May 26, 2015**

The DeKalb County Forest Preserve District Committee met Tuesday May 26, 2015 at 6:00 pm at Afton Forest Preserve. In attendance were committee members: Mr. Oncken, Mr. Brown, Ms. Haji-Sheikh, Ms. Turner, Mr. Emerson, Mr. Metzger and Superintendent Hannan. Ms. Polanco arrived after the call to order.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

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

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Ms. Turner called for a motion to approve an amended agenda. Mr. Metzger moved to approve the agenda, seconded by Ms. Haji-Sheikh and the motion passed unanimously.

**MONTHLY REPORTS AND ACTIVITIES**

Mr. Hannan began by welcoming the Committee to the Afton Preserve and presenting some of its history for the newer members. Afton is located near the headwaters of Little Rock Creek, he noted that the Preserve was purchased in 1975. The purchase consisted of 240 acres a farmhouse and barns. The farmhouse had the distinction of being the first farmhouse with indoor plumbing in the County, the Cypress wood water tower and windmill are still next to the 1902 farmhouse. The purchase in 1975 was for \$900 per acre and there was not a single tree on the farm property except for a large cottonwood along Little Rock Creek. He notes that the Walker family (from Afton Township) said in the late 1800's there was only one tree between DeKalb and Waterman, an old Hawthorn tree on the Walker farm. The District worked for many years to establish the trees, picnic areas and prairies a few acres at a time. In 1986, the District began the first prairie restoration on the site, aided by Paul Sorensen and students from the NIU Biology Dept. (now called Sorensen Prairie). Eventually FP began to develop 90 acres of prairie, picnic areas, stream and for a time in the 1979, home to a herd of 4 buffalo. With constant drifting of snow covering the fence in the winter of 1979, the buffalo kept escaping over the fence and at one point, ended up in Hinckley. The "Great St. Patrick's Day 1979 Buffalo Round-up" story was then told by Mr. Hannan

Ms. Polanco arrived.

Mr. Hannan continued by noting Afton is the old McGirr family homestead. It was County Board member George Stevens who championed the site for acquisition as a centrally located preserve. Kenny McGirr has a large collection of arrowheads from Afton and the uniform buttons from German POW's who worked the farmland during World War II.

Years ago Kenny McGirr also shared the secret hiding spot for a hidden bottle of Irish brew in the foundation of the 1940 dairy barn (the previous barn burned). Part of the 1940 barn has lumber in it that was once a part of the old Afton Schoolhouse on McGirr Rd. The name "Afton" comes from the name of the River Afton in Ireland.

Mr. Hannan noted this is an exceptionally diverse preserve with forest, prairie, wetland, pond and stream habitats. He noted that when the land was first being restored, FP staff planted a variety of trees and shrubs, some native, some non- native plants. Now the District focuses more on planting native Illinois plant species. Mr. Hannan noted that the Afton wetland bank is also located on this property as well as the new Afton South Prairie wetland bank addition.

Mr. Hannan noted that 170 individual species of birds have been documented at Afton.

Ms. Turner noted that the Sycamore High School Cross Country teams also use the Afton Preserve for regular practices and meets. She added that when her father was on the Forest Preserve Committee, he would often bring his fishing rod along and spend some time fishing before meetings at the stream areas.

Mr. Hannan noted that local nature photographer Tom Robbins has taken some excellent forest preserve photos and are posted on the County Facebook Page.

He then added that the District had also hosted another successful 5K run at Russell Woods, the Russell Hustle fund raiser for St. Mary's School in Sycamore. He noted that there are many kayakers and canoes on the Kishwaukee River forest preserves and that the District had held several volunteer trail cleanups and tree planting events for volunteers. Many Spring "outdoor education" field trips have also been at the Natural Resource Center

Mr. Hannan noted that morel mushroom season is currently on, with people out seeking to find this delicious mushroom. The morel season tends to run approximately one week before and after Mother's day each year.

District Naturalist Al Roloff contributed a report noting the scope of the plantings that have been done this season. He noted that through volunteer and staff efforts, 750 trees have been planted and thousands of water lilies and other wetlands plants as well. He

closed the report noting sighting of Sandhill Cranes that may be nesting at preserve wetlands and prairies.

Mr. Hannan closed his report by showing the Committee a recent “Hit the Trails” article that gave a very good overview of the trails throughout the County and northern Illinois.

Mr. Brown asked that the total acreage was of the combined Preserves in the County. Mr. Hannan replied that there are currently 18 forest preserves, approximately 1700 acres and there are additional acres that will be “willed” to the District in the future.

### **COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS**

Ms. Turner asked if there were any Committee member comments. Mr. Oncken asked about the Afton Blanding’s turtle that had been wandering about trying to find a mate. The very rare turtle will likely continue to migrate through the preserve and surrounding area.

### **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Ms. Turner then asked for a motion to enter Executive Session. Ms. Haji-Sheikh moved to take the Committee into Executive Session, seconded by Mr. Oncken. A roll call vote was held with 7 Committee members voting in the affirmative, none in the negative.

Following the Executive Session, Mr. Metzger moved to return the Committee to public session, seconded by Mr. Emerson. A roll call vote was held with 7 Committee members voting in the affirmative, none in the negative.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

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

Respectfully submitted,

Anita Turner, Chairperson  
Forest Preserve District Committee  
AT:kjr