



Community Engagement Department Memorandum

To: Benjamin Haberthur, Executive Director
From: Laurie Metanchuk, Community Engagement Director
Date: 11/10/2025
Re: October 2025 Report

Executive Summary

Community Engagement strengthens public support for the Forest Preserve District's mission by connecting residents to their forest preserves through communication, education, and outreach. These efforts benefit the District by building public support, expanding stewardship, strengthening awareness, and inspiring the next generation.

In October, the Community Engagement team:

- **Expanded our digital reach by 2.7% over September**
- **Boosted our engagements by 44.1% over September**, and our engagement rate per impression by 4.7%
- Reached **3,564 individuals through programs and nature center visits**
- Engaged **2,604 attendees in environmental education programming**
- Met for the **Environmental Education strategic plan** retreat, which included preliminary talks with community partners about the forthcoming Urban Ecology Field Station
- Took delivery of an **all-terrain wheelchair**, which will be available soon, upon request for the public to use at LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve

Communications & Marketing

DIGITAL MEDIA

- **Follower Growth:** +2.7% over September (Facebook +40, Instagram +39, LinkedIn +16, TikTok flat and YouTube +9)
- **Impressions:** 190,351 (-1.7% from September)
- **Engagements:** 8,970 (+44.1%) with Facebook up 42.2% and Instagram up 79.6%
- **Top Facebook Content by Views:**
 - 10/31: *We're back in land acquisition mode, Freeman Kame addition*; **26,609 views**, 725 interactions, 63 comments, 25 shares and 33 new follows
 - 10/22: *Now Hiring: Horticulturist*; **16,652 views**, 65 interactions, 4 comments, 17 shares and 10 new follows
 - 10/4: *Calling all nature lovers. Learn about KCCN*; **9,813 views**, 104 interactions, 5 comments, and 12 new follows
- **Video Views:** 7,564 (+42.3%)

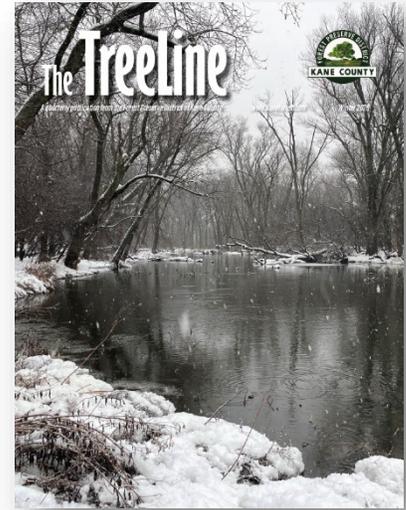
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- **Website Traffic:** 14,000 users and 32,000 page views

TREE LINE NEWSLETTER

Current print subscribers total 5,419 (+4). Current email subscribers total 15,725 (+2), for a combined total of 21,144 subscribers (+6). As always, free subscriptions to *The TreeLine* newsletter are available at: http://bit.ly/ForestPreserve_Email. The Winter 2026 edition of The TreeLine is published. Visit <https://kaneforest.com/the-treeline-newsletter> to view the issue.



PRESS COVERAGE

We published the following press releases in October:

- Ribbon Cutting to Celebrate Improvements at Brunner Family Forest Preserve, Oct. 14
- Learn How to Become a Kane County Certified Naturalist, Oct. 14
- Ease the Body and Mind at “Nurtured by Nature,” Oct. 22
- Forest Preserve District Plans Upcoming Prescribed Burns, Oct. 29

The following items garnered press coverage in October:

Brunner Family Forest Preserve

- New features enhance outdoor experience at Kane County’s Brunner Preserve, Daily Herald, Oct. 14

Nature Programs

- Geneva event to put spotlight on sandhill cranes, Chicago Tribune, Oct. 3
- Learn about nearby natural spaces at Kane County Certified Naturalist Program, Shaw Local, Oct. 12
- Learn how to become a certified Kane County Certified Naturalist, Daily Herald, Oct. 14
- Get ‘Nurtured by Nature’ at Forest Preserve District Programs, St. Charles Patch, Oct. 23

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Environmental Education

OCTOBER SPOTLIGHT

Community Engagement staff met at the Santori Public Library in Aurora for the annual environmental education strategic planning retreat. Spirited conversation and innovative ideas filled the room, and the forthcoming 2026-2030 *Environmental Education Strategic Plan* will position the division for continued success. The final two hours of the meeting were devoted to community engagement work. Leaders from Aurora agencies joined the group to discuss development of the Urban Ecology Field Station. Eight managers from six potential partner agencies shared insights and ideas and were extremely excited about the possibility of a new, urban nature center in Aurora.



Results of dot voting will help us design an Urban Ecology Center that fulfills the dreams of the Aurora community.

Program Reach & Revenue Generation

Programs	Programs Completed (Monthly)	Attendance (Monthly)	Avg Attendance Per Program (Monthly)	Programs Completed (Total FY)	Attendance (Total FY)	Avg Attendance Per Program (Total FY)
Public	12	218	18	57	1585	28
School	13	560	43	28	958	34
Scout	0	0	0	1	20	20
Community	4	87	22	21	647	31
Outreach	8	1646	206	12	1996	166
Learn from the Experts	4	93	23	7	170	24
Virtual Public*	1	n/a	n/a	4	n/a	n/a
Virtual School	0	0	0	0	0	n/a
Program Totals	42	2,604	64	130	5,376	43
Nature Center Visitors		960			3,953	
Total Attendance		3,564			9,329	
Revenues[^]	\$1,513					

*Note: Only webinars have live attendees

[^]Excludes LFE/KCCN partnership revenues.

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TESTIMONIALS

"This was an amazing behind the scenes look at something I knew nothing about. We can proactively volunteer to do this work to ... not only create more prairies but also save the Forest Preserve money!"

-- "Behind the Scenes Tour: Seed Processing Facility" program participant

"Super interesting and informative. Josh's [Naturalist Josh Libman] energy and enthusiasm is magical. Just a terrific program and another example of the high value programming offered by the district!"

-- "Creatures of the Night: Bats" program participant

"Great program! Barb [Environmental Education Manger Barb McKittrick] is awesome and I could listen to her talk all day. The program was great for both beginners or those who might have already been familiar with trees."

-- "Fall Tree ID" program participant

IN-PERSON PROGRAMS

- **Public Programs** – Each season, the naturalist team custom-curates new seasonal programs that interpret our local ecology, with the goal of inspiring connections with nature. Of the four new public programs launched this month, of special note were:
 - ***Creatures of the Night: Bats***: Kane County is home to many flying creatures, but none are as mysterious as the bat. We had 28 patrons join Naturalist Libman at LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve to experience nighttime in the preserve while learning about these winged mammalian creatures and the important role they play in our ecosystems.
 - ***EcoLab: Owl Puke 101*** – This month, Naturalist Amber Ross' quarterly science lab dove into the study of owls. At LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve, 13 participants learned fun facts about owls and got the unique opportunity to dissect their own owl pellets.
 - ***Seasonal Mushroom Foray*** – District mushroom monitors joined Environmental Education Manager McKittrick and consulting mycologist Crystal McAllister for the final seasonal foray of the monitoring season. Wandering the woodlands at Hannaford Woods/Nickels Farm Forest Preserve in Sugar Grove, the group collected and identified 30 species of mushrooms.



Monitors gather to observe features of the variety of mushrooms collected during their foray.

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To attract return patrons and build a loyal following of citizen conservationists, we offer several program series that meet on a recurring basis. All are popular, and together this suite of serial programs serves a wide range of target audiences:

- ***Bird Watching Walks:*** Naturalist Libman’s monthly walks celebrate the changing seasons, as he leads patrons on a hike to look and listen for birds. Basic bird identification skills are covered. There were 28 attendees who joined him at Elburn Forest Preserve.
 - ***Senior Stroll:*** Started decades ago, this is one of our longest-running public programs and it draws a large and devoted group of active adults. Naturalist Libman welcomed 22 attendees to Oakhurst Forest Preserve in Aurora to learn about singing insects and enjoy refreshments and social time.
 - ***Yarn Art:*** Naturalist Lemon invites crafters of all ages to bring their own yarn art project to work within a group of like-minded yarn enthusiasts. This month, 10 fiber artists joined the circle at Creek Bend Nature Center.
 - ***StoryTime at Creek Bend Nature Center:*** Our patrons join a librarian from the St. Charles Public Library for read-aloud stories, finger plays, and songs, staying to enjoy the interactive exhibits in the Nature Center following the program. We welcomed 40 folks in October.
 - ***Little Saplings:*** This monthly program, developed for 3-5 year olds by Naturalist Lisa O’Brien, explores seasonal themes in the natural world using a combination of stories, nature hikes, songs, games, and/or crafts. For October’s *Speedy Squirrels* theme, children and their adults learned about local squirrels and their role in our ecosystem, painted pumpkins and went on a hike to find squirrels, make dreys and look for seeds/acorns.
 - ***Twigs to Trees:*** For children in kindergarten to 2nd grade, Naturalist O’Brien extends our popular Little Saplings program. This month, children gathered at Creek Bend Nature Center for a focus on *The Color Orange* – about all things orange in nature in the autumn.
 - ***Nurtured by Nature:*** Naturalist O’Brien invites adults to experience the healing effects of nature. During this monthly series, she incorporates gentle stretching, deep breathing and a focus on awareness during hikes designed to nurture the mind, body and spirit. October’s program at Lone Grove Forest Preserve in Maple Park drew 22 patrons.
 - ***Trek with a Naturalist:*** Environmental Education Manager McKittrick designs and leads this monthly program for those who like active hiking, all year. October’s hike was at Blackberry Maples Forest Preserve in Elburn for 19 attendees.
- **Community & Outreach Programs** – A significant portion of the naturalist team’s efforts involve traveling to and educating community groups, school classes and partner library patrons. Community programs are given at or for private organizations like garden clubs, service organizations, church groups, private school/day care centers and senior centers. As a highlight of the four community programs given in October, Naturalist Ross presented a talk on *Sandhill Cranes* for the Geneva Natural Resources Committee at the Geneva Public Library. Nearly 100 patrons enjoyed learning about Sandhill Crane ecology and migration.

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Naturalist Ross packed the house with patrons eager to learn about Sandhill Cranes.

Outreach programs are given at public schools, day care centers and libraries. Of the eight October outreach programs, of special note are:

- Naturalist Lemon tabled an event at the Gail Borden Public Library Youth Fair, talking to 45 students about natural area ecology.
- Otter Creek Elementary School (U46) welcomed Naturalists Libman and Lemon for a *Traveling Naturalist: Nature Detectives* presentation for 100 students. These naturalists also treated 95 students at two Kensington Schools to *Traveling Naturalist: Backyard Wilderness* programs and 75 students at Brightpoint Child and Family Center to a *Traveling Naturalists: Birds of Prey* talk.
- Naturalist Libman teamed up with Senior Restoration Technician Pete Dall to engage with a gigantic crowd of 1,200 freshman students at the Waubensee Community College Career Fair.



Wildlife artifacts are the entry drug to learning about careers in conservation and interpretation.

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SCHOOL PROGRAMS

October was bursting with school field trips. Managing our *Mighty Acorns* partnership at Sunny Hill Elementary School (D220), Naturalist O'Brien worked with colleagues in Natural Resource Management to take 40 3rd graders on a field trip to Helm Woods Forest Preserve in Barrington Hills. They learned about tallgrass prairie ecosystems, then conducted brush cutting stewardship work. The entire naturalist team coordinated efforts to welcome 359 students from John Shields (Kaneland), Prairie View (D301), John Stewart (Kaneland), and Davis (D303) Elementary and Mid-Valley Special Education Cooperative to field trips at Johnson's Mound, Fitchie Creek and LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserves. Themes taught included *Trees & Their Leaves*, *The Wonderful Prairie*, *Animal Adaptations* and *Rivers, Streams & Everything In-Between*.

As our Homeschool expert, Naturalist Libman led *Homeschool Hikes* for 86 students representing four different homeschool networks. Field trip themes included *Bird Migration* and *Singing Insects*, and hikes were held at Oakhurst, Otter Creek and Muirhead Springs Forest Preserves.

KANE COUNTY CERTIFIED NATURALISTS AND LEARN FROM THE EXPERTS PROGRAMS

We conducted four LFEs this month. Identifying trees in autumn can be a unique challenge, but during the *Fall Tree ID LFE* program, Environmental Education Manager McKittrick explained to 22 patrons at Bliss Woods Forest Preserve in Sugar Grove how to identify trees by examining leaves, bark, twigs, and fruit. *Under the New Moon: A Deep Sky Exploration LFE* was presented by our partners from the Fox Valley Astronomical Society (FVAS). Twenty-one patrons at LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve learned about the various types of deep sky objects and how these celestial objects are classified. Although the skies were not clear enough for viewing, participants enjoyed looking at the telescopes set up inside Creek Bend Nature Center by members of the FVAS.

The *Sensational Species: Sandhill Cranes LFE* drew 26 participants to Camp Tomo Chi-Chi Knolls in Gilberts, where Naturalist Ross explained the natural history of cranes, then led a walk to watch and listen for the birds at sunset. During a *Behind-the-Scenes Tour: Seed Processing Facility LFE*, Naturalist Ross teamed up with colleagues in Natural Resources Management for a special tour for 24 patrons through our state-of-the-art seed processing facility at Mill Creek Greenway Forest Preserve in Elburn. Senior Restoration Technician Pete Dall explained the start-to-finish techniques and equipment used to dry, clean and sort native seeds in preparation for sowing back onto the landscape.



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NATURE, VIRTUALLY EVERYWHERE! ONLINE PROGRAMS

Kane County Certified Naturalists – To generate interest in our upcoming KCCN information session, we posted this video on KCCN. Naturalist Libman extolls program benefits at: <https://www.facebook.com/reel/1779735166078133>



CONTINUING EDUCATION

Naturalists Libman, Lemon and Ross attended an all-day crayfish training workshop at LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve presented by the Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant in partnership with Michigan State University.

Rental Facilities

BARBARA BELDING LODGE AT BREWSTER CREEK FOREST PRESERVE

In October, the lodge hosted four meetings and four special events, totaling revenue of \$4,050.

CREEK BEND NATURE CENTER AT LEROY OAKES FOREST PRESERVE

In October, Creek Bend hosted two special events, totaling revenue of \$3,500.