



Community Engagement Department Memorandum

To: Benjamin Haberthur, Executive Director
From: Laurie Metanchuk, Community Engagement Director
Date: 6/4/2026
Re: May 2026 Report

Executive Summary

Community engagement efforts continued to strengthen awareness, trust and support for the Forest Preserve District's mission through strategic communications, environmental education and meaningful connections with nature. Digital outreach remained strong, with social media engagement increasing 13.6% to 32,596 interactions and website traffic rising 27.3% to more than 21,000 users. These numbers demonstrate continued public interest in the District's preserves, programs and conservation initiatives. *The TreeLine* newsletter audience also grew to more than 21,000 subscribers, providing a valuable channel for connecting residents with District news, recreation opportunities and educational programming.

Media relations efforts generated positive visibility for the District, particularly surrounding the Burlington Prairie bison project, with coverage appearing in regional and local news outlets and additional feature stories forthcoming. Press coverage also highlighted environmental education opportunities, volunteer stewardship efforts and public safety communications, reinforcing the District's role as a trusted community resource.

Environmental Education and outreach programs continued to connect residents of all ages with nature while fostering stewardship and conservation awareness. Highlights included graduating 28 new Kane County Certified Naturalists (KCCNers), bringing the program's total graduates to 538 community conservation ambassadors, and serving more than 900 students through field trips and homeschool programs. Public programs, recurring nature series, community presentations and school partnerships provided opportunities for residents to learn about local ecosystems, wildlife and outdoor recreation while building lasting connections to the preserves.

Together, these communications, outreach and educational efforts advance the District's mission by cultivating informed, engaged residents who value conservation, support natural resource protection and actively participate in preserving Kane County's natural heritage for future generations.

Communications & Marketing

Digital Media

- **Social Media Engagement:** 32,596, up 13.6% from last month. Engagements are the number of times users engaged (clicked on, commented or reacted) with our content.

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- **Social Media Impressions:** 584,286, up 1% from last month. Impressions are the number of times content was displayed to users.
- **Engagement Rate Per Impression:** Engagement was at 5.6%, up 12.5% over last month.
- **Audience Growth:** Audience growth was down 11.2% over last month to 29,723, with 426 new followers gained. Audience Growth is the number of users following our profile on the last day of the month.
- **Website Traffic:** 21,000 users, up 27.3% over last month, viewing 38,260 pages (-2.09% over last month). The top pages on the site were:
 1. Home page – 6,219 views
 2. Paul Wolff Campground – 4,817 views
 3. Locations – 4,336 views
 4. Burlington Prairie FP – 4,074 views
 5. Big Rock Campground – 3,200 views
 6. Careers – 1,366 views
 7. Fabyan Windmill – 1,214 views
 8. Big Rock FP – 1,066 views
 9. Public Nature Programs – 1,013 views
 10. LeRoy Oakes FP – 892 views

TreeLine Newsletter

Our current print subscribers total 5,451 (+5). Current email subscribers total 16,042 (+35), for a combined total of 21,493 subscribers (+40). As always, free subscriptions to The TreeLine newsletter are available at: http://bit.ly/ForestPreserve_Email.

Press Coverage

Last month, Executive Director Ben Haberthur and Director of Natural Resources Pat Chess did an interview with *Outdoors Magazine* on the bison project. We're anticipating release of the online story, any day now. Additionally, Community Engagement Director Metanchuk did another interview with the *Chicago Tribune* and with WBBM News Radio on the bison story.

We published the following press releases, last month:

- May 4 update provided on human remains found in Carpentersville, May 4
- Explore the Fox River by Kayak, May 15
- Forest Preserve District to Open Arrowwood Point Archery Complex, June 6, May 27

We received the following coverage:

- Bison
 - Baby bison born at Kane County forest preserve, Daily Herald, May 14
 - Baby bison born at Kane County forest preserve; 1st bison Mother's Day in more than 200 years, Shaw Local, May 14

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- Kane County Celebrates First Bison Calf Born at Burlington Prairie Forest Preserve, Kane County Connects, May 18
- Environmental Education
 - Explore the Fox River by Kayak, Daily Herald, May 19
- Public Safety
 - Gender, approximate age of skeletal remains determined after bones found in Kane County preserve, Shaw Local, May 4
 - Skeletal remains found in Carpentersville preserve belonged to man in his 50s, Daily Herald, May 5
- Volunteer Resources
 - Kane County Forest Preserve to offer volunteer cleanup May 17 in Geneva, Shaw Local, May 10

Environmental Education



May Spotlight: With our partners from St. Charles and Geneva Park Districts, we gathered at Peck Farm Park to award graduation certificates to 28 members of the Kane County Certified Naturalists (KCCN) Class of 2026. Now in its 19th year, the KCCN program has trained and educated 538 patrons to be stewards and protectors of the environment. Importantly, the volunteer and continuing education requirements for KCCNers to annually certify help fuel the District's volunteer program.

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	16	312	20	143	5888	41
School	19	920	48	81	2766	34
Scout	0	0	0	2	35	18
Community	4	65	16	51	1570	31
Outreach	3	168	56	39	3590	92

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Learn from the Experts	1	30	30	20	586	29
Virtual Public*	1	n/a	n/a	10	n/a	n/a
Virtual School	0	0	0	0	0	n/a
Program Totals	44	1,495	35	346	14,435	43
Nature Center Visitors		1,170			10,731	
Total Attendance		2,665			25,166	
Revenues [^]	\$1,276					

*Note: Only webinars have live attendees ^Excludes LFE/KCCN partnership revenues



"Loved it, John [Kane County Audubon President John Sprovieri] in the front talking about birding and Erica [Naturalist Erica Lemon] in the back with plants." — "Warbler Walk" program participant

*"Amber [Naturalist Amber Ross], our instructor, kept everything very basic and easy to follow. Her visual aids and presentation exceeded expectations and were easy to understand. She made the course exciting! I really appreciate her time and the Kane County Forest Preserve. I love all the outdoor courses provide. Please continue providing these courses!"
— "Orienteering for Beginners" program participant*

Public Programs

Each season, the Naturalist team custom-curates timely new programs that interpret our local ecology, with the goal of inspiring connections with nature. Of the eight offered, highlights this month were:

- *Learn to Kayak:* In our first kayaking program of the season, Environmental Education Manager Barb McKittrick welcomed nine patrons to learn the skills and techniques required to paddle safely and enjoyably. After dry-land instruction by our partners from Rocktown Adventures, the group took to the water at Oakhurst Forest Preserve in Aurora to practice their new skills and learn a bit about the ecology of the preserve itself and Lake Patterson.



Instructors help kayakers adjust their personal flotation devices and properly configure their kayaks before launching into Lake Patterson.

- *Cinco de Mayo Yoga and Wildflowers:* Patrons gathered at Johnson’s Mound Forest Preserve in Elburn to celebrate Cinco de Mayo in nature. Naturalist Ross joined Jared Fedota from YogaSix Studio in Geneva for an outdoor, guided yoga session followed by a naturalist-guided stroll to enjoy the beautiful ephemeral wildflowers blooming in the woodlands.



Yogis pose atop the stone ledges constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps.

- *Warbler Walk:* John Sprovieri, president of Kane County Audubon, joined Naturalist Lemon and 27 intrepid birders for a guided bird walk around LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve in St. Charles. May is an ideal time for birdwatching, with the return of our resident breeding birds and a slew of migrants passing through on their way north. The group spotted sparrows, flycatchers, thrushes, woodpeckers and (or course!) warblers.



Birders young and old saw some familiar species and learned a few new birds from John Sprovieri.

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

- *Senior Stroll:* One of our longest-running public programs, the Stroll draws a large and devoted group of active adults. In May, Naturalist Josh Libman welcomed 41 participants to Johnson’s Mound Forest Preserve to learn about spring wildflowers, calling frogs, and glacial history and to enjoy social times with light refreshments after the stroll.
- *Bird Watching Walks:* Naturalist Libman’s monthly walks celebrate the changing seasons as he leads patrons on hikes to look and listen for birds and covers basic bird identification skills. In

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May, 35 attendees joined him at Burnidge Forest Preserve in Elburn. Highlights included spotting warblers, tanagers and nighthawks.

- **Trek with a Naturalist:** Environmental Education Manager McKittrick designs and leads this monthly program for those who like active hiking, all year long. We visit different preserves each month, with May's being at Johnson's Mound Forest Preserve for 42 attendees.
- **Nurtured by Nature:** Naturalist Lisa 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 walks designed to nurture the mind, body and spirit. May's program, with 15 patrons, was at Tekakwitha Woods Forest Preserve in St. Charles.
- **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 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 35 folks in May. Patrons were encouraged to visit a second story along the StoryWalk.
- **Little Saplings:** This monthly program, developed for 3-5 year olds by Naturalist O'Brien, explores seasonal themes in the natural world using a combination of stories, nature hikes, songs, games, and/or crafts. For May's Crayfish Mania theme, 12 children and their adults investigated crayfish specimens and their unique adaptations, listened to crayfish stories, created crayfish crowns and explored Ferson Creek for crayfish.
- **Twigs to Trees:** For children in kindergarten to 2nd grade, Naturalist O'Brien, extends our popular Little Saplings program. This month, nine children gathered at Creek Bend Nature Center for Nature Play — walking on logs and rocks, building a stick house and rolling logs.

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



Naturalist Lemon leads a Wildflower Walk for Messenger Public Library at Bliss Woods Forest Preserve.

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organizations, church groups, private school/day care centers and senior centers. In May, we served 65 patrons in this fashion.

Outreach programs are given at public schools, day care centers and libraries. The three May outreach programs (led by Naturalists Libman, Ross and Environmental Education Manager McKittrick) included a *Traveling Naturalist: Wonderful World of Insects* program for 115 students at Howard B. Thomas Elementary School (D301) in Burlington.

School Programs

The last month of school is our busiest time for school field trips. The naturalist team worked together to welcome 833 students from 13 public elementary, middle and high schools in D131, D300, D301, D303, Barrington D220 and BPS D101 to field trips at LeRoy Oakes, Helm Woods, Burlington Prairie, Oakhurst and Fitchie Creek Forest Preserves. Several of these field trips included more than 100 students. Topics included Discovery Hikes, Spring Wildflowers, Bison, Wonderful World of Insects, Mighty Acorns, and Rivers & Streams. Naturalists Libman and Ross also hosted 87 homeschoolers at Tekakwitha Woods, Johnson's Mound, and Burlington Prairie Forest Preserves.



And they're off! Students from Bell Graham Elementary School move like insects during a relay race.



Hermes Elementary scientists-in-training study water quality at LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve.

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Nature, Virtually Everywhere! Online Programs

For patrons that can't come to the forest preserves, or choose not to gather in groups, the Environmental Education team continues its innovative work to bring high-quality nature programs to folks via live virtual hikes, videos, and webinars. In May, we released:

- **Guess the Preserve!** – Can you guess where our naturalist was hiking?
<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/lit5WqRyLQA>

Staffing

Welcome to Naturalist Interns Harriet Hutchison and Faye Barkat! Harriet is a rising sophomore at the University of Illinois, majoring in Natural Resources & Environmental Sciences. Faye is a recent graduate of the University of Illinois and has worked as a field geologist.

Rental Facilities

Barbara Belding Lodge at Brewster Creek Forest Preserve

In May, the lodge hosted four meetings and a baby shower, totaling \$1,200.

Creek Bend Nature Center at LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve

In May, we hosted our first large ceremony and reception of the season, totaling \$3,500.