



Planning & Land Management Department Memorandum

TO: Benjamin Haberthur, Executive Director

FROM: Jennifer Rooks-Lopez, Chief of Planning & Land Management
Patrick Chess, Director of Natural Resources
Jeremy Jensen, Director of Operations

RE: April 2024 Department Monthly Report

PLANNING

LAND ACQUISITION

Staff continues to work with the Land Acquisition Committee on the evaluation and acquisition of properties. The District is set to close on an approximately 23-acre acquisition adjacent to Johnson's Mound FP in Elburn, Blackberry Township in early May.

GRANT PROJECTS

Carpentersville Dam Removal

In an agreement ratified by the Commission in 2015, the IDNR agreed to provide the funding to remove the Carpentersville dam, with a ratified extension agreement approved in May of 2018. The dam currently fragments the Fox River by creating a barrier that prevents the free movement of fish and other aquatic organisms, compromises the water quality of the Fox River upstream, and is an impediment to safe canoe and kayak recreational use.

Project Updates:

- February 2024 – District is negotiating a contract for construction administration and observation with V3 consultants, as required by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to oversee demolition of Carpentersville Dam which will be presented at the April 12th commission meeting for approval.
- March 2024 – Illinois Department of Natural Resources has requested an updated dam inspection report. V3 coordinating next steps with IDNR in order to still deconstruct the dam in summer 2024.
- April 2024 – Finally! Bids for the removal of Carpentersville dam were released on April 23rd and will be opened on May 14th at 2PM.

Jon J. Duerr F.P. Renovation Project

The District was awarded an Open Space Land Acquisition and Development (OSLAD) in June 2022 for improvements to the Jon Duerr Forest Preserve. This project will renovate the existing prairie, parking lots, shelters, restrooms and realign a section of the Riverbend regional trail as well as replace the existing boat launch with a new ADA compliant launch that is able to accommodate small motorized boats.

Project Updates:

- February 2024 – The bid for the Jon Duerr Renovation project was released on February 20th, and is expected to be awarded at the April 12 commission meeting.
- March 2024 – There was only one bid and it was over budget. Staff is re-bidding with the hopes of obtaining multiple bids by April 9th and awarding at the May 14th commission meeting.

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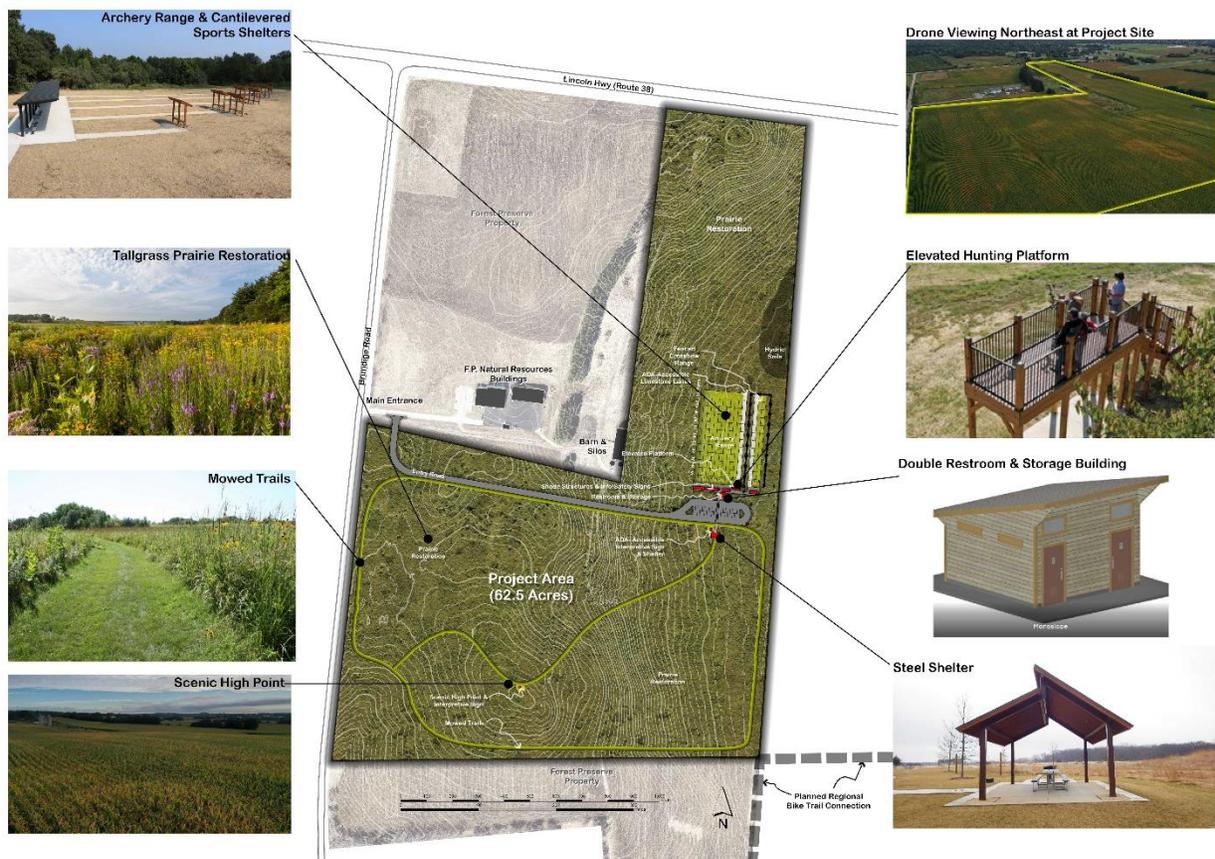
- April 2024 – The second round of bidding was received with a slight reduction in the bid price and an additional three bidders. The project is scheduled for presentation and award at the May 14th Commission.

Mill Creek Greenway

The District was awarded an Open space Land Acquisition Grant (OSLAD) in April 2023 for improvements to the Mill Creek Greenway Forest Preserve. This project will to develop the 62.5 acre purchased in 2016 with Land Water Conservation Funding (LWCF) parcel by introducing resource-based recreation elements that include an outdoor archery range (first of the District's kind), interpretive nature trails, 60 + acres of prairie restoration, parking, restrooms, and designing for a future linkage to a regional bike trail.

Project Updates:

- January 2024 – Hey and Associates began survey work in late January.
- February 2024 – Survey and geotechnical services were completed. Hey & Associates and F.P. staff working on preliminary design documents for the entry road, parking lot, and archery range.
- March 2024 – Staff worked with Hey & Associates to layout the entry road and parking lot and building amenities.



Mill Creek Greenway Forest Preserve
2023 OSLAD Conceptual Plan

Revised: 2024-02-19-2022

CAPITAL PROJECTS

Drainage Projects

The Drainage Committee met on May 15th to discuss the status of various active drainage projects throughout the District.



A flock of endangered whooping cranes with a young colt (orange-brown) made a stop at Muirhead Springs last month, accompanied by Sandhill cranes and a Canada goose. (photo credit Kevin Hatcher)

Muirhead Springs Wetland/Stream Mitigation Bank Project

In 2017, the District began planning to restore over 200 acres of wetland at Muirhead Springs Forest Preserve as part of a wetland mitigation bank. V3 Companies was chosen and approved to be the consultant for this project. Staff and V3 met on-site to review the site conditions.

Project Updates:

- January 2024 – Seeding for Phase 1 and 2 was completed this January. The next phase will include plug planting in Spring.
- March 2024 – The current round of the wetland mitigation bank and stream bank credits are sold out. Spring planting will begin in May 2024.
- April 2024 – Weed control and final staking for plug planting began in April. Plugs are anticipated to begin in May. The spring rains highlighted some areas of concern, especially in the central portion of the mitigation bank where water is escaping to the north and out of the mitigation zone. V3 is currently working with staff to create a berm to contain the north-central area water loss.

Brunner Family & Buffalo Park Forest Preserves Improvements Project

The District has been working closely with the Kane County Division of Transportation (KDOT) regarding various enhancements to these Preserves associated with the Longmeadow Road improvements. The improvements will include construction of a shelter, bathroom, trail connection from northerly parking lot to shelter/bathroom parking lot, existing gate upgrades, and converting various areas of limestone trails to asphalt surfaces including required drainage improvements.

Project Updates:

- January 2024 – Revisions are being made to the 95% construction documents to bring the project price down. The project is expected to be released for bid in March for award at the May commission meeting.

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- March 2024 – Revisions still being made to the 95% plans. The project is expected to be released for bid in April for award at the May commission meeting.
- April 2024- The project was released for bidding on April 23rd and will be opened on May 14th at 2PM.

LAND MANAGEMENT

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Earth Day Special Event

This year's volunteer tree planting event took place on Saturday, April 20th at Elburn Forest Preserve. This event was very well attended, with over 300 volunteers, including local Girl, Boy, and Cub Scout troops, as well as Senator Don DeWitte present. Volunteers helped plant 500 oak trees.



Native Plant Sale

Last month, NRM staff collaborated with the Kane Forest Preserve Foundation to host a public native plant sale. Pre-order pickup and day-of sales took place on Saturday, April 27th at LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve. The proceeds from this sale will go towards projects within the Forest Preserves.

Chemical Weed Management

Invasive weeds have begun to sprout and our crew has been working hard to combat a whole suite of pernicious pests including wild chervil, reed canary grass, and fig buttercup, among others. Widespread selective herbicide applications were conducted across the county at 46 preserves, totaling over 400 man hours.

Wildlife

Avian Studies & Nest Structure Program

Our staff have been working to expand our kestrel nest box program by collaborating with the University of Illinois to deploy color leg bands on adult American Kestrels. By using these color leg bands, individual birds will be identifiable in flight, during migration and upon arrival to the breeding grounds. It will help broaden our understanding of survival, migration, breeding success & site fidelity on a county-

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level scale. On our first banding day, we caught & deployed 3 individuals with color leg bands at Muirhead, Big Rock, and Hannaford Forest Preserves.

Wildlife staff have begun spring migratory bird surveys at Fabyan & Big Rock Forest Preserves this month. In addition to these, secretive marshbird surveys at Freeman Kame & Willoughby Farms Forest Preserve are underway. These surveys are conducted to help determine presence/absence of species using the preserves and how changes in the landscape affects species use & movement in the preserves.

Weekly surveys at Muirhead Springs continue through the spring. There has been a significant drop off in waterfowl, following a steady increase in shorebird activity. An incredibly rare sighting of a Glossy Ibis was reported to eBird with photo confirmation during the last weekend of April at Muirhead Springs.

Amphibian and Reptile Monitoring

Staff concluded surveys for salamanders in April. Cover objects were placed at several preserves with an emphasis on sites where smooth greensnakes may occur. Staff conducted turtle surveys at 2 locations and continues to care for 25 Blanding's turtle hatchlings from the 2023 season. The hatchlings will be released in Summer 2024.

OPERATIONS

North Operations

Campground Preparations

Preparations for opening day at the Paul Wolff Campground were a high priority in the month of April. Opening procedures in the campground includes testing electrical services, turning on water lines, grooming the landscaping and mulching trees, the playground and accessible camping sites. All picnic tables were checked and repaired, campfire rings were cleaned and the woodbin fully stocked. There was a heavy component of customer service training this year as the campground launched its first year of offering reservations and the software to support this.

Culvert Installation

Staff assisted the Trades Division with the installation of new culverts under the roadway at Freeman Kame Forest



Taking measurements on a banded adult female American kestrel.



Photos taken during and after the culvert installation at Freeman Kame FP.

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Preserve. This project will improve access for vehicles and hikers when traveling to the northern parts of the preserve.

Preserve Cleanup

District staff have continued to work on spring cleaning in the preserves. This work included more time spent working to clean up litter found in preserves and on the trails, riverbanks and road rights-of-way, as well as remove larger items that are dumped on District property. It's an annual spring objective to remove as much of the litter as possible before the vegetation starts to grow and obscure the materials. Additional assistance was provided by CAMBr to clean up Raceway Woods boundaries, and the Valley Model Railroad Club that worked along the Elgin Branch of the Prairie Path. Numerous other volunteers helped honor Earth Day by doing clean-up at a variety of District locations. Additionally, several areas along the linear trails were cleaned up by either scrubbing markings off the walls or painting over large concrete surfaces to obscure as much of the graffiti as they could reach.



Ranger Martin removing graffiti at the Raymond Street Tunnel.

Special Events

North Operations staff participated in two special events this month: Elburn Forest Preserve hosted the District's annual Earth Day event. Staff assisted with parking cars, transporting volunteers to the tree planting area and generally answering questions to improve the experience for the patrons participating in the event. The Free Woodchip Giveaway happened at Burnidge Forest Preserve with staff helping direct traffic and load woodchips for the public all day. This is an annual event allowing public to receive free surplus woodchips generated by regular preserve trimming projects over the winter season.



Free woodchip day at Burnidge FP.

Water Line Charging

All wells in the preserves have been turned on for the season and the water supply has been sampled and tested to ensure the safety of the water supply and compliance with Kane County's Non-Community Water Well Program. Some locations do require coordination with local municipal staff to install line equipment and turn on the water supply. Now that temperatures will be staying above freezing, all the water lines in the preserves will remain open for public service through the summer season.

South Operations

Annual Vehicle Test Lane Inspections

South Operations sent all trucks and trailers through the test lane to get their updated safety stickers. This is the first time we've sent our vehicles through the newly created safety lane that is being operated by the County DOT. This practice was not only faster because all of our vehicles were scheduled to be brought in which meant they were attended to in a timely fashion, but it was also more cost effective than going through a private mechanic.

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Special Event Assistance and Preparation

South Operations provided assistance with the Earth Day event at Elburn Forest Preserve, the annual District plant sale, and also provided two operators to load vehicles for the annual chip day at Big Rock Forest Preserve. Leading up to the Earth Day event at Elburn, South Operations delivered equipment and also patched potholes in the parking lot at Elburn Forest Preserve. On the day of the event, two staff members assisted the public by driving one of the hay rack shuttles and loading water buckets for the tree planting. For the plant sale, South Operations staff assisted with the unloading of plants and watering. Lastly, staff provided operators for eight hours to load vehicles with woodchips, which is an asset to the District because it helps reduce the volume of chips in our pit annually to keep the appearance tidy.



Dead tree removal at Voyageurs Landing FP (featuring Rangers Hernandez, Gregory, and Kvasnicka).

Campground Preparation and Opening

Our annual campground preparations got underway this month to prepare for our May 1st opening. This includes testing the campground water system, making any needed electrical repairs, and coordinating with the seasonal attendants to staff the campground for the summer. Also, due to the early season warmth herbicide application on the gravel pads is underway. Along with that, South Operations has been working with the Finance Department throughout the year with the launch online reservations through the Sportsman system.

Japanese and Centennial Garden Spring Cleanup

Annual weeding and general cleanup kicked off in April to prepare for the upcoming summer season at the gardens. This includes turning on the water system for the gardens, weeding and general maintenance to prepare for the annual delivery of flowers on May 13th. Soil testing is also underway to address concerns with pH levels in the soil to optimize growth potential. This has included introduction of sulfur additives to transition the soil to a more appropriate pH level for our plants.

Seasonal Water Startup

Sampling and repairs are underway with the drinking water systems in the preserves. Every year, this process takes place during late April into early May depending on weather to start up these systems which are shut down in the winter months. Annually, the state requires both decontamination and testing of public well systems to ensure the safety of the general public.

Ongoing Items

New staff continue to prepare to acquire their CDLs, logging hours and scheduling exams through the DMV. May will kick off our trail mowing along our regional bike trail system to ensure all of our trails receive their scheduled mowing before the Memorial Day holiday weekend. As the summer months continue trail grading and pressure washing of South Operations structures will be taking place as well.

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Trades

Sign Shop

- 30 kiosk posters
- 1 banner produced (Native Plant Sale)
- 1 foam board sign
- 6 corrugated signs produced
- 17 metal signs produced
- 140 decals produced
- 20 kiosk inspections

Building & Maintenance

Trades staff completed the following work last month: repairs to the Johnson's Mound FP staff residence in preparation for NRM's wildlife interns from UIUC; removed beaver dams; replaced the roof on the Jon Duerr FP garage; completed the Getzelman Road foundation project; elevated the access road at Freeman Road; installed sillcock faucet for water access at NRMF; repaired leaks at the Paul Wolff Campground and a water hydrant at Aurora West FP; and miscellaneous gate repairs.

Fleet Management

The Fleet Division welcomed a new Fleet Manager in April. Kyle Sparks re-joined the District under this new role. His knowledge and support of the District's mission will be critical in implementing a District-wide Fleet Maintenance Program. The Fleet Division performed services on 26 vehicles and 14 pieces of equipment this month. In addition, they oversaw the State of Illinois Vehicle Safety Lane Inspections in coordination with Kane County DOT, a new partnership to minimize financial resources needed by both entities to maintain compliance with state mandated requirements.