



Community Engagement Department Memorandum

To: Benjamin Haberthur, Executive Director
From: Laurie Metanchuk, Community Engagement Director
Date: 2/11/2025
Re: January 2025 Report

Public Relations & Marketing

CONFERENCES, MEETINGS & TRAINING

Maple Brewing Day: Director Metanchuk, majority of the naturalist staff, Executive Director Haberthur, Finance Director Dave Petschke, and Human Resources Director Jen Clough attended the creation of a special Maple Replay brew, Jan. 8 at Riverlands Brewing Company in St. Charles. The craft beer was created in part to celebrate Maple Sugaring Days' 30th anniversary, this year. Maple Replay is an imperial stout, brewed in collaboration with the Kane Forest Preserve Foundation. The beer features the same maple syrup that will be sold during Maple Sugaring Days, March 1 & 2 at LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve. A portion of Maple Replay's proceeds will benefit nature education and other initiatives supported by the Kane Forest Preserve Foundation.

Nature Play Space Meeting: On Jan. 17, Director Metanchuk, Environmental Education Manager Barb McKittrick, Natural Resource Management Director Pat Chess, Natural Resources Manager Jason Johnson, Operations Director Jeremy Jensen, Planning & Land Protection Director Jennifer Rooks-Lopez, Landscape Architect Zach Tegge, and Safety & Wellness Coordinator Chuck Misner met at LeRoy Oakes to discuss a site for the Nature Play Space grant project. The Kane Forest Preserve Foundation was awarded a grant by the Grand Victoria Riverboat Foundation. Staff determined a wooded spot just west of the Durant Peterson House Museum and just south of the red barns, would be the best location and provide parking and trail access.

New Commissioner Orientation: Also on Jan. 17, all department heads attended the New Commissioner Orientation. After a general Forest Preserve District overview, each director got to introduce themselves and talk about their department's initiatives. They were also able to answer questions from the newly installed Commissioners.

IAPD/IPRA Soaring to New Heights Conference: Director Metanchuk, Executive Director Haberthur and Planning & Land Protection Director Rooks-Lopez attended the annual park and recreation conference in Chicago, Jan. 23-25. The conference provides various networking opportunities, educational sessions, and meeting space for groups the Illinois Association of Conservation & Forest Preserves. President Lenert, Commissioners Gripe and Roth were also in attendance. In addition, Volunteer Coordinator Robb Cleave co-led a session entitled "Creating Impactful Service at Any Organization."

Community Engagement Department Memorandum

January 2025 Report

Forest Preserve & Conservation Foundations Meeting: Quarterly, representatives of local forest preserve and conservation foundations informally meet via Zoom to network, share ideas and issues at each of their respective foundations. Director Metanchuk attended the Jan. 31 meeting.

PRESS RELEASES

We published the following press releases in January:

- Gear Up for Nature Games and Winter Fun at Polar-Palooza!, Jan. 10
- Maple Sugaring Days are March 1-2 at LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve, Jan. 17

PRESS COVERAGE

The following items garnered press coverage, last month:

Golf

- Landscapes Golf Management: To operate Settler's Hill, Hughes Creek courses, The First Call, Jan. 16
- Landscapes Golf Management adds two Illinois courses, Golf Course Industry, Jan. 17

Nature Programs

- Kane County Forest Preserve District's first Polar-Palooza fest gets warm reception, Chicago Tribune, Jan. 19
- Maple Sugaring Days returns with sweet treats, anniversaries and exclusive beer, Shaw Local, Jan. 21

Natural Resource Management

- The year in birds: Conservation progress, remarkable sightings highlighted 2024, Daily Herald, Jan. 1

SOCIAL MEDIA

The District manages social media accounts on Facebook, Instagram, Threads, LinkedIn, TikTok & YouTube. Our performance summary for last month, follows:

- **IMPRESSIONS** (Times content was displayed to users): 241,908 (+ 74.8%)
- **ENGAGEMENTS** (Times users engaged with our content): 10,547 (+ 61.4%)
- **AUDIENCE** (Number of users following our profiles) 23,459 (- 4.8%)

January 2025 Report

TREELINE NEWSLETTER

Our current print subscribers total 5,390 (no change). Current email subscribers total 15,042 (+206), for a combined total of 20,432 subscribers (+206). As always, free subscriptions to *The TreeLine* newsletter are available at: http://bit.ly/ForestPreserve_Email. The Spring 2025 edition is just out, and available online at <https://kaneforest.com/the-treeline-newsletter>

Environmental Education

JANUARY SPOTLIGHT

In its inaugural year, the Polar Palooza festival was a serious success! Largely the result of Naturalist Amber Ross' creativity and hard work, this new winter event offered engaging, family-friendly nature-based arcade games and crafts, with prizes awarded for participation. The 13 activity stations included themes like *Make a Bird Feeder* (made with pinecones), *Animal Olympics* (moving like native animals), and *Who Made this Nest?* (bird-to-nest matching game). With patron smiles and compliments flowing freely, 350 patrons enjoyed an educational and fun filled day at Creek Bend Nature Center. We will definitely repeat Polar Palooza in 2026!



Nature-based stations both inside and out offered a wide range of activities for families eager to escape cabin fever, spend time in nature and have fun doing so.

Community Engagement Department Memorandum

January 2025 Report

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	14	706	50	90	2,676	30
School	6	153	26	53	1,580	30
Scout	0	0	0	4	49	12
Community	1	14	14	30	1,215	41
Outreach	5	272	54	23	1,287	56
Learn from the Experts	3	73	24	14	315	23
Virtual Public*		n/a	n/a	5	n/a	n/a
Virtual School	0	0	0	1	125	125
Program Totals	29	1,218	42	220	7,247	34
Nature Center Visitors		974			5,117	
Total Attendance		2,192			12,364	
Revenues [^]	\$686					

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



“[Naturalist Lisa O’Brien] Lisa was great at pointing out things I did not see on my own when I went a few weeks ago. Also pointed out what to look for in the Spring so will definitely go back...It’s not only great to get stimulated with a brisk walk on a cold morning, but to also stimulate the mind!”
 — “Nurtured by Nature” participant

IN-PERSON PROGRAMS

- Public Programs:** Naturalist O’Brien led her monthly, meditative, *Nurtured by Nature* hike at Rutland Forest Preserve in Hampshire for 13 patrons. The group enjoyed the healing benefits of a walk in nature while learning about peat formation and bog habitats. For the younger set, Naturalist O’Brien welcomed preschoolers and their caregivers to a *Cardinals in the Snow - Little Saplings* program at LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve in St. Charles. Participants learned how to identify cardinals by color and call, played a bird memory matching game, created bagel bird feeders, filled the Creek Bend Nature Center bird feeders and enjoyed a birding hike.

We had 25 patrons turn-out to Hannaford Woods/Nickels Farm Forest Preserve in Sugar Grove for Naturalist Josh Libman’s monthly *Bird Watching* walk. Sightings of Eastern Bluebirds were the highlight of the program. During the faster paced *Trek with a Naturalist* monthly program, Naturalist Libman welcomed 30 patrons to Les Arends Forest Preserve in Batavia for a 4-mile

Community Engagement Department Memorandum

January 2025 Report

journey along the Fox River Bike Trail, passing floodplain forests, dolomite outcroppings and the Fabulous Fox River!

Naturalist Erica Lemon's monthly *Yarn Art* program attracts patrons into Creek Bend Nature Center that might not typically attend field-based nature programs. As participants work their yarn art projects, they share tips and patterns with others while picking up pointers and ideas from friends old and new. This month, twelve crafters participated.



The Savanna Room at Creek Bend Nature Center makes the perfect retreat for crafting with natural fibers.



shared the story of linen. They demonstrated how the fibers are extracted from the plant and subsequently spun into linen.

In a related program, Naturalist Lemon worked with local fiber artists to develop a "spin-in." Linen experts shared a presentation on the production of this very useful fiber, then opened Creek Bend Nature Center to a hands-on workshop for spinners and their spinning wheels. We had 30 spinning enthusiasts attend.

In what has become an annual and well-attended travelogue tradition, 45 *Senior Stroll* patrons attended Environmental Education Manager McKittrick's presentation on *Backpacking the Sierra Nevadas – A Wilderness Experience!* She shared the adventure of her recent backpacking trek

Community Engagement Department Memorandum

January 2025 Report

through the Emigrant Wilderness of the Sierra Nevada range. Attendees learned about the history and ecology of this beautiful part of the country while enjoying backpacking snacks and warm drinks.

This month's *Storytime at Creek Bend Nature Center* attracted 40 young family members to Creek Bend Nature Center to enjoy read-aloud stories, finger plays, songs, and more led by a librarian from the St. Charles Public Library. Attendees stayed and enjoyed the interactive exhibits in the Nature Center following the program.



The bitter cold did not keep 20 patrons away from Naturalist O'Brien's *Wolf Moon Hike* at Les Arends Forest Preserve in Batavia. Strolling under the light of a winter moon, the group learned why Native Americans name each of the full moons and explored the trail and river area for night life and geologic formations (dolomite!) Not only was the Wolf Moon shining brightly in a star filled-sky, but Mars was in occultation, making for a magical night.

Wolf Moon Hikers were treated to the moon shining brightly over the Fox River.

- **Community & Outreach Programs** – The entire naturalist team worked together to deliver five *Traveling Naturalist* programs to a total of 272 students at area schools this month: three *Backyard Wilderness* themed and two *Nature Detectives* themed programs. Districts supported included D301, U46 and Brightpoint Child & Family Center in Carpentersville.

Naturalist Ross traveled to the Northern Illinois Special Recreation Association (NISRA) in Carpentersville to lead a *Birds of Kane County* outreach program. The 14 students enjoyed learning about birds, completing a bird beak activity and making/deploying pinecone bird feeders.

- **School Programs** – Environmental Education Manager McKittrick hosted the GeoAdventure Club from Wredling Middle School for a winter *Animal Adaptations* hike, nature crafting in the cabin and sledding at Johnson's Mound Forest Preserve. Naturalist Libman welcomed 48 homeschooling members from three networks to *Homeschool Discovery Hike* programs at Fox River Bluffs and Johnson's Mound Forest Preserves.
- **Learn from the Experts (LFE)/Kane County Certified Naturalist (KCCN) Programs** – After months of promotion, planning and anticipation, we kicked off instruction for the KCCN Class of 2025. This partnership program between the District and the Geneva and St. Charles Park Districts is now in its 18th year, with >500 students having participated in the program. In January, the first four of six

Community Engagement Department Memorandum

January 2025 Report

classroom sessions, consisting of two topics each (*Ecology, Ornithology, Geology, Soils, Woodlands, Mammals, Wetlands, Watersheds*), were well received by the 38 enrolled students. Director of Planning & Land Protection Jen Rooks-Lopez and Commissioner Mo Iqbal are celebrity class members.

We led three LFE adult education programs this month. Two sessions of the same topic (*Nature for All: The Origin Story of the Forest Preserve District of Kane County*) were taught by District Consultant Al Watts at LeRoy Oakes and Brewster Creek Forest Preserves. A total of 53 attendees enjoyed learning about the history of the District's establishment and growth, as well as the future Centennial celebration being planned. The third LFE, *Creatures of the Subnivean Zone*, explored the animals that call the subnivean zone between snow and ground their winter playground. Naturalist O'Brien described the formation, benefits and perils to the subnivean zone to the 20 attendees at Creek Bend Nature Center.

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 January, we released:

Beaver Dam Update – Check out the incredible work of beavers at LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve! This impressive dam is just one example of how these amazing creatures shape the landscape. Nature's engineers at their finest! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qNZkTtdmgsI>

INTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS

Environmental Education Manager McKittrick led the kick-off meeting for the *Nature Play Space* capital project being funded by the Grand Victoria Riverboat Grant submitted by the Kane Forest Foundation. Not meant to be a plastic playground, the Nature Play Space will be designed to get children outside, along the trails of LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve, for free, unstructured sensory play with limited adult supervision and rules. The \$38,000 project includes a \$22,800 grant award, \$9,200 from the Foundation and a \$6,000 in-kind District match. During a field visit to LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve, the working team selected a tentative location for the build out.

January 2025 Report

EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS

2025 is not only the Centennial anniversary of the District, it is the 30th anniversary of the annual Maple Sugaring Days festival. In celebration of this double birthday, the Environmental Education team has worked with Riverlands Brewing to craft a special beverage just for our event – Maple Replay Imperial Stout. Crafted with the same local Funks Grove



District staff learned from Riverlands owner Eric Bramwell about the science and nature behind the art of beer brewing, then helped start the Maple Replay

maple syrup sold at Maple Sugaring Days, Maple Replay will make its debut within a new beer tent at the festival. A portion of all sales of Maple Replay will be donated to the Kane Forest Foundation. In January, invited staff and supporters joined our partners at Riverlands to begin the brew process for our custom-crafted beer – a very exciting day!

In another project that will result in a Foundation donation, Environmental Education Manager McKittrick worked with KCCNer (and Glacial Lake Pingree expert) David Schoenknecht to make custom designed socks featuring the surficial geology map of Glacial Lake Pingree available to District supporters. David has pledged \$8 of every \$20 sock sale to the Foundation, to be used for interpretive Ice-Age signage in our preserves. You can purchase yours here! https://donorbox.org/20-socks-for-fpdkc-signs?fbclid=IwY2xjawIKGCZleHRuA2F1bQixMAABHbwyCQwg11-LuJh082yVRTzV68CBVa4kQInbyjnTG3KpT_GfhARGIsWByg_aem_x2eD5gxhtCuN3f3LjU2I-A

DESIGN: GLACIAL LAKE PINGREE GEOLOGY SOCKS



January 2025 Report

Rental Facilities

Barbara Belding Lodge at Brewster Creek Forest Preserve

In January, the lodge hosted four meetings, totaling \$300.

Creek Bend Nature Center at LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve

In January, staff used Creek Bend Nature Center for several planning meetings. Showings were available every Wednesday, from 3-7 p.m.