



Community Engagement Department Memorandum

To: Benjamin Haberthur, Executive Director
From: Laurie Metanchuk, Community Engagement Director
Date: 4/10/2026
Re: April 2026 Report

Executive Summary

Communications, marketing and environmental education efforts continued to strengthen public engagement and support for the Forest Preserve District's mission throughout April. Digital communications performance showed significant growth, with social media engagement increasing 62.9% and impressions rising 26.4%, demonstrating strong public interest in District programs, preserves and initiatives. Audience growth remained positive, while *TreeLine* newsletter subscriptions increased to more than 21,000 combined print and email subscribers, further expanding the District's reach. Media coverage highlighted key conservation and community initiatives, including the return of bison to Kane County, Earth Day tree plantings and operational services such as free wood chip distribution.

Environmental Education programs also experienced exceptional participation and community enthusiasm. The new "Kames, Kettles, and Eskers" Southern Kane County Ice Age Circle Tour sold out within a week, reflecting strong demand for high-quality interpretive programming. Across all program categories, staff completed 40 programs in April, serving 2,781 participants and visitors, with total fiscal year attendance surpassing 22,500. Public, school, outreach and community programs connected residents of all ages to local ecology, conservation and natural history through immersive experiences, field trips, guided hikes and hands-on learning opportunities. Participant feedback consistently praised the quality of programming and staff expertise, underscoring the District's role as a trusted leader in conservation education and community engagement.

Communications & Marketing

Digital Media

- **Social Media Engagement:** 28,683, up 62.9% from last month. Engagements are the number of times users engaged (clicked on, commented or reacted) with our content.
- **Social Media Impressions:** 578,782, up 26.4% from last month. Impressions are the number of times content was displayed to users.
- **Engagement Rate Per Impression:** Engagement was at 4.9%, up 28.9% over last month.
- **Audience Growth:** Audience growth edge up +1.3% over last month to 32,423, with 431 new followers gained. Audience Growth is the number of users following our profile on the last day of the month.

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- **Website Traffic:** 17,000 users, down 10% over last month, viewing 38,260 pages (-2.09% over last month). The top pages on the site were:

1. Home page – 4,949 views
2. Locations – 3,920 views
3. Paul Wolff Campground
4. Big Rock Campground
5. Careers
6. Burlington Prairie FP
7. Public Nature Programs
8. Fabyan Windmill
9. LeRoy Oakes FP
10. Bids & Proposals

TreeLine Newsletter

Our current print subscribers total 5,446 (+4). Current email subscribers total 16,007 (+124), for a combined total of 21,453 subscribers (+128). As always, free subscriptions to *The TreeLine* newsletter are available at: http://bit.ly/ForestPreserve_Email.

Press Coverage

Executive Director Haberthur and Community Engagement Director Metanchuk were interviewed for Fox 32 Chicago by Reporter Dane Placko. The feature on the bison project at Burlington Prairie Forest Preserve aired April 30:

https://www.fox32chicago.com/video/fmc-6cpbu744zfh52cou?fbclid=IwY2xjawRp5lBleHRuA2FlbQlxMQBicmlkETE0YWFBTnhLNnEyejIMZExVc3JOYwZhcHBfaWQQMjlyMDM5MTc4ODlwMDg5MgABHonbmr-MpifJK9cGO3BJLmRmDEyj4Zi7G5eFChJCdQvow2cJ_hKYBzG0JmF4_aem_yhi5Mwyw-xg4A4U78IjbCw



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We published the following press releases, last month:

- Plan for traffic/parking delays at Fabyan West during prom Saturdays, April 10
- Forest Preserve District offers free wood chips, May 2, April 16
- Human remains found at Carpentersville forest preserve, April 28
- Fabyan Windmill will be open Sundays, beginning June 7; *Volunteers invited to May 17 cleanup*, April 28

Media Coverage

Bison

- Bison Return to Kane County After 200 Years, National Today, April 10

Earth Day

- Kane County to plant 500 native trees for Earth Day at Fabyan Forest Preserve, Daily Herald, April 14
- Kane County Celebrates Earth Day with Tree & Shrub Planting, National Today, April 15
- Geneva planting event gives Kane County residents early start on Earth Day, Chicago Tribune, April 22

Fabyan Forest Preserve

- Kane County Forest Preserve advises early arrival for popular prom photo spot, Daily Herald, April 13

Operations

- Free Wood Chips Available at Two Kane County Preserves May 2, Elgin Patch, April 17
- Forest Preserve District offers free wood chips May 2, Daily Herald, April 23
- Kane County Forest Preserve to hold wood chip pick-up events May 2, Shaw Local, April 24

Environmental Education

April Spotlight

After two sold-out motorcoach tours of Glacial Lake Pingree's Ice Age wonders, we introduced a similar tour of the county's southern glacial features. Kames, Kettles and Eskers: a Southern Kane County Ice Age Circle Tour was hugely popular, filling within a week of registration opening. Drawing gratefully upon the expertise of Bliss Woods Volunteer Steward Mary Ochsenchlager and Illinois State Geologic Survey principal research scientist Dr. Brandon Curry (retired), Kane County Certified Naturalist David Schoenknecht was instrumental in crafting the route, stops and educational videos for this 6-hour, narrated, bus tour. Environmental Education Manager Barb McKittrick

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helped coordinate forest preserve interpretive stops and a guided tour through the Amrize Sand & Gravel pit in Elburn. Video producers Brian and Joyce Ostberg of www.youtube.com/@BeHistoric shared the cultural history of mastodons.



Geology enthusiasts pose in front of ice age relics: a mastodon replica sculpture and glacial deposits of sand and gravel.

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	483	40	127	5576	44
School	13	508	39	62	1846	30
Scout	1	15	15	2	35	18
Community	7	391	56	47	1505	32
Outreach	1	247	247	36	3422	95
Learn from the Experts	5	146	29	19	556	29
Virtual Public*	1	n/a	n/a	9	n/a	n/a
Virtual School	0	0	0	0	0	n/a
Program Totals	40	1,790	46	302	12,940	44
Nature Center Visitors		991			9,561	
Total Attendance		2,781			22,501	
Revenues[^]	\$3,797					

*Note: Only webinars have live attendees

[^]Excludes LFE/KCCN partnership revenues

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*"Excellent program in all aspects. We are so fortunate to have these programs as well as our Forest Preserves in Kane County. Staff is also very helpful."
— "Kettles, Kames & Eskers Motorcoach Tour" program participant*

*"Excellent guide [Naturalist Erica Lemon] with just the right amount of information. Learned a lot about the history of Earth Day and saw many examples of native plants."
— "Earth Day History Hike" participant*

*"This was a really great lab. It was fun, informative and egg-ceptionally well presented. Amber [Naturalist Amber Ross] always does such a great job. Our grandsons enjoy her labs and so do we!"
— "EcoLab: An Egg-ceptional Experiment" 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. The highlights this month were:

- *EcoLab: An Egg-ceptional Experiment*: Part of our seasonal *Eco-Lab* series, this science laboratory session led by Naturalist Ross delved into the ecology of birds, with a focus on their eggs. The 13 participants worked together at Creek Bend Nature Center, in St. Charles, on an egg-xperiment that culminated in a take-home project to observe over the following few days.
- *Earth Day History Hike* - Naturalist Lemon welcomed 22 patrons to LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve to learn about the history of Earth Day and the importance it plays all across the world.

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, and together this suite of serial programs serves a wide range of target audiences:

- *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 April's being at Oakhurst Forest Preserve in Aurora, for 32 attendees.



Enthusiastic trekkers don't let a little water deter their 4.8-mile hike!

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- *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. April's program, with 21 patrons, was at Rutland Forest Preserve in Hampshire.
- *Yarn Art*: Naturalist Lemon invites crafters of all ages to bring their own yarn project to work within a group of 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. They then stay to enjoy the interactive exhibits in the Nature Center, following the program. We welcomed 21 folks in April. 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 April's *Critter Babies* theme, eleven children and their adults listened to stories about baby animals, did a matching game, created a peep nest craft and walked in the woods to see Virginia Bluebells, and look for nests and listen for frogs.
- *Twigs to Trees*: For children in kindergarten to 2nd grade, Naturalist O'Brien, extends our popular *Little Saplings* program. This month, 10 children gathered at Creek Bend Nature Center for *Spring Explorations*, which included a springtime scavenger hunt.



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. In April, we served 391 patrons in this fashion, including over 200 from Del Webb Sun City for a Monarch migration presentation (led by Environmental Education Manager McKittrick) and a birding program (led by Naturalist Libman.)

Outreach programs are given at public schools, day care centers and libraries. The five April outreach programs (led by Naturalists Lemon, Ross and O'Brien) served 247 students at Hosanna Preschool in St. Charles, Wasco Elementary (D303), Brightpoint Child & Family Center in Carpentersville and BRIGHT. Topics included *Birds of Prey*, *Nature's Superheroes*, *Wonderful World of Insects* and *Backyard Wilderness*.

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School Programs

The full Naturalist team worked together to welcome 299 public school students from Dundee Crown High School (D300), Sunny Hill Elementary (D220), Prairie View Elementary School (D301) and Lincoln Prairie Elementary School (D300) to field trips at LeRoy Oakes and Fitchie Creek Forest Preserve in Elgin. Topics included *Biodiversity of Ecosystems*, *Tracks & Trails*, *Wonderful World of Insects*, *Mighty Acorns*, *Rivers & Streams* and *Illinois Wildlife*. Naturalists Libman and Lemon also hosted 201 homeschoolers at LeRoy Oakes, Johnson's Mound in Elburn, Fabyan in Geneva, and Burlington Prairie Forest Preserves. Themes included *Spring Ephemerals*, *Ecosystem Dynamics*, *Bird Migration* and *Bison Ecology*.

Kane County Certified Naturalists (KCCN) and Learn from the Experts (LFEs) Programs

Following six classroom sessions held this winter, naturalists led the first two of four half-day field trips for the current class of 37 KCCN students. At Camp Tomo Chi-Chi Knolls in Gilberts, we explored the topics of *Geology & Soils* by hiking through morainal and kamic geology. The class studied multiple soil samples and examined surficial geology maps. Johnson's Mound was host to the second field trip, led by Naturalist Libman

and Environmental Education Manager McKittrick, with a focus on *Woodland* ecology. Class members enjoy a refresher course on tree identification, followed by a hike to observe multiple tree species and woodland ecosystems, study decomposition in action and enjoy the carpet of spring ephemerals.



The future KCCN Class of 2027 pose along with instructors Naturalist Libman and Environmental Education Manager McKittrick.

Volunteer

Coordinator Robb Cleave and Volunteer Stewards from Johnson's Mound and Blackberry Maples joined us to explain volunteering opportunities at the District, as well as the cultural history of Johnson's Mound.

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In addition to the *Kames, Kettles, and Eskers: Southern Kane County Ice Age Circle Tour*, we offered three additional high-level LFEs in April:

- *Spring Ephemerals* – Naturalist Ross embarked on a stroll with 23 patrons through the woodlands of Johnson’s Mound, in search of emerging spring wildflowers. She taught patrons wildflower identification techniques along with interesting historical uses of these plants.
- *Sense of Place: Hampshire Forest Preserve* – 15 participants joined Naturalist Lemon to learn about the history of the land that makes up present-day Hampshire Forest Preserve.
- *Learning to Bird by Ear: Recognizing and Identifying Birds by Their Vocalizations* - Many experienced birders will say that 90% of their birding is done "by ear." Often, sounds are our first clue to the presence of birds, and sometimes these sounds are critical to bird identification. For 40 patrons at the Barbara Belding Lodge, Geoff Williamson, chair of the Illinois Ornithological Records Committee, described basic concepts in bird vocalizations and provided organizing principles for learning to bird by ear.



Erratic granite rocks were deposited here during the glaciation event that ended ~12,000 years ago. Operations Crew Leader Donat moved them to a new home near the shelter where they can engage and educate our patrons.

Partnership Events: Internal and External

Thank you to Operations Crew Leader Alex Donat for his special efforts to move several glacial erratics at Bliss Woods Forest Preserve to a visually-accessible location. These glacial artifacts contributed to the interpretive story of this month’s *Southern Kane County Ice Age Circle Tour* and will continue to inform patrons of our region’s glacial history.

Naturalist Ross joined Volunteer Coordinator Cleave to host an educational station at the *Fermilab Earth Day* event. An interpretive table packed with wildlife skulls and furs caught people's attention and helped to stimulate great conversations and interactions with 120 attendees.



One of Naturalist Ross’s favorite interactions of the day at Fermilab!

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Rental Facilities

Barbara Belding Lodge at Brewster Creek Forest Preserve

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

Creek Bend Nature Center at LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve

In April, weekly tours were held for potential renters. Creek Bend did not have any renters, as we have the “A Day with the Birds Exhibit” there until mid-May.

Kane Forest Preserve Foundation

Kane Native Plant Sale

On April 25, the Kane Forest Preserve Foundation hosted the Kane Native Plant Sale at LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve in St. Charles. The benefit raised approximately \$16,000 for the Foundation. Thank you to all of the staff and volunteers who helped make the event a success!

