



## Community Engagement Department Memorandum

---

**To:** Benjamin Haberthur, Executive Director  
**From:** Laurie Metanchuk, Community Engagement Director  
**Date:** 6/10/2025  
**Re:** May 2025 Report

---

### Public Relations & Marketing

#### CONFERENCES, MEETINGS & TRAINING

**Master Planning Meetings:** On May 7, 12 and 13, Director Metanchuk took part in planning meetings for the District's next master plan, the *2035 Plan*, with Director of Planning & Land Protection Jennifer Rooks-Lopez, Director of Finance David Petschke, and Executive Director Ben Haberthur. On May 12, the group met with J Blue of SmithGroup to review formatting of the forthcoming plan. The *2035 Plan* has been delayed to incorporate the impact of the successful 2024 Land Acquisition & Preserve Improvement Referendum. In the interim, Director Metanchuk prepared the *2026 Update: 2015 Comprehensive Master Plan*. It reflects current financials and priority projects.

#### PRESS COVERAGE

The following items garnered press coverage May 1 – May 31, 2025

We published the following press releases in May:

- Celebrate 100 Years of Nature: Join the Forest Preserve District of Kane County's Centennial Celebration, May 15
- Forest Preserve District to Host Wild Boar to Baconfest, May 15
- Celebrate the Forest Preserve District's Centennial on Sunday, June 5

The following items generated media coverage:

- Campgrounds
  - Camping season opens at Kane County Forest Preserve District Sites, Chicago Tribune, May 2
- E-bikes
  - Increase in e-bike use prompts safety, trail etiquette reminders in forest preserves, Daily Herald, May 5
- Centennial Celebration
  - Kane County Forest Preserve District holding centennial event, Chicago Tribune, May 31
- Fabyan Forest Preserve

## Community Engagement Department Memorandum

May 2025 Report

- \$500K restoration cleans up Geneva Creek, protects Grotto, Shaw Local, May 13
- Nature Programs
  - What's shakin', bacon? Kane Forest Preserve to present history of pigs, pork, Shaw Local, May 19

**TREELINE NEWSLETTER:** Our current print subscribers total 5,405 (+6). Current email subscribers total 15,699 (+109), for a combined total of 21,104 subscribers (+115). As always, free subscriptions to *The TreeLine* newsletter are available at: [http://bit.ly/ForestPreserve\\_Email](http://bit.ly/ForestPreserve_Email).

## Environmental Education

### MAY SPOTLIGHT

Naturalist Amber Ross was honored to represent the Environmental Education team at the Veterans Resource Fair at the Batavia VFW. Along with District colleagues from Operations and Human Resources, she helped welcome over 100 veterans to the District exhibit. The veterans were very interested in learning about nature education programs available to them, many free of charge, especially the monthly *Senior Stroll* and *Nurtured by Nature* series. We look forward to seeing them soon at one of our nature programs!

### 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	255	16	139	5,817	42
School	11	533	48	86	2,819	33
Scout	2	40	20	7	100	14
Community	4	67	17	48	1,487	31
Outreach	3	338	113	43	2,850	66
Learn from the Experts	1	55	55	21	583	28
Virtual Public*	1	n/a	n/a	8	n/a	n/a
Virtual School	0	0	0	1	125	125
Program Totals	38	1288	35	353	13,781	40
Nature Center Visitors		1,171			10,446	
Total Attendance		2,459			24,227	
Revenues <sup>^</sup>	\$1,363					

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

May 2025 Report



*"We thoroughly enjoyed learning about insects today! Your speakers (Naturalists Erica Lemon and Amber Ross) were very knowledgeable and great at being patient with kiddos who had so many questions and stories to share! We have never participated in this program before, but we hope to make it a yearly event! Thanks for being a part of our learning community!"*

*Lori DeRaedt, 2nd grade teacher D301; field trip participant*

*"It's so beneficial to be out in nature and especially to have an opportunity to learn more about the environment from someone [Environmental Education Manager Barb McKittrick] who is so knowledgeable."*

*"Trek with a Naturalist" participant*

*"This was a great intro to amphibians in the area. It made me and my daughter feel more comfortable with these types of animals and how to find them!"*

*"Amphibian Adventure" participant*

### IN-PERSON PROGRAMS

- **Public Programs** – As an extension of the Creek Bend Nature Center traveling fly-fishing exhibit, we've worked with Trout Unlimited to offer four *Fly-tying Workshops*. At the final session in May, attendees learned to design and create the perfect fly for their next fishing adventure and took home at least four different flies.



*Fly-fishing, and fly tying, is for all ages. These young men were very excited to attend the workshop, and left with some beautifully tied flies and tips for using them on our local waterways.*

Eighteen mothers, and those celebrating moms, joined Naturalist Ross for a *Mother's Day Wildflower Walk* at Bliss Woods Forest Preserve in Sugar Grove. She shared intriguing stories about the various wildflowers and launched a wildflower scavenger hunt.

## Community Engagement Department Memorandum

---

May 2025 Report

Along with consulting mycologist Crystal McAllister, Environmental Education Manager McKittrick co-led the first mushroom foray of the season for the Kane County Mushroom Monitors. Monitors gathered at LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve in St. Charles to search out and identify mushrooms emerging within the woodlands and grasslands. This learning experience is conducted three times per year to increase the monitors' knowledgebase and to generate excitement for our successful monitoring program!



*After collecting specimens under our scientific collecting permit authority, Illinois Mycology Association members Crystal McAllister and Barb McKittrick identified species based on their identifying characteristics, habitats and substrate.*

During the *Amphibian Adventure*, Naturalist Lemon showed attendees first-hand how animals that live both in the water and on land are very unique and interesting creatures! She introduced folks to the amphibians that call Illinois home and explained their special adaptations while the group used dip nets to explore the pond and creek for frogs, toads, and salamanders.



*Serious amphibian scientists get their feet wet!*

In other water-based programming, Naturalist O'Brien got 12 patrons into Ferson Creek at LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve for a *Welcome to your Watershed* event. She explained that we all live in a watershed and what each of us does in our homes and communities impacts our neighbors and the animals that

May 2025 Report

depend on aquatic habitats to survive. Then, during the creek exploration, the group investigated the health of the waterway and found many mussels and crayfish.

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:

- *Bird Watching Walks*: Naturalist Josh Libman's monthly walks celebrate the changing seasons as he leads patrons on a hike to look and listen for birds and covers basic bird-identification skills. In May, 19 attendees joined him at Burlington Prairie Forest Preserve in Sycamore.
- *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. This month, Naturalist Libman welcomed 35 attendees to Muirhead Spring Forest Preserve in Hampshire for a stroll to learn about flower structures and seed heads.
- *Yarn Art*: Naturalist Lemon invites crafters of all ages to bring their own yarn art project to work within a group of fellow yarn enthusiasts at Creek Bend Nature Center. This month, 18 fiber artists joined the circle.
- *StoryTime at Creek Bend Nature Center*: Every month, 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 43 folks in May.
- *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 May's *Damsels to Dragons* theme, eight children and their adults learned about *Odonates*, made a dragonfly craft and went on an insect hunt at LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve.
- *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. May's program at Johnson's Mound Forest Preserve in Elburn drew 19 patrons.
- *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 Tekakwitha Woods Forest Preserve in St. Charles. The 28 trekkers were treated to an ephemeral wildflower show during the 3.5-mile, fast-paced hike.



## Community Engagement Department Memorandum

---

May 2025 Report

The 2025 kayaking season kicked off with a *Learn to Kayak* paddling-skills class at Oakhurst Forest Preserve in Aurora. This beginner, lake-based program focused on learning paddling techniques on dry land, prior to hitting the water to practice these skills and build confidence. Certified instructors from our partner agency, Rocktown Adventures, led the skills portion of the program and Environmental Education Manager McKittrick led the naturalist-guided tour around Lake Patterson. We were thrilled to have Commissioner Myrna Molina and her daughter join us!



*After a picture-perfect day on the water, class members are now more confident of their paddling skills!*

- **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 May, Naturalist Libman held *Birdwatching Walks* for the St. Charles Environmental Commission (at Tekakwitha Woods Forest Preserve) and the Sun City Bird Watching Club (at Rutland Forest Preserve.) Naturalist Ross welcomed 12 Northern Illinois Special Recreation Association (NISRA) adults to Brunner Family Forest Preserve in Dundee for a *Regenerative*

May 2025 Report

*Agriculture* program. This community really enjoyed learning the differences between regenerative and traditional agriculture and seeing the dairy cows, including several baby calves, move from the barn to the pasture. One participant said happily, "This is the best day ever!"

- Outreach programs are given at public schools, day care centers and libraries. We presented to 338 county residents this month, including Naturalist Ross's table at the Veterans Resource Fair at the Batavia VFW; Naturalist Ross, O'Brien's and Lemon's *Traveling Naturalist: Wonderful World of Insects* programs at Howard B. Thomas Elementary School (D301) and Otter Creek Elementary School (U46); and Environmental Education Manager McKittrick's *Witness Trees of Illinois* presentation at the Batavia Public Library.
- **School Programs** – Spring is a busy time for school groups to take field trips to our forest preserves and spend time learning from naturalists in the field. In May, we hosted seven school field trips for a total of 491 students. Schools visiting included Howard B. Thomas Elementary (D301), Alice Gustafson and Grace McWayne Elementary (D101), Lincoln Prairie Elementary (D300), Fred Rodgers Elementary (D131), and Richmond and Wasco Elementary (D303) schools. We hosted them at Oakhurst and LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserves. Field trip topics covered included *Spring Wildflowers*, *Discovery Hike*, *Rivers & Streams*, *Tracks and Trails*, *Animal Adaptations* and *Wonderful World of Insects*. Naturalist Libman also welcomed 42 homeschoolers from 2 different homeschool networks to *Homeschool Hikes* at Schweitzer Woods Forest Preserve in West Dundee and Johnson's Mound Forest Preserve in Elburn.
- **Learn from the Experts (LFE)/Kane County Certified Naturalist (KCCN) Programs** – Our May LFE was *Fishing the Fox River*, taught by Tom Stewart, former Senior Ranger with the District and a 3rd generation fisherman that grew up along the Fox River in Elgin. Tom shared his knowledge about the sport of fishing and secrets for successfully fishing the Fox River with 25 lucky patrons at Creek Bend Nature Center.



## Community Engagement Department Memorandum

---

May 2025 Report

Members of the KCCN Class of 2026 gathered for their second field trip of the program. Led by Environmental Education Manager McKittrick and Naturalist Libman at Johnson's Mound Forest Preserve, the group enjoyed seeing first-hand the woodland ecosystem they learned about in class over this past winter. This field experience focused on the topics of woodland ecology, tree ID, woodland birds and restoration. Volunteer Stewards Kim Haag, Greg Knipp and Jeff Hedrich joined the program, too, to explain District volunteer workdays.

All KCCN instructors, from the District and our partner agencies St. Charles and Geneva Park Districts, welcomed eligible certificate candidates of the KCCN Class of 2025 to their graduation ceremony at Peck Farm Park.



*Members and instructors of the KCCN Class of 2026 pose together on the stone steps of Johnson's Mound.*

### 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:

- **Species Spotlight: Jack in the Pulpit** – Jack in the Pulpit is a tricky ephemeral! Learn more in this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UI4GSWCuwlk>



May 2025 Report

## PARTNERSHIP EVENTS: INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL

All Environmental Education staff members pitched in with colleagues from other departments to help set up, conduct, and clean up after the Kane Forest Preserve Foundation's Native Plant Sale at LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve.

The entire naturalist team assisted The Conservation Foundation and Kane County Environmental with their annual rain barrel and composter sale by hosting the pick-up event at LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve.

## STAFF UPDATES

Welcome to Naturalist Interns Jemma Waldrop and Marc Davall! Jemma is a Senior at Northern Illinois University, majoring in Environmental Studies. Marc is a newly-minted graduate of North Central College, with a degree in Elementary Education/Educational Studies.

## Rental Facilities

### BARBARA BELDING LODGE AT BREWSTER CREEK FOREST PRESERVE

In May, the lodge hosted four meetings and two special events, totaling \$1,990.

### CREEK BEND NATURE CENTER AT LEROY OAKES FOREST PRESERVE

In May, Creek Bend Nature Center hosted a wedding, totaling \$2,000.

## Kane Forest Preserve Foundation

### NATIVE PLANT SALE

The Kane Forest Preserve Foundation hosted its annual Native Plant Sale, May 3 at LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve. The event was a success, with more than \$10,000 raised.