



Community Engagement Department Memorandum

To: Benjamin Haberthur, Executive Director
From: Laurie Metanchuk, Community Engagement Director
Date: 1/14/2024
Re: December 2024 Report

Public Relations & Marketing

CONFERENCES, MEETINGS & TRAINING

Native Plant Sale Prep: It's hard to believe with the cold, December weather, but it's already time to start preparing for the annual Native Plant Sale. Each spring, the Kane Forest Preserve Foundation hosts an online and in-person Native Plant Sale. The sale is a fundraiser but also has the goal to encourage people to incorporate native plants into their home gardens. On Dec. 10, Community Engagement Director Metanchuk met with representatives from one of our local nurseries to prep for the 2025 sale. Online orders will begin in February, ahead of the May 3 order pickup & in-person sale.

District History: As part of the District's Centennial in 2025, the District has hired a consultant to research the Forest Preserve District's first 100 years. Director Metanchuk met with Consultant Al Watts On Dec. 19, at District headquarters, to discuss progress. So far, the first of three articles have been drafted for publication in Kane County Magazine. The first, on the District's first five forest preserves, will be published in January. There are also history programs scheduled for Jan. 8 at Creek Bend Nature Center and Jan. 14 at the Barbara Belding Lodge at Brewster Creek Forest Preserve. Both programs are 6:30-8 p.m. Registration is \$10 per person. Consultant Watts is currently working on creating a historic timeline to be added to the District's website. He's also working with District staff to create a history exhibit to be unveiled in June.



Celebrating 100 Years
Conservation | Recreation | Education

PRESS RELEASES

We published the following press releases in December:

- Guided snowshoe adventures available with the Forest Preserve District, Dec. 2
- Join the 100-Year Challenge, Dec. 10
- Celebrate Winter Fun at the Forest Preserve District's Polar-Palooza!, Dec. 12

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PRESS COVERAGE

The following items garnered press coverage in December:




- Carpentersville Dam
 - With the dam now gone, Fox River in Carpentersville flows freely and subject to freezing, Chicago Tribune, Dec. 14
- Nature Programs
 - New Forest Preserve Fest Offers ‘Nature-Based Arcade Experience’, St. Charles Patch, Dec. 18
 - Go on an Owl Prowl, Kane County Connects, Dec. 19

SOCIAL MEDIA

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

- **IMPRESSIONS** (Times content was displayed to users through Dec. 19): 82,023
- **ENGAGEMENTS** (Times users engaged with our content through Dec. 19): 4,521
- **AUDIENCE** (Number of users following our profiles through Dec. 19) 23,725

Our top three social media posts from Dec. 1-19, were:

Post Description	Total Engagements	Reactions	Comments	Shares	Post Link Clicks	Other Post Clicks
 <p>The majestic Bald Eagles from the north are returning to their winter home along the Fox River! Check out these stunning photo...</p>	505	234	16	24	—	231
 <p>This program includes an educational fiber-arts presentation open to all, and a hands-on workshop for current spinners. Bring...</p>	379	80	7	11	—	281
 <p>Congratulations to Bill Lenert, who was elected President of the Forest Preserve District of Kane County, at this morning's...</p>	340	101	20	7	—	212

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WEBSITE & EMAIL

The District has been approved by the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) for a government-level domain (.gov). A .gov domain provides increased trust for the public, can improve security and reduce the risk of fraudulent websites and communications impersonating government sources, and better visibility via search engines. District staff have begun the process of working with County I.T. and the District's web host to convert the website and email to the .gov domain. There will be an advance public relations campaign to make residents aware of the changeover, in early 2025.

TREELINE NEWSLETTER

Our current print subscribers total 5,390 (+2). Current email subscribers total 14,836 (+210), for a combined total of 20,226 subscribers (+212). As always, free subscriptions to *The TreeLine* newsletter are available at: http://bit.ly/ForestPreserve_Email. The Winter 2025 edition is online at <https://kaneforest.com/the-treeline-newsletter>

Environmental Education

December Spotlight

The Environmental Education staff conducted a very enlightening site visit and brainstorming session at the Urban Ecology Center in Milwaukee. We met with the Center's vice president of ecology & education, vice president of community engagement and director of environmental education. The purpose of this visit was to benchmark best practices and share site and programming ideas in advance of the District's own Urban Ecology Field Station in Aurora, a project put forth as part of the referendum package.



The nationally-renowned Urban Ecology Center in Riverside Park, like the planned FPDKC Urban Ecology Field Station, sits within a densely populated community and provides nature programming and events for underserved populations.

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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	9	137	15	74	1875	25
School	5	100	20	46	1417	31
Scout	0	0	0	4	49	12
Community	2	76	38	28	1,196	43
Outreach	4	96	24	18	1,015	56
Learn from the Experts	1	35	35	11	247	22
Virtual Public*	1	n/a	n/a	5	n/a	n/a
Virtual School	0	0	0	1	125	125
Program Totals	22	444	21	187	5,924	33
Nature Center Visitors		191			4,143	147
Total Attendance		635			10,067	
Revenues [^]	\$440					

+Estimates as of Dec 19, 2024

*Note: Only webinars have live attendees

^Excludes LFE/KCCN partnership revenues.



“I have been through this forest preserve before, but by attending this program, I learned and saw so many things I didn’t know, and saw things I never saw there, before. Our guide was informative and had a great personality, which made the hike a lot of fun!!! What a nice program!! See you in January.

— “Trek with a Naturalist” participant

In-Person Programs

PUBLIC PROGRAMS: In what has become a popular and highly anticipated annual event, the entire naturalist staff hosted the *Senior Stroll* holiday celebration at the Barbara Belding Lodge at Brewster Creek Forest Preserve in St. Charles. With nature-themed games and food, seniors enjoyed each other’s company and participated in a highly competitive game of Nature Jeopardy!



Naturalist Josh Libman served as the celebrity host of Nature Jeopardy.

In another recurring monthly program with a loyal following, Naturalist Lisa O’Brien led a meditative, *Nurtured by Nature* hike at LeRoy Oakes

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Forest Preserve in St. Charles. A dozen participants explored the new interpretive trails and learned about the resident beaver dam.

Nine birders turned out to Fox River Shores Forest Preserve in Carpentersville for Naturalist Libman's monthly *Bird Watching* walk. During the faster-paced *Trek with a Naturalist* monthly program, Environmental Education Manager Barb McKittrick welcomed over 30 patrons to Fabyan Forest Preserve in Geneva. The lively group hiked nearly four miles while learning about the cultural history of the land and the story of the Fabyans.



Trekkers take a break from their fast-paced hike to pose in front of the Fabyan Windmill.

Naturalist Lisa O'Brien welcomed preschoolers and their caregivers to a *Playful Penguins - Little Saplings* program at LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve. The little ones were disappointed not to find any penguins in the Creek Bend pond!



Little Sapling participants get outdoors to explore nature 12 months a year.

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While people can put on coats, hats and gloves to keep warm during snowy Midwestern winter, Illinois mammals have to beat the cold in creative ways. Naturalist Erica Lemon explained the special adaptations that help wildlife survive the harsh winter environment during a *Mammals in Winter* hike at Hampshire Forest Preserve.

The final three public programs of 2025 are full to capacity with waiting lists: *Owl Prowl* at Burnidge Forest Preserve in Elgin (30 patrons), *Hike into the New Year* at Johnson's Mound Forest Preserve in Elburn (40 registrants) and *Winter Solstice & Coffee Stroll* at Fabyan Forest Preserve (25 patrons.)

Community, Outreach & Scout Programs

Over 70 Kensington School students (at campuses in Geneva and St. Charles) learned about wildlife found in their own neighborhood during *Backyard Wilderness* programs led by Naturalist Lemon.

Northern Illinois Special Recreation Association (NISRA) communities in Crystal Lake and Carpentersville were treated to Naturalist April Ross' bespoke Nature Jeopardy games that wove in trivia about the group's forest preserve visits and programs during the past 12 months.

School Programs

Naturalist Libman hosted the GeoAdventure Club from Wredling Middle School for a joint program with Creek Bend Nature Center and the Durant House Museum. The 20 participants enjoyed a hike with Naturalist Libman before celebrating the holidays in the Durant House *Candlelight Open House*.

Naturalist Libman also welcomed 80 homeschooling members from four networks to *Homeschool Hike* programs at Fox River Shores, Johnson's Mound, Campton (St. Charles) and Oakhurst Forest Preserve (Aurora). Program themes included *Symbiotic Relationships* and *Discovery Hikes*.



Kensington School St. Charles students discover the wonders of our native mammals.

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Learn from the Experts (LFE)/Kane County Certified Naturalist (KCCN) Programs

Plans progressed for the start of the *KCCN Class of 2025*, which kicks off on January 9th. The class is completely full, with 39 registrants and a waiting list.

Environmental Education Manager McKittrick taught a sold-out audience of 35 folks about the history and cultural importance of *Witness Trees* during an LFE at Creek Bend Nature Center. She gave attendees the tools needed and then encouraged them to go out and find witness trees in Kane County.

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 December, look for a peek into the secret lives of beavers.

Internal Partnerships

Environmental Education Manager McKittrick attended the Seed Harvest Potluck celebration.

Rental Facilities

Barbara Belding Lodge at Brewster Creek Forest Preserve

In December, the lodge hosted three meetings and a special event, totaling \$425.

Creek Bend Nature Center at LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve

In addition to various nature programs, staff used Creek Bend Nature Center in December for several planning meetings. Showings were available every Wednesday, from 3-7 p.m. Carpets were also cleaned at the facility.