



AGENDA MEMORANDUM

DATE: August 28, 2025

TO: Forest Preserve District Planning & Utilization Committee

FROM: Jennifer Rooks-Lopez, Director of Planning & Land Protection

SUBJECT: Presentation and Approval of a request to apply for IDNR OSLAD Grant Funds For A Wildlife Observation Platform and Supporting Improvements at Muirhead Springs Forest Preserve

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide the Committee with information to consider applying for an Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) Open Space Land Acquisitions & Development (OSLAD) Grant for improvements at Muirhead Springs Forest Preserve in Hampshire, IL.

BACKGROUND:

Muirhead Springs Forest Preserve contains the first wetland mitigation bank created by the District. The volume and diversity of birds that have returned to this wetland is unrivaled by any previous projects completed by the District. Multiple state and federal threatened and endangered species have been seen utilizing the site, and the word of this success is widespread amongst the “birding” community. As a result, birders have inundated the site hoping for glimpses of these rarities. This increase in visitors to the preserve has created issues with the establishment of the wetland plants required for the mitigation bank.

The proposed wildlife-observation platform was included as one of six promised capital projects for the 2024 Land Acquisition & Preserve Improvement Referendum. This project is comprised of the construction of a raised observation deck overlooking a reconstructed wetland popular with marsh birds and waterfowl. It will allow visitors of varying physical abilities access for bird watching with as minimal damage to the plant community as possible and no impact to the mitigation bank. Staff is requesting permission to apply for the IDNR OSLAD Grant to assist with funding the proposed improvements which, if awarded, would reimburse up to 50% (\$600,000.00 cap) for development and engineering.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

There are no expenses required to submit the grant application.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends the Committee approve the request to apply for an IDNR OSLAD grant for the proposed improvements at Muirhead Springs Forest Preserve.

ATTACHMENTS:

Muirhead Springs Location Map

Referendum Project Presentation