Planning & Land Protection Department Memorandum

TO: Benjamin Haberthur, Executive Director

FROM: Jennifer Rooks-Lopez, Director of Planning & Land Protection
Zach Tegge, Landscape Architect

RE: February 2026 Department Monthly Report

LAND ACQUISITION & PLANNING

Staff continues to work with the Land Acquisition Committee on the evaluation and acquisition of properties.

GRANT PROJECTS

OSLAD GRANT ARCHERY RANGE AND PRESERVE DEVELOPMENT AT MILL CREEK GREENWAY FP

The District was awarded an Open space Land Acquisition Grant (OSLAD) in 2023 for improvements to the Mill Creek Greenway Forest Preserve. This project will develop the 62.5 acres purchased in 2016 with Land Water Conservation Funding (LWCF) by introducing resource-based recreation elements that include an outdoor archery range (first of the District's kind), interpretive nature trails, 60+ acres of prairie restoration, parking, restrooms, and design for a future linkage to a regional bike trail.

Project Updates:

- Cantilevered shelters, final built element, finally delivered to the site.

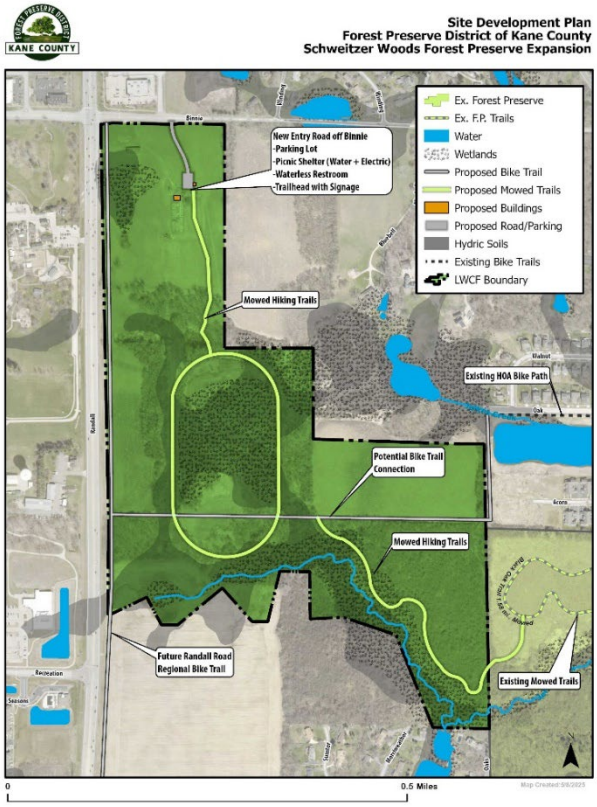
RTP GRANT LIMESTONE TRAIL RESURFACING AT FITCHIE CREEK FP

On September 24, 2024 the District was awarded a Recreational Trail Program (RTP) grant to assist in the restoration of the existing limestone trail at Fitchie Creek Forest Preserve. Sections of the trail, especially that section within the wooded area, experience significant washout and flooding. The project will include addressing known drainage issues and resurfacing of the limestone trail. The RTP grant, will fund 80% of the project costs up to $200,000.00.

Project Updates:

- Drain tile survey has been received from the contractor.

GRANT APPLICATIONS – PENDING



LWCF GRANT AND OSLAD GRANT APPLICATIONS FOR SCHWEITZER WOODS EXPANSION PROJECT

The Forest Preserve District of Kane County seeks funding assistance through the 2025 LWCF or OSLAD grant cycles to acquire an additional 122 acres of ecologically significant land adjacent to the existing Schweitzer Woods Forest Preserve. This expansion is aimed at protecting sensitive habitats, enhancing recreational opportunities, and ensuring long-term conservation of regional biodiversity. The proposed property lies immediately west of the current Schweitzer Woods Forest Preserve boundary and represents a rare opportunity to secure contiguous natural land in a rapidly urbanizing area of northern Kane County. The land is primarily composed of upland oak-hickory woodlands, open meadow, and seasonal wetlands, consistent with the native ecological profile of the existing preserve. Acquisition of this land will not only preserve these important habitats but will also expand passive recreational access and trail continuity for the public.

<u>Project Updates:</u>

- On November 18th, the District received notification from Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) that our Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grant application, submitted in May has been forwarded to the National Parks Service for review.

OSLAD GRANT WILDLIFE OBSERVATION PLATFORM AT MUIRHEAD SPRINGS FP

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 a

key project for the 2024 Land Acquisition & Preserve Improvement Referendum. It includes the construction of a raised observation deck that would be installed close to the water. It would allow visitors of differing abilities access to view the birds and the wetland, without causing damage to the plant community and disturbing the birds' activities.

Project Updates:

- On January 14th the District was notified that the Muirhead Springs Wildlife Observation Platform, is one of the 67 communities to receive $600,000 in OSLAD funding. Next steps include contracting with Wight Inc. for construction and permitting assistance. Construction is expected to begin in early Spring 2027.

CAPITAL PROJECTS

WETLAND/STREAM MITIGATION BANK PROJECT AT MUIRHEAD SPRINGS FP

In 2017, the District began planning to restore over 200 acres of wetland at Muirhead Springs Forest Preserve as part of a wetland mitigation bank. V3 Companies was chosen and approved to be the consultant for this project. Staff and V3 met on-site to review the site conditions.

Project Updates:

- V3 conducted a prescribed burn of the management area.

NEWLY ACQUIRED FOREST PRESERVE IN HUNTLEY – ROUTE 47 ACCESS

In 2024, the District acquired 298 acres in Huntley, at the southwest intersection of Illinois Route 47 (IL-47) and Interstate 90 (I-90). The property includes old oaks, a never-plowed sedge meadow, and more than 25 acres of prime waterfowl habitat. During the acquisition process, it was discovered that the approved entrance to the property is located at the edge of the eastbound I-90 exit ramp and IL-47. As part of the acquisition, an access easement on IL-47 was granted to the District by the adjacent property owner and the Village of Huntley. However, before a new entrance can be constructed, the District must also seek approval from IDOT.

Project Updates:

- On January 26th permits were submitted to the Army Corp of Engineers for review.

GLENWOOD PARK FOREST PRESERVE

Glenwood Forest Preserve is an older preserve located on the eastern side of the Fox River in South Batavia. The property was purchased in 1976 and the existing shelter and parking lot were installed in 1984 (40-year lifespan) and then followed by the single-vault waterless restroom in 2002 (22-year lifespan). The entrance road, Fox River Trail crossing, and parking lot configuration will be reconfigured and resurfaced, bathroom facilities and existing shelter will be replaced. In late 2026-early 2027, Fox

Valley Park District (owner of Lippold Park to the south of the site), will install a new pedestrian bridge that will link users to both sides of the Fox River and is expected to increase visitors at Glenwood Park Forest Preserve.

- Construction drawings for improvements have been completed. The project is expected to be released for bid in early March, for May Board approval.

URBAN ECOLOGY FIELD STATION: ARLENE SHOEMAKER

The proposed urban ecology field station at Arlene Shoemaker Forest Preserve in Aurora, was included as a key project for the 2024 Land Acquisition & Preserve Improvement Referendum. Patron data suggests that school groups, community groups and the general public in Kane County's urban centers, especially Aurora, need a nearby nature center that has programs, educational exhibits and outdoor infrastructure relevant to their unique urban ecology. Arlene Shoemaker Forest Preserve, is situated within the heart of Aurora, with connectivity to surrounding neighborhoods and walking trails to a nearby elementary school. In addition, the Illinois Prairie Path Aurora Spur runs along the northern boundary of the preserve. An urban nature center here will allow the District to better reach under-served communities, at-risk youth, and low-income families that reside and attend school in Aurora. In addition, the urban ecology focus will fully support the District's mission.

The District plans to seek funding assistance from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) Park and Recreation Facility Construction Grant (PARC) which, if awarded, could reimburse 75% of the project cost up to $2,800,000. A successful PARC grant application will require a site plan as well as preliminary facility design and costs for the Urban Ecology Field Station.

- Staff and Wight Inc. conducted a follow-up team meeting to review and clarify feedback from the January Kick-off meetings. WBK engineering was retained to perform a wetland delineation survey for the site.

CHICAGO PREMIUM OUTLETS – WETLAND RESTORATION PROJECT

The Forest Preserve District manages a 75-acre complex of wetlands created as a mitigation effort following the creation of the Chicago Premium Outlet Mall. Originally designed and constructed in 2003 by V3, the wetland complex is comprised of a series of pools surrounding a re-meandered section of Indian Creek. Each pool is managed at a specific elevation through the use of water control structures and separated by a series of earthen berms. Extensive planting of native vegetation took place and V3 managed the site for several years until the Army Corps of Engineers signed off on the project in 2017. Upon sign off, the site was transferred to the District for long term maintenance.

The initial construction took place over 20 years ago and there has been a lot of wear and tear on the berms. A combination of wave action eroding soil and beavers plugging water control structures has resulted in a multitude of breaches and repairs over the years. Currently, there are several locations where the berms are failing, causing adjacent pools to sit at the same water level. This potentially compromises the storm water capacity of the wetlands as well as threatens the plant communities present within the wetlands.

- As the original designing and construction engineering firm, District staff worked with V3 to develop a scope of services to include engineering and permitting services for the necessary repairs. The proposal is expected to be approved at the March Board meeting and design work to begin in late March early April.

MISCELLANEOUS UPDATES

- 2/10/2026: Planning Staff attended the Regional ADA Coordinators meeting hosted by CMPA
- 2/19/2026: Planning staff attended the Conservation Foundation Luncheon
- Planning staff made multiple preliminary design concepts for a parking lot expansion at Burlington Prairie.
- Planning staff met Fox Valley Aero Club to discuss their summer events next to the archery range. Operations handled the special events requests from this point.