

Cook County Forest Preserve 2022-2023 Annual Report

In 2021, the Cook County Forest Preserves determined that extra revenues were needed to meet the Next Century Conservation Plan. The LWV Cook County board asked for volunteers to study the referendum and positions. Carolyn Cosentino, Michele Nicolai and Laura Davis volunteered. The LWVCC board supported the referendum after being presented with the LWV positions and the referendum goals. On December 14, 2021, the Forest Preserve District Board of Commissioners voted unanimously to finalize language (21-0532) for a November 8, 2022, referendum raising the district's tax levy by .025 percentage points. The LWV Cook County and all LWVCC league chapters joined with over 170 other organizations to support the referendum which passed on November 8, 2022, with over 2/3 of voters voting Yes.

Positions:

Natural Resources - Land Use:

LWVIL supports development of a comprehensive land use policy for Illinois that provides for orderly growth while preserving the environment, conserving natural resources and providing needed open space. At every stage there should be citizen input.

To assure the future availability of essential resources, government policies must promote stewardship of natural resources. Policies that promote resource conservation are a fundamental part of such stewardship. Resources such as water and soil should be protected.

The League supports comprehensive long-range planning and believes that wise decision-making requires:

- Consideration of environmental, public-health, social, and economic impacts of proposed plans and actions;
- Special consideration for the protection of areas of critical environmental concern, natural hazards, historical importance, and aesthetic value.

Promote an environment beneficial to life through the protection and wise management of natural resources in the public interest and managed as interrelated parts of life-supporting ecosystems. Resources should be conserved and protected to assure their future availability. Pollution of these resources should be controlled in order to preserve the physical, chemical, and biological integrity of ecosystems and to protect public health.

Goals of Referendum:

The impact on taxes for a \$250,000 home is about \$20.00 a year and goes into effect in 2023. Forest Preserve District is not a home rule government and needs approval from voters to increase tax rates.

The money will:

- * Conserve and restore land to good health
- * Protect water quality of rivers, lakes and streams
- * Provide natural flood water storage
- * Protect wildlife habitat
- * Protect forests to improve air quality
- * Buy available quality land
- * Improve and maintain existing forest preserves and trails
- * Address more than \$60 million in deferred capital maintenance, including for Brookfield Zoo and the Chicago Botanic Gardens
- * Shore up the district's pension fund

The districts 2022 annual budget was \$137 million. Currently, 15,000 acres are under restoration with the goal to double that amount. Increased revenue estimated to be \$44 million, will support meeting the Next Century Conservation Plan, and includes a blueprint to purchase 20,000 additional acres by 2040, increasing the forest preserve district from 70,000 to 90,000 acres.

November 8, 2022, the referendum passed by 2/3 of voters. "Yes" votes were higher in Chicago than in the suburbs. The LWV Cook County was acknowledged as a vital coalition, on-the ground partner in getting the referendum passed.

Current Cook County Forest Preserve team:

Carolyn Cosentino (LWV Homewood/Flossmoor)
Laura Davis (LWV Palatine Area)
Annalee Fjellberg (LWV Glenview/Glencoe)
Karen Glennemeier (LWV Wilmette)
Sue Gorr (LWV Palatine Area)
Debby Halpern (LWV Chicago)
Michele Niccolai (LWV La Grange Area)
Barbara Palmer (Glenview/Glencoe)
Henrietta Saunders (Glenview/Glencoe)
Sabine Scholz (Glenview/Glencoe)
Trudy Turner (LWV Evanston)

Activities and events to educate voters about the referendum:

April 9, 2021 Virtual meeting with Benjamin Cox
Executive Director of Friends of Forest Preserves.

Sept. 7, 2021 — Brookfield Zoo - 2 tours
Presentations to Cook County league chapters

Sept. 17, 2021 - Walk: River Trail, Northbrook
Sept. 23, 2021 - Walk: Trailside, River Forest
Oct. 13, 2021 - Walk: Sagawau Canyon Nature Preserve, Lemont
Oct. 21, 2021 - Virtual meeting with Commissioner Suffredin to discuss budget
May 10, 2022 - Walk: LaBagh Woods, Chicago

May 18, 2022 - Walk: Little Red Schoolhouse, Willow Spring
June 8, 2022 - Walk: Dan Ryan Woods, Chicago
July 19, 2022 - Walk: Beaubien Woods, Chicago
Sept 8, 2022 - Walk: Crabtree Nature Center, Barrington Hills
Sept 13, 2022 - Walk: Sand Ridge Nature Center, South Holland
Sept 15, 2022 - Walk: Catherine Chevalier Woods, Chicago
October 2022 - Walk: Schiller Woods, Schiller Park

Forest Preserve 2023 program goals:

1. Monitor
 - a. land acquisitions and restoration efforts by the FP
 - b. capital improvements made and proposed by the FP in the preserves and at Brookfield Zoo
2. Offer guided walks in the woods to League members

Submitted by Laura Davis May 2023