



NATURE DOES
THE INVITING:
STORIES FROM
THE PRESERVES

Be inspired

All the work we do at the **Forest Preserve Foundation** tells our story. Whether it's a story about how we support mitigating climate change or the next generation of environmental advocates, we are always advancing our mission.

Every year our impact grows.

We are now approaching \$2 million in life-time grants to support the Forest Preserves of Cook County. Those dollars have helped underwrite some 400 internships for youth from some of the county's more underserved areas. Because of our fundraising, more than 200 acres in the Forest Preserves—from Palos to the North Shore—have been ecologically restored. More families are engaging with nature. More people are making tribute gifts that express their fondness for the Forest Preserves.

We produced this e-book to share stories from 2019 that exemplify the work we do year round. It's meaningful work that benefits all of us. We are proud to do it.

We hope you will read these stories and be inspired.



Nicholas Brown, left, with 2019 Student Conservation Association Chicago crew members.

Corps member embraces next-gen leader role

Nicholas Brown remembers volunteering at a forest preserve when he was in grade school. Then when he got to high school, he joined the environmental club. Those were the experiences he listed on his Student Conservation Association (SCA) application.

SCA wanted to know about his experiences in nature and what he might gain from future ones. It was his environmental club involvement that was pivotal.

"The club made me realize there are a whole lot more people who are excited and involved with the environment," says Nicholas, 19, a graduate of Chicago's Northside Prep High School.

A passion for conservation

Now Nicholas is one of those people excited about conservation. His interest in the field led him to Middlebury College in Vermont, where he plans to major in environmental studies.

His expanding resume also

"It's nice to represent the environmental field and show that there are black men involved."

includes three summers with the Conservation Corps. This past summer, he got promoted to assistant crew leader with SCA, which receives support from the Forest Preserve Foundation.

Nicholas' passion about conservation work surprises even him. Growing up in the city, he wasn't around many people who were involved in conservation efforts.

"No one in my family is particularly into conservation work," he says after wrapping

up a workday at the River Trail Nature Center in Northbrook. "No one is talking about ways to recycle, how to reduce our carbon footprint. Going to the park is about the extent of their exposure."

He thinks it's important that city residents who may not live close to a forest preserve get to experience them. "It gives them a chance to learn more and be more active."

Diversifying environmental field

Working in conservation puts Nicholas in an occupational field that historically has not been that racially diverse. As a young black male doing conservation work, Nicholas is fully aware of this fact. And he's proud to be stepping up as a next-generation environmental leader who is also bringing diversity to the field.

He says, "I definitely feel that a lot of what we do in the environmental field is presented as a white man. I'm there because I enjoy being there. It's nice to

represent the environmental field and show that there are black men involved.”

A chance to lead

Nicholas, who spoke at the Foundation’s Spring Symposium, stepped up to a leadership role in his third year with SCA. In early summer, he attended a 10-day training in Virginia to prepare him for the new responsibility. The training equipped him “to be a better leader for young adults and high school students.”

And, as an assistant crew leader (ACL), he got to mentor others much as he had been. “When I was a crew member, I felt like my ACL was a mentor, someone to look up to.”

He and his River Trail crew got a lot done, he says. They created a path for a pollinator garden that leads to a nature play area and built a 270 -foot-long gravel trail. He credits SCA with helping him blossom.

“SCA really helped kickstart my love and drive for conservation and push for environmental learning,” Nicholas says.

Positive and passionate

Daiva Gylys, Chicago program manager with the SCA, calls Nicholas “an exceptional young person” who works hard and leads by example. “He maintains a positive attitude and energy that others feed off. He is passionate about making positive change in the world, especially as it relates to the environment.”



NICHOLAS BROWN

At the annual Conservation Corps graduation in August, Nicholas commented on his first summer in a leadership role.

“This summer’s been absolutely phenomenal—getting to work with the members, seeing it from a different lens being an assistant crew leader,” he says. “I got to see how projects are chosen and the connections you can make when you’re in a position where people look up to you. Every day I woke up ready to go for the day.”

A few weeks later, he was

back to Vermont, known for its heavily forested landscape. Quite different from the Prairie State of Illinois. Of New England, he says, “it’s an adjustment,” making the transition from big, urban Chicago to small-town Middlebury, nestled between the Green and Adirondack Mountains. “People there really love the quiet. You get to appreciate a different kind of nature [there] than when you’re in the city.”

And that suits him just fine.

“SCA really helped kickstart my love and drive for conservation and push for environmental learning.”

—Nicholas Brown

Mitigating climate change through restoration

CAP SAUERS HOLDING PRESEVE

Walk through Cap Sauers highlights the success of restoration efforts

By Kristin Pink and Chip O'Leary,
Forest Preserves of Cook County

Have you been to the most remote place in Cook County?

You have if you've visited Cap Sauers Holding Nature Preserve in southwest suburban Palos Park. At 1,500 acres, it's the largest roadless tract in Cook County and the largest nature preserve in northeastern Illinois.

Close-up look

In mid-October, Forest Preserve Foundation board members, donors and guests hiked these big woods to get an up-close look at restoration work in the Forest Preserves of Cook County. Restoration repairs ecosystems that have been disrupted by human intervention.

Led by Preserve ecologists, the group walked through the cool morning air on a wooded trail. They saw huge bur oak trees and the elegant flight of a great-horned owl. But they also saw plants that pose an environmental threat. Invasive species like Asian honeysuckle and Oriental bittersweet grow in our Preserves, threatening to displace native plants and animals.

Invasive plants like honeysuckle shade out native plants, leaving an impenetrable wall of brush that can easily dominate in the preserve. Wildflowers cannot grow beneath honeysuckle, and it doesn't attract pollinators, either. When invasives take hold, a degraded landscape results. Honeysuckle also blocks views of the rolling landscape and Cap Sauers' unusual geologic features, especially the peaky esker that runs through the preserve's center.



Forest Preserve Foundation board members, donors and guest pose after their hike through Cap Sauers Holding Preserve.

Guard against climate change

Alarming, the group learned that climate change is expected to make conditions more favorable for the growth of invasive species. The need for restoration is more urgent than ever. Cap Sauers Holding must be restored to the healthiest condition now to make this ancient ecosystem as resilient as possible.

The Forest Preserves, the Forest Preserve Foundation, partners, and volunteers are committed to restoring Cap Sauers. Experience tells us native plants and animals rebound after restoration. The group got to see this recovery first-hand as they walked the "green trail" that runs along the south end of the preserve.

Donor's impact

Earlier in the year, restoration work begun by volunteers and staff got a big boost. An anonymous donor made a \$250,000 gift to the Forest Preserve Foundation, which funded the restoration of 120 acres of Cap Sauers Holding. The donor, inspired by the dedication of volunteer stewards, wanted to bolster their efforts. With the combined efforts, more than

one-third of Cap Sauers is now undergoing restoration.

For those who participated in the walk, the experience was enlightening. "My husband and I truly enjoyed the experience," said Leslie Sawyer, president and CEO of Environmental Design International, Inc. "We are both nature lovers and appreciate the important work that you and the Forest Preserve Foundation, with the critical support of donors and volunteers, are doing to restore this wonderful natural asset for our community."

Momentum is building for these kinds of public-private partnerships, which are restoring sites like Cap Sauers. Community leaders understand the importance of this work and want to help restore the entire preserve. The Forest Preserves and its partners are working hard to transform the most remote place in Cook County into one of the most beautiful.

Kristin Pink is a Resource Ecologist II for the Forest Preserves of Cook County. Chip O'Leary is Deputy Director, Department of Resource Management for the Forest Preserves of Cook County.

Nature Play welcomes all to Dan Ryan Woods



Something special happened in Dan Ryan Woods under a cloudless sky in late July. The Forest Preserves of Cook County, its partners and community members celebrated the opening of a new Nature Play and Treehouse near the northeast corner of 87th Street and Western Avenue in Chicago.

The **Forest Preserve Foundation** worked with the **National Recreation Foundation** to secure funds for a team of Youth Outdoor Ambassadors to develop a new multifaceted Nature Play programming.

The Treehouse, which looks out over the landscape, is a key feature of the site. Within the Nature Play area, children of all ages can make “thunder” or make music, climb the netting or lounge in a leaning hammock.

Nature Play for everyone

“Our goals were to help the Forest Preserves be more accessible, more welcoming to all,” Foundation president Shelley Davis said in her remarks during the celebration. “The purpose of the Nature Play is not only to support the play and exploration of nature for little kids, 0 to 5, but more importantly, all of us kids, 6 years and up.”

In all, more than \$3.5 million in new amenities went into the South Side preserve, located near the Auburn-Gresham and Beverly neighborhoods.

Other additions include the renovated and reopened Dan Ryan Pavilion and the popular new exercise stairs near the sledding hill.

The 257-acre Dan Ryan Woods is a signature Gateway Site for the Forest Preserves of Cook County.

“Dan Ryan Woods is one of our most popular preserves,” **Forest Preserves General**



A girl “makes thunder” at the Dan Ryan Woods Nature Play installation.

Superintendent Arnold Randall said. “Every year we issue more than 500 permits for picnics and other special events here. These investments bring even more to the site for visitors.”

Fulfilling Gateway Plan

The Preserves in 2015 created a Gateway Master Plan, which “defines a class of special gateway sites equitably distributed throughout the Forest Preserves to encourage people to enter.”

Features of gateway sites include well-marked trailheads and trails, outdoor concessions or technology that provides information on ways to engage with that site.

Public officials, including Cook County Board and Forest Preserves of Cook County **President Toni Preckwinkle** and Illinois State **Sen. Bill Cunningham** (18th), joined by

representatives from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, spoke and toured the site during the “Natural Recreation Celebration Ceremony.”

“Our administration has worked with many partners on a Master Plan to re-imagine Dan Ryan Woods and write a new chapter,” Preckwinkle said.

“These great new amenities here in Dan Ryan Woods reflect our commitment to ensuring that everyone across the county has the opportunity to enjoy and benefit from the nearly 70,000 acres of the Forest Preserves and all they offer.”

With temperatures in the high 70s, it was a perfect summer morning for the ceremony. While officials toured the site, families checked out the Nature Play area, community residents climbed the stairs, and a group of young girls did a dance routine atop the Treehouse.



Couple's donation funds grant to expand conservation program in schools

Through their \$5,000 donation to the Forest Preserve Foundation, a Champaign couple with deep ties to Chicago is supporting an expansion of the Forest Preserves Conservation@Home program into nine schools in Cook County.

The gift by Warren Lavey and Dr. Holly Rosencranz will fund a grant that allows the schools to start or expand pollinator gardens. The Forest Preserves adopted Conservation@Home, a program of The Conservation Foundation, in 2016. Its goal in Cook County is to "Bring the Forest Preserves beyond its borders."

"We are grateful for Warren and Holly's gift to expand the Conservation@Home program to more schools," Foundation president Shelley Davis said. "We know that this exposure will have influence on the next generation's

understanding of trees, pollinators and native gardens as a solution for climate change."

Chicago-area roots

Lavey and Rosencranz, who both grew up in the Chicago area, are fond of the Forest Preserves and share a deep commitment to environmental sustainability. They see gardens as one defense against climate change.

"Hearing about Conservation@Home really just fits with both our respect for the Forest Preserve District and our interest in promoting conservation," Lavey said. "Holly and I have been interested in sustainability, particularly the health impacts of climate change, for several years. We have been donors for several conservation efforts, including planting trees along the 606 Trail and in Urbana."


Lavey retired from the Chicago

office of an international law firm in 2010. He works in environmental law, policy and health with government agencies and nonprofits, and teaches at the University of Illinois in Chicago and Champaign.

Rosencranz is a medical doctor with a master's in public policy. Her work has evolved from clinical practice to teaching in the University of Illinois medical schools.

Additionally, she actively promotes policies in training doctors and community health. She is a master gardener who recognizes the health benefits of gardens, parks and forests.

"We grew up going to the Forest Preserves in Cook County, including the Chicago Botanic Garden," Lavey said. "We recognize how important the work of the Forest Preserves is in making Cook County a pleasant



“We’re doing what we can on conservation because trees, native planting and wetlands help reduce the greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.”

— Warren Lavey

place to live and contributing to sustainability, locally and globally.”

Motivated by climate change

The couple’s love for the area and interest in sustainability gives them a keen awareness of how climate change is affecting the region.

Seeing the “health impacts of climate change, which are already occurring in Cook County” is one motivating factor in their philanthropy, Lavey said.

“The seasons of asthma and allergy are longer and more intense,” he added. “We have higher summertime temperatures, more heat waves. Also infectious diseases like West Nile and Lyme disease are much more prevalent in Cook County than they were 20 years ago.”

Lavey and Rosencranz believe it’s important for everyone to

do what they can to increase community awareness of these health impacts and increase the training of the medical professionals and other health care workers.

Rosencranz said she is “trying to incorporate climate education for medical students who are going to be on the front lines of taking care of patients.”

She said it’s important to “educate our children from grammar school to professional school.”

At the Forest Preserves, climate change is a concern, too.

Threatened species

The Preserves is home to over 950 native plant species and over 100 endangered and threatened species. These species are being threatened by the negative impacts of a changing climate.

These negative impacts include increased flooding and erosion, and increased invasive species and plant diseases killing off native and endangered plants.

A more resilient Preserves

The Forest Preserves “Sustainability & Climate Resiliency Plan” calls on the Preserves to be even more ambitious in its efforts at mitigation and adaptation, Anthony Tindall, policy and special projects manager for the Preserves, said.

“To this end, the Forest Preserves is going to be seeking additional support for our habitat restoration and Conservation@Home programs,” Tindall said. “These two efforts will make the Forest Preserves more resilient as a changing climate continues to impact the region.”

Lavey and Rosencranz met Tindall about two years ago during a meeting in Washington, D.C., organized by the Union of Concerned Scientists. That led to the couple wanting to learn more about the Forest Preserves of Cook County, Tindall said.

Growing commitment

Since then, their commitment has grown. Lavey helped draft and review the sustainability and climate resiliency plan, and organized students to assist on various aspects of sustainability for the Preserves.

“We’re doing what we can on conservation because trees, native planting and wetlands help reduce the greenhouse gases in the atmosphere,” Lavey said. “We’re thrilled to be able to support a program that addresses the landscaping of schools and provides opportunities for students to be involved with planting trees and native plants.”

At the Foundation, we strive for equity in all that we do

The following is an op-ed that appeared in the Chicago Sun-Times in recognition of Cook County Racial Equity Week Sept. 16-20, 2019.

By Shelley A. Davis

Diversity, equity and inclusion are baked into the Foundation's approach to grantmaking, a major distinction within the larger community of organizations that do conservation-related work.

Throughout its history, the mainstream conservation movement in the United States has attracted a narrow segment of the population—white, wealthier Americans. This demographic imbalance prevails today.

Diversifying the conservation field

The Foundation works to bring more people of color and low-income young adults into the conservation arena. We do this by funding internships that will benefit those who are least likely to be involved in conservation work. So far, more than 400 young people from Chicago and the Cook County suburbs have benefited from these internships. They are, for the most part, African American, Latinx from low-income households.

We support opportunities for them because the Forest Preserves is in constant need of people who can restore the county's public lands to full ecological health.

More importantly, we are helping to provide exposure, inspiration and experience for these young people—opportunities that can lead them to consider careers in the environmental or STEM fields. We also are seeding the next generation of conservation activists, something we consider critically important as we confront a changing climate.

Addressing climate change

Climate change is a global phenomenon that impacts everyone, especially low-income and communities of color. Worldwide, people of color shoulder a heavier burden from toxic water, contaminated air, and dwindling natural resources. The same is no less true in Chicago and Cook County.

Cranberry Slough Preserves

- Cranberry Slough is the top priority for restoration
- With help from FPF we are restoring 55 acres to ecological health

Ecological restoration is a scientifically proven counterweight to climate change. Restoration helps sequester carbon, reduces flooding, improves water quality, provides natural habitats for wildlife and curbs pollution flowing into waterways. And, it's a vital priority that fits well with our efforts to elevate diversity, equity and inclusion.

Restoring public lands

An example of the restoration work the Foundation supports is at Cranberry Slough Nature Preserve and the adjacent Country Lane Woods, both top ecological priorities for the Forest Preserves. The 1,000-acre complex contains an unbroken expanse of rolling upland woods and savanna, wetlands, lowland sedge meadows and a bog.

Restoration work at Cranberry Slough improves the natural quality of the preserve and makes it more inviting and accessible to the public. After initial work, Forest Preserve ecologists reported that native plants species had re-emerged, including native orchids, giving a strong indication of the site's potential to recover.

At the Foundation, we strive for equity and diversity in the ways we invest in our community every day. We are proud to support the next—and more diverse—generation of conservationists, while we address the challenges of climate change. We also invite more allies and supporters to join us, as this work is essential for the future of Cook County.

Shelley A. Davis is president of the Forest Preserve Foundation.



**The Forest Preserve Foundation
proudly supports the Student Conservation
Association in Chicago.**

At the Forest Preserve Foundation,
we support the programs and activities
that give everyone access
to the natural treasures of Cook County.
With your support, these efforts
will make life better for us all.

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WE JUST BRING THE GUESTS.



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