



Capital Improvement Plan

UPDATE TO THE 5-YEAR PLAN
2026-2030





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Superintendent**

Adam Bianchi

January 30, 2026

Dear President Preckwinkle and Commissioners,

The final **2026 Update to the 5-Year Capital Improvement Plan** for the Forest Preserves of Cook County is enclosed for your records.

Projected spending for 2026 is now **\$57 million (vs \$54 million in 2025)**. Since the release of the draft report, projected spending was adjusted to reflect delays in a major trail project and deferral of restroom renovation to make room for some smaller, more urgent needs. Projected capital spending over the next five years (2026-2030) is still in the \$280 million range for highest priority needs.

In 2025, we completed several major capital projects, including an accessible kayak/canoe launch, fishing pier, program shelter and interpretive sign improvements at Beaubien Woods Boat Launch and renovation of 14 restroom buildings at Busse Woods and Dan Ryan Woods.

In 2026, we expect to award new contracts for major new trail improvement and building energy efficiency projects while continuing to invest in more ordinary capital needs.

An electronic version of this report can be downloaded from our web site at:

<http://fpdcc.com/cip>.

Please contact me or Chris Slattery, Director of Planning and Development, at [\(708\) 771-1572](tel:7087711572) or chris.slattery@cookcountyil.gov with any questions.

Sincerely,

Adam Bianchi
General Superintendent

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OVERVIEW OF PROCESS, PROJECT SELECTION AND NEED

The Forest Preserves of Cook County Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) is a five-year projection of planned capital improvements to the Forest Preserves' land and buildings, excluding land and buildings managed by Brookfield Zoo Chicago and the Chicago Botanic Garden. The policy of the Forest Preserves is to keep at least 80 percent of its land in a natural state and limit development to no more than 20 percent. Developed areas include over 350 miles of trails (including 125 bridges), over 300 parking lots, 200 picnic shelters, 60 restroom buildings, 43 fishing lakes (many with dams and water control structures), 10 golf courses, six nature centers, five campgrounds, three aquatic centers, three visitor and volunteer centers and dozens of maintenance yards and field offices.

The 5-year plan is about the same as last year at \$283M for highest priority needs and projected spending for the coming year, 2026, has decreased from \$63M to \$57M since the release of the draft report due to delays in a major trail project and deferral of restroom renovations to make room for smaller, more urgent needs.

NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

Staff and consultants perform regular inspection of pavement (trails and parking lots), bridges, dams and picnic shelters and prioritize the most urgent needs. Building inspections and energy audits are mostly done by in-house staff on a more targeted basis.

PROJECT SELECTION

Capital investment priorities are based on a variety of factors, including the condition of the facility or amenity, level of use, importance to guiding plans and principles, uniqueness of the resource or facility, impact on operations, geographic equity, complexity, and availability of funding and grant requirements.

CAPITAL FUNDING NEEDS

Projected 2026 capital spending is higher than last year at \$57 million with \$15 million funded through grants, mitigation fees and Motor Fuel Tax (MFT) funds. Transfer of \$5.4 million from reserves is proposed to supplement the Construction and Development tax levy of \$22.7 million. An estimated \$226 million will be needed to cover capital needs over the next four years. While nearly 75% of future need in 2027-2030 is expected to be covered by annual capital funding and anticipated grant funding, there is still a projected gap of \$61 million that will need to be covered by other sources.

DESCRIPTION OF FUNDING SOURCES AND CAPITAL SPENDING

GENERAL OBLIGATION BONDS

General Obligation Bonds are issued to pay costs of certain capital-improvement projects of the Forest Preserves, Chicago Botanic Garden and Brookfield Zoo as well as land acquisition. Two bond series issued by the Forest Preserves in 2015 retired in 2024, reducing \$8.2 million in tax levy, leaving an increased capacity to issue new debt in the future if necessary.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT FUND

The purpose of this fund is to account for all capital expenditures of the Forest Preserves that are funded by other financing sources and that are not related to land acquisitions. This includes transfers from the Corporate Fund.

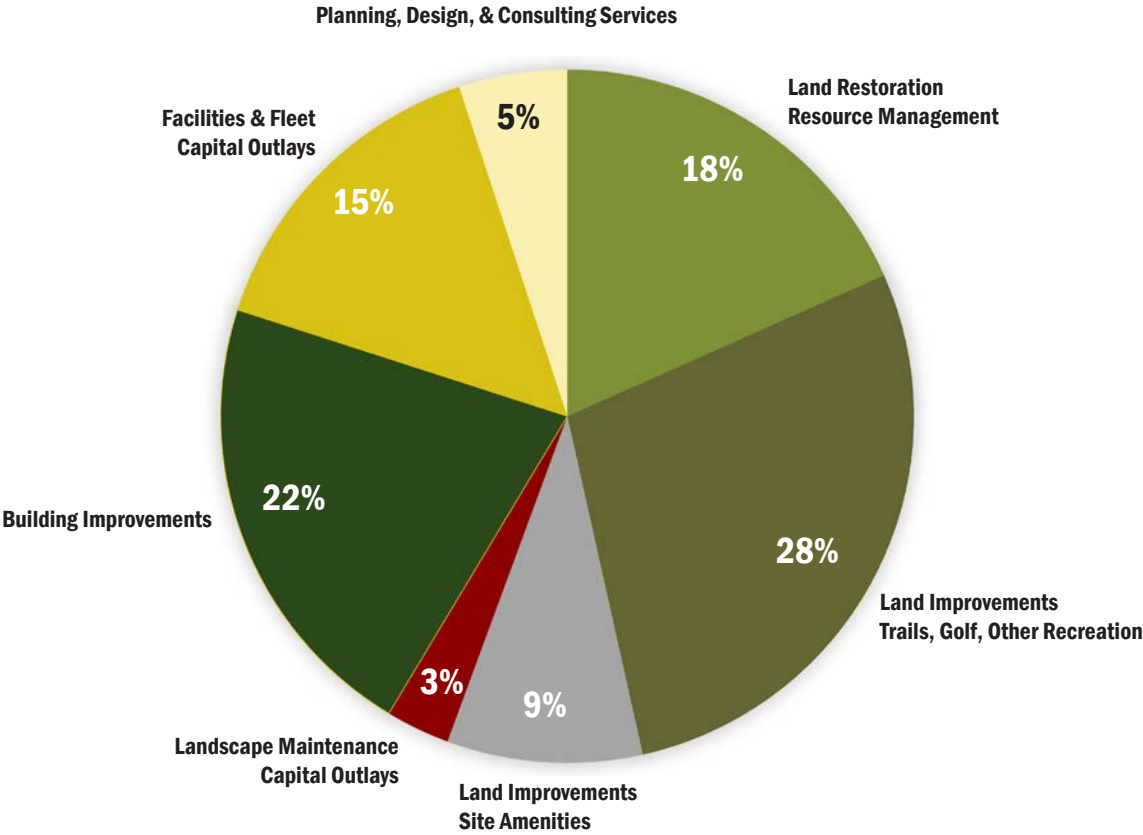
CONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT

The Construction & Development fund is established to account for roughly 10-12 percent of the annual tax levies devoted to capital improvements, including large-scale landscape restoration. C&D funds must be spent within five years. Any unspent funds at the end of the five years are transferred to the Corporate Fund.

GRANTS, FEES, AND OTHER

The Forest Preserves receives funds outside of its tax levy that are to be used in the construction of major capital facilities. These funds are received through grants, intergovernmental agreements, settlements and mitigation fees resulting from the Forest Preserves’ Tree Mitigation Ordinance.

2026 POTENTIAL CAPITAL SPENDING: \$57 MILLION



GUIDING PLANS AND PRINCIPLES

The **Next Century Conservation Plan** continues to provide the overarching long-term vision and goals for connecting people to nature. Other important plans released around the time of the Forest Preserves' centennial in 2014-2015, such as the Natural & Cultural Resources Master Plan, Gateway Master Plan and other plans described below to continue to guide investment priorities. The new **Cook County Policy Roadmap for 2024-2027** also reinforces the County's commitment to fostering healthy communities that support active lifestyles and sustainable communities and transportation systems.

TRAIL CAPITAL PLAN AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

This 2022 report is "part 2" to the 2014 Trail Master Plan to document larger long-term gaps in the trail system and annual on-going capital investment needs to maintain keep the extensive system. It also dovetails with the 2023 Cook County Bike Plan which recommends expansion of the low-stress off-street bike trail system as an alternate mode of transportation.

RACIAL EQUITY AND NATURE-BASED RECREATION POSITION PAPERS

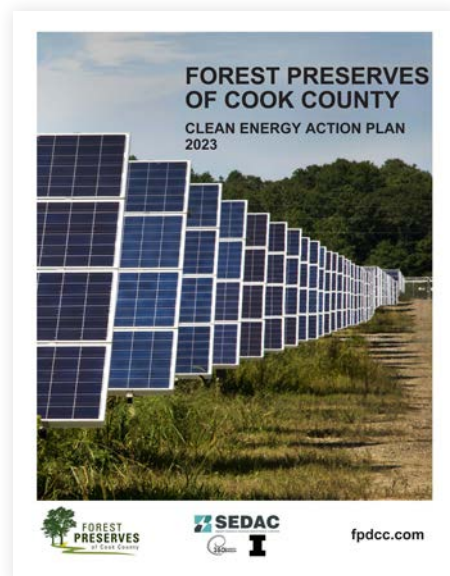
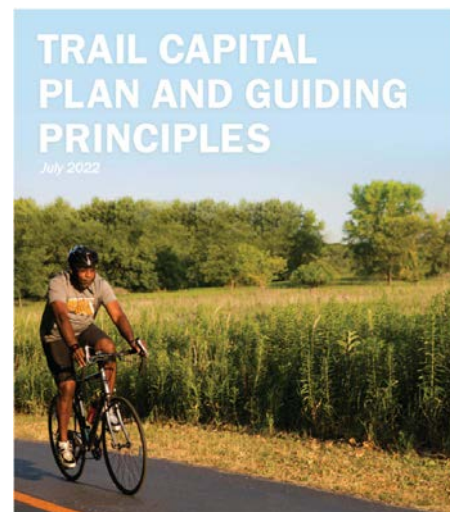
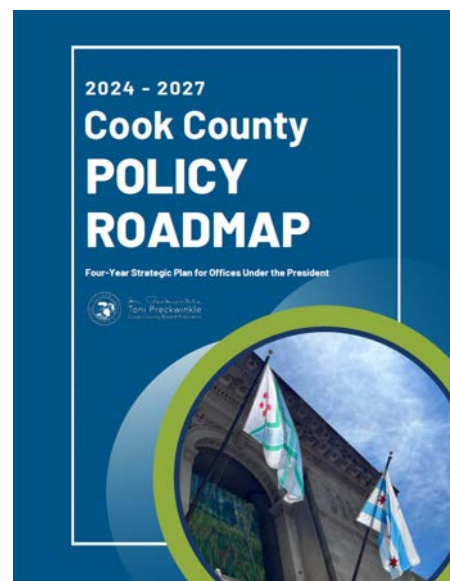
In 2020, the Conservation & Policy Council adopted a series of four position papers and two of these continue to influence capital investment: "Moving Towards Racial Equity" (which challenges staff to consider capital investment and engagement in adversely impacted communities) and Nature-Compatible Recreation (which asks if some uses, such as aquatic centers, could be converted over time to be more compatible or phased out).

SUSTAINABILITY AND CLEAN ENERGY

In 2019, the Forest Preserves Board of Commissioners pledged to shift to clean electricity by 2030 and become carbon neutral by 2050 by reducing its energy use, ideally eliminating fossil fuel usage and investing in new renewable energy sources. A Clean Energy Framework re- port was released in 2021 with assistance from the Illinois Sustainable Technology Center's (ISTC) Prairie Research Institute at the University of Illinois. The Smart Energy Design Assistance Center of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and 360 Energy Group, LLC, also prepared a **Clean Energy Action Plan** in 2022 to provide a roadmap for achieving these goals along with new **Green Building Standards** that were completed in late 2024.

FLOODING AND CLIMATE RESILIENCY

In 2024, the Forest Preserves entered into a master agreement with the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago that provides for cost-sharing on green infrastructure and ecosystem restoration projects over the next five years. In 2024, The Forest Preserves also joined as a partner in Cook County's 2024 Hazard Mitigation Plan with the Department of Emergency Management and Regional Security and the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago. Inclusion in this Plan will expand federal grant opportunities in the future.



LANDSCAPE RESTORATION PRIORITIES

Large-scale land restoration and habitat enhancement remain one of the largest categories of capital spending. The largest ongoing projects are featured on the following pages.

RED GATE WOODS

Palos landscape is the Forest Preserves' highest priority for restoration based on the Natural & Cultural Resources Master Plan. The area features rolling morainal topography and contains diverse ecosystems, including mesic oak woodlands, oak savanna, sedge meadows, emergent wetlands occupying depressions left by past glaciation, and even a bog. With funding provided in part by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Development, a major trail construction and restoration project began in the winter of 2023. Approximately 189 acres of brush removal remain out of the initial 1,045-acre project footprint and is scheduled for completion during the winter of 2025/26. Maintenance on the previously cleared 856 acres will continue during the growing season.

BUSSE WOODS

Busse Woods features high-quality remnant mesic upland forest, dry-mesic woodland, northern flatwoods, and freshwater marsh. Subtle changes in topography foster an intermingling of these natural communities which support immense biological diversity. Work is underway to conduct 52 acres of tree thinning and brush removal on the west side of Busse North within the newly-dedicated Illinois Nature Preserve expansion.



Red Gate Woods Before



Red Gate Woods After



Busse Woods

KING'S GROVE AND SCHUBERT'S WOODS

King's Grove and Schubert's Woods include stretches of oak-hickory mesic woodlands and ravines bisected by Thorn Creek. These sites are being impacted by erosion due to a lack of vegetation and a lack of protection at the outfall. Failure to address these issues would result in continued impairment and degraded water flowing into Thorn Creek, resulting in an ecosystem dominated by invasive species with minimal habitat to support a healthy population of native wildlife. The Forest Preserves previously conducted extensive riparian restoration work in the Thorn Creek watershed and developed a hydrologic restoration plan for the area using funds received by the Cook County Department of Environment and Sustainability under the American Rescue Plan Act.

Hydrologic repair work including installation of a series of check dams, rock outfall protection and ravine stabilization, were completed in 2025 in upstream portions of the creek, along with more than 220 acres of invasive vegetation removal through the collective efforts of several partners. An additional 2,970 feet of bank stabilization is planned through 2028 with the support of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Chi-Cal River Program.



King's Grove Prescribed Burning



Schubert's Woods

TRAIL REPAIRS

The Forest Preserves includes an extensive system of trails, bridges, dams and outdoor recreation amenities, along with access roads, parking lots and other site improvements. While new referenda funding provides a stable funding source for ordinary repairs, bigger projects still depend heavily on outside funding from federal and state grants and MFT support from Cook County.

TRAIL RESURFACING AND REHABILITATION

The Forest Preserves currently maintains a system of roughly 200 miles of unpaved trails that require continual maintenance by Resource Management crews. Capital funding is needed to address more serious problems that often result from erosion on steep grades that are beyond the capacity of in-house crews. While federal grants are supporting major reconstruction of parts of the Des Plaines River Trail, local capital funds are addressing trouble spots on other unpaved trail systems. Final work, under a \$3 million contract awarded in 2023, was completed on severely eroded portions of Thorn Creek trail system in South Cook County in 2025.

PALOS PRESERVES TRAIL IMPROVEMENTS

A major state grant through the Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity (DCEO) is funding major improvements to the Swallow Cliff and Palos trail system. Reconstruction on this popular hiking destination is currently in engineering design, and work at Swallow Cliff will start in 2026.

PAVED TRAIL REPAIR NEEDS

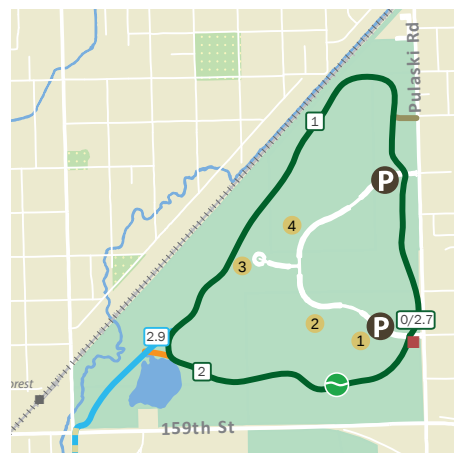
The Forest Preserves currently maintains a system of over 157 miles of paved, off-street bicycle trails. Every year the Forest Preserves assesses one-quarter of its paved trails system using a specialized data collection bicycle in order to prioritize future repairs. Trails in the Tinley Creek region have been a priority for resurfacing in recent years. Resurfacing of a 1-mile spur to Catalina Grove along with the 3-mile Midlothian Meadows loop trail is planned in 2026.



Thorn Creek Trail Repair



Trails near Swallow Cliff



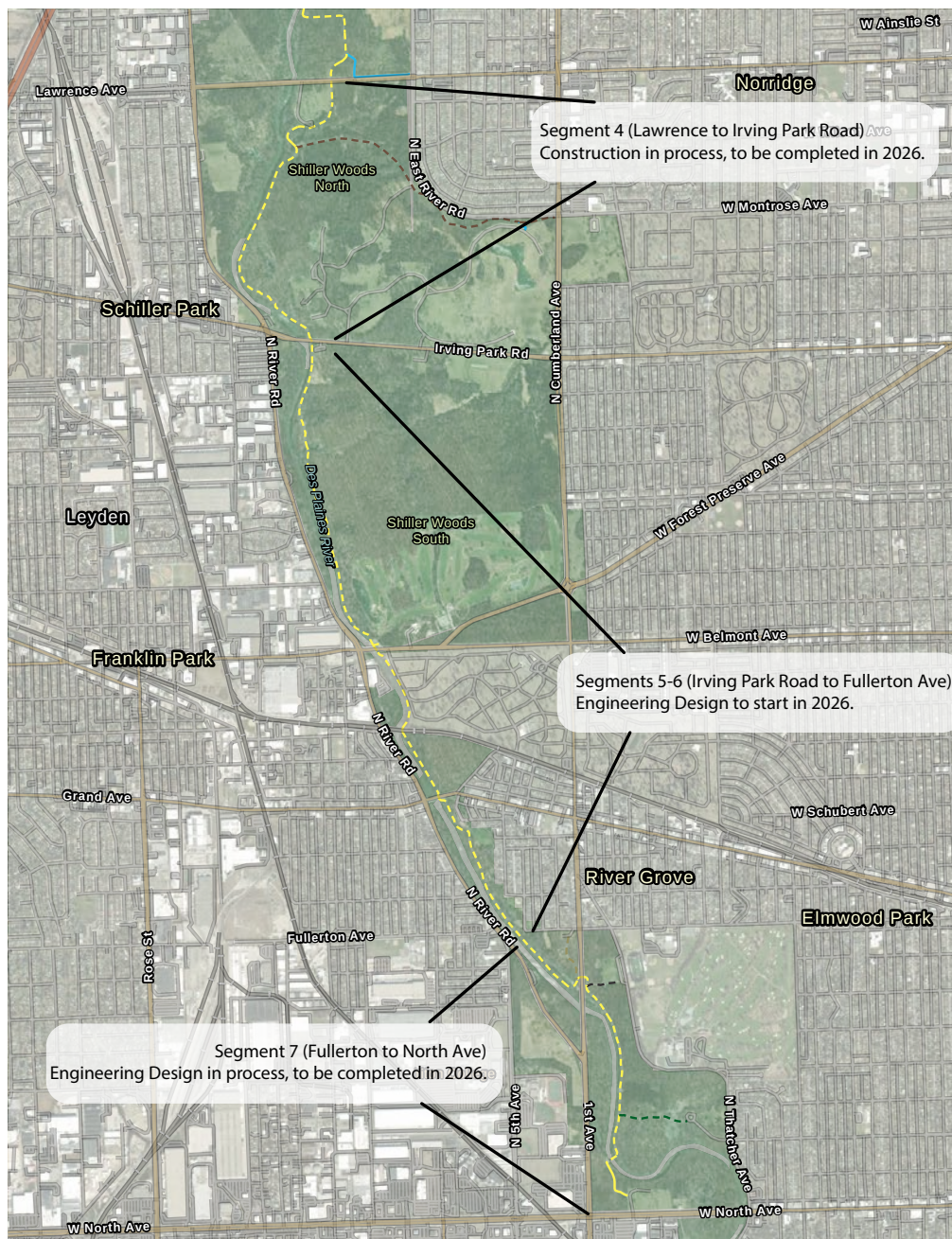
Midlothian Meadows

DES PLAINES RIVER TRAIL UPGRADES

After celebrating the reopening of 4.4 miles of the Des Plaines River Trail from Touhy Avenue to Lawrence Avenue (Segment 1-3) in 2024, work on the remaining 5.6 miles is continuing to move south. Reconstruction of the 1-mile segment south of the new Lawrence Avenue bridge (Segment 4) is underway and should be completed by spring 2026, funded almost entirely by grants and Cook County MFT funds.

Another section south of Fullerton Avenue to North Avenue (Segment 7) should also be ready for construction bidding by late 2026, funded in partnership with the Village of River Grove and Cook County. A federal grant has already been awarded for 80 percent of the construction cost, but roughly \$2.9 million in matching funds will be needed by 2027.

Engineering design for the last, much more difficult stretch involving new bridges over more roadways and rail-road tracks (Segments 5 & 6) will start in 2026 with 90% funded by a state ITEP transportation grant.



NEW BRIDGES AND TRAIL CONNECTIONS

Further north, just east of Oakton Community College in Des Plaines, construction of a larger new pedestrian bridge over Union Pacific Railroad tracks may start in 2027. An agreement with the UP Railroad has been reached, and construction bid documents have been submitted to IDOT, which are under review. Roughly 90 percent of the funding for this \$8.5 million project has been secured from federal and railroad sources.

In addition to new bridges, Forest Preserves staff are working on a few new trail spurs to improve connections to existing trails.

A contract to construct a new trail connection between the Beaubien Woods Boat Launch and a Chicago Park District Park (Carver Park) in the Altgeld Gardens complex was awarded in 2025, funded in part by the CTA Red Line Extension project mitigation. Tree removal is complete in advance of trail construction in 2026.

HORIZON FARM/SPRING CREEK TRAILS

Horizon Farm/Spring Creek Trails -Improvement of a new 1.2-mile loop trail at Horizon Farm and planning for connections to the Spring Creek Trail system is in the master planning stage.

NEW TRAIL CONNECTIONS BY MUNICIPALITIES AND TRANSPORTATION AGENCIES

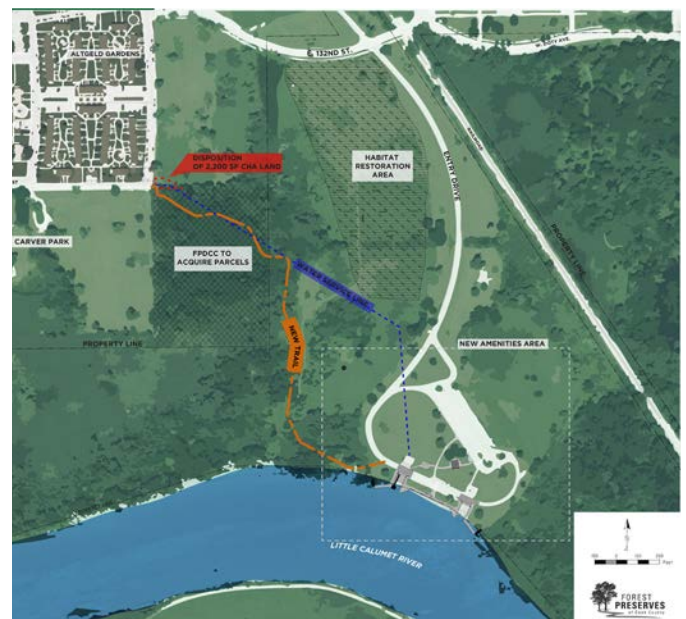
Municipalities and transportation agencies are also continuing to invest in connections to Forest Preserves trails under intergovernmental agreements or other agreements.

Elk Grove Village is currently constructing a new pedestrian bridge and connection to the Busse Woods paved trails across Arlington Heights Road. Cook County DOTH is currently in preliminary engineering for modifications to Deer Grove paved trail crossing at Quentin Road as part of a larger future road widening project.

Requests for additional connections to other Forest Preserves trails are received on a regular basis and reviewed by an internal Land Use Committee with representatives from various departments.



UP Railroad Crossing

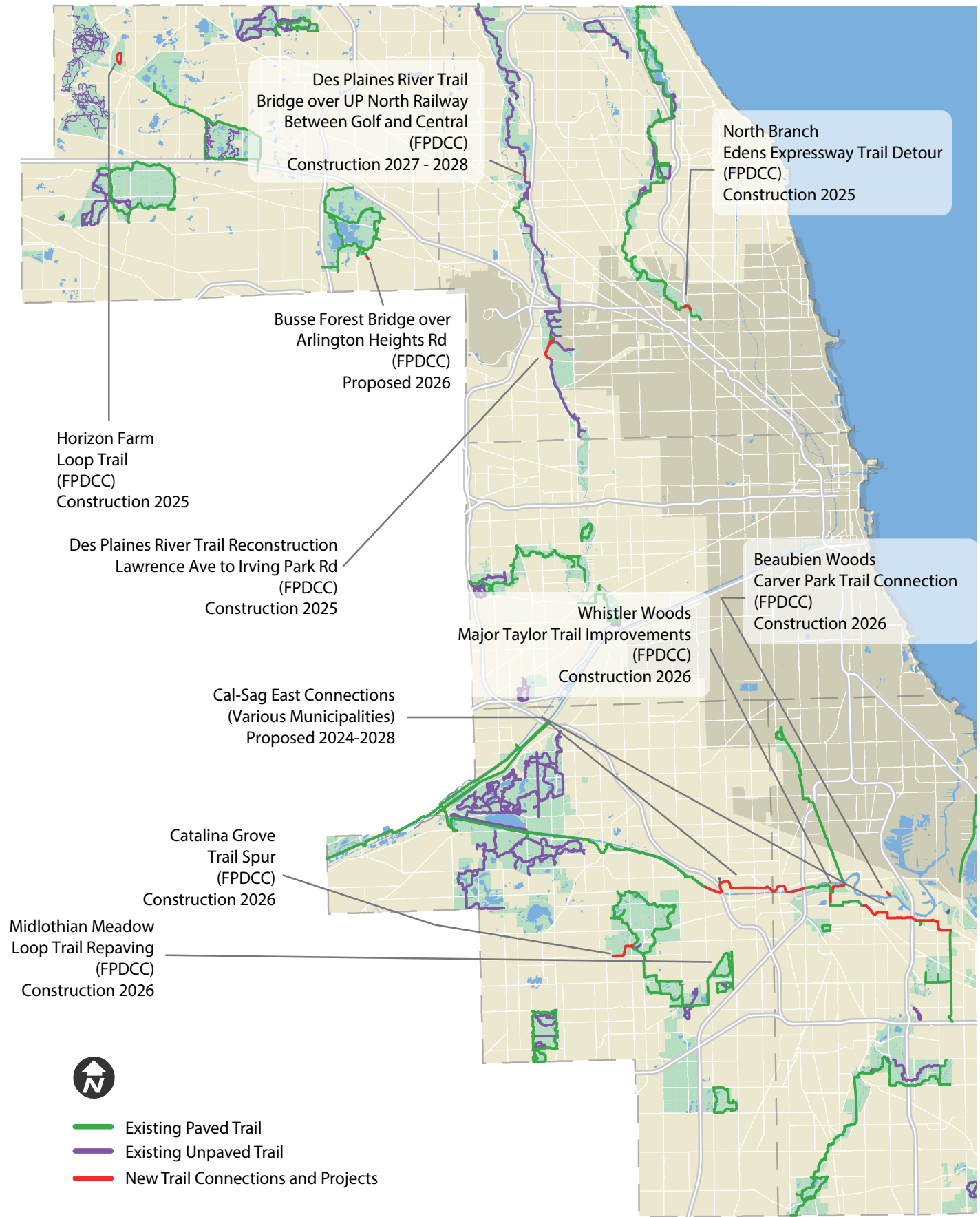


Altgeld Gardens Trail Connection



Elk Grove Village Pedestrian Bridge

TRAIL IMPROVEMENTS



TRAIL SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS

In addition to resurfacing and drainage improvements, the Forest Preserves' extensive system of trails includes other structures and safety features that require periodic inspection and maintenance.

DROP GATE AND STRIPING UPGRADES

As the number of trails increases and more people of all ages and abilities become trail users, the opportunities for exposure to the risks associated with road and trail intersections will continue to grow. Orange posts or drop gates are common on Forest Preserves trails to keep vehicles off but are ineffective if not kept upright and visible to cyclists. In keeping with current best practices, trail planners are taking action to remove most drop gates from our trail systems and replacing them with "NO MOTOR VEHICLE" signs.

Trail safety improvements were completed at Poplar Creek and Tinley Creek systems in 2024-2025. The program was expanded to include Deer Grove and Thorn Creek systems in 2025. The image features a paved connection from the Cooper's Hawk Family Picnic Area towards the main Tinley Creek system. Drop gates have been selectively removed, new center lines painted, and intersections updated to better inform and protect user well-being in a variety of trail and traffic scenarios.

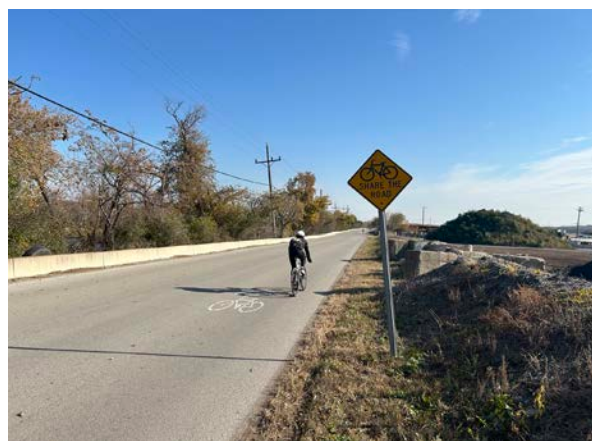
There is a new preliminary engineering study for trail crossing improvements on the Salt Creek Trail at 17th Avenue. Data collection and development of design alternatives will continue in 2026 with hopes to carry forward a preferred design for more detailed study in subsequent years, subject to available funding for construction.

BRIDGE, UNDERPASS REPAIRS AND INSPECTIONS

The Forest Preserves trail system includes 125 bridges and several underpasses that require regular inspection and maintenance. The Cook County DoTH provides regular inspection reports for some of these that cross public roads. Forest Preserves' consultants inspected more than 100 other bridges and underpasses in 2022. A contract for the repair of eight more bridges and the rerouting of North Branch Trail traffic under the Edens Expressway have been awarded and work is expected to be substantially completed in 2025.



Drop Gate at Busse Woods Before Removal



New Striping and Signs at Canal Bank Road - Centennial Trail



Deterioration at Bridge over Beckwith Rd

ACCESS ROAD AND PARKING REPAVING

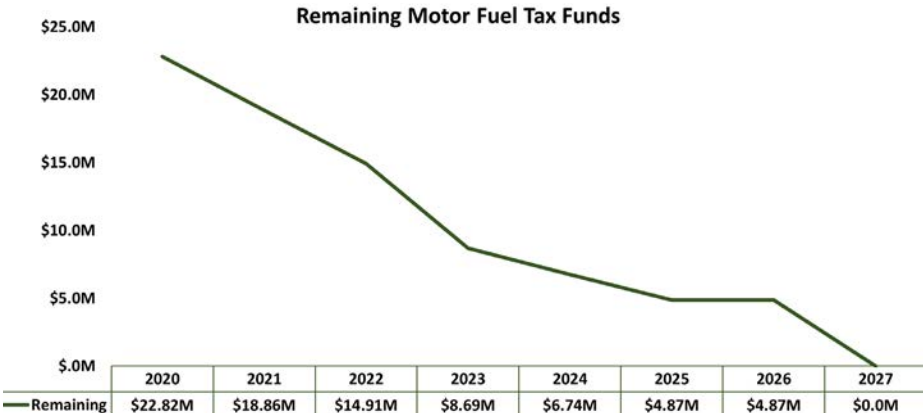
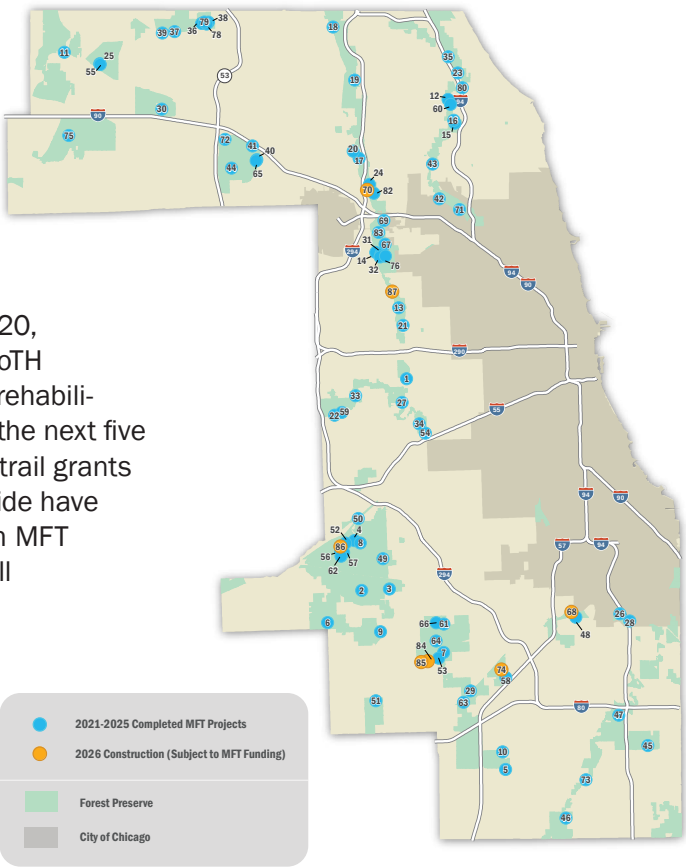
Over 300 access roads currently exist to bring visitors to an expansive network of Forest Preserves sites. In 2018, engineering staff estimated a need for roughly \$18 million for urgent repairs to 60 lots that were determined to be in poor or nearly failing condition. In 2020, an intergovernmental agreement with the Cook County DoTH approved up to \$25 million in MFT funds to address trail rehabilitation and access road and parking repaving needs over the next five years. In addition to providing the local match for federal trail grants and funding other trail work, more than 80 sites countywide have had their access roads and parking areas resurfaced with MFT funding since 2020. By the end of 2025, work at nearly all the original 60 poor-condition sites will be complete at a cost of roughly \$20.1M in MFT funds.

The Forest Preserves anticipates spending the remaining \$4.9 million in MFT funds in 2026. Proposed locations are in north, south, and southwest Cook County (Joe Orr Woods, Catalina Grove, Midlothian Meadows loop trail, Tinley Creek Trail, Bull Frog Lake, and the Des Plaines River Trail) including other eligible sites. Improvements will include ADA access upgrades to trails, parking lots, and picnic shelters.

The Forest Preserves will continue its ongoing Pavement Management Study to prioritize pavement of failing pavement in popular or special sites and consider partial closures or pavement removal in lower use areas. The 5-Year Plan anticipates an annual average need for roughly \$4 million per year for “ordinary” pavement maintenance, including some ADA upgrades. While increased capital funding due to the referenda should cover ordinary needs, additional funds will be needed from other sources for special grant-funded projects.

Shrinking pavement at oversized parking lots and adding porous pavement with stormwater retention will reduce long-term maintenance costs in a few locations each year. In 2025, pavement reduction work was completed at Che Che Pin Qua Woods, Schiller Woods-West Grove #4, and Thaddeus S. “Ted” Lechowicz Woods.

Additional pavement reduction is planned at two forest preserves in 2026 (Joe Orr Woods and Whistler Woods). Some of this work will be partially funded by MWRD through a 5-year agreement to jointly fund green stormwater infrastructure.



RECREATION AMENITIES

Picnic shelters and fishing and paddling facilities are popular outdoor recreation amenities that require annual capital investment. Investment in recent years has focused on structural repairs to existing facilities along with new access paths in some locations.

PICNIC GROVE REPAIR AND ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS

The Forest Preserves owns and maintains 200 picnic shelters, including some historic shelters. Thanks to new referendum funding, structural repairs are now almost complete. Repairs to 30 picnic shelters were completed in north, northwest, and central Cook County groves and work at 11 south Cook County grove shelters in 2024. Structural repairs are still needed at 2-3 shelters in 2026, including a limestone shelter in Harms Woods. After that, an estimated \$300,000 will still be needed for re-roofing and storm damage for a handful of shelters per year on an ongoing basis.

ACCESS PATH IMPROVEMENTS

New access path improvements from parking areas to picnic shelters, trails and restroom buildings are typically included in larger paving improvement packages for priority locations. New access paths were added at 17 restroom buildings at Busse Forest and Busse Boating Center in 2025, along with Poplar Creek Trail access improvements and resurfacing of the Carl R. Hansen Woods parking lot.

FISHING AND PADDLING FACILITIES

In addition to trails and picnic groves, the Forest Preserves owns and maintains a range of other outdoor recreation facilities, including fishing lakes, boating centers, canoe launches– all of which require capital investment and maintenance. Grant support from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) continues to be especially important in funding outdoor recreation for boating and paddling improvements.

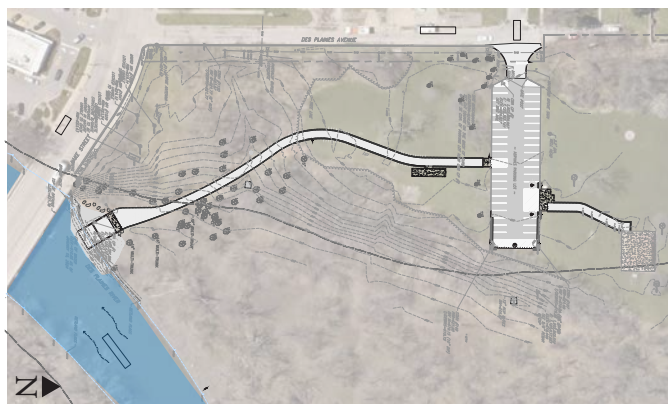
An \$80,000 IDNR grant for improvement of an existing primitive launch in Maywood was also awarded in 2024 and a construction contract was awarded in 2025. This site is a regular launch spot for the award-winning Maywood Paddling Program.



Shelter Repair at Harms Woods



New Accessible Restroom Path at Busse Woods



Maywood Grove Site Improvement Plans

FISHING LAKES, DAM STRUCTURES, AND PADDLING ACCESS

Many of the Forest Preserves' 43 fishing lakes are the result of flood control and recreation projects from decades ago. State regulations require regular inspections of dam structures to avoid potential failures and flood emergencies. In recent years, a failing spillway constructed by IDOT in the 1970s at Big Bend Lake, a popular fishing lake in northwest Cook County, experienced rapid and severe erosion, putting it at risk of failure. In 2025, emergency repairs to stabilize the levee were completed by the Forest Preserves with reimbursement by IDOT. Engineering design for the repair of spillways and levees at Saganashkee Slough, another popular fishing and paddling spot in the Palos Preserves, is underway. However, it will require millions for construction, while additional funding sources are sought over the next several years.

Reconstruction of a dilapidated pier at Beaubien Woods Boat Launch and addition of a new fully accessible floating aluminum canoe and kayak launch with grab bars was completed in 2025 with partial funding from an IDNR Boat Access Area Development (BAAD) grant. New shoreline fishing amenities, seating, and a rain garden with native landscaping were also completed with separate IDNR Open Space Land Acquisition and Development grant funds.

Improvements to the Little Calumet Boat Launch near Calumet Park and Kickapoo Woods canoe launch in Riverdale are targeted for 2027, with some additional work pending another successful IDNR BAAD grant award. The Willow Road Dam launch is expected to be constructed by 2029 with funding from the Village of Winnetka and is awaiting the removal of a downstream dam at Chick Evans Golf Course by IDNR. Feasibility studies have been completed for possible improvements at other sites in future years. These paddling improvements are currently being prioritized through an ongoing planning effort.



Big Bend Lake Erosion Repair



Beaubien Woods Site Improvements

GOLF COURSE RENEWAL

The Forest Preserves portfolio of 10 golf courses and 4 driving ranges are all older facilities with some significant deferred maintenance needs. The new concession agreement with Indigo Sprouts would fund \$11 million in capital improvements in the next three years (2026-2028), including an estimated \$5 million for irrigation system upgrades at George W. Dunne, Highland Wood and Joe Louis "The Champ" Golf Courses. Millions more would be invested in new revenue-generating amenities such as Toptracer driving range amenities.

PROJECT FORWARD»	Upfront Capital Projects		
	2025	2026	2027
Irrigation & Pump Houses Improvement			
Highland Woods Course Irrigation System Renovation		\$2,000,000	
George Dunne Course Irrigation System Renovation		\$2,000,000	
Joe Louis Course Irrigation System Renovation			\$1,100,000
Irrigation Consultant Services for all Three Courses	\$110,000		

Forest Preserves spending in recent years has been limited to a few urgent needs, such as clubhouse roof replacement at George W. Dunne National Golf Course in 2024 and major bridge repairs at Chick Evans in 2025.

There is still an urgent need to remove and replace a second bridge located near Beckwith Road. Plans by the IDNR and Army Corps of Engineers to remove a dam at Chick Evans Golf Course and replace an existing golf cart bridge are under evaluation. Weight limit restrictions are currently posted, and frequent monitoring and inspections will be needed until there is a decision on replacement.

Additional capital funding tied to revenue (5% of gross golf revenue, estimated at an average of \$890,000 per year in the next 5 years) could also fund improvements at underperforming courses. Modest visibility and accessibility upgrades are planned for River Oaks Golf Course in the next two years with \$300,000 grant funds from the Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity.

MAKING SITES MORE WELCOMING

One of the main goals of the Forest Preserves' 2015 Gateway Master Plan is to invest in improvements at special sites to make them more welcoming and accessible. Investment at 10 priority gateway sites is now complete and \$300,000-\$500,000 per year in capital funds are continuing to be allocated to add new signage at 60 special sites. Special sites include nature centers, camps, historical/heritage sites, special ecological or recreation sites, and trailheads on major regional trails.

New signs have been installed at more than 22 of these 60 special sites including Busse Woods and Sauk Trail. In 2025, we have secured a new contract that will allow for the installation of signs at the remaining special sites. The installation of signage has been started at Schiller Woods, Camp Dan Beard, and Rolling Knolls.



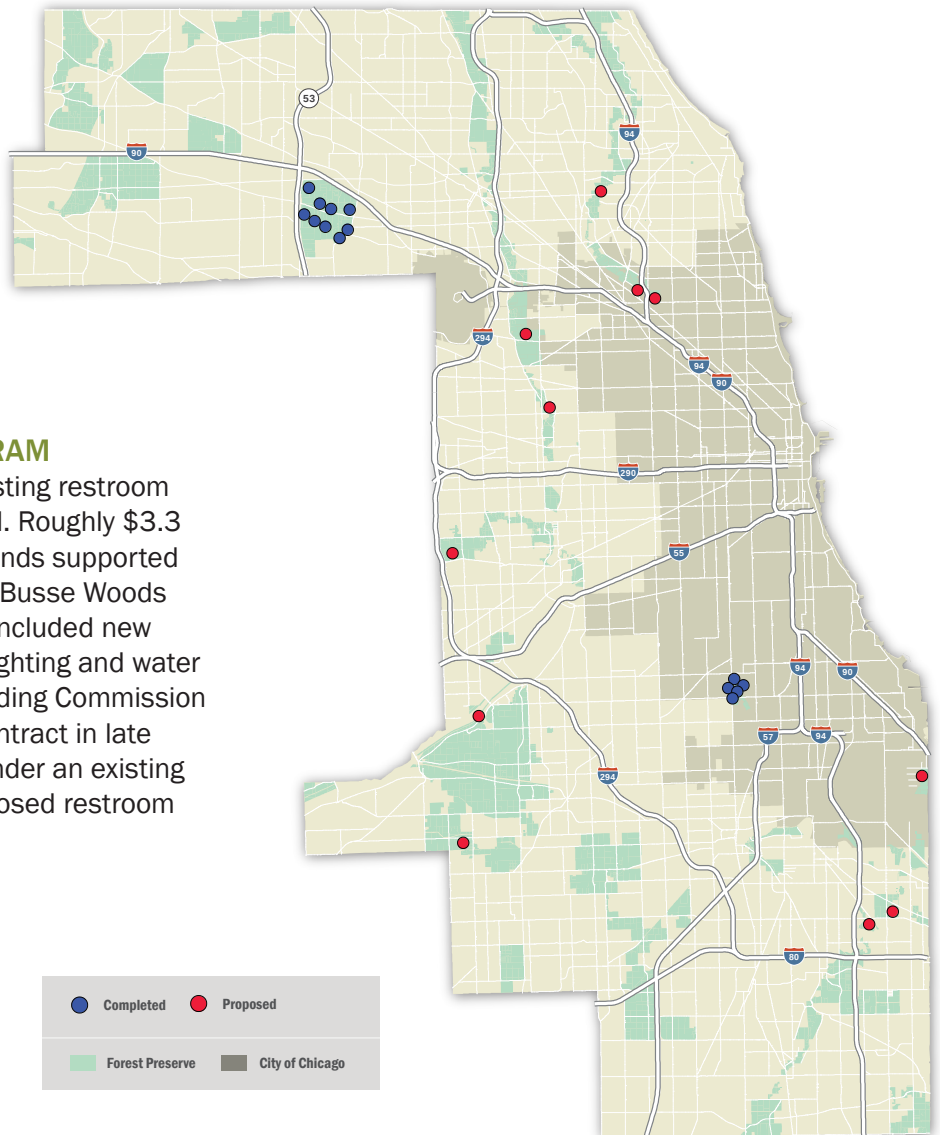
URGENT BUILDING NEEDS

The Forest Preserves owns over 550 structures comprised of more than 250 buildings and 200 picnic shelters. These include public buildings supporting education and recreation, over 50 restroom facilities, administrative and support facilities including the General Headquarters, Central Maintenance Compound and 15 field offices and maintenance yards for Landscape Maintenance, Resource Management and Law Enforcement staff. Due to several larger infusions of capital funds in the past 15 years (Illinois First in 2005, SB 83 in 2007- 2008 and Forest Preserves bonds issued in 2012, 2015 and 2019) and more recent Build Illinois bond funds, there is no longer a significant backlog of urgent building replacement needs. The estimated annual average cost for renovation to address building energy efficiency and ordinary needs is \$3.5 million. Additional funds will be needed for special capital renewal programs and projects including restroom renovation and districtwide building improvements.

RESTROOM IMPROVEMENTS

RESTROOM RENOVATION PROGRAM

Most of the Forest Preserves 60 existing restroom buildings are more than 40 years old. Roughly \$3.3 million in Cook County ARPA grant funds supported gut rehab of 14 buildings at popular Busse Woods and Dan Ryan Woods groves. Work included new roofing, flooring, plumbing fixtures, lighting and water bottle filling stations. The Public Building Commission of Chicago has awarded a \$3.2M contract in late 2024 and has managed this work under an existing intergovernmental agreement. Proposed restroom locations for 2026 - 2028 are at Schiller Woods, LaBagh Woods, Eggers Grove, and Green Lake Woods to mention a few. More than \$10 million will be needed in future years for the rehab of roughly 35 remaining buildings.



PLANNING AND FEASIBILITY STUDIES

Master planning and feasibility studies for improvements to existing facilities started in 2025, including Trillside Museum of Natural History, Thatcher Woods Pavilion, Camp Dan Beard, the Busse Lake Boating Center and a donated facility at Orland Park.

An architectural, engineering design team is in the process of site planning work at Trillside Museum/Thatcher Woods. Upon completion, it will include concept plans and cost estimates for new amenities, upgrades, and other improvements. Additional funding and partners will be needed in the future to implement the plan.

In 2025, the Village of Orland Park donated 27.5 acres of land located just east of McGinnis Slough at 13951 LaGrange Road that features extensive landscaping and site improvements, including a community gathering space, overlook platforms and a 2,500 square foot building that was acquired and partially improved as a “nature center” but never completed. A feasibility study for conversion of the building to a field office for Conservation & Experiential Program staff is in process. If feasible, the next phase of design and cost estimates for building renovation would start in 2026.



13951 LaGrange Rd Site Photos



SUSTAINABILITY UPGRADES

CLEAN ENERGY ACTION PLAN

The Forest Preserves staff is continuing to implement the Forest Preserves 2023 Clean Energy Action Plan.

By 2030, the Forest Preserves estimates that GHG emissions will be reduced by 75%, above the Sustainability & Climate Resiliency Plan goal of 45%. By 2030, the Forest Preserves is also planning to eliminate supplemental purchases of RECs, by purchasing renewable electricity directly from local solar providers and by retaining the RECs associated with those local sources.

In 2025, we completed LED lighting upgrades at three Nature Centers and renovations at General Headquarters, Crabtree Nature Center, Caldwell Woods Welcome Pavilion, and the new Salt Creek Landscape Maintenance Headquarters & Garage.

In 2026, the following projects are in design and being prioritized to be completed as soon as possible: Maywood Complex Boiler and Exhaust Replacement, Camp Reinberg facility upgrades, and McGinnis Fisheries' new storage building.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY, ELECTRIFICATION PROJECTS

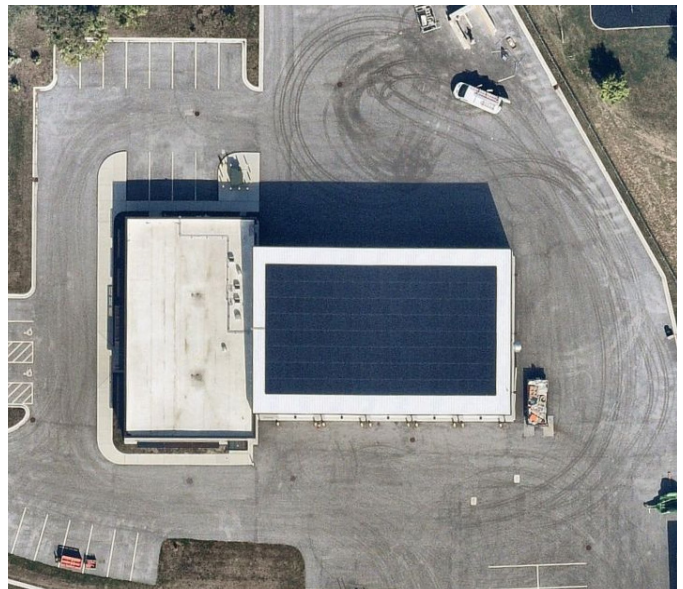
Eight Forest Preserves facilities account for approximately 50% of emissions from natural gas and propane use. Significant progress has been made in converting these facilities to all-electric use at Crabtree Nature Center, Caldwell Woods Wellness Center, Salt Creek Landscape Maintenance Headquarters, and our General Headquarters building. Additionally, rooftop solar panel installation is ongoing at the Salt Creek Landscape Maintenance facility.

The Central Maintenance Compound in Maywood contributes approximately 20% of total building energy emissions and remains a priority focus. Building envelope upgrades at the Central Maintenance Warehouse were completed in 2023. Replacement of the old boiler, which serves four buildings, along with additional energy efficiency improvements, is scheduled for 2027. Planned upgrades to lighting and exhaust systems at the Central Maintenance Garage are scheduled for 2026.

From 2027 through 2030, building envelope and HVAC upgrades are planned for additional facilities each year, with an estimated annual cost of \$2 million.



New Building at McGinnis Fisheries HQ



Rooftop Solar Panels at Salt Creek Maintenance HQ

LED LIGHTING UPGRADES

The Facilities Department is working on LED lighting upgrades at Little Red School house Nature Center and other locations in the Palos area. The Public Building Commission is managing a comprehensive assessment of lighting replacement at all field offices and support facilities, including incentives research, and over \$5 million could be needed in 2026.

NEW EV CHARGING STATIONS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Cook County ARPA funding covers the cost of five new public EV charging stations at the Busse Lake Boating Center, Mathew Bieszczat Volunteer Resources Center, General Headquarters, Dan Ryan Woods Visitors Center and Swallow Cliff Woods. Work is projected to be completed in 2026. Five additional chargers are planned at Green Lake Aquatic Center, George W. Dunne National Golf Course, Cermak Family Aquatic Center, Camp Reinberg and River Trail Nature Center by 2030 funded by a state Charging and Fueling Infrastructure grant in partnership with the Illinois Finance Authority / Illinois Climate Bank.

The Forest Preserves Facilities & Fleet Department allocated capital funds to design and upgrade electric supply, and install at least 19 internal Level II and higher EV chargers and charging pedestals at maintenance yards and other internal support facilities to provide charging of up to 38 fleet vehicles. Installations began in 2025 and will continue into 2026.

GREEN FLEET

Four electric refuse haulers will join the Forest Preserves Green fleet due to funding from the EPA's Clean Heavy Duty Vehicle Grant.



Maple Lake Boating Center



Interior and Exterior Lighting Features to Recieve LED Upgrades



New Electric Garbage Trucks

LONGER-RANGE PLANS AND STUDIES

A portion of capital funding each year is allocated to early planning, conditions assessment and feasibility study work for more complex programs and projects.

IMPROVEMENTS TO NEWLY-ACQUIRED LAND

The Forest Preserves and MWRD continue to work on concept planning and preliminary engineering for a multi-benefit project in southeast Cook County. The Forest Preserves has acquired and continues to acquire land (shown right) along Deer Creek watershed where MWRD has identified this area as a prime location to create stormwater storage to provide flood relief to residents of southeast Cook County.

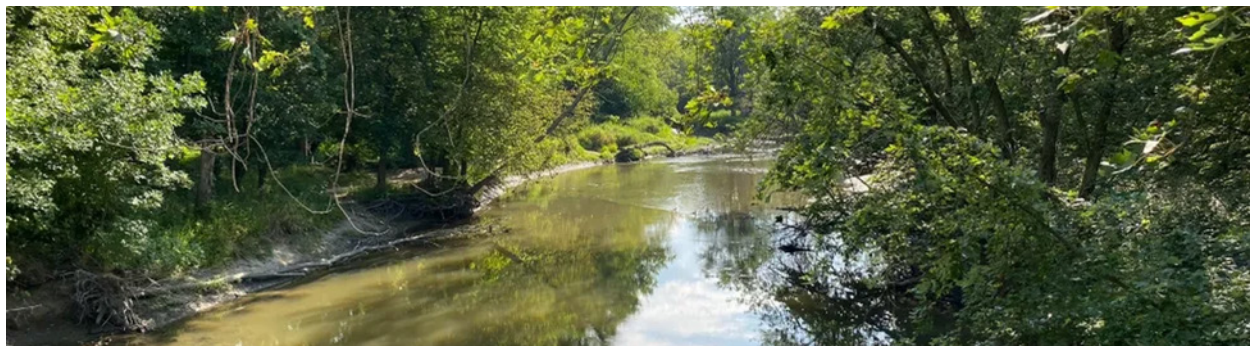
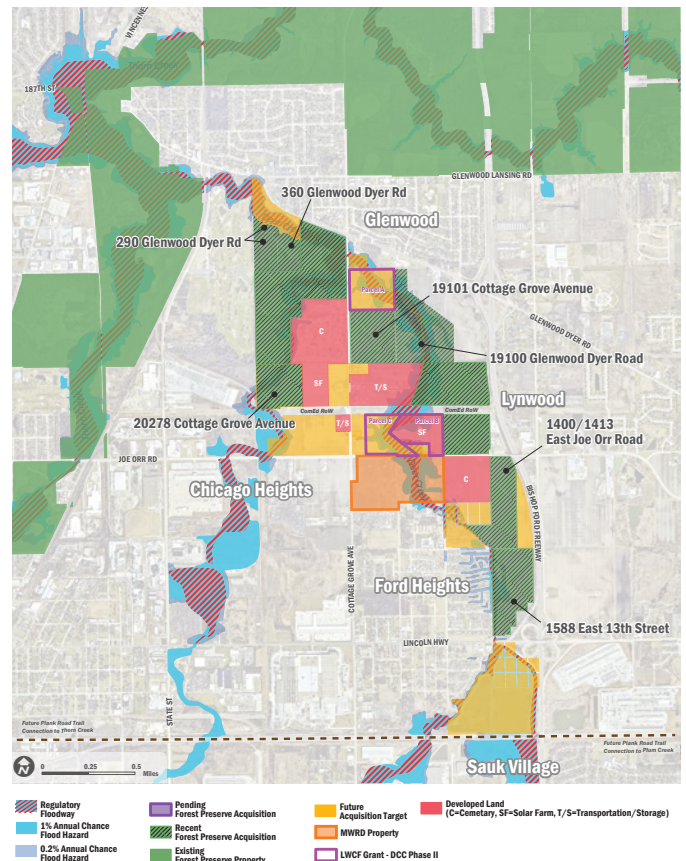
TRAIL GAP FEASIBILITY STUDIES - LOWER DES PLAINES AND OTHER GAPS

Cook County and Forest Preserves trail planners are continuing to collaborate on longer-range planning to fill in gaps in the low-stress off-street trail network described in Cook County's Bike Plan and the Forest Preserves' Trail Capital Plan & Guiding Principles. Phase I planning continues to advance for the extension of the Des Plaines River Trail south of Brookfield Zoo to connect to the Salt Creek Trail System near Cermak Aquatic Center. Phase II Engineering should begin in the summer of 2026. Other trail gaps that could be studied in the next five years include the Des Plaines River Trail crossing of Milwaukee Avenue and the extension of the Tinley Creek Trail system south to the Volmer Loop Trail.

SITE MASTER PLANS - SKOKIE LAGOONS, SPRING CREEK, AND OTHER SPECIAL SITES

Site master plans have been developed for various reasons over the past years for special sites with some unique education, recreation or historic/cultural importance. These plans document ideas and concepts identified through community outreach and engagement meetings, cultivate partners and funders and prepare for grant opportunities. The Skokie Lagoons 10-Year Vision + Action Plan is an example of a plan that has resulted in funding and support from the Village of Winnetka for new public amenities.

Planning efforts are underway for activating Horizon Farm and strengthening its relationship and connectivity to Spring Creek. In an effort to inform and highlight special sites, Forest Preserves planners are documenting site history, amenities, and recent improvements for Caldwell Woods and Sauk Trail Woods preserves as part of a "Connecting People to Nature" initiative.



North Branch Chicago River at Caldwell Woods

GRANTS AND PARTNERSHIPS

The Forest Preserves is working hard to improve its outdoor recreation amenities and its public facilities so that everyone in Cook County can enjoy the benefits of spending time in nature. Grants and partnerships continue to play an important role in helping the Forest Preserves leverage resources and expertise.

In 2025, the following new grant funds were awarded to enhance accessibility and support trails and outdoor recreation opportunities:

\$1,067,500 from Illinois Department of Natural Resources' Open Space Land Acquisition and Development (OSLAD) program to help fund the purchase of a 79-acre parcel in Sauk Village in southeast Cook County. The acquisition will knit together a series of smaller parcels - totaling 192 acres - purchased by the Forest Preserves over the last ten years, creating a 271-acre contiguous preserve that can better support wildlife and outdoor recreation opportunities.

\$2,594,547 in Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program (ITEP) funds administered by the Illinois Department of Transportation to support Phase 2 Engineering services for relocation, reconstruction and new pedestrian bridges on a 4.9-mile portion of the Des Plaines River Trail from Irving Park Road to Fullerton Road, also known as Segments 5 and 6. This project advances the Forest Preserves' Trail Master Plan and its Next Century Conservation Plan to improve access to outdoor recreation opportunities.

\$217,900 in Invest in Cook funds awarded through Cook County Department of Transportation and Highways (DOTH). These funds will advance engineering for two new trail segments at the convergence of the Salt Creek and future Des Plaines Trail systems. Salt Creek Trail gaps are between Parkview Road and Ogden Avenue and between Millbridge Road and Ogden Avenue. Addressing these gaps advances Cook County's 2023 Bike Plan and the Forest Preserves 2022 Trail Capital Plan and Guiding Principles.



Sauk Village New Acquisition

CAPITAL SPENDING BY FUNDING SOURCE SUMMARY

Project Category	2026 C&D Funds	Grant, Fees or MFT	Transfer	Rollover Existing Funds	2026 Total	2027-2030	Total
Land Restoration	\$ 7,997	\$ 2,515	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 10,512	\$ 36,143	\$ 46,655
Land Improvements - Trails and Other Recreation	\$ 1,312	\$ 10,892	\$ 25	\$ 3,920	\$ 16,149	\$ 93,271	\$ 109,420
Land Improvements - Site Amenities	\$ 2,910	\$ 1,600	\$ -	\$ 716	\$ 5,227	\$ 18,257	\$ 23,483
Landscape Maintenance - Capital Outlays	\$ 1,714	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 1,714	\$ 3,930	\$ 5,644
Building Improvements	\$ 4,477	\$ 40	\$ 1,550	\$ 6,176	\$ 12,244	\$ 53,855	\$ 66,099
Facilities & Fleet - Capital Outlays	\$ 2,987	\$ -	\$ 3,800	\$ 1,800	\$ 8,587	\$ 15,420	\$ 24,007
Planning, Design, & Consulting Services	\$ 1,300	\$ 50	\$ 65	\$ 1,484	\$ 2,899	\$ 5,340	\$ 8,239
Total	\$ 22,698	\$ 15,097	\$ 5,440	\$ 14,096	\$ 57,331	\$ 226,215	\$ 283,547

NOTES: ALL FIGURES REPRESENTED IN THOUSANDS

Amount of 2027-2030 anticipated grant funding	\$ 74,315
Estimated 2027-2030 C&D funding (at same level as 2026):	\$ 90,793
Estimated future funding gap 2027-2030	\$ 61,107

ABOUT THE FOREST PRESERVES OF COOK COUNTY

Explore the natural beauty of Cook County for an hour, a day or even a night. When you're surrounded by more than 70,000 acres of wild and wonderful, there's no better place to feel free. The Forest Preserves of Cook County protects and restores its prairies, woodlands, wetlands and savannas so native plants and animals can thrive. At Forest Preserves' facilities and events, millions of visitors annually create their own adventure—hiking, swimming, fishing, golfing, and more. From cleaner air and water to a place to exercise, the Forest Preserves makes our communities healthier.

Forest Preserves of Cook County

General Headquarters, 536 N. Harlem Ave, River Forest, IL 60305

Forest Preserves Board of Commissioners

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