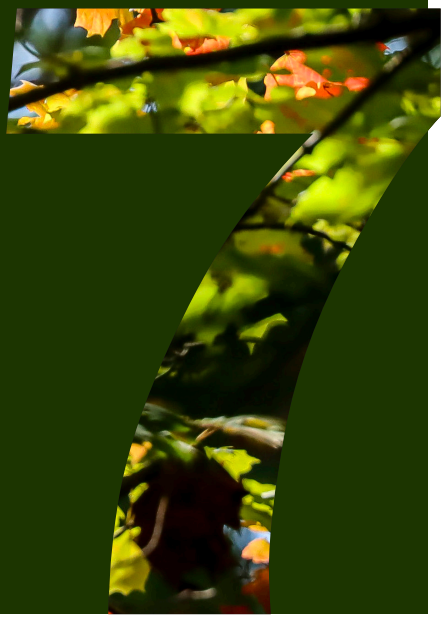


2027 Capital Improvement Plan





UPDATE TO THE 5-YEAR PLAN
2027–2031

FOREST PRESERVES of Cook County

feel free

fpdcc.com

FOREST PRESERVES of Cook County

November 17, 2026

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President

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General Superintendent

Adam Bianchi

Dear President Preckwinkle and Commissioners,

The draft of the **2027 Update to the 5-Year Capital Improvement Plan** for the Forest Preserves of Cook County is enclosed for your review and comments.

Projected capital spending for 2027-2031 is **$270 million,** down from **$283 million** in last year's plan. This decrease reflects the completion of several new assets and improvements to existing facilities. These include a newly constructed trail at Beaubien Woods, a new energy-efficient boat storage garage and workshop at McGinniss Fisheries, upgrades to the Maywood Canoe and Kayak launch, improvements to the Gold Star Memorial at Dan Ryan Woods, and reconstruction of an additional segment of the Des Plaines River Trail.

Projected capital spending for 2027 is **$68 million,** compared with **$57 million** in 2026. This increase is primarily driven by the advancement of significant improvements to additional segments of the Des Plaines River Trail, funded largely through grants.

In 2027, we anticipate awarding new contracts for major trail improvements, building energy-efficiency projects, and restroom renovations while continuing to address ongoing capital needs across the Forest Preserves.

An electronic version of this report can be downloaded from our website at: http://fpdcc.com/cip. Comments can be submitted through that page until the end of the year. A final version of the 2027 Capital Improvement Plan will be posted in January 2027.

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

Sincerely,

Adam Bianchi
General Superintendent

Table of Contents:

Overview of Process, Project Selection and Need ..... Page 3

Description of Funding Sources and Capital Spending ..... Page 4

Guiding Plans and Principles ..... Page 5

Project Highlights

- Landscape Restoration Priorities ..... Page 6
- Trail Repairs ..... Page 8
- New Bridges and Trail Connections ..... Page 10
- Trail Safety Improvements ..... Page 11
- Access Road and Parking Repaving ..... Page 12
- Recreation Amenities ..... Page 13
- Golf Course Renewal ..... Page 14
- Making Sites More Wecoming ..... Page 15
- Urgent Building Needs ..... Page 16
- Building Improvement Planning
- Feasibility Studies ..... Page 17
- Sustainability Upgrades ..... Page 18
- Longer-Range Plans and Studies ..... Page 20
- Grants and Partnerships ..... Page 21

Capital Spending By Funding Source Summary ..... Page 22

OVERVIEW OF PROCESS, PROJECT SELECTION AND NEED

The Forest Preserves of Cook County Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) provides a five-year projection of planned capital improvements to Forest Preserves land and buildings, excluding land and buildings managed by Brookfield Zoo Chicago and the Chicago Botanic Garden. The Forest Preserves' policy is to maintain at least 80 percent of its land in a natural state and limit development to no more than 20 percent. Developed areas include more than 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, 6 nature centers, 5 campgrounds, 3 aquatic centers, 3 visitor and volunteer centers and dozens of maintenance yards and field offices.

The five-year plan is lower than last year at approximately $270M for the highest priority needs. Projected spending for 2027 has increased by more than $10M since last year ($68M versus $57M), primarily due to major trail improvements, building energy-efficiency projects, and restroom renovations.

NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

Staff and consultants conduct regular inspections of pavement, including trails and parking lots, as well as bridges, dams, and picnic shelters, to identify and prioritize the most urgent needs. Building inspections and energy audits are conducted on a more targeted, as-needed basis.

PROJECT SELECTION

Capital investment priorities are determined on a variety of factors, including the condition of the facility or amenity, level of use, alignment with guiding plans and principles, uniqueness of the resource or facility, impact on operations, geographic equity, project complexity, and the availability of funding and grant requirements. In 2027, the Forest Preserves will be developing a strategic plan that may result in some changes to the current selection criteria.

CAPITAL FUNDING NEEDS

Projected 2027 capital spending is higher than last year at $68 million with $27 million funded through grants, mitigation fees, and Motor Fuel Tax (MFT) funds. Transfer of $7 million from reserves is proposed to supplement the Construction and Development tax levy of $19.6 million. An estimated $201 million will be needed to cover capital needs over the next four years. While nearly 72% of future need in 2028-2031 is expected to be covered by annual capital funding and anticipated grant funding, there is still a projected gap of $57 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.

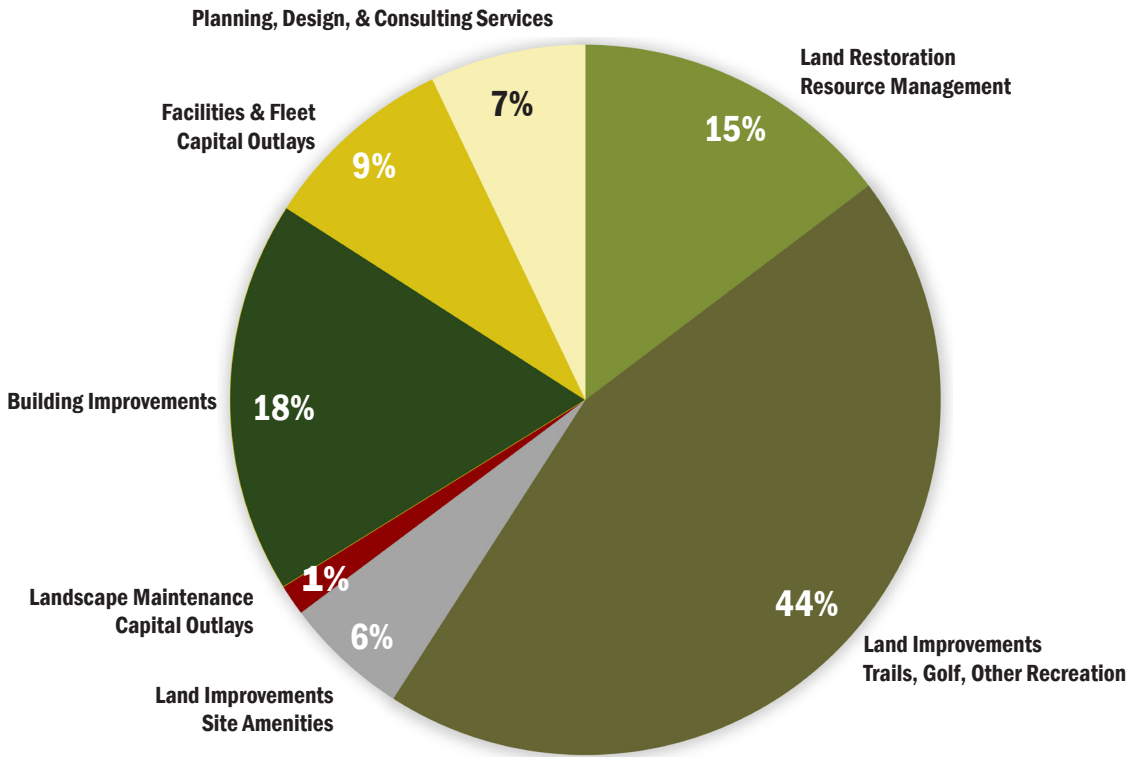
CONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT

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

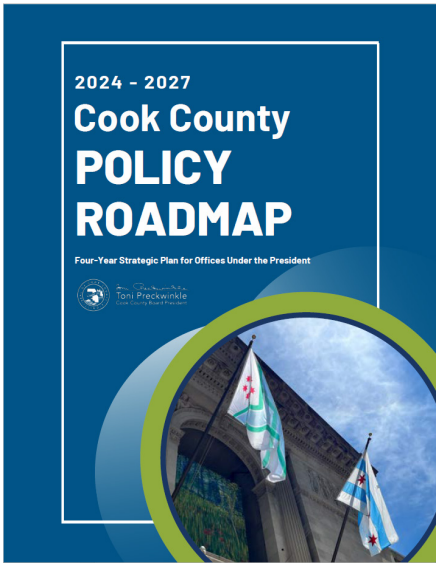
The Forest Preserves receives funds outside of its tax levy that are to be used in the construction of major capital facilities. These funds are received through grants, intergovernmental agreements, settlements and mitigation fees resulting from the Forest Preserves' Tree Mitigation Ordinance.

2027 POTENTIAL CAPITAL SPENDING: $68 MILLION



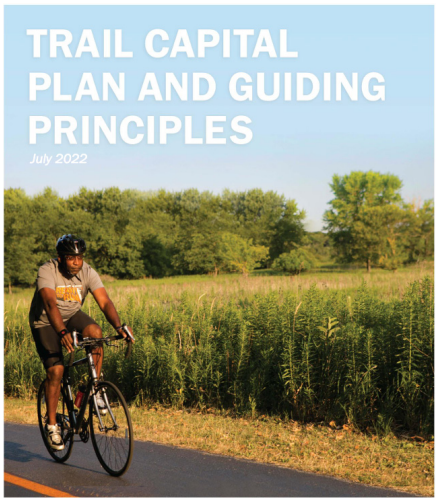
GUIDING PLANS AND PRINCIPLES

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.

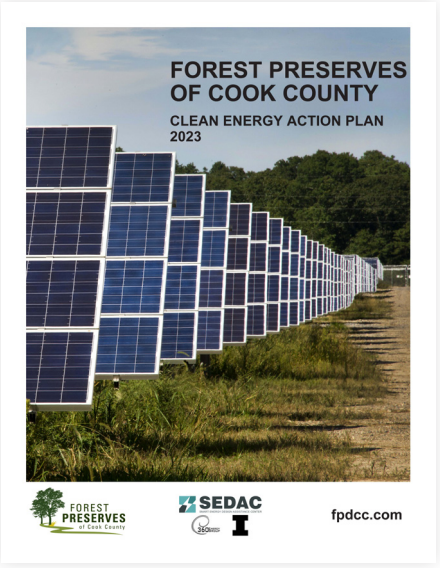


RACIAL EQUITY AND NATURE-BASED RECREATION POSITION PAPERS

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.

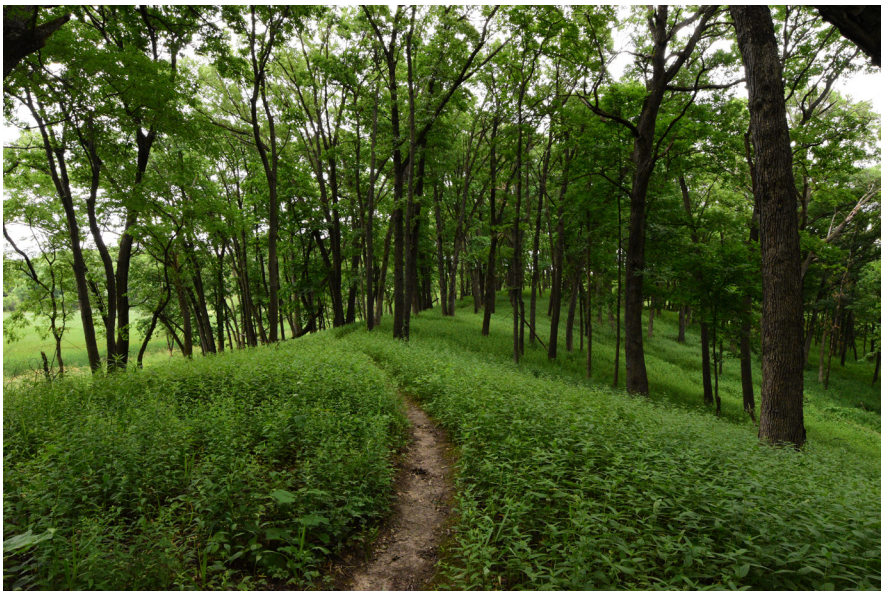


FLOODING AND CLIMATE RESILIENCY

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.



Cap Sauers Nature Preserve

RED GATE WOODS

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 remains out of the initial 1,045-acre project footprint and is scheduled for completion during the winter of 2026/27. Maintenance on the previously cleared 856 acres will continue during the growing season.



Bemis Woods

CAP SAUERS & PALOS REGION

The Palos landscape is the Forest Preserves' highest priority for restoration based on the Natural & Cultural Resources Master Plan. Starting in 2027, approximately 750 acres of land management work will be launching across the Palos region, primarily centered around Swallow Cliff Woods, Cap Sauers Nature Preserve, McClaughrey Springs Woods, and Paddock Woods. This multi-year investment will focus on restoring and improving the health, diversity, and resilience of the Palos landscape's natural communities. Work will include the removal of invasive and woody vegetation that has encroached into high-quality natural areas, selective tree thinning to restore appropriate ecological conditions, and management activities designed to improve the quality of oak woodlands, savannas, wetlands, and other native habitats. The work will also address landscape-scale restoration needs by connecting and strengthening existing areas of high-quality habitat.

Cap Sauers Nature Preserve alone will receive 428 acres of targeted invasive brush removal and tree thinning. The site supports a diverse mosaic of natural communities shaped by its varied topography, soils, hydrology, and forest structure. Known as the most remote place in all of Cook County, the preserve contains high-quality oak-dominated woodlands and savannas, as well as ravines, wetlands, and other specialized habitats that contribute to the overall ecological diversity of the Palos landscape.

BEMIS WOODS

Bemis Woods contains an assemblage of woodland and floodplain forest interspersed with scattered wetlands supporting regionally important wildlife, plants, and pollinators. Partially funded through grants received through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Great Lakes Restoration Initiative program, this phase of the work involves 51 acres of brush removal and thinning to promote native oak regeneration and open migratory corridors along Salt Creek.



Herbicide Application at Bemis 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 up-stream 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.

TRAIL REPAIRS

The Forest Preserves is home to 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 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.

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 2027.

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 for 2026-2027.



Palos Trail



Trail Repair at Midlothian Meadows

DES PLAINES RIVER TRAIL UPGRADES

Reconstruction of the 1-mile segment south of the new Lawrence Avenue bridge (Segment 4), including two boardwalk sections, was completed in fall of 2026 and funded almost entirely by grants and Cook County MFT funds.

A construction contract for another section south of Fullerton Avenue to North Avenue (Segment 7) is expected to be awarded in late 2026, A federal grant has already been awarded for 80 percent of the construction cost and $2.9 million in matching funds will come from IDNR Build Illinois funds

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 late 2026, which is 90% funded by a state ITEP transportation grant.



Segment 4 New (left) and Old (right) Trails



Segment 7 Existing and Proposed Alignments

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 the future. An agreement with the Union Pacific Railroad has not been reached. 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 new trail connection between the Beaubien Woods Boat Launch and a Chicago Park District Park (Carver Park) in the Altgeld Gardens complex is expected to be completed in late 2026, funded in part by the CTA Red Line Extension project mitigation.

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.

Improvements to the Major Taylor Trail are in engineering design to connect the north end of the trail to a Chicago Park District Park (Dawes Park). And the future transfer of a city owned section of the trail between 92nd Place and 94th Street is also proposed by the City of Chicago.

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.

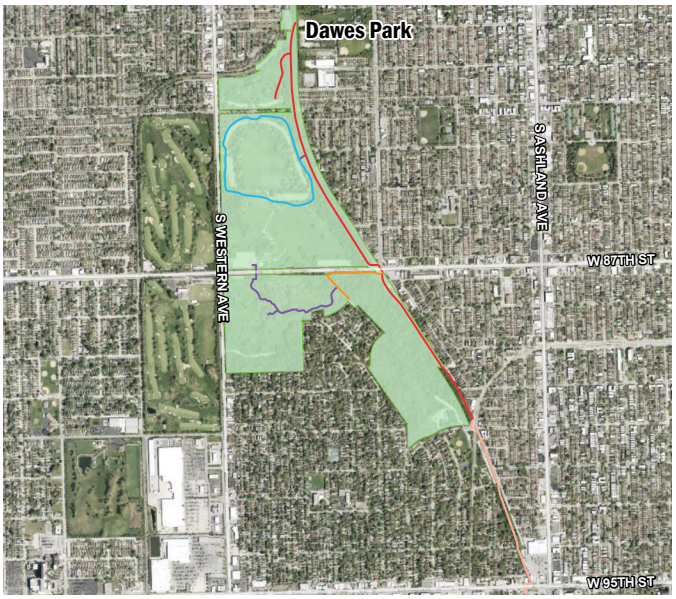


UP Railroad Crossing


Altgeld Gardens Trail Connection



Elk Grove Pedestrian Bridge



Major Taylor Trail at Dan Ryan Woods

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. New trail counters installed in 2026, at 16 locations, are helping staff prioritize project needs.



Busse Woods Parking Lot Striping

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 on the Thorn Creek, Orland Grassland, Deer Grove, I&M Canal, and Busse Woods trail systems in 2026, with more improvements planned countywide for 2027.

Drop gates have been selectively removed, new centerlines painted, and intersections have been updated to better inform and protect user well-being in a variety of trail and traffic scenarios.

TRAIL CROSSING UPGRADES

There is a focus on upgrading two road crossings on the Salt Creek Trail. Engineering design is in process for upgrades at the 31st Street crossing and an IDOT crossing at 17th Avenue

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. Repair work on five bridges at two North Cook golf courses was completed in 2026. An engineering consultant is reviewing highest priority needs for the next two to three years.


Bridge over Lake Cook Rd

The Lake Cook Road bridge on the Des Plaines River Trail is in need of reconstruction in the next five years. The Lake County Forest Preserve District and Forest Preserves of Cook County are executing an IGA in 2026 to cooperate on seeking grant funding and sharing costs of engineering and construction.

ACCESS ROAD AND PARKING REPAVING

In 2025, Planning & Development completed a comprehensive pavement conditions assessment to identify segments of parking areas that are in poor condition and in need of repair in the next five years. In 2026, paving work was focused primarily on a few parking lot locations, including Joe Orr Woods, under a contract awarded in 2025.



New Paving at Joe Orr Woods

In 2027, construction is expected to start at these locations: Bullfrog Lake, Cooper's Hawk Grove, Elizabeth Conkey North, Edgebrook Woods, Catalina Grove, Maple Lake Overlook, and ADA access at Miller Meadows 5 and 6. In 2027, we are also proceeding with detailed engineering design at these locations: Tower Road, Old Sutton Road, Poplar Trail, George Dunne parking lot and Purple Trail, and two field offices.



Parking Lot at Bullfrog Lake Awaiting Repair

In late 2026, MWRD announced a Stormwater award to the Forest Preserves for excellence for ongoing efforts to remove hardscapes demonstrated by projects such as Possum Hollow and Dam #4 at their 14th Annual Sustainability Summit.





MWRD Sustainability Award

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 2026, pavement reduction work was completed at Thaddeus S. "Ted" Lechowicz Woods and Whistler Woods. Currently in design are plans to remove pavement or add porous pavers and rain gardens to make them more flood resilient at these 5 locations (National Grove South, Westchester Woods, Crooked Creek, Buffalo Woods, and Police Headquarters). Partial funding for some of these locations may come from an existing IGA with MWRD.



Ted Lechowicz Woods after Parking Reduction

RECREATION AMENITIES

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. In 2026, IDNR grants supported improvements at both Beaubien Woods Boat Launch and Maywood Grove Canoe Launch, which is a regular launch spot for the award winning Maywood Paddling Program.



Beaubien Woods Boat Launch Ribbon Cutting

DAM STRUCTURES

The Willow Road Dam launch is expected to be constructed in the next five years with funding from the Village of Winnetka and is awaiting the removal of a downstream dam at Chick Evans Golf Course by IDNR, which is scheduled for late 2027. 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.



Maywood Grove Canoe Launch

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 multiple shelters in 2027, including a limestone shelter in Harms Woods. After that, an estimated $300,000 will still be needed for reroofing 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 and in 2027 ADA improvements at Miller Meadows 5 and 6 are planned.

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 Sports 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.



Bunker Renovation at George Dunne

In 2026, Indigo Sports completed bunker renovation and engineering design of new Toptracer driving range amenities. The bunker renovation represents a significant investment in the long-term quality and playability of George W. Dunne National. The project renovated approximately 151,000 square feet of bunkers, including new drainage, capillary concrete liners, new sand, and sodded bunker faces, while strategically eliminating approximately 65,000 square feet of unnecessary bunker area. The improvements provide more consistent playing conditions, improve drainage and maintenance efficiency, and help preserve George Dunne as one of the Forest Preserves' premier public golf facilities.

A new $15 million clubhouse is scheduled to open to the public in late October on Forest Preserve Land under a 2024 amendment to a 1922 agreement with the Village of Glencoe and Glencoe Golf Course.



Glencoe Golf Club Clubhouse

There is also a plan to replace a bridge located at Chick Evans Golf Course in 2028, after removal of a dam that supports the existing bridge. Weight limit restrictions are currently posted, and frequent monitoring and inspections will be needed until the bridge is replaced. 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 by 2028, with $300,000 grant funds from the Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity.



Weight Restrictions on Chick Evans Bridge

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 trail-heads on major regional trails.

New signs have been installed at more than 32 of these 60 special sites, including the Forest Preserves General Headquarters.

A multi-year sign contract is in place for installation of signs over the next two years. New trailhead signs have been in design for the past several years and installation will start in the Palos area in 2027-2028. Additional trailhead signs will be installed at select bike trail systems in the future.

New seating pavers and flagpole were installed at the Dan Ryan Woods Gold Star memorial to make this site more welcoming and accessible to veterans and Gold Star Families and funding was provided through a state grant.

The Illinois Tollway reopened the Salt Creek Trail under I-294 in July 2026 after years of construction. The new underpass structure includes welcome panels on each side embedded on the bridge abutments.



New Sign at General Headquarters


Gold Star Memorial



Welcome Panel on Salt Creek Trail

URGENT BUILDING NEEDS

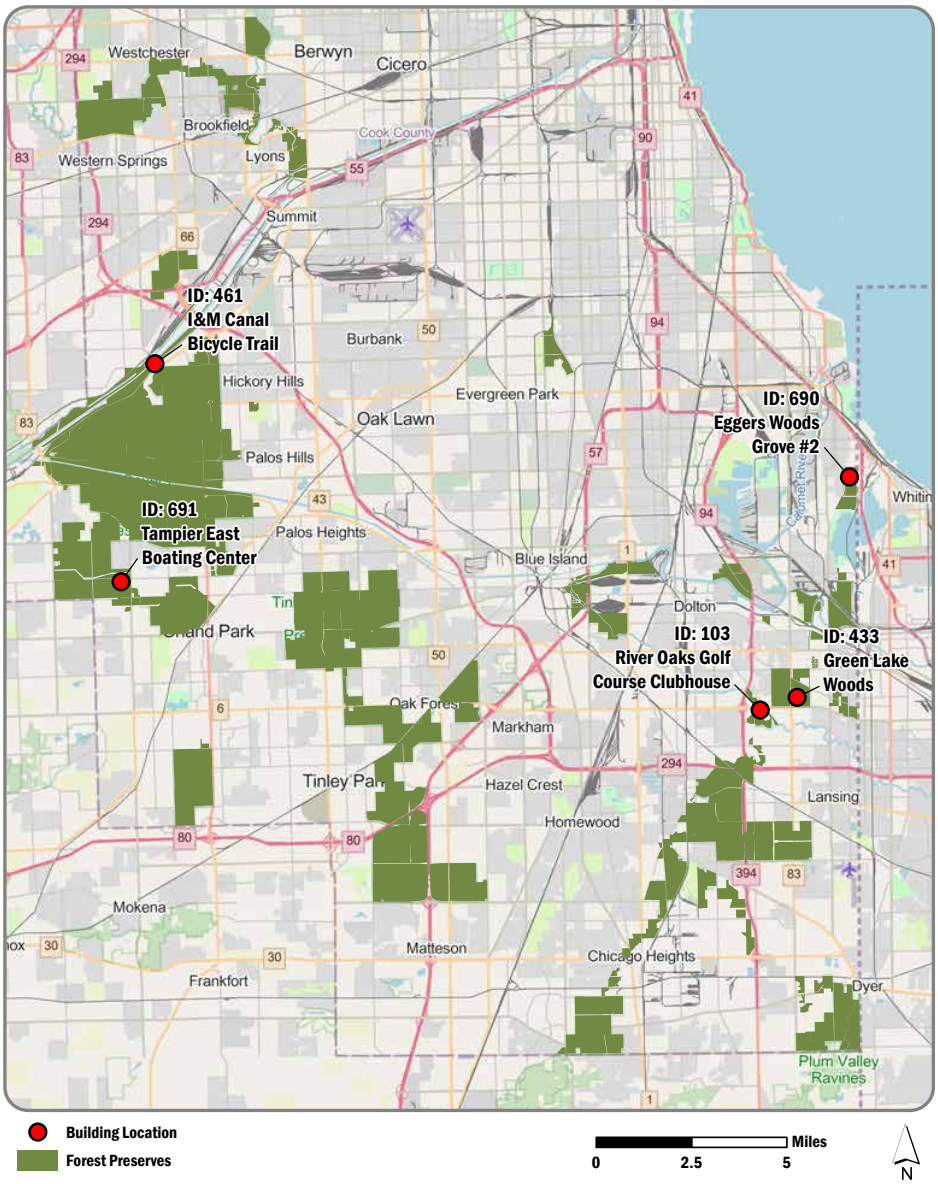
The Forest Preserves maintains a portfolio of more than 250 buildings that requires ongoing investment to preserve the condition, functionality, and long-term value of these facilities. Routine building improvements and other ongoing capital needs are estimated to require approximately $4 million annually. Beyond these recurring needs, additional capital resources will be necessary to address major renovation projects, including restroom renovations and districtwide building improvements

RESTROOM RENOVATION PROGRAM

The Forest Preserves' restroom facilities represent a significant part of its aging infrastructure, with most of the 60 existing restroom buildings being more than 40 years old. In 2026, major renovations were completed at 14 restroom buildings at Busse Woods and Dan Ryan Woods.

The next phase of the program is proposed for 2027, with renovations at 3-5 locations in South Cook County. Planned improvements also include plumbing upgrades at Swallow Cliff Pavilion to address water filtration capacity and improve the reliability of the facility's infrastructure.

In future years, the Forest Preserves will work on design and permitting for the remaining older restroom buildings. This phased approach will allow the Forest Preserves to address aging facilities, prioritize critical infrastructure needs, and strategically allocate available capital resources over time.



BUILDING IMPROVEMENTS PLANNING AND FEASIBILITY STUDIES

Master planning and feasibility studies are underway at several Forest Preserve locations to evaluate facility improvements, develop project concepts, and guide future capital investments. Additional funding and strategic partnerships will be needed to advance these plans in future years.

TRAILSIDE MUSEUM & THATCHER WOODS PAVILION

Concept plans and preliminary cost estimates for new amenities were completed in 2026. Proposed improvements at Trailside Museum include a new annex with additional restrooms, classrooms, and animal care facilities. Proposed improvements at Thatcher Woods Pavilion include acoustic upgrades, flooring improvements, and an expanded outdoor patio.

ORLAND FIELD STATION

A feasibility study and cost estimates for conversion of a vacant 2,500 square foot building located just east of McGinnis Slough at 13951 LaGrange Road in Orland Park to a field station for Conservation & Experiential Program Department use was completed in 2026. The building was donated to the Forest Preserves by the Village of Orland Park and partially improved as a “nature center” but never completed.



New Building in Orland Park

ENERGY EFFICIENCY, ENVELOPE UPGRADES, BUILDING ADDITION, AND NEW GREENHOUSE AT SALT CREEK RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Planned improvements at the Salt Creek Resource Management campus include energy efficiency upgrades, building envelope improvements, and a building addition to accommodate additional staff restrooms. These improvements will enhance the functionality, efficiency, and long-term usability of the facility for staff and program operations.

In addition to improvements to the existing buildings, Salt Creek Resource Management staff are planning for a new greenhouse to support the seed amplification program. The greenhouse would provide dedicated space for growing and propagating native plant material, supporting ongoing restoration and conservation efforts throughout the Forest Preserves.

OUTDOOR ANIMAL AMBASSADOR ENCLOSURES

Many of the existing outdoor animal ambassador enclosures are aging and no longer meet current USDA standards, creating a need for replacement and significant upgrades. Preliminary designs for upgraded enclosures at Sand Ridge Nature Center were completed in 2026 and are currently in review.

Upgrading enclosures across all five Nature Centers will require a significant capital investment. The Forest Preserves anticipates implementing these improvements in phases over the next 5–10 years, prioritizing the replacement of aging enclosures and improving facilities to better support our animal ambassador program.



Ambassador Animal Enclosure

SUSTAINABILITY UPGRADES

CLEAN ENERGY ACTION PLAN

Forest Preserves staff continue to implement the Forest Preserves' 2023 Clean Energy Action Plan.

By 2030, the Forest Preserves estimates that GHG emissions will be reduced by 75%, exceeding the 45% reduction goal established in the Sustainability & Climate Resiliency Plan. This progress will be supported by continued investment in renewable energy and the replacement of fossil fuel-based equipment with clean, fossil fuel-free alternatives.

The Forest Preserves also plans to eliminate supplemental unbundled purchases of renewable energy credits (RECs), by purchasing renewable electricity directly from local solar providers and retaining the RECs associated with those local sources.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY, ELECTRIFICATION

Eight Forest Preserves facilities account for approximately 50% of emissions from natural gas and propane use. Significant progress has been made in transitioning these facilities to all-electric operations. Electrification projects completed to date include Crabtree Nature Center, Salt Creek Landscape Maintenance Headquarters, Caldwell Woods Wellness Center, and the General Headquarters building. In 2026, electrification was completed at the McGinnis Fisheries campus buildings.

In addition to addressing energy use at large-consuming facilities, the Forest Preserves is addressing energy efficiency at other locations as major building systems reach the end of their useful life, including exterior renovations and HVAC upgrades at Camp Reinberg Dining Hall.



Camp Reinberg Dining Hall

The Central Maintenance Compound in Maywood is the Forest Preserves' largest consumer of natural gas and electricity and remains a priority for energy improvements. Planned upgrades to lighting and exhaust systems at the Central Maintenance Garage are scheduled for 2027. Replacement of the aging boiler, along with additional energy efficiency improvements at the Central Compound will be addressed next.

In future years, the Forest Preserves plans to invest approximately $2 million annually in building envelope and HVAC upgrades at additional facilities. Pools and campgrounds are also significant energy users and will be evaluated for potential improvements over the next five years.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

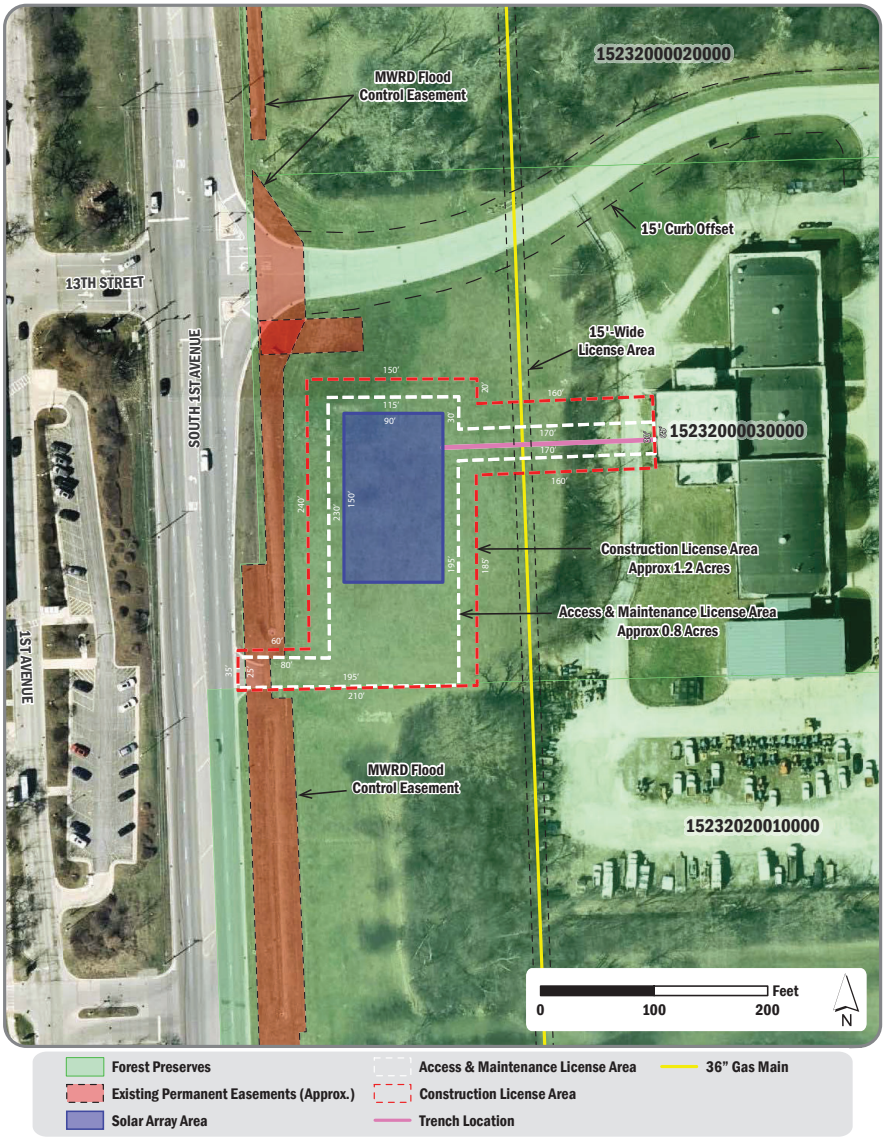
In 2026, a new rooftop solar installation was completed at the Salt Creek Landscape Maintenance Facility, making it the Forest Preserves' fourth facility with behind-the-meter rooftop solar. A new 140kW solar field will serve the Central Garage (right) in Maywood under a Power Purchase Agreement with a solar developer and is expected to be operational in 2027.

LED LIGHTING UPGRADES

The Facilities Department is working on LED lighting upgrades at Little Red Schoolhouse Nature Center and other locations in the Palos area. The Public Building Commission is managing a comprehensive assessment of lighting replacement needs at field offices and support facilities, including research into available incentives. In 2027, $2 million has been budgeted for an initial phase of upgrades.

NEW EV CHARGING STATIONS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

A new public EV charging station at the Busse Lake Boating Center was completed in 2026.
Additional EV charging stations are planned at General Headquarters, Green Lake Aquatic Center, George W. Dunne National Golf Course, Cermak Family Aquatic Center, Camp Reinberg and River Trail Nature Center. Some of these locations are funded by a state Charging and Fueling Infrastructure grant in partnership with the Illinois Finance Authority / Illinois Climate Bank.



GREEN FLEET

The Forest Preserves' Fleet Department is investing millions annually to replace older vehicles with more efficient vehicles and transition from fossil-fuel-powered vehicles and equipment to new electric, hybrid and propane-driven vehicles.

In 2027, six EV Chevrolet Silverado trucks are planned to be added to the fleet, along with the replacement of Police Hybrid Explorer Interceptors and Maverick AWD Hybrid trucks for several departments.



New Charging Station at Busse Lake

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 planning staff 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 2027. 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.



Lower Des Plaines River Trail Planning

SITE PLANNING

Site 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 through a framework study. Efforts are underway to develop a Forest Preserves Districtwide Strategic Plan; this Plan will cover future planning efforts.

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 2026, the following new grant funds were awarded to enhance accessibility and support trails and outdoor recreation opportunities:

$200,000 from Illinois Department of Natural Resources' Boat Area Access Development (BAAD) program to help fund improvements at the Little Calumet Boat Launch in southeast Cook County. Enhancements at this site will add accessibility and improve individual and group experience of visiting and recreating on the river. This project advances the Forest Preserves' Next Century Conservation Plan to improve access to outdoor recreation opportunities.

$100,000 awarded from the Prairie State Conservation Coalition. These funds will help purchase a 43-acre parcel along Deer Creek in Glenwood. The acquisition will add to the Deer Creek Corridor in the area and protect natural resources, improve water quality and habitat, provide flood control benefits and outdoor recreation opportunities within a targeted underserved area identified in a 2019 Southeast Cook County Land Acquisition Plan.



Little Calumet Boat Launch

CAPITAL SPENDING BY FUNDING SOURCE SUMMARY

Project Category	2027 C&D Funds	Grant, Fees or MFT	Transfer	Rollover Existing Funds	2027 Total	2028-2031	Total
Land Restoration	$ 7,997	$ 2,053	$ -	$ -	$ 10,050	$ 35,851	$ 45,901
Land Improvements - Trails and Other Recreation	$ 2,441	$ 23,595	$ 649	$ 3,698	$ 30,383	$ 75,217	$ 105,600
Land Improvements - Site Amenities	$ 1,700	$ 940	$ -	$ 1,245	$ 3,885	$ 20,405	$ 24,290
Landscape Maintenance - Capital Outlays	$ 964	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ 964	$ 4,050	$ 5,014
Building Improvements	$ 2,920	$ 284	$ 2,595	$ 6,456	$ 12,255	$ 47,882	$ 60,137
Facilities & Fleet - Capital Outlays	$ 2,237	$ -	$ 3,800	$ -	$ 6,037	$ 10,300	$ 16,337
Planning, Design, & Consulting Services	$ 1,335	$ 660	$ -	$ 2,858	$ 4,853	$ 8,090	$ 12,943
Total	$ 19,594	$ 27,532	$ 7,044	$ 14,256	$ 68,426	$ 201,795	$ 270,221

NOTES: ALL FIGURES REPRESENTED IN THOUSANDS

Amount of 2028-2031 funding secured through grants or MFT:	$ 65,987
Estimated 2028-2031 C&D funding:	$ 78,375
Estimated future funding gap 2028-2031	$ 57,434

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