

Native American Partnerships & Events

The Forest Preserves of Cook County continues to engage with organizations serving Native American communities, including the American Indian Center of Chicago, American Indian Health Services of Chicago, Trickster Cultural Center, the American Indian Education Program at Chicago Public Schools, the St. Kateri Center of Chicago, Northwestern University's Center for Native American and Indigenous Research, and Chicago American Indian Community Collaborative. We thank our partners with immense gratitude for sharing their expertise with us. Events that have been offered in partnership include:

Community Engagement: The Forest Preserves signed a partnership agreement with the American Indian Center to help develop community engagement strategies, including developing programming for Serpent Twin Mound (Pokto Činto) at Schiller Woods.

Land Acknowledgement Presentation: Chicago Wilderness hosted "Action and Intention Training on the Land Acknowledgement," a virtual program moderated by Forest Preserves' staff member Adam Kessel, to discuss the Forest Preserves' journey in co-creating its Land Acknowledgement, featuring Native American panelists from the Field Museum, Chicago Public Schools American Indian Education Program, and Indian Community School to share their experience.

Kayak Leaders Certification: American Indian Center members became Kayak Leaders through the Forest Preserves' community kayak training and gear lending library.

AIC's Annual Powwow: The Forest Preserves served as a partner and sponsor for the 68th & 69th annual Powwow of the American Indian Center of Chicago. The events were hosted at Schiller Woods, each over three days with nearly 6,000 people in attendance.

Walk and Talk: The Forest Preserves' Native Folklore program focuses on the Indigenous connection of storytelling and nature.

Stewardship Day: Forest Preserves' staff visited Trickster Cultural Center to tour the Center, learn about native plants from an Indigenous perspective and help with restoration in their garden.

The Forest Preserves of Cook County's Position paper "Amplifying Diversity & Inclusion" recognizes our special obligation to Native Americans, who have a historic and ongoing relationship with the lands of Cook County and with the Forest Preserves.

To honor and respect this unique and significant relationship, the Forest Preserves commits to the following initiatives:

1. Continue the practice of co-creating with the Native American Community in programs, exhibits and ongoing interpretation to acknowledge the relationship Native American tribes share with the land and the Forest Preserves' role in shaping the histories of local Natives Americans by acquiring the land. For example, the co-creation process of the land acknowledgment statement.
2. Co-create narratives to tell a more complete and complex story of Native Americans of the land that is now Cook County—from the earliest known inhabitants, through European colonization, to the vibrant Native American community living here today.
3. Incorporate input from the many diverse Native Americans who still live and practice their heritage and traditions on these lands today. Explore options to consider designating a staff liaison and/or including Native American representatives in Forest Preserves committees and/or its Next Century Conservation Council.
4. Protect, restore, and maintain significant cultural features pertaining to Native Americans on Forest Preserve land. This may include protection and maintenance of Native American mounds; work in partnership with Native American groups to identify Native American burial and effigy mounds and then work to protect and restore them in a manner that is consistent with the ecological goals of the site; and best management practices.

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Community Powwow: The first Community Powwow in partnership with St. Kateri Center and American Indian Health Services was held at Bunker Hill, and included traditional Powwow activities, native food, and stories of culture from the area. A special focus on the movement "Every Child Matters" reflected on the Indigenous children who lost their lives in Canada's former system of residential schools.

Winter Breakout Adventures: Forest Preserves partnered with the American Indian Center of Chicago to share Indigenous storytelling throughout this special event in Schiller Woods, in addition to other educational and recreational activities led by the Forest Preserves.

Winter Culture Camp: Trailside Museum, in partnership with the Ho-Chunk Nation's Language and Culture Department, hosted youth from Chicago Public Schools' American Indian Education Program.

Native American Representation: Representatives from the Native American community were added to the Forest Preserves' Naming Committee and Conservation & Policy Council.

Art Show: Trickster Cultural Center hosted a photography exhibit and offer related public photography classes at Trailside Museum.

Traditional Dyes and Botany: Trickster Cultural Center hosted this interactive class at Trailside Museum.

Seasonal Nature Camps: Trickster Cultural Center hosted nature camps for kids at Rolling Knolls. These offerings include cultural teaching, crafts, storytelling, and outdoor games.

Mound Stewardship: The Forest Preserves' Resource Management Department has added mound care to the Ecological Stewardship plan for Thatcher Woods. A future step is to collaborate with the Ho-Chunk Nation to discuss how to best care for the mounds.

Policy Framework: The Forest Preserves will partner with the Native American community and Tribal Governments to co-create a policy that strengthens our relationships and partnerships.

Land Acknowledgement:

In 2019, members of the Office of General Superintendent (OGS) and Conservation & Experiential Programming (CEP) departments drafted the Forest Preserves' Land Acknowledgement in consultation with the American Indian Center (AIC). The Land Acknowledgement was first read on Indigenous Peoples Day in 2019 at a celebration of the Serpent Twin Mound (Pokto Činto) at Schiller Woods.

In October 2021, the Forest Preserves updated its Land Acknowledgement based on feedback from a member of the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma. This update helped clarify that Forest Preserves are on the lands of all the tribes mentioned in the acknowledgement.

The Land Acknowledgement is a living document and a policy tool for the Forest Preserves.

Feedback is welcomed, appreciated, and gives the Forest Preserves an opportunity to engage more deeply with Native American communities.

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