

# 2015 Federal LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM



DRAFT 9-8-14

## FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE OBJECTIVES

- Protect the District's current authority.
- Prevent unfunded mandates that increase the District's operational or administrative costs.
- Limit exposure to additional liability or legal costs.
- Promote the health and safety of Forest Preserve visitors, volunteers, commissioners and employees.
- Ensure that current grant funding sources and budgets for federal and state agencies that assist in fulfilling the District's mission are not disproportionately reduced during federal budget deliberations.
- Develop appropriate new federal partnerships and funding sources to meet needs of Lake County residents.

## FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES

### **Protecting and Restoring Lake Michigan and Other Great Lakes**

The US EPA and other agencies need to continue initiatives designed to protect and improve water quality and supply and the natural and recreational resources found in Lake Michigan along Lake County's shoreline and elsewhere in the Great Lakes basin. Public education about the Great Lakes' natural and cultural history also should be supported. Sustain Our Great Lakes and the Great Lakes Fishery and Ecosystem Restoration Program are federal programs that have provided important support for our efforts to restore coastal habitats in Lake County.

### **Issues about Endangered Species, Clean Air and Clean Water**

Lake County is home to more rare, threatened and endangered species than any other county in Illinois. Voters have consistently supported efforts to preserve and restore habitat for these native plants and animals. Protections provided by the federal Endangered Species Act benefit native wildlife and plant populations that live in or migrate through our Forest Preserves. The District also supports efforts to strengthen protection of Clean Air and Clean Water to ensure the health of Lake County residents. Federal discussions about potential changes to environmental protection laws and regulations should be held separately and transparently, not combined with budgetary bills or other issues.

### **Chicago Wilderness as a National Model for Urban Conservation**

*U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service Urban & Community Forestry, U.S.E.P.A., National Park Service*  
The Lake County Forest Preserves are a founding member and active participant in Chicago Wilderness. The broad-based alliance has improved efforts to preserve and restore natural areas found in our forest preserves and enhanced related public communication, education and outreach. Chicago Wilderness allows federal agencies to invest in regional projects that fulfill federal conservation priorities in urban region. As a national model, Chicago Wilderness is now teaming with other members of the "Metropolitan Greenspaces Alliance" to pursue continued federal support for large-scale regional conservation efforts in major urban centers nationwide.

### **Tax-Exempt Public Bonds**

Lake County voters have overwhelmingly and consistently support referenda to authorize the Forest Preserve District to issue tax-exempt bonds for preserving more land, restoring additional wildlife habitat and constructing new trails and other public access improvements. Federal tax exemptions for municipal type bonds need to be maintained. Removal or reduction of the tax exemptions would increase costs to Lake County voters for future bond issues.



### **Funding for Federal Matching Grant and Assistance Programs**

*Land and Water Conservation Fund, Transportation Alternatives, State and Tribal Assistance Wildlife Grants, North American Wetlands Conservation Act, Save America's Treasures, Institute for Museum and Library Services, USDA Wildlife Services*

Federal matching grant programs leverage bond dollars approved by Lake County voters and other local funds for important projects to preserve land, restore wildlife habitats, create trail connections, improve public access to outdoor recreation, educate local citizens and care for historic buildings and collections. Funding for such programs should not be disproportionately cut during budgetary deliberations. Lake County Forest Preserves are part of a system of natural areas, forest preserves, parks, outdoor recreation and historic facilities at the national, state, regional, county and local levels. Full funding of the *Land and Water Conservation Fund*, including stateside pass-through grants to local agencies, and similar national grant programs such as *State and Tribal Wildlife Grants* and *North American Wetlands Conservation Act*, acquire and restore habitats needed by migratory wildlife, create multi-agency trail and greenway corridors, acquire and manage lands along waterways, promote public health through outdoor recreation, and preserve historic sites. *Transportation Alternatives* funding helps construct safe road crossings and connections for regional trails. *Save America's Treasures* has supported design of exhibits for the District's Adlai E. Stevenson II Historic Home, and the *Institute for Museum and Library Services* has supported improved public access to the Lake County Discovery Museum and its archives. *USDA Wildlife Services* provide contracted assistance to the District and other nearby conservation agencies.

### **No Child Left Inside**

Support passage of the No Child Left Inside Act or similar future legislation to promote environmental education in our schools in order to give future citizens the information and critical thinking skills that they will need to address the environmental issues facing our region, nation and world. Also supported are other legislation and initiatives to encourage children to become active outdoors to reduce childhood obesity, improve mental health and develop an interest in nature and conservation.

### **Conservation and Trail Easement Incentives**

Congress has regularly extended enhanced tax incentives for donors of conservation easements, but allowed the incentives and did so again recently through December 31, 2013. The incentives need to continue to be reinstated in the future and made permanent or multiyear to assist the District in securing needed conservation and trail easements.

### **Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge**

Continued implementation of the Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge in northeastern Illinois and southeastern Wisconsin is supported. As proposed, Hackmatack will protect private property rights, retain local ownership and control of existing public forest preserves, conservation areas and parks. It also will enhance protection and restoration of habitat for federally and state-listed endangered and threatened species, and expand public education and outdoor recreation opportunities, all nearby to the Chicago region and other major metropolitan areas in the Midwest.

### **ACOE and Upper Des Plaines River Project**

Support the Army Corps of Engineers and Upper Des Plaines River Project Phase II while understanding the associated financial implications and risks.