



LAKE COUNTY FOREST PRESERVES
www.LCFPD.org

Preservation, Restoration, Education and Recreation

DATE: October 1, 2018

MEMO TO: Craig Taylor, Chair
Operations Committee

Carol Calabresa, Chair
Planning Committee

FROM: John E. Nelson, Director
Operations and Infrastructure

FOR INFORMATION ONLY: The removal of a building, road and parking lots at Almond Marsh Forest Preserve to address public safety concerns, eliminate unneeded infrastructure and environmental impacts, and reduce operational costs.

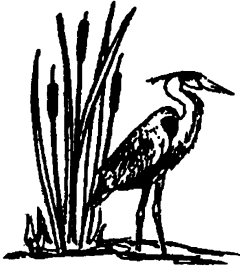
STRATEGIC DIRECTION SUPPORTED: Organizational Sustainability

FINANCIAL DATA: The removal of the 5,585 sf building is expected to save approximately \$6,000.00 in annual operating costs. The removal of the 49,437 sf of pavement is expected to save approximately \$5,000.00 in annual operating costs and avoid the long-term capital cost of replacing the pavement, which is estimated at approximately \$137,000.00 based on an estimate of \$25.00 per square yard to resurface.

BACKGROUND: On November 30, 2015, January 4, 2016 and January 7, 2016, the District's standing committees considered and issued policy direction regarding the removal of the former Planning Office building at Almond Marsh following expiration of the license agreement with Conserve Lake County. The license has now ended and the building was fully vacated in July, 2018. Operation staff will be removing the building this coming winter 2018-19. In conjunction with the removal of the building, Operation staff will remove the entire paved area and restore a total of approximately two acres of the site to match the surrounding conditions. The driveway apron and swing gate along Almond Road will remain in place to allow for future access for natural resource management activities.

In recent years, the Almond Marsh parking lot was used approximately 12-14 days per year by the District for the Rookery Watch program held in the spring. Education staff intends to cease the Rookery Watch at Almond Marsh and provide similar programming opportunities at other sites starting in 2019.

REVIEW BY OTHERS: Chief Operations Officer, Director of Planning and Land Preservation, Director of Natural Resources, Director of Education, Director of Finance, Corporate Counsel.



**Lake County Audubon Society
P.O. Box 332
Libertyville, IL 60048**

September 7, 2018

To: Lake County Board Members
From: LAKE COUNTY AUDUBON SOCIETY
RE: Almond Marsh Forest Preserve Closure

It has come to our attention that there is a discussion at the committee level about the plans to close Almond Marsh Forest Preserve. We've heard that there is a plan to tear down the building on the site as well as tear out the road.

We understand that it is the practice of the Lake County Forest Preserve District to tear down redundant buildings, but we were astonished and chagrined to learn that you will remove access as well. Consider this a letter of objection from the LCAS board to that portion of your plan.

We are a local environmental group that has invested ten years in a variety of contributions to the Almond Marsh Forest Preserve. Here are reasons that we request that you continue to provide periodic access to the public:

- State endangered Black Crowned Night Herons are known to nest there. Our future plans had considered improving the habitat further to encourage a nesting colony.
- It is a key educational location, with the Great Blue Heron rookery as the center point for teaching adults and children about the ecology of the area with the team of committed volunteers who have dedicated hundreds of hours at the spring Saturday morning open house events there. These monitors have been organized and supervised by LCAS board member, Jack Nowak, who has kept historical records of the bird population there for more than 10 years. Visitors are in awe of the squadrons of Great Egrets that fly in to roost on the island there. Sandhill Cranes strut through the restored prairie habitat. Many species of ducks are observed there, Wood Ducks nest there. The threatened Least Bittern has been observed there over time. The dozen artificial nesting platforms we installed and enhanced over time are the focus that draws visitors. Schools bring their students to the rookery, which has formed the basis of several school projects.
- If we allow this site to revert to a wild state without the stewardship provided by Don Wilson, another LCAS board member, the buckthorn presence will affect the reproductive success of the salamander and frog populations; oriental bittersweet and other invasives will dramatically contribute to the degradation of this habitat over time.

- An Eastern Bluebird trail is located at Almond Marsh. If access to the preserve is removed, this trail will not be able to be monitored. Nest boxes left unmonitored may lead to breeding success for invasive bird species like the House Sparrow.
- Members of the public are very appreciative of annual educational events we provide there, such as *Welcome Back Herons* in early spring, and *Cheese and Crackers with the Birds*, mid-June. Our attendance at each of the *Welcome Back Herons* events has been in excess of a hundred people over the last few years and has included many families who bring their children to learn about the birds and their habitat. Our future plans included a celebration of our ten years' work at the rookery. In many cases, we are identified as the group that, working with and in collaboration with the Lake County Forest Preserve District, has elevated the public's awareness of this significant site as an important habitat. Members of the public, not exclusively Audubon members, supporters of the Lake County Forest Preserve District, will be very upset once this current plan is revealed.

For these reasons, we request that you re-consider the current plans under discussion and get to a point of moderating them to accommodate the request for occasional public access that we have iterated.

Very truly yours,

Emma England
President

The mission of the Lake County Audubon Society is Education, Conservation and Restoration of natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity.