



Preservation Foundation of the Lake County Forest Preserves

DATE: August 11, 2021

MEMO TO: Nels Leutwiler, Chair
Preservation Foundation Board

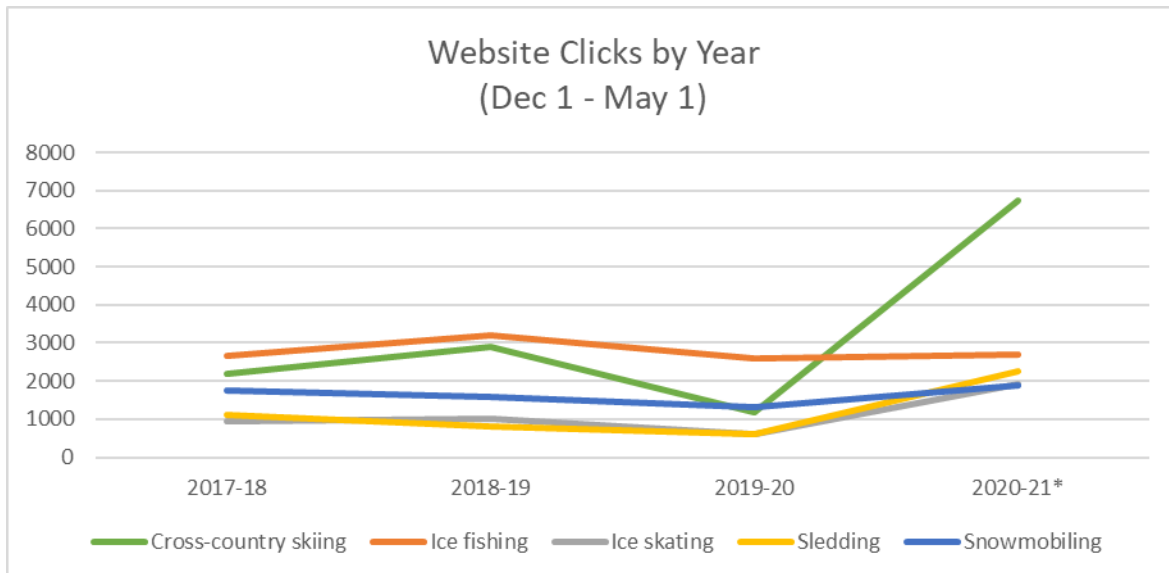
FROM: John Nelson
Director of Operations and Infrastructure

RECOMMENDATION: Recommend approval of a \$13,600 grant from unrestricted funds to purchase capital equipment to enhance cross-country skiing conditions in the Forest Preserves.

FINANCIAL DATA: As of June 30, 2021, the Preservation Foundation had \$301,882 in unrestricted funding. Staff anticipates raising an additional \$58,000 by December 31.

The total of grants payable from unrestricted funds is: \$11,798 (2021); \$100,965 (2022) and \$57,350 (2023).

BACKGROUND: Throughout 2020 use of the Forest Preserves increased approximately 70% and has remained approximately 30% above pre-pandemic levels through the first half of 2021. This included an increase in use through Winter 2020-2021 and across the variety of winter sports activities available to visitors. The most significant increase in winter activities by far, was cross-country skiing. Based on visits to the District's website for various activities, interest in cross-country skiing has increased more than 230% from pre-pandemic levels, as shown in the graph below of website visits between December 1 and May 1 each year.



**12/1/2020 – 2/1/2021: all other years represent 12/1 through 5/1.*

Currently, the District's Grounds Maintenance staff grooms trails for cross-country skiing using snowmobiles with a small tow-behind groomer for classic skiing. The snowmobiles used are 1996 Arctic Cats. At 25 years old, the Mechanical Services staff does their best to keep at least two of the three snowmobiles operational during the season; however, repair parts are becoming difficult to obtain. During the busy 2020/21 winter, crews only had one working snowmobile for much of the season as they groomed trails at Lakewood in the western half of the County and along the Des Plaines River Trail at Old School and MacArthur Woods in the eastern half of the County.

In 2022, one Utility Task Vehicle (UTV) used by the Grounds Maintenance staff will be due for replacement through the District's Vehicle Replacement Fund at an estimated cost of \$22,000. We propose to take advantage of this planned replacement by purchasing snow tracks (\$5,300) that could be seasonally mounted on the UTV, as well as a new 72-inch groomer with a two-track on one side (\$8,300).

The proposed purchase would leverage the District's equipment budget, avoiding the cost of purchasing a new snowmobile for the purpose of grooming trails alone. In addition, a 72-inch groomer would make it possible for staff to groom the entire 12-foot wide trail, in two passes—one out and one back—with two ski tracks on either side of the trail and an 8-ft wide flat area in the middle for skate skiing and fat-tire biking.

A grant from the Preservation Foundation would accelerate the District's ability to serve a rapidly growing user group: cross-country skiers, as well as skate skiers and fat-tire bike riders. If a grant is awarded, the items could be purchased in time for use during the 2021/22 winter season.

If the products work as expected, and user demand continues to grow, staff is likely to request District funds to purchase additional snow tracks and groomers as more UTVs are due for replacement in 2023. This would allow staff to groom more trails in more areas of the county.

REVIEW BY OTHERS: Chief Operations Officer, Chief Development Officer/Executive Director of the Preservation Foundation.

PRESERVATION FOUNDATION BOARD:

Date: _____

Roll Call Vote: Ayes: _____ Nays: _____
Voice Vote Majority Ayes: _____ Nays: _____