



**Preservation Foundation**  
of the Lake County Forest Preserves

**DATE:** February 9, 2022

**MEMO TO:** Nels Leutwiler, Chair  
Preservation Foundation Board

**FROM:** Pati Vitt  
Director of Natural Resources

**RECOMMENDATION:** Recommend approval of a \$30,600 contingent grant from unrestricted funds to provide partial support for a YCC crew from 2022 through 2024.

**FINANCIAL DATA:** The requested funds will be paid in equal installments of \$10,200 in 2022, 2023, and 2024 and will be matched by a \$30,000 donation from a private foundation (request is pending). If the pending grant is not funded, this grant will not be paid.

As of December 31, 2021, the Foundation’s total of unrestricted funding was \$379,652.20. Grants payable from the unrestricted funds as of December 31, 2021, include:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Amount</b>
2022	\$131,406
2023	\$69,350
2024	\$12,000
<b>Total Grants Payable from Unrestricted Funds</b>	<b>\$212,756</b>

**BACKGROUND:** The District is employing multiple strategies to ensure it serves and attracts Lake County’s diverse population, including employees, volunteers, and preserve patrons. Toward this end, we request funding to expand on the successful YCC program model by targeting recruitment for one crew from three specific communities: North Chicago, Waukegan, and Zion. This request would fund one additional YCC crew – comprised of one crew leader, one assistant crew leader, and three crew members – for 2022, 2023, and 2024.

For more than 40 years, YCC has provided Lake County high school students with a summer job working in the Forest Preserves. Students benefit from a paid work experience, as well one day each week of environmental education and learning about career and educational pathways in conservation, restoration, and parks and recreation. The Forest Preserves benefits from the restoration and public access improvement projects completed by the six YCC crews each summer.

In a typical summer season, six crews, each with six crew members, are hired – a total of 36 students – through a lottery system. With this grant, we propose to establish an additional YCC crew comprised of three students, one crew leader, and one assistant crew leader, chosen from North Chicago, Waukegan, or Zion to specifically work on Forest Preserves in these communities: Greenbelt and Lyons Woods Forest Preserves. For the students, the goal is to provide a paid work experience, encourage comfort in spending time outdoors, and inspire

appreciation for nature and the forest preserves. For the Forest Preserves, the goal is to inspire crew members to become local ambassadors in the community: spreading appreciation for our preserves while advertising the opportunities for employment and for volunteering. This approach takes advantage of the proven YCC model, which brings youth from across the county together and creates a pipeline of job training for future full-time employees.

### **Preserves Served by the Proposed YCC Crew**

Greenbelt Forest Preserve has been transformed over the past decade. The removal of dense buckthorn-infested thickets, control of cattails, and the installation of native trees, shrubs, wetland plugs, as well as hundreds of pounds of seed has dramatically increased the native plant cover and habitat quality. As a result of these efforts, the trails feel more welcoming, and trail usage has subsequently increased. The racial and gender diversity of users has increased as well. To both maintain this progress and to expand these efforts, the District recently secured two federal grants to fund follow-up invasive species control and expand restoration efforts to new units on the west side of Green Bay Road.

In addition to restoration efforts at Greenbelt, support from the Preservation Foundation helped establish a dedicated volunteer stewardship group at Greenbelt. The volunteer Steward who leads the workdays is a local resident and employee of the local school district and will be available to assist with the efforts of the YCC crew at Greenbelt.

Nearby Lyons Woods Forest Preserve is home to the District's newest Stewardship group, led by Preservation Foundation Board Member Bob Shears. This is the first volunteer restoration work group at this preserve. After years with YCC and the LCFPD volunteer program, Bob is now running workdays and leveraging his connections to improve Lyons while also helping local youth learn about the nature in their neighborhood. For most of these volunteers, these workdays are the first time they have ever stepped off-trail. For some of them, it's the first time they have been in a forest preserve. We are seeking funds to expand this experience to underrepresented members of the community, as not everyone has the capacity to volunteer.

In collaboration with YCC, this program will offer summer employment opportunities for high school students from Waukegan, North Chicago and/or Zion. These students will gain job skills, spend time in nature, and learn about careers in conservation, restoration, landscape architecture, and environmental education. Many former YCC students have pursued careers within the fields of environmental sciences, planning and outdoor recreation.

Crew members will be selected from the local community to work at Greenbelt and Lyons Woods Forest Preserves, as well as additional opportunities to work at the RAMSAR-dedicated Lake Plain. The crew will participate in the removal of invasive species removal such as buckthorn and dame's rocket, install native plants, and survey remnant and restored areas for endangered rusty patched bumblebees. There will also be opportunities to work with the volunteer Stewards, Natural Resources staff, and other YCC personnel.

Members of this YCC crew will explore remnant prairies, oak woodlands, and multiple types of wetlands. They will learn what makes this area special: piping plovers, rusty patch bumblebees, rare sedges, New Jersey tea, big majestic oaks, and the importance of these preserves along the migratory flyway for birds, butterflies, and dragonflies. The District will benefit from this

program in the short-term by expanding our restoration efforts at these preserves, as well as in the long-term by expanding our outreach efforts in a very deep and meaningful way that may well prove transformational for the participants.

**Budget:**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Cost</b>
YCC crew leader & assistant crew leader: \$4,250 per person/season	\$25,500
YCC crew members: 3 crew members/season * \$3,900/crew member * 3 seasons	\$35,100
<b>Total Cost</b>	<b>\$60,600</b>

**REVIEW BY OTHERS:** Executive Director, Chief Operations Officer, Preservation Foundation Executive Director.

**PRESERVATION FOUNDATION BOARD:**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_  Roll Call Vote: Ayes: \_\_\_\_ Nays: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Voice Vote Majority Ayes; Nays: \_\_\_\_\_