



DATE: January 9, 2023

Agenda Item # 10.9

MEMO TO: John Wasik, Chair
Planning Committee

FROM: Rebekah Snyder
Director of Community Engagement & Partnerships

RECOMMENDATION: Recommend approval of a Resolution approving a Memorandum of Agreement to designate St. Francis Woods (Independence Grove Forest Preserve) as part of the Old-Growth Forest Network.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS SUPPORTED: Leadership; Communication, Education and Outreach

FINANCIAL DATA: There is no financial impact.

BACKGROUND: The Old-Growth Forest Network (OGFN) is a national nonprofit organization that works to connect people to nature by creating a national network of protected, publicly-accessible old-growth forests. OGFN works with volunteers across the country to identify and dedicate protected, publicly accessible old-growth forests, with a goal of at least one in every county in the United States where forests grow.

Old-growth forests are remarkably rare. In the eastern US, less than 1 percent remain; in the western US, less than 5 percent remain. Like all forested lands, their ecological benefits are well documented: improved groundwater and surface water quality, formation and preservation of healthy soils, reduced ambient air pollution, carbon sequestration. However, untouched old-growth forests exhibit a number of important properties that younger, disturbed forests may not.

An old-growth forest may have more fallen and decaying trees, as well as trees with more established root structures and a higher average height. This provides a greater variety of habitats, greater access to some important nutrients, greater soil drainage and aeration, and other benefits, which, in turn, promote greater plant, animal, and insect diversity.

To date, OGFN has designated 151 forests in 28 states, ranging from federally-designated Wilderness Areas to local parks. An OGFN volunteer coordinator for Lake County assessed multiple forests to determine the most suitable site for nomination as part of OGFN. A 24-acre portion of Independence Grove Forest Preserve known as St. Francis Woods and shown in Exhibit A to the attached resolution has been nominated to become Lake County's first designated OGFN forest. If approved, it will be the first OGFN designation in Illinois.

The purpose an OGFN designation is to raise awareness about the unique benefits of old-growth forests and increase support for their preservation and long-term care. Designated forests are added to the OGFN website, and a public recognition ceremony will be organized and hosted by both OGFN and the District.

There are no costs for an OGFN designation, and it does not restrict management activities; however, the Memorandum of Agreement, included as Exhibit B to the attached resolution, must be approved and signed by the District.

The terms of the Memorandum of Agreement have been reviewed and determined acceptable by the Director of Natural Resources. The attached resolution authorizes the Executive Director to sign the Memorandum of Agreement.

REVIEW BY OTHERS: Executive Director, Chief Operations Officer, Director of Natural Resources, Corporate Counsel.

**LAKE COUNTY FOREST PRESERVE DISTRICT
LAKE COUNTY, ILLINOIS**

**A RESOLUTION APPROVING A MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT TO
DESIGNATE ST. FRANCIS WOODS (INDEPENDENCE GROVE) AS PART OF THE
OLD-GROWTH FOREST NETWORK**

WHEREAS, the Lake County Forest Preserve District (the “District”) owns and manages the approximately 24-acre area known as St. Francis Woods, located within Independence Grove Forest Preserve and generally depicted on Exhibit A; and

WHEREAS, St. Francis Woods is identified as an old-growth forest, which are remarkably rare within the United States; and

WHEREAS, the ecological benefits of old-growth forests are well documented and include improved groundwater and surface water quality, formation and preservation of healthy soils, reduced ambient air pollution, and carbon sequestration; and

WHEREAS, old-growth forests have more fallen and decaying trees, trees with more established root structures, and trees with a higher average height, providing a greater variety of habitats, greater access to some important nutrients, greater soil drainage and aeration, and other benefits, which, in turn, promote greater plant, animal, and insect diversity; and

WHEREAS, the Old-Growth Forest Network (“OGFN”) is a national nonprofit organization that works to connect people to nature by creating a national network of protected, publicly-accessible old-growth forests; and

WHEREAS, OGFN has nominated St. Francis Woods for designation as the first OGFN-designated old-growth forest in Lake County and in Illinois; and

WHEREAS, raising awareness of the importance of old-growth forests and inspiring the public to value old-growth forests is in the best interests of the District; and

WHEREAS, it is in the best interests of the District to approve a Memorandum of Agreement with OGFN in substantially the form attached hereto as Exhibit B (the “Memorandum of Agreement”); and

WHEREAS, the Memorandum of Agreement designates St. Francis Woods as part of OGFN’s national Old-Growth Forest Network;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Board of Commissioners of the Lake County Forest Preserve District, Lake County, Illinois **THAT**:

Section 1. Recitals. The recitals set forth above are incorporated as a part of this Resolution by this reference.

Section 2. Approval of Memorandum of Agreement. The Memorandum of Agreement, in substantially the form attached as Exhibit B, is hereby approved. The Executive Director of the District is authorized to execute, on behalf of the District, the Memorandum of Agreement, in substantially the form attached hereto. By approving the Memorandum of Agreement, the District does not intend to grant to OGFN any real property right or real property interest in St. Francis Woods.

Section 3. Effective Date. This Resolution shall be in full force and effect from and after its passage and approval in the manner provided by law.

PASSED this _____ day of _____, 2023

AYES:

NAYS:

APPROVED this _____ day of _____, 2023

Angelo D. Kyle, President
Lake County Forest Preserve District

ATTEST:


Julie Gragnani, Secretary

Exhibit No. _____

St. Francis Woods - Old Growth Forest Network



Disclaimer: Property boundaries and other data provided is for general information only and not for commercial purposes. The District provides this data for the user's exclusive use only. Any re-use, transmission, duplication, or distribution without the permission of the District is prohibited. Map sources include: Lake County GIS Division | Base map: 2022 Aerial

 **Lake County Forest Preserves**
Map Created on 11/23/2022

0 500 1,000
Feet

N

L
E
G
E
N
D

	Old Growth Forest (drawn from 1939 aerial)		Forest Preserve Easement
	Forest Preserve Property		Des Plaines River Trail

MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT

To include a forest in the Old-Growth Forest Network

Recognizing that less than 1% of the eastern US forests, and less than 5% of the western US forests, have remained undisturbed long enough to develop old-growth characteristics.

Recognizing that many species of plants, animals, and fungi are most successful in older forests.

Recognizing that the older forests are best at purifying the air and the water, and creating fertile soil.

Recognizing that most humans consider older forests to be the most beautiful forests, and will travel to see them.

Recognizing that ecotourism is economically beneficial for nearby communities.

Recognizing that all people, but especially the younger generations, need contact with natural areas.

Therefore

The *Old-Growth Forest Network* shall be established. Every county where forests can grow will be invited to designate a forest to be part of the network. These forests shall serve as examples of baseline conditions. They shall remain unlogged for all time, allowing old-growth characteristics to develop naturally. These forests will be open to visitation by all ages. Exceptions to the ‘no logging’ requirement are allowed for situations of visitor safety, trail maintenance, non-native tree species, and non-native insect infestations. Additionally, exceptions can include not for profit low-impact restoration activities that promote restoration of native, old-growth forests, outlined by a forest management plan.

For Lake County in the State of Illinois , the forest to be designated as part of the network shall be St. Francis Woods (Independence Grove Forest Preserve) which is owned by Lake County Forest Preserve District

(Signature of landowner’s representative)

(Signature of OGFN representative)

(Date)

(Date)

 Alex Ty Kovach
(Printed name of landowner representative)

(Printed name of OGFN representative)

 Executive Director
(Title of landowner representative)

(Title of OGFN representative)

Mailing Address for Landowner: 1899 West Winchester Road, Libertyville, IL 60048