



Preservation Foundation
of the Lake County Forest Preserves

DATE: May 25, 2023

TO: Nels Leutwiler, Chair
Preservation Foundation Board

FROM: Dr. Pati Vitt
Director of Natural Resources

RECOMMENDATION: Recommend approval of a \$60,000 grant to control invasive species and protect the Eastern Prairie Fringed Orchid at Wadsworth Savanna Forest Preserve.

FINANCIAL DATA: The requested funds will be paid over the next three years. As of March 31, 2023, the Foundation’s total unrestricted funding was \$417,198.88. Grants paid and payable from the unrestricted fund after March 31, 2023, include:

Year	Amount
April 2023 Transfer	\$51,500
2023	\$73,150
2024	\$26,300
2025	\$11,000
Total Payable from Unrestricted Funds	\$188,315

BACKGROUND:

Non-native Reed Canary Grass is an ongoing threat to all Midwestern wetlands. This invasive grass out-competes other vegetation by forming single-species expanses where once a diverse mix of grass and flowers occurred. It covers tens of thousands of acres of unmanaged wetlands throughout Lake County.

Wadsworth Savanna Forest Preserves contains our system’s (and likely the county’s) highest quality mesic and wet prairie communities remaining today. These wet prairies harbor an incredibly rich plant and animal community, including a large federally threatened eastern prairie fringed orchid population. The orchid population has been monitored by District staff in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services’ Federal Recovery Plan. Annual censusing, hand pollinations, seed exchanges, and deer herbivory protection are part of the District’s 30+ years of commitment to protect this species from global extinction. We implement frequent prescribed burns to maintain the orchid’s prairie habitat and control invasive species, including buckthorn, teasel, and reed canary grass. Without these management measures, Illinois will lose one of its most important locations for this species.

The Natural Resource Department has applied for an Illinois Department of Natural Resources Natural Area Stewardship grant. If awarded this fall, the \$60,000 grant will provide funds to support the control of invasive woody shrubs that threaten the orchid habitat at Wadsworth Savanna. This grant will fund a triage (critical) effort to rescue disappearing orchid habitat.

To bolster our efforts and expand critical orchid habitat beyond the IDNR grant's possibilities, we request the Preservation Foundation fund a 3-year effort at Wadsworth Savanna to control reed canary grass throughout 300 acres. Currently, scattered but small stands of reed canary grass occur in high-quality wet prairies. These small patches grow larger each year and usurp the rare habitat. In more degraded areas of Wadsworth and likely NEW orchid habitat, reed canary grass covers approximately 50 acres in monotypic stands. Funding will support contractual services to herbicide reed canary grass in key areas for a three-year period. Control of this invasive plant and prescribed burning is the best management tool to ensure this orchid has a protected and managed place in our forest preserves.

REQUEST --\$60,000

\$45,000 for three years of reed canary grass control (\$15K/year)

\$15,000 for native seed for areas of extensive reed canary grass treatment

REVIEW BY OTHERS: Executive Director of the Preservation Foundation, Director of Community Engagement, Chief Operating Officer, Deputy Finance Director, Director of Operations and Infrastructure, Director of Administration

PRESERVATION FOUNDATION BOARD:

Date: _____ Roll Call Vote: Ayes: ____ Nays: _____

Voice Vote Majority Ayes; Nays: _____