



**DATE:** April 1, 2024

**MEMO TO:** Paras Parekh, Chair  
Planning Committee

Gina Roberts, Chair  
Finance Committee

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

**REQUEST:** Provide policy direction regarding the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations Program.

**STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS SUPPORTED:** Leadership, Conservation

**FINANCIAL DATA:** There is no financial impact at this time.

**BACKGROUND:** In November 2023, the Lake County Stormwater Management Commission (SMC) contacted the Director of Natural Resources to request the District's cooperation with an effort to reduce flooding in the Upper Des Plaines River Watershed in conjunction with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Illinois State Office (IL-NRCS). IL-NRCS and SMC, serving as project sponsor, will be developing a Watershed Plan/Environmental Assessment (Plan/EA) for the Upper Des Plaines River Watershed in 2024-2025. Together, the District, IL-NRCS and SMC evaluated various portions of District preserves within the proposed project area to determine eligibility for inclusion in the Plan/EA. Three priority areas emerged from these discussions: Pine Dunes, Duck Farm, and Independence Grove Forest Preserves. The Plan/EA will focus specifically on flood reduction opportunities in Lake County, with an emphasis on wetland restoration and wetland creation. The District would cooperate with IL-NRCS and SMC in this endeavor, and District sites will be evaluated for restoration potential, engineering feasibility, and flood reduction benefits.

The Plan/EA process will be conducted in accordance with the rules and guidelines of the National Environmental Policy Act and the Council on Environmental Quality. Public meetings will be held so that the local community can provide input and feedback. A project website will be developed so that interested parties and stakeholders can obtain current information. IL-NRCS, the District, and the SMC are committed to including the local community and interested stakeholders in this planning process.

Development of the Plan/EA will be funded 100% under the NRCS Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations Program. Funding authority is through the Federal Flood Control Act of 1944 (Public Law 83-566) and allows IL-NRCS to provide both technical and financial watershed assistance to help communities reduce flooding, protect the watershed, and enhance the quality of their natural resources. IL-NRCS will contract with a private architecture and engineering firm to develop the

Plan/EA. Project initiation is scheduled for spring/summer of 2024. There are likely to be costs associated with project implementation, which will be determined as the plan develops. If the District chooses to implement any of the projects developed as a result of the Plan/EA process, the NRCS Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations Program provides opportunities for cost-share funding. The percent of cost-share will be dependent upon the actions recommended by the Plan/EA for each project area. The District will be under no obligation to pursue fulfillment of implementation projects after the Plan/EA is completed.

Staff seeks policy direction to continue coordinating with IL-NRCS and SMC on the Plan/EA process.

**REVIEW BY OTHERS:** Chief Operations Officer, Director of Finance, Manager of Board Operations, Corporate Counsel.