

**EFFICIENCY REPORT FOR THE
LAKE COUNTY FOREST PRESERVE DISTRICT**

**APPROVED BY THE DISTRICT'S
DECENNIAL COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY
ON SEPTEMBER 11, 2024**



I. Purpose

The Lake County Forest Preserve District (“District”) formed its Decennial Committee on Local Government Efficiency (the “Committee”) on May 10, 2023, to study efficiencies and report recommendations regarding those efficiencies and increased accountability pursuant to the Decennial Committees on Local Government Efficiency Act, 50 ILCS 70/1, *et seq.* (the “Act”).

II. Committee Membership

The Committee consisted of the following individuals:

Angelo D. Kyle, District President and Committee Chair

Marah Altenberg, District Commissioner

Esiah Campos, District Commissioner

Carissa Casbon, District Commissioner

Jennifer Clark, District Commissioner

Mary Ross Cunningham, District Commissioner

Michael Danforth, District Commissioner

Paul Frank, District Commissioner

Sandy Hart, District Commissioner

Diane Hewitt, District Commissioner

Elizabeth Hough, Resident Member

J. Kevin Hunter, District Commissioner

Sara Knizhnik, District Commissioner

Alex Kovach, District Executive Director

Nels Leutwiler, Resident Member

Ann B. Maine, District Commissioner

Paras Parekh, District Commissioner

Linda Pedersen, District Commissioner

Gina Roberts, District Commissioner

Adam Schlick, District Commissioner

Jessica Vealitzek, District Commissioner

John Wasik, District Commissioner

III. Committee Meetings

The Committee met as follows:

Meeting Date	Meeting Time and Place
November 15, 2023	10:25 AM, District General Offices 1899 W Winchester Road, Libertyville, IL 60048
May 15, 2024	10:15 AM, District General Offices
September 11, 2024	9 AM, District General Offices

Minutes of these meetings are available on the District’s website or upon request at the District’s General Offices.

IV. General Overview of Governing Statutes, Ordinances, Rules, Procedures, Powers, Jurisdiction

The District was established by a referendum initiated and approved by the voters of Lake County in 1958. All Illinois forest preserve districts outside of Cook County, including the Lake County Forest Preserve District, are governed by the Downstate Forest Preserve Act, 70 ILCS 805/.001 *et seq.*

Having a separate and distinct taxing body for the permanent protection of land for the purposes of conservation and enjoyment of the public is extremely beneficial to the community for many reasons, as detailed further in this report.

- **Elected Board.** The District is governed by a board of 19 commissioners. They are elected as Lake County Board members and, by operation of law, also serve as District Commissioners. Commissioners must reside within the boundaries of their district, are elected as County Board members at the General Election in even-numbered years and serve either a two- or four-year term.
- **Accessible and focused representation.** Community members have direct access to their elected representatives, who oversee District facilities, programs, and services. In their dual roles as Lake County Board Members and District Commissioners, each elected official is able to focus on the specific issues and concerns of the District, independent of broader County issues, which is particularly advantageous when it comes to budget and finance oversight.
- **Increased transparency.** Having an elected board with separate governance duties from the County of Lake supports transparency and openness related to the Board and District operations. Having detailed agenda and action items allows taxpayers to be better informed about the inner workings of their local government. When individual special purpose units of government, like forest preserve districts, are responsible for providing specific, focused services, transparency is increased because action items and budget procedures are more detailed.
- **Protection of revenues.** The District is an independent unit of local government, and its property tax levy and other revenues are used only for District purposes. This assurance is contrasted with general purpose governments like cities, villages, and counties, which in some cases may use general property tax levies and other revenues for park and recreation purposes as well as a variety of other services such as fire, police, public works, and economic development.
- **Protection of assets.** Land owned by the District is held in trust for the residents of Lake County, and, subject to limited exceptions, cannot be sold.

- **Providing the community more with less.** The District does more with fewer funding options. Other units of local government may receive tax revenues from property, income, sales, use, hotel/motel, motor fuel, and other taxes. In contrast, the District’s only tax revenues come from a modest portion of a property owner’s overall property tax bill and from the state replacement tax. In fact, despite its limited funding options, the District’s share of the average taxpayer’s annual property tax bill was less than 1.9 percent in 2024.

As part of good governance and implementing best practices in the management of day-to-day operations, the District has also adopted the following ordinances, rules, policies, and procedures:

1. 100 Year Vision for Lake County
2. 2022 – 2024 Rules of Order and Operational Procedures
3. Bond Record Keeping Policy for Tax-Exempt Bonds
4. Closed Session Minutes and Verbatim Records Policy
5. Deer Management Policy
6. Diversity Affirmation
7. Environmental Sustainability Policy
8. Ordinance Regulating Ethical Conduct and Political Activities by Elected Officials and Employees
9. Farm Management Program Policy
10. Ordinance Establishing Fees and Charges for District Permits, Programs, Services, and Facilities
11. Fundraising Authorization Policy
12. Ordinance Governing the General Use of District Property
13. Gift Recognition Policy
14. Green Fleet Policy
15. Investment Policy
16. Mosquito Management Policy
17. Collections Policy for the Bess Bower Dunn Museum of Lake County

18. P-Card and Purchasing Procedures
19. Personnel Policies and Procedures
20. Policy Regarding Ownership and Use of District Housing
21. Prescribed Burn Management Policy
22. Public Safety and Natural Resource Protection Animal Management Policy
23. Public Safety Policy & General Rules
24. Purchasing Policy
25. Policy for Attendance at Public Meetings by Video or Audio Conference
26. Recreational Development Policy
27. Road Map to 2025
28. Policy for Reimbursement of Travel, Meal, and Lodging Expenses
29. Trail Policy

V. Shared Services and Collaborative Relationships

The District works diligently to provide the best possible programs, services, and facilities to our community at a reasonable cost. One of the many ways the District achieves this goal is by collaborating with other units of local government, the State of Illinois, federal departments and agencies, nonprofit organizations, utilities, and for-profit companies. Below is a representative list of current collaborative relationships that assist the District's mission of delivering the best possible services at the least possible cost to our community.

1. Audubon Great Lakes, Lake County Audubon
2. Chicago Botanic Garden
3. Chiwaukee Prairie – Illinois Beach Lake Plain Collaboration
4. Citizens for Conservation
5. College of Lake County
6. ComEd
7. County of Lake
8. Des Plaines River Watershed Work Group, other Lake County watershed work groups
9. Federal Government – e.g. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
10. Fox Waterway Agency
11. Illinois Department of Natural Resources
12. Illinois Department of Transportation
13. Lake Bluff Open Lands Association
14. Lake County Department of Transportation
15. Lake County Partners
16. Lake County Health Department
17. Lake County Stormwater Management Agency
18. Lake County Sheriff's Office

19. Lake Forest Open Lands Association
20. Libraries
21. Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago
22. Municipalities
23. The Nature Conservancy in Illinois, the Nature Conservancy in Wisconsin
24. Northern Illinois University
25. Openlands
26. Park districts
27. Preservation Foundation of the Lake County Forest Preserves
28. Regional Office of Education
29. School districts
30. Snowmobile clubs
31. Townships & Township Road Districts
32. University of Illinois Extension
33. Visit Lake County
34. Youth Conservation Corps, Inc. (YCC, Inc.)

VI. Other Examples of Efficient Operations

Use of volunteers. One way in which the District reduces the burden on taxpayers is through the use of volunteers. Last year, 1,145 individuals volunteered 19,000 hours of service to the District, representing a value of approximately \$570,000.

Joint purchasing. The District participates in joint purchasing cooperatives pursuant to the Governmental Joint Purchasing Act (30 ILCS 525/0.01 *et seq.*) thereby saving taxpayer dollars through economies of scale. For 2024, contracts procured through joint purchasing include:

Product	Government Contract	Price	Savings
Axon Public Safety Cameras (Body Worn & In-Car)	Sourcewell	\$ 397,843.29	1-10%
John Deere Compact Track Loader	Sourcewell	\$ 157,761.58	30%
Ford Police Interceptor Hybrid Vehicles (3)	Suburban Purchasing Cooperative	\$ 145,295.00	about 7.2%
Mean Green Zero-Turn Electric Mower	Sourcewell	\$ 32,273.98	10%
Kubota Utility Vehicles (6)	Sourcewell	\$ 154,146.18	22%
Toro Groundsmaster rough mower	Sourcewell	\$ 78,291.43	22%
Sand Pro 3040	Sourcewell	\$ 24,950.08	22%
Tractor	Sourcewell	\$ 28,773.84	22%
Forestry Mower-Mulcher	Sourcewell	\$ 345,404.07	10%
Toro Groundsmaster rough mower (1) & Greensmaster (2)	Sourcewell	\$ 216,335.25	22%
Ford Police Interceptor Vehicles (7)	State of Illinois Central Management Services	\$ 282,695.00	
Roller Compactor	Sourcewell	\$ 127,048.67	29%
Pumps & HVAC controls - GBCC	Omnia	\$ 184,967.00	
Kubota Utility Vehicle	Sourcewell	\$ 24,907.71	22%
Kubota Utility Vehicles (5)	Sourcewell	\$ 124,505.81	22%
Electric Cargo Vans (2)	Sourcewell	\$ 113,180.00	<1%
Electric Zero-Turn Mower	Sourcewell	\$ 38,876.00	10%
Backhoe Loader, Excavator, Track Loaders (2)	Sourcewell	\$ 550,415.15	32-46%
Asphalt Paver	Sourcewell	\$ 174,380.80	10%
Ford Police Interceptor Vehicles (3)	Suburban Purchasing Cooperative	\$ 110,494.00	roughly 7%
Toro Golf Equipment	Omnia	\$ 120,342.30	22%
Intellipak Rooftop Units - GO (2)	US Communities	\$ 452,000.00	22%
Variable Refrigerant Flow Systems	Omnia	\$ 149,033.00	22%
Toro Groundsmaster (2)	Omnia	\$ 68,382.77	21.80%
Compact Track Loader (w/trade-in)	Sourcewell	\$ 37,302.76	25.50%

Preservation Foundation. The Preservation Foundation of the Lake County Forest Preserves (the “Foundation”) is a 501c3 not for profit corporation dedicated to raising funds for the benefit of the District. The Foundation’s mission is to extend and accelerate the District’s goals through private philanthropy. Last year, the Foundation and the District’s Development (fundraising) Division raised more than \$8.5 million in private donations and grants, which provided funding that allowed the District to provide more service than tax funding alone would allow.

Between January 1, 2012 and June 30, 2024, the total amount raised in grants and donations through the Preservation Foundation and the Forest Preserves Development Division was \$37,328,030 – a 518% return on investment.

Collaboration with other conservation agencies and organizations on best practices. The District regularly collaborates with other governmental and non-governmental conservation agencies and organizations. Because these agencies are not in competition with one another, they are more willing than the private sector to share best practices. These best practices help to avoid unnecessary costs and deliver services more effectively and efficiently. District staff serve in leadership roles in the following associations:

Chicago Wilderness

Des Plaines River Watershed Workgroup

Illinois Association of Conservation and Forest Preserve Districts

National Association of County Park and Recreation Officials

Park District Risk Management Agency (PDRMA)

Public Sector HR Association (PSHRA)

Special Park District Forum Host Agency, June 2023

Reliance on Non-Tax Revenue. Unlike many local governments that rely on a range of sales, use, property, income, and other taxes, the District only levies real property taxes as specifically authorized by statute. Additionally, although the District is an economic engine for the community by providing facilities and programs that generate much revenue for the state and our community in the form of hotel/motel, sales, and motor fuel taxes, the District does not receive any of these revenues. The District also does not receive state funding under the Local Government Distributive Fund (LGDF) or General State Aid (GSA), as do cities, villages, counties, and school districts.

Instead, the District provides all of its programs, facilities, and services to the community with a very modest amount of property taxes, modest funding from the State personal property replacement tax, and from **non-tax sources** such as permit fees, facility rentals, program registrations, private donations and grants, and competitive state and federal grant programs.

VII. Transparency to the Community

The District publishes information about its governance, operations, and finances on the District's official website (LCFPD.org), including the following:

- Annual budget and appropriation ordinance
 - https://www.lcfpd.org/assets/1/7/2024_BOARD_APPROVED_BUDGET_ALL_SECTIONS_COMBINED_LINKED_WEB.pdf
- Board and Committee meeting agendas, minutes, and recordings
 - <https://www.lcfpd.org/who-we-are/board/>
- Comptroller's annual finance report (AFR)
 - <https://www.lcfpd.org/file.aspx?DocumentId=8633>
- Ordinances, Rules and Regulations
 - https://www.lcfpd.org/assets/1/28/2024_GENERAL_USE_ORDINANCE_AMENDMENT_A_PROVED_1-17-241.pdf
- Freedom of Information Act procedures, instructions, and forms
 - <https://www.lcfpd.org/who-we-are/foia/>
- Employee Compensation Packages over \$75,000
 - <https://www.lcfpd.org/assets/1/28/202097.pdf>
- 100 Year Vision and Strategic Plan
 - <https://www.lcfpd.org/vision/>
- ADA transition plan
 - <https://www.lcfpd.org/about/accessibility/>
- Foundation Annual Reports, Audits, and Tax Filings
 - <https://www.lcfpd.org/who-we-are/preservation-foundation/about-us/financials/>

Community Engagement

The District offers residents and other interested parties many opportunities to engage with District operations and governance and provide feedback. These include:

- The District's Board of Commissioners generally meets once each month, and the Board has established several standing and special committees. All Board and committee

meetings are conducted in accordance with the Open Meetings Act, and the District has established rules that allow for public comment at all meetings.

- The District's Annual Budget and Appropriation Ordinance is made available to the public in draft form prior to its adoption and is discussed and approved at an open meeting of the District Board.
- The District's annual property tax levy is approved at an open meeting of the District board in accordance with the Open Meetings Act. The District follows all public notice and hearing requirements under the Truth in Taxation Law prior to the adoption of its annual tax levies. The District's annual levy is also subject to the limitations of the Property Tax Extension Limitation Law.
- Residents may submit questions on the District's website at www.LCFPD.org, find staff contact information, or request information by calling 847-367-6640.
- The Foundation was established in 2007 as a private 501c3 not for profit corporation dedicated to raising funds for District purposes. Its board is comprised of 19 volunteers; two District Preserve commissioners who are appointed every two years by the District President; and the Executive Director of the District, who is an ex officio voting member.
- The District conducted countywide attitude and interest surveys in 2022 and 2019 to understand usage, interests, and what priorities the public has in mind for the District. In the most recent survey, 77% of residents rated the District positively, with 40% holding it in the highest regard. Residents believe its top priorities should be to care for the trails and preserves and to restore and manage natural lands for native plants and wildlife and for the services that nature provides, such as flood mitigation, cleaner air and water, and carbon storage. <https://www.lcfpd.org/high-marks/>

VIII. District Awards and Recognition

The District's achievements have been recognized in numerous ways. The list below captures just some of the agency and staff recognition received in recent years.

American Council of Engineering Companies

Special Achievement Award: 2019 Engineering Excellence Award for Middlefork Savanna Trail Connection

American Public Works Association

Project of the Year Award for Transportation Projects between \$5 and \$25 million: 2019 for the Middlefork Savanna Bridge and Trail Connection

Project of the Year Award for Habitat Restoration and Preservation: 2019 for the Middlefork Savanna Bridge and Trail Connection

Awards for Publication Excellence (APEX Awards)

Award of Excellence: Spring 2024 issue of *Horizons*

Grand Award: Winter 2023 issue of *Horizons*

Grand Award: Fall 2022 issue of *Horizons*

Award of Excellence: Spring-Summer 2022 *Horizons* Feature Article

Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP)

Regional Excellence Award Program: 2022 Regional Resilience Award for Buffalo Creek Reservoir Expansion

Chicago Wilderness

George B. Rabb Force of Nature Award, 2023: Chiwaukee Prairie-Illinois Beach Lake Plain Partnership

Excellence in Ecological Restoration Awards:

2023 Platinum Award: Greenbelt Forest Preserve

2021 Platinum Award: Pine Dunes Forest Preserve

2017 Platinum Award: MacArthur Woods Forest Preserve

2014 Platinum Award: Middlefork Savanna Forest Preserve

2013 Platinum Award: Spring Bluff Forest Preserve

Crain's Chicago Business

Executive Director Ty Kovach: 2023 Notable Leaders in Sustainability

Director of Natural Resources Dr. Pati Vitt: 2023 Notable Women in STEM

Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA)

Distinguished Budget Presentation Award (23 consecutive years)

Excellence in Financial Reporting Award (29 consecutive years)

Illinois Association of Park Districts

Best Green Practices Award, 2023

Illinois Association of Park Districts and Illinois Park and Recreation Association

2nd Place: 2024 Overall Agency Showcase Award

1st Place: 2024 Brochure for *Horizons* magazine.

2nd Place: 2024 Marketing Campaign for the 25th anniversary of Hike Lake County.

3rd Place: 2024 Social Media Campaign for the Beer Garden at Independence Grove.

Illinois Conservation Foundation

Outdoor Hall of Fame 2023 Inductee: Nan Buckardt, Director of Education (Retired)

National Association of County Park and Recreation Officials

2024 New Professional Award: Stephanie Bosack

2024 Outstanding Volunteer Award: Nels Leutwiler

2023 Lifetime Professional Award: Mike Tully (Retired)

2022 Park and Recreation Program Award: *Our Voice is Black History* Exhibition

2021 Conservation Award: Climate Resilient Restoration at Grant Woods Forest Preserve

2021 Outstanding Volunteer Award: Joyce and George Proper

2020 Outstanding Support Organization Award: Preservation Foundation of the Lake County Forest Preserves

2020 Outstanding Volunteer Award: Carol Hogan and Wes Wolf

2020 Planning Award: Lakewood Forest Preserve Master Plan

2019 Operational Facility Award: Bess Bower Dunn Museum

2018 Trails and Corridors Class II Award: Middlefork Savanna Bridge and Trail
Park District Rick Management Agency (PDRMA)

2020 – 2023 Risk Management Accreditation

Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), Chicago Chapter

2024 Skyline Award: “Best Use of Print/Online Publishing” for *Horizons*

2024 Excellence Award: “Content Marketing” for *Horizons*

IX. Benefits and Services

The District serves the entire community from the youngest child to the oldest adult and all ages in between. It does so in a variety of ways.

1. Facilities

The District offered the following facilities to the community last year:

- Preserves and Trails
 - <https://www.lcfpd.org/places-to-go/preserves-trails/>
- Golf Courses
 - <https://www.lcfpd.org/things-to-do/recreation/golf/>
- Marinas
 - <https://www.lcfpd.org/things-to-do/recreation/marinas/>
- Fishing
 - <https://www.lcfpd.org/things-to-do/recreation/fishing/>
- Horseback Riding
 - <https://www.lcfpd.org/things-to-do/recreation/equestrian-trails/>
- Dog Parks
 - <https://www.lcfpd.org/places-to-go/dog-parks/>
- Paddling
 - <https://www.lcfpd.org/things-to-do/recreation/boat-launches/>
- Winter Sports
 - <https://www.lcfpd.org/things-to-do/recreation/winter-sports/>
- Concerts
 - <https://www.lcfpd.org/things-to-do/concerts/>
- Dunn Museum
 - <https://www.lcfpd.org/museum/>
- Independence Grove
 - <https://www.lcfpd.org/ig/>
- Rental Shelters
 - <https://www.lcfpd.org/things-to-do/shelter-rentals/>

2. Programs

The District offered the following programs last year. Registration numbers are also provided.

- Education
 - <https://www.lcfpd.org/things-to-do/education/>
- Adult & Senior Group Programs
 - <https://www.lcfpd.org/things-to-do/education/adult-and-senior-programs/>
- School Programs
 - <https://www.lcfpd.org/things-to-do/education/school-programs/>
- Science Explorers in Nature
 - <https://www.lcfpd.org/science-explorers/>

- Scout Programs
 - <https://www.lcfpd.org/things-to-do/education/scout/>
- Summer Adventures
 - <https://www.lcfpd.org/things-to-do/education/summer/>
- Hike Lake County
 - <https://www.lcfpd.org/things-to-do/recreation/hlc/>

3. Additional Services

The District provides the following additional services to the community.

- Native Seed Nursery
 - <https://www.lcfpd.org/what-we-do/nursery/>
- Controlled Burns
 - <https://www.lcfpd.org/what-we-do/natural-resource-management/controlled-burns/>
- Deer Population Management
 - <https://www.lcfpd.org/what-we-do/natural-resource-management/deer-management/>
- Managing Invasive Species
 - <https://www.lcfpd.org/what-we-do/natural-resource-management/invasive-species/>
- Monitoring Plant Communities
 - <https://www.lcfpd.org/what-we-do/natural-resource-management/plant-monitoring/>
- Monitoring Wildlife Populations
 - <https://www.lcfpd.org/what-we-do/natural-resource-management/wildlife-monitoring/>
- Natural Resource Management
 - <https://www.lcfpd.org/what-we-do/natural-resource-management/>

4. Other Benefits

While the District is a special purpose district, its impact to the community is multi-faceted and far-reaching. For example, the District’s preserves, recreational programming, and other opportunities improve the community’s overall physical and mental health and wellness, thereby reducing health care costs. The District’s open space and trees help improve air and water quality, mitigate flooding, sequester carbon, and reduce surface temperatures.

X. Recommendations for Increased Accountability and Efficiency

1. Develop an Organization-Wide Environmental Sustainability Work Plan

The District's Environmental Sustainability and Green Fleet Policies were topics of Committee discussion. It was noted that the policies are out of date and do not capture the depth and breadth of work the District has done and plans to do to make the organization's operations more environmentally sustainable. The Committee received a report on progress made in the following categories:

Reducing Electricity

- Right-sizing number of buildings
- Right-sizing building square footage
- Retro-fitting existing buildings
- New buildings designed and operated for net-zero energy

Reducing Oil and Gas

- Right-sizing the vehicle fleet
- Vehicle replacements
- Major Equipment:
 - Second zero-turn electric mower
 - Monitoring for electric UTVs
 - (2) electric greens mowers
 - (2) electric ball pickers/range mowers
- Small Tools & Equipment:
 - Trimmers
 - Blowers
 - Pole saws
 - Chainsaws

Other Initiatives

- Eliminating/reducing single use plastics at District facilities and programs
- Reducing use of road salt on District properties
- Reducing impervious surfaces by right-sizing parking areas and other infrastructure
- Continuing strategic land acquisition, preservation, and restoration throughout the County

The Committee recommends that the District create an Environmental Sustainability Work Plan with specific, measurable goals and a timeline for implementation. The Work Plan should identify one or two key metrics, such as amount of carbon emitted/sequestered, establish a baseline measurement, set near-term targets, and identify specific action steps across all aspects of the District's operations to meet the goal.

Dated: SEPTEMBER 11, 2024

Signed: 

Angelo D. Kyle

Chair, Decennial Committee on Local Government Efficiency

President, Lake County Forest Preserve District