



Byron Forest Preserve District

Efficiency Report

Approved by the Byron Forest Preserve's Committee
on Local Government Efficiency
July 15, 2024.

Preservation ♦ Education ♦ Recreation

Purpose

The Byron Forest Preserve District (the “Forest Preserve”) formed its Committee on Local Government Efficiency on November 20, 2023, to study efficiencies and report recommendations regarding those efficiencies and increased accountability pursuant to 50 ILCS 70/1, et seq. (the “Committee”).

Committee Membership

The Committee consists of the following individuals:

Aaron Vincer, Board President

Chris Remhof, Board Vice President

Kris Baker, Board Secretary

Dave Breen, Treasurer

Steve Patterson, Commissioner

Sandy Brooks, Resident

Jeff Ludwig, Resident

Todd Tucker, Executive Director

Michelle Gerke, Recording Secretary

Committee Meetings

The Committee met on an established schedule as follows:

Meeting Date	Meeting Time and Place
November 20, 2023	5:00 PM – Jarrett Prairie Center
April 15, 2024	5:00 PM – Jarrett Prairie Center
July 15, 2024	5:00 PM – Jarrett Prairie Center

Minutes of these meetings are available upon request at the Forest Preserve’s administrative office.

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

The Forest Preserve was established in 1980. The Forest Preserve is governed by the Illinois Compiled Statutes, Special Districts, (70 ILCS 805/) Downstate Forest Preserve District Act.

Having a separate and distinct taxing body for preservation, education, and recreation within the local community, which operates apart from general purpose governments, is extremely beneficial to the community for many reasons, as detailed further in this report.

- **Elected, non-partisan, non-compensated board.** The Forest Preserve is governed by a board of FIVE commissioners. Commissioners must reside within the boundaries of the Forest Preserve and are elected at the Consolidated Election in odd-numbered years. Pursuant to state law, commissioners are non-partisan and serve without compensation.
- **Accessible and focused representation.** Having a dedicated board to oversee these essential facilities, programs, and services provides the community with increased access to their elected representatives and allows those representatives to remain focused solely on those facilities, programs, and services. This is contrasted with general purpose governments where elected representatives are responsible for broad oversight on a wide range of issues. This special purpose benefit is particularly advantageous when it comes to budget and finance oversight.
- **Increased transparency.** Having a dedicated unit of local government to provide preservation, education, and recreation services also improves the relationship between the Forest Preserve and its residents because of the transparency and openness related to the board and Forest Preserve operations. Having a detailed agenda and action items allows taxpayers to be better informed about the inner workings of their local government. When individual units of government are responsible for providing specified services like forest preserves, transparency is increased because action items and budget procedures are more detailed. Additionally, these items and budgetary decisions are subject to more scrutiny by locally elected officials than is the case with larger, multi-purpose governments with a multitude of departments.

- **Protection of revenues.** Because the Forest Preserve is a separate unit of local government, the revenues it generates can only be used for forest preserve purposes. This assurance is contrasted with general purpose governments like cities, villages, and counties that provide a multitude of services such as fire, police, public works, economic development, etc., where revenues that are generated specifically for preservation, education, and recreation can be expended on these other services with limited, if any, input from voters.
- **Protection of assets.** The Forest Preserve board may sell any one or more parcels of land owned by the Forest Preserve that are less than one acre in size whenever the board determines the sale to be advantageous to the Forest Preserve. The board shall approve the sale by a two-thirds vote of the members of the board then holding office. A sale may not be approved by the board unless all parcels of land involved in the sale have been appraised by an MAI appraiser or a State-certified real estate appraiser within one year before the date the sale is to take effect. The net proceeds of the sale of any parcel of land shall be set aside for the Forest Preserve's future land acquisitions and may not be utilized for any other purpose.
- **Providing the Community More with Less.** The Forest Preserve does more with much fewer funding options. Unlike other units of local government that receive direct state funding, and income, sales, use, hotel/motel, motor fuel, and other numerous taxes, the Forest Preserve's only tax revenues come from a modest portion of a resident's overall property tax bill. In fact, despite its limited funding options, the Forest Preserve share is only 6.7% of the local tax bill.

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

- Forest Preserve Organization Guidelines
- Board of Commissioners Manual
- General Use Regulations Ordinance
- Standard Operating Procedures
- Employee Handbook
- Finance / Human Resource Procedures
- Risk Management Manual
- Annual Budget
- Annual Audit Report

List of Shared Services and Partnerships

The Forest Preserve works diligently to provide the best possible programs, services, and facilities to our community at the least possible cost. One of the many ways the Forest Preserve achieves this goal is by partnering with neighboring forest preserves, park districts, school districts, other units of local government within or near the community, the State, non-profit organizations, and for-profit corporations. Below is a comprehensive list of the current partnerships, agreements, and other relationships that assist the Forest Preserve's mission of delivering the best possible services at the least possible cost to our community.

Intergovernmental Agreements with Other Units of Local Government

The Forest Preserve relies heavily on intergovernmental cooperation to successfully provide services and share resources with our community partners. Intergovernmental agreements allow us to avoid unnecessary duplication of services and impart a number of public benefits.

Existing intergovernmental agreements include:

- **Byron Library District**
 - A Library staff member comes to the Forest Preserve's Preschool once per month to do a program with the students. The StoryWalks are also facilitated by the Library with Forest Preserve staff installing the pedestals and changing out the stories as needed.
 - We have agreed to share equipment, facilities, personnel, and services as needed.
- **Byron Museum District**
 - We have agreed to share equipment, facilities, personnel, and services as needed.
- **Byron Park District**
 - Forest Preserve staff assisted with the Johnson Park development and improvement project during 2022-2023, estimating \$25,000 on in-kind labor and equipment usage.
 - In 2016, the Forest Preserve shared office personnel with the Park District for approximately five (5) months until Park District personnel was hired.
 - The Forest Preserve's board and full-time staff are allowed to utilize the Park District's PE Center and other recreational facilities in exchange for golf privileges for their board and staff at PrairieView Golf Course.
 - The Forest Preserve assists the Park District with installing and removing their boat docks each season.
 - Equipment and facilities are shared as needed.
 - The Park District hosts their annual 5K ByronFest run, the Tiger 10-miler, etc. on Forest Preserve property at no charge.

- Byron School District
 - The Forest Preserve utilizes school buses and drivers for summer camp and other programs as needed at no charge.
 - The Byron High School Golf Team's home course is PrairieView Golf Course. This includes golf benefits such as reduced rates, etc.
 - The Forest Preserve waives fees for all of the School District's usage of banquet facilities at the Forest Preserve and Golf Course.
 - The School District pays the legal fees on behalf of the Forest Preserve as part of the Ogle County Intergovernmental Agency.
 - The School District allows the Forest Preserve's summer camp program to utilize the swimming pool with lifeguards at Byron High School at no charge.
 - The Forest Preserve waives fees for the School District's field trips to various facilities at the Forest Preserve such as the Jarrett Prairie Center and Heritage Farm Museums along with outdoor activities as well.
 - In the past, the Forest Preserve maintained a mowing and grounds maintenance agreement with the School District for a period of time until the School District hired their own personnel.
 - The Forest Preserve provides the use of the golf course driving range and putting green for the School District's physical education classes.
 - Byron High School students complete their required community service hours working on the prairie and other tasks on Forest Preserve property.
 - Equipment, facilities, and personnel are shared as needed.
- Byron Township
 - We have agreed to share equipment, facilities, personnel, and services as needed.
- City of Byron, IL
 - The City waives all fees for building and sign permits for the Forest Preserve.
 - The Forest Preserve is responsible for the cost of construction of all streets and roads within the Forest Preserve as well as the cost to maintain them relieving the City of these costs.
 - The City waives fees for licensing Forest Preserve vehicles.
 - The City and Forest Preserve share resources such as personnel, equipment, and facilities.
 - The Forest Preserve stores salt for the City. The City allows the Forest Preserve to use the salt as needed.
 - The Forest Preserve allows City personnel to utilize the Forest Preserve's mechanic's building and woodshop when needed.

- The Nature Conservancy / Nachusa Grasslands
 - Nachusa supplies the Forest Preserve with prairie seed.
 - The Forest Preserve allows Nachusa to utilize the hay racks and tractors for their Autumn on the Prairie event each year.
 - We have agreed to share equipment, facilities, personnel, and services as needed.
- Ogle County Intergovernmental Agency
 - The Forest Preserve participates in an intergovernmental agency with the taxing bodies who directly received tax revenue from Constellation and the tax parcels used for nuclear power generation. By joining forces, the taxing districts can jointly engage appraisers, attorneys, and other professional advisors to address the tax assessments for the two parcels owned and operated by Constellation.
- Ogle County for Weld Park
 - Forest Preserve maintains Weld Park at a reduced rate to save taxpayer dollars. This includes mowing, spraying herbicides, cleaning shelters, emptying garbage, cleaning restroom facilities, removing fallen trees and limbs, and scheduling shelter reservations.

Memorandum of Agreement

- Ogle County Emergency Management
 - The Forest Preserve agrees to cooperate and coordinate with OCEMA to provide personnel and/or equipment to effected individuals or jurisdictions and staging space for official entities mobilized for a disaster or emergency situation during the time frame of a Local, County, or State declared disaster.

Partnerships

- Byron Fire Protection District
 - The Forest Preserve staff members are allowed to attend CPR and First Aid classes at their facilities at a discounted rate.
 - The Fire Protection District comes to the Forest Preserve's Preschool to educate the students during Fire Prevention Week every year.
- Byron Chamber of Commerce
 - The Forest Preserve's staff assist with the setup and take down of ByronFest each year.
 - The Forest Preserve provides usage of golf carts, ATVs, and other equipment during ByronFest.
 - The Chamber hosts their annual golf playday fundraiser at PrairieView each year at a reduced rate.

- The Forest Preserve's staff assist with ChiliFest each year.
- The Forest Preserve provides wood for the scout groups to burn at Miracle on 2nd Street.
- Byron Lions Club
 - Forest Preserve staff sets up the markers for the layout of Lions Club's annual egg hunt that they host on Forest Preserve grounds.
 - The Forest Preserve stores and sets up the large wooden Christmas card displays.
 - Forest Preserve staff setup the ticket booth for the Lion's Club Christmas tree sales each year.
- Byron Dragway
 - Forest Preserve staff manage the prairie on the Dragway's property which includes burning, brush clearing and collecting seed.
- Exelon
 - Forest Preserve staff assist with burning Exelon's prairie plots on their property.
- Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR)
 - Forest Preserve staff assists with burning prairie at multiple state parks and brush clearing work days.
 - Forest Preserve hosts hunter safety classes.
- Prairie Preservation Society of Ogle County (PPSOC)
 - Forest Preserve staff assist with burning and managing Wade Prairie and Sand Ridge.
- Middle Rock Conservation Partners
 - Forest Preserve staff assist with work days, burning their prairie, and equipment usage.
- Natural Land Institute (NLI)
 - Forest Preserve staff assist with prairie burning, collecting seed, and equipment usage.
 - NLI assists the Forest Preserve with land purchases when needed.
- Revels Turf and Tractor
 - The Forest Preserve allows Revels Turf and Tractor to store equipment on Forest Preserve grounds.
 - Revels Turf and Tractor waives delivery fees on equipment purchased by the Forest Preserve.
- Illinois Association of Conservation Districts (IACD)
 - Forest Preserve staff assist with their annual conference.

- Ogle County
 - The Forest Preserve utilizes public service workers who need to complete their court ordered community service hours.
- Ogle County 4-H
 - 4-H participants assist with collecting seed and other tasks on Forest Preserve property.
- Living Lands and Waters
 - Forest Preserve staff assist with distributing free trees to the community donated by Living Lands and Waters.
- Trek for Troops – Darkhorse Lodge
 - Trek for Troops hosts their annual event on Forest Preserve property at no charge.
- Ogle County Government Agencies
 - Government agencies in Ogle County i.e. Extension Office, Highway Commissioners, etc. utilize Forest Preserve facilities and grounds at no charge.
- Ogle Natural Areas Alliance (ONAA)
 - The Forest Preserve works with ONAA on land purchases and donations.
- Local Residents
 - Several of the residents of Byron allow the Forest Preserve staff to tap their maple trees during the spring to collect sap to make syrup.
 - The Forest Preserve gives the residents free bottles of syrup for the use of their trees.
- By-Valley Bike Path Committee
 - The Forest Preserve works with this committee and other agencies, businesses, and organizations to establish safe bike paths throughout the community including paths to the Forest Preserve’s facilities. Cooperation includes monetary commitments.
- Illinois State Police
 - ISP stored their boat in Forest Preserve’s facilities.
- Illinois Nature Preserves Commission (INPC)
 - The Forest Preserve partners with INPC to protect, in perpetuity, the natural character and native plant communities that make our sites ecologically significant and aesthetically special for future generations to study, admire, and enjoy. As of this report, the Forest Preserve has 494 acres protected with INPC.

Other Examples of Efficient Operations

Use of Volunteers. One way in which the Forest Preserve reduces the burden on taxpayers is through the use of volunteers. Last year, volunteers worked over 6500 hours at the Forest Preserve. The Forest Preserve's woodshop volunteers not only build items for the Forest Preserve, they also build items for other local agencies which reduces the burden on taxpayers for those taxing bodies.

Youth Employment. The Forest Preserve is a major employer in the community, offering many seasonal positions suited for college and high school age youth. Not only is this an efficient way to deliver services, but youth employment serves as a valuable training tool for the future workplace.

Beekeeper Agreement. The Forest Preserve has an agreement with a local beekeeper who provides free beekeeping services in exchange for the Forest Preserve allowing him to have his personal hives located on Forest Preserve property. The honey produced from the Forest Preserve's hives is then sold to the community.

Sponsorships and Donations. The Forest Preserve has sponsorship agreements with Exelon and Byron Bank. Exelon sponsors the electric golf carts at PrairieView and winter lectures at the Jarrett Prairie Center. Byron Bank sponsors the immersive theater, the golf scorecards, and summer concerts. Donations from residents and corporations assist the Forest Preserve in offering facilities and amenities that may otherwise not be part of the Forest Preserve experience without their generosity. Some of the major donations include the following: Mr. & Mrs. Nardi donated 500 hundred acres of prairie that is now the Nardi Equine Prairie Preserve, Dr. Jerome Weiskopf donated the dome and telescopes for the observatory, OSF Healthcare and Prairie Forge donated towards the Jarrett Prairie Center Museum and kitchen remodeling, the McNett family donated a gazebo at Bald Hill Preserve, Don Hamer donated \$30,000 over five years to the District's previous Ogle Top Open Space and Park Foundation towards the establishment of the bike path within the Forest Preserve, and many families have donated memorial benches located within our preserves and on the golf course.

Cooperative Purchasing. The Forest Preserve participates in cooperative purchasing programs to save taxpayer dollars when purchasing equipment and vehicles.

Matt Johnson Scholarship Fund. Since its inception in 2003, the Fund has raised \$59,311 through fundraisers and private donations, which help alleviate the burden on taxpayers. The Fund provides recreational and educational opportunities for individuals who are unable to pay for the services. The Fund balance as of December 31, 2023, was \$1,335.

Junior Golf Fund. This Fund provides opportunities to children to play golf who are unable to pay to participate in the sport. The Fund also provides funds for the Junior Golf Team's tournaments, travel, awards, etc. Since its inception, the Fund raised \$39,005 through fundraisers and private donations. The Fund balance as of December 31, 2023, was \$17,053.

Collaboration with other Forest Preserves and Park Districts. Because Forest Preserves and Park Districts 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.

Golf Pass Trades. The Forest Preserve trades golf passes for advertising, contractual work, and other services which saves the taxpayer dollars that would have been expended for services.

Recycling. The Forest Preserve recycles at each of their public facilities. Scrap metal is also collected from various projects and recycled. The Forest Preserve offers a free recycling bin for the community. This recycling bin is provided through a grant with the Ogle County Solid Waste Department. Providing this service allows residents without residential recycling service to participate in recycling without being charged for it. Recycling is not only efficient, it also creates a better environment now and for the future.

Reliance on Non-Tax Revenue. Unlike most local governments that rely on a wide range of sales, use, and income taxes, the Forest Preserve is not permitted to assess these types of taxes. Additionally, although the Forest Preserve is an economic engine for the community and generates much revenue for the state and our community in the form of hotel/motel, sales, and motor fuel taxes, our Forest Preserve does not receive any of these revenues. Also, unlike Illinois cities, villages, counties, and school districts that received billions of dollars in direct financial assistance from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), our Forest Preserve did not receive any such direct federal aid. Our Forest Preserve also does not receive state funding under the Local Government Distributive Fund (LGDF) or the General State Aid (GSA) that these same cities, villages, counties, and school districts receive through the State budget.

Instead, the Forest Preserve provides all of the preserves, programs, facilities, and services to the community with a very modest amount of property taxes and from non-tax sources such as passholders, program registrations, facility rentals, and other user fees as well as private donations and grants.

Transparency to the Community

The following information about the Forest Preserve may be obtained by citizens in the location listed. This information may also be found at the Forest Preserve's Administrative Offices, the Ogle County Clerk's Office, and/or the State of Illinois' websites/offices.

Document	Location Available
• Annual Tax Levy	www.byronforestpreserve.com
• Annual Budget and Appropriation Ordinance	www.byronforestpreserve.com
• Board Meeting Agendas and Minutes	www.byronforestpreserve.com
• Annual Audit	www.byronforestpreserve.com
• General Use Ordinance	www.byronforestpreserve.com
• Forest Preserve's RFPs & Bid Information	www.byronforestpreserve.com
• Prevailing Wage	www.byronforestpreserve.com
• Election Information	www.byronforestpreserve.com

The Forest Preserve offers residents many opportunities to provide feedback. These include:

- The Board of Commissioners' meeting on the third Monday of each month. Residents may provide public comment at every meeting.
- The Forest Preserve's annual Budget and Appropriation Ordinance is available in tentative form at least 30 days prior to its adoption at an open meeting of the Forest Preserve board.

Additionally, at least one public hearing is held prior to final action, and notice of the hearing is published in the newspaper at least one week prior to the hearing.

- The Forest Preserve's annual property tax levy is approved at an open meeting of the Forest Preserve board in accordance with the Open Meetings Act. The Forest Preserve follows all public notice and hearing requirements under the Truth in Taxation Law prior to the adoption of this annual tax levy.
- Residents may request information or submit suggestions by phone (815) 234-8535 or email at info@byronforestpreserve.com.

Awards, Certifications, and Recognition

District achievements and recognition are outlined below:

- American Association for State and Local History Award of Merit – Jarrett Prairie Center Museum Renovation
- Best of Ogle County – 1st Place – Family Entertainment (PrairieFire)
- Best of Ogle County – 1st Place – Golf Courses (PrairieView)
- Best of Ogle County – 1st Place – Outdoor Recreation
- Best Tasting Maple Syrup Award
- Byron Chamber of Commerce Green Business of the Year
- C2000 Grant Awards (5) – Restoration and Invasive Species Removal
- Chicagoland Golf Magazine – 4 ½ Star Rating (PrairieView)
- Golf Digest Magazine - 4-Star Places to Play (PrairieView)
- GolfPass.com Top 25 Public Golf Courses in Illinois – Golfers' Choice (PrairieView-#5)
- GolfPass.com Top 50 U.S. Public Golf Courses – Golfers' Choice (PrairieView-#48)
- IAPD Best Green Practices Award
- IDNR Grant – Burr Oak Savannah Restoration
- IDNR Grant – Preserve Native Prairie and Protecting Non-Game Species Habitat
- IDNR Public Museum Capital Grant – Jarrett Prairie Center Addition – Patio Enclosure
- IDNR Wildlife Preservation Fund – International Earthkeepers Program
- Illinois Association of Museums Award of Superior – Jarrett Prairie Center Museum Renovation
- Illinois Big Tree Register State Champion – Eastern Cottonwood at Bald Hill Preserve
- Illinois Clean Energy Grant – Acquisition of Woolly Milkweed for Bald Hill Preserve
- Illinois Clean Energy Grant – Acquisition to Expand Bald Hill Preserve
- Illinois Clean Energy Grant (2) – Solar Installation (PrairieView)
- Illinois Department of Conservation (now IDNR) Snowmobile Grant – Shelter Construction
- IPRA Outstanding Conservation Program Award – Jarrett Prairie Preserve
- IPRA Outstanding Facility Award – PrairieFire Golf & Grill
- IPRA Outstanding Facility or Parks Award – Jarrett Prairie Center Museum Renovation and New Overlook Project
- IPRA Outstanding Special Event Award – PrairieFire Invitational
- Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Platinum Certification – Keller Education Center
- Ogle County Solid Waste Department Grants – Recycling Program and Benches
- Open Lands Trust State Grant (OLT) – Nardi Preserve (a portion)

- Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development Grant (OSLAD) – Nardi Preserve (a portion)
- Park District Risk Management Agency (PDRMA) Grant – Powered Tool Replacement
- Toptracer “Tracie – WOW” Award – PrairieFire Invitational
- US Fish and Wildlife Grant – Prairie Restoration
- US Fish and Wildlife Grant – Wetland Restoration

Staff achievements and recognition are outlined below:

- American Camp Association (ACA) Youth Mental Health First Aid Certification – One employee
- Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) Certification – Two employees
- Backcountry Guide Certification – One employee
- Byron Chamber of Commerce Citizen of the Year – One employee
- Byron Forest Preserve District Life Saving Award – One employee
- CDL Class B Licenses – Five employees
- Certifications for National Wildfire Coordinating Group:
 - I-100 – Five employees
 - ICS-200 – One employee
 - ICS-300 – One employee
 - ICS-400 – One employee
 - IS-00100 - One employee
 - IS-00700 – One employee
 - IS-00800 - One employee
 - S-110 – One employee
 - S-130 – Six employees
 - S-131 – One employee
 - S-133 – One employee
 - S-190 – Six employees
 - S-212 – Two employees
 - S-219 – One employee
 - S-290 – One employee
 - L-180 – One employee
- Certified Food Handler and BASSET Certifications – 53 employees
- Certified Food Safety Manager Certifications – Ten employees
- Certified Park and Recreation Professional – One employee
- Chainsaw Safety Demonstration and Skill Development Certification – Two employees
- Chainsaw Training and Hands-on Skill Practice Certification – Two employees
- Environmental Education Association of Illinois (EEAI) Certifications in Project Learning, Project WET, and Rise Challenge – One employee

- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) & Mobile Air Conditioning Society (MACS) Certification – One employee
- First Aid/AED/CPR Certified – 25 employees
- Forklift/Boom Operator License – One employee
- IDPH Non-Transient, Non-Community Water Operator License – One employee
- Illinois DCFS Certified Mandated Reporters – Eight employees
- Illinois DHS Credentialed in ECE, Infant and Toddler, and Director Levels – One employee
- Illinois Pesticide Applicator License Holders – Eight employees
- Illinois Pesticide Operator License Holders – Two employees
- Illinois Prescribed Burn Manager Certifications – Five employees
- Malcom D. Swan Award for Outstanding Service – One employee
- National EMS Certification – One employee
- Notary Public of the State of Illinois – Two employees
- PGA Professional Designation – One employee
- Pheasants Forever Conservation Educator of the Year Award – One employee (3X)
- Playground Safety Inspector Certification – Four employees
- Trauma Support Specialist Certification – One employee
- Wilderness First Aid Certification – Two employees

2023 Programs

Field Trips	70 events	1945 participants
Homeschool Classes	18 events	285 participants
Preschool Classes	4 events	72 participants
Scout Programs	4 events	62 participants
Hiking/Skiing Programs	14 events	111 participants
Family/Adult Programs	9 events	116 participants
Hunter Safety Class	1 event	100 participants
Summer Camps	26 events	701 participants
Special Events	4 events	1550 participants

Benefits and Services

The Forest Preserve serves the entire community and surrounding areas from the youngest to the oldest and all ages in between. Prairie Preserves, Golf Course, Indoor/Outdoor Driving Range, Restaurants, Banquet Facilities, Family Programs, Museums, Hiking/Biking/Horseback Riding Trails, Outdoor Education, and more provides something for everyone!

Bald Hill Prairie Preserve – 5502 North Silver Creek Road, Mt. Morris – 380.09 acres

This property was purchased from Peter McDaid-Leaf River Land Auction in 2017.

Amenities: Biggest tree in the state, hiking trails, portajohns.

Barrick Oaks Homestead Preserve – 3494 Oak Grove Road, Byron – 228.69 acres

This property was purchased from the Smeja Homestead Foundation in 2010.

Amenities: Hiking trails.

Dig Site and Primitive Campsite – Rt. 72, Byron – 12.5 acres

This property was purchased from Carol Last in 1996.

Amenities: Primitive campsite accessible from Rock River.

Etnyre Preserve – 1700 Townline Road, Oregon – 47.5 acres

This property was donated by William Etnyre, Patricia Etnyre-Zacher, Gary Ferb, and Susan and Gary Davis in 1990.

Amenities: Hiking trails, picnic shelter, leashed dog walking.

He-Leo Two Rivers Preserve – 6065 Rt. 2, Oregon – 46.88 acres

He-Leo was the first property owned by the Byron Forest Preserve. The first acres were donated in 1982 by Robert Piper in honor of his parents, Helen and Leo Piper, hence the name He-Leo. Miriam and George Etnyre donated a portion in 1985. Additional acreage was purchased by the District from Warren Ippen in 1992 and the Mt. Morris Boat Club in 2012.

Amenities: Non-motorized boat/kayak launch, picnic shelter, sand volleyball, portajohns.

Heritage Farm – 8059 North River Road, Byron – 34.84 acres

(acreage includes River Park and portion of golf course)

This property was included in the parcels purchased as the main site.

Amenities: Museum, barns with exhibits, outdoor stage, wooden bridge, portajohns.

Howard Colman Hall Creek Preserve – 12749 Weldon Road, Rockford – 302.86 acres

This property was purchased from Ruth C. Tower in 2010.

Amenities: Hiking trails.

Jarrett Prairie Center/Preserve, Keller Center, Observatory, Golf Maintenance, Shelters, and Residence – (Main Site) 7993 North River Road, Byron – 515.21 acres

The first acreage of the main site was purchased from Martin Stahl in 1985. Additional acres were purchased from Ronald Stocking in 1985, Ray S. and Kathleen Thompson in 1987, Harry Pond, Mary Walters, Carolyn Harris Pond, and Fred Bushnell in 1989, Larry Seabold in 1989, Johnson Family (land swap) in 1993, James and Linda Swanson in 2006, Elaine Wilson in 2011, and sold less than ½ acre to Barbara Netter and Sandra Anetsberger in 2015. This acreage includes Heritage Farm and PrairieView Golf Course.

Amenities: Jarrett Prairie Center houses the Administration and Education offices, a natural history museum, banquet rooms, and a 2600-square-foot wrap around deck. The Keller Center is a certified LEED Platinum building that houses our Preschool Program. The Weiskopf Observatory houses an 11” Celestron telescope and is open for free public viewing every week. Picnic shelters with electricity, water, grills, and restrooms are available for rental. Bike riding, walking, jogging, and leashed dog walking are allowed on the Don Hamer Recreational Path (bike path) which is a paved path along the drive off of River Road to the Jarrett Prairie Center. Programming at these locations include summer camp, special events, hiking trails, field trips, homeschool and other family programs, winter sports, etc.

Land Management Center – 6845 North German Church Road, Byron – 34.04 acres

This property was purchased from Robert A. Rogers in 2001. Using an OSLAD Grant, Stone Quarry Recreation Park was built on this property which opened in 2002. The park closed in 2012 and the facilities were re-purposed into the Land Management Center.

Amenities: Maintenance facility not open to the public. Recycling in the parking lot open to the public.

Mill Creek Wetland – Rt. 2, Byron – 79.18 acres

This property was acquired by a land trade with Basil Cascio in 2017.

Amenities: not open to the public

Nardi Equine Prairie Preserve – 6651 North River Road, Byron – 557.77 acres

A portion of this property was purchased from Darrel and Alice White and a portion was donated by Stephen J. Nardi in 2003.

Amenities: Hiking trails, horseback riding trails (bring your own horse).

PrairieView Golf Club – 6734 North German Church Road, Byron – 96.91 acres

(acreage is not the entire course, portions of the course are in other parcels)

This property is included in the parcels purchased as the main site.


Amenities: 18-hole award-winning golf course, Prairie Grass Pub, PrairieFire Golf & Grill (indoor/outdoor driving range), and the Pavilion for rentals, outings, and banquets.

Ripplinger/Gouker Preserve – 1700 Townline Road, Oregon – 58.5 acres

This property was purchased in 2008 from Margie Ripplinger. A portion of this property was sold to IDOT in 2010 to be used as a right-of-way.

Amenities: Hiking trails, picnic shelter, leashed dog walking.

The Forest Preserve's impact on the community and surrounding areas is multi-faceted and far reaching. For example, the Forest Preserve's prairie and woodland preserves, recreational and educational programs, and other opportunities improve the community's overall physical and mental health and wellness, thereby reducing healthcare costs. Summer programs offer safe, convenient, and affordable childcare options for working families during critical times when school is not in session. These opportunities also help reduce juvenile crime. The Forest Preserve's prairie and woodland restoration efforts have impacted our environment in ways that will be appreciated and enjoyed for many generations to come.

Dated: July 17, 2024 Signed: 

Todd Tucker, Local Government Efficiency Committee Chair