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Commissioner, Forest Preserve
District of DuPage County
District 6

ANNUAL REPORT

JULY 2014

ANNUAL REPORT, JULY 2014

Management of forest preserve land is one place where political party agenda and political affiliation have no bearing. The citizens of DuPage county own the forest preserves; the land has already been purchased. It simply makes good sense to elect the most qualified person to manage our investment.

**Political party affiliation and political agendas have no place
in land management.**

ANNUAL REPORT, 2014

WELCOME!

It has been a privilege to serve as YOUR commissioner since 2012. I am excited to share my accomplishments while serving my first term on the Forest Preserve Board through my first Annual Report.

During my first 18 months as YOUR commissioner, the Forest Preserve District has experienced an era of unprecedented change: we hired a new executive director, updated operating and accounting systems, planned for updated technology and communications platforms, and opened the door to greater public involvement via a county-wide strategic plan and video streaming of board meetings.

As YOUR commissioner, my goal has been to simultaneously (1) uphold the district's mission and (2) support best practice management in a way that conserves financial resources while increasing public involvement.

The accomplishments of the Forest Preserve District are not the work of any one person, or of any one board member. Managing over 25,000 acres of land in over 60 preserves requires board support, management and staff communication, volunteer empowerment and public involvement. It has been a privilege to work with each of these groups!

During my first term as YOUR commissioner, I have worked diligently to encourage positive change and improvements in all areas of the district. I have also worked in partnership with fellow board members, district staff, volunteers and the public to ensure that the land we own today remains protected for future generations.

As you read this report, I hope you will be pleased with our accomplishments. Of course, there is still much to be done and I am looking forward to continuing my work on behalf of DuPage county citizens with a second term as YOUR commissioner.

Shannon

I BELIEVE

- This land belongs to us, the tax paying public.
- Commissioners serve at the pleasure of the public and must be accountable.
- **Political party affiliation and political agendas have no place in land management.**
- Your tax dollars for the forest preserve should be spent primarily to maintain and restore natural areas.
- A commissioner who is involved in hands-on land restoration better understands the needs of the forest preserve.

LAND MANAGEMENT

There are three principles that guide my decisions on land management:

- (1) Restoring wetlands reduces flooding;
- (2) Land and buildings should be maintained; and
- (3) Collaborative projects share cost and reduce service duplication.

Ownership and restoration of land for the good of the environment and the enjoyment of the public is the reason the Forest Preserve District exists. Over the past 18 months, so much has been accomplished in this area that it would be impossible to describe in this report. Please call or email me if you would like to talk about the district's land management projects.

HOW I VOTE

I voted to support:

- Purchase of over 38 acres of land.
- The Wetland, Aquatic and Riparian Program (WARP), a program that produces non-property tax income to fund additional restoration projects.
- Research and monitoring projects for endangered and threatened species.
- Ongoing restoration and maintenance of wetland mitigation projects at eight district preserves.
- Rehabilitation projects at Graue Mill, the Peabody Estate, Danada House, and the Ben Fuller House.
- Projects that partnered with other agencies to protect and restore habitat.
- Cooperative flood control project with the Wayne Township Road District.
- Collaborative projects with the Conservation Foundation, the Wetlands Initiative, DuPage County Stormwater Division, and the Wheaton Sanitary District.

MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

I supported and/or proposed:

- Maintaining balance in resource allocation across district projects.
- Seeking sources of non-tax income to fund ongoing project maintenance.
- Leveraging land use and staff expertise to reduce flooding and manage stormwater by coordinating projects with outside agencies.
- A district-wide master plan and strategic plan.
- Long-term efforts to assess integrity of structures, along with planned replacement of infrastructure items.
- Leveraging non-property tax dollars to fund district projects.
- Increased volunteer opportunities to assist in land management.
- Upholding state law that prohibits sale or lease of district land to private entities.

PERSONAL ACTIVITIES

As part of my commitment to best practices in land management I:

- Furthered my education through formal classes and volunteer work.
- Consulted with residents and businesses on natural area issues.
- Volunteered in community projects throughout District 6.
- Took a two-day, 120 mile bicycle ride around DuPage county to observe trail quality and access.



FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Forest Preserve funding comes primarily from property tax dollars. There are three notable exceptions:

- (1) land purchases funded by bonds
- (2) projects funded by private industry, private donations or grants
- (3) joint projects that share funding with local or state agencies.

The need for property tax income is ongoing because

even when a project is funded by grants or private donations, the district is responsible for maintenance of restored areas in perpetuity. In 2013, as a means of reducing reliance on property tax income, the district began an innovative program – the Wetland, Aquatic and Riparian Program (WARP) – that will generate income through wetland credits. This income will be used to fund ongoing maintenance of restored natural areas.

HOW I VOTE

I voted to support:

- Projects that are funded by non-property tax dollars.
- Ending 20 years of negotiation to purchase Country Lakes Golf Course, thus recovering funds now available to purchase land elsewhere.
- District-wide inventory to assess fraud risk, resulting in controls that reduce district exposure to fraud risk.
- New policies that allow for savings in purchasing, and for Internet auction of obsolete equipment.
- Purchase of land parcels that connect trails, protect wetland, and protect district boundaries.
- Contractual services to increase safety and update programs at Danada Equestrian Center.
- Purchases to update District technology platforms and improve communication with the public.

I voted against programs that duplicate services.

MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

I supported and/or proposed:

- Development of a budget based on historical spending, rather than on expected income.
- Development of a single grant accounting function to manage grant funds.
- Development of a merit-based salary program for district employees.

I serve on the board of the Friends of the Forest Preserve, the district's non-profit foundation.

PERSONAL ACTIVITIES

Actions that demonstrate my fiscal responsibility:

- Devoted, on average, 25 hours per week to my job as commissioner
- Did not accept a district-paid iPad or cell phone.
- Do not request reimbursement for district related expenses.
- Voted to reduce commissioner salaries.
- Donated six percent (6%) of my annual gross salary to fund scholarships for student programs.



PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public involvement is vitally important but presents an inherent dilemma. Balancing the District's obligation to manage land according to best practice standards with the public's variety of interests in land use can be challenging. Consistent communication is critical!

I am committed to continuing to refine and improve district communication with the public in every way possible. Additionally, I am available by phone or email to talk with anyone who has questions or wants more detail about anything the district is doing.

HOW I VOTE

I voted to support:

- Increasing number of evening board meetings to four per year, an ethics committee, and improved reporting of public comment.
- Availability of complete board meeting packets for public review.
- Strategic and master planning processes.
- Video recording of district meetings, available for public viewing on-line at www.dupageforest.org.
- Assessing volunteer concerns at Danada Equestrian Center. (My final report was unanimously accepted by the full board and is available on the district's website).
- The district's first legislative agenda.
- Purchase of technology platforms to improve public access to district services.
- Collaborative efforts between the district and local or municipal agencies.
- Online internet access to district meetings and materials.

PERSONAL ACTIVITIES

I regularly attended, met with, or served on:

- DuPage Mayors and Managers Conference (monthly).
- Private individuals and groups (as requested).
- County board, various city council and other local governmental meetings in District 6.
- The Sierra Club's "Green Reads" Bike Plan committee.
- Local community events to increase district presence.
- Joint projects to improve land, restore rivers, and reduce flooding.
- Meetings between the district and DuPage United.

MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

I supported and/or proposed:

- District use of social media.
- Development of a new district website.
- Updating the marketing and communications department.
- Meetings with residential groups to discuss projects and concerns.
- Publication of district news via email blasts, press releases, and publications.
- Detailed advance public awareness of proposed projects.



I proposed the "Neighborhood Volunteer Restoration Program" a pilot project that, if approved, would allow owners of adjacent land to conduct planned restoration work on district property.

FUTURE GOALS

ONGOING GOALS

Ongoing goals that support the district's mission include:

- Purchase of land that will (1) connect trails (2) support stormwater and flood management and (3) preserve quality areas for restoration and wildlife habitat.
- Restoration, management, and maintenance of natural areas.
- Development of multi-use trail connections.
- Public enjoyment of district land.



MY FUTURE GOALS

To support the district's mission, the board must promote optimal use of limited funding while informing the public about land management decisions.

My personal future goals as YOUR commissioner are:

- Increased public awareness via improved communication systems.
- Proactive communication of planned restoration projects.
- Training programs to empower educators and volunteers.
- Enhanced opportunities for volunteer work groups.
- Online options for improved customer service.
- Consideration of organic farming on a pilot program basis.
- Assessment of internal systems to facilitate improved communication between departments.
- Assessment of internal systems to increase savings.
- Appropriate action to address need for new fleet maintenance facilities.
- Enhance options for handicap accessible trails.
- Continued support of existing programs that produce non-property tax income.
- Encourage employee involvement through new-idea incentive programs and merit pay opportunities.
- Completion of a district-wide master plan and strategic plan.

Additionally, I plan to continue my education in natural resource management through formal course work, public involvement and hands-on volunteer work.

The groundwork for implementing many of these goals has already begun but is in the initial stages. Accomplishing these goals will require a continued commitment — and a committed commissioner — to achieve full implementation. Some goals, such as testing

the feasibility of organic farming, are still in the idea stage and will require diligent pursuit to be accomplished. It's a big job—but not an impossible one! I look forward to telling you about positive outcomes in next year's report!