GOAL 3 / ECONOMY

Communities will value the economic benefits of protected lands.

The Forest Preserves of Cook County were created to help our entire region prosper. As long ago as 1909, Daniel Burnham’s Plan of Chicago made an economic argument for protecting them:

> [T]he need for breathing spaces and recreation grounds is being forced upon the attention of practical men, who are learning to appreciate the fact that a city, in order to be a good labor-market, must provide for the health and pleasure of the great body of workers.¹

Burnham was right: the forest preserves’ health and our region’s economic health are linked. Research proves that natural green spaces can help our communities thrive by attracting residents and increasing property values. Green spaces and trails help tourism spending and investment stay at home and can reduce health care costs by offering free public outdoor exercise opportunities.

Just by being there, the preserves also provide our region with millions of dollars’ worth of free services. They clean and cool the air, purify the water and prevent flood damage and soil erosion.
The Forest Preserves’ leadership can help communities and businesses recognize and build on the economic advantages of having protected nature nearby. Visitors to the forest preserves are an important market for small businesses that appeal to trail users and other outdoor enthusiasts. And the kind of young talent that businesses and residential developers want to attract includes outdoor enthusiasts who appreciate nature-conscious building practices and easy access to trails. The Forest Preserves can collaborate on marketing campaigns with neighboring communities, combining nature attractions with small business growth.

Nature is good for business, and the Forest Preserves has an important contribution to make.

GOAL 3 PRIORITIES

3.1 Build the economic case for nature.
3.2 Encourage nature-compatible business development.
3.3 Market the preserves as an iconic element of Chicago.

NOTES

i. Plan of Chicago
PRIORITY 3.1

Build the economic case for nature.

Documenting the Economic Value of Nature

While many people have a sense of the forest preserves’ intrinsic value, there has not yet been a formal evaluation of the preserves’ economic impact on metropolitan Chicago.

In this highly complex and diverse region, it’s a challenge to separate the value of open space from proximity to jobs, educational opportunity, public transit and an international airport.

“...there are strong arguments for the economic value of the preserves, especially in terms of the environmental benefits that they bring to communities...”

Nevertheless, there are strong arguments for the economic value of the preserves, especially in terms of the environmental benefits that they bring to communities and the opportunities for locally significant increases to the tax base through enhanced property values and small business attraction.

The Proven Value of Protected Open Space

Over the past two decades, national research has confirmed and analyzed the economic benefits of protected open space in four main areas:

- **Increased property values:** The existence of protected open space often raises property values in adjacent areas, increasing communities’ tax revenues. In Philadelphia, for instance, the impact of parks on property tax revenues was calculated at more than $18 million.ii

- **Attractiveness to entrepreneurs and the high-tech sector:** Studies of the economic impacts of the National Parks on small towns in the West argue that proximity to the parks attracts entrepreneurs and makes the region more economically competitive.iii Amenities like natural areas, trails and parks that provide recreational opportunities attract the kind of talented...
employees that businesses seek. One survey released in 1998 found that high-technology workers prefer to locate where there is a range of outdoor recreational activities including trails and that quality of life increases the attractiveness of a job by 33 percent.iv

Employers, too, value proximity to the preserves as an amenity for their employees. For example, the economic development staff in Elk Grove Village reports that the location close to the preserves helped to attract one corporation, which requested the installation of a new stop light to allow employees safe access to them across a busy road.v

- **Public health benefits:** By cleaning the air and providing places for relaxation and exercise, natural areas improve public health and reduce community healthcare costs. For example, the GreenSpace Alliance and Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission calculated the value of protected open space in southeastern Pennsylvania (14 percent of five counties). They found that the region benefits from **$795 million in annually avoided medical costs** due to recreation that takes place on protected lands.vi

- **Ecosystem services that bring environmental benefits to communities:** Green spaces provide “ecosystem services” that reduce the demands on local infrastructure—protecting water supplies, preventing flooding and soil erosion and limiting the impact of greenhouse gas emissions. In New York’s Nassau and Suffolk counties, for example, vegetation in its 92,000 acres of parks and open spaces helped to remove hundreds of tons of carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide and other pollutants. **The annual impact—the cost of preventing these emissions from entering the atmosphere—was equal to $17.3 million.**vii Studies from elsewhere document that restored landscapes are more absorbent and can help regions and neighboring communities survive severe weather.

In order to translate the findings of these compelling studies to the Forest Preserves of Cook County—and to make a persuasive case about economic value to the public—the agency needs both baseline and longitudinal local data. This can be particularly valuable as the land is restored. In addition to making the case to local communities, businesses and voters, demonstrating the ecological and ecosystem-service value of restoration over the long term will position Cook County as an important environmental leader internationally.
## PRIORITY 3.1: Action Steps

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<td>With research partners, document and publicize the dollar value and</td>
<td>Documenting the value of the preserves will inspire the public to invest in them and will help secure public support for restoration. It may also inspire people to use them more as places to exercise and improve personal wellness.</td>
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<td>avoided costs of nature’s benefits, such as reducing flooding,</td>
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<td>improving air quality and storing carbon, as well as offering free</td>
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<td>public health amenities.</td>
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<td>Help local developers and property owners understand and market the</td>
<td>The preserves need to help build a constituency for nature, and helping their neighbors understand how the Preserves provide economic benefits is one way to do this.</td>
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<td>advantages of proximity to protected land—such as higher property</td>
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<tr>
<td>values, the growing attractiveness of compact development and access</td>
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<td>to green space.</td>
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The Forest Preserves could follow the example of a luxury residential high-rise in Skokie that overlooks Harms Woods and markets the “serenity of woodland.” Its website boasts that residents will enjoy “hundreds of acres of indigenous forestland preserved against future development.”

The conservation development Prairie Crossing in Grayslake demonstrates both the value of compact, ecologically sensitive development and the ability of development to enhance the ecological health of the nearby Liberty Prairie reserve.
Collect empirical data on forest preserve users in order to build the case for investment in small business nearby.

Information about visitors to the preserves can help the Forest Preserves make wiser management decisions and can also help encourage businesses to invest in ways that will make the preserves a better experience for more users.

For example, if restaurateurs can find an easy source of information about trail users, they may decide to locate close to a preserve trail entry point. This can be a win-win for communities, cyclists and the Forest Preserves. See Priority 3.3 for further information about how these data can be valuable.

Demonstrate how restored habitats are more effective at soil erosion control and flood prevention than degraded landscapes, substantiating how an investment in restoration provides a sound economic return.

One of the most compelling arguments for investment in restoration is the potential to avoid significant costs of flooding and impacts of severe weather events. The specific cost benefits have not yet been quantified in the Chicago region. For example, the Center for Neighborhood Technology estimates that if restoration enhances water absorption by 10%, each acre restored would reduce potential stormwater runoff by approximately 27,000 gallons per year. The Forest Preserves have a unique opportunity to work with experts to calculate the costs savings of reduced flooding and other ecosystem services, and to serve as a “living laboratory” for demonstrating economic value as restoration proceeds on a large scale.
GOAL 3 / Communities will value the economic benefits of protected lands.
3.1 Build the economic case for nature.

______________________________
NOTES


v. Interview with Josh Grodzin, Director of Economic Development for Elk Grove Village May 2013.


viii. See http://www.optimaweb.com/Homes/SkokieCondos/

ix. For example, http://www.terrain.org/unsprawl/9/

x. Correspondence, Bill Eyring, Center for Neighborhood Technology to Tina Seaman, Openlands, December 2013
GOAL 3 / Communities will value the economic benefits of protected lands.

3.2 Encourage nature-compatible business development.

PRIORITY 3.2

Encourage nature-compatible business development.

Partnering to Attract Visitors and Help Local Businesses

The preserves are not well known as amenities that bring people from outside their immediate neighborhoods. Because of this fact, communities are missing an opportunity to attract additional businesses, and the Forest Preserves is missing an opportunity to create more engaging visitor experiences that could, in turn, result in more local spending and increased sales tax revenues.

“...the Forest Preserves is missing an opportunity to create more engaging visitor experiences that could, in turn, result in more local spending and increased sales tax revenues.”

A recent survey of Illinois trail users (many of whom were repeat visitors) found that 35 percent spent money in nearby restaurants. In addition, most made annual clothing, bicycle or equipment purchases related to their visits.xi A 2006 study by the National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation found that Illinois and Wisconsin residents spent between $36 and $47 per day during their trips away from home to watch wildlife.xii

NATURE-COMPATIBLE BUSINESSES

In addition to collecting data (see Priority 3.1), the Forest Preserves can strengthen relationships with community leaders and economic development departments to maximize opportunities for nature-compatible businesses. Together, the agency and surrounding communities can explore the following questions:

- **Trail intersections:** Are there opportunities for trail-related retail uses where trails intersect roads or neighborhoods? Can the Forest Preserves offer relevant market research opportunities (e.g., identifying particular groups of visitors)?

- **Special audiences:** Are there opportunities to tie specific audiences to local enterprises, such as farmers’ markets, restaurants, bike rentals, canoe and kayak liveries or outdoor outfitters?
GOAL 3 / Communities will value the economic benefits of protected lands.
3.2 Encourage nature-compatible business development.

- **Hospitality**: Are there appropriate sites for B&Bs, health clubs, hotels or retreat facilities that would benefit from being close to the preserves? Could the Forest Preserves help these businesses build new partnerships with specific visitor groups?

**Building Trust Among Developers and Neighboring Communities**

The preserves are surrounded by communities with a variety of uses—residential, industrial, transportation and institutional. In this urban environment, the Forest Preserves inevitably faces occasional conflicts over adjacent parcels—conflicts that can involve costly legal expenses and can damage relationships with nearby communities.

“…Forest Preserves can help neighboring communities recognize that nature conservation can be a benefit to their housing and economic development plans.”

To avoid such issues, the Forest Preserves can help neighboring communities recognize that nature conservation can be a benefit to their housing and economic development plans. In addition, the agency can build relationships of trust and mutual understanding with their neighbors. Open information, clear procedures and strong respectful relationships that are based on successful collaboration—like partnerships in nature-compatible business above—can lay a foundation for resolving potential concerns with win-win solutions.
GOAL 3 / Communities will value the economic benefits of protected lands.

3.2 Encourage nature-compatible business development.

## PRIORITY 3.2: Action Steps

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<tr>
<td>Work with communities to find opportunities for trail and preserve-related retail uses, such as farmers’ markets, restaurants, bike rentals, canoe and kayak facilities or outdoor outfitters.</td>
<td>Enhancing visitor experience with more amenities available near the preserves will help to draw more visitors to the forest preserves, extend visitor stays, and return more dollars to nearby communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help neighboring communities use the forest preserves to attract visitors and create markets for hotels, B&amp;Bs, health clubs and retreat facilities nearby.</td>
<td>When communities value the economic potential of the preserves, they will become partners, advocating for investment in restoring nature and engaging the public.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track and publicize increased local investment and tax revenues from these new preserve-related businesses</td>
<td>Demonstrating how new businesses that locate near the preserves provide an economic impact on their community is key to building the case for local communities to value and nurture the preserves.</td>
</tr>
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<td>Increase habitat and enhance communities through collaborative projects, such as promoting native landscaping on corporate campuses.</td>
<td>The Forest Preserves can bring expertise about habitat-creating native planting to neighboring businesses and communities, and by sharing such expertise, the agency can expand its ability to sustain nature and reduce pressure on the preserves caused by local flooding.</td>
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</table>
GOAL 3 / Communities will value the economic benefits of protected lands.

3.2 Encourage nature-compatible business development.

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<tr>
<th>Be proactive in publicizing clear policies, sharing information and anticipating how local economic development needs relate to nature conservation goals.</th>
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<tr>
<td>By planning proactively, forging relationships with local officials and establishing clear procedures and policies, the Forest Preserves can increase its opportunities to find win-win solutions when conflicts over development arise. The agency can educate companies about how they can be good neighbors to nature.</td>
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NOTES

[http://trailsforillinois.tumblr.com/maketrailscount](http://trailsforillinois.tumblr.com/maketrailscount)

xii. For more analysis on wildlife tourism in Illinois and Wisconsin, see Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge Viability Study, Trust for Public Land, February 2010.
PRIORITY 3.3

Market the forest preserves as an iconic element of Chicago.

A Regional Icon, Comparable to the Lakefront

When Daniel Burnham and Edward Bennett designed the Plan of Chicago in 1909, they saw two unique opportunities for elevating public land into something remarkable. The first was the city’s lakefront, with its “one great unobstructed view.” The second potential icon was what we now know as the Forest Preserves of Cook County.

Looking ahead, Burnham and Bennett knew that “the creation of extensive forests in the suburbs” would be invaluable to Cook County—attracting residents, increasing property values and helping tourism spending and investment stay at home.

“...the preserves were intended to be an icon of the metropolis...”

The part the Forest Preserves play in contributing to the quality of life and economic prosperity of Metropolitan Chicago has room to grow. While the preserves were intended to be an icon of the metropolis, they are not prominent in regional marketing, and even some Cook County residents don’t know what they have to offer.
Tourism Marketing Initiatives and Collaboration

The Forest Preserves has an opportunity to expand its audience by partnering with peer organizations, such as the Chicago Wilderness Alliance and its members. Together with Choose Chicago, the State of Illinois Office of Tourism or other tourism marketing organizations, the Forest Preserves and its peers can explore collaborative marketing opportunities and ideas:

- Is there a market, for example, for bird watching, biking, kayaking, picnics—as well as visits to Brookfield Zoo and the Chicago Botanic Garden—that would encourage visitors who are already here to stay longer?

- Is there a market for nature-based tours that could be added on as options to convention itineraries or offered to casual visitors—much as the Chicago Architecture Foundation offers bus tours?

Marketing the forest preserves to a broader audience could ultimately encourage tourists to extend their stays in Chicago. It could also keep more dollars in the local economy by capturing local residents’ “staycation” time. The Wisconsin Bureau of Tourism reported that Illinois residents accounted for more than 20 percent (17.3 million) of the visitors to Wisconsin in 2010. What’s more, this number increased by 10 percent between 2009 and 2010. If these tourists knew the outdoor recreation opportunities that forest preserves offer, some portion of them might stay closer to home to enjoy access to nature.

Brookfield Zoo  
Chicago Botanic Garden
### PRIORITY 3.3: Action Steps

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<td>Capitalize on shared marketing opportunities with the Chicago Botanic</td>
<td>The Zoo and Botanic Garden are already the Forest Preserves’ major partners and have larger marketing budgets and more sophistication in outreach than the Forest Preserves has. The agency can benefit from on-site marketing at these institutions to encourage more visitors.</td>
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<td>Garden and Chicago Zoological Society.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creatively tie the preserves to tourism opportunities at Navy Pier,</td>
<td>Collaborative marketing opportunities abound at locations that Chicago residents and tourists visit. The Forest Preserves should explore partnerships, and by getting the word out about the preserves to visitors, the agency will also expand relationships with the local residents who enjoy these locations and are always seeking activities for their guests.</td>
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<td>the Museum Campus, Millennium Park, Northerly Island, hotels and other</td>
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<td>destinations.</td>
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<td>Package visitor opportunities with cultural and dining possibilities</td>
<td>Cook County residents and visitors alike seek experiences that enable them to enjoy an entire day or half day with a mix of experiences. Packaged experiences that tie a hike outdoors to a good meal, a concert or other compatible activity can expand the Forest Preserves’ audience.</td>
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<tr>
<td>and a robust tour program.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A robust tour program—perhaps modeled on the successful volunteer program of the Chicago Architecture Foundation—can expand the reach and educational success of the Forest Preserves, attracting more local residents and visitors alike.</td>
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</table>
GOAL 3 / Communities will value the economic benefits of protected lands.
3.3 Market the forest preserves as an iconic element of Chicago.

NOTE

xiii. Wisconsin Bureau of Tourism, http://industry.travelwisconsin.com/~/media/Files/Research/Market%20Research/wdt_trips-from-midwest.pdf. Counted as “leisure person trips” - a “person-trip” is defined as one trip by one person. If a family of four takes a trip, this equals four person-trips.
A Timeline of Transformation

How will we measure success? The highlights here provide a sample of all the Forest Preserves should expect to achieve, and the agency should assess progress and set new targets every five years.

IN 25 YEARS

**MEASURE PROGRESS**

The Forest Preserves will partner with public and/or private agencies to study the value of ecosystem services including green infrastructure benefits.

The Forest Preserves and local partners will have in place tools for tracking how property values change as the forest preserves are restored and improved.

There will be at least two examples of new nature-compatible development adjacent to the preserves, and systems in place to collaborate with local officials and owners to track the economic impact.

**CELEBRATE OUTCOMES**

Data collection and analysis will demonstrate that increased investment in the care, maintenance and improvement of the forest preserves has a direct correlation to increased property values and sales tax revenue.

Through partnerships with Cook County community economic development offices, at least 30 new businesses will be in place, each closely tied to the Forest Preserves’ visitor market.

**IN 5 YEARS**

NOW

GET STARTED

Establish partnerships with local chambers of commerce, tourism bureaus and community organizations to promote the market value of the forest preserves.

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