

# Kendall County Forest Preserve District

## 5 -Year Plan

### 2020 - 2025



Fox River at Hoover Forest Preserve



Prairie Planting at Hoover Forest Preserve



Great Blue Heron Nest at Little Rock Creek Forest Preserve



Natural Beginnings Early Learning Program Participants along the Fox River



Prairie Seeding at Fox River Bluffs Forest Preserve



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### 2020 - 2025

November, 2020

Dear Kendall County Residents,

The Kendall County Forest Preserve District's 5-Year Plan is a document that guides priorities and directions for the District's mission-based activities through 2025, and is an extension of the District's Master Plan that was developed in 2014.

The Plan's focus areas include Land Acquisition; High-Quality Natural Resources; Preserve Improvement Projects; Connecting People to Nature and Outdoor Recreation; and Capital Infrastructure and Equipment Priorities. The Plan will be a guide for the District as work proceeds in the areas of capital and preserve improvement projects, enhancement of natural areas and environmental education programs, outdoor recreational program services, and leverage of additional support from community partners and grant-funding agencies.

My sincere appreciation goes out to our Planning and Advisory Committee, who met over the course of this past year to develop the guidelines that helped shape the vision for the District over the next 5 years, and special thanks to Committee Chairman Matthew Prochaska. Each member of the Committee brought their own area of expertise to the table, and the Plan reflects this diversity. Thank you all!

Thanks to our Board of Commissioners who continue to support the District's efforts to fulfill our mission. The approval of this Plan reflects the commitment to teamwork from all who are charged with stewardship of the District's resources.

Special thanks to Executive Director David Guritz, for his leadership and time spent preparing documents and supporting maps and materials for the Committee, and for the final preparation and presentation of the Plan. I also want to thank Environmental Education Manager Emily Shanahan, Communication, Marketing and Public Programs Specialist Antoinette White, and Natural Beginnings Program Manager Stefanie Wiencke for lending their support and expertise.

From all of us, please accept this document as a guide to the near future of our District, and a reflection of all the natural beauty we are so fortunate to enjoy.

**Judy Gilmour, President**

Kendall County Forest Preserve District



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## 5 -Year Plan

### 2020 - 2025

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Lynn Cullick	Marty Vick
Judy Gilmour	

This 5-Year Plan was approved by the Kendall County Forest Preserve District Board of Commissioners in November 2020. The Planning and Advisory Committee met monthly to draft the plan. The District greatly appreciates the time and effort that the Planning and Advisory Committee committed towards completion of this plan.

The Board of Commissioners and staff will refer to this plan on a regular basis for guidance in the decision-making process, and to develop the goals and objectives of the District through 2025. This plan will be reviewed annually and updated as needed.

Maps courtesy of the Kendall County GIS Department.





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*Little Rock Creek Bridge Crossing*



## SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION



*Creek and Limestone Outcropping at Hoover Forest Preserve*

The Kendall County Forest Preserve District is governed by a ten member Board of Commissioners. The commissioners are elected officials, with five commissioners elected by the public from each of the two Kendall County Board Districts. The Board of Commissioners elects a President, Vice-President and Secretary, each of which serves a two year term. The District has its own property taxing authority, which largely funds the daily operating expenses of the District. These property tax funds are augmented by facility use fees, program fees, grant awards, and farm license revenue.

A yearly budgeting process determines the operating budget and tax levy to be issued by the District for each fiscal year. The District also has the ability to issue bonds for land acquisition, capital improvement projects and capital equipment purchases.

As Kendall County continued its unprecedented population growth, in 2007 voters approved a \$45 million open space bond referendum for additional land preservation and capital improvement projects. These funds, combined with nearly \$13 million in ensuing grant revenue, punctuated an amazing growth spurt where the District owns 6 times more acres in 2020 than it did just two decade earlier. Three separate bond refunding efforts completed in 2015, 2016 and 2017 reduced tax impact by over \$3.8 million dollars, with a \$90.21 tax savings to the average homeowner in Kendall County.

Many of these preserved acres contain some of the finest natural areas in Kendall County. Fox River frontage, property along streams, quality woodlands and wetlands, and expansion of existing preserves have all been added to District holdings in the past 15-years. This additional acreage has allowed the District to expand its facilities and offer more recreational and environmental educational opportunities to residents than ever before.

In 2014, the District’s Board of Commissioners approved a Master Plan for the District. The Master Plan established the District’s overarching mission and goals, guiding the District’s priorities through 2019.



*Wooded Ravine at Fox River Bluffs Forest Preserve*





*Footbridge at Harris Forest Preserve*

## ORGANIZATION

As of 2020 the staff of the District is comprised of 9 full-time and 39 part-time employees. Seasonal employees assist with summer camps and grounds maintenance each year. The staff is responsible for preserve maintenance, natural areas management, environmental education programming, event coordination, volunteer coordination and administration of the District.

## MISSION STATEMENT AND GOALS

The mission of the Kendall County Forest Preserve District is to acquire, preserve and manage natural areas and open spaces, provide environmental education, and offer recreational opportunities for Kendall County residents.

More specifically, the goals of the Kendall County Forest Preserve District are to:

1. Acquire and hold lands containing forests, prairies, wetlands, streams and other natural areas in order to preserve the flora, fauna and scenic beauties of Kendall County for the enjoyment of county residents and future generations.
2. Acquire and hold properties containing lands capable of being restored to a natural condition and lands that will provide recreational opportunities and facilities.
3. Utilize the forest preserves to provide educational opportunities for county residents regarding the natural systems, natural processes and natural history of Kendall County.
4. Provide and maintain passive and active recreational opportunities and facilities for residents that are compatible with District natural areas and open spaces.
5. Provide and maintain multi-purpose event facilities for residents that are compatible with District natural areas and open spaces.
6. Implement resource management practices and policies that maintain and enhance the biodiversity of District natural areas.
7. Maintain and enhance practices and policies that promote fiscal responsibility and organizational proficiency.
8. Maintain and enhance multiple media outlets to inform Kendall County residents of District programs, properties, facilities and policies.
9. Partner with other governmental agencies, conservation organizations and private landowners to preserve natural areas, create greenway corridors, and develop linear trails.

## 5-Year Plan Development

On January 21, 2020 the Board of Commissioners established the Kendall County Forest Preserve District’s Planning and Advisory Committee. Committee appointments and representation included District Commissioners, Kendall County citizens, District staff, Forest Foundation of Kendall County, and natural resource agency professionals charged with development of priorities and strategies for achieving the District’s mission, goals and objectives through 2025. The Planning and Advisory Committee members participated in several planning meetings to examine the District’s core areas of operations and capital development including:

1. Land Acquisition
2. Conservation and Stewardship of High-Quality Natural Resources
3. Preserve Improvement Projects
4. Connecting People to Nature and Outdoor Recreation
5. Capital Infrastructure and Equipment

Within each of the District’s core areas, the Planning and Advisory Committee identified the vision, strategic priorities, goals, strategies, and achievable projects within the District’s current staffing and funding limits. The Committee also identified longer-term goals and projects where additional resources will be required.

Core area planning discussions were informed by review of the District’s Master Plan, other local, regional and statewide plans, and data-driven presentations from District staff.

Plans reviewed included the KCFPD 2014-2019 Master Plan; KCFPD 2020 Preserve Locations and Amenities Infrastructure Survey; KCFPD Floristic Quality Inventory Database; The State of Illinois – Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) State Wildlife Action Plan IDNR Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2014-2019; The Conservation Foundation’s 2019 Regional Conservation Message Study; The Morton Arboretum’s Chicago Region Trees Initiative - Oak Ecosystem Recovery Plan; the Chicago Wilderness Green Vision; Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) Northeastern Illinois Regional Greenways and Trails Plan, and the Kendall County Regional Trail Plan.



*Oak Tree Planting at Pickerill-Pigott Forest Preserve*

The 5-Year Plan was reviewed by the Forest Foundation of Kendall County, a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization to determine primary areas for Foundation support for the next five years. Primary areas for Forest Foundation support is highlighted within the Plan’s matrix.

The Planning and Advisory Committee finalized and approved recommendations of the planning matrix included within the appendices of this 5-Year Plan on October 27, 2020.

The Board of Commissioners approved the 5-Year Plan on November 16, 2020.

## Land Acquisition

### Vision Statement

Kendall County Forest Preserve District is committed to protecting forest preserve areas for future generations to connect people to nature; preserve quality of life for Kendall County citizens; protect wildlife habitat and natural lands, and support recovery of Kendall County's rare, threatened and endangered species.

### Goals

1. Maintain the current ratio 22.5-acres per 1,000 Kendall County resident population.
2. Identify high-quality natural areas for future acquisition located near Kendall County's population centers.
3. Prioritize fee-simple, voluntary purchases of land containing Class III (Native Floristic Quality Inventory=40-59) and Class IV (Native Floristic Quality Inventory >60) natural areas based on floristic quality assessments.



### Projects Achievable within Current Limitations

1. Leverage federal, State and local grants with Land-Cash matching funds; market and encourage opportunities for property donations; consider releasing non-referendum limited-tax bonds to support land acquisition.
2. Open Pickerill-Pigott Forest Preserve to the public; open Fox River Bluffs Forest Preserve to the public; establish a trail connection between Little Rock Creek and Maramech Forest Preserves.
3. Continue to work with the Forest Foundation of Kendall County to support Floristic Quality Assessments; continue to work with the Kane-Kendall Oak Ecosystem Recovery Group; continue to partner with the Chicago Botanic Garden's Plants of Concern monitoring program; complete baseline floristic quality assessments for all major preserve holdings (Hoover; Fox River Bluffs; Little Rock Creek; Lyon-Richard Young; Millbrook North and South); form a working Committee to identify, assess, and map locations of high-quality natural areas; work with other regional conservation partnerships to support natural area surveys and planning initiatives.



*Rare Fen Habitat at Lyon Forest Preserve*

### Beyond the District's 5-Year Plan

1. Increase funding, donations, and/or land acquisition grants (\$750,000 every five years) to maintain the current ratio of approximately 23-acres of open space per 1,000 population based on population projections. Consider establishing a Capital and Development Fund by referendum for the District under the provisions of the Illinois Downstate Forest Preserve District Act and/or issuing General Obligation Limited Tax bonds.
2. Establish a regional trail spur/loop from Yorkville to Millbrook along the Fox River corridor through voluntary, fee-simple land and easement purchases.
3. Establish an ongoing natural resources monitoring and management program.



*Conservation and Stewardship of High-Quality Natural Resources*

**Vision Statement**

Kendall County Forest Preserve District is committed to enhancing natural habitats, conserving Kendall County's natural history, and sustaining healthy populations of plants, animals, and other wildlife species native to Kendall County.



*Prescribed Burn at Hoover Forest Preserve*

**Goals**

1. Establish management plans for all Class III and IV natural areas. Identify priority areas for natural areas management based on preserve quality and identified management needs. Track prescriptive management activities using the Kendall County Geographical Information System (KC-GIS).
2. Clear invasive species and fallen tree material around all known Plants of Concern (PoC) populations. Reintroduce prescribed fire into oak woodland areas to support oak ecosystem regeneration.
3. Determine locations of breeding populations of rare populations of species in greatest need for conservation as identified within the State of Illinois Wildlife Action Plan. Increase monitoring, management, and habitat enhancement activities to sustain locally rare and declining populations.

**Projects Achievable within Current Limitations**

1. Continue to pursue and complete grant-funded restoration projects (Project Hoover; The Morton Arboretum - US Forest Service Landscape Scale Restoration Project; Fox River Bluffs cropland conversion project). Secure small grants from local, state and federal agencies (US Fish and Wildlife Service – Illinois Department of Natural Resources – Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation – The Conservation Foundation – Forest Foundation of Kendall County).
2. Complete floristic quality inventories for all Class III and Class IV preserve areas. Implement priority management activities based on limited staffing resources and funding.
3. Complete habitat enhancement projects at Hoover and Fox River Bluffs Forest Preserves to support Rusty-Patched Bumble Bee recovery; continue to support the District's Bow Hunt Program to support management of healthy White-tailed Deer populations and control the spread of Chronic Wasting Disease.

**Beyond the District's 5-Year Plan**



*Pileated Woodpecker Nest at Subat Forest Preserve*

1. Convert the District's remaining 571-acres currently in agricultural production to natural cover based on soil profiles and best practices. Pursue carbon credits for revenue generation for reforestation projects.
2. Complete FQI studies for all preserve areas every 10-years. Expand prescribed burning to 10% of preserve holdings annually. Increase invasive species clearing activities to 10% of preserve holdings annually.
3. Document trends of loss and recovery of wildlife populations in greatest need for conservation in Kendall County as identified and in accordance with the State of Illinois Wildlife Action Plan.

## Preserve Improvement Projects

### Vision Statements

#### **Trails and Corridors**

Expand the trail system in Kendall County for walking, biking and outdoor recreation.

#### **Amenities and Facilities**

Expand outdoor recreation opportunities for fishing, hiking, picnicking and education.

#### **Soil and Water Conservation**

Address soil erosion and water quality impacts to Kendall County's rivers, streams, and wetland areas.

### Goals

1. Construct a regional trail connection from Hoover Forest Preserve to Millbrook South Forest Preserve.
2. Construct a nature center for hosting at-leisure visitors, public and private functions at Subat Forest Preserve. Complete a master plan and architectural drawings, specifications and cost estimates for all master plan elements.
3. Complete soil erosion control projects to repair ravine head-cut formations and address streambank erosion and trail undercutting at Maramech, Little Rock Creek, Fox River Bluffs, Lyon-Young and Hoover Forest Preserves.

### Projects Achievable within Current Limitations

1. Complete the trail connection from Hoover Forest Preserve to Fox River Bluffs Forest Preserve; establish a maintained turf trail at Henneberry Forest Preserve; complete a trail connection from Little Rock Creek to Maramech Forest Preserve.
2. Leverage outside funding using the District's Endowment Fund to complete construction of a nature education center at Subat Forest Preserve.
3. Complete in-house soil erosion control projects at Little Rock Creek, Hoover, and Maramech Forest Preserves; identify opportunities for cooperating with Kendall County and local drainage districts to complete in-stream creek system debris clearing, low-head dam removal (Little Rock Creek Forest Preserve) and habitat enhancement projects.



*Oak Tree Planting at Pickerill-Pigott Forest Preserve*



*Groundbreaking and Sign Dedication at Fox River Bluffs Forest Preserve*

### Beyond the District's 5-Year Plan

1. Complete regional trail connections based on future land acquisition or trail easement purchases.
2. Extend at-leisure educational opportunities the dedication of operating funds for weekend interpretive staffing.
3. Establish a wetland mitigation bank in Kendall County through cropland conversion projects at Baker Woods and/or Millington Forest Preserve.



## Connecting People to Nature and Outdoor Recreation

### Vision Statement

Connect Kendall County residents and families to nature by offering and expanding high-quality educational and recreational program services.

### Goals

1. Maximize participation within District programs. Support inclusion of all residents, insure access and opportunities to benefit from educational and recreational offerings.
2. Create programs that incorporate the Rusty Patched Bumble Bee Recovery Plan efforts at Hoover; Oak-Ecosystem Recovery Group efforts and initiatives; Landscape Scale Restoration Project efforts; the Pickerill-Pigott Preserve Opening Natural Resource Management Plan; and Subat Forest Preserve - Illinois Natural Area Inventory site recovery plan (Schaeffer Road Fen).
3. Diversify early learning educational and outdoor recreational experiences.
4. Take creative approaches and diversify K-12 educational program offerings in response to COVID-19.
5. Expand adult education offerings.
6. Enhance Ellis Equestrian Center capacity, programming and fee structures to encourage group lessons and programs.
7. Create programs that impart health benefits from both exercise and outdoor activities in natural areas through participation.



*Helping Hands at Hoover Forest Preserve*

### Projects Achievable within Current Limitations

1. Continue to use popular social media channels; local news outlets; preserve kiosks, and new and emerging online platforms to engage residents.
2. Offer public events, create habitat programs to increase habitat and awareness for the Rusty Patched Bumble Bee and other pollinators at Hoover and Fox River Bluffs. Offer school programs that allow middle school and high school students to take part in a large scale stewardship project at different preserves.
3. Expand and diversify early learning educational and outdoor recreational experiences, adult education offerings, group lessons and programs, and guided outdoor recreational activities as affordable within the time constraints of District education full time and part time staff and instructors.



*Riding Lessons at Ellis Equestrian Center*

### Beyond the District's 5-Year Plan

1. Construct an early learning program building.
2. Employ additional education department staffing as program demand increases.

## Capital Infrastructure and Equipment

### Vision Statements

Assess, maintain, repair, and replace the District's capital infrastructure and equipment to maximize useful life and utility with a replacement schedule that emphasizes general public access and District employee safety.

Secure intergovernmental and private support for completing preserve improvement projects.



*"The Rookery" Early Learning Program Facility*

### Goals

1. Prepare cost estimates and recommendations to Commission for repair, replacement, or removal of existing facilities and infrastructure on the landscape based on operational needs and public use.
2. Evaluate condition and building repair needs for District maintenance and public use buildings at Harris, Hoover, Baker Woods, and Pickerill-Pigott Forest Preserves.
3. Evaluate condition and replacement costs for District vehicles and equipment essential for support District operations.
4. Contact local County agencies, township road districts, and park districts /departments to determine interest with establishing an equipment pool.

### Projects Achievable within Current Limitations

1. Replace District vehicles and equipment as needed based on useful life and/or increased maintenance cost trend (Replacement Schedule Attached).
2. Replace District equipment as needed based on useful life and/or increased maintenance cost trend (Replacement Schedule Attached).
3. Remove or replace District capital infrastructure as needed based on useful life and/or increased maintenance cost trend (Replacement Schedule Attached).
4. Continue to work with the Kendall County Highway Department and Kendall County Township Highway Commissioners to support preserve access road maintenance.

### Beyond the District's 5-Year Plan

1. Additional capital funding resources will be needed to replace District vehicles, equipment, and capital infrastructure beyond the scope of this 5-Year Plan replacement schedule.



*Prairie Broadcast Seeding at Hoover Forest Preserve*