REDI POSITION PAPER Part 1

Moving Towards Racial Equity

in the Forest Preserves of Cook County

Adopted by the Forest Preserves Board of Commissioners on July 28, 2020

FOREST PRESERVES of Cook County

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Adopted by the Conservation and Policy Council on June 20, 2020

ISSUE

The Forest Preserves of Cook County recognizes that it exists within a pervasive culture of structural racism that has produced deep inequities, and moving forward will apply a racial equity lens to its future investments, policies and operations in order to meet the Preserves' nature conservation mission in the most equitable way.

BACKGROUND & HISTORY

The founding of America and its expansion west has been one of exclusion, marginalization and disenfranchisement. Across the country and here in Cook County, government policies and practices created communities where people of different races and incomes live separately from one another, and the cost we pay for this racial inequity is steep—measured in lost income, lives and potential. While the Forest Preserves' purview is limited to stewardship of Cook County's system of natural lands, we must acknowledge that institutionalized racism has impacted the patterns of investment and stewardship of the Preserves, and examine how we can change our approach to *benefit all the people of Cook County.*

The vision of the Next Century Conservation Plan is that "the people of Cook County will celebrate and nurture our thriving woodlands, prairies and waters as world-class treasures that sustain our great metropolis." In order to achieve this vision and expand the ranks of those who deeply care, respect and enjoy our collective natural resources, we must intentionally break down barriers and build new bridges to the rich diversity of races and ethnicities that call our county home.

Build on momentum. The Forest Preserves and its partners have begun important efforts toward these goals. Case studies in Appendix 2 highlight programs and projects that intentionally welcome and include people of color, including Better Beaubien and the Serpent Twin Mound (Pokto Činto) at Schiller Woods. Other efforts at the Forest Preserves include recent reorganization of the Department

KEY TERMS:

Racial equity occurs when racial identity does not determine how one fares in society.

Achieving racial equity requires that we interrogate policies and institutional practices across the board to identify the influence of structural racism, and include those who are most impacted in the processes to create and implement equitable policies and practices.

Impacted communities. We use the term "impacted communities" throughout this paper, based on data and maps generated by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) to identify communities within Cook County that are impacted by a history of racial inequity. These include communities that are: (i) economically disconnected areas with concentrations of low-income and minority households *and* (ii) disinvested areas with long-run decline in employment and weak commercial markets.

See datahub.cmap.illinois.gov/dataset/on-to-2050-layer-edas-disinvested-areas

of Conservation & Experiential Programs (CEP) into a zone model to better create local partnerships, new pilot programs by the Volunteer Resources team to engage residents from impacted communities, and increased efforts to gather input from residents during planning and decision-making. In addition, the Brookfield Zoo and the Chicago Botanic Garden—both located on Forest Preserves land—have launched a number of initiatives to connect people of color to nature.

The Forest Preserves should build on this momentum and incorporate a racial equity lens into decisions about the investments, policies and practices of the Forest Preserves going forward, beginning by examining where the Forest Preserves has had a history of inequity based on race and how that history contributes to systems and policies of discrimination. The Forest Preserves should then use this analysis to correct past inequity, remove barriers that were constructed over time, and promote equity in its future implementation of the Next Century Conservation Plan.

We also know that equity starts from within, and the efforts outlined in this paper will build upon and complement a parallel internal effort at the Forest Preserves, the Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (REDI) committee, which is assessing hiring, training and other FPCC operations, policies and procedures to create a work culture that embraces diversity and is inclusive and welcoming to all employees and partners, and to all the people of Cook County.

Future steps to further inclusion. When we say welcoming to all, we mean all. We recommend beginning with race because the legacy of individual and systemic racism in metropolitan Chicago continues to have devastating impact today. As documented in the Metropolitan Planning Council report “The Cost of Segregation,” because of our regional and national history of segregation and income inequality, the communities most impacted by structural racism today are generally those with the least resources, lowest income and highest poverty. By adopting a racial equity lens as a first step, we open the door for a framework and approach that can also be applied to address other types of marginalization, including gender, sexual orientation, disability and age. A phase two position paper will address this broader issue of diversity and inclusion within the Forest Preserves.

POSITION STATEMENT

The Forest Preserves of Cook County should implement its goals to connect more people to nature and to promote and protect the biodiversity of its natural resources in partnership with all the residents of Cook County, including those most marginalized by structural racism. The Forest Preserves should work with the Conservation and Policy Council and other partners to ensure that voices from communities that are impacted by racial inequity are incorporated throughout the planning and decision-making process, and by applying a racial equity lens to major policy and budget decisions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Apply a racial equity lens to all future plans, programs, policies and investments.

A racial equity lens should address four critical questions:

- Does it expand access to protected nature in an impacted community. If so, how can we prioritize this work?
- Does it burden an impacted community? If so, how can we mitigate or remove the burden?
- Will the proposal contribute to a cycle of disinvestment? If so how can we reverse that cycle?
- How have we meaningfully reached out to people of color to seek input (both broadly and for specific proposals), and how are we using that input to shape plans and inform decisions?

1.1. Apply these questions in the context of the Forest Preserve's primary mission of nature conservation and connecting people to nature. The analysis should take place as early as feasible in the planning process.

1.2 Examine recent plans to ensure that these questions were not overlooked.

1.3 Explore implementing Racial Equity Impact Assessment tools, which offer a systematic examination of how different racial and ethnic groups will likely be affected by a proposed action or decision, and are intended to help reduce, eliminate and prevent racial discrimination and inequities. (Further description can be found in Appendix 4.)

2 Expand outreach to engage residents of impacted communities.

The Forest Preserves has begun to work towards including impacted communities in on-going decision-making and to provide opportunities to connect these residents to nature. The Forest Preserves should continue to develop and expand these strategies to engage more people from impacted communities.

2.1 Invest in culturally relevant programs and expand partnerships with the Brookfield Zoo, the Chicago Botanic Garden and community-based organizations working within impacted communities to promote the importance of protecting native habitats and animals and connecting people to nature.

2.2 Expand opportunities for volunteers from impacted communities to engage with the Forest Preserves via restoration, events, etc.

2.3 Explore best practices and implement new models that address barriers to visitors and volunteers, which can include time, transportation, language and disabilities.

2.4. Develop methods to measure the success of new partnerships and new models for nature-based volunteerism to determine how to continually increase engagement of people of color with the preserves.

2.5. Examine best practices for community input that may include applying new community engagement techniques designed to build participation, understanding and trust over time.

2.6. Expand the Conservation Corps to provide employment opportunities to residents of impacted communities and to diversify the conservation workforce. Incorporate best practices for inclusive place-making into Gateway Plans, new plans and new capital investments.

2.7. Incorporate best practices for inclusive place-making into Gateway Plans, new plans and new capital investments.

In addition to asking the questions outlined above, a racial equity lens should be applied to specific programs and initiatives of the Forest Preserves as indicated in recommendations 3 through 6.

3 Consider racial equity in land acquisition decisions.

The Forest Preserves of Cook County's primary mission includes protecting natural areas that are home to native plants and animals and that promote biodiversity. This is and should remain the top priority for acquiring new land. In addition, access to nature is important to the health and well-being for everyone, and in many cases low-income individuals are less able to travel to experience nature. Fortunately, there are many opportunities to protect high-quality natural areas in or adjacent to impacted communities, such as in the Calumet region.

3.1. Prioritize acquisitions that meet the Forest Preserves' ecological goals and also are located within or nearby impacted communities that are under-served by protected open space.

3.2. Explore opportunities to partner with neighboring municipalities to create better connections to the forest preserves via bike trails, walking trails or other key connectors.

4 Build a staff that is diverse and promotes racial equity.

The mission-driven employees of the Forest Preserves are one of its most valuable assets, and staff from many departments—including police, permits, volunteer resources and landscape maintenance—regularly interact with the public. From upper management to staff out in the field, the Forest Preserves must create a culture that emphasizes customer service, embraces diversity and is welcoming to all. Of special note, recognizing the nation's long history of fraught relationships between police and people of color, the Forest Preserves can become a model for equitable policing, public safety and positive community relations.

4.1. Develop and implement implicit bias training and racial equity training for all staff.

4.2. Train the Forest Preserves senior team and other staff to use Racial Equity Impact Assessments (REIAs) to reduce, eliminate and prevent racial discrimination and inequities. (See Appendix 4.)

4.3. Continue to use feedback from annual customer service surveys to strategically improve services throughout the Forest Preserves.

4.4. Modify hiring practices to promote employee diversity and use staff training to continually build a more inclusive culture and promote equitable decision-making.

5 Provide all residents with access to nature-related recreation by ensuring major recreational facilities are well-distributed across the Forest Preserves, accessible and well-maintained.

An initial assessment of major recreational facilities presented in the Compatible Recreation position paper indicates that Forest Preserves facilities are, for the most part, equally distributed throughout the Forest Preserves, with the noted exception of no major facilities located south of I-80. The Compatible Recreation position paper recommends that (a) the Forest Preserves of Cook County gives special attention to sites south of I-80, and (b) the Forest Preserves expands programs and outreach to connect more residents to nature.

5.1. Complete a full assessment of existing facilities location, accessibility and condition, and use this information to direct future investments to ensure equity.

5.2. Explore how the Forest Preserves can partner with workforce agencies to create a new Civilian Conservation Corps program in Cook County to complete major repairs, construct new facilities and provide job training for the building trades.

5.3. Ensure that decision-making for compatible recreation investments emphasizes breaking cycles of disinvestment in impacted communities.

6 Expand the criteria for restoration prioritization to also include racial equity.

Current restoration efforts by the Forest Preserves are directed to give priority to the areas of highest ecological value and areas that are actively being managed by volunteer stewards. (See Appendix 1.2.) A racial equity lens should be added to these considerations.

6.1. Expand programs that engage youth and adults from impacted communities in conservation, particularly the Conservation Corps programs that prioritize these populations.

6.2. Reach out to volunteers from impacted communities for restoration workdays, such as those currently being implemented at Midlothian Meadows and other sites.

6.3. Expand the number of stewardship sites in and adjacent to impacted communities utilizing new models of volunteer stewardship, outreach and education as recommended in the Scaling Up Volunteers position paper.

Position Paper

This position paper is one of four published in 2020 by the Conservation and Policy Council of the Forest Preserves of Cook County. Each of these documents outlines a set of principles and recommendations about a key issue that faces the Forest Preserves today and in the foreseeable future. It is our intention that these papers will set clear guidelines for the actions and direction of the Forest Preserves staff, its Board of Commissioners, and its partners and supporters.

These position papers continue an important legacy of civic leadership related to the Forest Preserves. While natural areas no longer remain in many Midwestern counties, in Cook County, natural communities have survived because of the vision of civic leaders.

From the beginning, the Forest Preserves has struggled, at times unsuccessfully, to uphold its mission and protect its land. Earlier Advisory Committees provided published reports in 1929, 1952 and 1959 to guide land acquisition, development plans, protection, operation and public use of lands, and methods of finance. These early advisory reports provide an important foundation to build on. The 1959 Advisory Committee, for example, wrote, “The Board has kept in mind the fact that the great holdings of the District are the property of all the citizens of Cook County and has refused to dissipate them for community, municipal or other purposes not in the interest of the general public,” and that it takes “vigilance, effort and courage” to sustain and enforce these polices with firmness and resolution.

The Council thanks the following for their assistance developing this paper: *Emily Harris (Council member and REDI committee chair), Shelley Spencer (Council member), Tracy Bishop (FPCC), Eileen Figel (FPCC), Kendra Freeman (Metropolitan Planning Council), Raquel Garcia-Alvarez (FPCC), Chloe Gurin-Sands (Metropolitan Planning Council), Commissioner Stanley Moore (Council liaison), Reinaldo Ramos (FPCC), Professor Kathleen Yang-Clayton (UIC).*

APPENDICES

Moving Towards Racial Equity

in the Forest Preserves of Cook County

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Moving Towards Racial Equity Appendices

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ADVOCACY/WORK PLAN 3

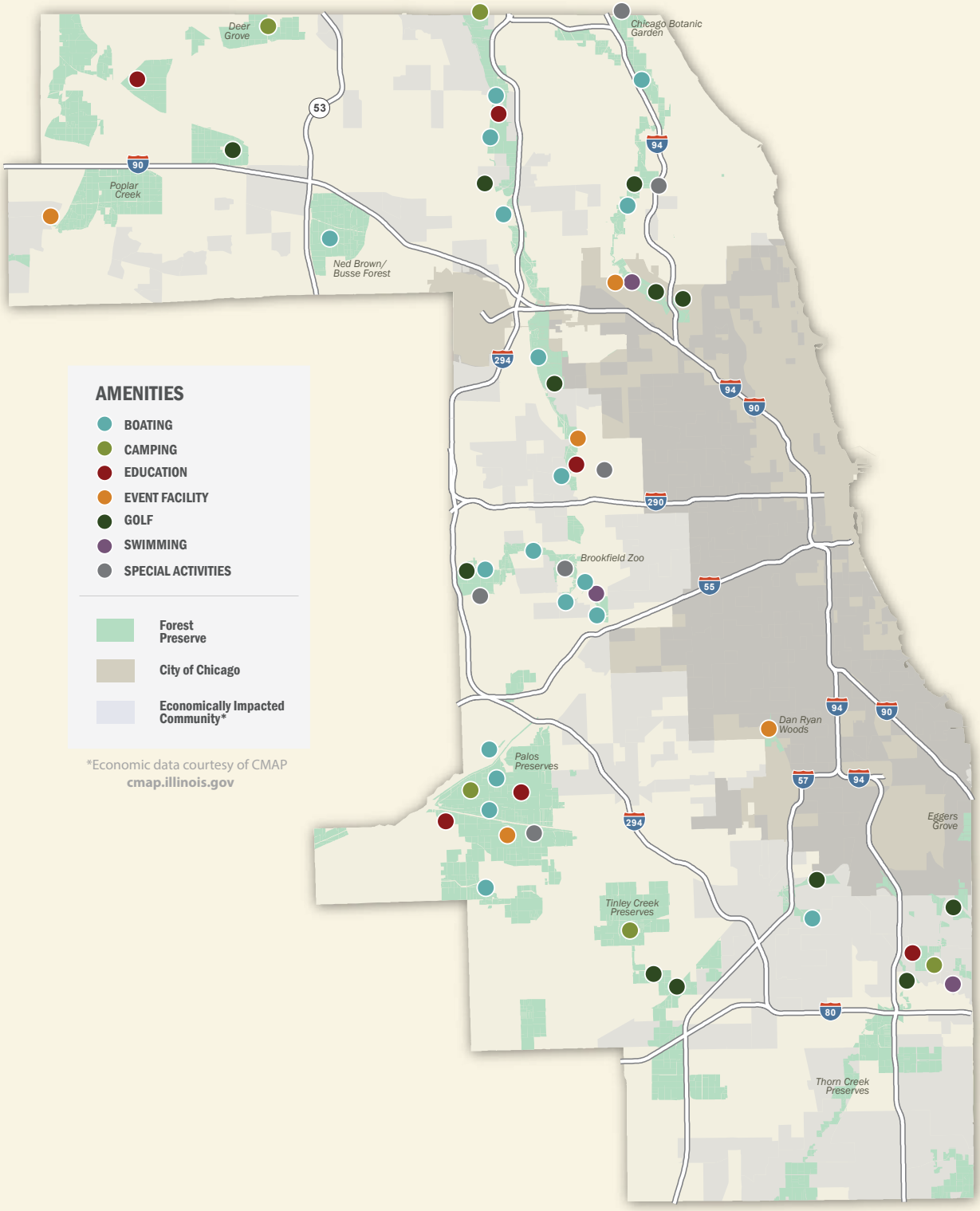
RACIAL EQUITY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS 4

OTHER REDI RESOURCES 5

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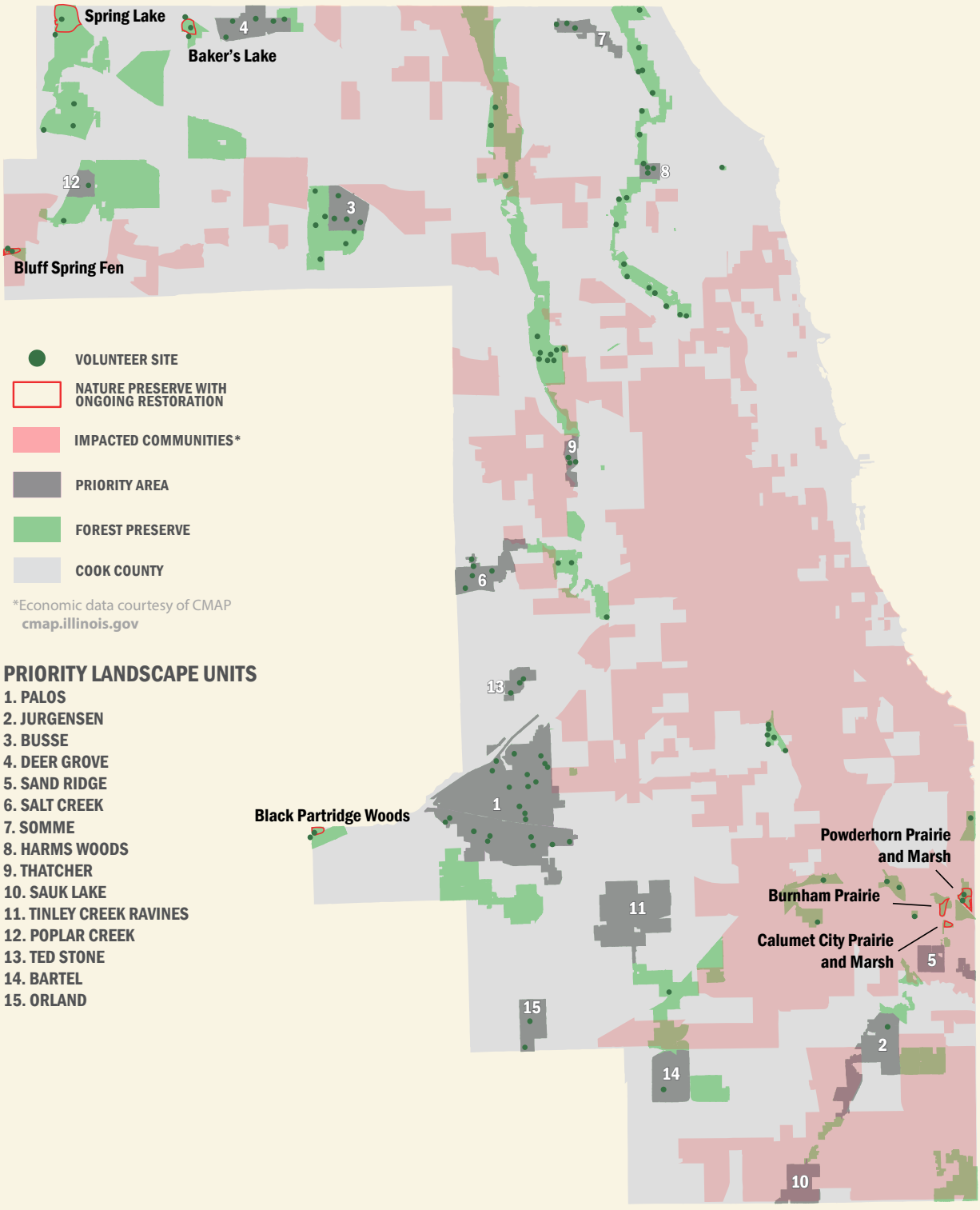
FOREST PRESERVES OF COOK COUNTY

Popular Attractions



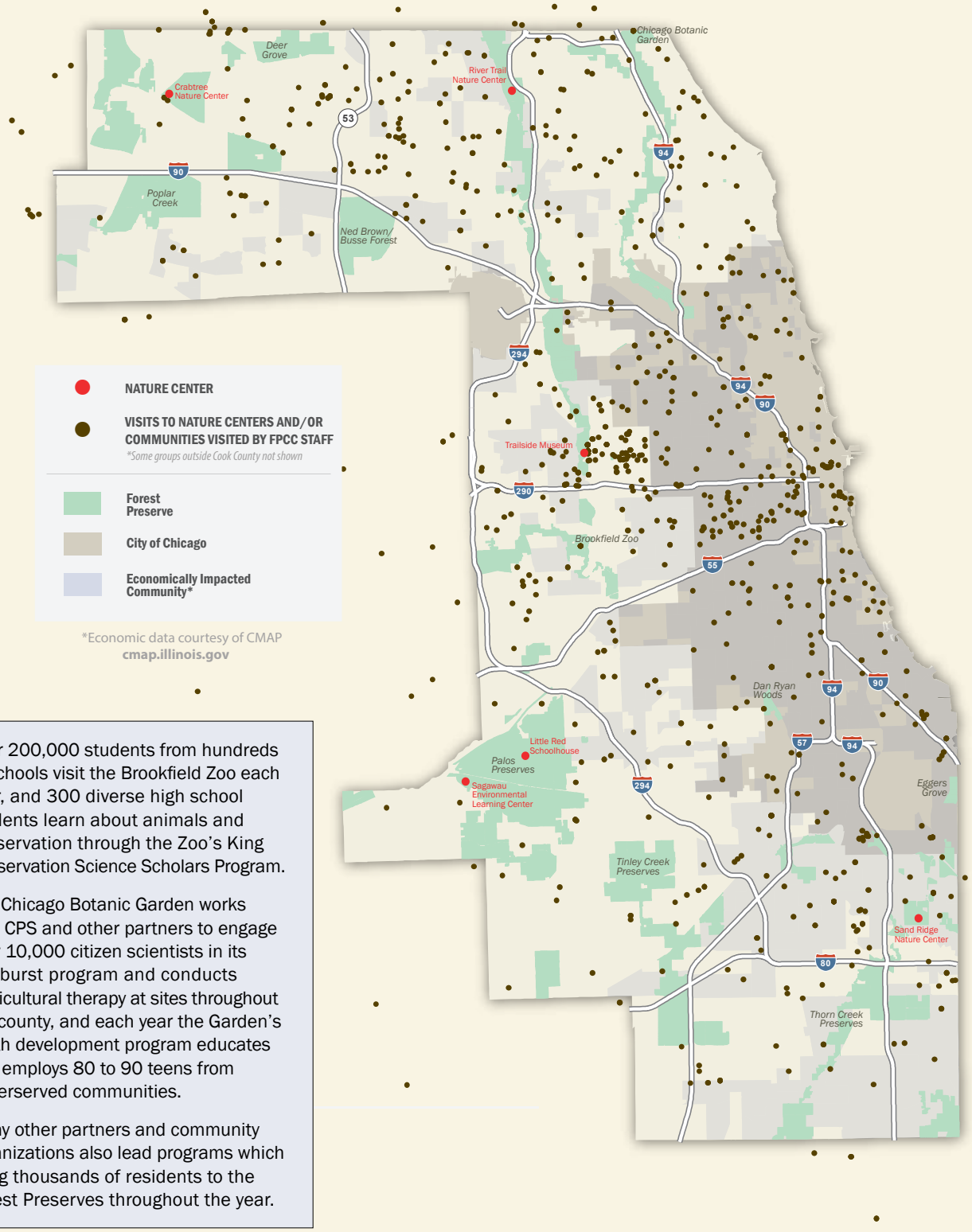
FOREST PRESERVES OF COOK COUNTY

Restoration Sites



FOREST PRESERVES OF COOK COUNTY

Programs and Community Outreach



Over 200,000 students from hundreds of schools visit the Brookfield Zoo each year, and 300 diverse high school students learn about animals and conservation through the Zoo's King Conservation Science Scholars Program.

The Chicago Botanic Garden works with CPS and other partners to engage over 10,000 citizen scientists in its Budburst program and conducts horticultural therapy at sites throughout the county, and each year the Garden's youth development program educates and employs 80 to 90 teens from underserved communities.

Many other partners and community organizations also lead programs which bring thousands of residents to the Forest Preserves throughout the year.

Appendix 2:
Case Studies

The following case studies highlight on-going efforts at the Forest Preserves, the Brookfield Zoo, and the Chicago Botanic Garden to promote racial equity via community engagement, volunteerism, hiring practices, and equity-based decision-making.

Promoting Racial Equity via Programming and Community Engagement

2.1. REIMAGINING BEAUBIEN WOODS

Improving the quality of life on the South Side of Chicago via community engagement and better connections to nature.

Adjacent to five communities on the southernmost edge of Chicago sit the Beaubien Woods Forest Preserve. Offering a boat launch, youth programming, stewardship opportunities and nearby bike trails, the woods are rife with possibility. Yet the area remains secluded and underserved.

To inspire a more vibrant and inter-connected region, in 2017 FPCC staff and the American Institute of Architects (AIA) developed a new model for engaging community members to discuss their concerns and priorities for Beaubien Woods, and to develop strategies to improve their overall quality of life via improved access to nature. The resulting plan, Better Beaubien in Action, identifies new partners such as Little Calumet Underground Railroad Project, We Keep you Rollin', F.R.E.S.H., TCA Health, BPI Early Childhood Initiative, Chicago Park District, Chicago Public Library and others. The next phase of the initiative focuses on services and programs the community needs and wants. The Community Partner Alliance, co-chaired by the Chicago Housing Authority and the Metropolitan Planning Council, oversees implementation of the plan.

2.2 CULTURAL PLACEMAKING AT SCHILLER WOODS THE SERPENT TWIN MOUND (POKTO ČINTO)

The ancestral practice of mound building showcases the rich cultural history of placemaking.

Native Americans continue to live and practice their heritage and traditions in the Chicago region, including through stewardship of the land. Chicago is home to the country's third-largest urban Native American community, and it is the responsibility of the Forest Preserves of Cook County to engage this community—celebrating its past and supporting its future. On Indigenous Peoples Day in 2019, the Serpent Twin Mound (Pokto Činto) was dedicated at Schiller Woods. Designed by Indigenous artist Santiago X, the serpent effigy pays homage to ancestral earthwork art—highlighting the human connection with the natural environment and warning humanity of the continuum of existence and the need to maintain the balance of our world. The Chicago Public Art Group (CPAG), American Indian Center (AIC), and Portage Park Neighborhood Association (PPNA) were awarded the Searle Funds at Chicago Community Trust's (CCT) Great Rivers Grant to plan and develop the serpent twin mound as one element of the Northwest Portage Walking Museum. The organizations commissioned Santiago X to work with the AIC community and youth to develop the design for the site which became the first noted installation of an effigy mound by an Indigenous artist in North America since the founding of the United States.

2.3 EMPOWERING COMMUNITY LEADERS TO CREATE THEIR OWN OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

Training and free access to gear enable leaders to connect their organizations to nature on their own time.

To engage a broader diversity of programming partners and bring more people to the preserves, FPCC offers a spectrum of resource sharing and trainings. The Community Leadership Workshops provide organization leaders with information about how being in nature and the preserves can help meet their organizations' mission and goals. Group leaders learn how to use nature for improved health and wellness, youth development, team building, field trips, and science lessons. They also meet FPCC staff and learn how to access FPCC resources including two gear libraries—one for campgrounds and one for paddling opportunities. Organizations from across Cook County are taking advantage of these programs to lead their own groups on camping trips, paddling excursions, or other visits to the Forest Preserves.

2.4 CONNECTING FAMILIES TO THE BROOKFIELD ZOO

Community passes and neighborhood programs ensure children living in under-resourced neighborhoods have access to the Brookfield Zoo and nature-based learning

As a result of the Chicago Zoological Society's efforts to advance diversity among zoo guests, people of color represent over 42% of non-member attendance. In total, nearly 65% of non-member guests receive complimentary admission through the Society's community pass program, an effort to keep the zoo accessible to individuals of all communities and backgrounds. The Society's Zoo Adventure Passport program, targeted for families living in under-resourced neighborhoods, connects children with wildlife and nature in their community through free monthly nature sessions at several Chicago Public Library locations. The sessions feature age appropriate hands-on science experiments, games, and crafts. Once a family has participated in three sessions, they are eligible for a free trip to the Brookfield Zoo and other science-and-nature focused institutions, transportation included. In 2018, the program served more than 2,840 participants (95% Latinx or African American) in the Belmont Cragin, Pilsen, Cicero, Melrose Park, and Fuller Park/Englewood neighborhoods.



Image: 2.4, Connecting Families to the Brookfield Zoo

Promoting Racial Equity via Volunteerism

2.5 CENTENNIAL VOLUNTEERS

An initiative to engage thousands of volunteers to conduct ecological restoration projects in the Chicago and Calumet river basins

Launched in 2014, the Centennial Volunteers (CV) program mobilizes people to heal and nurture the land. The initiative recruits volunteers to help restore habitat and the diversity of plants and animals while maintaining the ecological health of the Forest Preserves. Managed in partnership with Friends of the Chicago River and Friends of the Forest Preserves, individuals of Centennial Volunteers are geographically, racially and ethnically diverse and are laying the foundation for the next generation of leaders. The project focuses on north and south side locations and is currently in its fourth phase.

The program recognizes that partnering with community organizations addressing pressing social issues is a strategic way to build awareness about the many benefits of spending time in the preserves, particularly in the Calumet region. In response, CV staff dedicated time to attending community

events and meetings. New, non-traditional partners emerged through this work, such as F.R.E.S.H (dedicated to nutrition and food security), Little Calumet Underground Railroad (dedicated to honoring local history), Riverdale Residents Council, and local libraries.

Engaging People of All Backgrounds in Conservation Careers and Promoting the Next Generation of Conservation Leaders

The field of Conservation is recognized nationally and locally for a lack of diversity. The Conservation Corps intentionally brings together people who reflect the diversity of Cook County communities to engage people of color in conservation work. In addition, the FPCC, the Chicago Botanic Garden, and the Brookfield Zoo operate youth development programs designed to engage and educate youth interested in conservation, urban agriculture, and science.

2.6 CONSERVATION CORPS

Launched in 2005 with 15 participants, the Conservation Corps in 2018 included 303 participants who provided over 70,800 service hours towards improving the ecological health of the Preserves. Eleven different summer and year-long Conservation Corps programs offer training, employment and exposure to conservation-related careers to youth and adults, including programs dedicated to serving individuals facing barriers to employment. The Forest Preserves works closely with the Housing Authority of Cook County, the Forest Preserve Foundation, Greencorps Chicago, Friends of the Forest Preserves, Audubon Great Lakes, and the Student Conservation Association to provide these paid, hands-on experiences. Conservation Corps crew members learn valuable transferable skills such as job readiness and teamwork, and adult programs provide professional development opportunities including advanced certification in chainsaw and herbicide use. Conservation Corps graduates have gone on to jobs with the Forest Preserves, ecological restoration contractors, and other conservation organizations.

Forty-three percent of Conservation Corps alumni self-identify as African-American, 20% Latinx, 21% white, 7% multi-racial, 5% Asian and 4% choose not to answer.



Image: 2.6, Conservation Corps

2.7 YOUTH OUTDOOR AMBASSADORS

The Youth Outdoor Ambassador program was built on young people's ideas after a year-long process of being in the preserves and understanding the many possibilities in the district. The FPCC developed the Youth Outdoor Ambassador programs as an employment opportunity for young people. Since 2014, 99 youth from across Cook County have been employed by FPCC to provide support for summer programming, work at nature centers, assistance on resource management teams and shadow FPCC police and administrative professionals. Providing young people from throughout the county with jobs at the Forest Preserves develops a culture of connection to the district, to the mission and vision whether they are future employees, stewards or advocates.



Image: 2.8, Windy City Harvest Youth Farm

2.8 WINDY CITY HARVEST YOUTH FARM

The Chicago Botanic Garden's youth development program educates and employs 80 to 90 teens from underserved communities at three farm sites in Chicago and one in Lake County each year. As they advance through this program, grounded in sustainable urban agriculture and social emotional learning (SEL) principles, Youth Farm students learn to grow food responsibly, work as a team, advocate for food justice, eat in a healthy way, and become accountable—to themselves, their fellow farmers, and to their employers. Through nutrition demonstrations and redemption of federal nutrition assistance coupons at markets and Women, Infants, and Children offices, Youth Farm students serve their communities and gain a better understanding of pressing social and economic issues. Participants stay in school and pursue careers. Graduates have found jobs within Chicago's growing urban agriculture and local food sector or as growers and interns within the program itself, motivated by the knowledge that they can contribute to their communities in meaningful ways.

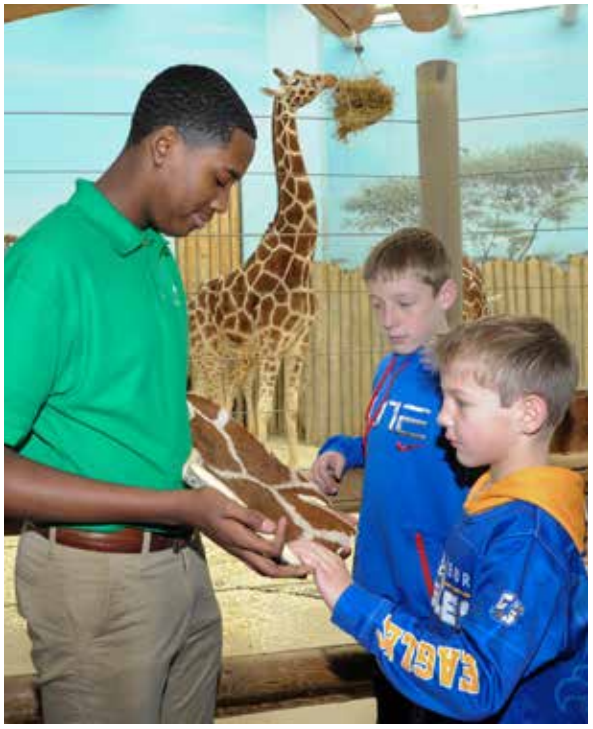


Image: 2.9, King Conservation Science Scholars leading at the Chicago Zoological Society.

2.9 KING CONSERVATION SCIENCE SCHOLARS

The Chicago Zoological Society's King Conservation Science Scholars Program brings together nearly 300 diverse high school students every year to learn about animals and conservation, network with scientists, and make a difference in their communities. Through interactive workshops, research opportunities, interpretation at the zoo, behind-the-scenes experiences, field trips and community projects, the Scholars gain conservation knowledge along with college

readiness, leadership, and career skills. With the support of Zoo professionals and community partners, all of these experiences culminate to prepare students for college, to apply for jobs, develop their own action projects, and to become leaders in their communities. The Scholars are ultimately encouraged to pursue their chosen careers with a conservation mindset. The program has served more than 1,000 students since its launch, and in 2018, the Scholars were 53% women and 57% minority participants. Of all the King Conservation Science Scholar graduates, 100% are attending college.

Promoting Racial Equity via Public Service

2.10 EMPLOYEE AMBASSADORS

Mission-driven employees are one of the Forest Preserves' most valuable assets. To ensure employees have a clear understanding of FPCC's mission, the district provides cross-training across all departments. (For example, Landscape Maintenance staff receive conservation training to improve their knowledge of native plants and Certified Interpretive Host training to foster customer service.) Annual customer service surveys provide feedback used by employees to strategically improve services throughout the Forest Preserves.



Image: 2.11, Employee Diversity at the Brookfild Zoo

2.11 EMPLOYEE DIVERSITY AT THE BROOKFIELD ZOO

People of color represent over 45% of the Chicago Zoological Society's workforce, and women account for more than 63%. When combined, women and people of color comprise over 79% of the Society's workforce. When it comes to recruitment, the Society is dedicated to developing diverse slates of well-qualified applicants for all positions. All open positions are posted on a variety of job boards and communicated to community partners, including those targeting diverse audiences. In addition, the Society participates in a wide array of job fair and recruitment events each year with partners such as the Chicago Urban League, Goodwill Industries, Helping Hand Center, Hiring our Hero's, Central States SER/SERCO, and many others. The Society has hosted individual meetings at the Brookfield Zoo with several of these partners to engage in a focused discussion on how to best match applicants with meaningful employment opportunities while fulfilling the Society's hiring needs.

Appendix 3:
Advocacy/Work Plan

TASK	LEAD(S)
1 Meet with President, individual Board members and other local officials in small groups to discuss recommendations in detail.	Council, partners, staff
2 Institutionalize the FPCC REDI staff committee so that its work becomes integrated with FPCC policies and procedures districtwide, including: a. **TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT:** Identify and eliminate barriers that prevent employees from engaging in professional development classes. b. **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:** Increase event/program partnerships and develop methods to evaluate the success of each partnership. c. **HUMAN RESOURCES:** Develop a diverse list of contacts for new job postings, review the minimum requirements for current and future job descriptions, and make interviews more conversational, while remaining Shakman Compliant. d. **HUMAN RESOURCES:** Track demographics and staff morale through reports and surveys to measure changes, and track staff retention with the use of exit interviews.	REDI Committee
3 Complete first phase of implicit bias training for all FPCC staff and implement policies and practices that embed REDI training on a continual basis.	HR Director & Training Coordinator
4 Increase funding to provide buses to connect residents from impacted communities to events, programs and sites throughout the Forest Preserves, including the Zoo and Garden.	CEP Director
5 Incorporate best practices for inclusive place-making into the implementation strategy for each Gateway Plan and into new plans and capital investments.	P&D Director
6 Convene a racial equity impact assessment training for the senior team.	Deputy Superintendent
7 Make racial equity assessments part of the process for all major policy, planning and budget decisions. Embed racial equity assessments in all FPCC requests for proposals and contracts for goods and services.	Deputy Superintendent
8 Continue outreach to Indigenous, people of color, and other groups to seek input and provide opportunities to co-design strategies to promote racial equity at the Forest Preserves.	CEP team, REDI Committee
9 Seek funding to expand the Conservation Corps and Forest Preserve Experience.	Corps Manager, Grants Manager
10 Evaluate how applying a racial equity lens changes decision-making and/or revises FPCC priorities. Track and guide REDI efforts and present annual progress report with recommendations for moving forward to General Superintendent, Conservation & Policy Council, President & Board. Assess how the FPCC is articulating its REDI values (via the diversity & inclusion statement, etc.) and how these values are being internalized to promote racial equity.	REDI Committee
11 Defend the position as needed.	Council

☐ 2020 ☐ Ongoing

Appendix 4:
Racial Equity Impact Assessments

The Center for Racial Justice Innovation defines racial equity impact assessments and explains their need as follows:

What are Racial Equity Impact Assessments?
A Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) is a systematic examination of how different racial and ethnic groups will likely be affected by a proposed action or decision. REIAs are used to minimize unanticipated adverse consequences in a variety of contexts, including the analysis of proposed policies, institutional practices, programs, plans and budgetary decisions. The REIA can be a vital tool for preventing institutional racism and for identifying new options to remedy long-standing inequities.

Why are they needed?
REIAs are used to reduce, eliminate and prevent racial discrimination and inequities. The persistence of deep racial disparities and divisions across society is evidence of institutional racism—the routine, often invisible and unintentional, production of inequitable social opportunities and outcomes. When racial equity is not consciously addressed, racial inequality is often unconsciously replicated.

When should it be conducted?
REIAs are best conducted during the decision-making process, prior to enacting new proposals. They are used to inform decisions, much like environmental impact statements, fiscal impact reports and workplace risk assessments.

SAMPLE TOOLKITS

The Center's REIA toolkit is available at **raceforward.org/practice/tools/racial-equity-impact-assessment-toolkit.** **The Government Alliance on Race and Equity,** a national network of government working to achieve racial equity and advance opportunities for all, also publishes a Racial Equity Toolkit which can be accessed at: **racialequityalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/GARE-Racial_Equity_Toolkit.pdf**

Appendix 5:
Other REDI Resources

Davis, Abel, Burnham, Rufus C., Brown, E.E., Brummel, D.H., Dawes, Fred W., Elliott, Wm. S., Gale, Paul C., Haugan, Henry A., Lews, John C., McCutcheon, John T., Penfield, Frederick W. Recommended Plans for Forest Preserves of Cook County, Illinois. Prepared by the Advisory Committee, January 1929.

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Appendix 6: Stakeholder's Roundtable



Moving Towards Racial Equity in the Forest Preserves of Cook County

A discussion with key stakeholders facilitated by Kendra Freeman, Chloe Gurin-Sands, and Adam Slade of the Metropolitan Planning Council

October 17, 2019

FOREST PRESERVES of Cook County

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Moving Towards Racial Equity in the Forest Preserves of Cook County

A roundtable discussion with key stakeholders

October 17, 2019

The Conservation and Policy Council is a group of civic leaders appointed by President Preckwinkle and the Board of Commissioners to guide efforts at the Forest Preserves of Cook County (FPCC) to protect and restore nature and to ensure everyone feels welcome at the Forest Preserves. For the past year, the Council has been working with staff and partners to develop four position papers which address issues related to racial equity, land acquisition, compatible recreation, and volunteerism. Each of the papers will set clear guidelines for the actions and direction of the Forest Preserves staff, its Board of Commissioners, and its partners and supporters.

On October 17, 2019, the Forest Preserves convened a roundtable discussion to solicit input on the draft Racial Equity position paper. The Forest Preserves of Cook County and the Conservation and Policy Council thank the roundtable participants for their frank input and constructive suggestions to promote racial equity in the Forest Preserves.

Roundtable Participants

Stakeholders	REDI Committee Members & FPCC Staff
Aaron Oshea, Midwest Color Camp	Adam Slade, MPC
Aasia Mohammed Castaneda, Field Museum	Chloe Gurin-Sands, MPC
Carina Ruiz, Audubon Great Lakes	Cynthia Moreno, FPCC
Lorena Lopez, Field Museum	Eileen Figel, FPCC
Radhika Miraglia, Friends of the Forest Preserves	Dr. Kathleen Yang-Clayton, UIC
Sergio Vargas, public policy student at UIC	Kendra Freeman, MPC
Vanessa Uribe, Cook County Racial Equity Leadership Council	Raquel Garcia-Alvarez, FPCC
	Shelley Spencer, Cons. & Policy Co.
	Tracy Bishop, FPCC

The roundtable covered three discussion topics as follows:

1. How can the Forest Preserves apply a racial equity lens to future plans and policies?
2. How do we expand outreach to engage residents of impacted communities?
3. How do we create a culture that emphasizes customers services, embraces diversity and is welcoming to all?

For each topic, a summary of the discussion follows.

Discussion Topic 1: How can the Forest Preserves apply a racial equity lens to future plans & policies?

Kendra introduced a key recommendation from the paper intended to bring an equity mindset to decision making. Specifically, the paper recommends that a racial equity lens be applied to all future plans, policies and investments by asking four questions as follows:

1. *Does it expand access to protected nature in an impacted community? If so, how can we prioritize this work?*
2. *Does it burden an impacted community? If so, how can we mitigate or remove the burden?*
3. *Will the proposal contribute to a cycle of disinvestment, and if so how can we reverse that cycle?*
4. *How have we meaningfully reached out to impacted communities to seek input (both broadly and for specific proposals), and how are we using that input to shape plans and inform decisions?*

Kendra asked participants to think about how the Forest Preserves can normalize and apply the racial equity lens and other tools to internal decision-making, and how it can be applied to core functions and other key challenges. Participants offered the following questions, comments and suggestions.

1.1 Implementing the recommendations: top down (Chief Equity Officer) v. bottom up (REDI Team)

There were differing opinions on how to ensure successful implementation of the recommendations. A participant asked, "Who is going to ensure all this will be done? The Forest Preserves have come a long way since 2008, but it is not where it needs to be. I worry that whoever is in the position of power that gets to give the 'yes' or the 'no' won't be culturally competent. There needs to be a person who is cognizant of land management and cultural programs. The person who gets to make the decisions needs to have the competency to use the racial equity lens." The participant recommends hiring a chief equity officer. Another participant replied that the evidence is unclear whether this is the best approach; research shows it often results in silos. This participant suggests it is better to have a broad effort to systematically institutional change throughout an organization. This, the participant adds, takes longer, but is ultimately more successful. This is the approach the Forest Preserves is pursuing via its internal REDI team.

1.2 How we select and talk about "impacted" communities

Participants discussed which communities should be selected for this work and suggested there may need to be different strategies for geographically-impacted communities AND people of color living in predominantly white communities, for people who live adjacent to Forest Preserves AND people who live far from the preserves, for people who actively use the preserves AND people who never visit the preserves.

One participant cautioned, "We definitely don't want to say, 'You are from an impacted community. How can we help you?' It is about saying, 'I understand.' Use language that speaks to the issues we know these communities face. We are all in this together; how are we ensuring this comes across? Another participant concurred and added, "We can have internal conversations around impacted communities, but it is important to use different language on the ground when it comes to outreach and engagement. A lot of us don't think we are part of an impacted community." One participant replied

that it has been hard to define this, adding, "To me, underserved communities are people who don't use the Forest Preserves. And a lot of people have no idea of the challenges these families face."

Participants also noted that the entire region—not just people in impacted communities--benefits from REDI efforts.

1.3 What else should be done to vet the draft paper?

Several participants suggested a broader vetting of the paper. Specific suggestions include:

- ✓ Have a special convening for Native people to review paper. When teaching about plants, Native people like to couple that with harvesting. But it is illegal for Native people to forage in the forest preserves. There are some great nations in Midwest that have policy around foraging; what might that look like in the Forest Preserves of Cook County? (See attachment 1 for a resource list provided by a participant.)
- ✓ Youth Outside, supported by the Hewlett Foundation, partnered with Environmentalists of Color to convene a focus group of Black, Indigenous and POC lead environmental organizations to help shape a new national environmental grant program. A participant offered to help tap this group to review the paper.

Discussion Topic 2: How do we expand outreach to engage residents of impacted communities?

Participants were asked to share best practices for engaging impacted communities in this level of equity work, and to think about how the Forest Preserves can amplify personal and cultural narratives that reflect different communities. Participants also shared ideas for how the Forest Preserves can gain and understand (ground-truth) data to help implement this work.

Participants noted that the people who already believe in promoting racial equity are also the people who are already talking to each other; it is the people who don't get it who aren't coming to the table.

Participants discussed how the Forest Preserves can achieve meaningful engagement. One asked, "How will we receive input? Are we talking a lot and asking for feedback, or are we starting by listening first? What does it really mean to incorporate input? And is it really realistic to do that for all plans and policies?"

Another participant responded that 80% of the decisions made are about internal operating procedures and explained, "This is boring. The community doesn't want to talk about that. So how do we address those standard operating procedures first and make sure the internal environment is healed?"

Another participant replied, "It is important to be in these communities; you have to be a presence and show up and meet them where they are at. It is about people trusting you and inviting you to these spaces."

Several recommendations and best practices were suggested, including:

- ✓ **Use partnerships to reach individuals**. The paper should address community partnerships. The FPCC is quick to re-grant to the same organizations. Engage groups within the community that understand the community and all the barriers.
- ✓ **Expand the Conservation Corps**. One participant explained, "You have a really good model and it is reaching certain impacted communities. To increase it would be great. Maybe the next step is on-boarding them to careers at the Forest Preserves. You can bring people together and see when groups are offering jobs and look at the calendar to see how we can maximize what we already have. When new funding opportunities come up, can we focus our energy on these communities."
- ✓ **Invest in culturally relevant programs that represent the diversity of the County**. A participant suggested that the Forest Preserves explore using a model similar to the Chicago Park District's Night Out program which requests proposals from community-based organizations to provide culturally relevant programming. She explained, "Staff need to understand what are realistic expectations to have when engaging people from these communities. Understand what programs can fill gaps in their quality of life. Our partners have a lot of barriers; maybe a scaled-down version of the Night Out program can help create a model. The Chicago Park District had to understand the barriers to community engagement. They had to understand how to provide more infrastructure for community organizations to provide programming. What resources can the Forest Preserves leverage to amplify programs being led by community organizations?"
- ✓ **Value newcomers to the preserves and give them the same respect we give to conservationists**. Someone who comes to the Forest Preserves for an annual family picnic is enjoying nature. Don't assume people aren't connected to nature.
- ✓ **Have reasonable expectations.** Participants warned that the Forest Preserves must understand the challenges people face. Not everyone has access to transportation, proper clothing and equipment, or the time and bandwidth to volunteer. One participant explained, "The expectation of communities is great—especially from those who are rooted in stewardship—but it is a lot to expect people to come out and volunteer when they are going miles to get food. We put a lot of pressure on our communities—especially in the south branch—but some of us don't have the equipment needed or even a jacket."
- ✓ **Remove barriers to engagement.** A participant added, "When we think about applying this lens and removing barriers, I think of the forest preserves as far away. So how are we pulling in transportation access?"
- ✓ **Use signage, multiple languages, and creative place-making to make everyone feel welcome**. A participant shared that some members of his crew are made to feel unwelcome at the Forest Preserves. He explained, "I work with men from the southside that have never been outdoors with nature. The way the public interacts with the crew . . . it is very discouraging. The number one question is 'Why are you here?' even though we are there every day. It is extremely discouraging when you feel like you are doing a great thing, but the people that are there make you feel unsafe, uncomfortable. More than anything, there needs to be policies in place to make sure the people who want to be there can be there

> ***More than anything, there needs to be policies in place to make sure the people who want to be there can be there comfortably.***
>
> - Aaron

comfortably." A participant asked what can be done to make sure people feel welcome at the Forest Preserves. Another suggested that creative place-making is a great way to show the Forest Preserves are embracing culture and welcoming everyone. The participant suggested several examples, including Anton Seals' projects which reflect the culture of communities adjacent to the south lakefront. She explained that using a cultural narrative totally transforms how people view the land so that when someone arrives, she/he says, "Yeah, this is for me." The participant believes that the serpent mounds recently built at Schiller Woods are another great example, adding, "People will see this and see that the Forest Preserves is acknowledging different cultures. This is a great way to say this land is welcoming." Another participant added that signage can be used to declare this is a welcoming place. Others suggested that translating signs and materials into Spanish and other languages will help a lot.

Discussion Topic 3: How do we create a culture that emphasizes customer service, embraces diversity and is welcoming to all?

Participants were asked to consider how the Forest Preserves can diagnose its internal culture within a diversity, equity and inclusion framework, what specific steps should be taken to normalize this framework internally and externally, and how it can build a sense of accountability for all staff to be "culture keepers". Participants offered the following suggestions.

- ✓ **Change hiring requirements**. One participant noted that "in the past, you had to have a bachelor's degree to work in restoration. Now if you have experience and the certificates needed, you can take on that role. That has worked out well for the Forest Preserves and it has helped increase diversity. I would love to see that adapted in the education positions as well, and to see the Forest Preserves continue these practices beyond entry level positions."
- ✓ **Change the face of people in leadership**. Staff explained that the internal REDI team is reviewing all job descriptions to make sure they include road maps that allow employees to get to the next level without a degree if they have the experience.
- ✓ **Help staff create a safe place**. A participant suggested that people feel threatened. She explained, "In my engagement work, I have come to realize that the recent ICE raids are a barrier to engaging in the outdoors. Is that a conversation being had in the FPCC?" She suggests equipping employees with conflict resolution and protocols so they understand how to create a safe place.
- ✓ **Offer CPR, other trainings in various communities**. Staff explained that the Forest Preserves offers off-site trainings, but there must be engagement and partnerships to bring people out. "For example, we are doing trainings at Little Village High School," she stated, "but first we focused on touch-points to bring the families and students out to the forest preserves."
- ✓ **Articulate the values of the Forest Preserves**. Kendra asked how the Forest Preserves articulates its values. Staff explained how the Permits department is identifying their values. "We have to value each other, value our differences, understand our differences. Having fun is one of our values."
- ✓ **Apply a racial equity lens to Settlers' Day at Sandridge, Juneteenth, and other events**. Settlers Day, Juneteenth and other special events should incorporate narratives that are more culturally relevant.

One participant suggested that a racial equity lens be used to vet these and other current programs. The REDI committee could then use the lessons learned from these early efforts to help guide future efforts to apply a racial equity lens to a broad range of decisions. Staff cautioned that the Forest Preserves must be mindful about how it changes, explaining that volunteers have hosted Settlers' Day for 46 years and some families have participated for generations. She added, "You need to educate and work with people. You don't want them to feel disenfranchised because you have excluded them."

- ✓ **Change internal culture**. Several models for culture change were suggested, including the (1) Racial Equity Transformation initiative at Demos, (2) Abbot Square town square project at the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History, (3) Field Foundation's Leaders for a New Chicago, and (d) the League of Cities REAL initiative. (See callout box below.)

Changing Internal Culture

Case Study 1: Operationalizing Racial Equity and Inclusion at Demos. It is one thing to advocate for equity and inclusion; it is another to turn the lens inward and commit oneself to live those values at the level of day-to-day practice throughout an organization. The Racial Equity Transformation at Demos resulted in the unlearning of deeply ingrained interpersonal and organizational norms, and the learning of new ones; the development of new organizational systems and practices; and the systematic elevation of the issue of race. Demos shares the lessons it learned, templates for racial equity assessments and other resources.

Case Study 2: Using Art to Build a Stronger and More Connected Community. The Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History (MAH) developed a creative town square to connect diverse community members to art. The MAH continues to explore how it can strengthen impact beyond the building, especially in well-used places that attract diverse participants like Abbott Square.

Case Study 3: Promoting Diverse Leadership in Chicago. Although more than 60 percent of Chicago residents are from African, Latinx, Asian, Arab and Native American (ALAANA) communities, the city's civic leadership does not reflect these demographics. Whether in the private, public or in the philanthropic sector, many individuals who are leaders in their communities, professional fields or interest areas are not heard or given a platform in the public discourse. The Field Foundation's Leaders for a New Chicago advances equity and access to opportunity, and fosters conditions that recognize and promote people who bring a broad diversity of background and experience to leadership positions.

Case Study 4: National League of Cities (NLC) Efforts to Build Safe Places for All. The NLC's Race, Equity, And Leadership (REAL) initiative serves to strengthen local leaders' knowledge and capacity to eliminate racial disparities, heal racial divisions, and build more equitable communities. Through training and online resources, REAL helps NLC members build safe places where people from all racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds thrive socially, economically, academically and physically.

Participant Reflections



These things are always heavy, especially when you are at them over and over. You are so happy to be amongst colleagues who are like-minded, but it is not the first time we have been at these tables. So seeing that action piece is important.

– Carina

These communities are not monoliths. We can interact with them in a much more impactful way to help them understand it is not their fault we did not reach out. We have to do the due diligence.
– Sergio

I am hopeful and grateful we are working with the Forest Preserves team to get this done.
- Kendra

I feel this is a really bold action paper. You are not sugar-coating it. I encourage you to continue being bold and stay true to your mission.
– Radhika

I have been here 8 years and this is the first time I have seen this on paper. But I also feel a pressure burden with very little resources to do this stuff.
- Cynthia



I am grateful to be invited to this because I am a fan of the Forest Preserves and so is my family and I want everybody to see the gems that we have.
- Lorena



As a Councilmember, I am very grateful. Without the input from folks like yourselves who have been so open and honest, we couldn't do this like we'd like to.
– Shelley

I love messy work. I love difficult conversations. This is a very comfortable space for me.

- Aasia

Looking at all the organizations I have worked with that are much further behind in this journey, seeing this has been empowering.
- Adam



I am really happy we are sitting here talking about issues using language that is real. The paper states that the founding of this country was based on exclusion and disenfranchisement. It was racist and I am very happy it is being talked about blatantly. That is important to me.
- Aaron

Everyone was so brave to talk about their feelings. I am motivated. There is a lot of work to do and this re-energized me to do it.
– Tracy

This is about making sure everyone is on the same page and has a voice and we are listening to those voices. Some areas know how to use their voice and how to advocate. We have to recognize that POC communities may not be using their voice, so it is helpful to hear everyone wants representation of various voices.
– Raquel



I learned a lot about the way the Forest Preserves is taking this on. It is so important to call out the language and be forward thinking about what we want to achieve. Government has been the main perpetrator of racial inequity. So being bold is important.
– Vanessa

Attachment 1: Examples of Native Nations' Land Management Policies

(Provided by Aasia Mohammed Castaneda of the Field Museum.)

1. Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band (Gun Lake Tribe) of Potawatomi Nation (Michigan)
   They have numerous environmental conservation projects that connect their community to ancestral knowledge. More information can be found here. Projects include culturally relevant environmental conservation of Kalamazoo River lake sturgeon (*Acipenser fulvescens*), wild rice (*Zizania aquatica and Zizania palustris)*, turtles as well as invasive species removal, environmental hazards, water quality monitoring, environmental education and traditional uses of nature. They receive funding from U.S. Fish and Wildlife, Currently, I'm building a partnership with them and plan to have a meeting with their Environmental Dept on December 4th.

2. Oneida Nation (Wisconsin)
   They have an entire guide to their conserved natural areas and trails. They promote traditional uses of land and published a web book of culturally significant plants that provides the scientific, common and Oneida name for each plant. They are invested in sustainable, organic farming using native plant species as pesticides and providing inexpensive, high quality produce that is accessible to the Green Bay area. Each year, they invite anyone, who is willing to work, to the Tsyunhehkw ("life sustenance" in Oneida, pronounced Joon-heh-kwa) Farm where they collectively harvest their traditional white corn, by hand. They come together as a community to ensure important traditions and history are passed down to the next generation.

3. Ho-Chunk Nation, Chicago Branch office, great space and they have led webinars and workshops for Vital Land Illinois on how to engage with Native communities. I am a Network Architect for Vital Lands and we are planning a summit in Champaign, IL Jan 29-30 where this conversation will continue on equitably engaging with Native communities.