

# Rock Island County Forest Preserve Park Plan

2025





Rock Island County  
Forest Preserve District  
Comprehensive Park  
Plan

2025



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The appendix for this plan is a separate document and can be obtained from the Rock Island County Forest Preserve District at (309) 795-1040 or [www.ricfpd.org](http://www.ricfpd.org)



# 1 Executive Summary

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*“The clearest way into the universe is through a forest wilderness.”*

— John Muir

The Rock Island County Forest Preserve District includes seven preserves disbursed within Rock Island County totaling 2,659 acres of owned and leased property. The District's boundaries are coterminous with those of Rock Island County, which is located in northwestern Illinois along the Mississippi River.

As reported in the 2022 Census American Community Survey, Rock Island County has a population of 143,819 residents. The county's population has experienced a decrease of over 14% since its peak in 1970 and is estimated to remain steady in the future. Even though Rock Island County's population is projected to remain steady, local municipalities continue to annex unincorporated parcels of Rock Island County for development, leaving less ecologically-viable land in a natural state for wildlife habitat and preservation.

While typical service levels and community guidelines and standards are available for municipal-oriented parks and recreation, the Forest Preserve District's purpose is to acquire and maintain lands. The District's planning efforts for future population and availability of land must be evaluated to meet the demands of the population and changing identified trends. The Forest

Preserve District's vision for its parks and facility system should not solely be steered by national trends or municipal park and recreation standards, but through an evaluation of ecological health and sustainability. The current and remaining needs of wildlife, and not just the use of the preserves by its patrons, should be evaluated.

This document plays an important role in identifying Forest Preserve District goals through the input of stakeholders, elected officials, and the general public to ensure that the District vision is being implemented through effective, feasible, and time-appropriate strategies.

The Rock Island County Forest Preserve District has completed a comprehensive analysis of the current and future needs for its parks system to increase efforts to appeal to the largest number of residents possible and to serve as a framework to achieve the identified goals and objectives. The plan describes the purpose and activities of the Rock Island County Forest Preserve District, who the District serves, and what implementation strategies will enhance the District's efforts. Components of the plan include the District's vision, goals, and objectives; a current and future needs analysis; policies; recommended strategies and implementation activities;

background and general information, including demographics/trends; and an inventory of each preserve facility's amenities and short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals along with operation/marketing details.

Community input about the preserves and District operations is referenced in various sections of the plan and has been influential in the completion of the plan. The ideas offered from internal and external stakeholders helped to steer the direction and vision of the Rock Island County Forest Preserve District. This input shows that accessible natural places along with parks serve as a social gathering space, and contribute to the overall mental and physical well-being and the quality of life for residents and visitors. Based on that feedback, we've created short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals and suggested implementation activities to achieve such goals.

By identifying opportunities to improve accessibility, respond to trends, and plan for future land acquisition, the District is staying focused on the evolving needs of our community. The District will continue to assess the physical, natural, and social setting prior to the development or restoration of new lands or facilities. These strategies support our vision for consistent, connected, and healthy public spaces for all. Ongoing reviews of park amenities, operations, outreach, and management help us stay on track and deliver a top-tier park system. On-going strategies that have been identified include:

- Support and maintain existing parks and preserves; acquire additional lands for preservation

of natural resources

- Provide access to preserved natural areas, and recreational and educational opportunities
- Continue marketing and outreach to maximize awareness and usage of District's parks and facilities
- Be fiscally responsible; monitor parks and land management trends to address cost effective and sustainable management of the District's park system

The Rock Island County Forest Preserve District Master Plan outlines strategies, defined as projects, actions, or purchases that may occur in the next five years. The recommended strategies are categorized by the plan's policies, and include the roles of the key contacts to further the progression and the proposed implementation activity.

This Master Plan is designed to be flexible and evolving. Annual review of the plan goals, objectives, and policies are recommended for the District staff. This annual review will determine whether the course of action to implement strategies outlined in this plan continue to be supported or should be revised to address changing needs and priorities. The annual review should also consider the public's feedback and the plan policies including system, parks and facilities, programs, and land policies.

## **Purpose**

Any forest preserve district organized under the Downstate Forest Preserve Act shall have the power to create forest preserves, and for that purpose shall

have the power to acquire in the manner hereinafter provided, and hold lands containing one or more natural forests or parts thereof or land or lands connecting such forests or parts thereof, or lands capable of being forested, or capable of being restored to a natural condition, for the purpose of protecting and preserving the flora, fauna, and scenic beauties within such district, and to restore, restock, protect and preserve the natural forests and such lands together with their flora and fauna, as nearly as may be, in their natural state and condition, for the purpose of the education, pleasure, and recreation of the public.

## **Mission**

The mission of the Rock Island County Forest Preserve District is to maintain and acquire lands with the intent to restore and conserve such lands for the purpose of preservation, education, and

recreation for its residents with fiscal responsibility.

## **Vision**

The vision of the Forest Preserve District of Rock Island County is to be a leader in natural resource management that connects nature and wildlife with people through recreation and education. Evidence of this vision will include:

- People and nature are united with quality amenities and experiences.
- Rock Island County will be a resilient landscape with restored and preserved natural areas.
- The Forest Preserve District leads Rock Island County in protecting, conserving, and enhancing the natural landscape.

**Forest Preserve Commission Members**

**Kai Swanson, President**

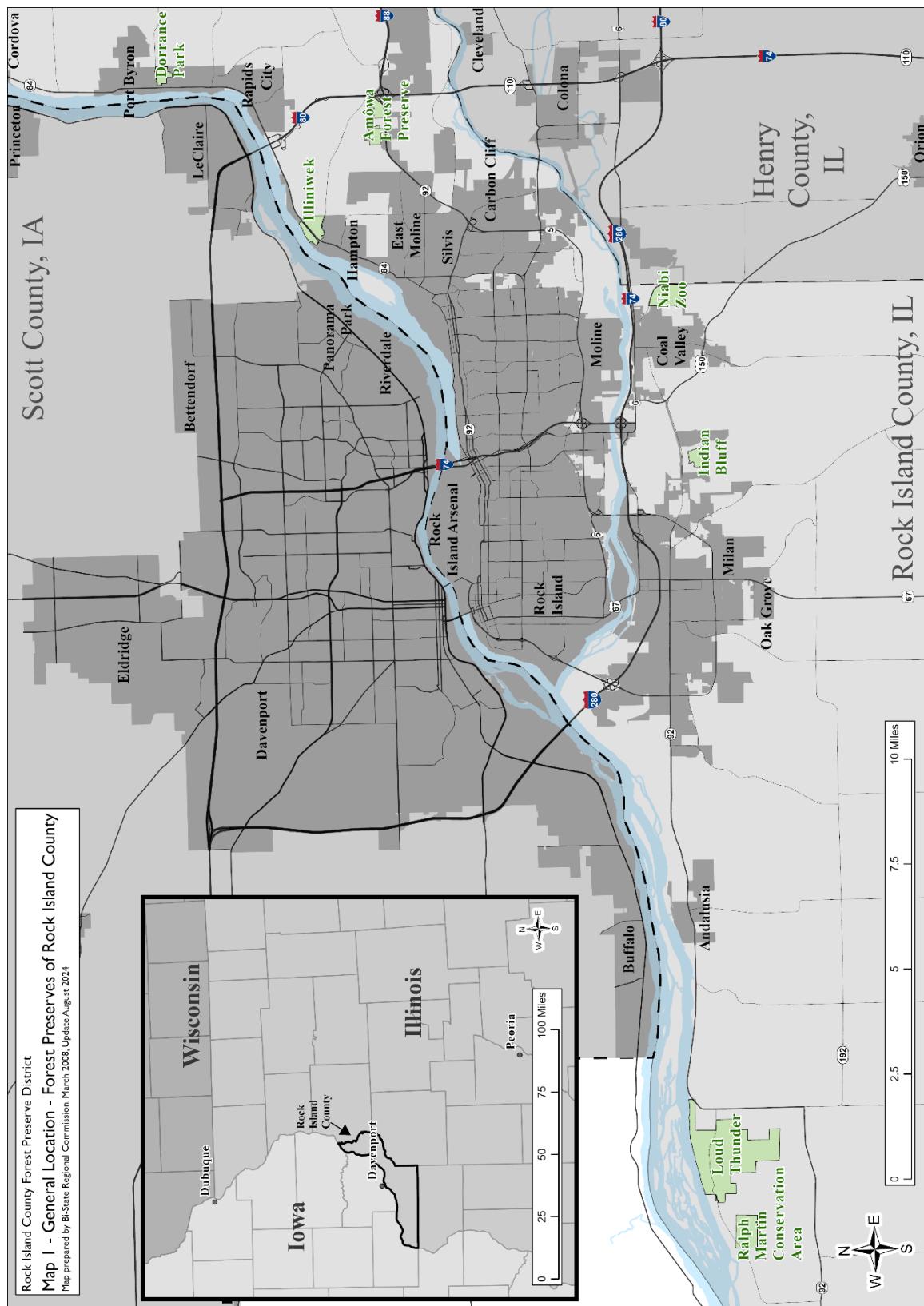
Rich Morthland	Richard H. "Quias" Brunk
Melissa Moreno-Baker	Timothy A. Foster
Larry Burns	Edna Sowards
Luis S. Moreno	Bob Perkins
Brian D. Vyncke	Enyo Dewith
Porter McNeil	Rodney K. Simmer
Carla Enburg	Johnnie M. Woods
Drue Mielke	Chuck Layer
David Adams	J. Robert Westpfahl

**Forest Preserve Executive Committee Members**

**Kai Swanson, President & Committee Chair**

Chuck Layer	Dr. Rodney Simmer
Drue Mielke	Edna Sowards
Luis Moreno	Johnnie Woods

## Map 1 General Location





# 2 Background and Items Considered

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## Background

In 1940, Arthur Wood, the president of the Moline Conservation Club, requested the establishment of a Rock Island County Forest Preserve Commission. The goal of the Commission was to obtain lands that the Forest Preserve would manage and maintain in their natural state. The proposal was passed in 1941 through a referendum vote.

Today, the Rock Island County Forest Preserve Commission is the governing body of the Rock Island County Forest Preserve District and oversees seven forest preserve areas totaling 2,659 acres. The Rock Island County Forest Preserve Commission consists of 19 members elected to the County Board. It's the responsibility of the Commission to oversee and approve all rules, policies, budgets, and procedures presented by the Forest Preserve Executive Committee. Every four years, one-half of the Commission seats are up for election. The Commissioners elect a Forest Preserve Commission President every two years and have traditionally appointed the County Clerk, Treasurer, and Auditor as the Commission's Secretary, Treasurer, and Auditor, respectively. The board selects a non-elected professional to serve as Director of the District. The District Director acts as the chief operating officer of the District, oversees all the Rock Island County Forest Preserve District operations, and is responsible for all administrative functions of the District,

including employment, budget administration, and implementation of board policies, actions and/or decisions.

It's the responsibility of the Forest Preserve Commission President to appoint up to 7 members to the Forest Preserve Executive Committee from the other 18 remaining members of the Forest Preserve Commission. The Forest Preserve Commission President is also the chairman of the Forest Preserve Executive Committee. The Forest Preserve Executive Committee is in charge of setting all rules, policies, budgets, and procedures that are then presented to the Forest Preserve Commission. The Forest Preserve Executive Committee meets once a month with the Forest Preserve District Director and the superintendents of each forest preserve.

The Forest Preserve Commission meets the third Tuesday of each month following the regularly scheduled meeting of the Rock Island County Board. The Forest Preserve Committee presents to the Commission the business of the District that requires the Commission's approval. The Commissioners are responsible for voting on all Forest Preserve statutory issues, and the actions of the Commission are considered final.

The District is primarily financed through direct property taxation and fees from facility usage. The Forest Preserve District Director and the superintendents of each forest preserve facility discuss and determine the fiscal budget. Each

initial fiscal year budget is reviewed by the Forest Preserve Executive Committee, and upon its approval is presented to the Forest Preserve Commission for approval.

The Forest Preserve employs 37 full-time employees and over 100 temporary employees traditionally employed to assist during the summer season when facility usage is at its greatest. The temporary employees work under the supervision of the District's full-time employees performing a variety of tasks.

## **Coverage Area**

This plan covers the geographic area of the County of Rock Island, Illinois, as the boundaries of Rock Island County and the Rock Island County Forest Preserve District are coterminous, but more specifically, the approximately 2,659 acres of land are under the stewardship of the Rock Island County Forest Preserve District. More information and history about each of the six preserves and the District as a whole is in the Forest Preserves section of this document.

## **Items Considered**

### **Recreation Trends/Level of Service**

The level of service, based on professional planning and recreation associations, will require the Rock Island County Forest Preserve District to be proactive in order to maintain a professionally recognized standard level of service. Currently, the District alone provides 18.6 open space acres per 1,000 population, which does not include space provided by municipalities in the county, while the 2024 National Recreation and Park Association

Performance benchmarks report the average for all park agencies is 10.8 acres per 1,000 population. In addition, the District has 4.0 full-time employees (FTE) per 10,000 population, which compares to 7.9 FTE's for all park agencies.

Changes in land management practices and a population seeking native natural areas for leisure outdoor recreational and educational experiences will only increase the interest for additional outdoor opportunities. Some of the trends that affect these considerations are:

- Interest in increasing RV camping amenities
- Increasing trail usage of all types – paved, unpaved, natural, etc.
- Increasing use of green technologies
- National and social push to be outdoors and move more – unplug
- Increasing emphasis in sustainability and momentum to restore and preserve native landscapes
- Changes in weather patterns and impact on property maintenance and their use – example, cooling stations may be needed in the hot summers
- Generational difference between millennials, baby boomers, etc. are shifting interests
- Increasing need to collaborate due to tight budgets
- Conservation of natural resources for flora and fauna preservation

- Decreasing funding support from federal and state sources requiring the need to develop new funding strategies

Special-use areas should be expandable and meet new and/or developing park and recreation trends. Public participation should be invited and encouraged during the planning and implementation of projects and/or activities affecting the District.

Awareness of existing and changing land-use patterns, zoning classifications, and proposed annexation areas will ensure adequate open space recreation land is retained and sensitive natural areas are protected and preserved to meet the needs of the prospective beneficiaries.

The 2023 National Recreation and Park Association Engagement with Parks Report referenced that parks provide a wide range of opportunities and noted parks and open spaces play a key role in healthy ecosystems. Studies on leisure time activities indicate there is a correlation between the amount of disposable income and level of educational attainment. This determination corresponds with a growing demand for leisure-oriented provisions and accommodations.

Considering median age, age distribution, income, and educational attainment, it is expected high-quality recreational opportunities will be needed to meet the demands of all age groups in Rock Island County. Rock Island County's population is projected to remain steady and older, with a median age around 40. This projected population data coupled with the increasing demand for leisure time options should encourage the District to

consider possibilities to enhance recreational opportunities for all ages at their facilities. In addressing these enhancements, the District may consider incorporating Illinois Association of Park District (IAPD) accreditation standards throughout where applicable and shall also consider the needs the citizens provided in the latest data collection as the plan considerations in addition to stakeholder and staff input.

### **Physical Development Trends**

According to Historic Rock Island County (published by Kramer & Company in 1908), the land along the Rock River had not been surveyed and was not open to settlement. However, squatters began to live on the land occupied by Native Americans. Rock Island County was formed in 1831, which was named after an island in the Mississippi River, and townships were formed in 1857. Most municipalities in Rock Island County have long histories, many dating to the 19th Century. The landscape has been altered with varied construction and development efforts for many years. A wide variety of buildings and facilities are found in Rock Island County, with the heaviest concentration in the Quad Cities metropolitan area. This urbanization has adversely affected the amount of open space available for outdoor recreation.

In 2020, the Trust for Public Land noted the outdoors connect people to nature and to one another and listed five reasons to support parks:

1. Parks help us stay active because research shows that the more parks there are in a

- community, the more people exercise.
2. Parks benefit our mental health, as studies show that nature can reduce stress and promote relaxation.
  3. Parks protect us from severe weather because climate change means higher sea levels and more powerful, more frequent storms and natural areas can slow and absorb some of these impacts.
  4. Parks keep our neighborhoods cooler since data scientists discovered that neighborhoods with a park nearby are up to 6 degrees cooler than those that *don't have a park within a half-mile*.
  5. Parks are pandemic lifelines. COVID-19 shrunk our world and the outdoors became an essential part of how we coped.<sup>1</sup>

Land use defines where people live and where they work or play. Rock Island County is an urban county and encourages development to be located within existing municipalities to preserve prime farmland and environmentally-sensitive areas as part of its land development plans. Land use patterns have important influences on access to recreation and open space. With the river valleys and bluffs, there are many areas with significant slope where erosion and runoff may be an issue in the county. These areas offer opportunities for open space conservation. Some locations represent areas with a greater density or

concentration of urban activity with residential, commercial, industrial, and institutional uses that emphasize the need for neighboring active and passive recreation activities. Our team at the Rock Island County Forest Preserve District assists in addressing these land development needs.

## Priorities and Guiding Principles

### Preservation and Maintenance: Preserve the Natural Flora and Fauna and Maintain Existing Facilities and Amenities

The highest priority is to preserve and maintain the existing resources of the forest preserve District. Protection and management of the flora and fauna is the primary objective of the forest preserve staff. Upkeep of the existing lands, facilities, and amenities must also include recognition of the needs and expectations of county residents and users of the parks. Input from the public meetings emphasized the importance of preservation and maintenance of the natural attributes within the preserves.

### Finance and Land Management: Enhance Financial Stability and Resources to Support Quality Facilities and Services

Our team at the Rock Island County Forest Preserve District faces some financial constraints leading to a disincentive for further land acquisition, improvements to existing facilities, and adding or continuing programs.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: The Trust for Public Land "Five Reasons to United for Parks," September 21, 2020

Currently, the District has 40.0 percent of expenditure through revenues not including taxes, while the 2024 National Recreation and Park Association Performance (NRPA) benchmark reports the average for all parks is 28 percent. In addition, it is reported that average operating expenditures per acre for all parks is \$8,499, while the District is \$2,698 per acre. The capital budget for the District for the next five years is \$3,750,000, excluding bonds, while the NRPA reports the average for all parks is \$10,000,000.

The District might consider the following initiatives and funding avenues in order to alleviate financial burdens:

- Increase community awareness of problems and priorities
- Research alternative funding options, such as grants, donations, in-kind contributions, endowments, hard/soft matching funds, et al
- Increase involvement in joint purchasing with other jurisdictions in the Bi-State Region for equipment, supplies, maintenance items and amenities
- Utilize volunteer organizations
- Establish ambassador programs, such as Friends of Foundations/Societies for fundraising
- Promote available rental facilities for gatherings and receptions
- Consider staffing for grant research and activity/events programming

- Evaluate current fee structure and identify areas where increases can be justified or added fees might be warranted
- Discuss tax levy increases or special bond referendums to fund needed expenses or generate sufficient revenue

In weighing the consideration of acquisition and improvements to the Rock Island County Forest Preserve District, the 2023 National Recreation and Park Association Economic Impact of Parks referenced that parks have economic values, such as increased property values related to proximity to parks, and that park and recreation lands and facilities generate indirect revenues through a multiplier effect. Further, the forest preserve districts and conservation districts in northeastern Illinois report on meeting the challenges in the 21st Century (a two-year study of the forest preserve and conservation districts in northeastern Illinois) noted districts should explore opportunities to diversify their revenue sources, including pursuing grant opportunities and collaborating with other organizations. The report also recommended districts should also advocate for the continuation of state and federal programs.

Some other key issues addressed within the report are pertinent to the Rock Island County Forest Preserve District, as follows:

- To have the funds needed for preservation, restoration, and other important activities, land preservation districts need to advocate for increased state and federal funding. This involves

educating voters and elected officials about the important role districts play and the need to supplement local property tax revenues.

- To ensure that district land remains available for the public, forest preserve and conservation districts must prevent encroachments and refuse to sell district land.
- Whether a forest preserve district or conservation district is well governed depends on a number of factors: the relationship of the district board to the county board, the interests and abilities of the members of the district board, the professionalism of staff, and the transparency of the decision-making process. The boards of forest preserve and conservation districts must focus on setting policy and let the staff manage the districts operations.

The report also stated adequate safety within forest preserves and conservation areas is best achieved with law enforcement officers that are part of the district staff due to the unique types of violations, customer service needs, and policing methods.

### *Riverfront and Waterway Protection and Access: Preserve Natural Riverfront and Waterway Resources while Maintaining Access for Citizens*

The Rock Island County Forest Preserve District realizes the greatest resources the community has are its waterways. The Mississippi River and Rock River provide and continually

afford new opportunities to enhance the natural recreation and education opportunities in Rock Island County. The District needs to view these and other natural areas as societal benefits rather than budgetary burdens and make a concerted effort to raise awareness encouraging appropriate riverfront and waterway uses. Development within or near the riverfronts should highlight and not diminish access to residents and visitors, while enhancing the natural beauty of these waterways. Conservation of natural areas by promoting proper management and maintenance of the flora and fauna was an important item identified through the public input processes.

### *Compliance with the “Accessibility Code (IAC) and “Americans with Disabilities Act” (ADA)*

Every reasonable effort to bring the existing facilities into compliance with the Illinois Accessibility Code (IAC) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) will be made. All new facilities must be constructed in accordance with IAC requirements. The Illinois Accessibility Code (IAC) is intended to resolve areas of difference between those federal standards of ADA and the former Illinois accessibility standards, applicable to buildings and facilities in the State of Illinois covered by the Illinois Environmental Barriers Act (EBA). The drafters of the IAC compared and adopted the stricter of the former state or federal accessible design standards. The Rock Island County Forest Preserve District is committed to making every reasonable effort to ensure that its parks and facilities can be used and enjoyed by

everyone. In 2012, an access audit of the entire District was performed. District staff is in the process of implementing the recommendations and addressing access deficiencies as funding becomes available. A summary of the access audit can be found in the Appendix.

## **District-Wide Goals – Background**

The Rock Island County Forest Preserve Plan is founded on goals and objectives that provide the framework for decision-making and investment in the District's facilities. The goals identified herein were established through extensive on-site inventories and evaluation of existing amenities; discussions with District officials, administrators, facility directors, and staff; public input; analysis of existing plans; consideration of national, state, and regional trends and standards; and recognition of the primary objectives and the mission statement of the Rock Island County Forest Preserve District.

### **History of the Forest Preserve**

The first meeting of the Forest Preserve Commission was held on December 15, 1942 in the Rock Island County, IL Courthouse. The thirty-eight (38) member commission selected its first officers, and Commissioner Louis C. Schafer was named the first President of the Forest Preserve Commission. County Clerk, Samuel H. Mullinix, was named Secretary, and Commissioner William A. Klingebiel was named Treasurer. Assistant States Attorney, Lawrence L. Phares, was made legal advisor. A committee of three commissioners was appointed to draft the first ordinances of the District that

were approved at the next meeting on record, February 9, 1943. The ordinances pertained to the officers & duties of the District and initially the Chairman of the County Board of Supervisors acted as the President of the Commission.

The first funding appropriation ordinance was approved on February 15, 1943 with a total operations budget of \$35,000, of which \$25,000 was appropriated for the purchase of land.

On August 10, 1943, a Land Committee was appointed by the president and approved by the board. The committee began to recommend land purchases to the board for much of the Forest Preserve that exists today. Further detail is found in the developmental history of each preserve. Once the Forest Preserve District had begun acquiring property, the board adopted its first set of ordinances pertaining to general rules and regulations on July 7, 1944.

On April 22, 1947, the District hired Ottar G. Bloomquist as the first Superintendent of the Rock Island County Forest Preserve District for an annual salary of \$4,500. At the November 11, 1947 meeting, the board adopted a motion to have rangers as custodians of the preserves. On May 11, 1948, the District began renting office space at 125-18th Street in Rock Island. Efforts to obtain space in the Rock Island County Courthouse were denied. The rent for the office space was \$25.00 per month, and Superintendent Bloomquist was allowed to hire a stenographer for \$10.00 per month.

On August 13, 1946, an engineering proposal by Carter Jenkins of Jenkins, Merchant & Nankivil for improvements to Blackhawk Hills, Oltman property, Dorrance Park, and Searle Ranch property was considered. These proposals were the first master plans for each park site. Mr. Jenkins also recommended the Board put forth a naming contest for the properties of the District, and on December 10, 1946, the board approved this concept. During the February 10, 1948 meeting of the board, the board adopted the preserve naming contest procedures and put forth a prize of \$15.00 to be awarded to each winner. The contest was to be held April 1-15, and the winner was to be determined by a committee of Rock Island County residents. The Blackhawk Hills tract, or Blackhawk Preserve as it was called, was named Indian Bluff, and the naming winner was Bob Van DeMaele. The Searle Ranch tract was to be named Loud Thunder, and the naming winner was Thomas W. Rogers. Lastly, Katherine Walther was the naming winner for the Oltman property for her submission of Illiniwek. Because it was not noted in the naming contest, it may be assumed the District preferred to keep the Dorrance Park name.

## **District-Wide Goals**

- **Support and maintain existing parks and preserves, and acquire additional lands for preservation of natural resources**
  - Identify and preserve or restore natural areas, such as wetlands, prairies, and significant tree stands that provide habitat for native wildlife
- Limit local and regional environmental effects through sustainable practices
- Develop an invasive species management program
- Develop a greenhouse and/or nursery to serve the entire District for restoration and beautification purposes
- Monitor the ecological health of the preserves related to invasive species, disease, environmental effects, erosion, and water quality
- **Increase awareness and understanding of the District's purpose and mission through usage of the District's parks, programs, and facilities**
- Enhance branding, marketing and promotion of the amenities available at the forest preserves through various medias
- Create educational materials for display on websites or distribution at District parks and facilities
- Install interpretive signage about the varied species of flora and fauna throughout trail systems and restoration areas, and increase the use of QR codes
- Develop formalized user groups for each park
- Hold seasonal or annual events that create publicity for first-time visitors
- Use social media to reach the general public, and for more audience targeting

- Hire a full-time employee to develop and manage an education and volunteer program, special events, and grant writing
- **Provide access to preserved natural areas and recreational and educational opportunities**
  - Offer programs, activities, and amenities according to the needs and wants of the residents of Rock Island County
  - Be accessible to all residents of Rock Island County
  - Provide recreation opportunities for all seasons
- **Be fiscally responsible and monitor parks and land management trends to address cost effective and sustainable management of the District's park system**
  - Pursue partnering opportunities with community businesses and organizations
  - Stay current on possible grant opportunities available for the District
  - Research possible cross-promotional opportunities with other county forest preserve or conservation districts and state or federal agencies
  - Create a Friends of the Forest Preserve 501(c) and/or an endowment
  - Consider fee increases carefully and what the market will bear, including differential user fees for visitors from outside the county/region
  - Market to outside metropolitan areas where fees are significantly higher or lack services offered
  - Consider off-season fund raising opportunities
- **Implement best operational, management, and governance practices**
  - Review the District's master plan annually and update the plan every five years
  - Implement Illinois Association of Park District's accreditation standards for the Forest Preserve and Conservation Districts and attain other institutional accreditations for Niabi Zoo and Indian Bluff Golf Course
  - Increase staff and board involvement and development through active participation in state and national organizations
  - Monitor and assess the current conditions, trends, and open space needs within Rock Island County on an annual basis
  - Review annually the District's liabilities and risk management program –consider hiring a Human Resource professional to manage the needs of the District in this area
  - Keep current on advancing technologies and implement in appropriate facilities such as computerized maintenance management system

## **Community Engagement**

A variety of methods were used to collect input from the public. As a public entity, the Rock Island County Forest Preserve District understands the importance of public guidance in the planning process. The needs and issues gathered from the public participation process have been considered in the development of the goals and objectives of the plan, and summaries of input are included in the appendix.

### **Public Meetings and Feedback**

An initial meeting was held with the Executive Committee to refine the purpose and mission statement of the Forest Preserve District. Two public input meetings were held to allow the public to discuss the strengths, needs, and suggestions for each of the forest preserves. The first meeting was held on April 30, 2024 at Indian Bluff Golf Course, and the second meeting was held on May 14, 2024 at Niabi Zoo. The public was given an opportunity to provide comments and/or suggestions on any of the services and operations of the District. In addition to the two general public input meetings, one strategic planning meeting was held with District management team.

## **Community Input**

In fall 2023, public perception research was conducted for the Rock Island County Forest Preserve District by Mindfire Communications. Focus group meetings were held with stakeholder groups including golf course users and conservation organizations, such as Living Lands and Waters, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Soil and Water Conservation. A sample of 1,950 residents and non-residents completed the survey in hard copy or electronically. Questions about the demographics of the survey respondent in addition to detailed questions about the perception of the various forest preserves were included. Questions were also asked about how frequently the park is visited by the respondent, and what, if any, improvements he or she would like to see.

The results provide detailed insight into which parks are the most or least well known and used, and also gave some guidance on how resources should be allocated in the future at each individual park. The survey and results can be seen on the forest preserve website, [www.ricfpd.org](http://www.ricfpd.org).

# 3 Natural Characteristics

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Unique and varied landscapes make Rock Island County an ideal setting for parks, open space, recreation facilities, and conservation areas. Rock Island County is bordered by the Mississippi River to the west, Whiteside County to the north, Henry County to the east, and Mercer County to the south. Rock Island County is both urban and rural, containing the Illinois Quad Cities. The county's location along the Mississippi River affords many scenic natural areas, which the county has recognized in its forest preserves.

## Climate

Rock Island County sits in a temperate continental climate zone. It experiences vast temperature changes throughout the year. Summers tend to be hot and humid, especially in July and August. The average summer temperatures are 73.7°F. The winters are cold with occasional severe weather mainly occurring in December, January, and February. The average winter temperature is around 26.6°F, and the average annual snowfall is around 36.1 inches. Rainfall averages 38.27" per year, with 65% of it falling during the months of April through September. The growing season is 170 days between approximately April 29 and October 24.

Rock Island County's climate allows for an assortment of recreational opportunities throughout the year. The Rock Island County Forest Preserves can be utilized the entire year.

However, some of the amenities or facilities are only open and available on a seasonal basis due to infrastructure and operational limitations.

## Topography

Three major glacial advances and retreats created the topography of Rock Island County. The Kansas and the Illinoian glaciations covered the entire county, while the Iowan glaciations covered the northern townships. The oldest glaciations are collectively termed Pre-Illinoian. The Illinoian glacier in the eastern portion of Illinois followed the Pre-Illinoian, while the Iowan glacier covered the northern townships. The native rock material of the county is buried under glacial drift and varying depths of loess left by the retreating glaciers.

Key contributors to the landscape in Rock Island County are the Mississippi River and the Rock River. In pre-glacial time, the Mississippi River followed its current course until reaching the present day northern tip of Rock Island County, Illinois, where the River turned to the east following the Meredosia channel and eventually entered the present Illinois River valley near Hennepin, Illinois. This course was altered to its existing passage through the Quad Cities in an east-west direction when a westward moving ice lobe blocked the eastern flow of the Mississippi River. (The Quad Cities is the only major metropolitan area, among the ten states through which the Mississippi courses

where the river flows in an east-west direction.) Over the past 10,000 to 15,000 years, the present channel has deepened and narrowed forming the distinct bluffs and lowlands found in the areas bordering the Mississippi River.

The remainder of Rock Island County is level to gently rolling, with stream valleys becoming deeper and the slopes increasingly pronounced as the valleys approach the Mississippi and Rock Rivers. Another notable feature in the landscape is the drainage network. The vast majority of streams and creeks flow into the Rock and Mississippi Rivers.

The rivers provide many recreational opportunities: two of the forest preserves, Illiniwek and Loud Thunder, both sit adjacent to the Mississippi River.

## **Geology**

During in the Devonian Period of the Paleozoic Era, which was around 300 million years ago, a shallow sea covered Rock Island County. The sea was inhabited by invertebrates and fish species. Decomposed shells and bones along with successive layers of sediment formed the current bedrock of the area, Devonian Limestone. Approximately 280 million years ago, during the Pennsylvanian Period, prehistoric trees and ferns thrived in the large swamp that covered the area. As the plants died, they mixed with clays and sands. Over time, the clay was changed into shale, and the vegetation and sand formed coal. There are large coal seams, which underlie much of the Rock Island County area still today.

## **Soils**

Soils across Rock Island County are mainly loess from past glacial deposits. Loess covers most of the county and is the main component of the upland topsoil that is found today. The soils found in the Mississippi and Rock River valleys are alluvial soils, which form from river sediment deposits. The alluvial, or water deposited soils, though subject to periodic flooding are very fertile, and if properly drained, can produce high crop yields.

Most soils found at the forest preserves consist mainly of silty or sandy loams and some clay. Surface and subsurface characteristics vary considerably by slope, area, and other factors.

The soils found in the five forest preserves are as follows:

### ***Dorrance Park***

Fayette silt loam; Hickory-Sylvan silt loam; Orion silt loam; Orthents loam; and Sylvan silt loam

### ***Illiniwek***

Coyne fine sandy loam; Fayette silt loam; Hickory-Sylvan silt loam; Joslin silt loam; Martinsville clay loam; Moline silty clay; Niota silt loam; Raddle silt loam; and Saude loam

### ***Indian Bluff***

Atterberry silt loam; Fayette silt loam; Greenbush silt loam; Hickory-Sylvan silt loam; Rozetta silt loam; Sylvan silty clay loam; and Sylvan silt loam

### **Loud Thunder/Martin Conservation Area**

Fayette silt loam; Hickory-Sylvan-  
Fayette silt loam; Hickory-Sylvan silt  
loam; Marseilles-Hickory silt loam;  
Oakville-Tell Complex; Orion silt  
loam; Rozetta silt loam; Stronghurst  
silt loam; and Sylvan silt loam

### **Niabi Zoo**

Fayette silt loam; Hickory-Sylvan-  
Fayette silt loam; Marseilles-Hickory  
silt loam; Orion silt loam; Radford silt  
loam; Rozetta silt loam; and Sylvan  
silt loam

### **Amôwa**

Fayette silt loam; Hickory-Sylvan silt  
loam; Orthents loam; Rozetta silt  
loam; Sylvan-Bold silt loam; Sylvan  
silt loam; Sylvan silty clay loam

## **Flora & Fauna**

There are a variety of ecosystems throughout Rock Island County, including forest, wetlands, streams and rivers, but very little prairie or savannahs. The majority of the vegetation is in the form of agriculture. The main crops grown in the area are corn and soybeans. Rock Island County's natural vegetation consists mainly of deciduous trees and various bushes and grasses. Many varieties of trees are found in Rock Island County, such as walnut, hickory, birch, various oaks, elms, aspen, willow, mulberry, and sumac.

The wildlife found in Rock Island County is common throughout the state of Illinois. The animals found include furbearers like the mink, muskrat, raccoon, fox, beaver, and skunk. The

only "big game" animal prominent in Rock Island County is the White-tailed deer. There are also bobcats, coyotes and fox. Other common animals found are rabbits, squirrels, opossums, and a variety of vermin (mice, rats, etc.); reptiles (snakes, turtles, frogs, and lizards); and crustaceans (crabs, clams, etc.).

Wide arrays of fish are found in Rock Island County waters; species include largemouth, smallmouth, white and other types of bass; many varieties of catfish, walleye and carp; saugers, northern pike, perch, bluegills, crappies, sturgeon, suckers, buffalo (sheepshead), and bullheads.

There are a wide variety of birds found throughout Rock Island County. There are common songbirds, such as the northern cardinal, American robin, red-winged black bird, and song sparrow. Other species of birds include quail, ring-necked pheasants, North American kestrel, great horned owl, barred owl, red-tailed hawks, bald eagles, green heron, great blue heron, and pelicans.

Rock Island County is located on a waterfowl migration route known as the Mississippi flyway. This brings many varieties of ducks and geese into the area. The Mississippi River and the backwaters provide waterfowl with important shelter, protection, and food resources during their migration. The Mississippi River in Rock Island County is an excellent place to view American Bald Eagles. The eagles use the river as a winter-feeding area and breeding ground. The best time to view them is in January and February where they fish in the unfrozen waters just below both locks & dams.

The American Bald Eagle remains a federally protected species through the Bald Eagle Protection Act, which prohibits the take, transport, sale, barter, trade, import, export, and possession of eagles. Other species that are protected by the Endangered Species Act in the area are the Indiana bat (endangered), Higgins eye pearlymussel (endangered), sheepnose mussel (endangered), the spectaclecase mussel (endangered), and the Rusty Patched Bumble Bee (endangered).

Even as outdoor space becomes more limited, the demand for desirable recreation areas and opportunities is on the rise. Rock Island County's varied terrain and vegetation provide interesting areas for diverse educational and recreational use with minimal impact to the existing natural features. To get a better sense of the species found in each of the forest preserves, the District has begun to collect information from partners. An avian biodiversity survey was performed by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Augustana College, BioEco Research

and Monitoring Center, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 2017. The results are in the Appendix of this master plan. Another biodiversity inventory was performed in Summer 2024 for the Amôwa Forest Preserve District by the Bi-State Conservation Action Network. Over 889 species were found in the preserve. The District will continue biodiversity inventorying and working with these and other agencies to develop similar surveys for all the forest preserves.

Smart planning needs to consider habitats of endangered or threatened species, erosive and unsuitable soils, and possible disruption to any ecosystems. Because some endangered species have disappeared or are at risk from the county, efforts to restore and/or reconstruct habitat for future propagation or relocation of these species should be considered. Making full use of the District's geography of the Rock Island County Forest Preserve District's existing and potential new recreational areas will offer opportunities to expand habitats.

# 4 Demographics

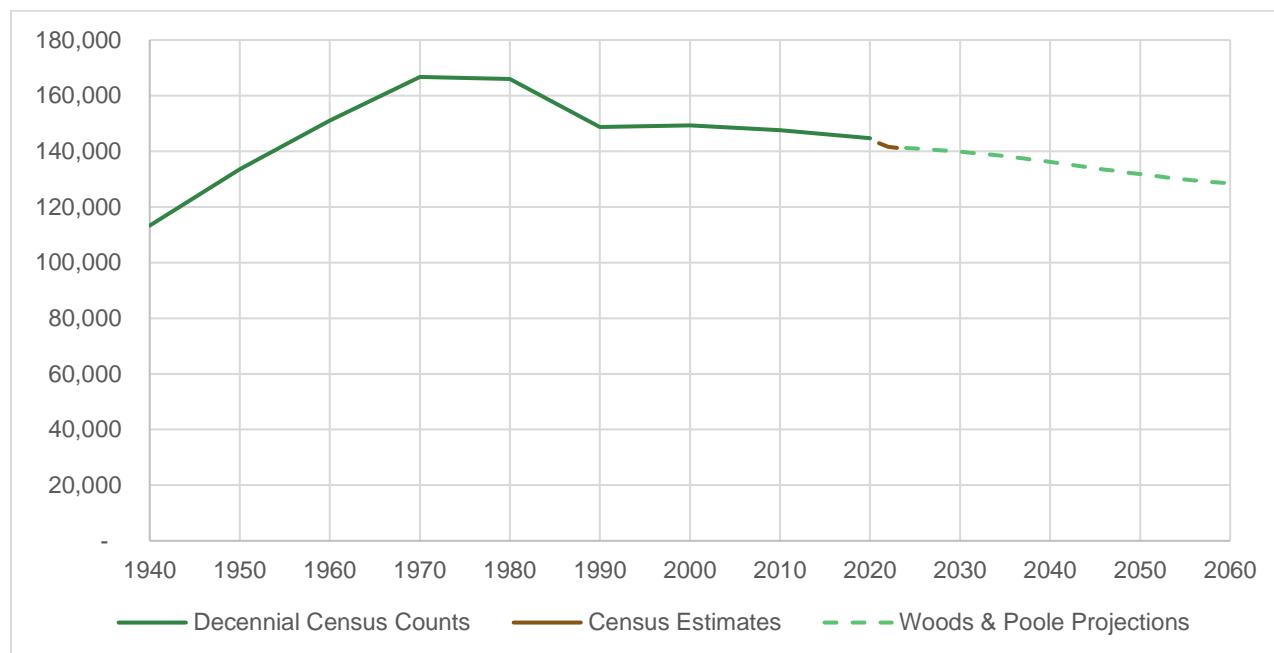
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This section includes information on population, gender, race, age, employment, income, education, and household characteristics. Much of the data from this chapter comes from the U.S. Census Bureau and their American Community Survey (ACS) estimates, with sources noted for each graphic. Historical data is included to show Rock Island County's progression over time, as well as provide some comparisons to the municipalities within the county. Getting a clearer picture of the county's demographics helps in planning for future needs and can help guide future development.

## Population Trends

As reported by the U.S. Census Bureau, The population was 141,236 as of 2023. The county grew rapidly until 1970, when it reached a peak population of 166,734. Since 1990, the population has decreased by 4,051 at the last Decennial Census count of 144,672 in 2020. Figure 1 shows the Decennial Census population counts from 1940 to 2020, available population estimates from the Census for the years 2021 to 2023, and projections from Woods & Poole Economics to 2060.

**Figure 1 – Rock Island County Population Trends**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, – Decennial Census, 1940-2020. U.S. Census Bureau, Population Trends Division, Annual Estimates of the Resident Population Trends, 2023. Woods & Poole Economics, 2023.

There are 15 incorporated municipalities within Rock Island County, as well as two Census-designated places (CDPs). The City of Moline is the largest and makes up 29.7% of the total county's population. Table 1 shows the comparison of all the municipalities and CDPs within Rock Island County.

**Table 1 – Rock Island County Populations Trends by Municipality**

	2010	2020
Rock Island County	147,546	144,672
Andalusia	1,178	1,184
Carbon Cliff	2,134	1,846
Coal Valley (Rock Island County part)	3,743 (3,585)	3,873 (3,700)
Cordova	672	671
Coyne Center CDP	827	877
East Moline	21,302	21,374
Hampton	1,863	1,779
Hillsdale	523	417
Milan	5,099	5,097
Moline	43,483	42,985
Oak Grove	396	476
Port Byron	1,647	1,668
Rapids City	959	964
Reynolds (Rock Island County part)	539 (511)	498 (467)
Rock Island	39,018	37,108
Rock Island Arsenal CDP	149	182
Silvis	7,479	8,003
Total Incorporated	129,849	127,739
Total Unincorporated	17,697	16,933
Percent Unincorporated	13.6%	13.3%

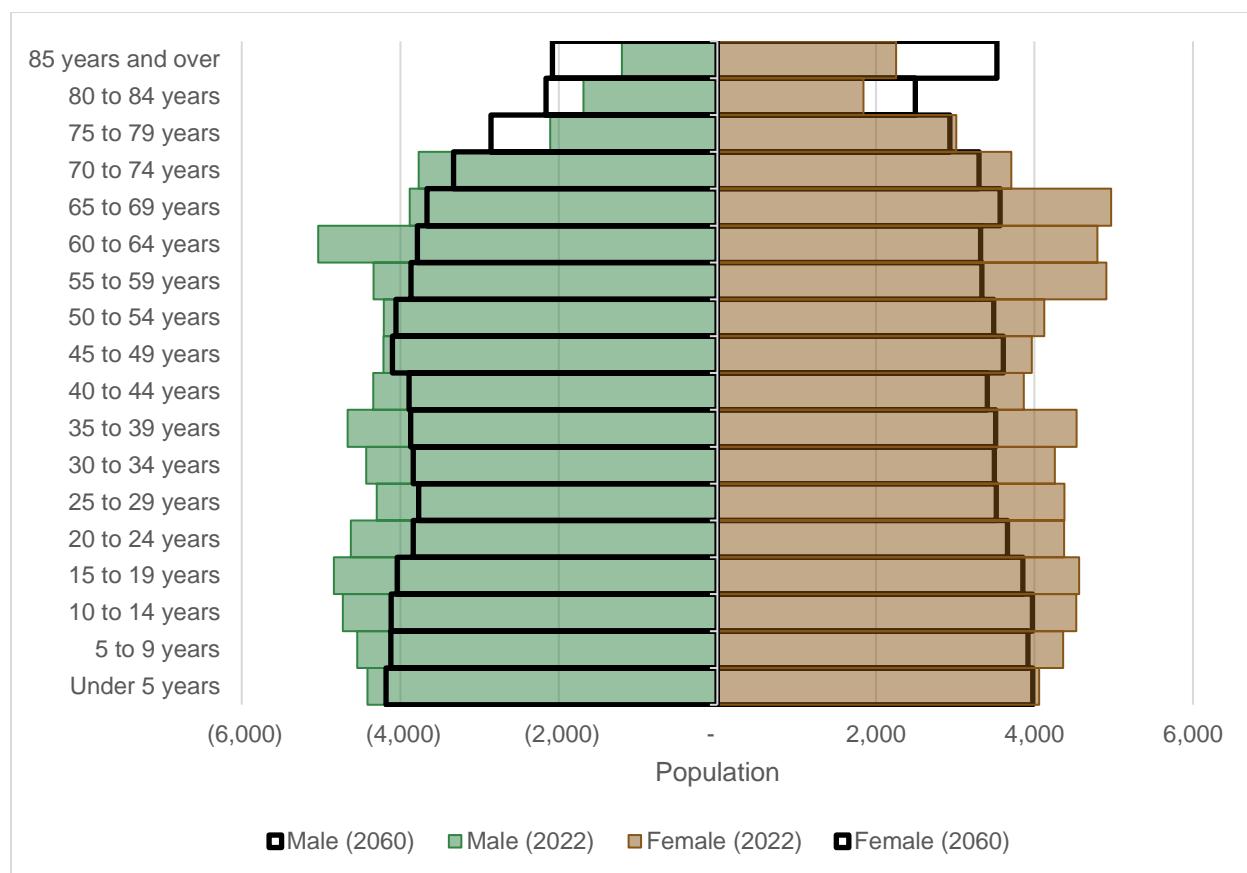
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census, 2010-2020, Includes revised counts.

## **Age and Gender Breakdown**

The median age is a statistic that can be used to gauge the overall age of the population. The higher the median age the older a population, and conversely the lower the median age the younger the population. Rock Island County has a maturing population. The median age rose from 40.0 in 2017 to 40.2 in 2022.

Like many places across the country, Rock Island County has nearly equal amounts of males and females. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2022 ACS data, Rock Island County had 49.6% males and 50.4% females. Figure 2 shows the population by age distribution in 2022 and the projections for how this could change by 2060. These 2060 projections indicate an aging population, with the population 65 years and over projected to increase 5.2% and the population 85 years and over projected to increase 62.1%. Rock Island County Population Trends by Age Distribution.

**Figure 2 – Population Trends by Age Distribution**



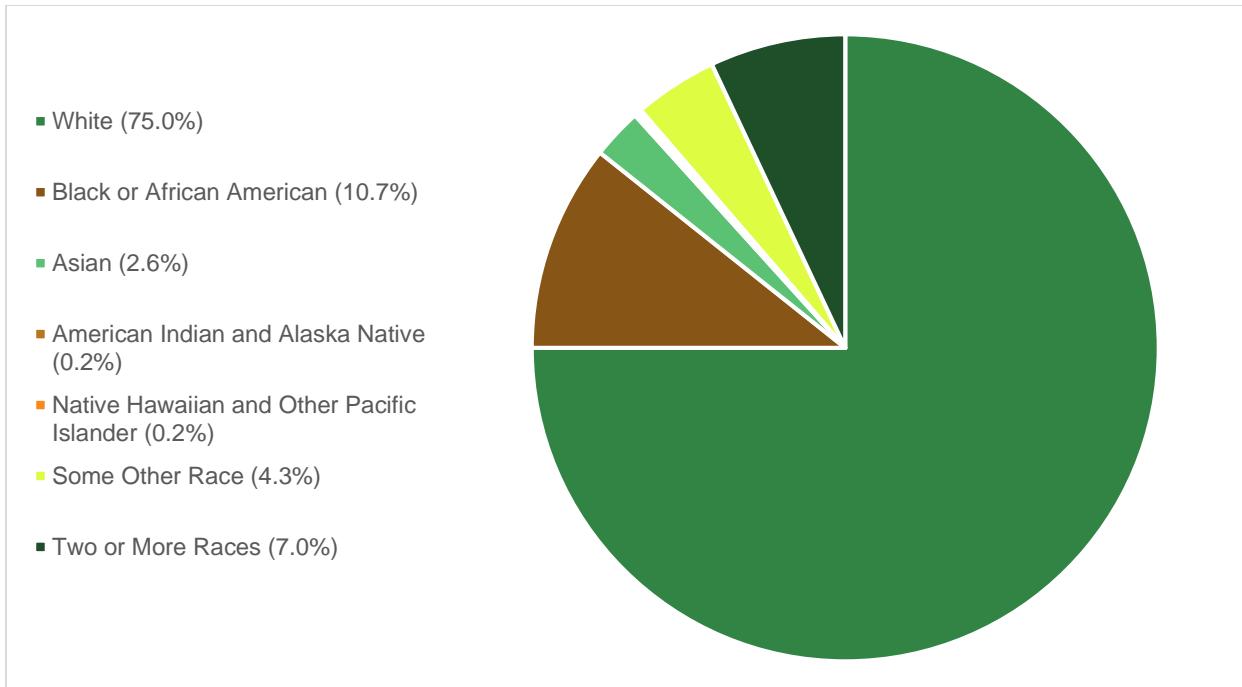
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018-2022. Woods & Poole Economics, 2023.

## Race & Ethnicity

Rock Island County's population as of 2022 shows that 75.0% of the population is identified as white alone. The most common single racial minority in Rock Island County are persons of Black or African American (10.7%), followed by Two or More Races (7.0%). Figure 3 shows race by category.

Hispanic or Latino ethnicity can be associated with any race. In 2022, 13.5% of Rock Island County's population identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino (of any race).

**Figure 3 – Rock Island County Race by Category**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018-2022.

## Workforce and Jobs

In 2022, Rock Island County's civilian labor force was 71,306 people. Rock Island County's workers are employed in a variety of industry sectors. An industry sector is any grouping of private, non-profit, or government establishments that have some type of commonality. The most common industry sector noted in 2022 was Educational Attainment, Health and Social Services, which employs 20.6% of the labor force, followed by Manufacturing, which employs 15.9%. Table 2 shows employment of Rock Island County residents for all industries.

**Table 2 – Employment by Industry**

Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	1.3%
Construction	6.2%
Manufacturing	15.9%
Wholesale trade	2.3%
Retail trade	12.0%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	7.3%
Information	1.3%
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	6.3%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative & waste management services	8.3%
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	20.6%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	9.3%
Other services, except public administration	4.2%
Public administration	5.3%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018-2022.

The largest employers in Rock Island County are listed in the table below. These employers show a variety of industry sectors including manufacturing, health care, and education.

**Table 3 – Major Employers in Rock Island County**

Rank	Rock Island County Top Employers	Estimated Employees
1	Rock Island Arsenal	6,400
2	Deere & Company	5,600
3	Unity Point Health	4,700
4	Tyson Fresh Meats	2,400
5	XPAC	1,000
6	Moline-Coal Valley CUSD 40	1,000
7	HyVee	900
8	WalMart	800
9	Black Hawk College	600
10	Bally's Quad Cities	500

Source: DataAxle, Reference USA GOV, and Individual employers.

Data Compiled by: Bi-State Regional Commission.

Note: Data subject to change.

## **Income Snapshot**

Median household income is a standard measure of prosperity of a community. Rock Island County's median household income was \$51,426 in 2017. By 2022, the median household income rose to \$64,435. When adjusted for inflation, Rock Island County's 2017 median household income figure rises to \$59,539 in 2022 dollars. Therefore, the estimated relative value of Rock Island County's median household income, when adjusted for inflation increased 8.2% from 2017 to 2022. (Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2013-2017 and 2018-2022.)

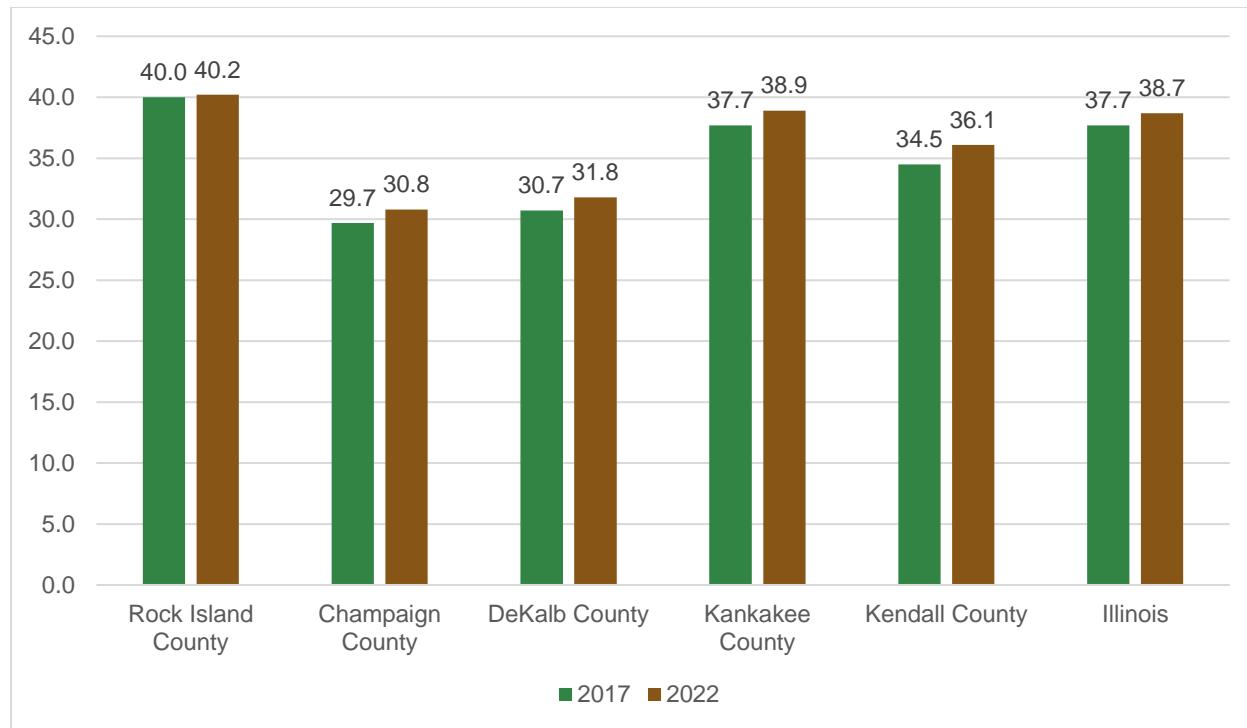
## **Educational Attainment**

The United States is becoming a more highly educated society. In the United States as of 2022, 89.1% of Americans had a high school diploma or higher, and 34.3% had a bachelor's degree or higher. Comparatively, in 2022, 89.6% of Rock Island County's residents had a high school diploma or higher, and 24.1% of residents age 25 and older had a bachelor's degree or higher. (Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018-2022.)

## **Comparison to Similar Counties**

Based on Rock Island County's demographics, Champaign DeKalb, Kankakee, and Kendall Counties were selected as peers for comparison. Comparing Rock Island County with areas of a similar status summarizes how parks and recreation in Rock Island County is scoring in relation to a peer community. These communities were chosen as having similar populations, total district acreage, and similar features in their forest preserve district. Rock Island County is compared to the State of Illinois, even though there is a large size difference, as the data is normalized by population.

**Figure 4 – Median Age**

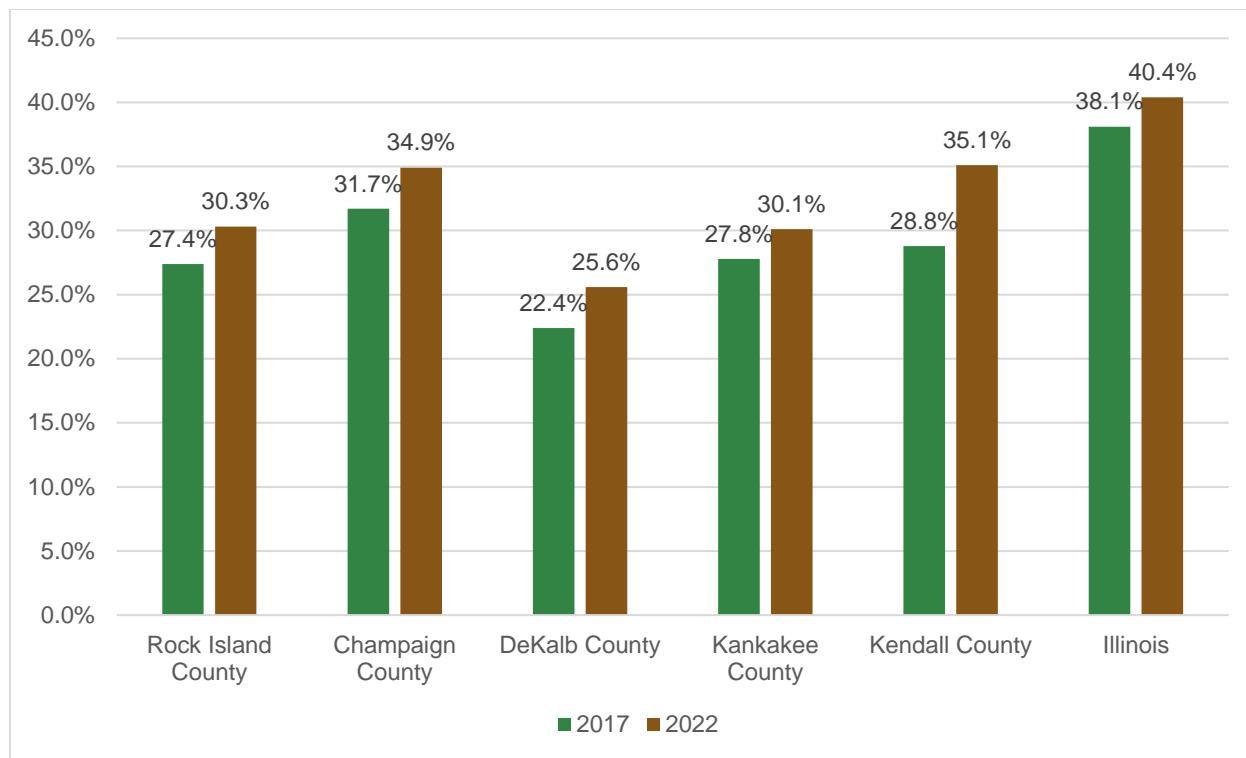


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2013-2017 and 2018-2022.

The median age in Rock Island County increased from 40.0 years in 2017 to 40.2 in 2022. This corresponds to the regional trends of an aging population. Figure 4 illustrates the median age of all six jurisdictions.

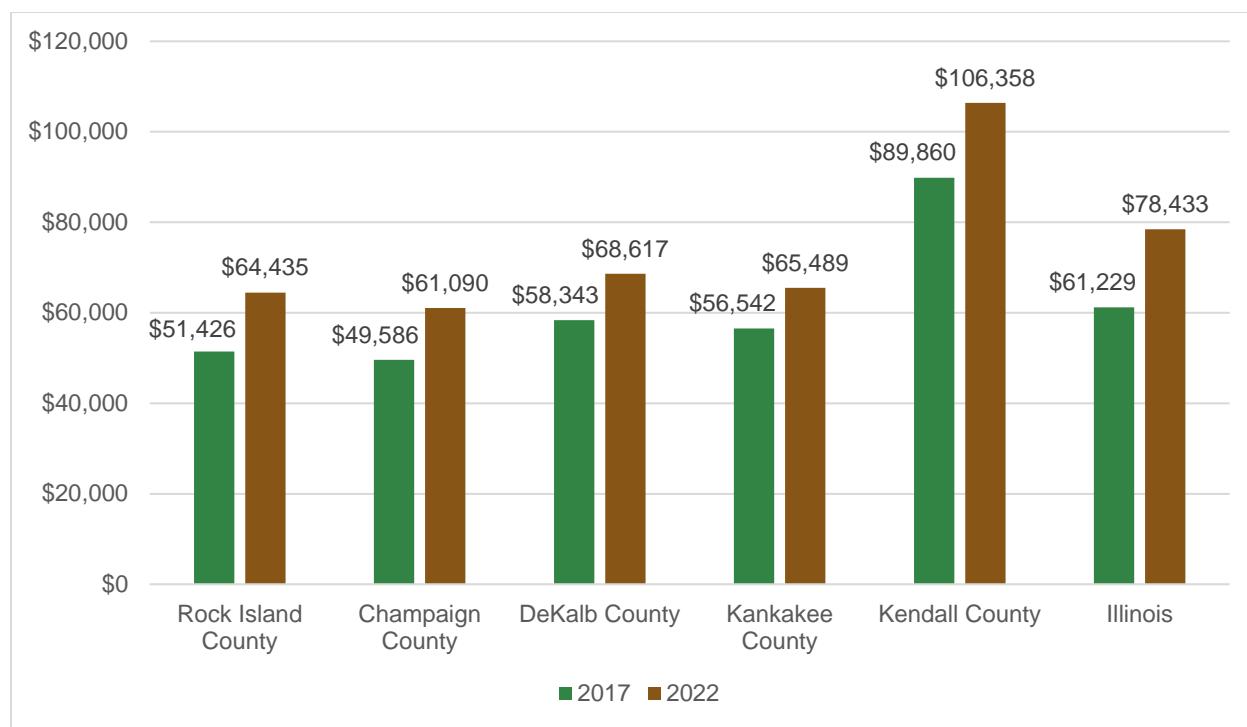
In 2017, Rock Island County had a minority population accounting for 27.4% of residents. This ratio increased to 30.3% in 2022. Figure 5 outlines a comparison of the different jurisdictions and the State of Illinois.

**Figure 5 – Percent Minority Population Trends**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2013-2017 and 2018-2022. Note: Racial minorities and/or Hispanic or Latino ethnicity

**Figure 6 – Median Household Income Snapshot**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2013-2017 and 2018-2022. Note: Not adjusted for inflation.

Rock Island County's median household income increased 25.3% from \$51,426 in 2017 to \$64,435 in 2022. Comparatively, the State of Illinois's median household income only increased 28.1% from 2017 to 2022. Figure 6 compares the 2017 and 2022 median household incomes for all jurisdictions.



# 5 Forest Preserves

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## Amôwa Forest Preserve

The newest addition to the Rock Island County Forest Preserve District, is Amôwa Forest Preserve with approximately 179 acres. “Amôwa” (pronounced uh-MOE-wah) is the Sauk word for “bee.” The name honors the Sauk people while also tying into the park’s purpose to provide and conserve a biodiverse habitat for the region’s native species, including vital pollinators. The Amôwa Forest Preserve offers protected land for visitors to explore and habitat for species that are in rapid decline due to loss of quality habitat. Quality habitat loss is a significant contributing factor for the decline of pollinators like the endangered Rusty Patched Bumblebee and vulnerable American Bumblebee.

### Developmental History

The Amôwa Forest Preserve is located along Interstate 80 and Illinois 92. In the spring of 2022, the Forest Preserve District completed the final purchase of the Preserve, and the total acquisition cost was \$1,291,500. The Illinois Clean Energy Foundation and The Conservation Fund gave \$1,111,050. The District has since funded \$700,000 in parking and stormwater controls and \$50,000 in prairie reconstruction from grants from River Action and USFWS.

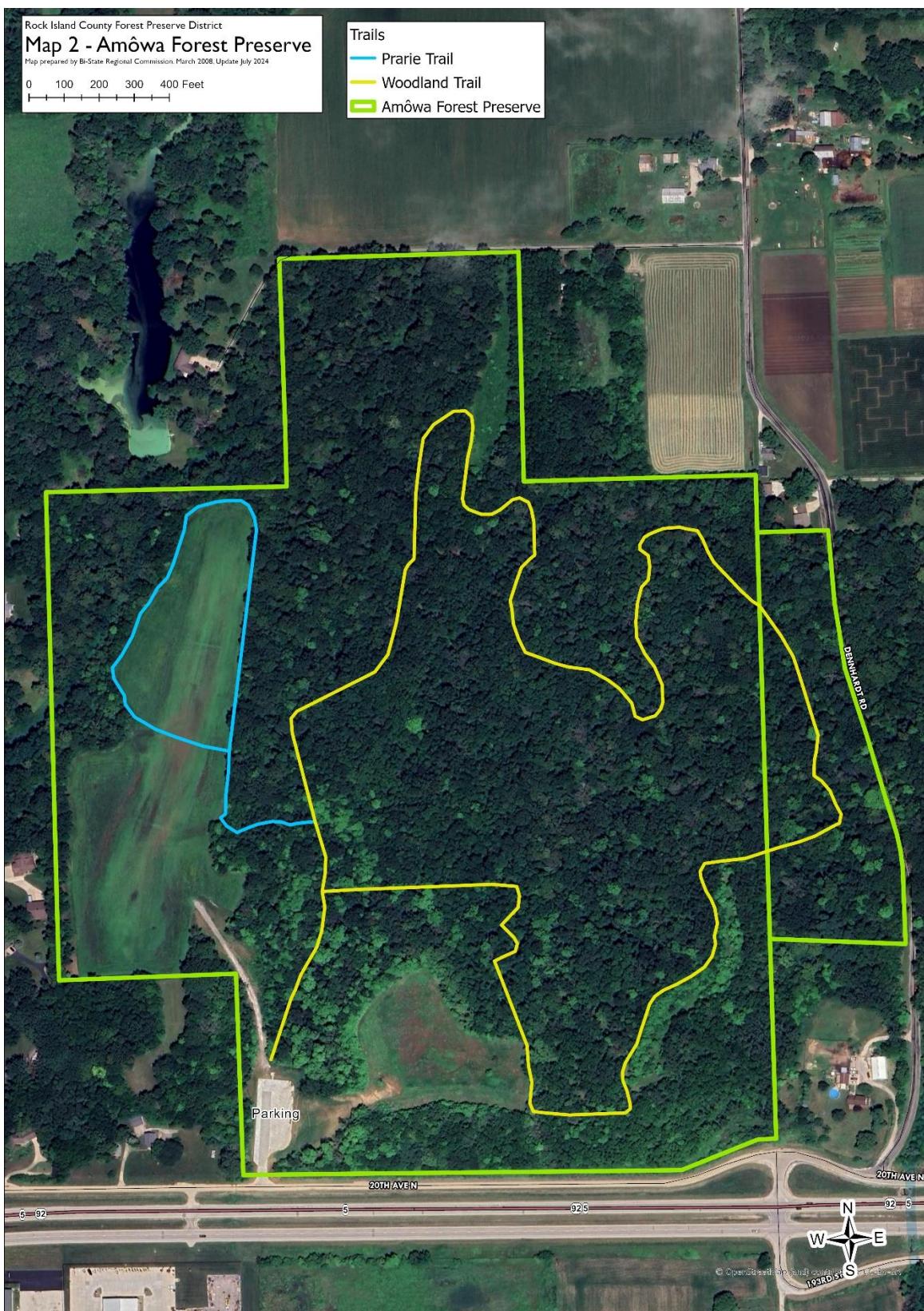
### Goals and Objectives

- **Maintain Amôwa Forest Preserve native landscape by protecting the natural resources within for the residents of Rock Island County**
  - Preserve and improve the health of the existing natural habitat through the development of a forest management plan and prairie reconstruction
  - Identify future ecological issues and be proactive in the management
  - Eliminate invasive species
  - Consider a small shelter and/or nature scape play area with a portable bathroom or composting toilet
- **Increase awareness of Amôwa Forest Preserve and Rock Island County's forest preserves**
  - Create "Friends of Amôwa Forest Preserve" Group
  - Create promotional materials
  - Install uniform Forest Preserve identification signs

- **Provide the residents of Rock Island County access to preserved natural areas and recreational opportunities at Amôwa Forest Preserve**
  - Establish and maintain a natural surface nature trail system for hiking

## Rock Island County Forest Preserve District Comprehensive Park Plan

### Map 2 Amôwa Forest Preserve



## **Dorrance Park**

Dorrance Park is located in Port Byron, IL and is the smallest of the forest preserves in Rock Island County at 79.3 acres. Dorrance provides an excellent mix of forested habitat for wildlife and traditional green space park amenities. Dorrance has three baseball diamonds and one peewee league diamond. The fields serve as home to the Upper Rock Island County Recreation Association (URICRA). The park also has a playground, picnic tables, restroom facilities, and approximately 4.5 miles of natural surface trails available for public use. Dorrance is a wonderful spot for bird watching, taking a short hike, playing on the playground, or playing ball.

### **Developmental History**

Nathaniel Dorrance was a pioneer in Rock Island County. He was the original owner of the land and the park's namesake, and willed the property to the Port Byron Academy. Upon the dissolution of the Academy, the land went to Dorrance's heir, his grandson Clarence Stephens. Stephens donated the land to the Village of Port Byron for Port Byron High School to use as an athletic field. On January 16, 1945, the Forest Preserve Commission was informed of the potential donation of Dorrance Park by the Village and School District of Port Byron. The Commission approved the donation on April 24, 1945, and Clarence Stephens, living in Denver, supported the transfer and making this site available for a forest preserve. The final transfer was adopted on June 11, 1945.

On November 13, 1946, the Board approved a motion to purchase an

additional 9 acres of land adjacent to the Dorrance Park property in Port Byron. In addition to the land purchase, the Board adopted a bond ordinance for improvements in the amount of \$225,000. Between 1945 and 1959, amenities like comfort stations, parking areas, picnic facilities with tables and fireplaces, roads, baseball diamonds, and a water system were added to the park. In the late 1970s, lights were added to two of the three baseball diamonds.

A new water line was constructed in 2015 and the first phase of a multi-use trail with interpretative signage began. Trail construction was overseen by Friends of Off-Road Cycling (commonly called FORC). Phase one was completed with a grand opening in spring 2017, and the final phase was completed in 2018. The District and Upper Rock Island County Recreation Association (URICRA) installed a Musco lighting system in 2018 in part due to a grant from the Carver Foundation.

### **Goals and Objectives**

- **Maintain Dorrance Park native landscape by protecting the natural resources within for the residents of Rock Island County**
  - Preserve and improve the health of the existing natural habitat through the forest management plan approved by the State District Forester and Commission (current plan can be found in the Appendix)
  - Identify future ecological issues and be proactive in the

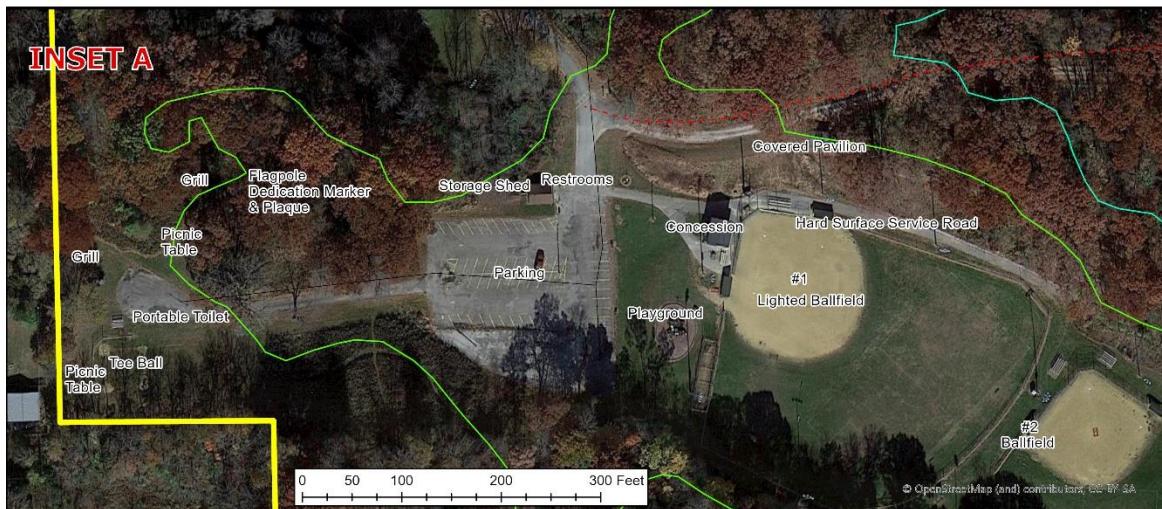
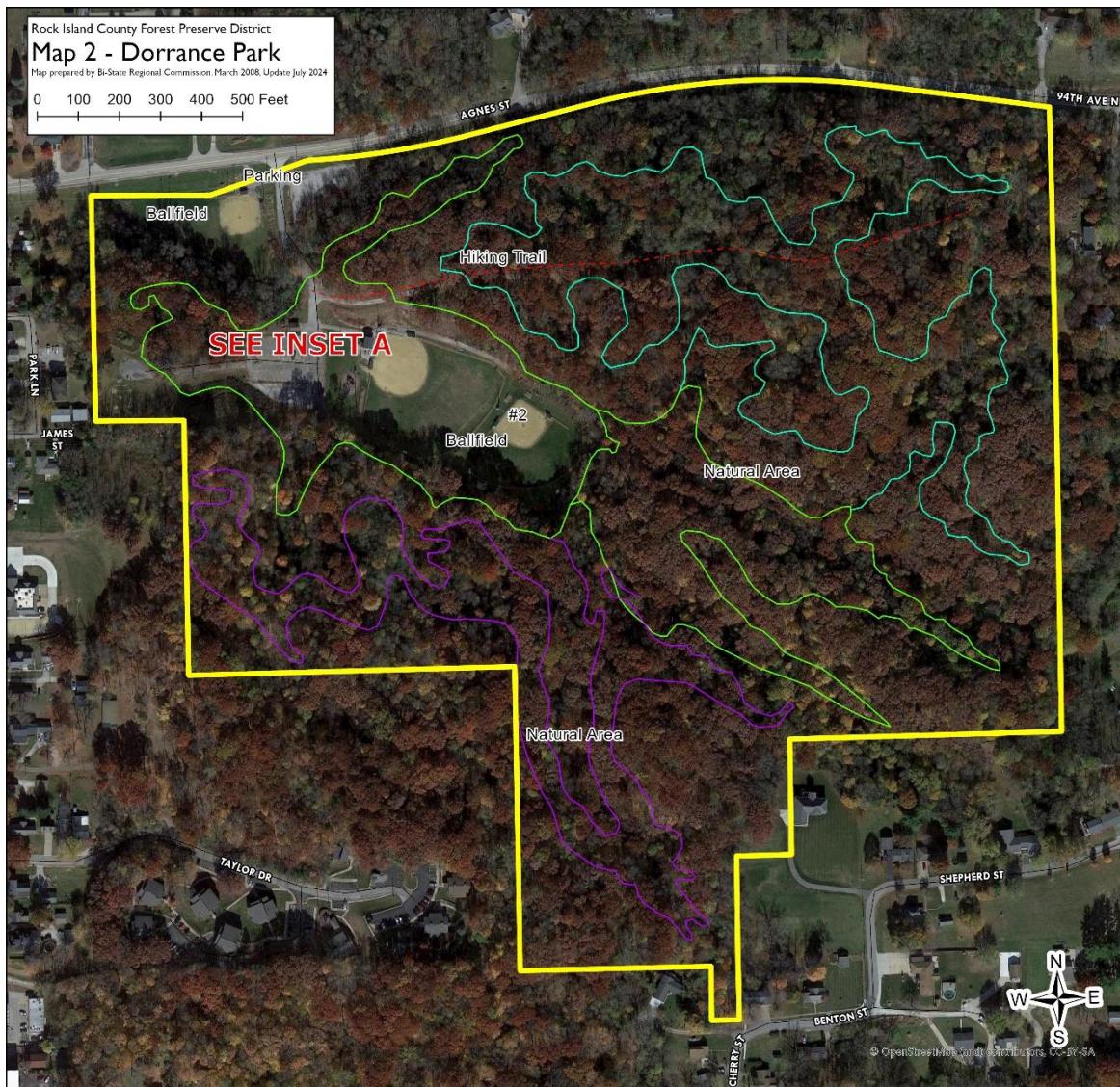
management (NOTE: Timber harvest due to oak wilt occurred in 2016 with proceeds used to replant a more diverse selection of trees)

- Consider establishing wetland prairies and other land management practices to slow erosion from the small watershed within the park
- Pursue acquiring additional properties adjacent to the park
- **Increase awareness of Dorrance Park and Rock Island County's forest preserves**
  - Engage partners and the public with park clean-up program and educational programs
  - Promote seasonal recreational activities
- **Provide the residents of Rock Island County access to**

### **preserved natural areas and recreational opportunities**

- Explore options for additional parking and infrastructure upgrades with the Village of Port Byron
- Add additional playground structures that have more aesthetic appeal to children and that are ADA accessible
- Install additional park amenities to promote day use, such as a smaller picnic shelters and playgrounds
- Construct a larger multi-purpose building for concessions, bathrooms, and storage
- Ball diamond improvements
- Evaluate drainage needs for athletic purposes on the ballfields
- Construct bleachers/seating with shade

**Map 3 Dorrance Park**



## Illiniwek Forest Preserve

Illiniwek Forest Preserve consists of 173.6 acres in central Rock Island County.

Illiniwek boasts three quarters of a mile of Mississippi River shoreline and scenic bluffs that overlook the river. There are many recreation opportunities available at Illiniwek. There are 60 full-service camping pads with 50-amp electrical service and water hook-ups as well as primitive/tent camping sites, and all sites are provided a fire ring and picnic table. Illiniwek is open for camping from April through October, weather permitting. Shoreline fishing is another very popular activity among visitors. There is also a playground, boat launch into the Mississippi River, a large picnic shelter for groups of 50 or less available for rental, and access to the Great River Trail.

### Developmental History

On January 11, 1944, the Forest Preserve Board approved the purchase of the Oltman Farm at a price not to exceed \$40,000. This land was owned by Albert Oltman, known as the Oltman Tract Farm, and was a 174-acre tract of land along the Mississippi River shoreline east of Hampton, IL. The Oltman Tract was believed to be a popular place for Indian gatherings, so the Forest Preserve Commission selected the name Illiniwek from a public naming contest, which means “favorite Indian spot.”

The acquisition of bonds in the amount of \$115,000 was adopted at a meeting of the Board on June 23, 1944. Negotiations to acquire the Oltman farm took several twists and turns, and during

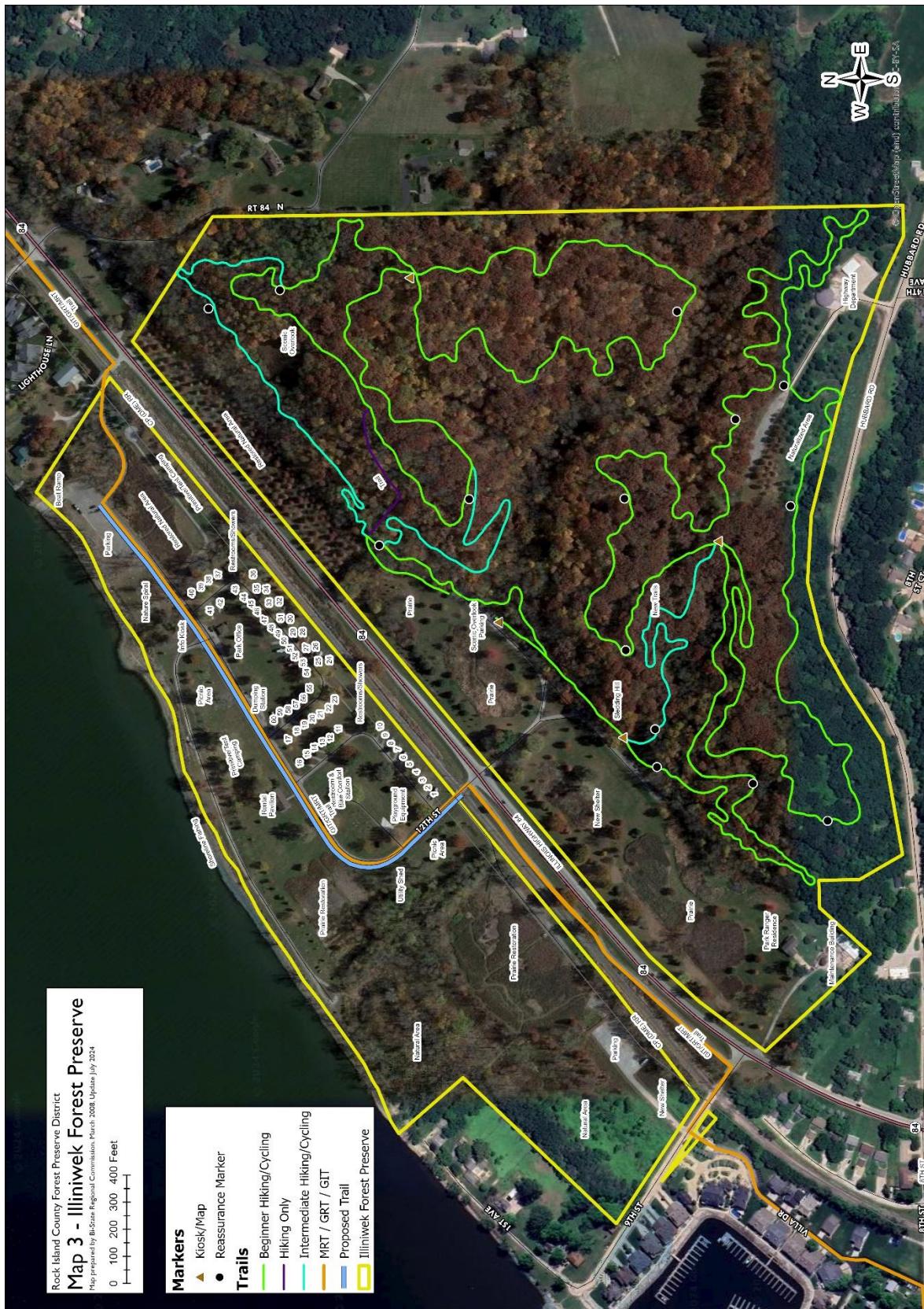
the November 11, 1944 meeting of the Board, a motion was adopted to allot the heirs of the Oltman farm three acres for \$500 an acre, which they never bought. The purchase of the Oltman farm actually occurred on September 28, 1945 for a price of \$40,000 and included the entire 173.6 acres.

In November 1946, the Rock Island County Forest Preserve Commissioners issued bonds for \$225,000, and Illiniwek received \$100,000 of the bonds for construction and improvements. In the late 1940s, a well and water system, roads, and parking areas were installed in the forest preserve. Throughout the 1950s, other improvements were added, and a caretaker's dwelling was constructed. Both modern and primitive camping facilities were made available to park patrons in the 1960s. A hillside scenic overlook was constructed in the 1980s, providing picturesque views of the Illiniwek preserve and Mississippi River. In the spring of 2013, the south shower facility was modified to meet current ADA standards, and then an ADA-accessible playground was constructed in 2015. Recently, 15 acres of prairie plantings were reconstructed in the open fields on the southeast side of Illinois 84 and where the two ball diamonds had been. Interpretive signage was installed throughout a designated prairie trail that connects the segmented parcels. A computerized point of sale system as well as additional upgrades were made to the camp office building in 2017. A new restroom and lift station that serves the building as well as the south shower building was constructed in 2024.

### **Goals and Objectives**

- **Maintain Illiniwek native landscape by protecting the natural resources for the residents of Rock Island County**
  - Preserve and improve the health of the existing natural habitat through the forest management plan approved by the State District Forester and Commission (current plan can be found in the Appendix)
  - Identify future ecological issues and be proactive in the management
  - Add additional maintenance facility space or begin utilizing the maintenance facility currently occupied by the County Highway Department
- **Increase awareness of Illiniwek and Rock Island County's forest preserves**
  - Continue established park clean-up and education programs
  - Promote and encourage seasonal recreation activities
- **Provide the residents of Rock Island County access to preserved natural areas and outdoor recreational opportunities**
  - Continue to convert open turf areas into a biological diverse habitat
  - Construct a fishing pier
  - Develop additional parking areas and address deteriorating road conditions throughout the park
  - Utilize the sewer connect by converting the remaining septic systems to feed to the lift station, and upgrade all or a portion of the RV sites with sewer hookups
  - Construct a new multi-season picnic shelter or building on the northwest side of the park to be used as an educational station and rental opportunity
- **Stay current with evolving technologies**
  - Install a MOTUS station

## **Map 4 Illiniwek Forest Preserve**



## Indian Bluff Golf Course

Indian Bluff is a forest preserve and 18-hole golf course situated on acres just south of the Quad Cities International Airport. The objective of Indian Bluff Golf Course is to be a public golf course of high quality with uniquely challenging golf holes for players of all abilities through exceptional care and customer service and natural recreation area featuring native habitats.

Indian Bluff recently completed building a new clubhouse in 2007 that includes pro shop sales, concessions, an ATM, club and cart rentals, and a practice green. There is also another concession stand located on the south edge of the golf course that serves hot dogs, brats, sandwiches, candy, beer, and assorted beverages during high-use periods.

The season is open from the end of March until November, and hours of operation are from 6:00 a.m. to dusk. Indian Bluff hosts several outings and leagues throughout each golf season. Indian Bluff also has a large picnic shelter available for rental in the southeastern corner of the preserve along with several acres of shaded picnic area space.

### Developmental History

The Rock Island Forest Preserve purchased Indian Bluff in 1945 from the previous occupants, the Blackhawk Country Club. The purchase included 180 acres plus equipment. In 1964, an additional 20 acres was donated by the Parker family. The property was completely remodeled and has included many upgrades throughout the years. The most recent upgrades include a

new irrigation system in 2006, new clubhouse and cart barn in 2007, and slope embankment stabilization and outfall structure modifications near hole #7 in 2011. The concession stand on the south side of the course received façade improvements and an outside water cooler in 2017. Bunker renovations began in 2015, and the director residence was demolished in 2016. An online reservation system for tee times was implemented in 2014.

### Goals and Objectives

- **Maintain Indian Bluff native landscape by protecting the natural resources within for the residents of Rock Island County**
  - Preserve and improve the health of the existing natural habitat through a forest management plan
  - Identify future ecological issues and be proactive in the management
  - Maintain the native hill prairie near the entrance and apply for Illinois Nature Preserve status
  - Consider becoming a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Golf Course
- **Increase awareness about Indian Bluff and Rock Island County's forest preserves**
  - Consider unique promotional events and alternative programs to encourage participation in the game

- **Make sure residents can enjoy the natural and recreational offerings of Indian Bluff**
  - Make improvements to golf course
    - Reconfigure the layout of Hole #12
    - Install additional retaining wall at Hole #7
    - Level grass surface on all the tee boxes
    - Continue to support bunker renovation plan that began in 2015 and document replacements
    - Continue the cart path improvement plan that was developed in 2017 and add new paths when necessary
    - Consider developing a chip range near outing shelter
    - Install 3-hole junior golf area and/or other youth initiatives such as First Tee
    - Replace concession and restroom building on the south side of the course
  - Create additional parking and resurface existing parking
  - Construct inclement weather stations (gazebos or shelters) throughout the course
  - "Beverage Cart" service
  - Develop a site plan for the area off of Hole #2 that evaluates replacement of restroom facility near large picnic shelter pavilion or demolition of the facility and whether to construct a new picnic shelter with restrooms in close proximity to clubhouse
  - Build additional storage/maintenance building
  - Consider construction of a deck off the back of the clubhouse with a grill and concession service
- **Stay on top of evolving technology**
  - Consider a virtual reality or golf simulator to be installed within the clubhouse

## Map 5 Indian Bluff Forest Preserve



## Loud Thunder Forest Preserve

Loud Thunder is the largest of the Rock Island County forest preserves at 1,495.6 acres, of which approximately 61 acres is leased from the United States Corps of Engineers along the Mississippi River. Loud Thunder is situated in southwest Rock Island County off Highway 92, and portions of the preserve are adjacent to the Illowa Council's Loud Thunder Boy Scout Camp. The Illinois Great River Road National Scenic Byway winds through the picturesque landscapes of the Preserve. Loud Thunder affords many recreational opportunities including camping, hiking, boating, and fishing. The Loud Thunder Forest Preserve provides an inspirational outdoor experience while expressing the importance of maintaining the flora and fauna.

One of the main attractions at Loud Thunder is Lake George, which is a 167-acre man-made lake. The lake is stocked with many varieties of fish including; bluegill, largemouth bass, crappie, channel catfish, bullhead, and muskellunge. Gas motors are not allowed on the lake creating a peaceful environment for both boaters and fisherman. Seasonal boat rentals are available during the summer season and a small selection of refreshments are available in the park office.

Other popular activities available at Loud Thunder are hiking trails. The Hauberg Trail East Branch and West Branch combine to form over two-miles of moderate level hiking through the scenic forested areas along the river. The Sac-Fox Trail is an approximately 12-mile, continuous loop, moderate level hiking trail that winds its way throughout

the Loud Thunder Forest Preserve. There are other shared-use trails located throughout the preserve for mountain bikers, horseback riders, and hikers. There are two playgrounds and two smaller sized and one large picnic shelter available for rental. In the winter, Loud Thunder offers cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and ice fishing on Lake George.

There are five campgrounds located in Loud Thunder. Campsite amenities vary throughout the campground type from primitive sites (mainly for tent campers) to water, electricity, and sewer hookups for RV and other camping units. All campsites are provided a fire ring and picnic table. Camping is open from April through October, weather permitting.

### Developmental History

Loud Thunder began in 1944 with the purchase of a 1,240-acre ranch from Charles Searle. On February 8, 1944, a land ordinance was approved, and a letter from the Forest Preserve Advisory Committee (consisting of John Hauberg, Dr. Conrad Bergendoff, and Arthur W. Wood) dated February 7, 1944 recommended the purchase of the mile or so of river front adjoining and lying immediately east of the recently purchased Searle Ranch.

On March 14, 1944, the land purchase Committee approved the purchase of the Gosline, Harlbutt, and White properties with the Gosline property in an amount not to exceed \$4,500, the Harlbutt property in an amount not to exceed \$1,400, and the White property in an amount not to exceed \$10,000.

On March 8, 1948, the District adopted a lease from the Department of Army for a tract along the Mississippi River near Lock & Dam 16. Adjacent properties were later purchased creating the existing park totaling 1,482 acres. The development of the preserve started in the 1950s with the creation of campgrounds, trails, and parking lots. In 1967, the Big Branch Creek that ran through the preserve was dammed to create Lake George.

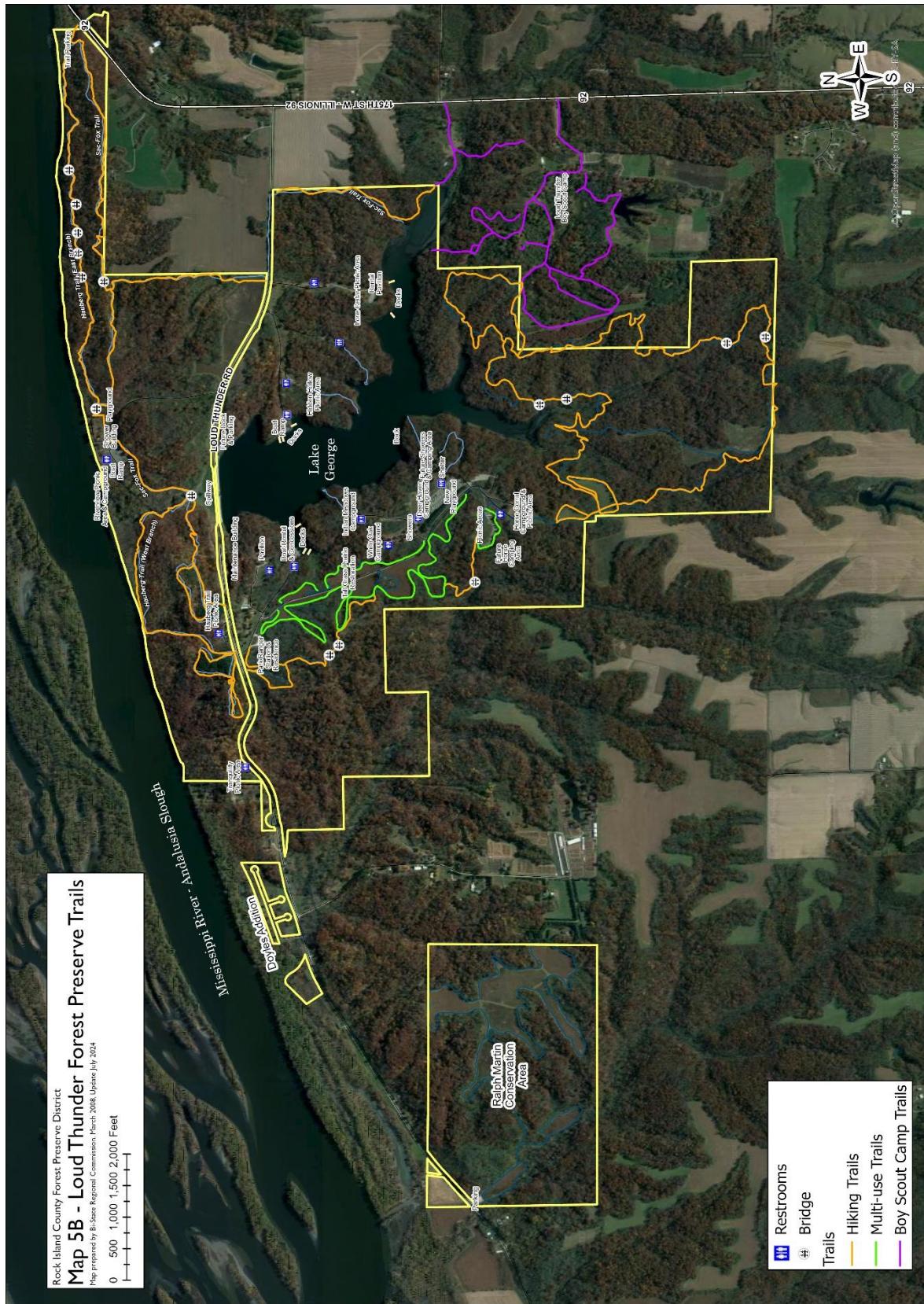
Loud Thunder offers many recreation opportunities. The maintenance of the park is important, so that visitors of the forest preserve have a pleasant experience. The upkeep of trails and well-marked signs and maps will help to keep visitors coming back. In 2012, a new ADA-accessible shower and restroom facility was constructed near the riverfront camping area. Row cropped parcels on the property were restored to native planting in 2017, mainly prairie and oak savanna. Funds were acquired to reconstruct the Sac-Fox Trail in 2017 and trail identification markers were installed. In 2016, shoreline access was provided from Lake George to picnic areas near the lake through the construction of trails. A site plan was developed for the Deer Haven picnic area in 2017. The boat rental area and concession building have been upgraded with new docks, and the service is operated out of the newly constructed park office. Pit-toilet buildings were refabricated and upgraded in 2016. The development of a new camp office in 2014 also included the establishment of online reservation for campsites.

### **Goals and Objectives**

- **Maintain Loud Thunder native landscape by protecting the natural resources for the residents of Rock Island County**
  - Preserve and improve the health of the existing natural habitat through the forest management plan approved by the State District Forester and Commission (current plan can be found in the Appendix)
  - Identify future ecological issues and be proactive in the management
  - Address erosion issues surrounding Lake George, specifically at the inlet of the Big Branch Creek, which will require significant engineering and funding as well as a partnership from the Illowa Council
  - Fund maintenance plan for spillway and dam developed after the 2018/2019 modifications, upgrades, and repairs
  - Address soil conditions at the horse corral and install drainage as necessary
  - Add additional maintenance storage for vehicles and equipment
  - Construct and maintain bridges throughout the trail system where needed
  - Continue Sac-Fox and Hauberg Trail Maintenance (NOTE: Funds were acquired to renovate the

- Sac-Fox trail on the south side of Loud Thunder Road in 2016)
- **Increase awareness about Loud Thunder and Rock Island County's forest preserves**
  - Establish partners and programs for clean-up and invasive species removal
  - Work with the Loud Thunder Boy Scout Camp and/or local groups such as the Illinois City Saddle Club, Friends of Off-Road Cycling, or the Blackhawk Hiking Club to determine responsibility for management, maintenance, and marketing of the trails at Loud Thunder
- **Provide the residents of Rock Island County access to preserve natural areas and recreational opportunities**
  - Develop parking lots along Loud Thunder Road and access routes/trails to Lake George
  - Renovate the Sac-Fox and Hauberg trails on the north side of Loud Thunder Road for mountain biking and hiking use only
  - Repair existing parking areas and roads
  - Pursue acquiring additional properties adjacent to the park
- **Stay on top of evolving technology**
  - Upgrade wireless internet service to staff and preserve in general

**Map 6 Loud Thunder Forest Preserve**



## Martin Conservation Area

The Martin Conservation Area is located just west of Loud Thunder Forest Preserve. The Martin Conservation Area is part of the ecologically significant Milan Bottoms and offers many natural and cultural resources. Over 60 acres of the site were previously enrolled in the USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and managed for wildlife. While no longer in the CRP program, the District manages the site for wildlife. There are 170 acres of native woodland, including two acres of direct seeded hardwood trees. There are over 20 acres of tall-grass prairie restoration and 40 acres of cool season grass legume habitat. The diverse wildlife includes many white tail deer, turkeys, and migratory birds. The site also contains seven confirmed Indian Burial Mounds of the Middle Woodland Indians (200 B.C.–600 A.D.).

### Developmental History

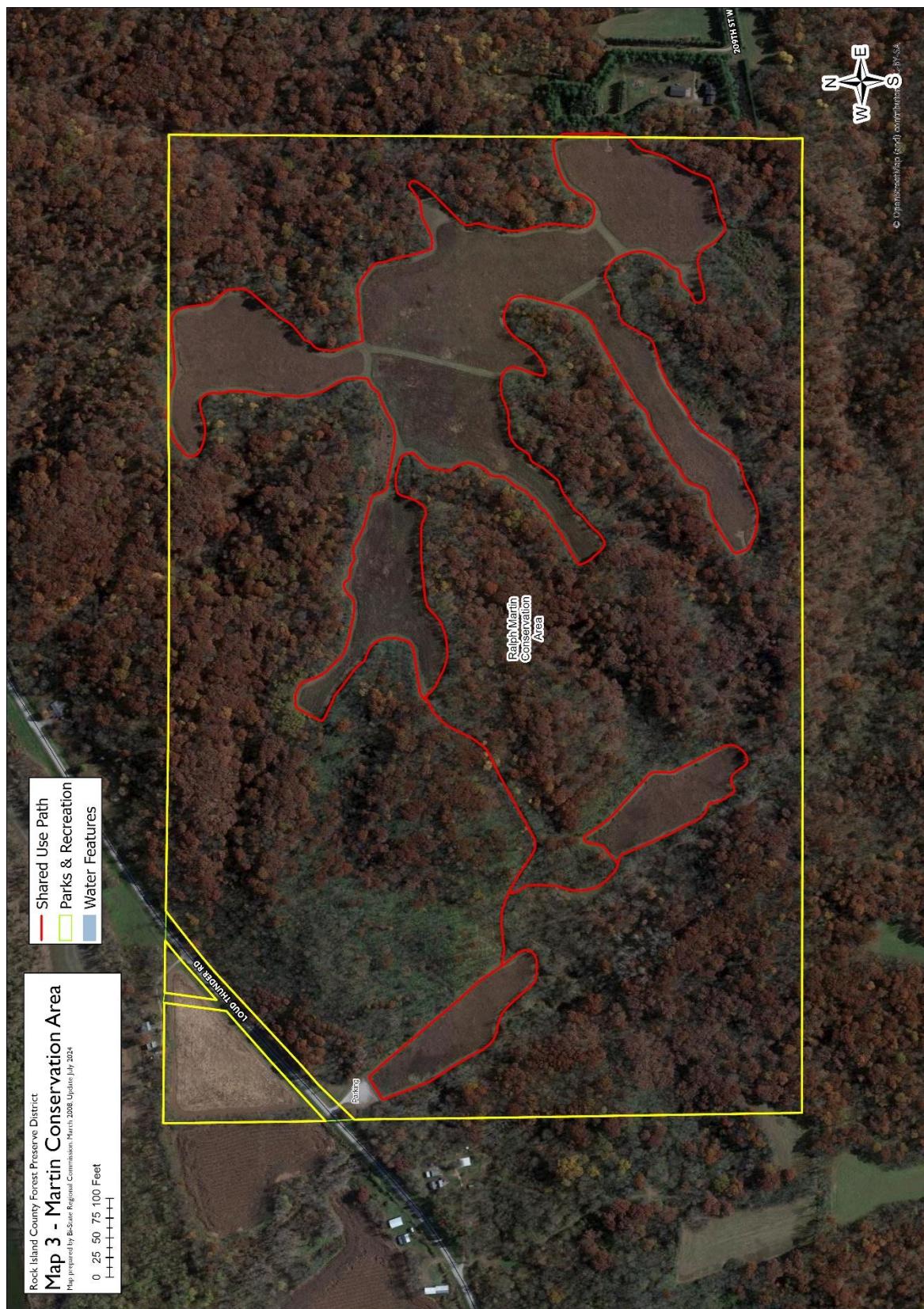
The Martin Conservation Area is a 253-acre tract of land west of Loud Thunder Forest Preserve. Mr. Ralph Martin left the land to the Rock Island County Forest Preserve District for the use and enjoyment of local residents in 1994. Mr. Martin knew this area was not ideal for farming and valued the area for its natural beauty. He believed the

property would be a great addition to Loud Thunder and the District in general.

### Goals and Objectives

- **Maintain Martin Conservation Area native landscape by protecting the natural resources for the residents of Rock Island County**
  - Preserve and improve the health of the existing natural habitat
  - Identify future ecological issues and be proactive in the management
  - Protect Indian Mound areas
  - Eliminate invasive species of Honeysuckle & Autumn Olive
- **Provide the residents of Rock Island County access to preserved natural areas and recreational opportunities at Martin Conservation Area**
  - Establish and maintain a natural surface multi-use trail system circulating throughout the property in partnership with FORC or other volunteer organizations

**Map 7 Martin Conservation Area**



## **Niabi Zoo**

Niabi Zoo utilizes approximately 50 acres to house an animal collection of 300 different species from all over the world. The remaining segments of land on the Niabi Zoo property is preserved in a natural state for native flora and fauna. The animal collection features giraffes, black & white colobus, gibbons, Bactrian camels, snow leopards, red wolves, amur leopard, giant tortoises, reptiles, and birds, among other of its many animal exhibits. Other amenities and attractions include an Endangered Species Carrousel; a playground; concessions; a gift shop; the Niabi Zoo Express, a train that travels the perimeter of the zoo; and the Administration Building. The classroom in the administrative building and other portions of the zoo can be rented out for birthday parties and group events. Niabi Zoo is open from April through October, with hours varying by season, and welcomes over 100,000 visitors a year.

### **Developmental History**

In 1957, Gordon McLain purchased the land that is now home to Niabi Zoo for the purpose of creating a family-owned wild animal farm just outside the Village of Coal Valley. When opened to the public in 1959, McLain's Wild Animal Farm housed lions, tigers, wild birds, ducks, and several domestic farm animals. Mrs. Charles Deere Wiman purchased the Wild Animal Farm in 1962. Shortly thereafter in 1963, she deeded the 238 acres consisting of the farm and the surrounding property to the Forest Preserve District of Rock Island County. An administration building, small mammal building, feline building, 16 wild birds and ducks, and 61 wild and

domestic animals were included with the original land donation.

In 1965, the zoological preserve was given the name Niabi. The word Niabi comes from the Native American language of the Osage (Wazhazhe) Nation meaning “the fawn spared by the hunter.” Shortly after the District began ownership, a “Friends of Niabi Zoo” support organization was established. The “Friends of Niabi Zoo” later changed the organization’s name to the Niabi Zoological Society. The Niabi Zoological Society still exists today as a non-profit organization; however, it does not have a formal relation with Niabi Zoo or the Rock Island County Forest Preserve District. Currently the zoo receives community support from the Niabi Zoo Foundation. The foundation provides funding for annual maintenance, exhibit construction, staff development, education, and conservation initiatives.

Today, the mission of Niabi Zoo is “Working today to assure a better tomorrow for all living things.” The vision is: “Leading conservation action locally and globally through relationships with conservation organizations, universities, and researchers, both in-situ and ex-situ.” These actions will be the driving force behind Niabi Zoo’s efforts: Connecting the community with animals and nature will increase awareness and appreciation for biodiversity, causing them to care about conservation issues; and Engaging educational experiences with unified conservation messaging and established action steps for individuals, families, and institutions will result in

behavior change and conservation action at home and abroad.

Over the past couple of years, the zoo has continued to transform itself under the current Zoo Director, Lee Jackson, into a science and education center. The Zoo Director and staff have been working on a short and long-range master plan with the following drivers of the plan being in no particular order: attractions are located based on best use of the site, the plan meets both the short-term and long-term needs of the Niabi Zoo, and the plan is focused on current land usage. The full Zoo Master Plan and as well as the Strategic Business Plan can be found in the Appendix of this plan.

The aesthetic modifications to existing exhibits and the zoo's landscape, infrastructure improvements, and the zoo's commitment to conservation and education have enhanced the visitor experience. Some of these improvements include creating habitats within the zoo and exhibit structures, a new format in signage throughout the zoo, an increase in educational offerings, and opportunities focused on science and conservation continue to reinforce the theme of the zoo being a science education center.

### Goals and Objectives

- **Maintain Niabi Zoo native landscape by protecting the natural resources for the residents of Rock Island County**
  - Develop a land management or forest management plan for the natural areas of the Niabi Zoo property to combat invasive and undesirable species

- Consider LEED certifications for all new and renovated buildings structures

- Continue to partner with organizations that preserve and protect natural areas and the conservation of natural resources

- **Increase awareness of Niabi Zoo**

- Continue to tell a story for the zoo and maintain a strong marketing and community presence through various medias

- **Provide the residents of Rock Island County access to preserved natural areas and recreational opportunities at Niabi Zoo**

#### Animal exhibits & renovations

- Construct new flamingo habitat
- Construct new lion habitat
- Construct new otter habitat
- Construct penguin habitat
- Construct camel habitat
- Construct or modify domesticated animal area or new winter holding areas
- Renovate red wolf exhibit
- Add air conditioning and heat to giraffe exhibit
- Renovate elk habitat
- Address koi pond
  - Landscape
  - Erosion and water quality

Visitor Areas/Educational Areas/  
Non-Animal Exhibit  
Buildings/Infrastructure

- Consider the addition of indoor and outdoor viewing areas with comfort stations
- Construct new entry plaza that includes a new gift shop and concession building
- Construct new restroom facilities
- Install permanent backup power generators at buildings and exhibits
- Install additional interior lighting throughout the zoo for security, extended operational hours, and special events
- Replace, repair, or modify the zoo perimeter fencing to standards
- Construct additional buildings for storage
- Construct day-use pavilions or picnic shelters for school groups, guests, and private party rentals
- Construct an outdoor deck off the administrative building with fire pit and seating for educational programs and experiences
- Develop graphics or murals on large building spaces
- Construct a “dino dig” area or active play area
- Expand photo opportunities with particular themes
- Construct new train station

- Install additional safety around tracks
  - Construct additional quarantine facilities
  - Construct storage facility with loading dock for gift shop merchandise
  - Install additional garage for vehicle storage
  - Install supply storage area with concrete floor, dividers, roof, and heat
  - Install greenhouse and grow plantings for exhibit replacement and zoo beautification
  - Upgrade water system and infrastructure by considering connection to a municipal water supply
  - Widen roadways and replace surface with concrete (include storm water drains)
  - Increase educational and special event offerings
  - Develop a nature trail within the perimeter and exterior fence
  - Implement or address ADA deficiencies throughout the zoo
- **Stay on top of evolving technology**
- Upgrade computer equipment with replacement plan
  - Purchase camera systems for each animal exhibit

- Install additional internet connections throughout the zoo
- Upgrade alarms and security devices throughout the zoo
- **Be fiscally stable and provide cost-efficient benefits to the residents of Rock Island County**
  - Create a development or resource plan to cultivate gifts and donations
  - Stay current on possible grant, sponsorship, and other funding opportunities
  - Develop a preventative maintenance program
  - Develop an equipment and vehicle replacement plan
  - Develop a utility plan
  - Develop a track repair and replacement plan (begin yearly cycle)
- **Keep the Forest Preserve District's future planning goals up-to-date, and reevaluate Niabi**

**Zoo's administrative policies as needed**

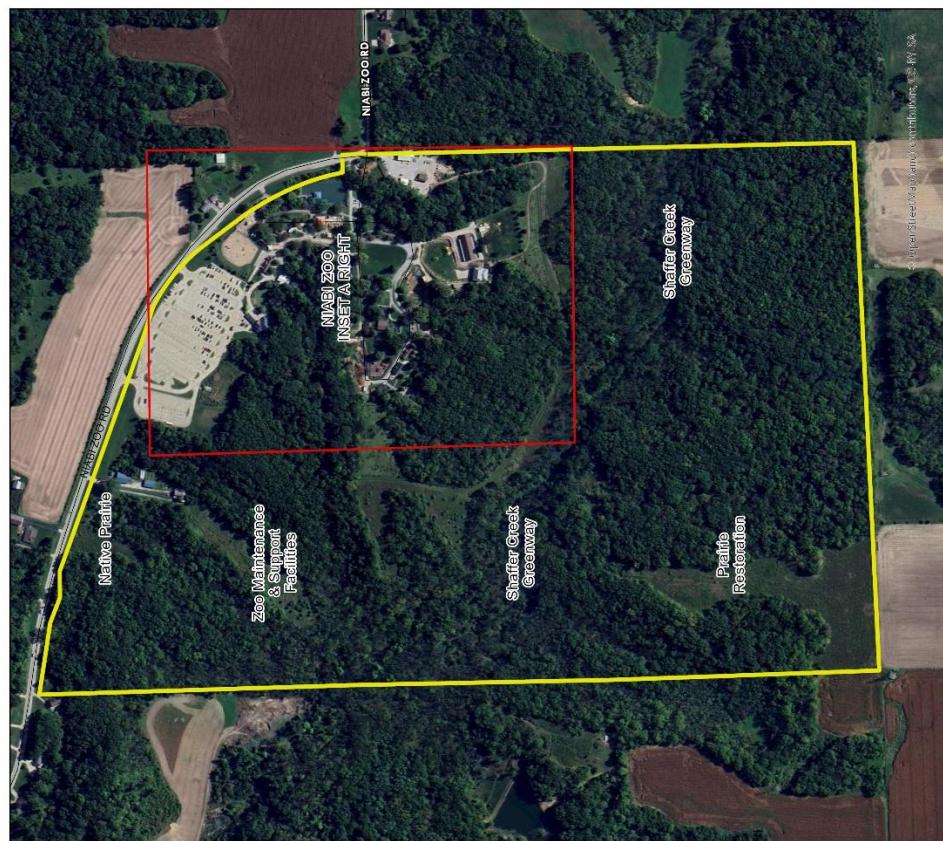
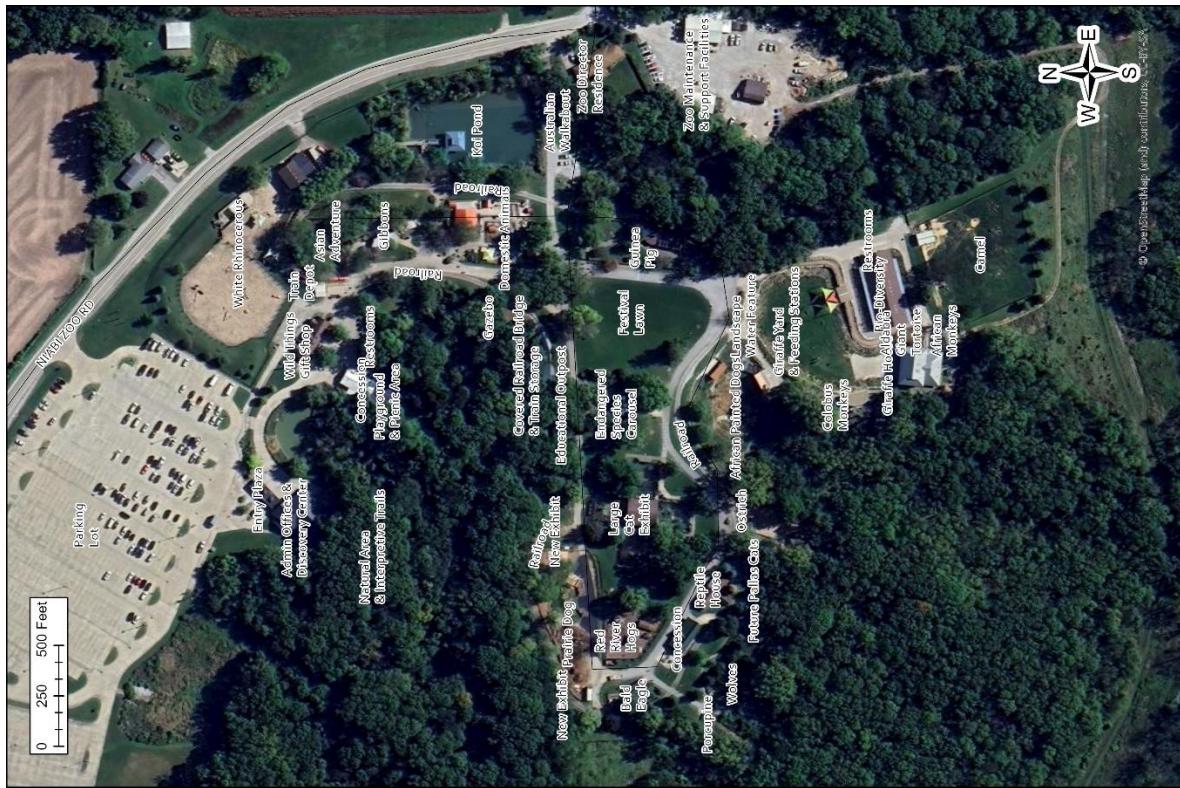
- Obtain and maintain zoological accreditations by implementation of modern zoological practices and philosophies
- Maintain and keep the zoo master plan current and fresh by reviewing and evaluating the plan every 5 years
- Update the Strategic Business Plan

Consider additional staffing

- Veterinarian
- Animal Handlers
- Key Holder/Assistant Manager position for Membership/Gift Shop/Concessions
- Maintenance Staff
- Development Coordinator Public Relations-Grant Writer
- Veterinarian Technician
- Horticulturist

# *Rock Island County Forest Preserve District Comprehensive Park Plan*

## Map 8 Niabi Zoological Park & Forest Preserve



## **Mississippi River Trail/Grand Illinois Trail**

The Mississippi River Trail (MRT) is a 10-state initiative to develop a world-class trail along both shorelines of the Mississippi River from its headwaters in Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico in Louisiana. The leg of the trail with Rock Island County is also part of the Great River Trail (GRT) that goes from Sunset Park in Rock Island upstream to Savanna, Illinois. The GRT is designated by the National Park Service and the U.S. Department of the Interior as a National Recreation Trail. In addition, the section through Illiniwek Park is a part of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources' Grand Illinois Trail (GIT). The GIT is an approximately 500-mile loop trail across the northern part of the state connecting the Mississippi to Lake Michigan.

The Great River Trail is a continuous, hard-surfaced multipurpose trail that extends along the east banks of the Mississippi River from Rock Island to the Rock Island County-Whiteside County line. This encompasses approximately 30 miles of trail within Rock Island County. The 60-mile trail extends to Savanna, Illinois, passing through numerous riverfront communities, county and state parks, and nature preserves. The Great River Trail is widely used as an alternative transportation link and for both active and passive recreational benefits. In addition, the trail provides the community with connections to neighborhoods, commercial districts, industrial areas, and recreation areas. The trail parallels the Great River Road National Scenic Byway (Illinois 92 and Illinois 84). Development of the MRT began in the early 1990s and was completed by 2005.

The Rock Island County Forest Preserve District manages the MRT in the following locations and arrangements:

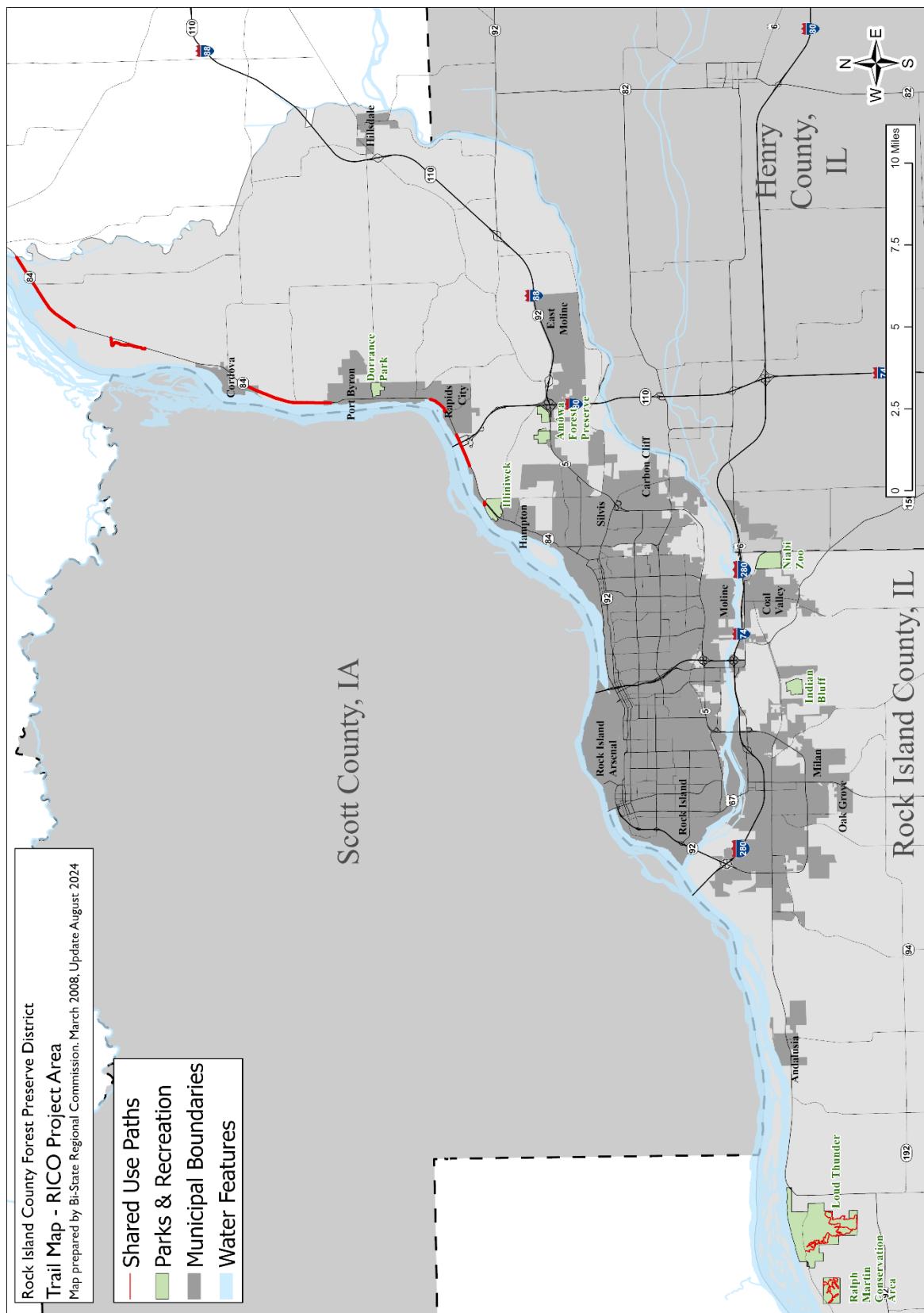
- Illiniwek Forest Preserve that is maintained entirely by the Forest Preserve District
- Under I-80 bridge that is mostly frontage road and another portion just north of Rapids City
- North of Port Byron beginning at approximately 115<sup>th</sup> Avenue North/Fairfield Road to 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue South in Cordova
- Commonwealth Edison Company easement through the nuclear power plant property from 192<sup>nd</sup> Avenue to 208<sup>th</sup> Avenue North (Note: the easement has since expired and Constellation now maintains that section)
- 222<sup>nd</sup> Avenue to Rock Island County Line

### **Goals and Objectives**

- **Maintain the MRT/GIT for the residents of Rock Island County**
  - Address erosion and other maintenance issues when identified
- **Increase awareness of the MRT and Rock Island County's forest preserves**
  - Continue to work with community groups and other potential trail user groups for litter pick-up and cleanliness programs

- **Provide the residents of Rock Island County access to preserved natural areas and recreational opportunities**
  - Maintain and reconstruct the asphalt surfaces of the MRT as needed. Identify sections that are in need of resurfacing due to heaving and roots buckling the path surface, and plan for their reconstruction
  - Install general amenities for trails including doggie bag stations and bike repair stations at trail heads
  - Continue to mow grass and trim tree/shrub branches as needed to maintain a minimum of eight feet high clearance and four feet clearance from the edge of the bike path

**Map 9 Trail Map – RICO Project Area**



# 6 Capital Projects and Land Acquisition

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## Capital Projects

Since 2013, the Rock Island County Forest Preserve District has completed several capital projects. The projects were identified in the 2013 Rock Island County Forest Preserve Park Plan and funded mostly through special revenue funds, grants, and partnerships. These projects significantly upgraded the District's operations and facilities, enhanced visitor experiences, and restored natural areas.

Capital projects are defined using these criteria:

- Having a lifespan of at least 3 years
- Improving or replacing existing facilities
- Construction of new facilities
- Restoration or management of natural resources

Examples of capital projects completed are the construction of improvements at Loud Thunder Forest Preserve including a park office building, multi-use trails, a shower and restroom building, boat docks, and prairie restoration with costs totaling \$700,000. At Illiniwek Forest Preserve, the shower and restroom buildings were remodeled, and a new playground was constructed with costs totaling \$200,000.

Capital projects that upgrade, repair, or replace existing facilities will generally

have a minimal impact on operating expenses. Construction of new facilities, especially those of a large scale, will have an effect on the operating budget as they will require additional resources to maintain.

The Rock Island County Forest Preserve District continues to have undeveloped areas of its properties that have little to no public use or environmental function other than open space labeled as green space, which requires mowing. These sterile green space areas should be repurposed with the mission and goals of the District. Additionally, the District must develop and pursue acquisition of additional lands for future use and preservation. Amôwa Forest Preserve was purchased in 2022, and \$700,000 of improvements have been made since then. All current and future properties will require capital projects in order to be maintained at a high level of service, preserved in a native natural state, and made accessible to the public.

As a mission driven conservation agency, the Rock Island County Forest Preserve District is committed to environmentally-sensitive and sustainable projects. Several District projects have included environmentally-sensitive components such as utilizing alternative materials, employing geothermal power, and increasing wildlife habitat. While these initiatives are commendatory, the District should

continue to explore additional sustainability opportunities.

### **Capital Project Planning**

Planning for the construction, installation, and maintenance of large-scale capital projects typically occurs over many years. These projects generally require architectural, engineering, and other professional services.

A number of factors will be considered when the District plans for capital projects. The factors include, but may not be limited to:

- Rock Island County Forest Preserve District mission statement and goals
- Rock Island County Forest Preserve District planning documents
- Public input
- Capital project funding
- Availability of capital project grant funding
- General Fund and other fund balances of the District

Since 2006, the District has strived to provide professional services, quality amenities, and affordable fees throughout its facilities. The District must continually strive to use the best professionals and management practices to ensure the basic amenities throughout the District such as playgrounds, shower and restroom facilities, signage, visitor information kiosks, drinking water, and trails are kept at an optimal level of service. The District should continually assess the

level of service, amenities, and services its facilities should be providing in order to meet the District's mission and budgetary conditions, as well as the public interest.

### **Capital Project Goals and Objectives**

- Establish and maintain a five-year capital plan, and annually review and update the capital plan
- Solicit public input for capital projects
- Develop concept plans, cost estimates, and construction documents for capital projects as needed
- Develop standardized construction details for use in the District's capital projects
- Apply for and utilize grants to maximize capital project funds
- Develop individualized site plans for the preserves to guide the location of capital improvements and protection of current natural resources on District lands
- Partner with other government agencies, non-profit organizations, businesses, and the public on the acquisition of multipurpose trail corridors and the construction of such trails
- Construct, refurbish and maintain facilities to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act
- Facilitate donations of funds, goods, services, and labor for

use with capital projects

## Land Acquisition

Shortly after the Rock Island County Forest Preserve District was created in 1941, it began to acquire property throughout the county. The first initial purchases comprise a majority of the current holdings of the District today. The initial purchases of properties in 1944 included the properties that comprise Loud Thunder, Illiniwek, and Dorrance Forest Preserves and Indian Bluff Golf Course. The Niabi Zoological Preserve was deeded to the District in 1962. An extended gap time occurred before the next land acquisition that was the donation of the Ralph Martin Conservation Area to the District in 1994. Amôwa was the most recent purchase in 2022. A spreadsheet providing the acquisition history of the Rock Island County Forest Preserve District is in the Appendix for this plan on the Forest Preserve website.

### Land Acquisition Evaluation Process

The District becomes aware of potential acquisitions in several ways:

- The District contacts a landowner directly to determine if there is interest to sell a property. If there is no interest, the District does not pursue the acquisition further.
- A landowner or real estate agent contacts the District regarding an available property.
- A resident informs the District of an available property.
- The District works with other governmental agencies, non-profits, and developers on preservation of open space.

Once a property is determined to be available, information regarding the property is gathered by staff and presented to the Forest Preserve Executive Committee. Included in this information is the land acquisition worksheet that assists the commissioners in evaluating the property based on its physical characteristics. Other factors including, but not limited to, price, threats to the property, needs of the District, and grant requirements are also considered by the Commissioners when making land acquisition decisions.

Forest Preserve Commissioners, through staff or consultants, negotiate the purchase of property. When agreements are reached with a landowner, the Forest Preserve Commission approves an Acquisition Ordinance providing the officers and staff have the authority to carry out necessary due diligence to complete the acquisition.

The District should utilize simple fee purchases for the majority of its acquisitions unless it has a partnership arrangement. Potential funding for land acquisition could come from a variety of sources including, but not limited to, open space bond referendums, state and federal grants, and the District's taxing authority.

### Land Acquisition Worksheet

Decisions regarding land acquisitions are the responsibility of the Board of Commissioners of the Rock Island County Forest Preserve District. The worksheet should be used to assist the Board, along with staff recommendations and resident input, in the land acquisition decision process. Other factors including, but not limited

to, price threats to the property, needs of the District, and grant requirements should also be considered by the Commissioners when making land acquisition decisions.

An sample worksheet, such as the one below, is numerically based. For each

quality that a parcel possesses, it receives the corresponding score. A high score indicates a property that should be considered for open space preservation. The total score may be compared with scores of other parcels in order to evaluate the properties as potential forest preserves.

**Preserving Natural Features:**

High Quality Natural Area (prairie, wetland, woodland, stream)	12
Mississippi or Rock Riverfront	12
Linkage between Protected Open Spaces	8
Streams/Lakes/Ponds	8
Expansion of Current Forest Preserve	4
Presence of Endangered or Threatened Species	4
Significant Geologic Features	4
100 Acres or Larger	4
Subtotal	56

**Recreational and Education Potential:**

Multi-Purpose Trails	12
Nature Trails	8
Water/Fishing/Canoe/Kayak Access	4
Picnic Areas/High Use Areas	4
Preserve Access/Parking	4
Subtotal	32

**Complement Existing Plans:**

Illinois DNR Conservation Opportunity Area	8
Rock Island County Greenway/Watershed, Municipal Park, or Trail Plan	4
Subtotal	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

### **Land Acquisition Goals & Objectives**

- Apply for and utilize grants whenever possible to maximize land acquisition funds
- Create a list of high-grade priority potential acquisition sites
- Consider a future open space acquisition bond referendum
- Utilize the Rock Island County Greenway and Land Use Plan as a guide for natural areas and open space acquisitions
- Expand existing preserves, especially those with limited opportunities for expansion or those with limited access
- Create and implement land acquisition procedures to streamline the acquisition process
- Increase public awareness regarding land preservation efforts
- Create greenway corridors along the Mississippi and Rock Rivers and the significant creeks and watersheds of Rock Island County
- Work in partnership with other governmental agencies, non-profit organizations, and private citizens to maximize open space acquisition and preservation
- Educate landowners on benefits of land donations
- Educate landowners and attorneys on the potential benefits and values of conservation easements
- Educate landowners and attorneys on the variety of financial and estate planning techniques that can result in open space preservation
- Work in partnership with the local municipalities' planning, building, and zoning departments and developers on conservation design as a means for the preservation of open space

**Table 4 – Grant Opportunities**

Grant	Source	Amount Available	Local Match	Cycle/Due Date
Boat Access Area Development Program (BAAD)	Illinois DNR	\$200,000 motorized/ \$80,000 non-motorized	Up to 100% reimbursable	Annual/September 1st
Federal Recreational Trails Program (RTP)	Illinois DNR	\$200,000	20% match	Annual/ March 1st
Illinois Bicycle Path Program	Illinois DNR	\$200,000	50% match	Annual/ March 1st
Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program (ITEP)	Illinois DOT	No set maximum	20% match/reimbursable program	Dependent on funding availability in any given year
Off-Highway Vehicle Recreational Program (OHV)	Illinois DNR	No set maximum	Up to 100% reimbursable	Annual/March 1st
Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development Program/ Land and Water Conservation Fund (OSLAD/LWCF)	Illinois DNR	\$1,725,000 acquisition/ \$600,000 development or renovation	50% match	Annual/July 1st
Park & Recreational Facility Construction Program	Illinois DNR	No set maximum For park & recreation unit construction projects and land acquisition projects	Typically matching	Annual/January
Public Museum Capital Grant Program	Illinois DNR & Illinois State Museum	To develop or update exhibits and facilities	100% match	Annually announced
Prairie State Conservation Collation	Various	Various	Varies	Varies
Openlands	Private Foundation	Land acquisition and development, \$10,000	At least 50%	Annual/March 16th
Riverboat Development Authority	Not-for-Profit	No set maximum. Average recent round \$28,000	Yes but no set amount	Last Business Day March and September
Scott County Regional Authority	Not-for-Profit	No set maximum. Average recent round \$31,000	Yes but no set amount	Last Business Day March and September
Community Challenge	AARP	No set maximum	Yes but no set amount	Annual/Mid-May
Community Grant Program	PeopleForBikes	\$10,000	≥50%	1-2 cycles per year
Let's Play Community Construction Grant	KaBoom	\$15,000	\$24,000-\$50,000	Tri-annual/ January, May, September

# Appendix