



Our story begins in 1957

Ethel Untermeyer organized a county-wide referendum to establish the Lake County Forest Preserve District. At this time, Cook County already had 47,000 acres protected as forest preserves. Only four people came to Ethel's first organizational meeting. She drove her Studebaker throughout Lake County, sometimes on dirt roads, speaking with groups and garnering support. The first organization to endorse the 1958 referendum was the Lake County Farm Bureau.

1958

- On November 4, the referendum passed by a wide margin, with 60 percent of the votes. Twenty days later, the Lake County Forest Preserve District was legally declared established in Lake County Circuit Court. A citizen's advisory committee was immediately formed, with Ethel as its chair.
- The population of Lake County was 300,000.

1959

- Robert Kelly was hired as the first District superintendent. He served until 1960.

The 1960s

1961

- The first Lake County Forest Preserve, Van Patten Woods in Wadsworth Township, was created with a 162-acre purchase. Additional parcels were acquired, and in the 1970s the abandoned gravel pit that was restored to become Sterling Lake was purchased. Today, the 991-acre Van Patten Woods Forest Preserve, named in honor of David Van Patten, President of the District in 1960, is a premier recreation site in Lake County.

1963

- One June 25, the Board of Commissioners approved the ordinance for the creation of the Des Plaines River Trail and Greenway. In 1980, construction began on the first section of the trail in the Wadsworth area. Today, 31 miles of trail are open.

1965

- The County board voted to buy the privately owned Lake County Museum of History in Wadsworth. The collection was put into storage, and in 1976 moved to Lakewood Forest Preserve and opened as the Lake County Museum, a department of the Lake County Forest Preserves.

1966

- The District received its first major land donation of 168 acres at Ryerson Conservation Area. Other donations made through 1972 and totaling 288 acres of the preserve's now 552 acres make Ryerson Woods recipient of the largest land donations ever received.

1968

- Jerry Soesbe was hired as the District's first Executive Director.
- A record amount of land, 1,005 acres at Lakewood, was purchased. Today, Lakewood is the District's largest preserve at 2,690 acres and the home of our nationally accredited Lake County Discovery Museum.
- The Nature Conservancy's Berkeley Prairie became a Lake County Forest Preserve and management of the District's natural areas officially began.

1969

- Rangers first appeared in the Forest Preserves, assisting visitors with myriad of services and keeping a watchful eye on the properties. Today, the District's professional Ranger Police and Community Service Officers continue to work to ensure the safety of all preserve visitors and neighbors by patrolling and offering assistance 365 days a year.

The 1970s

1970

- Habitat restoration efforts began in preserves throughout Lake County due to the federal government's Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) jobs program that provided for the hiring of wildlife biologists.

1971

- The first controlled burn was conducted with The Nature Conservancy at Berkeley Prairie; six acres were burned. Today, District ecologists now safely burn thousands of acres throughout Lake County each spring and fall. Controlled burns help natural areas regain a healthy diversity of species.
- Land acquisitions began at the Greenbelt Forest Preserve. Today, Greenbelt boasts 566 acres.
- Ryerson Woods became the base for all environmental education programs. Schools also began coming to Ryerson for on-site programs led by Forest Preserve naturalists.

1972

- Work began on designating preserves for inclusion in the inventory of high-quality natural areas statewide. The Illinois Natural History Survey led this project to assess the remaining examples of high quality plant and animal communities left in Illinois. The Survey has just started the process of re-sampling the state for new sites exclusive of previously identified Illinois Natural Areas Inventory (INAI) sites.

- A portion of Ryerson Woods was so ecologically valuable that it became the first site in the District to be dedicated as an Illinois Nature Preserve by the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission (INPC). This means that while these exceptional natural areas are still owned and managed by the Lake County Forest Preserves, they benefit from additional permanent protection by the INPC. Other dedicated Illinois Nature Preserves include Almond Marsh, Fourth Lake Fen, Gavin Bog at Grant Woods, Lloyds Woods at Wright Woods, Lyons Woods, MacArthur Woods, Middlefork Savanna, Spring Bluff, Wadsworth Prairie and Wauconda Bog at Lakewood.
- The first Seniors Day event was held to recognize and celebrate Lake County's senior citizens. Today, Seniors Day celebrates 36 years as the District's longest running special event.

1974

- The former home of Adlai E. Stevenson, along with 40 acres of land, was donated to the District.
- The Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) began in the Forest Preserves as a federally funded pilot program that provided teenagers with summer jobs. It was so successful that it became a model for similar programs throughout the nation. Today, the Corps employs more than 40 teenagers each summer for conservation work in Forest Preserves throughout the county.

1975

- The first comprehensive plan for acquiring land was adopted and the District's General Offices were moved from the County of Lake building in Waukegan, to their present location in Libertyville.
- The County board approved a resolution establishing a Lake County Museum, now known as the Lake County Discovery Museum.

1976

- The Museum was moved from its Wadsworth location to Lakewood Forest Preserve near Wauconda and became part of the Lake County Forest Preserves. Former farm buildings are adapted and expanded to accommodate galleries, offices, and archives.
- Acquisition at Grant Woods began. Recent land purchases have brought Grant Woods to a total of 1,118 acres, making it one of the largest Forest Preserves in the District.
- Most of the land at Cuba Marsh was acquired, though recent additions were made as late as 2006 to bring the current total to 792 acres.
- Countryside, the District's first golf course was acquired. Currently the District has four courses: Brae Loch, Countryside, Fort Sheridan and ThunderHawk.

1978

- The District's total acreage reached 9,981.
- The first parcel of land was purchased at Independence Grove, and the idea to reclaim the old quarry on the site began evolving.

The 1980s

1980

- The population of Lake County was 440,000.

1981

- A National Wetlands Inventory for the Chicago Metro Area was completed.

1982

- The nationally accredited Lake County Discovery Museum received the Curt Teich Postcard Archives donation and nearly \$1 million for its preservation and development. It is the largest public collection of postcards in the world.

1983

- Ground was broken for the Wetlands Demonstration Project, a joint project between Lake County Forest Preserves and Wetlands Research, Inc. It receives national distinction, honors and recognition.
- The Lake County Forest Preserve District marked its 25th Anniversary.

1984

- Ryerson's Smith Nature Symposium, an annual series of nature programs, was established, with international bird expert Roger Tory Peterson as its first keynote speaker. The Friends of Ryerson Woods grew from this first symposium.

1988

- The District's total acreage reached 12,790.

1989

- Rollins Savanna Forest Preserve was created with an 838-acre land buy. Additional land was acquired in phases through 1993. Today, Rollins Savanna is one of Lake County's largest preserves with 1,225 uninterrupted acres. Following extensive habitat restoration and new trails and parking, Rollins officially re-opened to the public in 2004.
- Middlefork Savanna, a rare tallgrass savanna remnant was created through a 42.5-acre purchase. Land additions from 1989 to 2000 grow this preserve to its current 576 acres.

The 1990s

1990

- A total of 1,838 acres was purchased. This was the most land acquired in a single year by the District.

1991

- Steve Messerli was selected as the District's second Executive Director.
- A new wing at the Museum was opened, making it one of the largest historical and cultural centers in Illinois and one of the 10 most popular destination spots in Lake County.

1992

- Work began on the Lake County Wetlands Inventory, a study of high-quality Advanced Identification (ADID) wetlands. The first of its kind in the state, the project was a joint study with key federal partners, including the U.S. EPA, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. The Lake County Stormwater Management Agency was the local partner for the wetlands inventory, which was completed in 1993.

1993

- In November 61% of voters approved a \$30 bond referendum and said "Yes" to preserving more natural areas, wildlife habitat, trail and greenway corridors and developing new opportunities for outdoor recreation and education in the Lake County Forest Preserves.

1995

- Howard "Shorty" Bonner, the great-grandson of Scottish immigrants William and Margaret Bonner, donated eight acres and a cluster of historic buildings from his parents' farm to the Forest Preserves. Today, the Bonner Heritage Farm tells the story of Lake County's agricultural roots through self-guided exhibits. It is also our smallest preserve.

1996

- Much of Ryerson Woods was designated as a National Historic District and listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
- The District became a founding member of the Chicago Wilderness consortium to protect biodiversity.

1997

- The original 541-acre Singing Hills Farm parcel was acquired. Several land additions later, Singing Hills now totals 685 acres.

1998

- The District's total acreage reached 20,107.
- The first section of the new regional Millennium Trail and Greenway began at Lakewood. Today, 11 miles are completed.
- After nearly a decade of work, the U.S. Department of the Army began to transfer much of the base at Fort Sheridan to Lake County, beginning with 258 acres. The District received the third and final parcel in 2001.

1999

- The Lake County Forest Preserve District was voted “Best in the Nation” as the National Gold Medal Winner by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA)
- The District began to acquire land at Sun Lake Forest Preserve. The preserve now totals 632 acres.
- In April, 66% of Lake County voters approved a \$55 million referendum for land preservation and for trail and public access improvement projects.

The New Millennium

2000

- In November, 67% of Lake County voters showed continued support for their Forest Preserves, approving an \$85 million referendum for land preservation and for a variety of trail and public access improvement projects.
- The Greenbelt Cultural Center, a multipurpose facility, opened through the support of the community and assistance from corporate sponsors Abbott Laboratories and Grainger. Planning is underway to expand this popular center.
- The population of Lake County was 644,463.

2001

- After years of restoration, Independence Grove was opened to the public and is now the most visited preserve in Lake County.
- The largest restoration project, with the most acreage restored to date, began at Rollins Savanna. Work to restore Rollin’s 1,225 acres is still underway with over 950 acres restored thus far. *(Other restoration projects include Gander Mountain and Prairie Wolf in 1994; Grainger, Middlefork Savanna, and Wadsworth Prairie in 1997; MacArthur Woods in 2000; Ethel’s Woods in 2001; Independence Grove in 2002; Old School in 2004; Fort Sheridan Hutchinson Ravine, Lyons Woods, and Marl Flat in 2006; Nippersink, Spring Bluff and Tanager Kames in 2007; and Fort Sheridan Janes Ravine, Lakewood North, Ryerson Woods, and Wright Woods in 2008)*

2004

- Tom Hahn, Director of Land Acquisition and Special Projects, was promoted to serve as the District’s third Executive Director.
- Following extensive habitat restoration and new trails and parking, Rollins Savanna officially re-opened to the public.

2005

- Rollins Savanna was named an Important Bird Area by the National Audubon Society.

2006

- The Welcome Center at Ryerson Woods, a model of green architecture, opened to the public. As the District's first "green" building, the Center was designed using the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) guidelines developed by the U.S. Green Building Council.
- The population of Lake County was estimated at 723,591.

2007

- The District received the National Leadership in Conservation Award from the Trust for Public Lands and the National Association of Counties.

2008

- The Lake County Forest Preserve District celebrated 50 years as Lake County's principal guardian of open space and natural areas.
- The District's total acreage reached more than 26,500. Annual visits to the Lake County Forest Preserves averaged 3.5 million.
- The Adlai E. Stevenson Historic Home, a State Historic Site listed on the National Register of Historic Places, opened to the public for the first time. Built in 1938, the architecture was remarkable for its time, modern in style, and simple in form and ornamentation.
- Two new preserves, Nippersink and Heron Creek, opened to the public.

The Trail Ahead

2030

- The population of Lake County in 2030 is estimated to be 841,860.

2058

- Help us create the future of the Lake County Forest Preserve District. With your continued support, we look forward to celebrating 100 years.