

DATE: November 13, 2025

MEMO TO: Elizabeth Hough, Chair
Preservation Foundation Board

FROM: Pati Vitt
Director of Natural Resources

RECOMMENDATION: Recommend approval of a \$28,000 grant from unrestricted funds to quantify conservation value and management effects on wildlife species in the forest preserves.

FINANCIAL DATA: As of September 30, 2025, the Foundation's unrestricted funding total was \$426,271.

The Preservation Foundation Board of Directors has awarded \$241,275 in grants that have not yet been disbursed.

Future Disbursements	Amount
2025	\$115,757
2026	\$90,518
2027-2028	\$45,000
Total	\$241,275

If awarded, \$28,000 will be disbursed the first quarter of 2026.

BACKGROUND: As the 501(c)3 charitable partner of the Lake County Forest Preserves, the Preservation Foundation's mission is to extend and accelerate the Lake County Forest Preserves' goals through private philanthropy to restore and preserve Lake County's natural and cultural resources in perpetuity.

In 2013, the Preservation Foundation Board of Directors adopted a policy regarding the use of unrestricted charitable gifts, which created a process for staff to submit an Annual Fund Grant request to support the priorities of the Forest Preserves, such as piloting a new initiative, extending or accelerating existing work, or securing matching funds. To date, the Preservation Foundation has awarded nearly \$1.5 million in grants from unrestricted funds.

In accordance with this policy, a request for a one-year grant in the amount of \$28,000 has been submitted for review and approval at the Preservation Foundation's November 13, 2025 Board of Directors Meeting.

REVIEW BY OTHERS: Director of Community Engagement and Partnerships, Chief Operations Officer, Director of Administration, Director of Finance, and Forest Preserves Executive Director

GRANT REQUEST:

Department	Natural Resources
Project Name	Quantifying Conservation Value and Management Effects on Wildlife Species in Lake County Forest Preserves
Project Lead (if not Director)	Gary Glowacki
Total Amount Requested	\$28,000
Amount needed per year	\$28,000
Grant Period	One Year
Grant Purpose	Pilot a new initiative
Project Description	<p>The Natural Resources department proposes to undertake an assessment of the conservation value of wildlife and select arthropod species and quantify the effects of management on these species across the Lake County Forest Preserves.</p> <p>A primary challenge of land management is the efficient allocation of resources. Assessment of biodiversity values is a crucial tool in identifying key areas for management and determining management priorities. This project seeks to create and deploy a standardized, data-driven basis for wildlife management decisions and information about wildlife outcomes across 63 preserves, focusing on the influence of site history, management and prescribed fire on wildlife quality indices.</p> <p>Like many land management agencies, the District utilizes a Floristic Quality Assessment (FQA) to determine habitat quality and assess project outcomes. FQA uses plant species found in an area to measure its floristic quality, first by assessing the total number, then by assessing how conservative each species is. Highly conservative species have high fidelity to high quality remnant habitats. Native plant species are assigned any value from 0 to 10, whereas non-native species receive zeros. The more conservative species, and the fewer non-native species, found in a habitat, the higher the quality of that habitat. There is no equivalent system for assessing wildlife quality.</p> <p>Funding will enable the District to engage a consultant to develop this new unified Wildlife Quality Assessment for vertebrates and select invertebrates.</p>
Project Impact	<p>This project will create a system for the wildlife found in Lake County by expanding upon previous efforts to compile complete species lists across our preserves by assigning conservation value scores (Coefficients of Conservatism), and establishing transparent, repeatable methodologies. Analytical approaches will be adapted to directly link site management histories — particularly site degradation status and fire regimes — with wildlife diversity and quality outcomes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify species of conservation importance through comprehensive data compilation and standardized scoring, validated by staff and expert input.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine correlations between site management, especially fire frequency and site history, with wildlife quality indices similar to the Floristic Quality Index (FQI), species diversity and community structure. • Analyze trends and site connectivity impacts for select high-value wildlife species, evaluating both management success and communication needs for observed trends. <p>Outcomes will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An additional category for our wildlife species database that assigns a wildlife conservatism value to each species. • Analytical datasets linking wildlife quality to management variables and detailed evaluation of site and species-level outcomes. • Technical summaries, stakeholder presentations, non-technical communication briefs, and GIS layers supporting management decision-making and outreach. <p>The project will require 250–280 hours of professional effort. The standardized framework and clear deliverables are expected to strengthen conservation prioritization, enhance transparency, and improve both management outcomes and public understanding of biodiversity stewardship in the preserves.</p>
<i>Additional Funding</i>	There are no funds available to support this project.
<i>Impact if not funded</i>	Staff in the Natural Resources Department began working on this initiative approximately two years ago but have only assigned values to the mammals found in our region. We are particularly excited to expand this effort to include birds, as burn management priorities would be greatly improved by incorporating avian "conservatism" into our prescribed burning decisions. We are already working on development of a GIS-based decision tool that incorporates plant conservatism, which could be readily expanded to our wildlife if these values could be created and validated.

PRESERVATION FOUNDATION BOARD:

Date: _____ Roll Call Vote: Ayes: _____ Nays: _____
 Voice Vote; Majority Ayes: _____ Nays: _____