



DATE: August 13, 2026

MEMO TO: Elizabeth Hough, Chair
Preservation Foundation Board

FROM: Alyssa Firkus
Director of Education

RECOMMENDATION: Recommend approval of a \$21,000 grant from unrestricted funds to fund an Animal Ambassador Raptor Training Consultant.

FINANCIAL DATA: As of June 30, 2026, the Foundation's unrestricted funding total was \$464,450.63.

The Preservation Foundation Board of Directors has awarded \$100,450 in grants that have not yet been disbursed.

Future Disbursements	Amount
2026	\$19,450
2027	\$25,500
2028 or TBD	\$55,500
Total	\$100,450

If awarded, \$21,000 will be disbursed in the fourth 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 \$21,000 has been submitted for review and approval at the Preservation Foundation's August 13, 2026 Board of Directors Meeting.

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

GRANT REQUEST:

Department	Education
Project Name	Animal Ambassador Raptor Training Consultant
Project Lead (if not Director)	Matt Mulligan
Total Amount Requested	\$21,000
Amount needed per year	
Grant Period	One Year
Grant Purpose	Extend or accelerate an existing project
Project Description	The red-tailed hawk is an education animal ambassador and highlight for visitors at Ryerson Conservation Area. Acquired in the spring of 2022, the hawk suffered wing and foot injuries from a prior vehicle collision, deeming him non-releasable. Residing in an outdoor flight enclosure, he is cared for by education staff and volunteers. Opportunistic internal training has been done by staff, however, an investment in training for current and future raptor ambassadors is needed to create a foundation of long-term support. Goals: • Hawk willingly participates in on-site education programs at Ryerson Conservation Area. • Hawk willingly participates in off-site education programs. • Education raptor ambassador program is operationally sustainable. Objectives: Hawk will: • Exit enclosure and transported to any Ryerson facility with little/no adverse behaviors. • Transported offsite to a non-District facility with little/no adverse behaviors. • Remain perched during a program with little/no adverse behaviors for 15 minutes in front of a group. Consultant will: • Ensure that education staff understand and can implement established training methods and procedures. • Create a long-term training plan that balances staff schedules and primary job duties. • Establish short- and long-term framework to sustain education raptor ambassador program.
Project Impact	Funding this project will accelerate training of the red-tailed hawk and ensure readiness for education programs along with laying the groundwork for future raptor ambassadors. Education animal ambassadors, particularly birds of prey, play



	a significant role in connecting Lake County residents to local wildlife and conservation issues. This helps foster a connection to the land, thus influencing future support of Lake County Forest Preserves.
<i>Additional Funding</i>	None. See budget detail.
<i>Impact if not funded</i>	If not funded, limited resources and finite staff time will reduce training efficiency and prolong the hawk and potential future raptors' absence from education programs. Education staff typically have a minimal animal training background; therefore, an animal behavioral specialist would strengthen our ability to build a process for the future and allow Educators more time to focus on primary teaching responsibilities.

Raptor Training Budget Summary

*Estimated from conversations with trained professionals

Rate: \$250.00 per hour

Session Length: 4 hours

On Site Program Training

Duration	Cost	Description
4 days	\$4,000	First week of training
4 days	\$4,000	One day a week for 4 weeks
5 days	\$5,000	One day a month for 5 months
Total	\$13,000	

Off Site Program Training

Duration	Cost	Description
8 days	\$8,000	2 days a week for 4 weeks

Total Amount

Duration	Cost	Description
21 days	\$21,000	Estimated to be up to but not exceed this cost

PRESERVATION FOUNDATION BOARD:

Date: _____

☐ Roll Call Vote: Ayes: _____ Nays: _____

☐ Voice Vote; Majority Ayes: _____ Nays: _____