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Forest Preserves of Winnebago County Awarded Grant to Boost Urban Tree Canopy

Cherry Valley, Ill. Monday, July 1, 2024 —The Forest Preserves of Winnebago County (FPWC) has been awarded a \$50,000 subgrant by The Morton Arboretum's Chicago Region Trees Initiative (CRTI) to improve its community tree canopy.

The competitive subgrant is among 17 provided to government entities through Inflation Reduction Act funding to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, administered by CRTI. The four-year grants, which do not require matching funds, are available for communities that meet the federal requirements as disadvantaged. The funding can be used for projects that increase tree canopy, improve forest health and create or enhance community forestry programs.

"We are incredibly excited about this project," says Mike Brien, FPWC Director of Natural Resources. "Not only will we undertake a large-scale tree planting initiative, but these funds will also enable us to remove invasive species from 17 acres of high-quality oak-hickory woodland at Kishwaukee Gorge Forest Preserve. Additionally, we will launch a monthly volunteer workday, inviting community members to help care for the newly planted trees and assist in restoring the site."

Through this subgrant, FPWC will begin a restoration project at Kishwaukee Gorge Forest Preserve. The goal of this project is to remove invasive woody species from approximately 17 acres of high-quality woodland, plant 110 trees in a 15-acre clearing in the heart of the preserve, and educate and engage community members to get involved in conserving their forest preserves. This site supports several high-quality natural area community types (prairie, savanna, and ravine) that need restoration and a former agricultural field that will benefit significantly from reforestation.

This project will be facilitated in partnership with Klehm Arboretum & Botanic Garden, who will assist with the tree planting and community outreach support. Alex Mills, Executive Director of Klehm Arboretum & Botanic Garden and an ISA Certified Arborist, will provide technical expertise for the tree planting component of the project.

About Forest Preserves of Winnebago County

The Forest Preserves of Winnebago County has been proudly dedicated to conserving, protecting, and enhancing Winnebago County's natural heritage for 100 years.

FPWC will mail educational postcards to the surrounding residents in order to educate them about the project and invite them to participate in the long-term management of the site. Forestry mowing in select areas will take place this winter. FPWC will host a tree planting event to celebrate Arbor Day 2025 and host monthly volunteer work days at the preserve through spring of 2026.

“Improving the distribution of trees and green spaces directly impacts the health and economic outcomes for communities,” said CRTI Director Zach Wirtz. “Projects like this improve quality of life and boost the urban tree canopy’s resilience to threats posed by climate change, pests and diseases.”

Funding support for this project was provided by the Inflation Reduction Act through the Urban and Community Forestry Programs of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the USDA Forest Service Eastern Region. This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

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