

PROFILE OF THE DISTRICT

Created by a group of ecologically conscientious citizens in 1971 and supported by the Illinois Conservation District Act of 1963, the McHenry County Conservation District began with the mission to preserve open space, and to provide environmental education programs and resources for recreational opportunities to the public. Today, McHenry County Conservation District continues as a special district governed by a seven member Board of Trustees appointed by the McHenry County Board.

The Illinois Conservation District Act sets forth the purposes of conservation districts as follows:

"...and their principal purpose is to, acquire ... preserve and maintain wild land, other open land, scenic roadways and pathways; hold such real property, with or without public access, for the education, pleasure and recreation of the public or for other open space values; preserve portions thereof in their natural condition and undertake development of other portions thereof; manage and use such real property in such manner and with such restrictions as will leave it unimpaired for the benefit of future generations; and otherwise promote the conservation of nature, flora and fauna, natural environment and natural resources of the district."

McHenry County Conservation District has its own taxing authority to accomplish its mission of preservation, education, and recreation. The majority of funding for the District is generated through a tax levy not to exceed 1/10th of one percent of the assessed value of all properties in McHenry County. The District also has the statutory authority to issue both referendum and non-referendum debt for the purposes of land acquisition, site improvements and the protection and restoration of wildlife and natural habitats. The funding requirements for the levy and budget are guided by District goals and objectives, which are approved by the District's Board of Trustees.

Refer to the Facts at a Glance report for additional general information.

Preservation Activities

One of the primary purposes of the District is to preserve open space. Remnant natural areas-prairies, wetlands and forests receive the highest priority in protecting the County's natural heritage. Each site is inventoried to ensure that development plans complement the protection of any native, rare or endangered species.

In an effort to restore land to its healthy, native condition, District staff and volunteers cut brush and remove non-native species. Seed is collected from areas where native plants have grown undisturbed by human activities and are used for reintroduction onto District sites. Prescribed controlled burns are conducted in the spring and fall to help encourage new growth in these native plant communities, thus ensuring their survival. District staff also provides professional natural areas management recommendations for other publicly and privately owned open space throughout the County.

Educational Activities

The educational purpose of the District is to promote the heritage of the County's land, helping to ensure its protection and enrichment for the future. The District presents a myriad of public programs and provides leadership training and field trip assistance to area schools. The Festival of the Sugar Maples in the spring shows how tree sap is collected and boiled to produce maple syrup. The Trail of History hosted each fall attracts thousands of visitors to the re-enactment of a pre-settlement time period. A quarterly newsletter, *Landscapes*, is available free to McHenry County Residents upon request.

Many special events, workshops and programs are held throughout the County for adults and children of all ages, including day camps, canoeing, night hikes, bird watching and wildflower walks. At the District's Wildlife Resource Center, the District conducts research and provides rehabilitation services for endangered, threatened and watch-listed species.

Recreational Activities

Recreational opportunities are plentiful at District sites. Families and individuals are encouraged to picnic and camp at many of the District sites. Nearly 20 miles of winding creek offer up to six hours of floating time by canoe. Fishing is available at 18 locations including the Nippersink Creek, the Fox River, the pond at Rush Creek, the Piscasaw Creek at Beck's Woods, Dufield Pond and Lake Atwood at the Hollows.

Hiking on over 108 miles of trail and biking on over 50 miles of multiuse trail are popular activities. Cross country ski programs are held throughout the winter months and several sites are groomed for leisurely trail use.

Land Acquisition Activities

The District acquires its land holdings through a combination of annual tax revenues and bond proceeds. The District has established land acquisition goals which it uses to review potential purchases. These goals include:

- Ecological preservation and restoration;
- Connection and consolidation to existing holdings to increase public accessibility and usefulness;
- Water resource management potential;
- Recreational potential;
- Multiple use potential; and
- Potential to increase diversity to enhance quality of life in the County.