



Fel-Pro RRR

An Outdoor Enthusiasts Playground



Fel-Pro RRR is a example of protecting natural areas habitat while providing diverse outdoor recreational opportunities. Unlike any other site the Conservation District owns, Fel-Pro RRR in Cary offers visitors activities more commonly associated with park districts. Typical activities on a Conservation District site are more passive in nature like hiking, fishing and picnicking. At Fel-Pro RRR, a visitor can enjoy all those, plus a sand volleyball court, basketball court, ball diamond, horseshoes and a newly updated 9-hole frisbee golf course. It's an outdoor enthusiast's playground!

A visitor looking for the wilder side will get lost in the beauty of the site which includes a gravel hill prairie, savanna, sedge meadow, fen, and several spring-fed lakes. Wetlands spread out from a small stream that meanders through the park. A nature trails lures a visitor through an oak savanna where columbine

and bottlebrush grass have reestablished, over steep glacial hills to a rare dry hill prairie filled with dropseed, little bluestem and birdsfoot violet, then to a high-quality graminoid fen where goldenrod, swamp thistle, angelica, and fringed gentian flourish. Then over to the wood bridges to a large pond, connected to a smaller pond to cast a line or two for the largemouth bass, bluegill, pumpkinseed, or warmouth that lurk in the waters below.

Visitors who appreciate the cooler temperatures of autumn and enjoy the late afternoon breezes will gather a few friends for some 3 on 3 basketball, challenge the neighbors to a game of horseshoes (bring your own shoes), and encourage some pals for some high-flying action on the frisbee course. The one mile paved shaded trail that leads to most of the recreational amenities is perfect for strollers and wheelchairs.



History

RRR: Rest, Relaxation and Recreation

The Fel-Pro Company, an auto parts manufacturer bought the 220 acres of open land in 1983. The company's vision was to enrich the lives of their 2,800 employees and their families by providing a nature preserve, onsite recreation, and a children's summer camp. Fel-Pro earned the Forbes Magazine's honor as the fourth best American employer in 1998.

When Fel-Pro was sold in 1998, the eight family owners decided the camp-tract should remain as a legacy for everyone. They initiated a collaborative venture with The Nature Conservancy, Metropolitan Family Services, and McHenry County Conservation District as the primary landowner.

The Nature Conservancy managed the 130-acre portion up until 2005 which included a gravel hill prairie, savanna, sedge meadow, fen, and several spring-fed lakes. Metropolitan Family Services, and later the YMCA of McHenry County leased and operated a summer camp in the 90-acre recreational area up until 2010.



Pets in the Preserves **The REAL predators — Dogs & Cats**

When it comes to pets in parks and preserves, everyone benefits when the three R's are followed: Respect other users, Respect the site and its amenities, and Respect wildlife.

Ultimately, you are responsible for your pet's behavior. The "dog on leash" rule and the practice of cleaning up after your pet are simple human behaviors that will make the Conservation District sites, safe and enjoyable for all visitors.

Love Em & Leash Em

Pets are part of your family, and you want them to share the fun outdoors when you visit a Conservation District site. Countless dog owners enjoy frequent romps at a variety of sites and follow and respect all the rules.

However, the District also gets numerous calls and emails from users

complaining about users with dogs and/or their lack of attention to cleaning up after the pet. In order for everyone; young and old, with canine companion or without, to have a great experience while at a District site, here are some of the basic rules to protect your pet, yourself and others.

Dogs are allowed in campgrounds, picnic areas, along roads and on trails, but must be kept on a leash (no longer than 10 feet in length and in your control at all times—which means physically restrained with you holding the leash). Dogs should not be tied to posts, trees or bushes. Both owners and pets are required to stay on the trails to avoid damaging flora, or encountering plants that are poisonous or full of painful thorns and burrs.

"It's not all coyote scat!" You must clean up after your dog and deposit the waste in the garbage. Mutt Mitt's are posted at all trailheads. If you have to, return to the trailhead to retrieve one. There is nothing more distasteful than bringing the grandkids for a fun stroll down the boardwalk and have it covered with waste! Garbage cans are conveniently located near the parking lot so visitors can throw out their garbage and pet waste, which was created on site, on their way out of the site.

Why Can't I just let Rover Roam?

Many people, especially children, are frightened by dogs, even small ones. Dogs on leash lessen the chance that dogs will startle hikers, cyclists, or equestrian riders. A dog allowed to roam free will stray from the trail; and if given the opportunity, they can't resist chasing, scaring and threatening birds and other wildlife away from nesting, feeding, and resting sites. In addition, the scent left behind by a dog can signal the presence of a predator, thus disrupting or altering the behavior of wildlife; such that small animals may hide in their burrow the entire day after smelling a dog and may not venture out to feed. Pets can also unintentionally carry disease into the wildlife populations.

On another note, dogs off leash and left to stray on their own even a few yards from their owner, may become prey for larger predators such as coyotes, hawks and owls. Unleashed dogs may also encounter insects that bite and plants that are poisonous or full of painful thorns and burrs. Leashes keep dogs from hurting themselves on unseen hazards like holes or old barbed wire fences or from disturbing newly seeded areas or trampling sensitive or endangered species.





Felines: Friend or Foe?

For centuries, people have admired cats for their agility, stealth, and grace. However, these same characteristics also make them highly capable predators.

Cats are estimated to kill hundreds of millions of birds and more than a billion small mammals nationwide each year. Cats have a built in hunting instinct and the problem of cat predation on birds and other wildlife is a serious one. While we cannot blame a family pet for following its instinct, we can blame the family. Wildlife depredation by cats, like most wildlife problems, is a people problem.

To some, there may be no difference between a wild, natural predator killing a wild animal for food and a cat doing the same. But there is a difference. The natural laws that govern wildlife tend to monitor their own populations; such that the number of prey animals determines the number of predators. However, this control does not apply to domestic cats or feral animals (domestic animals that have reverted to a wild state) animals because their numbers are constantly increased by newly abandoned animals and by free-ranging pets.

Another problem is that cats compete with native predators. In addition, a cat's survival is not dependent on its hunting success; they can always return home for food when the hunt is not successful. Cats also kill animals without eating them. In this way cats kill many more animals than a native predator. Remember, a cat is only responding to a natural instinct. Ultimately you are responsible for your cat and its behavior!



What you can do to prevent cat predation:

- Keep bird feeders out of a cat's reach. Place them high and away from windows and vegetation. If cat predation is severe, you may have to eliminate the feeders completely.
- If you do let your cat outdoors, try to train it to walk on a leash, or build a run or screened in area off of your house where your cat can still enjoy the outside.
- If you must let your cat roam free, at least try to control the time of day and season that you let your cat out. Birds are most active in the early morning and early evening. Also avoid letting your cat out during the breeding season, i.e. from May to August, when baby animals are most vulnerable.
- At the very least, always spay or neuter your pet to prevent overpopulation.

If you have any other questions about the problem of cat predation on wildlife, please call McHenry County Conservation District Wildlife Resource Center (815) 728-8307.



photos by Bob Williams