

~ including McHenry County News

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'Heart of a water wonderland'

Chain O'Lakes State Park features a variety of offerings

By Sandra Landen Machaj CORRESPONDENT

On a beautiful summer day, there is nothing better for many people than to spend the time outdoors, enjoying the fresh open air. Spending it with family members, especially the young people in our lives can make it even more special.

Those seeking a place to spend time outside doing a variety of activities should consider a trip to Chain O'Lakes State Park, which is located in the heart of Illinois' largest concentration of natural lakes. With nearly 6,500 acres of water and 488 miles of shoreline, it's appropriately referred to as "the heart of a water wonderland" by the Illinois Departtatives.

There are nearly endless opportunities for people and families, enough to surely curb the somewhat common boredom that can come with summer, particularly for children.

While the area did not become a state park until 1945, the history of it goes back far earlier, when the Algonquin tribes made their home here. The predominant tribes were the Miami, Mascouten and Potawatomi.

They were all semi-nomadic tribes who grew corn and hunted and fished for their food. The land in the Chain O'Lakes area was perfect for their lifestyle as it featured fertile soil to grow their corn and

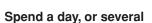
ment of Natural Resources represen- other plants, many lakes to fish and the variety of animals that inhabited the open land, which allowed them

> In 1673, Joliet and Marquette early explorers of the area - made their way through as they traveled the Fox River. The area they travelled included what is now known as Chain O'Lakes State Park.

> In the 1930s, a Civilian Conservation Corps camp became the Chain O' Lakes Conservation Area, which was incorporated into the state park

> The park is known not only for its open lands, picnic areas and trails but also for its lengthy shoreline. It borders three natural lakes in the Chain - Grass, Marie and Nippersink – and the Fox River, which connects the other lakes that make up the chain (Bluff, Fox, Pistakee, Channel, Petite, Catherine and Redhead. In addition, the park has a private lake, Turner Lake, which covers 44 acres and is in the camping section of the park.

> Despite having so much water frontage, the one activity not available at the park is swimming as there are no beaches.



"We bring our boat up here frequently in the summer," shared members of the Johnson family, from Kane County. "It's a short ride and there is no charge to launch the boat. We can spend a day on the water and be home in time to put the

See STATE PARK, Page 2



SANDRA LANDEN MACHAJ Hi-Liter/MCN

Above: Walking the trails through the park offers an opportunity to enjoy time outdoors, get some exercise and spend time with family or friends. Left: The main entrance to Chain O'Lakes State Park is on Wilmot Road south of Route 173.





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kids to bed at a reasonable ter. As stated before, the park hour.'

The main entrance to the park is located on Wilmot Road, just south of Route 173. As one enters the park they might be amazed at the open prairie land. Much of it is wetlands that continues to be restored.

Further into the park, the look changes from open grasslands to more heavily wooded areas. A variety of trails for walking, hiking and biking can be seen in various areas of the park.

For many years there was a horse concession on site where visitors could pay to join a trail ride through the park on the designated horse trail but for now, at least, that's not an option.

"For the past two years we have not had a vendor for horse rentals," shared Theresa Hahl, Office Administrator at Chain O'Lakes State Park. "We hope to obtain another but need to upgrade the facility first.'

Meanwhile, one can still bring their own horse to the park and ride the horse trail. There is ample parking for horse trailers in the equestrian parking area.

Many areas to picnic

One of the favorite activities for many to enjoy at the park is gathering for a picnic. There are several designated picnic areas: Oak Point, Deer Path, Hickory Grove, Pike Marsh, Oak Grove, Catfish Grove and Maple Grove. Each of these picnic groves includes tables, grills, water fountains and toilets.

Those with children may wish to choose Oak Grove or Oak Point areas for a picnic as there is playground equipment, which the children will enjoy before and after eating.

Picnic areas are open to the public, while Oak Point, Oak Grove and Deer Path have pavilions that may be reserved. Check with the park office to be sure the pavilions are not reserved before settling into one for the

After a bite to eat in a picnic area, it might be time to hike and work off that meal or build up an appetite for the next one.

There are hiking as well as biking trails that range in length or they may be combined to make a 6-mile trail through the park, accessible from any of the picnic areas as well as from the park office/concession stand area.

Take advantage of the bodies of water

The Chain O'Lakes State Park is great for those who wish to be on or near the wa-

borders some of the chain so is an ideal place to launch a boat and get out for a day.

While there is no charge to launch each boat must have paid a user fee to the Fox Waterway Agency to use the Chain O' Lakes waterways. The stickers can be purchased at the Fox Waterway office in Fox Lake or at the concession stand in the park.

'While we used to have paddle boats for rent, this year they are on hold as the piers are being remodeled," Susan McClaughry, from the Camp Post Office explained. 'Later this year the boat launch is also due to be upgraded but a definite date has not been determined.'

Along the shore it's common to see people with fishing poles in hand trying to catch one of the many fish found in the lake. There are catch as well as size limits that are enforced in an effort to maintain the supply of fish in the lake. Because of the shoreline's marshy nature, most of the fishing in the area is best done by boat or from the fishing piers located near the boat launch area.

Officials do encourage catch-and-release to ensure fish are reaching maturity. Muskies are one of the fish that live a long life and are often caught and released several times throughout their lifetime. There are signs posted telling those who fish how to release the fish safely so that they can continue to live and grow.

Camping and more activities to explore

Many visitors come to the park to camp, enjoying a night or more in nature in a tent or camper. The park contains a Class A campground with 150 sites available. These sites include electricity, disposal stations, flush toilets and shower facilities nearby.

The park also contains 87 sites that are Class B which have water, vault toilets and access to showers.

"Another upgrade this year is that all the electric service is being upgraded to 50-amp service," Hahl said.

There are several ADA accessible campsites at the park, four in the Honey Suckle area and two in Fox Den.

In addition, there are five sites that can accommodate youth groups, with room for a total of 150 children. The youth group sites are only available through advanced reservation with park office staff and there must be adult supervision. Contact them for reservations and for ad- ing motors are allowed on ditional information about Turner Lake.



PHOTO COURTESY ILLINOIS DEPT. OF NATURAL RESOURCES Hi-Liter/MCN

In addition to the boat launch at the park, there are several piers. Bottom photo: This aerial view of the park entrance road shows the beauty of the area.



SANDRA LANDEN MACHAJ Hi-Liter/MCN

In various areas, these turtle crossing signs are seen where the turtles make their way across to their nests. Left: People fish off one of the piers at the park. Most of it is catch-and-release to allow the fish to grow to full size

Campsites may be reserved by contacting the park office. Up to 25% of the available sites are reserved ahead of time while walkins are accepted daily for the remainder of the spaces. Visitors can only camp in the park 14 nights in any 30-day period. At the time of registration, on the day of camping, visitors must have their shelter with them and get it set up immediately after registering.

youth groups.

Alcohol is not allowed on any site in the campground at the park.

Visitors can enjoy kayaking and fishing from boats but note that only small troll-



Gathering around a picnic table, a family enjoys a day at the park, followed by games along the shore.



locate on Route 173 west of the Fox River. It's open from May 1 until the beginning of hunting season, from 8:30 a.m. until 8 p.m. daily. Pets are allowed in the park but must be always kept

chery, there is a practice range

on a leash of 10 feet in length or less and be under control of the owner.

There are also a variety of winter activities that take place in the park including ice skating, snow shoeing and cross country skiing, when the weather cooperates. A sledding hill is located near the park office and ice fishing is welcome on the Chain

For those interested in ar- O'Lakes and on Turner Lake when the ice is sufficiently frozen. While snowmobiling is not permitted in the park, access to the frozen lake water is provided with parking available at the boat launch.

The park is open in the summer from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m., daily. It's closed the last weekend in October through hunting season; hunting at the park is by registration only. In the winter, park hours are 8 a.m. to sunset.

Chain O' Lakes State Park is at 8916 Wilmot Road, Spring Grove, Illinois. For more information, call 847-587-5512 or visit the website, dnr.illinois.gov.



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Pet of the week

Salem is about 8 years old, neutered, up-todate on shots, tested negative for FIV, feline leukemia and heartworm and microchipped. Along with adoption appointments, walk-ins are also welcome and will be accommodated as time permits them. All adoptions, whether by appointment or not, require an approved adoption application (done on-site or online). For information and/or to complete an online application, please visit www. saveapetil.org/adopt.

Health Department urges caution to avoid Gl illness this summer

McHenry County Department of Health is encouraging residents to take common-sense precautions to avoid gastrointestinal illnesses more commonly experienced during summer.

The MCDH has seen a threefold increase in salmonella cases in June over May. Diseases such as salmonella, campylobacteriosis and cyclosporiasis can be contracted by consuming or handling contaminated or undercooked food, drinking contaminated water or contact with infected animals or animal waste.

Symptoms of these infections include diarrhea, which may be bloody, and also may include cramps, abdominal pain and sometimes fever within times varying from days to weeks after exposure to the source. Nausea and vomiting may also occur. The illnesses can last a few days to a month or longer, depending on the illness and the individual's immune system. Those who believe they have symptoms should contact their healthcare provider as soon as possible.

Most people with the above illnesses will recover on their own and should drink extra fluids to prevent dehydration. Antibiotics are occasionally used to treat severe cases or people who are at high risk for severe disease.

Taking the following simple steps are the best ways to prevent infection:

- Do not drink raw (unpasteurized) milk or untreated water from lakes, rivers or ponds.
- Always practice good hand hygiene, especially when handling puppies or kittens with diarrhea, or backyard chickens.
- Protect young children who often put items and dirty hands into their mouths.
- Wash hands before, during and after preparing food.
- Cook all raw meats to
- proper temperature. • Wash fruits and vegeta-
- bles before eating them. • Use soap and hot water to

Weather, disease challenge Illinois' strawberry crop

By Rhiannon Branch FARMWEEK

Weather conditions and disease have created hurdles for Illinois strawberry producers this season.

Austin Flamm with Flamm Orchards in Union County said their struggles began early when a disease called Neopestalotiopsis infected greenhouses in Canada where the Flamms purchase their

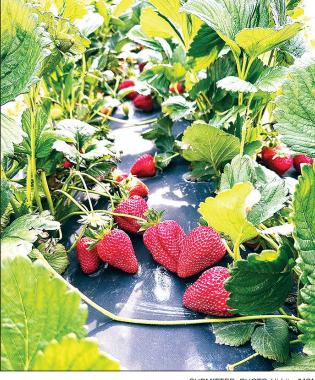
"Of the 100,000 plants for our early variety, we only planted 35,000 of them and of those 35,000, I'd say there was less than 5,000 that survived," Flamm told Farm-Week, noting a late start to the picking season due to poor stands.

He said frequent rains and disease pressure from high moisture conditions impacted the crop all season.

'Right now, our production has fallen off a lot," Flamm said. "It seems like the plants didn't put on flowers a month ago when they needed to be putting on flowers, so we're seeing the negative effects of that now.

The Flamms still have berries and are picking fresh ones each day, but supply has not met demand.

We've had to pretty well turn off our wholesale business in order to supply our retail business," he said. "We are going to be done (harvesting) sooner than later compared to most years and our supply is going to stay limited



SUBMITTED PHOTO Hi-Liter/MCN

Strawberries ripen at Flamm Orchards.

going forward, I'm afraid."

John Heider, with Heider's Berry Farm in McHenry County, said winter was the rough stretch for his 18-acre

"We lost quite a few plants because we had no snow cover when it was minus-10 degrees," Heider told Farm-Week. "We also lost some about three weeks ago when we had a frost that wasn't really forecasted, so we weren't prepared to cover them."

But he said they are still

expecting a decent crop.

'When you lose the early blossoms, the later blossoms that are normally smaller will then be bigger because they didn't have to compete with the early big ones," Heider said. "So, we won't be short of supply. We think we'll be in good shape."

It could be a couple more weeks before berries are ready to pick in northern Illinois.

"Last year we started picking on the 31st of May, which was the earliest we ever startwe're expecting around the 15th of June just because it's been a cool, late spring."

Greg Anderson, with Triple M Farm in DeWitt County, said the risk of weather variability is a big reason why he chose to grow 8,000 strawberry plants hydroponically in

vertical stacks. "It's a little bit more maintenance but we have less environmental risks for weather and bugs," Anderson told FarmWeek, noting that this year's crop looks good.

It also allows Triple M Farm to expand its U-pick season to six months.

"We opened about a month ago and every weekend we've been picking up the pace," Anderson said. "With a little luck, it won't slow down all the way through October."

Each of the three growers are also focused on caring for other specialty crops and plants as the calendar turns to

Flamm is expecting an above average peach crop and lighter turnout for apples. Raspberry harvest will begin at Heider's in late July and Anderson's crew has started planting 20,000 mums for the fall season.

This story was distributed through a cooperative project between Illinois Farm Bureau and the Illinois Press Association. For more food and farming news, visit FarmWeekNow.com.

Lake County State's Attorney's Office's public statement on improving community safety for all residents

Lake County State's Attorney Eric Rinehart released the following statement in response to recent reports of immigration enforcement occurring in the county assuring all Lake County residents that their safety and well-being remain a top priority:

"The Lake County State's Attorney's Office is dedicated to serving all residents of Lake County and upholding justice for EVERY victim—regardless of immigration status—with a trauma-informed approach built on the principles of trust and safety. It is imperative that victims and witnesses feel safe to report crimes so that perpetrators don't go unpunished. We won't have safe and healthy communities if people are afraid to contact the police or cooperate with the prosecutor's office."

The Lake County State's Attorney's Office is a county office

independent from the federal government and is required to follow both state and federal law. No federal court has struck down or invalidated the TRUST Act signed by Governor Bruce Rauner in 2017.

In accordance with valid Illinois laws governing interactions with the immigrant community, the Lake County State's Attorney's Office: • will never ask about immigration

status, will not require immigration

status documentation, and will not

- keep records of immigration status; has created a process to protect immigrants victimized by violent crime by: pro-actively providing information, connecting them to legal civil resources, and reviewing all certification request in a timely manner as required by the VOICES
- will keep victim information confidential – including legal status - and will not share it with

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federal immigration agents (unless presented with a federal criminal warrant; or when they are otherwise required by a specific federal law). The Illinois Crime Victims' Bill of Rights protects access to any of the victim's information including legal status;

- will not assist in the enforcement of civil immigration law (unless presented with a federal criminal warrant; or when they are otherwise required by a specific federal law) as required in the TRUST ACT; and
- will prosecute and punish any notario or individual who defrauds vulnerable immigrants by pretending to be an immigration

The Lake County State's Attorney's Office is committed to protecting every victim throughout the criminal legal process and providing a safe and supportive environment for all.

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Crime & Court News

Round Lake crash involves pedestrian

Lake County Sheriff's Crash Investigators are investigating a vehicle-versus-pedestrian crash from earlier in July that occurred in unincorporated Round Lake.

On July 4, at approximately 9:10 p.m., Lake County Sheriff's Deputies responded to Fairfield Road and Nippersink Road, unincorporated Round Lake, for a car versus pedestrian traffic crash. Sheriff's deputies arrived and found a 67-year-old man of unincorporated Round Lake, injured in the roadway.

Preliminary investigation shows a 2007 Nissan Versa, driven by a 22-year-old woman of Wauconda, was traveling southbound on Fairfield Road in the area of Nippersink Road. As the driver of the Nissan traveled southbound, she struck the pedestrian, who appears to have been crossing Fairfield Road.

The pedestrian was not

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wearing reflective or con- to the 18600 block of High- ty State's Attorney's Office believe they were likely retrasting clothing and was not crossing in a crosswalk. The Gurnee for a report of shots roadway in the area of the fired. The 911 caller saw a crash was an unlit area.

The pedestrian was transported to an area hospital with serious, but what appear to be non-life-threatening injuries. The driver of the Nissan was uninjured and is cooperating with the investigation.

The crash remains under investigation by the Lake County Sheriff's Office Technical Crash Investigations

Shots fired call leads to drug seizure in Gurnee

Lake County Sheriff's Deputies and the Sheriff's Tactical Response Team apprehended a man after responding to a shots fired call in unincorporated Gurnee.

On July 5, at approximately 2:15 a.m., Lake County Sheriff's Deputies responded

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field Drive in unincorporated man and woman shooting from their vard.

Sheriff's deputies arrived and spoke with the home's occupant, Nazareth T. Collins, 34, of the same address, as Collins exited the front door. Sheriff's deputies saw several discharged firearm rounds (.762 rounds and 5.7x28 rounds) in the yard of the residence.

Collins and others inside the home were uncooperative and declined deputies' request to search the residence. Believing the firearms used were likely still inside, deputies worked with the Lake Counto obtain a search warrant. A judge approved and signed the warrant at approximately

Shortly after, members of the Lake County Sheriff's Tactical Response Team executed the search warrant. Sheriff's deputies located the following items in Collins' bedroom:

Over 500 grams of cocaine Over 40 grams of MDMA

Over 1,400 grams of can-

Over 35 grams of psilocybin mushrooms

Alprazolam pills

The firearms were not located. Based on their investigation, sheriff's deputies

moved from the home by another individual before deputies arrived.

After reviewing the facts and circumstances of the incident, the Lake County State's Attorney's Office approved the following charges:

Unlawful Possession with Intent to Deliver - Cocaine (Class X Felony)

Unlawful Possession with Intent to Deliver - Psilocybin (Class 2 Felony)

Unlawful Possession with Intent to Deliver - MDMA (Class 2 Felony)

Unlawful Possession of Cocaine (Class 1 Felony)

Unlawful Possession of MDMA (15-100 (Class 1 Felony)

Unlawful Possession of Psilocybin (Class 4 Felony)

Possession of Cannabis with Intent to Deliver (500-2000 grams) (Class 2 Felony)

Possession of Cannabis (500-2000 grams) (Class 3

Unlawful Possession of Alprazolam (Class 4 Felony)

Further charges are possible regarding the discharge of firearms.

Collins remains held pending an initial court appearance scheduled for this morning. The Lake County State's Attorney's Office intends to file a petition to detain Collins while awaiting trial.

All defendants are presumed innocent unless proven guilty in a court of law.

Lake County Sheriff's arrest bulletin

The Lake County Sheriff's Mundelein, was cited for ag-Dept. reported the following arrests in Lake County. Suspects are considered innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

Jimmy Hall, 30, Chicago, was cited for a warrant obtained: organized retail crime, burglary, attempted burglary and theft;

Marquise Williamson, 24, Arlington Heights, was cited for a warrant obtained: organized retail crime, burglary, attempted burglary and theft;

Darryl Williamson, 26, Chicago, was cited for a warrant obtained: organized retail crime, burglary, attempted burglary and theft;

Demario Brown, 25, Chicago, was cited for a warrant obtained: organized retail crime and burglary;

Dequane Hall, 29, Chicago, was cited for a warrant obtained: Organized retail crime and burglary;

Krystal S. Lewiel, 33, Gurnee, was cited for aggravated domestic battery and domestic battery;

Francisco A. Guinea Delgado, 45, Mundelein, was cited for a warrant arrest: criminal sexual assault (JoDaviess

Pawel Kulikowski, 52, Antioch, was cited for domestic battery:

Jonathan B. Servin, 26, cited for street racing;

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Who, what

where,

when and

why!

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gravated DUI, driving while license revoked, and open transportation of alcohol;

Tovar Martin, 24, Round Lake Beach, was cited for DUI - alcohol, and no insur-

Francisco J. Garcia Aguilar, 18, Round Lake Park, was cited for DUI – alcohol;

Gudmaro Martinez, 44, Palatine, was cited for driving while license revoked;

Ryan K. Turner, Waukegan, was cited for a warrant arrest: aggravated assault to a peace officer and new charges: aggravated fleeing to elude, and driving while license revoked;

Skyler M. Beyer, 23, Antioch, was cited for DUI - al-

June 16

Ivan Jimenez, 21, Waukegan, was cited for criminal damage to state supported property

Bradley D. Sternal, 32, Spring Grove, was cited for a warrant arrest: theft;

Brock Z. Whipple, 32, Lake Villa, was cited for theft;

Andrews Alejandro Arenas, 20, Waukegan, was cited for street racing;

Brittaney Cassandra Munoz, 23, Milwaukee, WI, was

Rex T. Jones, 21, North Chicago, was cited for aggravated assault;

Joaquin Rangel, 55, Beach Park, was cited for driving while license revoked, suspended registration and no insurance;

June 17

Parker Marquese, 21, Waukegan, was cited for driving while license revoked;

Michael A. Moberg, Jr., 51, Gages Lake, was cited for DUI – alcohol, driving while license revoked, reckless driving, failure to make notification of crash and no insur-

Stephen G. Kunkel, 42, Mundelein, was cited for violating an order of protection and disorderly conduct;

June 18

Korey X. Russell, 25, North Chicago, was cited for failure to register as a sexual offender;

Jason Hart, 34, Beach Park, was cited for criminal trespass to property;

Ashlie M. Thatcher, 41, Mundelein, was cited for unlawful possession of drug par-

Angela Rhea Zamitalo, 41, unlawful possession of drug paraphernalia:

Gregory D. Flescher, 62, no permanent address, was cited for violating an order of criminal trespass to proper-

Dragan Mamlic, 64, no permanent address, was cited for criminal trespass to property;

Daniel J. Varsek, 53, Grayslake, was cited for aggravated assault;

Micaila L. Kline, 21,

Round Lake, was cited for violating an order of protec-Stephen G. Kunkel, 42,

McHenry, was cited for violating an order of protection;

Kurt R. Schulz, 63, Genoa City, WI, was cited for DUI alcohol;

Michael V. Kaprelain, 29, Waukegan, was cited for domestic battery;

Brian Lopez Flores, 23, Streamwood, was cited for DUI - alcohol, attempted unlawful possession of a controlled substance;

June 22

Erick Marchan Diaz, 32, North Chicago, was cited for driving while license suspended, and suspended reg-

Juvenile, was cited for Whitewater, WI, was cited for DUI – alcohol, no insurance and unlawful possession of cannabis:

Timothy Williams, 50, Beach Park, was cited for

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July news from IDNR -The Illinois Department of ods, seasons, and more: dnr. About IDNR

sharing the following remain- linepermitapplication.html. ing events for July.

• Fall turkey shotgun permit second lottery opens, statewide: Residents and non-residents are eligible to apply. Limit one application per person. Applications are accepted online at dnr.illinois. gov/lpr/turkeypermits.html or by mail.

July 27

• Site-specific first-come, first-served dove permits open, statewide: Hunters can acquire their first or second permit on a first-come, firstserved basis beginning at 8 a.m. July 27 through Aug. 25. Hunters must apply online at dnr.illinois.gov/hunting/dovehunting.html. Visit the free dove permit page for instructions, application peri-

Natural Resources (IDNR) is illinois.gov/hunting/dove/on-

Throughout July

- · Safety education courses, statewide: IDNR offers hunter field days and hunter and boating safety courses. Visit the safety education class schedule online for all upcoming safety education dnr2.illinois.gov/ courses: SafetyEd/SafetyEdClassBy-County.
- ENTICE teacher education courses, statewide: IDNR offers courses for continuing education credits for teachers covering a variety of nature and conservation topics, such as native bees, invasive carp and other topics. View the full schedule and register online: www.enticeworkshops.com/.

Follow IDNR on Facebook and its online calendar of events for further informa-

The Illinois Department of

Natural Resources is celebrating 100 years of conservation and service to the people of Illinois throughout 2025. The department was established July 1, 1925, as the Illinois Department of Conservation, bringing under one umbrella oversight of fish and game, forestry, public works, and lakes. Today, IDNR's work en-

compasses management of about 400 sites across Illinois, including state parks and historic sites; wildlife, fisheries, forestry, and natural heritage; Lake Michigan water allocation and coastal management; conservation police; mines and minerals; oil and gas; issuance of licenses, permits, and numerous grants; the World Shooting and Recreational Complex in Sparta; and the Illinois State Museum. Visit https://dnr.illinois. gov for more information.

Conservation District initiates long-term planning process by issuing request for qualifications to create comprehensive conservation plan

At their recent meeting, the McHenry County Conservation District Board of Trustees authorized the issuance of a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) to identify and engage a qualified firm to assist in developing a Comprehensive Conservation Plan, titled 'Forward to 2040 with a Vision to 2071.'

at the beginning of fiscal to develop a plan that will

District's priorities and initiatives through fiscal year 2040. It will also include a broader long-range vision looking ahead to the year 2071, when the District will celebrate its Centennial Anniversary.

The District is seeking a firm who is experienced Once completed, the plan in working collaborativeis envisioned to take effect ly with boards and staff

year 2028 and will guide the meet the needs of McHenry County with the resources of the District. "The District is a unique agency, so it is important to find the right firm who understands not just planning, facilities, and outdoor recreational amenities, but conservation, land management, climate resiliency, education and outreach, said Chris Dahm, President of the Conservation District Board of Trustees.

"In November McHenry County voters demonstrated their support for local conservation efforts by approving a proposition to protect water resources, preserve wildlife habitat, and expand outdoor recreation access for all," said Elizabeth S. Kessler, Executive Director of McHenry County Conservation District. "At that time, the Conservation District pledged

to develop a comprehensive terest groups. This feedback plan to guide the allocation of resources for the next decade and beyond," said Kes-

One of the initial steps in the planning process will be a county-wide needs assessment. The selected firm will lead town hall-style meetings and utilize other public engagement strategies to gather input from residents, stakeholders and special in-

will play a critical role in shaping the plan and guiding decision making.

The Conservation District encourages residents to stay engaged and participate in this important planning process in the months ahead. Information will be posted to the District's website at MCCD.me/Forward2040 and on the District's social media.







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Housing credit expansion could increase affordable rental units in Illinois: report

By Ben Szalinski CAPITOL NEWS ILLINOIS

Expansion of the federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credit could allow construction of tens of thousands more affordable housing units in Illinois.

The latest domestic policy plan signed by President Donald Trump on July 4 will increase available funding by 12 percent for a key tax credit used by developers to offset a portion of construction costs. It also lowers the threshold of private activity bonds needed to take advantage of another tax credit.

It's a lesser publicized inclusion in the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act" that cleared Congress with only Republican support, a bill more widely publicized for its cuts to Medicaid, food assistance and individual income

According to the accounting firm Novogradac, increasing the tax credit and lowering bond financing requirements for housing projects could allow 34,700 new affordable housing units to be built in Illinois and generate about \$2 billion in tax revenue for the state and local governments.

"It's a really big win and I think something that housing advocates have been working on for several years and will help us to increase the production of affordable rental housing at a time when we know there's a huge demand," Illinois Housing Council Executive Director Allison Clements told Capitol News Illinois.

How the credits work

The measure specifically pertains to two credits, starting in 2026. What's known as the 9 percent Low-Income Housing Tax Credit will see its funding pool increase by 12 percent. Projects eligible for the 4 percent Low-Income Housing Tax Credit will only need to secure 25 percent in private activity bonds, down from 50

The credits are allocated to states based on a formula, and Illinois award 16 developers \$24 million in federal tax credits for 2025. The credits are awarded by the Illinois Housing Development Authority to developers, and an investor makes a capital contribution toward the project in exchange for being given the credits, which puts the burden on private investors if the project falls through, according to the IHDA.

The developer is able to reduce the cost of the project with the credits, which allows the investor to provide rents at an affordable rate.

For a property to be eligible for the credits, the average income of tenants is limited to 60 percent of the area median income, according to IHDA. In Chicago, for example, that is \$50,400 for a single person, \$57,600 for a two-person household and \$71,940 for a four-person

Renting a two-bedroom apartment is becoming more unaffordable for more people in Illinois, according to a new report from the National Low Income Housing Coalition. It found a full-time employee in Illinois needs to earn an hourly wage of \$29.81 to afford such an apartment at fair market value while not devoting more than 30 percent of their income to housing costs. That's a \$62,000 annual salary.

Rents in developments covered by the tax credit are typically 45 percent lower than the average market rate, according to the Affordable Housing Tax Credit

It focuses on increasing the production of housing, which we think is really key to addressing the affordability crisis," Clements said. "We need to build more units of housing. Illinois I think especially has been falling behind other states in terms of making progress in terms of making progress on the number of homes being built versus our population."

Illinois has a shortage of nearly 300,000 affordable rental homes, according to a March report by Housing Action Illinois.

Media literacy education lacks consistency across Illinois

State law requiring instruction was passed three years ago

and Dr. Ann Strahle

A survey of Illinois educators reveals a significant disparity in how they interpret a three-yearold state law's requirement to teach high school students a "unit of instruction" on media

About one-third of respondents to a survey conducted by the University of Illinois Springfield indicated they spend more than one class period but no more than one week covering the topic, while about 29 percent spend more than three weeks' worth of class periods. Sixteen percent of schools surveyed discuss media literacy during a single class period over the course of a full school year.

Illinois became the first state in the nation to require public high schools to teach media literacy, which can include lessons on accessing information, analyzing and evaluating media messages, reflecting on how media affects the consumption of information and triggers emotions, and how to engage in thoughtful conversations with people using facts and reason. The state-mandated lessons began with the 2022-2023 school

A key feature of the law is its "bottom-up approach" that gives local schools flexibility to design and deliver media literacy lessons as they see fit, said Yonty Friesem, an associate professor at Columbia College Chicago and a co-founder of Illinois Media Literacy Coalition, a group that helped devel-

use to build lessons in wake of the new law.

While the local-control approach made the legislation more politically palatable, the flexibility brings major differences in what the students

'We definitely don't see the impact that we wanted to see," Friesem said of the law.

He recalled being asked to speak about media literacy in a high school class. The session lasted an hour.

"That was the unit of instruction," Friesem said. "Which, yes, they're correct, it is. But I would prefer it to be a little bit

Media literacy findings

Further illustrating Illinois schools' variations on how they handle media literacy education, the UIS survey, taken in spring 2024, found:

· Less than 82 percent of teachers said high school freshmen received media literacy instruction at their schools. That percentage decreases as students get older. Seniors received the training at 63 percent of the schools

· One-third of educators reported a student who attends their high school for all four years will experience a media literacy lesson four or more times. Another one-third of teachers say their students will see just one lesson over their four years in high school.

In Springfield, students are receiving the lessons in a variety of ways. Mike Havener, a library media specialist at op a media literacy education Springfield High School, one of

three public high schools in the capital city, arranges with other teachers to bring their classes to the library so Havener can offer a session that covers media literacy. But even then, he doesn't see every student in the

"I am not reaching with fidelity every student," he said. "I mean, we range between high 1,300s to almost 1,500 students and just to get that quantity of kids through the library (for these lessons) ... that is not happening. I can say that I do see every student in some capacity. But that's not always me teaching a media literacy lesson. They're coming in for English. They're coming in to get a book. ... I try to sneak it in as much as possible. There are other teachers in the building that do teach media literacy as part of their normal course-

For Heather Danek, who teaches public speaking courses at Minooka Community High School in the Chicago suburbs, media literacy lessons in her classroom are "interwoven throughout the class. It's not just a one-and-done situation for me."

"We start within the very first unit talking about meeting the needs of an audience and audience expectations which I think is part of media literacy and thinking about the information that you're using to create a point, thinking about the way that you're building an argument using information," said Danek, who serves on the Illinois Media Literacy Coalition. "And then, as we get further

I do more of the nuts and bolts of things like the true analysis of sources, looking at quality places to find information."

'It's a pedagogy'

That approach - working media literacy into the everyday educational process - is what will make the lessons most effective, said Michael Spikes, the other co-founder of the Illinois Media Literacy Coalition and a lecturer at Northwestern University.

"It's a pedagogy," he said. .. Not so much like you got to go take the media literacy class, or you do media literacy when you have the unit, like what we have in the policy. ... It's a way of seeing the world the way you move through (it) more than just saying it's just a subject that you learn.'

To that end, the UIS survey showed schools are working media literacy lessons into a variety of courses.

Dr. Ann Strahle is interim associate dean and a professor in the College of Public Affairs and Education at the University of Illinois Springfield. Jason Piscia is an associate professor and director of UIS' Public Affairs Reporting program. The UIS survey was conducted in spring 2024 by contacting more than 750 high school principals at Illinois' public high schools, asking them or other faculty at their schools to fill out a 19-question survey about how the media education law is being implemented in their building. Forty-nine responses, all

Feds weigh in on lawsuit challenging how Illinois maintains voter registration rolls multi-pronged efforts for the the names of ineligible voters ties and six municipal election

By Peter Hancock CAPITOL NEWS ILLINOIS

The U.S. Department of Justice added its voice this month to a lawsuit by private entities accusing the state of Illinois of failing to properly maintain a statewide voter registration list, in violation of a 1993 fed-

In a filing known as a "statement of interest," the Justice Department said the government has an interest in the outcome of the lawsuit, although the filing stops short of asking the court for permission to intervene as a party in the case.

"This case presents important questions regarding enforcement of the National Voter Registration Act," attorneys in DOJ's Civil Rights Division said in the filing. "Congress has vested the Attorney General with authority to enforce the NVRA (National Voter Registration Act) on behalf of the United States. Accordingly, the United States has a substantial interest in ensuring proper interpretation of the

The lawsuit challenges the state's practice of delegating to local election officials the responsibility of conducting regular maintenance of voter registration rolls, including the task of purging people from the rolls when they die or move out of the jurisdiction. Under NVRA, the suit argues, the state is responsible for carrying out that function.

U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois Judge Sara Ellis has indicated she could decide the case at a hearing currently scheduled

The DOJ filing comes at the same time the Trump administration has been launching

federal government to exert more influence over voter registration in the United States, a task traditionally reserved for

In March, Trump signed an executive order purporting to require people to show documentary proof of U.S. citizenship when they register to vote. That order has since been blocked from being enforced while a legal challenge to it

Meanwhile, the Washington Post reported July 16 that the DOJ has asked at least nine other states for complete copies of their voter rolls, and at least two reportedly have turned them over.

So far, the DOJ has not requested similar data from Illinois. Officials at the Illinois State Board of Elections declined to comment on the DOJ filing, saying they do not comment on pending litigation.

Basis of lawsuit

The suit was filed in 2024 by Judicial Watch, a conservative legal advocacy group known for filing Freedom of Information Act lawsuits to investigate allegations of official misconduct.

Other plaintiffs include Wheaton-based Breakthrough Ideas, a conservative advocacy group headed by former Republican state Rep. Jeanne Ives; Illinois Family Action, a Christian political advocacy group based in Tinley Park; and Carol J. Davis, identified as a DuPage County resident and member of Judicial Watch.

The complaint is based on a provision of NVRA that requires states to "conduct a general program that makes a reasonable effort to remove from the official lists of eligible voters" if they have died or changed their address.

The complaint also cites federal regulations that require each state's chief election officer to submit various kinds of election-related data to the federal Election Assistance Commission, including "the total number of registrations statewide that were, for whatever reason, deleted from the registration list ... between the past two federal general elections."

The election commission collects that data and publishes biennial reports that are delivered to Congress summarizing the information it receives.

According to the complaint, the commission's reports indicated that much of the required information from Illinois was missing. For example, the complaint notes, from November 2020 through November 2022, 11 Illinois counties reported removing zero voters from their registration lists, suggesting that no registered voters had moved or died in those counties over the twoyear period. Twelve other counties reported removing 15 or fewer registrations over that same period.

The complaint described those as "absurdly small numbers," given that those 23 counties were home to more than 980,000 registered voters.

In a letter to Judicial Watch responding to a request to supply the missing data, State Board of Elections Executive Director Bernadette Matthews wrote that the agency does not maintain such information because Illinois is a "bottom up jurisdiction" where local jurisdictions—including 102 counauthorities - are responsible for maintaining their own voter registration lists.

"This makes sense, as local election authorities are responsible for determining a voter's continuing eligibility to vote in their jurisdiction," Matthews

The plaintiffs, however, argue that NVRA gives states the responsibility for keeping voter registration lists up to date, and they cannot delegate that responsibility to local jurisdictions.

That is also the argument that the DOJ made in its statement of interest.

By its plain terms, the NVRA identifies one entity the state – to carry out the administration of voter registration for federal elections," DOJ argued.

Defendants' response

The Illinois attorney general's office, which is defending the State Board of Elections, has filed a motion to dismiss the complaint, arguing the plaintiffs lack standing to bring the suit. It also claims the plaintiffs have not stated a valid claim because NVRA allows states to delegate its responsibilities to local author-

Two labor unions - the Illinois AFL-CIO and the Illinois Federation of Teachers have intervened in support of the state's position. They argue that they spend considerable resources to ensure their members can vote in Illinois elections and they have an interest in making sure none of their members are unlawfully purged from the voter rolls if the plaintiffs succeed in the

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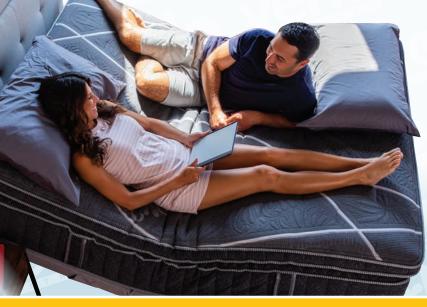
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