



# 2025 ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

The Nature Foundation of Will County is a 501c3 charitable organization dedicated to supporting the Forest Preserve District of Will County's preservation, conservation, education and recreation priorities that protect nature, inspire discovery and bring people and nature together.

**Long Range Planning Goals** - 2025 marks the Foundation's eleventh year of operations and its continued focus on two strategic goals:

1. Take action to ensure that The Nature Foundation of Will County continues to grow its operations.
2. Take action to create organizational sustainability.

**Mission** - We work to create a legacy of giving that supports and celebrates the preservation, conservation, educational and recreational priorities of the Forest Preserve District of Will County in perpetuity.

**Vision** - We envision a vital, dynamic and self-sustaining foundation that is committed to cultivating relationships and forging solid partnerships within our community that benefit and support the District's ability to protect, conserve, enhance and promote Will County's natural heritage for the educational, recreational, and environmental benefit of present and future generations.

**Values** - We believe in:

- Supporting and investing in high quality, mission-focused projects and programs
- Fiscal responsibility, transparency and accountability in all endeavors
- Cultivating and maintaining positive, sustainable relationships with our donors and supporters



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# 2024 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The Nature Foundation of Will County raises and administers funds to support the Forest Preserve District of Will County's priorities. The Foundation is committed to meeting the interests of its donors and supports programs and projects that protect nature, inspire discovery and bring people and nature together.



## Legacy Gifts

The Nature Foundation received additional gifts for habitat restoration at Goodenow Grove Nature Preserve. Additionally, landowners indicated their intent to bequeath a farm to The Nature Foundation.

## Invest in Nature Corporate Partnerships

In 2024, The Nature Foundation of Will County secured over \$79,000 from corporations and foundations to support Forest Preserve District initiatives and The Foundation's native plant sale events.

- STEM & STEAM education programs at all Forest Preserve Visitor Centers with funding from Pembina Pipeline Corporation, matched by gifts made to The Nature Foundation by its donors and supporters.
- Connecting Kids with Nature School Bus Scholarship Program with funding from Pembina Pipeline, Corp.
- Community events including Eagle Watch, Mammal Madness, and Pelican Party at Four Rivers Environmental Education Center in partnership with Enbridge Alliance.
- Fish restocking at Hidden Lakes Trout Farm for fishing derbies in partnership with Bass Pro Shops & Cabela's Outdoor Fund.
- Funding for In-House Exhibit Construction at Four Rivers Environmental Education Center in partnership with Pembina Pipeline Corporation.
- Education and program supplies for Hidden Oaks Nature Center in partnership with The Sgt. Thomas M. Gilbert Memorial Foundation.
- Supplies and equipment for volunteer community workdays and the Adopt-A-Preserve program in partnership with Target Corp.
- Supplies, gifts and lunch for Teacher Appreciation Days at Four Rivers in partnership with ONEOK.
- New signs to install at Whalon Lake Preserve in partnership with Vulcan Materials Company Foundation.
- Acquisition of a fully restored and operational mid-1930's John Deere Tractor and wagon with a grant from Target Corporation.
- Support for native plant sale events and the Bringing Nature Home Initiative received from A.J Dralle, Inc., Brent Hassert Consulting LLC, Christopher B. Burke Engineering, Ltd., Davey Resource Group, Enbridge, JULIE Inc., KGG, LLC., Nicor Gas, Strand Associates, V3 Companies, Village of Romeoville.



## 2024 Projects

**The Foundation's individual donors provided \$56,900 to Forest Preserve District programs and initiatives:**

STEM & STEAM Nature Education Programs

Restore Will County Site Steward Small Grant Program

Serve Will County Youth Service Grant Program

Take It Outside Challenge

Woods Walk Program

Willy's Wilderness Website

Capital Improvements at various sites:

- Interpretive/Wayfinding Signs
- Exhibition materials/supplies
- Trail Benches
- Outdoor Bird Feeding Station Enhancements

Animal Ambassadors

Indige-Facts Traveling Exhibit

Raising Riverview Exhibit

Lost & Found: Savannah Remnants and Old Growth Forests Exhibit

Birds in Art Traveling Exhibit



# Organizational Development

The Nature Foundation of Will County's ability to accomplish its mission and meet the interests of its donors relies on sound fundraising and investment strategies, a growing and diverse donor base, an engaged Board of Directors, developing and deepening relationships with donors and supporters, and a commitment to organizational development.

In 2024, the Foundation made progress on most of the areas below. The year brought a new part-time contracted executive director and the former executive director moved into a program coordinator role for the first 10 months of 2024.

As a way to create efficiencies in the Foundation's operations, a new customer relationship management database was implemented to reduce duplicative data entry, reduce credit card processing fees, eliminate multiple tools to reach donors and to lay the foundation for improved donor stewardship and cultivation.

## Fundraising & Projects

1. There is a constant and diversified revenue income.
2. Donors are engaged and the donor base is growing.
3. Donors are incorporating TNF in financial planning.
4. The Foundation provides significant funding to the Forest Preserve District in support of its conservation, preservation, education and recreation priorities.

## Finance & Investment

1. There is a constant and diversified revenue income.
2. The Foundation is able to invest and earn interest income.
3. The operating reserve ratio is 1.5 to 2.
4. The program expense ratio is 75%.
5. Meet or exceed a 10% to 15% profit margin.

## Board Development

1. Board members represent Will County and have diverse experiences and interests.
2. Board members understand and fulfill their duties as directors, officers, committee chairs and committee members.
3. The Board Development committee quickly and easily fills board vacancies.
4. Board members feel supported and valued.

## Volunteerism & Community Engagement

1. There is a collaborative relationship with Volunteer Services.
2. Volunteer experiences with the Foundation are positive.
3. Volunteers seek out Foundation assignments, programs and projects.
4. Foundation opportunities enhance the Forest Preserve's volunteer program.

## Leadership & Governance

1. The Foundation is modeling best practices in non-profit governance.
2. Daily administrative duties are well-managed.
3. Committees and work groups are motivated to accomplish their goals.
4. The Foundation is trusted and respected among its donors, supporters and peer organizations.
5. The Foundation has the capacity to serve in leadership roles.



## 2024 Highlights

Over the past 10 years, we've secured over \$1.85 Million in support of the Forest Preserve District of Will County's preservation, conservation, recreation and education priorities.

Our Native Plant Sales:  
325 - Online Orders  
1,073 - Event Transactions

We worked alongside 100 volunteers who donated 780 hours of their time.

Take It Outside  
Merch Gross Sales:  
\$60,600

We hosted 7 free  
Learn & Grow  
Seminars Online.

Facebook Engagement Rate  
(per impression)  
increased by 87%

# FOCUS AREAS FOR 2025

## Organizational Development & Leadership

Throughout 2024, the newly contracted executive director benefitted from having the former executive director contracted to execute the native plant sales, the native plant garden tour, and the Learn and Grow seminars. The former executive director retired at the end of October.

Priorities for this transition year include clarifying The Nature Foundation's vision for the future, creating a plan of work that supports that vision, and prioritizing work that can be achieved with limited human resources.

To increase capacity, the Foundation will contract with a part time bookkeeper/administrative assistant in 2025.

## Stewardship Development

Place a greater emphasis on stewardship efforts for all Foundation stakeholders including donors, corporate partners, volunteers, and board members.

## Financial Development

Place increased emphasis on growing unrestricted gifts and funding the Foundation's mission while continuing to invest and grow assets, provided the climate is favorable.

## Legacy Development

Complete development of the Legacy Society and Founder's Circle and continue to promote the benefits and impacts of legacy giving.

## Invest in Nature Partnership Development

Continue to engage the business community in multiple ways and grow support for the Foundation and its initiatives as well as for Forest Preserve District programs and projects.

## Board Member Development

Develop and implement an orientation, training and leadership development program for new and existing board members. Explore the possibility of holding hybrid board meetings.

## Storytelling Development

Develop a storytelling approach in the Foundation's marketing and communications strategies that focuses on sharing donor impacts, celebrating achievements, highlighting important issues, and honoring its donors and partners.



## 2025 Projects

The Nature Foundation plans to provide over \$69,000 to the Forest Preserve District with gifts provided by individual donors.

STEM & STEAM Nature Education

Restore Will County Site  
Steward Small Grants Program

Serve Will County  
Youth Service Grant Program

Take It Outside Initiative

Willy'sWilderness.org

Woods Walk Program

Program Support for Smokey  
Bear Exhibition

Smithsonian Gardens:  
Pollination Exhibition

The State of Water Exhibition  
Animal Ambassadors

At Various Locations:  
Bicycle Racks, Bicycle Repair  
Station, Interpretive Signage,  
and Outdoor Bird Feeding  
Station and Seed Storage

# 2025 EVENTS & PROGRAMS

## Native Plant Sale Event

### **Pollinator Party Pop-Up Native Plant Sale**

Saturday, June 15, 2024

Isle a la Cache Preserve, Romeoville

## Outreach Events

### **Mammal Madness**

Saturday, March 1, 2025

Four Rivers Environmental Education Center, Channahon

### **Oak-tacular Comeback Celebration**

Saturday, May 3, 2025

Hidden Oaks Nature Center

### **Pollinator Party!**

Saturday, June 14, 2025

Isle a la Cache Museum, Romeoville

### **Nature's Muse**

Saturday, August 23, 2025

Plum Creek Nature Center, Beecher

## Learn & Grow Events

While we'll still provide a couple online learning opportunities, this year, we'll partner with other community organizations to bring the "field trip" experience to adults. These special collaborations will help us expand our messaging to reach new audiences using meaningful experiences.

We're targeting one event each quarter in 2025.

## VIP Programs And Events

We'll be looking for new ways to make our board, donors and supporters feel special. Creating compelling programs and events to bring our community together, with a little VIP treatment, helps strengthen our relationships.

We're targeting one event each quarter in 2025.



## Donor Appreciation

Donor Appreciation Nights  
at FPDWC Fun & Food Trucks

- June 13 - Whalon Lake
- July 11 - Forsythe Woods
- August 9 - Hickory Creek

## Grant Programs

Restore Will County Site Steward  
Small Grant Program

Serve Will County Youth Service  
Small Grant Program

## Board Meeting Dates

January 22, 2025

March 26, 2025

May 28, 2025

July 23, 2025

September 24, 2025

October 22, 2025

December 3, 2025



# 2024 BUDGET PROGRESS

## 2024 Revenue

Individual and Corporate Gifts	\$99,240
Fundraising Events & Activities	\$168,180
Interest Income	<u>\$3,633</u>
	\$271,054

Revenue as of October 31, 2024.

## 2024 Expenditures

Bank/Audit Fees	\$6,026
Capital Projects	\$54,388
Contractual Services	\$15,600
Software Subscriptions	\$6,043
Misc. Commodities	\$81,404
Admin/Office	\$4,687
Sales Tax Paid	<u>\$14,708</u>
	\$182,856

Expenditures as of October 31, 2024.

## Financial Position Summary

\$1,107,227	Total Assets
\$921,727	Projected Carryover January 1
\$174,345	Gifts (Restricted/Non-Restricted)
\$79,000	Invest in Nature Partnerships
\$82,400	Capital Project Funds Awarded
\$107,546	Fundraising Revenue (Gross)
\$1,800,000	Legacy Gift (Expectancies)

