



Engaging Years

Fostering a Sense of Community 2010s - 2021

Rallying through nearly forty years of growth and operational experience, McHenry County Conservation District eases into the next decade, ready to set the stage for the next chapter of the District's history. During the previous ten years, the District saw a wealth of growth after the passing of two successful referenda. As land acquisitions and financial resources waned, the District adopted a renewed service excellence approach, expanded self-guided opportunities, improved ADA accessibility, and pivoted toward finding creative funding strategies.

In 2010 the Board of Trustees adopted *The Design Ordinance and Groundwater Monitoring Research* study, which set standards for developers to look at the land first to ensure that natural areas and groundwater recharge is being preserved. Fifteen groundwater monitoring wells were installed on District sites in a collaborative project with McHenry County. The District then adopted the Americans with Disabilities Act System-Wide Site and Facility Accessibility Audit & Transition Plan.

In that same year, the District opened the Lost Valley Visitor Center, an adaptive reuse of an existing facility that included multiple green technologies that met the "gold level" of LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification. The building becomes a model of achieving land, water and energy conservation showcasing the re-use of materials, daylight harvesting, natural water filtration, and geothermal heating and cooling.

The District enhances its commitment to providing excellence in environmental stewardship through environmental education programs and partnered with McHenry County College to offer a unique, first of its kind, *People and Nature* program; an expanded series of workshops designed to immerse people in learning about environmental problems, providing attainable solutions, and taking local action. The District then launched *The Weekend of Restoration*, a 3-day immersive program that involves science, education, poetry, reflection, and ecological restoration. The Weekend of Restoration was awarded top honors from The National Association of County Parks & Recreation Officials (NACPRO) as "an exceptional and unique program that provides an outstanding example that other agencies can adopt or emulate."



To add to its successes, in 2013, the District was nationally recognized for achieving excellence in environmental stewardship, honored by the National Recreation and Park Association with the Barb King Environmental Stewardship Award. Specifically the District was acknowledged for its efforts: to promote sound environmental practices through the development of the newly renovated Lost Valley Visitor Center; for establishing ongoing green practices within agency operations; and for promoting environmental stewardship through an active volunteer program. Additional accolades were given when the Department of the Interior presented the District the *Partners in Conservation Award* for their collaboration efforts and leadership role in establishing The Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge (authorized in July 2012 by The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and formally established in November 2012).

A key pillar of the Conservation District's mission is to create wild and scenic places that support thriving native plants and wildlife populations. A large portion of Nippersink Creek, the largest tributary to the Fox River, falls within the boundaries of Glacial Park and some sections are ranked among the highest quality in Illinois, supporting at least 21 animals and 30 plants listed as Illinois endangered or threatened species. In 2018, with the assistance of a \$4.9 million US Army Corps of Engineers Section 206 grant, the long-awaited restoration of the next 3.5 miles section of Nippersink Creek is completed (from the Section 29 snowmobile bridge on the west, to the confluence of the North Branch and the main stem.) The footprint of the project area covers 507 acres, and resulted in 25% of the 2-mile long creek having undergone restoration, thereby improving the ecological integrity of the entire watershed.

Along came March of 2020; the District found itself navigating through a worldwide pandemic. But despite the closings and stay-at-home restrictions, outdoors are deemed essential for individual's health and well-being.

More than ever before it was vital for the Conservation District to ensure that sites and trails could remain open and safe for residents to enjoy what we know to be undeniably true – that these wide open spaces of McHenry County Conservation District are treasured places to behold and not to be taken for granted – *protected today, tomorrow and for future generations.*



Pictured above left to right: Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar and Illinois Senator Dick Durbin tour Glacial Park during the dedication of the Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge with Land Preservation and Natural Resource Director Ed Collins; a representative group of the District's many volunteers and advocates; a spirit awakening hike through Harrison Benwell Conservation Area in Wonder Lake; bird watching at High Point Conservation Area in Harvard; ribbon cutting at Dufield Pond - McConnell Entrance with members of the McConnell family; ribbon cutting to celebrate one phase of Ridgefield Trace regional bike trail; and representative Grandpa passing on the love of the outdoors to the next generation at The Hollows Conservation Area.

Site Openings

Conservation Areas Open to the Public

2010
Lost Valley Visitor Center
Kishwaukee Headwaters
Nippersink Canoe Base Improvements

2011
Winding Creek
Lake in the Hills Fen

2012
Fel-Pro RRR
West Entrance

2013
Boone Creek
Dufield Pond
McConnell Entrance

2015
Community Research Forest
Brookdale
Multi Use Trail Opens

2018
Ridgefield Trace

2019
Alden Gap

