1996 S. Kirk Rd. Suite 320
Geneva, IL 60134

Forest Preserve District, Planning and Utilization Committee Meeting Minutes

President Bill Lenert, Chair Cherryl Strathmann, Vice-Chair Deborah Allan, Alex Arroyo, Mavis Bates, Dale Berman, Chris Kious, Myrna Molina, Ted Penesis

Thursday, September 25, 2025 9:30 AM 3rd Floor Board Room

I. Call To Order

Remote Attendance Approval

Commissioner Penesis

PRESENT	President Bill Lenert
	Chairman Cherryl Strathmann
	Vice Chair Deborah Allan
	Commissioner Mavis Bates
	Commissioner Chris Kious
	Commissioner Myrna Molina
	Commissioner Ted Penesis (Remote)
ABSENT	Commissioner Alex Arroyo
	Commissioner Dale Berman

Also Present: Commissioners Lewis, Roth; Exec. Dir. Haberthur & Dep. Dir. Monroe; Finance Mgr. Carrano & staff Wolff; Ops. Dir. Jensen; NRM Dir. Chess & staff Blackburn; Dir. of Planning & Land Protection Rooks-Lopez & staff Tegge; HR Dir. Clough; Chief of Police Burger; Dir. of Comm. Engagement Metanchuk; Admin staff Figliozzi, Rafferty and Attorney Sterk of Ancel and Glink.

II. Approval of Minutes from June 26, 2025 and August 28, 2025

RESULT:	**APPROVED BY UNANIMOUS CONSENT**
MOVER:	Deborah Allan
AYE:	Deborah Allan, Mavis Bates, Chris Kious, Bill Lenert, Myrna Molina, Ted Penesis, Cherryl Strathmann
ABSENT:	Alex Arroyo, Dale Berman

III. Public Comment (Each Speaker is limited to three minutes)

John Fogarty, longtime resident of Kane County, spoke in regards to safety of District trails. The increase of high-speed electric bikes and scooters have become hazardous to other trail users such as horse trail riders. He stated that these types of bikes can spook horses when passing and can be dangerous. He expressed his recommendation and request for proper signage to be placed. He emphasized on the issue of e-bikes and indicated his concern of lack of etiquette of the e-bike riders towards horse riders. Mr. Fogarty stated that the District has always been great and the horse community would benefit from assistance with mitigating the current concerns.

Kim Hancock, resident of Kane County, provided a handout and spoke in regards of trail sharing and safety with horses and e-bikes. She reiterated the importance of trail rider etiquette for all patrons. Ms. Hancock stated that the guidelines available for the public on trails that allow horses need to include etiquette on approaching someone on a horse, specifically how to yield and state they are there to not spook the horse. She stated the importance of these rules for the safety of the person as well as the horse rider.

Virginia Ramano resident of Kane County, spoke in regards to the agenda item TMP-25-1142, the resolution authorizing a license agreement for bison. She asked about the care of the bison on a day-to-day basis. She was curious as to who would be checking on the animals.

IV. Bids and Proposals

None.

V. New or Unfinished Business

TMP-25-1142 Resolution Authorizing a License For Bison Grazing with American Indian Center, at Burlington Prairie Forest Preserve

NRM Dir. Chess provided a PowerPoint presentation regarding the bison project and explained the ecological benefits of bringing bison back into prairie lands. The tallgrass prairie once covered Illinois in an ocean of grass. These diverse and productive ecosystems put down deep, stubborn roots and resisted settlement until the invention of the steel plow in the 1830s. Rapidly, the prairie disappeared from the landscape, ultimately leaving Illinois with less than a tenth of a percent of its original 22 million acres of prairie. Restoring tallgrass prairie has been one of the primary goals of the District. Currently the District is converting about 250 acres of agriculture to prairie annually. Restoration is a hands-on process to manage and maintain the diversity once present. Key to the historic management of the prairie was ecological disturbance, primarily driven by two factors: fire and grazing. Fire has been reintroduced by staff, but the grazing component is still missing. Bison were one of the engineers of the prairie, but suffered and even quicker decline than the prairie itself, and were fully extirpated from the state in the early 1800s.

Conservation efforts to preserve the North American bison have been wildly successful in the west, and more recently have proven to be successful east of the Mississippi River as well. The District has also completed a multi-year pilot project at Aurora West Forest Preserve. Over a 5-year period (2018-2023), cattle were used to simulate bison and demonstrated that our rebuilt grasslands can function following the introduction of a properly stocked grazing species. In fall 2024, the District built a fence to enclose 32 acres of restored tallgrass prairie with the intent to reintroduce bison to the landscape. In June 2025, the District released a request for proposals to seek a partner organization interested in a regenerative bison grazing collaboration. The only proposal submitted was from the American Indian Center (AIC) in partnership with Ruhter Bison.

AIC is the nation's first urban Native center, founded in 1953. AIC serves all Native people thorough a variety of programs, including Traditional Ecological Knowledge programs designed to maintain connections to traditional lifeways and a food sovereignty program that teaches gardening, foraging and traditional foods as tools for healing. Ruhter Bison has extensive experience managing bison herds for conservation purposes, including a herd on McHenry County Conservation District property. They will handle the day-to-day care of the herd, ensuring animal health and safety. The proposed license agreement with AIC calls for a three-year term with the potential for up to four renewal options. Initially, there will be between 6-12 bison within the Burlington herd, with the potential for expansion as the fenced in area grows in size. As bison owners, AIC will assume liability for the herd. Additionally, to help mitigate potential risks, District staff alongside representatives from AIC and Ruhter Bison have collaborated on a detailed incident response plan outlining emergency response procedure.
DISCUSSION: *Commissioner Roth asked about the water heater system, if it included an alarm system for loss of power. Dir. Chess responded that the District installed heat sensor alarms in other areas, this would include one as well. Commissioner Penesis commented on the property expansion plan noting it would be beneficial, however he expressed his concern with the walking path that currently runs through the property. Dir. Chess responded that the path would be addressed once the District was prepared for the second phase of the project. Commissioner*

Penesis asked about the food sovereignty program with the Native American Group, AIC. Dir. Chess explained that the food sovereignty program run through AIC in Chicago is a combination of a physical garden of traditional foods grown that incorporate recipes with bison meat. Commissioner Allan asked about the number of bison allowed in the available acreage and how this number was calculated. Dir. Chess responded that the data collected comes from bison farmers, the number of bison is determined by the appropriate heard size within a specific acreage. He noted that per the agreement, Rueter Bison would be handling the maintenance and day to day of the bison for the first 3 years. Exec. Dir. Haberthur explained that the traditional hierarchy established in the herd lends to a happier life for the bison. He noted that since the 1930s, this would be the first-time bison would be re-introduced to prairie in Kane County.

RESULT:	**MOVED FORWARD BY ROLL CALL VOTE**
TO:	Forest Preserve District Executive Committee
MOVER:	Chris Kious
SECONDER:	Deborah Allan
AYE:	Deborah Allan, Mavis Bates, Chris Kious, Bill Lenert, Myrna Molina, Ted Penesis, Cherryl Strathmann
ABSENT:	Alex Arroyo, Dale Berman

VI. Closed Session to Discuss Land Acquisition, License Agreements, Potential Litigation and Personnel

None.

VII. Communications

Dir. of Community Engagement Metanchuk reported on recent District events. She thanked all who attended the It's Our Fox River Days clean up event, noting that an estimated 100 lbs. of waste was removed from the Fox River. Dir. Metanchuk promoted the annual Harvest Fest on Sunday, September 28, 2025 from Noon to 3pm at Oakhurst Forest Preserve in Aurora. Lastly, the Kane Foundation Golf outing was a success, she thanked former Executive Director Monica Meyers who played a big role in assembling the event.

Commissioner Allan discussed e-bikes and expressed her concern with the need to increase safety for residents. Commissioner Linder added that the safety issue has been brought to state legislation with the intent to allow local governments to make their definitions of rules and regulations. He noted that e-bikes have become an issue even on public streets. Exec. Dir. Haberthur stated that all the municipalities have been dealing with the same safety concerns and have been looking towards legislation to help support all the municipalities.

Commissioner Penesis stated that he lives next to the Fox River Trail and has seen a boom of e-bikes. This increase is a concern for safety of all trail users. He added that there have been a number of complaints that people are using gas powered mopeds.

Commissioner Roth commented that additional safety information at bike shops would help when the e-bikes are being sold. Commissioner Lewis asked how the District could address the issue with the horse trails and e-bikes. Exec. Dir. Haberthur responded that staff will evaluate the areas of concern for the best solution to mitigate the concerns.

VIII. Chairman's Comments

None.

IX. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:21 AM.

RESULT:	**APPROVED BY VOICE VOTE**
MOVER:	Chris Kious
SECONDER:	Bill Lenert

AYE:	Deborah Allan, Mavis Bates, Chris Kious, Bill Lenert, Myrna Molina, Ted Penesis Cherryl Strathmann
ABSENT:	Alex Arroyo, Dale Berman

Chair Cherryl Strathmann
Forest Preserve District Planning and Utilization Committee
Forest Preserve District of Kane County

Respectfully Submitted,

Gabriella Figliozzi

Gabriella Figliozzi
Recording Secretary