2005 Picnic Permit Users Survey Summary Report

From the office of Commissioner Larry Suffredin, 13th District

I. Overall Information

Purpose
To conduct an informal survey of constituents using the Forest Preserves in the 13th District for picnics in order to measure user satisfaction and identify needed Forest Preserve improvements.

Survey Goal
The goal was to collect and summarize a wide range of data spanning the 2005 picnic season. Surveys were conducted with people holding permits from the beginning of June through August 9.

Target Audience
Survey forms were created and administered to people with valid picnic permits for groves located in preserves in the 13th District.

Method for Conducting Surveys
Surveys were conducted over the phone, 1-2 weeks after the individual’s picnic by interns working for Commissioner Suffredin.

Surveys Completed
A total of 61 surveys were completed.

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<tr>
<th>Surveys Completed</th>
<th>Forest Preserve</th>
<th>Surveys Completed</th>
<th>Forest Preserve</th>
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<td>33</td>
<td>Bunker Hill</td>
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<td>Harms Woods</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Linne</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Miami Woods</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Forestway Drive</td>
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<td>Turnbull Woods</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Wayside Woods</td>
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II. General Observations

Overall Conditions
With the exception of a few fair ratings, permit holding picnickers agreed that the preserves were in good overall condition. Many added that the preserves were the best they had been in a number of years. Specifically, that the grass was mowed (there were a few exceptions where people noted the grass did need to be mowed) and the grounds were generally litter free. Most non-bathroom related complaints involved the picnic tables.
**Grove Conditions**
The feedback on the condition of the grove shelters was more mixed than the feedback on the overall conditions. Concern was placed on crumbling concrete from the shelter walls as well as graffiti. Branches and debris dirtied the sometimes cracked concrete floors; however experienced picnickers took it upon themselves to be prepared to clean up debris.

**Picnic Tables**
While most picnickers found the number of tables to be sufficient, larger parties remarked that tables were too few and too damaged to accommodate their needs. The majority of constituents said that the tables were in good condition, although some could be replaced. Tables in need of replacement had broken wood planks, protruding nails, and graffiti. One respondent said that he had to use his own tools to tighten the picnic tables.

**Trash Cans**
Overwhelmingly, positive feedback was received regarding the number of trash receptacles as well as their condition. With the exception of just a couple picnickers’ experiences, all cans were empty upon arrival, as well as emptied periodically throughout the day.

**Bathrooms**
On most days, the provided bathrooms (there was usually one in close proximity to the grove) were sufficient in meeting the needs of picnickers. However, on crowded days such as Sunday, July 3rd, picnickers complained that there was no toilet paper or that there weren’t enough facilities. On the particularly hot days this summer, some picnickers claimed that the bathrooms were too smelly to use. Those who hold annual events at the forest preserves rented port-a-potties to alleviate congestion in the facilities.

**Parking**
Aside from trouble with parking at grove three in Bunker Hill, parking was sufficient for parties as large as 250 people.

**Water Pump**
Only a quarter of picnickers were able to locate a water pump but most reported that the pump worked. Signage at the preserves or providing information on the FPD website indicating the location of water pumps may be helpful. One respondent complained that he found a pump but that it did not work and this was a problem for his event. Additionally, five respondents reported no water pump in the area and stated it was a problem.

**Permit Application Process**
The new online permit application process has given constituents a fast and efficient way to obtain permits and was very popular. Picnickers who had applied for permits in person before remarked how easy and convenient the new process had made obtaining a permit. Of the 39 surveyed people who applied for a permit over the internet, the overwhelming majority found the website easy to use but had some complaints regarding extra charges and special permits. A separate link for special permits may have contributed to the confusion over the issue. One respondent commented that the help number should be more visible on the site.
Signage
Signs directing people to their groves were often obstructed by foliage or too low to the ground to attract necessary attention. Picnickers commented that trails were not properly labeled, and while they were clear on the rules of the picnic area, they did not see any signs stating them. While experienced individuals knew where to find their grove and its adjacent parking, some picnickers resorted to making their own signs to direct their parties either to the preserve or to the specific grove.

III. Specific Forest Preserves

Bunker Hill
In general, those surveyed said the overall condition of the preserve was good, making it the highest rated preserve of the survey. Its size, however, was at the heart of a couple of conflicts. Incidents occurred when picnickers in close vicinity to other parties interfered with space reserved through the purchase of a permit. On these occasions, Forest Preserve Police responded to complaints by mediating conflicts and resolving issues between picnickers arguing over shared space.

Linne
Linne picnickers enjoyed a positive experience. The noted problems being two complaints of long grass and one complaint of graffiti on picnic tables.

Harms
Harms Forest Preserve achieved overall good results, however, two of the most negative surveys came from Harms Woods from people using groves 1 and 6. Issues identified included one complaint that there were three wasps nest near a picnic grove which caused some alarm for the picnickers and no access to water.

Wayside
With great reports on the cleanliness of Wayside, the only outstanding complaint was the picnic tables. While there were enough tables at the grove, there were complaints that they were in poor repair. In addition, tables were fixed to the ground, making it impossible to rearrange the area or pull tables from other areas.

Forestway Drive
Overall good condition, one picnicker complained of beer cans littering their grove and one complained of the lack of a grill

Miami Woods
One of the two respondents did not have time for a full survey and complained simply that the concrete was in bad shape. The other respondent rated everything in the survey as “good.”

Turnbull Woods
The respondent rated the grove itself and the shelter as “fair” and noted the following issues: the grass needed to be mowed, there was no water available, there was a problem unlocking the area and he had to provide additional port-a-potties for his large event.
IV. Needed Improvements

The following suggestions summarize recommendations from respondents. Those responding to the survey felt these improvements would make future experiences more enjoyable.

- Specific measurements outlining the area around a reserved grove shelter could prevent future conflicts on busy picnic days.

- According to one constituent, a permit holding picnicker must to be present at the site at 9 am in order to officially reserve their area. For a party that didn’t start until 1, this was especially inconvenient as there were other issues to attend to on the day of the event. This constituent suggested removing this rule for the inconvenience it imposed on picnickers.

- It would be helpful if the District could better communicate the location of water pumps and inform permit holders if the pump closest to them works. It would be helpful to picnickers if they knew in advance if they will have access to water.

- While improved from last year, the condition of picnic tables continues to be a problem. Tables should be repaired at the start of each season.