



If you believe you can, or you believe you can't, you're right. - Henry Ford.





Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission

How We Created A Successful Stewardship
Organization

February 2019



Overview

1. Introduction – Who we are and what we do
2. What we have accomplished
3. How we did it
4. Challenges
5. Successes
6. How you can do it



The Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission Founders

We were founded in February of 2014 by Agnes Wojnarski and Kari Spiegelhalter

Two women with a dream and a passion of making a difference to the environment in Prospect Heights

The Commission is now 5 years old this month

They reached out to the Mayor and City Council and a resolution created the Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission

In the beginning there were 4 commissioners

As the Commission grew, more commissioners were added. Candidates were sought out that had expertise in a given area that would enhance the ability to get work done

Today there are 7 Commissioners

Peter Hahn – Commissioner
Retired Golf Course
Superintendent

Seth Marcus– Commissioner
Genetic Councilor

Dana Sievertson – Commissioner
Creative Director

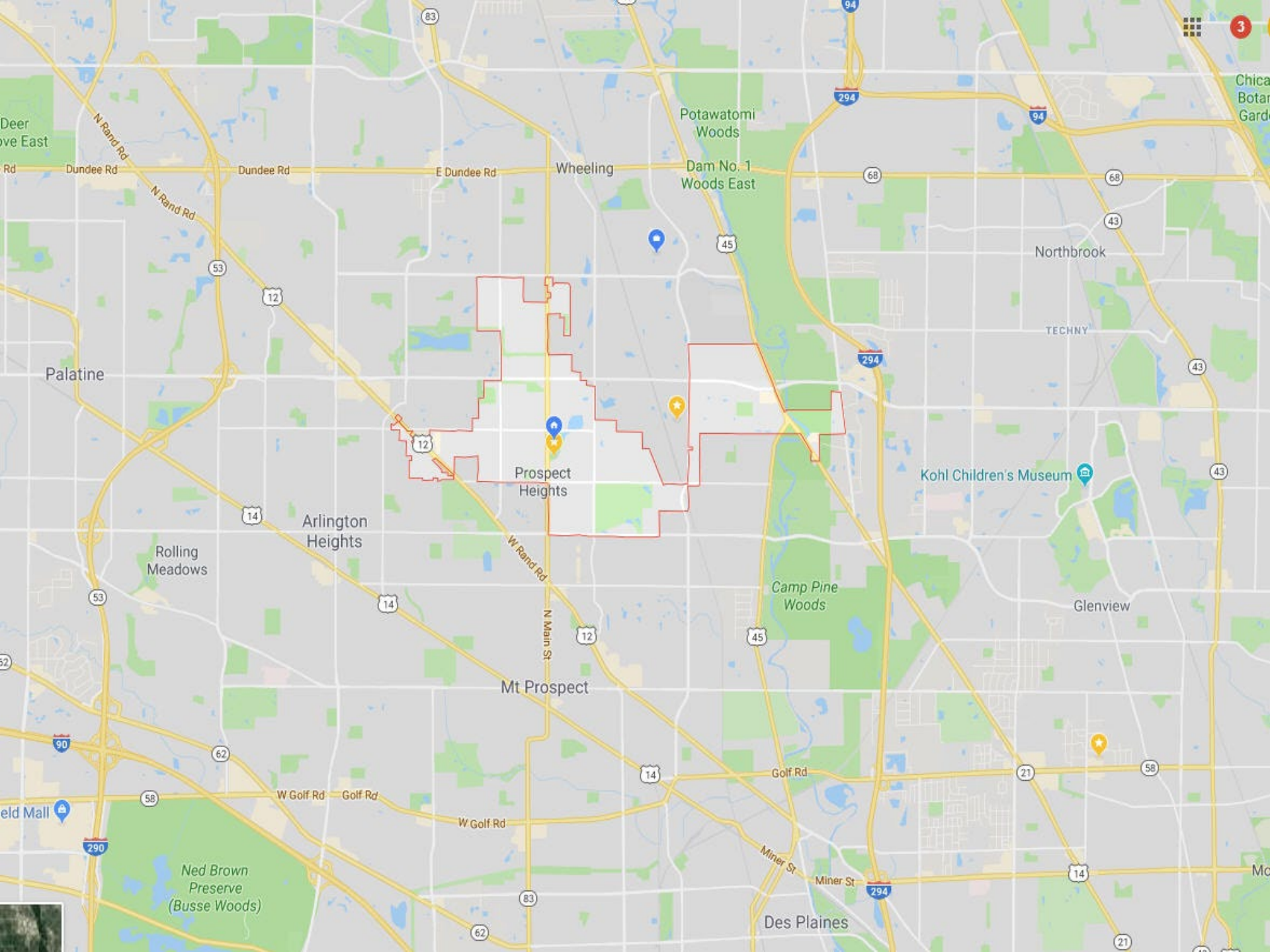
Ed Madden - Commissioner
Executive P.A.C.E. – Public
Relations



John Kamysz MD– Commissioner Radiologist

Agnes Wojnarski MD – Chair person
Family Medicine – Burn Boss-Ecologist

Jill Moskal – Commissioner Executive
Secretary - Secretary



We are all volunteers



We work every other Sunday year round on all of our sights



Volunteers

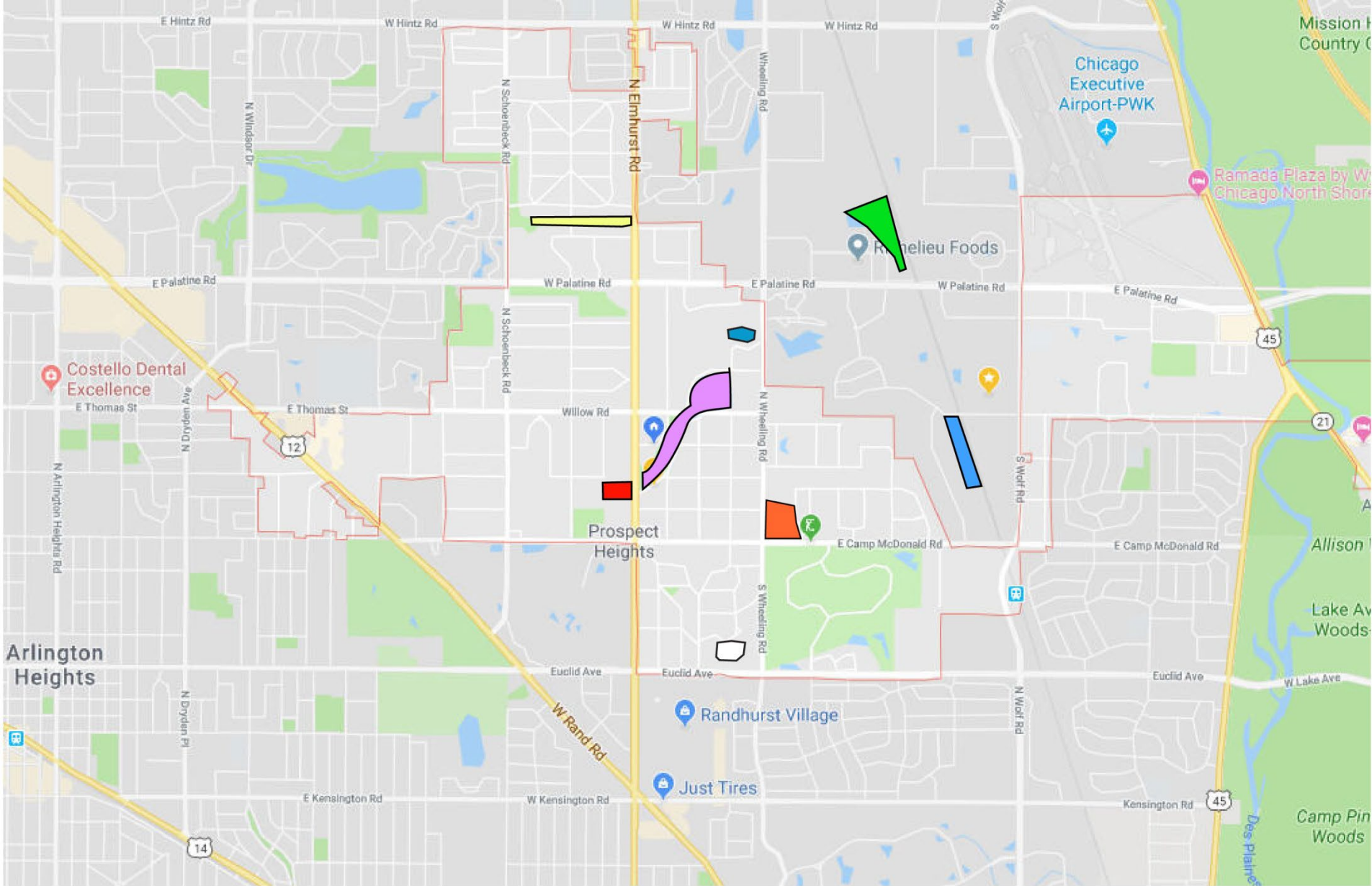


We have a pool of about 60 volunteers
Work days average about 13
Special events can bring them all out



Work day dogs are always welcome



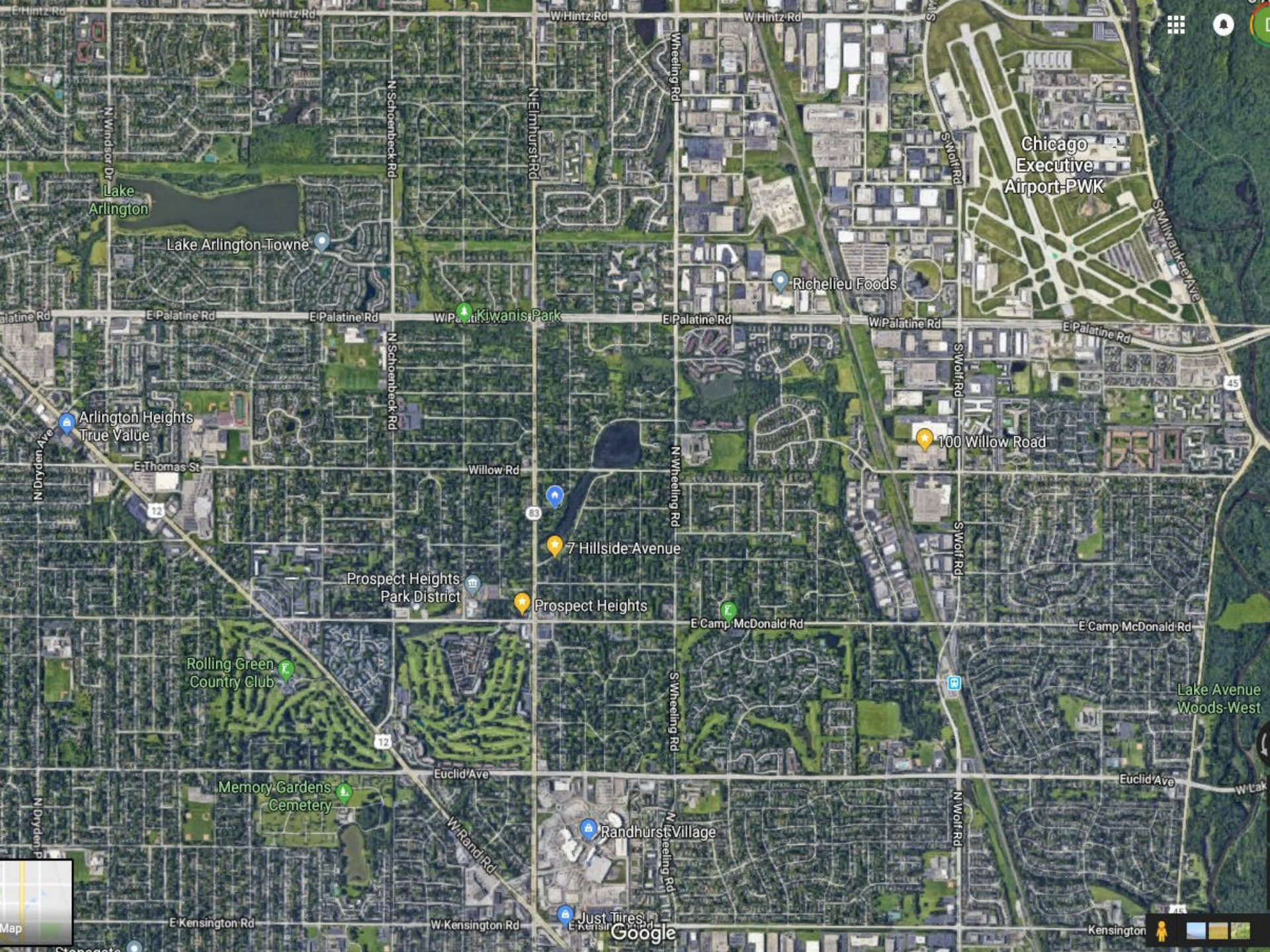


PHNRC Project Sites
January 2019

Circumstances can dictate land management practices

ComEd Prairie Restoration
 St. Alphonsus
 Remnant Prairie
 Remnant Sedge Meadow
 Slough & Hillcrest Lake
 Morava Nature Preserve
 Tully Park
 Heron Pond





Chicago Executive Airport-PWK

Lake Arlington

Lake Arlington-Towne

Richelieu Foods

Kiwanis Park

100 Willow Road

Arlington Heights True Value

7 Hillside Avenue

Prospect Heights Park District

Prospect Heights

Rolling Green Country Club

Memory Gardens Cemetery

Randhurst Village

Just Tires

Google



Education and Outreach



Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission
Home Projects Nature Speaks Calendar Volunteering Sponsors Gallery Publications Contactus Links

NATURE SPEAKS

Nature Speaks is a part of our Education and Outreach programs and is a collaboration with our partner, the Prospect Heights Public Library.

The series will feature four speakers annually, one each season and is designed to bring important national and regional speakers to Prospect Heights to discuss important, informative and entertaining topics affecting our city, our state and our planet.

All programs take place at the Prospect Heights Public Library's Borland meeting room and start promptly at 7:00. Nature Speaks is free admission but registration is necessary. Please register by calling or visiting the information desk at the library, 847.259.3500 ext. 35 or register on line at <http://www.pphl.info/> and go to the events calendar and click on the event.

April, 19 2017 - **Doug Taron**
Curator of Biology and Vice President of Research and Conservation at Chicago Academy of Sciences' Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum.

This is Taron's second engagement with Nature Speaks. This presentation entitled "The Monarch and its Migration" explores the life cycle and the incredible migration of this most determined and most well know



We created the Nature speaks program

Features prominent national and regional speakers

Features on speaker every season. Designed to be an intimate discussion on important environmental issues and to expand the knowledge base of residents

We create informational videos

We engage residents and passerby's at every possible opportunity at the sites



Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission Prairie Progress Report 2016

Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission
Progress Report on ComEd
Prairie Restoration. 2016

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Education and Outreach

We started an annual art exhibition of work based on the local restorations

We install informational displays for the library



© David D. Ludwin



Education and Outreach - We are in the schools



Education and Outreach - Community events



Summer intern program



Partnering



BIRD CONSERVATION NETWORK



An Exelon Company



PROSPECT
HEIGHTS
PUBLIC
LIBRARY
DISTRICT



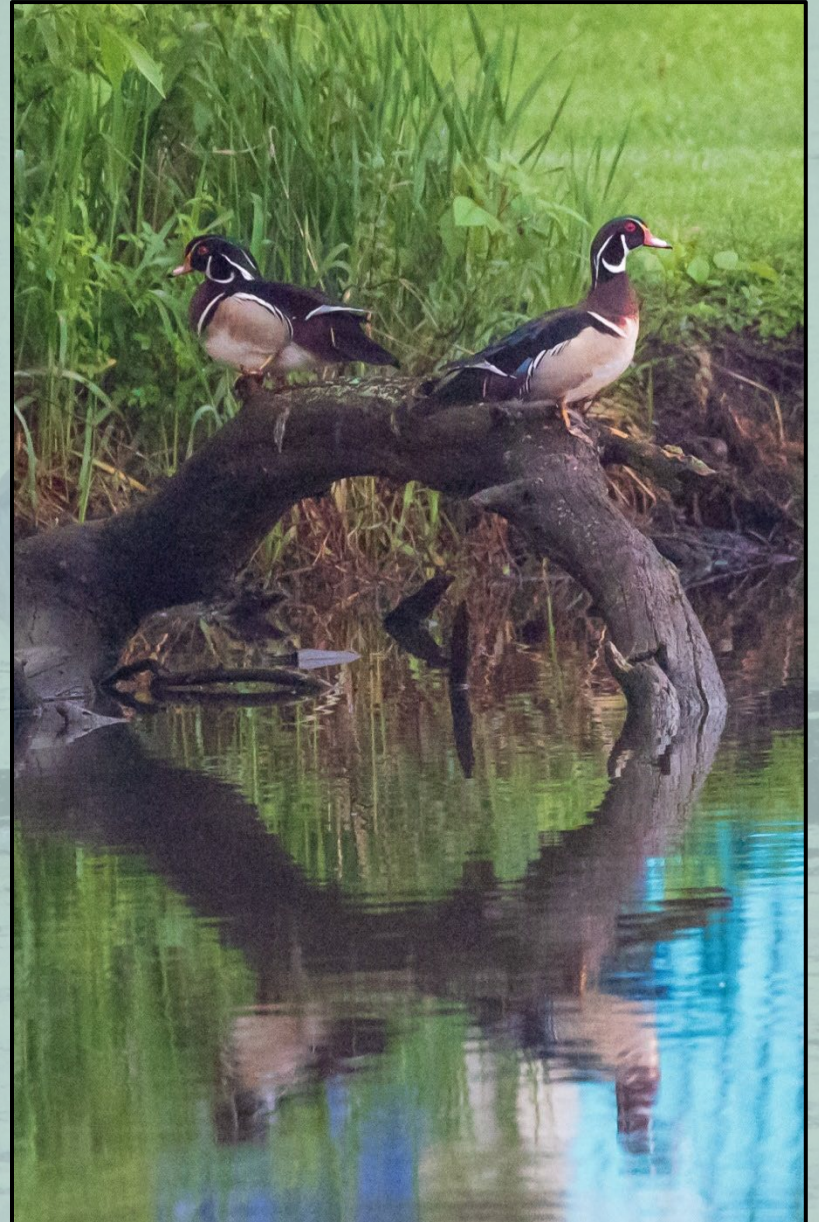
Speaking engagements and tours



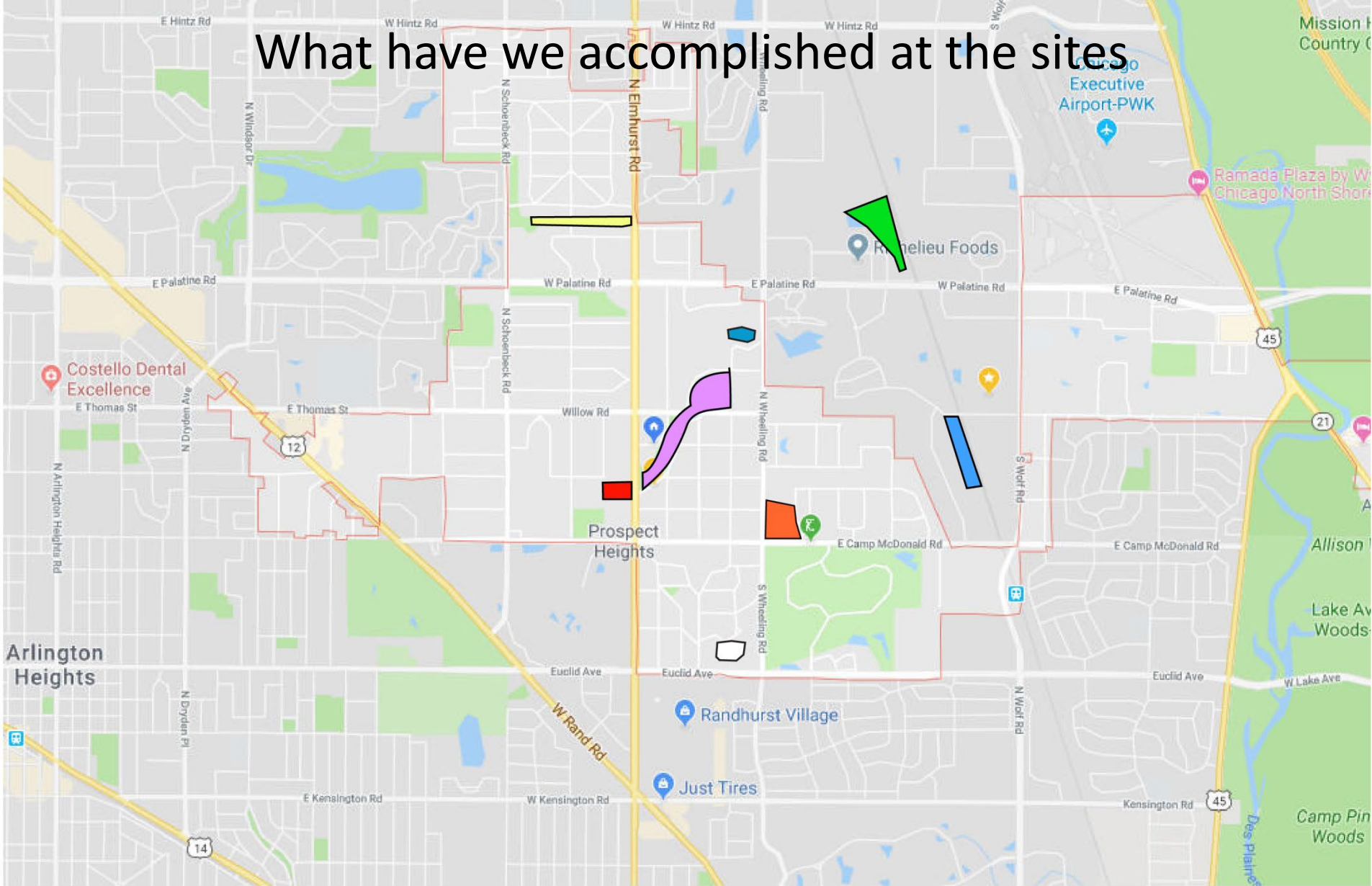
Bird walks and classes



Photo courtesy of
David Ludwin



What have we accomplished at the sites



PHNRC Project Sites
January 2019

- ComEd Prairie Restoration
- St. Alphonsus
- Remnant Prairie
- Remnant Sedge Meadow
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- Heron Pond



The Prospect Heights Slough circa 2014





The Prospect Heights Slough 2018



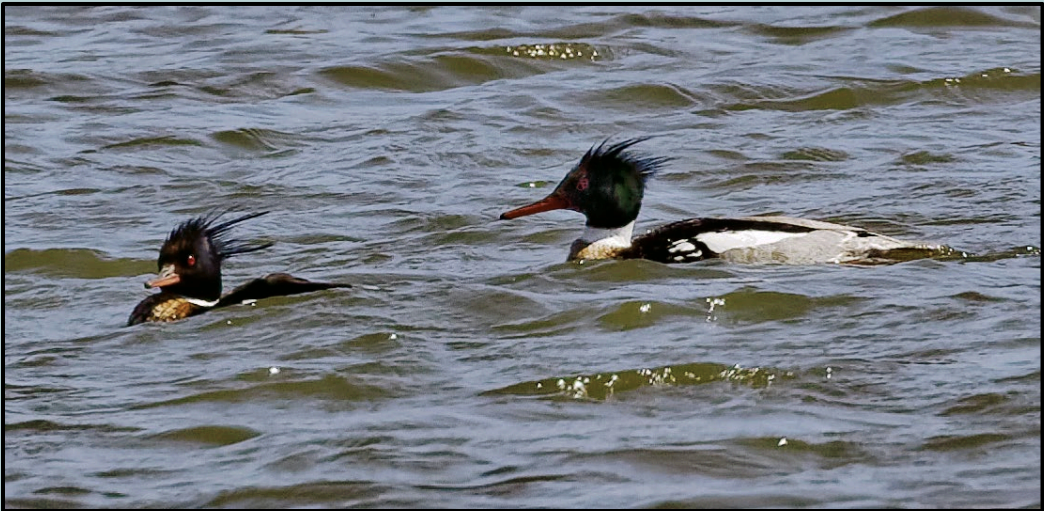
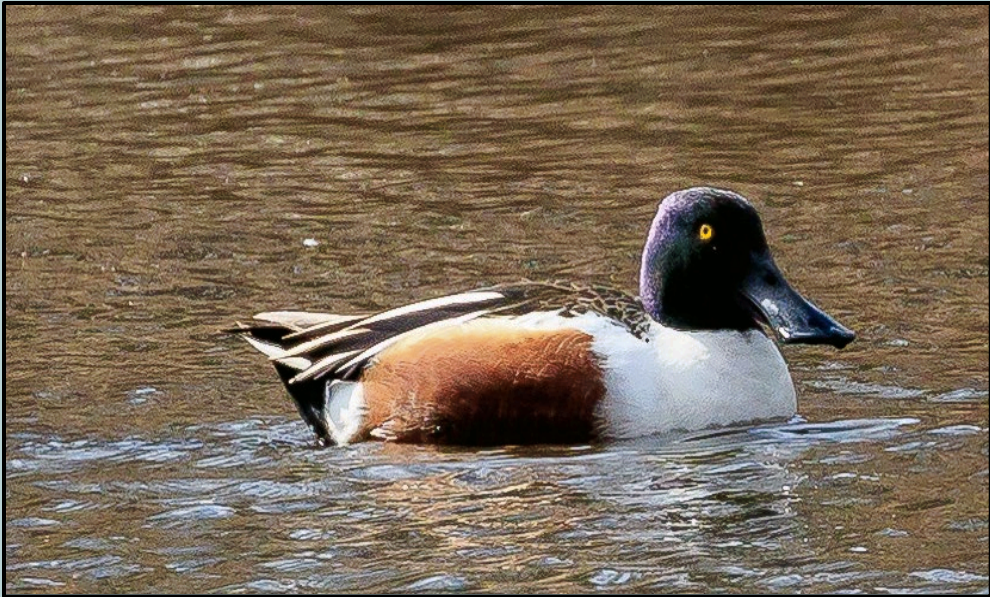
The Prospect Heights Slough 2018



The Prospect Heights Slough 2018



The Prospect Heights Slough 2018 Recent visitors



The Prospect Heights Slough 2018 Recent visitors

Photos courtesy of David Ludwin



The ComEd Prairie Conversion circa 2014



The ComEd Prairie Conversion 2015



The ComEd Prairie Conversion 2018





The ComEd Prairie Conversion 2018



The Nature Preserve 2016



The Nature Preserve 2017



The Nature Preserve 2018





Residential Projects



Residential Projects



Residential Projects





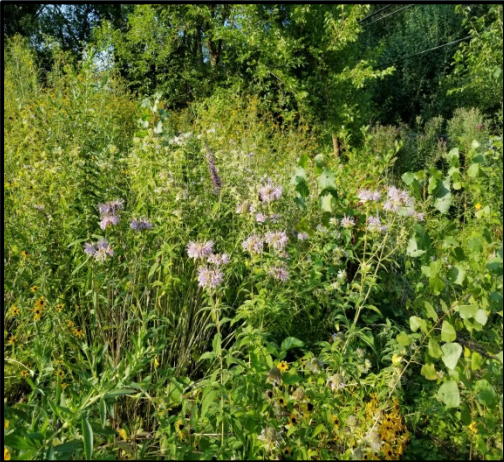
Tully Park 2018



Tully Park 2018



Tully Park 2018



The Remnant Prairie



The Remnant Prairie



The Remnant Sedge Meadow







Heron Pond



Heron Pond



Heron Pond



So how did we do it?



It started with passion, vision, and wanting to make a difference in the community and the world

We could see the potential in all of our projects and what they could become

We understood the enormous benefits to the environment, residents, wildlife and the community at large

We are committed to the projects, the process and all the details

Above all we knew it had to be fun or no one would want to do it.



So how did we do it?

The Commissioners have made the commitment to self reliance by continuing their education, taking classes, getting certified for herbicides, burn crew training.



Dr. Wojnarski receives Woodland Stewardship Certificate and 2017 Force of Nature Award.

Six of the seven commissioners are burn certified.



So how did we do it? Integration into the city



The Commission is part of the City of Prospect Heights

We are embedded into the City structure and report, advise and make recommendations to City Council and the Mayor

The Commission receives a small annual budget from the city



We are partnered with the Park District and advise and make recommendations. The majority of the NRC sites belong to the Park District

We are partnered with our Public Library to produce our Nature Speaks program, art exhibitions and displays. The Library funds speakers stipends

We are partnered with the Police and Fire Department, reporting to both about burn activities and vandalism

We enjoy close working relationships with all of these entities.



So how did we do it? Volunteers



The Commission is an all Volunteer organization
As commissioners, it seems we are volunteering
24/7

The heroes of the organization are the regular
volunteers who come out in rain or shine,
subzero or extreme heat

Without them, the organization would not
accomplish all the amazing things it has

We find ways to spend quality one on one time
With everyone

We incorporate end of work day site walks and
kielbasa roasts

It is a great for volunteers to see the fruits of
their labor, see how they have made a
difference and enjoys meaningful friendships



So how did we do it? Volunteers



So how did we do it? Volunteers



Seed collection
Wednesdays are
always well
attended

All the work days have a communal spirit

So how did we do it? Dialogue and Education



We understood very quickly that Urban restoration was a different animal

We learned that the cultural norms of the American landscaping aesthetic run deep and are hard to overcome

We learned that if we were to survive and continue our work that we had to move education to the forefront of everything we do

Information is king. Dialogue and education are the ways to disseminate it

We learned that perception was somehow not always attached to reality

We found that science was not necessarily a useful tool

We found we spent as much time managing people as we did invasives



So how did we do it? Dialogue and Education



We created our website phnrc.com

The website is the clearing house for all information

The goal is to drive everything we do to the website

We created The Resources Journal & Work Notices

The monthly e-newsletter to provide first hand information about events, issues and distribute information. Five years of journals are archived on the website

We send out regular work day notices to keep volunteers informed about dates, times, location, conditions and work to be accomplished

We maintain a calendar of events on the website



So how did we do it? We promote

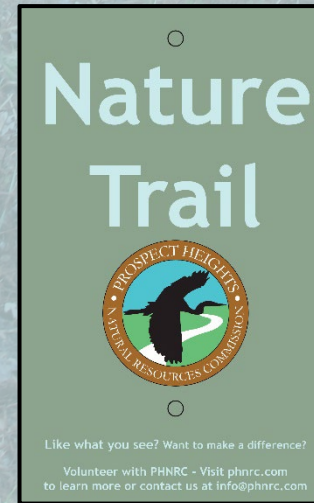


We branded everything: Stationery, business cards, logo, e-media, press releases, bumper stickers, interactive signs, work day signs, printed materials and presentations

Developed a relationship with news publications to get press releases out.

We give volunteers and officials bumper stickers

We have big native plant give-a-ways at community events in exchange for email addresses



So how did we do it? Partnering with other programs



Challenges - Funding

We receive a small budget from the City of Prospect Heights

Occasionally the Park District will contribute

We cannot fundraise

We cannot solicit donations but can accept them

We have anonymous donations

Commissioners make sizable contributions

No one wants to invest the time into being a 501 3C

Because of these conditions, it has forced us to be more efficient and economical in all we do

Self reliance is a way of life

Challenges – Resident push back



We have just about seen it all when it comes to restoration in the urban setting

We have had people threaten and swear at us

We have had people pull out new plantings

We have had people mow down entire plantings and do it again

We have had people cut paths through the prairie so they could dump their yard waste

We have had tree graffiti at the Slough

We have dumpers all the time at all sites

Early on we fought the “domain by osmosis” and “don’t mess up my view” syndromes

Our own park district dumped on one of the restoration sites



Challenges – Resident push back



This is a residence that butts up to the ComEd prairie

The photos show the view from their back deck, at the opening to the prairie and the prairie on the other side of their buckthorn wall

Their complaint was that their view was being destroyed by the weeds

This took place in the second year of progression



Challenges – Resident push back



This resident had complained vigorously to the Alderman, City Council and Mayor to the point we were called into council

They were rallying the few residents lining the prairie to have the prairie removed

We tried meeting with the resident to explain plant succession, but the attempts were futile. It was impossible to get the person to stop screaming

A moratorium was placed on all the NRC's activities until we came to council to make a full presentation on the progress of the prairie. We made a video and showed it to them

Agnes being the eternal optimist gave it one last try offering to take the resident to the Schulenburg or Poplar Creek prairies to see how different a mature prairie could be. They said no but agreed to meet her and she took pictures

Upon viewing the pictures, the declaration of that's what I want was made. A tall grass prairie would block off their view of the weed patch. Perfect

Challenges – Resident push back



The irony is that the “my view” syndrome trumps tall plantings so we were ecstatic that this could end so well

We planted in over a thousand plugs and “tended garden”

Indian grass, big blue stem, switch grass, tall coreopsis, smooth aster, downy sunflower, purple coneflower and prairie drop seed.

We also dropped in about 5 pounds of seed



The moratorium was lifted, the plantings took off over the summer and provided the prescribed “weed screen”

As we senesced into winter, we thought we had one the day

Challenges – Resident push back

Fast forward to a late spring check up and we see this

All that work had been once again mowed into a 2,000 square foot donut donut

The police paid them a visit and it appears to have stopped





Challenges – City policy

Officials can be reluctant to do the right things and easily succumb to resident pressure

Little willingness to stay informed on environmental and ecology issues, mostly uninformed

It's very easy to get sucked into being a politician, a real time killer



Successes – Grants



openlands
conserving nature for life

ComEd®

An Exelon Company



Our first grant was a Green Regions matching grant from ComEd/Openlands for \$`10,000.00 in 2014

The grants was matched by the City of Prospect Heights and the Park District for \$5,000.00 each making the total award \$20,000.00

The grant was to fund the 5 acre ComEd prairie conversion and to purchase native plants and see for the Slough Restoration

Our second grant in 2016 was also a ComEd/Openlands grant that was matched by the City and the Park District for a total of \$20,000.00

This grant funded the creation of an interactive nature park for children know as the Nature Preserve.

Embedded in close proximity to the Park District's early Ed programs, the Public Library and Eisenhower Elementary school, the location is perfect

Successes – Outreach and education programs

NATURE SPEAKERS

Started in September of 2015 the Nature Speaks program has been one of our great success stories

To date, 15 different speakers have been a part of the program with 3 more slated for this year

The events are free of charge, very well attended and a great vehicle to educate residents and lawmakers

In addition to the stipend we offer a dinner with commissioners as a way get to know speaker and commissioners better in an informal setting

Attendance continues to grow and the program has become a Community fixture



Successes – Outreach and education programs



Working with the Boy Scouts, Brownies, Kids Care and School District 23 has been a great benefit to everyone



Scouts have become a vital part of the workforce



The planting programs have become instrumental in getting young children introduced to nature, restoration and volunteering in the community



Most satisfying is the evolution of our relationship with District 23



What started as hosting field trips and science fair displays has turned into inclusion into the curriculum



Successes – Volunteers & Interns

Among our biggest successes are our volunteers and the intern program

What began as a rag tag bunch has turned into a very effective work force and a very close knit community steeped in love and commitment

Interns become very close and when their terms are over its more like sending a son or daughter off to college

We have built these platforms on education, respect and patience

There is enormous satisfaction in knowing that you have impacted a young life in a very meaningful way and that no matter what the task is, there is an expandable base of volunteers excited to help you do it



Successes – Winning public opinion and earning respect

Urban restoration demands undivided attention

We have been effective in resolving conflicts, politics, and producing tangible results that have transformed the Prospect Heights landscape for the residents and wildlife

Looking at the totality of who we are, what we are and how we do things, we believe that it has earned us the respect of residents, politicians, volunteers and our peers.

It is that respect that will build the trust you need to go forward in the court of public opinion.

So how can you do it? - Structure

Develop strong leadership

Develop a strategic plan

Keep everything regular and as predictable as possible

Schedule regular work days at the same time

Send out regular work day notices

Management needs to be transparent and meet at least once a month to plan and review

So how can you do it? – Build partnerships and networks

Explore becoming part of your city and or park district

Reach out to all parts of your local government. Get to know people on a personal basis. Networks get stronger through personal contact

Work with Scouting organizations, church groups, schools, garden clubs and community groups

Get out and meet others in the restoration communities. Look for opportunities to exchange labor, services and knowledge

Grow your email database every way possible

The strength of your networks will contribute to the support of your organization

So how can you do it? – Educate yourself

Go back to school. Continuing education is essential to success

Morton Arboretum is an excellent educational resource offering many classes and certifications including the Woodland Stewardship program

All the Forest Preserves have great educational components

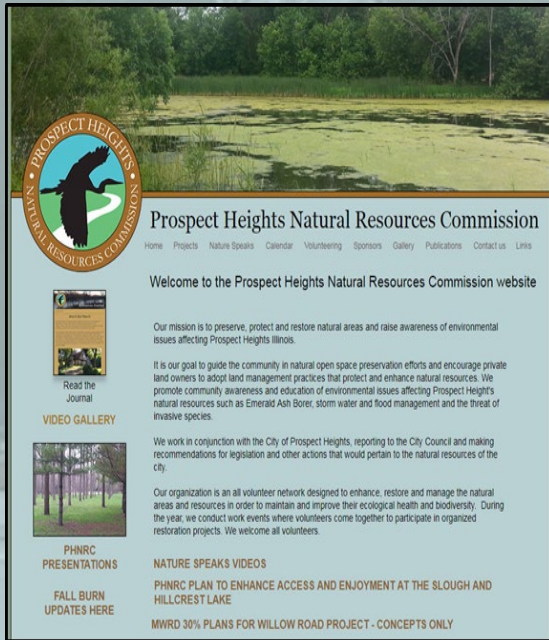
Attend talks, conferences and seminars

Learn by doing . Volunteer with other organizations and see how they think and do things

Learn CPR and first aid

Learn about conflict resolution

So how can you do it? – Educate your community and be visible



Create a website, it is the most important resource tool you have

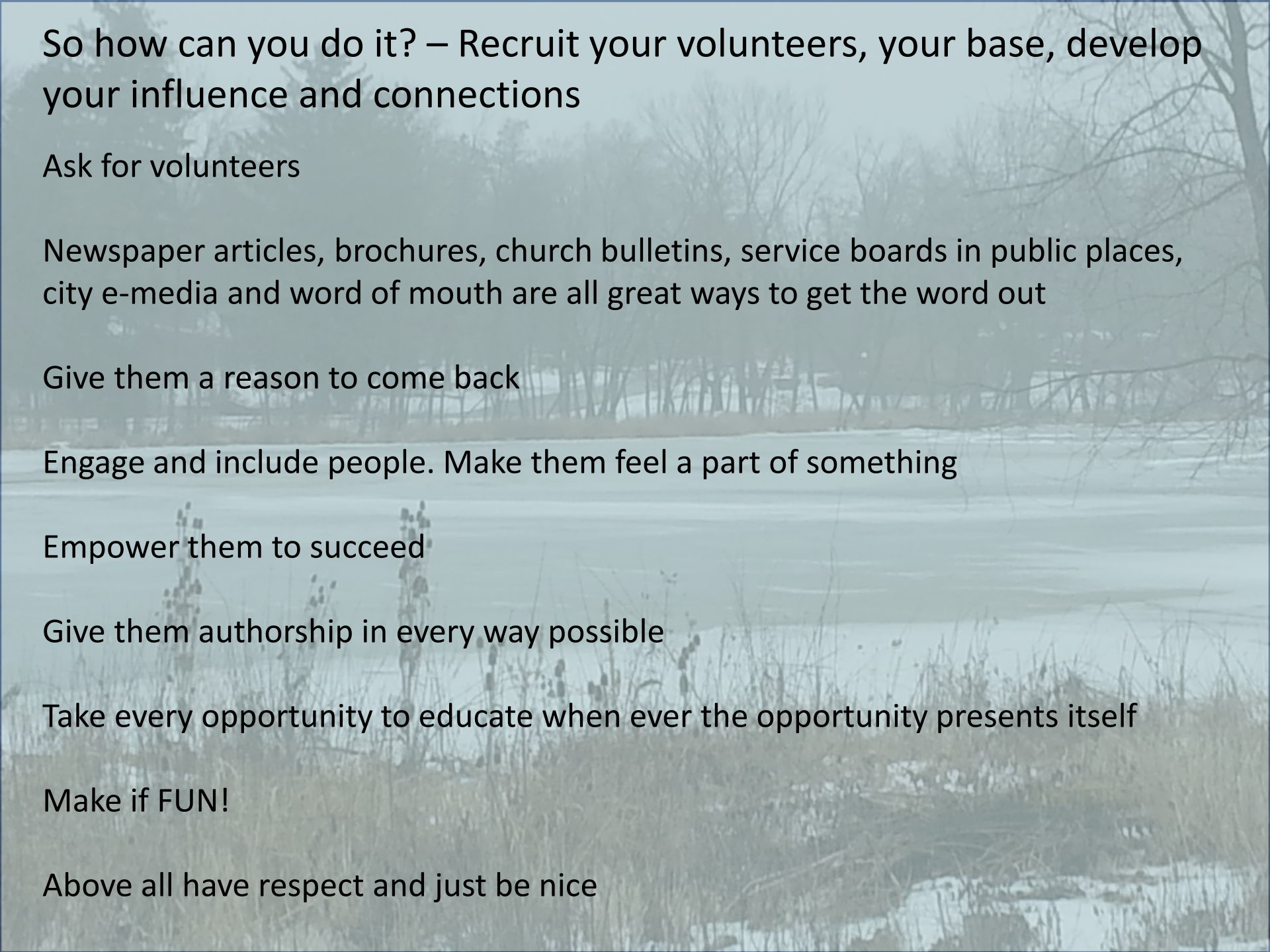
Stage or attend community events

Give talks. Look for opportunities to personally deliver your message

Create a monthly e-news letter and work day notices

Send out press releases – get press





So how can you do it? – Recruit your volunteers, your base, develop your influence and connections

Ask for volunteers

Newspaper articles, brochures, church bulletins, service boards in public places, city e-media and word of mouth are all great ways to get the word out

Give them a reason to come back

Engage and include people. Make them feel a part of something

Empower them to succeed

Give them authorship in every way possible

Take every opportunity to educate when ever the opportunity presents itself

Make it FUN!

Above all have respect and just be nice

So how can you do it? – Secure funding

Funding is essential: you have to have money

Look into municipal or park district funding if you become part of a city

If you are independent hold fundraisers

Look to hold plant sales

Solicit and receive donations

Explore becoming a 501 3C. It opens all kinds of opportunities

So how can you do it? – Monitor your results and document

Pay attention to every detail

Historical record is very important: comparing annual records can illuminate trends and problems

Always take BEFORE and after pictures

Encourage your volunteers to become monitors of plants, amphibians, reptiles, insects and birds

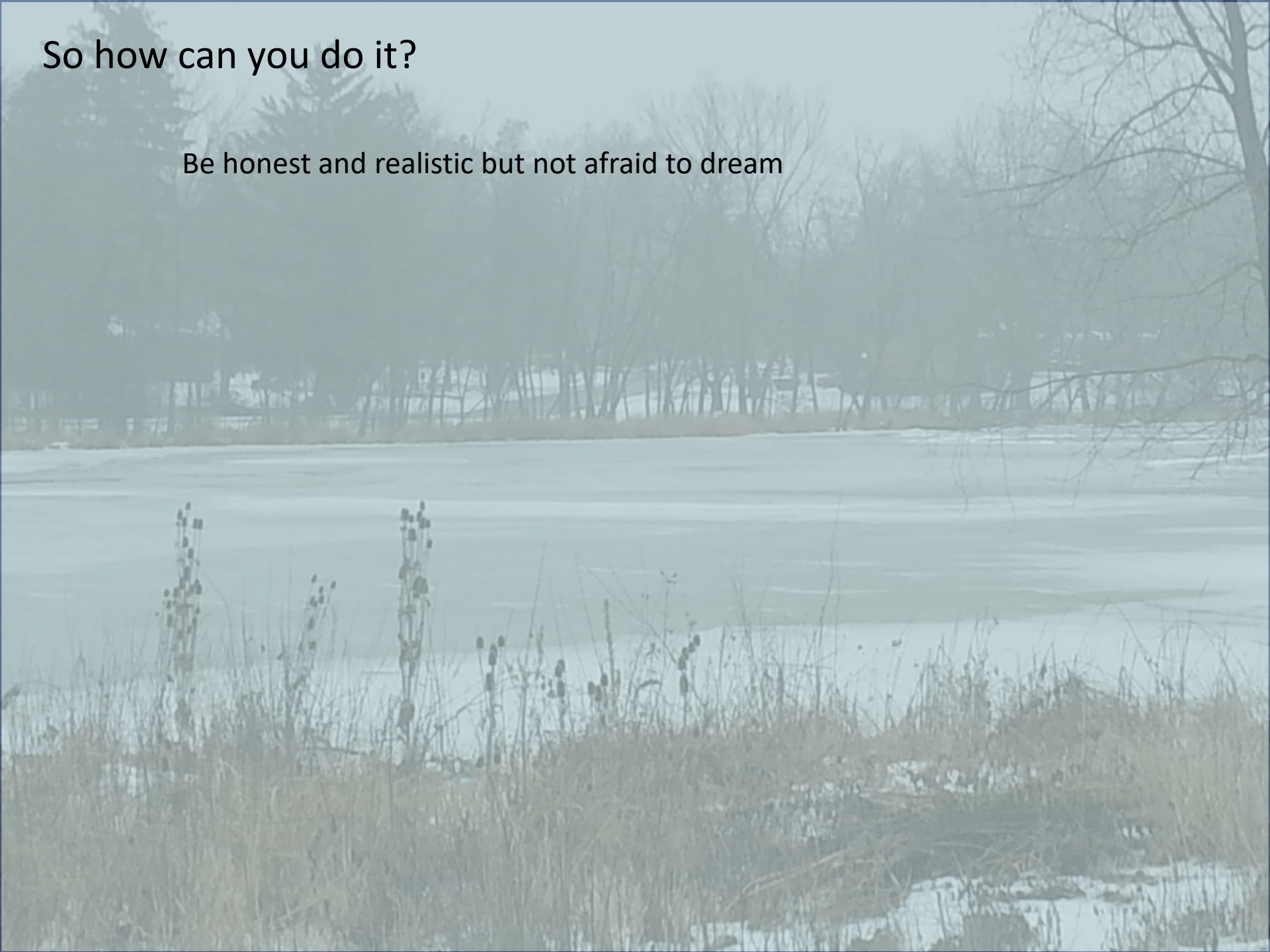
Be sure to date everything, standardized forms make it easy to be consistent

Create volunteer waivers and always think of safety issues

Be sure to record volunteer work hours. An annual record is a great way to monitor volunteer interest and performance. The data is necessary for some grants

So how can you do it?

Be honest and realistic but not afraid to dream



Questions?

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