

Frequently Asked Questions About the St. James Farm Master Plan

ST. JAMES FARM MASTER PLAN

As part of a planning process, the Forest Preserve District's Office of Planning recently presented a conceptual plan for St. James Farm Forest Preserve and its development to the public. It held an open house at the District's headquarters, posted the plan on its Web site and gathered feedback in person and by mail and e-mail submissions.

Below are general overviews of the St. James Farm Master Plan and responses to some of the most frequently asked questions about the forest preserve and its planned structures, amenities and operations.

MASTER PLAN CONCEPT OVERVIEW

St. James Farm's main farm — including historic stables, barns, and support buildings — lends to be a main interpretive area for the forest preserve. The east farm — including the existing large show stable, jumping and dressage arenas and picnic pavilion — is best suited for equestrian special events. The north farm is to feature an entrance, trailhead, picnic area and parking lot for cars and horse trailers. The south farm, which is largely undeveloped, provides opportunities for restoration to benefit plant and animal communities and watershed. This south farm area also features the historic Galusha House which offers an opportunity for a partnership with the Warrenville Historical Society.

CIRCULATION, PARKING, AND TRAILS

A forest preserve main entrance is to be constructed on Winfield Road, north of the Butterfield Road intersection. Its main access road passes through the property's former deer park. Along this route, a picnic area — with a small parking lot, shelter and restroom — overlooks the pond. The preserve's main parking area is located west of the main farm complex. During special events, overflow parking is planned for the meadow south of the main road, and the east farm is to be accessed by the Hoy Avenue entrance.

By separating traffic circulation between the main and east farms, conflicts between vehicles and trail users are minimized. During horse-related special events, trailers may access the east farm by the Mack Road entrance and by special-use permit. The Springbrook Creek bridge and trail are upgraded to support trailers. The south farm's parking lot is accessed from Galusha Avenue near the historic Galusha House; this lot supports trail users and interpretation at the house.

The multipurpose trail, which connects St. James Farm's north and south areas by the existing Butterfield Road underpass, passes through mature rolling woodlands, restored prairies, and wetland and riparian habitats. The trail also connects to the Illinois Prairie Path, the Herrick Lake, Blackwell and Warrenville Grove forest preserve trails, and a neighborhood and Hubble Middle School to the south. Bicycle parking near the main farm area is provided to encourage cyclists to park their bikes and explore the preserve on foot. The trail follows historic trail alignments and tree-lined allées, using existing on-site artwork as points of interest.

OPERATIONS

Why is St. James Farm Forest Preserve open only on certain days of the year?

St. James Farm Forest Preserve is open during select days of the year, because the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County must first convert the property from its former residential use to one that is suitable for public use. According to DuPage County, state and local fire-protection district regulations, the forest preserve must have appropriate infrastructure — including access, parking and utilities — in place to be operational full time. Much of the infrastructure improvements will be fulfilled during the first phase of the St. James Farm master plan. This phase focuses on the development of parking lots and trails and the connection of water and sewer lines to upgrade priority structures for the public's use.

When will St. James Farm Forest Preserve open in 2012?

St. James Farm Forest Preserve is open daily June through November, one hour after sunrise until one hour after sunset.

Join the "Family Field Day at St. James Farm," a family-friendly celebration of this historic preserve's equestrian and agrarian heritage, on Saturday, May 26, from 11 a.m. – 5 p.m. The event features horse and riding demonstrations,

canine performances, antique and vintage tractors, hybrid vehicles, hay-wagon rides, children's activities, recreation activities, blue-grass music, food service and more. Admission is free. A \$5 per family fee applies for some activities.

St. James Farm Forest Preserve's schedule will expand as amenities at the preserve are completed.

Will the District board horses at St. James Farm?

St. James Farm's stables will be open only for special events by special-use permits, which will be issued by the District's Office of Land Management. Because many of the stables are of historic significance, only intermittent stabling will be considered to preserve the buildings for the public's enjoyment.

Is the property to remain equestrian in nature?

The master plan retains an equestrian presence at St. James Farm.

Will St. James Farm's indoor arena be used for educational purposes?

Yes. The indoor arena will be upgraded for multiple educational and recreational uses.

Can the Danada Equestrian Center's programs use the indoor arena over the winter?

It is anticipated that some Danada programs may use the indoor arena at St. James Farm.

Will Danada's horse herd be housed at the St. James Farm show stable over the winter?

The show stable will not house horses year round but rather accommodate St. James Farm's special events.

Can the south area of St. James Farm be used by snowmobilers?

The District does not allow motorized vehicle use in its preserves.

CIRCULATION, PARKING AND TRAILS

Can a bike path be added to connect St. James Farm's north loop to the intersection at Mack and Winfield roads?

One of the goals of the master plan is to provide connections between St. James Farm and adjacent open spaces and recreational amenities. The master plan designates the construction of an interior trail along Mack Road from a proposed picnic area and parking lot west to Winfield Road.

Can a trail be added in the St. James Farm's southern area to connect to Warrenville Park District's Lion's Park?

The master plan's phase 2 calls for the construction of a multipurpose trail in the south farm area. A north/south segment of trail will be realigned to pass near the St. James Farm boundary at this location and feature a connection to Lion's Park.

In addition to a new multipurpose trail, can the existing turf trails be kept?

St. James Farm's master plan affords a balance between the preserve's natural areas and recreational amenities, including the preserve's trails. Many wildlife species thrive in unbroken blocks of habitat with little disturbance. Those species that can adapt to highly disturbed sites, fragmented habitat and along habitat edges — known as "generalists" — are abundant. Multiple trails facilitate edge habitat, fragment core areas and create disturbance; ultimately, too many trails degrade habitat where rare or uncommon wildlife species make their homes and find food and water. In addition, studies have shown that multiple trails advance the spread of invasive species into high-quality natural areas. Maintaining numerous trails at this preserve would impact the maintenance of other District facilities and amenities.

Many existing turf trails — which exist in woodland communities — cannot support turf cover, because an overhead canopy of trees limits sunlight and new plant growth. Some trail segments also have slopes which promote washouts or are located in wetland areas that cannot support heavy horse traffic. While the District provides turf trails at other preserves, it anticipates the use of such trails at St. James Farm would be far greater. Consequently, these trails would become unusable. Additionally, the necessary management, inspections, safety

patrols and emergency responses cannot be efficiently accomplished on turf trails unless conducted during ideal conditions.

What is the proposed surface of the multipurpose trails? Will these be like the trails at Herrick Lake and Blackwell forest preserves?

St. James Farm Forest Preserve's multipurpose trails are to be constructed much like the trails at other DuPage County forest preserves. This preserve's multipurpose trails will be limestone screened and 10 feet wide.

TRAIL USE AND RESTRICTIONS

Might the Forest Preserve District consider dedicating groomed trails for cross-country skiing at St. James Farm? Could a separate user fee support this recreational activity?

When conditions permit, the District grooms trails for classic and skate-style cross-country skiing at many forest preserves. Trail grooming is proposed in the St. James Farm master plan. However, as at other forest preserves during winter, trails are for use by the public. Other District-wide trails, which are groomed during the winter, provide signage containing trail etiquette.

Might the District add an equestrian cross-country course at St. James Farm?

Although the District intends to balance recreational amenities and habitat restoration at St. James Farm, a cross-country course is not identified in the master plan. A cross-country course is already available for visitors' use at Pratt's Wayne Woods Forest Preserve in Wayne. The addition of a second course at another forest preserve would fragment habitat, create disturbance and provide an opportunity for invasive species to spread. Much of St. James Farm's southern area also contains wet soils that are unsuitable for heavy horse traffic. Repeated horse traffic on unstable or bare soils at other areas in this preserve may also degrade the ecosystem and erode the soil.

Will the District separate turf trails exclusively for equestrians or bicycles or other uses?

St. James Farm's trail system is to be multipurpose and inclusive of all permitted uses, not particular to one user group or specific activity.

SITE ACCESS AND CIRCULATION

Won't additional traffic, especially travel by horse trailers, along Mack Road be dangerous?

During the master plan process, many equestrians raised concerns over horse-trailer traffic along Mack Road and a proposed entrance on that same road. Experienced preserve users, many of which towed horse trailers, favored entry into the preserve from the Mack Road entry over other available alternatives. The District will work with the township to mitigate safety concerns when developing a detailed design for the proposed entrance and parking lot on Mack Road.

When will the Winfield Road entrance open?

An entrance from Winfield Road is planned during the first phase of development, which is projected between zero and seven years out. This first phase concentrates on creating infrastructure to accommodate preserve users. Other developments at the preserve are to be phased as funding becomes available over the next 20 years.

SITE AMENITIES

Will the District add a practice soccer field on the south side of St. James Farm?

The Forest Preserve District's mission supports passive recreation over active recreation. A local park district may be better suited to support an athletic field at another area.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Will the District leave the north and south farm fields open to agricultural production? These fields could be maintained as a model of environmentally responsible farming practices.

The master plan's intent is to restore these areas to a natural and healthy state. The restored areas will supply habitat for a great variety of native species, provide flood control and serve as educational and recreational areas. When restored, the areas' native vegetation will slow storm water runoff, reduce erosion and filter pollutants. Forest preserve visitors may learn about agricultural production and historic farming practices at the District's Kline Creek Farm in West Chicago and Danada Model Farm in Wheaton.

Can the District restore this forest preserve's natural areas and yet allow equestrian use?

The master plan calls for the restoration of many natural areas, the development of trails which provide for interesting trail-related experiences and the restoration of former equestrian areas for public use.