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Forest Preserves Encourages Residents, Visitors to Opt Outside

The Forest Preserves of Cook County applauds its partner REI, in their decision to close on Black Friday. The retailer is instead encouraging its employees and by extension, the public, to spend time outside on what is traditionally the busiest shopping day of the year. In support of this initiative, the Forest Preserves of Cook County invites REI employees and Cook County residents and visitors to experience nature close to home in the Forest Preserves.

“Instead of spending time outside in long lines, the Forest Preserves of Cook County is joining the Opt Outside campaign and inviting local REI employees as well as members of the public to spend time in nature at their local preserve,” said Arnold Randall, general superintendent of the Forest Preserves of Cook County. “The Forest Preserves are a great place to make memories with loved ones over the holiday weekend by exploring the wilderness close to home.”

The Forest Preserves of Cook County encompasses nearly 70,000 acres of land, and includes various habitats such as forest woodlands, wetlands, prairie and savanna. Amenities within the Forest Preserves include 300 miles of marked trails for hiking, biking, horseback riding and cross-country skiing; nine sledding hills; five snowmobile areas; five campgrounds; six nature centers; 22 dedicated Illinois nature preserves; and more.

Below are ideas on different ways to Opt Outside within the Forest Preserves of Cook County. For more ideas and information on ways to enjoy time outdoors in the Forest Preserves of Cook County throughout the holiday weekend, download the Forest Preserves of Cook County’s online events brochure at fpdcc.com/events. Additionally, visitors can find information on making the most of the holiday weekend by booking a cabin at one of the Forest Preserves’ new campgrounds at fpdcc.com/camping.

North Zone

- Walk through sugar maple woods along the Des Plaines River on self-guided trails at [River Trail Nature Center](#), 3120 Milwaukee Ave. in Northbrook.
- Visit the Alexander Robinson family homestead site and burial grounds at [Robinson Woods](#). A footpath off East River Road leads to faint traces of the home.

Northwest Zone

- After exploring educational exhibits and visiting the live animals at [Crabtree Nature Center](#), 3 Stover Rd. in Barrington Hills, visitors can set out on a nearby self-guided trail among glacier-formed landscapes to see native wildlife and plants.
- Head to the east side of [Busse Woods/Ned Brown Preserve](#) to watch and listen to a small elk herd, which was established in 1925. The elk enclosure is on the west side of Arlington Heights Road, just north of Higgins.

Central Zone

- Visit [Trailside Museum of Natural History](#), 738 Thatcher Ave. in River Forest, for the [Turkey Trot Hike](#) on Friday, Nov. 27. Attendees are invited to walk off their turkey dinner during a special post-holiday guided hike of nearby trails. The event begins at 1 p.m., and is free to attend.
- Head to [Bemis Woods](#) to bird and wildlife watch along the creek shores.

South Zone

- Visit reproduced log cabins depicting the lifestyles of early 19th Century Illinois at [Sand Ridge Nature Center](#), 15891 Paxton Ave. in South Holland.
- Explore the recently completed [Thorn Creek Trail](#), which offers more than 16 miles of continuous paved trail.

Southwest Zone

- Visit exhibits on geology, history and habitat management from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at [Sagawau Environmental Learning Center](#), 12545 W. 111th St. in Lemont.
- Connect with Palos Hills' historic past at [Little Red Schoolhouse Nature Center](#), 9800 Willow Springs Rd. in Willow Springs. While there, visit with live native animals and more.

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