Navy Begins Assessment of Openlands Lakeshore Preserve

At the request of Representative Brad Schneider and Senators Dick Durbin and Tammy Duckworth, the Navy begins work with the City of Highland Park and Lake County

Naval Station Great Lakes, the City of Highland Park and Lake County hosted a subject matter expert and leadership meeting with Openlands on Aug. 25 and 26 to discuss efforts underway to support the return of public access to Openlands Lakeshore Preserve. The event included a site visit of the Openlands Lakeshore Preserve by Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command (NAVFAC) Mid-Atlantic Environmental experts and a synchronization update on resources and capabilities now available to assist the Navy with the site’s assessment. “Partnering with the City of Highland Park, Lake County and Openlands is an excellent example of cooperation that will continue to benefit the local area,” said Captain Jason Williamson of Naval Station Great Lakes.

“The Openlands Lakeshore Preserve is a natural treasure along our lakefront,” said U.S. Senator Dick Durbin. “That’s why I’ve worked alongside my colleagues Senator Duckworth and Congressman Schneider to ensure that the Navy is doing everything it can to help Openlands safely reopen as soon as possible. I thank Naval Station Great Lakes for their hard work and expertise and Openlands for their continued commitment to preserving and restoring our open spaces.”

“The Openlands Lakeshore Preserve is a valued natural area that holds significant importance to the surrounding community,” U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth said. “I appreciate Naval Station Great Lakes and the NAVFAC Mid-Atlantic Environmental experts for working with the community to make the Preserve open to the public in a safe and efficient manner.”

The work follows the discovery and disposal of three explosives that began the week of April 5, 2021, forcing the public closure of the Openlands Lakeshore Preserve for the
“The City greatly appreciates the partnership of the Navy and Lake County, and the advocacy of our elected officials in Washington in prioritizing the remediation of this incredible natural resource,” said Mayor Nancy Rotering. “Since acquiring the property, Openlands has completed extensive work at their property, which has greatly enhanced the quality of life for our community. We look forward to once again enjoying the trails and lakefront just as soon as it is safe to do so.”

Openlands Lakeshore Preserve is located on the former Fort Sheridan military base with shoreline and bluffs overlooking Lake Michigan. The post was closed in 1993 as part of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process and ownership of a portion of the installation was transferred in 2007 to Openlands, a nationally accredited land trust. Openlands restored the natural areas, installed trails and artwork, secured designation for the property as an Illinois Nature Preserve, and opened the site to the public in 2011.

“The safety of the public when visiting the Preserve is Openlands’ top priority. We want everyone to be able to fully enjoy the beauty and natural setting of the Preserve’s bluffs, prairie, and lakefront,” said Jerry Adelmann, president and CEO of Openlands. “The expertise the Navy provides is essential and we thank them for their co-operation and guidance. In addition, we are grateful for the leadership and coordination of Representative Schneider, Senators Dick Durbin and Tammy Duckworth, and the ongoing support of Mayor Nancy Rotering and the City of Highland Park to assist in securing this assessment and possible remediation.”

Openlands is committed to addressing concerns to return the preserve to its intended purpose for public enjoyment. Plans to reopen will not be available until the completion of the assessment, at the earliest. The public is asked to respect the closure while the assessment and any subsequent needed work is completed.

Founded in 1963, Openlands protects the natural and open spaces of northeastern Illinois and the surrounding region to ensure cleaner air and water, protect natural habitats and wildlife, and help balance and enrich our lives.

For more information, please visit openlands.org

25 East Washington Street
Suite 1650
Chicago Illinois 60602-1708
Email: info@openlands.org
Phone: 312.863.6250 | Fax: 312.863.6251