Land Acknowledgement Statements: moving from paper to action

Adam Kessel
Program Coordinator
Forest Preserves of Cook County
adam.kessel@cookcountyil.gov
Land Acknowledgement

The Forest Preserves of Cook County acknowledges that we are on the ancestral homelands of the Council of Three Fires—the Ojibwa, Ottawa and Potawatomi tribes—and a place of trade with many other tribes, including the Ho-Chunk, Miami, Menominee, Sauk and Meskwaki.

As a land management agency, we acknowledge that we have played a role in shaping the histories of local Native Americans by acquiring this land. We must also recognize, share and celebrate the history of local Native Americans and their immemorial ties to this land.

We commit ourselves to developing deeper partnerships that advocate for the progress, dignity and humanity of the many diverse Native Americans who still live and practice their heritage and traditions on this land today.
Agenda

• What is a Land Acknowledgement?
• Pathway to the Land Acknowledgement
• Integrating into Interpretive Practice
• Beyond the Land Acknowledgement
• Self Reflection
• Closing Activity
What is a land acknowledgement?

“Acknowledgment is a simple, powerful way of showing respect and a step toward correcting the stories and practices that erase Indigenous people’s history and culture and toward inviting and honoring the truth.” - Native Land: A Call to Acknowledge Guide

- Refuse erasure and invisibility
- Build a relationship with the land and Indigenous peoples of that land
Racial, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (REDI):

Operationalizing Equity
- Identify and prioritize issues as they relate to racial equity and inclusion in our work environment.
- Assess Forest Preserves operations, policies and procedures to build upon what is working well and change what is not. Improving systems to produce equitable outcomes.

REDI Mission
We envision the Forest Preserves promoting inclusiveness of services and employment to all residents of Cook County. Our actions will reflect these values by treating all people with respect.
Integrating into Interpretive Practice

Public Programming

The Land Acknowledgement was first read on Indigenous Peoples Day in 2019 at a celebration of the new Serpent Twin Mound (Puktu Ėnto) at Schiller Woods. Indigenous artist Simeone X created the mound as part of the Northwest Portage Walking Museum.

Professional Development

The poll results indicate that 36% of respondents feel comfortable sharing the Land Acknowledgement, while 4% are not comfortable and really don’t know how to share it. Additionally, 58% feel somewhat comfortable and still need to practice.
Integrating into Interpretive Practice
Beyond the land acknowledgement: Tribal Partnerships/ Business

Installation of lumber purchased from the Menominee Nation for renovations to Northwestern's sports facilities.

2020 Whistler Woods Winter Solstice Virtual Ceremony; Friends of the Forest Preserves (photo credit); St Kateri Center; American Indian Health Services of Chicago, FPCC
Moment of reflection

• What does the LA ask of us?
• What resources do you need to use an LA?
• What resources do you have?
• What relationships do you have or need to establish?
Chat Back

Please share one big take away you have in the chat.
Beyond Land Acknowledgements

• Best Practices
• Pitfalls
• Listen and Learn
• Show Up
• Invest
• Promote
Pilamaya

Thank you

Adam Kessel
Program Coordinator
Forest Preserves of Cook County
adam.kessel@cookcountyil.gov