Beaubien Woods Forest Preserve is home to several 100+ year-old oak trees, high-quality prairie, oak savanna, and wetland habitat, and hundreds of species of native plants and migratory birds. There are many ways to enjoy this 135-acre preserve. A hiking trail on the north end takes you through a mix of woodland and prairie habitats to Flatfoot Lake at the center of the site. The area has a rich history as a former farmstead and location on the Underground Railroad. We invite you to get to know your Cook County Forest Preserve using this field guide.
Land Acknowledgement
Beaubien Woods Forest Preserve sits on the traditional homelands of the Three Fires Confederacy, collectively known as the Anishnabek (or Anishenabe) people: the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Bodéwadmiké (Potawatomi), and Inoka (Illini Confederacy) and Myaamia (Miami) people. This region near Lake Michigan was a site for trade, gathering, and healing for more than a dozen Native tribes. The word ‘Calumet’ is thought to be derived from the ceremonial peace pipe used by native peoples of the region. We offer respect and gratitude to the diverse Indigenous people that still reside here and across the region, as well as their ancestors, and recognize, share and celebrate their immemorial ties to this land.

Beaubien: Then and Now
This aerial image shows what Beaubien looked like in 1938, showing agricultural fields and the railway line that still exists. The dark dots are native oak trees that still grow today.

This 2022 aerial image (on the right) of an interpretive, guided map of Beaubien Woods shows the places and landscape that currently exist in the area. Scan the QR code to explore.

Local Environmental Leaders To Know
Cheryl Johnson | People for Community Recovery (PCR)
Founded in 1979 by Cheryl’s mother, Hazel Johnson, to fight for environmental justice (EJ) in and around Altgeld Gardens, PCR and Cheryl continue that legacy today. Hazel is often considered the mother of the national EJ movement, demanding reforms to protect communities of color like Altgeld that are disproportionately affected by environmental hazards.
Beaubien Woods Forest Preserve

Beaubien is part of the Calumet Region, an area spanning Illinois and Northwest Indiana along the southern tip of Lake Michigan. Few places weave together life and landscape as distinctively as the bi-state Calumet region, a tapestry of people, industry, and globally significant nature. Beaubien is encircled by the Little Calumet River, the Bishop Ford Freeway, landfills, and Altgeld Gardens.

Beaubien Natural Communities
There are nearly nine acres of high-quality prairie at Beaubien, predominantly composed of tall, perennial, native grasses. Only about .01% of the original prairie in Illinois remains.

1. Prairie Community
2. Rattlesnake Master
   *Eryngium yuccifolium*
   The scientific name of this plant, means "like yucca leaves."
3. Common Milkweed
   *Asclepias syriaca*
   The most common milkweed, its leaves are the food for monarch caterpillars.
4. Big Bluestem
   *Andropogon gerardii*
   The state grass of Illinois, also called "turkey foot," due to the shape of its seedhead.

Local Environmental Leaders To Know
Onome Alabi | Assistant Principal at Carver Military Academy (on right)
Ms. Alabi taught Biology and Forensic Science to 9th-12th grade students, connecting hundreds of students with the Calumet Is My BackYard (CIMBY) program at Beaubien for over a decade, where they learn about local ecology and how to take action for nature conservation.
Local Environmental Leaders To Know
Deloris Lucas | Founder of We Keep You Rollin’ (WKYR)
The Bike & Wellness Group holds safety workshops, eco-tours to Beaubien Woods, as well as, the 7th annual “Lucas Legacy” Bike Ride & Wellness Pop-up event. Visit WKYR’s Facebook page for up to the minute details.
Local Environmental Leaders To Know
Mighty Acorns Students and Habitat Volunteers
Volunteers of all ages work together each month to care for and restore biodiversity and health in Beaubien Woods. Local elementary students participate in the Mighty Acorns program and have been learning about and helping to beautify and take care of Beaubien Woods since 2005.
Nearby Points of Interest

Jon Ton Farm and Underground Railroad
“Freedom seekers” escaping slavery found refuge with local abolitionists and Dutch immigrants Jon and Aagje Ton whose 40-acre farm was located adjacent to Beaubien on the north bank of the Little Calumet River from the 1840s until the Civil War. In 2019, the National Park Service formally included the Farm Site in the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom registry.

Altgeld Gardens and Golden Gate
To the west of the site, built in 1945 for returning World War II veterans, Altgeld Gardens was one of the nation’s first public housing developments and is still a vibrant, predominantly African-American community today, alongside neighboring Golden Gate homes and duplexes.

Calumet Heritage Area
Efforts are underway to establish a Calumet National Heritage Area. The heritage area showcases the assets of this unique American region, and Beaubien Woods is a part of that story. Pullman National Monument and Big Marsh are two other nearby natural areas of interest.

African American Heritage Water Trail
The Water Trail, which begins at the boat launch, honors the legacy and stories of African Americans who settled along the river. The Little Calumet River is part of the system that connects Lake Michigan with the Mississippi.

Local Environmental Leaders To Know
Donisha Reed and TCA Health
Donisha Reed is a public health leader, wellness consultant, yoga teacher, and outdoor enthusiast that works for TCA Health, a community health center adjacent to Beaubien Woods that brings community members to experience and enjoy the preserve.