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Forest district in DuPage asks for \$68 million: Land-purchase plan among 13 tax issues on ballot in county.

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Oct. 26--Five hundred acres for less than a buck a month? That sounds like fuzzy math, but it's the math that supporters of a \$68 million DuPage forest preserve bond referendum question would like taxpayers to focus on. "It's a pretty good deal if you like clean air and clean water, if you like outdoor recreation, bike trails and good wildlife habitat," said Brook McDonald, president of the Naperville-based Conservation Foundation. The DuPage Forest Preserve District has estimated that a \$68 million bond issue would add \$11.71 per year to the tax bill of a residence with a market value of \$300,000, considered the approximate average price of single-family residences in DuPage.

Proceeds of the bond issue would pay for 500 to 600 acres connecting existing preserves, particularly along the rivers and streams, and also to build trails, restore damaged environments and enhance wildlife habitat. The Forest Preserve District is one of 13 tax-increase or bond-issue referendum questions on the Nov. 7 election ballots of DuPage County communities. The forest preserve referendum would finance the purchase of what amounts to about 5 percent of the estimated 12,000 acres of undeveloped land in DuPage. The district has compiled a list of properties it would buy with the bond proceeds, but the list is being kept secret to avoid affecting the parcels' value. That means voters will have to cast a ballot without knowing specific plans for the money. McDonald doesn't have the secret list but said the land purchases would include the last remaining ecologically important lands in the county. "The county has an open space master plan that would connect greenways and paths for hiking and from one forest preserve to another. These are the last pieces that would make the plan a reality," he said. In Burr Ridge, Hinsdale and Wood Dale, the ballot will contain propositions to impose sales taxes--1 percent in Hinsdale and Wood Dale, one-half percent in Burr Ridge. Five fire protection districts are asking voter approval of bond issue or real estate tax increase proposals. A referendum question in Bensenville asks voters to approve a fire protection district and levy \$3 million in real estate taxes to support it. The Darien-Woodridge Fire Protection District, which laid off six firefighter-paramedics after the defeat of a bond referendum question last March, asks voter approval for an \$8.9 million bond issue. Fire Chief Robert Tinucci said the funds would pay off a \$7 million fire station construction debt and the purchase of a new ladder truck and other equipment. A new levy that would cost about \$39 a year in additional real estate taxes on a home worth \$300,000 would pay back the proposed \$8.9 million bond issue, the chief said. The existing operating levy could then be spent on restoring personnel.

The Bartlett Fire Protection District is asking voters for a rate hike that would increase the annual real estate tax levy from about \$3.1 million to about \$5.8 million. The funds would be used to staff and equip a new station under construction near Bartlett Road and Illinois Highway 59, said Chief Kevin Heine. The increased tax levy is projected to cost an additional \$151.44 per year on a home worth \$300,000.

A referendum question in the Glen Ellyn Park District would allow the district to sell \$11.9 million in bonds to renovate buildings, buy land and build a \$7.4 million multipurpose facility. A Westmont Park District referendum question would allow a tax-rate increase of 25 cents per \$100 of assessed valuation to build and operate a swimming pool. jsjostrom@tribune.com