

Caring for the Land, Caring for Each Other

At Openlands, we believe that nature is vital to all people. This idea is the through-line for our work. It is the basis for the scope of our programs. **It is our defining ideal.**



IN THE CHICAGO REGION, THIS IDEAL has a powerful corollary: that people are also vital to nature. By this we mean that in a sprawling metropolis that stretches across three states, nature needs the help of people in order to survive and to thrive. Here, human beings are part of the ecology of a place. This is of course true because we've impacted natural areas and the living communities they harbor. These impacts come in the form of roads and developments that hem them in. They come through degraded water and air quality. And they come in the increasing impacts of changes we created in our climate.

But humans are also part of the ecology of a place in that we have the opportunity and the responsibility to do everything we can to see that the natural areas we live with are as healthy as possible. As members of the community of life on this planet we are called to be stewards of it. Here in the region we call home, we are lucky to have lakefronts and riverfronts, prairies and savannas, woodlands, wetlands, and rolling dunes, all of which need our help to be healthy just as our health depends on them.

What a rewarding mandate we have to care for nature here in our home!

We can see this care for nature in many ways, big and small. We can see it dramatically in the large-scale projects that restore the interplay between land and water in restored wetlands. We see it in intimate ways in the patches of milkweed and other native plants that provide food and shelter to butterflies and birds in gardens in suburban neighborhoods. We see it in the parents, teachers, and students who gather at a neighborhood school to weed and maintain gardens that belong to all of them. We see it in the neighbors who meet—perhaps for the first time—on a weekend morning to fill their block with young trees.

Stewardship of the lands and waters of our region comes in many forms. At Openlands, we understand that it is our mission and mandate to offer programs that protect these resources and that invite people to become advocates for nature.

Get Involved



Birds in my Neighborhood

SINCE 2013, BIRDS IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD® has helped more than 7,000 students learn about nature in their local community. The program introduces students to the common birds of the region through in-class lessons and field trips. In a partnership led by Openlands and Audubon Great Lakes, this classroom-based and volunteer-driven program is offered to schools in the City of Chicago, McHenry County, and Lake County, Illinois.

In Chicago, Birds in my Neighborhood is taught by volunteers at CPS schools that have shared relationships with Openlands through the Building School Gardens program. School gardens and birds can be an entrée to connect youth with a life-long passion for the environment. By understanding more about birds, including how they survive and contribute to the urban environment, students forge a critical connection with nature as it exists in their own communities.

Birds in my Neighborhood needs volunteers to help the program run! You only need to be comfortable volunteering around kids, enjoy spending time outside, and be willing to help students learn. The commitment is minimal, but certainly rewarding.

For information about volunteering for Birds in my Neighborhood, please contact schools@openlands.org.

Conservation@Home: Beautiful Landscapes

A GROWING NUMBER OF PEOPLE manage their landscapes in ways that help keep the planet healthy. This adds beauty, value, and privacy; reduces flooding; and supports the rich profusion of indigenous species living here. Openlands can help. We provide these services in Lake County through the region's award-winning Conservation@Home program.

Our native plants are the flowers, trees, and other plants that have been growing in northeastern Illinois for centuries, long before the first Europeans arrived. They evolved here and are key to our ecosystems. Examples include white oak, prairie rose, wild ginger, and little bluestem.

Many of our songbirds, butterflies, frogs, and other wildlife need native plants to survive—and are declining because so few native plants remain today. They cannot survive solely on the European and Asian plants that cover so much of our suburban landscape. They need plants native to this specific area because of intricate food chain requirements subtly timed to synchronize with each other during pollination, migration, seed dispersal, and other seasonal rhythms. Planting natives in your yard will help our wildlife and create habitat connections between our remaining natural areas.

Conservation@Home is a program of The Conservation Foundation and is offered in Lake County by Openlands. For more information, please contact LakeCounty@openlands.org.

TreeKeepers

TREEKEEPERS WORK throughout the region to keep trees healthy, administering proper care and promptly recognizing and reporting harmful pests. Since 1991, nearly 2,000 trained volunteers have provided eyes and ears on the ground year-round in neighborhoods all over Chicagoland to identify potential tree-related problems and lead neighbors in tree planting and tree care.

TreeKeepers learn how to help keep trees green and growing, volunteering in a variety of situations from street tree care and tree planting to woodland stewardship and advocacy. They are passionate ambassadors who help educate their neighbors as well as their public officials about the importance of trees for the greater good.

For more than 25 years, TreeKeepers have supported the work of local forestry officials, such as the Forest Preserves of Cook County, the Chicago Park District, and the Chicago Region Trees Initiative.

To get involved, please contact treekeepers@openlands.org.

Openlands' forestry team is always in need of volunteers to assist with community greening. For more information on upcoming forestry events, please contact trees@openlands.org or call 312.863.6271.

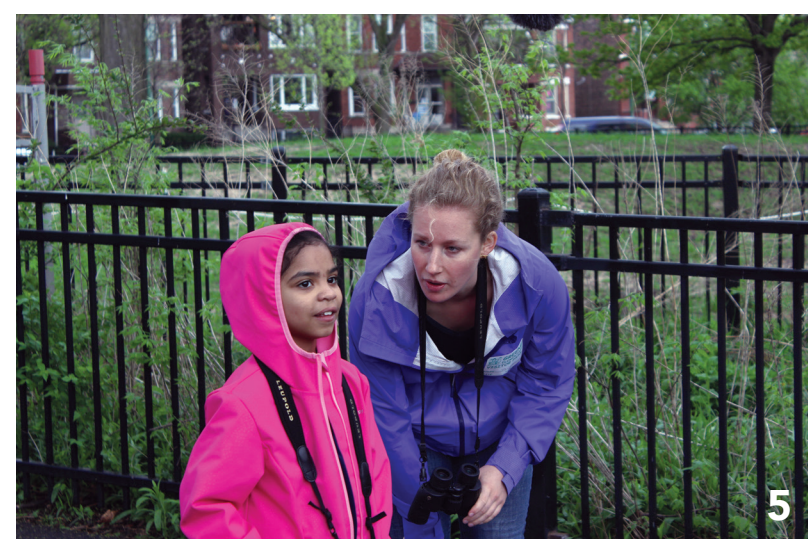
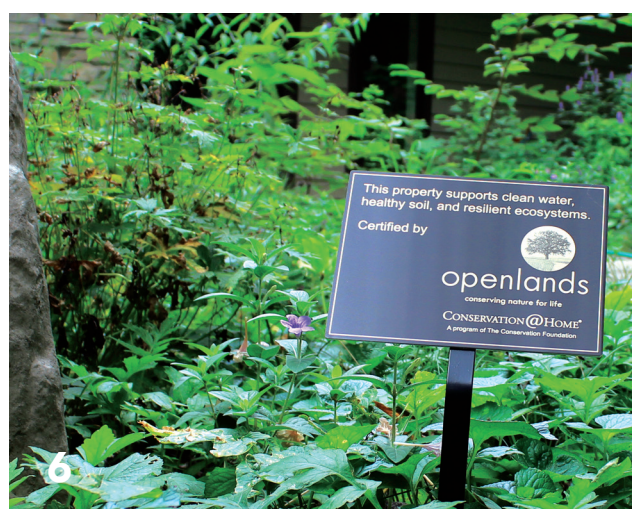
Tree Planters Grants

OPENLANDS TREEPLANTERS GRANTS provide new trees to communities in the City of Chicago and the near south suburbs. The grants encourage resiliency both through planting trees and creating or reaffirming a network of neighbors to work together. Communities are asked to organize themselves, find sufficient places to plant 10–40 trees, meet their neighbors, reach out and invite their elected officials, and create a successful event to learn about benefits of trees and the proper way to plant and maintain their new trees.

Openlands provides the education, organization, supplies, expertise, and quality control. On planting day, the Openlands Forestry Crew and certified TreeKeepers will provide tools, trees, mulch and training for volunteers. In return, we ask that you help gather your neighbors, all commit to work the full event (four hours), and keep caring for the trees for the next few years while they get established.

For more information, please contact trees@openlands.org.

PHOTOS 1. Birds in my Neighborhood volunteer training; 2–5. Birds in my Neighborhood; 6. Conservation@Home yard sign; 7. Conservation@Home consultation; 8–9. TreeKeepers at North Park Village; 10. Planting trees in Chicago



The Openlands Annual Luncheon Celebrates the Vital Role of Stewardship and Volunteerism

THE OPENLANDS 2019 ANNUAL LUNCHEON acknowledged and celebrated the essential role of stewardship and volunteerism in protecting our region's precious natural resources. The Openlands Annual Luncheon gathers together conservation-minded organizations, volunteers, and elected officials. Nearly 1,000 people attended the event held on October 31.

As Keynote Speaker Wendy Paulson shared, "The opportunity to participate, learn, and make a difference in natural areas restoration was pioneered in Chicago...When fully invested in the work and empowered to contribute, volunteers want to do more, not less. Their greatest reward is in personal growth, learning, working with others, getting to see and experience the results of their hard work, often years in the making." A member of the Openlands Board of Directors, Paulson is an environmental educator and activist with decades of hands-on experience in nature-based education, habitat restoration, and community-based conservation.

The Conservation Leadership Award was presented to Stephen Packard for his commitment to fostering a culture of conservation

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through which people and nature can re-establish mutually nourishing relationships in a changing world. Over 40 years ago, Stephen Packard initiated the North Branch Restoration Project, which has become a world-renowned model of volunteerism. Packard is the former Director of Science and Stewardship for The Nature Conservancy in Illinois and Founding Director of Audubon Chicago Region. He initiated and guided the Volunteer Stewardship Network. With thousands of volunteers working at hundreds of sites, these collaborations served as models for the creation of similar projects that are now commonplace at varied organizations.

"If people don't care and understand, the nature of the Chicago region would go away," said Packard. "If people don't care and understand, the livability of the planet will diminish... Some people said to me, 'Well that's a big switch. You worked on peace and civil rights in the 1960s, and now you're working on birds and bunnies?' But the Forest Preserves are every bit as much for people as they are for the ecosystem.

"Building a culture of conservation and a culture of caring as the agencies want to do, as Openlands works on, this is crucial to the future."

Welcome New Openlands Board Member

DAN LAUDERBACK

Dan Lauderback is a business services and technology services executive. He held numerous leadership roles with Accenture including Group Technology Officer of Accenture’s Health and Public Service global business. Dan was also a member of Accenture’s Global Leadership Council. Dan was recently the COO of GTY Technology and is an advisor to Ares Management Corporation’s Private Equity business.



Dan completed his B.S. in Engineering at Michigan State University and his M.S. in Engineering at the University of California, Berkeley. He has worked and lived in Chicago, Frankfurt, San Antonio, London, and San Francisco.

Why did you decide to get involved with Openlands?

I’m very impressed with Openlands’ mission and its involvement in the community.

Openlands’ programs in the Forest Preserves of Lake and Cook Counties pique my interest and align with things that are important to me. I have passion for the notion of space and vistas...the lands being as native and open as possible while simultaneously supporting human involvement and use.

Where is your favorite place to go outside in our region?

My favorite place to get outside locally is northern Lake County and McHenry County — it’s where I live and where I ride my bike. I am an avid cyclist and it’s been part of my life since I was teenager. We enjoy some of the most beautiful, natural, and open spaces of any urban area in the Country.

Support Openlands

Openlands is here to inspire and support volunteers and stewards across our region. Please help us continue to provide opportunities to connect people to nature.

Donate today at Openlands.org/support

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