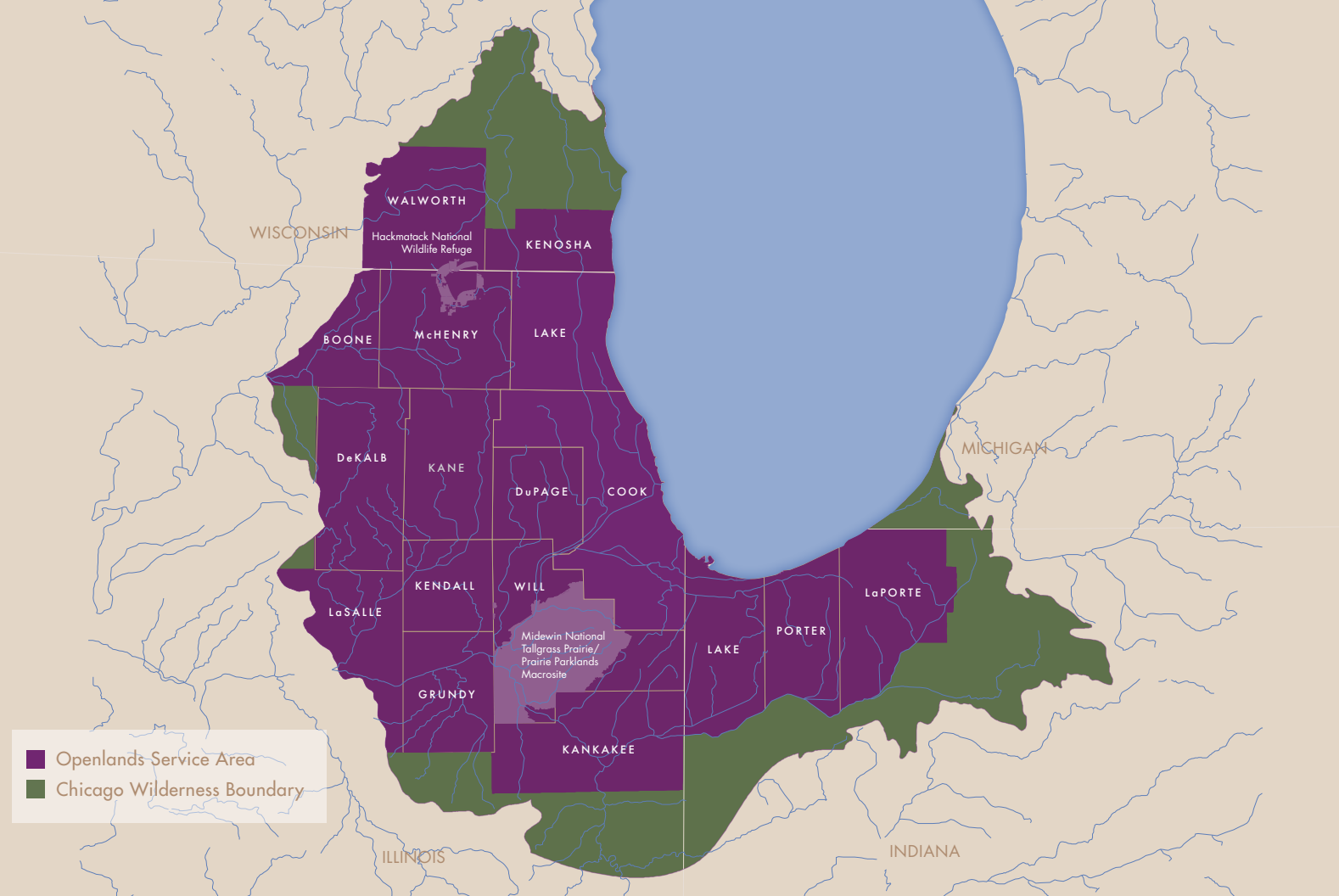


A LANDSCAPE OF HOPE





Openlands' mission is to protect the natural and open spaces of northeastern Illinois and the surrounding region; ensuring cleaner air and water, conserving natural habitats and wildlife, and helping balance and enrich our lives.

Openlands' vision for the region is a landscape that includes a vast network of land and water trails, tree-lined streets, and intimate public gardens within easy reach of every city dweller. It also includes parks and preserves big enough to provide natural habitat and to give visitors a sense of the vast prairies, woodlands, and wetlands that were here before the cities. In sum, **Openlands believes that protected open space is critical for the quality of life of our region.**



Dear Friends,

In conservation, you must carry a sense of hope with you, as the wins seem often incremental and the challenges immense. It is almost always a long game—a sometimes arduous, highly coordinated effort that takes patience, vision, and perseverance. It cannot ever be done alone, at least not successfully, and so it often reflects the challenges and opportunities that humans bring to collaboration. But when done successfully, it raises the threshold of hope that you've carried to everyone around you. In this historic and immensely challenging year, Openlands' mission to connect people to nature near where they live—raising that threshold of hope—has carried us through.

As the pandemic shaped much of the year, finding nature just outside your window was essential to peace of

mind, especially for young people. That is why early in the pandemic Openlands pivoted the Birds in my Neighborhood program from a volunteer-led, in-person program to one that could be delivered online easily by teachers. At a time when anxiety was high, Birds in my Neighborhood helped students find focus and calm through birdwatching from their window or front door. While Openlands was unable to gather volunteers for our TreeKeeper events, we were inspired by TreeKeepers across Chicagoland who spent time pruning, caring, and advocating for the tree canopy on their own time, safely.

Christian Cooper and the injustice he experienced in Central Park brought harsh truths into focus in society and the environmental field alike. We saw the importance

of public and natural land that is accessible, welcoming, and safe for all. Openlands continued ambitious land acquisition efforts across the region—from small pocket parks to connecting trails, corridors, and communities together. With equal commitment, Openlands engaged people with nature, especially in the Calumet Heritage Area. In June, we debuted the African American Heritage Water Trail, and in the fall added 50 new locations in the Calumet Region to the Get Outside Map, in partnership with the Calumet Collaborative.

As we continue to face the challenges of the pandemic, racial injustice, and climate change, we carry the hope that conservation instills in us, in the diverse landscapes of the Chicago Wilderness, and the people

taking individual and collective action for the health of our communities and world. Because as Openlands 2020 Conservation Leadership Award recipient, Dr. Debra Moskovits, reminds us, whether working in the remote villages of the Amazon or visiting Kankakee State Park, "it's really about connecting with people and the environment." Thank you for carrying that hope with us, and supporting our mission in 2020 and beyond.

Sincerely,

Carrie M. McNally

Carrie M. McNally
Outgoing Board Chair

Gerald W. Adelmann

Gerald W. Adelmann
President & CEO

LAKE COUNTY PROGRAMS

AREA: Lake County

SCALE: Property Owners > Incorporating conservation-friendly practices into their land

SCOPE OF INFLUENCE: Protecting and connecting essential habitats, large and small, across Lake County



25 FREE NATIVE TREES
planted in Waukegan
through the Chicago Region
Trees Initiative

72 PROPERTY OWNERS
engaged through Openlands
Lands in Harmony program

1,290 ACRES
in Liberty Prairie Reserve, monitored and conserved in
collaboration with private and public landowners



A TESTAMENT TO HEALING IN LAKE COUNTY

The Openlands Lakeshore Preserve is a testament to the power of healing through land stewardship. Heavily impacted by its past as a military base, Openlands took ownership of the preserve and opened it to the public in 2011 and continues to restore and protect this unique landscape.

Early in 2020 the preserve was affected by another global challenge—climate change. Severe storms battered the lakeshore and forced the closure of the beach trail. To mitigate damage of further erosion, Openlands responded by completing a shoreline

protection project in fall 2020. 1,500 tons of rock were brought to a 300 foot-long section of the Preserve's mile-long lakefront, in an attempt to protect the shoreline from severe storms in the future.

Over the course of the year, thousands of people flocked to the preserve to experience healing amidst the pandemic. Knowing the power of open space to heal, it was vital that the preserve remain open. Shifting focus, staff worked diligently to accommodate the significant increase in visitation and ensure the rare and fragile ecosystems that make the preserve unique remained protected.

◀ *Trillium blooms in the spring of 2020.*



▲ A view of the Openlands Lakeshore Preserve beach in summer 2020. Find over 400 other places to get outside in our region at openlands.org/getoutside.

Openlands Lakeshore Preserve has been a godsend this past year, giving us a place to escape the mundanity of being cooped up inside day in and day out. Every time we visit, we love to see how the seasons change the landscape, colors, and the lake, and learn more about the ravines, lakeshore, and natural history that make up this special place.

— TONY SANTIAGO
OPENLANDS LAKESHORE PRESERVE VISITOR

► Openlands Sustainable Landscapes Coordinator, Mary Fortmann listens to a property owner in Lake County pre-pandemic. Learn more about this work at openlands.org/landsinharmony.



How nature gave me **HOPE** in 2020...

I helped my cousin plant a garden with his grandchildren. We planted tomatoes in containers and created a new perennial garden bed with plants to attract butterflies and hummingbirds. In the fall we planted daffodils and I told them to watch for beautiful yellow flowers to appear in the spring. Seeing the excitement on their faces brought back childhood memories of me planting with my mother. So, I am hopeful because I know this is often how future gardeners, environmentalists, and stewards of the land are created.

—NADINE HARRIS CLARK, TREEKEEPER #677

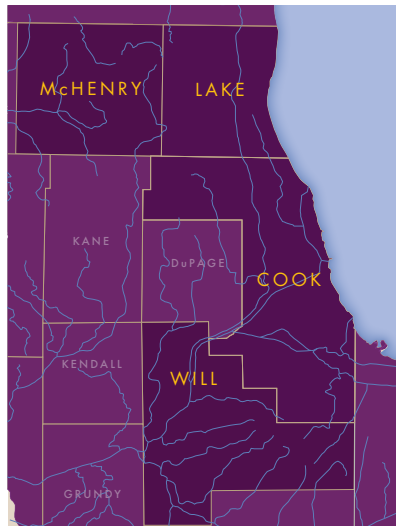


EDUCATION & SCHOOL PROGRAMS

AREA: Cook, Lake, McHenry, and Will Counties

SCALE: Students and teachers > Inspiring appreciation of and engagement in nature at all ages

SCOPE OF INFLUENCE: Improving access to green space and nature for youth, their families, and communities.



154 TEACHERS

across **30** schools took part in the Building School Garden workshops to integrate nature into their teaching

1,958 STUDENTS

engaged through Birds in my Neighborhood in Cook, Lake, and McHenry counties prior to the pandemic

25th

TRANSFORMATION of a Space to Grow schoolyard



EMPOWERING FOOD ACCESS IN CHICAGO

For the education team at Openlands, 2020 was about listening and responding to communities, whether it be taking care of school gardens while teachers, students, and staff learned virtually, pivoting the Birds in my Neighborhood program to an at-home virtual curriculum, or beginning the construction of five new Space to Grow schoolyards for kids to enjoy when it's safe.

And in that response, an exciting collaboration took root. In spring 2020, Openlands joined forces with nine local organizations for Chicago Grows Food, a collaborative project devoted to expanding and unifying the food growing community in Chicagoland.

Throughout the spring and summer, Openlands provided 297 grow kits to families at four of its school communities on the south and west sides, and together with partners made over 3,700 grow kits available to individuals and families experiencing hardship in 24 Chicago communities.

The project was formed in response to the challenges of the pandemic, yet grounded in principles that have driven Openlands since our founding: that communities deserve equitable and holistic health outcomes, and the equal opportunity to engage in safe and environmentally-conscious food production, land stewardship, and nutrition.

◀ Openlands Community Gardens Coordinator Danielle Russell bends down to give a Grow Kit to a family in Chicago.

As Chicago garden educators, we've collaborated like never before through this collective. Beyond the grow kits, we pooled our expertise to provide educational content and support in a powerful way. This collective is continuing to work at making gardening and access to nature more available, and strengthening our collective impact.

—DANIELLE RUSSELL, OPENLANDS SCHOOL GARDEN COORDINATOR



- ▲ Jen Idrovo, Community Outreach Coordinator (front left), and Lillian Holden, Education and Community Outreach Associate (right), pose with Chicago Grows Food collaborators before giving out grow kits in summer 2020. Learn more about the collaborative and what's next at chicagogrowsfood.org.
- ▲ Children play and garden at transformed schoolyards through the Space to Grow program (and we hope sometime again soon). Learn more about the Space to Grow program at spacetogrow.org.

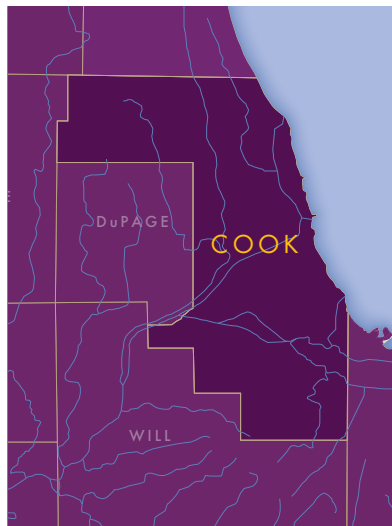
How nature gave me **HOPE** in 2020...

My community faces many challenges due to poverty and high crime in the area. I believe that having trees planted will give my neighbors hope and a reminder we matter, and we are not forgotten.

— JANET, BACK OF THE YARDS TREEPLANTERS GRANT RECIPIENT



URBAN FORESTRY PROGRAMS

AREA: Cook County**SCALE:**Volunteers > Community
Tree Plantings and Care**SCOPE OF INFLUENCE:**Community-driven tree
plantings lead to long term
care and health of the urban
forest across Cook County

500 TREES

planted through the Tree Planters
Grant by Openlands Forestry staff

160

TREEKEEPERS taught virtually

1,500+ MESSAGES

sent in support of the Urban Forestry Advisory Board



TRAINING A NEW GENERATION OF ARBORISTS IN CHICAGOLAND

For Openlands, training the next generation of arborists is not just about meeting the demand of a growing industry, it's about transforming the field into one that is more inclusive, diverse, and effective—especially in the face of climate change. Openlands seeks to do that each year with the Forestry Training Program. Through this year-long program, trainees gain 300 hours in professional development, in addition to being introduced to the dynamic career paths they can take in arboriculture. Since the beginning of the program in 2018, 100% of forestry trainees have obtained post-program employment in either the tree care industry or conservation field.

The program's success and the extensive need for more diverse and trained candidates in the arboriculture field

has driven Openlands to advance the Forestry Training Program into a 3-year Arborist Registered Apprenticeship that will launch in Spring 2021 and is already being looked at as a model for diversifying the arboriculture field nationally.

About his time as a trainee in 2020, Tonatiu Rodriguez reflected, "This program has been super beneficial because it gave me insight into what's to come as far as different jobs and a career, and I got to meet all sorts of different people involved in the community and also in the industry. It helped create some of those initial networks I can use later on in my career. Ending the program was a little bittersweet, but I'm looking forward to my next chapter."

I got to meet all sorts of different people involved in the community and also in the industry. It helped create some of those initial networks I can use later on in my career.

—TONATIU RODRIGUEZ, OPENLANDS 2020 FORESTRY TRAINEEE



- ▲ Openlands' 2020 Forestry Trainees Tonatiu Rodriguez, Pete Zubek, and Mikaila Davis walk with Allie Preble, Assistant Crew Lead. Learn more about the new Arborist Registered Apprenticeship Program at openlands.org/apprenticeship.
- ▲ Community tree plantings that took place pre-pandemic. Learn more about Openlands TreePlanters Grants at openlands.org/treeplantersgrant.

How nature gave me **HOPE** in 2020...

In 2020 I found that nature, in any form, became essential for my physical and mental well being...I turned to nature to help with the anxiety and stress of it all. I went on more hikes and runs than I had done in quite some time (with new 4-legged companion, Clyde), went on more bike rides, and spent more time playing in the yard and tending to the garden with my children. When the seasons changed we still made every excuse to get outside....We all grew to appreciate nature quite a bit more.

— LIZ BOECKMANN, OPENLANDS DONOR



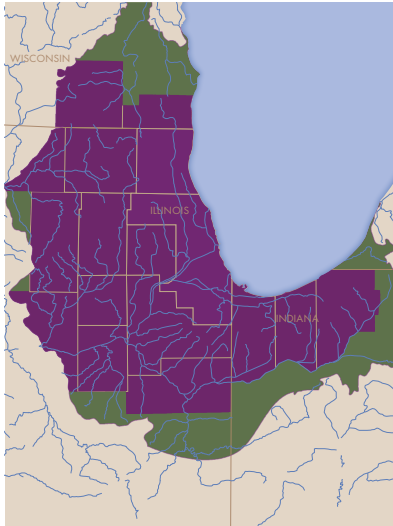
LAND PRESERVATION

AREA: Regional**SCALE:**

Dynamic partnerships >
Strategic regional land protection
that crosses geopolitical
boundaries

SCOPE OF INFLUENCE:

Ensuring clean air and water,
public access to open space,
and climate resilience



9 RESTORATIONS

complete or underway in
Will, McHenry, Lake, and
Cook Counties

30 PARTNERS
engaged in land acquisition

581 ACRES

protected through land acquisition and conservation easements



DEEPENING PARTNERSHIPS AT HACKMATAK NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Almost ten years since the designation of Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge and over 1,500 acres and counting protected, the partnership to revive this vital landscape was deepened through the restoration of it. In 2020, Openlands worked closely with the Friends of Hackmatack, McHenry County Conservation District, US Fish & Wildlife Service, and many others to coordinate restoration efforts throughout the refuge.

One particular parcel centered on the restoration of a 6-acre oak savanna. The area, near Richmond-Burton High School, gave Friends and Openlands the opportunity

to safely engage the school's students who had never participated in restoration, together with seasoned volunteers who have vast experience at the refuge.

The work at Hackmatack represents much of Openlands land protection work, where regional strategy and dynamic partnerships break pace to bring nature close to every resident. Whether it's a small lot that adds park space in Chicago, or in a large landscape like Hackmatack, Openlands protects land where it will have the most impact—for residents's health, community benefit, and climate resilience.



Working with Openlands to coordinate restoration efforts at Tamarack Farms parcel, a wonderful sense of camaraderie developed and molded these disparate groups together. Perhaps it was the need to safely seek solace in the outdoors during a pandemic, or perhaps it was the sense of belonging that kept bringing people back to the work of restoring the earth...Working at Hackmatack, it's amazing how many people, from volunteers new to restoration to hard core conservationists, understand the long term vision and buy into the 'for tomorrow faith'—that the small steps in this refuge will build a better future for all.

—NANCY WILLAMSON AND STEVEN BYERS, FRIENDS OF HACKMATACK

◀ Volunteers from Friends of Hackmatack and the local community surrounding Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge pose for a photo after a restoration day.

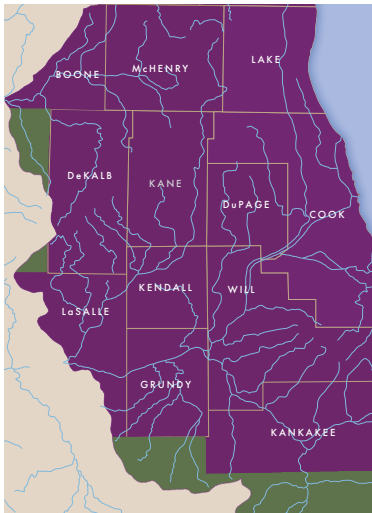
How nature gave me **HOPE** in 2020...

I saw lots of relaxed picnics on the grass. Couples on leisurely walks. Friends bumping into each other and chatting. My hope is that 2020 helped Chicogoans rediscover the simple pleasure of spending time in a city park.

— KATE COVEY, OPENLANDS DONOR



WATER TRAILS

AREA: Northeastern Illinois**SCALE:**Strategic Regional Plans >
Coordinated local action for
rivers, lakes, and streams**SCOPE OF INFLUENCE:**Improving aquatic habitat
and water quality throughout
Northeastern Illinois

20 SITES SURVEYED
for the Little Calumet River
Conservation Action Plan

11 PARTNERS
engaged to create the
African American Heritage
Water Trail

100 MUSSELS

tagged on the north branch of the Nippersink for a
collaborative mussel monitoring project

AMPLIFYING BLACK HISTORY ALONG THE LITTLE CALUMET RIVER

Hazel Johnson. "Chicago's Finest Marina." Bishop Louis Henry Ford. Robbins History Museum. These are some of the people and places that contribute to the vibrant culture along Little Calumet River, past and present. The African American Heritage Water Trail traverses the Little Calumet River and the Cal-Sag Channel between the Forest Preserves of Cook County's Beaubien Woods and the Village of Robbins, and explores the diverse stories of African Americans that made the Calumet area what it is today.

The collaboration to highlight the history along the trail was possible through leaders in the community like Tyrone Haymore, the Co-Founder and Director of the Robbins History Museum, who with Larry McClellan of the Little Calumet River Underground Railroad Project

and Openlands, spearheaded the vision and brought to light the sometimes little known histories in and around the river. Deloris Lucas, local wellness advocate and founder of We Keep You Rollin' (Bike & Wellness Group), brought the biking and wellness experiences she regularly hosts in the community to the waterfront and through the neighborhoods to activate and engage people in this rich history of the water trail.

Openlands' continuing work in the Calumet region builds on decades of leadership in engaging diverse communities on the importance of water quality and the health of our waterways. It also builds on decades of planning, from the development of the Northeastern Illinois Greenways Plan, the first metropolitan greenways plan of its kind, to today's African American Heritage Water Trail.

◀ The site of the Robbins Airport is one of the significant places along the African American Heritage Water Trail. The airport and flight school, co-founded by John Robinson (left) played an important role in U.S. aviation history as the first airport built, owned, and operated by and for African Americans.



We're next door to Lake Michigan, but not very many people realize we're close to the Little Calumet River, and the value that it can bring. This trail will begin to highlight some of the excellent assets we already have.

— DELORIS LUCAS,
WE KEEP YOU ROLLIN' (BIKE & WELLNESS GROUP)

- ◀ Paddlers under Major Taylor Bridge. Experience the history highlighted by visiting paddleillinoiswatertrails.org, and learn about the Robbins History Museum at robbinshistorymuseum.org.
- ▲ Bikers ride along the trail with We Keep You Rollin' (Bike & Wellness Group). Follow them at facebook.com/catchtheroll.
- ◀ Openlands' Aquatic Ecologist, Laura Barghusen and colleagues at the Shedd Aquarium tag mussels along Nippersink Creek for ongoing mussel monitoring.

How nature gave me **HOPE** in 2020...

In 2020, as many of my personal activities and business meetings moved to outdoor places, I experienced first-hand how critical it is for all people to have access to nature where they live, a constant source of joy and wonder and calm.

— JOANN SEAGREN, INCOMING OPENLANDS BOARD CHAIR

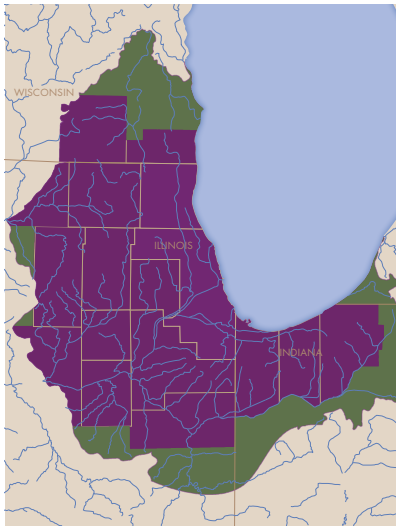


POLICY & ADVOCACY

AREA: Regional

SCALE:
Supporting smart local, state, and federal policy > Building advocates for nature

SCOPE OF INFLUENCE:
Protecting land and water in our region and nation for generations to come



50+ BILLS
proposed, supported, or helped block on the local, state, and federal level

100 ACRES
permanently protected at North Park Village Nature Center

3,000+ MESSAGES
sent to representatives advocating for environmental legislation



ADVOCATING FOR SMART GROWTH THROUGHOUT THE REGION

The path to permanent land protection is at times a long and complicated one, and at the end of 2020 Openlands celebrated a long awaited accomplishment with the North Park Village community. In September, under the leadership of Alderman Samantha Nugent and Mayor Lori Lightfoot, city council passed an ordinance that gave North Park Village Nature Center permanent protection through Openlands conservation easement with the City of Chicago.

Openlands also sought to protect Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie and the surrounding communities by joining a lawsuit against the City of Joliet to stop the damaging and ill-sited NorthPoint intermodal facility,

advocating instead for a land-use plan that complements Midewin and the surrounding nationally significant cultural, environmental, and agricultural resources in the area.

And in a year when our nation looked to nature for comfort, Openlands, in coordination with many environmental organizations across the country, worked towards the successful passage of the Great American Outdoors Act. The most significant federal legislation passed in a generation, the bill will invest billions of dollars into overdue repairs and maintenance of federal lands like Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge, Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie, and the Indiana Dunes National Park.

◀ A biker at Deer Grove, part of the Cook County Forest Preserves. Learn more about the Next Century Conservation Plan at openlands.org/nextcentury.



The North Park Village campus encompasses beautiful green space, parks, trails, a waterfall, and senior housing. The work of preserving this land has been an abiding priority for me since I took office and has been a priority for the community since 1989. The passage of this easement into perpetuity is incredibly meaningful to me and for all who enjoy the North Park Village.

—SAMANTHA NUGENT, ALDERMAN OF THE 39TH WARD

- ▲ One of the many beautiful trails at North Park Village Nature Center. Find over 400 other places to get outside in our region at openlands.org/getoutside.
- ▶ An American Bullfrog rests in the water and a mother and daughter explore the North Park Village Nature Center in fall 2020. Learn more about its protection story at openlands.org/northpark.



Our work is about raising the threshold of hope.

—GEORGE OVERTON, OPENLANDS CO-FOUNDER



2020 FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Revenue

Grants and Contracts	\$ 2,807,446
Contributions	\$ 3,075,808
Land Donations	954,208
Other	655,460

Total	\$ 7,492,922
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Expenses

Program Services	\$ 3,829,853
Restoration Activities	1,063,392
Management and Administrative	609,960
Fundraising	752,719

Total	\$ 6,255,924
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Change in Net Assets Without Donor Restrictions	\$ 1,236,998
Net Assets Without Donor Restrictions, Beginning of Year	5,085,434
Net Assets Without Donor Restrictions, End of Year	6,322,432
Net Assets With Donor Restrictions	24,027,308
Total Net Assets*	\$30,349,740

* This balance includes \$20M in land held for conservation and resources for land conservation activities.



WITH GRATITUDE TO OUR DONORS

As many took comfort in Nature this past year, Openlands gained a renewed hope from you, our loyal donors.

Thank you for your belief in our work and commitment to our mission!

THANK YOU TO OUR GENEROUS SUPPORTERS WHO HELPED TO FULFILL OPENLANDS’ MISSION OF CONNECTING PEOPLE TO NATURE WITH DONATIONS BETWEEN OCTOBER 1, 2019 AND SEPTEMBER 30, 2020.

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Governments, Organizations**

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