


# **THE VALUE** *of* **NATURE**

*Openlands Annual Report 2022*



A photograph of a bright blue sky filled with soft, white and yellow-tinted clouds. The clouds are scattered across the frame, with some appearing more prominent than others. The overall mood is serene and natural.

*Our ability to perceive quality in nature begins, as in art, with the pretty. It expands through successive stages of the beautiful to values as yet uncaptured by language.*

ALDO LEOPOLD



Dear Friends,

Nature plays a crucial role in every aspect of our lives. It cleans our air and water, puts food on our table, and improves our health. Nature also enriches our lives, providing balm from the stress of our everyday lives, creating cultural identity and community bonds between us, and inspiring and supplying the innovation that drives our economy. Even as the threat of the pandemic has subsided, people in our region have continued to visit forest preserves, parks, and open spaces at historic levels.

For 60 years, Openlands' success has been driven by ensuring everyone has access to nature, and in turn, values nature. As one of the country's first and largest metropolitan conservation organizations, Openlands works through on-the-ground conservation, engaging people of all ages in nature through Birds in My Neighborhood<sup>®</sup>, TreePlanters Grant<sup>®</sup>, and Lands in Harmony<sup>®</sup> programs. We ensure nature is close to home by connecting the web of green and blue across our region—conserving land for trail connections, large landscapes, and local parks and ensuring the health of our streams, rivers, lakes, and wetlands. Finally, we work collaboratively with conservation and community partners to ensure the protection of and investment in nature through our local, state, and national policy work.

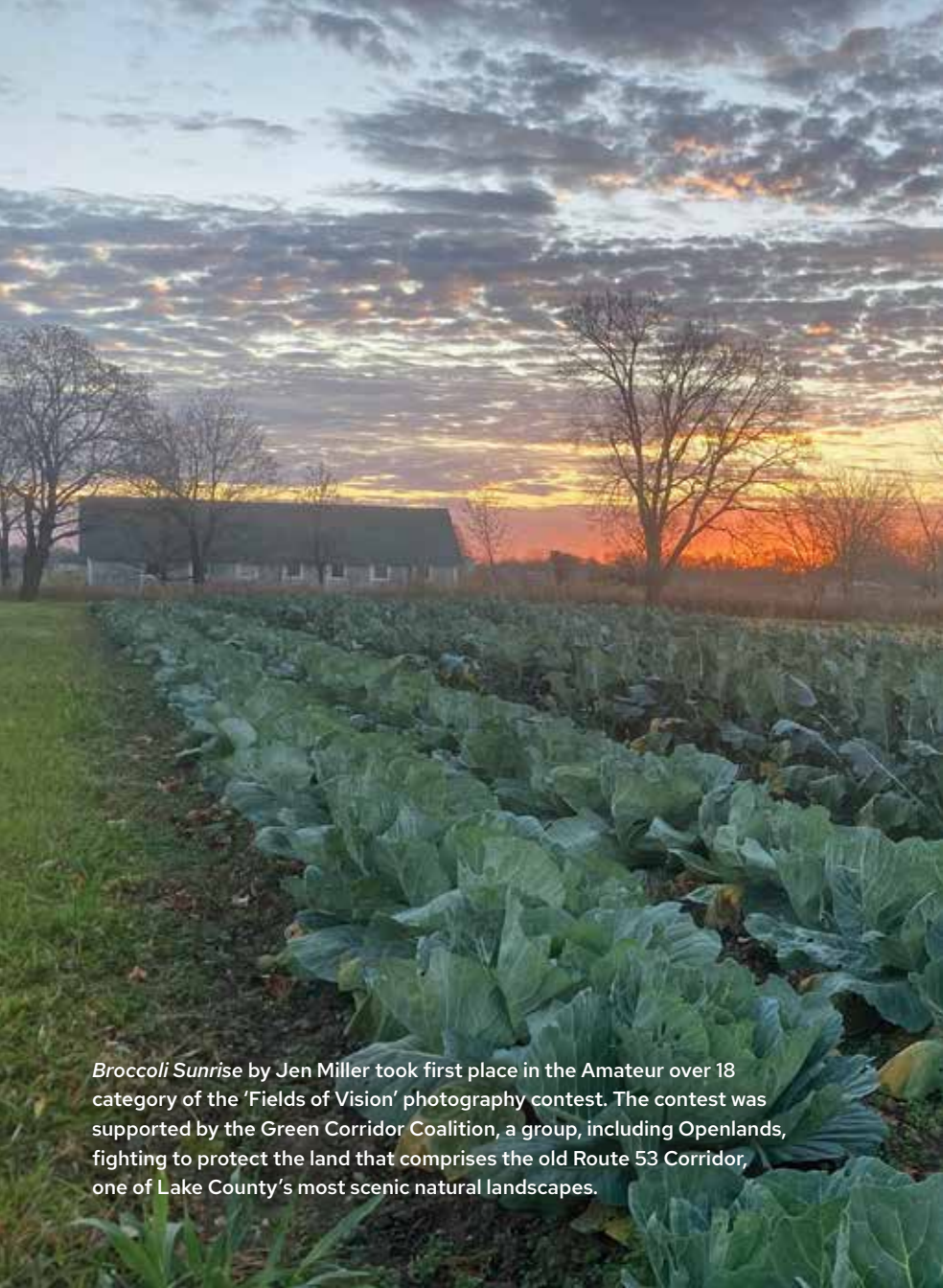
At 70,000 acres and counting, we see our impact through the people, communities, and the region we serve. And throughout this report, you'll see examples of the lives touched by nature and your support. From completing our 34th Space to Grow Schoolyard in the Calumet Heights neighborhood to adding hundreds of acres to Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge, Openlands works to advance nature-based solutions to climate change, improve the health and well-being of communities, and create a more verdant region for all. Thank you for your generous and vital support.

My best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jerry Adelman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jerry Adelman

President & CEO of Openlands



*Broccoli Sunrise* by Jen Miller took first place in the Amateur over 18 category of the 'Fields of Vision' photography contest. The contest was supported by the Green Corridor Coalition, a group, including Openlands, fighting to protect the land that comprises the old Route 53 Corridor, one of Lake County's most scenic natural landscapes.



Dear Friends,

2022 was, in many ways, the year nations and societies across the globe began to understand the value of nature. Governments, including the United States, began to decipher how we can account for the ecosystem services nature provides and the cost of its destruction. Federal and local investments, like the Vote Yes for Clean Air, Clean Water, and Wildlife referendum, which passed with overwhelming voter support, deliver millions of dollars to bring our land and water to good health. These investments ensure cleaner air, healthier communities, and more protected habitat for wildlife to thrive.

But nature's value goes beyond the balance sheet. Our everyday actions, big and small, show how we value our environment. In this report, you'll see the countless ways people throughout the region devoted their time, energy, talent, and treasure to nature in 2022. From advocates envisioning a new greenway trail in Lake County to apprentices learning the arboriculture skills that will lead to a flourishing career in Forestry, Openlands moved people to act for nature.

Marshall Johnson, Chief Conservation Officer at Audubon, said it best at Openlands Annual Luncheon as part of his keynote address. "We need big investment and big ideas, but it's the little individual acts done daily which really add up. We need to tell the truth and have authentic conversations across communities because the largeness of our ideas must still happen time and time again. In villages and ranches in Chile and prairies across the American west, many small conservation efforts come together across this vast landscape to produce big change."

Thank you for all the little and big ways you contribute to Openlands and nature in our region and world.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JoAnn Seagren', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

JoAnn Seagren

Chair, Openlands Board of Directors









## NATURE DRIVES JOBS.

A feeling of confidence. That was the key takeaway from the six Apprentices in the second class of the Openlands Arborist Registered Apprenticeship, who reported having gained a lot over their first year in this 3-year training program. The program is the first and only registered apprenticeship in Illinois, and has apprentices learn from Openlands in the first year before transitioning to a partner tree care company for their last two years. The 2022 cohort of apprentices gained over 2,000 hours of on-the-job training and classroom learning from Openlands and its partners, from taking the TreeKeepers® Course and planting trees in communities across Chicagoland to learning specific skills like tree climbing with the Illinois Arborists Association. Meanwhile, 2021 apprentice Lisa Mende gained new skills and professional experience through her secondary employer, Cantigny Park.

Learn more at [openlands.org/ARA](https://openlands.org/ARA)



Deron Davis, Arborist Registered Apprentice, and Tom Ebeling, Community Arborist for Openlands, smile with neighborhood volunteers after planting a tree in Gage Park on Chicago's Southwest Side.







2022 Apprentice Ray Bizot practices chainsaw skills at Beaubien Woods Forest Preserve.



Erica Nanton, Community Organizer at St. Sabina's Church and Openlands partner, welcomes attendees of an African American Heritage Water Trail event in Summer 2022 at Beaubien Woods Forest Preserve.





## NATURE ENERGIZES COMMUNITY INVESTMENT.

As one of the *New York Times*' "52 Places for a Changed World" in 2022, the Little Calumet River holds historical, cultural, and ecological significance in our region. Driven by community partners, Openlands works to ensure sustainable and equitable investments into the Altgeld Gardens and Golden Gate neighborhoods along its banks. This area has a storied past including being a part of the Underground Railroad, the site of heavy industrial pollution, and the birth of the Environmental Justice movement. With partners like People for Community Recovery, We Keep You Rollin' (Bike and Wellness Group), and more, Openlands coordinated efforts to acquire and restore land along the Little Calumet River. Working with the Field Museum and the Forest Preserves of Cook County to install a community gathering space and restore 20 acres of prairie, Openlands made strategic investments at Beaubien Woods Forest Preserve, the site that launches the African American Heritage Water Trail. Openlands continued work with the City of Chicago, NeighborSpace, and community partners to create public open space along the river. Once transferred, these spaces will create opportunities for urban farming, cultural storytelling, historical and ecological education, and increased community access to the river.

Learn more at [openlands.org/CAP](https://openlands.org/CAP)



Fatimah Al-Nurridin, *right*, and volunteer June Webb, *left*, scouting, flagging and pulling sweet clover at Beaubien Woods Forest Preserve.



A model for a gathering space to be built at the Beaubien Woods boat launch. The collaborative design process was led by a community curatorial committee facilitated by the Field Museum. Model by artist Christine Perri.





Students traverse the Little Calumet River in Kickapoo Woods for an Openlands paddling event in June 2022.



Grass pink orchid is a state-endangered plant that grows mainly in Northern Illinois.



## **NATURE PROMOTES HEALTH AND WELL-BEING.**

As Chicago's regional land trust, Openlands connects and energizes the region through strategic collaboration and local partnerships that protect land, water, and wildlife. In 2022, Openlands transferred hundreds of acres to regional partners in Lake, McHenry, and Cook counties for the public to access and enjoy for generations.

One such acquisition was the Alden Sedge Meadow, an ecologically significant parcel strategically located in the vicinity of Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge. Openlands joined the Illinois Audubon Society and The Land Conservancy of McHenry County to acquire and transfer the almost 77-acre site to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. The Department had sought the parcel for many years because it supports several elements of the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan. The site has high-quality wetland habitat and several state-listed species, including grass pink orchid, Blanding's turtle, snake-mouth, pitcher plant, and common bog arrow grass. Adjacent to McHenry County Conservation District's Alden Sedge Meadow, the land offers meaningful trail connections within Hackmatack for people to enjoy the natural beauty of the area for generations to come.

{**LAND CONSERVATION** *continued*}

Openlands transferred 270 acres to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to be a part of Hackmatack in 2022, including vital stream corridors, oak savannahs, wetlands, and prairies. Since its inception in 2012, partners have acquired 2,343 acres in the Refuge, with Openlands protecting 1,393 of those acres.

To visit Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge,  
visit [openlands.org/HNWR](https://openlands.org/HNWR).

The Blanding's turtle is semi-aquatic, dwelling in relatively quiet waters of bogs, marshes, small streams, and sedge meadows. The fragmentation of grassland habitat has endangered the species in North America.





Openlands and Shedd Aquarium staff do annual monitoring of mussels at North Branch Nippersink Creek in Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge, an Openlands property. Monitoring helps determine stream quality and ensure the preservation of important mussel populations in northeastern Illinois.









## NATURE ENCOURAGES HUMAN CONNECTION.

In 2022, Openlands completed the first phase of green schoolyards investment in Chicago, designing and constructing the last four out of thirty-four schoolyards with the communities. Together with Healthy Schools Campaign and our capital partners, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District, the City of Chicago Department of Water Management, and Chicago Public Schools, Space to Grow's multi-pronged approach to school greening is delivering nothing short of a culture change. The program, which centers on the transformation of schoolyards, works with schools whose students rarely play outside to transform them into schools that play, teach, and grow food and native plants on their grounds. Hosting workshops with the school and residential community, Space to Grow works with communities that once suffered from costly basement floodings and a lack of open space to understand how a Space to Grow schoolyard protects against urban flooding and actively utilizes the schoolyard for recreation and relaxation. And to ensure the longevity of the schools and

the natural value they provide, Openlands and Healthy Schools Campaign work with the city to understand the benefits of and invest in green stormwater infrastructure as a critical natural climate solution.

Space to Grow is an example of Openlands' passionate commitment to people and nature. While Space to Grow's 34 schoolyards comprise around 75 acres, these small but mighty landscapes serve over 13,000 Chicago Public School students and faculty, and tens of thousands more residents who live nearby through flood mitigation, access to recreational opportunities, and gardening.

Learn more at [openlands.org/space](https://openlands.org/space)

Previous Page: Boys play on a swing of their new schoolyard at the ribbon cutting ceremony for Robert A. Black Magnet School in the fall. Right: A volunteer places vegetable plants in a Space to Grow bag for community members to take at an Ashe Elementary School volunteer planting day in spring 2022.









Students run on their new field at the Mays Elementary ribbon cutting ceremony in fall 2022.



Volunteers construct a small greenhouse at Ashe Elementary School, improving their already existing Space to Grow schoolyard as part of Openlands' and Healthy Schools Campaign's ongoing support.







## NATURE IS A CLIMATE SOLUTION.

Openlands and partners achieved significant conservation wins that will support Chicago Wilderness's Green Vision—a plan that centers on nature-based climate solutions towards 2030:

**Chicago Museum Campus.** In Chicago, Openlands helped develop a new plan to continue to bring nature back to the Museum Campus. The report “Where Worlds Connect” calls for increased recreational and restored natural space, creating an urban nature retreat that educates through integrated stories of people and the rich environment in which Chicagoans live. It also proposes repurposing the Meig’s Field Terminal, now a Park District facility, to create the Great Lakes Climate and Biodiversity Lab, which could partner with the nearby museums to study climate change, resiliency, and other issues facing the lakefront. The city, museums, and park district are working to implement many of the recommendations, including native landscaping throughout the Museum Campus.

Left and next page: Renderings by SOM of the proposed rewilding of Museum Campus. From the plan “Where Worlds Connect”, spring 2022.



amphitheater

gameday plaza

pedestrian bridge

north



gateway

solidarity drive

harbor walk

play park

great lakes climate lab

rewilding northerly island

eco island

**Lake County Greenway.** In Lake County, Openlands helped drive the Illinois Route 53 Expansion Land Alternative Use Task Force to envision a new greenway. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to create a 1,100-acre linear park and trail system, linking trails for thousands of people in Lake County and the region, and providing a critical pathway for wildlife to migrate. The land is home to old-growth oak woodlands and undisturbed wetlands. The Task Force ended 2022 recommending the transfer of land to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and continues to work in 2023 to engage the community in the vision for the park.

**Cook County Referendum.** With partners in Cook County, Openlands led the successful passage of the Vote Yes for Clean Air, Clean Water, and Wildlife referendum, with 69% of the vote. The successful referendum passage will invest \$45 million in new funding to support the Forest Preserve of Cook County to enact The Next Century Conservation Plan, which will double restoration efforts, acquire 2,000 additional acres, and increase conservation job training and opportunities.

*Majestic Sandhill Crane* by Cheryl Keegan took third place in the “Fields of Vision” photography contest. The contest was supported by the Green Corridor Coalition, a group formed to protect the land that comprises the old Route 53 Corridor, one of Lake County’s most scenic natural landscapes.









**Volunteers play at Dan Ryan Woods Forest Preserve. This image was part of the Vote Yes for Clean Air, Clean Water, and Wildlife campaign, which successfully passed in November 2022.**

**Federal Gains.** Federally, Openlands advocated for nature-based investments in the Inflation Reduction Act, passed in August, and the protection of Conservation Easements through the Charitable Conservation Easement Program Integrity Act, and helped gain critical investment in Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge for our partner, Friends of Hackmatack.

Openlands policy and planning initiatives work at dynamic scales, from on-the-ground advocacy to strategic assistance and affect millions of people and tens of thousands of acres of natural landscape across the region.

To learn more about Chicago Wilderness' Green Vision and how organizations like Openlands are contributing to it, visit [openlands.org/CWgreen](https://openlands.org/CWgreen).

Winter along the Nippersink Creek, in Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge.



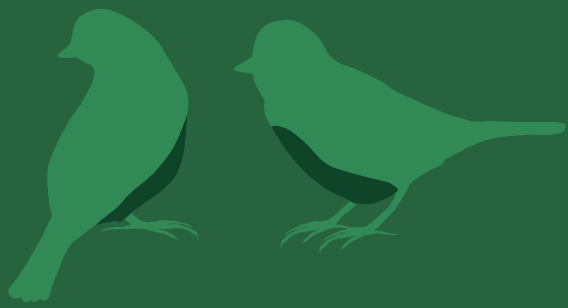




## A NATURAL EVOLUTION: ENSURING OPENLANDS CONTINUED IMPACT

Openlands made significant strides in 2022 to strengthen its human and financial resources, a pillar of its Strategic Plan. In the fall, Openlands launched a refreshed organizational identity, including an updated brand and forthcoming website. The new identity underscores Openlands' history and communicates its diverse and lasting impact across the region. The evolved brand identity represents Openlands' stewardship and innovation across a wide variety of our work. Depending on the application, color, and context, the logo mark reflects the trees, trail, land, and waterway systems of northeastern Illinois and the surrounding region that Openlands protects, while the color palettes embody the array of bold and elegant hues brought to life in each season in our landscapes.

Learn more about the evolution of Openlands' identity over the course of our 60 years at [openlands.org/evolution](https://openlands.org/evolution).





**REVENUE**

Grants and Contracts	\$ 3,278,782
Contributions	2,324,458
Other (a)	1,171,693
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Total	\$ 6,774,933

**EXPENSES**

Program Services	\$ 4,410,714
Restoration	552,251
Management and General	641,575
Fundraising	795,184
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Total	\$ 6,399,724

Increase in Net Assets Without Donor Restrictions	\$ 375,209
Net Assets Without Donor Restrictions, Beginning of Year	7,114,541
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Net Assets Without Donor Restrictions, End of Year	\$ 7,489,750
Net Assets With Donor Restrictions	27,222,463
<hr/>	
Total Net Assets (b)	\$ 34,712,213

(a) This balance includes \$982,877 from an Employee Retention Credit extended as part of relief efforts related to COVID-19.

(b) This balance includes \$18M comprised of land held for conservation and resources for land conservation activities.

*Thank you to our generous funding partners who helped to fulfill Openlands' mission of connecting people to nature over the past year.*



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**\$50,000 – \$99,999**

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*The cover art was inspired by the abacus, an ancient tool invented to keep tally and perform calculations.*