



What we've learned

Openlands Annual Report 2023

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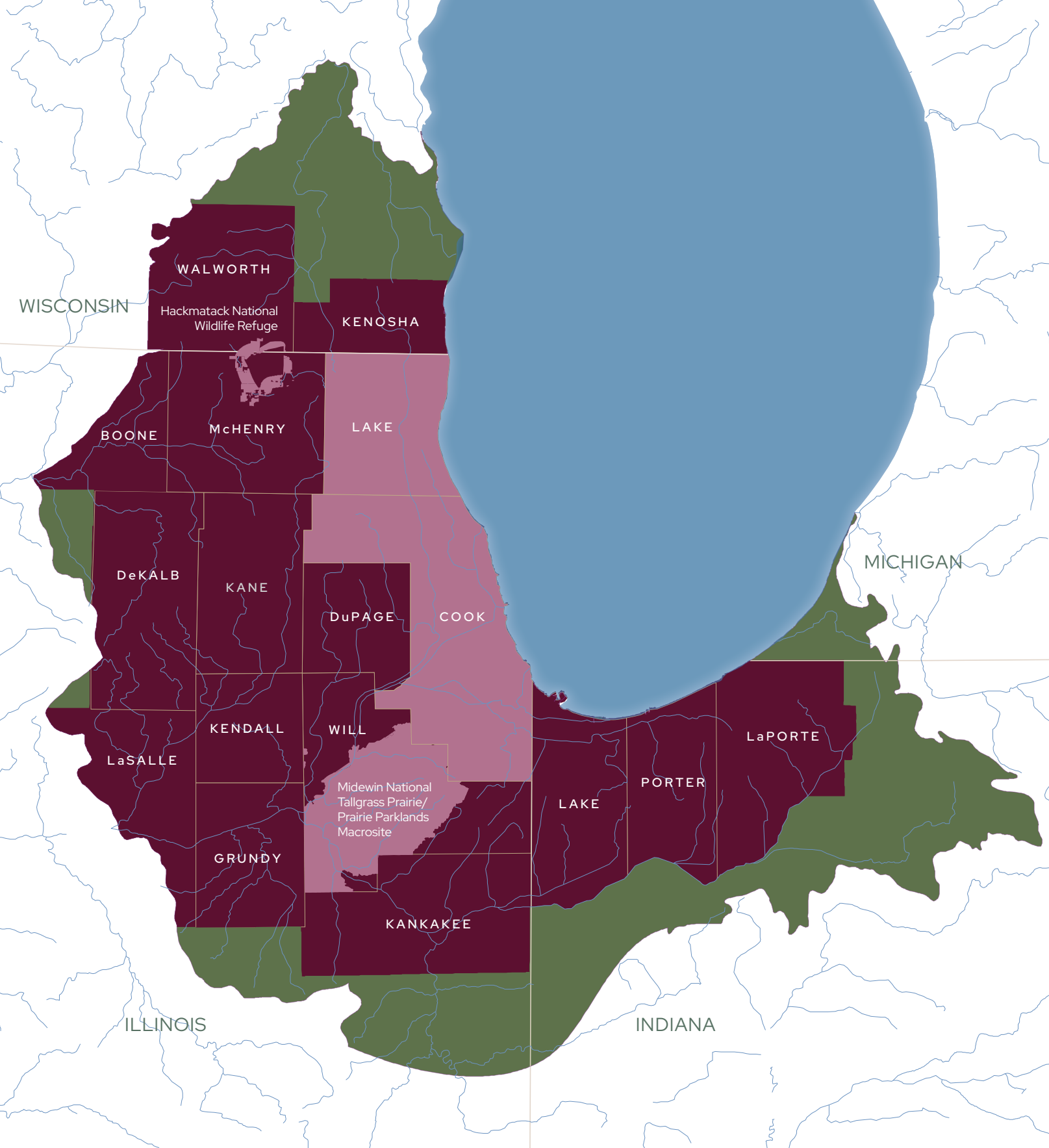
years

Conserving nature for life.

Founded in 1963, Openlands protects the natural and open spaces of northeastern Illinois and the surrounding region to ensure cleaner air and water, protect natural habitats and wildlife, and help balance and enrich our lives.

Where we work

- Openlands Service Area
- Openlands Priority Landscape
- Chicago Wilderness Boundary



LETTER FROM THE CEO

Dear Friends,

Openlands and its generations of leaders have long been guardians of nature in our region. I am deeply honored to assume the role of President and CEO of Openlands upon its 60th anniversary and excited to lead this venerable organization into the future.

“Conserving nature for life” exemplifies our ethos that this work is ongoing.

Openlands believes that conservation is not a one-and-done activity but rather a perennial commitment that takes dedication, adaptability, and expertise. Our tagline, conserving nature for life, exemplifies our ethos that this work is ongoing. I am humbled and deeply grateful to many people who have made our mission their life’s work. Over the course of these six decades, we have honed our own conservation toolkit that informs how we approach opportunities and challenges. These essential building blocks encapsulate the diverse strategies we use to create change and foster progress.

This annual report is organized around these core areas of expertise, providing a comprehensive view of how they have been put to use over the years to achieve milestone conservation wins and lay the groundwork for our endeavors today. Looking at examples from 2023, we showcase how these building blocks can be stacked and combined to achieve success in land preservation, restoration, community activation, and advocacy.

Since joining Openlands, I have seen our tradition of leadership, innovation, and collaboration in action. I had the pleasure of meeting with many of Openlands’ supporters and partners who have contributed to our mission. I am confident in the foundation we’ve built together and optimistic about what our collective efforts can achieve for the future of our region’s wide variety of natural lands and the people who enjoy them.

With gratitude,



Michael S. Davidson
President & CEO, Openlands



Above: Openlands staff, partners, and supporters attend the 2023 Openlands Annual Luncheon, which commemorates the 60th anniversary of the organization.

Below: Openlands staff gather for a group photo with Gerald W. Adelmann, President Emeritus, and Michael S. Davidson, President and CEO, at the Annual Luncheon.

LETTER FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

Dear Friends,

I am incredibly honored to chair the Board of Directors of Openlands during a milestone year for this remarkable organization. This annual report is a record of our achievements and a testament to the enduring strength of Openlands, forged over 60 years.

George Overton, who co-founded Openlands said, “our role is to raise the threshold of hope.” Openlands stands tall today thanks to the legions of board, staff, volunteers, partners, and supporters who hold this tenet as our guiding star. *We are Openlands.* The result is an organization that boldly advances nature-based solutions to improve the health of our environment, enhance the well-being of communities, and create a more verdant region. Together, we are stronger than ever and well-positioned to provide continued critical leadership in conservation.

We believe
that
nature is vital
to all people.

Jerry Adelmann, who led Openlands for 35 years, remarked in his keynote address at the 2023 Openlands Annual Luncheon, “We measure our success as much by the number of lives enriched as the number of acres saved.” This powerful sentiment sets the stage for the Nature for All campaign, Openlands’ most ambitious and hopeful campaign to date. We believe that nature is vital to all people. The Nature for All campaign aims to increase access to nature for people, for now, and for generations to come. We encourage you to explore the campaign updates section of our annual report to learn more about our progress and ways to get involved.

In 2023, the entire board and staff of Openlands welcomed Michael Davidson as our new President and CEO. Michael, who is a strong multidisciplinary leader, is well-poised to spearhead the next chapter of our organization.

Join us to protect our region’s economic, cultural, and ecological future in the face of global challenges. With Openlands’ legacy of impact at the regional and national levels, we stand ready. Together, let’s continue raising the threshold of hope.

In partnership,

JoAnn Seagren
Chair, Openlands’ Board of Directors



Building blocks
of conservation

Over Openlands’ 60-year history, Openlands has created a unique toolkit for conservation based on five diverse building blocks: partnering for greater impact, planning and policymaking for systemic change, protecting important landscapes, delivering technical expertise in ecology and restoration, and igniting advocacy momentum. What makes this model work is our ability to leverage, mix, and match these tools strategically to ensure an adaptable approach to conservation.

Partnering for greater impact

Openlands staff and partners gather for the ribbon-cutting ceremony of Prairie Boat, a new gathering space at the Forest Preserves of Cook County's Beaubien Woods. The Field Museum, with funding from Illinois Coastal Management, organized a community curatorial committee to create goals and choose designs for this space. Artist Christine Perri designed and built Prairie Boat with funds granted to Openlands from the Walder Foundation.

Challenges in conservation require collaboration and Openlands is committed to building and strengthening a diverse array of partners to advance our mission. Partnerships enable fellow conservation organizations to pool resources and amplify our collective impact. To achieve the scope and reach of our work, we rely on a robust network of partners. At times, we lead initiatives, and at other times, we play a supporting role to our partners. We engage with public partners such as forest preserve districts, park districts, school districts, and those at the city, regional, state, and federal levels to navigate the complex regulatory landscapes and enact meaningful policy changes. We also rely on community partners to involve us in work that is relevant and uplifts and reflects neighborhood assets.

**250+ partner
organizations
in the greater
Chicago
metropolitan
area**





Planning and
policymaking
for systemic
change

Openlands serves as a pivotal force in shaping policy and planning decisions within the intricate geo-political landscape of the greater Chicago metropolitan area. This region, spanning three states, faces unique challenges with more local units of government than any other metropolitan area in the nation. Often, land use decisions occur within municipal boundaries without a comprehensive coordinating perspective on their regional impacts on ecological health, climate resilience, and biodiversity. Openlands serves as a lynchpin in taking a comprehensive approach to the entire region by fostering collaborations among organizations, government entities, and the public.

**The Vote Yes
referendum
victory will
raise \$1.1 billion
over 25 years
for the FPCC**

Children playing on the Des Plaines River Trail at the River Trail Nature Center, Forest Preserves of Cook County (FPCC).



Protecting important landscapes

Openlands safeguards both public and private lands through property acquisition and conservation easements. As an accredited land trust with the Land Trust Alliance, Openlands adheres to the highest national standards for excellence and conservation permanence. Our strategic approach involves identifying and purchasing key properties, expanding protected areas, and ensuring their permanent preservation as open spaces, wildlife habitats, and trails. By acquiring and transferring land to public entities like forest preserve districts and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Openlands actively prevents the degradation of ecologically rich areas. Additionally, we support private landowners in protecting significant natural features through conservation easements. This helps further secure landscapes. Openlands remains vigilant against ongoing threats to land, water, and wildlife, collaborating with partners across geographies to oppose projects that could have detrimental impacts on our invaluable natural resources.

A herd of bison grazing at the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie, a priority landscape for Openlands advocacy and protection efforts.

**70,000+
acres of land
protected**

A photograph showing four people engaged in restoration work in a wetland. Two people are in the water, one using a bucket. Another person is kneeling on the muddy bank, and a fourth person stands nearby. The background is a dense forest of tall trees.

Delivering technical expertise in ecology and restoration

Openlands provides vital technical expertise in ecology and restoration to secure and expand diverse habitats throughout the greater Chicago metropolitan area. This region boasts exceptionally varied native vegetation, from bogs to oak savannas to rare grasslands, hosting over 1,500 native species—more diversity than any single national park. Ongoing land protection efforts rely heavily on restoration to combat encroaching invasive species pressure. Openlands' ecologists provide technical expertise in seed collection, revegetation, prescribed burns, erosion control, and more to restore landscapes back to ecological health and abundance. In addition to restoration projects, our experts conduct species inventories, monitor water quality, and work closely with the scientific community on data collection and research. From coordinating and managing large-scale restoration initiatives to bringing nature back to residential properties, Openlands weaves a connected web of landscapes to preserve biodiversity, enhance water quality, and foster healthier ecosystems.

15,000+ acres restored to a healthy state for nature, wildlife, and people

Openlands staff conducting restoration work at Deer Grove-East, Forest Preserves of Cook County.

Igniting advocacy momentum

Attendees of the 2023 Green and Growing Summit gather at the Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences. The Chicago Public Schools, together with Openlands, the Healthy Schools Campaign, and the Advocates for Urban Agriculture hosted this inaugural summit to strengthen the connectivity of Chicago's garden education movement.

Openlands sparks advocacy momentum by educating, empowering, and engaging the public in conservation efforts, making the cause personal and local. Several flagship programs, such as TreeKeepers, have emerged from this commitment to creating a diverse community of advocates across all ages and backgrounds. Garden and nature-based education initiatives involve volunteers, teachers, and students, expanding awareness and instilling a sense of responsibility for the outdoors. The Arborist Registered Apprenticeship program creates a pipeline of green jobs, further showcasing the importance of education and capacity-building in conservation. Openlands recognizes that conservation requires collective action, and our strength lies in empowering everyone to find their role in the conversation, encouraging each individual to see themselves as advocates for a sustainable future.

**12,000 students
engaged
through the
Birds in My
Neighborhood
program**

Birds in My Neighborhood volunteers attend the 10-year anniversary celebration of this program at North Park Village Nature Center.



Drawing on over 60 years of conservation experience, Openlands has developed a set of building blocks that serve as a flexible and dynamic framework. We creatively stack and combine these building blocks to address unique opportunities, challenges, and locales, allowing us to tailor our approach to the needs of each endeavor. The following section showcases a selection of impact stories from 2023 that demonstrate how these building blocks allow us to adapt and innovate to achieve meaningful conservation victories.

Building blocks in action



2000s–2023

Openlands Lakeshore Preserve, southeastern Lake County, IL

IMPACT STORY

1

Openlands gifts Lake Michigan coastline gem along with restoration endowment

Openlands donated the 72-acre Openlands Lakeshore Preserve to the Lake County Forest Preserves in August 2023. This geographically and ecologically important landscape is now part of the adjacent Fort Sheridan Forest Preserve in southeastern Lake County. The Openlands Lakeshore Preserve features one mile of Lake Michigan shoreline, three beautifully restored ravines, blufftops, accessible trails, overlooks, and art installations.

Openlands had assumed ownership of this parcel, formerly part of the Fort Sheridan Army Base, in the early 2000s, and carried out extensive restoration of ecologically sensitive ravine and blufftop habitats, installed bridges and staircases, built accessible trails, and led nature-based education programming. As part of the transfer, Openlands also donated approximately \$1.3 million for the ongoing conservation and habitat restoration of the property to the Preservation Foundation, the charitable partner of the Forest Preserves. The Lake County Forest Preserves has been a valuable and long-standing partner of Openlands. The transfer of the Openlands Lakeshore Preserve was the third time in 18 months that Openlands transferred land to another qualifying entity in Lake County, totaling 133 acres. The Openlands Lakeshore Preserve is now managed by the Lake County Forest Preserves and a full master planning process to incorporate the new property as part of the greater Fort Sheridan experience is forthcoming.

Openlands did a wonderful job creating accessible trails through the sensitive ravine and blufftop habitats, installing bridges and staircases and did exceptional restoration work. We look forward to building on their investments in the site and to incorporating the new acreage into the Fort Sheridan experience.

PAUL FRANK, LAKE COUNTY FOREST PRESERVES
COMMISSIONER

- Partnering for greater impact
- Protecting important landscapes
- Delivering technical expertise in ecology and restoration



Above: Prescribed burn crew members conduct restoration work at the Openlands Lakeshore Preserve.

Below: Visitors enjoy a system of trails at the Openlands Lakeshore Preserve.

Right: A beautiful summer day at the Openlands Lakeshore Preserve with a view of Lake Michigan.

IMPACT STORY

2

TreeKeepers lead extensive inventory project on Chicago’s urban forest

The Openlands TreeKeepers program, established in 1991, has trained over 2,000 volunteers to grow and care for Chicago’s urban forest. In 2023, TreeKeepers expanded their impact by conducting extensive tree inventory efforts across the city. To date, TreeKeepers have meticulously collected data on nearly 8,000 trees.

Tree inventory work sets the foundation for urban forestry management, as it provides the information needed for thoughtful and effective care. An inventory collects information on all trees in a determined area with a specific set of data. This data generally includes information on the location of the tree, tree size and species diversity, overall health condition of the tree, and any specific follow-up needs to promote longevity. The inventory guides immediate stewardship, such as where TreeKeepers will host pruning workdays in the following seasons, and long-term management, like informing the type of species required for plant diversity and resilience or supporting grassroots campaigns to increase tree canopy in underserved communities.

Following a ward-wide inventory project by the 1st Ward TreeKeepers Chapter, TreeKeepers met with Alderman Daniel La Spata to strategically look at opportunities for tree care and future plantings within La Spata’s jurisdiction. This collaboration resulted in two ward-level stewardship days where the aldermanic office provided critically needed mulch during a very dry summer. As interest in using an inventory model to drive stewardship gains momentum, TreeKeepers are prepared to use this data to expand future ward-level advocacy.

TreeKeepers are the eyes, ears, and boots on the ground, providing hands-on tree care but also proactively planning for the future well-being and sustainability of Chicago’s urban forest.

Climate change is upon us and a healthy tree canopy is an important nature-based solution. Inventory is fundamental to that effort and is also something anyone can do to make a difference. When we inventory trees, we are interacting with them. We create a relationship between tree and community, a relationship that is precious and worth protecting.

AMY ABRAMSON, TREEKEEPER #1,930

- Planning and policymaking for systemic change
- Igniting advocacy momentum



Above: A TreeKeeper uses a diameter tape to measure the size of a tree in Ward 1.
Below & Right: A group of TreeKeepers receives inventory training at Winnemac Park.

IMPACT STORY

3

Setting a social precedent for the rights of nature

In 2023, Openlands transferred 43.55 acres of land to the Center for Humans & Nature, expanding the Center from five-acres to nearly 50 acres of prairie, wetland, woodland, ravine, and stream ecosystems. This property, which sits within the Liberty Prairie Reserve, is home to the Center’s Humans & Nature Press and the future Humans & Nature Farm.

Openlands, in partnership with the Center for Humans & Nature and with strategic input from the Earth Law Center, developed innovative and transformational language for the conservation easement that now impacts this land. Conservation easements are voluntary, legally binding agreements between land trusts like Openlands and a landowner, that limit the use of the land to protect its conservation values. As a legal “bundle of rights,” this conservation easement underscores the land itself as having inherent and inalienable rights, including the right to exist, thrive, evolve, regenerate, and be respected and cared for. Furthermore, humans, as a part of nature, have the responsibility to ensure the rights of nature are realized. This easement sets a social precedent using existing legal structures to support the rights of nature.

The expansion of the Center’s campus will provide a unique platform for education, exploration, and engagement in promoting a more sustainable and interconnected world. It is an exciting advancement within the Liberty Prairie Reserve, which Openlands played a key role in establishing in 1991. This ecologically significant area in central Lake County is home to 28 threatened wildlife species, with 60% of the Reserve permanently protected as open space. Openlands is the largest conservation easement holder in the Reserve, preserving nearly 1,300 acres to date through conservation easements.

The conservation easement the Center for Humans & Nature developed in partnership with Openlands highlights our shared commitment to land relationships and the rights of nature. We are very grateful to Openlands for this partnership, which has allowed for a new chapter in the Center’s work.

BROOKE HECHT, PRESIDENT,
CENTER FOR HUMANS & NATURE

- Partnering for greater impact
- Protecting important landscapes



Three seasons at the Center for Humans & Nature—**Above:** Colorful autumn foliage; **Below:** Snowy winter forestscape; **Right:** A path flanked by wildflowers.

1963–present
Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie, Will County, IL
City of Chicago, Cook County, IL

IMPACT STORY

4

60th anniversary programming elevates nature accessibility to new heights

Openlands is committed to fostering a harmonious relationship between people and nature by not only protecting and restoring natural spaces but also by actively making them accessible for everyone to enjoy. Recognizing the importance of connecting people with the environment, Openlands organized a series of impactful events throughout the year in honor of the 60th anniversary of the organization.

Among these nature-based programs were paddling trips along the African American Heritage Water Trail, which offered participants natural and historical interpretations on the Little Calumet River. Bilingual tree walks in both English and Spanish were conducted throughout Chicago, providing urbanites with the opportunity to learn about trees in their neighborhoods. Additionally, a birding field trip took families to experience the natural wonders of Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie in Will County. Collaborating with various partners, Openlands ensured that these programs were not only enriching but also free and accessible, removing barriers to getting outside and engaging with nature.

Recreation in nature is a powerful form of advocacy. Openlands believes that when individuals experience and appreciate the natural world, they are more likely to become advocates for preservation. This rings particularly true for the younger generation, who will inherit the planet we shape today. Openlands, through its outdoor experiences, continues to ignite advocacy momentum by instilling a deep-seated love and understanding of nature in the hearts and minds of all people.

From botany to birds to bison—the family field trip with Openlands at Midewin had something for everyone! Getting people out into nature takes time and effort. This was exciting, fun, and nicely executed.

JESSICA SAFFOLD, FOUNDING EDUCATOR,
SOUTH SIDE NATURE PLAY

- Partnering for greater impact
- Protecting important landscapes
- Delivering technical expertise in ecology and restoration
- Igniting advocacy momentum

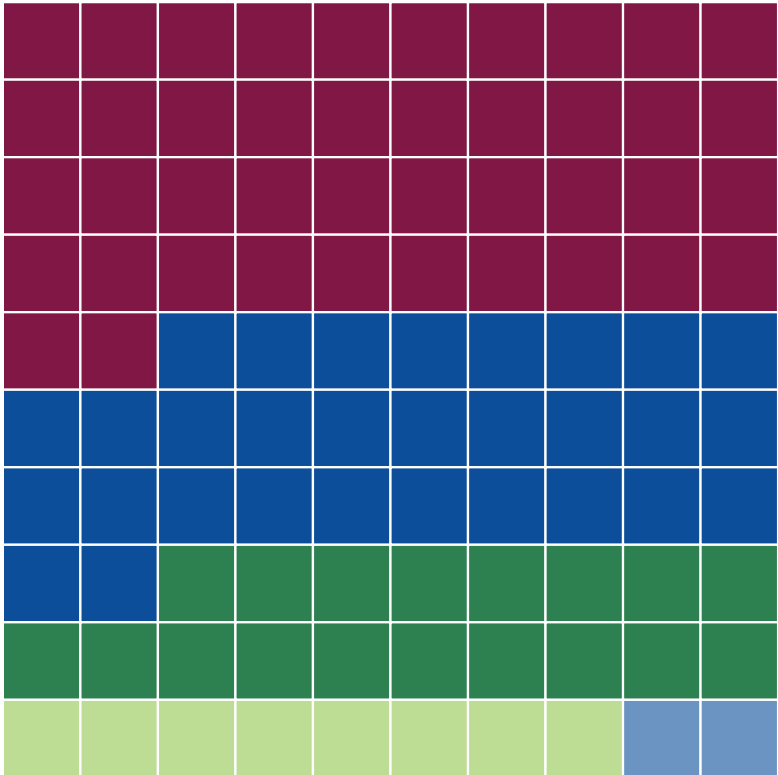


Above: Openlands and Wilderness Inquiry host a series of canoe trips along the African American Heritage Water Trail to help expand water recreation opportunities on the Little Calumet River.

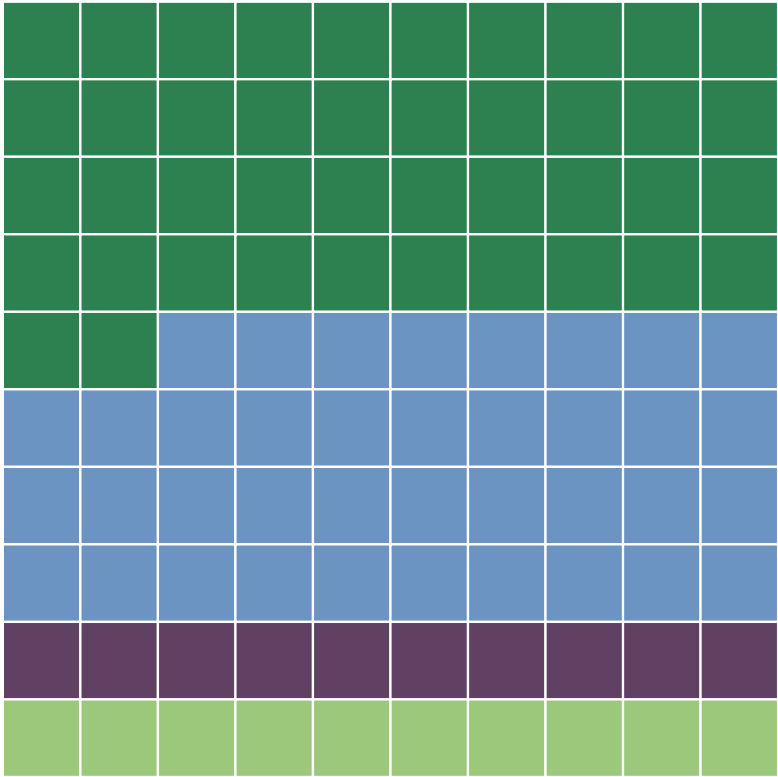
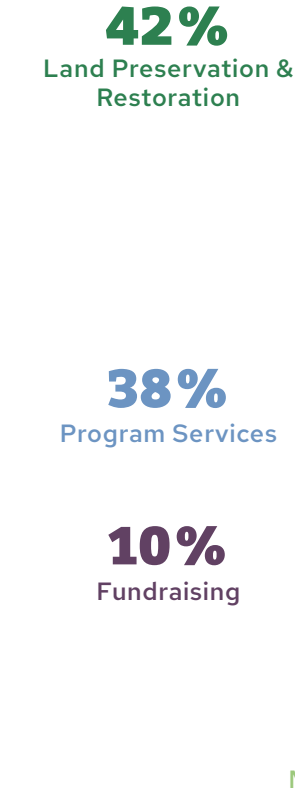
Below: Openlands staff and volunteers attend a bird walk in honor of the 10-year anniversary of Birds in My Neighborhood program at North Park Village Nature Center.

Right: Wetlands at the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie.

Revenue



Expenses



2023 Financial Report

Revenue	
Contributions	\$ 3,782,471
Foundation and Government Grants	2,721,210
Investments	1,570,574
Property Contributions	703,244
Other	171,308
<hr/>	
Total Support and Other Revenue	\$ 8,948,807
 Expenses	
Land Preservation and Restoration (a)	\$ 3,567,751
Other Program Services	3,287,360
Management and General	850,233
Fundraising	839,698
<hr/>	
Total Operating Expense	\$ 8,545,042
Increase in Net Assets before Non-Operating Loss	\$ 403,765
Non-Operating Loss—Due to Property Donation (b)	(2,455,534)
Total Decrease in Net Assets	(2,051,769)
<hr/>	
Net Assets without Donor Restriction, Beginning of Year	\$ 7,489,750
Net Assets without Donor Restriction, End of Year	\$ 6,851,438
Net Assets with Donor Restriction, Beginning of Year	\$ 27,222,463
Net Assets with Donor Restriction, End of Year	\$ 25,809,006
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Total Net Assets, End of Year	\$ 32,660,444

(a) Includes donation of 61 acres valued at \$1,499,000 and Impairment Loss of \$411,573 on lands held for conservation.

(b) Non-Operating Loss—Donation of the Openlands Lakeshore Preserve, consisting of 72 acres and improvements valued at \$1,094,796 plus \$1,360,737 in cash to protect said acreage in perpetuity.

60 Years of Impact

Discover a curated selection of Openlands’ milestones spanning six decades, each leveraging various building blocks of conservation. Explore the full timeline online for a more comprehensive journey through our legacy at Openlands.org/1963

1960s

1963
Openlands Project (originally Open Lands Project) is created as a program of the Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago, becoming independent in 1968. ■

1964
Illinois Prairie Path, in DuPage County, is approved as the first rails-to-trails project in the nation. ■ ■ ■

1965
Beall Woods, an old-growth forest up for sale in southern Illinois, is purchased by the state and becomes a 329-acre nature preserve thanks to Openlands advocacy. ■ ■

1966
Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore is authorized by Congress after a decades-long environmental effort that energized Openlands’ early organizers. ■ ■ ■ ■

1968
Peacock Prairie (now James Woodworth Prairie), a rare example of virgin black soil tall-grass prairie, is preserved and eventually deeded to the University of Illinois Chicago. ■

1969
Goose Lake Prairie State Park, the largest remnant of the tallgrass prairie east of the Mississippi, is established as a State Park and an Illinois Nature Preserve, after lobbying from Openlands.* ■ ■ ■ ■

1970s

1970
Openlands launches the Lake Michigan Federation (now Alliance for the Great Lakes). ■ ■

1972
Openlands organizes support for a successful referendum to establish the McHenry County Conservation District.* ■ ■ ■ ■

1973
Openlands lobbies for the Chicago Lakefront Protection Ordinance to protect the lakefront from encroaching development. ■ ■ ■ ■

1976
After a ten-year battle supported by Openlands, the Illinois Supreme Court rules against U.S. Steel’s plan to fill in 195 acres of Lake Michigan. ■ ■ ■ ■

1977
Garfield Farm is donated to Openlands, which today serves as a living history museum of Illinois farming practices. ■

1979
Friends of the Chicago River is established as a program of Openlands.* ■ ■ ■

1980s

1982
Upper Illinois Valley Association (now Canal Corridor Association) is incorporated to advocate for the creation of the Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor. ■ ■ ■

Openlands coordinates and leads a ten-year organizing effort to acquire railroad land to create the Old Plank Road Trail in Will and Cook Counties. ■ ■ ■ ■

1983
An Open Land: Photographs of the Midwest, 1852–1982 exhibit opens at the Art Institute of Chicago, organized by Openlands.* ■ ■ ■

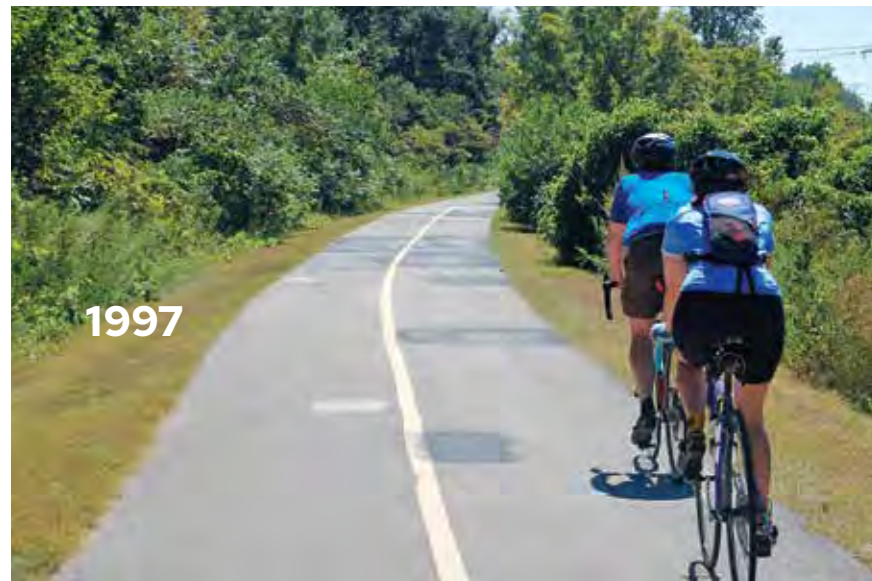
1984
President Ronald Reagan signs legislation establishing the Illinois & Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor, the first national heritage area in the nation.* ■



key

- Partnering for greater impact
- Planning and policymaking for systemic change
- Protecting important landscapes
- Delivering technical expertise in ecology and restoration
- Igniting advocacy momentum

* Photo at right



1985
Openlands and the Illinois Prairie Trail Authority identify potential trail and greenway corridors in northeastern Illinois. ■ ■

1986
Openlands begins the land acquisition and easement program for Liberty Prairie Reserve in Lake County, Illinois. ■ ■

1989
Openlands acquires conservation easement to protect natural areas at North Park Village. ■

1990s

1990
Openlands assembles the first city-wide inventory of vacant lots in Chicago. ■

Openlands' *21st Century Open Space Plan* is launched, calling for a new generation of parks and gardens for the city of Chicago and a network of trails and greenways and large reserves of natural areas throughout the region. ■ ■

1991
TreeKeepers program is launched, training volunteers to plant and care for trees.* ■ ■

1992
Northeastern Illinois Regional Greenways Plan is published, creating a vision for a network of interconnected corridors of open land. ■

1993
Neighborhood Open Space Planning program is launched with a focus on underserved Chicago neighborhoods. ■ ■

1994
Openlands-led Community Land Use Network convinces Chicago to streamline the transfer of abandoned publicly-owned lands for productive uses, including affordable housing and community-managed green space. ■ ■ ■

1996
President Bill Clinton signs legislation to create Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie at the former Joliet Arsenal.* ■ ■ ■

The Chicago Wilderness coalition is launched; Openlands is a founding member. ■ ■

1997
Openlands acquires Burnham Greenway to close a major trail gap between Chicago and south-suburban Burnham.* ■ ■ ■

1998
Openlands releases extensive mapping project and report, "Losing Ground: Land Consumption in the Chicago Region, 1990-1998," showing the threat of urban sprawl in the previous decade. ■

1999
"Northeastern Illinois Regional Water Trails Plan," written by Openlands, Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission, and the Illinois Paddlers Council, proposes a coordinated

system of water trails for non-motorized boating. ■ ■

Openlands participates significantly in the production of the *Calumet Area Land Use Plan*, a major milestone in creating and protecting open space in the Lake Calumet region. ■ ■ ■ ■

2000s

2000
The Illinois Department of Natural Resources opens the Grand Illinois Trail, a nearly 500-mile network of locally managed routes for hiking and biking, many of which were built with support from Openlands.* ■ ■ ■

2001
Openlands, the Forest Preserves of Cook County, the Chicago Audubon Society, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers begin the restoration of Tinley Creek Wetlands and Bartel Grasslands.* ■ ■

2004
President George W. Bush signs legislation authorizing the transfer of 77 acres at the former Fort Sheridan to Openlands for permanent protection. ■

2005
Revealing Chicago: An Aerial Portrait exhibit opens at Millennium Park with photographs by Terry Evans commissioned by Openlands and Chicago Metropolis 2020.* ■ ■

■ Partnering for greater impact
■ Planning and policymaking for systemic change
■ Protecting important landscapes

■ Delivering technical expertise in ecology and restoration
■ Igniting advocacy momentum

* Photo at left



2005



2006



2011



2012



2013



2014



2020



2021



2023

2005 (continued)

Openlands begins extensive wetlands restoration at five public sites in the region funded through the O'Hare Modernization program.* ■

2006

Building School Gardens program is launched in partnership with Chicago Public Schools to create gardens as teaching spaces and provide training for teachers and administrators.* ■ ■ ■

2010s

2011

Openlands Lakeshore Preserve opens to the public.* ■ ■

Openlands and the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission bring

together 11 communities in Illinois and Indiana to create the cross-border Calumet Connections regional trail system. ■ ■

2012

Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge is authorized by the U.S. Department of the Interior; Openlands acquires the first property for the refuge. ■ ■ ■

Openlands organizes a coalition of 30 partners to oppose the proposed Illiana Tollway and protect regional open space treasures such as Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie.* ■ ■ ■ ■

2013

Birds in My Neighborhood program is established to bring birding to elementary school children across the region.* ■ ■

Openlands becomes an accredited land trust through the Land Trust Alliance. ■

Openlands launches the Urban Forestry Initiative to plant 5,000 trees on public land in Chicago with seed funding from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. ■ ■ ■

Openlands partners with Friends of the Chicago River to publish "Our Liquid Asset: The Economic Benefits of a Clean Chicago River." ■ ■

2014

The Chicago Region Trees Initiative (CRTI) is launched by The Morton Arboretum and Openlands, with partners from other leading organizations, to build a healthier and more diverse urban forest by 2040. ■ ■ ■

Openlands launches the TreePlanters grant program to support communities that organize neighbors to plant new trees and care for them. ■ ■ ■ ■

The Next Century Conservation Plan, written in partnership with Openlands and Metropolis Strategies, is formally accepted by the Forest Preserves of Cook County. ■ ■

Openlands and Healthy Schools Campaign launch Space to Grow to transform Chicago schoolyards through green infrastructure, with capital partners Chicago Public Schools, Chicago Department of Water Management, and the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago.* ■ ■ ■

2017

Openlands launches Paddle Illinois Water Trails, a comprehensive guide for canoeing and kayaking on the waterways of northeastern Illinois. ■

2019

Openlands launches the Get Outside Map, a comprehensive digital tool for connecting people to parks, preserves, natural areas, and trails in the metropolitan region. ■

2020s

2020

Openlands with community partners debuts the African American Heritage Water Trail along the Little Calumet River.* ■ ■ ■

2021

After a multi-year advocacy effort by TreeKeepers and others, an Urban Forestry Advisory Board ordinance is passed in Chicago's City Council. ■ ■ ■ ■

Arborist Registered Apprenticeship program is created as a workforce development program to train skilled arborists.* ■ ■

2022

Openlands runs the first TreeKeepers course in Spanish. ■ ■

Openlands participates in a planning process to re-envision Chicago's Museum Campus as an urban nature retreat and contributes to the report "Where Worlds Connect". ■ ■

With partners in Cook County, Openlands leads the successful passage of the "Vote Yes for Clean Air, Clean Water, and Wildlife" referendum to invest \$45 million annually in supporting the Forest Preserves of Cook County to implement *The Next Century Conservation Plan*. ■ ■ ■

2023

Openlands hosts the first Green and Growing Summit, a gathering of educators around the Chicago region to advance garden and nature-based education.* ■ ■ ■

Openlands Lakeshore Preserve is transferred to the Lake County Forest Preserves for long-term preservation. ■ ■

* Photo above

- Partnering for greater impact
- Planning and policymaking for systemic change
- Protecting important landscapes
- Delivering technical expertise in ecology and restoration
- Igniting advocacy momentum

Nature for All

“Growing up the youngest of 10 children in East Chicago, Indiana, a gritty, working-class town, my parents created pockets of nature and beauty for us to enjoy. Through this real-life experience and appreciation for nature and its positive impact at a very young age, I grew to understand that nature is vital to all people. The Nature for All Campaign is firmly grounded in this inclusive and powerful core value. I’m so proud to enthusiastically support the Campaign and the lasting positive impact that it will have today and for future generations.”

ALAN BELL, OPENLANDS BOARD MEMBER



Through this Campaign, you can help us achieve:

1,300+
new acres of land
and water protected

60 years ago, Openlands was founded in response to a national call for more open space in urban areas. Today, we are propelled by new, accelerating challenges. Poor land use decisions erode habitats and biodiversity, urban disinvestment prevents large swaths of our region from experiencing nature, and a rapidly warming climate creates huge uncertainty on the land.

Openlands responds to these challenges with empathy, decisiveness, and vision for a bright and just future. The Nature for All Campaign fortifies Openlands as the region’s open space leader.

In light of the outpouring of support, we are setting our sights on a goal of \$25 million for the Nature for All Campaign. We need your help in this final push and we are immensely grateful to all who have already given. Your contribution, no matter the size, will make a meaningful difference in safeguarding the beauty and biodiversity of our region.



2,250+
new trees planted
in low-canopy areas

The Nature for All Campaign will conclude at the end of April, but there is still time to make a gift to the future. We are confident that with your help, we can reach our goal. Join us in Openlands’ most ambitious Campaign to scale our impact and protect land, water, and wildlife for a more resilient world. To continue the conversation, visit Openlands.org/NatureForAll

Nature for All Campaign donors through March 1, 2024. *Our deepest gratitude goes to the supporters of the Nature for All campaign for their truly phenomenal foundational support.*

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Chief Operating Officer

Emily Reusswig
*Vice President of
Conservation and Policy*

Molly Roche
*TreeKeepers Program
Specialist*

Tonatiú Rodríguez
*Forestry Program
Coordinator*

Matt Ruhter
Conservation Attorney

Danielle Russell
*Green Schoolyards
Program Manager*

Patrick Schlomas
*Executive Administrator and
Board Liaison*

Craig Shillinglaw
*Geographic Information
System (GIS) Analyst*

Victor Short
Forestry Field Supervisor

Lai Smith
*Gift and Data Entry
Coordinator*

Huan Song
Director of Communications

Paul Spector
*Director of Finance and
Accounting*

Floyd Stewart
*Arborist Registered
Apprentice*

Sarah Surroz
*Director of Lake County
Programs*

Javier Torres
*Communications
Coordinator*

Gerardo Trujillo
Landscaping Specialist

Yamys Urbano Valencia
*Bilingual PR &
Communications Specialist*

Lucia Whalen
*Institutional Grants
Manager*

Nate Whelden
*Arborist Registered
Apprentice*

OPENLANDS LEADERSHIP
1963 TO PRESENT

Openlands Board Chairs

JoAnn Seagren (2020–present)
Carrie C. McNally (2016–2020)
Rich Carlson (2014–2016)
Jill Allread (2008–2013)
Nancy Sutherland (2004–2008)
Susan S. Bell (2003–2004)
Anthony T. Dean (1999–2003)
Stephen W. Baird (1996–1999)
Thomas Flavin (1994–1996)
Shaun C. Block (1990–1994)
Frederick N. Bates (1989–1990)
H. James Fox (1984–1989)
Arthur W. Berry (1981–1984)
George W. Overton (1978–1981)
Richard L. Ettlinger (1977–1978)
George E. Bullwinkel (1975–1977)
Farwell Smith (1972–1975)
Jeffrey R. Short (1963–1972)

Openlands Presidents & CEOs

Michael S. Davidson (2023–present)
Gerald W. Adelman (1988–2023)
Peter Coolson (1986–1987)
Judith M. Stockdale (1978–1986)
April L. Young (1975–1977)
Richard L. Ettlinger (1975)
Larry Christmas (1975)
Gunnar A. Peterson (1963–1975)

CorLands Presidents
(1978–2010)

George W. Overton
George Covington
George E. Bullwinkel
H. James Fox
Kenneth V. Fiske
Stephen W. Baird
Richard J. Carlson

CorLands Executive Directors

Judith M. Stockdale (1978–1983)
Thomas Hahn (1984–1999)
Nancy Kaszak (2000–2003)
Robert Megquier (2004–2010)

*In 1978, the Corporation for
Open Lands (CorLands)
was formed as an affiliate of
Openlands to provide technical
assistance to local governments
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acquisition and preservation.
CorLands merged with
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As we celebrate 60 years of conserving nature for life, we look forward with optimism, knowing that our building blocks of conservation will continue to guide us towards an enduring impact. Thank you for being a part of our legacy.

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