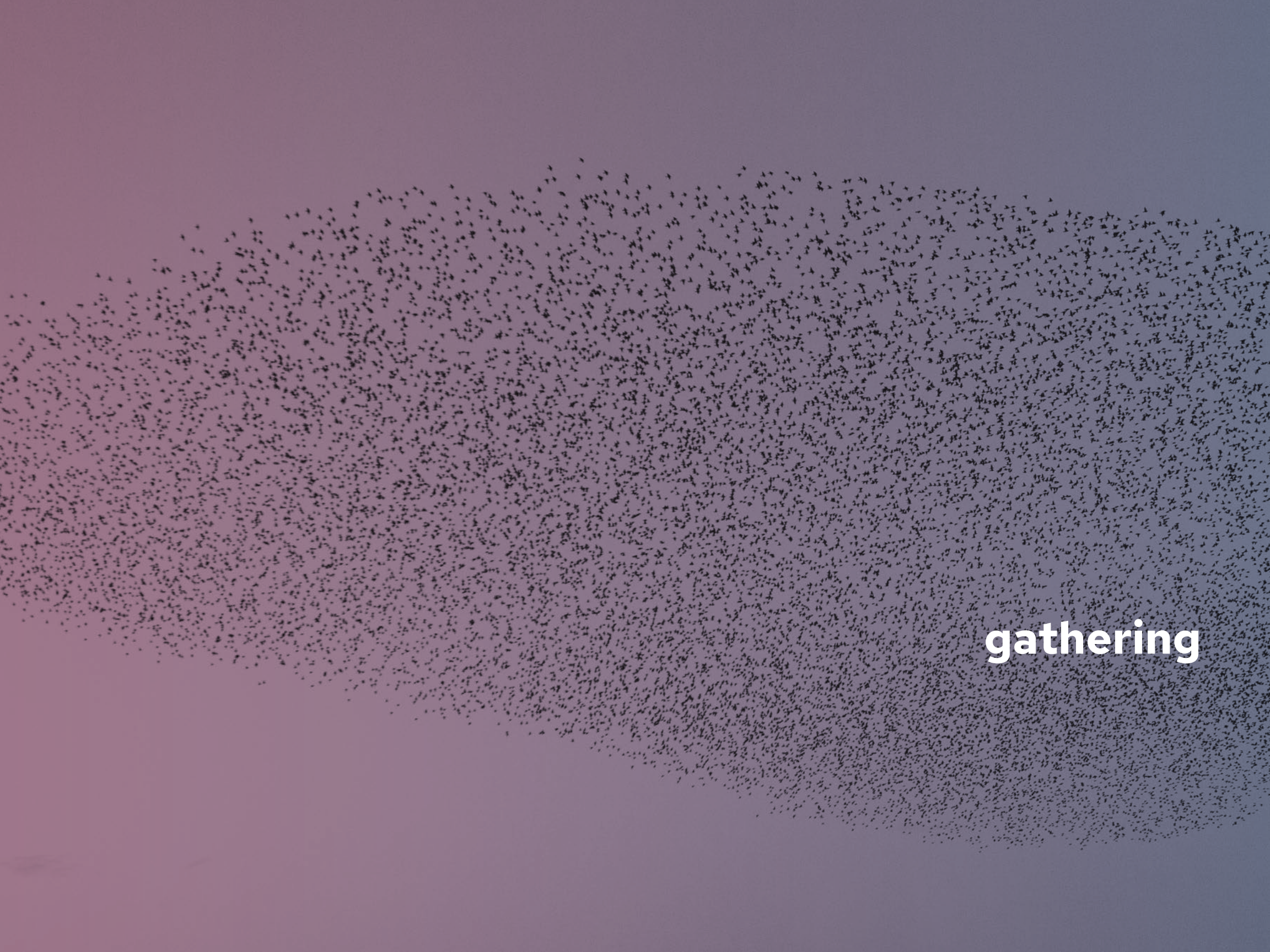


A large flock of birds, possibly terns, is captured in flight against a clear blue sky. The birds are silhouetted, showing their wings and bodies in various stages of flight. They are scattered across the entire frame, creating a sense of movement and a large gathering.

**Together,
we are a force
for nature.**



gathering



**Dr. J. Drew Lanham, 2024 Openlands
Luncheon Keynote Speaker**

I WALKED INTO THE ROOM and it was as if I walked into the midst of a fabulous human murmuration...all gathered together as birds in a flocking murmuration would do for some unified purpose even though each bird makes its own move.



The 2024 Openlands Annual Luncheon gathered more than 800 influential individuals, including elected officials, civic and environmental leaders, and community partners.



adapting

THE COST OF INACTION is too great—it threatens not just our ecosystems, but our way of life.



Dear Friends,

As I reflect on my first year leading Openlands, I am energized and inspired by this community. I have always admired Openlands, but experiencing its impact firsthand has illuminated the relentless drive of those who care deeply about nature. Staff, board members, volunteers, and supporters like you show up with purpose, ensuring that our region thrives. From planting that white oak on a Chicago parkway to reimagining expansive oak savannas on the suburban edge, ***we are united by a shared commitment to conserving nature for life.***

At a time of national uncertainty, one thing remains clear—local action shapes our future. ***This annual report highlights victories made possible by people coming together to drive change—right here in this region. Across differences, people find common ground in nature.*** Our open spaces belong to everyone, and it is our collective responsibility to protect and expand them.

As Pulitzer Prize-winning architecture critic and our 2025 Annual Luncheon awardee Blair Kamin wrote, “Public spaces make better democracies, better citizens, and better lives.” Nature and democracy both require vigilance, bold leadership, and collective protection. They are deeply connected because we fight for our democracy in these very public spaces. Their survival depends on engaged communities, and the power to safeguard them lies with us. When federal leadership steps back, local communities must step up. The cost of inaction is too great—it threatens not just our ecosystems, but our way of life.

Our region was shaped by civic leaders with the vision and creativity to build something lasting. Now, it’s our turn. This is a defining moment—one that calls for every person to do what they can, right here at home. ***We must be a force for nature,*** harnessing our collective strength to protect the landscapes that sustain us and the democratic ideals that uphold our right to access them.

The stakes are great, but so is our power. It cannot be taken, outsourced, or consolidated. Our power blossoms through action. It multiplies when we come together.

With gratitude and determination,

Michael S. Davidson
President & CEO, Openlands

**Openlands is
uniquely positioned
to meet these
challenges because
we are
collaborative in
uniting people
across differences,
courageous in
fighting for what is
right, and
steadfast in
seeing change
through**



Dear Friends,

Openlands was founded in 1963, at the dawn of the modern American environmental movement. In an era of division, nature was a unifying cause, bringing people together across political and social lines. More than six decades later, Openlands remains one of the nation's oldest metropolitan conservation organizations—an organization that doesn't just respond to the challenges of today but builds solutions that last for generations.

The challenges facing our region are complex and ever evolving. They require bold action, but also unwavering persistence. Openlands is uniquely positioned to meet these challenges because we are collaborative in uniting people across differences, courageous in fighting for what is right, and steadfast in seeing change through—no matter how long it takes. Many of our most transformative projects span decades, requiring deep community trust, steady leadership, and an enduring vision.

At Openlands, we believe that access to nature is a right, not a privilege. Nature for all is embedded in every aspect of our work, from the communities we serve to the policies we champion. For over 60 years, Openlands has led with conviction, expertise, and heart. We bring people together—landowners, policymakers, community members, and advocates—because real solutions are strongest when they are inclusive. We remain a constant force in a changing world, committed to protecting the land that sustains us, now and for the future.

Thank you for being part of Openlands' enduring mission.

In partnership,

Alan M. Bell


Chair, Openlands' Board of Directors

JoAnn M. Seagren

Immediate Past Chair, Openlands' Board of Directors



accomplishing



**In many ways,
the acquisition of
Tamarack Farms
represents a
'dream realized' for
a small group who
first came together
over two decades ago
to advocate for its
protection as part of
the National Wildlife
Refuge system.**

*Steve Byers, chair of Friends of Hackmatack
National Wildlife Refuge*

**We are a force for
land, water, and wildlife**

Land, water, and wildlife

1,321

acres of habitat to be restored in Midewin

985

acres added to Hackmatack

\$3 million

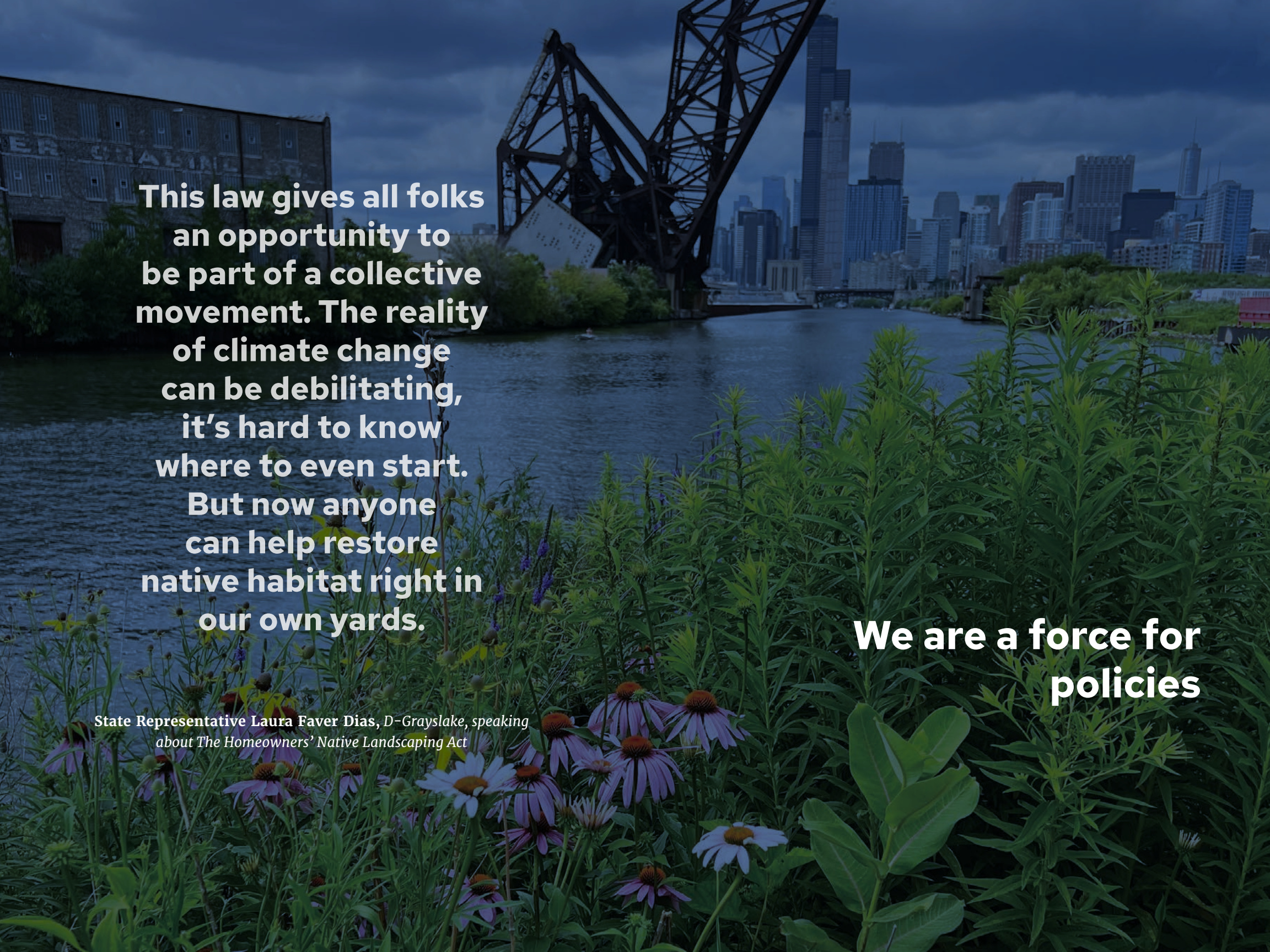
secured for strategic land protection

This year, we celebrated transformative conservation milestones that demonstrate the power of local, collaborative action in reshaping the future of our landscapes.

AT MIDEWIN NATIONAL TALLGRASS PRAIRIE, Openlands and The Wetlands Initiative broke ground on a \$1.5 million Grant Creek restoration project, funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation as a part of the America the Beautiful Challenge grant. This project will be the largest restoration in the region. It will benefit imperiled species like grassland birds, enhance future recreational opportunities, and strengthen the region's ecological resilience. Openlands and 23 partners spent decades advocating for Midewin's creation as the nation's first national tallgrass prairie, and this project marks the next chapter for this invaluable landscape.

OPENLANDS, ILLINOIS AUDUBON, AND THE CONSERVATION FUND partnered to acquire 985 acres of Tamarack Farm for Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge. This acquisition, which represents about 10% of the refuge's total footprint, helps create the third-largest conservation area in the region. It highlights how collaboration between local conservation organizations can amplify our collective impact. This milestone marks a major advancement for the Refuge, the region's biodiversity, and the 12 million residents of the greater Chicago, Rockford, and Milwaukee metropolitan areas, who will now benefit from expanded recreational opportunities.

ADDITIONALLY, OPENLANDS IS PROUD to announce the creation of The Negaunee Opportunity Fund to expand strategic land protection within the region thanks to a generous \$3 million gift from The Negaunee Foundation. This fund highlights the foundation's leadership in conservation philanthropy, providing revolving capital for Openlands to scale land protection initiatives. A key focus of the fund is expanding Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge, ensuring a lasting legacy of preserved natural landscapes.

A photograph of a Chicago river scene with a bridge and city skyline in the background, and native plants in the foreground. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

**This law gives all folks
an opportunity to
be part of a collective
movement. The reality
of climate change
can be debilitating,
it's hard to know
where to even start.
But now anyone
can help restore
native habitat right in
our own yards.**

**We are a force for
policies**

*State Representative Laura Faver Dias, D-Grayslake, speaking
about The Homeowners' Native Landscaping Act*

Policies

\$1.6 billion

for conservation throughout the greater Chicago metropolitan area

At Openlands, we drive systemic change by shaping policy and planning decisions across a complex geopolitical landscape. Nature doesn't recognize governance boundaries, which is why we work across every level of government and unite a broad coalition of partners to protect the places we love.

IN 2024, voters in DuPage, Kane, Lake, and McHenry Counties supported four major conservation ballot measures, adding to the success of the 2022 Vote Yes for Clean Air, Water, and Wildlife referendum in Cook County. Openlands has been integral to these efforts as part of the coalitions. These five measures, along with a \$50 million bond in Will County, will channel \$1.6 billion into the region's natural areas over the next two decades—a generationally significant investment. These victories highlight the bipartisan support for nature and show how local engagement drives lasting change.

IN ADDITION TO THESE BALLOT WINS, Openlands is empowering residents to take action at their own homes. The Homeowners' Native Landscaping Act ensures that Illinois residents can no longer be barred by HOAs from planting native gardens, empowering them to mitigate climate change and support biodiversity locally. Championed by State Representative Laura Faver Dias and State Senator Karina Villa, and guided by Openlands' technical expertise, the bill passed unanimously in the House and Senate.

\$1 million

funding for the Lake County greenway master land-use plan

OPENLANDS ALSO SUPPORTED the Illinois General Assembly's approval of \$1 million for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to develop a master land-use plan for the greenway along the former Route 53 extension. In partnership with the Green Corridor Coalition, Openlands celebrates this key investment, which will convert a vital open space into a thriving public greenway and trail, providing more families with access to nature, recreation, and vital ecosystem services.

IN CHICAGO, the city established the Native and Pollinator Garden Registry Advisory Board to enhance urban green spaces and wildlife. Openlands' Jessica Fong serves as president, working alongside the City's Urban Forestry Advisory Board—another initiative championed by Openlands and TreeKeepers. These collaborative efforts demonstrate the collective force for change that drives progress locally.

A group of people are participating in a tree-planting activity. The image shows the lower legs and feet of several individuals standing on a patch of grass and soil. They are holding shovels with yellow handles. One person is wearing a green jacket, another dark pants and blue sneakers, and a third is wearing a blue jacket. The background is slightly blurred, showing more greenery and a paved area.

**If you look around,
you'll see that everyone
here represents not
just different parts of
Chicago, but also diverse
cultures, customs,
beliefs, experiences,
and interests. Some
TreeKeepers love
pruning, others prefer
planting, and some enjoy
doing inventory work.
But we all matter,
and we all play a part.
This is Chicago.
This is what makes
our city great.**

**We are a force for
people**

Chicago First Lady Stacie Johnson
TreeKeeper #2068

People

10,000/2,000

trees planted

TreeKeepers certified

first

Arborist Registered Apprentice
completes program

1,620,267

gallons of stormwater captured

In the interdependent community of life, people play a critical role as protectors of nature. Openlands empowers individuals and organizations to take action, creating a collective force for nature that transforms neighborhoods, fosters conservation jobs, and inspires optimism through agency.

THIS YEAR, we celebrated remarkable milestones in community forestry, planting the organization's 10,000th tree and certifying our 2,000th TreeKeepers. Openlands marked decades of impactful community engagement in urban forestry with a special planting event at Jardín Mallinali in La Villita. Through pioneering initiatives like the English and Spanish language TreeKeepers® program and the TreePlanters Grant, Openlands has emerged as a national leader in fostering environmental stewardship and empowering individuals to champion our urban forest.

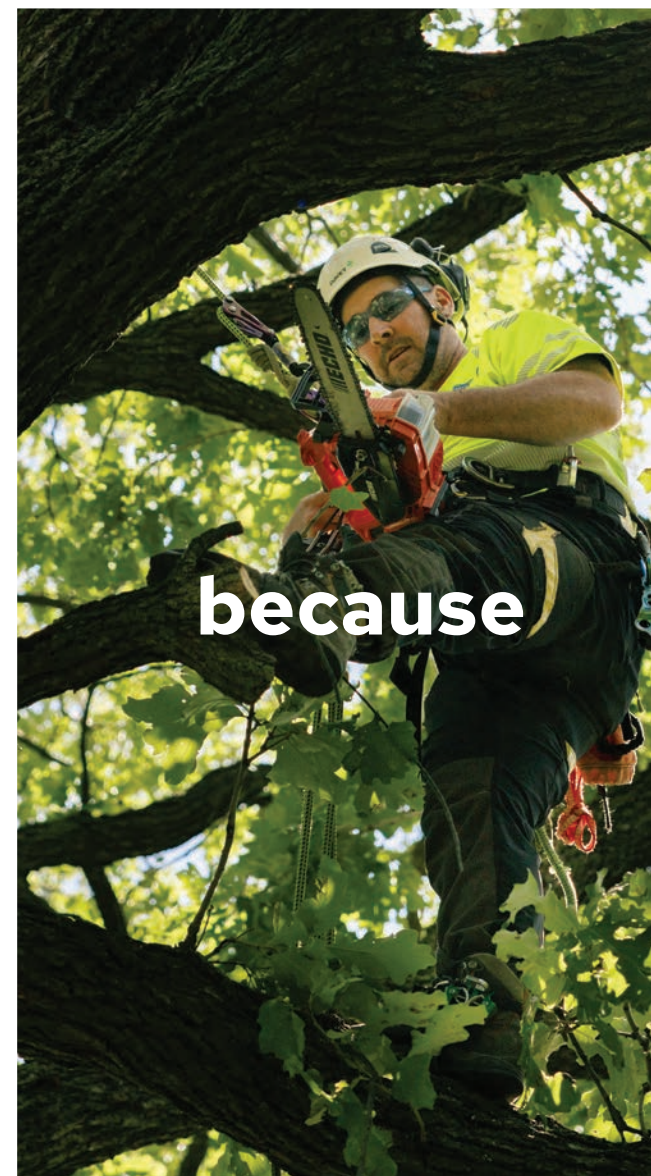
THE ARBORIST REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP program achieved a significant milestone with the graduation of our first apprentice, Lisa Mende. Paired with Cantigny Park as part of the program, Lisa has worked there since 2022 and was offered a full-time position. She also passed the International Society of Arboriculture's Certified Arborist exam. Lisa's inspiring journey highlights the value of the ARA program in cultivating a diverse, skilled, and green workforce with a well-paying career.

IN ADDITION, over the past year, we completed two new Space to Grow green schoolyards—at Ronald H. Brown Elementary in West Pullman and Spencer Technology Academy in Austin.

These schoolyards offer safe, green spaces for kids to play and learn while also benefiting the broader community through stormwater management. Combined, they will hold 1,620,267 gallons of stormwater annually from entering the surrounding community's flood-prone basements. Openlands, in collaboration with the Healthy Schools Campaign and the City of Chicago's Department of Environment, has led a Green Stormwater Infrastructure Maintenance Working Group to ensure coordinated, long-term care of green infrastructure investments on public property, maximizing their impact and longevity.



**We show up
with purpose**





local action

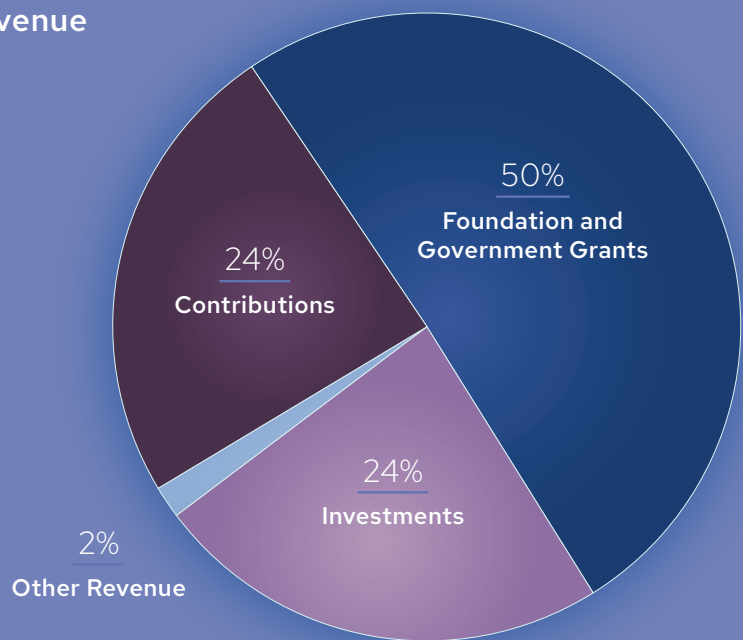


drives

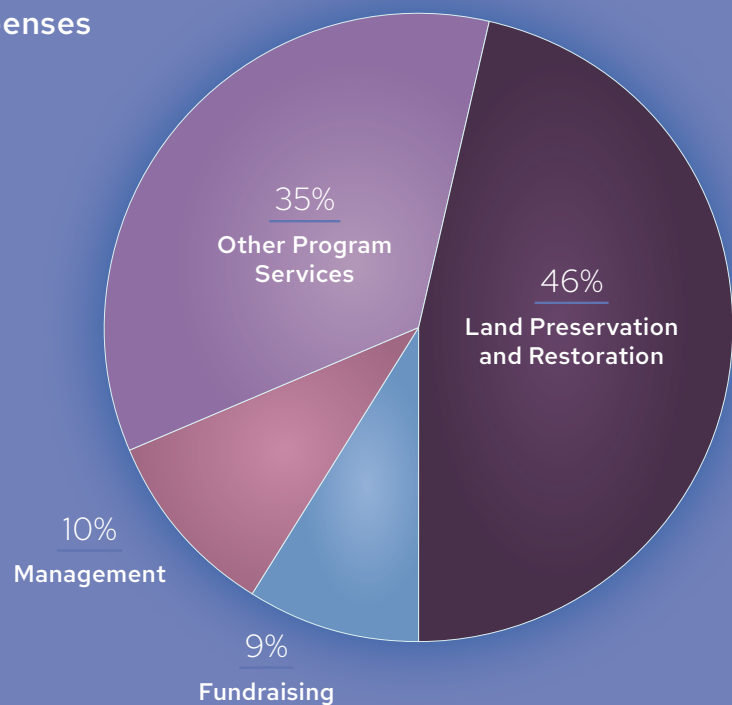


lasting change.

Revenue



Expenses



2024 Financial Report

Revenue	
Contributions	\$ 3,057,535
Foundation and Government Grants	6,358,012
Investments	2,971,261
Other Revenue	196,719
Total Support and Other Revenue	\$ 12,583,527
Expenses	
Land Preservation and Restoration	\$ 4,379,512
Other Program Services	3,272,085
Management and General	911,121
Fundraising	833,251
Total Operating Expense	\$ 9,395,969
Increase in Net Assets	\$ 3,187,558

	10/1/2023	9/30/2024
Net Assets without donor restriction	\$ 6,851,438	\$ 5,819,282
Net Assets with donor restriction	\$25,222,463	\$30,028,720
Total Net Assets	\$32,660,444	\$35,848,002

**I give because
I believe
that Openlands
is a premier
conservation organization
in Chicago.
I am amazed and
proud of their
accomplishments
in both
large-scale projects
and local neighborhood-
focused programs**

Veronica Cook, TreeKeeper #508

Donors

THANK YOU to our generous funding partners who helped to fulfill the mission of Openlands over the past fiscal year, October 1, 2023 to September 30, 2024.

Nature for All

*Nature for All Campaign
donors through March 1, 2024.*

*With heartfelt thanks
to all who supported the
Nature for All Campaign,
and special appreciation
to Campaign Co-Chairs
Dean Fischer and
Judith Stockdale for their
outstanding leadership.*

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\$500,000 or more

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The Negaunee Foundation

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in Chicago and we donate
to local environmental efforts,
both land and water,
to sustain our planet for
generations to come.**

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Thank you to the following nature-based experts who dedicated their time to support the professional development of educators in the Birds in My Neighborhood program.

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