



A regional alliance dedicated to
protecting nature and enriching life

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Chicago Wilderness Recognizes Excellence in Conservation Leadership

19 organizations honored for habitat restoration efforts in the Chicago region

Chicago, IL—On **November 6, 2013**, Chicago Wilderness honored 19 organizations for their exceptional work to restore the region’s natural areas to benefit both people and nature at its inaugural *Celebrating Nature* benefit. Celebrating Nature brought together conservation and civic leaders from across the region to celebrate organizations that achieved the **Excellence in Ecological Restoration accreditation** and **Conservation and Native Landscaping award**.

“As a regional alliance of more than 300 organizations dedicated to protecting and restoring our natural areas, it is essential that we recognize and promote excellence in habitat restoration and natural resource preservation,” said **Melinda Pruett-Jones, Executive Director of Chicago Wilderness**. “We are proud to honor these organizations for their achievements; their projects serve as a terrific example of what conservation organizations, corporate partners, community groups and others can do to advance biodiversity recovery efforts in the Chicago Wilderness region.”

The newly-launched **Excellence in Ecological Restoration Program (EERP)**, sponsored by ArcelorMittal, was developed to recognize large, high-quality restoration sites and the organizations that manage them. Through the EERP, organizations conduct comprehensive self-assessments of their natural resource management programs and the quality of the natural areas being accredited; the assessments are based on a set of rigorous, science-based standards that recognize best management practices in natural resource management. Sites are evaluated in five categories:

1. Landscape context and site features
2. Management practices
3. Threat assessment and action plan
4. Collaboration and resources
5. Organizational programs, practices, policies and procedures

The Chicago Wilderness Commission on Excellence in Ecological Restoration reviews the assessments and determines the level of site certification. Site accreditation, which lasts for five years, is awarded at four levels based on a 100-point system: Bronze (50%), Silver (65%), Gold (75%) and Platinum (85%). A score that achieves any level of accreditation is a demonstration of excellence in the use of best restoration and management practices.

“The natural areas and organizations accredited through the EERP are important elements of our shared heritage and landscape,” says **Elizabeth S. Kessler, Executive Director of the McHenry County Conservation District** and Co-Chair of the Excellence in Ecological Restoration Commission. “These sites provide habitat for native plants and animals, and they are tremendous assets to the local communities and to our region as a whole.”

The following organizations received accreditations for their sites in this inaugural year of the program:

Platinum Accreditation

- Forest Preserve District of Will County—*Braidwood Dunes & Savanna Nature Preserve*
- Lake County Forest Preserves—*Spring Bluff Forest Preserve*
- McHenry County Conservation District—*Nippersink North Branch Conservation Area*
- The Nature Conservancy—*Indian Boundary Prairies*

Gold Accreditation

- Chicago Botanic Garden—*McDonald Woods*
- Forest Preserve District of Kane County—*Dick Young Forest Preserve*

Bronze Accreditation

- Forest Preserves of Cook County—*Powderhorn Marsh and Prairie Nature Preserve*

The **Conservation and Native Landscaping Awards Program** recognizes organizations that manage either public or private lands within the Chicago Wilderness region and demonstrate exemplary use of native landscaping, habitat restoration and protection, and/or conservation design. The following organizations received the 2013 Conservation and Native Landscaping Awards:

- Advocate Sherman Hospital—*Advocate Sherman Hospital Campus*
Recognized Partners: Damguard Landscaping, Hitchcock Design Group, Thornapple Landscapes
- Ball Horticultural Company—*Corporate Campus Landscape*
Recognized Partners: Conservation Land Stewardship, WRD Environmental

- Chicago Botanic Garden—*North Lake Shoreline Restoration Program*
Recognized Partners: Living Habitats, Native Landscape Contractors, LLC, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – Chicago District
- Chicago Park District—*Bobolink Meadow*
Recognized Partners: Pizzo & Associates, Ltd.
- The Conservation Foundation—*McDonald Farm Conservation Demonstration Projects*
Recognized Partners: Aquascape, Inc., Cardno JFNew, Pizzo & Associates, Ltd.
- Forest Preserves of Cook County—*Edgebrook Woods Demonstration Site*
Recognized Partners: Friends of the Chicago River
- Forest Preserves of Cook County—*Thatcher Woods Savanna Restoration Project*
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- Forest Preserves of Cook County—*Theodore Stone Preserve*
Recognized Partners: Des Plaines River Valley Restoration Project
- Lake Forest Country Day School—*Lake Forest Country Day School Preserve*
Recognized Partners: Hey and Associates, Inc., Kinnucan Tree Services, Native Restoration Services, Rogers Nursery
- Lindenhurst Park District—*John Janega Memorial Park*
Recognized Partners: Integrated Lakes Management, Inc.
- Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie, USDA Forest Service—*South Patrol Road Wetland Restoration*
Recognized Partners: Openlands, The Wetlands Initiative
- Village of Glenview—*Reach 1 River Naturalization*
Recognized Partners: Applied Ecological Services, Hey and Associates, Inc., Lake County Grading

More than 275 people attended Celebrating Nature, which was sponsored in part by ArcelorMittal.

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Chicago Wilderness

Chicago Wilderness is a regional alliance that connects people and nature. More than 300 organizations work together to restore local nature and improve the quality of life for all who live here, by protecting the lands and waters on which we all depend. The four key initiatives of Chicago Wilderness—to restore the health of local nature, promote green infrastructure, take climate action, and to leave no child inside—reflect our commitment to using science and emerging knowledge, as well as a collaborative approach to conservation, to benefit all the region’s residents. For more information, visit www.chicagowilderness.org.

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