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## Chicago Wilderness Recognizes 23 Sites for Conservation Excellence

Chicago, IL—The Chicago Wilderness alliance has honored 23 sites for excellence in habitat restoration, conservation design, and native landscaping. At a special reception held at Loyola University, 10 sites were recognized for achieving the **Excellence in Ecological Restoration accreditation**, and 13 were honored with **Conservation and Native Landscaping Awards**.

From vast, rolling prairies and woodlands to outdoor classrooms, the accreditation and awards showcase our region's best examples of places that benefit both wildlife and people.

The Chicago Wilderness Excellence in Ecological Restoration program recognizes large, high-quality natural areas and the organizations that manage them. The Conservation and Native Landscaping Awards recognize projects that demonstrate exemplary use of native landscaping or conservation design.

"The Chicago Wilderness alliance is excited to celebrate these sites and the conservation leadership of the organizations that manage them," said **Suzanne Malec-McKenna, Executive Director of Chicago Wilderness**. "They are ensuring that our region's natural resources survive and flourish for generations to come."

The natural areas of Chicago's wilderness are home to a wide diversity of species and rare habitats that provide opportunities for recreation and exploration, as well as clean air and water, flood protection and so much more. Yet the region's natural areas are threatened by fragmentation; invasive plant and animal species; pollution; and the impacts of climate change.

The award recipients are addressing these threats through their conservation work. Together, they are:

- Actively restoring **more than 14,000** acres
- Increasing access to healthy nature in **23 communities across 10 counties**

- **Providing habitat for more than 65 state or federal threatened and endangered species**, such as the Blanding's Turtle, Hines Emerald Dragonfly, and Prairie White Fringed Orchid
- **Improving water quality in and around 16 communities** through wetland, stream, or river restoration

## **Excellence in Ecological Restoration**

Through this program, developed with support from ArcelorMittal and launched in 2013, organizations conduct comprehensive self-assessments of their restoration 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 practices in natural resource management. Conservation experts from across the region review the assessments to determine if the site meets one of the accreditation levels: Platinum, Gold, Silver, or Bronze. The 2014 recipients are:

### ***Platinum***

#### **Bluff Spring Fen, Elgin, IL, *Forest Preserves of Cook County***

Known for its rare, namesake wetland, the 165-acre Bluff Spring Fen preserve holds a diverse community of native plants and wildlife, including 12 species listed as threatened or endangered in Illinois. Media contact: Don Parker, Forest Preserves of Cook County, 708-771-1159, don.Parker@cookcountyil.gov.

#### **Hickory Creek Barrens Nature Preserve, New Lenox, IL, *Forest Preserve District of Will County***

With more than 550 different plant species, the Hickory Creek Barrens Nature Preserve is ranked as the second richest preserve in Will County, Illinois. Media contact: Laura Kiran, Forest Preserve District of Will County, lkiran@fpdwc.org.

#### **Johnson's Mound Forest Preserve, Elburn, IL, *Forest Preserve District of Kane County***

A serene, wooded preserve surrounded by rolling prairie, this site features a glacial kame cloaked by oak-hickory woodland. Media contact: Laurie Metanchuk, Forest Preserve District of Kane County, 630-232-3955, MetanchukLaurie@kaneforest.com.

#### **Middlefork Savanna Forest Preserve, Lake Forest, IL, *Lake County Forest Preserves***

Home to more than 1,000 different plant and animal species, this preserve features a 25-acre tallgrass savanna—a globally threatened natural community—frequently described as the best surviving tallgrass savanna in Illinois. Media contact: Susan Hawkins, Lake County Forest Preserves, 847-968-3207, shawkins@LCFPD.org.

#### **The East Woods and Schulenberg Prairie and Savanna, Lisle, IL, *The Morton Arboretum***

Occupying more than half of The Morton Arboretum's 1,700 acres, its East Woods and Schulenberg Prairie and Savanna holds one of the oldest prairie-savanna restorations in the country. Media contact: Kelley Regan, The Morton Arboretum, 630-725-2103, kregan@mortonarb.org.

**Pleasant Valley Conservation Area, Woodstock, IL, McHenry County Conservation District**

Home to hawks, fox, salamanders, and other wildlife, Pleasant Valley Conservation Area protects the main stem of the Kishwaukee River and its neighboring floodplains. Media contact: Wendy Kummerer, 815-260-5401, wkummerer@mccdistrct.org.

**Illinois Beach State Park, Zion, IL, Illinois Department of Natural Resources**

As one of the largest collections of unique natural communities in the state, Illinois Beach State Park protects the last remaining undeveloped shoreline in Illinois. Media contact: Chris McCloud, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, 217-785-0075, Chris.mccloud@illinois.gov.

**Gold**

**Goose Lake Prairie Nature Preserve, Morris, IL, Illinois Department of Natural Resources**

With more than 1,600 acres, Goose Lake Nature Preserve is the largest unfragmented prairie remnant in Illinois and provides habitat for 17 endangered and threatened species, as well as for grassland birds that are sensitive to habitat fragmentation. Media contact: Chris McCloud, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, 217-785-0075, Chris.mccloud@illinois.gov.

**Silver**

**Deer Run, Oak Ridge & McKiski Forest Preserves, Cherry Valley, IL, Forest Preserves of Winnebago County**

These sites encompass more than 1,300 acres of prairie, forest, and savanna, and are home to several threatened and endangered species, including the Prairie Bush Clover, a federally endangered plant found only in four states. Media contact, Jamie Johannsen, Forest Preserves of Winnebago County, 815-877-6100, jjohannsen@winnebagoforest.org.

**Ambler Flatwoods, Michigan City, IN, Shirley Heinze Land Trust**

Donated by the state of Indiana as a nature preserve, this site's dominant community of northern flatwoods is extremely rare and considered globally imperiled; more than 430 plant and 440 wildlife species have been documented here, many of them also rare or endangered. Media contact: Barb Labus, Shirley Heinze Land Trust, blabus@heinzetrust.org.

## Conservation & Native Landscaping Awards

The Conservation and Native Landscaping Awards recognize community projects that use native landscaping, restoration, or conservation design to provide ecosystem benefits to plants, animals, and people. Below are the site names and locations of the 2014 recipients, as well as the project owners and partners who made the work happen.

- **Bambrick Park – Hines Emerald Dragonfly Preservation Area, Romeoville, IL, Lemont Park District.** This 2.5 acre detention basin now contains all native plants after a turf to prairie and wetland conversion in early 2010. Project partner: Pizzo & Associates. Media contacts: Carrie Dellamano, Lemont Park District, 630-257-6787, x3010, [carrie-dellamano@lemontparkdistrict.org](mailto:carrie-dellamano@lemontparkdistrict.org); Karen Broadhurst, Pizzo & Associates, 815-826-0839, [karnb@pizzo.info](mailto:karnb@pizzo.info).
- **Bartel Grasslands Restoration, Matteson, IL, Forest Preserves of Cook County.** Formerly an agricultural field, now - after 10 years of restoration – its 485 acres have been converted to grassland through brush and tree removal, and partial restoration of hydrology. Project partners: Audubon - Chicago Region, Openlands, Thorn Creek Audubon Society, and the US Army Corps of Engineers. Media contact: Don Parker, Forest Preserves of Cook County, 708-771-1159, [don.Parker@cookcountyil.gov](mailto:don.Parker@cookcountyil.gov).
- **Brook Forest Subdivision, Oak Brook, IL, Brook Forest Community Association.** Formerly suffering from erosion, this site now consists of prairie, emergent vegetation, and wetland areas that encompass two pond shorelines and two stretches of Ginger Creek shoreline. Project partner: Pizzo & Associates. Media contacts: Mort Westman, Brook Forest, [westman@westmanassociates.com](mailto:westman@westmanassociates.com); Karen Broadhurst, Pizzo & Associates, 815-826-0839, [karenb@pizzo.info](mailto:karenb@pizzo.info).
- **Eugene Field Park Section 206 Ecosystem Restoration, Chicago, IL, Chicago Park District.** With the reestablishment of wetland, mesic prairie, and oak savanna habitat, this park has become a neighborhood hub for residents to enjoy nature. Project partner: US Army Corps of Engineers. Media contact: Zvez Kubat, 312-296-0510, [zvezdana.kubat@chicagoparkdistrict.com](mailto:zvezdana.kubat@chicagoparkdistrict.com).
- **Glen Flora Ravine Restoration at Bowen Park, Waukegan, IL, Waukegan Park District.** Removal of invasive plants, controlled burning, and support from citizen scientists have helped healthy, native vegetation thrive in this 32-acre natural area. Project partner: Waukegan Harbor Citizens Advisory Group. Media contact: Theodora Anderson, Waukegan Park District, 847-360-4726, [Tanderson@waukeganparks.org](mailto:Tanderson@waukeganparks.org).

- **Grand Army of the Republic and Thomas Jefferson Woods, Thatcher Woods Complex, River Forest, IL, *Forest Preserves of Cook County***. As a part of the Thatcher Woods Complex, this land has benefitted from removal of invasive plants, opening the savanna to sunlight and activating the dormant seeds. Project partner: Thatcher Woods Savanna Restoration Project. Media contact: Don Parker, Forest Preserves of Cook County, 708-771-1159, don.Parker@cookcountyil.gov.
- **Grand Dominion Natural Areas, Mundelein, IL, *Grand Dominion by Del Webb Community***. This residential development created and implemented a native landscape and management plan as a part of the development. They removed invasive species such as buckthorn and reed canary grass to make space for native prairie plants, which now thrive. Project partner: Christopher B. Burke Engineering. Media contacts: Jessica Towles, Grand Dominion, 847-566-2403, x11, granddpm@fosterpremier.com; Elizabeth Gilson, Christopher B. Burke Engineering, 847-833-0280, egilson@cbbel.com.
- **Heritage Woodland Sanctuary & Community Center, Lemont, IL, *Lemont Township***. This area of more than 60 acres was previously an agricultural field and remnant oak and hickory woodland. Restoration activities improved the health of the woodland and restored the agricultural field to prairie and wetland ecosystems. Project partner: Pizzo & Associates. Media contacts: Kathy Henrikson, Lemont Township, 630-863-3411, kathyhen58@att.net; Karen Broadhurst, Pizzo & Associates, 815-826-0839, karenb@pizzo.info.
- **McDowell Grove Forest Preserve / West Branch DuPage River Restoration, Naperville, IL, *DuPage County Stormwater Management and Forest Preserve District of DuPage County***. This 55-acre project enhanced the West Branch DuPage River corridor and surrounding landscape by replacing invasive plants with native landscaping and reestablishing the banks with river rock and vegetation. Media contacts: Mary Mitros, DuPage County Stormwater Management, 630-407-6706, mary.mitros@dupageco.org; Audra Mason-Bonnet, Forest Preserve District of DuPage County, (630) 933-7200, AMason-Bonnet@dupageforest.org.
- **Native Plant Garden, Valparaiso, IN, *Taltree Arboretum & Gardens***. This native plant garden gives visitors a snapshot of what northwest Indiana would have looked like during before it was developed, including a Monarch Waystation certified by the Monarch Watch. Media contact: Stephanie Blackstock, Taltree Arboretum & Gardens, 219.742.2550, sblackstock@taltree.org.

- **Outdoor Classroom, Elmhurst, IL, *Elmhurst District 205 - Hawthorne Elementary School***. Formerly turf grass, this outdoor classroom includes wildlife habitat for birds and butterflies, a rain garden, vertical vegetable garden, compost bin, weather station, and other areas that encourage children to explore and learn about the natural world. Media contact: Sue Lindstrom, slindstrom@elmhurst205.org.
- **Pingree Grove, Village of Pingree Grove, IL, *Forest Preserve District of Kane County***. With 395 acres and more than 40 tallgrass prairie plant species, this site has transformed from a degraded marsh and crop fields to a preserve that is rich in biological diversity. Media contact: Laurie Metanchuk, Forest Preserve District of Kane County, 630-232-3955, MetanchukLaurie@kaneforest.com.
- **Somme Nature Preserve Restoration, Northbrook, IL, *Forest Preserves of Cook County***. This preserve is an oasis of remnant prairie surrounded by degraded natural space. Since 1990, removal of brush and invasive species saved the original area, and in the last three years, more intensive restoration has been conducted to expand the prairie. Project partner: North Branch Restoration Project. Media contact: Don Parker, Forest Preserves of Cook County, 708-771-1159, don.Parker@cookcountyil.gov.

### ***Honorable Mentions***

- **Lincoln Park Peace Garden, Chicago, IL, *Chicago Park District***. For the native plant installation and support at the Peace Garden. Media contact: Zvez Kubat, 312-296-0510, zvezdana.kubat@chicagoparkdistrict.com.
- **John L. Siple Elementary School Green Campus Initiative, Woodridge, IL, *Woodridge School District 68***. For improving their campus through native plant gardens, permeable pavers, and their curriculum. Project partner: WRD Environmental. Media contact: John Erickson, ericksonj@woodridge68.org.

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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 initiatives of Chicago Wilderness reflect the alliance's 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](http://www.chicagowilderness.org).