



**Media Contact:**

[MariaTSadowski@gmail.com](mailto:MariaTSadowski@gmail.com)

*High resolution images available on request*

**CONSERVATION ALLIANCE HONORS EXCEPTIONAL EFFORTS ACROSS 4-STATE REGION**

*Awards and Accreditations bestowed on people and projects that inspire; will be recognized at ceremony in October 2025*

**CHICAGO, IL (27 August 2025)** – The Chicago Wilderness Alliance, a conservation collaborative that spans portions of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin, honored 31 individuals, organizations, and projects across the region for their exceptional work today, with the announcement of their 2025 Force of Nature Awards and 2025 Excellence in Ecological Restoration Program Site Accreditations.

“Communities across the country are facing unprecedented challenges, so it’s more important than ever to find hope and strength in collective action,” says Elizabeth Kessler, chair of the Alliance and executive director of the McHenry County Conservation District. “The individuals and sites recognized this year remind us that optimism and collaboration remain powerful forces. Their work is not only inspiring—it’s a blueprint for how we can continue to come together to protect what matters most and build a more resilient future.”

**2025 Force of Nature Awards**

The [George B. Rabb Force of Nature Awards](#) are given every two years. The awards are named in honor of the late, longtime director of the Chicago Zoological Society and Brookfield Zoo, who was a tireless leader in international conservation and a central force in the establishment of the Chicago Wilderness Alliance. Force of Nature awardees are recognized by their peers for rising to meet the moment with bold ideas, creative solutions, and meaningful collaboration. Their efforts—large or small—create ripples of positive change for nature and for communities, proving that one person or one project can make a difference that reaches far beyond expectations.

The 2025 Force of Nature Awardees are:

- **Benjamin Cox:** For over 20 years, Benjamin has been a fierce advocate for Cook County’s forest preserves through his role as the Executive Director of Friends of the Forest Preserves (Friends). Benjamin led Friends from one employee to 40+ year-round staff and 100+ more annual summer program participants. As Friends’ advocacy leader, he has been a consistent community advocate, sitting in on every community and district meeting he can to show support for the forest preserves, fend off land grabs, and fight for sensible land management. Benjamin is an exemplary, strategic, and collaborative leader committed to protecting, promoting, and caring for our forest preserves — and the people who help them thrive.
  
- € **Brook McDonald:** Brook has been transformational for conservation throughout northeast Illinois. Brook’s leadership transformed The Conservation Foundation (TCF) into what it is today: TCF’s programming in northeast Illinois includes nationally recognized watershed work, educational endeavors for all ages, the popular Conservation@Home program helping residents bring nature home, and an organic farm serving more than 700 families and five food pantries. In 1997, Brook led a campaign for DuPage’s Forest Preserve District that garnered \$75 million for new open space. Since then, TCF has managed and won 16 campaigns, resulting in more than \$1

billion for open space and ecological restoration and translating into more than 50,000 acres of additional public land in this region.

- ☞ **Claudia Galeno-Sanchez:** Driven by a passion to save the monarch butterfly and to green her neighborhood of Pilsen in Chicago, a historically underserved, environmental justice community with inadequate green space and a history of industrial pollution, Claudia has worked tirelessly to increase tree canopy, plant native pollinator species, and green her local public schools. She created Women for Green Spaces/ Mujeres por Espacios Verdes as a 501(c)(3) organization in 2023, run entirely by volunteers. Working with Claudia is inspiring, and her enthusiasm for the work is infectious. She sees the work of women for green spaces as part of the larger struggle for social justice in Pilsen and other immigrant neighborhoods.
- ☞ **Emy Brawley:** Emy is an adept problem solver who sees and advocates for nature as the answer to many of the complex challenges we face. Long before we as a community were using the now common buzz words, Emy was advocating for the conservation of working lands as a nature-based climate solution that is good for nature and good for people. She is a committed bridge builder who has connected the conservation land trust community with farmland preservation and food justice advocates in Chicago and beyond. She led the creation of multi-organizational partnerships linking these groups and changemaker farmers to access a new source of funding - USDA's Regional Conservation Partnership Program - that was not being utilized to benefit nature in Chicagoland or Illinois. Emy also brought The Conservation Fund's Working Farms Fund program to Chicago, which has unlocked land access for sustainable food production.
- ☞ **George Johnson:** At 100 years old, George's life and legacy exemplify the highest ideals of conservation leadership, community building, and ecological stewardship. A lifelong advocate for nature, George was pivotal in the permanent protection and restoration of High Point Conservation Area, part of McHenry County Conservation District and the highest glaciated point in Illinois. George's leadership mobilized a network of local conservation-minded landowners to manage hundreds of acres of prairie, woodland and wetlands. He inspired efforts to harvest and share native seed, coordinated prescribed burns, mapped vernal pools, and fostered a collaborative stewardship ethic that continues to grow. Through tireless efforts, generous spirit, and unwavering vision, George has left an indelible mark on the local landscape and those working to protect it.
- ☞ **Jay Young:** Jay, Co-Executive Director of the American Indian Center (AIC) in Chicago, is redefining what conservation looks like in urban Native communities. Under his leadership, the AIC, one of the oldest American Indian Centers in the U.S., has become a hub for land-based healing, cultural revitalization, and intergenerational stewardship. Jay's conservation work began with the Food is Medicine program, where he secured growing space at the Global Refugee Gardens. There, urban Native families reconnect with ancestral foodways and traditional ecological knowledge (TEK). Jay co-created the first-ever TEK Summit, which brings Native and African American knowledge keepers together to share ecological practices and envision just, sustainable futures. He has also forged groundbreaking partnerships with Openlands, Morton

Arboretum, and others. Jay is conserving more than land; he is conserving lifeways, sovereignty, and the right to belong to place.

- ✧ **John Quail:** As the Director of Policy and Conservation at Friends of the Chicago River, John has spent 25 years leading on-the-ground projects which resulted in immediate gains for ecological health for the river and adjacent lands, as well as advocating for a healthy, accessible, connected river system through the systemic policy initiatives necessary for transformational change. He was instrumental in the launch of Illinois' Dam Removal Initiative established by Governor Pat Quinn in 2012. His work in landscape scale restoration initiatives has resulted in improved stormwater capture, upland, riparian, and instream habitat, and public access. John has demonstrated great dedication to partnership by coordinating with elected officials and community members across the Chicago-Calumet River watershed and tackling problems encompassing industrial and residential areas as well as parks and forest preserves.
- ✧ **Ken Klick:** Ken has been a fierce advocate for remnant plant communities and their sustainability: rare plants/habitat management/recovery, fire dependent biotics layer, invasive species management, and INAI/INPC inclusion/dedication. He helps foster relationships between many staff, outside agencies, contractors, and volunteers. He regularly leads educational programs and hikes. Ken is an expert in plants, lichens, birds, local geology/glaciation, and Native American history. He is always willing to share his knowledge, time and books with others, after hours and on weekends.
- ✧ **Lenore Beyer:** Lenore is an imaginative innovator who consistently models and advocates for regional thinking and acting on behalf of people and nature. She was an early adopter of a collaborative mindset and taking collective action both to protect nature on a grand scale (i.e., Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge) as well as to integrate nature and ecological sustainability into other facets of human life, namely our food system. As a manager of the multi-year funding initiative, Food:Land:Opportunity, Lenore facilitates continuous learning among all partners, ranging from funders to practitioners to food business operators to farmers, which inspires and allows for adjustments that will sustain effective collaboration and lead to lasting impacts on the landscape. With creativity and openness, Lenore advances ecological sustainability, social and racial equity, and economic resilience for the Chicago region and beyond.
- ✧ **Linda Masters:** Linda is well known for her long time leadership on the Wild Things Conference, organizing the Great American Thismia Hunt, her time and effort as a volunteer for the Cook County Forest Preserves, and her noteworthy work as an assistant to Floyd Swink and Gerould Wilhelm on their 4th edition of the Flora of the Chicago Region. At Openlands, Linda stewarded the implementation and completion of 5 major restoration projects in the region through the O'Hare Modernization Mitigation Project, which restored over 530 acres of wetlands and a total of 1,620 acres of protected natural area. All were de novo projects, significantly expanding high-quality, contiguous habitat across the region, and also exceeded expectations along the way. Her impact as a Force of Nature in the Chicago Wilderness Region cannot be overstated and her contributions are both far-reaching and transformative.

- € **Liza Lehrer:** Liza, Assistant Director of the Urban Wildlife Institute at the Lincoln Park Zoo, has been a relentless, passionate champion for urban wildlife in the Chicago region for over fifteen years. She manages a massive survey of urban biodiversity at over 100 sites including city parks, forest preserves, cemeteries and golf courses, using camera traps and acoustic monitoring devices, a project that is the envy of other urban wildlife researchers around the world and has been emulated in over fifty other cities. She also manages two huge projects that connect the public to wildlife in the city--Chicago Wildlife Watch and Bat Tracker. To advance this work, she works with a vast and diverse group of partnering agencies. Liza has published dozens of research papers, mentored dozens of interns into careers in science, and dedicated her life to helping connect people and wildlife in the city.
  
- € **Mark Bouman:** Mark is known by all he has worked with over his 40+ year career as a trusted advocate for communities and places, a generous advisor and leader, and someone who brings people together for a greener, more connected Chicago Wilderness region. Throughout his career at Chicago State University and at the Field Museum's Keller Science Action Center, Mark was dedicated to mentoring the next generation by creating opportunities for voices underrepresented in conservation. Mark founded the GIS lab at Chicago State University and contributed to projects like the CW Green Infrastructure Vision and the CW Hub. He is a nationally recognized champion for Calumet, still serving on the board of the Calumet Heritage Partnership and advocating for its designation as a National Heritage Area. His investment in conservation extends beyond Calumet to Kankakee County, where he worked closely with residents to establish the Community Development Corporation of Pembroke-Hopkins Park and produce a Sustainability Plan for the region. Mark exemplifies a Force of Nature who leads from behind, inspires, and uplifts the work of his many colleagues and partners.
  
- € **Andy Johnson:** Since 2005, Andy has been a driving force behind Greencorps Chicago, a green job training initiative of the Chicago Department of Transportation that empowers individuals facing barriers to employment by preparing them for meaningful careers in environmental fields. Rising through the ranks to become program director in 2019, Andy has demonstrated unwavering dedication to both people and the planet. His leadership has shaped and sustained countless ecological projects across the region, enhancing the resilience and biodiversity of the Chicagoland landscape. But his impact goes far beyond the physical: he has cultivated a generation of stewards who carry forward a vision of a better future. Whether through direct teaching or strategic leadership, Andy has inspired a lasting love for nature and a belief in its power to heal both people and places.
  
- € **Joseph Suchecki:** Joe has volunteered with the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County since 1995, mainly at Springbrook Prairie, a key grassland habitat and state-designated nature preserve. In the early 1990s, Joe identified important bird species using the area after cover crops were planted. He co-led a successful petition to rename the preserve from "Dragon Lake" to Springbrook Prairie, focusing on protecting grassland bird habitat. Since 1994, Joe has monitored birds, served as a site steward from 1996, and monitored dragonflies since 2009,

contributing thousands of wildlife reports. Over nearly 30 years, he has dedicated close to 5,000 volunteer hours, often leading the District's Natural Resources program in hours logged. His knowledge and passion have been critical to Springbrook Prairie's success. An avid birder, he travels globally and shares his knowledge through leadership roles with the DuPage Birding Club and Bird Conservation Network.

- € **Lee Hansen:** Lee is a tireless and trailblazing leader who continues her lifetime commitment to building connections to the natural world, lighting a generational fire in others from tots to the oldest in our community. Lee began her work 35 years ago, before the 13-acre site was dedicated as a nature center and has been instrumental in entrepreneurially guiding the development of nature education, sustainable land management philosophies and practice and recreational programming, all aligned with encouraging our connection to nature toward creating stakeholders. She has grown the center from its modest beginning to a beloved community center with a distinct sense of place that welcomes and nurtures hundreds of visitors and volunteers each month. She introduced the Earth Education philosophy by implementing the Earthkeepers school program and outlined a plan of development for tots that now includes the Growing Sprouts preschooler program.
- € **Patricia K Armstrong:** Patricia K Armstrong: Pat's love, passion, effort, and positive impact for nature is constant. Pat has been a Forest Preserve District of DuPage County volunteer for more than 20 years. Her volunteer efforts include monitoring sensitive species and natural area restoration. She has also shared her expertise as a consultant. Pat is a biologist, ecologist, teacher, artist, and mentor whose impact spans more than 50 years. With a Master's in Ecology, she's brought science alive by sharing her expertise and inspiration through institutions such as the Morton Arboretum, College of DuPage, the Chicago Botanic Garden, and several local park districts. Her impact goes beyond the borders of Chicago Wilderness with teaching experience in Missouri, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Alaska. Pat has published more than 60 articles and four books. As the founder of Prairie Sun Consultants, Pat has spent over four decades helping people understand and restore native ecosystems. Her Naperville home is a "living classroom," with more than 400 species of native and edible plants, green roof, and designed in harmony with the land. Pat continues to be out in the field adding to nearly 40 years of valuable data on plants in the region. Researchers call this a treasure trove. Pat leads by example through the Greater DuPage Chapter of Wild Ones and the Illinois Native Plant Society. Her wild edible courses do more than teach—they reconnect people to the land and to food that belongs to our region and history.
- € **Friends of Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge:** The mission of the Friends is to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural resources, rural character and scenic beauty of the Refuge and to connect people to these resources. After 8 years of working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Friends celebrated formal recognition of the Refuge in 2012. Since then, the Friends have engaged (with our partners) in conservation outreach activities (Monarch Fair, World Migratory Bird Day, In Search of Eagles, etc.) and stewardship of lands acquired by our Land Protection Partners. That stewardship includes "hands-on" volunteer activities (approaching 700

volunteer hours each year)- frequently engaging local High Schools and securing funds (Community Project Funding - \$975,000; National Fish and Wildlife Foundation - \$48,000; Illinois Clean Energy Stewardship Grants (2) - \$68,000; and several NICOR grants - \$10,000) to restore lands. The Friends were honored by the National Wildlife Refuge Association as the "2024 Friends Group of the Year" for its conservation outreach activities, stewardship, and for support of the Refuge.

- € **Vote Yes on the McHenry County Conservation District Proposition Committee:** The Committee was a grassroots effort that united community members in pursuit of an important conservation mission. Formed in 2024 to support a ballot initiative aimed at Protecting Water, Preserving Wildlife Habitat, and Increasing Outdoor Recreation Access for All, this citizen-led campaign brought together dedicated volunteers, McHenry County Conservation Foundation Board of Directors, regional conservation leaders and engaged residents and conservation area site users. Through tireless outreach, the committee educated voters with accessible, factual information and mobilized support via tabling, canvassing, phone banking, media engagement, mailings, digital marketing and one-on-one conversations. Their efforts were instrumental in elevating awareness of what was at stake and how the proposition would benefit the entire county for generations to come. Their persistence proved decisive: the proposition ultimately passed. The committee's work didn't just secure critical funding for land stewardship and public access—it inspired confidence in the McHenry County Conservation District's mission and reminded people of the power of collective action.
- € **Chicago Council on Science and Technology (C2ST):** C2ST exists to make science feel relevant, welcoming, and real for everyone across Chicagoland. Through free and low-cost public programs, they help people of all ages explore how science shows up in everyday life—whether that's in nature, in policy, in our mental health, or in the night sky above our neighborhoods. C2ST brings science out of the lab and into community spaces—parks, cemeteries, breweries, libraries, and schools—making it something you can experience, not just observe. Their events are engaging and hands-on, focused on sparking curiosity and connection, not just delivering information.
- € **Defusing Disasters Working Group (DD):** DD began in the fall of 2022 after the City of Chicago's Climate Action Plan (CAP) was released earlier that spring. DD is funded by the Buffett Institute for Global Affairs at Northwestern University, to co-develop a community driven, data-informed, public health-focused Heat Vulnerability Index (HVI) with researchers, community, and government. The mission of DD aligns with Pillar 5 of the CAP which includes the development of an HVI to integrate it into planning and development, community safety, and public health planning processes. It was the first time an HVI would be co-developed by the community. One of the results of their efforts have results in the creation of an HVI Governance Advisory Council and Community Engagement Working Group. This first of its kind community-driven, data-informed, public health-based HVI incorporates public health, socioeconomic, environmental, and climate data.

- € **Citizens for Conservation (CFC):** Founded in 1971 and based in Barrington, Illinois, CFC is a volunteer-driven nonprofit devoted to “Saving Living Space for Living Things” through land protection, habitat restoration, and community education. Over five decades, CFC has safeguarded more than 3,500 acres in the Barrington area—owning 777 acres across 14 preserves and spearheading the protection of over 3,200 acres of public land such as Fox River Preserve, Ela Marsh, and Baker’s Lake. At the heart of its efforts is the Barrington Greenway Initiative (BGI), a visionary program to link fragmented habitats across a 14,000-acre corridor of prairies, oak savannas, forested wetlands, and waterways. Launched in collaboration with partners like Lake and Cook Counties’ Forest Preserve Districts, Audubon Great Lakes, Friends of the Forest Preserves, and the Bobolink Foundation, BGI aims to create continuous habitat corridors—from Poplar Creek to the Fox River—to bolster regional biodiversity and ecological resilience.
- € **Rewilding the South Branch: Chicago River Restoration Through Partnership:** Since 2022, the Shedd Aquarium, the Chicago Park District and Urban Rivers have collaborated on the Rewilding the South Branch project to improve river health, support biodiversity, foster climate resilience and connect residents to the river. A historically industrialized and polluted portion of the South Branch of the Chicago River is once again teeming with wildlife and recreational activity. Shedd has secured more than \$1.8 million in grant funds to kickstart and support this collective work. Urban Rivers has installed more than 3,000 square feet of floating wetland habitats in the river to provide resources to wildlife above and below the water’s surface. To expand terrestrial habitat and mitigate impacts of climate change such as flooding and erosion, the Chicago Park District has improved the natural areas at Canal Origins and Canalport Riverwalk Parks, established a new natural area at Park 571 and built new fishing stations. The Park District also worked with community members to design a nature play space at Park 571. These organizations contribute to ecological monitoring to understand habitat quality and wildlife populations and guide restoration efforts. They have hosted more than 1,000 individuals at various recreational and learning opportunities on and near the river to foster a sense of stewardship and appreciation in the South Branch as an ecological, economic and cultural asset.
- € **Powderhorn Lake Habitat Restoration Project:** The historic Powderhorn Lake Habitat Restoration project, completed in 2023, restored more than 100 acres of wetlands by reconnecting Powderhorn Lake to Wolf Lake – and ultimately Lake Michigan. Powderhorn Lake is a 50-acre freshwater lake located within Powderhorn Forest Preserve on the southeast side of Chicago. It is one of the most biodiverse natural areas in Illinois and contains a globally rare dune-and-swale landscape. Wolf Lake, a 950-acre freshwater lake, is located directly to the north, and is managed by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. A multi-year collaboration with Audubon Great Lakes, and the partnership and funding from the Great Lakes Commission and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, led to the successful completion of this project. Like many locations in the Calumet Region, urban and industrial development had profoundly changed the natural conditions of the site. The successful hydrologic reconnection reestablished vital marsh habitat for migratory birds, and the lake is

once again a thriving fish nursery. Surrounding communities are seeing reduced flooding and erosion, and people can recreate in, and explore an ecologically healthy preserve.

- ☞ **Master Plan for Salt Creek at Fullersburg Woods:** Fullersburg Woods Forest Preserve is home to the historic Graue Mill, a popular restored grist mill that is on the National Historic Register. The site is also characterized by Salt Creek and a run of the river dam (Graue Mill/Fullersburg Woods dam) constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930's adjacent to the mill. The impoundment formed by the dam had the poorest water quality, aquatic habitat, and macroinvertebrate community on Salt Creek, and eliminated 16 species of fish from the upstream river. Working together, in 2023-2024, the DuPage River Salt Creek Work Group, Forest Preserve District of DuPage County, and the Metropolitan Water District of Greater Chicago, implemented the Master Plan for Salt Creek at Fullersburg Woods. The implementation was more than 20 years in the making. This involved removing the dam and restored approximately one and a half miles of riverine habitat and associated wetlands at Fullersburg Woods Forest Preserve.
- ☞ **Be a Trailblazer Campaign:** "Be a Trailblazer" is a year-round public engagement campaign by the Forest Preserve District of Will County designed to ignite outdoor exploration through self-guided nature challenges, both inside and outside of Will County preserves. This engagement campaign empowers individuals and families to discover nature on their own terms and at their own pace. The campaign targets residents across all ages and ability levels. Participants complete photo, GPS-based, and trivia missions to get out in the wonders of nature with more regularity. The campaign has more than \$10,000 in prizes being awarded thanks to sponsorship from The Nature Foundation of Will County and dozens of local businesses.
- ☞ **Illinois RiverWatch:** Illinois RiverWatch is a community science program dedicated to protecting and improving the health of Illinois' streams through citizen engagement, education, and scientific monitoring. Designed for volunteers of all backgrounds—including educators, students, conservationists, and concerned citizens—the program empowers participants to become stewards of local waterways by training them to collect scientifically valid data on water quality and stream ecology. The program's primary purpose is twofold: to build a long-term, statewide dataset that informs restoration and policy efforts, and to foster a stronger connection between people and their local environments.

The [Excellence in Ecological Restoration Program Site Accreditations](#) demonstrate the highest standards and best management practices in terms of ecological restoration and managing healthy landscapes. The accreditation process includes a formal application, a self-assessment, and a site visit by a team of conservation professionals. Each recipient must show evidence of meeting the highest restoration standards. The entire region benefits from both the site stewards' knowledge and the effort they put into ecological restoration. This competitive program, which can result in certifications at the Platinum, Gold, or Silver levels, is administered by the Commission on Excellence in Ecological Restoration.

The 2025 Excellence in Ecological Restoration Program certifications are:



- Blackwell & St. James Farm Forest Preserves – Forest Preserve District of DuPage County – Platinum:** Blackwell and St. James Farm Forest Preserves serve as critical habitat for endangered wildlife and are home to the Urban Stream Research Center. A transformative restoration revitalized the impaired Spring Brook #1. This collaborative project corrected historic channelization by re-meandering the stream, reconnecting it to its floodplain, and removing a dam to restore aquatic passage. Ecological restoration restored remnant woodlands and re-established wetland and prairie plant communities. The result is significant stream water quality and habitat improvements, creation of vital habitat supporting over 700 native plant species, over 1,000 native species in total, including threatened and endangered species and imperilled suites of species like native mussels and fish, enhanced flood resilience, and improved public access. This project serves as a leading example of successful, science-based urban stream ecosystem recovery.
  - Busse Forest Nature Preserve – Forest Preserves of Cook County – Platinum:** Busse Forest Nature Preserve is the seventh largest nature preserve in the state of Illinois. The preserve protects a mosaic of remnant mesic upland forest, mesic woodland, dry-mesic woodland, northern flatwoods, shrub swamp, sedge meadow, and freshwater marsh. Also present are areas of unassociated woody vegetation and reforestation. The preserve is located at the toe of the Tinley moraine, where it meets the terrace of Salt Creek. Subtle changes in topography and soils foster an intermingling of natural communities and create a hotspot of biological diversity, including over 270 native plant species, including several state-listed species.
- Grassy Lake Forest Preserve – Lake County Forest Preserves – Platinum:** Grassy Lake Forest Preserve protects 691 acres of oak woodlands, prairies, wetlands, and successional habitat, near the town of Barrington. Important natural features are known from this Preserve and include the state dedicated Wagner Fen Nature Preserve, Fox River and Flint Creek watercourses, a glacial lake, remnant high-quality sedge meadow and wet prairie communities, and >20 years of exemplary volunteer stewardship-led restoration achievements of the site's prairie, oak woodland and wetland communities. This Excellence In Ecological Restoration application nominates the most biologically diverse 320-acre portion, where stewardship activities by dedicated volunteers, augmented by District staff and contractual support have improved and expanded habitat for many rare plants and animals, including 25 Species of Greatest Conservation Need noted by IDNR. Four state threatened plants species occur here, along with many regionally rare and conservative species.
- High Point Conservation Area – McHenry County Conservation District – Platinum:** High Point Conservation Area is located in Alden Township in northern McHenry County. It is bordered by Wright Rd to the East, Hebron Rd to the north, Reese Rd to the West, and Oak Grove Rd to the south. High Point is located in the northeastern morainal division of Illinois. The site is located on the terminal moraine of the last glacial period where the Woodstock moraine (18-20,000 years before present YPB) overlaps the Marengo moraine (30,000 YPB). This gives High Point its characteristic rolling topography with oak hickory woodlands and the highest glaciated point in Illinois. Between the rugged hills many kettles were formed and provide critical habitat for amphibians and invertebrates. Several headwater streams start their course at High Point and continue to flow and from one of the highest quality streams in the state, Nippersink Creek. Many intact stream side wetlands are found on the site as well. There are also over a hundred acres of restored prairie on the site.
  - Lockport Prairie Nature Preserve – Forest Preserve District of Will County – Platinum:**

Lockport Prairie Nature Preserve (LPN) is a 320-acre preserve owned and managed by the Forest Preserve District of Will County (FPDWC). The preserve contains globally rare dolomite prairie that develop in shallow soils over dolomite bedrock. Within LPN, there is a complex assemblage of remnant dolomite prairie and groundwater-fed wetlands across the bottom of the Des Plaines River valley, bounded on the west by a steep, wooded bluff. The site supports two federally listed Endangered/Threatened plant species – leafy prairie clover (*Dalea foliosa*) and lakeside daisy (*Tetraneuris herbacea*). The seep-fed rivulets provide larval habitat for the federally endangered Hine’s emerald dragonfly (*Somatochlora hineana*). The rare habitats also support 11 state-listed E/T plant species, the federally endangered Rusty Patched Bumble Bee (*Bombus affinis*), and two state-endangered turtles: Blanding’s turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*) and the largest population of spotted turtle (*Clemmys guttata*) in Illinois.

To recognize the 2025 honorees and accreditations, the Chicago Wilderness Alliance is hosting a [Celebration of Conservation on Wednesday, October 22, 2025 at the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum.](#)

The [Chicago Wilderness Alliance](#) is a regional collaborative of hundreds of partner organizations and individuals working to implement landscape-scale approaches to conservation in and around the southern shores of Lake Michigan including members from Southeast Wisconsin, Northeast Illinois, Northwest Indiana, and Southwest Michigan.

The Alliance brings together leaders, experts, and conservation professionals at all stages of their careers to share diverse voices and perspectives, and to work toward a common vision: creating and protecting a vibrant, accessible region where people and nature thrive.

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