



2023 ANNUAL REPORT



YOUR YEAR OF ACTION

Guiding
Exploring
Trusting
Inspiring



YOUR YEAR OF ACTION



Elizabeth S. Kessler, Chair

We said 2023 would be our Year of Action at the Chicago Wilderness Alliance—and wow, did you deliver!

In these pages, you'll see highlights of what 6,000 people and 313 partner organizations accomplish when committed to a shared goal. Our Green Vision united and inspired us all. Across Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin, you provided unwavering dedication and led the way to a region that is more sustainable, climate resilient, and equitable.

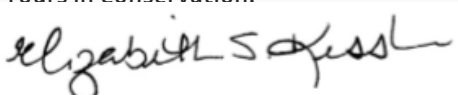
The Alliance has even bigger goals for 2024—and you are an essential partner to achieve them. We invite you and your networks to:

- Join a Green Initiative Team and work on prioritized actions with regional impact;
- Propose Cafe topics on shared successes and challenges;
- Use Alliance Action Alerts, job postings, community calendars, and other tools to reach conservation professionals, promote training opportunities, and draw attention to issues of concern;
- Engage in Executive Council meetings to set direction, review progress, and identify new partners; and
- Watch for opportunities to participate in our Climate Action for People and Nature Plan process.

Most importantly, mark your calendar for Friday, November 15 to join us for Congress 2024 at Purdue University Northwest. At Congress, we bring together the entire Alliance network to build momentum around the Green Vision and share the many ways it manifests across the region. We'll also spotlight the Calumet region, where a collaborative approach to conservation was co-created with a local community. I promise you'll be inspired and energized.

On behalf of the Steering Committee and the entire Chicago Wilderness Alliance, thanks for all that you cultivated in 2023. Let's continue our commitment to nurturing a generation of conservation stewards and building a resilient region through partnership in 2024 and beyond. Stronger together!

Yours in Conservation.



THE GREEN VISION

We bring 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.



YOUR IMPACT IN 2023

6000

People in
4 States

From early-career professionals
to CEOs, all donating their time to
accomplish shared goals

313

Partners in
37 Counties

Spanning businesses,
organizations, agencies,
municipalities, and more

800

People Creating
7 Workplans

Creating shared goals, identifying
priorities, and understanding
funding opportunities

1229

People in Cafes
on 24 Topics

Discussing ideas and challenges
via online spaces to network and
learn

200

People on
4 Field Trips

Enjoying in-person opportunities
for peer-to-peer learning

966

Equity Training
Participants

Discovering solutions to the
challenges and needs of people
working on environmental issues

16

Awards and
Recognitions

Celebrating Forces of Nature and
Excellence in Ecological
Restoration

750

Jobs Posted

Sharing pathways for
conservation professionals,
volunteers, and board members

175

Events Shared

Spreading the word about
training, meetings, funding, and
more

GUIDING ACTION

Green Vision Initiatives are the framework that helps the Alliance set, track, and implement action and create an inclusive approach to thriving nature for people and wildlife. Seven thematic areas—plus a centralized data tool—empower regional partners to visualize and share progress. Successes in 2023 included:



- Updating *Community Wildfire Preparedness Plan*
- Offered multiple Midwest Prescribed Burn Trainings
- Agreement on process to approve new burn trainers
- Planning for urban forestry and Milwaukee Arborist Apprentice Field Trip and Cooperative Weed Management Areas



- Sold out Kane County Field Trip
- Building coalition for Will County alternative land use plan
- Hosted Cafe on building natural and working land partnerships in NE Illinois
- Planning for 2024 Field Trip in NW Indiana, enhancing local agriculture infrastructure, increasing biodiversity on farms, and native seed production pilot



- Advanced gROWing Chicago Habitat initiative through 2 in-person meetings to develop tools and strategies and building a habitat prioritization tool based on equity, connectivity, and biodiversity; tool is freely available on Hub
- Planning for more partner engagement



- Updating Chicago Wilderness Alliance map to include watersheds
- Hosted Cafe with agencies concerned with protecting private lands
- Collaborating to secure referendum funding
- Planning for recruitment and best practice series





GREEN VISION INITIATIVES



- Reworked goals and strategies to be more actionable
- Offered free online JEDI training to Alliance partners and others
- Shared resources and best practices
- Planning for equity roadmap across all initiatives and supporting emerging professionals



- Updating *Climate Action for People and Nature* via community-forward process
- Co-led Riverside, IL C4 Climate Planning Initiative with Urban Efficiency Group
- Supported grants and policy connections at local and federal levels
- Participated in gROWing Chicago Habitat planning
- Building connections with regional/national climate organizations, programs, and collaboratives
- Planning for improved climate mapping and analysis, support for community climate planning, and coordination of climate goals across all initiatives



- Hosted Cafe on regional watershed indicies and priorities
- Held 2 consensus-building meetings on watershed planning

HUB

- Developing metrics for each Green Vision Initiative
- Co-developed maps for ecological planning areas
- Created interactive restoration maps and agriculture dashboard
- Creating dashboards across all initiatives
- Refining site to be more user-friendly



EXPLORING ACTION

Created in 2020 to connect us virtually, the Alliance's [online Cafe series](#) are now one of the benefits most valued by partners. This forum opens up conversations on a huge variety of topics, all related to the region's biggest challenges and connected to the Green Vision initiatives. Person-to-person connections on these webinars have fostered deeper understanding and new collaborations.

Field Trips were funded by Nicor Gas in 2023. The trips are potent sources of energy for the Alliance. All [four Field Trips](#) sold out, proving that you are eager to be outdoors to learn about conservation innovations and meet your peers.



African-American Heritage Water Trail
and Beaubien Woods
June 2023



Kane County Growing with Agriculture
August 2023



Illinois Beach State Park
July 2023



Chicago's Wild Mile
August 2023

African-American Heritage Trail/ Beaubien Woods

Innovative approach to recreation, cultural engagement, community-based conservation, and site activation

Illinois Beach State Park

Perspectives on the Lakeplain Partnership, conservation successes, and Zion Nuclear Plant decommissioning

Kane County Agriculture

Sustainable and organic practices, community wellness, and climate - friendly farmland protection

Chicago's Wild Mile

Floating eco-park serving people, wildlife, and the environment

TRUSTING ACTION

Thanks to our major supporters—the Illinois Department of Natural Resources Urban and Community Forestry Program, the U.S. Forest Service, Forest Preserves of Cook County, and Nicor—the Alliance continued to advance equity and justice for the region. This included stipends and scholarships for Field Trips and support for Initiative team leads. In 2023, we hosted our second year of free online training on equity issues, which were created specifically for the conservation community. The courses quickly filled to capacity and training will continue through 2024.

Topics included:

- Why Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Is Vital to Conservation Goals
- Understanding Privilege and Microaggressions
- Visioning for Effective Allyship
- Organization Review Lens
- Inclusive Leadership: Building Culturally Competent Organizations and Effectively Leading Diverse Teams

Comments from equity training participants:

I work at the cross-section of DEI and conservation. This opportunity allows me to dive deeper into the work.

I've been through a number of DEI trainings but none specific to conservation. Thank you!

We are excited to bring this knowledge back to our organization. Grateful for the learning opportunity!



INSPIRING ACTION

Among our Alliance partners are people and organizations who serve conservation in truly outstanding ways. At our Celebration of Conservation this winter, we were extremely proud to recognize our George B. Rabb Force of Nature winners and the sites granted Excellence in Ecological Restoration Program certification.

Congratulations on your accomplishments! You are an inspiration to us all.



Brenda Elmore

Production Manager, Friends of the Forest Preserves



Cathy Geraghty

Director of Strategic Initiatives, Forest Preserves of Cook County



Dani Abboud

Senior Program Director, Brushwood Center at Ryerson Woods



Eriko Kojima

Board Member, Friends of IL Nature Preserves



Raquel Garcia-Alvarez and Xochitl Lopez

Forest Preserves of Cook County



Adopt a Lot Program

Chicago, IL

FORCE OF NATURE

EXCELLENCE IN ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION PROGRAM



Green Belt Forest Preserve
Lake County Forest Preserves
PLATINUM



Sand Ridge Nature Preserve
Forest Preserve District of Will County
GOLD



Natural Solutions Tools



Rusty Rodeo



Youth Outdoor Ambassadors
Forest Preserves of Cook County



LAKE PLAIN
Feasibility
Study

Chiwaukee Prairie-IL Beach
Lake Plain Partnership



Conservation Action
Planning in Calumet Region
Partnership



Little Village Environmental
Justice Organization Farm

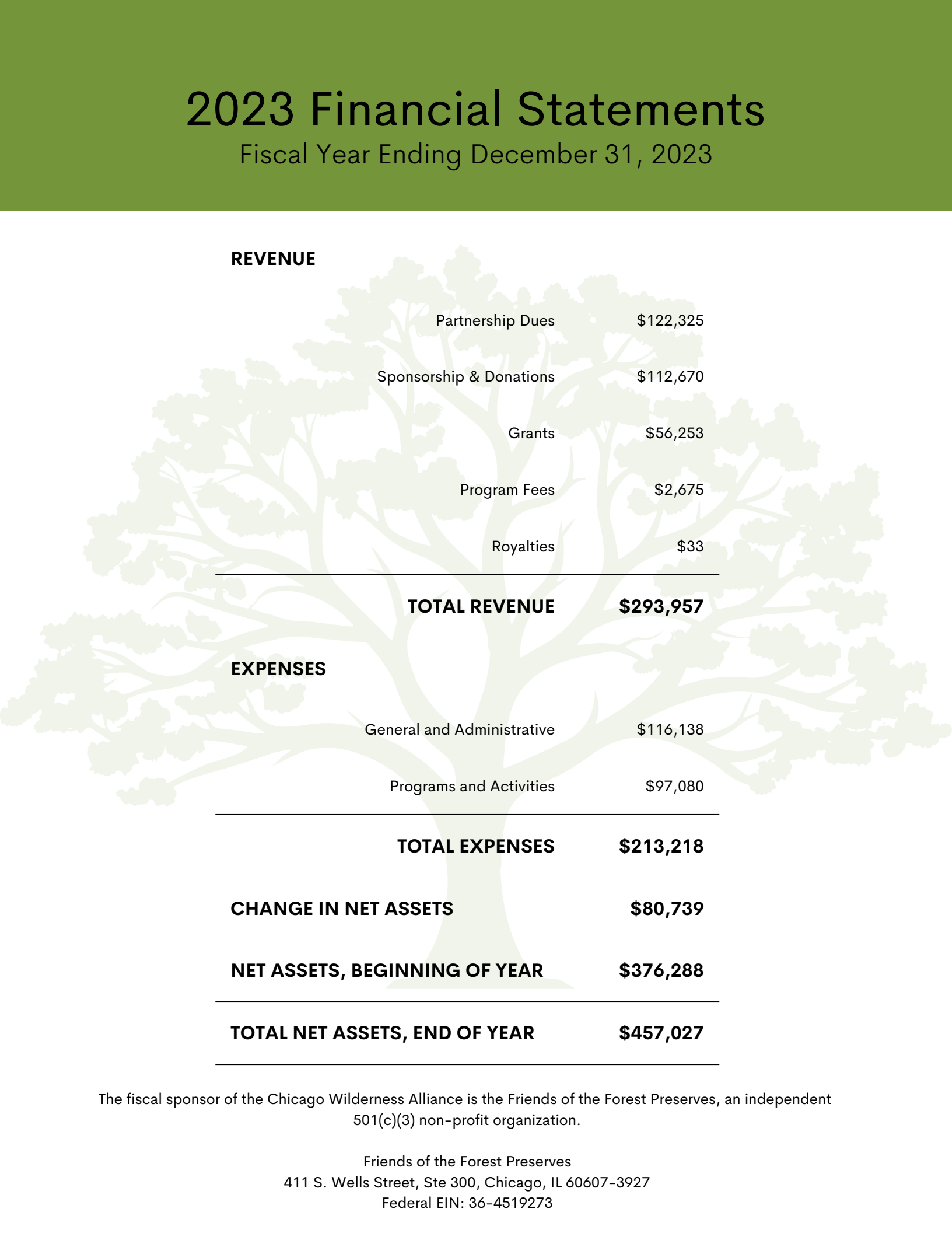


Rising Lights

2023 Financial Statements

Fiscal Year Ending December 31, 2023

REVENUE



Partnership Dues	\$122,325
Sponsorship & Donations	\$112,670
Grants	\$56,253
Program Fees	\$2,675
Royalties	\$33

TOTAL REVENUE	\$293,957
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EXPENSES

General and Administrative	\$116,138
Programs and Activities	\$97,080

TOTAL EXPENSES	\$213,218
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CHANGE IN NET ASSETS	\$80,739
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NET ASSETS, BEGINNING OF YEAR	\$376,288
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TOTAL NET ASSETS, END OF YEAR	\$457,027
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The fiscal sponsor of the Chicago Wilderness Alliance is the Friends of the Forest Preserves, an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

Friends of the Forest Preserves
411 S. Wells Street, Ste 300, Chicago, IL 60607-3927
Federal EIN: 36-4519273



THANK YOU

With appreciation to all the people and organizations who make up the Chicago Wilderness Alliance.

2023 Steering Committee

Chair: Elizabeth S. Kessler, McHenry County Conservation District

Vice-Chair: Michelle Carr, The Nature Conservancy in Illinois

Treasurer: Mike Glester, Magnolia Land Partners

Executive Secretary: Jim Anderson, Citizens for Conservation

Gerald Adelman, Openlands

Mark Bouman, The Field Museum

Leslie Dorworth, Illinois-Indiana SeaGrant

Cherie Fisher, U.S. Forest Service

Cathy Geraghty, Forest Preserve District of Cook County

Ted Haffner, Climate Change Consultant

Vincent J. Mosca, Hey and Associates

Nathanael J. Pilla, Midwest Biological Survey, LLC

John Rogner, Illinois Department of Natural Resources

David Shimberg, Riverwoods Preservation Council

Maggie Soliz, Kane-Dupage Soil and Water Conservation District, AIWSCD

Victoria Wittig, PhD, Northwest Indiana Urban Waters Federal Partnership

Laura Reilly, Alliance Coordinator

ChicagoWilderness.org