2023 ANNUAL REPORT

YOUR YEAR OF ACTION
Guiding
Exploring
Trusting
Inspiring
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,

Elizabeth S. Kessler, Chair

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
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 indices 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
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 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 DEIJ 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!
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.
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

Chiwaukee Prairie-IL Beach
Lake Plain Partnership

LAKE PLAIN Feasibility Study

Conservation Action Planning in Calumet Region Partnership

Little Village Environmental Justice Organization Farm

Rising Lights
# 2023 Financial Statements
## Fiscal Year Ending December 31, 2023

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<th>Revenue Source</th>
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<td>Partnership Dues</td>
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<td>Sponsorship &amp; Donations</td>
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<td>Grants</td>
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<td>Royalties</td>
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<th>Expense Category</th>
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<tr>
<td>Programs and Activities</td>
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<td><strong>Total Expenses</strong></td>
<td><strong>$213,218</strong></td>
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**Change in Net Assets**  
$80,739

**Net Assets, Beginning of Year**  
$376,288

**Total Net Assets, End of Year**  
$457,027

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 Adelmann, 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