



2018 Year In Review

**Annual Report
of Land Conservation Achievements
in Illinois**

by David Holman



About Prairie State Conservation Coalition

Prairie State Conservation Coalition is a statewide, not-for-profit association that works to strengthen the effectiveness of conservation land trusts in Illinois. Conservation land trusts, such as local land conservancies, are also not-for-profit organizations seeking to improve the quality of life in their communities. Collectively, these organizations have helped protect more than 200,000 acres of open space in Illinois.

PSCC provides continuing education and training for conservation land trusts and advocates for strong statewide policies that benefit land conservation.

Find out more at prairiestateconservation.org.

Our Mission: Empower the conservation land trust community to fulfill the promise that our wild places and open spaces will be preserved for generations to come.

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2018 - Year in Review

With 2018 having come to a close, the time has arrived to once more look back upon the year just passed. But before we begin, readers may notice that this year's report is being issued by The Prairie State Conservation Coalition, the association of Illinois' 501(c)3 land trusts and the creator of both the mobile [Hike App](#) and the [I-View](#) Protected Lands Database.

PSCC's role in our state's conservation equation is to connect, serve, and to advance the capacity and impact of *all* land trusts throughout Illinois, and through them, protect our land and water resources. I am grateful for and respect the work of member land trusts who are the backbones of leadership for PSCC. I also appreciate many other organizations, foundations, agencies, municipalities and individuals in Illinois that dedicate themselves to furthering conservation. As such, it is my pleasure to work directly with PSCC to draft, coordinate, and issue this annual report.

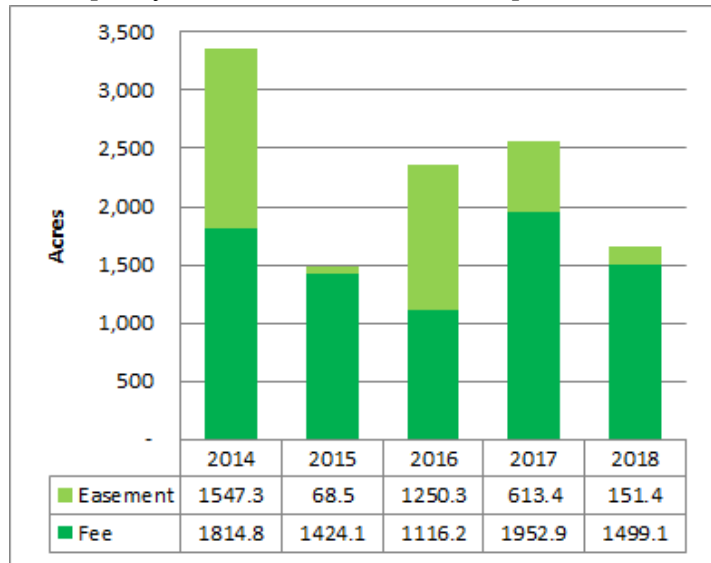
What does that mean for the content and tone of this report? Not a thing (well, aside from the introduction of the aforementioned cover page). I'll still be expounding on each of the past year's natural area land acquisition projects and on major restoration, management, and policy projects and initiatives. And, as the commentary will likely make clear, I maintain editorial control over the contents. As such, the Standard Disclaimer Text is in order; all opinions in this report are my own, and do not necessarily reflect those of either PSCC or its members. If there's something you don't like, it's all on me. So, with that out of the way, let's get to the main event, shall we? It's time for 2018 in Review! This year, we have:

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Private Sector Land Conservation

Illinois has nearly three dozen conservation land trusts working across a huge range of landscapes and communities, and it shows. This past year, the state’s land trusts protected 1,650.5 acres in projects that will improve local water quality, preserve and expand wildlife habitat, and provide trails and other recreational opportunities to their communities. As was the case last year, there were a number of projects that involved transferring a property or easement from one organization to another. These projects aren’t included in the acreage totals, though they *are* discussed in full below:

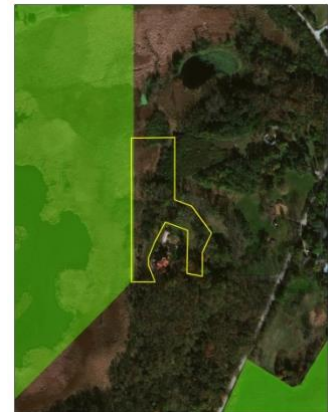


This is the fifth year in which I’ve written this annual report, and over that time, Grand Prairie Friends has steadily and methodically been creating a vast preserve that will link state and municipal lands to create a seamless corridor for residents and wildlife alike. In 2018, they purchased 280 acres to near the completion of that unequalled effort. Not to be outdone, the **Illinois Audubon Society** purchased 377 acres, significantly expanding two preserves that have been identified by the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory as representing some of the finest ecological resources in the state. Over the last year, fourteen land trusts have worked with their communities to establish or expand preserves and to open new lands to the public. Let’s take a look!*

* Projects for each organization are described sequentially by their completion date.

✿ Barrington Area Conservation Trust

A 4.64-acre conservation easement encompassing restored hill prairie, woodlands and wetlands in the Village of Barrington Hills, in northwestern Cook County. The easement borders the Forest Preserve District of Cook County’s ~4,000-acre Spring Creek Forest Preserve to its west, protecting the eastern extreme of a wetland & sedge meadow complex that encompasses much of the site. The owner of the property has long managed the natural areas as a seamless extension of the adjacent publicly owned preserve; the wetlands in the west of the easement quickly transition to a mixed hardwood canopy that in turn gives way to prairie and hill prairie bordering a residence.



✿ Citizens for Conservation

4.183 previously protected acres in the Village of Lake Barrington in southwestern Lake County, along U.S. Route 14 as an addition to the 156.1-acre Flint Creek Savanna. The eponymous creek which bisects the site is a reasonably high quality (Grade B) tributary of the Fox River, which is both unusual in such an urbanized area and a tribute to the care with which the local communities care for their local flora and fauna. The acquisition is part of a long-term partnership with the Village of Lake Barrington, through which CFC has been acquiring portions of a larger 29-acre parcel since 2010. The property contains small wetland areas while primarily consisting of upland that is populated by a small concentration of large bur oaks, a community which the organization has begun to restore.



✿ Friends of the Kankakee

7.47 acres of open field and woodland in nine separate acquisitions, all with the robust support of the **Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation**. Friends has now preserved a total of 314.62 acres, the vast majority of which, as I reiterate each year, has been subdivided into lots of only $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ acres in size. Friends is slowly reassembling this fractured landscape and will eventually deed its acquired properties to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to become part of the Kankakee National Wildlife and Fish Refuge; the Refuge's inaugural 66.1-acre property (seen in the upper left-hand corner of the map at right) was in fact donated by Friends of the Kankakee. Put simply, the Refuge *exists* because of Friends of the Kankakee.



Long-time readers may know that this is one of my favorite projects in the whole of the state. The ambition and dedication required to make it a reality are matched only by its ecological value. 2018 was host to a significant milestone in this years-long effort, as Friends acquired two parcels that physically connect the Wildlife and Fish Refuge with the Illinois DNR's 1,642-acre Iroquois County State Fish and Wildlife Area; a connection made possible only because of the major acquisitions completed in 2017 and discussed in this report a year ago! The FOK properties also abut ~18,025 protected acres across the state line owned by the Indiana DNR and The Nature Conservancy, creating a contiguous corridor. As Friends of the Kankakee continues its work, that slender corridor promises to grow to become an integrated landscape.

✿ Friends of the Sangamon Valley

42.7 acres that had previously been registered as an Illinois Land & Water Reserve in the far north of Mason County. The site lies across a County road from the 7,555-acre Sand Ridge State Forest (itself part of a complex of publicly and privately protected properties over 33,000 acres in size). Donated to Friends by the longtime landowner, who had been caring for and restoring the land since the late 1980s, the majority of the property is covered by a second-growth woodland, complemented by an 11-acre restored sand prairie (which has naturally regenerated from surviving plants and/or seed beds) and an additional 1 acre remnant sand prairie. Surviving sand prairies are even less common than their other grassland kin, making the site well worth inclusion in the Illinois Nature Preserves system.



For those keeping track at home, this is the third fee donation to FOSV in the last five years. Friends maintains active outreach, educational, and landowner assistance programs; these both complement and strengthen the organization's rapport with local landowners, with deeply impressive results.

✿ Grand Prairie Friends

148.0 acres along the Embarras River south of the City of Charleston, in southeastern Coles County. Woodlands along the river and the site's north border a large agricultural field in its south and east. Acquired with the support of the **Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation** and the **Lumpkin Family Foundation**, the property is the latest of many additions to GPF's Warbler Ridge Conservation Area, discussed in both the 2015 and 2017 editions of this report. The preserve lies between two large natural areas; the City of Charleston's 844-acre Woodyard Conservation Area and Lake Charleston to the north and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources' 1,720-acre Fox Ridge State Park to the south. Grand Prairie Friends has been striving to link these two areas together; an endeavor begun less than a decade ago. This new property is a significant milestone in the effort in that it directly connects the main body of GPF's now 871-acre preserve (adjacent to a 75 acre privately held Illinois Land & Water Reserve) to the City of Charleston's land to the north.

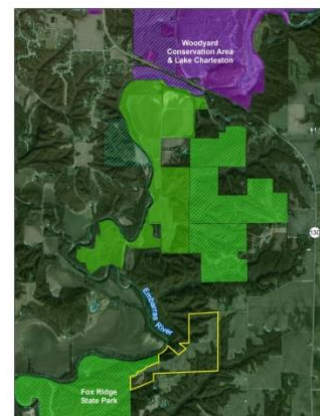


Grand Prairie Friends will plant the majority of the agricultural field to a high-density forest, complemented by a small wetland. The goal is to further a USFWS Habitat Conservation Plan for the region which seeks to establish optimal habitat for the Indiana Bat and the Northern Long-Eared Bat (the former of which is on both the Federal and State Endangered Species lists and was documented at a nearby site in

2017, while the latter is on the Threatened Species list at both the federal and state levels).

The municipal conservation area forms the northern anchor of what is now becoming a single macrosite, with Fox Ridge State Park acting as the (future) southern anchor. Taken together, the three preserves and adjacent Land & Water Reserve incorporate 3,414 acres of varied habitat, including, as I've written previously, prairie, riparian, forest, and open water, and contain five individual Illinois Nature Preserves and Land & Water Reserves (demarcated in a light blue crosshatch on the map). This is one of the most impressive projects in the state, and one that continues to grow at a remarkable pace.

131.906 acres a bit south of the parcel described above, also with a small amount of frontage along the Embarras River. Acquired with the support of the **Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation** and the **Lumpkin Family Foundation**, the property is split between timber and an agricultural field planted to corn and soybeans. The forested areas mostly lie on the steep ridges that characterize much of the larger area; the property falls ~250 feet from its highpoint to the bottomlands. The Foundation will be restoring the agricultural field to forest and pollinator habitat. I've already described the context of this project above, so will end by directing your attention to the fact that this is the first GPF property to border Fox Ridge State Park!



✿ Heartlands Conservancy

135.1 acres along the Kaskaskia River (~140 acres if you include the river bed) in Heartlands' first foray into Washington County, along whose northwestern border the land sits. The area is biologically rich, as demonstrated by the presence of three privately held Land & Water Reserves just south of the new preserve. Acquired with the support of the **Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation**, a bottomland forest dominates the entirety of the property. Many readers are most likely scratching their heads trying to work out what a "bottomland forest" is (OK, actually, truth be told, folks probably blew right past that, but I'm gonna explain it anyways). Common along the Gulf coast, these forests are located in floodplains that are inundated on a fairly regular basis; indeed, the new preserve was completely flooded this past spring. This facilitates the growth of forests with a very different look and feel to those found further north, something I'll elaborate on shortly when discussing a very neat project brought to fruition by the Illinois Audubon Society.



✿ Illinois Audubon Society

347.436 acres in far southern Pope County, just west of the Ohio River marking the state's border with Kentucky.

Acquired with the support of the **Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation**, the land is rich with old growth bald cypress and tupelo gum timber growing in a very high-quality swamp adjacent to equally high-quality wet floodplain forest and wet-mesic floodplain forest. It's an ecosystem that [looks](#) for all the world as though it were transplanted directly from Louisiana; it should surprise no one that high quality examples of all of these ecosystems are quite rare in the state.



The property is also adjacent to The Nature Conservancy's 206.6-acre Round Pond and a 130-acre WRP easement on privately owned land, creating a ~676.6 acre preserve, most of which is part of an Illinois Natural Areas Inventory site (with the TNC property having been dedicated as an Illinois Nature Preserve). Adding to the preserve's value, an open, spring-fed pond in the middle of the site shared by IAS and TNC is part of a long standing Great Blue Heron Rookery; an area that is also home to multiple Threatened & Endangered species. A fascinating, really unusual site on which IAS has, with the support of the ICECF, already begun to control invasives and improve the timber stands.

29.346 acres in south central Lee County southeast of the City of Amboy as an addition to the 394.888-acre Gremel Wildlife Sanctuary, discussed in the 2016 edition of this report. As I wrote at the time, the Wildlife Sanctuary lies less than half a mile from IAS' 302-acre Amboy Marsh and "contains a mix of dunes, savanna, and prairie". The new parcel significantly improves access to the sanctuary; existing access points were often flooded during wet times of the year. In addition to expanding the restoration opportunities and providing improved access, the property contains a house and associated out buildings which IAS will use as housing for interns, further deepening their already strong relationship with the Augustana College.



224.73 acres transferred from Ducks Unlimited along the Illinois River, originally acquired with the support of the **Grand Victoria Foundation** and the **Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation**. Located immediately north of the city of the same name and adjacent to the southernmost segment of the 6,428-acre Marshall State Fish and Wildlife Area, the property contains extensive wetlands and open water. The local Peoria Audubon Society documented 152 bird species



using the property several years ago. The property contains mud flats, a habitat in which many wetland birds thrive.

✿ Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation

148.4 acres acquired with the support of the *Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation* and the *Grand Victoria Foundation* as an addition to the 42.75-acre Horseshoe Mound preserve, more than quadrupling its size. Heavily forested in the south and east where it is adjacent to the existing preserve, the land is mostly pasture in the north and west. The property is also home to an Illinois Natural Inventory Category IV site (“outstanding geological features”) in addition, as if all that weren’t enough, to lying across U.S. Hwy 20 from a 204.83-acre complex of JDCF easement and fee-owned lands, including Gateway Park, discussed in last year’s edition of this report.



The landowner had placed the eastern 27.83 acres into an easement held by the Foundation in 1998. To ensure that the terms of the easement would be protected, the Foundation transferred the easement to **The Prairie Enthusiasts**, preventing the easement and fee from being combined under a single owner. Such foresight has precedent; readers may recall that the Foundation worked with the Natural Land Institute last year on a similar project, transferring a long-held easement over the 406-acre property discussed above. I can’t emphasize strongly enough the wisdom of this approach. If an organization wants to ensure a property is protected in perpetuity, holding an easement over land it also owns is a decidedly odd way to do so!

✿ Lake Forest Open Lands Association

36.4 acres and a conservation easement over an additional 16.4 acres of a 61.5-acre ravine and surrounding woodland in eastern Lake County, along the Lake Michigan shoreline. Over 500’ wide in places, McCormick Ravine, as the property is named, is the single largest and most ecologically intact ravine ecosystem along the entire lakeshore and thus one of LFOLA’s most important properties. To be transferred at the beginning of the new year from the City of Lake Forest (and thus previously protected) as part of a multi-year land swap, LFOLA has been managing this special property for over two decades. In 2015, the organization partnered with the City and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to begin a major \$3.5 million restoration of the site which concluded this year, with much of the site subsequently being deeded to the Association. In addition to the land already acquired, the Association has an option on an additional 0.78 acres as well as on the 16-acre easement property, and manages a third, 6.7-acre parcel that is protected by a permanent open space covenant; all three parcels presently remain under the ownership of the



municipality. Though quite valuable in its own right, McCormick preserve is adjacent to the 260.6-acre Lake County Forest Preserve District-owned Fort Sheridan Preserve to its south, which in turn borders the 77.8-acre Openlands Lakeshore Preserve, creating a nearly contiguous 400 acre, 1.9-mile-long public and private conservation area along the shore of the lake.

✿ Natural Land Institute

40.0 acres along Raccoon Creek in north central Winnebago County, northwest of Rockford near the Wisconsin border. Acquired with support from the **Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation**, the majority of the property contains a high-quality sedge meadow that, along with the creek which flows through the northeast corner of the site, is home to multiple Illinois endangered or threatened plants and animals. Interestingly, a survey of the property also discovered the Northern Bog Orchid (*Platanthera aquilonis*); this plant is neither threatened nor endangered, but hadn't been seen in Winnebago County in almost 150 years. Given that scale is rather important in preserving the viability of many plant and animal populations, it's worth noting that the new preserve is adjacent to ~130 acres of wetlands enrolled in the Natural Resource Conservation Service's Wetlands Reserve Program, which stretch north across the state line. In addition to the sedge meadow, the property includes substantial pasture areas as well as a small oak savanna remnant along its southern extent.



150.2 acres of forest, prairie, and agricultural fields in east central Jo Daviess County adjacent to the 1,706-acre Apple River Canyon State Park. Acquired with the support of the **Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation** and the **Grand Victoria Foundation** after a decade of discussions with the former landowner, the property is home to multiple threatened and endangered plant and animal species. These include three state-listed flora (White camass grass, Cliff goldenrod, and Sullivantia). The site also provides potential habitat to two state-listed mussel species that are found upstream in the Apple River, which flows through the northwestern tip of the site. Most impressively, volunteers confirmed the presence of the federally-threatened Indiana Bat. Restoration and stewardship of the habitat for this federally-threatened avian mosquito-devourer is being funded through a bat mitigation grant administered by The Conservation Fund. Quite the engaging project, on multiple levels.



35.0 acres acquired with the support of the **Grand Victoria Foundation** as an addition to the 126.3-acre Silver Creek Woods Preserve in southern Winnebago County just southwest of the City of Rockford and north of the Rock River. Containing a farmstead which will be sold (NLI actually acquired 40.0 acres; the 35-acre number is the size of the property being retained), the site is a mix of agricultural fields and woodland, with Silver Creek flowing through the latter before entering the existing preserve, which itself is home to a mosaic of prairies and woodlands.



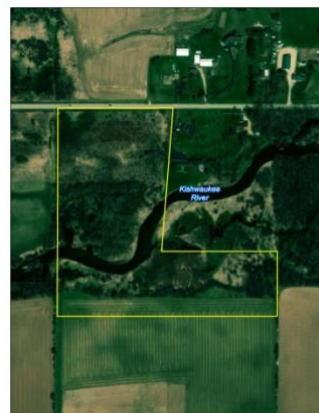
The Silver Creek Preserve was donated to NLI in pieces over more than 30 years between 1977 and 2010 by [George and Barbara Fell](#), who jointly created The Nature Conservancy as we know it today and founded NLI. George Fell also created the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, on whose board he served for decades.

✿ Openlands

24.18 acres in western Boone County immediately northwest of the Village of Caledonia. Part of a former ~80-acre oak-hickory savanna and wetland complex, the land lies just beyond Willow Creek, a tributary of the Rock River, into which rainfall on the property flows. Acquired in cooperation with the Boone County Conservation District with the support of the **Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation**, the property was deeded to the District, which owns the adjacent Long Prairie Trail. The 14-mile trail runs the entire length of Boone County from west to east. The acquisition is the first preserve in the area owned by the BCCD and will eventually be both ecologically restored and developed into a place of rest and recuperation for the trail's visitors.



24.51 acres of wetland and some upland through which runs the Kishwaukee River, acquired with the support of the **Grand Victoria Foundation**. The property is found in eastern Boone County near the border with McHenry County; immediately west of the unincorporated Village of Garden Prairie. Restoration of the Kishwaukee, a Category II and VI INAI site (one that contains “specific suitable habitat for state-listed species or state-listed species relocations”, and that has “unusual concentrations of flora or fauna and high-quality streams”) with portions rated as a Class A stream is a longstanding priority for the region’s conservation agencies, land trusts, and private foundations. That focus has resulted in a string of public and private preserves running from western



McHenry County to the river's terminus at the Rock River in central Winnebago County, with additional work along one of its main tributaries (which will, as it happens, be discussed later in this report!).

Just as was the case with the property described above, the land was acquired with the intent of and subsequently deeded to the Boone County Conservation District, which granted a conservation easement to Openlands as part of the legal agreement transferring ownership of the fee.

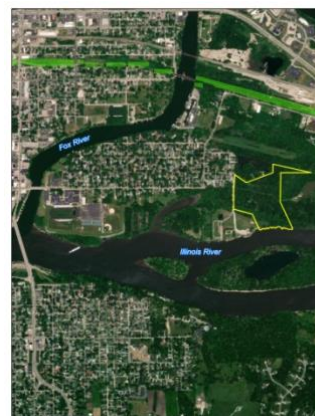
Later in this section I discuss a 150.957-acre easement acquired in concert with The Land Conservancy of McHenry County. I strongly encourage you to take a look at the project, which I place with TLC simply because it was the grantee of the easement. As I write below, the project is far more than simply a conservation easement. It's innovative and meaningful in equal measure, and would not have been feasible were it not for the dedication and resourcefulness of these two equally remarkable organizations.

✿ The Conservation Foundation

130.38 primarily wooded acres in west central Kendall County adjacent to the 85.8-acre Maramech Forest Preserve, owned by the Kendall County Forest Preserve District (to whom they transferred the land following its acquisition). Acquired with the invaluable support of the ***Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation***, the property is bisected by Little Rock Creek just shy of its confluence with Big Rock Creek and subsequent terminus at the Fox River. A portion of the stream flowing through the site has been designated by the IDNR as a biologically significant stream, with a fairly high degree of biotic integrity, which was one of the biggest draws of the project. The acquisition furthers a years-long TCF initiative to protect and restore properties along the streams, while adding to a growing concentration of publicly owned natural areas in western Kendall County along or near the Fox River.



25.32 wooded acres along the Illinois River near its intersection with the Fox River in central LaSalle County, on the eastern edge of the City of Ottawa. Located a short distance downstream from TCF's 254.4-acre Dayton Bluffs Preserve and the adjacent 75.3-acre Fox River Illinois DNR site, the property was generously donated to the Foundation and will in a year or two's time be deeded to the City of Ottawa. The City has recently begun leasing the land from the Foundation, and will eventually install trails and shelters to open the new preserve to the public. The property's donation is a demonstration of the strength of TCF's



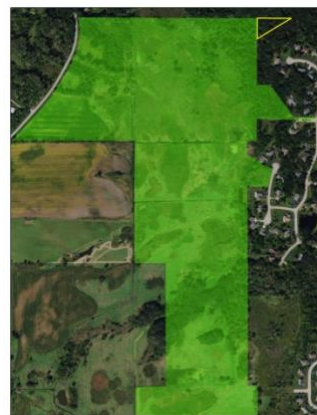
community outreach, and representative of both its long-standing interest in and commitment to the Lower Fox River watershed.

14.29 acres of forest and pasture donated to the Foundation in the will of an extraordinary individual who, along with her husband, spent decades dedicated to caring for rescue animals of all shapes and sizes on the land. Next year the Foundation will sell the property at a greatly reduced price to the Forest Preserve District of Kane County as an addition to the 204.4-acre Helm Woods Forest Preserve. Most of the preserve is a dedicated Illinois Nature Preserve, which the addition now buffers. The preserve is also adjacent to a 20-acre property owned by the Dundee Township Park District and the 71.3-acre Helm Prairie owned by the Dundee Township Open Space District...both of which, yep, are also in whole or in part dedicated Illinois Nature Preserves. While the headline story of this property is the ecological integrity of the adjacent preserves, the more important story is the trust that the donor had in the Foundation to see that her property would be properly cared for in perpetuity. The value of that combination of integrity and competence cannot be overstated, nor can its rarity. The Conservation Foundation is, and I can say this without a hint of exaggeration, one of the most impressive (and diverse) land trusts in the state.

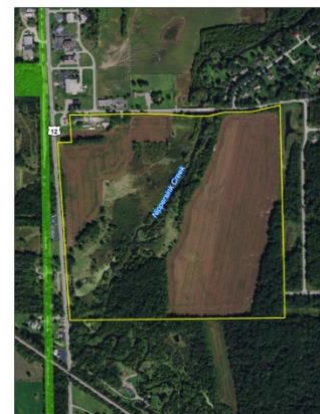


✿ The Land Conservancy of McHenry County

0.952 acres of an oak/hickory woodland at the northeastern tip of the 69.5 acre Yonder Prairie preserve. Located on the western edge of the City of Woodstock in the center of McHenry County and first discussed in the 2014 edition of this report, the heart of the preserve is a remnant tall grass prairie that extends onto and is buffered by a 63.8 acre preserve owned by the City, with whom The Land Conservancy works closely, and which is in turn adjacent to a 37.7-acre TLC-held conservation easement. The new addition buffers the core natural area, adding to a 172-acre high quality prairie, forest, and wetland ecosystem, the majority of which has been dedicated as an Illinois Nature Preserve.



150.957 acres in a conservation easement in northeastern McHenry County with the support of the ***Grand Victoria Foundation***. Acquired in cooperation with **Openlands**, the property lies immediately east of the acquisition boundary of the Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge. The North Branch of Nippersink Creek (containing a robust mussel population) meanders through the site flowing from the northeast to the southwest, buffered by wetlands and remnant oak woods that will be restored by the lessee. A farmstead in the northwest provides a base of operations for agricultural operations that cover about half of the site on both sides of the river.



If that summarized the entirety of the project, it would already be impressive for its size and location. It is however but half of a larger story to be told. Openlands acquired the fee immediately following the grant of the easement to TLC, and will, once financing is arranged, sell the land to the current lessee who is developing the property into a native seed nursery. Restoration professionals in northeastern Illinois have an uncommon fidelity to local genotypes in their vegetative restoration work. The new business will grow these locally specialized strains of native grasses and shrubs, supplying seed to the firms that sell the bulk of such products to local conservation nonprofits and governments in McHenry and Lake Counties.

The easement was purchased through the USDA's Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP; the successor to the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program). This is the *very first* agricultural easement purchased by a land trust in the state using the ACEP, a program that has only ever been utilized within Illinois by Kane County in putting together an impressive assemblage of protected farms in the southwestern portion of the County. TLC is also the first (and as of this writing, the only) land trust in Illinois to qualify as an "entity" certified by the USDA to hold easements purchased through the agency's conservation programs.

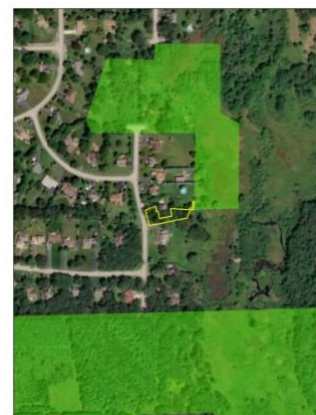
While it seems as if I write some variant of this every year, it bears repeating once again: The Land Conservancy locally and Openlands regionally are the leaders in conceiving, developing, and implementing cross-organizational projects that produce tangible, on-the-ground results. For a sector that produces a plethora of often little read and even more often ignored and forgotten reports and studies, both organizations can and should serve as a model of effectiveness and initiative.

1.14 acres as an addition to the small 1.79-acre Concannon Conservation Area, and also adjacent to two conservation easements totaling ~12 acres. Located in central McHenry County surrounded by the City of Woodstock, the property contains a vernal pool that is home to a rare sedge. TLC sought to acquire the land to provide a buffer to their existing site (neighborhood kids often riding ATVs through both the future addition and TLC's preserve) as well as the vernal pool.



And here's where it gets interesting. Because "sought" is the operative word. The property was owned by McHenry County, which had acquired it using funds from FEMA's [Hazard Mitigation Grant Program](#), which provides resources to buy out homeowners on land that is repeatedly subject to natural disasters; in Illinois, that means flooding. TLC and the County had to secure approval from the Illinois Emergency Management Agency before the land could be transferred, a process which understandably can take some time. The HMGP program isn't well known in much of Illinois, but has been extensively used in the state's southwest along the Mississippi River, where, fun fact, some lands acquired through the program have been repurposed as public nature areas.

And closing out the year, a 0.42 acre conservation easement adjacent to TLC's 13.4 acre Lynda Clayton Preserve in east central McHenry County north of both the Village of Johnsburg and several hundred acres of public and privately protected woodlands, wetlands, and prairie lying on high ground west of the Pioneer Fen McHenry County Natural Area Inventory site (it's like the Illinois Natural Area Inventory, but, well, for McHenry County) through which runs Dutch Creek, a tributary of the Fox River. The southern portion of a housing lot in a residential development bordering the larger natural area, the land has already been restored and maintained by the landowner for three decades.



✿ The Nature Conservancy

9.96 acres of ephemeral wetlands and sand prairie, acquired with the strong support of the ***Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation***. The property contains habitat for the state threatened [Illinois Chorus Frog](#), and is adjacent to the 43.3-acre IDNR Sand Road Mitigation Area, onto which the amphibian's territory extends. The chorus frog lives only in sand prairie/wetlands, an unusual ecosystem which thus severely limits its population while also making it exceedingly vulnerable to habitat destruction. The threat is such that the original Illinois Wildlife Action Plan, a



document not known for articulating hard, quantifiable objectives specifically called for the restoration and management “of ephemeral wetlands and accompanying upland sand prairie habitat” in this part of the state to be “restored and managed for Illinois chorus frogs”. This exciting acquisition makes real progress in reaching that goal. The land will eventually be deeded to Heartlands Conservancy which is well equipped to manage the site.

116.9 acres in a single parcel at Kankakee Sands, one of the state’s largest and best examples of an oak savanna ecosystem, in southern Kankakee County. The wooded property sits at the northeastern edge of TNC’s project area, near the Illinois/Indiana border). Almost entirely covered by sand forest (which historically may have been a sand savanna prior to European settlement of the area), the parcel is an unbroken, natural extension of the landscape found on the adjacent and very appropriately named Tallmadge Sand Forest LWR (light blue crosshatch on the map). With this new acquisition, TNC has connected two existing large parcels, creating a 534-acre contiguous protected area; part of the larger 2,576-acre Illinois component of the Kankakee Sands Preserve.



45.47 acres of grassland, 34.2 acres of which are in a conservation easement previously granted to the Conservancy. Located in the heart of the Nachusa Grasslands on the southern border of Ogle County near the Village of Franklin Grove and acquired with the support of the ***Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation***, the property is already an integral part of the 4,274-acre (including fee-owned and easements) prairie restoration. The previous landowner generously allowed Conservancy staff to fully incorporate their property into the bison enclosure that, in the fall of 2014, became home to the first wild herd in the state since the great mammals were extirpated in the 1800s (a reintroduction discussed in the inaugural edition of this report as, understandably, one of that year’s most Awesome Projects).



As a final bonus, the property is immediately adjacent to the preserve’s Visitor’s Center, ensuring that visitors for generations to come will be able to enjoy the wind swept, bison-filled vista that the prairie restoration has quickly become identified with.

✿ **The Prairie Enthusiasts**

A 6.4-acre remnant dolomite prairie in far northeastern Stephenson County. Generously donated by the previous landowners, the property once lay at the edge of a dairy farm, ensuring it was only lightly grazed by livestock. A fortuitous ditch cut across the corner of the land precluded most farming activity, leaving the site relatively untouched. The prairie boasts over 75 native species, predominantly forbs. Most of the area is a Grade C INAI site, with a small portion of Grade B along the southern and western slopes. Beyond the prairie itself, the donors included a small buffer currently in agricultural production in their gift, and TPE plans on restoring this property using seed from the site, further reinforcing the land's nature as a buffer to the prairie remnant.



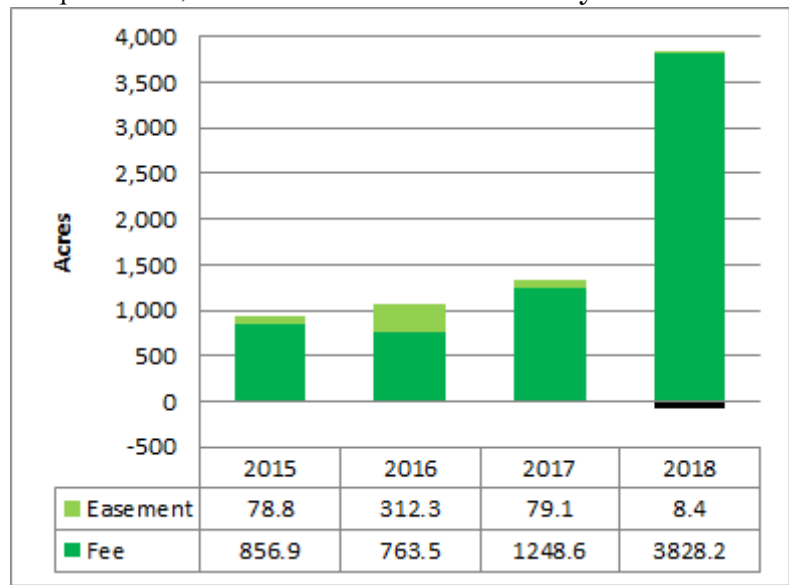


Public Sector Land Conservation

Land protection in the public sector was split this past year between major expansions and small, strategic acquisitions. Some of those expansions were major indeed; local and state government added more protected land in 2018 than in the last 3 years combined.

One addition you'll notice on the chart below highlighting 2018's impressive growth is a small black bar. What's that represent? Well, while 2018 was a record-breaking year for land acquisition, it also saw ~83.7 acres of previously protected public lands sold or otherwise deeded for new purposes. Among other smaller sites, around 18.5 acres in Lake County were deeded to the local Department of Transportation, while about 64 acres owned by the Illinois

Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) that promoters once hoped to develop into the Prairie Wind State Trail were deeded to adjacent landowners, as per the terms of [legislation](#) passed in 2015. What happened here? Well, in the early '90s the legislature [encouraged](#) the IDNR to negotiate with a firm that had acquired the assets of a defunct railroad company, with the idea that the ROW could be turned into a trail, as had and has since been done around the state. Problem was, it was later discovered that the company didn't, well, actually *own* the entire ROW. Which kinda made building a 30-plus mile trail a bit of a challenge. The moral of the story? Title searches are your friend.



The year's clear leaders were the IDNR and the Forest Preserve District of Kane County. The state purchased a single, massive 2,638-acre property that expanded two of its most popular preserves. The Forest Preserve District, returning to this space after also dominating 2017, continued its breakneck growth, adding over 800 acres across more than a dozen separate sites. Neither agency comes close to having a monopoly on meaningful or ecologically valuable acquisitions though, with 14 state, county, and local governments expanding the natural lands held by and for their citizens. *

* The graph includes 9.4 acres of natural areas acquired by local park districts that aren't discussed in this report.

✿ Boone County Conservation District

As described above in the ‘Private Sector’ section of this report, the Conservation District acquired a 24.18-acre parcel in western Boone County from Openlands in a project supported by the **Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation** and a 24.51-acre parcel in the eastern portion of the County along the Kishwaukee River with the support of the **Grand Victoria Foundation**. Openlands acquired both properties in cooperation with and with the express purpose of selling them to the Conservation District. The parcels were each encumbered by a conservation easement held by Openlands, reducing the assessed value of each, making them affordable to the District.

27.6 acres of a remnant oak/hickory savanna acquired with the support of the **Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation** in central Boone County, north of the City of Belvidere and south of the Village of Poplar Grove. Around a third of a mile north of the District’s 122-acre Funderburg Conservation Area, portions of the native plant community are still extant on the site, which the District will restore. A small portion of the land (around 3.5 acres) also lies within the 100-year floodplain of the nearby Piskasaw Creek.



Piskasaw Creek is a tributary to the Kishwaukee River and is [identified](#) by the Illinois DNR and Illinois Natural History Survey as one of the most biologically intact waterways in the state, with most portions rated A or B. I saw this firsthand several years ago when writing one of my first ever conservation easement baseline documentation reports (thanks Emy Brawley for giving me that opportunity!) for an addition to the aforementioned Funderburg Conservation Area. I quite unexpectedly came upon the clearest stream I had ever seen, and literally stood there dumbfounded. Yeah, I’m weird like that. Anyhow, protecting the creek’s floodplain and larger watershed serves to maintain and even enhance this regional, nay, statewide gem.

✿ Byron County Forest Preserve District

73.6 acres of wetland in exchange for 41.1 acres of upland in agricultural production in north central Ogle County, along the borders of the City of Byron, for a net gain of 32.5 acres. In exchange for the agricultural property, which the City seeks to develop into a commercially owned hotel. The wetland property is bisected by Illinois Route 2. The southern section abuts Mill Creek and a small offshoot of the Rock River on its west, with the main river itself forming the southern boundary. Much of the property is in agricultural production, while the remainder is wooded. The northern section of the site also borders Mill Creek, and contains a substantial wetland in its northeast while floodplain forest occupies most of the balance of the property. Both parcels abut residential developments along their eastern borders.



✿ City of Edwardsville

71.8 acres of agricultural fields and woodlands as the William C. Drda Woods addition to Bohm Woods Nature Preserve, in western Madison County. Acquired with the support of the **Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation**, the land contains ~10 acres of bluff-top forest and ~60 acres in agricultural production. The existing Bohm Woods Illinois Nature Preserve encompasses 112.9 acres in both public and private ownership, so the new property significantly enlarges the site.

The City plans to restore the agricultural land to its native condition, adding ~22 acres to the bluff-top forest and restoring an addition ~37 acres to bottomland wetland. An access road running along the southeast of the property will be expanded, creating a small parking area for visitors. To close out this impressive project, Heartlands Conservancy, as described earlier in this report, has taken on a conservation easement over the property to ensure it remains protected in perpetuity.



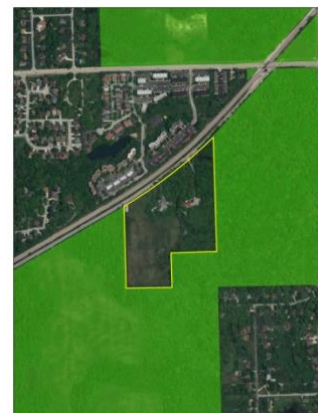
✿ DeKalb County Forest Preserve District

151.2 mostly agricultural acres (ten of which were donated) as an addition to the 299.8-acre Potawatomi Woods Forest Preserve in northwestern DeKalb County, directly northwest of the Village of Kirkland. The southern stretch of the property is noticeably moist, and is in the 100-year floodplain. This area will be restored to wetlands with the support of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Other portions of the site will be leased for continued agricultural production, which will help cover the cost of the land's acquisition. The Potawatomi Woods Forest Preserve abuts both the 47-acre MacQueen Forest Preserve, and the Illinois DNR's 541.6-acre Kishwaukee River State Natural Area. The new addition thus enlarges this diverse natural area to 1,039.6 acres of river, forest, wetland, and prairie.

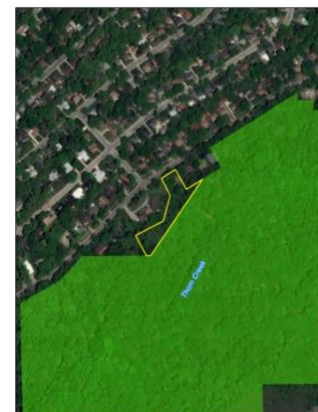


✿ Forest Preserve District of Cook County

29.25 acres adjacent to the Village of Tinley Park as an addition to an unnamed preserve that is part of the massive 8,500-acre Tinley Preserves in west central Cook County. The property is an inholding of forest and grassland with frontage along Oak Forest Avenue and also contains several buildings. Its acquisition permits a more comprehensive management program for the larger area while also providing the site with added depth. The Tinley Preserves are one of the largest contiguous blocks of preserved natural areas in the greater Chicago area, and are a major component of the “Emerald Necklace” (or, less poetically, the “Outer Park Belt”) of preserves ringing Chicago that was conceived in the early 20th century to provide both the current residents of the city and County and future generations (which the far-sighted advocates of the preserves felt would dramatically expand the population) with places of respite and recreation.

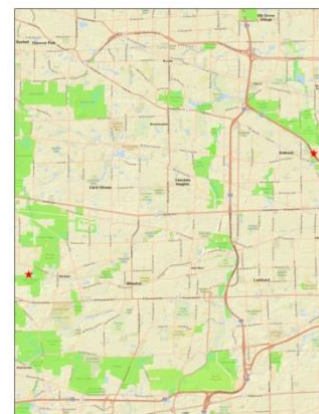


1.1 wooded acres with a vacant house acquired from the Land Conservancy of Will County as an addition to the 512.3-acre King’s Grove...which is part of a larger macrosite spanning Cook and Will Counties encompassing over 2,200 acres. Located in southeastern Cook County adjacent to the Village of Park Forest, the property lies along Monee Road adjacent to a residential development. By acquiring this property from the nonprofit, the Forest Preserve District greatly eased the organization’s subsequent merger with The Conservation Foundation, which has the effect of strengthening the land trust sector by building scale and consolidating resources and expertise.



✿ Forest Preserve District of DuPage County

1.08 acres in two small transactions. In the northeast corner of the County, the District acquired 0.43 acres in the Village of Addison as an addition to the 209.54-acre Cricket Creek Forest Preserve. The parcel lies along the eastern side of I-290 and is part of a small wooded corridor between the Interstate (opposite of which is a municipal park owned by the Village which connects discrete portions of the larger preserve) and a residential development. The property is mostly comprised of wetlands, with the woods beginning on its southern end.



To the southwest, the District vacated a right-of-way which cut into the 457.9-acre West DuPage Woods Forest

Preserve, east of the City of West Chicago and west of the Village of Winfield. The small ROW, on which is an old gravel road, is bordered by wetlands and wet woods, and the DuPage River runs along its southwestern boundary.

✿ Forest Preserve District of Kane County

Before we move forward, a word of advice. Pause your reading, get up, and go make a sandwich. No matter when you're perusing this, I assure you, it's going to be time to eat something by the time you're finished with this section, because the Forest Preserve District was *insanely* active this year. Ready? If you didn't at least go and grab some nachos or something, I take no responsibility for your impending starvation.

54.86 agricultural acres in central Kane County north of the Village of Campton Hills as an addition to the 389.15-acre Bowes Creek Woods Forest Preserve. The property is part of a large agricultural zone that occupies over 2/3 of the preserve. Its most distinguishing feature is the stream running from the northwest to the southeast bisecting the site. An upstream portion of the waterway which gives the forest preserve its name. The acquisition of this property and that of the surrounding farm land will enable the District to improve management of the waterway by reducing soil erosion and the runoff of agricultural chemicals. The name of the preserve notwithstanding, the agricultural land will eventually be restored to prairie.



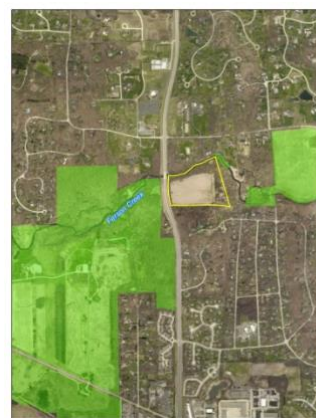
74.7 acres of wetland along I-88 in the northeastern corner of the City of Aurora, about one mile south/southwest of the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory (Fermilab) near the eastern border of the County. Established as a wetland mitigation site under the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 2001 (required by law as part of a retail development on adjacent property), the land is dominated by large open ponds, and is bisected by a narrow waterway which lies downstream from a small easement held by The Conservation Foundation which in turn lies south of the Batavia Park District's Fidler Farm Park. The property was gifted to the District by its previous owner, who had held the mitigation site since the construction of the development and accompanying wetlands.



120.6 acres as an addition to the west side of the 207.3-acre Cardinal Creek Forest Preserve in central Kane County; readers with good memories will recollect that this same site had a 12.5-acre addition on its eastern flank. As with the rest of the preserve, the addition is currently used for row crop agriculture. The Forest Preserve District will eventually restore the site to a mix of wetland, oak savanna, and prairie. The addition will likely host examples of all three vegetative communities, as it combines moist lowlands in the northeast (including some existing wetlands that couldn't be fully drained via tiling) and drier uplands in the southwest.



22.4 acres along Ferson Creek near its mouth with the Fox River in two adjacent acquisitions in east central Kane County, north and west of the City of St. Charles. An addition to the 436.3-acre LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve, the properties go a long way towards closing a gap between the main body of the preserve and a ~56-acre satellite area to the northeast. The addition is home to woodlands both along the creek (which defines the property's northern border) and in the east. These buffer an agricultural field that covers the majority of the site. In addition to facilitating the management of the two units of the preserve as a more integrated whole, the property's acquisition improves the District's ability to control runoff into the creek, one of Kane County's premier waterways.



111.8 acres as an addition on the southeastern side of the 849-acre Muirhead Springs Forest Preserve in north central Kane County, southwest of the City of Elgin and north of the Village of Campton Hills. As discussed in last year's report when describing an addition on the preserve's *western* extent, Muirhead is one of the largest prairie restoration projects in Kane County, with 575 acres, and set to expand to both east and west as the new property, which is in agricultural production and bisected by a small stream is restored as well. Further growing the prairie area benefits grassland birds specifically, many of which require large, contiguous grasslands that are a rarity not only in the greater Chicago area, but throughout the state. This addition was followed up by...



160.1 acres as yet another addition to the Muirhead Springs Forest Preserve, this time on the south and east side of the rapidly growing site; a preserve that now takes in 1,121 acres. As is the case with the earlier acquisition, the property is currently in agricultural production. A portion of the land is bisected by an upstream portion of the same small stream that runs through the year's first addition to the preserve. Around half of the new land is directly adjacent to the existing prairie restoration project described above,

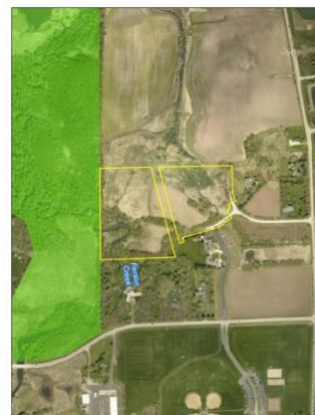
permitting the prairie to expand not only in breadth, but also, pivotally, in depth. Such depth tends to increase the resilience of the ecosystem for plants and animals (particularly, in this case, the aforementioned grassland birds) alike. The Muirhead Springs Forest Preserve is one that I'm paying a good deal of attention to; the potential size of the grassland once restoration is complete will be tough to match.



86.3 acres along Big Rock Creek east of the 840-acre Forest Preserve of the same name. Located on the border of Kane and Kendall Counties south of the Villages of Big Rock and Sugar Grove, the eastern wooded boundary of the property parallels the creek as it flows from north to south. The majority of the site is currently in agricultural production growing corn and soybeans, though a small wetland and open water pond lie along its southern boundary, extending north into the middle of the site. The Forest Preserve will keep the property in agriculture for the near future, eventually restoring it to an oak savanna or woodland, building off of scattered oaks growing along the creek corridor.



16.9 acres in central Kane County south of the Village of South Elgin, west of the City of St. Charles, and east of the Village of Campton Hills as a southeastern addition to the now 161.4-acre Ferson Creek Forest Preserve. The new property takes in a portion of the preserve's namesake stream which, buffered by woodland, flows through the southwestern corner of the newly acquired property. The site is divided by a 66' wide parcel owned by the local gas company, but is managed as a unified tract. The majority of the land alternates between wetlands and farmed uplands in a corn/soybean rotation, with smaller streams and rivulets running through the wetland. Keep this project in mind, because we're going to be returning to the area in about a page and a half.



7.0 acres in northeastern Kane County in the Village of Carpentersville as an addition to the 154.7-acre Raceway Woods Forest Preserve. A mix of open field and woodland adjacent to IL-31, the property adds to a larger complex of protected natural lands. Though small, the property adds depth to the preserve in addition to providing improved access to the southern half of the site.



Directly west of the FPD property sits the Dundee Township Open Space District's 133.3-acre Greater Raceway Woods and a 28.9-acre conservation easement held by the nonprofit land trust Openlands; small easements directly to the north held by The Conservation Foundation round out this patchwork of properties, much of which was registered as an Illinois Land and Water Reserve in mid 2018. To the east, immediately opposite IL-31 lie additional Forest Preserve District sites encompassing over 1,000 acres.

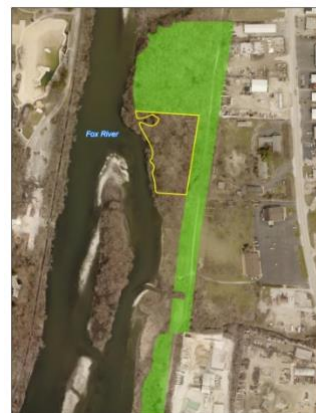
Two small lots with existing structures totaling 0.5 acres, acquired from separate landowners along the Fox River. Located in northeastern Kane County immediately north of the Village of Carpentersville and half a mile south of the Village of Algonquin, the lots are an addition to the 346.6-acre Fox River Shores Forest Preserve, which hugs the eastern bank of the eponymous waterway. Across the river sits the 719.2-acre Brunner Forest Preserve (which itself lies immediately to the east of the Raceway Woods Forest Preserve described in the previous paragraph). The acquisition goes some way towards filling a gap in the District's ownership along the riverbank, and has the added benefit of easing restoration and management of the area by establishing a more contiguous preserve.



A 1.2-acre open field of an inholding surrounded on three sides by the 253.6-acre Binnie Forest Preserve. The Forest Preserve is itself adjacent to both a restored wetland preserve owned by the Dundee Township Open Space District and a large conservation easement held by the 501(c)3 land trust The Conservation Foundation. Adjacent to these two sites are two *additional* Dundee Township OSD preserves, creating a 573.5 acre protected natural area. Astute readers will note that this is the second example this year of Forest Preserve District of Kane County properties that abut lands protected by other public and private entities. Both Kane and its neighbor Lake County have an unusual preponderance of such partnerships (intentional or not), providing excellent examples of the power of leveraging multiple organizations to create large, coherent natural areas that none working alone could achieve.



A 1.9-acre addition to the small 39.4-acre Glenwood Park Forest Preserve in the City of Batavia, in eastern Kane County. The property is part of a nearly unbroken link of Forest Preserves and municipal parks (two of which border the District property) along the Fox River. The heavily wooded property is adjacent to a regional trail that runs through the site; part of the Fox River Trail that roughly parallels the river for the length of almost all of the County. The addition permits the expansion of management activities focused on the woodland which extends down from the north and also continues a long effort to place much of the river frontage into public ownership in order to maintain and improve the ecological health of this major regional waterway.



60.1 acres south of the Village of South Elgin in eastern Kane County as a *second* addition to the 221.5-acre Ferson Creek Forest Preserve (I promised you we'd be returning to this one). The preserve is adjacent to over 400 acres of municipal park district properties that include a mix of natural, recreational, and agricultural land. The preserve's namesake creek meanders through the northwestern corner of the new property, which is predominantly in agricultural production (with a residence in its southeast), bisected by wetlands. The land will eventually be restored to a mix of wetland, prairie, and forest, all of which will buffer the waterway. This newest acquisition lies directly north of and adjacent to the smaller addition to the site described above.



84.6 acres just southeast of over 1,000 acres of District property spread across several preserves along the Fox River as a second, much larger addition in northeastern Kane County to the 346.6-acre Fox River Shores Forest Preserve. Situated between two small municipal park properties in the City of Carpentersville, the land contains a large concentration of Advanced Identification (ADID) wetlands. Woodlands buffer the wetlands, while an agricultural field in the southwest rounds out the site. This large (for suburban Chicagoland), undeveloped property is hydrologically connected to the District land to the northwest and thence to the Fox River. The property will be managed as part of this larger system, both preserving and enhancing the water quality of the area.



In 2016, I discussed a property acquired by The Conservation Foundation, writing “12.29 acres (13.26 acres gross) of a platted but unbuilt subdivision in a residential area in far east central Kane County, just east of the Fox River. The forested property was generously donated to the Foundation by its family owners. The property will be used by the Forest Preserve District of Kane County as a match for a grant in 2017 or 2018, during which it will be deeded to the District for addition to the adjacent 77-acre Fox River Bluff Forest Preserve located directly to the south”. Well, guess what? Congratulations; you guessed correctly, as the property has indeed been added to the Fox River Bluff Preserve.

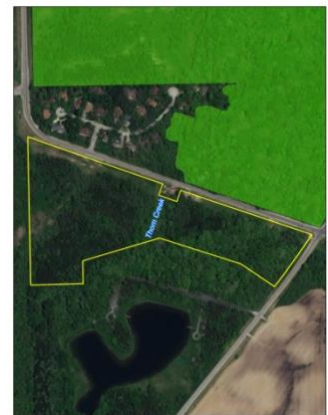


✿ **Forest Preserve District of Will County**

7.87 heavily wooded acres along Fiddymment Creek linking the two halves of the 271.3-acre Fiddymment Creek Preserve in eastern Will County about four miles from the Illinois/Indiana state line, a bit east of the City of Lockport. The land, donated to the Forest Preserve District by a local municipality, will permit District staff to take a more holistic management approach to both the forest and, notably, the waterway, most of the upper reaches of which are now located with the preserve. Plus, as I think anyone reading this will agree, it’s a heck of a lot easier and a whole lot less annoying to be able to walk from one side of a preserve to the other, rather than having to turn around, hike out, jump in a car, and drive halfway across town to get to the other half of the site!



27.62 acres of woodland as an addition to the 1,182-acre Thorn Creek Woods Nature Preserve in eastern Will County in the Village of University Park. Though somewhat isolated from the rest of the site by lying south of a major east/west road (University Parkway), it is connected to the rest of the property by the preserve’s namesake creek, which bisects the new land down the middle, with dense forest on either bank. Thorn Creek Woods is quite the interesting preserve. The District manages the entire site, yet only owns a small portion outright. The rest is owned by other government entities, including the Village of University Park, the Village of Park Forest, and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, each of whom have dedicated all or most of their holdings as an Illinois Nature Preserve.



✿ Illinois Department of Natural Resources

1.4 acres in western Jo Daviess County (almost all of which were already protected via easement; .07 acres are newly protected). This project was first described last year as an initiative of the Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation. As I wrote at the time:

“JDCF worked with three landowners and the local Township over multiple years to vacate ~0.3 miles of old roadway right-of-way just east of the Mississippi River in southwestern Jo Daviess County so that the land can be used to extend a major community trail running south from Galena. The Township, not being in the business of trail construction, let alone trail maintenance or management elected to abjure the rights granted by the right-of-way’s dedication. Vacating those rights then returned full ownership and control of the properties, two of which are covered by easements held by JDCF, to their underlying private owners.



The Foundation is working with the landowners to eventually deed to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources the vacated right-of-way property, which will maintain the new trail and open it to public use. While not a certainty, the transfer will likely take place next year.”

Well, guess what? The transfer *did* take place this year! The three parcels were first deeded to a local nonprofit bicycling club, which in turn granted the property to the Department. The IDNR will eventually incorporate the property into its future Mississippi River Trail.

10.2 heavily wooded acres along the southern border of the 1,713.8-acre Argyle Lake State Park in west central McDonough County, west of the City of Macomb and north of the City of Colchester. The small property has extensive frontage along the La Moine River (a tributary of the Illinois River) as it runs from north to south and also includes an even smaller inholding at the park. The acquisition both rationalizes the park’s boundary and extends this portion of the site to a logical anchor point. The park’s namesake artificial lake offers a variety of recreational opportunities to area residents, while the surrounding woodland, of which the new property is a part, combines its own set of recreational activities with an extensive forest ecosystem.



The IDNR purchased the 117.7-acre Eagles Nest Preserve in west central Jo Daviess County southwest of the Village of Hanover from the Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation as an addition to the 801.5-acre Hanover Bluff State Natural Area. Acquired between 2009 and 2011, the property is a registered Land and Water Reserve with both ecological and archeological significance. Following the winding path of the Apple River, the site was formerly in agriculture and has since its acquisition by the Foundation been restored to a mix of prairie and wetland. The enlarged Hanover Bluff SNA is part of a 1,967-acre macrosite, with adjacent lands owned by the U.S. Government (the 29,261-acre Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge), Illinois DNR, and two private land trusts. It's one of three such integrated sites in the state, and as such should be a model to anyone reading this report attempting to build a robust, large scale preserve. That is to say, everyone.



Ducks Unlimited sold 243.1 previously protected acres (and so not included in the bar chart at the beginning of this section detailing the total amount of newly protected land) to add to the 8,570.6-acre Woodford State Fish and Wildlife Refuge, most of which is leased land in Upper Peoria Lake, part of the Illinois River. Located in northwestern Woodford County south of the City of Chillicothe, the addition is on mostly *dry* land, and increases the fee-owned portion of the Refuge to over 1,000 acres. First acquired with the support of the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation and the Grand Victoria Foundation, the property includes wetlands, some open water, agricultural fields, and a small woodland, and offers improved access to the Refuge off of IL-26, which bisects the site.



In the largest single land acquisition in at least five years (aka the length of time I've been writing these), the DNR purchased over 2,600 acres in LaSalle County, expanding two popular state parks. The sheer size of this addition makes it one of the top three most impressive projects of this year, and so it's discussed in greater detail in that august section of this report.

2018 appears, unbeknownst to me, to have been the year of the public/private partnership in Springfield, with the DNR finishing up December by acquiring the 112.6-acre Mill Creek Natural Area in southeastern Randolph County from Heartlands Conservancy and Clifftop NFP, two area land trusts which had co-owned the site since acquiring it in 2012. This wooded and *very* hilly property, bisected by Little Mill Creek and interspersed with old agricultural fields, has been added to the equally wooded 85.1-acre Swayne Hollow State Natural Area (an Illinois Nature Preserve, dedicated in 2006 almost immediately following its acquisition) located on its southern border.



✿ Illinois Nature Preserves Commission

The Illinois Nature Preserves system grew by 2,118.9 acres this past year, adding 718.5 acres of Nature Preserves/Nature Preserve Buffers and 1,400.4 acres of Land & Water Reserves. The majority of the new sites are on lands owned by public conservation/recreation entities or private land trusts, while 8.4 acres had no prior form of protection. Six new Land & Water Reserves and one new Nature Preserve were established, while 13 existing sites were expanded. Also, a 77.215-acre term-limited Land & Water Reserves (there're less than five such term-limited sites in the entire state) was, at the request of the private landowner, upgraded to a permanent Reserve; neat! Of the newly dedicated or registered sites, 30% were established by private individuals or land trusts with the balance being established by the state or local governments. Measured by acreage, 12% of the new area brought into the system came from the private sector, with the remaining 88% being publicly owned.



✿ Kendall County Preserve District

As described above in the 'Private Sector' section of this report, the Forest Preserve District acquired a 130.38-acre parcel in west central Kendall County from The Conservation Foundation (which purchased the property with the intention of donating it to the District) in a project supported by the ***Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation***. Half of the property's purchase price was paid for by a grant to the District from the ***Illinois Department of Natural Resources***.

✿ Lake County Forest Preserve District

11.6 acres in central Lake County in the Village of Libertyville as an addition to the 233.5-acre Wilmot Woods Forest Preserve; part of a network of connected preserves stretching along the Des Plaines River from the Wisconsin border in the north to Cook County in the south (the Forest Preserve District of Cook County has its own network of preserves that continue to follow the river further south). The LCFPD's Des Plaines River Trail, which also traverses the length of the County runs along the property's eastern border. Overgrown woods buffer small open water wetlands in the site's west, while the majority of the floodplain-lying property is open and somewhat wet, crisscrossed by pack-earthed vehicle paths that are likely a remnant of the property's historical use as gravel operation in the first half of the 20th century.



8.0 acres in west central Lake County adjacent to the Village of Wauconda as an addition to the 2,799-acre Lakewood Forest Preserve. Lakewood is the core of a large concentration of preserves which are adjacent or in close proximity to this largest of the District's properties, forming the greatest concentration of protected natural lands in Lake County.



Primarily open field with scattered woodland and a very small northerly extension of a wetland in the south, the newly acquired property lies immediately west of the District's Millennium Trail, which, when completed, will create a vast semi-circle through the west of the County, anchored in the east by the Des Plaines River.

Alright, buckle in, 'cause this one's a doozy. 0.21 acres as an addition to Fourth Lake Fen Preserve in north central Lake County west of the Village of Lindenhurst, north of the Villages of Round Lake Beach and Third Lake, and east of the Village of Lake Villa and, subsequently, an additional 0.12 acres of ROW connecting the new parcel to the larger preserve of which it is a part...followed by another 1 acre purchase next door, and the vacation of another 0.67 acres of the same ROW. The properties lie slightly north of a calcareous floating mat, which is a rather unusual ecological system in Illinois. Finally, the District also acquired a small 0.18-acre parcel in the south of the preserve near the shore of Fox Lake, and another 0.67 acres in the northwest corner of the property, for a total of **2.85 acres**.



The acquisition of the small properties, part of the northwestern and southwestern corners of a large wetland and fen complex (most of which is part of the existing preserve, with the new properties protecting almost all of the remainder) is this year's example of land protection using unconventional means. The first parcel was purchased from the County government (for the exorbitant price of \$1), which had taken ownership following the previous owner's failure to pay its property taxes. Most if not all counties in the state compile and make available a database of properties that have come into their ownership in this way as they endeavor to return the land to private (or other public) ownership. As such, taking a few hours to examine such compendiums in whatever county or counties one's organization operates in to learn whether any small parcels are available that could enlarge or buffer existing preserves is well worth the time.

We finish up the Lake County Forest Preserve District's work with a much simpler project; 9.1 acres in the north central portion of the County near the Village of Wadsworth as an addition to the 1,179.8-acre Wadsworth Savanna Forest Preserve. The land is a mix of open field and small wetlands, with two drainage ditches flowing north to south. On the practical front, the property also contains an access road that nearly runs its length from east to west. The District will use this addition to better access the eastern extent preserve for maintenance and management tasks, something heretofore accomplished with significant difficulty.



✿ McHenry County Conservation District

6.7 acres in the Village of Ringwood on the southern boundary of the 3,389-acre Glacial Park Conservation Area; one of the District's premier ecological treasures. The addition is almost entirely wetland, both open water and solid ground, with a small copse of upland trees in the northwest. The District also acquired 0.19 acres at Spring Grove Fen along Nippersink Creek near the County's eastern border (not pictured on the map at right), connecting two small parcels already owned by the MCCD. Both properties were acquired via the County tax sale, which, as I've opined in the past, is an excellent, cost-effective means to pick up small parcels that often serve to buffer larger preserves, and one which long-time readers will recall the District regularly uses to expand the protection of Nippersink Creek.



✿ United States Fish and Wildlife Service

Two years ago, I described a property acquired by Openlands, explaining that it was "27.146 acres of wetlands bisected by Nippersink Creek with a small agricultural buffer in northern McHenry County with the support of the *Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation*, which also provided a smaller amount towards restoration work at the site. Lying within one of the Hackamack NWR's core areas, the property lies only 1,500 feet to the north of a 26.1-acre easement acquired last year by The Land Conservancy of McHenry County which in turn sits half a mile upstream from a 1,200-acre property owned by the McHenry County Conservation District (MCCD). The property provides the second piece of a protected riverine corridor anchored by two MCCD preserves to the north and south. This corridor is the most significant and ecologically important



land acquisition initiative currently underway at the Wildlife Refuge, and thus far it's being assembled wholly by the private sector...".

As planned since the project's inception, that property has now been sold to the USFWS, making it a significant milestone in the Refuge's creation as the Service's first fee-owned property within the Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge. In my 2017 report, I further discussed a 33.56-acre property also acquired by Openlands that created a single 86.6 acre protected riverine corridor, connecting the parcel now owned by the FWS and the TLC easement. The newly public property is therefore part of a larger dynamic endeavor that is literally making significant progress on an annual basis.



Natural Areas Restoration and Management

As I write each year, although it's not practical to detail every single one of the many restoration and management projects and initiatives that have been completed on the hundreds of conservation sites around the state, there are a lot of impressive or emblematic endeavors that stand out for their scale, uniqueness, or impact.

- ✿ Fogelpole Cave, as long-time readers will no doubt know, is the largest cave system in Illinois. Much of the land overlying the cave and in its larger catchment area was purchased earlier this decade and has been restored by the land trust Clifftop, as extensively discussed in past reports. The main entrance to the cave however has long been owned by the **Illinois Department of Natural Resources**. To prevent unwarranted disturbances to this unusual ecosystem, home to a number of federally endangered species including one endemic to Fogelpole and a scarce few other area caves, the Department installed a gate across the main entrance in 1990.

Located at the bottom of a sinkhole through which runs a stream, the gate, in the nearly 30 years since its installation, became an object lesson in the Law of Unintended Consequences. By the summer of 2018, the 26' wide, 12' tall gate had been almost completely buried by silt which slowly accumulated against the steel structure, with only around 1' still open to the world. As you might imagine, this rather markedly reduced air flow into the cave. So DNR staff [took action](#).

Eschewing the use of heavy equipment due to the damage it would cause the surrounding natural community, the Department hit upon a genuinely innovative solution; [hydro-excavation](#). Engaging the services of a local contractor, pressurized water was used to break up material that was subsequently sucked through a 6" PVC pipe. Over five days, the expert crew removed almost 2,500 cubic feet of material, reopening the cave entrance, allowing air to once again flow freely as it had for millennia. If you haven't already done so, take a look at the before and after photos that accompany the article in the first hyperlink; my words can't do justice to the scale of the change.

- ✿ **Lake Forest Open Lands Association** has finished a multi-year project to restore the state's largest ravine ecosystem along the shoreline of Lake Michigan. The breadth of the restoration and improvement work and the rarity of this very unusual ecosystem is such that it's discussed later in this record as one of the top three most impressive projects of the year.
- ✿ The **Illinois Prescribed Fire Council** [tracked](#) 48,550 acres that were burned in the 2017-2018 burn season (July 1-June 30). A really, really impressive 11,331 of those were burned by the **Forest Preserve District of Cook County** *alone*. The District has five

dedicated burn crews supported by logistics and management personnel enabling them to care for nearly 70,000 acres in the most heavily urbanized County in the state. County government gets a lot of grief, often deservedly so, but it can also be a showcase for effective, landscape-level management. That is *certainly* the case here.

- ✿ **Openlands** is finishing their restoration work at Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie, and expect to receive final signoff from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 2019. First discussed in the 2016 edition of this report, the project, funded through the O'Hare Modernization Mitigation Account (OMMA) involved restoration of 202 acres of dolomite prairie and wetland in and around Jackson Creek in the western portion of the preserve. The project area is home to a variety of E&T flora, including federally endangered Leafy Prairie-Clover and state listed Slender sandwort, Glade quillwort, and False mallow. This effort is part of a larger project to restore multiple habitat areas with OMMA funding, including the Forest Preserves of Cook County's Tinley Creek-Bartel Grassland and Deer Grove sites, and the Forest Preserve District of Will County's Hadley Valley and Messenger Woods sites.
- ✿ Readers may recall that last year the **Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation** launched a new grant program to support public use of the state's nature preserves. This year the Foundation awarded a second group of 32 Public Amenities and Events grants, providing up to \$5,500 to support public amenities and events at Illinois natural areas. Twenty-one will help or have already been used to add amenities, such as trail connections and ADA compliant picnic tables at sites owned by nonprofit organizations. The other eleven will or have helped add amenities including bike racks, wayfinding stations, and dark-sky compliant light fixtures to government-owned sites. Speaking to that last point, congrats are due the Champaign County Forest Preserve District, which recently saw its Middle Fork River Forest Preserve named as Illinois' first certified Dark Sky Park by the International Dark Sky Association!
- ✿ A researcher from **Northern Illinois University** studied the effects of a class of herbicides often used to treat certain invasive plant species. I was struck by both the subject and the reporting of the results; so much so that this has been selected as one of my most impressive projects of the year, and will be discussed it in that section of this annual epistle.
- ✿ Last year I discussed the multi-year restoration project that Openlands has been involved in at its Openlands [Lakeshore Preserve](#) in Lake County (and this year detail an equally impressive project completed by Lake Forest Open Lands Association at its McCormick Ravine property). Both initiatives are part of a US Army Corps of Engineers Great Lakes Fishery and Ecosystem Restoration project, a program under which projects are developed in cooperation with the Corps. The Corps covers 65% of the project's costs, and the partner the remaining 35%. In 2018, **Openlands** completed a multi-year effort to control invasives at the preserve's Schenck Ravine alongside supplemental seeding of native vegetation.
- ✿ The **Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation** awarded 12 grants this year under its K-12 Pollinator Schools Grant Program: 6 to public schools, 4 to nonprofit organizations, and 2 to local governments. Grantees commit to installing and

maintaining habitat for insect pollinators and using those plantings as a resource to teach K-12 students about Illinois native plants and the importance of pollinators. This year's grantees include two Chicago-based nonprofits – Gardeneers, which is working in the Homan Square neighborhood, and Keeler Gardens, which is in Old Irving Park.

✿ I wrote last year about a unique program at the **Forest Preserve District of DuPage County** in which the District raised and released thousands of native freshwater mussels into the West Branch of the DuPage River. In 2018, the District [built](#) on this experience, raising slippershell and other native mussels at its Urban Stream Research Center in partnership with the Forest Preserve District of Kane County that were subsequently released in Kane County waterways. The District also worked with the McHenry County Conservation District, raising and releasing creek heelsplitter and fluted-shell mussels into Nippersink Creek as it flows through the MCCD's Glacial Park. Nippersink Creek, as I've written previously, is one of McHenry County's most outstanding waterways. The Creek's course through Glacial Park was expertly re-meandered at the turn of the century; I thus take extra notice of restoration projects at the site as it continues to develop into not only one of the region's, but the state's riverine jewels.

✿ The **U.S. Army Corps of Engineers** and the **Forest Preserve District of Will County** have begun two expansive hydrological [restoration projects](#) at the District's Prairie Bluff Preserve and Lockport Prairie Nature Preserve (the acquisition of a significant portion of the latter being discussed in the 2015 edition of this annual review). Covering around 700 acres, the five-year, \$2.5 million project (which could be expanded to \$4.3 million in future phases) being funded by both the USACE and the FPDWC will "replenish Prairie Bluff's underground water system so it flows to Lockport Prairie". In addition, the project will remove invasive species and restore native plant communities.

Lockport Prairie contains wet and wet-mesic dolomite, an ecosystem for which the word "rare" is something of an understatement, given that a survey 25 years ago identified only 140 acres in the entirety of the state, with most of that, unlike the case at Lockport Prairie, in small isolated patches. As such, a majority of the high-quality Prairie in the state is located at this one site, which is home to two federally-listed species and several state-listed faunas.

✿ The **Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation** continued supporting the participation of a multitude of organizations in the Calumet Land Conservation Partnership (CLCP). First begun in 2013-2014 in partnership with European/Indian steel company ArcelorMittal, the Partnership, for which the Foundation provides general operating support to its members, have set restoration goals and identified specific restoration projects on which they will jointly engage. Work on the first of those projects began last year, and is ongoing.

✿ **Citizens for Conservation** organized the [release](#) of 22 Smooth Green Snakes into a restored Prairie in Barrington. The release was part of the Barrington Greenways Initiative, a regional effort by local communities, nonprofits, and area Forest Preserve Districts to improve the natural habitats on the more than 16,000 acres of protected

lands found at the intersection of Lake, McHenry, and Cook counties in northeastern Illinois.

The **Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum** raised the snakes for about a year and ensured that the restored area into which the reptiles were released was of the high quality necessary to ensure that the snakes would have the wide mix of plants and natural communities that they require. This was a project that brought together multiple diverse parties and would not have been possible for any had they been toiling in isolation.

- ✿ **Openlands** completed stewardship projects in Hackmatack in cooperation with the Friends of Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge, which secured a Stewardship Challenge Grant from Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation that enabled them to leverage volunteer stewardship hours on properties within the refuge area to raise funding. Work sites included land owned by McHenry County Conservation District and Openlands' Blackmon property in Richmond. The resulting funds from Clean Energy supported the purchase of native seeds, trees, and shrubs for these sites.
- ✿ So after that last project description you might be thinking "Stewardship Challenge Grant? What're those?" That's a fine question dear reader, so I'll get right to the point. Rounding out its trifecta of restoration & management grant programs, the **Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation** awarded challenge grants for the 5th year to nonprofit organizations with the aim of raising support for the care of habitat. The program matches funds raised by its grantees 3:1 up to \$21,000, which also includes partial reimbursement for the value of the time worked and logged by volunteers. As I've written previously, I'm psyched by this program and those like it that spur grantees to build support from multiple sources rather than relying on one or two lump sum grants or rewards. This past year, the Foundation awarded a total of 23 grants; 15 for government-owned sites and 8 for those owned by nonprofit organizations. Encouragingly, at least from my perspective, 15 of the 23 grants were awarded to new groups that were receiving funding from the Foundation's Natural Areas program for the first time.
- ✿ Thirty-three bison were born this year at The Nature Conservancy's Nachusa Grasslands in Ogle and Lee Counties. After selling 25 animals, the herd stands at 108. South of Chicago, the three year old herd at the United States Forest Service's Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie stands at 78.
- ✿ I'll close this section by turning to some really engaging work within Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge. It wouldn't be one of my annual reports without describing varied, ongoing, and increasingly integrative projects at the site and then following that up by reminding my readers that this is a place I never thought would get off the ground, a prediction that, I am quite pleased to confess, looks more farcical by the year. This year's projects were driven by a well-oiled team including **Openlands Friends of Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge**, **The Land Conservancy of McHenry County**, and the **Nippersink Watershed Association (NWA)**.

The NWA secured funding support for Openlands from the Illinois EPA in the form of a 319 grant (designed to address nonpoint sources of water pollution), and managed and implemented much of the grant work alongside Openlands' staff and contractors. The grant was used to fund restoration efforts at two Openlands-owned sites. The first was the same 27.146-acre property discussed earlier in this report that the organization sold to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service earlier in the year, upon which it became the first federally-owned property within the Refuge's Illinois unit. Prior to the sale, Openlands worked with NWA to stabilize and grade the banks of Nippersink Creek, which bisect the property, and also began controlling invasive plant species on the site, instituted a prescribed burn regimen, and planted native flora. The second site lies downstream of the first and is part of Openlands' Twin Creeks project along the Refuge's southern extent. Work here focused on improving water quality by restoring a swale and accompanying drainage area, as well as on managing invasives and replacing them with native vegetation.



Policy and Advocacy

The Massachusetts state constitution (largely written by an obscure bloke by the name of John Adams, well before the U.S. Constitution was later penned), strives to create “...a government of laws and not of men”. This simple yet profound idea has guided the American polity and society for over two hundred years. In the collective decisions of the citizens and elected representatives of the state are born the laws upon which almost all of our work rests.

- ✿ While 2018 was subject to a dearth of policy work after the breakneck pace of 2017, you’d be mistaken if you conflated quantity with quality. Exhibit A: **Openlands** and the **Illinois Environmental Council**, in partnership with many of the state’s environmental and policy organizations earlier this year successfully led a multi-organizational effort to defeat a legislative proposal from the Farm Bureau that would have weakened many protections for threatened species listed on the Illinois T&E list and. As importantly, it would have also eliminated the ability for the state to design customized protection and recovery plans for these imperiled species, forcing state agencies to defer to federal conservation plans that are both subject to federal whims and are designed with a broader scope that aren’t necessarily appropriate to the needs of the Illinois populations of these rare plants and animals.
- ✿ Remember last year when I wrote about a successful land acquisition and improvements referendum put forth by the Forest Preserve District of Kane County and **The Conservation Foundation**? Well, the Foundation, never being one to rest on its laurels, completed its 14th Chicago area open space referendum campaign this past year (not to mention another half dozen that they've consulted on and in other ways assisted with), and in November secured its 14th victory, working with Supporters of the Oak Brook Park District to pass, by a margin of 68%-32%, a \$17.9 million referendum put to the District’s residents that will enable the likely acquisition of 34 acres being sold by McDonalds Corp. now that the company has moved its headquarters from suburbia to Chicago. It’s important to note that the land in question is subject to a conditional contract with a local developer, so its ultimate disposition is not yet certain.

TCF has, working with a diverse group of public sector partners, raised over \$700 million in Open Space referenda in just twenty years; equivalent to over \$945 million when adjusted for inflation. There is no comparison to the breadth or success of their work, which is directly responsible for the creation of thousands of acres of new preserves throughout the Chicago area, and dozens of infrastructure and restoration projects in Forest Preserve and Park Districts across the region.

- ✿ Passage of the [Illinois Natural Areas Stewardship Act](#) was one of my self-identified most important projects of 2017. The Act established a grant program through which the **Illinois Department of Natural Resources** will provide grant funding to 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations for restoration projects on land protected as a dedicated Illinois Nature Preserve or registered Land & Water Reserve. The IDNR has finished drafting the administrative rules for the new program, the review for which is expected to be completed early in 2019. The program, which has gained wide support across the environmental community, will be launched shortly thereafter. Land trusts across the state have already prepared project proposals, so I both expect and look forward to discussing a good number of those next year!

- ✿ **The Conservation Foundation**, with the support of the *Gaylord & Dorothy Donnelley Foundation*, will conduct a comprehensive survey next year throughout the six Chicagoland collar counties to determine the conservation issues that residents value and the varied messages that resonate geographically and demographically.

I'm really interested in this one, as the survey's scope, interviewing 1,200 people (200 in each county) will offer what is by any metric an unprecedented understanding of the thoughts and viewpoints of my fellow Chicagoland peeps. These sorts of surveys have been undertaken in the past, but never with such a large sample set. I'm going to geek out a little here, because statistics and market research are two of those things that my professors in grad school pounded into me with a passion.

For starters, the size of the survey should allow the results to be far more granular than most such research, breaking people down into more specific demographic groups and determining how both their interests and receptiveness to different messages might differ from their peers. And this can be done not just across the region, but within it as well, helping inform the framing of future campaigns and initiatives.

As importantly, the breadth of the project will enable the Foundation to analyze 20 years of polling data and then compare that with the results from this new survey at county and regional levels and across multiple demographic groups to see how opinions have changed and identify issues that have gained or lost relevance with each group of voters. The crosstabs are gonna be fascinating.



Top Three Most Awesome Projects

This year's top projects are a study in diversity. From the public sector to the private and, for the first time, academia. Land acquisition, restoration, and research. Multi-million dollar and shoe-string budget. For all their differences though, they're united by their impact and by the vision and effort of the women and men who made each a reality.

- ✿ Apparently deciding that they were tired of my noting every year that the private sector protected more land than did the public, the **Illinois Department of Natural Resources** [purchased](#) a whopping 2,628 acres at Starved Rock and Matthiessen State Parks along the Vermilion River immediately east of the City of Oglesby in west central LaSalle County, south of the Illinois River. The largest single acquisition by anyone since I began tracking such things, the new property increases the size of the combined site (the two parks are adjacent to one another) by 56%; ~184 acres were added to Starved Rock State Park in the north, and ~2,444 acres added to Matthiessen State Park in the south. Most of the land has been mined for coal and limestone over the last century (with much of it since reclaimed). The DNR plans to restore the property to a mix of forest and prairie, and to begin opening the site to the public for a wide variety of active and passive recreational uses in two or three years.



- ✿ **Lake Forest Open Lands Association** completed [restoration and began capital improvements](#) at its newly acquired Jean and John Greene Nature Preserve at McCormick Ravine (described in detail in the "Private Sector Land Conservation" section above). First discussed in the 2015 edition of this letter shortly after the agreement had been signed, the multi-year, \$3.5 million initiative was part of the larger U.S. Army Corps-directed Great Lakes Fishery and Ecosystem Restoration project that also included restoration of ravines a short distance to the south owned by Openlands and Lake County Forest Preserve District as described in last year's letter. The Corps funded 65% of the project's costs, with LFOLA raising the balance.

At McCormick Ravine over the last three years, a 600-foot long failed storm sewer system was removed and replaced with 12 stone step-pool and riffle cascades for high quality stream habitat, all invasive species have been eradicated, the seeds of the rarest plant and tree species were collected and nursery grown to further enrich this botanical hotspot, an 80' long dam that blocked three ravines from being hydrologically connected to Lake Michigan was removed, and design work on new trails, bridges, and a preserve gateway were initiated.

McCormick Ravine is the finest example of an intact lakeshore ravine ecosystem remaining in the state, home to a plethora of state listed species and a high-quality old growth oak woodland. Its restoration, especially coupled with that of other ravines to

the south by Openlands and LCFPD is a significant and laudable achievement. Though a public opening is still in the future, local resident populations of fish and red headed woodpeckers are already competing to call McCormick their new home, and we are all benefiting from these improvements to Lake Michigan water quality already.

- ✿ Nachusa Grasslands, owned and run by The Nature Conservancy is apparently the center of restoration science in Illinois. I did not know this, but quickly following up on the fascinating [study](#) I discussed last year that showed the wholly unexpected speed with which the microbiome recovers following the initiation of restoration activities, the home of the first wild bison herd in Illinois was this year host to a study conducted by a graduate student at **Northern Illinois University** who hypothesized for his thesis that herbicides used to treat invasive flora (in this case Red Clover) would have an adverse impact on rodent populations. To his surprise, he found that the class of herbicides tested, which include the Transline and Crossbow brands had [little to no effect](#) on these small mammals. While both the author of the thesis and his academic adviser emphasized that this is not a definitive study, the results are both robust and encouraging. Regardless of the results, this type of research is of inordinate value; I was truly surprised that no one had thought to engage in such a study before now. The researcher will be interning with the Illinois DNR in the near future, and based simply on this work, I suspect whichever office he lands in will inspire the jealousy of its peers.

The research and results alone would not have been enough to promote this project to one of the most awesome of the year though. What further elevated it was the reporting that a null hypothesis was not disproven or, to use laymen speak, that the hypothesis wasn't born out by the experiment. Hypotheses that aren't proven [rarely](#) see the light of day in either popular media or scientific journals, and that's a huge problem, as it leads others to waste time and money on avenues that've already been explored. Props to the Medill School of Journalism for showing everyone in the field how it should be done.

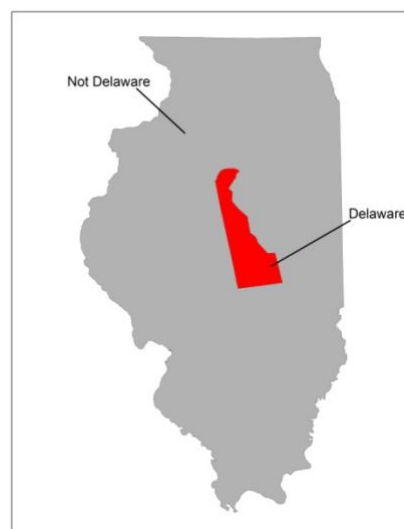


Let's Talk About Plans

For this year's outside the box topic, I give you **plans**. They're everywhere. Short-term, long-term, strategic, tactical. There's an entire industry devoted, for a very reasonable price, to helping you make 'em. So, for something so ubiquitous to organizations of almost every shape and size, why are so many plans so *bad*? That's a question you'd need a management consultant to answer in detail, but I want to focus on two aspects that seem to pop up time and time again. **Achievable Goals** and **Measurable Goals**.

Conservationists are by nature ambitious. What other word can be used for people who think it possible to preserve and restore vast ecosystems spanning thousands or even millions of acres? Ordinarily, that's a fantastic trait; in this field, one could argue that it's essential! However that determination can lead to plans that are so friggling ambitious as to be functionally impossible to ever fulfill. I've come across plans like this at all levels; local, county, state, even national. One of my favorites once called for establishing ~1.5 million acres of *new* conservation lands in Illinois over the span of a few decades. Sound reasonable? That, dear readers, is about the size of Delaware. For the less geographically-inclined:

There's an old book, [Good to Great](#), about companies that successfully became leaders in their fields. The author recounts a social gathering at one such firm a month or so after they had settled on a major plan; something like winning x% of the market within 5 years (I'm paraphrasing; I don't have the book at hand to find the specific numbers). A manager at the company jovially noted that they had 5 years to hit their target, and so had best get to work. The CEO immediately corrected him, saying that they had 4 years, 11 months. And with that simple statement, everyone within the company's leadership immediately came to understand that this wasn't an amorphous objective or something so far out into the future that they could worry about it later. It was an objective that was going to require dedication and constant effort; effort that had to begin immediately.



Next time you're involved in a planning effort, consider asking yourself a simple question. "If my annual compensation were to **double** if the goals in this plan were met, but would be **cut in half** if they weren't, would I be comfortable in making those goals official? Or in confidently touting them to partners or the media?" If the answer is No; if, when you're being honest with yourself, it's an 'aspirational' goal rather than an achievable one, then it might be worthwhile taking another crack at things!

Plans can also error in the *opposite* direction. Instead of being too ambitious, they're too vague. I can't speak for anyone but myself, but I have no idea how to know whether I or anyone else has succeeded in "increasing community outreach" or "educating residents on the importance of <blank>". Nor am I clear how to determine whether I've succeeded in

“increasing/improving habitat”. If you haven’t quantified the goal or objective; if it can’t be *measured*, then it’s very difficult to figure out if you’ve achieved it...or even how to achieve it. If you want to increase community outreach, set a number of events that you’ll hold, or the number of individuals that will be met with. If you’re going to improve habitat, set a goal for the quality that the land’s going to be improved to, and the geographic area that you’re going to work within!



2017 Revisited

I kept it to less than a handful ☺, but four acquisitions last year successfully flew under my radar ☹ and so failed to be included in last year's report. Before turning to 2019 then, I invite you, my readers, to revisit the wild and crazy world of 2017 to learn more about some consequential work from both the private and public sectors alike.

*** Jane Addamsland Park Foundation**

191.7 acres in northern Stephenson County, on the border with Wisconsin northeast of the Village of Orangeville. The Hartman Lyndon Wildlife Sanctuary contains a mix of woodland and former pasture, and was generously donated to JAPF which has committed to maintain the property as a preserve in perpetuity.

*** Illinois Department of Natural Resources**

160.9 acres in southeastern Livingston County, south of the unincorporated Town of Chatsworth. Currently enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), the property, which lies along N 3350 Rd. E, will be restored to and maintained in grassland habitat, and will also be available for recreational hunting.

*** Nippersink Watershed Association Inc.**

6.46 acres in eastern McHenry County, mostly along Merchant Creek as it flows into Wonder Lake. The Association has been clearing invasive brush along the corridor since June of 2017, and is continuing to restore and manage the site.

*** The Nature Conservancy**

TNC accepted a 129.1 acre donation adjacent to Illinois DNR's White Pines State Forest that had previously been registered as an Illinois Land & Water Reserve. The tract has a gentle roll of planted prairie that descends to oak woods along a small stream that flows into the State Forest.



Changes at the Top

It was pretty quiet on the western front this year, with but a single land trust and county forest preserve each embarking upon a new era of leadership.

- ✿ **Susan Lenz** has taken on the task of guiding the **Barrington Area Conservation Trust**, succeeding Lisa Woolford, who simultaneously expanded the land trust's holdings, developed a wealth of programs that successfully engaged with the public, particularly local schools, and significantly strengthened the Trust's financial position, leaving a strong and vibrant organization that is a firmly established and appreciated part of its community.
- ✿ **Jamie Pasquale** has been promoted to be the new Executive Director of the **Vermilion County Conservation District**, taking over from Ken Konsis who is enjoying a well-earned retirement after over 40 years with the District.
- ✿ **Arthur Pearson** has moved on from the **Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation**, where he managed all Chicago-area programs, to pursue his other many and varied interests. Arthur was central to dozens of the Chicagoland area's major policy and restoration initiatives, both supporting individual organizations and guiding the creation and realization of regional, collaborative initiatives. His work speaks for itself like that of few others.



Prairie State Conservation Coalition Guiding Principles

We believe in:

Service to the Entire State

PSCC recognizes its role to connect, serve, and to advance the capacity and impact of *all* land trusts throughout Illinois, and through them, protect our land and water resources.

Collaborative Leadership

We are grateful for and respect the work of member land trusts who are the backbones of leadership for PSCC. We also appreciate many other organizations, foundations, agencies, municipalities and individuals in Illinois that dedicate themselves to furthering conservation. We work collaboratively and transparently by leading, serving, convening and coordinating to best leverage the work of all for maximum impact.

Building Trust and Awareness

We acknowledge that many within Illinois may not understand the value of its natural assets or the long-term effectiveness of community-based land trusts to protect the health of our land and water. Therefore, it is our responsibility to support and promote our membership by providing some of the educational tools and operational assistance necessary to build awareness, relevance and trust, and ensure that their work is honored in perpetuity.

Reflecting the Communities We Serve

We acknowledge that Illinois is geographically and demographically diverse and that individual land trusts must be sensitive and responsive to that diversity. We are made more whole by fully reflecting and engaging the depth and breadth of the populations we serve.

Nature Nurtures

Our individual physical, intellectual and spiritual well-being is dependent upon access to and engagement with beautiful, natural spaces. We believe that nature is good for the soul, and that everyone is entitled to experience the outdoors.

Healthy Natural Ecosystems That Sustain Communities and Strengthen Economies

The allure of Illinois and the quality of life enjoyed by its residents is inextricably linked to the health of the natural environment. Natural ecosystems benefit our well-being, and our State's future economic health is dependent on the sustainable use of its abundance of natural resources.