
CHICAGO WILDERNESS HABITAT PROJECT

2010 GRASSROOTS CONSERVATION LEADERSHIP AWARDS

All nominees are proposed by the region's leaders and volunteers.



MARLIN BOWLES

Marlin Bowles, Plant Conservation Biologist with the *Morton Arboretum*, was ahead of his time with two studies that should have changed the world. He followed up on the 1978 Illinois Natural Areas Inventory (INAI), a first-of-its-kind assessment of the intact nature surviving in our state. The original Inventory determined that only 7/100ths of 1% of Illinois still consisted of natural prairies, woodlands, and wetlands. Bowles re-sampled these areas from 1998 through 2002 with colleague **Michael Jones** and found that most prairies and woodlands, even though formally protected, had deteriorated. In forests, light-sensitive oaks and native shrubs declined. Invasive species increased. In prairies and wetlands, quality grass and wildflower species declined. Only a small percentage of prairies and fens were receiving fire frequently enough to remain stable. Bowles and Jones used their data to project fire frequencies needed to maintain this vegetation and to establish benchmark statistics against which future conditions can be compared. It was hoped at that time that major new resources would be found to remedy the shocking losses that were increasing year by year. The Habitat Project bestows this award in hopes that this important work receives the attention (and response) it deserves.

CHICAGO CITY DAY SCHOOL

The **Chicago City Day School** has become a model for incorporating care for nature into middle school education. The school has integrated restoration work and stream studies into the school's curriculum, including sciences, social studies, art, reading, computing, and language arts. Visits to the Chicago River in *Cook County's Miami Woods* began in cooperation with the *Friends of the Chicago River* and expanded to include stewardship work in cooperation with the *North Branch Restoration Project*. Each autumn and spring, fourth, sixth, seventh, and eighth graders gather, process and plant seeds in the prairie area. They also battle invasive species; they've already eradicated buckthorn and garlic mustard from a quarter mile stretch along the *North Branch of the Chicago River*. They also study hydrology, water chemistry, and benthic macro-invertebrates with **Thomas "Mac" McFeely**, formerly of the Shedd Aquarium and Brookfield Zoo. Jennifer Ratcliff focuses on prairie plants. The restoration work is led by City Day administrator **Lucinda Klevay**, in cooperation with site stewards **Kent and Jerry Fuller**. Faculty members **Sheila Epstein**, **Linda Campbell**, **Ruth Piper**, **Sue Chung**, and **Dayvid Schultz** lead the social studies and language arts components. This dedicated group is making a difference in the woods as well as in the lives of children.



(Photo from Left to right: Ruth Piper, Linda Campbell, Mac McFeely, Lucinda Klevay, Dayvid Schultz, Sue Chung, Sheila Epstein)



MARILYN SCHWEITZER, CHRISTINE ESPOSITO,
TOM LANG, AND GINA LETTIERE



Four volunteer leaders did amazing work to make the 2009 *Wild Things* conference smart, smooth, and powerful. Attended by more than 1,000 people, this conference symbolizes and realizes the significance of the Chicago Wilderness conservation community. Before the conference even started, **Marilyn Schweitzer** paved the way with an extraordinary website through which people could look for interesting sessions, register, and more. Public relations expert **Christine Esposito** donated more than 140 hours, publicizing the conference while harnessing the power of newspapers, TV, radio, and online media to reach millions of potential volunteers and voters with messages about conservation issues and their inspiring people. **Tom Lang** served as the upbeat, can-do public face of Wild Things – responding to countless inquiries, staffing the information desk, solving problems. Tom figured out every needed job, noticed all the holes and pitfalls before anything came crashing down, and pitched in creatively, whether the task was big or small. Even so, it takes a small army of volunteers to make the day clear and comfortable for the attendees, solve problems for speakers, and handle so many details. **Gina Lettiere** was the general who organized that army on the day of the conference.

ED AND JENNIFER HAMMER

Ed and Jennifer Hammer have been stewards of *Salt Creek Woods Nature Preserve (Bob Mann Woods)* in Westchester for 10 years. In 2007, they began working effectively with the restoration contractors hired by the *Forest Preserve District of Cook County* to clear large areas of invasive brush. The Hammers understand the importance of being constructive collaborators, they have impressive knowledge of the flora and fauna at their site, and they are persistent in providing continued feedback to the District about the effectiveness of the contractors' work. District staff see this kind of partnership with stewards as key to the District's ability to effectively manage contractors and retain quality companies. Two years ago, the Hammers established long-term plant monitoring plots on the site in collaboration with *Audubon*, so that over time they and the rest of us can learn more about the effects of restoration and the impact of its absence. The Hammers' full life includes being good parents to Josh & Erin. At age 7, Josh regularly participates in volunteer workdays and Erin, 4, is a great seed collector.



JIM HARRIS



Jim Harris, videographer and nature lover from Kankakee, recognized how important media and communication can be to citizen science. He first created a video documentary of the region's frogs and toads, celebrating their biology, ecology, and beauty. Just in time, he called up the eight leaders of the *Calling Frog Survey's* training workshops and arranged to personally deliver enough copies of the videos. Then he drove hundreds of miles across eight counties -- so that each volunteer frog monitor could have one, free of charge. Jim went on to create documentaries about the region's dragonflies, insects, and woodpeckers, again distributing these videos to the *Dragonfly Monitoring Network, Butterfly Monitoring Network, and Bird Conservation Network*, so that citizen scientists could learn more about

their subjects. Jim's videos are visually enchanting, intellectually engaging, and just plain fun to watch. Jim's generosity, energy, friendliness, and talent are inspiring.

SUE HARNEY

Sue Harney and friends advocated for an Open Space District for more than ten years. They were successful in 1996, when residents passed the *Dundee Township* Open Space Plan and approved \$18.6 million worth of bonds to buy land. **Harney** was elected Dundee Township Supervisor in 2001 with a promise to save and restore ecological health to woodlands, prairies, and wetlands. The Township has acquired seven sites totaling 862 acres; most have stewards, monitors and restoration programs. Harney has sought and received almost \$7 million in grants for acquisitions and land management throughout the Township. New grants continue to purchase land and fund restoration including two stream corridors and a 240 acre gravel pit. Harney, with the support of her board, has hired two full time employees to care for the township's open space properties. With volunteers, they have cleared brush, conducted controlled burns, and monitored threatened plant species through the *Plants of Concern* program. The Township has rescued and restored three prairie preserves (approximately 170 acres) which staff and volunteers now use as a seed source for further restoration.



JUNE KEIBLER



June Keibler has long been a spark plug for conservation. She was the principal organizer of the *Kane County Natural Areas Volunteers*, which assembled more than 400 people to work on more than 20 sites and played a major role in establishing a Kane County natural areas program. With Sue Harney, June and 20 other advocates worked for more than five years to win the vote that established the *Dundee Township Open Space District*. She led the nationally respected volunteer component of the *Eastern Prairie Fringed Orchid Recovery Project* of the *U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*. She has provided some of the essential inspiration and leadership for the *Fox Valley Land Foundation*, the local chapter of *Wild Ones*, and the *Elgin Garden Club*, which is restoring two prairies. June sprang into action when a car show was

planned to celebrate the former race track at her own bird monitoring site, *Raceway Woods*. Some saw it as a defeat when the event was held despite the opposition, but the event was billed as a one-time commemoration coupled with a permanent closing of the raceway. For 20 years she has hosted a New Years workday for *Shaw Woods*, drawing 30 to 50 people for celebratory work – and then dinner. June is a vigilant, energetic force for conservation, creating a legacy to ensure that the Fox River's natural lands will thrive forever.

KEN KLICK

“Citizen Scientists are our region's best advocates for open space and all of our restoration efforts,” says **Ken Klick**. As an ecologist with *Lake County Forest Preserves*, Klick professionally guides management and ecological research by District staff and volunteers. But he goes above and beyond. Ken's willingness to share his considerable knowledge, combined with his genuine friendliness, makes him one of the region's most effective, sought-after collaborators in projects large and small. He freely shares his land management expertise from a two-acre fen to a region-wide planning effort. His input is sought from the *Wild Things* conference to Chicago Wilderness regional monitoring projects. As he puts it, he himself is inspired to watch volunteers gain a “sense of place” while becoming the “world experts” for their own rare species populations or restoration sites. Judging from the numbers of volunteers who appreciate being motivated by Klick, the inspiration is mutual.



Joe Neumann helped found the *Palos Restoration Project* in 1990 and has become one of the group's foremost experts in natural areas management. Joe has a long history in conservation; he led the effort to save the *Ashburn Prairie* from development in 1993, when he assisted the *Chicago Park District* in moving the small remnant to *Marquette Park*. Since then, his major focus became the 13,000-acre Palos forest preserves. Joe began there as steward of *Spears Woods* and *McMahon Fen*, but he saw greater needs and currently is steward or co-steward of nearly 2,000 acres. Joe mentors new stewards and shares his expertise on the history of Palos natural areas and the current best management practices that are returning these areas to ecological health. As Joe has put it, "For me, the single most exciting aspect about working in the Palos/Sag Valley preserve system is its large size. The potential to restore a broad diversity of habitat and species there is truly thrilling."



DEBRA SHORE AND DON PARKER



Debra Shore and Don Parker created and sustained for more than a decade one of the most influential and exciting conservation publications in the country – *Chicago Wilderness magazine*. Four times a year from Fall 1997 to Spring 2009, their stories and photos of nature and people amazed and inspired us. They reached about 30,000 people per issue, were sold in bookstores and supermarkets across the region, and were read from grammar school classes to County board rooms and (famously) the Chicago mayor's office. They helped people have fun and delight in nature while cataloging burn seasons, recognizing great organizations and heroic volunteers, and introducing hundreds of thousands of readers to dragonflies, fens, stewards, and scientists. The magazine was a huge effort made possible by countless talented contributors (many of them also volunteers) and a series of top-notch designers. Joined by *Phyllis Wier* (business manager), *Alison Brown* (news editor), and *Stephen Packard* (senior editor), Debra and Don led the team that had most of us watching our mailboxes for eleven and a half years. Thank you.

MIKE QUIGLEY

The Forest Preserve District of Cook County lost one of its most effective watchdogs and advocates when **Mike Quigley** won a much-deserved seat in the United States Congress. As a Forest Preserve Board member, Quigley fought land giveaways, raids on the budget, and misguided restrictions on ecological management. Mike is the only Commissioner in history who came frequently to restoration workdays, and he worked hard. Mike spearheaded a new "land policy" that marks one of the District's most progressive steps in recent decades. Commissioner Quigley always voted to protect the preserves even under great political pressure, when some of his best allies voted wrong. Now, in Congress, he has supported bills to limit greenhouse gas emissions, encourage Americans to drive more fuel-efficient cars, and increase fuel economy standards. He has also boldly addressed the House of Representatives saying simply there is "no such thing as clean coal." The Chicago Tribune said it well (Oct. 29, '09): "Quigley's in Washington, and it's good to see that he hasn't changed... Keep it up, Congressman."



LEE RAMSEY, JENNY VOGT, AND STEVE FLEXMAN



Lee Ramsey, Jenny Vogt, and Steve Flexman developed a sophisticated model of good conservation work through this year's *Poplar Creek Breeding Bird Blitz*. Five years ago, Lee Ramsey and many partners worked with the *Forest Preserve District of Cook County* to initiate a brush mowing program at a number of sites with good but deteriorating grassland bird habitat, including a section in the Poplar Creek preserves. Lee shared the plans with Steve Flexman and other leaders of the Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards, who for decades have been the stewards of 400 acres to the north. When they learned of the new site's importance to birds, they adopted it as well. Then, last summer, Ramsey got together with *Audubon* and other experts to design an expanded bird and habitat inventory for all of Poplar Creek. Ramsey walked and mapped 72 units from 11 different habitats. Jenny recruited 32 blitzers, obtained a donated lunch, and organized the day. Stewards and land managers now have a map showing the locations of bird species of concern for nearly 4,000 acres, which will much improve the ability of forest preserve staff and stewards to protect existing habitats and prioritize restoration work.

STEVE BYLINA, RICHARD NEWHARD,
JOHN RAUDENBUSH, DIANA KRUG, AND JUSTIN PEPPER

Steve Bylina, Richard Newhard, John Raudenbush, Diana Krug, and Justin Pepper have provided outstanding leadership for implementing one of the most ambitious initiatives of the *Forest Preserve District of Cook County*. So ambitious, it really took five leaders to make it work. Recognizing that hundreds of restoration volunteers can perform small miracles, but that bigger miracles are possible (and needed), the District appropriated \$3.5 million for contract restoration support in 2009. To assure that money was well targeted, General Superintendent Bylina, Director of Resource Management Newhard, and Resource Manager IV Raudenbush coordinated those funds with the work of the stewards – many of whom know the needs of their sites better than anyone. Resource Management Aide Krug and *Audubon*'s Pepper (who runs the District's restoration intern program) helped Raudenbush with communications and ascertaining which needs were best answered by FPD staff, stewards, interns, or contractors. The result was a true staff/steward partnership that, in the words of one steward, "allowed us to do in one year what would otherwise have taken twenty – and to do it better."





John Rogner exemplifies the spirit of a true public servant. As director of the Chicago Area office of the *U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service* for twelve years, John vigorously fought for wildlife while supporting grassroots efforts to restore and protect our natural habitats. He stopped polluters, saved rare wetlands and woodlands, and saw to it that the grasslands got their controlled burns. He was one of the creators of the *Chicago Wilderness* coalition and has served as the Chair of its Executive Council since 1998. In this role, he has been a tireless advocate for sound land management and citizen participation in restoring nature. In 2009, when the *Illinois Department of Natural Resources* (IDNR) decided it was time for major changes, to recover from an unsupportive previous administration, they naturally called on Rogner. John is now Assistant Director at IDNR. His dedication and good sense give conservationists profound confidence that IDNR is on the way back. From his early days as a volunteer steward of *Ferson Creek Fen*, John has donated his free time while also working these difficult jobs. He's a public servant who's deeply committed to success; and he's had a major impact.

**JAN STESSL, LOU STESSL, JOEL GOLDBERGER,
SUE WITKOWSKI, AND MARIANNE KOZLOWSKI**



Jan Stessel, Lou Stessel, Joel Goldberger, Sue Witkowski, Marianne Kozlowski, and many supporters have been helping to overcome ignorance and misinformation. In October 2006, ten years of "moratorium" finally ended for five woods and savannas in *Chicago's Edgebrook* and *Sauganash* neighborhoods. Even so, a handful of antagonists continued attempts to block restoration activities. The education challenge was enormous, because misinformation had spawned fear and controversy. Jan, Lou, Joel, Sue and Marianne put out flyers, wrote uncountable letters to officials, and organized public meetings and informational ecology hikes attended by many neighbors. They organized a "Nature in Your Neighborhood" lecture series, with experts from universities and conservation organizations. They helped rally hundreds of positive, hard-working volunteers to workdays to demonstrate widespread community support. They partnered effectively with **John McCabe, Bill Koenig, Cheryl McGarry** and other dedicated staff of the **Forest Preserve District** to provide authoritative, effective responses to people with challenging questions. Many organizations helped. But the crucial element was that neighborhood leaders like Jan, Lou, Joel, Sue and Marianne provided clear, positive, factually accurate information to other neighbors, preserve visitors, reporters and whoever else was interested. They have helped to protect the lives of rare animals and plants in rare ecosystems, while educating thousands of their neighbors to support and appreciate healthy, thriving forest preserves.

JANICE AND PAUL SWEET

Janice and Paul Sweet combine science, hard work, and a love of raptors to make *Hawk Watch* a model of citizen science. Now in its eleventh year, Hawk Watch records more than 600 observation hours each fall along the lakeshore at *Illinois Beach State Park*. Janice organizes and supports the volunteer hawk watchers and enters their data into the database of the Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA). Paul, an ornithologist and environmental biology instructor at the *College of Lake County* in *Grayslake*, analyses the data. Because of the leadership of Paul and Janice, the Illinois Beach State Park Hawk Watch has been selected to participate in the Raptor Population Index (RPI). Paul and Janice are also leaders in the *Illinois Winter Raptor Survey*, co-founded by Paul in 2005. Paul designed this survey's protocol, which has been adopted by HMANA for their continent-wide survey. The data from these efforts will help us to better understand and protect hawks and eagles in Illinois.



BARBARA WILSON



Barbara Wilson has been a steward at *Lake in the Hills Fen Nature Preserve* for 25 years – most recently as co-steward for monitoring and education. She is also one of the region's best botanists, having recorded 425 species at the preserve. She trained monitors for the *Chicago Wilderness Grassland Audit* and continues to lead annual field classes for both beginning and advanced botanists. She monitors eight endangered or threatened plant species through *Plants of Concern*, while mentoring the many volunteers she has recruited to help. She leads nature walks at the fen, leads youth programs with the *McHenry County Conservation District*, provides nature programs for kids with the *Algonquin Parks and Recreation Department*, and volunteers to protect oak ecosystems with *Project Quercus* in McHenry County. She has worked to install a trail for a streamside outdoor classroom and restore an oak savanna at a nearby elementary school.