
CHICAGO WILDERNESS HABITAT PROJECT

2012 GRASSROOTS CONSERVATION LEADERSHIP AWARDS

Some of these awards honor heroic efforts that took decades. Some recognize a specific deed that was remarkable in part because the person who did it faced unusual obstacles. These awards taken together over the years tell a powerful story – how a great variety of groups and individuals are restoring the spirit and health of human and ecological communities in Chicago Wilderness.



JOAN BRUCHMAN

Joan Bruchman has been called a healing force of nature, with good conservation initiatives naturally forming around her. Joan uses knowledge gained from bird monitoring to build connections with ecosystem restorationists. Again and again she has seen a need, taken on a responsibility, and led others to achieve great conservation successes. A long-time leader within the birding community and currently in her third year as president of the *Bird Conservation Network*, she has connections everywhere. She has been chair, leader, or activist in the *Illinois Ornithological Society*, the *Illinois Birding Calendar*, the *Deer Grove East* restoration project, *Illinois Beach Hawkwatch*, *Field Museum* bird initiatives, and the *Butterfly Monitoring Network* and is an original member of *Chicago Bird Collision monitors*. The conservation community is stronger, wiser, and more resilient thanks to people like Joan.

ED COLLINS



Ed Collins of the *McHenry County Conservation District* has helped to develop a culture of conservation in McHenry County through his commitment to ecology-based restoration and his love and understanding of both the cultural and natural histories of McHenry County's lands. He led his agency's bold initiative to re-meander the *Nippersink River*. He began his career as a volunteer who did creative work on the *HUM Prairies*, developed restoration expertise at *Pleasant Valley*, and then played a leading role in making the MCCD a model of science-based, results-focused restoration. He has furthered the developing culture of conservation in McHenry County and beyond through the initiation of historic enactments and other creative outreach initiatives.

DONNIE DANN AND BOB FISHER



Donnie Dann and Bob Fisher used their advocacy skills to halt state legislation that would have authorized the establishment of feral cat colonies, a technique called trap, neuter, release. Although on the surface such colonies seem a humane response to the problem of abandoned, wild cats, in fact the colonies do not reduce feral cat numbers, and they spread disease such as rabies. Feral cats are a significant source of migratory bird mortality, and are the bane of all small animals when colonies are near natural areas. Donnie and Bob went to Springfield to meet with key lawmakers, and the two long-time activists turned to their networks of trusted allies. They found people who were close to key committee chairs and House and Senate leaders. They provided factual information that countered the claims that had attracted co-sponsors of the bill. One by one, sponsors dropped the bill until it was finally withdrawn by its principal sponsor. Thanks to Donnie and Bob, democracy worked for conservation and good sense.

BILL FATH



Bill Fath became steward of some savanna openings in the *Tinley Preserves* in southern *Cook County*, after being invited by Forest Preserve District ecologist *Mike Konrath*. Part of the deal was that Bill could gather seed from Tinley for the nearby *Orland Grassland* where Bill was a steward and which desperately needed seed. One species at Tinley was the “threatened” and very rare savanna blazing star. Bill and friends cut the brush to save the Tinley blazing star populations and sowed a small proportion of the seed at Orland Grassland. In doing so, he not only helped this conservative species get established at the newly restored site, but he brought attention to the natural areas that were the source of this rare seed – the Tinley Preserves. These preserves are now getting increased management attention and being recognized for their needs and significance.

WILL FREYMAN



Will Freyman is a volunteer brush cutter who also happens to be computer savvy. Listening to stewards at workdays agonize over “adaptive management” tools, Will saw the need for IT, and he stepped up to offer a solution. Will has developed an interactive web-based tool called *Restoration Map* where stewards and monitors can enter management plans and records side by side with species data and then view the collective results for their sites. *Restoration Map* seems to get more robust by the week, as Will adds data on soils, fire histories, bird monitoring, frog monitoring, seeding histories, and more. Discoveries will be made, problems solved, and conservation will advance thanks to Will's generous work.

THE VILLAGE OF GLENVIEW AND THE GLENVIEW PARK DISTRICT

The Village of Glenview and the Glenview Park District have an outstanding record of conservation achievement. They have saved and restored a 32-acre prairie, a 124-acre bur oak prairie grove, and the town's last dairy farm. The village adopted a report from their Natural Resource Commission, *A Plan for Nature in Glenview*. The Park District developed a wise and ambitious restoration plan including the control of white-tailed deer at *The Grove*, where their process was a model of outreach, accord, and effectiveness (with special thanks to leadership from *Steve Swanson*). Both Village and Park district have supported first-class restoration management for the prairie (now also dedicated as the *Kent Fuller* Air Station Prairie in honor of its longtime advocate, former Village board member, and steward). The Village maintains a full time Natural Resources Manager, *Robyn Flakne*, who ensures that the village's natural areas are well managed. The Village created an Environmentally Significant classification in its zoning ordinance and, most recently, used federal stimulus money to restore a section of the *Chicago River*. (The Village and Park District are represented here by *Kerry Cummings* and *Chuck Balling*.)



LINDA GOHLKE, DANIEL KIELSON, DAVE KOSNIK AND DOLPH WILLIAMS

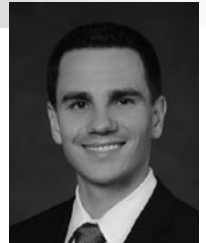


Linda Gohlke, Daniel Kielson, Dave Kosnik and Dolph Williams fought back teasel at the *Skokie Lagoons Sedge Meadow* for the sake of the birds. Bird monitors Linda, Dolph, and *Mary Lou Mellon* noticed that as teasel encroached on the Sedge Meadow, nine previously recorded bird species were no longer found and five other species were drastically reduced in numbers. They contacted site stewards Dave and Daniel to get permission to fight the teasel.

Linda and Dolph got their herbicide licenses, and the monitors spent the summer in the field, alongside *Forest Preserve District of Cook County* staff, attempting to eradicate the teasel. To build support, educate the public, and round up more help, stewards Dave and Daniel organized workdays of boy scouts and high school students from *Northfield* and *Winnetka* and hosted many other groups. The results were "miraculous," with bird species counts nearly doubled and a great increase in diverse vegetation in a year's time.

MATT HAAS

Matt Haas is one of *Cook County's* youngest stewards, having been site steward of *Busse Woods* since 2009, when he was 25 years old. Since then, Matt has formed the *Friends of Busse Woods* to support ecological habitat restoration through partnering with local corporations. These partnerships have significantly increased the amount of volunteerism within Busse Woods and have provided the necessary funding to hire a part-time project coordinator who supervises corporate employee workdays. This program has introduced many people to stewardship, and in most cases companies have renewed their support by incorporating workdays into their annual calendar of events. The Friends of Busse Woods is still in its infancy, but it has a committed board of directors that wants to engage the community through educational, family friendly events and volunteer opportunities. Matt's ultimate goal is to create the infrastructure necessary to allow stewardship to continue at Busse Woods for generations.



BARBARA AND WALLACE HILDY



Barbara and Wallace Hildy live near *Goose Lake Prairie*. But the few acres of original prairie by their house have something that the thousands of acres at Goose Lake do not – the prairie white-fringed orchid, a plant on the Federal endangered species list. In cooperation with volunteer stewards, the *U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service*, and the seven organizations of the *Chicago Botanic Gardens'* orchid project, the Hildys have given the site such good care (clearing brush, weeding, and doing controlled burns) that in some years blooming orchids number in the hundreds, making their population one of the largest in the world. They have also provided seeds for the establishment of

orchid populations on many other sites. The Hildys recently dedicated their 3-acre prairie for all time as an *Illinois Nature Preserve*, and their brother and sister-in-law – *Clyde and Mary Ellen Hildy* – did the same for their 5.5 acres across the road.

THE ILLINOIS NATURE PRESERVES COMMISSION, ORLAND GRASSLAND VOLUNTEERS, AND RICH TOWNSHIP

The Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, Orland Grassland Volunteers, and Rich Township joined together to produce a spectacular restoration turnaround for a one-mile stretch of the *Old Plank Road Prairies* called *Dewey Helmick*, near *Matteson*. This stretch of remnants was said to have been the finest mesic black soil prairie in the state in the 1970s. But when the *Orland Grassland Volunteers* looked at it as a possible seed source, most of the prairie was suffering from brush, dumping, teasel, crown vetch, and other ecological evils which could well have destroyed most of its biodiversity values. The volunteers offered "intensive care" stewardship in exchange for a small portion of the site's rare seed. *Al Riley, Tim Bradford*, and *Carney Barr* of the Township and *Kim Roman* of the INPC quickly cleared the inevitable bureaucratic obstacles, and the volunteers went to work, with on-the-ground help from *Jim Pieri* of the township. Now this remnant has been brought back from the brink and is thriving once again. (The INPC is represented by *Kim Roman*, Orland Volunteers are represented by *Pat Hayes*, Rich Township is represented by *Al Riley* and *Jim Pieri*.)





Pete Lekki, steward of *Sauganash Prairie Grove* in *Cook County*, solved a problem that could have stopped restoration work all winter. A Department of Agriculture official challenged Pete on herbiciding cut brush stumps with Garlon when snow was on the ground. Despite this being standard practice, it turned out that a quirk of the label forbade such work. Pete got together with a number of other stewards and **Karen Tharp** of the *Volunteer Stewardship Network*. They did the necessary research, education, and advocacy to convince Dow Chemical to go through the necessary legal procedures to change the label. Now we're all legal again. Thanks, Pete.

SUZANNE MALEC-MCKENNA



Suzanne Malec-McKenna was nominated by *Mayor Daley* as the *Commissioner of Chicago's Department of the Environment* in 2007, at which time she had already been a dynamic conservation leader for more than 15 years (ever since being a restoration volunteer and student of steward **John Balaban** at *St. Ignatius College Prep*). Suzanne was instrumental in leading many significant conservation programs, including *Greencorps Chicago*, the *Chicago Center for Green Technology*, the *Calumet Initiative*, the *Chicago Conservation Corps*, and the implementation of the *Chicago Climate Action Plan*. She played important roles in *Openlands' Tree Keepers*, the *Bird Treaty program* (in cooperation with *Audubon* and the *U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service*), *Lights Out* (which saves migrating birds by dimming the lights of the Loop's tall buildings), and the city's *Bird Habitat Agenda* for parks and parkways.

NACHUSA GRASSLANDS VOLUNTEERS AND THE NATURE CONSERVANCY



Nachusa Grasslands Volunteers and The Nature Conservancy. Under twenty years of stewardship by **Bill Kleiman**, Nachusa Grasslands has become the model for high-quality restoration to which both experienced and new stewards make pilgrimages in order to learn how to do this work and see how a site is capable of looking. It works through myriad partners and leadership. TNC provides highly qualified staff, including Kleiman and restoration ecologist **Cody Considine**. TNC also provides housing so that volunteers can spend multiple days on this rural site near *Franklin Grove, IL*. The collaboration between TNC staff and volunteers is excellent and rich, including the coordination of volunteer work with machines, gathering local farming knowledge, and monetary contributions from volunteers to buy adjacent land. In addition to the overall health of the site, orchid numbers are way up.

RICHARD NEWHARD



Richard Newhard worked for the *Forest Preserve District of Cook County* for 39 years, most recently as Director of Resource Management, where he supervised the rise of restoration and ecosystem conservation to the top of the District's agenda. Richard was instrumental in developing productive relationships with other conservation agencies and organizations. He was instrumental in smoothing the way for large restoration projects, insisting on what he called progressive "baby steps" to keep projects moving forward. He worked hard to establish strategic intern programs with *Audubon* and *Friends of the Forest Preserves*. He was deeply respected and much appreciated by conservationists, as he worked with legendary patience and determination to solve problems and bring disparate sides together. While dealing with issues from gypsy moths to trail maintenance, political pressures to budgets, he still found the time and wisdom to assure that conservation rose to the top of the agenda. He leaves a great legacy for future generations over thousands of acres of woodlands, prairies, and wetlands.

OPENLANDS



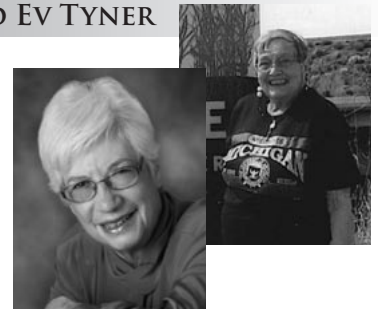
Openlands has nearly 50 years of conservation and open space success stories. In recent years it has set a bold and creative example by securing more than \$30M in eco-restoration funding and then facilitating projects with many partner agencies. These restored ecosystems have set new standards for landscape-scale restoration. Openlands has demonstrated that private sector entrepreneurialism can restore health to thousands of species of diverse plants and animals. Openlands' partners have included the Chicago District of the *U.S. Army Corps of Engineers*, *Midwin National Tallgrass Prairie*, and the *Forest Preserve Districts of Cook, Will, and Lake Counties*. Restoration projects have included *Bartel/Tinley* and *Orland Grasslands*, *Deer Grove East*, *Hadley Valley*, *Messenger Woods*, *Heron Creek*, and the *Lakeshore Preserve*. Openlands understands that partnering with the volunteer community is critical to achieving sustainable, long-term success and helped establish such thriving groups as the *Bartel Grassland Volunteers*, the *Orland Grassland Volunteers* and the *Friends of Deer Grove East*. For Openlands on-the-ground results we owe special gratitude to **Joe Roth**, **Jerry Adelman**, **Linda Masters** and **Bob Megquier**.

RON PANZER



Ron Panzer of *Northeastern Illinois University* has long been our region's foremost expert on the conservation of insects. He has also been a pioneer in the developing discipline of prairie restoration. He developed a means of ranking insect species according to their remnant-dependence. Now stewards and land managers can better prioritize management decisions for insects as well as evaluate the disturbance histories of various sites. Ron's research has provided guidelines for controlled burns that help make decisions about burn frequency, intensity, and the setting aside of insect refugia. Surveys for insects led by Ron made it clear that the majority of prairie insect species, including many once thought extinct, still survive in isolated high quality remnants. This fact made him an advocate of preserving and managing even the smallest remnant habitat. Ron also has been a long-time naturalist and advocate for the *Indian Boundary Prairies*.

Bernice Popelka and **Ev Tyner** were perhaps the region's first grass-roots prairie advocates. In the 1960s they waged a successful campaign to save the remnant *Woodworth Prairie* in *Glenview*. At that time few people even knew that there was such a thing as a rare ecological community called a prairie. Their effort required community organizing and media initiatives as well as strategies to engage the scientific, academic, and open space conservation communities. Bernice recently published a book on the battle, *Saving Peacock Prairie*, giving deserved credit to **Marion Cole**, **Dr. Robert Betz**, **Openlands**, and many others. This book is another fine contribution to conservation as it teaches us and future generations not only how precious these remnants are but also what creativity and dedication it takes to conserve them.



STEVE SILIC, JIM PHILLIPS AND MARY LOU MELLON



Steve Silic and **Jim Phillips** of the Fisheries Section of the *Forest Preserve District of Cook County*, in cooperation with **Mary Lou Mellon** of the *Bird Conservation Network*, solved a problem that was killing birds. The FPD had installed PVC tubes to hold anglers' used fishing line, to keep birds from becoming tangled in it. Ironically, these tubes turned out to be a deadly trap themselves, as cavity nesters explored the tubes and then were unable to climb back out along the too-smooth PVC material. Conservationists including **Annette Prince** and **Diane Fieri** noticed that the PVC pipes were killing birds and alerted the BCN and the FPDCC to the problem. Steve and Jim retrofitted the tubes with covers to keep birds out. Mary Lou organized a team of volunteers to monitor the tubes at 12 lakes on a weekly basis. When the "tube monitors" found tubes vandalized or damaged by weather, Steve and Jim promptly fixed them. No bird fatalities were observed during the summer of 2011. This is a fine example of volunteers and staff working closely together for conservation.

TOM SIMPSON

Tom Simpson has had a notable career of research, teaching, and conservation with the *McHenry County Conservation District*. He looks for answers to pressing conservation questions such as why oaks often don't reproduce even with adequate sunlight. Tom came across a vegetative anomaly at *Glacial Park* – a nearly pure stand of reed canary grass in an otherwise unremarkable field. Tom literally dug deeper and found wetland soils buried under several inches of agricultural sediment. Next step: rewet the marsh. But Tom went further and, with **Ed Collins**, turned the project into an extraordinary learning experience for a group of volunteers. These citizen scientists attended an immersive "Weekend of Restoration" to learn about the soil and hydrology of the site, effects of land use, remediation methods and challenges, and much more. They then did a large part of the restoration work and emerged with greater knowledge, sense of community, and connection to the spirit of conservation. What might have been an engineering project executed by staff and contractors became an extraordinary learning and restoration experience for the community.



SPRING CREEK STEWARDS AND THE FRIENDS OF SPRING CREEK



Spring Creek Stewards and the **Friends of Spring Creek** have worked creatively since 2003 to garner local support and resources for the *Spring Creek Preserves*. Their outreach to neighbors, local officials, and the equestrian community have combined with creatively designed special events to attract neighbors, local officials, and the boards of interested organizations. With support from U.S. Representative **Melissa Bean**, they secured from the *U.S. Army Corps of Engineers* an appropriation of \$5M for hydrologic and ecosystem restoration. With support from *Audubon*, they helped secure major grants from *Exelon*, *the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service*, and others. The stewards are close partners with long-time conservation leader *Citizens for Conservation* (which has helped train the stewards and donates tens of thousands of dollars of invaluable local seed every year). Their "Native Seed Gardeners" program (in cooperation with the *Chicago Botanic Garden*) reaches home gardeners who learn to grow rare seed for restoration and has engaged more than 400 families. (The Stewards and Friends are represented here by **Dave Cook** and **Ginger Underwood**.)

ROB SULSKI

Rob Sulski has had a distinguished career as an imaginative, hard-working environmental advocate with the *Illinois Environmental Protection Agency*. He's a steward himself at the high quality *Glenbrook North Prairie Nature Preserve* and in the process discovered that some native plant species were proving difficult to restore to recovery areas in the buffer. Experimenting in his backyard, he sought ways to produce significant amounts of seeds and seedlings. Rob was persistent and figured out how to produce massive amounts of rarities for restorations, including prairie phlox, Leiberger's panic grass, Bicknell's sedge, fire pink, and others. He now not only restores the Nature Preserve buffer but shares plants, seed, and knowledge with the stewards of other local preserves. Rob has worked for many years to engage youth and young adults in other hands-on stewardship activities with the *Governor's Environmental Corp.*, *the Arava Institute internship programs*; *FOCR River Rescue Day*, *Green Corp.*, raptor research and education, and school activities.

