NATURAL LAND INSTITUTE

Conserving Land in Northern Illinois

The Beauty

Newsletter
Fall 2019 • No. 87

ACCREDITED LAND TRUST ACCREDITATION COMMISSION

LAND & NATURE

A message from our Executive Director

A Proposal...

Kerry Leigh
Executive Director

Dear Friends,

I have a proposal for you. I've been thinking about national research that the Land Trust Alliance did this past January, to get a feel for Americans' understanding and impressions of conservation land trusts. The results? Many people don't know what a land trust is or does because land and land conservation play little or no role in their lives, at least as far as they are concerned.

The good news is that when the respondents were offered a definition of a land trust or land conservancy, they were 15 times more likely to offer a positive response. In other words, we need to get out there and tell our story if land trusts are to secure enough dollars, votes, volunteers and ambassadors to continue to pursue our essential work.

So I thought, why not ask you, our ambassadors, to share your stories with us? Stories of your first experience of the natural world, of experiences you have had in nature and/or in our preserves, stories of what you love about natural land, the landscape you live in, or stories of what you fear may happen without natural areas and habitat protection; stories about your relationship to the land, and to your local land trust. Will you share your stories with us and be an ambassador for nature? You can send them to: info@naturalland.org and we will be in touch! (See page 19 for more information).

In ambassadorship,

Kerry Leigh

NLI Executive Director

An oak savanna featuring the distinctive curvy branches of bur oak trees at Burr Oak Valley Preserve
Photo by Jill Kennay

Cover Photo: *The Beauty of Fall Colors* by Rick Barton

Natural Land Insitute

The mission of the Natural Land Institute is to create an enduring legacy of natural land in northern Illinois for people, plants and animals.

Our Vision: *We envision a world in which people recognize that we are a part of nature and act with the knowledge that our future depends upon preserving the natural systems that support all life on Earth.*

The Natural Land Institute, an accredited conservation land trust, is based in Rockford, Illinois, and has protected more than 17,300 acres of natural land in Illinois since 1958. NLI's current service area covers twelve counties: Winnebago, Boone, northern DeKalb, Ogle, Lee, Bureau, Henry, Rock Island, Whiteside, Carroll, Jo Daviess and Stephenson Counties.

NLI preserves forests, prairies and wetlands for native plants and animals, restores habitat for wildlife, protects rivers and streams for fish and other aquatic species, educates people about their part in nature, and provides opportunities to enjoy natural areas.

The NLI is a 501(c)3, not-for-profit organization supported by tax deductible contributions. To donate, contact:

Natural Land Institute, 320 South Third Street, Rockford, Illinois 61104
Phone: **815/964-6666**
Email: **info@NaturalLand.org;** or
visit our website at **www.NaturalLand.org**.

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Raccoon Creek

Photo by Rick Barton

The Beauty and the Beast at the Door

The Raccoon Creek watershed, or drainage area, straddles the Illinois and Wisconsin border in Winnebago County. This Beauty of a watershed has spring fed stream tributaries that tumble and gush their way into the creek; this Beauty of a watershed has endangered insect, bird and fish species that call it home; and this Beauty of a watershed has a community of people who love the land, the wetlands, the forests and the fields. This Beauty of a watershed also provides clean drinking water to all the homes tapping into the aquifer. In 2016 staff of the Natural Land Institute rediscovered a rare natural wetland located along Raccoon Creek that had not been documented since 1947 with many rare species of plants, including some that were new to the county and rediscovered two species that had not been seen for several decades.

Land Protection

But the Beast is at the door... The last couple of years have seen some alarming threats looming in the watershed of this creek, this Beauty. We have seen a private corporation attempt to put a rail line through this Beauty threatening not only it, but our community's way of life; we see that there is now a major road proposed to go through it; and we have found that fecal coliform is extremely high in the creek and comes from various sources.

NLI is putting together a plan for the Illinois portion of the watershed with many different strategies that both NLI and landowners can do to protect the water quality of the beautiful Raccoon Creek and its tributaries. We will be holding an informational gathering in the early spring to share some strategies, including funding opportunities for landowners, for working together to protect this Beauty of a watershed with the local community.

We wish to thank the **Grand Victoria Foundation** for funding this planning project to protect this Beauty from the Beast at the door.

A gift of land to expand NLI's Conklin Preserve

A few miles southwest of Rockton Township, nestled along the south bank of the Pecatonica River lies a floodplain forested area owned by a family since the late 1800's. John Carleton's family has owned much of this land and his friend and neighbor Richard Conklin owned land adjacent to the Carleton farm. When Richard passed away two years ago and gifted 125 acres of his land along the Pecatonica River to NLI, John had the idea that he should also donate an approximately 11-acre parcel to NLI to increase the Conklin Preserve.

Photo by John Longhenry

Northern Harrier

All of this is part of a larger protected habitat complex along the Pecatonica River corridor. This corridor is home to the Illinois endangered Northern Harrier as well as Sandhill Cranes, Bald Eagles, Bobolinks, Dickcissel, American Redstart and the Hooded Merganser.

Thank you, John, for donating that piece of the forest to become part of the permanently protected Conklin Preserve.

Building Skills While Restoring Nature

Photo by Zach Grycan

In August volunteers helped conduct a stream survey in the creek at Silver Creek Woods Preserve

Volunteers are the reason Natural Land Institute's restorations continue to provide the habitat for so many plants and animals in northern Illinois. Whether it's clearing invasive species, picking seeds, or documenting the wildlife and changes on the landscape over time, the impact is high and the experiences can be life changing.

Land Stewardship

Much of our work requires different skill sets and in the process of creating healthy habitats we all learn together about the different techniques that accomplish our mission. Even something as simple as learning to sharpen a pair of shears for seed collection, or checking air pressure or oil levels of equipment are easily understood tasks that can build knowledge and have practical uses in the world away from restoration.

Often times people walk away from stewardship events having learned about a new tree or wildflower and may have learned firsthand how to use a flapper on a controlled burn. Every little thing we do is a skill we build and when we restore the land, we do so much — it's true that many hands make light work!

NLI offers a few workshops each year to try to hone different skill sets for anyone interested in getting more involved. Winter tree and shrub identification and wildflower walkabouts are a great way to become more familiar with the natural areas around us! Our workshop on controlled burns aims to provide basic knowledge about fire on the landscape in the region. How and when to burn are important lessons to be learned in a region where fire and the survival of our native biodiversity are so deeply intertwined.

We invite you to join us!

Restoring Beauty

You, our volunteers, helped create this prairie at Burr Oak Valley Preserve

Photo by Zach Grycan

Photo by Kim Johnsen

The first part of the workshop includes learning by matching twigs with leaf scars and buds to the images on the worksheets

Photo by Kim Johnsen

The second part of the workshop involves learning how to identify trees and shrubs outside

Workshops Build Skills

Mark Your Calendar
Register: www.naturalland.org or call 815/964-6666

Winter Tree and Shrub Identification Workshop

Sun., January 5, 2020
9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
Location TBA, Cost: $20

Learn to identify native and non-native trees and shrubs of northern Illinois by buds, twigs, and bark. Classroom and outdoor sessions.

Prescribed Burn Training

Sun., March 29, 2020
9:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.
Location TBA, Cost: $60

This workshop is based on the Chicago Wilderness' Midwest Ecological Prescription Burn Crew Member Training Manual with a classroom session and opportunity to help with a prescribed burn (weather permitting). The classroom session topics will include fire behavior and suppression, effective use of hand and power tools, use of water to aid fire suppression, and ecological effects of fire. Participants will receive a copy of the manual to keep.

Photo by Zach Grycan

Wander at the Wetland: Full Moon Snowshoe & Hike

Photo by Jill Kennay

The glow of the bonfire and winter themed greenhouse (with hot cocoa and cookies) provided a warm reprieve for snowshoers and hikers

For the first time in a few years we had enough snow to enjoy snowshoes (plus skis for some), and hiking along the luminary lit trail through the prairie at **Wander at the Wetland: Full Moon Snowshoe & Hike**. The 9th annual winter event at Nygren Wetland Preserve was held on Mon., Jan. 21. More than 150 people came outside with us to enjoy learning about Nygren Wetland Preserve and seeing the natural winterscape. Thank you to all who donated to NLI to use the snowshoes provided and sponsored by **Rocktown Adventures**, to **NorthPointe Health & Wellness Campus**, which provided the luminaries, and to all of the volunteers who helped with pre-event preparations, set up and tear down and at the event.

Annual Dinner and Presentation of the George and Barbara Fell Award

NLI held the Annual Dinner on March 13 at Giovanni's Restaurant. **Kerry Leigh** (NLI Ex. Dir.), talked about accomplishments in land protection and stewardship during the past year with the help of you, our volunteers and donors.

Community Outreach & Engagement

The featured Guest Speaker was **Ed Collins**, whose career spans thirty-three years with the **McHenry County Conservation District**. He is the *Director of Land Preservation and Natural Resources*, administering restoration and land preservation efforts on 25,000 acres of open space. Ed is also one of the contributing authors to NLI's nature poetry and prose anthology, *NATURAL VOICES: Celebrating Nature Through Opened Eyes*.

Photo by Kim Johnsen

Ed Collins

NLI presented the **2019 George and Barbara Fell Award** to **Steve and June Keibler**. Jack Shouba, their nominator, introduced the Keiblers and had many poignant stories to share with the audience about their impact on natural landscapes and ability to corral others to help. For many years Steve and June have been leaders and activists in the preservation of natural areas and open space, restoration of degraded natural areas, and saving endangered species. June is an organizer and leader, while Steve is engaged more in on-the-ground (and in the air – he's a pilot) conservation activities.

Steve and June are accomplished naturalists with many interests, and are especially knowledgeable about birds

and wildflowers, most notably orchids. They are sponsors of *Platanthera leucophaea*, prairie white fringed orchid, in the *Flora of the Chicago Region* by Wilhelm and Rericha.

The award is named for **George and Barbara Fell** who founded the **Natural Land Institute** in 1958 and devoted their lives to the protection of natural areas in Illinois. They were committed to protecting Illinois' natural heritage so rare and endangered plant and animal species would be here for future generations.

Steve and June Keibler

Photo by Jill Kennay

Thank you to the Annual Dinner Sponsors: Chinkapin Oak (Table/$1,000) – **Applied Ecological Services, Christopher B. Burke Engineering. Ltd., Forest Preserves of Winnebago County, Gibbons Electric, Midwest Packaging and Container, KERRY, Jon and Joy Duerr, Ed and Vicki Eggers, Dan and Susan Swift**; Swamp White Oak ($500) – **Boone County Conservation District, Nicor Gas, NorthPointe Health & Wellness Campus, Viking Chemical**; Friends – **Linda Miller and Keith Syfert**.

We appreciate the additional support from program advertisers: **Lindstrom Travel, The Land Conservancy of McHenry County, Severson Dells Nature Center** and **Kerry Leigh and Jim Anderson**.

Lee Johnson leads the Wildflower Walkabout at Colored Sands Forest Preserve

Photo by Jill Kennay

Wildflower Walkabout

350 people attended the weekly guided walking tours during the 2019 **Wildflower Walkabout** Season! **Natural Land Institute** and **Severson Dells Nature Center** co-sponsored the hikes that were led by area experts. The wildflower walkabouts are a great way to see and learn about our area's natural history, native plants, and animals, too. We couldn't present this series without the help of the tour guides who provide invaluable information and insight into our natural heritage.

Photo by Jill Kennay

Blue-eyed Mary, a spring ephemeral woodland wildflower

A big ***THANK YOU*** to: **Barbara and Dan Williams, Aaron Minson, Brian Hale, Mike Groves, Mark Keister, Richard Benning, Zach and Melissa Grycan, Lee and Lynda Johnson, Steve Schmaeng, Todd Tucker, Mark Herman, Lenae Weichel, Dave Kostka, Gary and Judy Anderson, Jerry Paulson, Joni Denker,** and **Jack Armstrong**.

Thank you also to our host organizations: **Boone County Conservation District, Byron Forest Preserve District, Forest Preserves of Winnebago County and Rockford Park District**.

Holding a young green frog *(Lithobates clamitans)*

Photo by Jill Kennay

Family Nature Day

"One mother told us at the Swearing In station that her daughters were exhausted, but they didn't want to go home until they went to all 13 learning stations to get their passport stamped because they were having so much fun! Only six station stamps are required to get the Nygren Wetland Junior Naturalist Badge," said **Kim Johnsen**, coordinator of **Family Nature Day**. Johnsen also said, "The station hosts provided unique and meaningful learning experiences with activities for kids, but adults really enjoyed getting a little closer to nature, too. We are so grateful to the station hosts who are the foundation of Family Nature Day. We couldn't do it without their commitment."

The fifth annual Family Nature Day was held on Sat., June 22 at Nygren Wetland Preserve. The four hour event (9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.) grew significantly this year with 342 participants, 87 of which were children who received a Junior Naturalist badge.

Thirteen learning stations, each with a different topic and related activities, were scattered throughout the preserve to allow attendees to participate and see a variety of natural habitats (prairie, woodland, wetland) at their own pace. A volunteer at the Swearing In station verified that they collected at least 6 stamps, and asked them to raise their hand and "swear to visit Nygren Wetland Preserve often and to do my best to protect nature in my community." Then they were given the badge with their name written on it, and a Certificate of Appreciation.

Adults were also encouraged to

Photo by Jill Kennay

Digging for artifacts, Archeology Station

visit each station. If they got 6 or more stamps they got to choose a gift from a selection of gift items (Thank you **Wild Birds Unlimited** and **Prairie St. Brewing Co.**). Johnsen said, "Several of the station hosts commented at the end that the adults seemed to be participating more at the stations this year. Not only do the kids enjoy getting actively involved in learning about birds, butterflies, macroinvertebrates, fish, frogs, wildflowers and more, but adults do too."

Thank you to Family Nature Day Sponsors: *Media* – **WTVO/ FOX39**; *Common Milkweed* ($500) – **Northern Regional Groundwater Protection Planning Committee**; *Wild Petunia* ($250) – **Nicor Gas**.

Thank you to our Grantors. This program was supported by the **Dr. Louis and Violet Rubin Fund** of the **Community Foundation of Northern Illinois** and **The Kjellstrom Family Foundation**.

Thank you to our partner organizations and Learning Station Hosts, who all volunteered their time: NATIVE BEES & WASPS - **Barbara and Dan Williams**; PRAIRIES - **Lee and Lynda Johnson, Dawn, John, Forest and Payton Skupien, Sue Hansell**; RAPTORS - **Northern Illinois Raptor Rehab & Education (Candy and Steve Ridlbauer, Cathy Hoover, Tina Neuman)**; SEEDS - **Taylor Creek Restoration Nurseries (David Nelson, Lynnette Nelson)**; HEALTHY WATERS - **Northern Regional Groundwater Protection Planning Committee (Dan and Diane Kane, Sean and Huxley Von Bergen, Ryan Kerch)**; LIVING SOILS - **Winnebago County Soil & Water Conservation District (Wednesday Jordan, Tatiana Gil)**; BUTTERFLIES - **Julie Tackett and Machelle Dopkins**; BLUEBIRDS - **Rich Toppe, Susan Heinke, Rob Clark, and Neil Mclaughlin**; WETLANDS - **Rick Barton, Mark Luthin, Ellwyn Englof**; FISH - **Severson Dells Nature Center (Ann Wasser, Andrea Wallace Noble)**; ARCHAEOLOGY - **Macktown Living History (Reid Ferguson and Lucy Andrignola)**; FORESTS - **Welty Environmental Center (Aaron Wilson, Missy Henderson, Audrey McManigle)**; MAMMALS - **Stacy and Dana Wallace**.

Many thanks also to the other volunteers who helped before, during and after the event including: **Pam Shaver, Mary Conley, John Prenot, Josh Prenot, Dwayne Pieske, Chris Reisetter, Chad Etnyre, Mike Williams, Deborah Krug, Karol Rosman, Dan and Susan Swift, Bev Moore, Judy Letourneau, Merritt Schuneman, Jim Anderson, Paul Johnson, Linda Miller,** and **Keith Syfert.**

Photo by Jill Kennay

The beauty of bonding at Family Nature Day

Fall Prairie Harvest Day

Photo by Kim Johnsen

Rock Valley College Environmental Sciences students learned how to collect seeds from native prairie wildflowers at Nygren Wetland on October 5.

A Party on the Prairie Thank You!

Photo by Jill Kennay

L-R: Debbie Nelson, Julie Schmidt Woodward and Cindy Campbell had a great time at Party on the Prairie

More than 200 people gathered at the edge-of-the-prairie celebration to benefit the Natural Land Institute and Nygren Wetland Preserve at this summer's **Party on the Prairie**. The eighth biennial event was held on the evening of July 13th under warm, sunny skies. The theme of this year's party was ***"Party on the Prairie Goes WILD...flowers"*** which took place in a 100 ft. tent along a prairie in full bloom – a carpet of golden and lavender prairie flowers.

Guests were greeted at the Welcome tent, featuring a Complimentary Cocktail and lavish hors d'oeuvres. Wagon rides began at 4:30 and continued until dinner was served. Music by **Swingbilly RFD** set the mood for a prairie-inspired dinner which began in the big tent at 6:30 p.m.

Dinner was provided by Chef Extraordinaire **Michelle Princer** and her staff from **Toni's of Winnebago**. The first course was a Sweet Corn Bisque with Chipotle Drizzle, followed by the choice of a Surf & Turf entrée or a vegetarian Field and Forest entrée. Dessert was a berry and custard delight. **Reed Sjostrom** helped coordinate bar service, with **Elliot Oliver** leading the set up and crew for **Prairie St. Brewing Co.** As always, they delivered exceptional libations, including the Dandelion Wit, especially brewed for and providing extra funds for NLI.

Photo by Jill Kennay

Reed Sjostrom presented a donation check to Kerry Leigh (center) for more than $600 from the Dandelion Wit proceeds, while Kim Johnsen held two bottles of the benefit brew. Thank you PSBC!

There are so many people to thank, beginning with the event sponsors: Presenting Sponsor ($5000) - **Campbell Science**; Grey-headed Coneflower ($2000) - **Lindstrom Travel**; Culver's Root ($1500) - **Sjostrom & Sons, Inc.**; Purple Prairie Clover ($1000) - **SAVANT, Dave and Nancy Voss, Prairie St. Brewing Co.**; Hoary Vervain ($500) - **Nicor Gas, Gary W. Anderson Architects, Wipfli, LLC, Specialty Screw Corp., Northwest Bank**; and Media Sponsor **Eyewitness News (WTVO/FOX39)**.

Thanks also to the Silent Auction Donors, as well as Live Auction donors **Jerry Paulson, Scott Erickson, Rockford Art Museum** and **Carrie Johnson**, the **Eggers Family**, the **Nygren Fall Dinner Crew**, and **Carol and Hazen Tuck**.

Photo by Jill Kennay

Thanks to everyone who contributed to the overall atmosphere, including **Bruce Hammond** and **Sound Concepts** for lighting up the night -

Photo by Judy Barnard

As the sun went down the tent lit up with a colorful atmosphere

providing exceptional tent lighting to augment the glorious colors of the prairie and to **Jerry Paulson** for creating the beautiful wildflower arrangements that graced the tables.

With special appreciation to **Village Green** for the loan of many plants. Thanks also to **Kent Wolfe** who provided exceptional mowing services under both tents, **Gene Hertenstein** for the beautiful graphics and **Rockford Litho** for great printing services.

Special thank-you to NLI Staff including **Jill Kennay**, who coordinated many of the logistics including registration and rentals; **Kim Johnsen** who acquired sponsors, assisted with the silent auction and coordinated volunteers; **Zach Grycan**, who helped with everything at Nygren, including major moving, lifting and making Nygren shine; and **Jess Formea** for helping with registration and silent auction checkout.

Many people helped with set-up, tear down and during the event including NLI staff, **Becky Genoways, Richard and Michelle Swanson, Gladys Anderson, Rick Strader, Becky Brearley, Susan Hammond, Bonnie and Jim Binning, Joe and Sindy Micho, Ashley Sarver, John Prenot, Victoria Ciceri, Josh Prenot, Dwayne Pieske, Karol Rosman, Machelle Dopkins, Dean Ullrich, Toni Murray, Melanie Kandler, Alan Nowicki, Jim Anderson, Bruce and Susan Hammond, Kent Wolfe**; and *NLI Trustees*: **Paul Baits, Nancy Williamson, Jenn Nowicki,** and **Charlie Sturm**. Thanks also to **Becky Genoways** and **Rick Strader**, who helped with many trips up and back from Rockford with items for decorations, silent auction, and more and to **Becky Brearley, Becky Genoways** and **Michelle Swanson** for helping with silent auction set-up and making it look beautiful.

Special gratitude to the NLI Board for helping in so many other ways - from contributing to the silent auction, to greeting guests, to tearing down! Thanks also to Hospitality table sponsors, **Ed and Vicki Eggers, Jay and Jane Evans, Dan and Susan Swift** and **Dan and Barbara Williams**.

A big thanks to **Aramark** for in-kind donation of the table linens and to the **Forest Preserves of Winnebago County** for the loan of a golf cart. We also greatly appreciate **Jim Binning** for creating a fun, live auction; wagoneers for rides through the prairie; wagon naturalist hosts; and **Gladys Anderson** and **Bonnie Binning** for serving Complimentary Cocktails. Thanks to **Kerry Leigh** and **Paul Baits** for opening remarks.

Thanks to everyone for your commitment of time, funds and goods!!! As with any event, it takes an entire team to make it happen, and ours is the very best!! It was indeed another perfect Party on the Prairie. See you in July, 2021!

— **Judy Barnard**, Event Coordinator

Photo by Jill Kennay

Peter Clark, Kira Devin, Ashley Sarver and Jennifer Smith enjoyed refreshing beverages on the edge of the prairie before dinner

The NLI Trustees and Staff would like to extend their heartfelt gratitude to Judy Barnard for the countless hours of time she put into planning Party on the Prairie and coordinating the silent and live auctions. Her extraordinary commitment to the mission of NLI and this fundraiser for Nygren Wetland Preserve is priceless. Her dedication to this event, as well as the significant amount of in-kind contributions of items to the silent auction, are very much appreciated. Thank you, Judy!

Legislators Tour and Lunch

NLI and the **Illinois Environmental Council** (IEC) hosted a tour and lunch for Legislators and local elected officials at Nygren Wetland Preserve, in Rockton, on July 30.

Kerry Leigh, Executive Director of NLI, led the tour on and off the wagon around the preserve and the discussion during lunch. Topics of the tour included the need for more open space and passing a Capital budget that invests in open space acquisition for Illinois' future; soil erosion problems, soil health and fully funding the state's Soil & Water Conservation Districts; reinstating the Endangered Species Council; keeping the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission an independent agency; and protecting our legacy and economy by funding statewide invasive species control.

NLI and the IEC believe this was an ideal opportunity to help elected officials and lawmakers "go from aware of the environmental issues we care about to highly knowledgeable, or from knowledgeable to passionate". First-hand experience in nature and participating in a conversation about environmental and conservation issues is a good way to grow environmental champions.

Representatives from NLI and IEC welcomed Congresswoman Cheri Busto's Field Rep. **Ricardo Montoya-Picazo, Rep. Joe Sosnowski** and his team, **Simone Cameron**, Legislative Assistant to **Rep. Maurice West**, Rockton Township Trustee **Matt Cuyler, Sharon Hecox**, representing Rockton Township Supervisor **Paul Williams, Dennis Anthony**, Ex. Dir. of Winn. Co. Soil & Water Conservation District, and Roscoe's Village Administrator **Scott Sanders**. In addition to IEC representatives, staff from the **Illinois Stewardship Alliance**, and several NLI Trustees attended.

The IEC held a series of tours throughout the state this summer to build relationships with lawmakers and engage them with first hand experiences in natural areas and natural resource conservation practices.

Photo by Jill Kennay

Listening to Kerry Leigh explain the ecological benefits of wetlands

About the Illinois Environmental Council

Founded in 1975, IEC seeks to protect our environment by creating and advocating for sound environmental laws and policies. IEC represents over 90 environmental and community organizations and more than 300 individuals from throughout Illinois.

Photo by Jill Kennay

Getting ready to start the tour of Nygren Wetland Preserve

Nature Poetry & Prose

The sixth annual **Nature Poetry & Prose** event was held on September 27 with 43 people in attendance. This was an opportunity for nature lovers and writers to share their observations through words and for those who attended to be inspired by the poems and stories they heard. It was an inspirational evening for all and celebrated the natural world with creativity and imagination.

Ten writers participated this year and each either read two poems, several Haikus, one story or an excerpt from a book. New to the line-up this year was **Katie Andraski**, who read an excerpt from her book ***The River Caught Sunlight***. Other writers who read at past events joined the line-up this year and are featured in NLI's anthology, ***Natural Voices: Celebrating Nature Through Opened Eyes***. They included **Carolyn Bailey, Mary Caskey, Carol Fox, Don Miller, Wilda Morris, Lani Richardson, Dr. Karen Ruffner, Christine Swanberg, and Kaitlyn Tibbetts. Don Miller** surprised everyone and read from his newest tome, a children's book called ***River Stone Finger Bone*** while his wife, **Sue**, held up enlarged illustrations from it that were created by Aaron Minson.

Photo by Jill Kennay

Don Miller read from his children's book while his wife, Sue, held up enlarged illustrations

Thank you very much to **Christine Swanberg**, Master of Ceremonies, who also helped Kim Johnsen, NLI's Marketing & Membership Director, coordinate this event.

Nature Poetry & Prose was a partnership with **Nature at the Confluence**, the location for the event. We extend our sincere appreciation to them and their Director, **Therese Oldenberg**, for their hospitality and help in promoting this evening of natural inspiration.

Thank you also to all of the volunteers who helped with set up and tear down and during the event.

A Great Gift Idea!

The holidays are approaching and we want to remind you about this inspiring treasure trove of writings commemorating the natural world. ***Natural Voices: Celebrating Nature with Opened Eyes***, a soft cover anthology of nature themed poetry and prose, was published by Natural Land Institute in 2018 and is available in the NLI office for a $12 donation ($15 to order online and have it mailed to you).

The book is a collection of pieces written by past Nature Poetry & Prose event participants and include: **Carolyn Bailey, Dorothy Bock, Mary Caskey, Ed Collins, Sandra Fenton, Carol Fox, Don Miller, Wilda Morris, Chelsea Peterson, Christopher D. Sims, Christine Swanberg, Lani Richardson, Dr. Karen Blake Ruffner, and Kaitlyn Tibbetts.**

NLI is very grateful to the writers who donated their work to make this book possible. Thank you to **Christine Swanberg** who donated her time as editorial consultant and to **Laura Sjoquist** who created the illustrations in the book.

Thank You to NLI Major Donors and Project Partners

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Photo by Kim Johsen

Rick and Bonnie Barton

CONSERVATION@HOME

Rick and Bonnie Barton became certified Conservation@Home participants in August. They have several bird feeders, a rain barrel, many types of native wildflower planted in their landscaped garden beds and use an electric mower to cut the grass. Thank you both for providing native habitat in your urban neighborhood.

Thank You! Truck Fundraiser

We announced a truck fundraiser at the Annual Dinner on March 13 and within a few weeks, because of you, our donors, we met the goal of $24,000. Thank you for helping us complete the puzzle and meet our goal to raise funds that matched an **anonymous** gift and a grant from **Grand Victoria Foundation** to purchase a truck, trailer, and skidsteer and attachments, which will assist our land stewardship staff and volunteers in their management and restoration work at NLI preserves.

The heavy duty truck is able to pull the trailer loaded with the skidsteer and hold a large water tank for prescribed burns. The skidsteer is an important tool in allowing us to accomplish the removal of invasive brush at a faster pace and with greater impact than ever before. We're happy to report that all of these items have arrived and Zach Grycan, Director of Stewardship, was able to start using them this summer. Again, thank you to all who donated to this truck fundraiser!

Photo by Kent Wolfe

Zach Grycan and the Nygren Wetland Wednesday Crew (Lee Bach, Loren Schafer, Bob Ramirez) are happy to have the new truck to help carry out their tasks

The expansion of non-native invasive species such as bush honeysuckle, common buckthorn, and autumn olive, among others, in our woods and prairies is one of the greatest threats to our preserves. Effectively tackling invasive threats such as these is an essential step in creating and maintaining healthy natural areas.

Photo by Zach Grycan

The new Bobcat skidsteer ready for restoration work

Thank you for your commitment and dedication to supporting ongoing land stewardship for healthy natural areas.

The **815 Outside** campaign was launched in April as a county-wide initiative and is an alliance of non-profit and public service organizations working together to promote opportunities and encourage residents to connect with green space and experience nature in Winnebago County for enhanced quality of life.

Partners include **Natural Land Institute, Winnebago County, Rockford Area Convention and Visitors Bureau** (RACVB), **Severson Dells Nature Center, Forest Preserves of Winnebago County, Nature at the Confluence, Rockford Park District,** and **Klehm Arboretum**.

A growing body of research is linking physical and mental well-being to spending time in nature. Winnebago County is ranked the third unhealthiest county in the state, but has the benefit of forest preserves and parks that offer free access to natural areas. The county government has long understood the importance of these resources and is now taking the step to help connect the community to the natural treasures in the county. **Winnebago County Board Chairman Frank Haney**, who helped to spearhead the 815 Outside alliance, said, "Winnebago County and the Rockford Region have a lot of things going for it these days, including world class healthcare, leading manufacturing and aerospace, a thriving airport, outstanding education and cultural institutions. One of the best kept secrets is its natural assets. I am not aware of a community in the Midwest that offers the outdoor experiences we do, whether that be our award-winning parks and forest preserves, trails, or rivers. Join me in 'unplugging' from the constant noise of technology and social media and explore some of the green spaces that are the envy of communities all over the Midwest."

815 Outside hosts a website (www.815outside.com), Facebook and Instagram pages which provide a comprehensive guide to the area's green spaces, outdoor activities, free and low-cost nature-related events, and resources and inspiration for getting outdoors.

OAKtober — Oak Awareness Month

October has become known as **OAKtober** in the conservation community throughout the state of Illinois since it was first declared "OAKtober" in 2015. The purpose of OAKtober is to bring attention to the importance of oak trees, which clean our air and water, reduce air temperature and energy usage, and provide habitat for wildlife.

Photo by Kim Johnsen

Girl Scout Troop 1398 paused in front of one of the restored oak savannas at Burr Oak Valley Preserve.

Oak trees are strong and majestic and create a sense of place wherever they are. The Illinois State Tree is the White Oak.

NLI celebrated OAKtober by holding the **OAKtober Hike** on Sat., Oct. 26 at Burr Oak Valley Preserve in Roscoe. Around 50 people attended the hike led by NLI staff **Zach Grycan** and **Kim Johnsen**, and volunteers **Rick Barton** and **Mark Luthin** (Trustee). Hikers were able to see and learn about the different types of oak trees and restored savannas, as well as a restored prairie and a remnant dolomite prairie in the preserve. In addition to individuals and families who attended the OAKtober Hike, Girl Scout Troop 1398 brought a group of 18. They were working on earning their animal habitat badge and enjoyed learning about what kinds of animals live there. Several Rock Valley College Environment Sciences students attended the hike and helped at the event. Thank you to all of the volunteers who helped and to everyone who attended. You made it a fantastic fall adventure.

Photo by Jill Kennay

Zach Grycan points to a young American hazelnut tree during the OAKtober Hike. These have been planted in several areas of the preserve as part of the restoration process after removing invasive shrubs.

Peace and Beauty —
an oxbow lake at Nygren Wetland Preserve

Photo by Christopher Reisetter

Thank You to Retiring Trustees

Rick Barton

Rick served on the NLI board from 2010 until earlier this year. He also served on and chaired the Education and Board Development Committees. Rick was one of the key organizers of Family Nature Day and has hosted the Wetlands Learning Station since 2015; and established the Full Moon Snowshoe & Hike Event in 2011.

Ruth Little

Ruth has given more than 23 years to NLI since she first came on the board in 1988. Her last stint as Trustee started in 2010 and has provided valuable input on the Resource Development Committee and served as Chair of the Personnel Committee.

Mark Maffei

Mark first came on board as a Trustee in 2000. He served on the Nygren Wetland Science Advisory and Finance Committees and is a past President. Mark also led NLI through the process of creating two strageic plans.

Alan Nowicki

Alan has served on the board since 2013 and served on the Resource Development Committee and the Nygren Wetland Solar Sub-Committee where he led the process of selecting a solar energy company to install solar panels at Nygren Wetland Preserve.

Carrie Zethmayr

Carrie joined the NLI board in 2017 and provided strategic input as a member of the Marketing & Membership, Education and Resource Development Committees and continues to serve on Resource Development.

Welcome New Trustees

The following Trustees have joined the NLI board since December 2018. For more information about them visit our website at www.naturalland.org/nli-board.

Judy Barnard

As a past Trustee (2004-2013) and President (2008-2011) Judy is happy to be back on the NLI board. Judy has continued to serve on NLI committees, coordinate silent auctions, and chair the biennial Party on the Prairie fundraiser. She feels that the work of NLI is important to the sustainability of the region.

John Cook

John is a landscape architect who has worked with the private and public sectors for decades and brings a scope of knowledge and understanding about how a natural environment can be enjoyable and encourage healing of the mind and body.

Bill Hoff

For the past three years Bill has been on the Campaign Committee for the Gordon G. Eggers Fund, an Endowment for the Nygren Wetland Preserve. Now, in addition to serving on the NLI board, Bill is a member of the Land Conservation and Resource Development Committees.

Jenn Nowicki

Jenn brings her experiences in outdoor education, event planning and restoration work to her new role as NLI Trustee. She also serves on the Jane Addamsland Park Foundation board.

Charlie Sturm

Charlie served a 6-year term from 2006-2012, took seven years off and is back with NLI starting a new term and is the new Marketing & Membership Committee Chair. Charlie has graciously agreed to Chair the Wine & Brew at the Wetland event next year.

Nancy Williamson

Nancy retired from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources in 2018 after serving 19 years. She brings her extensive green infrastructure and watershed planning experiences to her role as a member of the Land Conservation Committee and NLI board, as well as her skills as graphic artist and illustrator.

Natural Land Institute meets all 20 BBB Standards for Charity Accountability and was recently awarded the recognition as a **BBB Accredited Charity**. Visit the BBB website for more information at: http://blue2.bbb.org/chicago/charity-reviews/internal/charity-90006838/.

Thank You for Supporting NLI in These Ways

EarthShare Illinois Earthshare.org

Thank you to those who participate in the workplace giving program, EarthShare Illinois, which supports NLI.

Schnuck's eScrip Customer (Gas) Card

We appreciate the opportunity to participate in Schnuck's eScrip Customer Card program where Schnuck's gives back to the non-profit community a percentage of what you spend in the store when you designate Natural Land Institute as the recipient organization with your card. Thank you to those who designated NLI to receive funds from your purchases.

Smile.Amazon.com

Thank you to Amazon.com and to you who shop with this online store and designated NLI to receive a percentage of your purchases.

Send Us Your Story

Be an Ambassador for Nature

We're looking for your stories to share in future newsletters. We want to hear about your first experience of the natural world, of experiences you have had in nature and/or in our preserves, stories of what you love about natural land, the landscape you live in, or stories of what you fear may happen without natural areas and habitat protection; stories about your relationship to the land, and to your local land trust.

Will you share your stories with us and be an ambassador for nature? If your story is chosen to be in one of our e-newsletters we will give you a one-year gift NLI membership to give to anyone of your choice.

Send your story to us by Dec. 30, 2019. Email it to: info@naturalland.org and we will be in touch!

NLI on Social Media

Facebook: Natural Land Institute, Nygren Wetland Preserve, Howard D. Colman Dells Nature Preserve, Burr Oak Valley Preserve, Silver Creek Woods Preserve, Milan Bottoms

Twitter: NLI 1958

Instagram: NLI1958

Tumblr: Natural Land Institute

YouTube: Natural Land Institute

Remembering People of the Land

Sister Dorothy Bock passed away on Dec. 25, 2018 at the age of 90. Dorothy co-founded Womanspace in Rockford in 1975. In addition to being a spiritual and civic leader, she was a poet, writer and artist. NLI was honored that Dorothy was able to be a part of the 2018 Nature Poetry & Prose event and is one of the featured writers in NLI's anthology, *NATURAL VOICES: Celebrating Nature With Opened Eyes*.

Lee Botts, Great Lakes advocate and environmental pioneer, passed away on Oct. 5 at the age of 91. Among her many accomplishments she organized Chicago's first Earth Day celebration, advocated for the Clean Water Act of 1972, founded the Indiana Dunes Environmental Learning Center, produced a documentary about the Indiana Dunes and helped establish Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, now the 61st National Park.

Michael Bugler, 68, passed away on March 5. His NLI family greatly misses him. He became involved with NLI in 2006 when he began designing the NLI newsletters and joined the Marketing & Membership Committee. Through the years he worked on many graphic design projects including the current NLI logo, branding images, fundraising appeal cards, event logos and material (Wine at the Wetland, Wine & Brew at the Wetland, Party on the Prairie, Wander at the Wetland, Family Nature Day), signs, banners, and the 60th Anniversary logo, T-shirt, and other promotional items. He was a dedicated volunteer at many events and donated his design services for Wine & Brew at the Wetland, Party on the Prairie and Family Nature Day.

Webbs Norman, age 85, "graduated" from this earthly life on Jan. 19. He was a visionary, philosopher and community leader whose passions were parks, recreation and supporting people. He was Executive Director of Rockford Park District from 1972 to 2006 and in retirement co-wrote, *Building a Lasting Dream 1909-2009: A History of the Rockford Park District*.

NATURAL LAND INSTITUTE
Conserving Land in Northern Illinois

320 S. Third Street, Rockford, Illinois 61104
Phone: 815/964-6666
E-mail: info@naturalland.org
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2020 Annual Dinner

and presentation of the George and Barbara Fell Award

Mark your calendar for the **Annual Dinner** and presentation of the **George and Barbara Fell Award** on **Tuesday, March 24, 2020.** The social hour starts at 5:30 p.m. with dinner at 6:30. The program will start at 7:15 with the award presentation, remarks from Executive Director, **Kerry Leigh**, and a celebration of **Nygren Wetland Preserve's 20th Anniversary.**

Tickets to the Annual Dinner cost $60 each for non-members (includes a one-time, one year introductory membership) and $45 each for NLI members. Tables of 10 are available for $600 (non-members) and $450 (NLI members). A Table Sponsorship is available for $1,000. Call 815/964-6666 for more information and to order tickets or purchase online at www.NaturalLand.org by March 18, 2020. Individual and corporate event sponsorships are also available. Contact Kim Johnsen at kjohnsen@naturalland.org for more information about all sponsorship opportunities.

George and Barbara Fell Award Nominations

NLI is now accepting nominations for the **2020 George and Barbara Fell Award**. The award is named for **George and Barbara Fell** who founded the Natural Land Institute in 1958 and devoted their lives to the protection of natural areas in Illinois. They were committed to protecting Illinois' natural heritage so rare and endangered plant and animal species would be here for future generations.

To see the criteria and download the nomination form visit: https://www.naturalland.org/gb-fell-award/. Nomination deadline: January 17, 2020.

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