Protecting Our Trees
A message from our executive director...

Grace and Gratitude in Transition

One of the many wonderful experiences of working for a not-for-profit is that partnership between a director and their board of trustees, those wonderful people who give their time, energy, and expertise to a cause they are committed to and where they recognize that they can make a significant contribution. I have been asked by people, why should I give? Everyone has their own special reason for the significance of their giving, usually related to the cause that is important to them, yet there is a thread of care and desire that runs through all the givers in this world. That thread is the knowledge that their giving is intimately interwoven with the benefits that they and others receive from that giving.

Many of us intuitively know that giving and receiving are really the same, and also how different receiving is from ‘taking.’ Givers and receivers understand the fluidity of the experience and the hidden dynamic that defines the richness and the gratitude inherent in that experience. Dan Williams, NLI’s President of the Board of Trustees for the past 5 years, is a person who has been making a difference with his warm personality and quick wit.

My experience with Dan has been one of not only a wonderfully supportive and creative partnership, but also one of intellectual rigor and sensitivity to nuance. During these last 5 years, Dan has been providing leadership and stability for NLI during the incredibly important transition of Executive Directors. He has shepherded the trustees and staff through challenges, and been a true and respectful friend to the family of donors and givers who make up the NLI family.

Dan is retiring from the position of Board President this spring, and will continue to give of his talents, good nature, and passion for the natural world as Chair of the Nygren Wetland Preserve Endowment Campaign Committee. Thank you, Dan, for serving with grace and humility. NLI is honored that you have chosen us to be the recipient of your giving on so many levels.

We are welcoming Mark Maffei, a past president of NLI, to return to bring his gifts to this position of Board President. Mark is known by many of you as a passionate promoter of the natural world. He has served on the Board of NLI and been integral in the restoration of the Nygren Wetland Preserve. Welcome Mark! We look forward to a creative partnership as we look to NLI’s future.
A Sad Tale... and Hope for the Future

In the fall of 2012, one of NLI’s protected sites (a Natural Heritage Landmark) suffered trespass and had 61 mature trees cut through unauthorized logging. The loggers left a mess of broken tree trunks, downed tree top debris and broken branches. Additional damage occurred to remaining trees, the understory, and ecological damage, including rutting, slope erosion, several areas of soil compaction, and invasive species colonization from equipment. Our experts determined that the trespassers’ action will require $438,880 in remediation costs to clean up and begin to restore the property. The trespassers claim, however, that we are only entitled to three times the stumpage value, not remediation costs. The consultant’s estimate of three times stumpage value of $165,857.85 is significantly under the cost of site remediation and the lost functional value of the resource. Because of this discrepancy, we started asking questions of other conservation groups, and found that this is a statewide problem.

Trees are fundamental to natural areas throughout Illinois: they provide wildlife habitat, prevent soil erosion, clean our air and filter water. They are the literal roots holding an ecosystem together. Despite these essential benefits, we have discovered that perpetrators of illegal logging in conservation areas in Illinois get away with it without facing substantial consequences. As interpreted by trespassers, the current law, the Illinois Wrongful Tree Cutting Act, falls short of compensating for any of these losses and is not enough to allow the wronged land owners to clean up the mess left behind. To properly compensate conservation land trusts, conservation easement owners, forest preserves, park districts, and others that oversee natural areas, a change to the law, which removes any doubts about landowners’ rights, is needed.

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Protecting Our Trees by Kerry Leigh

Kerry Leigh, NLI Executive Director, at the Illinois Senate
Protecting Our Trees

Continued from page 3

Treading in the advocacy footsteps of George B. Fell, NLI, in partnership with the Illinois Environmental Council and Openlands are proposing an amendment to the Illinois Wrongful Tree Cutting Act (HB5577/SB3289) to allow a conservation property owner to be adequately compensated for all of the damage done to a natural area by illegal logging. Wrongdoers frequently argue that the law limits recovery for damages to three times the logged value of the trees and cannot take into account other damages done to conservation and preservation properties when trees are cut unlawfully.

The proposed change to the Illinois Wrongful Tree Cutting Act will provide owners of conservation and preservation properties the certainty that their rights are protected and the funds necessary to remediate damages done to their properties will serve as a deterrent to those who would knowingly and illegally cut trees in these protected areas.

As an environmental land trust we are specifically tasked with protecting special places, and we make a promise that the land and its ecosystem will always be there, for us, our children, their children, forever. The NLI Board of Trustees decided that we need to clarify and amend the legislation to prevent defendants such as these trespassers from escaping liability for the true damages they cause.

**Update:** As of this writing, the amendment to the Illinois Wrongful Tree Cutting Act has moved out of the Illinois Senate Environment Committee with a unanimous ‘yes’ vote, and out of the full Senate with a vote of 55 to 4.

**Next Step:** On to the House! This important bill clarifies and confirms the law that conservation landowners are permitted to recover for any damage that is caused by tree theft or wrongful cutting of trees on their properties. This will be a deterrent to theft and protect our conservation lands.

A big ‘Thank You’ to our very own Senator Steve Stadelman and Representative Litesa Wallace for sponsoring this bill.

The Senate Committee Agenda from the 2016 Environmental Lobby Day
Funding Conservation for the Long Term

The times, they are a changin’…

Sadly, we are seeing that the traditional land acquisition and ongoing ecosystem management funding mechanisms are becoming inadequate and unsustainable. Just relying on private donors or state grants for sustainable, long-term land protection does not begin to address the statewide crisis now occurring and the breadth of need. Insufficient funds for conservation acquisition and management is an issue not just for environmental land trusts, but for other land protection agencies across the state. We are beginning to see many conserved lands spiraling into low-quality ecosystems because of the extent of the stresses being put on them, one of which is global and regional climate change. We are seeing unprecedented challenges through the spread of invasive species and microclimate alterations. There is a tipping point where an ecosystem may go beyond recovery.

NLI, in partnership with the Delta Institute and the Illinois Environmental Council is taking a look beyond the traditional model of stewardship funding to find alternative sustainable revenue streams that will ensure the future success of long-term land protection in Illinois.

With a research grant awarded by the Grand Victoria Foundation, the team is researching the conditions and policies that make other national and international models successful, and understanding the potential barriers to implementing these programs in Illinois. The project team’s goal is to create a new model for sustainable funding of conservation projects throughout the state. This will entail:

- identifying promising financing scenarios,
- defining the infrastructure that would need to be built both externally through policy and legal initiatives and internally within the conservation community, and
- discovering what is needed to successfully implement the scenarios.

This is a bold strategy to create momentum in Illinois to change the business as usual attitude, and challenge stakeholders to think larger than their organization and activities. 🎯
2015 Year in Review

SchloMar Farm

Our brothers, William, Richard, John and Jim Schlobohm, donated their family farm of 63 acres to NLI. This new NLI property is located near Howard D. Colman Dells Nature Preserve. NLI’s Land Conservation Committee has been discussing potential options for managing this land.

Clear Water Legacy 1:

Seven conservation easements came into effect in 2015 along the South Branch of the Kishwaukee River.

Partnering with NLI, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, through their C2000 program, provided funds for NLI to purchase 30-year Conservation Easements from seven private contiguous landowners in 2004. They are part of a larger complex of 12 protected parcels along the south branch corridor protecting a total of 417 acres.

These easements provide a forested riparian buffer along the river reducing scour erosion of soils that were being washed into the river degrading its water quality.

Land Stewardship and Management

We made great strides in land management at some of our preserves because of ongoing weekly and monthly volunteer days at Howard D. Colman Dells Nature Preserve, Silver Creek Woods, Burr Oak Valley, and Nygren Wetland preserves. Every other Monday was added to Burr Oak Valley Preserve.

Activities at these, as well as other preserves, included invasive species control through brush removal, various spot treatments, and timed mowing. Volunteers also assisted with repairs to equipment, general site maintenance, prescribed burns, wildlife surveys and reporting, and seed collection.

Josh Sage of Boone County Conservation District provided a week’s worth of time and equipment during the winter to clear some of the high-quality areas along the edges of Burr Oak Valley Preserve.

Because of your donations towards the Tackling Invasive Threats Initiative providing matching dollars for stewardship grants, we were able to hire contractors to do additional restoration work at Burr Oak Valley Preserve and initiate new stewardship efforts at Kyte River Bottoms Land and Water Reserve. These additional resources allowed us to achieve more invasive species removal in a timely manner and with much needed larger equipment in some cases. Pizzo and Associates removed invasive woody species from 16 acres of high-quality woodland, savanna, and cliff communities at Burr Oak Valley. We appreciate funding from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation that supported the work at Kyte River Bottoms where Northern Illinois Resource Solutions was able to clear 35 acres of invasive species.
Rare Plant Discovery at Fall Field Botany Day

Paul Bollinger, professional botanist and environmental consultant, led a group of 20 on a full-day class to learn about native fall wildflowers and grasses. The day started at Nygren Wetland Preserve then moved over to Harlem Hills Prairie Nature Preserve. Paul explained botany vocabulary, showed students how to key out plants as a way to identify them and provided tips on how to work through a plant key. While out in the Harlem Hills Prairie that day they made a thrilling discovery of the rare Great Plains Lady’s Tresses.

Lady’s Tresses. It’s a “late blooming orchid with a deep vanilla-like aroma” said Ed Cope, NLI Restoration Ecologist. “This represents the first population of the species ever recorded in Winnebago County,” he said.

Spring Public Stewardship Day

On Saturday, May 9 volunteers and staff helped remove garlic mustard from Howard D. Colman Dells Nature Preserve during the Spring Public Stewardship Day. All ages participated from cub scouts with parents, to college students and other adults. Thank you to all who helped that day.

Thank you to our 2015 Volunteers of the Year

Illinois State Senator Steve Stadelman recognized our 2015 Volunteers of the Year with a personal letter from him and a Certificate of Senate Recognition. “The work that you perform ensures a better future for northern Illinois’ environment and wildlife. Additionally, you are helping to cultivate a mentality of civic responsibility and caring, which will positively affect future generations” said Senator Stadelman in his congratulatory letter on behalf of the Illinois Senate of the 99th General Assembly.

Volunteer Recognition

Natural Land Institute preserves depend on the commitment, time and dedication of many volunteers throughout the year. Full descriptions of our 2015 Volunteers of the Year were in the 2016 Annual Dinner Program and can also be found on the News page of our website, www.naturalland.org.

Mary Mohaupt

We appreciate Mary Mohaupt’s willingness to help whenever she can. In 2015 she baked cookies for Wander at the Wetland, co-hosted the Mammals Learning Station at Family Nature Day, and helped with Party on the Prairie, Nature Poetry & Prose, and the Volunteer Picnic.

David Hinde

David Hinde has been a dedicated and steadfast land steward of Burr Oak Valley Preserve during the past year. He was always there to help remove bush honeysuckle and other invasive brush at the First Saturday and every other Monday Stewardship Days in 2015.

Dion Faith

We are lucky to have Dion Faith as Site Steward for the Silver Creek Woods Preserve. He has coordinated volunteers and invasive species removal at this preserve for many years. We appreciate Dion’s enthusiasm and devotion to this preserve.

Bernie Faith

NLI is fortunate to have Bernie Faith helping remove invasive brush at the Silver Creek Woods Preserve. His skills and experience provide wonderful resources for the other volunteers and benefits this natural area.
2015 Year in Review

Changes in Stewardship Staff

Our new Restoration Ecologist position, filled by Ed Cope, who officially started in December of 2014, was partially funded by a grant from the Grand Victoria Foundation. Ed has been instrumental during the past year in expanding our stewardship reach to preserves that were neglected.

We bid a fond farewell to Director of Stewardship Kevin Rohling (3 years) in June and welcomed Zachary Grycan, in July, to fill the position.

Summer Stewardship Interns

Sudan Garner, Beloit College Sustainability Fellows Intern, worked mainly at Nygren Wetland Preserve with an examination of Reed Canary Grass and best practices for managing this invasive plant. Her final project poster can be found here, along with other past Sustainability Fellows posters: https://www.beloit.edu/sustainability/pathways/sust_fellows/Current_Projects/Nygren/. Luke Samaras, another summer intern, helped remove the same invasive species and collected seeds, as well. They both assisted with turtle monitoring and wetland plant propagation. Their efforts are greatly appreciated. The 2016 Beloit College Sustainability Fellows Intern will be Mason Dixon.

Burn Training

NLI hosted two prescribed burn training workshops with the help of Bill Bowes from Silviculture: Fire Training and Forestry Management in the spring and fall. The workshops were part of the S130/S190 certification process.

Bell Bowl Prairie

NLI organized the Northern Illinois Land Managers to remove brush from the Bell Bowl Prairie located on Chicago Rockford International Airport property south of Rockford. This site doesn’t have any legal protection, though it is recognized by the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory as a high quality remnant prairie.

George B. Fell, founder of NLI, saved this prairie from being destroyed by a giant bulldozer decades ago.

Thanks to our partners who helped: Byron Forest Preserve District, Forest Preserves of Winnebago County, Rockford Park District, and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

Fall Prairie Harvest Day

The annual Fall Prairie Harvest Day was held on Saturday, September 12 at Nygren Wetland Preserve, in Rockton. Several Boy and Girl Scout Troops, individuals and families volunteered to gather seeds from native wildflowers and grasses. The seeds were then dried out and stored over the winter. In the spring volunteers and staff planted the seeds.
Bluebird Nesting Boxes

There are twelve nesting boxes at Nygren Wetland Preserve, which were set up in 2002. Thank you to our volunteer Bluebird monitoring team of Rich Toppe, Susan Heinke, Rob Clark, and Tricia Graham. The team maintained detailed records on each box, checked on the bluebirds' general safety and health and cleared the boxes of nests made by other species. They were excited to report a significant increase with 26 Bluebird fledglings in 2016!

Northern Illinois Native Seed Network

NLI staff organized the first gathering and seed exchange of this network of governmental and non-governmental organizations in November. Agencies shared the seeds of native plants with others as a way to expand their ongoing restoration efforts in our region. The other participating organizations were Forest Preserves of Winnebago County, Boone County Conservation District, Rockford Park District, Byron Forest Preserve District, McHenry County Conservation District, The Land Conservancy of McHenry County, and DeKalb County Forest Preserve District.

Grant Partners

The grant partners of NLI help protect and preserve natural land:

- Grand Victoria Foundation, 2-year capacity grant for ecosystem restoration and a research grant on conservation funding with the Delta Institute and the Illinois Environmental Council.
- Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation, 2015 stewardship grant for Kyte River & Milan Bottoms
- The McKnight Foundation awarded a research grant to the Resilient Rivers Coalition (Natural Land Institute is a partner) for water quality impact.

Annual Dinner

The 2015 Annual Dinner, held March 24, featured guest speaker Peggy Macnamara, artist, author, Professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and Artist in Residence at the Field Museum. Peggy shared her unique perspective as an artist viewing the natural world.

Randy Nybøer, an ecologist with a distinguished career of protecting natural areas, was presented with the George and Barbara Fell Award. This award has recognized outstanding achievements in land conservation since 1997 and is named for the NLI founders.

Wildflower Walkabout

Last year’s Wildflower Walkabout series kicked off at Severson Dells Nature Center (SDNC) on Earth Day, April 22, and followed with nine weekly guided hikes at preserves around the area. This series of free guided tours is coordinated by NLI and SDNC. Several of the Walkabouts had record-breaking attendance with 50 people per walk. We appreciate the support of all of our partnering organizations and those who led the Walkabout programs.

Rare Plants Program

NLI hosted a program about, “Rare and Unusual Plants in Illinois’ Natural Areas” on Friday, May 1, at Katie’s Cup. The educational program was presented by Christopher David Benda, M.S., and featured his photographs of the rare and unusual plants he has observed and studied.
2015 Year in Review

Throughout the state of Illinois during his career, Benda also talked about the mission and activities of the Illinois Native Plant Society.

**Art in Nature**

For the 4th year the NLI Education Committee coordinated the *Art in Nature* program at Klehm Arboretum & Botanic Garden for 5th graders from Lathrop Elementary and 6th – 8th graders at RESA Middle School. Held in May, it’s a half-day program for each school and incorporates drawing, journaling and the science of trees and other plants as a way to increase students’ awareness of nature and better understand their relationship to it. The presenters were Sherrie Dorr, Adriana Villagomez, Christine Swanberg and John Moors.

This program was partially supported by a grant from the Rockford Area Arts Council, which receives support from the City of Rockford, the Illinois Arts Council and its members.

**Party on the Prairie goes FIESTA! South of the Border**

*Party on the Prairie* is a fun-filled evening that takes place every other year in a spectacular setting — inside a large tent overlooking the prairie at Nygren Wetland Preserve. The 6th biennial Party fundraiser, which was held on July 11th, went South of the Border for a FIESTA. Guests were treated to horse-drawn wagon rides and the lively music of Mariachi Lira de Rockford.

Thank you to everyone who contributed from our set-up and tear-down crew, silent auction donors and buyers, and to our sponsors: Campbell Science, SAVANT, Rockford Brewing Company, Bugler Design Inc., Specialty Screw Corporation, Sjostrom & Sons, Inc., NorthPointe Health & Wellness Center, UTC Aerospace Systems, WIPFLi, Members Alliance Credit Union and Bill and Sally Hoff.

Our endless appreciation goes out to Judy Barnard who coordinated the event and auctions. Thank you to Michelle Princer, Owner and Chef of Toni’s of Winnebago for her imaginative and delicious appetizers and dinner, and to Reed Sjostrom and Rockford Brewing Company for managing the bar.

Proceeds from this event benefit the ongoing restoration and management of Nygren Wetland Preserve.

**Nature Poetry & Prose**

Nature is marvelous inspiration to writers. NLI hosted an evening of poetry and prose at Nygren Wetland Preserve on July 23 that featured thoughts and commentary on the natural world and our relationship to it. More than 30 guests enjoyed a warm sunny evening under the canopy of a tent overlooking the prairie while listening to the featured writers read their poems and stories. Christine Swanberg was the MC, one of the featured writers who read her poetry, and helped coordinate the event. Our other featured writers were NLI Trustee Mary Caskey and Severson Dells Nature Center staff Don Miller and Greg Keilback.

**Guest Bartending Fundraiser**

Thank you to the University Club of Rockford for giving us the opportunity to raise money one evening in August. With the help of our “Guest Bartenders” — NLI Trustees Mary Caskey, Troy Skwor, Reed Sjostrom and past President Judy Barnard — we raised more than $1,000 from U Club and NLI members and friends. We enjoyed and are grateful for the live music that night provided by The Groove Hotel (Phil Pilcher, Dan Kasten and Bob Rub).
OAKtober Hike

October 2015 was proclaimed “OAKtober” – OAK AWARENESS MONTH in the State of Illinois by Governor Bruce Rauner. Since NLI participated in the effort to make this happen with a letter of support from Executive Director Kerry Leigh, we thought it would be a good idea to ask the City of Rockford and Winnebago County to also proclaim October as Oak Awareness Month in the city and county. And they did.

Thank you City of Rockford and Winnebago County!

Natural Land Institute was pleased to support this statewide and local effort to create awareness and educate the public about the importance of the oak ecosystem.

NLI staff led 55 people on a free tour through the oak savannas of Burr Oak Valley Preserve last October 17 on a sunny, cool fall afternoon and talked about the restoration work that was done there and will be ongoing to protect the oak ecosystem and spoke about the environmental benefits of oak trees.

Governor Rauner already proclaimed October 2016 as Oak Awareness Month so watch for information about our plans to celebrate it this coming October.

About 100 Washington Academy 4th-graders took a field trip to Nygren Wetland Preserve in April and learned about prairies and wetlands and the animals that live there.

In June, Northwest Illinois Audubon Society brought 33 adults for a guided tour.

During two days in September 140 Hononegah High School Honors Biology Class students used the preserve as their classroom to study macroinvertebrates, analyze the water quality of Raccoon Creek and other elements of the environment, and conducted a prairie transect line.

Rock Valley College’s Center for Learning in Retirement brought a class of retired folks for a private tour on September 23.

Private tours of this or other preserves may be arranged for a small fee with 10 or more participants. Contact the NLI office to make arrangements.

New Field Notes Launched

A new NLI publication dedicated to sharing news about what’s happening at the preserves was launched in the summer of 2015. It is called Notes from the Field and informs you about the work of our stewardship staff (sometimes excerpted from their personal journals), volunteer options, and lets you know about opportunities for you to play a role in protecting and preserving natural land for future generations. Notes will be published twice a year alternating between the Land & Nature newsletters.

Corporate Council

NLI’s Corporate Council membership program brings together business leaders to network and learn about best practices for environmental stewardship and sustainability.

Luncheon programs were held on June 10 and August 12. Thank you to our guest speakers for their time and enlightening presentations: Paul Dempsey, Communications Manager, Excelon Generation (Byron Station), spoke on June 10. Reed Sjostrom, NLI Trustee and Vice President of Rockford Brewing Company, hosted the luncheon on August 12 and took guests on a tour of the micro-brewery/restaurant and the historic Prairie Street Brewhouse, home of Rockford Brewing Company.

Rockford City Market and GPS Farmers Market

NLI’s Marketing & Membership Committee hosted two kids’ activities at Rockford City Market during the summer (June and August). While kids were making bird feeders out of pinecones, peanut butter and seeds, committee members talked to parents and market guests about the mission of NLI. In June they hosted a kids activity at GPS Faith Market located in Machesney Park.

Learning at Nygren Wetland Preserve

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You and I are witnesses to the return of the bluebirds, whooping cranes, white pelicans, and green frogs…returning to their home all because of you and your support of the restoration of this unique place. The converging rivers were a major trading point for the Winnebago and other first people. Later the settling farmers came, breaking the prairie sod to support their families.

Now we are giving back to the creatures who first settled this land.

Your gift will continue to grow ensuring their future for generations to come.
Congress Passed It! The Charitable IRA Rollover is Now Permanent

A bill that permanently extends the Charitable IRA Rollover was passed at the end of last year by Congress and signed by the President. We have included a list of requirements here for your convenience, but as always, please consult your personal financial advisor before taking any action.

1. The donor must be 70½.
2. The maximum contribution is $100,000.
3. The contribution must come from an IRA. SIMPLE IRAs and SEP-IRAs do not qualify.
4. The contribution must go directly from the IRA to the charity. The donor can deliver the check, but if he is required to endorse the check, the contribution will not qualify. The donor must report income and will get a corresponding deduction.
5. The recipient must be a public charity, and cannot include donor advised funds or supporting organizations.
6. The contribution must otherwise be fully deductible. A donor cannot use it to fund a gift annuity or charitable remainder trust, for example.

Wildlife Monitoring at the Wetland

Stewardship staff worked with interns and volunteers to expand wildlife monitoring beyond the Eastern Bluebirds (see the 2015 Year in Review section) to include turtle monitoring last year, as well. They will continue monitoring turtles in 2016 and plan to add frog and butterfly monitoring. If you are interested in assisting with this type of undertaking please contact Zach or Ed for more information.

Video Tells the Story

A video about Nygren Wetland Preserve was presented at the 2016 Annual Dinner. You can find the video on our website homepage under Quick Links, www.naturalland.org, Nygren Wetland Preserve: The Story.

Thank you to all of the people who were interviewed and to the photographers whose photos contributed to a beautiful and fascinating story.

Record Breaking Seed Collection

Remember these numbers: 2015, 261 pounds, 210 species, $50,940 value. This was a record breaking year for our seed collection program! Thank you to all of the volunteers who helped staff collect seeds at several preserves with the bulk of the seeds being collected at Nygren Wetland. All seeds are sorted, dried and stored in the Seed Room of the barn at Nygren Preserve, where most of the seeds will be sown.
Explore the Beauty of North Central Illinois

Co-Sponsored by Natural Land Institute (NLI) and Severson Dells Nature Center (SNDC)

Come experience the north central Illinois landscape. Walk where flowers carpet the forest floor and birds fill the air. Natural Land Institute and Severson Dells Nature Center are the organizing agencies of the event, with local groups providing leaders from their organizations.

Eleven Wildflower Walkabouts are scheduled this spring for your nature hiking pleasure. The guided tours started Wednesday, April 20 and continue weekly, alternating between Wednesday and Tuesday through June 29. Please join us for one or more of these informative and enjoyable tours led by expert volunteers.

No fee for the walks, but membership in NLI and/or SDNC is encouraged! SDNC: 815-335-2915 • NLI: 815-964-6666.

All walks begin at 6:00 p.m.

Howard D. Colman Dells Nature Preserve

Tuesday, May 10
Located near the intersection of East Severson Road and North Weldon Road. From Meridian and Montague Road, drive south and turn west onto McGregor Road, turn north onto Weldon Road.

Greg Keilback of Severson Dells Nature Center will lead this hike on property owned and managed by NLI. This 55-acre Nature Preserve is located along Hall Creek, southwest of Rockford. One of the attractive features of this preserve is a series of cliffs known as the dells. Many unique plants restricted to limestone and dolomite outcrops are found here, as well as some northern relict plants. The floral display in the upland woods is one of the best in Winnebago County.

Aldo Leopold and Paul Riis conducted some early deer studies in this preserve in the mid 1930’s.

Moderate-difficult hiking.

Burr Oak Valley Preserve

Wednesday, May 18
Park in the church lot at 7404 Elevator Rd, Roscoe and meet at the preserve entrance across the street.

The Natural Land Institute owns this 63-acre oak woodland with three small hilltop prairies. NLI staff member Ed Cope will lead this moderate hike through the woodlands, near an intermittent stream, and up the hills to the prairie openings. We can expect to see blue-eyed grass, columbine, maidenhair fern, and rare kittentails.
Kishwaukee Gorge North Forest Preserve  
**Tuesday, May 24**
Located on Blackhawk Road near Cherry Valley. Meet in lower parking lot.
**Jerry Paulson**, former executive director of **Natural Land Institute**, will lead this hike.

The “Gorge North” is one of the many beautiful spots along the Kishwaukee River Valley. We will explore a hill prairie, enjoy a scenic over-look of the Kish, and walk to the river’s edge. **Moderate hiking due to hills.**

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Sugar River Alder Forest Preserve  
**Wednesday, June 1**
Meet at parking lot off of Haas Road near Durand.

**Richard Benning**, Severson Dells volunteer, will lead this wildflower walkabout walk in the far northwest corner of Winnebago County. It hosts numerous ecosystems providing great habitat for many species of birds and plants. The prairie is outstanding on this property. Also great hiking trails in one of the most quiet forest preserves in the district. **Easy hiking.**

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Hartley Memorial Forest Preserve  
**Tuesday, June 7**
This 40-acre upland forest located 3 miles south of Durand on IL Rt. 70, park on Campbell Road.

**Mark Keister** will lead a wildflower walkabout through this mature forest, which is dominated by basswood and white oak. A dense layer of spring and summer flowering herbaceous species includes wild geranium, sweet cicely, and blue cohosh. This preserve is one of the real gems of the **Forest Preserves of Winnebago County. Easy hiking.**

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Hartley Memorial Forest Preserve  
**Tuesday, June 21**
Meet on Flora Drive in Loves Park.

**Gary and Judy Anderson** will offer their guidance on this visit to Harlem Hills Prairie. If the season is progressing typically, the hills should be pink/purple with thousands of Pale Purple Coneflowers. Always a great place to see a sunset. **Easy hiking.**

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Sears Prairie Nature Preserve  
**Wednesday, June 29**
Located on Central Avenue in Rockford. Meet across from soccer fields on south side of road.

**Jack Armstrong**, Rockford Park District board member, will take us on this hike to Sears Prairie, owned by the Rockford Park District. It is dominated by mesic and wet-mesic prairie where prairie dropseed, Indian grass, big bluestem and little bluestem grow. The site is one of the highest quality wet prairies in the state and will be full of bloom. **Easy hiking, but the area may be wet.**

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Colored SandsForest Preserve  
**Wednesday, June 15**
Meet at the Banding Station parking lot at the end of Haas Road near Durand.

Join **Sand Bluff Bird Observatory**’s naturalists **Lee and Lynda Johnson** for a wildflower walkabout tour of the beautiful sand country at Colored Sands Bluff Nature Preserve. The vegetation is unique to dry sand prairies, which once dominated the area but now are very rare. This easy level walk will be a great hike for beginners as well as the experienced. Bring a wildflower book, binoculars, and bug spray.

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Marsh Marigolds

**Photo: Jill Kennay**

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Wild Lupine

**Photo: Jill Kennay**

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Phlox at Howard D. Colman Dells Nature Preserve

**Photo: Randy Zimmerman**
Volunteer Training and Service

Zach Grycan, Director of Stewardship, and his wife Melissa, Restoration Ecologist for The Land Conservancy of McHenry County, led the Winter Tree & Shrub Identification Workshop on March 5, which taught participants how to identify winter trees and shrubs by their bark, buds, and leaf scars. The morning session was led indoors at Rockton’s Talcott Free Library with a lecture and hands-on exercises using twig samples and ID information sheets. The afternoon session was conducted outside at NLI’s Burr Oak Valley Preserve in Roscoe.

The Spring Public Stewardship Day focused on Garlic Mustard removal on April 16 at Silver Creek Woods Preserve.

Zach led the Prescribed Burn Training Workshop on April 30 that utilized the Chicago Wilderness’ Midwest Ecological Prescription Burn Crew Member Training Manual.

COMING UP A Basic Chainsaw Safety, Usage and Maintenance Workshop will be May 21 led by Zach and Melissa. To register for this call the NLI office at 815/964-6666. Cost: $20.

Spring 2016 Natural Land Institute Events Update

Wander at the Wetland: Full Moon Snowshoe & Hike

Held on Monday evening, January 25, the 6th annual Wander at the Wetland has now experienced just about every kind of weather. Rain and sleet did not deter 91 people from attending and enjoying the bonfires, luminary lit trail, and refreshments including homemade cookies, hot cocoa and other snacks in the greenhouse. Some guests came prepared with their umbrellas! There was a little snow on the ground and we appreciate Rocktown Adventures sponsoring the snowshoes so guests could use them if desired, which they did. Everyone who attended expressed enthusiasm and appreciation for the opportunity to get outside during the middle of winter and explore the prairies and wetlands at Nygren Wetland Preserve in Rockton. Thank you to NorthPointe Health & Wellness Center for sponsoring the hundreds of luminaries and to all of our volunteers who helped with set up, tear down, and during the event.

Celebrating at the Annual Dinner

The NLI 2016 Annual Dinner and Fundraiser, held on March 29 at Giovanni’s, was an evening filled with excitement as old and new friends gathered to celebrate the presentation of the George and Barbara Fell Award to John “Jack” White, ecologist and researcher, for his decades-long career of working to preserve natural areas. After receiving the award he shared his
thoughts and memories of working with George and Barbara and how they impacted the natural landscapes of Illinois and influenced others with their dedication to preserving those areas. Jack referenced three essays in his remarks. One was written by George B. Fell and the others by him. They are available to read on our website under the homepage Quick Links section, “Recommended Readings by Jack White.”

We thank our Table Sponsors for their support: Christopher B. Burke Engineering, Ltd., NorthPointe Health & Wellness, Rockford Park District, Dan and Barbara Williams, and WilliamsMcCarthy LLP.

Thank you to all of our Silent Auction donors and buyers, the program book advertisers and to everyone who attended. A huge THANK YOU to Judy Barnard who coordinated the Silent Auction. We are always amazed and appreciate her talent and ability to create an extraordinary display of interesting items and experiences for guests to purchase as a way to support the mission of NLI.

Illinois State Senator Steve Stadelman presented a Certificate of Senate Recognition to John “Jack” White for receiving the 2016 George and Barbara Fell Award for outstanding land conservation leadership. 🍁
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- Judy Barnard provided decorations for events, and silent auction coordination
- Lou Cambier moved at Pecatonica Woodlands
- Dion Faith provided equipment for restoration work at Silver Creek Woods
- Tim and Janaan Lewis donated a magnetic dry-erase board
- David Holman produces GIS-based maps for NLI preserves
- Chad Hoover provided equipment for restoration work at Silver Creek Woods
- Gordon and Linda Neele donated a new HP OfficeJet printer/scanner
- Gordon Neele replaced the entrance gate to Burr Oak Valley
- John Peterson gave a bail mower, pressure washer, and sieves
- Larry Holotow moved at Pecatonica Ridge Prairie
- Pheasants Forever allows the use of equipment for management at NLI preserves
- Gerald Rilling gave a Whooping Crane book
- Tyler’s Landscaping Service, Inc. plowed NLI’s office driveway and parking area all winter
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Kay Dyce
Ed and Vicki Eggers
Emerson Eggers
Georganne Eggers
Gordon G., Jr. and Rose Eggers family
Jarrett Eggers Family
Dr. and Mrs. Theodore Eller
Karl and Barbara Erickson
Ellen B. Erkert
Jay and Jane Evans
Joseph W. Ferraro
Darrell and Audrey Forbes
John and Jean Frana
Lori Frith
Barbara Gambino
Gordon and Nada Geddes
Susan Grans
Cynthia Grantz
Eugene and Lola Gustafson
James and Andrea Gustafson
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David and Anne Hagney
Alan and Frannie Heggblom
Daniel and Catherine Herdeman

Linda Holm
histoire
Shirley Burks
George and Darlene Bull
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histoire
Shirley Burks
Fiscal Year 2015 Financial Summary

**Assets**
- Cash ................. $  709,535
- Accounts receivable ............. 20,120
- Prepaid expenses ............. 12,419
- Land held for preservation ... 4,848,261
- Other fixed assets ........ 1,297,008
- Investments ............... 2,348,061

Total Assets ................. $ 9,235,404

**Less**
- Payables ................ $  68,442
- Deferred Revenue ........... 244,938

Net Assets ................. $ 8,922,024

**Revenue and Expenses**

**Revenue**
- A) Contributions from individuals .... $ 298,264
- B) Donation of Land ............. 413,700
- C) Grants and contracts ........ 242,910
- D) Special events ............. 20,192
- E) Investment income .......... -162,663
- F) Program fees ............... 4,323

Total Revenue ................. $ 816,726

**Expenses**
- G) Program services ............. $ 495,382
- H) Management and general .... 54,046
- I) Membership and fundraising .. 21,294

Total Expenses ................. $ 570,722

**Immerse Yourself in Prairies**

The 24th *North American Prairie Conference*, “From Cemetery Prairies to National Tallgrass Prairies,” will be held **July 17 – 20, 2016** at **Illinois State University** in Normal. Register by June 1st for $150 per person or between June 2 and July 1st for $195. There will be exhibits and posters, many speakers, oral papers, field trips, and banquets providing many opportunities to learn about landscape scale restoration, the status of grassland birds, prairie ecology and innovative ideas for prairie stewardship. Here is the website address to learn more and register: [http://nap2016.illinoisstate.edu/](http://nap2016.illinoisstate.edu/)

**Great Lakes Basin Rail Line**

A group of private investors is proposing to build a new railroad line from LaPorte Indiana, around Chicago through a portion of Winnebago County then splitting into two spurs that follow the Winnebago County line, one east of Belvidere and going north through Boone County and the other going west linking into the Canadian National Railroad line. The purpose of the new rail line is to allow freight to bypass the congested Chicago terminal, and add capacity to accommodate growth.

**Nygren Wetland Preserve featured in Rockford Coloring Book**

Thank you to artist Lenny French for creating our coloring page with a crayfish collage. Coloring books are available in the NLI office for a $4 donation with $1 going to Forest City Beautiful and $3 to support Nygren Wetland Preserve.
Barbara Garst Fell (95), wife of Natural Land Institute’s (NLI) founder George B. Fell, passed away peacefully at her home on Saturday, October 24, 2015. She was born in Coon Rapids, Iowa on July 8, 1920, daughter of Goodwin Garst and Lovenia (Kline) Garst. While still a child, her family moved to Rockford. Barbara studied botany and biology at Rockford College before taking more advanced science courses at the University of New Mexico, where she graduated with a Bachelor’s of Science degree. Barbara worked as a bacteriologist at the Rockford Public Health Department, where she met George Brady Fell. They were married in Rockford on May 21, 1948. Throughout her life, Barbara and George were a team working tirelessly to protect natural areas, plants and animals. In 1950, they accepted an invitation to help transform the Ecologists’ Union into The Nature Conservancy in Washington, D.C. Barbara worked part-time as a medical technician and volunteered to keep track of memberships, typed and edited correspondence, and generally helped out in any way she could with the fledgling organization. In 1958, the Fells returned to Rockford where George started NLI. Again, Barbara was a full partner in this effort. Over the next decades, Barbara was a constant helpmate in her husband’s efforts on behalf of NLI, the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, the Illinois Chapter of The Nature Conservancy and several other preservation organizations. In 1978, the Fells restored 320 S. Third Street for NLI, where the offices are still located. The Fells purchased their home in Haight Village in 1991. She was known by her friends for her incredible energy, passion for environmental concerns, interest in her flower garden, tenacity, fierce loyalty to her friends and her independence, which fortunately she retained until shortly before her passing. A memorial service was held on November 1, 2015 in her home where friends and family came to share their memories of her. Gifts received in her memory have been allocated to the expansion and restoration of Silver Creek Woods, an area southwest of Rockford that the Fells preserved.

Gordon Garrett Eggers (88) passed away on February 17, 2016 with his loving family at his side in his home. Gordon was a longtime member of Natural Land Institute and served on the Board of Trustees from 1995 – 2005. He served as President of the Board for several years during which much of his time was spent planning for the purchase of Nygren Wetland Preserve, raising funds for the capital campaign, meeting with grant funders and learning about restoring a farm to prairies, woodlands, and wetlands. Gordon loved “black dirt” and his passion and dedication were critical to the success of the project. Gordon remained an active member of NLI in the years following his role as President and took a keen interest in the activities and people of NLI. We are grateful for the passionate example he set, his dedication, and endless enthusiasm. Memorial gifts will be used to plant a tree at the Nygren Wetland Preserve, to help purchase a Kubota utility vehicle to facilitate management activities at the Nygren Wetland and other NLI preserves and to build the Nygren Wetland Endowment Fund.

Jim Pemble (87), former NLI Trustee, passed away on September 26, 2015. Jim started the NLI Education Committee and spearheaded it for several years. Jim was recognized at the 2016 AFP Honor Your Own Luncheon. In his role as President, he has led NLI to receive significant financial contributions from individual donors and through major fundraising initiatives with his deep commitment to protecting the natural environment and leadership in cultivating relationships with donors and nature lovers.

Lois Winkle, longtime stewardship volunteer, passed away on Saturday, November 14, 2015. Lois was dedicated and passionate about caring for Howard D. Colman Dells Nature Preserve. She loved the beauty of this special preserve and cared for it by removing invasive species at weekly and monthly volunteer days. She also assisted at other NLI preserves throughout the years. Lois enjoyed learning about nature and attended many nature hikes.

Marian Doyle, a longtime NLI member, passed away February 27. She enjoyed spending time in nature and traveling on birdwatching adventures. Marian encouraged her daughters to enjoy and appreciate nature as much as she did.

Mary Jane Baucom, former NLI Trustee, passed away March 31. She enjoyed spending time in nature and prairie restoration projects near her home.

The Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) Rockford Area Chapter presented Dorothy and Stephen Baits with the Outstanding Philanthropists Award at their 2015 National Philanthropy Day Awards and Luncheon program on November 17. They were nominated by Rockford University for their leadership and generosity, not only with the RU Charter Club that was created by Dorothy while a student at the college more than fifty years ago, but also because of their philanthropic support of several area nonprofits including NLI, Children’s Home & Aid Society, the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society and others. Dan Williams was recognized at the 2016 AFP Honor Your Own Luncheon. In his role as President, he has led NLI to receive significant financial contributions from individual donors and through major fundraising initiatives with his deep commitment to protecting the natural environment and leadership in cultivating relationships with donors and nature lovers.
Summer Events at Nygren Wetland Preserve
3190 West Rockton Road, Rockton, Illinois 61072

Saturday, July 16, 2016
3:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.
Cost: $30 per person, advance;
$40 per person at event

Taste samples of specially selected wine and craft beer. Enjoy live music, a light menu by Toni’s of Winnebago, a cash bar, mingling, and exploring the beautiful prairies and wetlands. Pre-Registration and Payment Requested online at www.NaturalLand.org or call 815/964-6666.

Several new features have been added to the event this year.

- Artale & Co. will provide specially selected wine for you to sample. All will be chosen because of being self-sustainably farmed or Bio Dynamic.
- In addition to Prairie Street Brewing Company providing samples of their craft beer, they are creating a distinctive blend just for Natural Land Institute (with a portion of proceeds going to Nygren Wetland). The NLI benefit beer will be launched at Prairie Street Brewing Company in June so any PSBC customers will have a chance to taste it prior to July 11. But only guests will have a chance to name the benefit craft beer when they attend Wine & Brew at the Wetland. Watch for details closer to June.
- Two new local craft breweries have been added to the line up to provide beer tasting samples: Generations Brewing Company (Freeport) and Lena Brewing Company.
- Turn back time with 1940s and 50s honky tonk music of Swingbilly RFD.

Sponsored by: Specialty Screw Corporation, Pizzo and Associates, and Bugler Design Inc.

Nature Poetry & Prose
Thursday, August 4, 2016 • 6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m., FREE

Join us under the big tent overlooking the prairie for a lovely summer evening while the featured writers read their nature-themed poetry or prose.

Registration requested for this FREE activity by Wednesday, August 3, 2016. Call 815/964-6666 or email info@naturalland.org.