Hearing the Whispers of Our Voices For a Thousand Years

In the summer of 2013 my husband and I took our 2 grandsons, then ages 6 and 8, on vacation. They live in England, and we wanted to spend some quality time with them sharing our love of the natural world. We drove up the east coast to Scarborough and then worked our way south following the ancient trails through the old smuggling cove of Robin Hoods Bay. We visited beaches, watched shore birds and went out to sea looking for seals. We ended our trip at the RSPB bird sanctuary where the puffins and gannets nest high in the cliffs. The boys rented backpacks with binoculars, magnifying lenses to identify tiny insects, and notebooks to record their observations. They were so excited to be ‘birding’ with their papa and meema. They still remember the gannets flying back from the sea in squadrons to feed their huge fluffy chicks perched precariously on the cliffs.

Yet… I can’t wait for the boys to come and visit the Nygren Wetland Preserve! I can’t wait for them to see the silhouettes of the pelicans and the herons, hear the ancient trilling of the cranes and perhaps even see the flicker of a rare hummingbird. I can’t wait for them to hear and search for the spring warblers, the goldfinches, the bluebirds and the red-winged blackbirds. What about the monarchs, dragonflies and summer fireflies lighting up the prairie? We could paddle the river…how thrilled they would be to see a turtle, an otter or a beaver.

Even with puffins and gannets, there is more biological diversity at the Nygren Wetland Preserve than we observed on that whole trip down the east coast of England. This is our legacy that we are creating, right here, each and every day. Every one of us that has supported this restoration is part of this legacy story. We each participate in different ways, through our time and money, and through being advocates for this rich heritage we walk through. Advocating for nature is woven into all of our relationships, and we have seen the effects this has when the children are in awe, or when so many people spoke to Merrill Johnson about the work of NLI that he was inspired to give his legacy gift. This February we also received a legacy gift from Shirley Rolf who knew the power of our unique places, and was connected to NLI through people who care. Thank you everyone for being the inspiration.

When the next generations of children, grandchildren, great grandchildren and their children sit peacefully in the shade of the craggy ancient oaks or roam the prairie in the creeping dawm or the twilight of the evenings, they will hear the whispers of our voices and remember us.

On the Cover: A detail from “Kathy’s Field,” (shown above in its entirety) by Peggy Macnamara. Used with permission of the artist.
In the spring, one of the best places to look for birds in the county is from the Wildlife Overlook platform at the Nygren Wetland Preserve, located just west of Rockton at Rockton and Hansberry Roads. From here you can see a huge variety of wildlife, even if you cannot hike or participate in more vigorous activities.

Be sure to bring your binoculars, and a spotting scope, if you have one. We like to arrive just after dawn. You don’t have to come quite that early, but early morning is definitely the best time! Migrating Sandhill Cranes may be gone by mid-April, but a resident breeding pair can often be seen from the platform. In past years at least three pairs have been known to nest at various spots at the preserve. This is why the path around the wetland by the platform may be closed — during sensitive nesting periods we need to protect the cranes and other birds that may be sitting on nests or feeding young. As spring progresses, you may see the parents walking very close to the platform with their new chick, and feeding it.

Other wading birds you can expect to see are Great Blue Herons and Green Herons. From time to time Great Egrets are seen there, too. If you look carefully along the edges of the water, you may spot an American Bittern or even a Least Bittern hiding in the grassy edges. Rails are also present, and Coots are often seen swimming in the water. Rails are very shy, but if you look carefully, you can see a Sora skulking in the edges. Wilson’s Snipe can be heard winnowing at dawn, but are very hard to see!

By mid-April, most of the ducks will have passed on their way further north, but you can still see Northern Shoveler, Blue-winged Teal, Mallard, Wood Duck and Hooded Merganser. By summer the swimming Mallards,
Wood Ducks and Hooded Mergansers will be followed by their babies. **Shorebirds** will migrate through, but their numbers are dependent on the water level. **Greater** and **Lesser Yellowlegs** and **Solitary Sandpipers** will be regulars, but if there are a lot of mudflats, other sandpipers may be there.

Throughout the spring and summer various **gulls** can be seen, as well as **White Pelicans**, and **Double-crested Cormorants**. Other birds seen hunting over the water can be **Belted Kingfishers**, all the **Swallows**, **Ospreys**, and **Bald Eagles**. **Northern Harriers** often patrol the grassy areas beyond the water.

Walking the trails at the Nygren Wetland Preserve, you can observe a wide variety of **perching birds**. The largest variety will be there during migration. The **Yellow-rumped** and **Palm Warbler** can be seen from mid-April, joined by other **warblers**, **flycatchers**, **tanagers**, **thrushes**, **vireos** and **sparrows** as the season progresses, and will reach the largest numbers in the second week of May...some may still be arriving at the end of May.

The prairies along the paths attract **grassland birds** which are seriously declining elsewhere because of loss of habitat. Look for **Eastern Meadowlark**, **Dickcissle**, **Bobolink** and **Sedge Wren**. **Grasshopper Sparrow**, **Savannah Sparrow**, and even **Henslow’s Sparrow** are possible. These nesting birds can be seen throughout the summer. **American Goldfinches** are common nesters at Nygren Wetland Preserve, too.

In the savanna areas (prairie with scattered trees) you can expect to see **Eastern Towhee**, **Orchard and Baltimore Oriole**, **Rose-breasted Grosbeak**, **Black-billed Cuckoo**, **Indigo Bunting**, and **Red-headed Woodpecker**. Because of Nygren Wetland Preserve’s varying habitats and location at the juncture of two of the county’s major rivers, often unexpected rare birds show up within its boundaries. You may never know what to expect — and the surprise is what is fun!

A good way to see birds is to stop and sit quietly at one of the benches along the paths. Listen and look! Birders will tell you that the person who stays behind and sits quietly while the rest of the group charges ahead, often sees more birds than the hikers!

If you look carefully along the water edges, you may see a family of **River Otters**, hear **frogs** and **toads** singing, see an occasional **coyote** or **White-tailed Deer** observing you, and if you are lucky, you may see a **Common Garter Snake** minding his own business. Don’t worry — there are no poisonous **snakes** anywhere around! You may also see **Painted Turtles** sunning, a **Snapping Turtle** or a **Spiny Soft-shelled Turtle** making its way through the water or mud.

The variety of events at Nygren Wetland Preserve, sponsored by the Natural Land Institute, are a great way to see birds and all the other wildlife, including native wildflowers. Please support NLI so that we all can enjoy the preserve far into the future!

Happy discoveries!

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**Nygren Wetland Preserve**  
Continued from page 3

Your Whole Family Will Enjoy  
**Family Nature Day**!

Family Nature Day will be a good time to see birds and learn how they interact with the prairie and wetland habitats at Nygren Wetland Preserve.

- Check out our birding station
- Explore the woods, streams, prairie and wetland
- See page 9 for more details!
We Had a Very Busy Winter!
By Kevin Rohling, Director of Stewardship

In February, I organized the regional Northern Illinois Land Managers to remove brush from the Bell Bowl Prairie. Bell Bowl Prairie is located on Chicago Rockford International Airport property near Rockford. The site currently does not have protection status of any kind, though it is recognized by the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory as a high-quality remnant prairie and has a storied history with NLI. Over the years, NLI has maintained the natural integrity of the prairie in hopes that it will one day be protected. It had been several years since the last management had been conducted and woody species were threatening to take over portions of the prairie. Staff from several of the regional land management agencies, including Byron Forest Preserve District, Forest Preserves of Winnebago County (FPWC), Rockford Park District, Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), Illinois Nature Preserves Commission (INPC), and Natural Land Institute all pitched in to remove these invaders.

After successfully completing this project, we realized that we had overestimated the amount of time it would take. With the extra day, staff from the IDNR, INPC, and FPWC offered to help NLI at Burr Oak Valley Preserve (BOVP), where we have several ongoing projects controlling invasive species and removing woody encroachment from prairie and savanna remnants. With equipment and experienced professionals, we accomplished a great deal that day and supplemented our ongoing management at the site.

In addition, Josh Sage, from Boone County Conservation District donated time and equipment towards removing woody invasive species from the fringes of the high-quality portions of BOVP. Josh spent a week at the site despite sub-zero temperatures and equipment challenges. The areas cleared will serve as buffer to the core area and complement the work being done by our contractors, Pizzo and Associates. They are continuing our work on the sensitive portions of the BOVP and they are nearing completion with the first phase of that work, removing invasive woody species from an additional 16 acres of high-quality woodland, savanna, and cliff communities. Following this work, Pizzo and Associates will be controlling resprouts in the area to make sure the invaders do not come back.

We’ve also added more volunteer days at Burr Oak Valley, with a devoted core of volunteers enthusiastically contributing to the management of this special place. The group now meets every first Saturday of the month, as well as every other Monday to accomplish a variety of tasks (contact Ed Cope for more details if you are interested in joining the team).

At Kyte River Land and Water
Reserve, we’ve been working with Northern Illinois Resource Solutions to combat invasive species. They have cleared over twenty acres through the winter to control plants like multiflora rose and autumn olive that out-compete native plants for resources. The work was funded in part from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation and matched in part by, our members.

We’ve also continued our volunteer days at Nygren Wetland Preserve, Howard D. Colman Dells Nature Preserve, and Silver Creek Woods Preserve. Among many tasks, we have continued removing woody invasive species, burned brush piles, spread native seeds, repaired equipment and prepared for the Spring burn season. All of which would not be possible without the support of our dedicated volunteers, especially Lois Winkel at Colman Dells, Dion Faith at Silver Creek, and many others at Burr Oak Valley and Nygren Wetland Preserve. One of our Youth Conservation Corps Team Members from last year has been particularly involved in our volunteer activities. Chelsea Peterson has come to many of our Saturday offerings and almost always brings a few friends along to help out. Thank you, Chelsea!

In addition to preparing our equipment for burn season, we also held a Prescribed Burn Crew Training lead by Bill Bowes of Silviculture: Fire Training and Forestry Management for our volunteers, staff, and neighboring agencies’ staff and volunteers to learn about fire safety, techniques, and ecology. We had a full house and are looking forward to putting our volunteers’ knowledge to good use in the upcoming burn season.

A big part of getting so much accomplished over this last winter has been the addition of our Restoration Ecologist, Ed Cope. Ed has been instrumental in forming the new volunteer group at BOVP, and bringing fresh ideas and energy to our restoration projects among other things. Bringing Ed’s knowledge, experience, and skills on board have enabled NLI to broaden the reach of our natural areas stewardship to include previously neglected sites, such as Lyndon-Agnew Prairie Nature Preserve and others that were in desperate need of attention, and we are thrilled to have the capacity to bring these natural areas back to their full potential.

Introducing ‘Notes from the Field’

This summer we are introducing a new biannual summer and winter ‘field’ based newsletter. These field notes will give you detailed updates on preserve stewardship and management activities, and assistance to local landowners who have or are interested in protecting the natural habitats on their land. The Land & Nature Newsletter will continue to be published twice a year in fall and spring. These two publications will keep you up-to-date with news and opportunities to volunteer and participate!

NLI’s Tackling Invasive Threats Initiative

2014 saw an impressive start to this important Initiative. In partnership with the IDNR Illinois Youth Recreation Corps Program, Rock Valley College Environmental Studies Program, the Community Foundation of Northern Illinois and many of you, we were able to hire fourteen youth workers and two supervisors to clear woody invasive species for 8 weeks over the summer. The clearing of over 80 acres of invasive species occurred at the Silver Creek and Colman Dells Preserves. Because invasive species removal helps encourage healthy natural areas, we are grateful for work that would otherwise have taken us years to complete. The workers were enthusiastic, and several expressed an interest in continuing with this type of work.

As part of the 2014 Initiative, in partnership with the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation’s pilot Stewardship Challenge Grant Program and you, our donors, NLI was awarded a 2-year grant to tackle invasive species at Kyte River and Milan Bottoms Preserves, both of which were purchased using Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation grants.

The 2014 Initiative also saw the initiation of the Phase II woody invasive species clearing of the Burr Oak Valley Preserve with the help from an anonymous donor. This donation combined with all of your special contributions, have begun a real transformation on this preserve. We can’t wait for you to see it! We’ll keep you posted as 2015 will see us continue this work.

Finally, the 2014 Initiative saw the hiring of Ed Cope, an extremely talented local graduate. This was made possible through the award of a two-year capacity building grant from the Grand Victoria Foundation to partially fund an Assistant Stewardship / Restoration Ecologist position. This position is funded through 2016 by this grant and major gifts by donors who wish to remain anonymous. Our efforts will now focus on the long term stability of this important position as we continue to steward our preserves and our Conservation Easement landowners.
Natural Land Institute is grateful for the partnership with River Bend Wildland Trust (RBWT) for the past two years to coordinate stewardship at the 92-acre Milan Bottoms Preserve near the Quad Cities that NLI has owned since 2008. On Dec. 6, 2014, RBWT hosted a Seed Blitz to restore a prairie area that had been overtaken by invasive teasel. After removing the teasel, the prairie needed to be restored with native species. It was exciting to see so many people from the community show up to help plant Monarch Truffles filled with native plant seeds throughout the prairie that day. Tami Schmidt, RBWT member said, “Die-hard Milan-Bottom volunteers like Rich and Cecelia Vogel, who have volunteered at Milan Bottoms for YEARS, and so many new volunteers showed up.”

What are Monarch Truffles?

Schmidt explains, “You may know them as seed bombs. They have clay and compost mixed together in large marble-sized orbs and contain the native seeds for plants that Monarchs (and other pollinators) need for their entire Midwestern stay. We now call them Monarch Truffles.”

How It Started Last Summer

Tami writes, “I had heard of seed-bombs for years. Our group, like all other conservation groups, is always trying to think of ways to engage and educate the public. In the past, Marilyn Andress had sold seed-bombs at environmental events so everyone knew what they were. I proposed that we could coordinate a seed-bomb workshop with a dynamic and knowledgeable instructor and invite the public to make seed-bombs. The RBWT board agreed that it sounded like a good idea and Candace Marner would be an excellent choice as an instructor.”

Tami continues, “I was thrilled that Candace liked the idea! Candace and I spent the next 2 months planning the workshop and acquiring the workshop needs. Candace convinced a local city group to donate the compost. I am a ceramic sculptor, so I donated the clay. Candace, who has years in the conservation field, created an informational PowerPoint presentation. She researched seed-bombs and the plight of the Monarch. Joyce Rice, Angella Moorehouse, and Marilyn Andress donated native seeds from their own local prairies. Paul Crosser’s Environmental Team at Bridgestone Bandag LLC in Muscatine, IA, and their helpers from Muscatine schools, gathered native flower seeds from the pollinator garden located at the Bridgestone Bandag Learning Center site located near Weed Park, Muscatine Community College, and Colorado School.”

Some members of RBWT thought the word “bomb” would have a negative perception so they searched for a different name and eventually came up with “Monarch Truffles,” coined by Rich and Cecelia Vogel. The Monarch Truffle Workshop was held on November 22. It was $5 per person and included a presentation by Candace and all materials to make Monarch Truffles. The participants were able to make MTs for their own yards and were asked to make some for Milan Bottoms, which they all did, and invited to attend the Seed Blitz, which many did! Thank you to US Fish & Wildlife Service for printing the planting instruction labels created by RBWT.

“We’ve done quite a few Monarch Truffle workshops since November and we are currently researching copyrighting the name Monarch Truffles,” said Tami. NLI extends appreciation to RBWT (www.rbwt.org) and all of the volunteers who helped make the Seed Blitz a success!

For more information about where to buy milkweed and pollinator plants in your area and for a copy of the RBWT Monarch Truffle brochure call the NLI office: 815/964-6666.
NLI 2015 Educational Programs and Events

For more information and to register for these events: call 815/964-6666, email: info@naturalland.org, or visit the events page at www.NaturalLand.org.

Spring Public Stewardship Day
Saturday, May 9, 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Location: Howard D. Colman Dells Nature Preserve, Rockford
Registration requested: info@naturalland.org, 815/964-6666.

May is Illinois Invasive Species Awareness Month. You can help us create awareness about one of the greatest threats to our natural habitats, as well as help us to remove non-native invasive plants. Individuals, families, scout troops and other groups of all ages are invited to participate. Dress for the weather. Long sleeves, pants and sturdy shoes are recommended.

Living on the Edge
University of Illinois Extension, the Natural Land Institute and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources present Living on the Edge, a 3-part educational series designed to teach property owners how to manage edge habitat for optimum forest, savanna, wildlife and/or agricultural health. Living on the Edge will be held on Monday evenings in June from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m.

Please see the schedule below for meeting location, topics and instructor information. Participants can choose to attend one, two or all three sessions.

Pre-registration is requested.

PROGRAM DATES:
6:00 to 8:00 p.m. on Monday, June 15
The Unique Challenges of Edge Habitat: Invasive Species at the Edge
Presented by Jeff Harris, Illinois Department of Natural Resources

6:00 to 8:00 p.m. on Monday, June 22
Targeted Management Techniques for Edge Habitat Howard D. Colman Dells Nature Preserve Site Visit
Presented by Kevin Rohling and Ed Cope, Natural Land Institute

6:00 to 8:00 p.m. on Monday, June 29
Mushrooms and Brambles Production: Ag on the Edge
Sylvopasturing: Using Small Animals to Improve Forest Health
Presented by Grant McCarty and Jay Solomon, University of Illinois Extension

PROGRAM LOCATIONS:
The June 15 and 29 programs will be held at U of I Extension SNAP-ED Office, 650 N. Main Street, Rockford.
The June 22 program will be held at Howard D. Colman Dells Nature Preserve off of Weldon Road, southwest of Rockford.

COST:
Participants can choose to attend one, two or all three programs. The cost is $10/session or $25 for the entire 3-part series.

REGISTER or for more information: www.web.extension.illinois.edu/jsw, 815/986-4357

Family Nature Day
KEY SPONSOR: BMO Harris Bank
Location: Nygren Wetland Preserve, 3190 W. Rockton Rd., Rockton
Saturday, June 27, 9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
Registration is requested for this FREE event. Call 815/964-6666 or email: info@naturalland.org for more information and to register.

Kids to Grandparents, families and individuals will love exploring the natural prairies, wetlands, streams and forests found in this private 721-acre wildlife refuge owned by NLI during Family Nature Day. Kids can earn a Nygren Wetland Junior Naturalist badge if they meet certain requirements. Maps with learning stations marked will be distributed. An activity booklet for kids to get stamped at each station will be provided. Adults will also be invited to join in visiting the stations to learn about prairies, wildflowers, trees, wetlands, birds, mammals, pollinators, archeology, invasive species, pollution and how to create a phenology journal.

Summer Nature Poetry and Prose
Location: Nygren Wetland Preserve, 3190 W. Rockton Rd., Rockton
Thursday, July 23, 6:30 to 8:00 p.m., FREE. Registration requested to attend and read poetry (limited availability). Donations will be accepted.

Join us for an evening of poetry and prose that celebrates the natural world and personal experiences in nature featuring noted writers from our area, including Don Miller, Greg Keilback and event MC, Christine Swanberg. 📚
Serving the Land and Our Community

Land Protection and Stewardship

The 2014 Tackling Invasive Threats Initiative was a huge success and the focus of most of our land protection and stewardship work this past year at several preserves. See page 7 for more information about it.

At Burr Oak Valley Preserve, we made significant progress to restore rare dolomite prairie habitat that had been overtaken by woody invasive species. We thank you for your contributions to our 2013 fall appeal, which helped provide funding for this. Gordon Neese also dedicated his own time, equipment and employees towards combatting the invasion of buckthorn and other non-native shrubs.

Dion Faith, our volunteer coordinator for Silver Creek Woods’ Third Saturday Stewardship Day, led with dedication, the removal of the non-native bush Honeysuckle on a monthly basis.

Our weekly Wednesday Crew at Nygren Wetland Preserve worked on restoration projects throughout the year. In May we hosted a public stewardship day with a Garlic Mustard Pull. Volunteers monitored the bluebird houses in the prairie. The public SAVANT Fall Prairie Harvest Day was held on September 27. Stewardship staff and volunteers conducted numerous prescribed burns at several of our preserves in the spring and fall.

Volunteers and Interns

Volunteers are the heart of our work. We appreciate all of our volunteers. Your skills and time are invaluable. Each year we recognize a few for their outstanding efforts. At the annual volunteer picnic in August the 2014 Volunteers of the Year were recognized: Michael Bugler, Bill Fruin, Charlie Sturm, Robert Ramirez, and Lois Winkel. Thank you! Two NLI volunteers, Lute Wyttenbach and Judy Barnard, were recognized at the annual Association of Fundraising Professionals Rockford Area Chapter’s Honor Your Own banquet in April.

NLI hosted two Outreach Interns under the direction of Kim Johnsen, Director of Marketing & Membership: Laura Sjoquist (spring) and Christy Trank (summer). The Beloit College Sustainability Fellows Intern, Kate Karl, worked under the direction of Kevin Rohling, Director of Stewardship, during the summer.

2014 Annual Dinner & Fundraiser

The 2014 Annual Dinner and Fundraiser was on March 25 at Cliffbreakers. Dave and Nancy Voss received the George and Barbara Fell Award because of their exceptional support of preservation of our natural world. The guest speaker was Joel Greenberg, author of 4 books including A Feathered River Across the Sky: The Passenger Pigeon’s Flight to Extinction. A huge thank you to Judy Barnard for coordinating the silent auction.

Learning at Nygren Wetland Preserve

Middle and High School students from the ESL/Multicultural Summer School program (Rockford Public Schools) and biology classes from Hononegah and Auburn High Schools visited Nygren Wetland Preserve to use it as an outdoor classroom where they observed and recorded what they saw.

Residents from Peterson Meadows and retired students from the Center for Learning in Retirement took tours of the preserve. The University of Illinois Extension held the ecology of wetlands and mammals Master Naturalist class there in October.
Art in Nature

The NLI Education Committee presented the Art in Nature program at Klehm Arboretum & Botanic Garden on May 15 to 5th-graders at Lathrop Elementary School and 6th-graders at RESA Middle School. Art in Nature is an educational program that incorporates art, writing and the science of trees and other plants. 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.

Spring Field Botany Day

In May we held the Spring Field Botany Day led by Mike Jones. Mike gave us an in-depth look at the vast array of sedges in our preserves in the wetlands, woodlands and upland prairies.

Community Events

We appreciate opportunities to reach out to people at community events. In May we partnered with the Regional Design Center on a presentation about Bald Eagles by Barbara Williams and a presentation about the Kishwaukee River Green Infrastructure Plan by Kerry Leigh. In June NLI hosted an information table at the Swedish Historical Society’s Midsommar Fest. During the summer the NLI Marketing & Membership Committee hosted children’s activities at Rockford City Market and the GPS Farmers Market. We hosted an information table at the UTC Aerospace Systems Health Fair at their 11th Street plant in July.

Wildflower Walkabout

Natural Land Institute and Severson Dells Nature Center co-sponsored eleven Wildflower Walkabouts mid-April through the end of June. Each week a free guided tour was presented at a different preserve.

Wine & Brew at the Wetland

The casual outdoor Wine & Brew at the Wetland was held on June 7 at Nygren Wetland Preserve. Wine sampling was provided by Artale Wine Company and beer by Rockford Brewing Company with classical guitar music by Ted Stavrou. Toni’s of Winnebago presented a buffet of gourmet appetizers. Thank you to all of the event sponsors including the MAJOR SPONSOR ($1,200) Sjostrom & Sons, Inc. and SUPPORTING SPONSORS ($1,000) Campbell Science, and Specialty Screw Corporation. Thank you to the Event Chair, Charlie Sturm, for his time and commitment.

Wildflower Weekend

The two-day Wildflower Weekend event held on July 12 & 13 was a free family-friendly event that provided a variety of activities on Saturday and quiet walks and meditation with Qigong in nature on Sunday. We appreciate all of our volunteers and exhibitors who helped make it a successful event. Thank you to all of the sponsors including the MAJOR SPONSOR ($1,500): BMO Harris Bank.

Technical Seminar: The Case for Change in Stormwater Management

The NLI Education Committee partnered with Winnebago County, Winnebago County Soil & Water Conservation District, Boone County Conservation District, and the Regional Groundwater Planning & Protection Committee to plan and host a Technical Stormwater Management Seminar on August 26. The presenters showed projects and explored creating long term solutions to our flooding and water quality challenges.

Private Picnic

On September 24 Natural Land Institute hosted a private picnic at Nygren Wetland Preserve donated and coordinated by Judy Barnard for Mary Caskey and Hazen and Carol Tuck and 22 of their closest friends. It was purchased by Caskey and Tucks at the silent auction held at the 2014 Annual Dinner. They were treated to a horse and carriage tour through the preserve and then a delicious dinner served to them overlooking the prairie.

Corporate Council

Mike Nicholas, President of Rockford Area Economic Development Council, was the guest speaker at the Corporate Council luncheon program on October 29.
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.

No fee for the walks, but membership in NLI and/or SDNC is encouraged!

For more information about the hiking level, parking and location directions visit [www.naturalland.org](http://www.naturalland.org) or call the office. SDNC: 815-335-2915 • NLI: 815-964-6666.

Piscasaw Fen Conservation Area
Wednesday, May 6, 6:00 p.m.
The Piscasaw Fen Area is located at the south end of Norris Lane. Norris Lane runs south off of Edson Road. Edson Road is just south and east of the Village of Poplar Grove.

Join volunteer Brian Hale on a hunt for spring wildflowers in the fen and oak savanna habitats of the Piscasaw Fen. Participants will also see the habitat restoration that is in process at this Boone County Conservation District site. Easy hike.

Pecatonica Wetlands Forest Preserve
Tuesday, May 12, 6:00 p.m.
Pecatonica Wetlands may be accessed just north of Pecatonica and the Pecatonica River, on the west side of Pecatonica Road. 4550 North Pecatonica Road, Pecatonica.

Dave Kostka of Angelic Organics Learning Center will take us on a tour of the Pecatonica Wetlands Preserve, which includes river edge floodplain forest, oxbow pond marshes and upland forest along the Pecatonica River. The site has outstanding spring flora and birdlife. Dave will help us identify frogs on this walk from their calls. Easy to moderate hike.

Howard D. Colman Dells Nature Preserve
Wednesday, May 20, 6:00 p.m.
Colman Dells is 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 our hike on this property owned and managed by the Natural Land Institute. 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 to difficult hike.
Seward Bluffs Forest Preserve

Tuesday, May 26, 6:00 p.m.
16999 Comly Road, Seward. 12 miles west of Rockford on Highway 20 to Pecatonica Rd., south 1 mile to Comly Rd., west 1½ miles.

Mark Keister will lead a hike through this preserve, which boasts woodland, stream and dolomite cliffs and a great bird population. It is home to many northern relic species as well as a good spring wildflower display. We'll hope to catch one of the nicest displays of Green Dragon in the area in bloom.

Predators of Illinois/Evening Stroll
Severson Dells Forest Preserve

Wednesday, June 3, 6:00 p.m.

Peg Doly gives a program on “Large Predators Return...Or Are They?” Cougars, wolves, and bears have all been spotted in Illinois over the past few years. There are many reasons, scientific and unknown, why we are starting to see the occasional lone large predator in Illinois. It is important for people to understand why we are hearing about these mammals in Illinois more often. The animals are simply trying to adjust to changes in their current environments which can send them our direction. Due to the sightings of cougars, wolves, and even black bears in Illinois, this program is being offered to discuss the animals themselves and the behaviors that may be playing a part in their attempts to return.

Join Don Miller of Severson Dells on this easy walk through the late spring flora of S.D. Forest Preserve. A beautiful and relaxing walk along Hall Creek to the Dells, good sightings all the way there and back and good conversation too. Lions, Tigers, and Bears?...we’ll see what Peg has to say about that!

Cal Ferguson Forest Preserve

Tuesday, June 9, 6:00 p.m.
Meet at the boat launch along the west bank of the Pecatonica River at Two Rivers Forest Preserve, 12251 Harrison Road in Harrison.

Lee and Lynda Johnson of the Sand Bluff Bird Observatory will lead this hike to the newest acquisition of the Forest Preserves of Winnebago County. The property spans more than 520 acres at the confluence of the Sugar and Pecatonica rivers in Shirland. It is home to several threatened plant species and about 150 species of birds. It is a migratory stop for the federally endangered Whooping Crane. Moderate hiking.

Atwood Park Prairie

Wednesday, June 17, 6:00 p.m.
From the intersection of Rt. 251 and Blackhawk Road, drive south, cross the Kishwaukee River and turn east on Rydberg Road.

Board member Jack Armstrong and staff Nathan Hill from the Rockford Park District will lead a tour of this fine remnant prairie. Early summer is a great time to see and awesome display of native flora. Atwood Prairie is owned by the Rockford Park District and besides having great birds and wildflowers, the area has a rich cultural history. Easy hiking.

Nygren Wetland Preserve/Bumble Bees and Other Native Pollinators

Tuesday, June 23, 6:00 p.m.
Nygren Wetland Preserve, 3190 West Rockton Road, Rockton.

Our native pollinators are an important part of our lives and our landscapes. They pollinate most flowering plants including many of our crops and the plants that provide food and habitat for wildlife. Pollinator populations reflect the health of the environment which directly affects human health and well-being.

Northern Illinois has a lot of different species of native pollinators, but many of their populations are declining. Barbara Williams' program will acquaint you with some of our bees and show you how to give them some help and a place in your garden. We'll start with a short session on the general outline of bumble bee identification, what is or is not a bumble bee, what features to look for and how to pick out the different species. Then we'll go out on the prairie restoration and see if we can find five or six species of bumble bees as well as some of the other species of native pollinators that might be active. Warm summer days are a good time for bee hunting and the Nygren Wetland Preserve features a good diversity of restored habitats.
Bottomland forest along Raccoon Creek at Nygren Wetland Preserve
Leave a lasting legacy for conservation in Northern Illinois

Making a bequest by naming the Natural Land Institute as a beneficiary in your estate planning is an easy way you can continue to protect precious natural lands.

Estate Gift Benefits NLI
Shirley Rolf grew up on a farm in Nelson, Illinois, near Amboy, where she was raised by her grandparents and never lost touch with her roots. Jerry Paulson (former Executive Director of NLI), was a longtime friend of hers and describes her as a “free thinking, determined young woman who wouldn’t let anyone keep her down.” Shirley worked as an occupational nurse at Rockford Clutch Division and Sundstrand throughout her career. She and her husband, Dick, loved to travel around the world. Shirley loved nature and especially the area where she grew up. When NLI became involved in helping to save a natural area near Amboy, now called Amboy Marsh, she was very interested in learning more about it. Eventually Shirley notified Jerry that she had named NLI in her will. She passed away in July of 2013. NLI is grateful for the major gift received from the Shirley Rolf Estate at the end of 2014 and will recognize Shirley for it in a way that will leave a lasting memory in her honor.

Tell Us Your Plans
If you plan to name us in your estate plan, please let us know so that we can thank you and confirm that any special requests you may have can be honored.

If you wish to name us in your will or estate plan, please name us as the Natural Land Institute, a nonprofit 501(c)3 corporation organized and existing under the laws of the State of Illinois with a principal business address of 320 S. Third St., Rockford Illinois 61104.

Also, you may want to make sure you keep a copy of your beneficiary designation form.

Benefits
- Your gift remains in your control
- Your gift can be modified
- Your gift can be designated for a specific purpose, or allow us to use it for the greatest need
- Your gift will provide a lasting legacy
- Your estate & family will not be liable for income tax on the gift amount

Ways to Give
You can ensure a lasting legacy by naming the Natural Land Institute as a beneficiary of:
- your will and/or trust
- a life insurance policy,
- a retirement plan such as an IRA, 401(k), or 403(b)
- financial accounts such as bank or brokerage accounts, or certificates of deposit

For More Information
For more information and to get our tax identification number please call 815/964-6666.

The Natural Land Institute cannot give tax or legal advice so please consult your financial advisor before designating your gift.
2015 NLI Annual Dinner

Ecologist with Forty-Year Land Protection Career Receives Award

The Natural Land Institute presented the George and Barbara Fell Award to Randy W. Nyboer (Morrison, Illinois) at the Annual Dinner on Tuesday, March 24, 2015, held at Cliffbreakers in Rockford. Since 1997 NLI has presented this award, named for our founders, to recognize outstanding achievements in land conservation.

Randy W. Nyboer has dedicated his entire 40-year career to protecting natural areas and endangered species in northern Illinois. Through his work for the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory and Illinois DNR he has taken inventory and protected many natural areas throughout Illinois. He currently works for the Cook County Forest Preserve District.

After accepting the award, Randy said, “None of us do this ‘saving nature stuff’ to get awards, nor do we do it alone. Each and every accomplishment I am linked with was done with a team of talented people who were all working towards the same goal.”

Executive Director Kerry Leigh gave a presentation about the work of our organization during the past year with a look to the future and talked about the importance of connections to others who have a shared vision of protecting and preserving natural land. Thank you to our Sponsors: PRIMARY EVENT SPONSORS – Dave and Nancy Voss. TABLE SPONSORS – Christopher B. Burke Engineering, LTD., Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation, NorthPointe Health & Wellness Campus, and WilliamsMcCarthy, LLP.

The guest speaker for the Annual Dinner was Peggy Macnamara. Peggy is the Artist in Residence at the Field Museum, Professor at the School of the
Art Institute of Chicago and author of five books featuring her watercolor paintings of birds, insects, flowers and mammals. Peggy says her art is “about the study of nature.” With her distinctive sense of humor and perspective she took the audience behind the scenes at the Field Museum and into her personal life with photographs and stories about the process of creating her art.


Thank you to Peggy for being a part of our Annual Dinner and for allowing us to reprint her artwork that you see on the cover and throughout this issue of the newsletter. The photos of Peggy’s art were taken by Paul Lane, Paul Lane Fine Art Prints, who specializes in fine art reproductions.

Solar Power: Walking the Walk

My wife Jane and I have been concerned about climate change, global warming and rising atmospheric carbon levels for some time. After talking-the-talk, we decided it was time to walk-the-walk. We bought a Chevrolet Volt — a plug-in hybrid — and decided to install solar-electric panels to reduce our carbon emissions.

Let’s back up for a moment. In just the last 100 years atmospheric carbon levels have become greater than at any time and headed higher if nothing is done. And you already know atmospheric heating from increased carbon levels can be demonstrated on any college level chemistry lab bench. Most of our electric pow er comes from carbon (CO₂) emitting fuels. More atmospheric carbon, more heat and rising temps makes the planet unhappy. You understand our sense of urgency!

First, we needed to replace old roofing before the solar installation could begin. Then we found a good solar installer at the Ogle County Renewable Energy fair. The combination involved lots of roof banging and took around three weeks. All costly and briefly aggravating, but more a matter of lowering our carbon foot-print than an analysis of cost-benefit numbers.

Along with carbon-saving solar, we’ve become backyard native gardeners, planting shrubs, trees and other plants that help with their exquisite carbon sequestering powers. We’ve found native gardening — just like fine wine or impressionist art — is an acquired taste. This of course is in perfect line with the Natural Land Institute’s goal of conserving and restoring our Northern Illinois native lands, one of many reasons we are enthusiastic NLI members and longtime supporters.

In the end, we installed 18 photovoltaic panels (3½’ by 6’). Over a complete day, our output has maxed at 30 kWh. And over the year since installed, we’ve saved half the electricity we would normally use and fed the Volt, saving over 5,000 lbs. of CO₂ emissions — the equivalent of planting 230 trees.

Though only a small humbling part of the collective effort needed to hold carbon emissions and climate change to manageable levels, we’re enjoying the journey and can highly recommend solar and other renewable power, backyard native gardening and the Natural Land Institute to you. Do good for nature, walk-the-walk, and have fun! – by Jay Evans, Trustee, Natural Land Institute
Thank you to our 2014 NLI members

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Looking for aquatic life in the wetland during Wildflower Weekend
Thank you to Members Who Supported the Second Phase Restoration at Burr Oak Valley Preserve

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Support NLI every time you search the internet

It’s easy to direct money to our land conservation work every time you use Goodsearch to search the internet. Just register at www.goodsearch.com to designate the Natural Land Institute as your favorite organization. Each internet search is worth about a penny, and the pennies can add up to help us save more land for wildlife. The service is free to you and to NLI. We’ve been part of the program since June 2006.

Schnucks eScrap Customer Card

Thank you to everyone who has signed up for a Schnucks eScrap Customer (gas) card and designated Natural Land Institute as the charity. Your purchases add up to give you a discount at the gas pump while at the same time Schnucks will give us a percentage of the money you spend at their stores. You can sign up for a card at the store or see Kim in the NLI office to get a card. Just remember to hand the cashier your card every time you make a purchase. NLI received $602.00 in 2014 from Schnucks because of you.

Earth Share

NLI is a member of Earth Share, an association of the nation’s most respected environmental and conservation organizations. Our thanks to those who support NLI through their workplace giving and payroll deduction campaigns. To learn how you and your workplace can support NLI, please call 815-964-6666.
Fiscal Year 2014 Financial Summary

Assets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asset</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cash</td>
<td>$664,845</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accounts receivable</td>
<td>5,421</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prepaid expenses</td>
<td>13,007</td>
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<tr>
<td>Land held for preservation</td>
<td>4,434,562</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other fixed assets</td>
<td>1,307,922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investments</td>
<td>2,553,717</td>
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Total Assets ..................................... $8,979,473

Less

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Payables</td>
<td>$63,521</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deferred Revenue</td>
<td>239,932</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Net Assets ..................................... $8,676,020

Revenue and Expenses

Revenue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Contributions from individuals</td>
<td>$211,105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Grants and contracts</td>
<td>141,773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Special events</td>
<td>20,967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D Investment income</td>
<td>188,854</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E Program fees</td>
<td>2,862</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Revenue ................................ $565,561

Expenses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F Program services</td>
<td>$449,897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G Management and general</td>
<td>51,205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H Membership and fundraising</td>
<td>17,351</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Expenses ................................ $518,453

Summary of audited financial statements. For financial statements audited by Wipfli LLP, please visit www.naturalland.org.

People and the Land

C. Lowell Edwards, M. D., passed away in December. He was a physician in the Rockford area for more than 30 years. Lowell served on the Natural Land Institute Volunteer Committee for five years, starting in 2000. He enjoyed helping with the early stages of restoration work at the Nygren Wetland Preserve in Rockton and leading a volunteer crew at Howard D. Colman Dells, a little closer to his home.

New IDNR Director: Appointed by Governor Rauner earlier this year, former State Representative (R-95th District) Wayne Rosenthal is the new Director of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Rosenthal served on several committees as a member of the House of Representatives including Agriculture & Conservation. He has owned his family’s 800-acre grain farm in Morrisonville for 20 years where conservation plays an important role.

Kevin Rohling, as part of his role as Board Member with the Lower Sugar River Watershed Association (LSRWA), recently moderated a panel discussion at LSRWA’s Annual Member Meeting titled, “Border Battles: Combating Invasive Species Across the Stateline.” The panel included state and regional experts on invasive species from both Illinois and Wisconsin. The discussion provided resources and answers as to how the LSRWA will help combat invasive species in one of our wildest watersheds.

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Corporate Council

Natural Land Institute’s Corporate Council membership program is an opportunity for business leaders with an interest in environmental stewardship and sustainability to network and learn about how other businesses in the community are working to conserve resources and enhance efficiencies. Any business that supports the mission of NLI is welcome to join the Corporate Council.

Mark your calendars to join us for the following luncheon programs (11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.):

- **Wed., June 10 –** Paul Dempsey, Exelon (Byron Station), hear about their environmental management system and stewardship program (location TBA).

- **Wed., August 12 –** Reed Sjostrom, Rockford Brewing Company and Prairie Street Brewhouse — learn about the environmentally-friendly practices incorporated into the renovation of this historic building and take a tour (location: Rockford Brewing Co.).

Cost of the luncheon is $15 per person. Registration required. To register for a luncheon program and for more information about joining the Corporate Council contact Kim Johnsen, Director of Marketing & Membership: 815-964-6666, kjohnsen@naturalland.org.

Thank You Corporate Council Members:

- $5,000+
  - Voss Metals Co.

- $1,000+
  - Campbell Supply Company
  - Specialty Screw Corporation

- $500+
  - Androck Hardware
  - Loescher & Associates, LTD.
  - Tyler’s Landscaping Services
  - Viking Chemical

- $250+
  - Arc Design Resources, Inc.
  - Christopher B. Burke Engineering, Ltd.
  - Davey Resource Group
  - Forest City Gear
  - Hey and Associates
  - NorthPointe Health & Wellness Center
  - Olson Ecological Solutions

NLI Uses Social Media to Reach Out

Connecting with People
*Like us, follow us, talk to us, share your photos with us*

Using one or two of these hashtags on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram will help us keep track of who is talking about us:

#naturallandinstitute, #nlilandtrust, #nygrenwetland,
#nygrenwetlandpreserve, #colmandells, #burroakvp,
#nlilovesnature.

- **Facebook pages:** Natural Land Institute, Nygren Wetland Preserve, Milan Bottoms, Siver Creek Woods Preserve
- **Twitter.com:** Follow us @NLI1958
- **Tumblr.com:** See our website news page or follow us on Tumblr at “naturallandinstitute”
Party on the Prairie goes **FIESTA!**

Party on the Prairie, NLI’s premier fund-raising event, returns on July 11th, so mark your calendars and save the date!! Party on the Prairie is a fun-filled evening that takes place in a spectacular setting — inside a large tent on the edge of the prairie at Nygren Wetland Preserve, 3190 W. Rockton Rd., Rockton.

Every other year, the fundraiser takes on a different persona. This year, **Party on the Prairie Goes South of the Border for a FIESTA!** The food is prepared fresh, the drinks are cold and the salsa hot. The décor will be festive, the music Mariachi, and as always, dress is casual.

The evening begins with appetizers, beverages and horse-drawn wagon rides alongside the prairie for patrons. Next, it’s on to a “delicioso” seated dinner provided by Toni’s of Winnebago, followed by a Silent Auction of wonderful nature-themed items and experiences. Cost: $75 per person. Look for your mailed invitation in early June. Or, to save your spot (seating is limited), go to www.naturalland.org. To make the evening a real Fiesta, create a table of eight ($600), including favorite friends. **Join us!**

**Saturday, July 11, 2015 ★ 5:00 – 9:00 p.m. ★ Register Now!**

**Major Sponsors:** ★ Campbell Science ★ Savant

**Supporting Sponsor:** ★ Sjostrom & Sons, Inc.