As you know, NLI, and other conservation land organizations across Illinois are facing challenges in finding the resources to fund effective land management. This is especially true in the last few years as we have seen the steady march of invasive species threatening to displace precious woodland spring wildflowers and habitat for wetland creatures.

We are looking at how we can borrow, trade, share and increase our resources. Most importantly, we need more boots on the ground! NLI is partnering with several land management agencies, both non-profit and local government, in NW Illinois and we are calling it the NW Illinois Land Stewardship Cooperative. This is an exciting time for us as we begin exploring how we can work together to get grants to hire an invasive species ‘Strike Team’ of two to three hardy souls to venture daily into the wilderness of plants that attack with thorns or just quietly strangle our habitats. The Strike Team will be able to travel to our far-flung outlier preserves in Ogle, Stephenson, Whiteside and Jo Daviess counties and work with our staff to achieve more than we could on our own.

We are still exploring how this Co-op will work, and have some funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to start our planning process. This partnership is an effort to initiate a new approach to preserving and restoring diverse habitat in perpetuity that has emerged as a strategy out of the Vital Lands Illinois Network of land trusts and land protection agencies. We will keep you updated as we go through our planning and funding acquisition process!
**Still Searching for Odes**

For the last three years and with the help of Barbara Williams and Joyce Gibbons, we have been taking a closer look at the dragonflies and damselflies that utilize a selection of our preserves. Aquatic invertebrates can tell us a lot about the health of our preserves as well as how they respond to management over time.

Often referred to as Odonates, or Odes for short, (members of the order Odonata,) dragonflies and damselflies need clean water and feed upon associated aquatic organisms early in their lifecycle, and later rely upon many species of insects for food in the air — insects who rely upon a healthy diversity of plant life for their survival.

Ideally, we will see an increase in species observed over time, hopefully with more of the ones that are currently imperiled due to loss of habitat and pollution. We have seen about 30 species of these acrobatic insects including species that are classified as imperiled in the state of Illinois because of rarity, and therefore threatened with extirpation. The Springwater Dancer damselfly is one of those rarities and was found only at Burr Oak Valley Preserve out of the four that were surveyed this year.

It is important that we keep our eyes on these creatures as we move ahead with various management techniques aimed at improving biodiversity through invasive species management and runoff reduction.

Preserves surveyed in 2017 were Nygren Wetland Preserve (19 different species were spotted), Kyte River Bottoms Land & Water Reserve (15 species), Burr Oak Valley (6 species), and Howard D. Colman Dells Nature Preserve (2 species observed).

We hope to expand the surveys to other preserves in the future and couldn’t do it without the help of dedicated and knowledgeable volunteers! Thanks Barbara and Joyce!

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**2017 Volunteers of the Year**

**Bob Ramirez**

Bob Ramirez earned the distinction of “Volunteer of the Year” in 2017. One of our most committed Nygren Wetland volunteers, he has logged more hours than anyone across all of our preserves! We recognize him as a highly dependable individual, whose mechanical know-how, experience on the fire line, and capability with a chainsaw help keep Nygren Wetland Preserve running. Thank you for your service, Bob!

**Martin Kehoe**

Martin Kehoe also distinguished himself as a 2017 “Volunteer of the Year.” He took it upon himself to clear over three acres at Burr Oak Valley Preserve, nearly single-handedly! He worked multiple days a week throughout the winter, both on and outside of scheduled work days, to accomplish this. That acreage will now be included in our upcoming 2018 planting. Thank you for all your hard work, Martin!

**Rick Barton**

Rick Barton, Vice President of the NLI Board, was recognized as a 2017 “Volunteer of the Year” at the Volunteer Picnic in August. He has served as Trustee since 2010. Rick has given countless hours serving on the board, on committees and at events. He is past Education Committee Chair, continues to serve on this committee and has been Board Development Committee Chair since 2013. Rick has helped at many NLI events as tour guide, and host of the Family Nature Day wetlands learning station, and before that at Wildflower Weekend. Thank you for giving us so much your time, your commitment and leadership Rick!
**Last Chance for the Birds:**
**NLI Receives a Conservation Easement Bird Sanctuary**

Deep in the Rush Creek Valley of Stockton, Illinois is a conservation story of love of the land and the creatures of the air. For NLI, this story begins with the donation of the 410-acre Valley of Eden Bird Sanctuary to Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation (JDCF) by local resident Nancy C. H. Winter, and her wish that the Conservation Easement be transferred to NLI.

For Nancy Winter, this story began long ago. For 25 years Nancy has called this place Big Sky Farm West: Last Chance for the Birds,” said Steve Barg, JDCF Executive Director. “When I asked her why she added ‘last chance for the birds’ as the tagline, she told me that growing up in western DuPage County, Illinois she saw field after field and woods after woods being destroyed by rampant development. She wanted to create a refuge for birds with lots of native habitat.” She has done just that, and now has gifted the land to JDCF and the Conservation Easement to NLI to be its forever and full-time caretakers.

Using The Nature Conservancy’s “Prairie-Forest Border Ecoregion Plan” as her guide, Nancy planted thousands of hardwood trees, restored over 50 acres of tillable fields to prairie, and seeded more than 150 acres to cool-season grassland habitat. Today, more than 120 species of birds have been documented on the property, including 21 listed in Illinois as species “in greatest need of conservation” and two state-endangered species: the northern harrier and the short-eared owl.

Thank you, Nancy Winter and JDCF, for entrusting NLI with stewarding this remarkable place in perpetuity!!

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**Summer Stewardship Intern**

**Brenda Finkbeiner**

Brenda Finkbeiner worked as our Stewardship and Restoration Intern this year. Coming from a background of similar work at Boone County Conservation District and Cardno, we were able to rely heavily upon her to achieve our land management goals this summer. With her help, we were able to attack invasive species on 9 of our preserves and collect a tremendous amount of seed for our plantings at Burr Oak Valley. Thanks for a great season, Brenda!!

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**NLI Uses Social Media to Reach Out**

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

- **Facebook pages:** Natural Land Institute, Nygren Wetland Preserve, Milan Bottoms, Siver Creek Woods Preserve, Howard D. Colman Dells Nature Preserve, Burr Oak Valley Preserve
- **Twitter.com:** Follow us @NLI1958
- **Tumblr.com:** See our website news page or follow us on Tumblr at “naturallandinstitute”
- **Flickr.com:** Screen name: Natural Land Institute
- **Instagram.com:** Follow us @NLI1958
- **Prairie State Hike Application**
- **QR Codes:** connect you to information.

Scan this code to visit our website ➔
Welcoming Them Home

Burr Oak Valley Preserve is in the midst of a major transformation, as some of you are aware. At the core of the preserve lies a small area of extraordinarily rare remnant prairie and cliff-face habitat, which harbors a great number of rare and imperiled species. But, like a precious gem embedded in duller strata, these remnants are nested within less impressive habitat. And so, the process has begun to convert “less impressive” to “fittingly impressive.”

We have been working hard to remove invasive species, and in January of 2018 will begin seeding native species in their place. But how exactly do we determine when this work has achieved its goals? How will we know if the habitat we create is, by a statistical measure, better than what was previously in its place?

To address these questions, we have undertaken a series of biological surveys to establish baseline data on life within the preserve. These surveys are designed to be easily repeatable so that over time we can track how populations of birds, plants, butterflies and dragonflies change in response to our restoration efforts. In time, we will likely survey for other creatures such as snakes, frogs, and bumblebees. Taking such a wide sampling will allow us to get a broad picture of what’s happening in the preserve; we want to manage for a great diversity of organisms, not one specific group.

Thus far, surveys for both birds and butterflies have been completed (plants and dragonflies are still underway). We have documented 32 species of birds which breed on site, including regionally declining species such as the Red-headed Woodpecker and Scarlet Tanager. Twenty-three species of butterflies were recorded around the preserve, including beauties like the Northern Pearly-eye and Red-spotted Purple. This is a very healthy starting point, and we have every expectation that these numbers will grow in the years to come.

Perhaps one day the long-absent Regal Fritillary butterfly may return to the Valley—it hasn’t been seen on site since the 1980’s. In the meantime we’ll make sure its habitat is there, waiting to welcome it home.

Send your Tackling Invasive Threats Initiative donation to:

Natural Land Institute
Attn: Tackling Invasive Threats Initiative - BOVP
320 S. Third Street
Rockford, IL 61104

Or donate online: https://www.naturalland.org/burr-oak-valley-preserve-2/
Land Stewardship Community Service Days

The Natural Land Institute’s stewardship volunteers have long been one of our most valuable assets, and our crew has certainly set the bar high this season. We have called upon them to be restoration technicians, horticulturalists, wildlife monitors, wildland firefighters, and even carpenters! Managing our preserves would not be possible without the tireless efforts of these dedicated individuals.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer steward, please contact Zach Grycan or Ed Cope for more information.

We are always looking to expand our community, and have opportunities for people of all ages. NLI will provide tools, gloves and water (and sometimes special snacks).

Bring a sack lunch if you plan to stay through the noon hour. Volunteers may work part or all of the designated time for each day. Wear long sleeves, pants and sturdy boots. Dress for the weather. Tasks may include removing invasive species, planting/collecting seeds, helping in the greenhouse, general maintenance, bird and mammal monitoring, and helping with prescribed burns.

Call one of the names listed below for more information about directions to the site and to let the Site Steward or staff person know to expect you.

Stewardship Wish List

- Backpack leaf blower
- Riding lawnmower
- Hammer Mill for seed processing
- ATV 4 wheel or 6 wheel
- Truck (in need of lightweight 4x4 and/or heavy duty)
- Trailer
- Compact track loader with grapple and/or forestry mower
- Tractor 100hp+
- Batwing mower
- Construction materials

The Pandorus Sphinx moth likes to fly at dusk. This one was seen on a bat box at Nygren Wetland Preserve.
Natural Land Institute’s Upcoming Events

December 24, 2018 is the 60th Anniversary of the founding of Natural Land Institute by George B. Fell. Help us celebrate throughout the year. Watch for more details in the months to come.

You’re Invited to join us for the
Holiday Open House
Tuesday, December 12, 2017
4:00 – 7:00 p.m.
We invite you to celebrate the Holiday Season with us at the Natural Land Institute office in Historic Haight Village, 320 S. Third St., Rockford. Stop by anytime between 4:00 and 7:00 p.m. to enjoy appetizers, desserts, coffee and hot cider while you mingle with NLI staff, Trustees, and other members. Please RSVP by Monday, December 11 at 815/964-6666 or info@naturalland.org.

Wander at the Wetland
Wednesday, January 31, 2018
4:30 – 8:00 p.m.
Nygren Wetland Preserve
3190 W. Rockton Rd., Rockton, Ill.
Free Admission. Register to attend by January 30 at www.naturalland.org or call 815/964-6666.

Join us for Wander at the Wetland: Full Moon Snowshoe & Hike on a blue moon in January. See the spectacular winter prairie and wetland views as you hike, snowshoe, or ski the trail on your own or with a tour guide. Listen for owls, coyotes and other night sounds. We can’t promise snow, but we can promise a fun evening discovering the natural wonders at Nygren Wetland Preserve. Bring the whole family or come on your own. Hundreds of luminaries will light your way on the trail, two bonfires and the winter-themed greenhouse with refreshments will warm your spirits. Snowshoes sponsored by Rocktown Adventures will be available to use for a $10 donation to NLI. Luminaries are sponsored by NorthPointe Health & Wellness Campus.

60th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION DINNER & FUNDRAISER AND PRESENTATION OF THE GEORGE AND BARBARA FELL AWARD

Celebrating 60 years of Land Protection!
Special Program
March 13, 2018, 6:00 p.m.
Giovanni’s Restaurant & Convention Center
610 N. Bell School Rd.
Rockford, Ill. 61107

Nominations are now being accepted for the George and Barbara Fell Award, which recognizes outstanding land conservation achievements and leadership. Request the nomination form: Call 815/964-6666 download form at: www.naturalland.org/gb-fell-award/.