



The Chikaming Legacy

Newsletter of Chikaming Open Lands

Fall 2008

CHIKAMING OPEN LANDS

ACCREDITATION CELEBRATION!

The Land Trust Accreditation Commission, an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance, announced recently that Chikaming Open Lands has been awarded accredited status. The accreditation ceremony was held at the national meeting of the Land Trust Alliance September 17-21, 2008 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.



accreditation at the special recognition ceremony at the Land Trust Rally on September 19, 2008. "Chikaming Open Lands is proud to be one of the first land trusts in the country to attain accreditation," said Steve Smith, Board President.



"When the call came in August that we had attained this status, we were ecstatic!" commented Jean Brokish, COL Program Director. "We literally put in 700 hundred hours — various board members doing their parts — to get this accomplished. It was a huge effort and we are really pleased."



"Chikaming Open Lands' accredited status demonstrates our commitment to permanent land conservation," says Jean Smith, member of the Board of Directors. "Our land trust is a stronger organization today having gone through the rigorous accreditation program."

Nearly 1700 land trusts operate across the country, and just thirty-nine were awarded

according to Jean Brokish, Program Director. "Working with local private landowners, 17 conservation easements have protected over 360 acres of land along the Galien."

"Anything land trusts or other public charities are able to do directly depends on retaining the public trust," commented Rand Wentworth, President of the Land Trust Alliance. "Accreditation is an essential way to demonstrate to the public that land trusts are operating at the highest standards."

Chikaming Open Lands was founded in 1999 and has protected over 800 acres in Berrien County. "For the past three years COL has focused on protecting land and improving water quality in the Galien River watershed, made possible by a Michigan Department of Environmental Quality grant,"



Top: Board and staff at Rally. Bottom: Rand Wentworth, President of the Land Trust Alliance presenting Accreditation Award to Jean Smith.

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Dear Members and Friends of Chikaming Open Lands:

As the new president of the Board, I am fortunate to have many great organizational accomplishments to report to you. But first, I want to inform you that Jean Smith, someone I know well, has decided to step down as President. She felt it was time for her to focus on other aspects of COL and will continue her service on the board. We greatly appreciate all she has done as an officer and dedicated volunteer.

As you can see from the cover story, COL is one of the first of 1700 land trusts in the country to be accredited. COL, as a young land trust, is particularly proud of this milestone. Many members have asked exactly what this means for us. In short, it means that we meet the highest legal and ethical standards established for the land trust community. As a landowner, member of COL, or a resident of southwestern Michigan, this accreditation signifies we will always operate in an ethical manner.

This September, we completed the DEQ Galien River Grant. In a little over three years, we accomplished the goal of conserving 17 easements covering 359 acres and improving the water quality in the Galien. The cost of the easement acquisitions paid by the grant was approximately 25% of the land value, which represents a great value and benefit to members of this community. The successful completion of this grant was made possible by the hard work and dedication of Jean Brokish, our Program Director.

Also in September, we signed a 3-year contract with JFNew to begin restoration of the Great Lakes Marsh in New Buffalo. As you may have read in the local papers, this work

is being funded by a grant from the Pokagon Trust Fund.

By this time, you may know Jean Brokish left COL on October 10, 2008, to move to Honolulu, Hawaii, where her husband Ben has taken a new position with the Department of Agriculture. She contributed so much to COL as our first full-time employee. Elizabeth Nellums began work as our Land Protection Specialist and comes to us from the University of Michigan.

I am grateful to the two departing Board members and welcome four new ones. Don Flinn and Al Chapman recently elected to retire after serving eight years. We will miss their commitment to COL on many levels. We elected to 3-year terms Ron Farina, Jon Janott, Mike Jasper, and Kip Miller. Each brings diverse experience and enthusiasm to our board and you can read about them in more detail in this newsletter.

Finally, our fiscal year is complete and once our financial position has been audited we will issue a winter annual report. I thank each of you for your ongoing support. Without enthusiastic and charitable members and friends, we could not accomplish the work that we do.

Sincerely,

Steve Smith, COL President



Welcome New Board Members!

Ron Farina, President and CEO of New Buffalo Savings Bank, has served on various banking boards and is confident that these experiences will prove to be an asset to COL. "In addition to my career as a community banker, I want to influence the direction of development that promotes the protection of environmentally sensitive lands without inhibiting economic growth. If I can help provide a better quality of life to future generations, I would consider my participation with COL and the community successful."

Jon Janott is a 7-year resident in southwest Michigan and even in that short time has observed a great deal of development and change in the landscape. "I feel an obligation to future generations to preserve this area's natural beauty and resources. I want to involve as much of the community as possible in these efforts." An investment banker by trade, Janott is committed to the vision of COL and looks forward to working with its members and the community in general.

Mike Jasper of Sawyer, Michigan, is a farmer in the area who recently conserved portions of his property. He served for 8 years on the Lake Township and the Galien River Sanitary District boards and says, "The experience I gained with these boards helped me to bring people together and build consensus on important issues. In addition to this, I feel my own experience working with COL on 2 conservation easements on my property will be an asset in land preservation and stewardship issues."

For 25 years, **Kip Miller** has served as Chief Naturalist for the Berrien County Parks Commission and is responsible for operation and programming at Love Creek County Park and Nature Center near Berrien Springs. His nearly 30 years as an interpretive naturalist and his work with COL on its project review committee will complement expertise already present on the board. "COL will play an increasingly important role in preserving natural areas. I want to more actively play a role in these efforts."



El Topo Conservation Easement



El Topo conservation easement is a gem of a spot. Gently winding pathways pass through this property, with sculpture adornments left from the previous owner. The gazebo overlooking the Galien River is a favorite spot for Jim and Rita Crimmins to view the wildlife on their property. “We can sit out here, light a fire in the stove, and watch birds, deer, a fox. It’s very peaceful and is a respite for us away from the bustle of the city.”

El Topo conservation easement is located in Chikaming Township, Michigan, and protects approximately 3.5 acres of upland and floodplain forest. Little is known of the history of the land use on the property except that the previous owner, Richard Olsen, an eccentric local artist, used the property for his own personal canvas, sculpting viewing benches and art pieces which would allow the viewer to really appreciate his surroundings. The Crimmins family has placed the conservation easement on the northern portion of their property, which consists of a bluff and floodplain along the Galien River. The side slope of the bluff is very steep — 40-50 feet — and dramatic, with a view of the floodplain below. Jim Crimmins commented, “During the recent round of heavy rain, the entire floodplain was entirely engulfed with water. Areas like this are so important to the vitality of the river and to all of us.” All of the property is wooded, with the upland area and the slope consisting of beech/sugar maple forest with a wide variety of canopy and under story species in all size and age classes.

“We wanted to preserve this property for all time, and the conservation easement seemed to be the way to do it.” This portion of the property will continue in its present state, never to be altered by anyone.

To learn more about conservation easements and other land preservation programs, please visit the Chikaming Open Lands office in Lakeside, MI, or contact Elizabeth Nellums, Land Protection Specialist, by phoning 269-469-2330 or email enellums@chikamingopenlands.org.

Conservation Easement Update

Newly acquired conservation easements :

- Covenant Farm (29 acres) ***
- Three Corners (3) ***
- Hanover (8.6) ***
- Happy Tails (7.3) ***
- Priest (8.3) ***
- Detweiler (4.5) ***
- Sanctuary (30)**

* Acquired under COL’s DEQ grant and protects good water quality by preserving wetlands and natural vegetation in the watershed.

Total acreage to date: 832.2 acres





2008 SECOND SATURDAY SERIES RECAP



This year's Second Saturday Series focused attention on the Great Lakes Marsh — we kayaked, hiked, and attempted to Voyageur Canoe it (although Mother Nature had other plans for that one). We also had an interesting spring tour through a private nature preserve (Covenant Farm Easement) and a very successful Clean the Galien event where we unloaded almost 2 tons of trash from a hillside in the Galien River watershed. Thanks for participating and look to include yourself next year!



PROTECTING THE LAND ~ PRESERVING OUR HERITAGE



I thank you . . .



After more than three years of dedicated service to Chikaming Open Lands as its Program Director, it is time for me to say farewell. I will be relocating to Hawaii in late October.

In my short time at Chikaming Open Lands I have encountered many wonderful individuals, community leaders and generous supporters. I appreciate your participation, dialogue and guidance.

I have had the honor of talking with local landowners and listening to their stories of the land. I thank each one, and am especially grateful to the 19 families who made the decision to permanently preserve their property for those to come.

I thank the Board of Directors for their support and trust in me. You are the backbone of the organization. Your vision of land preservation in Berrien County is what keeps the organization going forward.

Thank you all for being a part of this chapter in my life. Aloha.

- Jean Brokish



Please welcome!

Elizabeth Nellums just moved to Lakeside from Ann Arbor, where she graduated from the University of Michigan with a Masters in Environmental Planning. Her previous work included jobs with the National Wildlife Federation and the Huron River Watershed Council. Elizabeth also has a bachelor’s degree in Ecology from Miami of Ohio University.

Elizabeth grew up in the suburbs of Detroit, where she experienced first-hand the effects of sprawl and commercial development on former farmland. Now she works to protect natural areas in Michigan and maintain working farms in our communities.

She has joined Chikaming Open Lands as the Land Protection Specialist and is your point person if you are interested in learning more about the conservation process. Give her a call at the office: 269-469-2330.



Memorials and Honorariums

Recent gifts were made in memory of:

*Doris Batcher
James Legault
Ronnie & Phil Lieb
Elizabeth Sowers*

*Joan Marie Tremblay
Richard Vavra
Elaine Ward*

Recent gifts were made in honor of:

Matthew Reck, DDS



Galien River Implementation Project Grant in Review

Since 2005, Chikaming Open Lands has been partnering with various organizations to improve water quality in the Galien River Watershed. This project, named the Galien River Implementation Project, was funded by the Department of Environmental Quality with COL as the lead agency



A view of El Topo Conservation Easement (3.5 acres) protecting floodplain along the Galien River.

and support from various organizations. In total, the original grant from the DEQ was \$590,300 with matching funds in the amount of \$1,584,700, the biggest chunk of which came from generous landowners in the form of conservation easements.

The Galien River winds through southwestern Michigan and northwestern Indiana, emptying into Lake Michigan at New Buffalo, Michigan. The entire basin contains 112,222 acres, the majority of which (82,665 acres) lies in Michigan. The Michigan area of the watershed, the focus of this project, consists of 62% rural and agriculture, 23% forest, and 5% urban, while the remaining land is lakes, streams and wetlands. The Galien River water quality is impacted by sediment, *E. coli* and nutrients. The goals for this project included repair of 39 road/stream crossings, the acquisition

of 13 conservation easements for water quality and the promotion of low impact development to township planners and best management practices to agricultural landowners.

In terms of conservation easements, COL met its goal and then some. In total, 17 conservation easements were completed protecting

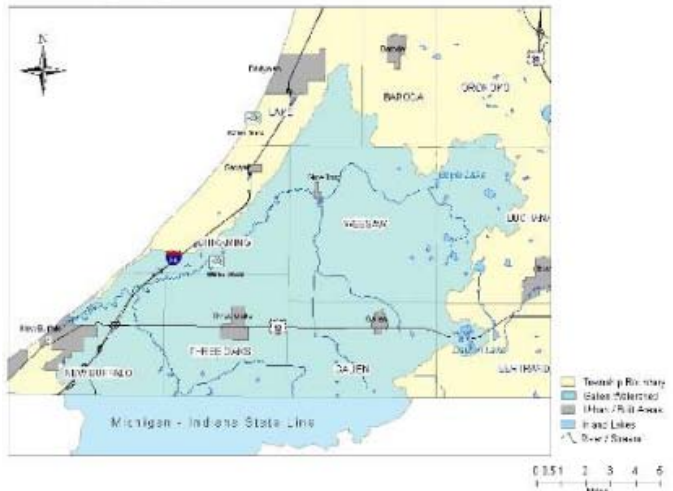
359 acres. In addition to this, over the past 3 years, COL has sponsored “Clean the Galien” events which engaged members of the community in caring for the watershed. Jean Brokish, COL Program Director commented, “Chikaming Open Lands appreciates the dedication of our partner organizations and participation from individuals in the community. We also recognize that this project would not have been a success without the commitment from those 17 families to protect their properties for water quality. For that, we are eternally grateful.”

Chikaming Open Lands appreciates having the opportunity to focus so much attention on the Galien River watershed as doing so improves the lives of all of us and other living creatures.



Debris from a “Clean the Galien” event in the Galien watershed.

Galien River Watershed
Berrien County, Michigan



Map of the Galien River Watershed



Happy Tails Conservation Easement



To Drs. Rob Smith and Rocky Roberts, their home is their sanctuary — literally. Rocky is the head of the storied trauma unit of Cook County Hospital in Chicago and could be the prototype for some Hollywood hospital drama television show. She lives on adrenaline from the time she arrives for her 30-hour on-call shift until the time she gets on the train to ride home, too exhausted to even drive herself. Rob, a doctor now retired from that extreme environment, has to hold it all together — their beautiful home, their pets, and the sanity of all who reside therein.

They have managed to create a very peaceful spot for themselves on the banks of the Galien River. “We used to live in Chicago full time and make trips to our home in Three Oaks on the weekends or whenever we had time. We began to notice sometime along the way that our trips extended longer into the week and we knew it was a sign to make a more permanent move.” She agreed to move and he agreed to get another dog, and the rest is history.

The Happy Tails Conservation Easement protects approximately 7.25 acres of open floodplain, including approximately 550 feet of frontage on the Galien River, and upland woods. This encompasses nearly the entire property — all but the house and the existing structures atop the floodplain. There is a man-made pond on the property in the floodplain area along the south boundary and a mowed trail on the north

side of the pond that circles the property. Walking the path is an easy stroll and one that Rob makes often. “I like to bring the dogs down here for their morning walk. We see all types of wildlife. Seems as though there’s always something new going on.” During our stroll, there were muddy water marks on the surrounding grasses, a by-product of the recent rains. “The rains we had last month were notable, but weren’t really out of the ordinary. This area frequently floods, especially in the spring.”

To their long list of credits, these doctors can now add “stewards of the land”. It was an easy decision for them to conserve their property — they want to make sure this area stays the way it was intended to be for all time. “We like the simplicity of our life here together. We think it’s important to take care of our fellow humans, the animals of the world, and now the land. It’s really important.”



This property was preserved under COL’s DEQ grant and protects good water quality by preserving wetlands and natural vegetation in the watershed.



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Chikaming Open Lands . . . dedicated to preserving open space and the diverse, natural character of southwest Berrien County.

Chikaming Open Lands wishes to thank:

Harbert Business Association and The Pokagon Fund for making COL a recipient of its “Umbrellas of Harbert” event for a total donation of \$3,000!

City of New Buffalo for waiving its parking fee for the Kayak the Great Lakes Event in July (a Second Saturday Series event).

Reliable Disposal, Forest Lawn Landfill, Sarett Nature Center, volunteers, and the Iwanowski family for their parts in the “Clean the Galien” event in August.

Kip Miller and Love Creek Nature Center for donating the Voyageur Canoe for a ride in the marsh in September and leading a walk in the Galien River County Park Preserve in October (Second Saturday Series events).



Food For Thought....

- We live in a culture that produces more malls than high schools, more prisoners than farmers, and develops land at the rate of 257 acres per hour. *Center for Whole Communities*
- Today’s average American can recognize one thousand corporate logos, but can’t identify ten plants and animals native to his region. *Peter Forbes, Center for Whole Communities*
- We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect. *~Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac*
- If all mankind were to disappear, the world would regenerate back to the rich state of equilibrium that existed ten thousand years ago. If insects were to vanish, the environment would collapse into chaos. *~Edward O. Wilson*