



CHIKAMING OPEN LANDS

FALL/WINTER 2020 NEWSLETTER



Nature: Resilient, Reliable, Restorative.

If there's one thing we've all learned this past year, it's how to adapt to change. We strode into March, annual strategic plans in hand, with a good idea of where we were headed, and a solid grasp on what we needed to do to get there.

And then, in what seemed like a matter of days, everything was turned on its head. Our plans—professional and personal—went out the window. Events were canceled. Travel came to a halt. Businesses were closed. Anxiety hung thick in the air. Even mundane activities like going to the grocery store became nerve-wracking chores.

At Chikaming Open Lands, we, like everyone else, faced what seemed at the time to be unanswerable questions: How to move forward in a time when uncertainty reigns supreme? How to make any kind of plans for the future—for next week, much less six months hence?

But what became very clear very quickly this spring, and in the months since, is that despite all the chaos, nature remains constant. Nature never closed down. Nature is still just as beautiful, just as calming, just as clarifying as it always has been. And it now offers one of the few relatively safe recreational activities available to us outside our homes.

So, while we are not on the front lines during this crisis, we recognize that we do have a role to play in preserving and maintaining our shared open spaces for the community to enjoy. Although we have been working mostly remotely, with very limited in-person meetings and no volunteer stewardship workdays, we continued moving ahead with our work.

While we necessarily made some adjustments in our timelines and our methods this year, we were able to accomplish quite a lot.

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Letter from the Executive Director

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Dear Members and Friends,

2020 has been a tumultuous year, but during this holiday season we have many things for which to be thankful. Thankful that our staff and Board have remained healthy and well. Thankful that we have so many beautiful parks and preserves in our area for residents and visitors to enjoy. Thankful that we have been able to continue in our work to preserve the open spaces in our area through the challenges of the pandemic so far. Most importantly, we are thankful for you, our supporters and friends.

As you'll read in this newsletter, we have developed new trails at preserves, completed construction of a new parking area and picnic shelter at Flynn Woods Preserve, expanded Burns Prairie Preserve, and are in the process of acquiring our new Sugarwood Forest Preserve. Many exciting things are on the horizon for next year – new trails, new preserves, and hopefully new in-person events and activities. This success wouldn't be possible without your support and partnership with COL. Together, we can continue to preserve our valuable natural areas, protect our agricultural lands, and provide opportunities for people to connect with nature.

I thank you for your continued support and look forward to a time when we can gather again in celebrations of our collective success.

Sincerely,



Ryan J. Postema, Executive Director

Now is the Time to Determine Your Legacy



Leave a legacy that will preserve our cherished natural places **FOREVER.**

Including Chikaming Open Lands in your estate plan is a wonderful way to create a lasting legacy and protect the unique natural, rural character of this corner of Southwest Michigan for generations to come.

Ways to make your legacy gift:



Make a gift of cash, investments, or other assets to Chikaming Open Lands in your will or trust.



Name Chikaming Open Lands as a beneficiary of your IRA or other retirement plan.



Designate Chikaming Open Lands as a beneficiary of your life insurance policy.



Make a gift to Chikaming Open Lands of real estate to be managed as a nature preserve, or to be sold with the proceeds supporting our work.

Chikaming Open Lands has made a commitment to care for its protected lands and waters in perpetuity. Estate gifts help us fulfill that promise, so future generations can enjoy our beautiful natural landscapes just as we do today.

To learn more about making legacy gifts, contact our office at (269) 405-1006.

Protect Sugarwood Forest



It's official! Thanks to the generous support of our friends and neighbors, we are now able to preserve one of the last remaining old-growth forests in Southwest Michigan!

Over the past several months, nearly 100 individuals and organizations came together to successfully raise the funds necessary for Chikaming Open Lands to forever protect this 40-acre tract of forest on Elm Valley Road adjacent to Warren Woods State Park. We are now moving forward with the acquisition, which will be completed in January. Upon acquiring the property, COL will designate it as a nature preserve, permanently protecting this desirable woodland in

its natural state. Some of the features that make this property special include:

- A high-quality, mature beech-maple forest; in fact, one of the last remaining old-growth forests in Southwest Michigan.
- Its location next to Warren Woods State Park, which will provide an open space corridor along with nearby protected properties. These corridors, particularly ones like this that run adjacent to a river system, provide critical habitat for native plants and animals, promoting biodiversity and a healthy, balanced ecosystem.
- The opportunity to open the property to the public, building a trail system through the preserve and providing a new place where members of our community can enjoy the beauty of this rare virgin forest.

Most important, this acquisition allows COL to create an accessible, welcoming place where everyone in our community--residents and visitors alike--can enjoy the restorative benefits of nature. And as many of us have discovered over the last few months, that is a commodity that is in high demand, now more than ever.

Thank you to all who helped ensure this important woodland is preserved for future generations.

Did You Know?

You Can Take a \$300 Charitable Tax Deduction in 2020!



As a part of the CARES Act passed last spring to provide economic relief for those affected by the pandemic, Congress created a universal deduction of up to \$300 for people who do not itemize as a way to incentivize charitable giving. To qualify for the deduction, the donation must be made in 2020, and made in cash (checks and credit cards count as cash too).

This temporary deduction makes it easier for you to receive a tax benefit for giving. Because this is an "above the line" deduction, it reduces your adjusted gross income by up to \$300! Learn more at [IRS.gov](https://www.irs.gov), or take a look at this article in the New York Times:

www.nytimes.com/2020/11/20/your-money/charity-deductions-taxes-coronavirus

Nature: Resilient, Reliable, Restorative

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Recreational Improvements

At Flynn Woods Preserve on East Road, we have completed a vehicle entrance and parking area. A new picnic shelter with designated space for portable toilets has also gone up. Toilets, picnic tables, running water and a bicycle repair station will be installed in the spring. Hiking trails that include boardwalks and bridges in wetland areas will also be built next year, as the weather permits work to begin.



Burns Prairie Preserve

New Trails

New trails were built and markers installed at two of our nature preserves. The Chris Thompson Memorial Preserve on Warren Woods Road now boasts a trail system that winds through an old agricultural field that will undergo a prairie restoration beginning in the spring, and a high-quality forest that includes frontage on the Galien River. The prairie restoration will begin with the removal of invasive shrubs like autumn olive. In the spring, we will do a prescribed burn to prepare the area to be seeded with a mix of native grasses and wildflowers.

The recently expanded Burns Prairie Preserve, located on Mt. Zion Road in Galien Township, features several trail loops meandering through the 38-acre restored prairie. We were able to include this trail in our annual #10Trail Challenge (see page 7), and it was a big hit with the participants due to the explosion of wildflowers found there in the summer months.

Burns Prairie was originally seeded in 2014, and it offers a preview of what the prairie restoration at the Chris Thompson Memorial Preserve might look like a few years from now.

A New Preserve!

Finally, we have been working hard to raise funds to acquire a new 40-acre preserve that features a beautiful old-growth forest—some of the last remaining in the region. Sugarwood Forest, located on Elm Valley Road just adjacent to Warren Woods State Park, is a highly desirable tract of land offering the opportunity to create a lovely woodland trail system that could potentially connect to the existing trail network in Warren Woods. You can read more about our efforts to acquire Sugarwood Forest on page 4.

And we have ambitious plans for next year too—including new trails and other recreational improvements in our other recently-acquired preserves—that will allow us to create more accessible, welcoming places where everyone in our community can enjoy the restorative benefits of nature. And as many of us have discovered over the last few months, that is a commodity that is in high demand, now more than ever.

Questions about our preserves or trails? Call our office at (269) 405-1006.



Sugarwood Forest

A Conservation Plan for Our Community



The Plan and the Purpose

As a land conservancy, our mission is to permanently protect land as a benefit to both people and the native plants and animals of the ecosystem they call home. Currently, we own and manage nearly 20 nature preserves providing shared open spaces for outdoor recreation, and hold more than 30 conservation easements protecting private land from development. In addition to providing quality habitat to resident wildlife, these properties enrich life for those recreating and living in the area. This is especially true during a global pandemic, when getting out in nature is one of the few pastimes we can safely enjoy.

As we look to the future, it is important to develop a Land Conservation Plan to maximize our land protection capacity and stay focused on our mission. More specifically, we will be creating a strategic plan that details land conservation priorities and lays out focus areas to guide our activities over the next 5-10 years.

The Process

Gather Internal Data: We have already begun the process of developing a land conservation plan. First, we reviewed our existing focus areas and priorities. Next, we updated the criteria outlined in our land protection evaluator to reflect our current priorities. Lastly, we wanted to understand the community's thoughts on the land preservation work that COL does, so we surveyed community members, asking questions about how people interact with the land and water as well as what land protection factors they value most.

Gather External Data: Collaboration is key in today's conservation scene, so we want to be sure our plan is consistent with the direction in which other organizations are heading. We will be reviewing master plans and recreation plans for local municipalities. Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) has mapped land uses for Berrien County, and we will review this information as well. Finally, ecological assessments will be critical for preserving the natural character of Berrien County, and we will be using external tools like the Resilient Land Mapping Tool from The Nature Conservancy, which helps identify which lands will likely respond well, and which will respond poorly to climate change.

Identify Priority Areas: After gathering all relevant data, analysis begins. What areas in our service area are most at risk for development? Which sites are expected to adapt well to climate change and which will not? What sites will expand existing natural areas? After examining all these questions and more, we will identify hotspots in our service area where we will focus our efforts. Once that is complete, we will circle back to our land protection criteria and update it again based on what we found.

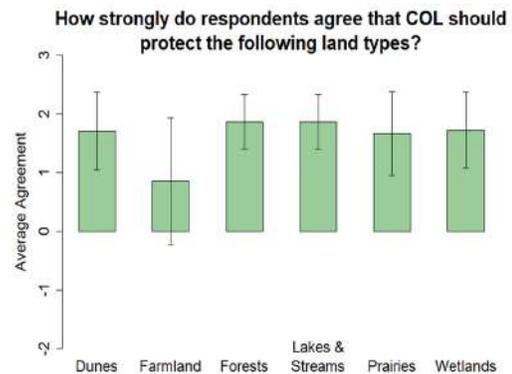


Figure 2: Average agreement about whether COL should protect these land types. Positive numbers are agreement, and negative numbers are disagreement. Error bars indicate the variation in responses.

The Product

At the end of this process, we will put together a strategic Land Conservation Plan to guide our preservation efforts moving forward. The plan will serve to help us identify conservation priorities and focus areas, as well as to design marketing and promotional materials to share those priorities with and engage the public.

Outreach Programs

#10Trail Challenge



This year, we were unable to host many of the events and programs we typically do. But with outdoor recreation being one of the few activities outside the home many were able to safely enjoy, we did want to be sure we put on our annual, hugely popular hiking challenge. So this July, the third annual #10Trail Challenge went on as usual! Once again, it was a HUGE success, with 230 total participants, nearly 50 of whom hiked all ten area trails, and more than 750 selfies submitted!

Thanks to our sponsor, Rotary Club of Harbor Country for helping us pull another fantastic #10Trail Challenge!

Upcoming Programs



Animal Attraction Hike

Sat. February 13, 1:00 p.m.

Jens Jensen Preserve

Find out about all the different ways animals attract a mate, including brightly colored plumage, crazy dances and boisterous calls.



Doggie-Friendly Nature Walk

Tuesday, April 27, 6:00 p.m.

Chris Thompson Memorial Preserve

COL is excited to partner with Michiana Humane Society on a dog-friendly walk through our Chris Thompson Memorial Preserve!

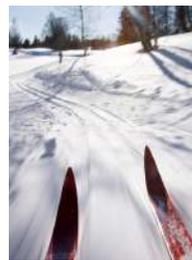


Maple Syrup Tapping

Sat. March 6, 1:00 p.m.

Covenant Farms

Join us at Covenant Farms to discover how maple syrup goes from tree to table. Note: winter weather determines how the sap flows, so this date may change.



Pop-Up Winter Outings

Dates and locations TDB

COL plans to host a few "pop-up" programs, like hikes, cross country ski/snowshoe outings, etc. Events will be scheduled based on weather conditions and state safety requirements regarding COVID-19.



Early Migrants Birding Hike

Sat. April 24, 9:00 a.m.

Burns Prairie Preserve

Learn about early spring migration, what birds you can expect to see and when you might see them at Burns Prairie Preserve.

...and more!

You can see all of the events and programs we offer on our website:

www.chikamingopenlands.org/events



Chikaming Open Lands

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Support COL Today!

CONSERVING
cherished places...



This year, many of us have become more aware—and more appreciative—of the simple pleasures in our lives that remain constant, providing enjoyment and peace of mind. And without a doubt, one of those things is nature. Now more than ever, we are grateful for the abundance of natural areas for outdoor recreation we have available, right at our doorstep.

If you feel that way too, please consider making a year-end gift to Chikaming Open Lands.

We're not on the front lines of the pandemic response. But with your partnership, we are able to provide an essential benefit—safe places to connect with nature—that will improve the lives of those in our community. That's why your support is so meaningful, perhaps this year more than any other.

To make a gift, visit our website and click the "Donate" button at the top right of the homepage:
chikamingopenlands.org