



CHIKAMING OPEN LANDS

Fall 2023 Newsletter

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- Notes From the Field
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THE EVOLUTION OF YOUR PRESERVES

One of the best parts about living in Southwest Michigan is the ever-changing landscape that comes with the four seasons.

Late-season blooms like goldenrod and asters are already ushering us out of summer, and soon, the trees will shift from green to gold. We are a land-focused organization, so we are acutely aware of both the cyclical, seasonal changes happening in our preserves as well as the changes that are a direct result of our work. As the fast-paced buzz of summer dwindles into the cooler, more introspective autumn months, we are beginning to slow down and reflect on the progress made during our busiest season.

So much of the work accomplished by Chikaming Open Lands takes place behind the scenes, and on top of that, it does not always end with immediately tangible progress or the instant gratification we've all grown more accustomed to. As a result, it is not always easy to pick up on the gradual changes taking place in your preserves. We are here to summarize the main projects we have tackled most recently so you can see how your support has directly influenced change in the preserves you love. You can enjoy some of the benefits now, while others will require patience . . . and perhaps, your help.

A Game-Changing Grant

In October 2022, Chikaming Open Lands and two of our partners, the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians and Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy, received a \$220,000 Sustain Our Great Lakes (SOGI) grant from the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) to fund work aimed at reducing the spread of invasive plant species and improving degraded plant and wildlife habitat throughout the Galien River watershed.

This grant allowed us to hire two full-time seasonal field technicians (pictured right) to help multiply our impact during summer 2023. With the guidance of our Stewardship Coordinator Dan Engel and the on-the-ground leadership of our Field Supervisor Alex Schrader (pictured below), the field crew implemented control of over 70 acres of invasive species in COL preserves, including multiflora rose, autumn olive, barberry, winged euonymus, and honeysuckle (see maps on pages 4 and 5).



Donavin Harte,
Stewardship Field Tech



Mandy Allred,
Stewardship Field Tech



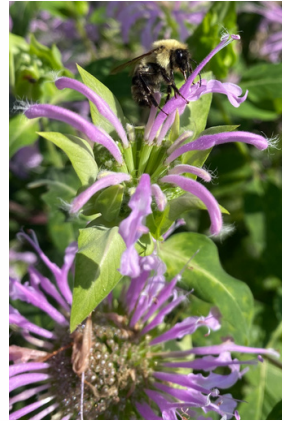
In addition to this heavy focus on invasives, our team took on multiple other projects and witnessed some exciting changes and results from the work done in prior years—evidence that the combination of investing in the future and a little patience can go a long way.

Edward and Elizabeth Leonard Wildlife Preserve

On top of the substantial invasive species control at this site, our team also finished laying the groundwork to convert a pre-existing buffer strip into a pollinator buffer strip. In May, they seeded the strip with a mixture of native Michigan grasses and wildflowers. This project will create important (and beautiful!) habitat for pollinators. In turn, those pollinators will help increase the crop yields of the farmland the strip borders.



Leonard Wildlife Preserve and Merritt & Younger Family Preserves, 45.5 acres of invasives controlled



Sugarwood Forest Preserve, 5 acres of invasives controlled

Sugarwood Forest Preserve

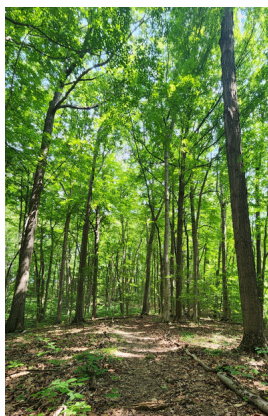
The southern end of this preserve is in the process of being converted from an agricultural field to a prairie and was seeded for the first time last year. This summer brought us the first blooms, most notably a stunning display of thousands of black-eyed Susans. These flowers are typically the first to bloom from our prairie seed mixes, and they provide a welcome pop of color while we wait for the other species to establish roots.

Chris Thompson Memorial Preserve

Another focus area for the SOGL grant work, our crew controlled 24 acres of multiflora rose and honeysuckle in this preserve. In August, volunteer stewards helped us extend the trail system to better showcase the Galien River and make it more accessible to the public.



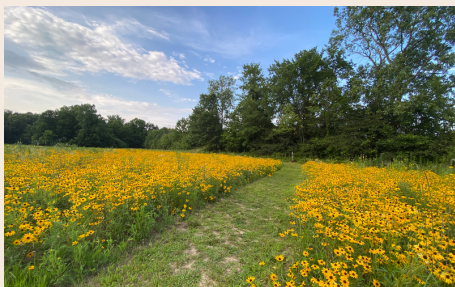
Chris Thompson Memorial Preserve, 21 acres of invasives controlled



Myron Perlman Nature Preserve

Our most recent land acquisition, this Buchanan property includes a farm field, wetlands, a beech-maple forest, and—thanks to the combined efforts of the donors, volunteer stewards, and staff—brand new hiking trails! We are so excited that this preserve is now open to the public so everyone can enjoy this peaceful property.

This year, a variety of wildflowers were interspersed among the black-eyed Susans, and we look forward to seeing what the coming years bring. With an old-growth forest and now a prairie, this preserve features varied habitat that makes for a diverse hiking experience.



The background of the entire page is a close-up photograph of autumn leaves in various shades of brown, orange, and yellow, some with green spots, scattered on a dark surface.

NOTES FROM THE FIELD CREW

How would you feel about spending all day out on the preserves, up-close and personal with all the wildlife the area has to offer—multiflora rose thorns and all?

What if you were wearing long sleeves in 95-degree weather and wielding a chainsaw? While this lifestyle may not appeal to everyone, this is a typical day for our field staff. We told you about the substantial work our field crew accomplished; now, hear about our seasonal field crew's personal experiences during their time here.

Donavin Harte came to COL with field experience, primarily in invasive species work, so he was ready to help tackle invasive plant control on COL preserves. He appreciates the organic learning that comes from on-the-job experience, like the exchange of knowledge that naturally happens during field work. He notes that while he learned a lot from Dan and Alex, he was also able to share fun facts with them, like the way tree of heaven can be identified just by scent—it smells distinctly like peanut butter baking in the sun. Donavin is leaving COL with the certainty that this is the right career path for him, and he plans to pursue similar work upon graduation. He is especially proud to have made a positive impact on the environment. He said, "I think it's important to remember that no plant is inherently bad, but it feels good to remove the plants that do not belong in this particular ecosystem so native plants can thrive."

Mandy Allred came to COL with a passion for wildlife and a desire to learn more about field work. As this was her first experience working in the field, Mandy was excited for the opportunity to be immersed in nature while at work. She gained valuable knowledge in plant identification and herbicide application, and her genuine enjoyment of the work assured her she made the right choice in selecting Fisheries and Wildlife as her college major. During her time at COL, Mandy also took on monitoring a butterfly route at Castle Keep Preserve. On her first visit, she counted nearly 100 butterflies, 83 of which were the same species: little wood satyrs. "We haven't begun restoration work at Castle Keep yet, so all of the data I'm collecting will serve as pre-management data," said Mandy. "Butterflies are good indicators of ecosystem health, so the data will provide a baseline measure to determine the impact of any future projects we complete."

**We like to be prepared!
Advance registration for
stewardship days is
encouraged.**

To register, please contact Dan Engel, COL Stewardship Coordinator, at dengel@chikamingopenlands. org or call (269) 405-1006.

Fall Stewardship Days



Saturday, October 14

10 am - 12 pm ET

Myron Perlman Nature Preserve

Come visit our newest nature preserve! Help us control invasive multiflora rose and autumn olive so we can keep this preserve in tip-top shape.

Saturday, November 11

10 am - 12 pm ET

Flynn Woods Preserve

Enjoy the fall colors while you work. Join our crew of passionate people as we control invasive Japanese barberry and help our native plants flourish.

SUPPORT CONSERVATION IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Join us to make our community a better place to live, work, and play. Your gift to Chikaming Open Lands will make certain our cherished natural places will be preserved forever. It will help ensure our Lake Michigan waters are clean and safe. It will instill a lifelong love of nature in our kids through our environmental education program, the Mighty Acorns. It will create trails, educational signage, and interactive trail markers in our nature preserves. Your support makes it all happen. Together, we can determine what our local landscapes will look like 100 years from now. Scan the QR code to make your donation today!



Annual Benefit: Cocktails in the Garden

On August 12, we held our Annual Benefit at Steve and Cindy Mitchell's gorgeous property, complete with wildflower gardens and a renovated barn. It was a lovely evening with wonderful company, amazing food, and of course, the generous support of our members and friends.



We would like to thank everyone who attended and who gave so generously during the event. Thanks also to the donors of our fabulous raffle and auction items: Terrace Room, Verdant Hollow Farms, Ray and Al's, Jack Pizzo, Lost Dunes Golf Club, Mary Strahota, Adam Marton, Frank Kurland, Red Arrow Roasters, Flatwater Farms, River St. Joe, The Historian, Elizabeth Nuti, and Brookwood Golf Course.



Special thanks go to our Annual Benefit sponsors:



Finally, we owe an enormous amount of gratitude to Steve and Cindy Mitchell, who were incredibly gracious hosts and made it a special evening to remember!

#10Trail Challenge

This July, the #10Trail Challenge returned for its sixth consecutive year.

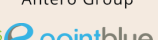
Every summer, this hiking challenge gives the community the extra incentive to get outside and take a hike. Featuring trails from Northwest Indiana to Southwest Michigan, #10Trail introduces people to trails they've never hiked before, some of which turn into favorite trails.



2023 brought several familiar faces back into our selfie frames, as well as some first-time #10Trail-ers. This year's participants completed a whopping 912 hikes, and we gave away nearly 100 prizes! Thank you to the dedicated hikers that made #10Trail 2023 a huge success. Thanks also to our sponsors for making this challenge possible:



EDGEWATER
AUTOMATION



FALL EVENTS & PROGRAMS

September

Fall Migration Hike

Wed. September 20

8 am - 9:30 am ET

Grand Beach Marsh Preserve

Lake Michigan and our wetlands serve as a refueling stop for birds that are migrating south. Some northern species even stay all winter! Join COL and David Ferris of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi's DNR to see who's flying in.

Kayak and Brews

Mon. September 25

2 pm - 5 pm ET

Galien River Marsh

Join COL and Ghost Isle Brewery for a scenic guided kayak tour through the Galien River Marsh. After exploring the marsh, participants will be invited back to Ghost Isle to enjoy discounted food & drinks with a front-row view of the beautiful Galien River!

October

Enchanted Forest

Thurs. October 26

4 pm - 7 pm ET

Robinson Woods Preserve

Join COL for an evening of fall family fun! This event will feature activities for all ages, including a costume contest and a whimsical walk through an enchanted forest.

All events require pre-registration.

To register, please contact Grace Ball, Education & Outreach Coordinator, at gball@chikamingopenlands.org.

For more information on COL events,

scan the QR code or visit www.chikamingopenlands.org/events.

