



THE CHIKAMING LEGACY

Newsletter of Chikaming Open Lands

Spring 2015



A New Nature Preserve *23 acres of woodland and trails*

As 2014 came to a close a few months ago, it's fair to say that we here at Chikaming Open Lands (COL) are thrilled and a little blown away by how successful it was... there were a whole lot of "firsts," "bests," and "mosts." It's also fair to say that we were all thinking, "How are we going to top this in 2015??"

Well, so far, we are off to a great start. On March 6, we closed on our 10th nature preserve, a gorgeous 23-acre tract of high-quality woodland in Sawyer. The property includes an extensive, well-maintained trail network suitable for hiking, bird watching or cross-country skiing. Moreover, its location west of Red Arrow Highway and south of Holloway Drive makes it especially valuable to us and to the community, as open space there is becoming more and more threatened by development.

The new preserve is part of an open space corridor stretching from Warren Dunes State Park to Cherry Beach Road, including Pepperidge Dunes, to which it is directly adjacent. These corridors provide uninterrupted canopy for migratory bird flyways, allowing natural habitat for the birds to rest and feed during their journeys up and down the lakeshore in the spring and fall.

But the really great thing about this new preserve is the incredible community-driven effort that made the acquisition possible. More than 160 neighbors and community members participated in the *Save the Trails* campaign, which kicked off in November 2014 to raise the funds needed to complete the purchase of the property and protect the open space in perpetuity. In less than four months, we were able to raise \$130,000, thanks to the

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Letter from the President

Chikaming Open Lands is the local land conservancy dedicated to preserving the open spaces and natural rural character of southwest Berrien County.

We protect and restore native plant and animal habitat in the area, improve water quality in our rivers, streams and in Lake Michigan, and permanently preserve ecologically significant forests, prairies and wetlands, as well as prime farmland and other open spaces in this community.

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Ryan Postema
Land Protection Specialist

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Dear Members and Friends of Chikaming Open Lands,

Chikaming Open Lands has experienced tremendous growth over the past few years, and it has been a thrill for me to see us evolve into an organization that has the capability, focus, drive and resources to actively manage our future.

As the next step in our evolution, I am proud to announce that we have established a strategy we are calling the Lakeshore Conservation Initiative, which will help us to add an additional layer of focus to our activities. Our goal is to create conservation neighborhoods stretching from Michiana through Sawyer by engaging communities near the Lake Michigan lakeshore to preserve important conservation properties in their neighborhoods.

Of course preserving rural open space further inland is still an important concentration for us, but there is a great sense of urgency to preserve properties in the more populated areas. Our new preserve in Sawyer and our strong support of the Tower Hill Camp project are current examples of this effort.

We are thankful for the generous support that we have received from our members, our neighbors, our volunteers, The Pokagon Fund and others in furthering our mission and enabling Chikaming Open Lands to continue to improve and to grow.

Chikaming Open Lands is on a roll, and we look forward to your continued support. Together, we can enhance the quality of life in our community through the benefits of protecting land and open spaces for generations to come.

Sincerely,



George S. Lucas
President



Executive Director's Message



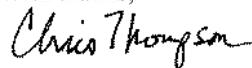
To our dedicated members,

As George has noted above, Chikaming Open Lands has had great success over the last couple of years, and we have an ambitious plan in place to continue on that path in the foreseeable future. But without a doubt, our success depends on the support and ambassadorship of you, our members.

With your partnership, we are able to ensure that the unique natural character of this area remains intact and untouched forever—improving not only our quality of life, but that of future generations as well.

I am thankful to have such a dedicated circle of supporters sharing our values of preserving the natural landscapes of our community. Please continue on this journey with us—and bring friends, family and neighbors into the fold as well. As our membership circle expands, so does our ability to determine what this beautiful corner of Southwest Michigan will look like 100 years from now.

With thanks,



Chris Thompson
Executive Director

Chikaming Open Lands is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. All contributions are tax deductible to the full extent of the law.

Massasauga Research Project Underway

-by Ryan Postema, Land Protection Specialist

Stewardship



Ryan Postema and Dr. Daniel Gonzalez undergo snake-handling training in California

Did you know there is a species of poisonous rattlesnake in Michigan? The Eastern Massasauga rattlesnake is found across the Midwest, and is the only venomous snake found in Michigan. Massasauga are primarily found in unique wetland communities, such as prairie fens, sedge meadows, or bogs.

Michigan is considered the last remaining stronghold for the species, where it is identified by the MI Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) as a “Species of Special Concern” and is also currently a candidate for federal listing by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) as a threatened or endangered species.

Historically, several known rattlesnake populations have been identified on sites in Berrien County, including on Chikaming Open Lands’ property, but little data has been collected recently on the actual existence, size, and stability of these populations.

Last year, one of our preserve stewards found a deceased snake on COL property, which spurred a partnership with Andrews University to conduct a scientific research survey led by myself and Daniel Gonzalez Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Biology to obtain data on Eastern Massasauga rattlesnakes at a COL preserve.

Our initial project, working with Dr. Gonzalez and a research student, is to survey a COL preserve for “the presence (or absence) of massasauga rattlesnakes”. We will conduct visual surveys and set traps throughout the spring, summer and

fall of 2015 in an attempt to capture massasaugas. Because the massasauga is a protected species in Michigan, a special permit was obtained from MDNR to allow capture and handling of the snakes.

If captured, biological data and measurements of a snake will be taken, it will be tagged with an identification chip, and then released. The intent of this project is to initiate a long-term study to identify and assess a population of massasaugas on the property and the surrounding area. The annual results of this study will be vital for management of the preserve, as well as for obtaining funding for restoration activities, and for acquisition and preservation of neighboring properties.

To improve the efficiency and success of the initial surveys, Dr. Gonzalez arranged for training in handling and taking measurements of rattlesnakes for the research team with a leading herpetologist and rattlesnake biologist at his lab in southern California. This training will be crucial to successfully and safely completing the field surveys in 2015 and beyond.



A massasauga trap is set up in one of the preserves

To date, the research team has reviewed previous studies and data to design a protocol for the survey. We have also constructed and placed traps, and are currently conducting field surveys, which will continue throughout the summer.

This is an exciting project for us to be a part of, and we look forward to reporting back on our findings. Stay tuned!



Stewardship Workdays

Caring for and restoring land creates a physical connection between human and earth. We have created stewardship plans to help volunteers better connect with the land and the work we do to preserve it. The more we understand our nature preserves, the better connected we are to the land.

Chikaming Open Lands hosts Stewardship Workdays monthly from June through November, when volunteers remove invasive plant species, clear debris, build trails, or install informational kiosks, and other tasks as needed. Each workday includes an educational component like plant identification, guided nature walks through the properties, and more.

We invite you to volunteer and join us for one of our stewardship workdays in 2015 not only to help us tend the preserves, but to learn more about the ecological characteristics of each property or simply for a fun and rewarding experience in the great outdoors!

Join us for one of our upcoming Stewardship Days!

June 13– Bio Blitz!

10:00 a.m. to Noon at the new preserve in Sawyer. Join us as we comb this beautiful woodland and record the flora and fauna found there.

July 19– Grand Beach Marsh

10:00 a.m. to Noon. We’ll be cleaning up the new trail and removing invasive plants.

Also mark your calendar for **August 8, September 12, October 17 & November 14**; projects to be determined! Stay tuned.

A Community-Driven Campaign



Sue and Leo Krusack



Land Protection Specialist Ryan Postema leads a guided walk through the property in January

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generosity of a community that cares deeply about preserving the natural spaces in our area. The remainder of the purchase price was provided by COL, using funds previously raised for land acquisitions. “It has truly been a privilege to be part of a grassroots community fundraising campaign that involved so many friends and neighbors coming together to save these special trails and woods,” says Executive Director Chris Thompson. “This was an extraordinary effort undertaken by a group of people who were determined to see this project succeed.”

One community group that was particularly generous were the members of the Prairie Club, a nonprofit organization that promotes outdoor activities and conservation and maintains the Hazelhurst Camp in Harbert, not far from the new preserve. Sue and Leo Krusack, President and Community Relations Chair of the Prairie Club, respectively, led the effort within the Club.

“Sue and I attended [a community gathering to highlight the project] and were immensely impressed with COL’s presentation and with the enthusiasm of all the people in the room,” says Leo. “[We] left... convinced that the *Save the Trails* campaign was a very worthwhile project for us to devote time and energy to. As life-long, multi-generation

Prairie Club members, the Club became a perfect venue for us [to do so].”

The property was first brought to COL’s attention by Tom Hackley, a member of the Springbrook Homeowners’ Association, which neighbors the new preserve. “Preserving our natural environment is a top priority for us - it is our treasure and our legacy,” says Hackley. “I applaud the people of the area who have given so generously of their time and money to ensure that our grandchildren will be able to freely roam the open lands of this area as we did before them.”

A public dedication celebration at the new preserve is planned for Saturday, June 27 at 4:00 p.m.

**Help Us Name the New Preserve in Sawyer!
Vote for your favorite name:**

- Greenway Preserve
- Beech Grove Preserve
- Silas Sawyer Preserve

Email us your choice from those above, or give us your own write-in candidate at col@chikamingopenlands.org! Entries must be received by June 5. Winning name will be revealed at the June 27th dedication event!

Working Together to Achieve Success

-By Clay Robinson

Member, Board of Directors, Development Committee & Finance Committee



You've probably noticed a common theme throughout this publication and many of the other recent communications from COL: that this organization has enjoyed amazing success and growth over

the last few years. As a member of COL's Board of Directors, I'm proud of our accomplishments, and I wanted to take some space here to talk about them, and to thank you, our members, for helping to make them possible.

Three years ago, our membership totaled about 330 households. At the time of this publication we have 515 member households. And we now have nearly 80 members of The Conservation Circle, which recognizes annual donors of \$1,000 or more. Both of these are all time high numbers.

Three years ago COL had stewardship of approximately 1,000 acres. In the last 15 months, we protected 503 acres from an additional five projects resulting in our current stewardship of 1,575 acres. All of these significant accomplishments were achieved thanks to your support and partnership as members of this organization. What makes many of these recent land protection accomplishments exciting is the level of local community involvement. We have talked about how it "takes a community" to get involved to be successful in land preservation. The more involvement we have, the more land we can preserve. All of us are better off because of these grassroots efforts. We are excited about plans to continue working with the community to make such a positive impact on our area.

I also want to highlight a tool we are using to protect farmland for agricultural use: the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Agriculture Conservation Easement

Program (NRCS|ACEP). This federal program contributes up to 50% of the value of an agricultural easement to a farmland preservation project. Given the world's expanding population and decreasing resources, preserving land for food production is an important effort. We are currently working on more farmland preservation projects, which are great examples of COL's diversification of land protection endeavors. It's also an example of how we leverage our funds to bring federal dollars to the area, maximizing the impact of our financial resources.

Our Annual Barn Benefit, which is our primary fundraiser each year, had its most successful outing ever in 2014, doubling the dollars raised from the previous year. Each year the event has expanded as we have made efforts to make it a fun and enjoyable evening for all. I want to thank all of you for stepping up and supporting COL through your attendance and enthusiastic participation.

Last summer, we completely overhauled our website, updating the technology and freshening up the design. The site is now more compatible with today's search engines, more user-friendly, and looks pretty nice too. Please visit chikamingopenlands.org and check out upcoming events, news updates, preserve information, videos, and our blog.

I would like to finish by saying that all of these efforts are focused on our overall objective of preserving this wonderful area for all it has to offer. All of us want to be able to enjoy it for not only now, but also for generations to come. We love to see our grandkids running on the beach, playing in the water, canoeing through the marsh, watching those magnificent sunsets, walking the nature preserves. It's those feelings and memories that we want to hold onto and to pass down for others.

Nature is precious, sensitive and an extraordinary wonder. I strongly believe that we all have a responsibility to ensure its future.

Tower Hill Update



In the Fall 2014 Newsletter, we highlighted the Tower Hill project that we are working on in partnership with the Deer Creek Open Space Association (DCOSA). Over the past several years, DCOSA has been raising funds to place 30 acres of high-value forest in the Tower Hill Camp in a conservation easement, which would be held by COL. Their target is \$530,000.

As of today, \$514,000 has been raised, including \$125,000 committed by COL to protect the woods. This means that there is just \$16,000 left to raise. If you have considered donating to support this effort but have not yet done so, this is the time. **Now more than ever, every gift really does make a difference!**

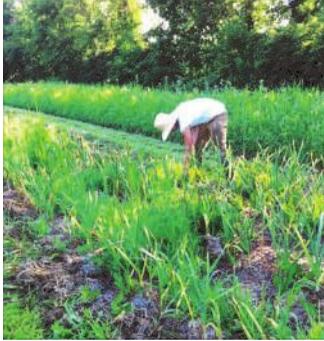
To make a gift to this project, please make your check out to:
BCF-Tower Hill Camp CE Project Fund
and send it to:
Berrien Community Foundation
2900 S. State St., #2E
St. Joseph, MI 49085

You are also invited to join a guided Spring hike through the woods led by Dr. Bob Tatina on Saturday, May 9 at 11:00 a.m. or Saturday, May 23 at 11:00 a.m. Hikes will begin at the Shorewood Hills Community House.

Contact COL for more information:
(269) 405-1006, or
col@chikamingopenlands.org.

Outreach

We have a fantastic lineup of fun and educational activities to offer this year. Don't miss out, reserve your spot early!



The Sustainable Living Series

Session I- Yard-to-Table: Organic Gardening

Saturday, May 16, 10:30 a.m. Join COL and Granor Farm to learn the art and science of creating and managing a vibrant and productive organic vegetable garden in your backyard. Assistant Farm Manager Katie Wiegman will lead this workshop on location at Granor Farm. You'll learn about soil science, succession planting plans, and how to choose the best veggie varieties for a healthy and well-rounded garden.

Session II- Going Native: Backyard Native Landscaping

Saturday, June 20, 10:30 a.m. COL Land Protection Specialist and botany expert Ryan Postema will show you how to create and maintain a native landscape on your property. This session will be held in the beautiful 10-acre restored prairie on the property of Peter and Jeanie Van Nice in Lakeside.

Session III- Stew U: Native or Invasive?

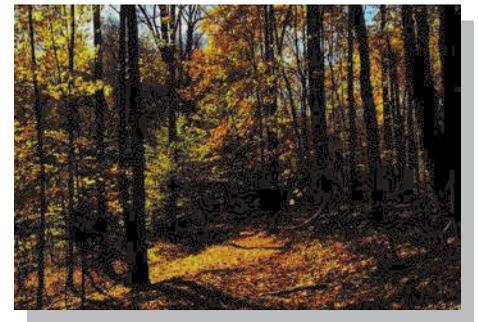
Saturday, July 18, 10:30 a.m. Become a better steward of your own land, or enhance your COL volunteer experience at one of our preserves. Join us at Robinson Woods Preserve for a 101 seminar on plants that belong here and those that are invaders. You will also learn about local ecology and habitat restoration.

\$10 per person, per session (\$25 for all three sessions), free to COL members. Register by contacting COL at (269) 405-1006 or col@chikamingopenlands.org.

Party on the Preserve! A Dedication Celebration

Saturday, June 27, 4:00 p.m.

Join us to celebrate the acquisition and official naming of our 10th Preserve, a 23-acre woodland located west of Red Arrow Hwy. and south of Holloway Drive in Sawyer (see feature article)! Enjoy guided walks, food, beer, friends and fun surrounded by the natural beauty of our newest preserve. All are welcome!



Nature Explorers! At Robinson Woods Preserve

Saturday, July 25, 10:30 a.m.

Join us for a family-friendly outdoor experience! Take a guided hike through the woods led by Love Creek naturalist Pat Underwood, and learn to make Earth Art from the fallen leaves, twigs, acorns and mosses found on the forest floor. Fun and educational for the whole family! *Please RSVP, (269) 405-1006 or col@chikamingopenlands.org*

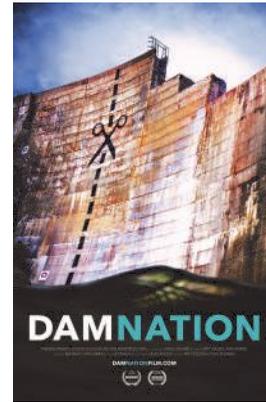
Get in on the fun and join us for one of these activities! Watch our website for the most up-to-date information, or call (269) 405-1006.

Green Screens: An Environmental Film Festival

Chikaming Open Lands is partnering with Fernwood Botanical Garden and Nature Preserve to present our first annual Environmental Film Festival.

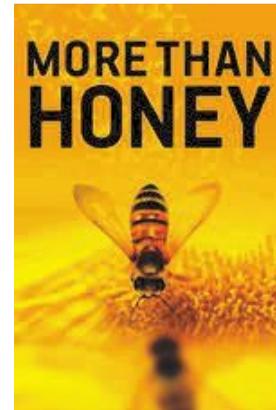
Thursday, July 30, 7:00 p.m. at The Vickers Theater

DamNation This powerful film odyssey across America explores the sea change in our national attitude from pride in big dams as engineering wonders to the growing awareness that our own future is bound to the life and health of our rivers. Dam removal has moved beyond the fictional Monkey Wrench Gang to go mainstream, and where obsolete dams come down, rivers bound back to life, giving salmon and other wild fish the right of return to primeval spawning grounds, after decades without access.



Saturday, August 1, 7:30 p.m. at Fernwood Botanical Garden
Pre-screening reception at 6:30 p.m.

More Than Honey Over the past 15 years, numerous colonies of bees have been decimated throughout the world, but the causes of this disaster remain unknown. Depending on the world region, 50% to 90% of all local bees have disappeared, and this epidemic is still spreading from beehive to beehive – all over the planet. Scientists have found a name for the phenomenon that matches its scale, “colony collapse disorder,” and they have good reason to be worried: 80% of plant species require bees to be pollinated. Why is it happening?



Seating is limited! Advance reservations recommended.

\$10 per person, per film (\$8 for COL and/or Fernwood members), \$15 per person, for both films and reception (\$12 for COL and/or Fernwood members). Register by contacting Fernwood at (269) 695-6491.



Marsh Meander in the Voyager Canoe

Saturday, August 22, 10:00 a.m.

Meander through the channels of the Louis J. Sima Marsh and enjoy the natural beauty of one of the richest habitats in the world. Love Creek naturalists Pat Underwood and Kip Miller will steer us along the marsh, where we'll point out some of the improvements and restoration Chikaming Open Lands has made over the years.

\$10 per person, free to COL members. Space is limited! Register by contacting COL at (269) 405-1006 or col@chikamingopenlands.org.

6th Annual Barn Benefit

Saturday, September 19, 5:00 p.m.

Save the date to join us for another fun and festive evening in support of Chikaming Open Lands. This year, we will gather at the incredible property of Deborah and Elzie Higginbottom in Three Oaks. Enjoy great company and fabulous local food and drink. Most important, you will be supporting our mission to preserve the natural spaces of Southwest Michigan that we all love.



Autumn Color Walk

Saturday, October 25, 1:00 p.m.

Take in the brilliance of nature's autumn palette on this hike through Chikaming Township Park and Preserve and Robinson Woods led by Love Creek Naturalist Pat Underwood. *Please RSVP, (269) 405-1006 or col@chikamingopenlands.org.*



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304 Acres in Berrien Township....

The property is our largest conservation easement and our largest donation *EVER!*



Late in 2014, we received a donation of a conservation easement on 304 acres consisting of high-quality wetlands, woods, lakes and prime farmland in Berrien Township. The property is one of the few undivided and undeveloped parcels of its size remaining in Berrien County, making it a significant acquisition for us!

"With acres of rolling agricultural fields, two lakes, mature woodlands of beech-maple, oak-hickory and sycamore, sedge meadows and extensive wetlands, this property is really something special," says executive director Chris Thompson.

Berrien County has lost almost 60 percent of its original wetlands, which are critical to improving water quality, protecting wildlife habitat and minimizing potential flooding. This conservation easement protects more than 100 acres of high quality wetlands, and that alone makes this a very important project for us.

The conservation easement, which extinguishes the development rights on the 304 acres in perpetuity, was a full donation by the landowners, Kevin and Michelle Mize. "Rare pieces of property like this will continue to get more scarce as the population grows," says Kevin. "This easement will protect the land from development and preserve (natural) habitat for fish, birds, mammals, plants and trees...for generations to come."

Kevin says his family enjoys spending time on the two lakes on the property. He is also creating trails through the property so that he and his children can enjoy the hardwood forest and the unusual flowers that bloom in the wetland areas.

Aside from being the largest land protection project we've ever completed, it's the largest donation we've ever had the privilege to accept. And, of course, it's a stunning tract of land... we couldn't be more excited!