



CHIKAMING OPEN LANDS

Spring 2026 Newsletter

- The Path to Opening a Preserve
- A Journey of Healing
- 2025 Financial Summary
- Spring Events & Programs



A WORD FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear members and friends of Chikaming Open Lands,

Chikaming Open Lands (COL) enters 2026 coming off a very successful year. Your generous contributions and dedicated support achieved the following:

- The acquisition of the 87-acre Founders Preserve and the 31-acre Chapman Family Preserve.
- Preservation of nearly 80 acres of farmland in Royalton Township with conservation easements.
- Expansion of the Mighty Acorns program.
- Raising over \$200,000 at the Annual Benefit, including over \$100,000 for the Founders Preserve.
- Growth of staff and capacity, increasing COL's ability to better serve our community.

In 2026, we look forward to habitat restoration and recreational improvements for the Founders Preserve and Chapman Family Preserve (see page 4). We will grow and develop more outreach, education, and stewardship programs, hiring a new full-time Outreach Naturalist, as well as our summer stewardship field crew. We will protect more land throughout Berrien County, with a strategic focus on developing nature preserves in Berrien Springs, Buchanan, and Niles areas, and protecting agricultural land in the central region of the County.

Your support will accomplish all of this and so much more! I encourage you to join us at a Stewardship Day or nature hike, visit the preserves on your own (stay tuned for details of our annual #10TrailChallenge), or participate in so many other ways. And I thank you for your generous gifts, contributions, and support for Chikaming Open Lands.



Sincerely,

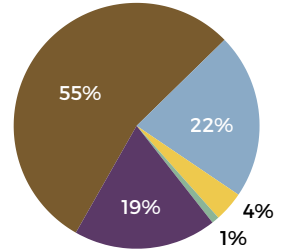
A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Ryan J. Postema".

Ryan J. Postema, Executive Director

2025 FINANCIAL SUMMARY

2025 Income	
Charitable Contributions	\$1,446,929
Public & Private Grants	\$592,619
Fundraising Events	\$104,560
Other Revenues	\$14,145
Investment Income	\$491,624
TOTAL	\$2,649,877

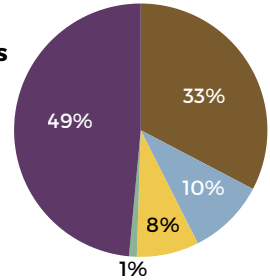
2025 Income



- Charitable Contributions
- Investment Income
- Fundraising Events
- Public & Private Grants
- Other Revenues

2025 Expenses*	
Program Services	\$779,436
Management & General	\$225,026
Fundraising	\$178,271
Investment Fees	\$25,072
Nature Preserve Acquisition**	\$1,153,633
TOTAL	\$2,361,438

2025 Expenses



- Nature Preserve Acquisition
- Program Services
- Management & General
- Fundraising
- Investment Fees

*Personnel expenses are distributed in relation to areas of responsibility.

**Expenses associated with nature preserve acquisitions are capitalized as an asset at year end.

Assets as of December 31, 2025	
Operational Reserve Funds	\$302,654
Depreciable Fixed Assets	\$227,426
Land Protection, Stewardship, Outreach & Education Project Funds	\$817,437
Board Designated Stewardship & Legal Defense Fund	\$515,420
Board Designated Endowment Fund	\$3,360,593
Nature Preserves	\$7,110,347
Assets as of December 31, 2025	\$12,333,877
Assets as of December 31, 2024	\$10,911,344
Net Change in Assets	\$1,422,533

2025 financials are under audit at time of publication.

Audited financial statements and IRS Form 990 tax returns from prior years are available upon request.

THE PATH TO OPENING A PRESERVE

Thanks to your support, Chikaming Open Lands (COL) added two major properties in 2025: the Founders Preserve and the Chapman Family Preserve. While we all envision wandering through these newly protected woods and prairies, the closing date is really just the starting line. Opening a preserve to the public is a complex, multi-year process that balances public access with habitat restoration. Here is a look behind the curtain at that work.

The Management Plan: A Roadmap for the Land

Every acquisition begins with a formal Management Plan: a deep dive into the property's history, ecology, and long-term vision. This document acts as a constitution for the land, dictating how our stewardship team will restore and manage it for generations to come.

Our restoration strategy is guided by the land itself, with a hands-off approach taken on intact or thriving habitats. Degraded areas like former farm fields offer a blank slate for restoring valuable grasslands or oak forests. To restore an old field to native prairie, we'll engage a variety of partners – state and federal agencies, contractors, even local farmers.

Planning, Permits, & Parking

Before a single trail is flagged, we have to fully understand the land. This may involve wetland delineation (mapping water to protect sensitive ecosystems), botanical inventories (botanists identify every species on site), and engineering (managing runoff and soil erosion where parking lots are involved).

A safe, accessible parking lot is often a top priority, yet it's a major undertaking. Even a basic gravel lot can cost upwards of \$100,000. These parking lots may require culverts, driveways, asphalt aprons, and handicap-accessible pads. Once plans are drawn and permits are approved, we are at the mercy of contractor schedules, which can take months before the first load of gravel is ever dropped.

Crafting the Experience: Trails & Signage

A good trail isn't just a path. It's a guided tour of the property's best features that keeps your feet dry while also protecting the flora and fauna that call the property home. When creating a trail system, we start by walking the land and using satellite

imagery to plan the route, incorporating existing paths or old access roads. We then do a three-pass system: flagging the route, clearing heavy timber with chainsaws, and fine-tuning the path with loppers, brush cutters, and rakes. Depending on the terrain, this often involves the grueling work of hauling lumber and gravel by hand to install footbridges, steps, or drainage tiles.

We also want visitors to find a deeper connection to the land. With visitor experience in mind, our signage process includes:

- **Wayfinding & Safety:** Preserve signs and consistent trail markers to ensure a safe experience.
- **Educational placards:** Signs that teach hikers the story of the land- highlighting rare species, regional significance, and why the parcel was chosen for protection.

Throughout the entire process, being a good neighbor is a priority. We coordinate with adjacent landowners to ensure our trails and habitats mesh seamlessly with any surrounding protected properties. All the while, our team continues the essential work of caring for the lands already under our protection.

Founders Preserve & Chapman Family Preserve

While stewardship is a marathon, we are making great strides toward welcoming you to explore new trails. Here are our current goals for each property:

- **Founders Preserve:** We are pushing hard to complete the primary restoration work and parking infrastructure with a goal of fully opening the trails to the public by this Fall.
- **Chapman Family Preserve:** Although restoring the former vineyard on this property will require heavy equipment and significant land re-contouring, we anticipate having a trail system completed later this year. These trails will connect to the existing Royalton Township Nature Trail, which already offers a parking area and public access.

We know you are eager to explore these new lands, and we thank you for your patience as we work hard to do it right. Stay tuned to our social media channels and upcoming newsletters for progress photos and official opening announcements.

Want to help?

Many hands make light(er) work. We invite you to volunteer at one of our Spring Stewardship Days - see *details on page 9!*

A JOURNEY OF HEALING

For John, a 71-year-old Three Oaks resident and hobbyist mystery writer, the word of the year is **FINISH**. It's a goal that applies to the handful of "long short stories" he's determined to complete, but more importantly it defines a health journey that has been years in the making.

John has undergone a series of heart surgeries, with the most recent surgery in May 2025. The operation was a success, but the recovery came with a directive from his doctor:

Get moving.

This served as a turning point and catalyst for his journey on the preserves. Surrounded by fresh summer air and the steady songs of birds, the preserves quickly became a foundational part of John's healing routine.

John and his wife Donna had been visiting COL preserves for years, but like many of us, they settled into habits of revisiting the same favorite trails and unintentionally overlooking others. Spurred by his doctor's advice to get moving and inspired by COL's annual #10trail challenge, John set out to hike all ten trails and **FINISH** the Challenge.

What began as a personal recovery goal quickly became something bigger.

A Voyage of Healing for the Whole Family



John's dog, Myrtle, was recovering from surgery of her own after having her ACL surgically repaired that spring. An inseparable pair, Myrtle and John tackled all 10 trails, with Myrtle bounding through the dunes, across prairies, and under canopies of oak and maple trees on her own journey of recovery.

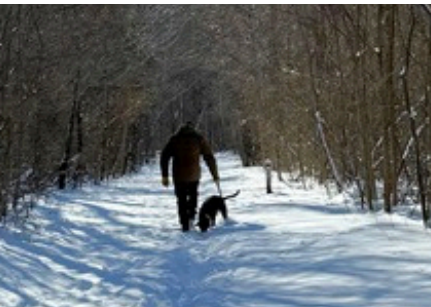


John and Donna Dodderidge at a #10trail Challenge selfie station

The impact has been undeniable. **During his most recent physical, John's doctor told him it was the best report he'd seen in the six years John has lived in Michigan.** His vitals were improved, his bloodwork was excellent, and his heart was strong. John credits the preserves for this transformation and reflects on how different his recovery would have looked without the preserves. More treadmills and exercise bikes, less fresh air.

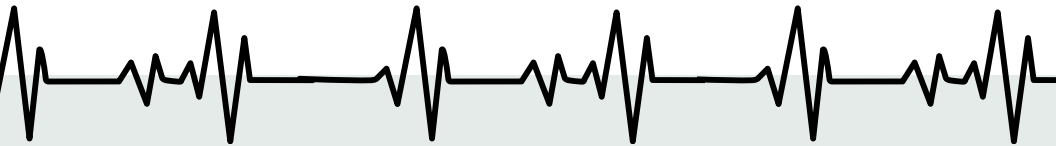


"I much prefer being out in nature, where the benefits reach beyond physical health, delivering peace and tranquility you can't find in a gym."



Hiking is now woven into John and Myrtle's daily life. It's how the day starts, ends, or resets itself. It's how John continues working toward his personal goal for the year: **FINISH.**

Finish losing weight.
Finish building stamina.
Finish strengthening his heart.



Why Preservation Matters

Stories like John's are just one reason why land preservation matters. These places are not only protected landscapes - they offer recovery, connection, and peace.

Inspired by John's story? You can help us keep these stories accessible for everyone in our community. Whether you hike to heal, to socialize, or to connect with nature, your support ensures these trails remain open and protected for generations to come.



It's never been easier to support conservation in our community!

Become a Four Seasons Supporter by setting up your donation to Chikaming Open Lands as a recurring monthly gift.

You'll save time, paper, and postage – secure payments are automatically charged to your credit card each month, so you don't have to worry about mailing a check. And you can change your monthly donation at any time.

Plus: Giving monthly makes a bigger impact!

You'll provide sustained support to protect our shared natural areas year-round. Better yet, your dollars go further—monthly donations incur fewer operational costs to reach COL (this also means less paper in your mailbox, since we won't be sending you donation renewal requests!).

Every gift makes a difference in shaping what our local landscapes will look like for generations to come. Visit our Four Seasons Supporter page online to get started today.



2026 SPRING STEWARDSHIP VOLUNTEER WORKDAYS

Help us care for the land by volunteering for a stewardship day. We provide all the guidance and tools you need, so no experience is required!

Shrub Control at Grand Beach Marsh Preserve

Sat. March 14
10 AM - Noon ET

Help COL control invasive shrubs throughout the many habitats at this 11-acre preserve.

Invasive Control at Chapman Family Preserve

Sat. April 11
10 AM - Noon ET

Join COL in controlling invasive shrubs and get a sneak peak at this newly protected property.

Earth Day Tree Planting at Chris Thompson Memorial Preserve

Wed. April 22, 10 AM - Noon ET

Celebrate Earth Day by supporting our continuing efforts to restore native habitat by planting trees.



Invasive Control at Trillium Woodlands Preserve

Sat. May 9
10 AM - Noon ET

Help us continue to restore native habitat at one of our newer preserves by fighting garlic mustard.

Phragmites Spading at Grand Beach Marsh Preserve

Sat. June 13
10 AM - Noon ET

Learn how we remove phragmites from our preserves. This invasive pushes out native wetland plants and soaks up all the water!

Stewardship Days require pre-registration.

RSVP to Stewardship Manager Dan Engel at dengel@chikamingopenlands.org or 269-405-1006.

To view the full events calendar, visit chikamingopenlands.org/events.

SPRING EVENTS & PROGRAMS

Spring Ephemerals Hike

April 18

10 AM ET

Trillium Woodlands Preserve

Explore one of COL's newest preserves during one of the most beautiful times of year. Join us for a spring hike as we learn about and identify spring ephemerals - the early-blooming wildflowers that appear before the forest fully wakes up.

Registration opens 3/18.



Spring Homeschool Mighty Acorns

Tues. May 5

10 AM - 12PM ET

The Homeschool Mighty Acorns program includes one field day each season at a COL preserve. During their trips, students play an educational game to reinforce their classroom curriculum, participate in stewardship, and freely explore the preserve.



Location and additional details will be shared with registered families closer to the start of the program.

Registration opens 4/6 at www.chikamingopenlands.org.

STORYWALK ON THE PRESERVES

March 13 - May 25

View details on the next page!



Events and Programs require pre-registration.

Please register by emailing col@chikamingopenlands.org.

To view the full events calendar, visit chikamingopenlands.org/events.



TAKE A WALK, READ A BOOK!

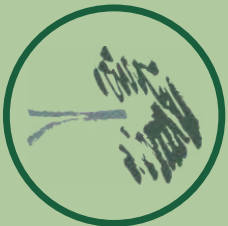
We are excited to bring StoryWalk back to COL preserves for a sixth year!

This springtime program is the perfect opportunity to hit the trails with your little ones. Life-sized storybook pages line the hiking trails at Jens Jensen Preserve, Myron Perlman Nature Preserve, Robinson Woods Preserve, Turtle Creek Preserve, Royalton Township Nature Trails (adjacent to the recently acquired Chapman Family Preserve), and Trillium Woodlands Preserve. As you hike, read along with each story along the trail. At the end of your hike, be sure to scan the QR code for a chance to win all five StoryWalk books!

For more information, visit chikamingopenlands.org/events.



Thanks to our partners: Bridgman Public Library, Niles District Library, Buchanan District Library, Three Oaks Township Library, Lincoln Township Library, and New Buffalo Township Library!



Chikaming Open Lands

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chikamingopenlands.org



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