



# CHIKAMING OPEN LANDS

Spring 2023 Newsletter

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# BRANCHING OUT

## **Spring— a time for change, growth, and discovery.**

As we eagerly anticipate the return of the lush greenery, cheerful wildflowers, and warmer weather, we also look forward to our own growth as an organization—broadening our impact in the region, and we celebrate the recent steps we have taken to foster that growth.

Expanding our reach is one of the long-term goals in our newest conservation plan here at Chikaming Open Lands. While our service area spans southern Berrien County, currently the majority of our protected properties are found in New Buffalo and Chikaming Townships. Now, in an effort to expand our reach, we have been actively focusing our efforts on acquiring land and conservation easements in surrounding townships such as Buchanan, Berrien Springs, Baroda, and Weesaw. In line with this intention of expansion, we are excited to announce that we recently received board approval to formally expand our service area even further to include Berrien, Niles, and Oronoko Townships.

With this approval, we can officially start preserving land in those areas, furthering our impact and helping us create accessible, welcoming spaces for people to enjoy nature in new communities across a more comprehensive expanse of Berrien County.

So, what exactly does “expanding our reach” mean? For us, expansion does not simply mean acquiring land; that is only the beginning. Expansion also means connecting with the community and learning about who they are and how we fit together. It means forming new partnerships. It means getting the word out about our already existing (and new!) preserves and informing people about how they can access, enjoy, and help us take care of them. One of our top priorities has always been to connect people to the land. Put simply, our goal is to make that connection for more people, in more places across the region.

Through this calculated expansion, we can permanently protect a larger geographic area and even work towards the goal of connecting some of those areas to promote long, uninterrupted expanses of protected spaces.

We can connect new populations with nature and help them form mutually beneficial relationships with the lands surrounding them. As our reach extends, the benefits of land preservation extend: protection of native plant and animal habitat, improved water quality, open spaces that reflect the natural landscape and rural character of Berrien County, and further community engagement and education.

### Meet Myron Perlman Nature Preserve

With this long-term goal in mind, we have been actively working to find new properties to preserve within our expanded service area. Thanks to the mindful decision-making and generosity of landowners Jerry Herst, Julie Dorfman, and Anne Krantz, we were recently able to take that inaugural step into Buchanan Township. In December, the landowners donated their 45+ acre Buchanan property to us, which we will protect and manage as a nature preserve. Additionally, a conservation easement on the property is held by our partner in the project, Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy.

The property, now called the Myron Perlman Nature Preserve in honor of Krantz’s late husband, includes farm fields, wetland, and a beech-maple forest. Other notable features include an abundance of spring wildflowers, an on-site cabin, and impressive plant biodiversity. The area will be open to the public for recreation, and we plan to build a trail system through the preserve this year.

This donation is a prime example of landowners consciously considering the land’s value and recognizing that they likely would not be able to singlehandedly maintain the good condition of the land forever. Rather than selling their land to single owner who may have developed it or kept it for private use, now this land will be protected forever and be accessible to Buchanan residents and visitors alike for recreation, inspiration, and education. Herst, Dorfman, and Krantz commented, “We hope this forest will inspire others as it has inspired us and so many dear ones. We want people to love and protect this precious gem. We can all share in the satisfaction of doing something positive to encourage biodiversity and protect life on our planet.”

“With its high-quality mature forest, this is a really beautiful property,” said COL Executive Director Ryan Postema. “It’s also our first nature preserve in Buchanan Township.”



# In Memoriam: Peter Van Nice

**It is with a great deal of sadness that we relay the news that one of Chikaming Open Lands' founders, Peter Van Nice, passed away December 7.**

Chikaming Open Lands (COL) was born at Peter's kitchen table. Upon his retirement, having come to Lakeside since childhood, he recognized a potential problem. The growing popularity of this area was leading to an increase in development, which was beginning to change the landscape. Always a champion of conservation, Peter decided to set up a land conservancy in southern Berrien County. He recruited his wife Jeanie, and friends Jean and Steve Smith, and forged ahead, incorporating COL in December of 1999.

In the 22 years since, Peter worked tirelessly to cultivate his vision, growing COL into a fully operational land trust with full-time staff, offices, and a portfolio of protected natural areas. He served as its first President, and put in countless hours doing the on-the-ground work to protect land; managing acquisitions, actively participating in preserve stewardship, and securing funding to make it all happen.



"It was Peter's vision and hard work that led us for the first six or seven years before we had any staff," says fellow founder Steve Smith. "He was a mentor to all of us on the early Board about what had to be done." Adds Jean Smith, "Throughout this process Peter always remained humble, and never wanted special recognition for what he had accomplished." Peter was passionate about land conservation, and was dedicated to sharing that passion with others. We will miss him terribly, but his legacy lives on in the forests, wetlands, and prairies COL has preserved in this community as a result of his vision and leadership.

We are forever grateful.

# PRAIRIE RESTORATION IN BLOOM

**Burns Prairie Preserve is a 38-acre natural area located in Galien Township featuring a peaceful prairie, seasonal wetlands, and woodland- but it didn't always look that way.**

When Chikaming Open Lands was gifted the first 12 acres of the property in 2012, the land was mainly comprised of a crop field. This spring and summer, that once-vacant crop field and the additional acreage will be bursting with native prairie grasses, wildflowers, and animals that thrive in prairie ecosystems thanks to restoration and ongoing property management efforts by Chikaming Open Lands, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

Establishing a self-sustaining prairie from seed does not happen overnight— it typically takes three to five years or more, plus additional maintenance. Now, 11 years into our restoration efforts, the fruits of our labor are finally evident. Visitors can expect to see big bluestem and Indian grass, as well as an abundance of summer-blooming wildflowers, including black-eyed Susan, purple coneflower, and butterfly weed.

This restored prairie most closely resembles a mesic (or moist) prairie, a once common feature in Michigan that is now considered critically imperiled. According to the Michigan Natural Features Inventory, remnant mesic prairies are so rare that none occur on sites in the state that are open to the public. Burns Prairie might not be a naturally occurring mesic prairie, but it does provide visitors with a good representation of one.

The progress at Burns Prairie is a great example of our prairie restoration vision for our other properties with similar open spaces, such as Chris Thompson Memorial Preserve and Sugarwood Forest Preserve. Make sure to head on over this spring to check it out!

# SUPPORT CONSERVATION IN OUR COMMUNITY

**W**hat can you get for a dollar? Not a whole lot! A can of soda, a temporary tattoo... maybe a sample-sized container of dental floss, or enough gas to get you 5 or 10 miles down the road.

What if we told you that for just a dollar a day, you can preserve the beautiful natural places that make this corner of Southwest Michigan special... forever.

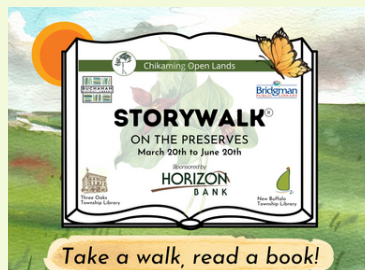
Join Chikaming Open Lands' **365 Circle** with a gift of \$365, or just a dollar a day. Your gift will ensure our cherished open spaces will never be developed. It will increase public access, so these places can be shared by everyone in our community. It will protect our fresh water, ensuring it's clean and safe. It will preserve crucial habitat for the wildlife that surrounds us. It will instill a lifelong love of nature in our kids through our environmental education program, the Mighty Acorns. Your annual support makes it all happen. Scan the QR code to make your donation today!



## StoryWalk is back!

From March 20 - June 20, you'll be able to read a storybook as you walk at four COL preserves. To participate, head out to a StoryWalk Preserve, read the story, and scan the QR code to be entered in a drawing for the StoryWalk books. Books have been provided by Bridgman Public Library, Buchanan

District Library, New Buffalo Township Library, and Three Oaks Township Library. Special thank you to Horizon Bank for sponsoring this event. Scan the QR code to visit the StoryWalk event page for more information.



# SPRING EVENTS

## April

### **April Stewardship Workday**

Sat. April 15, 10 am - 12 pm

#### **Merritt & Younger Family Preserves**

Help COL work to tame invasive crown  
gap shrubs at the Younger Family  
Preserve.

### **Earth Day Extravaganza**

Sat. April 22 , 10 am - 12 pm

#### **Robinson Woods Preserve**

Celebrate Earth Day with COL!  
Help us clear invasive shrubs and stay  
for family-friendly activities and crafts  
focused on ways to invest in our planet.

### **Spring Has Sprung Wildflower Walk**

Sun. April 29 , 1 pm - 2:30pm

#### **Chris Thompson Memorial Preserve**

Join COL and Botanist Nathanael Pilla  
from Orbis Environmental Consulting as  
he guides us through the preserve to  
learn about these beautiful spring  
flowers.

### **All events require pre- registration.**

To register, please contact  
[gball@chikamingopenlands.org](mailto:gball@chikamingopenlands.org).

## May

### **Spring Migration Hike**

Wed. May 3, 8:30 am - 10 am

#### **Burns Prairie Preserve**

Join COL and David Ferris from the  
Pokagon Band of Potawatomi for a  
hike and discussion on spring  
migration.

### **May Stewardship Workday**

Sat. May 13, 10 am - 12 pm

#### **Edward and Elizabeth Leonard Wildlife Preserve**

Friends that pull invasives together  
stay together! Meet our wonderful  
stewardship crew and like-minded  
community members as we identify  
and pull garlic mustard.

### **Big Sit**

Sat. May 20, 8:30 am - 10 am

#### **Flynn Woods Preserve**

Count birds and contribute to citizen  
science with COL and David Ferris  
from the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi.

### **For more information on COL events,**

scan the QR code  
or visit

[www.chikamingopenlands.org/events](http://www.chikamingopenlands.org/events).





# Chikaming Open Lands

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