

We save land.

We save rivers.



Year In Review

Fiscal Year 2019

July 1, 2018 through June 30, 2019

Our Mission

We improve the health of our communities by preserving and restoring natural areas and open space, protecting rivers and watersheds, and promoting stewardship of our environment.



www.theconservationfoundation.org

Throughout the year we work tirelessly to fulfill our mission and be leaders in improving the health of our region's land, rivers, and communities, and to equip citizens, business owners and community decision makers with the skills and confidence to be good stewards of the environment.

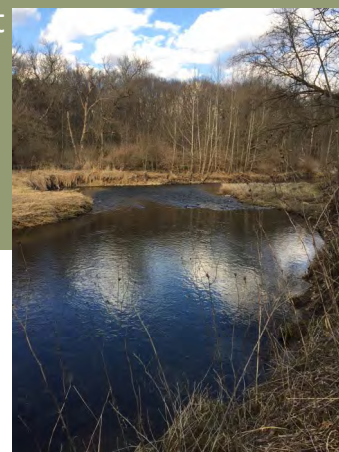
Preserving Land

Working with the City of Ottawa, we have accepted the donation of a 25-acre property along the Illinois River. It is adjacent to other City-owned land in an area that is envisioned to provide both active and passive recreation for future citizens. It was donated by the Mitchell family, and by us taking the land, the Mitchells were able to take their tax benefits right away and the City will be able to use the land's value to obtain a grant in the next couple of years.

A landowner in Barrington Hills left us her 14.4-acre horse property in her will. She knew she could count on us to make sure the land is treated the way she wants it to be, and she was hoping the donation would help support our programming. We were able to put the right restrictions in place prior to transferring the land to the Kane County Forest Preserve District, which owns land right next door. The modest sum we were able to receive for the land will be used in supporting our many programs.

Voters in Oak Brook said yes to open space on election day in November, approving a \$17.9 million Oak Brook Park District referendum to purchase 34 acres of the former McDonald's complex next to Central Park along Ginger Creek with 68% support. What was slated to become a luxury gated townhome community will now remain open space to improve the quality of life in Oak Brook. We were honored to help pass this referendum on behalf of the Oak Brook Park District!

This year was the grand opening of the Little Rock Creek Forest Preserve in Kendall County that after 44 years of committed pursuit was purchased and preserved last year. Adjacent to the Maramech Woods Nature Preserve, this property will continue to provide Kendall County residents an opportunity to explore nature for years to come.



Little Rock Creek Forest Preserve,
Kendall County

Growing Healthy



The Green Earth Harvest (GEH) program worked tirelessly all year long to bring fresh, organic vegetables grown at our McDonald Farm to nearly 500 shareholders and the community. Nine employees along with the continued support of around 50 volunteers made this year a success. During the calendar year GEH was able to donate over 6,800 pounds of vegetables to Loaves and Fishes, a local non-profit working to end hunger. Shares can now be ordered directly from the website thanks to a new ordering system, and the introduction of the "flexbox" lets shareholders at delivery sites request exactly what they want in their share. GEH also welcomed the lease of a new van used for vegetable transport and compostable bags in day-to-day operation! A Thursday afternoon Farmstand has also offered a new way for the public to have access to healthy, organic vegetables.



Protecting Rivers & Streams



During the annual DuPage County River Sweep, approximately 500 volunteers worked along 60 miles of shoreline to clean out 5 tons of debris and remove about 1.7 acres of invasive species including garlic mustard, buckthorn, and honeysuckle.

In 2019 the DuPage River Salt Creek Workgroup (DRSCW), staffed by TCF, worked with partners on developing 4 dam modification projects, running a regional salt management program and conceptualizing a regional water quality trading system. All projects are focused on cost effectively improving fish distribution, water quality and habitat in Salt Creek and Upper DuPage River.

In 2018 TCF staff worked with the Lower DuPage River Watershed Coalition (LDWRC) to implement a third round of Bioassessment Sampling. Fish, bugs and habitat information in addition to water and sediment chemistry data were collected at 41 stations across the watershed. This data is being used to update a model that will identify what the most important stressors to aquatic life are and help prioritize segments of the river for restoration. The LDWRC has also signed an agreement with the Forest Preserve District of Will County to fund the removal of the Hammel Woods Dam in Shorewood for improved water quality and fish passage. Seasonal outreach materials for members were expanded to include seasonal checklists, social media posts and newsletter articles.

TCF worked with the Lower DesPlaines Watershed Group (LDWG) to implement the first year of a Bioassessment Sampling program focusing on the lower portion of the Des Plaines River from just north of I-355 down to the Kankakee River. Fish, bugs and habitat information in addition to water and sediment chemistry data were collected at 28 stations. This data will provide valuable information about the watershed to guide local resource management decisions. Thanks to the partnership of LDWG and the LDRWC, we are able to coordinate the seasonal outreach campaigns across much of Will County.

This year we celebrate the completion of the third year of our Fox River Education and Outreach Initiative. The *A Fox River Testimony* exhibit of original Fox River paintings by our Artist-In-Residence Joel Sheesley was on display at the Schingoethe Center of Aurora University, Little White School Museum in Oswego, the Batavia History Museum and Jeremiah Joe Coffee in Ottawa. The last exhibit was held at the Elgin History Museum through November 15th. More than 4,000 people have taken in Joel's exquisite renderings of Fox River landscapes through these exhibits, and we hope they have left with a deeper appreciation for and connection to the Fox River!



Joel Sheesley, Artist-In-Residence for Art of the Fox

Empowering Citizens & Communities



As part of our Conservation@Home and Conservation@Work programs that are so central to our mission, we were able to certify 48 new properties. A notable number of these properties were throughout the Fox Valley, including the Fox Township building and Oswegoland Park District park sites, and we welcomed several new sites in Will County as well. We have now certified a total of 1,053 properties in our service area.

The Conservation in Our Community program has grown from 12 participating communities of Carol Stream, Downers Grove, Elgin, Elmhurst, Lisle, Naperville, Oswego, Warrenville, Wood Dale, Frankfort, Mokena, and Glen Ellyn to include the City of Plano which recently approved a contract in February 2019. We will be working with the city to assist with recommendations for native planting demonstrations on city-owned property, provide native garden supportive ordinance language, and continue support for our conservation programs.

Through our partnerships with Upcycle Products and local communities, we successfully sold over 900 rain barrels this year. In addition, we have set up 22 community rain barrel programs in order to help residents and businesses gain access to and knowledge about rain barrels.

Teaching Children

The Conservation Foundation has been providing Mighty Acorns® for 20 years! Our Mighty Acorns® partnerships continue to thrive with 46 classes and over 1,100 students across three counties. We expanded our reach in Kane County with an after school nature program at the Elgin Math and Science Academy serving approximately 200 students in 8 classes, kindergarten through 3rd grades.

DuPage County — Serving 5 schools with 7 classes and one after school program

Kane County — Serving 17 classes and two Boys and Girls Club after school programs

LaSalle County — Expanded to serve 11 classes that support restoration at Dayton Bluffs

This year we hosted “Nature on the Farm” summer camps at our McDonald Farm. Over four weeks, 44 children from grades 1-6 joined us for half day camps exploring the woodlands, wetlands, and prairies as well as farm life! Campers welcomed special animal guests Sara The Turtle and Peaches The Chicken and made their very own snacks with produce grown by our Green Earth Harvest program.

The farmyard at our Dickson-Murst Farm in Montgomery also echoed with the sounds of happy children as 26 local youngsters joined us for a full fledged farm experience the last week in June to attend our 2nd annual Farm Camp. Our enthusiastic participants enjoyed music, games, interacting with farm animals, learning farm tasks and chores, crafting and making new friends.



Fostering Connections



More than 3,000 people enjoyed our historic Dickson-Murst Farm in Montgomery thanks to our amazing volunteers.



Western DuPage Special Recreation Association took in a little Nature RX at McDonald Farm in June.



Ravine hikers get to explore restored woodlands and newly added trails at our Dayton Bluffs Preserve in Ottawa.



Our Green Earth Harvest CSA U-Pick days let shareholders participate in the harvest of the food on their tables.



We were delighted to welcome 140 members and friends to our table for our annual Farm to Fork dinner.



Our annual Earth Day Benefit Dinner welcomed over 500 guests to support the mission of The Conservation Foundation.

Strengthening Our Foundation

This past year our extremely generous donor Betsy Hamill Bramsen challenged us to grow. Through the New Member Challenge, Betsy pledged to give an additional donation of \$75,000 if we were able to add 300 new members by June 30th, 2019. Thanks to everyone who helped spread the word about our mission and this challenge that made every dollar go further, we were able to exceed that goal and welcome 353 new members! Betsy's generous donation and the support of these new members vastly strengthens our ability to fulfill the mission so dear to us.



In June we launched a new and improved theconservationfoundation.org! With a sleek design, easy navigation, and overall beauty, our new website allows us to better connect with members and the communities we work in. And it's mobile friendly for all those savvy smartphone users out there.

A number of notable staff changes have made their way through TCF as former Senior Advancement Officer Scott LaMorte sought other career opportunities and former Director of Advancement Chere Hayes took the joyful step towards retirement this year. After 5 years of hard work at TCF, Scott now works for Itasca Bank & Trust Company as Vice President, Business Development Officer. After a devoted 17 years, Chere is now enjoying a retirement full of grandkids and gardening, two of her many loves. Their tireless work will have a lasting impact on TCF and those they've worked with.

Early this year we gladly welcomed Steve Baldwin as our new Director of Advancement. Steve is a joyous addition to the team and his experience and skills are sure to take TCF in the right direction. Additionally, we welcomed Taylor Joray to the TCF family as our Land Stewardship Manager and Lea Rodbarry as our Watershed Education & Outreach Manager.



Lea Rodbarry
Watershed Education & Outreach Manager



Steve Baldwin
Director of Advancement



Taylor Joray
Land Stewardship Manager