

We save land. We save rivers.



# 2020 Impact Report

*As you peruse these updates on the impact The Conservation Foundation has had in the last fiscal year, thanks to your generous support, you should feel a deep sense of pride knowing none of this would be possible without you.*

July 2019-June 2020



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Throughout the year we work hard to fulfill our mission and be leaders and advocates for our lands, rivers, and communities. As a supporter of our work, we'd like to provide you with a progress update on some of the ways we have fulfilled our key mission areas in the last fiscal year.

These achievements were made possible only by your support!

Thank you!

## Preserving Land

Landowners in Kendall County, who had already put a conservation easement in place on 132 acres of their land, decided to donate the land itself to The Conservation Foundation in 2019. We will hold onto the land for the next year or two until the Kendall County Forest Preserve District will be able to use its value as the match for a grant that will pay for trails, a small parking area, a pavilion and restrooms. This property is adjacent to an existing preserve and will provide public access to it, opening two preserves to the public at once!

There is a newly preserved 18-acre property at the busiest intersection in the Village of Wayne, thanks to a forward-thinking woman who purchased it and put a conservation easement in place. It will help preserve land along a creek as well as preserve important riding trails. This is a great example of benefits for nature and the community alike!

A project that started 22 years ago finally came to fruition in January of 2020.

What is described as the most beautiful and ecologically valuable land on the Lower Fox River, 176 acres in total, is now protected from development forever.

The two families that own the land have put conservation easements in place to preserve the bluffs, ravines and rare ecosystems in this east-west stretch of the Fox River.



## Green Earth Harvest

In the face of a world changing by the minute, Green Earth Harvest has proven its adaptability by changing to fit the needs of shareholders, the influx of interest in local food, and the safety of all staff and community members. A crew of eight has worked tirelessly to seed, plant, weed, cultivate, fertilize, harvest, wash, and pack produce for more than 600 families. This year, farmshares sold out for the entire 28 week season before Week One began!

Thanks to partnerships with Hufendick Farms, a local organic meat supplier, the North American Pizza & Culinary Academy, JL Honeybee Farms and others, being a shareholder with Green Earth Harvest has gone beyond the vegetables and has become a true experience. Pizza nights, the opportunity to purchase locally sourced meat, eggs, flowers, honey and more on our peaceful 60 acres have vastly enriched the shareholder experience.

We have also welcomed many happy customers to our Wednesday afternoon farmstands.





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# Protecting Rivers & Streams

## ~ DuPage River Salt Creek Workgroup ~

The DuPage River Salt Creek Workgroup (DRSCW), staffed by The Conservation Foundation, identifies, designs and implements water quality and aquatic life improvement projects throughout its namesake watersheds. The DRSCW has been working with partners on four dam modification and stream restoration projects, running a regional salt management program and completing bioassessment sampling in the East Branch DuPage River.

## ~ Lower DuPage River Watershed Coalition ~

The Lower DuPage River Watershed Coalition, also staffed by The Conservation Foundation, is working with the Forest Preserve District of Will County to remove the Hammel Woods dam in Plainfield, which will allow fish passage to the upper reaches of the watershed. The project will meet goals outlined in wastewater treatment plant permits. This is a project that our staff have been talking about for more than 20 years and it will be exciting to see this dangerous barrier removed.

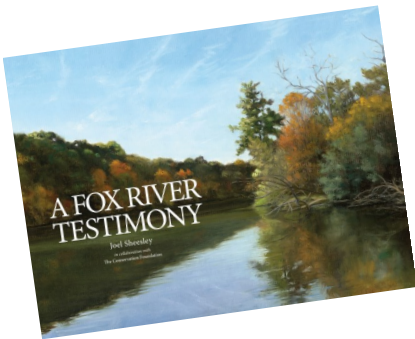
## ~ DuPage River Sweep ~

In response to the need to be socially distant, our annual DuPage County River Sweep was adapted to a River Sweep Month where community members were encouraged to take to the rivers and streets on their own to pick up trash in and along the DuPage River and its tributaries on their own time, anytime throughout the month. Participants were brought together virtually on social media to share what they collected using the hashtag #riversweep2020.

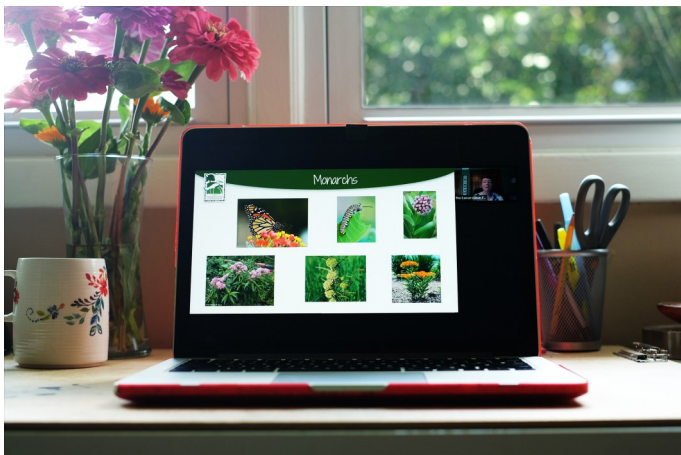


## ~ Fox River ~

With every stroke of his paintbrush, our Artist-in-Residence for the Art of the Fox program, Joel Sheesley, captured the beauty and changing landscapes of the Fox River. Art of the Fox came to a close with an exhibit at the Elgin History Museum, though copies of *A Fox River Testimony*, a breathtaking coffee table book of the more than 75 Fox River paintings Joel created as well as his inspiring writings is still available for sale. As part of our Fox River Initiative, Art of the Fox was a stunning visual way to bring attention to the Fox River and help citizens see and connect with it more deeply, and we engaged with thousands of people through the project's exhibits and events. We would like to thank artist Joel Sheesley for his willingness to enter and fully immerse himself in a unique and powerful project and partnership, and for sharing his extraordinary artistic talent with us! As a way to further connect people to the Fox River, the "A River Flows Through It" Fox River Lecture Series kicked off in January in partnership with the St. Charles Park District and the Kendall County Forest Preserve District, and was adapted from in-person lectures to webinars when COVID-19 hit.



# Empowering Adults



In an effort to comply with social distancing guidelines and continue educating our community, we adapted all of our in-person educational events into online webinars. Webinar topics ranged across our program areas and included talks on organic gardening, Conservation@Home, and water quality, just to name a few. We also welcomed a handful of guest speakers to present on things like edible landscaping and light pollution. More than 3,000 registrations have hit our inboxes and the number only continues to grow! We plan to continue offering webinars into the foreseeable future in our Conservation Online webinar series.



All of our past webinars are available for viewing on our Youtube channel.

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## Educating Our Youth



We expanded our Mighty Acorns® partnerships with schools in DuPage, Kane and LaSalle Counties to serve 47 different classes (almost 1,200 kids), including a new partnership with Kane County Forest Preserve for the John Dunham STEM Partnership School, two after-school programs with Elgin Boys and Girls Club, as well as an expanded presence in Elmhurst thanks to the support of ComEd. Our Spring Mighty Acorns® offerings were adapted to virtual hikes and lessons to address the needs of schools that had to move to remote learning due to COVID-19, and all of these virtual hikes can be viewed on our YouTube channel!

Our Children's Garden at McDonald Farm has had a stunning transformation this past year thanks to very dedicated and talented staff and volunteers! Our "Children's Sensory Garden" and the new "Lenore's Backyard Garden," a space with raised planting beds, perennial gardens and even a digging station, were the perfect backdrop for the June Family Adventures we held as a safe replacement to our summer camps, and to the distanced Nature on the Farm summer camps we were able to hold in July when COVID-19 restrictions allowed. Our current public health crisis, while immensely challenging, has provided us the opportunity to experiment with new and different ways to fulfill our mission to get kids outside and connected to nature.

## Healing Landscapes, Healing Ourselves

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the focus of our NatureRx efforts had shifted to the education front, and how nature is the perfect campus for physical and academic education. And in the midst of the current pandemic, the outdoor classroom concept makes more sense now than ever before! The pandemic has also emphasized the profound impact nature has on our mental health, as we saw our Dayton Bluffs Preserve as well as other local natural areas being heavily used as a safe way for people to cope with their stress and anxiety.

Our Conservation@Home and Conservation@Work programs continue to spread native plants and earth-friendly pockets of habitat for wildlife and pollinators all across our region. And as these programs help people manage their landscapes in an earth-friendly way, participants also experience the physical and mental health benefits of gardening and bringing nature close to their homes and businesses! Webinars have made our how-to Conservation@Home presentations accessible to more people than ever, and using proper social distancing and safety measures, our staff are out doing yard visits and certifying properties across northeastern Illinois every day.



## Promoting Stewardship

Our Annual Earth Day Benefit Dinner was adapted this year to a weeklong virtual Earth Day celebration. The week featured daily motivational videos surrounding recommitting to nature and raised more than \$135,000 in support of The Conservation Foundation's programs and operations.

Thank you so much for your support, which makes ALL of this possible!