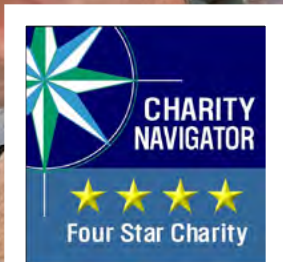




ANNUAL Report

Fiscal Year 2024



Teacher Training Workshop at McDonald Farm, Naperville

We save land. We save rivers.

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.

VISION

We envision a sustainable region where, through education and collaboration:

- **Protected natural areas** provide habitats for wildlife and places where people can enjoy nature forever.
- **Public and private partnerships** accelerate the pace of land preservation for the enrichment of all.
- **People benefit** from and enjoy clean and healthy streams, wetlands, and lakes.
- **All land development incorporates stewardship of the environment.**
- **People understand and embrace conservation issues**, and act to preserve the environment.

The Conservation Foundation is a recognized expert and reasoned voice on conservation issues and, with the help of our members and donors, we provide the leadership required to achieve this vision.

WE BELIEVE

Every person, regardless of where they live or their social-economic status, deserves clean water, clean air, healthy food, and safe access to nature as a way to be healthy and happy.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

As an organization dedicated to environmental stewardship, we acknowledge the many Native People and tribes who were the original stewards of this land for thousands of years before European settlement. With reverence and respect, we acknowledge the indigenous spirit of everything that is on and in the land. Native Peoples did not choose to leave this land, and now we are working to carry on the legacy of land stewardship that is inherent in their culture and customs.

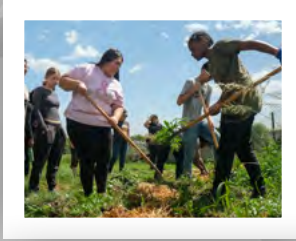
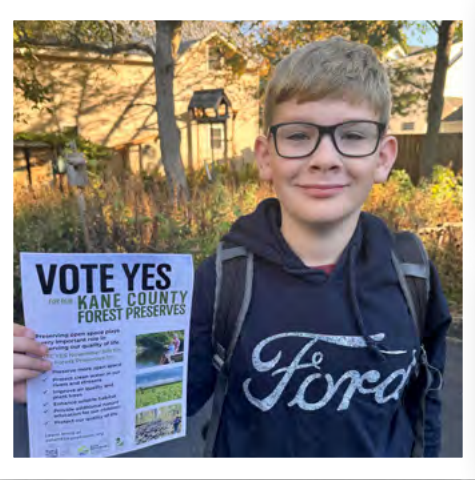
WHO WE ARE



WELCOME TO OUR ANNUAL REPORT

Behind every fact and figure in this Annual Report is your loyal generosity and the hard work of our staff, volunteers, and partners. Each and every impact we have – and after flipping through the following pages I think you'll agree that's a lot – comes back to YOU, our members and donors.

I am proud to share one of the highlights of the year, that **our professional accredited status has recently been renewed by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission.** This demonstrates that as part of a network of more than 450 accredited conservation land trusts across the nation, we are committed to sound finance, ethical conduct, responsible governance, and lasting stewardship. I hope this news reinforces your confidence that your contributions are being used wisely, responsibly, and with great impact. Our strength means special places - such as our Dayton Bluffs Preserve, McDonald Farm, and Belrose Farm - will be protected forever, making this beautiful, diverse region where we live and work an even greater place, both now and into the future.



Another major high point of 2024 was the passing of open space referenda in both Kane and DuPage Counties. If you are a voter in Kane or DuPage County and you cast your vote in favor of the forest preserve district referendum, you voted YES for open space, clean air and water, wildlife habitat, and the preservation and restoration of natural lands for future generations.

These properties that the forest preserve districts have acquired over the years with the use of referendum funds are not isolated pieces of property. They connect rivers together, they connect communities together, and they connect people together. This is big-scale land conservation. Thousands of acres of land is being preserved, thousands of acres of land is being restored. That's a direct hit on our mission.

I would like to thank all of the volunteers who served tirelessly on the DuPage and Kane County Neighbors for Open Space, Clean Water, and Clean Air committees, all who voted yes and encouraged others to do the same, and the members and supporters of The Conservation Foundation for making it possible for us to work behind the scenes on these open space referenda, and on all of our other impactful programs and projects.

Thank you for entrusting us with your support!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be "Brook McDonald".

Brook McDonald, President/CEO



L to R above:

Mary Ochsenschlager and John Rogner, Kane County, and Connie Schmidt, Kaaren Oldfield and Bob Schillerstrom, DuPage County Referenda Committee Co-Chairs



LAND PRESERVATION

Successfully ran the referenda campaigns for the Forest Preserve Districts of Kane & DuPage. These wins will result in \$450 MILLION in funding for local nature over the next 20 years, & thousands of acres of land preserved.



Celebrated the 20th anniversary of **Conservation@Home** and conducted 236 visits and certified 58 homes.

EDUCATION & OUTREACH

We are expanding our community engagement work, establishing connections with new and different audiences, and developing meaningful projects to engage people right where they live.



We hosted a DuPage County Martin Luther King event at the McDonald Farm in August. Speakers focused on Native American connections to the land and MLK's history of working with Native Americans.



Our **Farm to Pantry** initiative nourished more than 900 families each week in DuPage and Will Counties with our fresh, organic produce.



Restored & managed more than 1,137 acres of natural areas



Established partnerships with affinity groups & targeted underserved communities with **conservation programming**



Conducted 75 **Nature Rx** events



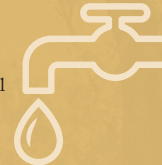
Sold over 3,000 native plants, trees and shrubs at our **annual plant sale**, & distributed thousands more to homeowners



Served more than 4,100 children through **environmental ed**



Certified 6 businesses **Conservation@Work** and installed 2 demo gardens.



Our **Next Generation Advisory Council** held their annual Trivia Night Fundraiser, three professional development seminars, and three **Conservation on Tap** networking events.



Our **Green Earth Harvest farmshare program** fed over 800 families healthy, organic produce grown at our McDonald Farm in Naperville.



WATER QUALITY

The watershed groups developed their Nutrient Assessment and Reduction Plans and submitted them to the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency. These management plans will guide the watershed groups' efforts for the next 15-20 years.

Trained and supported 123 **Winter Chloride Watchers**. Volunteers submitted 1,221 chloride sample results for 188 sites in 17 counties in Illinois.



Completed 3 **conservation easements** preserving 13.3 acres.



Made accessibility upgrades to McDonald Farm, including a path to the pavilion, paved parking area near the barn, and improved building features for better access.



The DRSCW restored 35 acres of **wetland and riparian habitat** and 14.5 acres of **upland buffer** as part of the stream restoration at Fullersburg Woods.

The DuPage River Salt Creek Workgroup (DRSCW) installed 9 **riffles, 2 pools, and 1400 feet of stream bank stabilization** in Salt Creek as part of the Graue Mill dam removal.



The **Take a Hike! Challenge** engaged over 1,400 participants

Received a grant to pilot a **Conservation@School** program in 2025!

Distributed 1,000 **rain barrels** to local communities



Received support from more than 500 **farm and natural areas volunteers**.



Brought the **Mighty Acorns®** curriculum to 49 classrooms

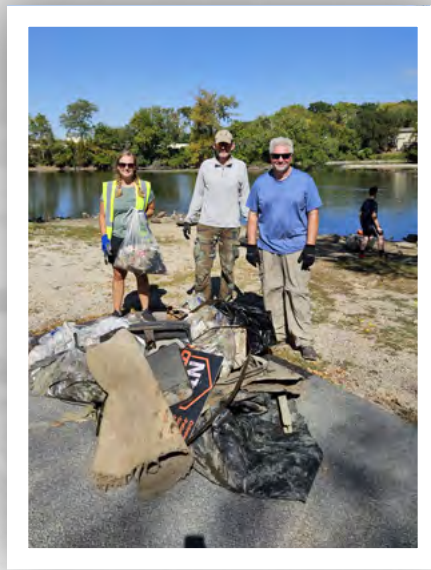
A DIVERSIFIED APPROACH TO FUNDING

The many different sources of funding demonstrated in this chart show that at The Conservation Foundation, we have positioned ourselves to be financially stable regardless of the overall political or economic landscape. We do not rely on state or federal grants to survive, but rather are poised to carry out our mission, thanks to diverse sources of revenue and private support.

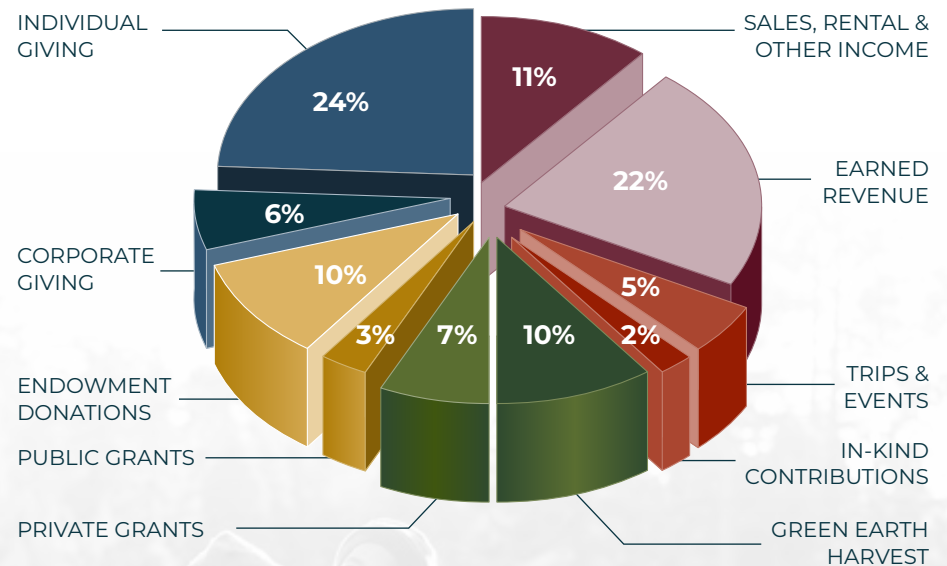
The “Earned Revenue” slice of this pie chart is one that doesn’t get as much attention as some of the others, but is significant for both our budget and for conservation across the region. We earn this revenue in three main ways: Watershed Consulting, Land Management, and various educational programming.

We save land. Sometimes public agencies have the money to acquire land, but don’t have the time, personnel, or the skill sets needed to work with landowners and find the preservation option that best fits the situation and all parties’ goals. Landowners are sometimes reluctant to talk with public agencies, but we are often able to sit down with them at their kitchen tables and start a conversation, sharing our expertise and working towards protecting their land in the way that feels most comfortable for them. We have negotiated for thousands of acres of land throughout our service area on behalf of public open space agencies, and the fees the public agencies pay us for these services create revenue towards our mission, leading to even greater conservation impact throughout the region.

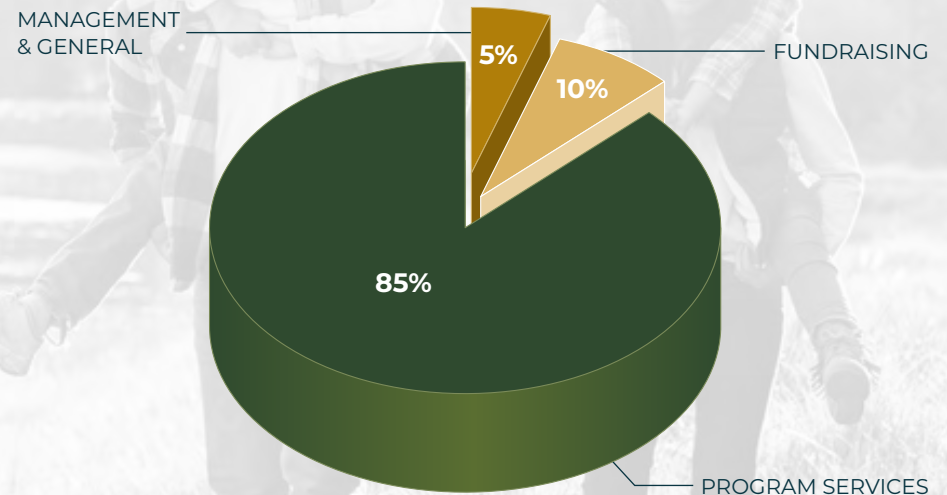
We save rivers. We are known across the region for our water quality efforts with the Lower DuPage, Lower DesPlaines, Chicago Area Waterways, and DuPage River Salt Creek Workgroups, which are all staffed by The Conservation Foundation. The vital work being done by these four stakeholder groups is funded by their member agencies. Wastewater treatment facilities, municipalities, park districts, county governments, and private businesses pay dues to fund the staff we provide as well as monitoring, planning, project implementing, and reporting on the water quality of the rivers and streams upon which more than 7 million people rely.



2024 REVENUE



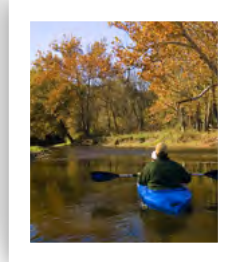
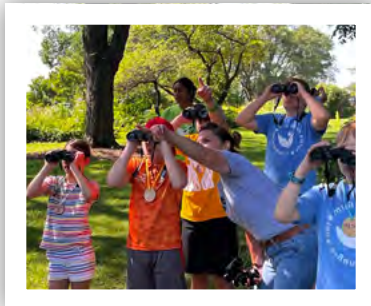
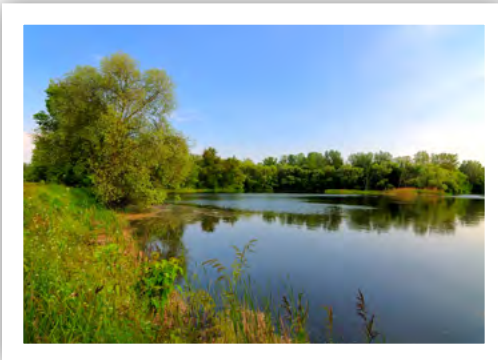
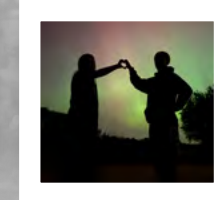
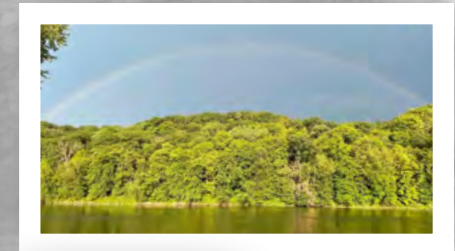
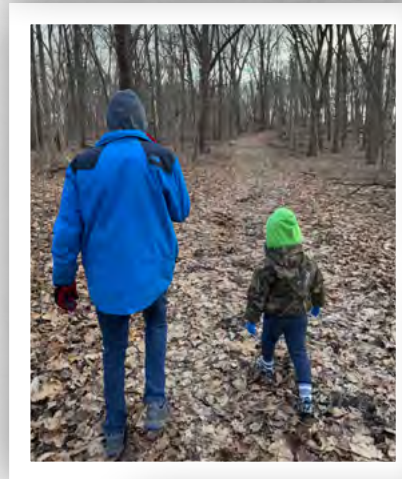
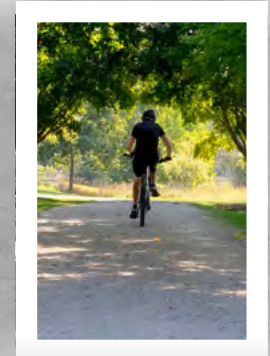
2024 EXPENSES



THANK YOU

We would like to sincerely thank the following foundations, corporations, and grantors who contributed **\$5,000 or more in Fiscal Year 2024** (July 1st, 2023 to June 30th, 2024) in support of our mission:

- AXA XL
- Ball Horticultural Co.
- Bedrock Earthscapes LLC
- Bosch Community Fund
- Christopher B. Burke Engineering, LTD.
- CITGO Petroleum Corporation
- ComEd
- Community Foundation of The Fox River Valley
- DuPage County
- DuPage Foundation
- Earthrise Energy
- Ecolab
- Endeavor Health
- G. Carl Ball Family Foundation
- Gaylord & Dorothy Donnelley Foundation
- Green State Credit Union
- Hamill Family Foundation
- Illinois Department of Natural Resources
- Itasca Bank & Trust Co
- Land Trust Alliance
- Nayar Family Foundation
- Nicor Gas
- NOW Natural Foods
- Robert R. McCormick Foundation
- Solberg Manufacturing
- The Schmidgall Family Foundation
- Wheaton Bank & Trust
- Will County



BETTER TO LIGHT ONE CANDLE: A PERENNIAL CIRCLE TESTIMONIAL

There is an old Asian adage that **the first third of our life is devoted to becoming an adult, the second to creating a family and working, and the third to giving back.** This, plus my dad's favorite saying, "Better to light one candle than to curse the darkness," are guiding principles for Tim and me.

Nature has always been a major factor in my life. As a child growing up in Milwaukee, when other children were in Bible school, I would walk ten blocks to the old Milwaukee Zoo. It was almost deserted on Sunday mornings so I could enjoy the animals alone; on several occasions I even held hands with the gibbon who would extend his hands through the bars for me. A fond memory. Our family vacations always took us to northern Wisconsin to a rented cabin on a lake, sometimes with no indoor plumbing, but we loved playing in the woods, swimming in what were then clear lakes, and fishing with my dad.

I have often been fortunate enough to live in homes that provided a natural setting, or probably we chose them because of the setting. Our current home is two mostly natural acres, full of wildflowers, deer and other visitors, and a multitude of birds. Today we had breakfast in front of our picture window and enjoyed watching a doe and her offspring, a pair of tufted titmice, many juncos, nuthatches, a very red cardinal, woodpeckers, and, of course, squirrels. It's good for our souls!

Tim and I were introduced to The Conservation Foundation both by our naturalist neighbor Valerie, and by a mutual friend, Julie Long, who is on the Foundation's Board of Trustees. **We have seen The Conservation Foundation put their mission into action, saving precious natural land in five counties, including our immediate neighborhood.** They have come to our area to demonstrate how to preserve our portion of Person Creek, helped us with wildflower plantings in our yards, given advice on the proper trees to plant which will flourish, as well as how to conserve water. Valerie's property is directly adjacent to our property so together we have a bit of a park. Neither of us uses herbicides, which results in a sea of flowers in the spring and many throughout the summer. We feed birds all year around, and Tim provides them at least five different types of bird feed, which results in a wide variety of birds. Because of what we have learned from The Conservation Foundation, we have fostered the growth of native seedlings, protecting them from deer until they mature. One of our "babies" is now a 20-foot Shagbark Hickory, of which we are extremely proud.

Tim and I have chosen to give to The Conservation Foundation in our estate plans because The Conservation Foundation is local. They preserve the land and the rivers near us when developers and poor land management are encroaching upon the land and rivers we cherish. Other valuable organizations help nationally and internationally but we care deeply about the areas right here around us. We feel that the next generations should be able to enjoy the spiritual and natural beauty with which we have been blessed. To continue with these highly valuable efforts, the Foundation requires funding, the more the better. They spend it wisely. In this last third of life, one of our duties is to help create a healthy and meaningful life for those who are to follow. We believe supporting The Conservation Foundation is an excellent way to achieve this end.

*By: Susan Van Duyne
Perennial Circle Member*



*Susan Van Duyne & Tim Rainey,
Perennial Circle Members*

The Conservation Foundation's Perennial Circle is a group of donors who have chosen to make a profound impact on the future of The Conservation Foundation through a planned gift. Gifts of life insurance, annuities or remembering The Conservation Foundation in your will enable you to achieve your financial and estate goals and leave a legacy of land for future generations. These gifts often come with some beneficial tax incentives as well. We have also partnered with FreeWill as a no-cost helpful online will and trust planning tool.

**Learn more on our website,
or contact Abby Beck at
abeck@theconservationfoundation.org
or 630-428-4500, Ext. 135.**



THE CONSERVATION FOUNDATION
We save land. We save rivers.

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DEEP roots
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FLOWERS
KEEP THE
~Theodore Roethke

2025 Earth Day
BENEFIT DINNER

Thursday, April 24th, 2025, 5pm to 9pm

Bobak's Signature Events, Woodridge

Evening Includes:

- ~Nature-Inspired Silent Auction
- ~Hors d'oeuvres, Libations & Exquisite 3-Course Dinner
- ~Inspirational Video & Short Program
- ~Wall of Wine
- ~Opportunity to Support Our Mission

Sponsorships and Silent Auction donations are gratefully sought.

