



The Chikaming Legacy

Newsletter of Chikaming Open Lands

Fall 2013

New Growth

Dayton Wet Prairie, Transformed...

Dayton Wet Prairie, September 2013

A big part of Chikaming Open Lands' mission is restoring the land on each of our eight preserves to its natural, native state. As the organization has grown over the last several years, so have these efforts, culminating in several ambitious restoration projects. In the spring newsletter, we highlighted one of these, the restoration of our newest preserve, Burns Prairie. This edition, we are excited to tell you about a long-term project at Dayton Wet Prairie in Bertrand Township.

Our restoration efforts at Dayton Wet Prairie are really beginning to pay off, as was evident during several recent site visits. These included plugging a ditch in the preserve that was likely made 50 or 60 years ago to drain the wetlands and create more viable farmland in the area. The ditch plugs, installed last winter by Blue Heron Ministries and funded by a grant from the Landowner Incentive Program of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, work to slow down the movement of water flowing through the ditch and recreate the natural wetlands.

The four plugs, which are basically walls of cedar placed to block water flow, have begun to create a whole new landscape at Dayton Wet Prairie this spring and summer. Or,

it is really more accurate to say, have begun to *RE*-create the *ORIGINAL* landscape. Native wetland grasses and wildflowers have exploded in the prairie fen, with the vegetation as high as six or even eight feet in places. And water that was previously running off the land via the ditch has now begun to saturate the prairie, restoring the natural hydrology of the preserve.

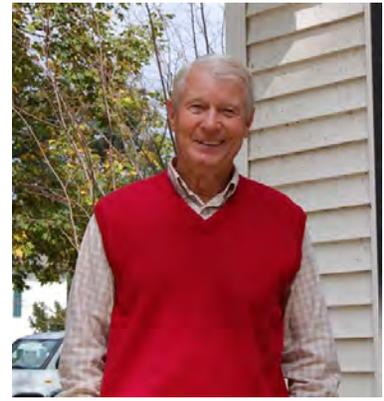
Alas, some woody invasive vegetation is flourishing at Dayton Wet Prairie as well. To tackle this issue, COL's dedicated stewardship volunteers came out in force at the September Stewardship Day with loppers, bow saws, and even a chainsaw to cut down these aggressive non-native species, which were then dabbed with a herbicide to discourage regrowth.

Most recently, on October 28, Blue Heron Ministries came back out and conducted a prescribed burn on nearly the entire area of the preserve that lies north of Curran Road. Regular prescribed burns have no equal when it comes to controlling invasive species and encouraging native regrowth.

(continued on page 5)



Board President Letter



Mission

COL is dedicated to preserving open space and the diverse, natural character of Southwest Michigan.

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Stephen Smith, *President*
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Clay Robinson, *Treasurer*
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Chris Thompson,
Executive Director
Jen Drackley,
*Development and Marketing
Manager*
Ryan Postema,
Land Protection Specialist

Dear Members and Friends of Chikaming Open Lands,

Last summer the Board of Directors approved a Strategic Plan developed and written by the board and staff for the next five years. The plan established four goals:

- **Accelerate the pace and effectiveness of land protection.**
- **Improve awareness of what Chikaming Open Lands does and how that benefits the community.**
- **Leverage Chikaming Open Lands’ strong financial position to continue to sustain its vital work by building unrestricted income to a level that covers all regular operations.**
- **Increase restricted funding to support accelerated land protection and stewardship efforts.**

Each of these goals has a set of strategies developed by the staff and various working committees. These strategies set out the “how” these goals will be achieved. Further details will also be incorporated in work plans developed by the staff and committees each year.

I would like to call your attention to the second goal as many of us who worked on this plan feel this is critical to the overall success of the plan.

We are still a relatively young organization, but I think we have made great strides in our efforts to protect the land, water and beautiful open spaces of Southwest Michigan. This has a very positive impact on the lives of everyone in the community. Now we must place a focus on communicating the benefit of what we are doing every day to all who live and visit here.

We are prepared to work very hard to build that greater awareness of how COL impacts the quality of life in Southwest Michigan. As a result, we feel that we will be in a much stronger position to achieve our other ambitious goals for land protection and growth in membership and funding.

I thank all of you for your continuing support. Chikaming Open Lands is poised to grow dramatically over the next five years. As our members, you have helped construct a solid foundation that will make that growth possible.

Best regards,

Steve Smith
Board President

COL is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. All contributions are tax deductible to the full extent of the law.



Robinson Woods: COL's Ambassador Preserve

Over the past year, Chikaming Open Lands' Stewardship Committee has focused a good portion of its efforts on making several recreational improvements at Robinson Woods, increasing public accessibility and installing educational tools at the Preserve.

Last winter we put in a parking lot, to which our Stewardship volunteers added fencing in the spring. Also this spring, volunteer stewards finished the new 1.25 mile loop trail, which has been attracting more and more hikers over the summer and fall!

In July we installed an informational kiosk, seen in the photo at right, at the trailhead. And just this fall, we have developed and installed 16 trail markers linking to an interactive trail guide pointing out and explaining some of the interesting features you will see along the way. Each marker includes a QR (Quick Response) code. When scanned using a QR code reader app on your smartphone, the code links to the corresponding guide entry, which will appear right on your device (see photos at right and below right). For those without smartphones, we will have reusable hard copy versions at the kiosk... please be sure to return these if you use them.

We would like to thank our stewardship volunteers for all their hard work on these efforts, and to the Laura J. Musser Fund for the grant that made them possible.

If you haven't been by Robinson Woods for awhile, come by and check it all out!

Robinson Woods is located on East Road in Chikaming Township.



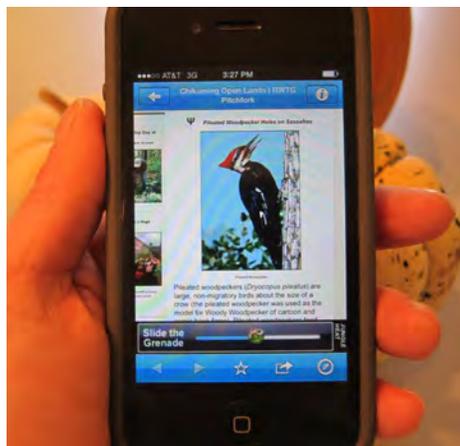
Nancy Baird and Bob Tatina with the completed informational kiosk



Trail marker with QR code



Jean C. Robinson, one of the prior owners and donors of the property that is now Robinson Woods, talks about her time there on the site where her cabin once stood.



Trail guide entry, scanned from a QR code on one of the trail markers.

Standing Committees

Executive Committee
 Steve Smith, *President*
 George Lucas, *Vice President*
 Clay Robinson, *Treasurer*
 Ron Farina, *Secretary*

Finance Committee
 Clay Robinson, *Chair*
 Ron Farina
 Bill Racine
 Peter Van Nice

Land Protection Committee
 George Lucas, *Chair*
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 Terry Hanover
 Lauri Lindquist
 Joe Margol
 Lee Strohl
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Stewardship Committee
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 Dave Eblen
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 Peggy McGrath
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 Barb Robinson



Notes from a COL Intern

-by Ellie Burck
COL Intern

It all started with me not wanting to work at a fast-food place.

There had to be a better way for a high school senior like me to make some money over the summer. I live in the United States where opportunity is abundant, so there had to be something more interesting and meaningful I could sink my teeth into.

A season of exciting expeditions exploring the forests, watching beach sunsets, devouring fresh berries, and swimming in warm waters were on the way and I was impatient. But then I started wondering how many kids really thought about the outdoors like that, and if they even knew about the secret alcoves along the Galien River, or the thick, wild grape vines twisting down from the thickets of the forest canopy that make perfect swings.

I lived my first few years in the city of Chicago, so when we moved to the Michigan country, it was a pivotal moment that made me grow to love the outdoors. I explored the woods, streams, rivers, prairies, and wetlands with fascination. My mom taught me names of trees, butterflies, wildflowers, reptiles and amphibians.

As more years passed I did cleanups and invasive species removals on Chikaming Open Lands' preserves, and I participated in programs and classes that taught conservation and the dangers the natural world is facing. I was horrified to learn that there was a trash vortex in the middle of the Pacific Ocean as large as Texas and that there were people chopping down the rainforests.

I think these things are critically important, but let's face it, they're depressing. So, instead of bogging everyone down with scary statistics, I decided to approach the issue in a more positive way: by working with children to instill in them an early appreciation of their environment. We all know that kids don't go outside as often as they used to; it's a subject that seems to be discussed left and right. Since I always want to be outside anyway, I thought, "*Why not get some children out here, too?*"

I cultivated these thoughts and came up with this idea: I would teach kids how to make cordage, which is a kind of rope made from cattails, how to create earth art from things they find in nature, and I would organize a beach cleanup along with a lesson about how our waterways are interconnected, to give kids a taste of the outdoors and get them hooked.



I wrote up a proposal for COL to see if they were interested in my idea. The idea quickly became reality when COL invited me to be an intern for them, and *Nature Explorers! A Discovery Series* was born.

I didn't know how the program would do or how I would do as a teacher or even if it was worth it, but after teaching 90 or so K-3rd graders about the outdoors, I knew that I was worrying about the wrong things.

At one session, a kindergartener raised his hand when I asked if anyone knew what cordage was, and tentatively he said, "I think it has something to do with Goldilocks and The Three Bears, and how they ate their *porridge*." And while everyone was attempting to twist their cordage into a workable rope, a girl exclaimed with eyes squinting up at me, "I feel like this should just be easier!" But they eventually got it, and seemed to come away with a new appreciation of the natural world around them.

There was one particularly passionate girl who came to all three of my sessions. She was so eager to learn and absorb her surroundings... she would get so excited she would flutter her hands like a fledgling bird about ready to take flight. That's when I realized that it was all good.

COL does things in small but crucial steps—preserve a forest here, create an easement there -- and I was doing the same thing. Each time I taught a session I saw that perhaps I was changing their futures, small step by small step.



Two of the four ditch plugs being installed in December 2012



One of the ditch plugs as seen this past September, now barely visible

Plans Move Forward for Sima Marsh Restoration Project



In 2014, COL plans to continue its restoration efforts at Louis J. Sima Marsh in New Buffalo, truly one of the “crown jewels” of its eight preserves.

This spring, we plan to release several thousand **galerucella beetles** in the preserve. Why? These beetles feed on the invasive purple loosestrife that has begun to fill the marsh. If this sounds familiar, it is because COL released beetles in the marsh in 2011 as well; however this population has since disappeared, likely due to the unusually warm winter that year.

Also, we will conduct another “marsh mow,” cutting down the dead cattails and phragmites left behind from chemical treatments so that the natives like marsh mallow have space to flourish. We also plan to seed some areas to encourage that and other natives to regrow. Check the website for updates on what is happening when!
www.chikamingopenlands.org



Ann Flesvig gives woody invasives the “heave-ho” in September

Dayton Wet Prairie Transformed (cont. from page 1)...

Ideally, COL will conduct another burn at Dayton Wet Prairie next fall, this time covering the portion of the preserve on the south side of Curran Road.

Now that the prescribed burn has been successfully completed, the final Stewardship Day is scheduled for November 16, at which time our volunteers will survey the burn site, and cut invasive species south of the burn area.

We can’t wait to share with you how much it’s changed by next summer! Stay tuned.



Judith Brown and Diane Fitzgerald in the tall native vegetation



Great Blue Lobelia



Joe Pye weed



Prescribed burn at Dayton Wet Prairie, October 28, 2013



Springwater Farm Soirée



Executive Director Chris Thompson and emcee Rob Gow speak to the crowd.



Top to bottom: COL President Steve Smith; guests Brian Ortiz, Keith Stolte, Robert Shearer and Gail Lowrie; Vivian May and Jean Sharp; harvest hors d'oeuvres; Peggy Cooper; Chef Jean Joho; benefit committee members Vickie Kaiser and Jean Smith (chair)

Springwater Farm Soirée a Great Success!

With a spectacular burst of orange and pink, the sun set on the Springwater Farm Soirée, Chikaming Open Lands' most successful benefit yet, raising over \$35,000 to support land protection in SW Michigan. Nearly 250 people bought tickets to visit Cynthia and Jean Joho's beautiful Baroda property, dine on spectacular hors d'oeuvres donated by the Chef, and participate in the silent auction.

Congratulations to high bidders Kirkwood Brodie (Everest dinner); Clay Robinson (Farm-to-Table dinner); Brian Ortiz (In the Walled Garden); Paula Fasseas (Cocktails and Coreopsis); and Grace & Scott Rappe (Candlelight Harvest Supper).

Many thanks to co-sponsors New Buffalo Savings Bank, Jean and Ken Schiffer/Baroda Founders Wine Cellar, and Pizzo & Associates for your commitment to COL's mission. Also, thanks to the donors of silent auction prizes, Cynthia Joho and Chef Joho; Granor Farm, Local and Brad Hindsley; Bill Kurtis and Donna LaPietra; Jeanie and Peter Van Nice; and Charlie Moore/Season's Harvest and Nancy Watson/Harbert House Bed & Breakfast.

And finally, many thanks and much gratitude to our hosts, Cynthia and Jean Joho, for all of their generosity, support, and commitment.



Sunset over Springwater Farm.



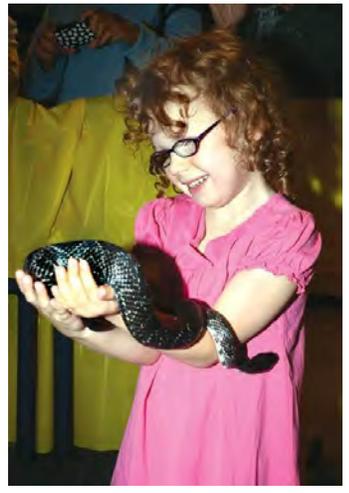
2013 Events



Observing the spring flowers at the Wild-flower Walk in May (left).



Agritour participants led by Nick Colin at Granor Farm (left) and David Alphonse at Old Shore Vineyards (above) had an all around fun and educational June afternoon!



Kids like Hope Wilson (above) loved the slither-y scale-y guests at *Lizards & Turtles & Snakes... Oh My!!!* In July. —Photo by David Johnson



Children make earth art (left) and cordage (above) at the *Nature Explorers!* sessions held at Robinson Woods in August.



Pat Underwood shows Autumn Color walkers a colorful (but assuredly poisonous!) mushroom in October.



A fantastic crew for August's Marsh Meander!

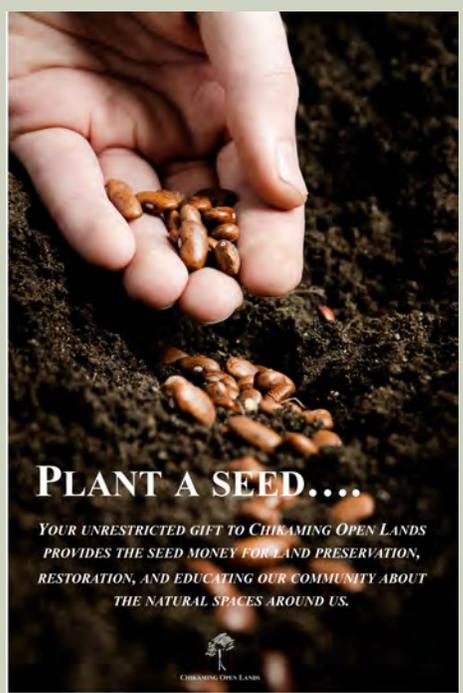
When you plant the seed of your unrestricted donation, Chikaming Open Lands grows and we all reap the rewards!

As board president Steve Smith shared in his letter on page two, COL recently drafted a five-year strategic plan. The idea of protecting another 1,000 acres, and the impact that will have on water, air and wildlife habitat, excites everyone! It's a challenge, but it's one we're up for!

The plan for undertaking this growth also calls for growth in Chikaming Open Lands' unrestricted income — donations from our members that serve as seed money for all we do. Members live, work and play where we protect open space, and so are the greatest beneficiaries of COL's work, and our most committed supporters.

We are entering the season of giving. This month, we will formally ask all of COL's members to make year-end donations in support of our work in 2014. We know you care about COL's mission to protect open space and the diverse natural character of Southwest Michigan. Your generous year-end donation prepares us to meet the challenges of the strategic plan.

CORRECTION: In the Spring 2013 Newsletter, COL mistakenly omitted Kathy and Scott Loess from the 2012 donor listings under the \$500-999 category. We regret the error.





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Three Cheers for Our Volunteers!!



Chikaming Open Lands would like to thank our amazing and dedicated stewardship volunteers for all their hard work keeping our eight preserves in tip-top shape.

This year, the stewards have put in lots of time and effort to make Robinson Woods Preserve more accessible to the public (*see article on page 3*). If you haven't taken a hike there recently, we encourage you to go check out the new interactive trail markers!

It is all possible due to our great volunteers, some of whom are pictured at left after our April Stewardship Day.

Robinson Woods recreational improvements were made possible in part by a grant from the Laura J. Musser Fund.

Learn more about volunteering at our website:
www.chikamingopenlands.org