UPCOMING EVENTS

March 2nd
Winter Membership & Awards Luncheon

March 13th
Water Conservation Workshop

April 21st
Earth Day Benefit Dinner

May 21st
25th Annual DuPage River Sweep
Our Mission Statement

We preserve and restore natural areas and open space, protect rivers and watersheds, and promote stewardship of our environment.

The Conservation Foundation is a 43-year-old private 501(c)3 land and water protection organization working to preserve nature in northeastern Illinois. FEIN #23-7221206

Follow us on Social Media!
When I heard Nancy Hamill Winter say, “Frankly, I don’t know of any other land trust in the whole United States that has been as successful in such a broad geographic area as The Conservation Foundation,” I could hardly believe my ears. And when her sister Betsy Bramsen concurred that she felt The Conservation Foundation was the best conservation land trust in the country, you could have knocked me over with a feather. I have come to know and respect the Hamill siblings each separately, but the afternoon I got to spend with all three of them together was a humbling and gratifying experience I will never forget.

Nancy, Betsy and their brother Jonathan together oversee the Hamill Family Foundation, and carry on the philanthropic and conservation-minded ethics of their parents, Joan and Conwith “Corky” Hamill. It was their decision to present The Conservation Foundation with our 2015 Hamill Family Foundation Matching Challenge, which matched new donations 2 to 1 after we raised $250,000. On this afternoon I got to ask them a bunch of questions that I had been wondering about. Why did they make the gift a challenge gift? What do they hope the gift will accomplish? Why The Conservation Foundation?

All three of the siblings shared so many fabulous stories about growing up in rural Wayne, where they were free to roam the woods and meadows around their home from sunup to sundown. A stream they named Sleepy Creek ran below their house on its way to the Fox River, so from an early age they all expressed feeling a connection to the Fox, which was at that time a very degraded river. Their parents took them canoeing, fishing and ice skating and taught them about the flora and fauna around them. As Nancy said, “Our little hollow by Sleepy Creek was a great place of nature.” Though their adult lives took all three of them in different directions, their childhood love of nature stayed with them and grew into a conviction to be part of conserving the history and natural resources of the Chicago region. And through their philanthropy and their leadership in area organizations, they have certainly made their mark. But all three were quick to say that it isn’t about name recognition, fame or even legacy.

“Our parents opened our eyes and showed us the way,” shared Jonathan. “We do it because we want to do it, because we’re all so personally interested in it.”

“The vision of your founder Brooks McCormick was a great inspiration to me and an example of what you can do if you really care about something,” said Nancy. “It’s very impressive that The Conservation Foundation has expanded, taken on the challenge of sprawl, and become strong enough to care about the Fox River all the way down to Dayton Bluffs. My hope for this gift is that it lets people enjoy nature and clean water. We need clean water! And I think The Conservation Foundation can be a real inspiration to other land trusts.”

It is my absolute honor to say that we exceeded our $250,000 Hamill Family Matching Challenge goal and have received an additional $500,000 from the Hamill Family Foundation. I want to sincerely thank the 640 individual donors who helped us make this match, and Nancy, Betsy, and Jonathan for the faith and trust they have shown in us by offering it. We have stretched and grown as an organization as a direct result of this opportunity.

By: Brook McDonald
President/CEO
Certification’s in Season

Throughout the summer and fall, our staff, interns and volunteers have been on the march like a conservation army, transforming the landscape one yard, corporate campus, school and public park at a time. It is so encouraging to see all of the home and business owners, municipalities, schools and other agencies who are committing to conservation-minded landscaping practices, and it is our pleasure to recognize them for their efforts through our Conservation@Home and Conservation@Work programs. Here are some of the highlights from this season of certification:

Lisle’s Morton Arboretum is a renowned place of learning and the enjoyment of trees. We were honored to present Kris Bachtell with the Arboretum’s Conservation@Work certification for their innovative stormwater management features, such as permeable pavement in their parking lots, and their commitment to conservation.

Plano High School students earned Conservation@Home certification for their school and the rain gardens they have been stewarding on school grounds for the last few years.

Joliet Junior College boasts hundreds of acres of natural areas, which they have incorporated into their curriculum and are managing with utmost concern for conservation and environmental health. These practices earned them Conservation@Work certification and the 2015 Sustainable Development Award from The Conservation Foundation.

Hawthorne Hill Nature Center in Elgin receives Conservation@Work certification.

Naperville’s iconic Naper Settlement earned Conservation@Work certification for their environmentally sustainable landscape designs and practices. Naper Settlement was also the winner of The Conservation Foundation’s Sustainable Development Award in 2011.
Waunobsee Community College in Sugar Grove was recognized for native landscaping and sustainable stormwater management at both their Sugar Grove and Plano campuses. They have also done extensive prairie and woodland restoration and incorporated solar and wind power on the Sugar Grove campus, making them most worthy of Conservation@Work certification.

Kelsey Shaw accepts Conservation@Work certification for Possibility Place Nursery in Monee. Possibility Place specializes in native plants.

We helped the Ronald McDonald House in Winfield earn Conservation@Work certification by planting a butterfly garden.

Dundee’s Schweitzer Nature Center’s beautiful native gardens and enthusiastic volunteers earned them their Conservation@Work certification.

The William Hammerschmidt Elementary School in Lombard recently opened its Learn+Play Gardens, the first green playgrounds in the district. We partnered with WRD Environmental to recognize the superior environmental elements of this project, including the use of native plants, rainwater conservation methods and reduced chemical use, with a Conservation@Work certification.
A High Five for the Wheaton Park District

Wheaton Park District and The Conservation Foundation have a long and storied history. Over the years, we have worked together on some key land acquisition and ecological restoration projects, rain barrel sales, environmental education initiatives and water conservation measures. In fact, our President/CEO Brook McDonald’s first foray into Illinois conservation work was at the Wheaton Park District’s Lincoln Marsh, which The Conservation Foundation helped to preserve!

But conservation is at work now more than ever at the Wheaton Park District, and their efforts earned them certification through our Conservation@Work program at five different sites this summer!

Angie Dosch of Wheaton Park District’s Cosley Zoo says, “We create relationships between people and nature.” And the site’s many on-the-ground examples of sound conservation design, such as pervious paving parking lots, bioswales for stormwater runoff, native gardens, recycling efforts and education on Blandings Turtles and other threatened species bring the message of conservation to life in a fun, touchable way. The site’s interpretive signage is one of the keys to its impact – it’s one thing to do lots of things right for the environment, but without the proper signage to explain to visitors what you are doing and why, the message can get lost. Cosley Zoo is a family friendly favorite, and its excellent signage makes it educational as well as fun.

Incorporating 11 new acres of “no mow” habitat, the Wheaton Park District’s Arrowhead Golf Course gives “golf green” a new meaning. With buffer areas of more than 10 feet around the course’s ponds, irrigation management that reduces waste and uses on-site water, invasive species management and minimal chemical use, Arrowhead is hardly the ecological desert that many golf courses are. Approximately 200 dead or dying ash trees had to be removed from the property, but they are being replaced with native trees that will increase the tree diversity on the site. Wheaton Park District is also working with the Audobon Society to improve habitat for birds on the golf course property. They are also considering installing The Conservation Foundation’s Pollinator Meadow Seed Mix that could add more flowering forbs to the roughs and “no mow” areas.

A naturalized shoreline at Wheaton Park District’s Northside Park has helped reduce goose populations and create habitat for songbirds, butterflies, dragonflies and other native species. About 75% of the park is located in a flood plain, and the district has been working for almost ten years with Christopher B. Burke Engineering, Ltd. to increase stormwater management capacity and efficiency. The parking lot is made of permeable pavers and LED lighting reduces energy use while still keeping the popular park well-lit. On the day I visited with Steve Hinchee as my guide, I was struck by what a wonderful neighborhood amenity this park is. Herons and egrets were happily fishing not far from fishermen on the piers, and there were runners, dog walkers, bikers and moms pushing strollers enjoying the paths and the peaceful atmosphere.

The 150-acre Lincoln Marsh is one of the largest naturalized parks in our area, and a true trash-to-treasure story. Our President/CEO Brook can tell you everything you want to know about that, but suffice it to say that Lincoln Marsh’s wetlands, oak savannah and woodlands, miles of trails and abundant wildlife are true gems of the Wheaton Park District.

The fifth Wheaton Park District site certified this season was Toohey Park, boasting many of the innovative features you’ve just read about on other Park District properties. We commend Wheaton Park District for their commitment to conservation and congratulate them on their various Conservation@Work certifications.

By: Jim Kleinwachter
Land Protection Specialist, Conservation@Home Program Manager

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

The 25th anniversary DuPage River Sweep will be held Saturday, May 21st, 2016.

Continue the legacy of the thousands of volunteers who have pulled more than 250 tons of trash out of the DuPage River and its tributaries over the last 25 years, transforming it from a degraded and dangerous river to a source of community pride and identity.

Change Flows at the 25th annual DuPage River Sweep.

Visit www.theconservationfoundation.org/sweep for more information and to register.
Harold Schessler was a quiet man, but his actions to protect the environment spoke loudly. Harold recently passed away after a lengthy battle with cancer, but his decades of conservation work and support of environmental organizations, including The Conservation Foundation, definitely left a legacy.

Harold lived an understated life on his nearly five-acre property near Yorkville. The site's four-acre high quality wetland known as a fen was his great love, and he dedicated himself wholeheartedly to this gem near Blackberry Creek. Harold sought legal protection for the natural area, placing a conservation easement on it with the Fox Valley Land Foundation (which merged with The Conservation Foundation in 2007). He followed up by donating the land under the easement to the Kendall County Forest Preserve District. Rare native plants such as Turtlehead (Chelone glabra) grace the fen with blossoms in late summer.

In addition, Harold supported numerous other non-profit organizations with environmental missions. He was an active supporter of the Alaska Conservation Society, as well as the Wild Cat Haven Sanctuary in Oregon. He was a bird enthusiast, housing several rescued parrots from Latin and South America. He was a backer of World Parrot Trust and Showing Animals Respect and Kindness (SHARK), both nonprofits that seek better treatment of animals.

Schessler's Fen remains in the hands of the Kendall County Forest Preserve District, but the remainder of Harold's property was donated to The Conservation Foundation upon his passing. In his estate planning, Harold sought to have The Conservation Foundation take legal ownership of his home and remaining one acre, and sell it. The proceeds of the sale will be used by The Conservation Foundation for conservation purposes.

The Conservation Foundation will proudly carry on Harold's efforts to protect natural areas in our region. We think Harold would be gratified to know that his fen will remain in its beautiful, natural state while we will continue to honor the Schessler legacy with our work in and around his community.

By: Scott LaMorte
Major Gifts Officer

With a very simple gift...
...you can help us do what we do today even better tomorrow.

Visit [www.theconservationfoundation.org](http://www.theconservationfoundation.org) for more information on gift and estate planning.
A refiner of petrochemicals and a conservation organization might seem unlikely partners, but the blossoming partnership between the CITGO Lemont Refinery and The Conservation Foundation flies in the face of that assumption. A common concern for the Heritage Quarries Recreation Area in Lemont has united us, and together we were able to gather nearly 300 volunteers for an October 24th restoration work day. This enthusiastic group set about the task of removing invasive plants that have been attacking native species and degrading the Recreation Area’s wildlife habitat.

“The large volunteer showing is a testament to how the environment can benefit from collaborative efforts,” said Dan Lobbes, our Director of Land Protection. “Since our founding in 1972, The Conservation Foundation, with help from volunteers, has preserved more than 33,000 acres of open space and natural land. We’re glad to partner with CITGO to restore the Heritage Quarries Recreation Area and make it even more educational and family-friendly.”

While the Heritage Quarries Recreation Area is certainly not the highest quality natural area we have ever encountered, it means a great deal to the thousands of students and families who live near it, and offers their greatest opportunity to connect with nature. And it is located amongst thousands of acres of forest preserve, including more than 65 miles of hiking and biking trails, as well as access to fishing and boating along the I & M Canal and the Consumers, Great Lakes and Icebox Quarries.

The environmental restoration effort of the Heritage Quarries Recreation Area is a part of the CITGO Caring for Our Coast initiative, a series of projects designed to boost ecological conservation, restoration and education. We have brought Jason Pettit, well known for his nearly two decades of work with the Kendall County Forest Preserve District, on board to manage this project. Another work day is being planned at the site in April of 2016.

By: Jill Johnson
Communications Manager

A Conservation@Home Spotlight:
Don & Espie Nelson

Don Nelson (pictured) and his wife Espie are long-time members of The Conservation Foundation and our Lower DuPage River Watershed Coalition, and have been a certified Conservation@Home property for more than 5 years. Their 35 acres along Lily Cache Creek in Plainfield are under the permanent protection of a conservation easement, which tells you something about the Nelson’s. They have a deep and personal regard for the natural environments of northern Illinois, especially Will County, and are committed to doing their part to preserve them for future generations.

Ten years ago Don and Espie planted a prairie on their property, and have been lovingly stewarding it ever since. They have been burning the site annually, hand pulling weeds and collecting seeds. I recently had the opportunity to visit the Nelson property, and what an amazing transformation in ten years! It was literally a pollinator’s field day in the Nelson prairie, with bees, butterflies and dragonflies flitting about in every direction. We saw several great egrets and a great blue heron wading in Lily Cache Creek. The Nelson’s prairie was just bursting with all of the love and dedication they have poured into it all of these years, and we sincerely commend them for their efforts.

By: Jill Johnson
Communications Manager

Don and Espie Nelson of Plainfield are tireless stewards of their 35 acres along Lily Cache Creek.
Planning for Preservation in the Big Rock Creek Watershed

Kane and Kendall Counties are home to the beautiful Big Rock Creek, a stream of exceptional natural value. In fact, Big Rock Creek is one of the highest quality streams in northern Illinois, and hosts several endangered and threatened species. Over the past year, local landowners, agencies and conservation group staff have been studying the Big Rock Creek basin in Kane and Kendall Counties as a part of the Big Rock Creek Land Conservation Planning Project.

The mission of their intended outcome, a strategic land conservation plan for the Big Rock Creek, is “to encourage individual and community-based preservation and protection of the highest quality natural areas along the main stem of Big Rock Creek through voluntary actions.”

The designated study area is the main stem of the Big Rock Creek, which lies within Kane and Kendall from Big Rock to south of Plano. The watershed currently is comprised of primarily agricultural and municipal areas, and the creek itself is made up of Class A and Class B sections meandering through high quality open savannas and natural areas.

Kane and Kendall Counties are two of the fastest growing counties in the entire country, and as they grow so does the risk for damage to the quality of Big Rock Creek. Our hope is that the Big Rock Creek Strategic Land Conservation Plan, while strictly voluntary, will serve as a guide to all of those making land use decisions in the watershed. Landowners of properties identified as priorities for protection in the plan will be contacted and made aware of the preservation options available to them.

This isn’t just a plan that will sit on a shelf collecting dust. The Conservation Foundation has led many similar planning projects, including the Lower Fox River Land Conservation Planning Project, which led to the protection of the 250+ acre Dayton Bluffs Preserve in Ottawa and the new Fox River Bluffs Forest Preserve in Yorkville.

By: John Church
Kendall County Program Director

Restoring Sacred Ground at Dayton Bluffs

Its rich history is one of the reasons the Dayton Bluffs Preserve is one of The Conservation Foundation’s greatest success stories over the last few years.

Not only does this 253-acre property boast a mile of river frontage, ravines bursting with rare native plants, high quality woodlands and incredible plant and wildlife diversity, there are also 14 Native American burial mounds located on the Dayton Bluffs. This is truly sacred ground. But the area around the mounds was choked with invasive brush like honeysuckle and buckthorn and many small tree saplings, making it difficult to navigate through and covering up the burial mounds. Our energetic Friends of the Dayton Bluffs volunteers have worked very hard to remove the brush and small trees and now the area is more open and you can see the mounds much better.

Eventually we plan to have a walking trail skirt the area around the burial mounds complete with interpretive signage that tells visitors they are looking at something of deep cultural and historical significance.

If you would like to join the restoration efforts at the Dayton Bluffs Preserve, we have volunteer work days at the site on the second Saturday of each month, 8am to Noon. You can contact Jennifer Hammer at 630-428-4500, Ext. 114 or email jhammer@theconservationfoundation.org to sign up.

By: Jill Johnson
Communications Manager

Jolie Krasinski (2nd from left) and Dennis O’Brien (far right) of the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation discuss restoration of the area around the burial mounds with TCF staff members Jennifer Hammer (far left) and Dan Lobbes (2nd from right). The Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation helped fund the purchase of Dayton Bluffs and have continued their support for its restoration.

By: John Church
Kendall County Program Director
People & Philanthropy

Interns Make Our World Go Round

The energy, fresh ideas and frankly just the extra hands of our recent short and longer-term interns has made quite an impact on The Conservation Foundation and our ability to further our mission over the last year. We want to sincerely thank all of these individuals for their time and willingness to do all sorts of tasks in the name of Illinois conservation!

By: Jill Johnson
Communications Manager

Introducing our Newest Trustee

We have had the privilege of welcoming Dennis Wisnosky of Naperville to our Board of Trustees. With bachelor’s degrees in Physics and Mathematics and master’s degrees in Electrical Engineering and Management Science, Dennis is not short on book-smarts, but he finds his greatest fascination in nature. Dennis decided to join The Conservation Foundation’s Board of Trustees because he wants to see as much open space preserved as possible.

“You can’t have too much,” Dennis said. “It’s what distinguishes this country from the rest; we intentionally preserve land and we recognize the folly of our past of destroying the ability for water to sustain animals, including us.”

Dennis is senior advisor/consultant for the Enterprise Data Management Council and he and his wife Rosemary have lived in Naperville for more than 30 years. During that time, they have both been heavily involved in the work of The Conservation Foundation and are frequent attendees of our activities and events.

In addition to his distinguished career and professional achievements, including being named one of the five heroes of manufacturing by Fortune Magazine in 1997, Dennis is also a pilot and loves taking people up in his restored 1942 Piper Cub airplane.

“I am privileged to have the opportunity to work closely with The Conservation Foundation’s leadership in pursuing our mission of preserving land and protecting rivers and streams,” Dennis said.

By: Jill Johnson
Communications Manager
Our Conservation@Home program earned the Urban Forestry Award for Most Sustainable Tree Program this past summer. Getting more native plants, trees and shrubs on the landscape is at the core of Conservation@Home, and in the last two years we have been focusing on distributing oak trees as a part of the Oak Recovery Program. Our Conservation@Home Program Manager Jim Kleinwachter accepted the award during a presentation at The Morton Arboretum.

For information on how to get started, visit www.theconservationfoundation.org/conservationathome.

By: Jill Johnson
Communications Manager

Our President/CEO
Your Nonprofit Executive of the Year

The West Suburban Philanthropic Network made official this year what we already knew – our President/CEO Brook McDonald is a legend. Brook was named the 2015 West Suburban Philanthropic Network’s Nonprofit Executive of the Year! Whether you know him as boss, dad, Nature Boy, husband, friend, colleague or fellow lover of the environment, you know that Brook is incredibly deserving of this recognition. He is passionate yet level-headed, polished yet genuine, a jock and a teddy bear, and an incredibly effective and inspiring leader to his staff, volunteers, supporters of The Conservation Foundation and all who have worked beside him on behalf of the natural world. Our deepest congratulations, Brook! We’re so proud to call you our own.

By: Jill Johnson
Communications Manager

Your West Suburban Philanthropic Network Nonprofit Executive of the Year, otherwise known as our President/CEO Brook McDonald on right, pictured with our Board Chairman, Christopher Burke
• Set up your automatic monthly contribution at www.theconservationfoundation.org/renewableresources, and forget about it! No checks to send in or due dates to remember. We’ll automatically bill your card and send a statement in December summarizing your gifts for that calendar year.

• Receive all of the benefits of membership in The Conservation Foundation, including a New Member Welcome Packet, email updates on important environmental events and issues in the region, and The Heron magazine, printed three times a year.

• Since it’s all done electronically and we don’t have to generate and mail reminders, you can feel great about helping to save significant natural and human resources.

• Accomplish more by giving a smaller amount more often. It’s a lot easier to find $20 a month than to come up with $240 all at once, and having a steady donation stream allows us to act quickly when an urgent conservation opportunity arises.

Visit www.theconservationfoundation.org/renewableresources for more information!