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A Promising Future

During this time of year, we get inundated with stories about what happened in the past year. Well, I'm going to do it to you too. Ha!! So, what did we do this year?

Through special Board and Committee members, Douglas Kaufman-Dickson, Krista Kirkham and Keith Pluymers, we developed and adopted a new personnel manual.

We increased our number of volunteer stewards, including apprentice stewards, from 21 to 30, so we have more energetic people helping to preserve and restore our prairies and savannas.

We held some great events during the year that included hikes open to the public, a special walk at Ridgetop Preserve for our large donors, and a River Event at Hayes Preserve exploring mussels of the

Probably the most exciting event we held was when kids from the Western Avenue Community Center in Bloomington came out to Merwin Preserve, had lunch and then rushed to have fun in the Mackinaw.

They caught crayfish, looked at animals under the microscope and had just plain fun in the river.

In February, we held a retreat with the Board and past Board members, where we discussed fundraising. Ultimately, the Board approved of a proposal by David Allen, of Development for Conservation. At the November Board meeting, the Board approved the proposed Fundraising Plan.

The future is bright for ParkLands! We have a lot to look forward to.

More events will be held. There will be more hikes available, another river event, the Wildflower walk at Merwin, special events for our donors and members and a New Year's hike at Sweeney Woods Preserve.

We are already engaged for three speaking events and looking for more. If you have an organization that needs a speaker, call our office and we will make arrangements to be there.



*Mary Jo Adams and Tom Niebur at the South Chinquapin Bluffs Preserve harvesting seeds of Leadplant, White Wild Indigo, Rattlesnake Master, Pale Coneflower and Compass Plant.



We continue to attend McLean County Chamber of Commerce events; some are social events and some are educational. By doing this, our staff and Board members are learning more and spreading the word about what ParkLands does.

The Board is going to develop a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion guideline and statement that will guide us into the future.

In February, the Board will hold a retreat to educate themselves on what preserves we have, how it is best to manage them and where ParkLands' priorities are in the future. This can lead to a strategic plan for property ownership.

It can take years to develop a capital project that could include a new storage facility or pavilions or educational facilities. Generally, the process involves the development of a concept, cost estimating, design and then fundraising. For this reason, an ad hoc committee will be formed from Board members to begin the process development of a future capital project.

We have up to three positions on the Board that will be open this year, so there will be a search for energetic and nature-minded candidates to help lead ParkLands into the future. Let us know, if you have an interest in being a part of this movement, either as a Board member or on one of our committees.

As stated, the future is bright for ParkLands and we are so glad that you are helping us move into the future. Thank you!



Working Together

We are extremely grateful to our members, stewards, volunteers, and donors for all they do and the ongoing support they give to ParkLands Foundation. This year ParkLands completed restoration projects and offered volunteer opportunities across McLean and Woodford Counties. These included the removal of invasive brush throughout the year at various preserves, starting an E-News email campaign and continuing our volunteer stewards program.



2023 Calendar of Events

South Chinquapin Bluffs Public Workday

As the weather began to warm up, volunteers gathered at South Chinquapin Bluffs to remove Honeysuckle, Autumn Olive, and Garlic Mustard.

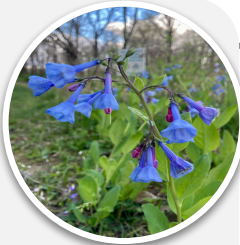


Merwin's Bluebell Season

If you visited the Merwin Preserve between April 15th and April 30th, chances are you witnessed the stunning sea of bluebells at the Merwin Preserve.

Earth Day Wildflower Walk

The annual Wildflower Walk was hosted on Earth Day this year at the Merwin Preserve, where participants viewed the first wildflowers of spring.



July 2nd Hike at the Moon Preserve

LBA Members, ParkLands Board members, and Volunteer Stewards enjoyed a lovely hike at the Moon Preserve to celebrate the July 4th and commemorate Finn Amble.



2023

Jan

New Years Day Hike

On the first day of the New Year we hiked Merwin Preserve's beautiful trails with a fantastic turnout!



Feb

First Hike with a Naturalist

ParkLands hosted its first ever monthly Hike with a Naturalist at the South Chinquapin Bluffs.



Mar

Hayes Woods Hike with a Naturalist

Participants enjoyed a scenic walk by the river at Hayes Woods Preserve for ParkLands second Hike with a Naturalist.

April

Workday with State Farm at Sweeney Woods Preserve

ParkLands hosted a group of volunteers from State Farm to remove honeysuckle and unwanted trees at the Sweeney Woods Preserve.



May

Bike Ride Sign-up Party

Keg Grove once again hosted our bike ride sign-up party. We talked to many of our riders and 20 signed up on that day!



June

Franklin Farm Meet and Greet with Senators Bennett and Koehler

ParkLands staff and volunteers met with our two state Senators to discuss the Franklin demonstration farm and ParkLands' receipt of the INAS grant



July



New Member hike

In the heat of the summer, we gathered our new members for a stroll around Letcher's Basin.

July

6th Annual Bike Ride

Nearly 200 riders met in Lexington for a day of riding alongside the prairies and woodlands of the Mackinaw River at our Annual Bike Ride.



Aug

Musseling on the Mackinaw

Our annual musselling event took place this year in the waters of the Mackinaw River at Hayes Woods Preserve. Children of all ages splashed in the river and had a blast exploring its aquatic diversity. Children collected, identified, and then returned the mussels to the river.



Moon Preserve Workday

Volunteers gathered at Moon Preserve on to remove invasive species.

Sept

Annual Meeting of Members

On September 10th we gathered to host our Annual Meeting of Members at the Franklin Family Farm, with a morning hike at Lexington Preserve.



2023 Autumnal Festival

ParkLands Foundation had a booth at Illinois State Universities Horticulture Center for their annual Autumnal Festival.

Nature Trails Day at Comlara Park

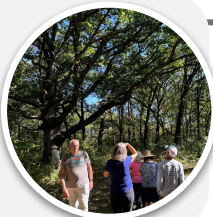
This years Nature Trails Day was hosted by the Illinois Master Naturalists. ParkLands handed out information and cool swag.



Oct

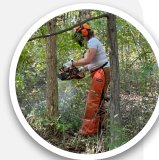
OLLI Tour at Chinquapin Bluffs

An Osher Lifelong Learning Institute class came to tour the South Chinquapin Bluffs and learn more about ParkLands.



Chainsaw Training

We held a chainsaw training session at the South Chinquapin Bluffs for our volunteers who were interested in learning how to safely use them on ParkLands Properties.



Nov

Hike with a Naturalist at Kenyon-Baller

Chuck Croxton and Andy Smoot guided a beautiful autumnal hike through the Kenyon-Baller Woods. Around 25 members of the public attended and learned more about the area.



Weston Cemetery Workday

Volunteer Stewards cleared out invasive woody shrubs and brush at ParkLands Weston Cemetery Nature Preserve.

Dec

ParkLands Holiday Get Together

ParkLands Volunteers, Staff, and Board Members met to celebrate and reflect on the past years accomplishments.

Volunteer Steward Meeting

We gathered at one of our Volunteer Stewards homes for a cozy morning meeting to review this year's changes to the organization and stewarding guidelines.



Upcoming Events

January

1

New Year's Day Hike

What better way to bring in the new year than time outside? Join us for a guided hike through Sweeney Woods Preserve! Start your year off right in nature! Check our website and social media to register for the hike!

Visit <https://www.parklandsfoundation.org/events/>



2023 Stewardship and Land Protection Updates

- ParkLands permanently protected 80 additional acres in Woodford County with a conservation easement in coordination with the Regional Conservation Partnership Program.
- We continued restoration projects at Ridgetop Nature Preserve, Letcher Basin Land and Water Reserve, Merwin Nature Preserve and Weston Cemetery Nature Preserve with funds from the IDNR Natural Areas Stewardship Grant.
- South Merwin's south trail was upgraded by Katie Heger and her team in completion of her Eagle Scout project.
- ParkLands also accepted a donation of 10 acres in Southeastern Woodford County from the Schlosser Family. You can visit our "News" page on our website to read more about the property and the land dedication ceremony. Go to <https://www.parklandsfoundation.org/schlosser-land-dedication/>

We hope to add more protected spaces in early 2024. Stay tuned for news of additional preserved lands!



Ike and Barb Schlosser at their land donation dedication

A Special Thanks to our 6th Annual Bike Ride Sponsors

On July 8th, 2023 ParkLands hosted its 6th Annual Bike Ride through some of ParkLands beautifully restored prairies and woodlands along the Mackinaw River. We had a 20 mile, 50 mile route, and a 100 kilometer ride. There was a great turnout this year and we had a great time!

**Our sponsors made this
all possible! Let us
thank...**

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ParkLands Foundation

2024 Event Calendar

All dates and times are tentative

January

New Year's Day Hike
January 1, 10am-12pm
Sweeney Woods Preserve

ParkLands Social Event
January 28, 2pm-4pm
Stave Wine Bar and Market

February

Hike with a Naturalist (possible
ski/snowshoe event)
February 10, 1pm-3pm
Merwin Nature Preserve

March

Hike with a Naturalist
March 16, 10am-12pm
Lexington Preserve

April

Wildflower Walk
April 27, 10am-12pm
Merwin Nature Preserve

May

Hike with a Naturalist
May 5, 10am-12pm
Hayes Woods Preserve

June

Hike with a Naturalist
June 15, 10am-12pm
Kenyon-Baller Preserve

July

Annual Bike Ride
July 13, 7am-1pm

August

Musseling the Mackinaw
August 17, 10am
South Chinquapin Bluffs Preserve

Hike with a Naturalist
August 24, 9am-11am
Letcher Basin Preserve

September

Annual Meeting of Members
September 8, 10:30am
Moon Preserve and Davis Lodge

October

ParkLands Stargazing with Twin
City Astronomers
October 4, 6:30pm
South Chinquapin Bluffs Preserve

November

Hike with a Naturalist
November 2, 1pm-3pm
South Chinquapin Bluffs Preserve

Board Member Spotlight – Tracy Shepard



Favorite Parklands "Spot" The Moon Preserve.

Years with Parklands

An earlier version of the Parklands web page on their History stated that my father, Trent A. Shepard, was one of the original founders of Parklands. My father used to go duck hunting with several of the other founders. Regarding the other Parklands founders, in 1986 we bought the Lake Bloomington cabin of Paul Snow and I went to Bloomington High School with Becky Lantz, daughter of Stanley Lantz.

Of the recent Parklands Directors, I grew up in Bloomington with Mac Arnold, Paul VanNess and Dan Deneen. Mac contacted my family several years ago and we donated money for a bench at the Merwin trailhead to honor our childhood friends Dana Soper and Jimmy Hiltabrand. Dan suggested I join the Parklands Board.

I have known Guy Fraker for many years and I worked with him and Dr Wil Thielemann on a Parklands project trying to establish a hiking trail along the north bank of the Mackinaw.

At the suggestion of Vickie Robertson, John Robertson and I recently joined the U of I Extension Master Naturalist program, under the guidance of Nick Frillman. The Master Naturalist program often overlaps with Parklands. Another member of our Master Naturalist crew is Janet Wiser. Janet is the steward of the Moon Preserve. John and I have been assisting Janet, along with Tom Niebur, with maintenance at the Moon Preserve. Jason Shoemaker is helping us set up a burn of the Moon Preserve in 2025. We call our Master Naturalist crew the Mighty Warriors. Kathy McLean and Ann Schreifels are also Parklands stewards from our Master Naturalist class.

Why Volunteer?

I have been planting trees and prairie since 1983 and working with Parklands was a perfect match for this interest in nature. I originally began exploring local nature with Audubon, lead by Margaret and Chuck Hollowell and Dale Birkenholz. I believe a third of all land should be set aside for nature, that there are too many people on our little planet, and that Kentucky Bluegrass has little value.

What is your favorite 'memory' with Parklands?

John Robertson and I were active with the YMCA Indian/Y-Guides. Once a year we would organize a hike for the parents and children. Usually Dale Birkenholz would lead us on a hike at Merwin in the spring during the bluebell bloom. Dale was an incredible master of nature and could answer all the children's many questions. It was great fun.



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