



ANNUAL REPORT 2023

Protecting the land, water,
and wildlife along the
Mackinaw River in McLean
and Woodford Counties.

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Letter from ParkLands Board President

ParkLands Foundation is going on 57 years old. It was born two years before the birth of Earth Day. I was a senior in college that year and it was a big celebration across the country. Rachel Carson, with her book "Silent Spring," had caused people to start thinking about how we treat the Earth. Over the years, the enthusiasm for Earth Day has waned but in recent years, people have started to see that we are losing the Earth's natural habitats. That means that the work of ParkLands Foundation takes on more importance every day. The work and contributions our Board, volunteers, donors, and staff make has a greater impact every day.

So, what did we do this year?

- We added two preserves to our lands totaling 65 acres in Woodford County. This is in addition to our 25 preserves and 3,300 acres.
- We increased our number of volunteer stewards, including apprentice stewards, from 20 to going on 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 Mackinaw.
- 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, 2023, the Board held 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.

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 have spoken to five community organizations and are looking for more. If you have an organization that needs a speaker, call our office and we will make arrangements to be there.
- 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 the good things that ParkLands does.
- The Board is going to develop a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion guideline and statement that will guide us into the future.
- It can take years to develop a capital project that could include a new storage facility, 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 of development of a future capital project.

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

Thank you for believing in ParkLands!



Frank Sanders
ParkLands Board President

Preserve



3,300 acres
of habitat
along the
**Mackinaw
River**

MCLEAN COUNTY 1,518.56 ACRES

Breen 1 Champion Federal Preserve.....	37.60 acres
Breen 2 Preserve	21.76 acres
Frey-Henline Preserve	80.91 acres
Hubert Preserve.....	4.80 acres
Lexington Preserve	173.32 acres
Merwin Nature Reserve and Land and Water Reserve	712.84 acres
Mohr Preserve	277.70 acres
Moon Preserve	42.45 acres
Newlin Preserve.....	20.20 acres
NIG Preserve	22.30 acres
Shelley Preserve	30.51 acres
Sweeney Preserve.....	92.63 acres
Weston Cemetery Prairie Nature Preserve	1.54 acres

WOODFORD COUNTY 1,374.61 ACRES

Hazle Preserve	40 acres
Chinquapin Bluffs Land and Water Reserve	728.78 acres
Devil's Backbone	55 acres
Woodrum Preserve.....	54.29 acres
Dungey-Sam Leman Canoe Launch	6.09 acres
Letcher Basin Land and Water Reserve	153.91 acres
Ridgetop Hill Prairie Nature Preserve.....	17.46 acres
Wyatt's Ford Preserve	61.88 acres
Kenyon-Baller Preserve	177.71 acres
Hayes Woods Preserve	69.49 acres
Schlosser-Denman Woods	10 acres

CONSERVATION EASEMENTS 483.96 ACRES

Betts Easement	86.8 acres
Sears-Butler Easement	120.52 acres
Fraker-Thornton Easement-Letcher Basin	51.73 acres
Fraker-Thornton Easement-Woodrum.....	5.71 acres
Franklin Farms Easement	139.2 acres
Stine Easment.....	80 acres

Preserve

25

Preserves under the
Parklands Foundation
protection

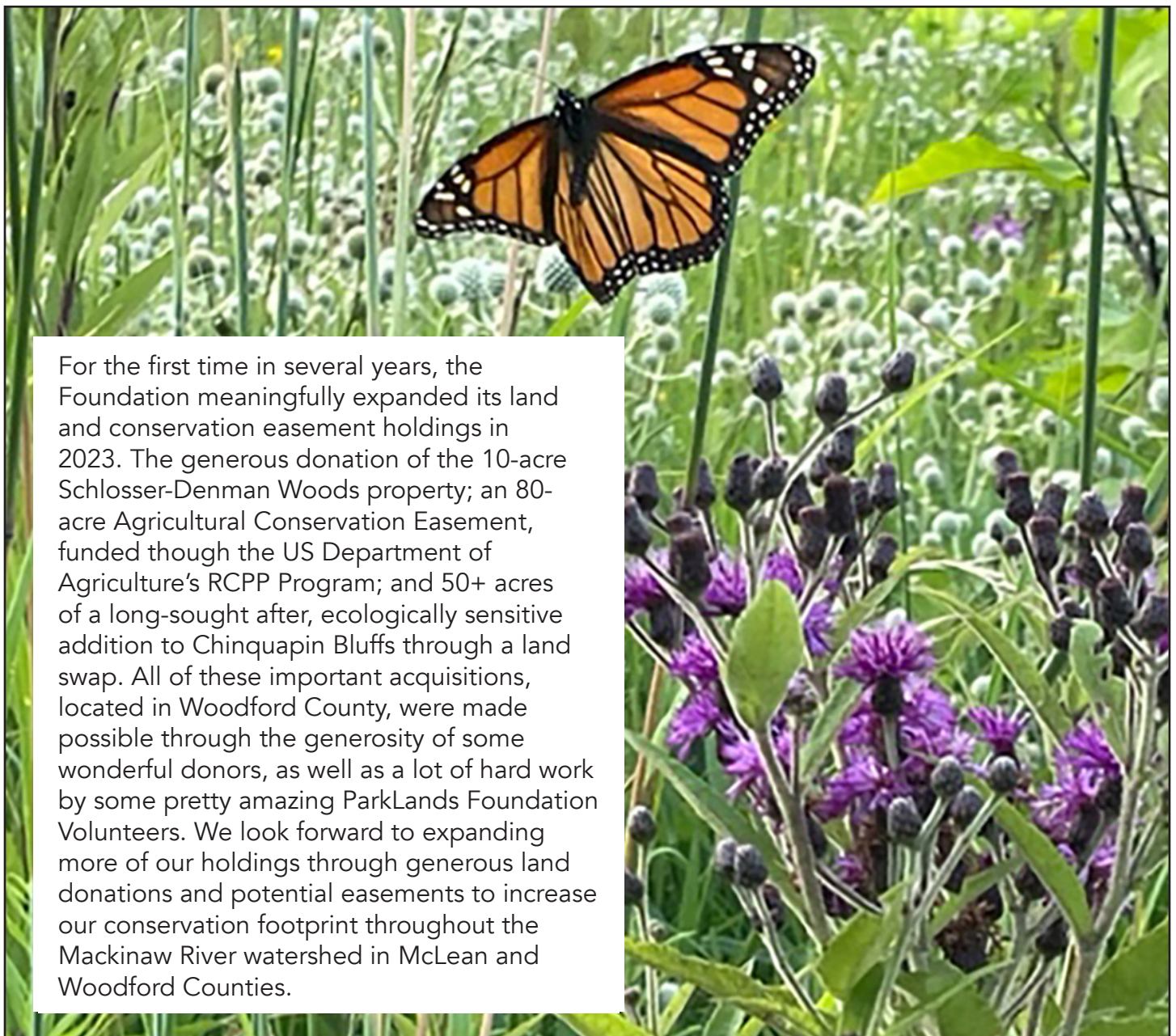
3,300

Acres of habitat along the
Mackinaw River

6

Conservation easements
held and inspected by
ParkLands

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)



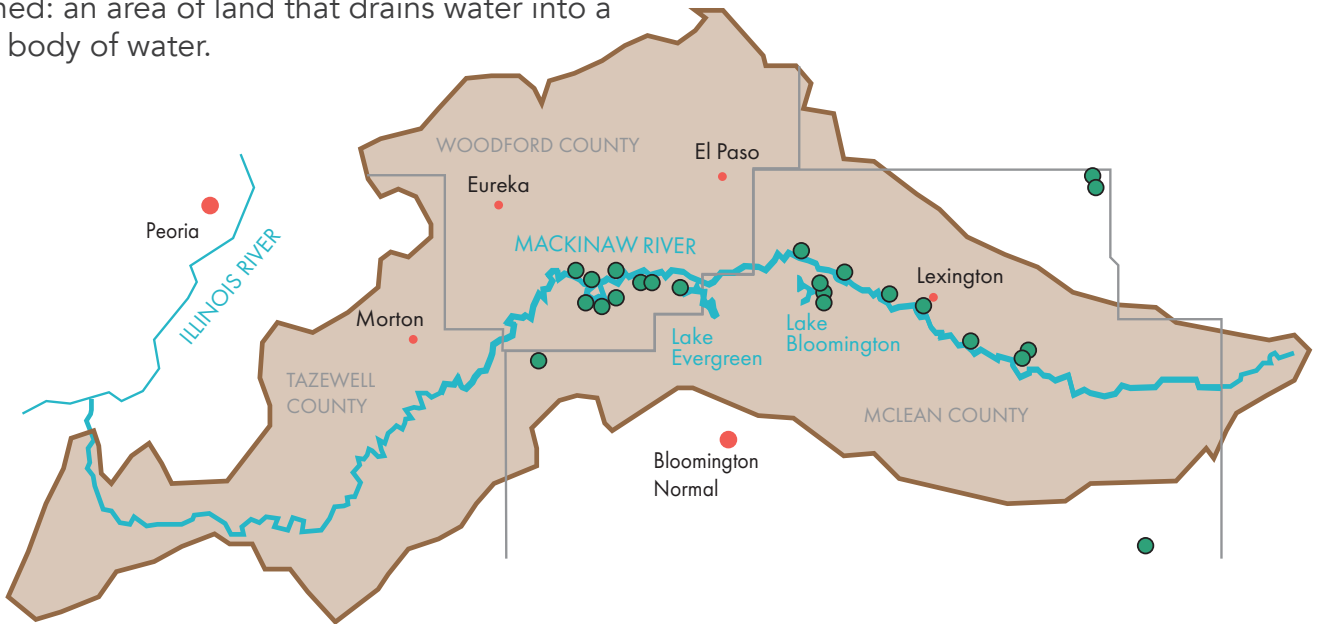
For the first time in several years, the Foundation meaningfully expanded its land and conservation easement holdings in 2023. The generous donation of the 10-acre Schlosser-Denman Woods property; an 80-acre Agricultural Conservation Easement, funded through the US Department of Agriculture's RCPP Program; and 50+ acres of a long-sought after, ecologically sensitive addition to Chinquapin Bluffs through a land swap. All of these important acquisitions, located in Woodford County, were made possible through the generosity of some wonderful donors, as well as a lot of hard work by some pretty amazing ParkLands Foundation Volunteers. We look forward to expanding more of our holdings through generous land donations and potential easements to increase our conservation footprint throughout the Mackinaw River watershed in McLean and Woodford Counties.

Protect

Mackinaw River Watershed

What is a watershed?

Watershed: an area of land that drains water into a specific body of water.



Achievements

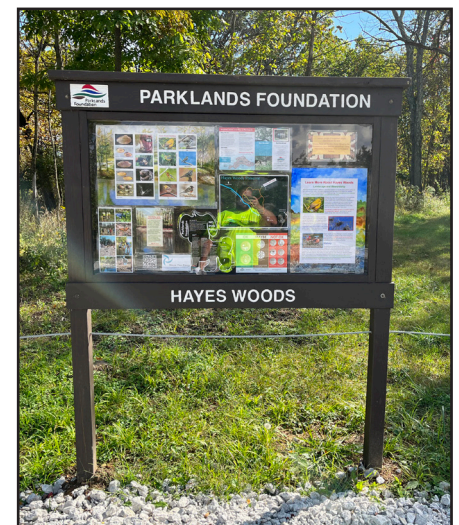
ParkLands once again received a grant from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to fund continuing work at our registered Land and Water Reserves and Nature Preserves.

The Illinois Prairie Community Foundation awarded ParkLands a grant from their Environment and Nature Grants Program. This grant was used to purchase supplies for volunteer stewards at each preserve. This will allow them to be more efficient, having what they need at their own location, as opposed to trading and borrowing between preserves.

ParkLands received a Public Amenities Grant from the Illinois Clean Energy Foundation in 2022 and this grant was used to construct a parking lot and add signage to Hayes Preserve.

The Nature Conservancy Volunteer Stewardship Network awarded ParkLands funds to purchase new fire equipment for our Volunteers.

Wilson Foundation awarded ParkLands funds to remove more invasive species and install a fence around the parking lot at the Champion Federal/Breen Preserve. Funds will also be used to install a new bench at the Merwin Preserve.



Manage & Restore

ParkLands Foundation's success wouldn't be possible without our supportive community, donors, members, and most importantly, volunteers. In 2023, ParkLands Foundation volunteers embarked on a multitude of tasks and projects to maintain, preserve, and improve ParkLands Foundation preserves in Woodford County and McLean County.

ParkLands Volunteer Stewards

ParkLands hosted a chainsaw training in fall of 2023 for our Volunteer Stewards.

Prescribed fires were implemented at the Chinquapin Bluffs Land and Water Reserve, Weston Cemetery Nature Preserve, and Letcher Basin Land and Water Reserve.

Working with the Ecology Action Center, five thousand trees were planted at Lexington Preserve to honor Mike Hall, who passed away in January of 2023. Mike was ParkLands' first Administrative Director, as well as a longtime supporter of both the Ecology Action Center and ParkLands Foundation, and is deeply missed.

We continue to have our intern program every year. We have given internships to two college students each summer. This is an opportunity that allows them to get hands-on paid work experience with our Land Steward and our Volunteer Stewards throughout the summer.

Lexington Preserve is in process of becoming another INPC (Illinois Nature Preserves Commisison) Land and Water Reserve and will be finalized in January of 2025. This will add additional protection for the property in perpetuity.



Kenner Gravel, as a child (l) then returning to the same spot as an intern in 2023 (r).



Katie Jo Jackson
Summer intern, 2023

Manage & Restore

In
2023

>50
volunteered

>1388
community volunteer & steward hours
were performed

Community Volunteers

Given Harper brought out his Illinois Wesleyan Restoration Ecology class to work at Lexington, Weston, and Merwin almost every Thursday in August through October.

Volunteers from State Farm spent a couple of days at Lexington Preserve removing invasive plants and clearing trails.

Several public workdays were held, giving the community a chance to make a positive impact on the environment at ParkLands Preserves.



Education, Outreach, & Events

Education is at the core of the mission at ParkLands Foundation, as education is essential for the sustainable and equitable use of natural lands. Our preserves are dedicated primarily for preserving the biological diversity of native plants and wildlife, and secondarily for passive public recreation, environmental education, and scientific research.

Our preserves offer the public opportunities for an experiential, hands-on approach to learning about the environment in Central Illinois. ParkLands Foundation organizes many educational opportunities for the community throughout the year including family-oriented activities for all ages in nature, informational programs, and tours at our Woodford County and McLean County preserves, and collaborative research projects with local universities.

Here are a few of our notable events. See more in the Calendar of Events on page 9.



More than 220 bicyclists took to the road in support of ParkLands Foundation at our 6th Annual Bike Ride.



Kids and adults enjoy the cool river water as they search for mussels and other aquatic creatures during our River Adventure.



Angelo Capparella, Ike Schlosser, Barb Schlosser, and Frank Sanders (left to right) attend the dedication of the Schlossers' land as it becomes a ParkLands Foundation property.



The Nature Conservancy and ParkLands staff and volunteers met with state Senators Bennett and Koehler to discuss the Franklin demonstration farm and the INAS grant awarded to ParkLands. Photo credit: Ashley Maybanks, The Nature Conservancy

Research



"Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose." - Zora Neale Hurston

At ParkLands Foundation, we encourage use of our preserves for research, but projects of any size need to be coordinated with the appropriate oversight organization or individual.

ParkLands Foundation preserves offer a rich environment for teaching and research activities, and are conveniently located a short distance from the Illinois State University campus in Bloomington-Normal.

Recent projects include the study of bumble bee infectious diseases, and ecological surveys of bobcats in Central Illinois on several of our

preserves.

Merwin is also home to a 40+ year study on house wrens. The Thompson, Sakaluk, and Nietlisbach Labs conduct house wren studies on Merwin and other ParkLands properties. The study area is home to over 700 nest boxes, some of which can be viewed from the Merwin trails.

The Sadd Lab surveys the bumble bee queen community every spring, including checking for infectious diseases. Some queens are used to establish colonies in the lab, which are used in studies to understand threats to native bumble bee health. Threats studied include parasites and pathogens, pesticide exposure, climate change, diet quality, and their interactions.



Investigators proposing to conduct research on listed (state or federal) species are required to obtain appropriate permits from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and/or the Illinois Department of Fish and Wildlife. Proof of permits are required prior to initiating any research on ParkLands preserves.

For information in conducting research at any of our McLean County or Woodford County preserves, contact info@parklandsfoundation.org to receive a brief project request form.

2023 Calendar of Events

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 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.

Master Naturalist's Home, Lawn, & Garden Day

ParkLands was in attendance to answer questions, give information and encourage membership of our organization.

April

Letcher Basin Hike with a Naturalist

Hikers celebrated spring during a guided hike at Letcher Basin.

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.



May

North Chinquapin Hike with a Naturalist

Hikers were led through North Chinquapin Preserve to learn about the flora and fauna specific to this area.

June

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!



July

July 2nd Hike at the Moon Preserve

Lake Bloomington Association Members, ParkLands Board Members, and Volunteer Stewards enjoyed a lovely hike at Moon Preserve to celebrate July 4th and commemorate Finn Amble, who passed away in September of 2022.



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.





New Member hike

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

Juy

6th Annual Bike Ride

Nearly 220 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 musseling event took place this year in the waters of the Mackinaw River at Hayes Woods Preserve. People of all ages splashed in the river and had a blast exploring its aquatic diversity. They collected, identified, and then returned the mussels to the river.



Sept

ISU Autumnal Festival

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



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.



Oct

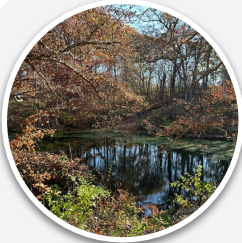
Nature Trails Day at Comlara Park

Hosted by the Illinois Master Naturalists, Nature Trails Day gave ParkLands the opportunity to teach kids and their parents about our organization.



OLLI Tour at Chinquapin Bluffs

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



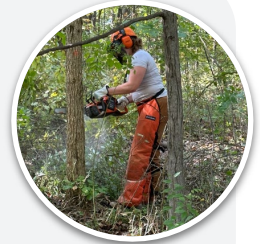
Hike with a Naturalist at Kenyon-Baller

Chuck Croxton and Andy Smoot guided a beautiful autumnal hike through the Kenyon-Baller Woods.

Nov

Chainsaw Training

We held a chainsaw training session at South Chinquapin Bluffs. This was provided for volunteers interested in learning how to safely use them on ParkLands Properties.



Dec

ParkLands Holiday Get Together

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

Volunteer Stewards Meeting

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



Finances

Overview of Fiscal Health as of the 2023-24 Fiscal Year ending Feb 29, 2024.

Throughout its long history, ParkLands has largely depended on the generous financial support of its members and other conservation-minded individuals, families, businesses, and various grant-making bodies to survive and thrive. This public support, in the form of annual membership dues, contributions to our annual appeal, thoughtful end-of-life bequests and memorial donations, fundraising through such events such as our annual bike ride, event sponsorships by local businesses, and corporate gift-matching programs, among other avenues of giving, are the financial “lifeline” of the Foundation.

Our general operating account finished the fiscal year on solid footing leaving us with sufficient cash reserves and a positive outlook to start the new year. Furthermore, our endowment accounts and other restricted-use reserves, which are invested through Schwab, had more than fully recovered from the stock market swings of the prior two years and had a record-high combined balance of just under \$1.8M at fiscal year-end.

This past fiscal year we also continued an especially important recent trend. For the past several years running, despite the tumult of the Covid pandemic and everything that followed, we have largely covered our annual operating expenses with our annual fundraising. And that is despite the very significant impact of inflation and of purposeful investments in increasing staff hours and wages and other necessary increases in operational spending. In FY2023-24, our “Functional Expenses” topped \$350,000 after exceeding \$300,000 for the first time (at least in recent history) the year prior. This recent success in avoiding operational deficits has allowed us to give a few of our endowments the “rest” they needed to recover after a period during which they had been relied on rather heavily, and the Foundation is on a stronger financial footing as a result.

All of this has only been possible through the incredible growing and continuing generosity of our members and other donors – more specifically resulting in a 3-4x increase in recurring, consistent public support over the past 4+ years. Every dollar counts and adds up, but we would be remiss if we didn’t give a special thanks to those “outsized” and often anonymous individual donors who have once again done much more than their fair share of giving – you know who you are!

Also very important has been our recent success at securing grant funding from both the State of Illinois and private granting bodies. In FY23-24, the nearly \$100,000 of grant funding we received from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources for equipment purchases and contract stewardship support at our preserves was a tremendous help in furthering the ParkLands mission, and

that success seems to be breeding more, as we’ve been awarded two more state grants – the first for follow-up on stewardship work, and the second for more needed equipment. Generous additional grant funding from the Illinois Prairie Community Foundation, the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, and other donors continues help us equip and enable the crucial efforts of our volunteer stewards and expand our stewardship efforts to some of our preserves that sometimes haven’t gotten the attention they’ve deserved.

For the first time in several years, the Foundation also meaningfully expanded its land and conservation easement holdings in FY23-24. The generous donation of the 10-acre Schlosser-Denman Woods property, the 80-acre Agricultural Conservation Easement which was funded through the US Department of Agriculture’s RCPP Program, and the long-sought acquisition of the ecologically sensitive 50-acre+ “Devil’s Backbone” property through a land swap, all of which are in Woodford County, are reflected in the financial statements. These important acquisitions were made possible through the generosity of some wonderful donors as well as a lot of hard work by some pretty amazing ParkLands Foundation volunteers. Again, you know who you are!

While this is wonderful news, if we put it in the context of the roughly 3,300 acres of vital natural lands we are striving to protect, improve and maintain, it’s still fair to say that our true financial needs to do the job justice continue to greatly exceed our resources, and the inflation we’ve experienced in recent years certainly hasn’t helped matters. But that said, I’d would like to drive home the progress that WE the members of the ParkLands Foundation have collectively been making over the past several years. As a result, we are well-positioned for continued success as we continue to define and pursue our mission-driven priorities over the next several years.

Finally, I would like to mention that, just recently, the Foundation’s auditors at Striegel Knobloch & Company LLC completed an audit of the Foundation’s FY23-24 Financial Statements which resulted in another “clean” opinion. It will be made available to members or other interested parties on request. We would be happy to address any questions as needed.

Respectfully,

Michael McKinley
Board Member and Treasurer

2023 ParkLands Volunteer Stewards

The Volunteer Steward program provides the ongoing, focused care and maintenance that is critical to our most precious locations. Volunteer Stewards take “ownership” of a preserve through regular, periodic visits (i.e. monthly) to check-in on the property. They might remove invasive vegetation, gather trash, or document needed maintenance. Thank you to these Volunteer Stewards for their hard work this past year.

Chinquapin Bluffs Land and Water Reserve

Mary Jo Adams

Jim Franks

Tom Niebur

Suzanne Rogers

Frank Sanders

Chinquapin Canoe Launch

Wayne Gustafson

Bill Snyder

Hayes Woods Preserve

Ann Schreifels

Kenyon-Baller Woods Preserve

Chuck Croxton

Andy Smoot

Letcher Basin Land and Water Reserve

George Farnsworth

Dianne Feasley

Douglas Kaufman-Dickson

Jack Pfaffmann

Lexington Preserve

Jeff Howard

Terrie Howard

Mohr Preserve (Bunney Tract)

Amy Woodrum

Moon Preserve

John Robertson

Tracy Shepard

Herb Wiser

Janet Wiser

Ridgetop Hill Prairie

Denise Ellis

Sherrie Snyder

Sweeney Woods

Lexi Farmer

Thomas Farmer

Wyatt's Ford Preserve

Mary Jo Adams

Weston Cemetery Prairie Nature Preserve

Kathy McLean

Kiosk and Sign Manager for All Preserves

Peg Schickedanz

2023 ParkLands Committee Members

The following committees within ParkLands Foundation help monitor progress, make plans, and report to the Board of Directors on their respective subject areas.

Development Committee

Dan Deneen
Mike Doherty
Dee Frautschi, Chair
Shannon Fulton
Michael McKinley
Frank Sanders

Finance Committee

Michael McKinley, Chair
Dan Deneen
Jim Franks
Bill Snyder

Membership Committee

Nancy Armstrong, Chair
Douglas Kaufman-Dickson
Krista Kirkham
Michael McKinley
Keith Pluymers
Paul Van Ness

Outreach Committee

Mary Jo Adams
Vasudha Gadhiraaju
Craig Lutes, Chair
Keith Pluymers
Frank Sanders
Jan Turner
Paul Van Ness

Stewardship Committee

Roger Anderson
Angelo Capparella
Katy Everett, Co-Chair
Krista Kirkham
George Farnsworth
Jim Franks
Given Harper
Douglas Kaufman-Dickson, Co-Chair
Krista Kirkham
Frank Sanders
Eric Smith
Bill Snyder

Real Property Committee

Dan Deneen, Co-Chair
Matt Fraker
Shannon Fulton
Eric Smith, Co-Chair
Bill Snyder



ParkLands Foundation

2023 Board of Directors

ParkLands Foundation is led by a committed and talented all-volunteer Board of Directors, and a small, but very dedicated paid staff comprised of our Director of Development and Administration, Land Steward, and Outreach Coordinator.



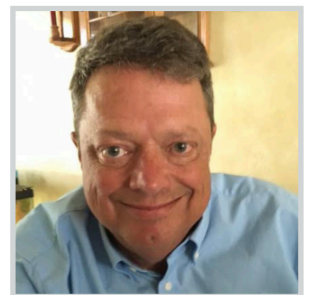
**Frank
Sanders**
President



**Shannon
Fulton**
Vice President



**Michael
McKinley**
Treasurer



**Jim
Franks**
Secretary



**Dan
Deneen**
Director



**Michael
Doherty**
Director



**Katy
Everett**
Director



**Vasudha
Gadhiaju**
Director



**Robert
Fitzgerald**
Director



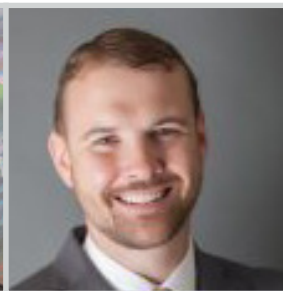
**George
Farnsworth**
Director



**Dee
Frautschi**
Director



**Douglas
Kaufman-Dickson**
Director



**Mark
Larsen**
Director



**Craig
Lutes**
Director

ParkLands Foundation 2023 Board of Directors



**Keith
Pluymers**
Director



**Corrie
Scott**
Director



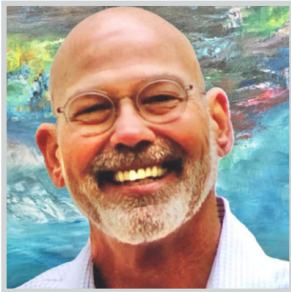
**Tracy
Shepard**
Director



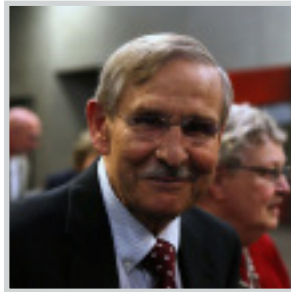
**Eric
Smith**
Director



**Bill
Snyder**
Director



**Paul
Van Ness**
Director



**Roger
Anderson**
Honorary
Director



**Guy
Fraker**
Honorary
Director



**Dale
Birkenholz**
Honorary Director
(Deceased)

ParkLands Foundation Staff



**Jason
Shoemaker**
Land Steward



Erin Herbez
Director of
Development &
Administration



Addie Burns
Volunteer &
Outreach
Coordinator

Sponsors & Funders

Public Agencies

Illinois Department of Natural Resources

Business & Private Supporters

Bloomington Cycle and Fitness

Caterpillar Foundation

Commerce Bank & Trust Company

Daniel G Deneen Law Office

Deer's Mill Farm

Gentle Family Dentistry

Heartland Bank & Trust

Keg Grove Brewing Company

Kemp's Upper Tap

Prairie Oak Veterinary

Vitesse Cycle Shop

Wilson Conservation Trust

Zimmerman & Armstrong Investment Advisors

Nonprofit Sponsors & Partners

Ecology Action Center (EAC)

Grand Prairie Friends

Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation

Illinois Prairie Community Foundation

Illinois Prairie Wild Ones

New Covenant Community Church

The Nature Conservancy

U of I Extension Master Naturalists and Master Gardeners



Shooting Stars at Weston Cemetery Prairie Nature Preserve



YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS ARE ESSENTIAL IN PRESERVING LIFE ALONG THE MACKINAW RIVER.

Become a Volunteer or Donate Today

With only one full-time Land Steward to care for 3,300 acres across 25 preserves in two counties, volunteers are at the core of ParkLands Foundation's success. There is no experience required to become a Volunteer Steward!

Stewardship workdays are scheduled throughout the year and are posted on the event calendar of our website and social media pages. Individuals and groups of corporate employees, scouts, retirees, and students are encouraged to sign up! Or volunteer on a regular basis at your choice of preserve.

Join the community on the front lines of conservation and consider a donation that will go a long way to preserve and restore Central Illinois to its greatness as the home of the Grand Prairie.

There are many ways to donate. Become a member. Establish your legacy for now and the future with estate planning. Set up monthly gifting. And, if appropriate and advisable by your tax accountant, make a non-taxable donation from your IRA.

However you decide to give, you will become a ParkLands Champion! Visit parklandsfoundation.org for more information.



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