



# Beyond BOUNDARIES

*The Barrington Greenway Initiative Promotes Conservation  
Collaboration to Link Vital Open Spaces*

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*A view of Penny Road Pond in Barrington Hills.*





Lake County Forest Preserves

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FOUNDATION



A SALAMANDER EMERGES from the vernal pool where it hatches to live in a mixed hardwood forest as a red-headed woodpecker disappears into the cavity of a tall, dead tree. A rusty bumblebee gathering nectar from spring wildflowers in the forest moves to a nearby prairie for a summer feast, where a smooth green snake scans the ground for grasshoppers and beetles. Not reading signs, they are oblivious to who owns the land, but thrive in high-quality habitats provided by people who care.

Tom Vanderpoel cared. The restoration director for Citizens for Conservation (CFC) and an active conservation volunteer for more than 40 years until his passing in August 2017, Vanderpoel knew no limits. He and a dedicated cadre of volunteers worked every week to transform local natural areas into sanctuaries for rare native plants and the indigenous animals that are dependent upon them—removing invasive species, gathering and dispersing native seed, and educating others along the way. They were not alone. Today, individual landowners and not-for-profits together with forest preserves are striving to improve the ecological health of the Barrington Area Council of Governments (BACOG) region through the coordinated efforts of the Barrington Greenway Initiative (BGI). The north-south plan for linking habitats in Cook, Lake, and McHenry counties, including prairies, wetlands, and forest preserves, runs in an arc from Popular Creek Forest Preserve, south of Interstate 90, and north to the Fox River Preserve in Port Barrington, according to Citizens for Conservation.

### • An outgrowth of generosity •

The Bobolink Foundation, Citizens for Conservation, Friends of the Forest Preserves, Audubon Great Lakes, Forest Preserves of Cook County (FPCC) and Lake County Forest Preserves (LCFP) formalized this collaboration in 2016 to create habitat corridors for 12 priority species identified by wildlife specialists, ecologists, and social scientists for Chicago Wilderness. According to the Chicago Wilderness website, “supporting these species and their habitats enhances air and water quality, nurtures a multitude of wildlife populations, and preserves the last fragments of our region’s globally rare ecosystems.”

While Barrington Greenway Initiative (BGI) is new, many of these inter-organizational and individual relationships have been nurtured for decades.

“I believe that the Barrington Greenway Initiative has always been an idea that Tom and his dad, Waid, shared,” Lake County Forest Preserves Director of Natural Resources Jim Anderson said, citing their dedicated work to protect open space in and around Barrington including Cuba Marsh, Grassy Lake, and Fox River Forest Preserves, properties that LCFP eventually acquired.

Aligning with CFC’s BGI vision of connecting 14,000 acres, Lake County Forest Preserves rolled out the Lake County Green Infrastructure Model and Strategy (LCGIMS) in 2017. This identified important Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas in and around Lake County. Almost 2,000 acres of Forest Preserves will support BGI’s 14,000 acre goal.





On Sept. 30, 2017, volunteers for Citizens for Conservation collect seeds at Galloping Hill. From left: Cliff Schultz, Tyson Leitalo (a student at Whitney Young), Joyce Leitalo, and David Cook, a Spring Creek Steward volunteer.



Prairie Middle School students John Crossin (left) and Alex Kermath help collect seeds for CFC.



CFC leaders Jim Vanderpoel, vice president, and Tom Crosh, president, gather seeds at Galloping Hill.





CFC Board Member Gail Vanderpoel, Matt Hokanson, Larry Anglada, and Daniel Suarez of the Audubon Society/Great Lakes Region work together on Galloping Hill.

For Bobolink Foundation Chief Conservation Officer Justin Pepper, “BGI is not only about excellence, but generosity.” Describing the initiative as “an outgrowth of the generosity of Tom Vanderpoel,” Pepper said, “It’s really about increasing the scale of the restoration for climate change, water quality, human benefits, and wildlife benefits, from hundreds of acres to tens of thousands of acres.”

“I think the basic concept of CFC and the BGI is to help nature be as good as it can be to deliver services back to the community,” CFC’s BGI Chair Steve Smith said. These services include flood and erosion control, air and water purification, aquifer replenishment, pollinator habitat, carbon sequestration, and resources for recreation, education, and wellness. Prairies process organic matter and sequester carbon. A mature oak-hickory forest can remove over 130 tons of carbon per acre and reduce soil erosion. An acre of wetland can reduce peak flows by 85 percent, storing upwards of 1,000,000 gallons of floodwater and retaining more than 70 percent of sediment. Natural wetlands lower the cost of water treatment from \$4.36 per 1,000 gallons to \$0.63 per 1,000 gallons (in 2014 dollars). Spending time in nature can reduce stress, contributing to the physical, mental, and spiritual well being of the human community—a value that is difficult to quantify in dollars.

### • *Connecting the dots* •

Land acquisition, restoration, and education efforts are supported by committed volunteers, stewards, paid interns, restoration professionals, and wildlife biologists from partnering organizations utilizing each other’s strengths to create synergies.

“We’ve learned a lot, but one of the biggest things is compromise, and how better to work together to meet common goals across the three land-owners with one crew,” says Forest Preserves of Cook County (FPCC) Director of Resource Management John McCabe. “We do have differences of opinions on how to do certain land management work; but it’s good to see and hear other professionals’ thoughts on these items.”

To assist with planning, LCFP has hired a doctoral student in Biological Sciences to examine over 10 years of wildlife monitoring data to offer recommendations regarding the restoration of natural communities as they relate to each other geographically. “For 2018, we are looking at further restoration work at Cuba Marsh, removing drain tiles to restore the historical hydrological conditions,” Anderson said. “We will also be working on replacing the water control structure on the central marsh to create a hemi-marsh for wetland dependent bird and animal species.”

“With BGI Explore and Restore events kicking off in January, we’re really





## Ways You Can Help

- Learn about native landscaping, so you can improve the ecological value of your land. Visit the library to find local resources.
- Participate in an upcoming BGI “Explore & Restore” Events:

**Sunday, Jan. 14:** Cuba Marsh Brush Cutting, at 21185 N. Ela Road, Deer Park;

**Saturday, Feb. 10:** Spring Creek Brush-cutting (Spring Lake Nature Preserve) at 348 Donlea Road, Barrington, or Healy Road Savanna, if weather does not permit: 16 Healy Rd., Barrington

- Visit [citizensforconservation.org](http://citizensforconservation.org) for information regarding future BGI “Explore & Restore” Events
- Donate funds to support BGI's work. Contact CFC and indicate you'd like to make a donation for BGI.

trying to illustrate the breadth of what we do—buckthorn removal in winter, sedge planting in spring, bird watching [spring-fall], long exploratory hikes [in summer], and seed collecting in fall,” explains Audubon Great Lakes Stewardship Program Associate Daniel Suarez. “We want to welcome people who have never really engaged with nature.”

### • *Acreage and proximity matter* •

Sustainable grassland bird communities require at least 500 acres of land to support breeding, migrating, and year-round populations. Prairie reptiles and amphibians need 200 acres of habitat to maintain healthy populations. While birds have not been actively reintroduced, populations of Henslow's sparrows and bobolinks, which continue to suffer declines on the national front, have increased on less than 1,000 acres of restored prairie in the 4,000-acre Spring Creek Forest Preserve complex.


Responding to the collaborative work begun over a decade ago by Audubon Chicago Region's founding director Stephen Packard, together with Justin Pepper, Forest Preserves of Cook County, the dedicated volunteer Spring Creek Stewards, and generous seed donations from CFC, these once steadily disappearing birds are returning and multiplying. Galloping Hill, one of the sites these pre-BGI collaborators restored over the course of the past decade, hosted its first seed collection day this past fall.

Smooth green snakes that once flourished in local prairies will be reintroduced by researchers and herpetologists from Peggy Notebaert Nature

Museum and CFC volunteers to carefully selected sites this spring as part of the Green Snake Recovery Project.

“It's all about working together, through shared and coordinated efforts to provide greater ecological impact,” emphasizes CFC Board Member Patty Barten. “All lands are supported by all partners. Leaders from the strategic partner groups collaborate on executing the prioritized activities, determining who will contribute which specific resources and coordinating these respective aspects.”

“If [BGI] is going to be successful, there has to be a broad base of support with a shared commitment to high standards of habitat restoration and participatory volunteer conservation stewardship,” Pepper said. “It will take time to get to the scale we want. We need additional volunteers, but this effort and aspiration is really important to us and it's wonderful to be a part of it.” Joining hands in collaborative conservation produces not only a stronger

community, but a better place for everyone to live. 

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*April Dickey Anderson writes children's stories, designs native wildflower gardens, and leads engaging nature walks. To learn more, please visit her website: [naturallygoodinterpretation.weebly.com](http://naturallygoodinterpretation.weebly.com).*

