



What is Chicago Wilderness?

Chicago Wilderness is a regional alliance that connects people and nature. More than 250 diverse organizations work together to restore local nature and improve the quality of life for all who live in the region, by protecting the lands and waters on which they depend. Members work collaboratively in a region of 34 counties, more than 480 municipalities and 10 million people across four states.

Collaborative Conservation Action Across a Metropolitan Landscape

Since 1996, Chicago Wilderness has leveraged more than \$13 million in federal funding to plan, fund, and implement more than 480 collaborative projects to protect, restore and manage the rich natural heritage of the Chicago region, and to educate and engage local residents as stewards of our lands and waters. **The Chicago Wilderness Corporate Council contributes significantly to these efforts and to date has contributed \$1 million to the work of the alliance.**

The work of the Chicago Wilderness alliance and Corporate Council is accomplished through four strategic initiatives:

The Chicago Wilderness Green Infrastructure Vision: The “GIV” is an action plan for creating a region where nature is accessible to all residents and the built environment reflects our commitment to sustaining a healthy environment for today, and for generations to come.

Leave No Child Inside: A region-wide campaign to engage adults—parents, caregivers, community leaders—in improving the health and well being of children through unstructured play and outdoor exploration, while fostering generations of children that care enough about nature to protect it.

Restoring the Health of Local Nature: Chicago Wilderness and Corporate Council members are applying the best science to restore and manage the region’s natural areas, while engaging thousands of volunteers as stewards of the landscape.

Climate Change: The Chicago Wilderness Climate Action Plan for Nature identifies adaptive conservation practices and strategies to mitigate the threat of climate change through land and water conservation action, placing climate-fighting value on our region’s natural areas and open spaces.

Recent Accomplishments

Chicago Wilderness and the Chicago Wilderness Corporate Council are making a significant conservation impact in the region, a true testament to the work of our unique alliance and its partners. During the last two fiscal years, we have celebrated:

- The passage of the Chicago Wilderness Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights by the Illinois legislature, along with the declaration of every June as Leave No Child Inside month.

- The participation of more than 3,000 families and children in June, 2010 Leave No Child Inside month programs, with activities designed to connect children to nature and foster a long-term sense of stewardship.
- The engagement of more than 300 people, including number of high school groups, in the Chicago Wilderness Corporate Council Day of Service, an annual event that promotes stewardship of the region's natural resources.
- The establishment of the Teaching Academy, which will build the capacity of high school teachers to incorporate concepts of biodiversity into their environmental education programs.
- The release of the Chicago Wilderness Climate Action Plan for Nature; the first plan to link climate change specifically to issues of biodiversity conservation across a metropolitan region.
- Concrete recommendations and a powerful model for collaborative conservation in response to the President's America's Great Outdoors initiative to shape a new, national conservation agenda for the 21st century.
- The enthusiasm and cooperation engendered by our collaborative approach to conservation as more than 550 representatives of over 240 organizations, as well as students, volunteers, and conservationists from around the country, joined together for the 7th biennial Chicago Wilderness Congress in November, 2010.
- The creation of the Urban Forestry Task Force, dedicated to addressing the unique challenges of promoting woodland biodiversity conservation in a metropolitan and suburban environment.
- The launch of a regional, collaborative invasive plant management program: the Northeastern Illinois Invasive Plant Partnership.
- Reaching the milestone of more than 1,000 individuals trained through the Chicago Wilderness Midwest Ecological Prescription Burn Training class.
- The funding of two conferences to promote green infrastructure protection within local municipalities.
- More than 38 grant awards, totaling over \$15 million, through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative to support priority conservation projects that will advance biodiversity recovery in our region.
- The creation of the Metropolitan Greenspaces Alliance (MGA). The Chicago Wilderness alliance serves as a national model for coordinating conservation efforts at a regional scale across a metropolitan landscape. In 2009, Chicago Wilderness helped form the MGA, a group of conservation coalitions that work across extensive natural landscapes. The MGA includes Chicago, Cleveland, Houston, Los Angeles and Portland and in aggregate, comprise more than 500 nonprofit and public organizations, and regions comprised of 23 million people. Because we have brought so many organizations together, investments are leveraged many times.

A Look Ahead

The world and our region are changing rapidly, and we are thoughtfully determining present actions with an eye to the health and resiliency of the Chicago wilderness landscape. With newly-completed action plans for each of our four strategic initiatives, we are focusing on shared conservation priorities to address key issues and opportunities in the region. Through our diverse membership, we seek to deepen relationships and impacts in communities where we work, and expand our efforts into areas where we've identified conservation needs. By working together, we can make a difference at many scales: on our conservation sites, in our neighborhoods and communities, and in our region.