



restoration

collaboration

education

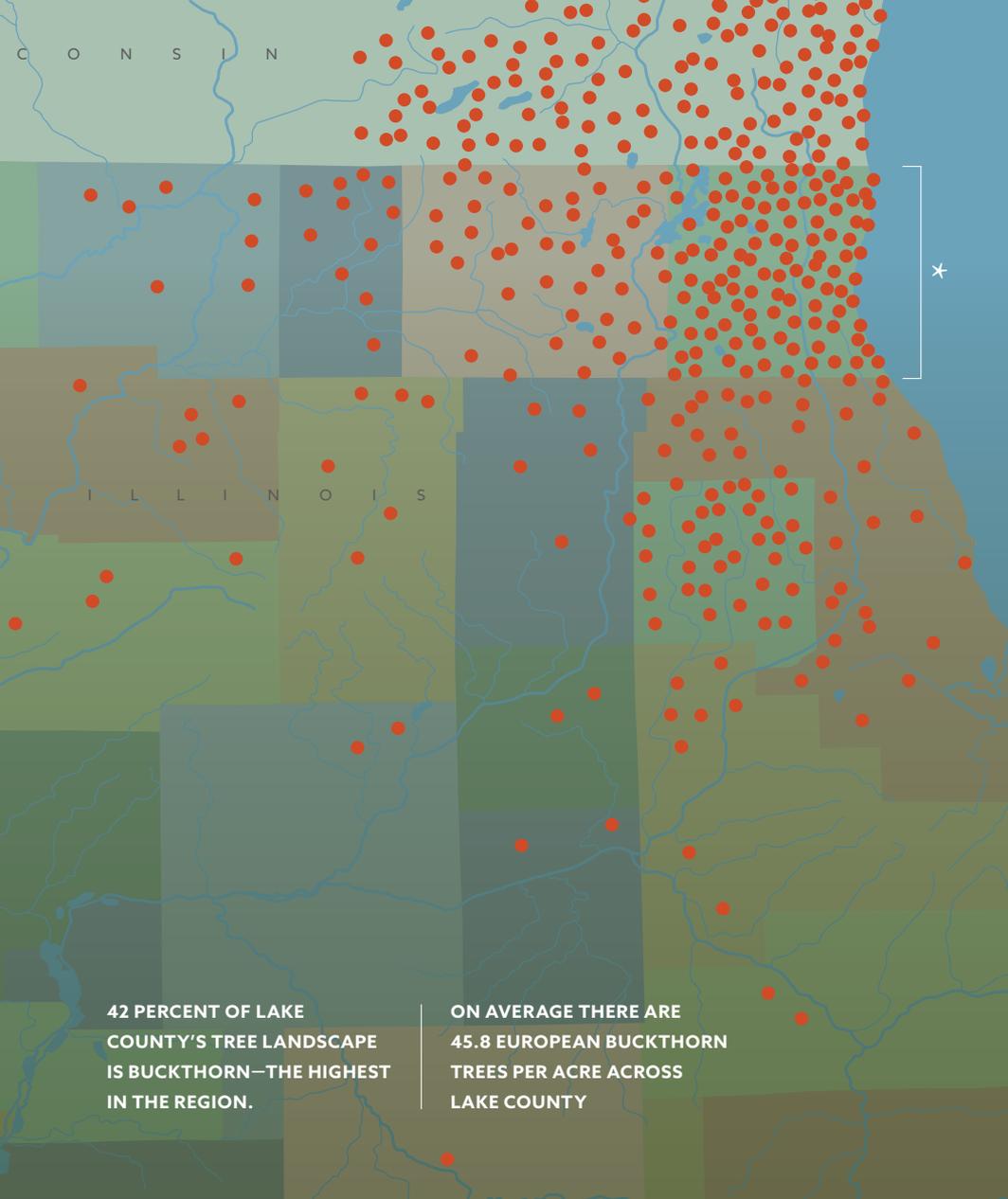


PRESERVATION FOUNDATION
2017 ANNUAL REPORT

For decades, invasive plant species from around the world have spread across Lake County, threatening local biodiversity and native ecosystems. One of the most problematic is European buckthorn.

(Cover) While their glossy, black berries are beautiful, buckthorn seeds are not a healthy food source for wildlife and remain viable in the soil for two to six years. Removal efforts should start with fruit-bearing trees to reduce spread. (Below, from left) European buckthorn thicket, leaves, fruits, and bark.





42 PERCENT OF LAKE COUNTY'S TREE LANDSCAPE IS BUCKTHORN—THE HIGHEST IN THE REGION.

ON AVERAGE THERE ARE 45.8 EUROPEAN BUCKTHORN TREES PER ACRE ACROSS LAKE COUNTY



Introduced to the United States in the 1880s, buckthorn crowds out native plants, turning diverse habitats into a dense thicket of just one species. If left unchecked, buckthorn will have devastating ecological and economic consequences for our region.

Following are a few ways the Preservation Foundation of the Lake County Forest Preserves supports restoration, collaboration and education initiatives across the county to address this pressing issue.





{ restoration }

IN JULY 2017, TORRENTIAL RAIN AND WIDESPREAD FLOODING CAUSED GOVERNOR RAUNER TO DECLARE LAKE COUNTY A STATE DISASTER AREA.

While damage to homes and businesses was devastating, it could have been much worse. During that storm event, the forest preserves did their job, storing floodwater and mitigating much of the damage. In fact, more than 50 percent of the flooding in the Des Plaines River watershed was on Forest Preserve lands.

To manage the worst flooding disasters, it is not enough simply to preserve open space. Restoration is key. Buckthorn does little to absorb rainwater. It creates a dense understory that blocks sunlight and eliminates understory plants. In the worst buckthorn infestations, rainwater washes quickly off the bare soil, causing erosion into surrounding waterways. By contrast, native plants stabilize soil, reduce erosion, and hold rainwater on the landscape, reducing peak flows and improving water quality.

These are the environmental and human health services a healthy ecosystem provides, and this is why we focus on large-scale habitat restoration. In 2017, one of the largest grants to the Forest Preserves provided \$1 million to continue a multi-year restoration project at Ethel's Woods Forest Preserve in Antioch. The grant is funding phase two of the restoration, which began with dewatering a highly degraded man-made lake and recreating the historical channel of North Mill Creek.

When restoration is complete, the restored streambed will feature natural ponds and riffles and native plants to provide habitat for mussels, fish, and other wildlife. Within the larger Des Plaines River Watershed, the project will improve water quality by retaining floodwaters, reducing sediment and nutrient loads, and improving oxygen levels.

{ collaboration }

As critical as it is to preserve and restore Forest Preserve lands, we cannot stop at our boundaries. Nearly 80 percent of Lake County land is in private ownership. To ensure our quality of life in the future, the Forest Preserves will have to lead, collaborate, and inspire in ways we never have before.

Middlefork Savanna Forest Preserve in Lake Forest is the site of a pilot project to engage private landowners in eradicating buckthorn from a 2,900-acre landscape of public and private lands. As we clear the last buckthorn infestations from the preserve, private grants through the Preservation Foundation are enabling us to work in a different way with our neighbors. In 2017, we surveyed all residents





within the project area to assess their awareness of and concerns about buckthorn. The results are informing development of a community education and engagement plan.

A KEY PART OF THAT PLAN IS A DEMONSTRATION GARDEN, which was installed in 2017 near the entrance to the preserve on City of Lake Forest property. Thanks to Bluestem Ecological Services, which donated all plant materials and labor, visitors to Middlefork can walk through a well-labeled native plant habitat, sized for the residential landscape. This summer, native plants are thriving, accompanied by interpretive signage detailing the value of planting natives for both humans and wildlife.

Our goal is to inspire a critical mass of concerned landowners to eradicate buckthorn on their own properties and to communicate with others. Ultimately, we hope to achieve social change around tolerance for invasive species and use of native plants.



{ education }

TUCKED INTO LAKE COUNTY'S MOST DENSELY POPULATED AREA BETWEEN North Chicago and Waukegan, Greenbelt Forest Preserve is an island of green. Until recently, the 596-acre preserve was anything but inviting for people and wildlife. Dense thickets of buckthorn lined its 5 miles of trails. Remnant oak groves, wetlands, and prairie were degraded by decades of fragmentation and an influx of invasive species.

State and federal grant funds helped accelerate restoration at Greenbelt in recent years, allowing the Forest Preserves to clear invasive species and plant native seed and shrubs with the help of



volunteers from the surrounding community. In 2017, a grant from the Preservation Foundation Annual Fund enabled that work to continue, advancing our goal of building a self-sustaining volunteer corps to support restoration at Greenbelt.

During regularly scheduled workdays in 2017, 154 volunteers logged 493 hours cutting buckthorn, burning brush, weeding, planting seeds and shrubs, and monitoring plants and wildlife. On one workday, 30 students from Abbott Middle School in Waukegan donned work gloves, loppers, and saws to remove buckthorn.

Where dense thickets of buckthorn once lined the trails, visitors now feel safe walking and enjoying the wide-open spaces Greenbelt has to offer. Migrating birds, such as eastern kingbird, northern flicker and brown thrasher have returned, along with the local community.

Dear Friends,

According to the Chicago Region Trees Initiative, 42 percent of our tree cover in Lake County is buckthorn, the highest percentage in the Chicagoland area. For the Lake County Forest Preserves and the Preservation Foundation, this statistic is a call to action.

Individuals, companies, and foundations heeded this call by supporting our battle against buckthorn in numerous ways in 2017. It's just one lens through which we can appreciate the impact donors have on the Forest Preserves each year.

Thank you to all who donated in 2017, the 10th anniversary of the Preservation Foundation. We are grateful to you and to all of our “first decade donors” —the more than 2,000 people and organizations who stepped forward once or many times to help the Forest Preserves do more.

Sincerely,

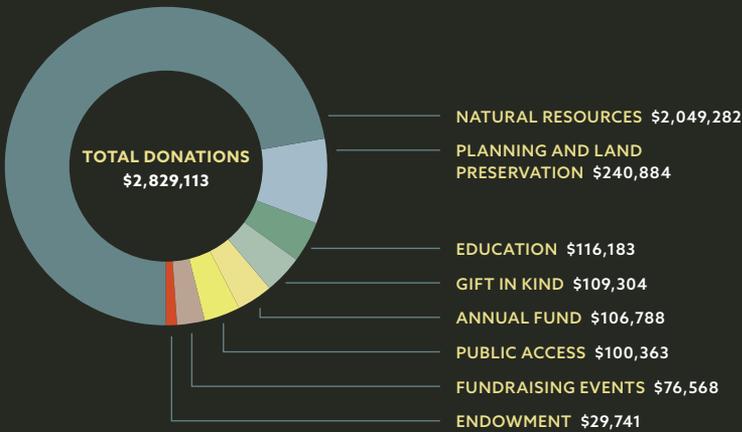


Nels R. Leutwiler
President

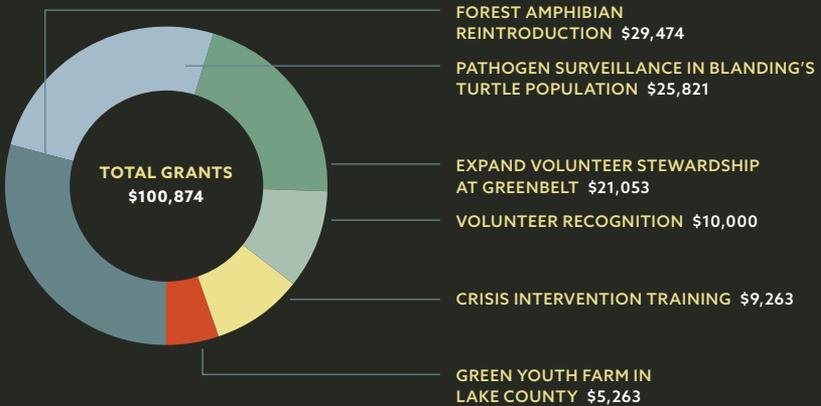


Rebekah Snyder
Executive Director

2017 DONATIONS



2017 ANNUAL FUND GRANTS



In 2017, the Preservation Foundation received its first endowment donations. Four gifts totaling nearly \$30,000 were received, establishing an unrestricted endowment fund, an endowment to care for Middlefork Savanna, and an endowment to support our educational outreach in perpetuity. A strong endowment provides financial security for the future, and as the long-term outlook for tax revenues is flat, endowment will be a top priority for the Preservation Foundation moving forward.

With their gifts of time, energy, skills, and passion, volunteers are the epitome of the Preservation Foundation’s mission to “extend and accelerate” the Forest Preserves work. From Girl Scout troops to corporate workdays, from retired couples to working professionals, volunteers played a key role in operations and public safety, habitat restoration, historic preservation, and education in 2017.



Perhaps no one person has done more to battle buckthorn in Lake County than **Tom Smith**, longtime stewardship coordinator for the Forest Preserves. Over his many years of service, Tom has been the face of the organization for tens of thousands of volunteers. He shared his knowledge and passion, leading groups of just a few to more than 100 in clearing invasive species and collecting native seed. We wish Tom well as he retires in 2018 after 34 years with the Forest Preserves.

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Audited financial statements and a complete list of institutional and individual donors can be found online at ThePreservationFoundation.org.



Almond Marsh Forest Preserve after buckthorn removal. See page 3 for the same view taken prior to clearing.



Preservation Foundation
of the Lake County Forest Preserves

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LAKE COUNTY
FOREST PRESERVES