



The Chikaming Legacy

Summer 2007

CHIKAMING OPEN LANDS

Mt. Zion Prairie Conservation Easement

Chikaming Open Lands Announces Another Preserved Parcel!

Just a bit southeast of the Village of Galien is a place where the water ripples on the surface of a small pond, and a small stream runs through rolling prairie fields. Big bluestem, little bluestem and Indiangrass sway in the breeze. Song birds nest in and feed on the seeds of prairie wildflowers. This little piece of paradise is known to the owner as Mt. Zion Prairie. To Chikaming Open Lands, this recently completed conservation easement is an important addition to protected acreage in the Galien River Watershed.

Since acquired by Dan Whitman in 2004, Mt Zion Prairie has undergone a transformation from row-crop agriculture to established warm season grass prairie with the help of Michigan DNR. Dan worked with Chris Hoving, the DNR's Wildlife Habitat Biologist to select plants that would attract wildlife and add beauty to the landscape.

Part of the planning process identified any "at-risk" species in the area:

- ⌘ The special concern Blanchard's cricket frog has been seen near the property. These frogs inhabit the more open edges of permanent ponds and slow-moving streams.
- ⌘ The state threatened spotted turtle inhabits shallow ponds and wet meadows like the ones found on Mt. Zion Prairie. Female turtles seek sunny upland areas to lay eggs, where they will incubate until August or September. Young hatchlings take 8-10 years to reach maturity.
- ⌘ The Eastern Massasauga rattlesnake is currently being considered for federal listing as a threatened species. It is usually associated with damp lowlands and moist prairies. Massasaugas are generally shy and unaggressive, offering little danger to people willing to leave them alone.



Also relying on prairie grasslands are numerous birds: pheasants, quail, wild turkeys, bobolinks, meadowlarks, sedge wrens and various sparrows to name a few.

In addition to offering a safe home for these and other animals, preserving the 12 acres of prairie, pond and stream helps preserve good water quality – something that rattlesnakes, birds and people all appreciate!

Once planted in row crops, this prairie restored to its native splendor, preserves water quality and provides habitat for a variety of creatures.

PROTECTING OUR LAND ~ PRESERVING OUR HERITAGE



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President's Letter

Dear Members and Friends of COL,

It has been an exciting winter and spring for Chikaming Open Lands. Our organization continues to grow and gain recognition throughout southwest Berrien County. Thanks to informative articles in our local newspapers, an article in Lake Magazine, and the efforts of our Land Protection Specialist, Jean Brokish, COL is achieving name recognition throughout our community. COL is now looked upon as a resource in the community for its expertise in land protection, preservation, restoration, and stewardship. Professional and business groups have contacted COL for workshops and informational presentations on such topics as conservation easements, tax advantages for doing an easement, or the benefits of land restoration. After two years of phone calls and making contacts with landowners Jean Brokish, is seeing exciting results. To date, Jean has closed on three conservation easements totaling 48 acres, and is finalizing work on six other sites, protecting 200 additional acres.

Our Second Saturday Series was well received by our members last year so we are doing it again this year. The events are listed in this newsletter and we hope you will attend to view first hand some of the unique natural features located in our area. There will be a naturalist guided tour through Warren Woods, the annual Galien River Clean-up and a chance to explore the Galien River Marsh aboard a 30-foot replica of a Voyageur canoe. We hope you will join us!

I want to thank you all for your continued support of conservation and of COL. Without our members and friends in the community we would not have achieved the successes we have today. Together we are making a difference as stewards of the land that will preserve the unique character of our area for generations to come!

Sincerely,

Jean Smith

President

Learn more about Chikaming Open Lands and our mission!

Chikaming Open Lands invites you to visit our updated website and share it with friends. Meet our board members and staff, view listings of our current events and learn about the progress you have helped us make in the community through your support. Read about conservation easements, their possible tax benefits and what you can do to help support Chikaming Open Lands.

www.chikamingopenlands.org



Last Chance!

Enhanced Tax Benefits for Donating a Conservation Easement

Current law governing income tax deductions for qualified conservation easement donations will expire at the end of 2007 unless Congress acts soon. And since we can't predict what Congress will do, we encourage you to act now!

Donating a conservation easement may be one of the smartest ways to conserve the land you love. Currently, an individual donating a conservation easement can deduct up to 50% of his/her adjusted gross income the year of the gift (individuals that receive the majority of their income from farming can deduct up to 100%), and any remaining donation value can be carried forward for as many as 15 years.

Beginning January 1, 2008, the above guidelines revert to pre-2006 status. Under those rules, donors will be able to deduct up to 30% of their adjusted gross income, with any remaining amount carried forward for up to 5 years. No additional benefits will be available to farmers.



Jean Brokish explains the tax benefits of donating a conservation easement.

The current guidelines allow many modest income landowners to deduct much more than they could under the old rules, bringing increased fairness to the tax code.

What you need to know:

- ⌘ Remember that conservation easement refers to a legal agreement between a landowner and a nonprofit land trust like Chikaming Open Lands.
- ⌘ Land with a conservation easement stays in private ownership, allowing you to continue using your land and to sell it or pass it on to heirs. It does not grant public access to your property.
- ⌘ Conservation easements are permanent, and future landowners are bound by the terms of the easement.
- ⌘ If a conservation easement meets federal tax requirements, it can qualify as a tax-deductible charitable donation. The amount of the donation is the difference between the land's value with the easement and its value without the easement.
- ⌘ Additional tax advantages in the form of reduced estate tax and / or reduced property tax liabilities may also be available.

It takes time to draft and properly execute a conservation easement. Don't delay. If you think a conservation easement is right for you, or would just like to learn more call Jean Brokish at Chikaming Open Lands: 269-469-2330.



The Chikaming Legacy

Celebrate the Open Spaces of Southwestern Michigan



Don Vander Molen

***Explore the unique beauty of Warren Woods with Chikaming Open Lands
Saturday July 14th 10:00 am***

(see sidebar for more information on our Second Saturday Series)

Chikaming Open Lands works collaboratively with other organizations in Berrien County. We encourage our members to explore the many opportunities offered.

Fernwood Botanical Garden and Nature Preserve

Butterfly Festival and Plant Sale ~ June 28 through July 1

Hours are: 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Thursday –Saturday and 12:00 noon to 7:00 p.m. on Sunday

Fernwood also offers concerts and Art exhibits throughout the year.

For more information call (269) 695-6491 or visit: <http://www.fernwoodbotanical.org>

Native Landscaping Series 2007

Sponsored by the Kellogg Bird Sanctuary.

(For more details visit: <http://www.kbs.msu.edu/birdsanctuary/events.php> Phone: (269) 671-2510)

Lakescaping: Alternative Shoreline Landscapes

Date: Tuesday, July 24th - 6:30pm to 8:00pm - Education Center/Carriage House Fountain

Learn about alternative shoreline landscapes that enhance wildlife habitat and protect water quality

Planting Michigan Native Plants in the Fall

Date: Tuesday, September 25th - 6:30pm to 8:00pm - Bird Sanctuary Auditorium

Learn why fall is the perfect time to plant native perennials. Plant types for dry, wet, sunny, or shady areas will be discussed.

Sarett Nature Center

Building Hours Tuesday-Friday 9:00 AM-5:00 PM Saturday 10:00 AM-5:00 PM Sunday 1:00-5:00 PM

This unique nature center, located in Benton Township, has five miles of trails meandering through its 800 acres. The trail system includes boardwalks, observation platforms, and an easily accessible barrier-free walkway. For more information on the many classes and weekend events offered, call: (269)927-4832 or visit <http://www.sarett.com>

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In the Mood to Hike?
Some great local spots include:

- Chikaming Park & Preserve**
- Fernwood Botanical Garden
and Nature Preserve**
- Grand Mere State Park**
- Hickory Creek Preserve**
- Kesling Nature Preserve**
- Mud Lake Bog**
- Sarett Nature Center**
- Warren Dunes State Park**
- Warren Woods State Park**

Berrien County Parks

**Galien River ~ Love Creek ~ Madeline Bertrand
Rocky Gap ~ Silver Beach**

The Berrien County Parks Commission sponsors many special events throughout the year.

For more information call 269-983-7111 ext 8435 or visit <http://www.berriencounty.org/parks/>

Berrien Birding Club

To promote recreational birding and bird conservation in Southwest Michigan, the Berrien County Parks sponsors the Berrien Birding Club. Activities include regularly scheduled outings in or near Berrien County.



*Membership is encouraged,
but scheduled field trips are open to all!*

For more information on these events call (269) 471-2617. or email: lovecreek269@att.net

CHIKAMING OPEN LANDS SECOND SATURDAY SERIES

We are excited to announce our 2nd season of our Second Saturday Series and hope you will have the opportunity to join us on our naturalist guided tours.

Warren Woods

July 14th 10:00 am

Meet at park entrance of Elm Valley

Learn about River Ecology, Plants, Stream Health and Restoration

Cleanup the Galien

August 11, 2007

13284 Oaks Rd. Three Oaks MI

Join us for a day of great camaraderie as we work at improving the habitat for our feathered and amphibious friends.

**Call Conservation Fund Office at: 616-510-1221
for additional information**

Voyageur Canoe Outing

Sept. 8th 10:00& 11:30 am

Meet at New Buffalo Boat Launch

Please RSVP for this popular event.

Explore the Galien River Marsh aboard a 30-foot replica of a Voyageur Canoe.

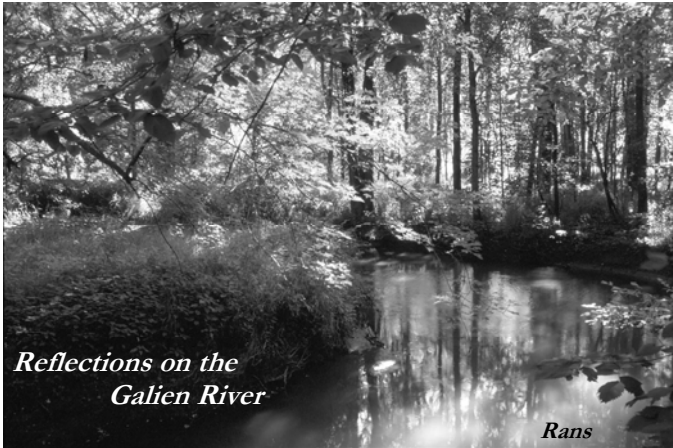
MEMBERS FREE NON-MEMBERS \$25

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND RESERVATIONS,
PLEASE CALL BEV AT COL 269-469-2330 OR EMAIL
INFO@CHIKAMINGOPENLANDS.ORG



Landscaping Tips for Protecting Water Quality

Chikaming Open Lands is committed to improving the water quality of the Galien River Watershed. Reducing sediment, chemicals and fertilizers are steps that homeowners and farmers alike can take by controlling erosion and monitoring their use of chemicals.



A hefty portion of the 100 million pounds of household pesticides Americans purchase each year is poured on their yards and can end up in streams and groundwater. Nitrates in the resulting fertilizers can harm both humans and marine mammals by seeping into groundwater or drinking water supplies.

Environmentally friendly fertilization

- ⌘ Choose a **plant-specific** organic fertilizer designed for what you are growing. Different plants require different nutrients, even in the same garden.
- ⌘ Use **slow-release** organic fertilizers that nourish as they decompose in the soil. Most contain fish meal, bone meal, or blood meal derived from food-processing waste. Others include fruit and vegetable waste, kelp, and earthworm castings.
- ⌘ Apply a **liquid** organic fertilizer when plants are in need of a quick boost. These consist mainly of seaweed and fish-processing wastes.
- ⌘ Avoid fertilizers made from municipal **sludge** (also called biosolids). These are often labeled organic, but have been found to contain heavy metals and other toxic chemicals that can build up in your soil.

Ways to keep your lawn natural.

- ⌘ Mow up to 3" inches to give the grass the opportunity to shade out weedlings.
- ⌘ Recycle the clippings as mulch by leaving them on the lawn
- ⌘ Use a soil-testing kit or have the soil tested by your local Cooperative Extension Service to make sure it's around 6.5 pH, amend if needed.
- ⌘ Water deeply and early in the day and only when the grass appears to need it.
- ⌘ Moss plants can also be used as an alternative to lawn grass in shady spots, where grass refuses to grow. Moss plants can function not only as a decorative element, but also as a living "mulch".
- ⌘ Introduce or attract insects and birds that prey on troublesome species. They are safer than chemical applications and often have more lasting effects.
- ⌘ **"xeriscape"**-- landscape with plants and grasses that don't need a lot of extra water and chemicals to stay healthy.



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What is stewardship?

“....stewardship is an individual’s responsibility to manage life and property with the proper regard to the rights of others”

Chikaming Open Lands recently formed a stewardship committee to address the needs of properties we own and have agreed to protect. During a recent meeting to identify goals for the stewardship committee, the question was posed “what is stewardship?” The responses included comments like: taking care of the land in a manner that maintains its natural processes... to educate and observe... to understand... to preserve, restore, enhance and protect. According to Webster, stewardship is an individual’s responsibility to manage life and property with the proper regard to the rights of others

Under this definition, everyone is a steward of the environment. We do not own the environment – we are simply caretakers of the resources that we use in our daily lives. It is our responsibility to administer those resources to the best of our abilities so they are available for the use and enjoyment of others, including future generations. Stewardship is what we do. It is one of the reasons Chikaming Open Lands was founded.

For Chikaming Open Lands, stewardship is the active protection and restoration of land based on a thorough understanding of the natural communities and processes native to this area. On-the-ground stewardship activities might include removing invasive species, replanting native species and restoring natural water flows. It also includes educating our members and the public about conservation, and carrying out our mission of “Preserving open space and the diverse natural character of southwest Berrien County” so future generations will be able to experience the quiet woodlands, rolling streams, working farms and beautiful wildlife.



Casey Sullivan, Al Chapman and Gene Goldwasser discuss a management plan for the Wilson Woods Property. COL’s stewardship committee is taking steps to restore the forested property to native vegetation by removing the non-native invasive species.

Other stewardship opportunities include compiling plant inventories, assisting with education events, and work days. Anyone interested in stewardship can call the office: 269-469-2330



Chikaming Open Lands

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Do you have a benthic macro-invertebrate in your neighborhood?

- ℞ If you want to know how healthy your local stream is, just look for the creatures who live there. They are called benthic macro-invertebrates.
- ℞ Macro-invertebrates are animals that lack backbones and are visible to the unaided eye. They are called benthic when they live on the stream bed or are attached to plants or floating wood.
- ℞ Dragonfly, Caddisfly, Stonefly, Mayfly and their larva are common benthic macro-invertebrates that live in a trout stream.
- ℞ These creatures cannot tolerate degraded streams. They require clear oxygen rich streams with riffles, runs, glides and pools. Sounds like a trout stream! They love these creatures for dinner.



Chikaming Open Lands is organizing a volunteer stream monitoring for the Galien River Watershed. We are looking for volunteers to help determine the health of our stream. Contact us to volunteer!
Phone: 269-469-2330 or email: info@chikamingopenlands.org