



**Greenbelt Final Report**  
**The Preservation Foundation of the Lake County Forest Preserves**  
**July 29, 2020**

Since April 2016, Audubon Great Lakes (a regional office of National Audubon Society), in partnership with Lake County Forest Preserve District (LCFPD) has worked to cultivate and empower a group of volunteer stewards from North Chicago and Waukegan at Greenbelt Forest Preserve. The launch of this effort was funded through the Illinois Coastal program, and has been continued since through generous funding from the Preservation Foundation of the Lake County Forest Preserves. In 2018, Audubon hired a Lake County Wild Indigo Engagement Fellow to form and strengthen relationships between Greenbelt and Lake County natural areas and local community groups.

Between June 2019 – May 2020, Audubon delivered a total of 34 events in Lake County, exceeding our original projection of 24-30 events. This is due to the overwhelming support and enthusiasm that partners have shared for the work happening at Greenbelt and signals the need for continued and expanded engagement efforts. Within this project period, Audubon leveraged an additional \$20K from the Caerus Foundation, Inc., and \$15K from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Coastal Management Program.

Over the past year, events have been facilitated with a diversity of community partners such as: Chicago Botanic Garden's Green Youth Farm, Abbvie, Lake Forest Open Lands Center for Conservation Leadership, Waukegan Public Schools, Murphy Elementary School, Lake County Forest Preserves, Lake County Nature Network, Latino Alliance Club (CLC), Roberti Community House, City of Waukegan, US Forest Service, Environment for the Americas, Boys & Girls Club, St. Paul Lutheran Church, Waukegan Public Library, Family Services of Lake County (Nuestro Centro), Brushwood Center, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Cool Learning Experience, Seward School, Mano a Mano, and Faith in Place Lake County.

In working with these partners Wild Indigo developed a series of nature-based activities –tailored for each audience— that built on each other, moving participants from education and awareness and leading up to conservation action. Activities and events were tailored to each partner organization's specific needs so that each of the experiences had a different starting point but all led to the same end goal. Rather than entering communities with assumptions about what they knew or did not know about environmental concerns, outdoor recreation, or conservation, Wild Indigo co-designed activities with input from community leaders.

As COVID-19 began spreading throughout the region in March 2020, holding volunteer stewardship days and in-person Wild Indigo events became impossible due to state restrictions as well as National Audubon Society policy. The last volunteer stewardship day occurred on March 7<sup>th</sup>, and the last Wild Indigo event with the Boys & Girls Club occurred on March 2<sup>nd</sup>. With these restrictions, Audubon began developing an array of virtual materials that could be used for outreach, education, and engagement. A Google Expedition, a series of interactive, 360 degree photos, was created, along with live-streamed bilingual bird walks at Greenbelt and Nippersink

Forest Preserve, virtual classroom presentation on oak savannas, virtual nature-themed art activities, and the creation of a short video on the habitats of Greenbelt for the Lake Forest Open Lands Center for Conservation Leadership program. While COVID has made Audubon's work more difficult, it has forced us to think creatively. In the process, we have created a library of virtual tools that can be used in future engagement and education efforts within North Chicago, Waukegan, and beyond.

In June, Kelly Schultz, LCFPD Stewardship Ecologist, began leading small groups of volunteers at Greenbelt for weekly Thursday morning workdays, and in late June, Daniel Suarez, Audubon's Stewardship Manager, was allowed to resume stewardship activities. Starting August 1, 2020, monthly volunteer stewardship days will resume, and volunteers are eager to continue hosting Thursday workdays. One regular volunteer who has been involved since 2016 has expressed interest in leading Thursday workdays, putting Greenbelt on track for having an official volunteer steward to take over the work into the future. This development, along with the creation of a virtual media library, gives Audubon hope that even with COVID-19 causing interruptions for the foreseeable future, Greenbelt is on a sustainable trajectory. In total, over the last year, Audubon has delivered the following:

Stewardship + Wild Indigo: June 2019 – May 2020	
Events	34
Participants/Volunteers	1,286
Virtual Participants	1,024
Volunteer Hours	300
Organizations Engaged	23

### **Volunteer Stewardship**

#### **June 2019 – May 2020 Totals**

# of stewardship events: 10

# of volunteers: 100

# of volunteer hours: 300

# of partner organizations: 3 (Green Youth Farm, Abbvie, Lake Forest Open Lands Center for Conservation Leadership)

**7/20**

#### **Greenbelt Volunteer Stewardship Day**

Participants: 0

July's Stewardship Day was cancelled due to extreme heat.