



## Conservation@Home

A project by the Alliance for the Great Lakes, Chicago Botanic Garden, The Field Museum, and Openlands.

### Historical Context

With nearly 20% of Lake County preserved as open space, local leaders have ramped up their support for the remaining 80% by delivering programs to those people who wish to implement positive actions on their own properties that support an improved quality of life at both the individual and community level.

Conservation@Home has become one of the most popular of such programs. Created in DuPage County, it is now available throughout much of the Chicago Region. In Lake County alone, over 870 property owners have enrolled in the program in the past four years.



### Overview

Created and Owned by the Conservation Foundation of Naperville

Operated in Lake County by Conserve Lake County (501c3)

### Applicable Sites

- Residential properties
- Corporate and municipal campuses
- Homeowner association properties
- Any publicly or privately owned site

### Program Summary

This nonprofit program supports and recognizes people who are interested in conservation-friendly landscaping and land stewardship. Personalized recommendations are provided through property appointments in which property owners or their representatives walk their site with a Conserve Lake County consultant for 60-90 minutes.

Additional support comes from online resources, presentations, social-learning gatherings, native plant sales and certification of qualifying properties.

### Goal: Conservation Throughout Communities

Clean water, healthy soil, resilient ecosystems, and people within communities that are connected to the land and each other through action.

#### Key Program Themes

private property, stormwater management, landscaping, lawn care, invasive species, healthy land

### Criteria for Success

Success occurs when property owners implement one or more actions from the program's Idea List that are a good fit for their property, budget and goals. At the community level, success occurs when a critical mass of property owners takes action.



## How it Works

During 60-90 minute appointments, property owners walk their site with a certified sustainable landscape consultant and learn how to make better use of time and budgets while contributing to protection of Lake County's exceptional natural resources. They learn how to retain aesthetics and improve property values while making the landscape healthy for pets, people, songbirds and butterflies.

Recommendations are tailored to each property and will often promote natural lawn management, native plants, on-site rainwater management, wildlife habitat, and encourages personal, family, and community relationships with nature, and more.

Property owners can then act on recommendations to receive points and Conservation@Home certification.



## Possible Conservation Actions

\*Not a comprehensive list

|   | Points |
|---|--------|
| <b>Under 1 Acre First Priority Actions</b>  |        |
| Simple map of property showing rainwater flow   | 5      |
| Invasive species cover less than 5%   | 10     |
| Plants native to northeastern Illinois make up at least 5% of the landscape                   | 20     |
| <b>Over 1 Acre First Priority Actions</b>   |        |
| An aerial map showing plant cover, water features, and rainwater flow                         | 5      |
| At least 10 trees or shrubs native to northeastern Illinois are present                       | 10     |
| An Ecological Plan has been created   | 20     |
| <b>Native Plants</b>  |        |
| Each native tree  | 5      |
| Each additional 10% of landscape is native  | 10     |
| Land supports at least 30 species of natives  | 20     |
| <b>Rainwater</b>  |        |
| Rain-permeable walkway  | 5      |
| Each rain garden or bio-swales  | 10     |
| Roof downspouts are directed to a garden, flat portion of lawn or to a rain barrel or cistern | 15     |
| <b>Land Management Practices</b>  |        |
| Natural flowing hydrology has been re-estestablished  | 10     |
| Property has been enrolled in Illinois Conservation Stewardship Program                       | 10     |
| Portion of property has been burned in past 3 years   | 10     |



## Lessons Learned

Every property owner and municipality has unique needs and reasons for participating or not participating, and success is greatest when care is taken to **identify and respect them**. The strength of Conservation@Home is that it is tailored to each customer's needs, whether that is an individual, institution or government. As with any successful program, an appropriate level of resources needs to be allocated so customers are aware of their options and are served well as they proceed on their journey of implementing new actions.

## Lasting Impact

For impacts to have a lasting effects:

- a) the products and services needed by customers are readily available,
- b) the program is well-funded and **promoted by community leaders**,
- c) **barriers to the norm have been established through ordinances** and other means, and
- d) a culture of caring has been established within the community that includes support and structure for emerging leaders and young adults.

**Successes are publicly celebrated** and effective ways of engaging and re-engaging residents are established.



## Advice to Ravine Communities

- 1 Do not use valuable resources to re-invent the wheel when a proven model is already available within the region. Synergistic benefits of funding, marketing and more come to entire Chicago Region when one strong program is employed rather than a variety of individual programs.
- 2 Work with groups such as residential program operating nonprofits like Conserve Lake County and The Conservation Foundation to structure and market your program in a way that improves the likelihood of participation by your target audience. For instance, when working with private properties, a trusted nonprofit organization oftentimes serves as a valuable conduit between a municipality and its landowners.
- 3 Budget a modest amount of funding for the project and adjust as needed. **Even a modest amount of funding can have an impact if residents and other landowners learn their municipality has vetted and approved a program** such as Conservation@Home.

Many thanks to Sarah Surroz for sharing this program with the ravine region.

For More Information:  
Sarah Surroz  
Director of Conservation Partnerships, Conserve Lake County at [ssurroz@ConserveLakeCounty.org](mailto:ssurroz@ConserveLakeCounty.org)