

The Conservation Leader Internship Program (CLIP): Five Years of Empowering Future Conservationists

By: Kim Elsenbroek, Land Conservation Specialist

In 2025, the Conservation Leader Internship Program (CLIP) will celebrate its 5th anniversary. To mark this milestone, we reflect on the program's origins and accomplishments. TLC envisioned a paid internship program offering hands-on experience to individuals who are under-represented in the conservation field. The goal was to equip young people with both educational and practical skills, providing a launch pad for careers in conservation.

CLIP is an 11-week, internship program held from June to August. Interns, or "CLIPsters," work 40 hours a week—20 hours of hands-on labor and 20 hours of educational programming. Over the past five years, 19 students contributed 1,665 hours managing 50 acres of land. Most importantly, CLIP empowers participants with the confidence and skills to succeed in conservation.

Here are updates from a few alumnae:



Claire '21

Claire graduated with a BA in Biology and minors in GIS and Environmental Studies from Augustana College. She then earned a Master's in Environmental Conservation from the University of Wisconsin Madison, where she worked with the Northeast Wilderness Trust on ecological restoration. After completing her master's, Claire worked as a resident

with the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission. She now works for TLC as a restoration technician.

How did CLIP help you achieve these goals?

"CLIP introduced me to TLC, the ecology of McHenry County, and ecological restoration in general. Connections from CLIP also helped me find my previous job, which was a 1-year residency with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources based in McHenry."



Bree '22 What are you doing now career-wise?

"Over the past two years, I have been conducting environmental chemistry research in my department at WIU quantifying pesticide levels in local water

samples. Additionally, I have been leading WIU's Environmental Service Club where we focus on giving back to our natural community and getting students involved in conservation and environmental careers.

As my next step after graduating in May, I will be attending Old Dominion University in Virginia to pursue an M.S. in Environmental Chemistry where I've received a research assistantship."

How did CLIP help you achieve these goals?

"CLIP provided me the necessary insight and passion to lead the Environmental Service Club. I got us involved with our local land conservancy (Prairie Land Conservancy), prioritized education & plant ID, and diversified our fieldwork opportunities to help with resume building. Furthermore, CLIP inspired me to professionalize my college experience by taking the extra step to pursue multiple semesters of research in my specific chemistry interest and complete a second internship. Overall, CLIP kick-started my career and helped me find my exact path while leaving me with valuable connections and memories."

The success of CLIP is a direct result of the hard work and dedication of its participants, as well as the support of its teachers, mentors, and collaborators. This program would not be possible without their contributions. Interested in CLIP 2025? Visit <http://conservemc.org/clip/>



Sofia '21: After completing CLIP, Sofia continued to be an active TLC volunteer while working with local landowners to manage invasive species on their natural areas. Currently, she is working as a seasonal intern conducting prescribed burns and performing ecological restoration on 9,600+ acres of the prairie, wetland, and upland high pine sandhill habitats of Ordway-Swisher Biological Station, an extension facility of the University of Florida.



Evelyn '21: Evelyn, a graduate of Harvard High School and McHenry County College, is studying Biology at Olivet Nazarene University. She has worked for several TLC landowners since 2021, assisting in invasive plant management.



Amelia '22: A graduate of Crystal Lake South High School, Amelia is pursuing Environmental Studies at Eckerd College with a double minor in Biology and Film Studies. Her documentary on nature photography was selected for screening at an environmental film festival.



Nari '23: Graduated from Northern Illinois University, then interned with Fermilab Natural Areas managing their ecological land. She later worked with consulting firm Encap Inc. in Dekalb, IL, and plans to attend graduate school.



Joee '23: Graduated from the University of San Diego with a double major in Marine Ecology and Spanish, and a minor in Biology. She is applying for internships to gain more experience and plans to pursue graduate school in 2025.



Arden '21: Graduated from Cornell University in 2023 with a double major in Economics and Environment & Sustainability. She now works on the Corporate Finance team in the Treasury Department and hopes to explore green investing or climate risk in the future.



Leah '23: A high school senior, Leah has been working on a regenerative farm since April 2024. She is exploring different conservation careers each year to find the best fit.



Emma '23/24: A senior at North Park University, is earning a bachelor's degree in Chemistry and Environmental Science. She leads the school's sustainability club and works on projects like cultivating native plants and teaching others how to make healing jewelweed salve.



News and Notes

from our Executive Director, *Lisa Haderlein*

So much good news in 2024: more farmland and natural land preserved, the fourth year of the Conservation Leader Internship Program, natural areas restored, and thousands more people learning about how to take care of the environment by planting more native wildflowers, shrubs and trees (especially oaks!), and also how to remove invasive species so that the indigenous flora and fauna can thrive!

Plus, TLC's national Accreditation was renewed by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission for another 5 years! Thank you Kim Elsenbroek for leading us through the Application process!

Accreditation is awarded to land trusts meeting the highest national standards for excellence and conservation permanence. Each accredited land trust completes a rigorous review process and joins a network of organizations united by strong ethical practices. The Land Conservancy of McHenry County is one of just 471 organizations in the US to achieve this distinction.

Thank you for a fantastic 2024! I look forward to working together to accomplish even more in 2025!

Best wishes to you and all you love for a wonderful new year.

The Land Conservancy of McHenry County

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ConserveMC.org

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Welcome New Members!

Mark Biederwolf | Marengo
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Ray Golec | Lake in the Hills
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Amy Vandament | McHenry
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A quick, easy tip to make your home more Earth friendly

—Karen Lavin, TLC Board Member - lawdog57@hotmail.com

Microplastics (extremely small pieces of plastic debris) are showing up everywhere.

I just read that soil, water and wildlife studies have found microplastics in Antarctica, the Arctic circles, every continent's soil and water, and even in a dolphin's breath! The need to use less plastic is becoming critical.

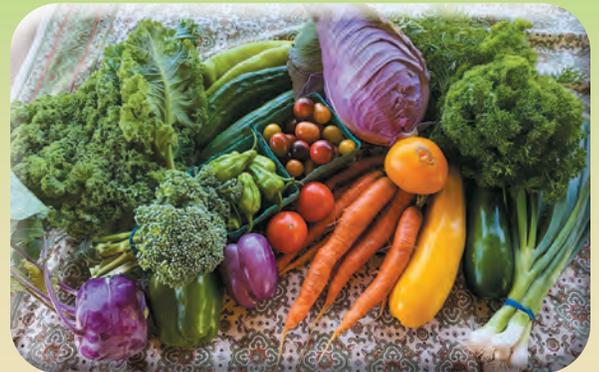
Even small changes can make a difference. I recently came across a new food storage item that I hadn't seen before – storage covers made of silicone.

These reusable covers are handy for covering bottles, jars, cans, etc. They stretch a bit and come in different sizes. They come in handy for a number of things, and they don't cost much. You can buy them at IKEA and on Amazon. Unfortunately, I haven't found them at local stores yet.

If any of you have tips or suggestions on ways to reduce your use of plastic, please email me at Lawdog57@hotmail.com, and we may share your tip in an upcoming column.



CSA Fair/ Film Screening



Join us...

for a community-supported agriculture (CSA) fair to highlight farmers who are right here in McHenry County! This is a new, family friendly event that will include farmer booths, children's activities, light refreshments and a selection of agriculture-related short films.

Date/time: Saturday, Feb. 8, 1–4:00 p.m.

Location: McHenry County College,
8900 Northwest Hwy #14, Crystal Lake, IL 60012

Fee: Free, no registration required.

Conservation@Home Webinars

Make a difference in 2025 by planting new native plants in your yard!

Need some ideas? Check out these free webinars with TLC's Community Ecologist, Sarah Michehl. Watch the recordings afterward anytime on TLC's YouTube channel! Or schedule a Conservation@Home site consult, and we'll give you custom ideas for your yard! (Yes, even in the winter!)

Visit <https://conserveMC.org/conservation-home-program/> for more information.

Save the date!
TLC's native plant sale will open for online ordering April 3-23. Certain varieties sell out quickly!
Become a member at [ConserveMC.org](https://conserveMC.org) for one-day early access!

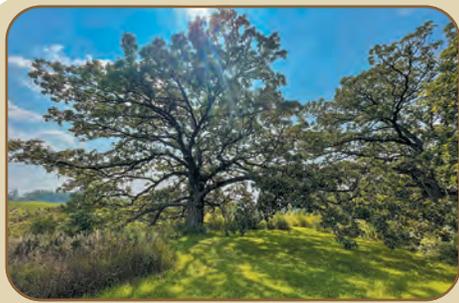


Native Replacements for Invasive Shrubs (TLC Webinar)

Many homeowners have inherited invasive landscaping that needs to be replaced, whether for ecological or aesthetic reasons. In this presentation, TLC's Sarah Michehl uses her yard as a case study to show "before" photos of invasive shrubs and the "after" of native replacements to bring beauty and life back to your yard.

Date/Time: Wednesday, Jan. 15, 12-1:00 p.m.

Fee: Free, please register online at [www.ConserveMC.org](https://www.conserveMC.org) by Jan. 13 at noon.



How to Care for Your Oak Woods (TLC Webinar)

McHenry County has lost 87 percent of its oaks since 1837, and we need you to help care for those that remain, as well as nurture the next generation of oaks. Join us to learn how to care for your oak woods as an entire habitat. This will include simple tricks on how to analyze your woods, identify and manage invasive species, plant natives, and let the sunshine in to encourage new oaks to grow!

Date/Time: Wednesday, Jan. 22, 12-1:00 p.m.

Fee: Free, please register online at [www.ConserveMC.org](https://www.conserveMC.org) by Jan. 20 at noon



Plan Your Native Plant Garden (TLC Webinar)

Planning to start a new native plant garden this spring? Join us!

This webinar will cover:

- Site preparation
- Favorite plant choices
- The pollinator connection, and
- Vital maintenance tips to make any garden a success.

Date/Time: Wednesday, Jan. 29, 12-1:00 p.m.

Fee: Free, please register online at [www.ConserveMC.org](https://www.conserveMC.org) by Jan. 27 at noon.



Native Plants for Sunny Gardens (TLC Webinar)

It's winter, so let's dream about our native sun-loving prairie plants and how they add beauty and function to our gardens! We will share layering techniques and favorite combos for gardens large and small.

Date/Time: Wednesday, Feb. 12, 12-1:00 p.m.

Fee: Free, please register online at [www.ConserveMC.org](https://www.conserveMC.org) by Feb. 10 at noon.



Native Plants for Shade Gardens (TLC Webinar)

Shade gardens can be filled with a beautiful diversity of native plants, from wildflowers to sedges and ferns. Join us for creative ideas on enhancing those shady areas of your yard while supporting pollinators and suppressing weed growth!

Date/Time: Wednesday, Feb. 19, 12-1:00 p.m.

Fee: Free, please register online at [www.ConserveMC.org](https://www.conserveMC.org) by Feb. 17 at noon.

Winter Tree and Shrub Identification

Join Kim Elsenbroek, TLC's land conservation specialist, to learn how trees and shrubs can be identified based on twigs and bark. This class will be entirely outdoors, so please wear clothes and boots appropriate for the weather and uneven trail conditions.

Date/Time: Wednesday, Jan. 15, 2–3:30 p.m.

Location: Ryder's Woods, 751 E. Kimball Ave., Woodstock.

Fee: \$5 per person, please register online at www.ConserveMC.org



Winter Night's Family Fun



Enjoy a wintery night in the woods complete with bonfires, night hikes, and a sheltered area with hot cocoa. Bring the whole family out to experience the magic of a Woodstock winter evening. Dress to be outside and walking on trails in the winter!

Please register so we can contact you in case of cancellation due to inclement weather.

Date/Time: Friday, Jan. 17, 6–8:00 p.m.

Location: Hennen Conservation Area, 4622 Dean St., Woodstock.

Fee: Free, please register online at www.ConserveMC.org

UPCOMING EVENTS

Event dates and times are subject to change. If you are new to TLC workdays or it's been a while, please be sure to fill out a volunteer form online at www.conservemc.org/volunteer before you attend so you can receive updates or cancellations.

Jan. 4: Irish Oaks Nature Preserve restoration workday.
19019 Lincoln Rd., Harvard.
10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

Jan. 6: Thompson Road Preserve restoration workday.
9505 Thompson Rd., Bull Valley.
10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

Jan. 8: Crowley Oaks restoration workday.
18725 Crowley Rd., Harvard.
10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

Jan. 11: Boloria Meadows restoration workday.
7219 Millburne Ct., Bull Valley.
10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

Jan. 15: Crowley Oaks restoration workday.
18725 Crowley Rd., Harvard.
10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

Jan. 15: *Native Replacements for Invasive Shrubs Webinar*
Free, please register online at ConserveMC.org
12–1:00 p.m.

Jan. 15: *Winter Tree and Shrub Identification.*
Ryder's Woods, 751 E. Kimball Ave., Woodstock.
\$5 per person, please register online at ConserveMC.org
2–3:30 p.m.

Jan. 17: *Winter Night's Family Fun.*
Hennen Conservation Area, 4622 Dean St., Woodstock.
Free, please register online at ConserveMC.org
6–8:00 p.m.

Jan. 18: Yonder Prairie restoration workday.
1150 S. Rosefarm Rd., Woodstock.
10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

Jan. 20: Thompson Road Preserve restoration workday.
9505 Thompson Rd., Bull Valley.
10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

Jan. 22: Crowley Oaks restoration workday.
18725 Crowley Rd., Harvard.
10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

Jan. 22: *How to Care for Your Oak Woods Webinar.*
Free, please register online at ConserveMC.org
12–1:00 p.m.

Jan. 29: Crowley Oaks restoration workday.
18725 Crowley Rd., Harvard.
10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

Jan. 29: *Plan Your Native Plant Garden Webinar.*
Free, please register online at ConserveMC.org
12–1:00 p.m.

Feb. 1: Irish Oaks Nature Preserve restoration workday.
19019 Lincoln Rd., Harvard.
10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

Feb. 3: Thompson Road Preserve restoration workday.
9505 Thompson Rd., Bull Valley.
10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

Feb. 5: Crowley Oaks restoration workday.
18725 Crowley Rd., Harvard.
10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

Feb. 8: Boloria Meadows restoration workday.
7219 Millburne Ct., Bull Valley.
10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

Feb. 8: *CSA Fair and Film Screening.*
McHenry County College,
8900 Northwest Hwy #14, Crystal Lake, IL 60012
Free, please register online at ConserveMC.org
Time: 1–4:00 p.m.

Feb. 12: Crowley Oaks restoration workday.
18725 Crowley Rd., Harvard.
10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

Feb. 12: *Native Plants for Sunny Gardens Webinar.*
Free, please register online at ConserveMC.org
12–1:00 p.m.

Feb. 15: Yonder Prairie restoration workday.
1150 S. Rosefarm Rd., Woodstock.
10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

Feb. 17: Thompson Road Preserve restoration workday.
9505 Thompson Rd., Bull Valley.
10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

Feb. 19: Crowley Oaks restoration workday.
18725 Crowley Rd., Harvard.
10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

Feb. 19: *Native Plants for Shade Gardens Webinar.*
Free, please register online at ConserveMC.org
12–1:00 p.m.

Feb. 26: Crowley Oaks restoration workday.
18725 Crowley Rd., Harvard.
10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

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