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# THINGS YOU CAN DO TO JUMPSTART YOUR ENVIRONMENTAL CAREER IN THE GREATER CHICAGO REGION

## VOLUNTEER

[habitat2030.org](http://habitat2030.org) | [citizensforconservation.org](http://citizensforconservation.org)  
[calumetstewardship.org](http://calumetstewardship.org) | [habitatproject.org](http://habitatproject.org)  
[chicagoenvironment.org](http://chicagoenvironment.org) | [plantsofconcern.org](http://plantsofconcern.org)  
[northbranchrestoration.org](http://northbranchrestoration.org)  
[nature.org/volunteerLL](http://nature.org/volunteerLL)

- Join a volunteer program to gain hands-on skills and experience in conservation, make new professional contacts, explore different career tracks, and gain satisfaction from having a direct impact on the land.
- Look up volunteer programs at county forest preserves, nature museums, zoos, botanical gardens and arboreta, and other conservation organizations.
- Seek opportunities to green your campus, neighborhood, or town: volunteer at community gardens, organize a park clean-up event, advocate for green city policies, or serve on school or town volunteer advisory committees.

## NETWORK

[facebook.com/wildthingscommunity](https://facebook.com/wildthingscommunity)  
TNC-INPC Volunteer Stewardship Network  
Chicago Wilderness Congress  
Environmental Professionals of Color Network  
[naturalareas.org](http://naturalareas.org) | [melaweb.org](http://melaweb.org) | [msphds.org](http://msphds.org)  
[esa.org](http://esa.org) | [swcs.org](http://swcs.org) | [eeai.net](http://eeai.net)

- Most jobs are found through personal contacts. Start with people you know – e.g. people you meet while volunteering – and expand your network from there. Conduct informational interviews (look up tips online). Learn how people got into their fields.
- Join the listservs, follow the social media channels, and bookmark the career webpages of conservation organizations you admire.
- Join professional networks such as the ones listed to the left (most have free or reduced rates for students), join or form eco-clubs at your school, or look up Green Drinks or other networking events for environmental professionals in your community.

## LEARN

“A Natural History of the Chicago Region”  
“The Chicago River: A Natural and Unnatural History” | “Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West” | “Miracle Under the Oaks”  
Field guides to trees, mushrooms, birds, and other animals and plants of the region

- Many employers prefer job candidates who are familiar with local natural history. Complement school courses with programs offered by local conservation orgs. These programs can last an hour or an entire season – find one that best fits your schedule.
- Explore and participate in citizen science programs in the region (good places to start are [habitatproject.org](http://habitatproject.org) or [scistarter.com](http://scistarter.com)). If you have access to a garden, grow native plants and learn hands-on about their needs and relationships with other organisms.
- Read some of the many fine books about our region’s environmental history and ethics, or its flora and fauna. A few suggestions are to the left.

## BECOME CERTIFIED

Interpretive Guide | Basic Wildland Firefighter  
Wilderness First Aid Responder | TreeKeeper  
Master Naturalist or Gardener | Midwest  
Ecological Prescription Burn Crew Member  
Certified Arborist | Urban Ag & Horticulture

- Many conservation jobs require applicants to have specific certified skills. For other jobs, a certification may set you apart from other candidates. Talk to your network of professionals to find out if you should pursue a certification in your specific field.
- Use your professional and volunteer networks to seek out free or reduced-cost training programs. Some of the most popular certificate programs are listed to the left.
- For some jobs that require you to operate heavier trucks or equipment, you will need a Class B driver's license.

## HAVE FUN!

Audubon Society bird walks | Forest preserve  
district wildflower walks | Illinois Mycological  
Society mushroom foraging outings | Chicago  
River canoeing programs | Outdoor heritage  
events | and many more: look up upcoming  
programs at conservation organizations nearby

- Most importantly, spend time outdoors! Visit the many unique ecosystems found in the Chicagoland region, such as prairies, dunes, bogs, limestone canyons, and more.
- Discover fun things to do outside – go on bird and wildflower walks, start a nature journal, or try some nature photography. Get involved in outdoor sports or artistic pursuits: hiking, sledding, canoeing, fishing, cross-country skiing, drawing, watercoloring, etc. Read a book, take a nap, or just relax under a tree.
- Join local groups of outdoor enthusiasts. We have started a list for you to the left.

# Chicago Wilderness

Chicago Wilderness is a regional alliance that connects people and nature. We are more than 300 organizations that work together to restore local nature and improve the quality of life for all who live here, by protecting the lands and waters on which we all depend.

Many thanks to staff from the Chicago Academy of Sciences and its Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, Chicago Botanic Garden, Chicago Public Schools Service Learning Office, Faith In Place, Forest Preserves of Cook County, The Morton Arboretum, Student Conservation Association, and Triton College for developing this resource.