Openlands Lakeshore Preserve
Preserve Rules and Regulations

- The Preserve is open from 6:30 a.m. to sunset.
- Please park in designated parking lots only, and pay attention to street parking signs or risk being towed.
- Please DO touch gently, smell deeply, and look closely, and enjoy your visit!
- Please DON’T pick plants or seeds, pocket rocks, leave behind litter, trample beach plants, or climb slopes and trees.
- Leashed dogs are welcome on all paths, but please pick up after them. Waste bags are provided at stations along the trails.
- Dogs are not allowed on the beach because of our state endangered and threatened plant communities. Leashed dogs are welcome on the lakeshore to the north of our beach; this area is part of the Lake County Forest Preserve District’s Fort Sheridan Preserve.
- Bicycles are welcome on all paths but please stay to the right, watch your speed, and be careful of pedestrians.
- Picnics are a lovely way to spend your day at the Preserve, but please remove any trash afterwards.
- For your own safety, the following are strictly prohibited: swimming, wading, boating, campfires, camping, hunting, and firearms.
- State fishing regulations apply.
- In an emergency, please call 911.
Openlands: An Overview

Founded in 1963, Openlands protects the open spaces of northeastern Illinois and the surrounding region to ensure cleaner air and water, protect natural habitats and wildlife, and help balance and enrich our lives.

As one of the nation’s oldest and most successful metropolitan conservation organizations, Openlands has helped save, secure, and provide public access to more than 55,000 acres of land for prairies, wetlands, greenway corridors, parks, forest preserves, and urban gardens.

Openlands Lakeshore Preserve

The Openlands Lakeshore Preserve is a 77-acre Illinois Nature Preserve located in Highland Park, just 25 miles north of Chicago. Once part of the historic Fort Sheridan military base, the Preserve offers public access to a mile-long stretch of scenic Lake Michigan shoreline and towering bluffs, along with three unique lakefront ravines. The site is home to a wide variety of native plant species, including seven on the state endangered and threatened lists, and it provides crucial stopover habitat to birds migrating along the Lake Michigan flyway.

Openlands has been actively restoring and managing the Preserve’s rare natural communities since 2008. An ADA-accessible trail system and an innovative, art-based interpretive plan offer a unique outdoors experience for visitors. Educational programs and volunteer opportunities engage the public with the site’s incredible beauty, helping to fulfill Openlands’ mission to connect people with nature and build future stewards of our environment.

More information about Openlands and the Preserve is available at www.openlands.org.
Preserve Background

The Lakeshore Preserve was once part of the historic Fort Sheridan military base. In the 1880’s, a group of wealthy businessmen called the Chicago Commercial Club pooled their money to buy about 712 acres of land here. They gave that land to the Federal government in exchange for the promise that a military base would be built.

The purpose of the base, as the Club saw it, was to provide a military police response to the labor riots that were going on in Chicago at that time. Ironically, the Fort deployed troops only one time for that reason, to the Pullman riots in 1894. After that, it was mostly used as a training and administrative center.

The original Fort buildings were constructed around 1890 and the Fort operated for about 100 years until it was closed in the 1990’s. When that happened, the land was divided among many new owners. In 2004, Openlands obtained the 77 acres that make up the Preserve. The Lake County Forest Preserve District owns the 250 acre Fort Sheridan Forest Preserve. The balance of the property consists of residential housing and an Army Reserve training base.

Ravines

There are three lakefront ravines on the property. Bartlett is the largest; the other two, Van Horne and Schenck are located to the south. These ravines were formed about 15,000 years ago by water towards Lake Michigan as the glaciers melted.

The road in the bottom of Bartlett Ravine was originally a cavalry pathway. Openlands realized early on that this road was actually helping to support the ravine slopes. Today, it has the added benefit of being an ADA-accessible trail for our visitors.

For many years, it was common practice to pipe water into ravines from streets and homes. Over time, this has caused a lot of damage to ravines up and down the lakeshore. The high volume and velocity of piped water creates serious erosion and brings in invasive plant species that compete with the native plant communities.

At the Lakeshore Preserve, we still have problems with large amounts of water coming into our ravines from other properties. Openlands is committed to using “best management practices” to handle storm water. One way was to install rain gardens along the trail. Another example is by working with the Preserve’s neighbors, helping them to plant native species in their backyards that let rain water work its way into the ground, instead of pouring over the slopes.

Lakeshore

The Lakeshore Preserve’s beach extends about a mile south from where we are standing. In the distance to the south, you can see the Baha’i temple in Wilmette. To the north you can see the old cooling towers at the closed nuclear power plant in Zion. The Fort Sheridan
Forest Preserve’s beach adjoins the Preserve where we came out of Bartlett Ravine, and it continues for another mile to the north of us.

Here are some facts about Lake Michigan that you may not have heard of:

- 84% of North America’s surface fresh water is contained in the Great Lakes, which is about 21% of the entire world’s supply.
- Lake Michigan is the third largest of the Great Lakes, when you measure the surface of the water, and the second largest when you measure by depth. Lake Superior is deeper and both Lake Superior and Lake Huron are larger by area.
- On average, Lake Michigan is about 279 feet deep, but it can reach almost 1,000 feet deep in some places.
- Lake Michigan was accidentally discovered by explorer Jean Nicolett in 1634. However, native peoples knew it was here for a very long time before that.
- Like all of the Great Lakes, Lake Michigan has had many shipwrecks. One of the most famous was the Westmoreland, a steamer that sank in northern Michigan in 1854. It was accidentally discovered by a diver in 2010.
- There are seven state endangered or threatened plants found here at the Lakeshore Preserve. Five of those are beach species.

**Land Management and Restoration**

When Openlands obtained the Lakeshore Preserve property, the site was in a degraded condition. Years of piping storm water into the ravines and down the bluffs had destabilized and eroded the slopes. The land was overgrown with invasive species like buckthorn, Norway maple and honeysuckle. This had created dark and crowded conditions where sunlight could not penetrate, and as a result the native plant communities were struggling to survive. There was also a lot of debris here, both from people dumping trash and from the military days.

Openlands hired consultants and scientists to make a restoration plan. From that research, we created a vision for the site that includes oak-dominated woodland in the ravines, shrubby prairie on the bluff, and open oak savanna on the uplands.

We have been actively restoring and managing the ravines, bluffs, and lakeshore since 2008. Restoration involves removing the debris and the invasive species. Doing this opens up the ground to more sunlight, and we find the native plants start to flourish pretty quickly after that. We have also planted native seed mixes, fixed some of the worst erosion areas, repaired the old sewer system, and used tools like prescribed burning to keep weeds from coming back.

**Art in Nature**

When Openlands first started planning to develop the Lakeshore Preserve as a park, we wanted to take an innovative approach to interpreting nature for our visitors. Using art to do this has a few benefits. Artwork can speak to people of different languages and
backgrounds and artwork has different significance to everyone, based on their own interpretation of what an art piece means.

Even the signs in front of the artworks are innovative. They use poetry to explain the intent of each artist in their piece. Openlands won an award from the American Alliance of Museums for several of these signs.

**Reading the Landscape**
Designed by Kate Friedman.

Iodonized aluminum on existing metal trestle
Using the words of literary greats, Freidman’s artwork plays off of the concept of bridges (both literal and figurative), referencing the physical bridge between the rich historic past of the site and its new life as a public nature preserve, and the metaphysical bridge that connects humans to nature.

**Erode**
Designed by Vivian Visser

Driftwood affixed to steel elevation posts (3 feet high)
Because of its immediate association with water, Visser used driftwood to evoke the movement of rushing water during rainfall, exaggerating the natural land erosion process within the ravine ecosystem. The artist wanted to show how water continues to shape the landscape even today.

**Arc of Nature**
Designed by the Chicago Public Art Group

Mural composed of acrylic painted surfaces, metal, and mosaic glass tile (32 feet by 50 feet)
The talents of many artists came together in the creation of this stunning mural that inspires and engages visitors as they follow the ravine path towards Lake Michigan. The theme of this piece is the spectrum of nature's expressions at all different scales, from the microscopic to the macroscopic. The metal arcs refer to lines of latitude and longitude. The tree roots turn into the shape of Bartlett Ravine seen from the air. Finally, the ants and white trillium represent two natural residents found here in the ravine. Ants play an important role here because they help to propagate sedges, which are a type of grass-like plant that are crucial to the health of this ecosystem.
The Soil is Alive
Designed by Sharon Bladholm
Sculptural bronze-look relief plaques affixed to a stone wall along the ravine path
Soil microorganisms are the largest unexplored source of genetic richness and diversity on the planet - the underground heroes of a healthy aboveground environment. All of the microorganisms represented in these plaques are actually ones found here at the Lakeshore Preserve.

Lake, Leaf, and Earthbark Prism Series
Designed by Olivia Petrides
Acrylic polymer paint on aluminum poles (12 feet high)
Using her experience as a botanical illustrator, Petrides created a series of three color prisms that echo and highlight the subtle, yet amazing, natural hues found in the waters of Lake Michigan, the layering of foliage, and the strata of the land. The artist Olivia Petrides created these pieces by matching color swatches with the variety of greens, browns, and blues found in the vegetation, bark, and water you see around you at the Lakeshore Preserve. This shows you how what we think is just “green” or “blue” at first glance is really just one hue out of dozens of different shades of the same color. The palette of nature is incredibly detailed.

Overlooks
Elemental Matters
This one interprets the macroscopic and microscopic aspects of nature. The rings here represent the paths of electrons around the carbon atom, which is the building block of all life. The center column represents the nucleus of the atom, with protons and neutrons inside it.

The rings also have a second meaning, representing the pattern of the Earth orbiting the sun. In this case, the center column is the sun and the Earth is over there.

And finally, the whole overlook has a third meaning, which speaks to the stories people have told about the world around them for millennia. In this case, the different colors on the ground represent the mythological concepts of Earth, Air, and Water, and the center column represents Fire.

Van Horne Bridge
The surface underneath this overlook is a man-made dam that was put in by the Army back in the late 1960’s. Openlands considered taking this dam out to allow the ravine to open back up to the lake naturally, but the logistical and financial difficulties are quite extensive.
As a result, we have worked with the existing conditions to provide an overlook that gives you one of the best scenic views here at the Lakeshore Preserve.

Openlands incorporated quotes into this overlook from Aldo Leopold, a man whom many call the “grandfather of conservation.” In his book *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold wrote about the many interconnected parts present in nature and how the human relationship to nature must involve stewardship. Here at the Lakeshore Preserve, our restoration work shows our attempt to restore these connections.

**Sun Central**

This is a sundial that uses your shadow to tell the time. It is calibrated precisely for this location on Earth, which is 42.21° north of the equator and 87.81° west of the prime meridian at Greenwich, England.
Native Plants - Spring

**Large-flowered bellwort** *Uvularia grandiflora*
Ravines

**White trillium** *Trillium grandiflorum*
Ravines

**Red trillium** *Trillium erectum*
Ravines

**Bloodroot** *Sanguinaria canadensis*
Ravines

**Early meadow-rue** *Thalictrum dioicum*
Ravines

**White trout lily** *Erythronium albidum*
Ravines
Wild geranium  *Geranium maculatum*
Ravines

Jack-in-the-pulpit  *Arisaema triphyllum*
Ravines

May apple  *Podophyllum peltatum*
Ravines

Spring Beauty  *Claytonia virginica*
Bluffs, tablelands
Native Plants - Summer

**Wild bergamot** *Monarda fistulosa*
Ravines, bluffs, tableland

**Jewelweed** *Impatiens capensis*
Ravines

**Woodland sunflower** *Helianthus divaricatus*
Ravines, bluffs

**Black-eyed susan** *Rudbeckia hirta*
Ravines, bluffs,

**Golden Alexanders** *Zizia aurea*
Ravines, bluffs, tableland

**Zigzag goldenrod** *Solidago flexicaulis*
Ravines, bluffs
Native Plants - Beach

Sea Rocket *Cakile edentula lacustris*

Marram Grass *Ammophila breviligulata*

Seaside Spurge *Chamaesyce polygonifolia*

Buffaloberry *Shepherdia canadensis*
Native Plants – Trees & Shrubs

White Oak *Quercus alba*

Bur Oak *Quercus macrocarpa*

Red Oak *Quercus rubra*

Black Oak *Quercus velutina*
Black-eyed susan *Rudbeckia hirta*

When: Summer
Where: Ravines, bluffs, tablelands

Witch-Hazel *Hamamelis virginiana*

Ironwood (Hop Hornbeam) *Ostrya virginiana*

Paper Birch *Betula papyrifera*

Common Juniper *Juniperus communis*
Birds

There are well over 100 species of birds that use the Lakeshore Preserve as an important stopover while they migrate along Lake Michigan. Some of the common waterfowl we see resting or feeding in the lake includes red-headed mergansers, Caspian terns, and double-breasted cormorants. In the wooded areas, you can see several different species of woodpeckers and hawks, along with songbirds like Eastern bluebirds, northern cardinals, flycatchers, and indigo buntings. Several types of warblers can be seen here too, depending on the time of year.
American Kestral

Indigo Bunting

Ruby Throated Hummingbird

Eastern Bluebird

Baltimore Oriole

Northern Cardinal

American Goldfinch