

President's Report~Annual Meeting, May 18, 2022

John Sentell, President, Lake Forest Open Lands (2010-2022)

Time has really flown by. It's been a great 12 years. The privilege of leading Lake Forest Open Lands has been an incredibly rewarding experience for me. Being a part of this organization and working with you has been one of the most meaningful experiences of my life. I thank you. And we've accomplished so much together over the last decade. The list is impossible to rank, but if you asked me what the most impactful thing is we've done, I'd say witnessing how this "promise of conservation"—the value in, and the need for, people to be connected to nature—is now center stage. What started back in 1967 as an incredibly wise vision to save land before it's gone, is now so much more. It has blossomed into a movement that we need nature in our lives. Our founders built this organization on the hope people would understand why caring for nature is so important to them. It worked. Our business of "thinking outside" is a good business to be in right now. We have a lot of work left to do, but the on-ramp is clear, and the green light says go!

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. I wasn't sure what to say tonight, but then I thought about this simple picture of the American redstart (pictured at right).

Lake Forest Open Lands has so many lovely pictures of plants and animals and critters in our archives that capture the hidden vibrancy of our open spaces and wild places. But the picture on the screen is my favorite. Our staff knows this—they always say, "John we can't use that picture again!"—and so they gave me a framed copy of this picture last week. I'll cherish it.



American redstart

This picture was taken just before I started at LFOLA during one of our bird banding days with Lake Forest College. When you look at the picture, the immediate message illustrates the delicate balance in the connection between man and nature. It is a lovely sentiment in its own right, and one I think we all believe. But for me, the message in this picture is deeper. Over the years, this picture has grown in meaning to define so much more about the importance of what we do.

The bird pictured is an American redstart. A lovely warbler that winters in Central America and northern South America. Surveys suggest their numbers are declining a bit. In early spring, this little bird starts a bold journey from South America in an effort to fly ALL the way north. It stops over here in late May. To make that difficult journey, it has to overcome unpredictable weather, open water, habitat loss, clean windows, lack of insects, windmills, housecats—you name it. It is not easy. But when it starts its journey, it leaves because nature compels it to go with the promise that a place to rest and eat will be here

when it arrives in our preserves.

The redstart's entire life really depends upon hope. And here we are. Doing what we do. Lake Forest Open Lands is now linked to that hope. Today, our collective work is needed to help make that hope to stay a reality—a hope that has been delivered over centuries but is no longer guaranteed.

And it's not just this redstart, but so many plants, animals, and birds we share this planet with today that are becoming increasingly dependent on people. On us.

The world is changing where it's not enough that people just enjoy nature. So many things are in the balance. The paradigm has shifted where nature depends upon us to give it a helping hand. So, when we say the work we all do is important and has an impact beyond our borders, it's true. There's a very special compassion—a caring—in what we do every day. It's bigger than us. It's noble work we do. This tiny bird would say thank you if it could.

This bird's story has a happy ending because of people who share in this hope. People like everyone in this room who appreciate the deeper value of something so special that we want to help. If we don't do it, who will? I believe the hope for our natural world will be saved one community at a time. We are a great example of that.

Our organization's history is built upon people who cared and acted to make a difference. That's what makes working and volunteering for Lake Forest Open Lands so meaningful. Ryan London will be only our 5th president in a 55-year history. And he's going to do a great job. So many on our incredible staff and board stay a long time because they know the work we do is important, and the people in this organization are the best.

I think you can retire—but I don't think you ever “leave” Lake Forest Open Lands. It's permanently grafted to your heart. Thank you again for your support over the years and giving me the privilege to help make a difference. I'm so pleased to stay connected and help this organization where I can down the road, and to stay connected to so many of you who are now my friends.

You've heard me say that “Lake Forest Open Lands is in the forever business.” Well, that's true. And I will be forever grateful for the opportunity to be a part of this organization.

~John Sentell, May 18, 2022