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CONTACT:

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Chicago Wilderness
Catherine Game
Email: catherine@chicagowilderness.org
Office: 312-224-8087
Mobile: 269-967-0527

Chicago Wilderness to Champion 12 Animal Species in Region

(Spoiler Alert: No Groundhogs)

Chicago, IL—Chicago Wilderness, a regional conservation alliance, announced a historic effort to champion 12 animal species in the metropolitan area. These priority species represent globally rare ecosystems in parts of Illinois, Wisconsin, Indiana, and Michigan.

After months of deliberation and input from more than one hundred Chicago Wilderness members, including 40 taxonomic specialists, educators, social scientists, ecologists, and regional conservation leaders, rigorous scientific criteria were applied to select the 12 priority species.

Selection criteria included the species' distribution across the region, synergy with existing efforts, and whether coordinated action would positively impact each species.

"This effort is the result of strategic collaboration," said Suzanne Malec-McKenna, Executive Director of Chicago Wilderness. "World-renowned wildlife specialists, ecologists, and even social scientists are working together to restore these local species and their habitats."

Chicago Wilderness aims to improve the health of each of these species and their habitats over the next five years. Efforts will range from restoring woodlands and river systems to planting pollinator-friendly native gardens.

Key Chicago Wilderness organizations stepped forward as lead partners to drive efforts for each species:

Blanding's Turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*), [Lake County Forest Preserves](#) and [Illinois Natural History Survey](#): This regionally endangered yellow-

chinned turtle spends a lot of its time in water, but is known to travel long distances over land. It matures slowly, not until age 14 to 20, and can live up to 70 years or more.

Blue-spotted Salamander (*Ambystoma laterale*), [Illinois Natural History Survey](#): Distinguished by its pale blue specks, this salamander spends much of its time underground in woodlands and benefits from restoration of small wetlands.

Bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*), [Audubon Chicago Region](#): This unmistakable grassland bird delivers a bubbly song in spring and summer, often as it flutters over hayfields, meadows and prairie.

Ellipse (*Venustaconcha ellipsiformis*), [Openlands](#): The ellipse, like many mussels in North America, is declining in population. At three inches or less, this little critter filters headwater streams and gravel and cobble habitat throughout Chicago Wilderness.

Henslow's Sparrow (*Ammodramus henslowii*), [Audubon Chicago Region](#): This small and cryptic sparrow is vulnerable to the loss of large, native prairies where it prefers to nest. Efforts to revitalize such lands restore hope for the Henslow's Sparrow.

Little Brown Bat (*Myotis lucifugus*), [Lincoln Park Zoo](#): Weighing less than a few nickels, this brown/gray bat roosts in old trees, snags, and buildings. Once common throughout the United States, the little brown bat has declined in recent years due to white nose syndrome, an emerging fungal disease.

Monarch Butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*), [The Field Museum](#), [Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum](#), and the [U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service](#): The monarch butterfly ventures through Chicago Wilderness on its multi-generation migration from Mexico to Canada and depends on milkweed plants in backyards, parks, and other open spaces for food.

Mottled Sculpin (*Cottus bairdi*), [Openlands](#): Find a cold, unpolluted headwater stream, and there's a chance mottled sculpins are present. Sporting a big head, narrow body, and large pectoral fins, it hides under rocks, preys on smaller aquatic critters, and aggressively defends the nest of its mate.

Red-headed Woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephala*), [The Nature Conservancy, Illinois Chapter](#): This distinctly red-headed bird inhabits oak woodlands and savannas. Its drastic decline is the result of oak ecosystems loss across the region.

Regal Fritillary (*Speyeria idalia*), [Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum](#): The population of this large and colorful butterfly has dropped since the 1970s. It

inhabits large, intact prairies that contain abundant prairie and bird's foot violets, the food of its caterpillars.

Rusty Patched Bumble Bee (*Bombus affinis*), [Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum](#): Easily recognizable by its orange markings, this important pollinator has experienced rapid decline in range and abundance.

Smooth Green Snake (*Opheodrys vernalis*), [Lincoln Park Zoo](#): This friendly snake depends on tall grass prairie, sedge meadows, prairie ponds, and oak savannas. It is an Illinois Species in Greatest Need of Conservation and is State Endangered in Indiana.

These organizations will work with Chicago Wilderness partners across the region to coordinate and track conservation action for each species. They will also collaborate with area residents, businesses, and municipalities.

This is the first time that Chicago Wilderness, which includes more than 200 organizations, has rallied around such a focused group of animal species to advance measurable, on-the-ground change.

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ABOUT PRIORITY SPECIES

The Chicago Wilderness Priority Species include 12 animal species that represent critical habitats across Illinois, Wisconsin, Indiana, and Michigan. Lead partners include Audubon Chicago Region, The Field Museum, Illinois Natural History Survey, Lake County Forest Preserves, Lincoln Park Zoo, The Nature Conservancy - Illinois Chapter, Openlands, Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

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ABOUT CHICAGO WILDERNESS

Chicago Wilderness is a regional alliance leading strategy to preserve, improve, and expand nature and quality of life. By connecting leaders in conservation, health, business, science, and beyond, Chicago Wilderness tackles challenging issues to ensure a resilient region. Building on a 20-year legacy of collaboration, this broad alliance of member organizations advance work in Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, and Michigan.

Website: www.chicagowilderness.org

Photos of the species are available at: <https://chicagowilderness.site-ym.com/news/271878/Chicago-Wilderness-to-Champion-12-Animal-Species-in-Region.htm>

LEAD PARTNER MEDIA CONTACTS:

Audubon Chicago Region: Nathaniel Miller, 312-453-0230 x2006, nmiller@audubon.org

The Field Museum: Matthew Northey, mnorthey@fieldmuseum.org, 312-665-7202, Jaclyn Johnston, 312-665-7107, jjohnston@fieldmuseum.org

Illinois Natural History Survey: Jen Mui, 217-333-5986, Jmu@illinois.edu

Lake County Forest Preserves: Gary Glowacki, Wildlife Biologist, gglowacki@lcfpd.org, 847-968-3264

Lincoln Park Zoo: Jillian Braun, 312-742-5791, JBraun@lpzoo.org

The Nature Conservancy, Illinois Chapter: Gelasia Croom, gcroom@tnc.org, 312-580-2175

Openlands: Brandon Hayes, 312-863-6260, bhayes@openlands.org

Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum: Marc Miller, 773-755-5140, mmiller@naturemuseum.org

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service: Louise Clemency, 847-381-2253, louise_clemency@fws.gov

