



Honorary Director Stephen Packard



Stephen Packard

Founding board member -- Society for Ecological Restoration

As a volunteer in 1977, Stephen Packard initiated the North Branch Restoration Project which became a world model of volunteer stewardship. He became Director of Science and Stewardship for the Illinois Nature Conservancy (1983-1999) and Founding Director of Audubon Chicago Region (1999-2014). He taught at Northwestern University (2008-2013).

Stephen has worked to develop the practice and popular understanding of ecological restoration and biodiversity conservation. Packard was the primary initiator of the Chicago Region Biodiversity Council (Chicago Wilderness) which became a globally respected collaboration of more than 200 national and local conservation-minded agencies and helped establish biodiversity conservation as a core part of the region's culture. He currently collaborates with and counsels a wide variety of efforts to conserve natural areas, wildlife and habitats and "create a culture of conservation" through which people and nature can re-establish mutually nourishing relationships in a changing world.

Packard initiated and helped to plan and implement many of Illinois' larger ecological restoration projects including Nachusa Grasslands (4,000 acres), Bartel Grassland (750 acres), Orland Grassland (960 acres) and the restoration of the North Branch, Poplar Creek, Deer Grove, and Spring Creek Forest Preserves. He has extensive experience in the restoration of prairies and oak woodlands. His work on oak ecosystems, in particular, has led to new insights that have clarified ideas about the composition and dynamics of these formerly-vanishing rare communities. Some have referred to this work as the "rediscovery" of this ecosystem.

At the Nature Conservancy and later with Audubon, he initiated and guided the Volunteer Stewardship Network. With thousands of volunteers working at hundreds of sites, these collaborations served as models for the creation of similar projects by many agencies in other parts of the United States and internationally. He helped assemble and was a founding board member of the Society for Ecological Restoration which now has members throughout the world and is the pre-eminent organization in this flourishing new field. He helped design and initiate the Mighty Acorns (youth stewardship program), Friends of the Forest Preserves, and Chicago Wilderness magazine. To support the volunteers in the Cook County Forest Preserves, he organized a restoration intern program, first through the Conservancy and later through Audubon and Friends of the Forest Preserves, that has introduced the restoration profession to a new generation.

Packard received a Bachelor's degree in social psychology and anthropology from Harvard College in 1966.