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# For conservation's sake, transfer Joliet Training Area to Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie

An investment in Midewin, one of the largest prairie restorations east of the Mississippi River, is an investment in a climate-resilient future for our region, leaders of Openlands, Wetlands Initiative and Sierra Club Illinois write.

By Michael Davidson, Paul Botts and Jack Darin | Jan 5, 2024, 4:00am PST

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Henslow's sparrow, a grassland bird species that faces rapid population decline due to habitat loss, is shown on perched on a plant at Midewin Prairie. | Bill Glass/Provided

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Recently, at the United Nations Climate Change Conference, COP28, Assistant Secretary for the Interior Shannon Estenoz said, “Investing in nature is investing in ourselves. By employing nature-based solutions, land managers and decision-makers can restore and sustain healthy ecosystems that in turn support healthy communities and economies.”

Less than an hour south of Chicago lies our region’s most substantial investment opportunity: the Joliet Training Area, a 3,000-acre landscape operated by the U.S. military directly north of the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie. With encroaching development pressure, diminishing water supply, and increasing truck traffic, the future of this area is at a crossroads.

It’s time for Congress to embrace a vision for healthy ecosystems, communities, and economies and steward the transfer of the Training Area to the U.S. Forest Service at Midewin.

## Opinion

As the Sun-Times recently reported, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation awarded a historic \$1.5 million to **restore and expand over 1,300 acres** of grassland and wetland habitat at Midewin, as part of the America the Beautiful Challenge grant. This funding is a national recognition of Midewin in achieving our country’s **America the Beautiful Initiative**, an effort to conserve and restore 30% of U.S. lands and waters by 2030.

With less than six years left, we need bold actions. What better way to build on this historic restoration than with this transfer, protecting our region’s largest landscape for future generations?

### Home to endangered species

The word “Midewin” is rooted in healing and used by the tribal nations of the Great Lakes Region: the Ojibwa, Chippewa, Ottawa, and Potawatomi. When Midewin was established in 1996, it foreshadowed the immense healing to come. As one of the largest prairie restorations east of the Mississippi River, conservation partners and the Forest Service are proud to have restored several thousand acres, with more underway.



A flock of birds soar over Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie, above a herd of bison. | Preston Keres, USDA Forest Service/Provided

In turn, wildlife and people have responded. Today, Midewin is home to many threatened and endangered species, especially grassland birds, some of the most endangered in the world. Thousands of people visit Midewin every year to experience its history and nature. The Joliet Training Area is no less ecologically or recreationally significant. With over 3,000 acres of woodland, the