Katie: Hey, we're Katie and Caitlin coming to you from our library living room. We are here, not just as children's librarians, but as people who are parenting our own children.

Caitlin: Each month, we'll bring a new conversation about parenting with helpful resources from our library and beyond, this is "Your Family, Your Library," and we're your librarians.

Katie: Before we jump into this month's topic, we want to remind our listeners that though we are pretty good at finding resources and we have experiences parenting our own Children. We are not child development experts. Our choices don't need to be your choices. There is no judgment here. We are all doing our best with the health and well being of our families and mind.

Caitlin: Always and forever.

Katie: Yes.

Caitlin: We're excited about this month's episode because one of the episodes, I don't know about you, Katie. I think you feel the same way. But one of the episodes that we did that is most dear to my heart is the one in which we talked about climate change. And we focused during that episode on not just our own fears but what we can do as individuals with our families on a really micro level. And this month we are returning to that conversation because we have a special guest with us today who is here to talk about what we can do as a community.

Katie:: We are very excited to introduce you to Amanda Krause from Oakton College.

Amanda: Hello.

Caitlin: Hello. Thank you for being here with us.

Amanda: I'm delighted to be here. Thank you for having me.

Caitlin: Amanda, do you want to tell us a little bit about what your role is at Oakton College?

Amanda: Sure. I am the naturalist at Oakton College.

Caitlin: Wait, what is a naturalist?

Amanda: Great question. A naturalist is a professional nature nerd, yeah.

Caitlin: I'm an amateur nature nerd.

Amanda:You get points. I'll give you a badge.

Caitlin: Yes.

Amanda: So I get to take care of all of our nature. And at Oakton College, we are really fortunate to have almost 100 acres of remnant woodland at our Des Plaines campus. And then we also have our Skokie campus here. So Oakton is poised to be able to engage the community, whether you have acres and acres of forest to play with or whether you have the regular traditional residential landscape. I get to take care of all of it. And I love engaging with the community to show what we're doing at Oakton College and how folks can incorporate some of those nature benefits into their own lives.

Caitlin: That is so cool. I don't think it even occurred to me that that would be a job at Oakton College. How long have you been doing that?

Amanda: I have been here for almost three years and I am having a ball. It is great.

Caitlin: How did you become a naturalist?

Amanda: Well, I didn't know that I could get paid for trees. So I thought, I thought I was headed into medicine and I was going to school doing kind of the basic biology degree stuff and working at a doctor's office at the time. And I thought, gosh, I just don't know if this is for me. And so I wasn't sure what to do. And I started volunteering in our local Cook County Forest Preserves. Now, I did not know at the time but fun fact, the Cook County Forest Preserves are as old as the National Park system. Some people would say even older. Yellowstone is the world's first National Park and that was founded in 1872. But the National Park system itself wasn't established until 1916 by President Woodrow Wilson. The Cook County Forest Preserve System was created two years before that in 1914. And the Cook County Forest Preserves' very first acquisition was Deer Grove West Forest Preserve in Palatine. They purchased that in 1916. So the same year that the National Park system was created. So here in Cook County, we have just a wealth of resources to get out there and explore. It's a lot of fun stuff. So when I started exploring the Cook County Forest preserve system. I just fell in love and here's fun fact number two. the Chicagoland region has greater biodiversity than any US National Park.

Katie: Wow.

Caitlin: Say more.

Amanda: I know. Right. I have to say that again because it sounds like it can't be true, but it is. The Chicago land region has more biodiversity than any US National Park. And so what does that mean?

That means we have more species of animals and plants and flowers and insects. We have more nature to explore here in Chicago, right? In one of the country's largest cities, we have more nature to explore than any US National Park. It's right here. So we really have an awesome opportunity to just get out and explore and have fun and learn.

Caitlin: That is incredible. I had no idea and I feel like I'm sitting here like, I don't know, some sort of a person whose mind is blown. I'm sitting here like some kind of person whose mind is blown. That's incredible. And it makes me feel so lucky.

Katie: Yeah, I mean, I always say to my kids like we are so incredibly lucky to live next to a part of the Great Lakes system.

Amanda: Absolutely.

Katie: But learning from you about all the others like nature that's around us and what that really is and how bountiful that is. I mean, that's, it makes me feel even more glad to live here.

Caitlin: I think what's really interesting about it too is when we think about Katie and I are both from Indiana. Although Katie's a little more urbane than I, coming from Indianapolis. I know my parents were, had a vision of what Chicago looked like as did I. And so we think of museums and we think of big streets and we think of the CTA, the Sears Tower or the Willis Tower if you will. But we don't think about the forest preserves. And that was something that really surprised me. I think I hadn't really even fully explored it until the lockdown when we were looking for things to do outside. And I didn't realize how much there was. And even with that knowledge, hearing from you about that biodiversity really blows my mind. And I think it's really important, especially when we're looking at species extinction and we're looking at, you know, the way that we approach even basic things like lawn care and stuff.

Amanda: Oh, absolutely. And you are right on the money about that.

Caitlin: Do we have a tick on the desk with us?

Amanda: Well, yes and no, I'm afraid I'm afraid so. But, we do not have to be afraid of it. And that's the good news, right?

Caitlin: It's a former tick.

AmandaIt is. Yes, it, it's, it's a specimen is what we have, we have a specimen. You know, one of the things that I'm glad to be able to talk about is that, you know, while there are an awful lot of scary headlines out there right now, particularly in regards to environmental issues. There's a lot of fun and easy things that we can do in the face of those headlines. So we don't have to be powerless is

the thing and we can have a lot of fun getting out there and actually see the difference that we're making. And that's why getting involved in some of these wonderful nature experiences that we have locally is so satisfying. You know, and especially in this digital age, when we don't necessarily see the results of our labor after eight hours at a computer, you can see the results of your labor. You're out there getting involved in nature. If you're helping me do some seed collecting or planting native plants and we'll get into all of that. Yes. So we have a tick specimen with us because when we are out in nature, there's no way around it there are ticks out there. But what I have learned is that there's only one species of tick that even can carry Lyme disease. So, if you see a tick on you, after you are out in nature, it's not necessarily the species that even can carry Lyme disease. In fact, it's probably not a species that even can carry Lyme disease.

Katie: Is that the deer tick?

Amanda: Well, yeah, the deer tick is the one that can carry Lyme disease. But that doesn't even mean that every deer tick does. So the most common ticks that we have out here in the Cook County region, the most common are called American dog tick. They are big-ish. You know, they're about the size of a lentil and it's not even the species that can carry Lyme disease. So nobody likes ticks. I'm not out here saying ticks are great. Let's adopt ticks as our mascots or anything. Nobody likes ticks except possums.

Katie: Let them infest your scalp.

Amanda: No, no, no, no, no, no.

Caitlin: She's speaking as a possum.

Amanda: Ticks are lovely.

Caitlin: My sisters wanted to develop a program called Tick Tok.

Amanda: Oh my God.

Caitlin: It was just talking about ticks.

Amanda: That sounds like a podcast. And I have been, you know, I'm like one of those nature nerds who is very excited to attend a lecture from one of our foremost tick researchers.

Caitlin: You went to a Tick Talk.

Amanda: I did go to a Tick Talk and it was just so fascinating and the more that I learn, the more that I don't feel afraid or powerless. Right? So, if I see a tick and I go, oh no, that's a tick. And then I

freak out, you know, that's one option. But, and I definitely did that numerous times years ago. But now when I see a tick, I look at it and I go, oh, that's an adult female American dog tick. That species can't even transmit Lyme disease. It's just like an annoying little ant crawling around my body. And, my favorite way to dispose of ticks is to wrap them up in a little piece of packing tape and then they're stuck. They can't go anywhere and then you can look at it if you want to or you can just toss it in the trashcan, you know, sometimes people will throw them down the toilet or put them in the trash and they're just creepy, they crawl back out, but if you wrap them up in tape, they're done. They're not going anywhere.

Caitlin: Do I remember correctly that we're seeing sort of a tick surge because of climate change a little bit.

Amanda: One of one of the, the delightful fun gifts of climate change. We are seeing an increase in the abundance of ticks and we're also seeing some of the range of ticks, different species like, so tick species maybe that previously were limited to just the southern United States, maybe are coming up a little more northern now. So ticks are out there, but when you're in nature, you just make it a habit to stay on the trail in the middle of the trail. Ticks often will hang on the edge of the vegetation and they do this funny little dance where they wave their forearms in the air and they're just waiting for something to come by so they can grab it and latch on. It's called questing, which sounds very dungeons and dragons.

Caitlin: : You're kind of making me appreciate ticks a little bit.

Amanda: You know, that's the, I'm not trying,

Katie: It's kinda groovy. I'm not. But, yeah, it is interesting. Right.

Amanda: They're just, all these little critters are just trying to eat.

Katie: And survive.

Amanda: They're, they're questing. So, you know, that's why we say stay in the middle of the trail, try not to brush against the vegetation because that's where they are questing. That's where they're hanging out, waiting for a ride. But in general, we don't have to freak out when we see it. And something that I find is a wonderful tool for families outside is an app called Seek. S-E-E-K. And this is a great app for identifying plants and flowers and animals and all sorts of things. It's sort of the civilian version of what a lot of us in the profession use and that is one called iNaturalist. So you are certainly welcome to look up both and use both. iNaturalist will take people's observations and create scientific data from it. Seek is more

like a game where it will help you identify the things that you see, but you also can earn badges if you find 20 different flowers, you know, stuff like that.

Caitlin: That is fun.

Amanda: Yeah.

Caitlin: Join me and Katie, your favorite podcast hosts in our hour of casual supportive conversation. We'll chat about all things, parenting and yes, snacks are provided. Learn more in our show notes and we hope to see you there.

Katie: I am curious when you started it at Oakton, was there anything that surprised you about what you found there? Given the abundance of land and vegetation that surrounds it?

Caitlin: Two things surprised me and both positively. Number one is that Oakton is really ecologically minded. Oakton really strives to be environmentally responsible and environmentally sustainable in all aspects. So not only do we have a full time naturalist, me but also a full time sustainability specialist, constantly seeking to find ways to reduce our carbon footprint and be more ecologically responsible and sustainable. So that's number one, Oakton does a great job with that. Number two speaks to that in that when I drove through the Des Plaines campus, I was shocked at what I did not find because that is a stunning, beautiful, wonderful absence of public enemy number one in Chicagoland restoration and that is a shrub called Buckthorn, Rhamnus Cathartica.

Caitlin Dun Dun Du.

Amanda: Buckthorn! And this is something that was brought to the US about 100 years ago to be sort of a living fence because the European or British mindset of raising livestock was really kind of to turn them free right to, to let your cows and pigs roam the forest and eat the acorns and whatever. And so it was commonly done to plant the types of shrubs that would be just big thorny thickets to keep your livestock in your property. And so buckthorn was, was brought to the US to do that. And boy did it. It has absolutely escaped. So, if you are driving down the road past a forest preserve and if you can't see in to the forest, that's buckthorn, it just is a wall. So it is now 66% of the Chicagoland forest canopy. I mean, this one species.

Katie: How tall does it get?

Amanda:: So it kind of straddles the line between large shrub and small tree. So it might be, you know, 12 to 15 feet.

Katie: Oh that's tall.

Amanda: Kind of some of the biggest, biggest ones I've seen. And you know, it is, it is a jerk. I mean, we don't want to anthropomorphize plants. I mean, I do, I do want to do that.

Caitlin: I do, we're children's librarians and so it's par for the course.

Amanda: So Buckthorn is a villain, first class nature. The Latin name is Rhamnus Cathartica. Cathartic meaning cleansing because it gives the birds diarrhea.

Caitlin: Stop it.

Amanda: A lot of the Latin names...

Caitlin: That's a fun fact.

Amanda: Isn't that a fun fact? I mean, I'm also that kind of nerd that I was like the Latin minor in college, which really just helps me with city mottos and plant names.

Katie:I was actually just thinking I was like, wow, that would be so hard to remember all the Latin names.

Amanda: Unless you use it all the time.

Katie: It seems like you've got that in the bag.

Amanda:: So, yeah, I mean, if you look at it and you go, oh, that just means diarrhea, it kind of sticks in your mind. So, so, right. So one of the things that we see a lot of our different invasive plants do not just buckhorn, but what a lot of our invasive plants do to outcompete our native plants that, that evolved and developed here in the Chicago region is that they will put out their leaves a couple of weeks sooner in the spring and get that extra couple weeks of sunlight and they will keep their leaves another two or three weeks after our native plants lose their leaves. So they end up with about a month of extra photosynthesis, a month of extra energy. So that's thing number one. Which means that around October, you also can identify buckthorn when everything else has started to drop its leaves and there's still something out there with green on it. Then you go "uh-oh." Yeah, buckthorn also emits a hormone from the roots that prevents other things from growing. It's kind of a jerk move.

Caitlin: That is a total jerk.

Amanda: It has these crazy little thorns all over it. I actually got one about five years ago, jabbed me in the base of my fingernail and I think all have a wonky fingernail for the rest of my life. It's kind

of just, you know, battle scars. We all have these battle scars and although it does produce berries, so maybe we would think, you know. Ok. Well, if it has berries, then it's contributing to the wildlife, right? Well, remember as we said, the berries give the birds diarrhea. It doesn't actually provide any nutritional value. Here in the Chicagoland region, our winters are rough, right? And imagine being a tiny, tiny little bird out there in the forest and you have to somehow survive the winter. And what a lot of birds do and what a lot of other wildlife do is just really pack on the weight, right? And in order to help that, a lot of the, the fruits and nuts and seeds and acorns and, and so on of our native plants have a pretty high fat content if you think about. I mean, we all know that like a handful of almonds is way more calories than we want it to be, right? Or a tablespoon of peanut butter nuts have a really high fat content. And so a lot of our, our native fruits and nuts and seeds will have that high fat content to help the wildlife put on enough weight to make it through Chicago winter. Well, the buckthorn berries don't have those big seeds. They're mostly fruit. It's mostly just a berry and the birds still eat it. I mean, if there were a donut tree I'd eat it. Yeah, absolutely.

Caitlin: Is there a donut tree somewhere in the Cook County forest preserves?

Katie: Specifically Doo Rite.

Amanda: You know, there is one, there is one that I have come across. Yes. And I think it's somebody who is just like putting donuts out for birds.

Caitlin: Wait, are you being serious right now?

Amanda: I'm serious. I found a donut tree and I was like, wait a second.

Caitlin: Oh, my gosh. I thought you were messing with us.

Amanda: Well, maybe there used to be a donut tree until I found it.

Caitlin: That's right.

Amanda: Yeah, so, so buckthorn, definitely public enemy number one. And I find it really interesting, particularly as I, as I got my Chicago nature involvement by starting with the forest preserves. It's definitely the thing that volunteers really spend a lot of time fighting.

Caitlin: I was going to ask what's the protocol in terms of remittance?

Amanda: Fire.

Caitlin: Dun dun dun!

Amanda: That is the only good thing about buckthorn here in the US. It, it has this flammable resin inside it, which means that it doesn't really degrade, it doesn't rot and return carbon to the forest floor the way a native maple or an oak tree might rot. It just sits there and does nothing but that resin is flammable. So that is what we do all winter long. If you search for volunteer opportunities at the Cook County Forest Preserve website, guarantee six months out of the year from about October to March, you will find somewhere to jump in and help battle the buckthorn and it's these massive bonfires. And I mentioned how satisfying nature work can be. And really, that's what I meant if you look at the end of a two hour volunteer shift on a Saturday morning in November and you know that when you got there in the morning you couldn't see 10 feet past your feet. And now there's this massive open area. It feels so good and it was fun. And you got to have a big bonfire and you know that you got to really make a positive difference to the local ecology.

Katie and Caitlin: That's really cool.

Katie: So wait, you're saying that the Des Plaines Campus had none had no buckthorn.

Amanda: Just about. It really speaks well to Oakton. It really speaks to how Oakton over the years has prioritized ecological restoration and being a responsible steward of this land. So we had our initial naturalist Ken Schafer who came in and he was there for 30 years and he just fought the good fight and it is shocking. It is shocking and such a treat to get to look around and because that buckthorn has been removed and not to say that there's zero, right? Because those berries are still in the soil. So I just talked to someone this morning about making sure that when the new buckthorn sprouts that we're still staying on top of it. But because most of that big buckthorn has been removed, that means that when we go look at the woodlands at the Des Plaines campus, it's an opportunity to step back in time to see what the Chicago land woodlands looked like before humans brought Buckthorn to Chicago. So it's a living museum. It's a really, really precious piece of land. And because it's what we would call a remnant forest, it's what used to be called like a virgin forest, essentially. You know, I can, I can take an acre of land, like, let's say that there was an old, an old farm field, an old agriculture field and somebody wanted to turn it into a forest. Awesome, great, I'm there, right? So I could take that and I could plant a whole bunch of trees and shrubs and flowers and grasses, you know, and I could make a forest, but you can never make a remnant forest when it's gone, it's gone forever. And so that's why at Oakton College, we want to be really good stewards while we, while we have this land and really make sure that we're able to preserve it as the living museum that it is. And we're trying to

make sure that we are really being good stewards of this land for the community, for the students and the educational opportunities. We have a thriving environmental studies concentration at Oakton. It is, it is so fun. And the environmental studies students are not the only ones who get to benefit from the woodlands. There are more and more and more studies, hard peer reviewed data coming out showing that as little as a 20 minute nature experience helps students perform better academically. And this is not just college students, this is, it's been studied with kindergarteners, it's been studied with third graders. So we know that nature is good for our physical health and our mental health, right? Like we all know that we should get out in nature more. But when you think that these nature experiences can help students perform better, it's such a wonderful opportunity.

Katie: Yeah, that's cool. Yeah, when my kids were really little and we were having a hard day inside, I mean, even if it was 10 degrees outside, it's like everybody get your stuff on, we're going outside because 100% of the time, I mean, even for myself, not just for my kids, we would come back like changed from being outdoors.

Caitlin: It's a reset.

Amanda: It is a reset. I mean, it's, it's a literal reset physiologically in our brains and the way it works actually is very similar to, you know, we talk about like shower thoughts. So there's the story of the Greek mathematician Archimedes, right? And he's the one who shouted eureka. And that's where we got the whole eureka thing. And the story with him had been that his king wanted to have a crown made and he gave quantity X of gold to this crown maker guy and the crown maker guy returned a crown, but the king was kind of suspicious and he thought maybe the crown maker kept some of the gold and mixed a lesser metal in there. And so the king tasked Archimedes figure out if this crown is pure gold but don't melt it down or do you know, just figure it out.

Caitlin: Just figure it out.

Amanda: You know. No big deal, you know, like on pain of death or something.

Caitlin: Yeah. No big deal, right.

Amanda: And, and so Archimedes was trying and trying and trying to figure out, you know, figure out how to do this and it was like an ancient Greek shower, thought he was lounging in the bath just letting his mind kind of wander and relax. And when it suddenly came to him and he, he realized that he could use water displacement with the crown and do a density experiment. And that's how he solved it for the king. But he shouted, you know, "Eureka!" Old ancient Greek for, I've got it and he supposedly jumped up and ran naked through the streets.

Caitlin: I mean, under pain of death. You want to get there as soon as humanly possible.

Amanda: Absolutely, you do. And so that's a very similar thing to the way that nature resets our brains now because when we are trying so hard to focus on something, whether it's school or a lecture or work or, you know, you're in a classroom or you're trying to study, you're trying to figure out a problem. We're using a part of our brain called the prefrontal cortex. And it just gets tired, it gets tired. You know, we're all tired, we're all tired. But when we go out in nature, we're able to turn off the prefrontal cortex. And instead we're engaging a part of our brain called the default mode network. And this is just a diffuse network of areas all over our brain. And this is the site of insight and creativity and introspection and imagination and all of these things. So that's why when we're in the shower or, you know, maybe washing the dishes when we're doing something kind of simple and mindless and we can let our minds just wander or go on autopilot. That's when we're able to suddenly make these connections that we wouldn't have been able to make before. So these studies are showing that when kids are able to go out in nature and engage the default mode network that they're then able to focus better when they go back in the classroom and they are getting better grades, writing their papers, they're doing their homework better, all sorts of benefits to nature.

Katie: Learn about climate change through steam projects. Each workshop which includes a discussion of a topic and a related hands on activity is perfect for families of all ages. Find more information in our show notes.

Katie: So are families...like is anyone able to come to the Des Plaines campus and drive through, walk through.

Amanda: I have an awful lot of opportunities available for folks and they can email me at naturalist at Oakton dot E D U. I'm the only naturalist. So it's just me, naturalist at Oakton dot E D U. And the best way to get involved with our nature experiences is just to get on my notification list. I've tried in the past to schedule things ahead of time and the rain never cooperates. So if people are wanting to get involved, then I can let them know when we have fun experiences coming up. Anybody is welcome to drive through. We don't have a lot of walking trails in the forest because we want to be mindful that we're not introducing too much disruption. Our woodlands are in a really skinny U-shape around the campus, so they're already pretty vulnerable to a lot of outside influence, right? Much more than like a big square would be. So we want to make sure that we can appreciate the nature and we can learn from it and we can enjoy the benefits, but that we're that we're not introducing any harm. So we're going to be putting together a big fun roster of events in October. Not only is it campus

sustainability month, but it's Oaktober.

Caitlin: Oaktober?!

Amanda: Oaktober. We're very excited and that's not just Oakton College that is global. Oaktober is a big deal. So we're going to have all sorts of fun events. We're putting up a bunch of interpretive signage, forest preserve type interpretive signage. So people can learn about the difference, for example, from our maple woodlands. So I have the honor of tapping the Sugar Maples and making the maple syrup on the same land where the Potawatomi tapped.

Caitlin: Oh my gosh.

Amanda: I just, I get chills. We're 188 years on from the Potawatomi living on that land.

Caitlin: That's amazing.

Amanda: And, you know, it's such an honor to get to care for these trees.

Katie: And is that on the Skokie campus as well?

Amanda: The Skokie campus, I'm still working on the history of the Skokie campus. The Skokie campus does not have Sugar Maples, but we are putting in a whole bunch of oak trees, not only on our own, but I mean, if you want to know about what kind of opportunities there are in Skokie. Well, gosh, the Village of Skokie is already doing so many cool environmental things. The Village of Skokie kicked off their Skokie Roots for Trees campaign. Just this last April, April 2024. The Village is going to be planting hundreds and hundreds of trees all over Skokie over the next three years, starting mostly with schools and disadvantaged area. Yes! And so they came to Oakton and they said, all right, you've got some space, we're going to put some trees in here.

Katie: That's awesome.

Amanda: Yeah, and we were able to walk around and identify places where we're putting a whole bunch of trees at Oakton and they'll be moving all throughout the Village doing that. And when I was speaking this week with some others from the Village of Skokie, I learned that they have all sorts of, all sorts of composting services.

Caitlin: Yep.

Amanda: I didn't even know that!

Caitlin: Skokie is so proactive. It makes me incredibly proud to live

here.

Amanda: Absolutely.

Katie: Do they do it through Collective Resource?

Caitlin: Yes, they do.

Katie: Ok, awesome.

Caitlin: They're really on it. I mean, there are public sites that you can drop off your compost if you don't want to...

Katie: Yeah I see it at Village Hall right across from us.

Caitlin: That's so cool.

Katie: It's awesome.

Amanda: And I was looking up the website this week and in addition to the drop off sites, you can do a pickup service. And if you want to have your own compost bin and make your own compost at your place, there's even a rebate for buying a compost bin.

Caitlin: It's so great.

Amanda: Skokie's amazing. And I learned about Skokie's solar energy savings program. They said that anybody who pays an electric bill can get in on this program. They said it's like a 10 minute set up. It's free. You're not going to end up with solar panels on your roof. And, anybody who pays an electric bill in the Village of Skokie can get in on this savings program.

Caitlin: How do we find information about this?

Amanda: Oh, I got the links and we will have them in your show notes.

Caitlin: Amazing!

Amanda: So Skokie has those things already set up as the Village of Skokie. But at Oakton, we also have the community apiary at Oakton College and this is something that the village of Skokie came to Oakton and said, hey, we have some residents who are interested in maybe beekeeping for honey. Can we do a community apiary at the Oakton College campus? Sort of like a community garden? And we said, sure.

Katie: That's awesome.

Amanda: So we have this apiary right now. Yeah, we have a bunch of Skokie residents who have beehives there and they do their own thing.

And then Oakton College as well has two official beehives. So we get a whole bunch of Oakton honey each year and it's really neat.

Katie: And our library's Teen Services department has done some events with your apiary.

Amanda: Yes. That's exactly right.

Caitlin: I think our early childhood team did some programming with it too. Laura and Gudrun.

Amanda: That's right. They got to come see the bees and how it works.

Caitlin: I mean, it's so meaningful on so many different levels. One we know that bees are vital to our very existence.

Amanda: No big deal.

Caitlin: But also being able to go and check it out in person and sort of be close, gives you a more..,I mean, it creates buy-in it shows you that you're right next to nature. You're part of it.

Amanda: I love that. You're absolutely right. I mean, I think that's the most crucial thing for people who want to get involved in nature things, right? Who want to take action in the face of the scary environmental headlines. It's just that paradigm shift of, it's not humans versus nature, right? Like we are part of nature. The rest of nature was here first. It's a big paradigm shift, but when we can start framing it that way. Yeah, it's really, it's really a satisfying way to think about nature and to approach nature and be like, ok, I'm here and a third of the food on my plate is pollinated by bees. If the bees disappear, I'm going to have a lot less to eat. You know, we're all connected.

Caitlin: We're all connected. I think that speaks too to your comment earlier about it's an additional benefit to being in nature because you're experiencing it as a part of it as opposed to just sort of a voyeur.

Amanda:I love that. That's exactly right.

Caitlin: I love it too. I love and speaking to you of your biodiversity and how we have this rich forest network here in Cook County. But we also have some prairie spaces that are really cool. So if you go, one of the places that I like to go is Linne Woods. And if I always find myself in that prairie grass area, if you know what I'm talking about, and if you go at the right time when the butterflies are doing their thing, it feels like you're in an enchanted world, it is so cool and it's cool to experience this area, the way it probably looked before we came in and, and, you know, did our human thing.

Amanda: Absolutely.

Caitlin: It's kind of amazing.

Amanda: So we're doing a lot of prairie plantings as well. And, and you're right when you talk about biodiversity, because one of the reasons the Chicagoland area has such incredible biodiversity is because we sit at the junction of three major continental ecosystems, right? So the Chicagoland region is right at the intersection of the vast Midwest Prairie ecosystem and all of the forested woodlands of kind of the east coast. And then we also have what's called the northern boreal forest. That's kind of some more conifers, kind of up more like Michigan and Canada. And that ecosystem just reaches down and kisses the top of Chicago's head.

Caitlin: Oh that's such a gentle way to say it. Also, I love the word boreal. Do you all have words that just resonate with you. That's one of them. Boreal is such an excellent word, especially when I think of it, kissing the top of my head.

Amanda: It feels like northern lights.

Caitlin: It does! Aurora borealis.

Katie: It is.

Amanda: That's right.

Caitlin: Coming down in Dallas. You know that song from the Muppets? Aurora borealis coming down to Dallas. Can you picture this? boom-boom. Thank you.

Caitlin: There's almost nothing that Katie and I love more than talking about native plants and invasive species. Lucky for us, this conversation is not over yet. Join us next month for part two of this scintillating conversation with Amanda Krause from Oakton College where she will continue to enlighten and wow us about all things nature in the Skokie area. Tune in next month to learn more about native plants and invasive species and so much more.