



WINTER 2023

Tennessee field notes

What legacy are we leaving future generations? If that legacy is a healthy planet, the time is now to make an intentional commitment to nature.

The Nature Conservancy is part of a global effort focused on protecting 30 percent of the planet by 2030. We know this won't be easy and it will take more than simply protecting areas on land, in freshwater and the sea. We also need to address the root cause of climate change and biodiversity loss, which is land use changes, pollution, resource exploitation and invasive species.

The good news is that TNC boasts a diverse portfolio of strategies guided by innovative science, a talented and creative staff, and a hands-on presence in the places where we work. In all of these places, a common theme resonates: nature represents a powerful tool, even a solution, for tackling our climate crises and biodiversity loss at a global scale.

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The Nature Conservancy's mission is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.

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From The Director



It is something that crosses all our minds at one time or another. "What kind of legacy will I leave to the next generation?"

This thinking factors into why I am working at The Nature Conservancy in my native state of Tennessee. What better legacy is there to leave than clean air and water, healthy soils for growing food, and lands and waters for finding peace and outdoor fun?

In this issue of *Tennessee Field Notes*, we highlight several ways that our staff, partners and volunteers are leaving invaluable legacies. In the pages that follow, we feature new science that is guiding our work in conserving federally endangered gray bats, which serve as important pollinators and insect consumers throughout their broad range. We also dedicate space to celebrate recent acquisitions key to connecting and building resilient landscapes that can support wildlife while reducing the impacts of a rapidly changing climate.

You will also read about how our trustees and staff are advocating for nature-friendly legislation and policies—from watershed restoration to wildlife protection and support for working farms and forests—that will secure a healthier planet in the future. And throughout the year, we marked the 50th anniversary of the Endangered Species Act, a true legacy that has benefited so many plants and animals comprising our nation's unique biodiversity.

Finally, I want you to know that all of the work featured in this issue of *Tennessee Field Notes*—and much, much more—represents YOUR legacy as well. That is because none of this work would be possible without your support.

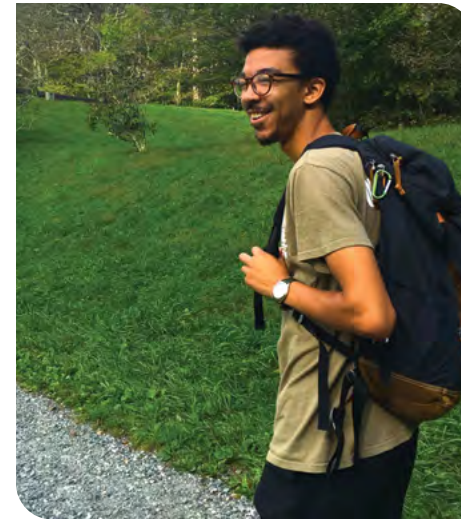
Thank you for all that you do to make it possible for us to *conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends* here in Tennessee. I wish you happy holidays and a healthy New Year.

To a healthy today and tomorrow,

Laurel Creech
Tennessee State Director

P.S. Want to learn more about leaving a legacy that benefits our planet? As a new state director with The Nature Conservancy, I am in the process of becoming a TNC Legacy Club member. This commitment to dedicating all or part of my estate to nature after my lifetime feels like the right decision for me. You can learn more about the Legacy Club on Page 7 of this newsletter.

New staff members add skills and talents that advance our mission in Tennessee.



© Courtesy/Nasyr Bey

Nasyr Bey

Conservation Policy Fellow/
Nashville Urban Bird City Coordinator

When The Nature Conservancy decided to join partners in pursuing a designation for Nashville as an Urban Bird Treaty city, a clear need for some extra help emerged. Enter Nasyr Bey. Since childhood, Nasyr felt drawn to learning more about how humans perceive and engage with nature. This curiosity stayed with him into adulthood, eventually informing the focus of his studies at Appalachian State University—biology and animal studies. Upon graduation, Nasyr sought to expand on his ever growing interest in the field of urban ecology, which represented a perfect fit for this new role. In addition to working with partners to navigate the process of achieving this unique designation, Nasyr researches issues, tracks legislation and builds relationships with communities.

"In college I tailored a major around exploring how humans interact with nature. When this position came along, it seemed like a perfect fit."

– NASYR BEY



© Courtesy/Brad Denton

Brad Denton

Conservation Coordinator

Brad Denton had enjoyed a 45-year career working with West Tennessee farmers as an employee with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). It was so satisfying that he could not pass up an opportunity to emerge from retirement to help The Nature Conservancy with enrolling some of those same farmers, and others, in the NRCS Wetland Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP). The WREP engages eligible land owners interested in exploring conservation easements as a way of conserving wildlife habitat while maintaining their land's productivity. In his new role, Brad also works with farmers on using cover crops to keep water and fertilizer on the land and out of local waterways.

"I wasn't looking for a new job, but did miss my daily contact with the farmers. Now that I'm back at it, I am enjoying this second career and new chapter."

–BRAD DENTON



© Courtesy/Allana Funderburk

Allana Funderburk

Tennessee State Forest Action Plan
Coordinator

As a 2021 University of Tennessee graduate with a Bachelor's of Forestry, Allana Funderburk has the academic and hands on experience required for this newly created position. Prior to joining The Nature Conservancy, Allana gained important skills in project coordination, environmental stewardship and stakeholder engagement. Specifically, Allana will work with partners to oversee implementation of goals and strategies identified in the Tennessee Forest Action Plan. Hers is a shared position between The Nature Conservancy and the Tennessee Division of Forestry with funding provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service and the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, Division of Forestry.

"This role resonates with my aspirations, and I am excited about the potential to integrate my skill set to help conserve, protect and enhance Tennessee's forests."

–ALLANA FUNDERBURK



Research reveals new information about endangered gray bats.

The evening carried the same tone as any high pressure, carefully orchestrated, race-against-the-clock situation like the Super Bowl or a popular game show. However, these were scientists collecting and studying federally endangered gray bats (*Myotis grisescens*). Due to the protected status of gray bats, regulations allow only 30 minutes for handling by the scientists before their mandatory release. That does not leave much time for learning more about their health and needs.

“To conserve gray bats, we need to know about every stage of their life cycle . . . what they eat, where they fly and which parts of the landscape they use the most.” says Cory Holliday, The Nature Conservancy’s Cave and Karst program manager in Tennessee.

Recently, this research has benefited from an expanding MOTUS Wildlife Tracking System, a network of radio receivers that detect signals from transmitters attached to birds, owls, bats and even butterflies. However, attaching the devices to a diminutive creature that flies can be challenging. Up for the task, TNC staff, partners and volunteers convened on a warm night in July to execute their well-choreographed

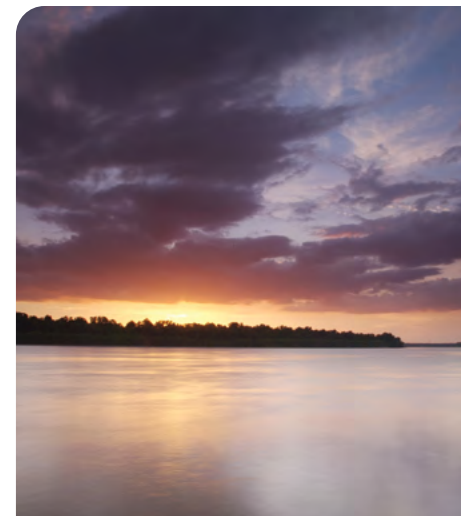
mission near a cave in West Tennessee. At the strike of dusk, as thousands of bats emerged from the cave, the team prepared to make the most of EVERY. SINGLE. MINUTE.

Beginning at the cave’s mouth, volunteers safely captured enough bats to make efficient use of mandated time limits. From there, other team members transferred each bat into a cloth bag that they clipped to a clothesline with a timer. One by one, researchers plucked the bags from the line to examine the bats and record data. A final group outfitted bats with transmitters to communicate with the MOTUS network. Then it was time for release. In all, the team collected and examined 78 bats and equipped 22 with transmitters.

According to Holliday, this effort also yielded valuable and unexpected preliminary results. “The bats are moving in ways and in places we would not have predicted.” He adds, “They are flying farther from their roosts and moving between roosts, leaving us to wonder about the need for conserving connected habitats across a broader range. This would be a new approach to conserving gray bats, a game changer.”

Gray Bats Make the Big Time!

Usually only observed by an audience of birds and insects, our scientists and volunteers welcomed YouTube celebrity and *Brave Wilderness* host, Coyote Peterson, to this field study. While there, Peterson and his crew captured footage for a *Brave Wilderness* episode that aired on October 28th. *Brave Wilderness* aims to revolutionize how people learn about and interact with the natural world while giving viewers an up-close and personal look at some of the most fascinating, bizarre and iconic animals on the planet.



Supporting policies that protect wildlife and build climate resilience in Tennessee.

Once a three million-acre network of streams and forested wetlands branching out into the surrounding floodplain, the watershed has been transformed and compromised by levees and other alterations over the years. These efforts to control the river for navigation and even flood prevention have had the unintended effect of jeopardizing wildlife habitat and the landscape’s ability to naturally filter and control the seasonal flows of these waters.

In response, TNC and our partners participated in the Lower Mississippi River Resource Assessment (LMRRA) to highlight the need for restoration in this region. That led to securing authorization in WRDA 2018 to study eight priority conservation areas highlighted in the LMRRA. The Hatchie-Loosahatchie Ecosystem Restoration Feasibility Study, which covers a 39-mile stretch of the river and approximately 146,000 acres near Memphis, is the first of these studies.

In October, our trustees and staff joined hundreds of Nature Conservancy peers in Washington, D.C. to advocate for policies that address our planet’s climate and biodiversity crises. Top of mind in conversations with the Tennessee Congressional delegation was securing construction authorization in the 2024 Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) for the next phase of the Hatchie-Loosahatchie Ecosystem Restoration Project.

Years in the making, this project represents a collaborative effort across six states to connect and expand natural areas in the Lower Mississippi River, one of the largest floodplains in the world.

“This study establishes a template for the seven remaining areas named in the LMRRA,” says Shelly Morris, TNC’s director of floodplain strategies in Tennessee and Kentucky. “It showcases what is possible throughout the Lower Mississippi River.”

In anticipation of the study’s completion, TNC requested 2024 WRDA construction authorization for implementing a plan that includes reconnecting the river with side channels and meander scarps, unique and critical habitats for endangered aquatic species.

Morris adds, “This project serves as a proving ground for doing this work at a larger scale in the other reaches. If successful, it can pave the way for a future that includes clean waters, diverse wildlife, reduced flooding, and economic opportunities around recreation and nature in communities located throughout the region’s 954 river miles.”

Inflation Reduction Act Marks One-Year Milestone

August marked one year since Congress passed this historic law that provides investments and incentives for reducing carbon emissions by 40% by 2030 to meet our nation’s climate commitments. Tennessee is benefiting as the recipient of almost \$7 billion for 14 projects slated to advance clean energy and generate 5,600 additional jobs in our state. The law also directed approximately \$208 million to Tennessee state agencies for projects that advance energy efficiency, reduce pollution and protect forests. We look forward to working with state partners to implement these efforts.



Advocacy Day 2023

During Advocacy Day in October, our trustees and staff traveled to Washington, D.C. to talk with the Tennessee Congressional delegation about several key issues. Specifically, they requested funding for Farm Bill conservation programs and support for the Recovering America’s Wildlife Act, which would help states manage habitat in ways that prevent at-risk wildlife from becoming threatened or endangered.



Working across state lines to protect and connect conservation lands in a globally significant landscape.

During a time when a rapidly changing climate and accelerated biodiversity loss represent causes for concern, The Nature Conservancy and our partners have stepped up the pace in protecting key parcels in the Appalachian Mountains, a global priority for the organization.

Together with our colleagues at The Nature Conservancy in Kentucky and The Conservation Fund, we successfully acquired the iconic 712-acre Fern Lake property near Cumberland Gap National Historical Park and the City of Middlesboro, Kentucky. Cherished by the local community and an important water source for the region, the property will eventually become part of the National Park Service’s (NPS) portfolio in both states. (NOTE: This property will remain closed to the public until the NPS establishes a management plan

and infrastructure for welcoming the public.)

On the opposite side of the state along Tennessee’s border with Alabama, The Nature Conservancy teamed up with the Open Space Institute, the Tucker Foundation and a private donor to acquire 87 acres in Franklin County that comprise the new and long-awaited Paint Rock River National Wildlife Refuge. Located at the southern portion of the Appalachians, which includes the Cumberland Plateau, the parcel fits into a matrix of public and private forested lands—like the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency’s Bear Hollow Mountain Wildlife Management Area—that are key to accommodating the region’s rich biodiversity and resilience in the face of a changing climate.

In the mountains of East Tennessee, The Nature Conservancy and The Conservation Fund acquired a 65-acre forested property outside of Erwin that will be transferred to the adjacent Cherokee National Forest. The property boasts a spur trail behind Temple Hill Elementary School that connects with the Appalachian Trail.

“Purchasing high conservation-value lands such as these three recent success stories is a key strategy in our larger Appalachians work. It is important because these transactions prevent forest and freshwater habitats from conversion to other land uses while expanding public outdoor recreation access.”

– GABBY LYNCH, TNC’S DIRECTOR OF PROTECTION IN TENNESSEE

Pursuing our mission in Tennessee requires generous support from dedicated members, donors and trustees.



Legacy Club Spotlight: Deb Wilkinson

Like many of our supporters, Deb Wilkinson started budgeting for monthly donations to The Nature Conservancy after securing her first job as a chemist working in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

“Something probably came in the mail and caught my attention as I love spending time outdoors, diving and skiing. Originally from Kansas, I also cherish areas that feature big skies and flat land,” says Deb. “I appreciated that TNC bought land. They didn’t seem to mess around.”

Over the years, Deb moved to different parts of the country for jobs and continued to support TNC along the way. Now retired, she has resided in Johnson City, Tennessee, near Virginia and North Carolina, for 34 years. Since living there, she has grown to love the mountains of Northeast Tennessee and especially Shady Valley, where TNC has several nature preserves.

During retirement, Deb also became a member of TNC’s Legacy Club, which includes members who name TNC, solely or in addition to other heirs, in their will in order to benefit nature beyond their lifetime.

“This felt like a way to truly leave a meaningful legacy that benefits the places that I care most about,” adds Deb. “Specifically, I have designated Shady Valley and prairies and grasslands in Kansas areas as places I wish to care for in this way at the end of my life. I have a lot of confidence in TNC and know they will save what they can for future generations.”



Have No Egrets.

— Join —

THE LEGACY CLUB

Among our dedicated supporters are special individuals who make the most lasting gifts of all by remembering The Nature Conservancy in their estate plans or through life-income gifts.

HOW IT WORKS
Membership in The Legacy Club is available to those who have included The Nature Conservancy in their estate plans or established a life-income gift. It is voluntary and without obligation.

INSIDER OPPORTUNITIES
As a member of The Legacy Club, you will receive

- Invitations to special events and field trips
- *Nature Conservancy*, our award-winning magazine
- Insider communications and opportunities
- *Legacy*, our semiannual newsletter
- A summary of TNC’s annual report

WE’RE HERE TO HELP
We would love the chance to thank you and ensure your wishes are carried out by answering any questions you have about how your gift may be used.

To discuss the best option for you or to notify us of a legacy gift you have planned, please contact Britt Moses at **615-983-6557** or britt.moses@tnc.org.

Learn more at nature.org/legacy.



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UPCOMING WEBINARS

If you have enjoyed our Tennessee webinars featuring a variety of conservation topics, you are in for a treat. Mark your calendar for the first in our 2024 series.

FEBRUARY 21, 2024
Whiskey and Wildlife:
Restoring White Oaks in Tennessee

Stay in the loop on all of our webinars at nature.org/tnwebinars.

