



EFROYMSON RESTORATION AT Kankakee Sands

WINTER 2023 - 2024

An October surprise! Calf born this October into the Kankakee Sands herd. © Olivia Schouten/TNC

Kankakee Sands Bison: Herd Update

Bison typically give birth in the late spring, but this year held a surprise for our herd. Not only were two bison calves unexpectedly born in August, another calf was born in October! Twenty-seven calves were born this year into our Kankakee Sands bison herd, bringing our total to 116 animals. Calves not only grow our herd, but also give us the opportunity to share animals above our pasture-carrying capacity.

Bison are a keystone species of our North American prairies, sustaining thousands of natural relationships that ensure ecological and cultural resiliency. In the 1800s, these vital relationships were severed by U.S. government policies intended to harm and control Native Peoples through the eradication of the bison. The loss of bison still reverberates across the land and within communities today. This history is richly retold in the recently released 4-hour PBS documentary, *The American Buffalo*, by Ken Burns. TNC is working in partnership with the InterTribal Buffalo Council, Tanka Fund and Native Nations to return bison to tribal lands.

The InterTribal Buffalo Council, Tanka Fund and Native Nations are leaders in buffalo restoration. We are humbled and honored to work in partnership with them. To learn more about these organizations, visit itbcbuffalonation.org and tankafund.org.

Student Conservation Internship

Kankakee Sands continues to partner with the Newton County Soil and Water District, LaSalle Fish and Wildlife Area and Willow Slough Fish and Wildlife Area on the county-wide Student Conservation Internship (SCI) program for Newton County high school 11th and 12th grade students. During the 2023-2024 school year, we are jointly hosting another cohort of four students who will explore the field of conservation agriculture and natural resource conservation through hands-on learning. THANK YOU to the Jasper Newton Foundation and the Newton County Economic Development Commission for making this program a reality!

Analise Cooper, Ava Ivey, Kedzie Kmiec and Karalyn White are the four students who have been selected for the 2023-24 school year cohort. Karalyn, a senior at South Newton High School, is stationed at our Kankakee Sands office. In addition to helping us with seed harvest, seed processing and hosting outreach events, Karalyn has also been able to spend time at local DNR properties and with conservation farmers. Thanks for spending your school year with us, Karalyn!



Student Conservation Interns (left to right): Karalyn White, Ava Ivey, Kedzie Kmiec, and Analise Cooper. © Gus Nyberg

SCI was awarded the 2023 District Showcase Award by the Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts!

New Staff Member: Carly Hlebasko

Welcome to Carly Hlebasko, our new Kankakee Sands Land Steward! Carly joined our team in October 2023 but has been with TNC since 2017. Carly was previously based out of the TNC's Southern Lake Michigan Rim project office in Merrillville, Indiana, focused on restoring dune and swale habitats within the Grand Calumet River Area of Concern. Carly has a B.S. in Forestry and a minor in Studio Art Illustration from Purdue University.

Carly shares, "I am so grateful to be part of the Kankakee Sands team! I look forward to working with—and learning from—all our crew members, partner organizations, and dedicated volunteers. You'll likely find me on a trail with my dog, conducting prescribed fires, or in a wetland looking for frogs! See you soon!!"



Carly with her dog, Ani © Carly Hlebasko/TNC

There is always so much to do and see at Kankakee Sands, and we're so glad that visitors are coming to enjoy it all! Kankakee Sands is free and open to the public every day of the year for non-consumptive use.

Bioblitz Update



Snail-killing fly (*Trypetoptera canadensis*) © Steve Marshall

The full results of this year's BioBlitz will be published in the *Indiana Academy of Science Journal*.

If you'd like to learn more about the BioBlitz and the 2024 BioBlitz, visit indianaacademyofscience.org/resource-center/bioblitz-events-data/

On June 3, 2023, the Indiana Academy of Science (IAS) and Kankakee Sands partnered to host a Bioblitz—a 24-hour period in which scientists from all around the state visit one site to inventory as many living creatures as possible. What a day it was! Glené Mynhardt, the IAS Bioblitz organizer, has been accumulating the data from the many different taxa teams. To date, a total of 759 different species were noted during the time period. Highlights include:

- The Bird Team documented 89 species, including several endangered species: trumpeter swan, king rail, northern harrier, barn owl, sedge and marsh wrens, and Henslow's sparrow. Also noted were multiple species of special concern: northern bobwhite quail, eastern whip-poor-will, sandhill crane, American woodcock, and grasshopper sparrow.
- The Snail-killing Flies Team found 8 species, 5 of which are new Newton County records. Worldwide, 551 species of snail-killing flies have been documented. North America has 170 species, and Indiana has 61. We were lucky to have Bill Murphy, a snail-killing fly expert, at this year's BioBlitz!
- The Fungi Team identified 27 species, one of which, in the genus *Inocybe*, was found in the bison pasture and seems to represent the first of its kind in Indiana based primarily on DNA sequence similarity.
- The Lepidoptera Team documented 16 butterfly species and 426 moth species, six of which are rare, threatened or endangered. Fifty-five new moth species were recorded, bringing Kankakee Sands' moth total to 1,330 species!

Landscaping improvements at the Kankakee Sands Nursery

The Kankakee Sands Nursery is a hub of volunteer and outreach activities. In 2023 alone, we led more than a dozen greenhouse, seed harvesting and seed processing workdays. We also had school groups visit, led tour groups, and hosted evening mothing events and daytime monarch tagging events. The nursery is a welcoming, safe and beautiful place to spend time in nature.

This year, volunteers Marc and Barb Meijer offered their experience and expertise to work in partnership with Friends of the Sands and TNC to revamp the nursery landscaping with 65+ plant species native to Newton County and install an ADA accessible walkway and an informational kiosk. Great strides have taken place this year—the walkway was laid, informational kiosk installed, and seed acquired for the plants that will be grown next spring. Thank you to Marc and Barb for leading this project!

This project is just one of several to be implemented next year as part of our Kankakee Sands Visitor Improvements effort. At the Kankakee Sands Nursery, a picnic pavilion and signage will be installed. At the Kankakee Sands Headquarters and the Bison Viewing area, welcome pavilions and bison viewing platforms will be constructed. There will be parking area improvements at all three locations as well.

TNC is seeking qualified contractors to construct these facilities. In January 2024, we will advertise for the construction phase of this project. If you or your firm want to receive a Notice to Bidders to bid on this project, please contact Melissa Moran at Melissa.Moran@tnc.org.



Laying the landscaping fabric below the walkway. Pictured (right to left): Marc Meijer, William Dittman, Phil Templeman, Joyce Dittman, Barb Meijer, Trevor Edmonson. © Alyssa Nyberg/TNC



Gravel walkway at the nursery installed! © Alyssa Nyberg/TNC

Outreach and Volunteering

An enormous thank you to our Kankakee Sands volunteers and Friends of the Sands volunteers who work tirelessly all year long to help us achieve our Kankakee Sands goals. We are so grateful and always astounded by how much we accomplish thanks to our wonderful volunteers.

This year, 221 volunteers have given more than 3,800 hours of volunteer service to Kankakee Sands! We were able to connect more than 2,750 people with nature, thanks in large part to Friends of the Sands (who led more than 50 educational programs), and the Kankakee Sands Bison Rangers, who met with the public and answered their questions about bison and prairies.

We are planning our 2024 volunteer and outreach calendar, again in partnership with Friends of the Sands, DNR, Newton County Public Library, Newton County Soil and Water Conservation District and the Newton County Park Board. We look forward to spending more time with all of you in nature in 2024!

Visit our TNC Indiana Volunteer webpage at nature.org/indianavolunteer to find out more! To receive the weekly email documenting the events and activities in the Kankakee Sands area, reach out to Alyssa Nyberg at anyberg@tnc.org.

Kankakee Sands Wish List

- Altoz Zero turn mower with tracks for grounds maintenance - \$18,000
- Polaris Ranger Hood Racks to transport fuel, tools and pumps on prescribed burns - \$380
- Dewalt Cordless Power Drill and Auger set, Power Planter model - \$360
- Reusable 25-50 Corelle plates for outreach events, used or new - \$100
- Plush stuffed bison for use in outreach programming - \$50
- Ziplock plastic bags for seed storage, assorted sizes - \$5

Please contact Trevor Edmonson at trevor.edmonson@tnc.org if you'd like to donate a Wish List item. Thank you!