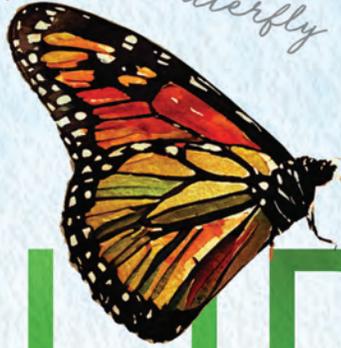


Monarch butterfly



Indiana bat



# INDIANA UPDATE

FALL 2023

Kittentail



Paradise jumping spider



Monkshood



Eastern hellbender salamander

## Indiana's Biodiversity

Red-headed woodpecker



River otter



Kidneyshell mussell

### IN THIS ISSUE:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 2 Land Updates in Indiana               | 8 Renewable Energy in Indiana                     |
| 3 Critters Need Conservation            | 9 Prescribed Fire: An Important Conservation Tool |
| 4 Cover Crop Program Rewards Farmers    | 10 Volunteering for Nature                        |
| 6 Breaking Down Biodiversity Challenges | 11 Inspiring People for Nature                    |

# Land Updates in Indiana



## Lake Monroe

This summer, we closed on a 360-acre forested property in Monroe County. The forests on this property—adjacent to Lake Monroe, Ransburg Scout Reservation and the Hoosier National Forest—are a stronghold for rare plants and wildlife species, including the tens of thousands of songbirds that migrate from South America every year to breed and raise their young in central and southern Indiana’s hardwood forests. This “home away from home” cannot be replicated or replaced.

This was one of the last and largest privately-owned parcels remaining in the Lake Monroe area, with a high risk for development due to its proximity to both State Road 446 and Lake Monroe. More than a mile of the property borders the Hoosier National Forest. TNC will be working with the U.S. Forest Service to transfer ownership and management of the property within the next five years.

*Special thanks to Efrogmson Family Fund and other key donors for their support of this project.*

## Big Walnut

Earlier this year, TNC assisted the Indiana Department of Natural Resources with the purchase of an important 138-acre addition to Big Walnut Nature Preserve in Putnam County.

Big Walnut is an important refuge for our many plants and animals that require deep forest interiors, including eastern box turtle, bobcat, red bat, cerulean warbler and showy orchid. Rich wildflower displays carpet the forest slopes and floor, and native pollinators thrive.

The protected tract was the largest unprotected forest parcel in the area, and due to its prime location, has been a conservation priority for more than 40 years!

*Special thanks to the Smith Family Fund and the Sherman and Marjorie Zeigler Foundation for their support of this project.*

## Our People

TNC’s Indiana Chapter has ambitious goals for its 2025 plan: protect forests, prairies and wetlands; connect more Hoosiers to nature and volunteerism; ensure sustainable agriculture; and tackle climate change. To help meet our vision for the future where people and nature thrive together, we’ve added the following members to our team.

**Summer Brown**  
Restoration Crew Member,  
Southern Lake Michigan Rim

**Carrie Karl**  
Operations Specialist

**Max Willis**  
Restoration Crew Member,  
Southern Lake Michigan Rim

The forests on this 360-acre Monroe County property are critical for songbirds that migrate from South America to breed and raise their young in central and southern Indiana. © Whitetail Properties; The latest Big Walnut acquisition was the largest unprotected forest parcel in the area, and due to its prime location, had been a conservation priority for more than 40 years! © Cristina Rutter

# Critters Need Conservation



We hear news all the time about climate change. In fact, the next global COP-28 conference starts November 30 in Dubai with leaders from The Nature Conservancy joining the chorus of concern about our changing planet. It's great we work at a global level, but we must couple that with local actions.



We don't hear as much about the other interconnected crisis facing nature now, and that's the rapid acceleration of biodiversity loss. The food we eat, the air we breathe and our climate depends on the interplay of millions of organisms in diverse ecosystems, which have learned to thrive and interact over billions of years. Today, one quarter of plant and animal species are threatened with extinction, owing to major drivers like habitat loss and climate change. The iconic monarch butterfly is now close to joining the Endangered Species List, which marks its 50th anniversary this December.

Despite that grim news, we're seeing glimmers of hope right here in Indiana. Volunteers discovered a paradise jumping spider during a Bioblitz at our Kankakee Sands Preserve this summer. In southern Indiana, researchers in the Blue River found a juvenile hellbender salamander—the first time a young hellbender has been documented in Indiana in the wild in 40 years. The discovery suggests that conservation efforts—such as TNC's work to improve water quality in the Blue River—are helping with the recovery of this endangered species.

We're seeing these comebacks in nature as a result of our long-standing conservation efforts. Ecosystem restoration has tremendous potential, when done thoughtfully, to slow or even reverse the decline of biodiversity. In addition, restoration can also absorb greenhouse gases, reducing emissions contributing to climate change.

As the world hears about climate change at COP-28, we hope you'll hear local news about what we're doing here with smart siting to promote building wind and solar farms in areas that minimize impacts to nature and biodiversity, including degraded lands like old surface mines and landfills. We've had a record year with our prescribed fire program, conducting the biggest burn ever in our state's history. You'll see many more results of our progress in this newsletter.

Conservation takes time, even decades, to yield tangible, positive results. We often hear people say they love The Nature Conservancy because we take action to protect the plants, animals and places they love. Together, we can find a way to build on successes that ensure a more resilient future for both people and nature.

Does conservation work? Hell(bender) yes it does, thanks to your support!

Yours in conservation,

Larry Clemens, State Director



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## Cover Crop Program Rewards Farmers

The adoption of soil health practices—such as cover crops—provides multiple benefits, including reducing nutrient loss from agricultural fields. Improving soil health is a key strategy for TNC for both climate and water quality benefits.

More than 85% of Hoosier cropland acres carry crop insurance, so linking resilient practices—like cover crops—to crop insurance has the potential to catalyze conservation adoption and keep Indiana as the epicenter of soil health.

In 2021, TNC and partners initiated the Cover Crop Premium Reduction Program in the Upper White River Watershed. The Program provides farmers a direct reward for adopting resilient practices—a \$5/acre premium discount on their crop insurance for participating acres.

In 2023, the final year of the program’s pilot, the project expanded across south central Indiana to the Ohio River, included 35 counties and directly supported 35,000 acres of cover crops. The program acres contributed to the new record set by Indiana farmers in early 2023—an estimated 1.6 million acres of cover crops, which is more than 13% of the state’s row crop acres.

### Cover Crop Premium Reduction Program Partners

Indiana State Department of Agriculture  
United States Department of Agriculture—  
Risk Management Agency  
Members of Indiana Agriculture Nutrient Alliance



# Fresh Perspectives from the White River

The West Fork of the White River flows through north central Indiana and supplies drinking water to more than 2 million Hoosiers. The river is also an important ecological resource, yet few take the time to explore its waters. In 2023, TNC led a group of Ball State University student leaders on a two-day river expedition to study the river and its watershed. *White River: Freshwater, Fresh Perspectives* documents the expedition and what was discovered. Visit [nature.org/whiteriver](https://nature.org/whiteriver) to view this and two other short videos about our work on the White River.

## White River Report Card



This summer, a new tool to assess watershed health was released to the public—the White River Report Card. The goals of this assessment and communication tool are to measure community progress, align partners and activities, and inspire change that improves the White River and its watershed and protects our economy and way of life. The overall health of the watershed’s upper portion scored an average 51%.

Specific indicators of watershed health fall into three categories—land, water, and community. The watershed indicator with the highest grade is *Education* with a B (71%)

due to good high school graduation rates (or equivalent) in the region. The lowest grade overall is *Wetland Change*, which scores an F (7%) due to extensive historic and ongoing wetland loss throughout the watershed. Individual indicator grades demonstrate where our work can make the most impact on improving the indicator grades and overall report card scores.

The report card is a dynamic assessment and will be revisited regularly to evaluate new data and update grades. Visit [nature.org/whiteriver](https://nature.org/whiteriver) for more information.



# Breaking Down Biodiversity Challenges

The letter on page 3 from Indiana Chapter state director Larry Clemens broached the “other” crisis the world is facing: the rapid acceleration of biodiversity loss. Today, a full third of freshwater and marine species face extinction, while countless invertebrates could disappear before we realize their full importance to the interconnected web of life.

## How is TNC prioritizing biodiversity?

TNC is committed to helping protect at least 30% of the world’s land, lakes, rivers and oceans. We are focused on conserving a representative sample of all habitats in places that will be resilient as the climate changes. We invest in the management of protected areas to maintain biodiversity, and where we can’t meet our protection goals, we work to restore degraded habitats. Finally, we are advocating for more public investment in conservation and creating opportunities to direct more private investment capital toward the protection of nature.

We have decades of success that we can continue to build off of, including the Endangered Species Act, which celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2023. This highly impactful piece of legislation has **helped save 99% of listed species** from extinction thanks to the collaboration between federal and

local governments, Indigenous leaders, conservation organizations, communities, landowners and businesses.

## Where does the Midwest fit in?

In the Midwest, our work contributes to TNC’s commitment to protect 30% of the world’s lands and waters. We are focused on those land- and waterscapes that are iconic and unique to our region. They include Great Lakes fisheries and coastal communities; the Mississippi and Ohio rivers, their floodplains, and tributary streams; our northern forests, lakes, and wetlands; and the prairie and savanna landscapes in the heart of the Midwest.

Here in Indiana, we’re seeing our conservation work achieve tangible results. The discovery of the paradise jumping spider and the juvenile hellbender salamander received the media, but we’re also seeing results with many other species, such as the kidneyshell mussel, kittentails, Hill’s thistle, squarrose goldenrod and monkshood.

The work we’re doing in the Upper White River Watershed (see pages 4 and 5) benefits not only Hoosier people and wildlife, but also all life all the way down to the Gulf of Mexico.

## What can I do to help?

You can invest in nature with your time, money, or both. If you are a TNC member, you're off to a good start! Your financial support is protecting iconic Midwest lands and waters. Other things you can do are speak up for nature with your elected officials and champion good government policy and funding programs like the Restoring America's Wildlife Act.

Visit [nature.org/indiana](https://www.nature.org/indiana) to sign up for our free monthly **Nature News** email. You'll learn more about our work and how you can help.

## Hellbender Discovery in Blue River



This summer, while conducting a routine survey, our partners at the Indiana Department of Natural Resources discovered a young Eastern hellbender salamander in south-central Indiana's Blue River. Over the past three to four decades, no juvenile hellbenders have been documented in the wild in Indiana.

The hellbender, once occurring in most of southeast Indiana's tributaries to the Ohio River, is now on Indiana's endangered species list due to habitat loss and polluted waterways. To help improve water quality and save the hellbender—as well as other aquatic species—TNC and partners got to work. We planted more than half a million trees along the Blue River, worked with agricultural retailers to promote conservation practices on nearby farmland, and removed two low-head dams, with a third slated for removal in 2024. These efforts are paying off! The discovery of a juvenile means that there is a population healthy enough to reproduce on their own.

## Rare Species of Indiana

Rare species are plants and animals that have historically lived in our state, but currently only occur in small numbers or in limited areas. Visit [nature.org/Indiana](https://www.nature.org/Indiana) to read how TNC conservationists are working to bring our amazing species back to their former glory by strengthening current populations and reintroducing plants and animals back into areas they used to inhabit.

Scan the QR code to learn more.



Hill's thistle © Alyssa Nyberg/TNC



Kidneyshell mussel © Cassie Hauswald/TNC



Kittentail © Nathan Herbert/TNC



Stout goldenrod © Alyssa Nyberg/TNC



Monkshood © Mike Everidge/TNC

In July, researchers found a juvenile hellbender salamander in the Blue River in southern Indiana, the first time in decades a young hellbender had been discovered there. © Indiana DNR



# Renewable Energy in Indiana

**Hoosier voters across the political spectrum view wind and solar projects positively and want to see an increase in renewable energy production.**

More than a quarter of America’s energy will come from renewable sources by 2025, and up to 75% of the nation’s largest clean energy projects will take place in the central United States.

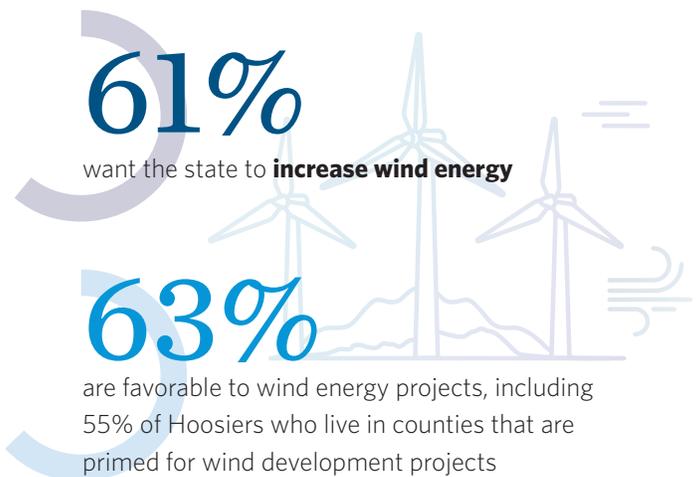
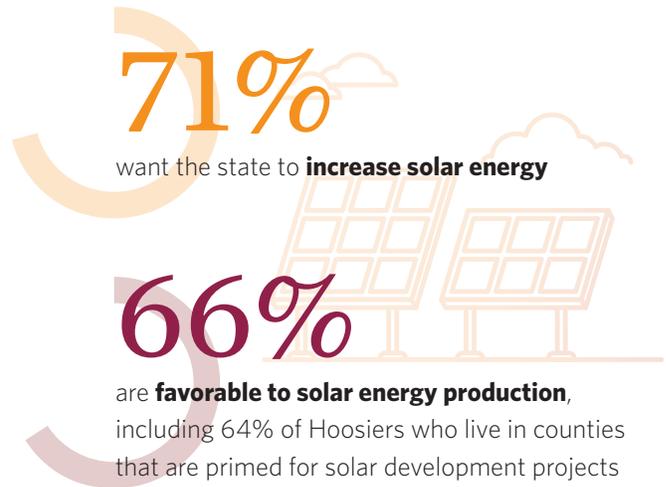
Accelerating the renewable energy transition will require a lot of land—and fortunately, Indiana has it in abundance. Indiana can smartly leverage its resources to transform the state’s economy, create thousands of new jobs—all while protecting nature.

TNC commissioned a statewide survey of 600 voters this past May. The poll, conducted by Bellwether Research, shows that Hoosier voters believe the state can achieve critical climate objectives by transitioning to renewable energy, while simultaneously addressing **conservation and community opportunities and challenges**.

**54%** of voters who live in counties that are prime for solar development and

**58%** 58% of those who live in wind counties believe that **renewable energy projects can co-exist with wildlife** and maintain the character of their community.

**3 in 4** (76%) would support the state requiring clean energy developers to site renewable energy in areas that **consider community input and conservation outcomes** before beginning projects.



**For more information on what TNC is doing to help Indiana lead the renewable energy transition, visit [nature.org/indianaclimate](https://nature.org/indianaclimate).**



## Prescribed Fire: An Important Conservation Tool

The Indiana Chapter stewardship team has had a very productive year for prescribed fire. In the last 12 months, TNC has set three records: number of controlled burns (31), number of acres burned (3,370), and number of acres burned as assists on partner lands (3,954).

### What is a prescribed fire?

Prescribed fires, or controlled burns, are fires that are purposefully set by land managers under a set of conditions that considers safety, weather, and probability of meeting the burn objectives. Many habitats are fire-dependent—meaning they evolved with fire and require it to meet the needs of their inhabitants and preserve biodiversity. Prairies, meadows, wetlands, rivers, streams and forests all need fire in order to flourish.

### Why are prescribed fires necessary?

For more than a century, suppressing natural fire was a standard practice resulting in the accumulation of material—like leaf litter and dead woody material—that can fuel larger fires. However, in some systems, fires at regular intervals used to be a normal occurrence and provided significant benefits to the ecosystem. By mimicking natural fire, controlled burns help reintroduce fire to landscapes in a way that limits its impact on surrounding communities. While wildfires are unusual in the Lower Midwest, Indiana’s summers are predicted to become hotter and drier, leading to a much higher potential for wildfires.



Prescribed burns are about more than preventing wildfires. Many species rely on fire to recycle nutrients and encourage healthy habitats. The bare soil exposed by a burn can promote the germination of native plant species. Many wildlife species benefit from the plant species and vegetation structure promoted by fire. A controlled burn can also help fight invasive species, clearing them out and making room for native plants to take their place.

### A cost-effective tool

TNC actively stewards approximately 30,000 acres of land across Indiana—an enormous responsibility for our land managers. Prescribed fire is a cost-effective tool that allows our staff to treat hundreds of acres in a day.

# Volunteering for Nature

Join the dedicated team of volunteers and interns making a difference in Indiana! Visit [nature.org/indianavolunteer](https://www.nature.org/indianavolunteer) for more information on events and volunteer workdays.



## Volunteer Spotlight: Kirsten Sprecher

### What is your role with The Nature Conservancy and how did you get started?

I am the Preserve Monitor for Mosquito Creek nature preserve in Laconia, Indiana. I visit the preserve about once per month to monitor it, help maintain the trail and report any issues to TNC staff. I found out about this opportunity when a friend forwarded an Indiana TNC volunteer newsletter to me.

### Can you share a little bit about your background and your relationship to Southern Indiana?

I am married and a mother of three wonderful teens. I have been working in education for almost 20 years and recently completed the Indiana Master Naturalist program. I have lived in southern Indiana most of my life and love to explore all the natural areas our region has to offer.

### What drew you to volunteering with TNC specifically?

I have been a financial supporter of TNC for many years and am excited to contribute in a more hands-on way. I appreciate the important work TNC does to preserve, protect and maintain our natural spaces in Indiana and around the US.

### When you are out at Mosquito Creek, what's something memorable you've seen out there?

Mosquito Creek is a beautiful area! It is so quiet and peaceful. I love that it has such a large variety of trees, wildflowers, fungus, and wildlife. My favorite experience there so far is when a Great Horned Owl swooped down and flew right past me. Amazing!

### Do you have any advice for those who are thinking about starting to volunteer?

I encourage any fellow nature lover to volunteer with TNC. They offer many different types of opportunities throughout the state. It is a flexible way to support a great organization that's working hard to preserve our natural areas.

### When you aren't volunteering, what do you like to do for fun?

When I'm not volunteering I love hiking with friends, gardening, reading and traveling.

## Weed Wrangle at Mosquito Creek Glade, Harrison County

October 28, 2023,  
9 am - 12 pm EST

Help TNC remove invasive shrubs from this scenic preserve. Invasive species pose a significant threat to Indiana's natural areas, as they out compete native species, thus reducing biodiversity and degrade habitats for our native insects, birds and other animals. Come be a part of the solution at this family-friendly Weed Wrangle.

## Holiday Hike at Kankakee Sands, Newton County

December 24, 2023,  
10 - 11:30 am CST

Join fellow nature lovers for an early winter hike and enjoyment of the natural wonders of the world. Youth are always welcome at this annual tradition!





# Inspiring People for Nature

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) has invested heavily in outreach and education across Indiana over the past year with a unique media partnership, the creation of informational and inspirational videos, and a greater presence at community events.

## A Partnership with the Indianapolis Recorder

TNC is in the second year of a partnership with the *Indianapolis Recorder* to provide environmental reporting to Indianapolis minorities. Jayden Kennett was hired in 2022 and has published more than 50 environmental, health, and wellbeing articles in the Recorder, with 10 also published in the *Indiana Minority Business Magazine*. Articles have ranged from “Companies fail to take advantage of federal dollars while surrounding communities suffer the consequences” to “Program prepares previously incarcerated youth for environmental management jobs.” The need for a trusted source of good information on coping with climate and environmental disasters is increasing, and the Recorder is helping provide that vital link.

## Gary Revitalization—Vacant to Vibrant

TNC staff in our Southern Lake Michigan Rim office staff have begun an initiative to build relationships with neighbors and landowners in and around Ivanhoe Dune & Swale Nature Preserve, a globally significant preserve located in the heart of Gary, IN. TNC has begun providing a newsletter to neighbors, written in both English and Spanish, with information about the preserve and why it should be considered a point of pride for the community. Additionally, TNC staff recently hosted a block party with food and games for neighbors. Neighbors responded positively and expressed interest in a guided tour of the preserve and growing native plants in their yards.



Last month, the sixth annual **Festival de la Monarca** was held in East Chicago, Indiana. This year’s festival was attended by more than 500 people. The monarch butterfly and its ties to the Latino culture were celebrated through food, dance, art and butterfly releases.

## Flagship Preserve Updates

With our partners at the National Park Service’s Rivers Trails and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) Program, we completed the Concept Design Report for Improving Access and Visitor Experience at **Kankakee Sands**. After a pause to adjust the project budget, we have now moved into detailed design of the Bison Viewing Area and the Welcome Pavilion, with construction anticipated in 2024.

Also in conjunction with our partners at the RTCA, we are underway with the conceptual design plan for visitor improvements at **Douglas Woods** in Northeast Indiana. Open house style listening sessions were held in November 2022 to gather community input for the improvements, and a design charrette was held in February 2023 to refine concepts and ideas to welcome more visitors and improve accessibility. The concept design report will be complete by the end of 2023.

**Green’s Bluff Nature Preserve** in Owen County has hosted monthly trail building days with our partner, the Hoosier Hikers Council, with 77 volunteers contributing approximately 1,241 hours over the past year. The trail is well on its way to completion and will become a five-mile system through the preserve, one of our longest trails in Indiana.

# INDIANA UPDATE

FALL 2023



Donate  
online  
anytime



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## BINGE ON NATURE!

TNC has its own channel on YouTube! This handy site is where you'll find all our videos illustrating the great work of our staff across the state. From bats and bison to forests and freshwater, our videos will entertain and enlighten. Visit [nature.org/Indiana](https://nature.org/Indiana) or scan the QR code to start watching!

