

# missouri UPDATE





Todd Sampsell © Amy Hepler Welch/TNC

We often forget how intertwined our lives are with the natural world around us. We depend on nature for the food we eat, water we drink, and air we breathe. Nature provides us with medicine, supplies our energy, inspires our work and art, and gives us priceless opportunities to enjoy hiking, swimming, picnics, and much more with our families. It protects our cities, homes, and farmlands from hurricanes, floods, and other dangers — often more effectively and economically than man-made structures.

### In short, nature makes our lives better.

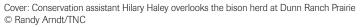
Indeed, severe weather conditions over the past couple years remind us just how closely our fate is tied to the natural world. We've seen record-breaking floods and unprecedented heat and drought. Farmers lost crops while ranchers watched pastures dry up, no longer able to sustain their cattle. Throughout the West millions of acres of overgrown and pest-decimated forests burned uncontrollably, and Missouri saw a record-breaking year for wildfires.

Our future will be shaped by how we manage the lands and waters on which we all depend. Here at the Conservancy, we find ways to meet human needs while securing natural places to sustain life for the long haul. I'm proud to let you know that despite a year of tough weather, we continue to make progress on our conservation-managed lands.

Native grasses, able to withstand drought, were still green this summer on our restored prairies. The newly reintroduced bison herd is thriving at Dunn Ranch Prairie, and eight calves were born this spring. We worked with the Saint Louis Zoo, the Missouri Department of Conservation, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to bring the American burying beetle back to Wah'Kon-Tah Prairie in April. With our partners, we've continued restoring a lost pinery forest to return jobs and a healthy watershed to Ozarks communities. And our work continues.

I hope you are inspired by the conservation progress highlighted in this update. With your help, nature will continue to make a comeback here in Missouri.

Judd





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Butterfly on coneflower © Bill Duncan

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# Going Batty:

### Cave Gate Installed to Protect Endangered Bats

Dressed in jeans and a flannel jacket speckled with burns from stray welding sparks, Jerry Fant stands atop a rocky outcrop and surveys a massive steel gate set into the mouth of an Ozarks cave.

It's a cold rainy day in April, and Jerry and his crew have just finished installing the second-largest cave gate in the country. At 64 feet wide and 20 feet high, the 13-ton gate will prevent people from disturbing endangered gray and Indiana bats that use the cave.

Situated 150 feet up a bluff in a remote area of the Ozarks, the cave is difficult to access. Fortunately, the installation went off without a hitch thanks to a monumental collaboration among The Nature Conservancy, the Missouri Department of Conservation, the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, the National Park Service, AmeriCorps, Bat Conservation International, and Jerry's company, Karst Solutions.

Over the past 11 years, Jerry and his crew have gated more than 300 caves and mines to protect bats, which face threats from habitat loss, human disturbance, and white-nose syndrome a devastating disease that has killed at least 5.5 million bats and is still spreading.

Gating places where bats live helps in three ways: 1) bats aren't awakened during hibernation, which can result in starvation; 2) bats aren't startled when roosting, which can cause babies to be dropped; and 3) the fungus that causes white-nose syndrome isn't spread by shoes or caving gear.

Protecting bats benefits people, too. Bats are a major predator of night-flying insects; in fact, Missouri's gray bats alone eat an estimated 540 tons of insects each year! This natural pest control prevents crop loss without the use of pesticides, saving the forestry and agriculture industries billions of dollars.

As for Jerry, he's glad to be able to help both bats and people while doing something he loves. "We're losing a lot of bats in the U.S. and this is just one of the steps to preserving that resource."









# Prairie Comebacks:

### Here's to the Underdogs

The endearing qualities of underdogs are undeniable. Their tenacity, even in the face of overwhelming odds, brings out our instinctual nature to root them on. The Nature Conservancy is working in Missouri's grasslands to revive four such underdogs: American bison, Topeka shiners, greater prairie chickens, and American burying beetles.

When European settlers arrived in the 1800s, the prairie landscape was changed so rapidly that populations of countless native species were devastated in just a few decades. Today, with less than one percent of native tallgrass prairies remaining, many native species struggle to survive.

The Conservancy is rehabilitating grasslands worldwide to improve habitat for native species. In Missouri, intensive restoration efforts have produced incredible results, and our prairies are now able to support the return of key species.

In 2011, the Conservancy reintroduced the iconic American bison to the 3,247-acre Dunn Ranch Prairie in a project that was a decade in the making. The reintroduction was the final step in restoring a fully functioning prairie, which is further improved by the bison herd's grazing, trampling, and wallowing. The success of the project isn't limited to impacts on the prairie: the local community also benefits from educational and economic opportunities.

A species that couldn't be more different than bison, the federally endangered Topeka shiner, will be reintroduced at Dunn Ranch Prairie next year. This tiny, silver minnow is another victim of habitat loss and land conversion. Without deep-rooted native plants to hold water in place, streams can dry up, leaving the fish without a home. The Conservancy and the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC)

Top: Dunn Ranch Prairie © Hilary Haley/TNC; Middle: Digging holes for American burying beetle release at Wah'Kon-Tah Prairie © Bill Graham/MDC; Bottom: Wild bergamot © Hilary Haley/TNC



worked together to restore streams at Dunn Ranch Prairie, creating a healthy habitat for the Topeka shiner. The fish will be an ongoing indicator of good conservation practices.

Equally exciting progress is being made in Missouri's southwest prairies. This year, MDC released over 60 greater prairie chickens at the Conservancy's Wah'Kon-Tah Prairie, the last step in a five-year plan to reestablish the critically endangered bird. Prairie chickens are famous for their unusual "booming" mating calls and outlandish mating dances, which draw visitors from miles around. Unfortunately, this sight became increasingly rare in Missouri as prairies were converted and fragmented. By working with partners and neighboring landowners, the Conservancy is reestablishing habitat critical for the birds' survival.

A species that's smaller in size, though certainly not smaller in importance, is also benefitting from the Conservancy's work. In partnership with the Saint Louis Zoo, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and MDC, the Conservancy hosted the reintroduction of the American burying beetle. The first federally endangered species to be reintroduced in Missouri, this striking black-and-orange insect acts as "nature's undertaker," burying carcasses on which to feed and raise its young. The beetles were brought to the Conservancy's Wah'Kon-Tah Prairie in June and have already successfully reproduced at the site!

These success stories offer hope for Missouri's native prairie species. With the help of partners, neighbors, private landowners, and donors, these underdogs can once again thrive on Missouri prairies.







Pineknot pinery © U.S. Forest Service

### **Dunn Ranch Prairie**

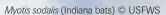
Over a decade of restoration work, including plantings, tree removal, controlled burns, and the reintroduction of bison, has resulted in a remarkable diversity of species at Dunn Ranch Prairie. In 2013, the Topeka shiner (a silver minnow) is slated to return to prairie streams (see "Prairie Comebacks," page 4).

### Wah'Kon-Tah Prairie

The Conservancy is working diligently to restore native grasslands at Wah'Kon-Tah Prairie. Greater prairie chickens were relocated to the site from Kansas to reestablish a population in Missouri, and American burying beetles were reintroduced this spring (see "Prairie Comebacks," page 4).

### **Bat Cave**

In a colossal collaborative effort, the Conservancy and numerous partners installed a cave gate to protect endangered bats (see "Going Batty," page 3). nature.org/mobatcave



### **Pineknot Pinery - Pine-Oak Woodlands Collaborative Landscape Restoration Project**

Using thinning and controlled burns, this project will make woodlands more resilient to wildfires, drought, and pests, while also improving wildlife habitat. Over the next 10 years, the project is expected to support 600 jobs in the southeastern Missouri Ozarks.

### **Missouri River**

The Conservancy is promoting sustainable use of freshwater resources and a multi-state strategy to promote overall river basin and watershed management on the Missouri and other rivers. Through better floodplain restoration and reconnection, we can holistically manage our waters for nature and people.

° Dunn Ranch Prairie

Wah'Kon-Tah Prairie

Strickler Tract

Springfield

**Stoner Cave** 

Miss

Grand River

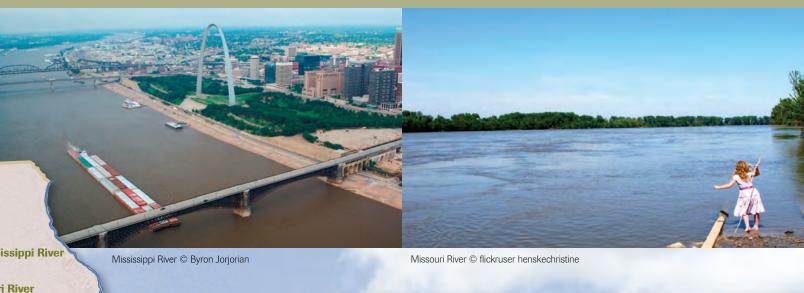
Kansas City





Enjoying a float © Erik Herzog

Background photo: Cloudy shadows at Dunn Ranch Prairie © Hilary Haley/TNC



### **Mississippi River**

Columbia

Bat Cave

gall Mountain<sup>6</sup>

ineknot Pinery °

St. Louis

**Meramec River** 

Current River

Through the Great Rivers Partnership, the Conservancy works to manage and develop the world's great rivers. In Missouri, we're working to connect, maintain, and restore Mississippi River system tributaries, such as the Meramec and Current Rivers.

### **Stoner Cave -Strickler Tract**

This 51-acre property, donated by John and Joan Strickler, contains a significant cave system and intact woodlands (see "Conservation in the Movies," page 10).

### **Stegall Mountain**

Conservancy and Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) fire crews often work together to conduct controlled burns in key areas, including MDC-owned Stegall Mountain. This site is home to a population of eastern collared lizards, which need routine fires to thrive on rugged Ozarks landscapes (see "Leapin' Lizards," page 9).

### **Meramec River**

The Meramec River is not just a fun place to visit; it's also an irreplaceable freshwater resource with a high diversity of fish and mussels. With start-up funding from Crystal Light, the Conservancy is collaborating with agencies, partners, and private landowners on a conservation action plan to combine efforts and maximize results. nature.org/meramec



American burying beetle in hand © Bill Graham/MDC

The Stricklers hike up to Stoner Cave © Doug Ladd/TNC





Jan Armstrong with fellow travelers on the grasslands of Mongolia; Jan Armstrong in Mongolia © Teresa Beck

# Global Grasslands:

### An Interview with Jan Armstrong, Missouri Trustee

Conservancy trustee Jan Armstrong has walked fertile prairies near and far, from her home in Kansas City to the savannas of Brazil and the steppes of Mongolia. She travels not just to see the world's great places, but to learn how people in those places live and relate to the lands and waters around them.

During her visits to Conservancy project areas, Jan has witnessed communities at a crossroads between conservation and development.

"In Mongolia," says Jan, "I found it particularly interesting to see the things the Conservancy is doing to support nomadic and herding cultures." These native cultures are increasingly threatened by mineral development that fragments the landscape, severing vital migratory passageways and threatening freshwater resources. The Conservancy is engaged with businesses, governments, and communities to help mining operations minimize environmental damage. The goal is a healthy, sustainable future.

Grasslands now face unprecedented conservation challenges, and Jan knows that success will require investment today and tomorrow. In fact, she's become a tireless advocate for legacy giving to support The Nature Conservancy. "There are so many ways to leave a

legacy to the Conservancy and so much satisfaction in knowing that your life resources will go on helping conservation work even after you are gone."

Jan's travels have instilled a deep sense of appreciation for just how much people depend on nature. "The Conservancy's work isn't just helping nature; we're helping people, too. The potential impact of our work is just staggering — Brazilian savannas cover 500 million hectares, that's three times the size of Texas. We need those grasslands for water, food, and community livelihoods, and so will our grandchildren and great-grandchildren."

"There are so many ways to leave a legacy to the Conservancy and so much satisfaction in knowing that your life resources will go on helping conservation work even after you are gone."

— JAN ARMSTRONG

# Leapin' Lizards!

### Missouri Trustee's Research Shows Connection Between Fire and Fauna

As a child, Dr. Alan Templeton delighted in visiting Ozarks glades to look for his favorite animal, the eastern collared lizard: a large, colorful reptile with black bands across its neck. Years later he returned to the Ozarks and was saddened to find that collared lizards had vanished from many of the glades where he had commonly seen them as a child — in fact, he learned that populations in the Ozarks were rapidly going extinct. A biologist by trade, Dr. Templeton decided to investigate the lizards' disappearance.

Dr. Templeton found that decades of fire suppression had altered the glades, allowing cedar trees to encroach on the open landscape. He hypothesized that habitat loss and fragmentation were affecting the lizards.

Dr. Templeton and organizations such as the Conservancy advocated for the use of planned, controlled burns to restore

Missouri glades. In the early 1980s, Conservancy partner the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) began conducting controlled burns on glades. Dr. Templeton, working with MDC, began relocating collared lizards onto the newly restored glades in 1984. In particular, 28 lizards were relocated to three glades on Stegall Mountain in MDC's Peck Ranch Conservation Area, a region in which collared lizards had gone extinct. After several years it became apparent that the lizards on Stegall Mountain were surviving, but they weren't dispersing — a necessary step to a healthy and diverse population.

In 1994, MDC and the Conservancy began burning the woodlands between the glades, which thinned out a thick understory that had been too dense for the lizards to travel through. The impact on the lizards was remarkable! Almost immediately, Dr. Templeton observed that the lizards were colonizing other nearby glades. Today there are more than 550 lizards in 111 glades on Stegall Mountain and adjacent mountains, including the Conservancy's Thorny Mountain Preserve — all descendants of the original 28 translocated animals.

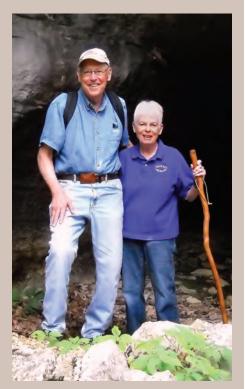
Although they continue to face risks from climate change and poaching, Missouri's collared lizards are thriving. Dr. Templeton still loves to explore the glades, especially with his grandchildren — who, thanks to dedicated conservation and research efforts, didn't miss the chance to meet an eastern collared lizard face-to-face.



Averaging about a foot long, eastern collared lizards are Missouri's largest lizard. They run on their hind legs to catch grasshoppers or escape from predators, and large males can hibernate for more than a year if conditions on the glade are unsuitable. © Alan Templeton



Dr. Alan Templeton is the Charles Rebstock professor of biology and a professor of genetics and biomedical engineering at Washington University in St. Louis. He enjoys hiking, caving, scubadiving, flying, and being a grandpa. Dr. Templeton has been a Missouri trustee for 24 years.



John and Joan Strickler at Stoner Cave © Doug Ladd/TNC

### Conservation in the Movies

The Oscar-nominated movie Winter's Bone was filmed in our own Missouri Ozarks! Many scenes were shot on land owned by Conservancy trustee John Strickler and his wife Joan. After its Hollywood debut, the Stricklers generously donated the 51-acre property to the Conservancy. Located in southwest Missouri, this forested tract borders Mark Twain National Forest (MTNF) and contains a biologically significant cave system, which includes Stoner Cave. The property will be transferred to the U.S. Forest Service and incorporated into MTNF, ensuring it will be conserved and maintained for public enjoyment. In return, the Conservancy will receive trade lands to support conservation projects in the Stricklers' home state of Kansas.



Above: The Conservancy and local university researchers work to keep turtle populations stable for indigenous communities in Oiapoque in Brazil. © Guilherme Noronha; Right: Two members of the Açaízal Village paddle through a flooded açaí palm woodland. The Conservancy has partnered with local indigenous communities since 2001 to demonstrate how lands can be managed to conserve biodiversity while still meeting economic, social, and cultural needs. © Haroldo Palo, Jr.; Bottom: Macaw © Ana Garcia/TNC

### Success at Macy's

The Missouri chapter participated in Macy's "A Magical Journey: Brasil" campaign, which raised more than \$3 million this summer for the Conservancy's Brazilian Amazon Rainforest program. The program trains young leaders in land management, works with indigenous communities to manage natural resources, creates incentives for private landowner conservation, and establishes forest carbon projects to reduce deforestation and emissions. Macy's contributed 100 percent of the proceeds from \$3 shopping passes and 10 percent of the sale price of all Brazilian marketplace products.





## "The Conservancy's work isn't just helping nature; we're helping people, too. The potential impact of our work is just staggering."

— JAN ARMSTRONG, MISSOURI TRUSTEE

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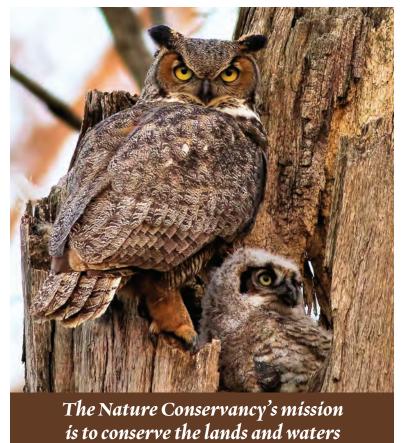
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