



# 2024

## Michigan Annual Report





# One Future Together



**Helen Taylor**

Michigan State  
Director



**David Barfield**

Michigan Board of  
Trustees Chair

## Table of contents

- 4 Land
- 8 Fresh Water
- 14 Natural Climate Solutions
- 18 Community
- 22 Our Supporters

Cover photo: Kayakers paddling off the Keweenaw Peninsula. © Michael George; This page: © Ricard Flematti

A livable climate, healthy communities and thriving nature: This is the future The Nature Conservancy (TNC) envisions. Turning this vision into reality requires ambitious goals to protect the lands and waters on which all life depends, and to address the interconnected crises of rapid climate change and biodiversity loss. TNC recognizes 2030 as a milestone year to make a positive impact for the planet—which is why we have set clear priorities, conservation goals and pathways to get there (see page 3). Our work won't stop in 2030, but the actions we take now are vital to set us on a course to a better future.

How do we get to this future? **Together.** The *only* way forward is together. As we reflect on our achievements in conservation last year, it's clear that our work is only possible through strong partnerships and the contributions of many people—including donors, community members, businesses, organizations, institutions and more.

As you can see in this report, we are at our best when working in partnership. In 2024, we deepened our relationships with agencies, universities and Tribal communities as we worked to research and restore native Great Lakes fisheries. In collaboration with the U.S. Forest Service, we planted 51,000 trees to improve water quality and biodiversity in Upper Peninsula rivers and wetlands. In partnership with local farmers, we had record-breaking success with our corporate engagement programs that benefit both growers and nature. And working alongside local leaders in Detroit, we're reinvesting funds raised from our working forest programs to support home repair and weatherization in some of the communities experiencing the most severe impacts of climate change.

And none of this would be possible without the most important partner of all—**you!** Thank you for everything you do in support of our mission and goals. We are endlessly grateful, for together, we are charting a brighter future where people and nature thrive.

As we forge ahead in 2025, we hope you will join us once again. Because together, we find a way.

Yours in conservation,

Helen Taylor and David Barfield

# The Nature Conservancy's Global 2030 Goals:



Climate  
Mitigation

3Gt

We will avoid or sequester **3 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions** (CO<sub>2</sub>e) annually—the same as taking 650 million cars off the road every year.

**In the Midwest:** We will help triple the amount of renewable energy in the Midwest, as compared to 2024, with at least 90% developed in a way that conserves nature and benefits communities.



Climate  
Adaptation

100M

We will help **100 million people** at severe risk of climate-related emergencies such as floods, fires and drought.

**In the Midwest:** Our work will benefit people who are at severe risk of climate-related emergencies—through the use of nature-based solutions, such as wetland restoration along Great Lakes coasts.



Healthy  
Lands

650M

We will conserve **650 million hectares of lands**, such as forests and grasslands—an area twice the size of India.

**In the Midwest:** We will protect 175 million acres of land (71 million hectares), including prairies, forests and coastal areas.



Healthy  
Oceans

4B

We will conserve **4 billion hectares of ocean**—more than 10% of the world's ocean area.

**In the Midwest:** We will help improve the management of 4 million acres (1.7 million hectares) of downstream marine ecosystems in the Chesapeake Bay and Gulf of Mexico.



Healthy  
Fresh Water

1M  
30M

We will conserve **1 million kilometers of river systems** and **30 million hectares of lakes and wetlands**—enough river length alone to stretch around the globe 25 times.

**In the Midwest:** We will protect 41,000 miles (66,000 kilometers) of rivers—enough river length to wrap around the earth nearly two times. Additionally, we will protect 60 million acres (24 million hectares) of lakes and wetlands.



People

45M

We are supporting the leadership of **45 million people** from local and Indigenous communities whose well-being and livelihoods depend on healthy oceans, fresh water and lands.

**In the Midwest:** We partner with Indigenous communities, farmers, foresters, city-based groups and other communities to assure conservation decisions benefit nature and people.

*\*We will achieve these goals through the efforts of TNC and our partners. The Midwest goals may shift slightly as we learn more and advance our work. We will update these annually.*



# Land

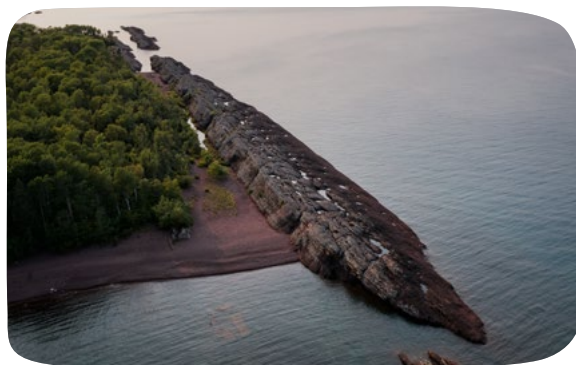
People have thrived on Michigan's two great peninsulas for thousands of years. From highlands to fens to farmlands, the abundance of these lands continues to shape our lives, and the future of Michigan. Our land conservation strategies include protection, restoration and collaboration with local partners and communities.

## Protecting Land through Acquisition

In Michigan, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) currently manages 47,393 acres on four working forest reserves and 55,713 acres across 32 preserves. But that's only a fraction of the land we've helped protect.

Since the founding of TNC's Michigan chapter in 1980, we have conserved more than **438,000 acres** across the state. A significant portion of those acres are lands we helped partners acquire by granting or lending funds, assuming interim management or providing other substantial support. Now, these lands are in the safe hands of conservation organizations equipped to manage them for their conservation value, which frees up TNC to take on new projects.

In 2024, we focused on acquiring key parcels of land that fill in gaps and inholdings in existing conservation areas, as well as supporting our partners with their conservation goals. Here are land protection highlights from the year:



Mary Macdonald preserve © Michael George

### Keweenaw Peninsula

Our [Mary Macdonald Preserve at Horseshoe Harbor](#) is finally fully connected from east to west with a **24-acre acquisition** on Lake Superior! The preserve now covers 1,224 acres of unique volcanic bedrock lakeshore, including billion-year-old rocks and fossils.

### Two Hearted River Watershed

An important 40-acre puzzle piece was filled in at our [McMahon Lake Preserve](#), which now totals more than **4,100 acres** and acts as a critical wildlife corridor in the Upper Peninsula.



#### Giving Spotlight

#### Elizabeth Stieg

*Executive Director,  
The Carls Foundation*

The Carls Foundation has been a consistent and impactful supporter of TNC for two decades and has gone above and beyond to help secure several major land protection projects, including North Point Nature Preserve in Alpena and Wilderness Lakes Reserve in the Michigamme Highlands.

It was TNC's 271,000-acre "Big U.P. Deal" in the early 2000s, though, that drew the foundation into large-scale conservation. "For the first time, regional landscape-based preservation truly seemed possible, which opened the eyes and minds of the foundation's trustees about how The Carls Foundation could help," says Elizabeth Stieg, executive director of the foundation. "Working with The Nature Conservancy has been an exciting collaboration ever since.

"TNC also recognizes the importance and capabilities of local conservancies," adds Stieg. "This collaborative understanding helps the foundation assess all our grant-making efforts to conservancies large and small, and make a greater impact across Michigan."



## Ottawa National Forest

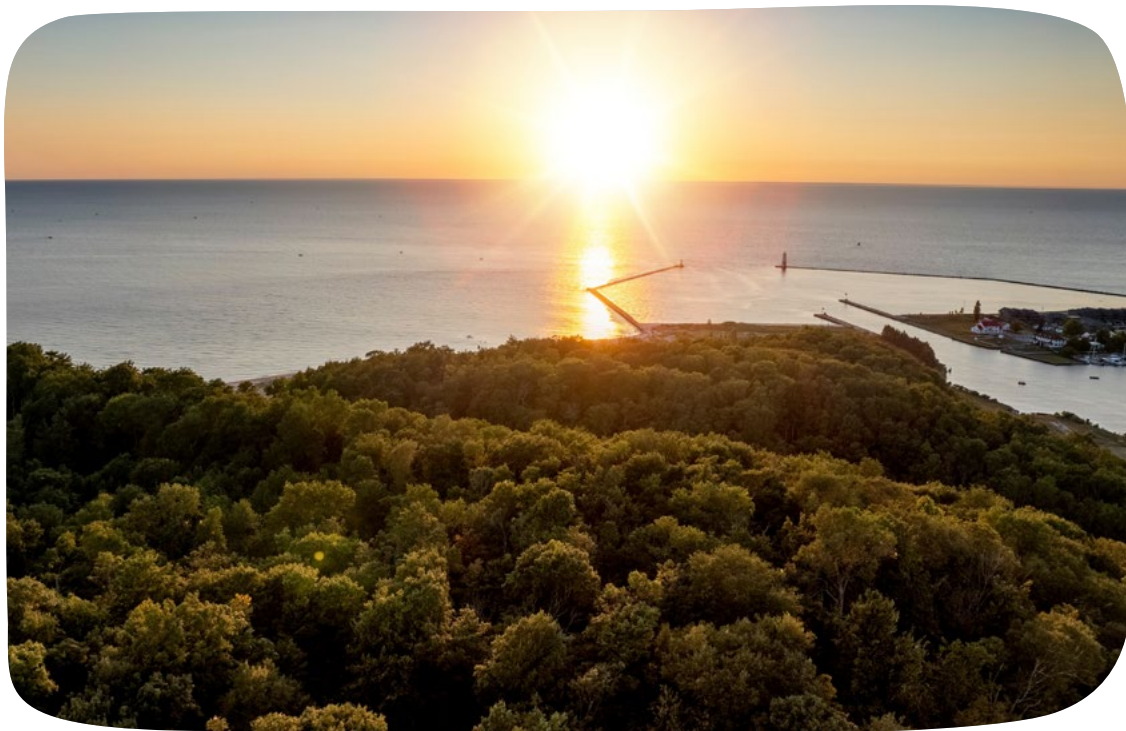
We acquired a key **40-acre parcel** surrounded by the Ottawa National Forest that will be transferred to the U.S. Forest Service.

## Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge

We also acquired a 46-acre parcel near the Shiawassee refuge that will be transferred to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to be incorporated into the refuge. With this acquisition, TNC has added a total of **195 acres to the refuge and 334 acres at the neighboring Saginaw River Headwaters Rec Area.**

## Elberta Waterfront Community Conservation Project

A huge win this year was supporting our long-time partner, the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy (GTRLC), in acquiring **35 acres in the Village of Elberta**. This acquisition protects 578 feet of Lake Michigan shoreline and 3,120 feet of Betsie Bay shoreline. TNC was proud to assist GTRLC with negotiations, fundraising and financing for this once-in-a-lifetime project, which is crucial to coastal conservation and the economic and cultural priorities of the Elberta and Frankfort communities.



Elberta Waterfront Community Conservation Project © Wirestock Creators



### Partner Spotlight

#### Glen Chown

*Executive Director,  
Grand Traverse Regional  
Land Conservancy*

Glen Chown is the founding Executive Director of Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy (GTRLC), which was established in 1991. Before that, he launched his conservation career with The Nature Conservancy as an intern in Michigan, followed by a period as land protection director for TNC's Virginia chapter.

GTRLC and TNC have always worked closely to advance Michigan conservation efforts. "Our relationship is built upon a deep-seated trust and shared vision that has enabled us to do big things together," says Chown. "Since the founding of GTRLC, our organization has been working hand-in-hand with TNC to advance mutual conservation goals, starting with the transfer and expansion of the Wilcox-Palmer-Shah Nature Preserve in Elk Rapids.

"Today, 20 years later, TNC is partnering with GTRLC yet again on the Elberta Waterfront Community Conservation Project," notes Chown. "It's a unique placemaking effort, with conservation and recreation as the key economic development drivers—similar to TNC's Keweenaw Heartlands project.

"At the core of this close partnership between our two land trusts is my longtime friendship with TNC's State Director, Helen Taylor, who has boundless energy, passion for conservation and an understanding that, in the conservation world, a rising tide lifts all boats."



# Stewarding and Restoring Lands

TNC knows that simply acquiring land is not enough to achieve our long-term conservation goals. Careful science-based research, management and restoration is critical to ensure we're preventing and eradicating invasive species; protecting native, rare and threatened species; and building resilience.

In Michigan, TNC has a rich history of accomplishing this work through collaboration, including working with other conservation groups, universities, Indigenous communities, government agencies and even neighboring Midwest TNC chapters. We are grateful for our field staff and partners that take on this strenuous work, in all kinds of conditions!

In 2024, we continued to expand our management and restoration practices to support healthy habitats. Here are highlights from the year:

**238**

acres restored with  
prescribed fire



**513**

acres managed  
for invasives



**2,700+**

acres surveyed  
and monitored



## Monitoring Invasive and Rare Species

Effective land management requires a watchful eye for the arrival of new invasive species, and early detection and management so they don't dominate native populations.

This year, we monitored invasive and rare species on more than **2,700 acres of TNC and partner lands** in the Upper Peninsula. This included a large survey of alvar ecosystems on Drummond Island and our [Maxton Plains Preserve](#) with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR).

## Tackling Invasive Species

In 2024, we **removed and managed invasive species on 513 acres** across our preserves and partner lands—including removing woody invasives at our southern fen and savanna preserves, and phragmites and spotted knapweed at our coastal preserves.

## Detecting Hemlock Woolly Adelgid

Hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA) is an invasive insect that sucks sap from hemlock needles, eventually killing hemlock trees if left untreated. This pest poses a major threat to Michigan forests.

In 2024, following the principles of early detection and rapid response, we worked with the Cooperative Invasive Species Management Associations to **conduct HWA surveys** at our Upper Peninsula preserves. Our partners at MDNR also identified the presence of HWA at our [Zetterberg Preserve](#) and the Northwest Michigan Invasive Species Network helped treat it.

## The Healing Power of Fire

Prescribed fire is an important tool; it mimics natural processes, enriches the soil and prepares the seedbed for native plants, among other benefits. This year, we **applied fire on 238 acres** of our land in Michigan and Ohio, in partnership with TNC Ohio and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



# Science and Research

At TNC, rigorous, evidence-based science underpins everything we do, including our ability to reach our 2030 goals. Our research answers important conservation questions, informs decision-making and allows TNC and partner organizations to implement successful programs at a scale necessary to have meaningful impact. Here are some of the research and science programs we advanced in 2024:

## Michigan the Beautiful

We continued to partner with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) on Michigan the Beautiful—a multi-year, science-based partnership that aims to conserve, restore and connect at least 30 percent of Michigan's lands and waters by 2030. Together, we are assembling comprehensive data to develop shared strategies, action plans and tools to guide conservation work across the state.

This year, we worked with MDNR and Public Sector Consultants to **gather public perspectives** on how nature enriches the lives of Michiganders, which will inform a roadmap of actionable goals and plans for the initiative.

## Sharing Knowledge

We hosted a cohort from the **African Women in Science program** at our [Erie Marsh Preserve](#) and professional development events with Inforum and ITC. Led by the African Center for Aquatic Research and Education program, this program supports African women scientists and provides knowledge sharing opportunities between the North American and African Great Lakes.

## On-the-ground Science

We currently host **14 active science projects** on our lands, including acoustic bird surveys, stream sampling projects, predator-prey relationship studies and more.

## Leadership in Conservation

TNC leaders shared their expertise and received recognition at events across the state:

- TNC Chief Scientist, **Dr. Katharine Hayhoe**, spoke at the University of Michigan on climate solutions.
- TNC Lead Scientist and Director of Conservation for TNC's Asia Pacific region, **Dr. Eddie Game**, presented innovative ecoacoustic conservation research at the Cranbrook Institute of Science.
- Michigan State Director, **Helen Taylor**, received the 2024 Women Rock Science Outstanding Leader Award from the Cranbrook Institute of Science.





# Fresh Water

With Michigan located at the center of the largest freshwater system on Earth, we have an important role in contributing to TNC's global 2030 goals for freshwater protection. Our work touches down across the Great Lakes, and our science and methods are impacting the region through knowledge sharing. 2024 was a big year in our efforts to restore native fisheries; create healthy, resilient rivers and streams; and expand sustainable agriculture practices that protect our freshwater resources.

## Innovative Native Fisheries Restoration

### Lake Whitefish

TNC continued experimental efforts to restore lake whitefish in partnership with the Sault Tribe of Chippewa Indians, the Little Traverse Bay Band of Odawa Indians, the Bay Mills Indian Community and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. This year we:

- Stocked **120,000 lake whitefish eggs** in the Jordan River. Since 2022, more than **250,000 eggs** have been stocked in Great Lakes tributary rivers where whitefish once flourished a century ago.
- Led by the Sault Tribe, **125 pre-spawning adult lake whitefish** were translocated from Lake Huron into the Carp River.
- Used drift-netting to confirm that young lake whitefish are **successfully being produced** from our efforts.
- Launched **environmental DNA (eDNA) sampling** in Michigan, Wisconsin and New York tributary rivers to understand where whitefish are already spawning and better target our restoration work.



Researchers stocking lake whitefish eggs in a Michigan river. © Ryan Hermes/TNC



#### Partner Spotlight

### Jason Smith

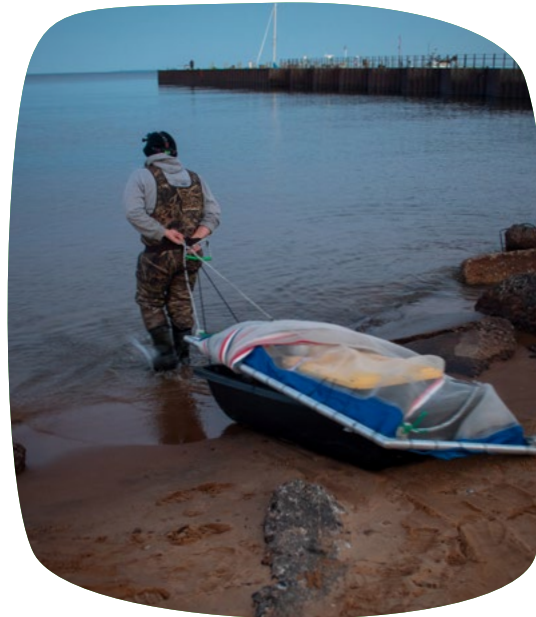
Fisheries Biologist, Bay Mills  
Indian Community

For the past four years, TNC has partnered with researchers from the Bay Mills Indian Community, Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, Little Traverse Bay Band of Odawa Indians and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) to restore declining lake whitefish populations in the Great Lakes.

Lake whitefish are the most harvested fish in the Great Lakes, making them an important economic resource. But they're also a crucial cultural resource. "The time to merely think about Atikameg\* restoration is past, and the time to do is now," says Bay Mills Fisheries Biologist Jason Smith. "The relationship between the Anishinaabek and Atikameg is ancient and critical. Atikameg have given to the people of this area for over 5,000 years. It is our turn to be the givers in this relationship."

The team is working closely on experimental research and stocking methods. "A million things are unique about my partnership with TNC," says Smith. "But if I had to pick one thing, it's the people. Working with Matt Herbert and Jamie Dobosenski is always a highlight of my field season."

*\*Atikameg is the Anishinaabe word for lake whitefish.*

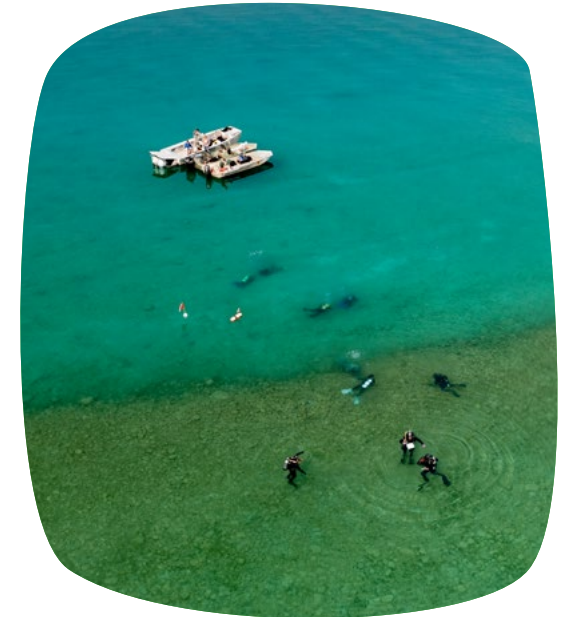


### Kiyi

TNC is testing methods to collect kiyi, an important native prey fish historically abundant in the Great Lakes, now found only in remnant populations in Lake Superior. Together with partners at the Little Traverse Bay Band of Odawa Indians (LTBB) and the U.S. Geological Survey, we are studying the viability of rearing and stocking kiyi in other Great Lakes where they once thrived.

After testing the collection of spawning kiyi in Lake Superior in the winter, the team trialed a **new sampling method** by collecting young larval kiyi in the summer. Dozens of larval fish were collected and are now at the LTBB hatchery for rearing and further study.

Photos left to right: © Hayley Hanway/TNC; © Fauna Creative



### Reef Restoration

We also continued locating, mapping and studying Lake Michigan reefs to learn more about the habitats where native fish spawn and thrive, all in partnership with the MDNR and Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians. This year:

- We completed assessments of nearly **two dozen Lake Michigan reefs** to learn if they are healthy and producing native fish populations or are in need of restoration.
- The tools we're developing from these reef surveys are already **informing protection and restoration** efforts by agencies across the Great Lakes.



# Improving Freshwater Habitats

Michiganders have a deep love for the Great Lakes, but Michigan's unique and irreplaceable freshwater resources extend far beyond our largest lakes. In Michigan, you're never more than six miles away from a body of water. TNC is committed to protecting and restoring the lakes, wetlands, rivers and streams that support biodiversity, provide clean water and make up the fabric of our state.



Top: Mapping vernal pools © Mindy Kantola/TNC; Bottom: Assessing culverts © Alex Helman/TNC

## Protecting Forest Wetlands

Did you know that hidden in Michigan's forests are unique, temporary wetlands known as vernal pools? These wetlands provide habitat for uncommon species, absorb and store water and filter out pollutants.

Vernal pools are only identifiable at certain times of year, leading them to be inadvertently harmed by land managers unaware of their presence. Mapping these vernal pools, wetlands and streams helps forest owners avoid impact and improves forest protection for aquatic and riverside habitats.

This year, in partnership with Michigan Technological University and the Michigan Technological Research Institute, **we mapped vernal pools at approximately 200 locations** in the Hiawatha National Forest. Due to the success of this research, we plan to scale up the work across a larger part of the forest, and we hope to eventually expand the effort for greater wetland protection across the Great Lakes region.

## Infrastructure Impacts on Fresh Water

Most people don't realize the impact that infrastructure such as bridges, roads and stream crossings can have on our freshwater systems. If the roads or crossings are undersized, damaged or poorly constructed, they can increase sedimentation, prevent fish passage and degrade water quality and fisheries.

In 2024, TNC and partners surveyed and identified infrastructure improvements on TNC and federal lands across the Upper Peninsula to improve water quality, aquatic habitat and riparian and wetland function. We collected data on:

- **18.61 miles of roads and 6 stream crossings** in the Hiawatha National Forest. This field work enabled staff at the Hiawatha to update their database and plans to improve infrastructure.
- **17 stream crossings** at our [Slate River Forest Reserve](#) and **5 stream crossings** at our [Wilderness Lakes Reserve](#). This data will inform our plans to replace undersized or damaged culverts, protecting the rivers from sedimentation and improving fish passage.



## Resilient Rivers and Streams

Since 2018, we've worked with the U.S. Forest Service to replant native conifers along cool and coldwater streams in the Ottawa National Forest. These efforts restore areas that maintain cool aquatic habitats, which have been impacted by the spruce budworm pest. These insects defoliate and kill spruce and fir trees, destabilizing streambanks, increasing erosion and decreasing shade cover. This raises water temperatures and threatens native coldwater fish, like brook trout, and other aquatic life.

In 2024 alone, we planted **51,000 seedlings**—white pine, red pine, white spruce, tamarack, hemlock and cedar—across **170 acres of streamside and riverside habitat** in the Ottawa. In total, the partnership has resulted in more than **400,000 seedlings planted across 1,500 acres** in the forest.

### Partner Spotlight

#### Pam Nankervis

*Wildlife Biologist, U.S. Forest Service*

TNC has worked with the U.S. Forest Service for years to restore and protect healthy forests and clean water in the Ottawa National Forest. It's a partnership that advances the missions of both groups.

"Our common goals are part of the beauty of this partnership because both TNC and the Ottawa seek to restore and enhance these beautiful public lands for multiple uses and multiple generations," says Pam Nankervis, wildlife biologist for the Ottawa National Forest. "TNC has been especially helpful in assisting us with planting in riparian areas and dying ash stands to enhance regeneration. They were able to focus on both the planning and implementation of these projects that allowed for more acres of restoration than we could have achieved with our in-house staff."

The strength of the partnership is also unique. "We've been able to create close relationships between our planning and field staff," adds Nankervis. "Despite staff turnover, we've maintained long-term connection, and it has been a pleasurable and productive partnership with lasting ecological benefits to our public lands."



Top: Ottawa tree planting © Mindy Kantola/TNC; Bottom: Brook trout © Kent Mason



# Regenerative Agriculture

Agriculture is an important economic sector in Michigan, and TNC is working with farmers to adopt practices that improve soil health and decrease harmful runoff of sediment and nutrients into our waterways. TNC is making it easier for farmers to shift to these practices that benefit both growers and water quality.

Working with Michigan farmers and agricultural businesses, our programs achieved record-breaking success in 2024, demonstrating the benefits of regenerative agriculture practices for Saginaw Bay farms and surrounding watersheds.



## Sustainable Option Wheat

Our three-year Sustainable Option Wheat pilot program, in partnership with Star of the West Milling Company, ended this year with a record enrollment of **21 farms, totaling 8,560 acres** that produced more than **906,000 bushels of sustainably grown wheat**. This program pays a premium to wheat farmers who deploy sustainable farming practices, thus embedding conservation in the supply chain and meeting consumer demand for sustainably raised foods and products.

## Farming to Manage Flooding

TNC has expanded its proven agricultural conservation approaches in the Midland area, with support from the Rollin M. Gerstacker Foundation. This area was heavily impacted by flooding in 2020, and TNC is exploring water-saving farming practices to help mitigate flood risk and protect water resources. This year, we commissioned a study to identify which farms in the Midland area can make the **biggest impact on water runoff levels** through sustainable farming practices and surface water storage methods, such as wetland restoration and floodplain reconnection.







## Soil Health Heroes

Our Soil Health Hero awards program, launched in 2018, celebrates Michigan farmers and professionals who are leading the way in sustainable farming practices. In January, more than 150 attendees gathered for a **celebration at the Great Lakes Crop Summit** to honor the fourth group of awardees.

## Increasing Awareness and Adoption

We continued to work with farmers to spread the word about agricultural conservation practices. This year, we demonstrated practices at **four field days** and shared knowledge and resources at events, such as AgroExpo and farmer-led watershed meetings.



## 2023 Soil Health Heroes

**Conservation Excellence Agribusiness Award:** Sarah Michalek, Michigan Milk Producers Association

**Conservation Newcomer Award:** Caleb and Cody Symons, Symons Farms

**Conservation Innovation Award:** James Weber, Weber Farms

**Conservation Legacy Award:** Wayne Bierlein, WMW Bierlein Farms



### Partner Spotlight

## Chuck Lippstreu

*President, Michigan Agri-Business Association and TNC Michigan Board Member*

The Michigan Agri-Business Association (MABA) is committed to the development and prosperity of Michigan agriculture. TNC has partnered with MABA over the past decade to deliver conservation resources, support and innovation to Michigan farmers.

"Anyone who cares about the future of our air, land and water should know The Nature Conservancy has been a consistent leader in partnering with Michigan farmers and the agriculture industry to safeguard those precious resources," says Chuck Lippstreu, President of MABA. "We have been continually impressed by TNC's engagement with partners on the ground and, importantly, the long-term view with which it approaches stewardship on Michigan farms."

Both TNC and MABA recognize how important the agricultural industry is in Michigan. "We need agriculture for the future of our economy, and for the future stewardship of our rural lands," says Lippstreu.

"The industry is full of innovators who are eager to learn about and adopt strategies to keep the industry growing and bolster their existing stewardship efforts. That's where TNC has been so valuable—helping link up experts in agriculture with pathways to continue leading and making a difference."



# Natural Climate Solutions

Climate action is urgently needed, and TNC is working across Michigan to protect climate-resilient lands and waters; demonstrate and advance natural climate solutions; and promote innovative technologies, policies and nature-based strategies.

## Northwoods: Climate-Strong Forests

Our climate work in 2024 focused largely on the [Great Lakes Northwoods](#)—which span more than **60 million acres** across the northern parts of Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin. We are working with partners and communities to conserve these iconic Midwestern forests and the way of life they uphold for people and nature. By properly protecting and managing these forests, we can also unlock their greatest potential for biodiversity, climate resilience and carbon sequestration.



© Jason Whalen

## Family Forests

Most family-owned properties are too small to participate in registered carbon credit programs, but collectively, these properties make up more than 38% of U.S. forests. By working with landowners who own 30 acres of forest or more, the [Family Forest Carbon Program](#)—a partnership with TNC and the American Forest Foundation—is helping to address this market access gap by incentivizing and increasing the number of family-owned forests practicing climate-smart management.

In 2024, we added **29 landowners and 2,500 acres** to the program in Michigan, further increasing the acreage of forests benefiting from sustainable management. As part of a 20-year contract, the program encourages practices that support wildlife habitat, forest health, water quality and the sequestration of carbon.

## Carbon Management

Created in 2023, the Michigamme Highlands Carbon Project spans 13,660 acres across part of our Upper Peninsula forest reserves and is estimated to store an additional 850,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide over the next 20 years through our ownership and improved forest management.

In 2024, we completed our first round of carbon credit verification. A third-party program **verified more than 211,000 carbon credits** on the project, and we **sold 170,000 verified credits** to Michigan-based companies looking to supplement their decarbonization efforts after taking all feasible steps to reduce their emissions.

The revenue generated by this project will further support our natural climate solutions work, maintain our high standard of land stewardship and support communities experiencing severe impacts of climate change (see page 20).



## Improving Forest Health and Resilience

Our working forest reserves act as living laboratories where we use sustainable forest management, applied science and prescribed fire to improve forest health, sequester greater amounts of carbon and restore biodiversity. This year on our forest reserves:

- We installed **60 long-term forest inventory plots** at our 11,667-acre [Wilderness Lakes Reserve](#) to track the ecological health of forests under both our management and natural processes.
- We completed a **three-year inventory** at our 9,760-acre [Slate River Forest Reserve](#), providing important insights into tree species and forest health and structure.
- To accelerate the regeneration of important hardwood species, we **selectively harvested 38 acres** at our Slate River Forest Reserve that will improve ecosystem health and biodiversity and increase the forests' ability to capture and store carbon. We also used a new silvicultural practice to regenerate high-quality bigtooth aspen and enhance habitat for the golden-winged warbler, a species that has experienced significant population decline in North America.
- We developed plans to use **prescribed fire to naturally regenerate Northwoods forests**. Decades of fire suppression have caused areas like the Slate River Gorge's natural red pine forest to stop regenerating. By thinning the forest and implementing prescribed fire, adequate light levels can penetrate the canopy, prepare the soil for red pine seed germination, help restore important native plant species and increase the climate resilience of these special forests.

Left to right: Field staff measuring trees. © Alex Helman/TNC; Golden-winged warbler © Scott Keys/TNC Photo Contest 2019



### Giving Spotlight

#### Ridgway White

*President and CEO, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation*

The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation has supported TNC's work across Michigan and the Great Lakes for many years—from working with farmers for soil health in the Saginaw Bay watershed to helping advance natural climate solutions in the Northwoods.

"The Mott Foundation's long relationship with The Nature Conservancy is based on our shared love of Michigan's landscape and water resources. TNC is the leading conservation organization in Michigan, and it consistently delivers results in ways that we are proud to support," shares President and CEO Ridgway White.

"Mott's recent support for TNC's natural climate solutions work was an outgrowth of our longstanding support for its efforts to preserve forests in the Upper Peninsula. TNC's growing emphasis on nature-based climate solutions and carbon markets is critical for two reasons: It protects the environment and creates sustainable methods for funding the conservation of additional ecosystems that offset the effects of climate changing pollution."

Like TNC, the Mott Foundation is also committed to ensuring the well-being of Michiganders. "We've grown to understand that in places like Michigan's Upper Peninsula, communities rely on the forest and the rest of the natural world for their livelihood, culture and identity," says White. "The fate of the forest and forest-dependent communities are inextricably linked."



# Community-Based Forest Protection

## The Keweenaw Heartlands

The Keweenaw Heartlands project continues to offer a robust model for long-term, community-based conservation. Since acquiring [32,500 acres of forest](#) with the support of the local community in 2022, we've been working alongside Keweenaw residents to set up a new governance structure to manage the lands when TNC transfers ownership to the community in the coming years. In 2024, we continued to lay a strong foundation to ensure the Heartlands are preserved in perpetuity and will meet the community's needs:

- With the support of key partners, such as Michigan Technological University and the Michigan Natural Features Inventory, we completed the **Keweenaw Heartlands Inventory Project**, to understand the cultural, ecological, timber and infrastructure features of the Heartlands and guide future management.
- Based on engagement and input from residents, community leaders and interested individuals, we completed the [Blueprint for the Keweenaw Heartlands](#)—a document that outlines the local values and community-based principles necessary to guide this project.
- We facilitated the Heartlands Community Advisory Committee and subcommittees as they carefully reviewed and refined the **local public governance model** that is foundational to this project.
- We helped develop **key governance components**, such as amendments to state law and plans for establishing a future elected Forest and Recreation Authority Board.
- **Public understanding and appreciation** of the Keweenaw Heartlands increased through legislative tours, field trips and community events.
- We supported the development and funding of an **emergency operations center**, which will provide essential services for the growing recreational activity on Keweenaw County lands.

To learn more about the project visit [keweenawcommunityfoundation.org](https://keweenawcommunityfoundation.org).



© Devin Leonarduzzi/Quincy Aerial



### Giving Spotlight

#### Vivian Day Stroh

*Civic Leader and TNC Michigan Board Member*

Vivian Day and John Stroh have been dedicated supporters of TNC since the 1990s, and Vivian has served on Michigan's Board of Trustees since 2014. The Strohs were some of the first donors to boldly step up and support our early Northwoods work, and they have made important gifts to TNC forest projects like the Slate River Forest Reserve.

"What first caught my attention was the opportunity to help protect corridors for wildlife migration and flyways, due to the changes they will face with climate change. From there it grew because the Keweenaw and Michigamme Highlands are such beautiful, wild places."

Like many Michiganders, the Strohs are inspired by their experiences in the Upper Peninsula. "I've always loved Michigan's Northwoods," says Vivian. "We've had a family home in the U.P. for 45 years, and when I'm there, my senses come alive. Having the honor of being a steward of this wonderful place has made me much more aware of the biodiversity and magic of it all."

# Farmers Innovating Climate Solutions

Climate solutions are being forged in other parts of the state as well. Downstate, our work with farmers achieves far more than protection of our waterways; farmers are helping mitigate the impacts of climate change, while also improving soil health.

TNC's [Feed in Focus program](#), in partnership with the Michigan Milk Producers Association, is a three-year pilot to help Michigan dairy farmers try different dairy cattle feed and adjust growing practices to reduce methane emissions and sequester more carbon in the soil, providing dual climate benefits.

In 2024, we saw record enrollment of **27 farms** of varying sizes across the state—nearly twice as many as last year!



## Partner Spotlight

### Sarah Michalek

*Farm Sustainability Manager,  
Michigan Milk Producers  
Association*

TNC is proud to partner with innovators across the agricultural sector to achieve a more sustainable future. The Feed in Focus program works closely with dairy farmers to help them reduce their carbon emissions. The Michigan Milk Producers Association (MMPA) is a

critical partner working both with farmers and organizations to help deliver this program.

"The sustainability and climate spaces are difficult to navigate. And a farmer's to-do list is never-ending" says Sarah Michalek, farm sustainability manager for MMPA. "Through partnership, we can provide established, trusted resources and the expertise needed to enable farmers to find success in adoption of new practices, while not adding to their already full plates."

"I appreciate the partnership with TNC, as they have brought a depth of knowledge and technical expertise to the table," adds Michalek. "Farmers speak highly of their experience discussing opportunities on their farm with TNC staff and have utilized their team as resources when making decisions on adoption of new practices."





# Community

TNC is committed to strengthening community-based conservation and the people whose lives and livelihoods are most closely linked to healthy lands and waters. Together, we can adapt to a changing climate and shape a healthy, thriving future—a future we all share.

## Working Alongside Indigenous Peoples

Respecting and supporting Indigenous sovereignty and leadership is imperative as TNC works to meet our 2030 goals and beyond. At the foundation of our partnerships on research and conservation is our commitment to the rights of Native communities to steward their environment, secure their rights to resources and shape their future. We are continually learning and growing in how we show up as an authentic, ethical and effective conservation partner.

### Returning Lands

In 2021, TNC purchased 10,550 acres of stunning forests and rivers, including four miles of the Slate River in the Upper Peninsula. Included in this acquisition, now known as the [Slate River Forest Reserve](#), were 760 acres located within the boundary of the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community (KBIC) L'Anse Indian Reservation.

The purchase presented an opportunity to return these lands to KBIC, and in June, TNC staff joined KBIC during a Tribal Council meeting to officially sign the deed [transferring the 760-acre tract](#). KBIC, part of Michigan's First People, the Anishinaabe, have been stewards of Michigan lands and waters for generations, and their cultural teachings signify and honor the connection between people, wildlife and the natural world.



State Director Helen Taylor signs the deed at the KBIC Tribal Council meeting. © TNC





## Planting Wild Rice

In September, TNC joined staff from KBIC's Natural Resources Department to **plant wild rice at TNC's Wilderness Lakes Reserve**. The team filled two canoes with 300 pounds of wild rice and dispersed the seeds by hand over the water. It's the first year of a multi-year initiative with the goal of reestablishing native wild rice beds in the area.

Wild rice, known as manoomin or mnomen to Anishinaabe communities, was once plentiful in Michigan waterways and was a key reason Indigenous peoples settled in the Great Lakes region. Over time, habitat loss, damming, pollution, uninformed harvesting practices by settlers, climate change and other factors have nearly wiped out its populations. Many Tribes across the state are working to restore this native plant for its natural, cultural and economic value.



© Nick Mead/TNC



# Supporting Detroit Communities

## Urban Canopy Cover

While Michigan is largely forested, many urban areas lack tree cover that is essential to providing shade, managing stormwater, supporting wildlife, sequestering carbon and enhancing aesthetics. Detroit benefits from local groups like The Greening of Detroit, which is leading a partnership with the city to increase the tree canopy.

This year, TNC began working with the group **to design and fund a new baseline study of the city's tree canopy**—set to take place in 2025—which will help update data and integrate tools that partners use to guide this work.

## Grassroots Detroiters

48207-11 Grassroots Detroiters is a local organization whose mission is to improve the quality of life for long-term Detroit residents and serve the community's diverse needs, such as food distribution, connections to resources and home repairs.

For the third year, TNC supported the community-led home repair program by **redirecting funds from carbon credit sales** on our working forest reserves—**now totaling \$375,000**—to climate-resilient home repairs. This ensures that income from climate solutions is reinvested where climate impacts are most felt.

Additionally, we were proud to help the group secure a public grant for critical energy efficiency upgrades and repairs to a local community gathering building, which was significantly damaged by storm events.



### Partner Spotlight

#### Mrs. Dee

*Leader, Grassroots Detroiters*

The Grassroots Detroiters group is committed to taking care of its community in a number of ways, including instilling a sense of community pride. “Through our partnership with The Nature Conservancy, we’ve been able to bless people in the community with things they just don’t have a way of getting,” says Mrs. Dee, leader of the Grassroots Detroiters. “This work is inspiring people to want to stay in their homes, by alleviating some of their concerns like rain coming through their roof. A lot of people can’t qualify to get a grant to repair their homes, and this partnership is helping them qualify.”

TNC is proud to work with the group and has plans to expand the scope of the partnership in future years. “We are excited to continue cultivating an even bigger and better relationship with TNC that will bless many generations to come,” adds Mrs. Dee. “One thing that I really love is that God has blessed the Grassroot Detroiters with some awesome people at TNC to work with, like Helen, Candace, Sam, Abigail, Andrea and Tracy, as well as many others behind the scenes. We are thankful that He has connected us with the right people to further us on our awesome journey.”



# Connecting People with Nature

The opportunity for people to engage deeply with nature is an important purpose of TNC's preserves and reserves. We maintain our lands to ensure the protection of habitat and wildlife, and for visitors to have meaningful experiences in the outdoors. By enhancing access—both in person and virtually—we hope to enhance awareness of the importance of conservation and inspire people to take action to protect Michigan's lands. In 2024, this is how we grew engagement on our lands:

- Welcomed **tens of thousands of visitors** to our 32 preserves across the state (not including the Keweenaw Heartlands) and improved **19.6 of miles of trails**. In total, our preserves offer 43.7 miles of trails.
- Did you know that you can find our preserves on AllTrails? This year, AllTrails members explored our preserves for a cumulative total of **5,358 hours and 9,821 miles**.
- Hosted miles of state-designated trails that cross the **Keweenaw Heartlands** and our U.P. reserves that were used by more than 50,000 snowmobilers, ATVers and recreationalists in 2024.
- Led **hiking events** at preserves across the state, including Ross Coastal Plain Marsh Preserve, Echo Lake Nature Preserve and Mary Macdonald Preserve at Horseshoe Harbor.
- Hosted **volunteer events**, including invasive species removal at the Point Betsie Lighthouse and a native seed collection and processing workday at our Ives Road Fen Preserve.
- Gathered more than 100 staff and guests to experience “totality” at a **solar eclipse watch party** at our Erie Marsh Preserve.
- Supported **festivals in our preserve communities**, including the Aldo Leopold Festival and Fresh Coast Film Festival.
- Completed **boardwalk repairs** at our Nan Weston Nature Preserve near Chelsea and developed plans to add a new three-mile loop.
- Enrolled almost 1,000 acres of the Slate River Forest Reserve in Michigan's **Commercial Forest Program**, opening more of the property to non-motorized public use.
- Learn more at [nature.org/miexplore](https://nature.org/miexplore).



© TNC



## Giving Spotlight

### Jim M. Nicholson


*Chairman, PVS Chemicals Inc. and TNC Michigan Board Chair Emeritus*

The Nicholson family represents generations of TNC support and commitment to community involvement and volunteerism. Jim B. Nicholson first became a TNC member in 1985 and has dedicated much of his life to the success and growth of Michigan communities, serving on a number of boards, including TNC's Michigan Board of Trustees. He was recently awarded the prestigious Governor George Romney Lifetime Achievement Award for his lifetime commitment to community involvement and volunteer service. Now, his children are following in his footsteps.

“Our family has called Michigan home for over 90 years, and we believe in the state and its people, which is why we continue to invest in what’s best for our communities,” says Jim M. Nicholson, son of Jim B. “Our support of TNC comes down to its recognition that people matter, and that science can drive good, effective decision-making and stewardship.”

Like his father, Jim M. also serves on TNC's board as chair emeritus. “The TNC Board of Trustees provides a unique opportunity to gather with smart, capable people to consider and act on issues that impact many throughout our state. It's an opportunity to help influence how our state grows and changes into the future.”





**Interested in  
supporting  
this work?**

Use the provided  
envelope or visit  
[nature.org/midonate](https://nature.org/midonate).

## Planned Givers

A planned gift is one of the most impactful ways you can support The Nature Conservancy's critical conservation work. Some planned gifts have an impact now, some after your lifetime. Many offer tax savings, and some even provide you with income for life.

We would like to recognize the individuals who have increased or initiated a planned gift between July 1, 2023, and June 30, 2024.

Anonymous – 4

Cathy & Bob Anthony

Menakka & Essel Bailey

Charles S. Barr

Robert S. Beahan

Jan & Carol Bell

Cheryl L. Brand

Shelley Carpenter

Marilyn M. Cooper

Julie Craves & Darrin O'Brien

Terry P. Deegan

Joyce Delamarter

Marian Donovan

Jeffrey G. Drew

Thomas Freiman & Diane Ulin

Adrian G. Gillissen

Georgia Griffin

Heidi L. Hernandez

Roger Hewlett & Jonene

Eliasson

Allison V. Koetsier

Loretta Lorenzo

Pamela J. Melichar

Louis Mika

Sue Monaghan

Louis H. Nichols

James B. & Ann V. Nicholson

Diann K. Onsted

Bethany Patton

Mary J. Pitcher

Dawn Pornthanomwong

Jacalyn N. Pozniak, DVM

Everell Price

Patricia A. & Gerald R. Raker

George E. Reasoner, Jr.

James J. Schafer

Nathaniel Siddall

Ken & Toni Spears

Patricia Tschritter

Joan H. Verwilst

Christine & Keith Weber

Janice Weren

James C. Zandee

# Our Supporters

We would like to recognize the following individuals, companies, foundations and organizations who have supported our work in Michigan, as well as Michigan-based donors who supported other domestic and/or international conservation projects with cumulative gifts of \$5,000 or more between July 1, 2023, and June 30, 2024.

We extend our deep appreciation to the thousands of donors not listed here whose commitments make our conservation results possible.

## \$1,000,000 – \$5,000,000

Anonymous – 3  
Grainger Family Descendants Fund  
Polk Family Foundations

## \$500,000 – \$999,999

Menakka & Essel Bailey  
Carls Foundation  
Steve & Judy Dobson  
Charles Stewart Mott Foundation

## \$250,000 – \$499,999

Anonymous – 1  
Fred A. & Barbara M. Erb Family Foundation  
Meijer Foundation  
Jon & Christine Saari  
Mr. & Mrs. Tadd Seitz  
Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation  
J.A. Woollam Foundation

## \$100,000 – \$249,999

Gerard & Lizann Anderson  
Arcus Foundation  
Carhartt, Inc.  
Thomas B. Cook & Anna Owens  
Jeffrey C. & Cynthia M. Littmann  
Gregory C. Maze  
Nancy C. Maze  
Robert & Joyce Mims  
David & Catherine Rice  
Harry A. & Margaret D. Towsley Foundation  
Dr. Lois M. Verbrugge  
Wege Foundation  
Stuart & Lynn T. White

## \$50,000 – \$99,999

Anonymous – 3  
Richard C. Devereaux Foundation  
Dragonfly Fund  
Bill Duffield  
Joan M. Durgin  
Environmental Initiatives  
Richard P. Hoeger  
Martin Family Foundation  
Ralph L. & Winifred E. Polk Foundation  
Ruth & Joel Reinoehl  
Elizabeth, Allan & Warren Shelden Fund  
Robert J. Wagner

## \$25,000 – \$49,999

Anonymous – 1  
Cathy & Bob Anthony  
David & Kiana Barfield Family Foundation  
BorgWarner, Inc.  
The Day & Stroh families  
Douglas & Alicia Griffiths  
Franklin E. Hull, M.D.  
Thomas E. & Nancy S. Mertz  
James B. & Ann V. Nicholson  
Oak Foundation  
Rosenberg/Starr Family Foundation  
Peter & Carol Walters  
Weyerhaeuser Day Foundation  
Mr. & Mrs. William Zehnder

## \$10,000 – \$24,999

Anonymous – 4  
Annapurna Foundation

Andrew & Linda Apsey  
The Bear Factory, LLC  
Gary Burk  
The late Leslie C. Devereaux  
John Drake  
Mark J. & Sandy L. Ehlert  
John M. & Deborah D. Erb  
George W. Ford  
Paul & Judith Freedman  
Friedman Family Fund  
Robert & Phyllis Grannan  
Erik & Camille Higley  
Martin B. & Nancy E. Hillila  
Drs. Richard A. & JoAnn S. Hirth  
Janice E. Hoekstra  
ITC Holdings Corp.  
Nancy & Eric Jensen  
James P. Motiff  
Michael & Kim Mulder  
Larry Neiderheide  
John & Frances Parker  
Karen & Drew Peslar Foundation  
John & Cathleen Ranke  
Dean & Barbara Richardson Donor Advised Fund  
Vivian Roeder  
Rhonna & Mark Shatz  
Sandra B. & Richard H. Simon  
Diana D. Simoni  
Sherrill Smith  
Karen & Donald Stearns  
Stryker Corporation  
Robert & Rebecca Tisch  
Barbara Van Dusen  
Verlan & Norma VanRheenen

Steven & Lanette VanWagenen  
Salome E. & Jonathan T. Walton Family Fund  
Kim & Mike Wiggins

## \$5,000 – \$9,999

Anonymous – 3  
Amsted Foundation for Means Industries, Inc.  
Darl E. Bennink  
Dr. Rosemary Berardi & Dr. Carolyn Zaleon  
Kenneth W. & Barbara A. Bollin  
Wade T. & Mary Ellen Bridges  
Joanna M. Cohen  
Estate of Dr. Mary L. Cretens  
Don Davis  
Buck Drew & Becky Klassen-Drew  
Elizabeth Dole & the late Stanley F. Dole, Jr.  
Roberta Patt & Fred Fechheimer  
Philanthropic Fund  
Patricia J. Forbes  
Ari Gilder  
Cynthia C. & Daniel L. Goulston  
Margaret Halls  
Debra S. Harber-Dennis  
Christopher & Nancy Heberer  
Virginia C. Hieber  
Charles & Mary Hodge  
Lorrie Howenstein  
Hoyer Family, LLC  
Jury Foundation  
Barbara L. Kafka  
Kirchhoff Automotive

Sonya Larsen  
Lear Corporation  
Michael E. Lozen  
Maryann Lynch & the late Ed Lynch  
Bruce J. & Claudia Maguire  
David B. & Kathleen Mayo  
Annemary Meeter Trust  
Michael M. Myers  
James M. & Mary Beth Nicholson  
Kim A. Noorman  
Larry M. & Linda Oman  
Richard W. & Christine M. Powers  
Stan & Connie Rajnak  
Mark D. Reckase  
Milton W. & Barbara J. Rohwer  
Edward & Elyse Rogers Family Foundation  
Randolph & Kathleen Schein  
Eric J. & Eva J. Schoettle  
Lloyd A. & Cynthia T. Semple  
Mary M. Sies  
Suzan M. Stacknik & R. Scott Webb  
Lyda Stillwell & the late Vern H. Stillwell  
Rebecca & Roger Tuuk  
Kyle Valade  
Curt R. & Lisa Vander Meer  
S. Evan & Gwen Weiner  
Dr. Jean Wineman  
Lawrence & Sylvia Wong Foundation  
Benjamin Zaitlen





101 E. César E. Chávez Ave.  
Lansing, MI 48906

## Management Team

Helen Taylor, *State Director*  
Rich Bowman, *Director of Policy*  
Nina Devries, *Director of Development*  
Randy Gavorin, *Director of Operations*  
Peggy Shannon, *Director of Finance*  
Tracy Melvin, *Conservation Programs Manager*





## 2024 Board of Trustees

David W. Barfield, *Chair*  
Terry A. Barclay, *Vice Chair*  
John M. Ranke, *Treasurer*  
Gerard M. Anderson  
Linda H. Apsey  
Essel W. Bailey Jr.  
Jocelyn K. Coley  
Brittanie L. Dabney  
Jeffrey J. Davis  
Mary F. Draves  
John M. Erb  
Charles A. Lippstreu  
James M. Nicholson  
Stephen R. Polk  
David M. Rice  
Vivian Day Stroh  
Robert R. Tisch  
Gretchen R. Valade  
Peter S. Walters  
William A. Zehnder

## Life & Emeritus Trustees

Robert L. Anthony  
Thomas B. Cook  
Paul C. Hillegonds  
Philip H. Power  
Lloyd A. Semple  
Barbara Van Dusen

## CONNECT WITH US!

-   Follow us on social media: [@TNCMichigan](https://www.instagram.com/TNCMichigan)
-  Learn more at our website: [nature.org/michigan](https://nature.org/michigan)
-  Sign up for our e-newsletter: [nature.org/naturenews](https://nature.org/naturenews)

NON-PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
PERMIT NO. 488  
LANSING, MI

TNC works beyond state lines to protect the lands and waters across the Midwest. Learn about conservation wins in other Great Lakes states:

[nature.org/midwestwins](https://nature.org/midwestwins)