

2025 Legislative Session

TNC in Tennessee



Executive Summary

The Nature Conservancy in Tennessee champions policy and legislation to strengthen conservation efforts and protect healthy lands and waters.

Our nonpartisan and evidence-based approach guides our collaboration with local landowners, communities, businesses, and government agencies to implement practical conservation solutions that benefit both people and nature.

We engage with city, county, state and federal lawmakers, making recommendations to influence policy and keep nature at the forefront of decision-making. Healthy natural systems are the foundation of Tennessee's economy, security, and way of life and we seek to uphold our state's strong natural heritage for future generations.

Legislative Priorities

Urge strong protections for wetlands

Streams, rivers, lakes and wetlands are critical to the well-being of people and nature, providing valuable—and often irreplaceable—sources of drinking water and habitat for fish and wildlife. They also power local economies and thriving communities. Approximately sixty percent of wetlands in Tennessee have already been lost to ditching, draining and development. Those losses are concerning for the many benefits wetlands provide for drinking water quality, flood control, groundwater recharge and wildlife habitat.

HB1054 / SB0631 was introduced and heard in the 2023-2024 Tennessee General Assembly Session, which would have severely threatened our state's existing wetlands. For the 2025 Session, TNC will advocate for strong wetland protections and science-based definitions for wetlands and management.

Support biodiversity of freshwater in the Tennessee and Cumberland River Basins

It is critical to conserve freshwater diversity of the Tennessee and Cumberland river basins by ensuring the restoration and maintenance of ecosystem processes to improve floodplain, wetland, tributary, and mainstem river habitats.

We will work to ensure there is adequate state and federal funding to support activities for barrier removal, Duck River and Cumberland River conservation, environmental flows, and sediment abatement. Additionally, we will participate in stakeholder planning processes and advocate for regulatory approaches that better manage our freshwater resources.

Support resilient and healthy forests

Forests cover approximately 53% of Tennessee and are under threat from urbanization, fragmentation, a changing climate, wildfire, loss of diversity, invasive insects and disease. TNC is working to enhance forest resiliency in Tennessee through restoration, improved forest management, and permanent protection of private forestland.

TNC will encourage policies and legislation that incorporate science and data from the Tennessee Forest Action Plan and State Wildlife Action Plan to guide priorities for implementation and funding. We support maintaining adequate funding and capacity for active forest management, including prescribed fire.

Provide food and water through healthy floodplains and sustainable agriculture

Floodplains and wetlands in west TN have been severely degraded over the past 100 years, and TNC is dedicated to restoring and conserving these ecosystems to benefit water quality and wildlife habitat. Efforts are being made to reduce nutrient runoff from agriculture and increase practices on farms that would support biodiversity,

decrease carbon emissions, and increase carbon storage in crops and soils.

TNC supports funding for restoration projects on the Lower Mississippi River and throughout Tennessee. We will participate in planning efforts for integrated floodplain management, and we urge state support for agricultural conservation practices.

Accelerate clean energy and implement natural climate solutions

People, wildlife and natural landscapes feel the negative effects of extreme weather, such as severe flooding and catastrophic wildfires. To prevent these impacts from being felt more frequently and at a larger scale, TNC strives to accelerate clean energy deployment, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and implement natural climate solutions to remove carbon from our atmosphere. One example is working with family forest landowners to improve forest health, increase carbon storage, and earn income.

TNC will identify legislative and funding opportunities to implement recommendations from the TN climate action plan. We will provide tools and resources to support siting solar and renewable energy projects to minimize impacts to lands of conservation value. Additionally, TNC will offer expertise to expedite rapid deployment of renewable energy.

Secure recurring funding for conservation

To date TNC has secured 450,000 acres of land in Tennessee for recreation and natural resource values, and we aim to conserve an additional 50,000 acres by 2030. A key component of our strategy is to play a “partner assist” role, where TNC lends expertise and financial support to priority real estate transactions. This requires access to capital, and the State of Tennessee currently lacks a recurring grant funding source for nonprofit partners to access for land acquisitions.

The Tennessee Heritage Conservation Trust Fund (HCTF) was created in 2005 to assist the State in permanently conserving and preserving tracts of land to promote tourism and recreation; protect, conserve, and restore Tennessee’s physical, cultural, archeological, historical, and environmental resources; and preserve working landscapes. Budget appropriations put \$30 million into the account between 2005 and 2009, and more recently Governor Lee appropriated \$30 million in 2023 and \$71.5 million in 2024 legislative sessions. Rather than rely on intermittent appropriations, TNC is exploring opportunities to secure a reliable source of revenue for the HCTF, and will educate legislators about the importance of conservation funding in Tennessee.

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