

EFROYMSON RESTORATION AT **Kankakee Sands**

SUMMER 2022

Constructed Wetland in Unit E © Trevor Edmonson/TNC

Newly-Created Wetland

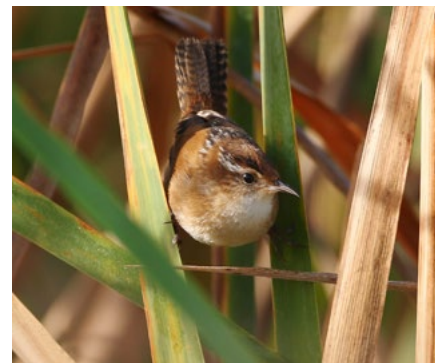
In 2021, we embarked on our restoration of Unit E, a 561-acre unit north of the bison pasture, from agricultural land to a planted prairie and wetland. It was our single biggest project of 2021 for [Kankakee Sands](#), and it involved months of collecting, cleaning and mixing thousands of pounds of seed and spreading them over the land.

An important part of the restoration design called for a 12-acre wetland to be carved out of the flat field. Why? The acres in Unit E were part of historic Beaver Lake, and the soil longs to be wet again. Working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), we engineered a plan to capture more water by doing three things: 1) Carving out a shallow wetland in an area that still has wet soils today, 2) using the dirt from that to fill three lateral ditches that quickly drain the field, and 3) disable as much inground drain tile as possible. By accomplishing these three things, we are holding more standing water and saturating a lot more wetland habitat. Our goal for the wetland is for it to be a rich stopover spot for migrating birds.

The wetland construction and seeding were finished in late February of this year. We will have to wait a few years for the plant communities to gain their footing, but the birds have already begun to explore the new planting. Birding reports dating back to 1999 showed that 78 bird species had been seen in and around Unit E. In just the three months since the area was planted and the wetland was constructed, an additional 51 bird species have been documented in Unit E! Some of those new species include marsh wren, long-billed dowitcher, red-necked phalarope, black-necked stilt, ruddy turnstone and black-bellied plover.

We've had many birding groups visit the Kankakee Sands this spring, and Unit E was a hot spot during their visit. On your next visit to Kankakee Sands, make sure to bring your binoculars and check out what might be flying into the wetland in Unit E!

Welcome to the neighborhood! From top: Marsh wren © Shari McCollough; Black-necked stilt © Matt Williams/TNC; Black-bellied plover © Matt Williams/TNC



Welcome to Kankakee Sands Land Steward, Elizabeth Wilson!

Elizabeth "Liz" Wilson is our new Kankakee Sands Land Steward. Liz has a degree in Geography and Environmental Resources from Southern Illinois University Carbondale. She has worked at TNC's Southern Lake Michigan Rim Office managing dune and swale habitat and has five years of experience working with private restoration companies. In her new role, Liz is responsible for managing nearly 2,600 acres of prairie at Kankakee Sands.

Liz shares, "I feel very fortunate to have been able to work in such diverse settings, from contractors to non-for-profits, working on every type of site, from homeowners to large scale restoration projects like here at Kankakee Sands."

Welcome, Liz!



Liz Wilson © Alyssa Nyberg/TNC

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

A Regal Survey to Study Regal Fritillaries



Strolling through the prairie for butterflies may sound like fun, but trudging through waist-high prairie grasses in the heat of July to get accurate counts of fast-flying regal fritillaries can be a very hard but rewarding challenge!

The regal fritillary is a large, orange, state endangered butterfly. Roughly the same size as the monarch, it differs in that it has white spots on its hind wing and does not migrate. Instead, it overwinters as a caterpillar.

Over the past five years, we have been conducting field surveys to assess the number of regal fritillaries at Kankakee Sands. Though we still have another five years of monitoring, we are excited by the trends that we are seeing—more butterflies across more acres!

We are also looking at the densities of arrow-leaved violet and bird's foot violet. The regal fritillary caterpillar feeds only on violets, so the more violets we have growing at Kankakee Sands, the more regal fritillary butterflies we can sustain.

We are partnering with staff at the Indiana and Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Chicago Botanic Garden and the Xerces Society to deepen the understanding of regals, not just at Kankakee Sands but across its entire Indiana and Illinois range.

Top: Stephanie Frischie (left) turning in her data to Savanna Nyberg. © Alyssa Nyberg/TNC.
BOTTOM: Regal fritillary on butterfly milkweed © Jeanette Jaskula



Researcher Spotlight: Lila Fried

Lila Fried is the Marsh Bird Survey Coordinator for the Indiana Audubon Society's Calumet Region. The primary goal of the survey is to understand species-habitat associations for secretive marsh birds to inform management practices at high-priority wetlands in Indiana.

Lila's work includes running a pilot audio recording unit (ARU) program at Kankakee Sands for the state-endangered black rail, a typically nocturnal species that is difficult to detect using standard survey methods. She deployed five ARUs in areas adjacent to wetlands at Kankakee Sands from May to July to record nighttime activity. Lila will be analyzing the recordings later this year and will let us know what she finds. Stay tuned!



Lila (right) checking the ARU located in the north bison pasture, with Alyssa Nyberg. © Jacob Drucker

Kankakee Sands Wish List

- Utility Terrain Vehicle (UTV) Cargo Rack (\$390) for transporting tools and equipment on top of the UTVs, especially during fire season when the back of the vehicle is filled with the water tanks.
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Metal Picnic Tables (\$1,100 each) for the Bison Viewing Area and Nursery, where people like to sit and enjoy a picnic lunch on the prairie. Extra-long ends are wheelchair and stroller friendly.
- Chest Waders (\$200) two pair for staff and volunteers who traverse wetlands to spray invasives and harvest seed.
- Rubber Boots (\$120) six pair for volunteers who are assisting with harvesting seed and spraying invasives.

Outreach and Volunteering



Seed harvest and monarch tagging event at the Kankakee Sands Nursery in partnership with Friends of the Sands. © Alyssa Nyberg/TNC

In partnership with Friends of the Sands, Newton County Park Board and the Newton County Public Library, we offer a wide variety of activities and educational events for all ages and abilities. In the coming months, we want to spend time with you seed harvesting, mothing (watching for moths at night), monarch tagging, hiking the prairies and savannas, and going on a driving geology tour of Kankakee Sands.

Please be sure to join us for two very special events this fall:

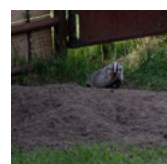
- Celebrate [Kankakee Sands' 25th Anniversary](#) with us on Saturday, September 24th from 9 to 3 pm. There will be family-friendly guided hikes, crafts, short-presentations, and food!
- Join us on Saturday, November 5th for **National Bison Day**. There will be Kankakee Sands Staff and Bison Rangers on hand to discuss bison and prairies, and to give tours of the bison corral.

To find out more about our events, visit nature.org/indianavolunteer.

If you would like more information about our conservation work and/or how you can be involved, visit us online at nature.org/kankakeesands or contact Trevor Edmonson at 219-285-2184 or trevor.edmonson@tnc.org. Thank you!

There are so many ways to volunteer at Kankakee Sands to make a difference! This spring, volunteer Bill Glass monitored marsh birds at Kankakee Sands. He also took on a special photography project for us. In early May of this year, TNC staff noticed a large den not far from our main office. It wasn't long after that a badger was seen near the area, and we wanted to get clear documentation of it. Bill, already used to early morning marsh bird monitoring, offered to bring his camera and sit near the large burrow entrance before sunrise. The badger was indeed still there and popped out just long enough for Bill to capture the photo pictured here.

In Indiana, badgers are listed as a species of concern and are protected by law. These mainly nocturnal animals are rarely seen. Sometimes staff will see a burrow in the prairie, but more than likely, the badger has already moved on as their home range can be several square miles. Thank you, Bill, for the wonderful, crisp shot of this unique creature.



Badger near the KS bison corral.