



### Profile of a Conservationist

**Christina Thompson**

*Baltimore Program Manager*

Growing up in Baltimore, Christina Thompson developed a connection to the city's unique history, culture, attractions and cuisine. Thompson joined The Nature Conservancy in 2017 and recently became the Maryland/DC chapter's Baltimore Interim Program Manager.

Thompson holds a bachelor's degree in environmental science and policy from Duke University, and a master's degree in biology from Miami University.

"I'm excited that TNC is expanding our urban conservation program to my home town," shares Thompson, "because we'll be able to support the amazing work already taking place in communities across the city, and find new ways to tap into nature's limitless potential to tackle some of today's toughest challenges."

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## The Nature Conservancy in Baltimore Announcing a new urban conservation program in Charm City

The nickname "Charm City," although no longer an official city slogan, is still embraced by the people of Baltimore, who believe it captures the friendly, proud, colorful soul of the city. The Nature Conservancy is thrilled to announce that, thanks to a recent grant from the Baltimore-based France-Merrick Foundation, we are launching an urban conservation program in Baltimore, with the goal of weaving our mission into the fabric of this vibrant community.

Baltimore is one of the most densely populated coastal cities in America. Residents' lives are heavily impacted by heat waves and flooding, both of which are exacerbated by climate change. TNC's conservation focus in Baltimore will be centered around making the city more resilient and adapted to the climate impacts that are already being felt with each heat wave, each high tide and each storm.

As we embark on this journey, it's important that we understand the injustices that exist today and the history of systemic racism, segregation, and discriminatory housing and urban planning practices that led to them. In the 1930s, the federal Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC)—a government-sponsored corporation created as part of the New Deal—surveyed and mapped neighborhoods in 239 U.S. cities. The HOLC maps color-coded neighborhoods by race, with majority Black communities marked in red and designated as "hazardous." As a result, these "redlined" neighborhoods were locked out of economic opportunities, which set the stage for the country's persistent racial wealth gap that is still growing today.

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"Fells Point - Hurricane Isabel aftermath" by future15pic is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

In Baltimore, the devastating impacts of redlining were compounded by a local law that was passed by the city in the early 20th century, which effectively barred Black people from living on any block in the city that was occupied by whites. Today, the lasting impacts of these legacy racist policies have created neighborhoods that lack access to green spaces and trees. This is especially dangerous in light of COVID-19, which has kept more people in their homes, sometimes without air conditioning.

Communities and organizations in Baltimore are facing these challenges head on, demonstrating that the city's past doesn't have to dictate its future. With innovative city programming, community organizing, and public-private partnerships, Baltimore is in the midst of the type of transformative change needed in cities across the country.

As we launch this program and deploy on-the-ground projects in Baltimore, we are committed to applying an equity and justice lens to everything we do. As an organization that works both globally and locally, we bring solutions and lessons that have been tested in other cities. We also bring pre-existing relationships with government agencies and state officials that can accelerate the pace and scale of conservation in Baltimore. We envision a future where Charm City is America's most resilient city.



A black swallowtail butterfly drinks the nectar of a white fringed orchid at the Nassawango Creek Preserve. © Gabe Cahalan/TNC

## Orchids

Protecting one of Maryland's most incredible flowers in a changing climate

Orchids are among the most popular and coveted flowers in the world, often because of their rarity. Many of these extraordinary plants evolved in places with unique ecological conditions, which are the same types of places The Nature Conservancy has long worked to protect.

As TNC works in Maryland to make our lands more resilient to climate change, some of our local rare orchids are returning. White and yellow-fringed orchids reappeared for the first time in many years since we brought fire back to the landscape at our Nassawango Creek preserve on the Eastern Shore. By managing the landscape with controlled burns, we're not only restoring a vital natural process on which plants like orchids rely, we're also creating a healthier ecosystem better suited to cope with change.

In Western Maryland, we're working to create connected corridors of healthy, protected forests that will allow species to migrate to new places as temperatures rise and weather patterns evolve. The diverse topography and geology of Western Maryland's mountains have made them the perfect habitat for rare plants like the white lady's slipper orchid, which is found on a TNC preserve in just one Maryland county. The rarity of these orchids can unfortunately also make them valuable targets for poaching, which is why their exact locations need to be kept secret.

Turn to page 34 to learn more about these amazing plants and how TNC is working to protect them in Maryland and beyond.