



### From the Executive Director

Like the rest of the world, The Nature Conservancy has experienced significant change since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic downturn, and social justice movement on behalf of black lives.

We are taking an honest look at the role that race has played in the nation's conservation movement and within TNC. We are redoubling our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. And we are coming up with new ways to advance our mission, at a time when our mission is more relevant than ever.

This change will not happen overnight. The environmental movement can only prosper when social justice is also a priority. Thanks to supporters like you, TNC is committed to working toward a fair and equitable world where people and nature thrive.

**Tim Purinton**

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Gabe Cahalan (left), conservation steward for the Maryland/DC chapter of The Nature Conservancy, leads a briefing with the burn crew deployed to TNC's Sideling Hill Creek Preserve, where TNC and partners proceeded to burn nearly 60 acres. © Severn Smith / TNC

## 30 Years of Controlled Burning

### A conservation anniversary in Maryland

According to tradition, a 30th anniversary should be commemorated with a gift of pearls. Pearls are seen as enduring gems that last under pressure—just like a 30-year partnership. This year, The Nature Conservancy celebrates 30 years of conducting controlled burns as an ecological management tool in the state of Maryland. Since we love oysters, and pearl cultivation isn't really our thing, the pearls that we offer on this 30th anniversary are pearls of wisdom.

In much of the country, including our region, fire is a natural process—like rain. Many of the native plants and animals that call Maryland home have evolved to thrive with periodic episodes of natural fire. Returning fire to the landscape at a meaningful scale in the 21st century requires experience, extensive partnerships, and a new generation of fire practitioners who will carry the mantle for the next 30 years. To this next generation, here are a few pearls of wisdom:

- **Follow the science.** Ecologists, dendrochronologists, biologists, meteorologists, and a number of other experts have spent decades building the body of science that supports controlled burns as a conservation tool.
- **Never stop learning.** Fire management, like all other conservation practices, is an evolving specialty that requires ongoing training and education.
- **Work with partners.** Returning fire to our forests at a landscape scale is work that no single organization can do alone. Building strong public and private partnerships is critical for success.

Learn more at [nature.org/MDFire](https://nature.org/MDFire).



The scarlet tanager is an exotic songbird that spends its summers in the northeastern woodlands of the United States. © Kent Mason

# The Sounds of Nature

## A new study reveals the forest soundscape

Spending time in nature has a restorative effect on our psyche. If you close your eyes, you can imagine the clear-headed calmness that you feel during a walk through the woods. The sounds of rustling leaves, a babbling stream, bird songs, and the chorus of insects will melt the stress away. There is a growing body of science dedicated to the study of nature soundscapes and how we interpret the sounds of nature, including a new study by the Maryland/DC chapter of The Nature Conservancy.

For the past several years, Gabe Cahalan, TNC conservation steward has been conducting an acoustic monitoring study on two TNC preserves in Maryland. Gabe is comparing biodiversity in forests we have kept open with controlled burns to overgrown forests where fire has been suppressed by measuring the “bio-acoustic index” of each forest type.

“In open forests, where we have been burning, we’re hearing a higher diversity of birds and other species than in the overgrown forests” says Cahalan. “I think this study confirms that our fire management is working. It’s helping preserve some of the rare species we aim to protect on our lands.”

The science is clear that healthy, well-managed forests are good for people and nature. The global pandemic caused by COVID-19 has resulted in new and different levels of stress for all of humanity. It’s emphasized the need to protect and conserve nature at a faster rate than ever before. Nature is talking to us, and we must listen.

## NATURE MARYLAND/DC

### There’s a Story Behind Every Growth Ring



Tree rings tell us much more about a tree than just its age, such as the historical fire record. © TNC

Dendrochronology is the study of tree rings. This science has revealed—among other things—that fire is a natural and necessary process that boosts forest health and resilience. With 30 years of experience using controlled burns as a conservation management strategy in Maryland, TNC understands that studying tree rings is the best way to learn the history of our forests. There’s a story behind each growth ring, and understanding those stories can help us protect and manage our forests into the future.

To raise awareness of the importance of studying tree rings and the stories that they tell us, we have started sharing hand-crafted “tree cookie coasters” with influential leaders and supporters of TNC’s mission. Trees are excellent storytellers, and we are learning just how connected their stories are to the history of our nation and our communities.

As part of a dendrochronology study of forests in Western Maryland, Gabe Cahalan, TNC conservation steward, has been connecting the stories of tree rings with our human stories. Cahalan has matched more than 70 newspaper articles, dating back to the early 1800s, to fire scars from trees on Catocin Mountain. To learn more about this study and to see some of these historic articles, visit:

**Nature.org/MDFire**