



Lena Easton-Calabria. Photo © Matt Kane/TNC

Profile of a Conservationist

The relatively new and emerging field of urban conservation includes one important variable that hasn't always been prominent in traditional conservation efforts: People. Cities are full of people.

Lena Easton-Calabria, urban conservation associate, understands the human dynamic well. Lena has a degree in medical anthropology and global health from the University of Washington and an MSc in environmental change and management from the University of Oxford. She also spent three years researching the impacts of climate change on indigenous communities in the Amazon rainforest with National Geographic. "We know we need more nature in urban areas, and one thing I've learned from my past work is that involving communities in the planning process is incredibly important," Lena says.

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A visitor to Mount Olivet Cemetery in northeast Washington, DC, enjoys a moment of peace on a Nature Sacred bench. The bench was installed as part of a community-designed greenspace, co-located at a TNC stormwater retention site. Photo © Matt Kane/TNC

Open Spaces, Sacred Places

A partnership making cities greener, healthier places to live

How can individual community members participate in designing and expanding our urban green spaces? What are the human health benefits of nature in cities? How can urban green spaces do more for both people and nature? These are some of the questions that we're actively exploring through our new partnership with Nature Sacred—an organization focused on the creation of urban green spaces they call Sacred Places—founded by the TKF Foundation.

“Many organizations ‘sell’ conservation through fear. Falling in love with the environment is a different kind of proposition. We want to build positive experiences.”

Tom Stoner, Founder, TKF Foundation and Nature Sacred

In cities across the country, The Nature Conservancy is focused on building green infrastructure to curb stormwater pollution. In many of those same cities, including Washington, DC, Nature Sacred is focused on building Sacred Places that reduce stress, improve health and strengthen communities. Their approach is unique in the way that it engages the community in the design, ensuring each space is reflective of the community it serves. By joining forces, TNC and Nature Sacred are building Sacred Places that maximize benefits for both people and nature. In June 2019, we completed our first collaboration at Mount Olivet Cemetery in northeast DC. Through partnerships that we have formed with Nature Sacred, Casey Trees and the Catholic Archdiocese of Washington, Mount Olivet has become a model urban greenspace that addresses multiple urban conservation needs, including stormwater retention and urban heat through tree canopy expansion, while also providing cemetery visitors with a place to reflect and connect with nature.



Urban conservation director Kahlil Kettering talks to students at the Georgetown Day School in northwest DC about how to exercise their civic voices to enact the changes they want to see in the world. Photo © Matt Kane/TNC

Inspiring the Next Generation of Environmental Leaders

“The best way to predict the future is to create it,” goes the saying generally attributed to President Abraham Lincoln. At The Nature Conservancy, we couldn’t agree more. As the world’s leading conservation science organization, we believe in addressing the root cause of any problem, including environmental injustice. By working with youth, we are investing in a future where people recognize the importance of nature at an early age and are inclined to take better care of it, for themselves and for their communities.

Our youth environmental advocacy training program is designed to teach young adults about the power of taking civic action. The course is delivered in partnership with DC-area high schools that incorporate the training into the existing science curriculum. In spring 2019, our team conducted a six-day workshop with students at Georgetown Day School in northwest DC, as part of the school’s environmental science class. The class split into four groups and brainstormed environmental issues around which they would create a team advocacy strategy that would be presented to decision makers in the city. The issues that the students chose were reducing food waste in DC, building more bicycle infrastructure in DC, curbing stormwater pollution and litter in the Anacostia River, and using natural solutions to reduce flood risks for vulnerable communities in DC.

By working with youth, TNC is building the next generation of environmental leaders. When students feel connected to nature within their communities, they are inspired to conserve it into the future.

Nature Sacred

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Tom and Kitty Stoner © TKF Foundation

More than 25 years ago, Tom and Kitty Stoner found themselves in a quiet park while on a trip to London, England. They had been there for several days and were beginning to feel stressed and buffeted by their bustling urban surroundings. When Tom and Kitty entered the park, they were struck by the sense of tranquility. Shortly thereafter, they began laying plans for a nonprofit that would create urban green spaces in communities where the need is particularly urgent. Nature Sacred was born, and with it, a model for creating green spaces that reconnect people to nature in ways that foster mindful reflection, restore mental health and strengthen communities.

Today, their vision is taking the next evolutionary step through the partnership with TNC. Our projects, like the one at Mount Olivet, will combine the human health benefits evidenced by Nature Sacred with the proven conservation returns brought to bear by TNC.

To learn more, visit:
[Nature.org/DCSacredPlaces](https://nature.org/DCSacredPlaces)