



ILLINOIS

CONNECTED BY NATURE

GIVING TO ILLINOIS 2023

The Nature
Conservancy 

NATURE CONNECTS US ALL

Across Illinois, we are linked by nature: from towering 1,000-year-old cypress trees in the southern swamps ... to the cherished shores of Lake Michigan ... to the lush wetlands along the meandering Illinois River ... and the nearly 2,000 acres of natural areas in Chicago parks.

No matter where you are in Illinois—whether walking along a tree-lined street or sitting on a combine harvester, birdwatching in the prairie or fishing along a river—here, we are all connected by nature.

These connections are what make our state vibrant.



Bald cypress trees in the Cache River Wetlands Preserve, Illinois. © Ralph Earlandson



A child enjoys a swim in Lake Michigan at Rainbow Beach in Chicago. © Ariana Lindquist

OUR 2030 GOALS

The natural connections across Illinois—and around the globe—remind us of what is at risk if we don't act now and act together. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is guided by ambitious worldwide goals aimed at addressing the interconnected, dual crises of climate change and biodiversity.

PLANET-SIZED PROBLEMS CALL FOR PLANET-SIZED SOLUTIONS.

Sardines, sea lions and other aquatic species in the Sea of Cortez.
© Rick Francis/TNC Photo Contest 2023

BY 2030, TNC WILL ...



Tackle Carbon Emissions

Avoid or sequester **3 billion** metric tons of **CO₂ emissions**, which is like taking **650 million cars off the road**—every year



Save Healthy Lands

Conserve enough **healthy land**, including prairies and forests, to cover **India—twice**



Deepen Solutions for Our Oceans

Protect **>10%** of the **world's oceans**



Conserve the World's Fresh Water

Conserve enough **river** length to stretch **around the globe 25 times**, plus protect **>74 million acres of lakes and rivers** (30 million hectares)



Work Alongside Local Leaders

Partner with **Indigenous peoples and other communities** to learn from and support the leadership of **45 million people** whose lives depend on nature every day



Help People on the Front Lines of the Climate Crisis

Assist **100 million people** at severe risk of climate-related emergencies, including **floods, fires and droughts**, become more resilient

OUR CONSERVATION PRIORITIES IN ILLINOIS

Here in Illinois, we aim to make the most impactful contribution to TNC's 2030 goals by focusing on **three conservation priorities**.

© Robert J. Hurt
Forested islands create a maze in the Mississippi River.

01

RESTORE OUR CONNECTED WATERS

From the Mighty Mississippi to Lake Michigan, freshwater arteries nourish our state and bind us to the world. Nearly 30 million people rely on the Great Lakes for drinking water, and more than 325 migrating bird species depend on the Mississippi Flyway. But our fresh waters are at a tipping point. Flooding is devastating communities and excess fertilizer used for crops is polluting waterways.

With your support, TNC can expand our science-backed work to improve the health of our fresh waters, which includes conserving vital wetlands and fostering sustainable agriculture practices.

BUILD CLIMATE-RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

Illinois is the seventh highest emitter of CO₂ in the United States. Most emissions in the state come from cars, trucks and planes. We have a massive opportunity—and responsibility—to help reduce our carbon footprint and help people threatened by heat waves and other climate change impacts.

Philanthropic support allows TNC to pursue climate action in Illinois and across the Midwest. Specifically, we are working with partners to plant more trees and native plants, advocate for nature- and people-friendly renewable energy development and support the switch to electric vehicles.

02

Solar and wind installations can share the same space, reducing the amount of land needed to produce clean energy. © Adobe Stock/Kampan

Native species thrive at TNC preserves.
© Charles Larry



03

PROTECT LAND FOR NATURE & PEOPLE

Thanks to donors like you, TNC is protecting a growing amount of land by expanding our preserves and partnerships. In addition to providing critical habitats for wildlife, TNC preserves serve as teaching laboratories for conservation. By collaborating and sharing information with government agencies, global universities and other nonprofits, our preserves provide insights that can be replicated and applied across other states, countries and continents.

At the same time, we are helping to ensure that more people can walk through prairies, help plant trees or connect with nature in other ways. Through outreach and community alliances, we are working to address barriers that prevent everyone from enjoying nature's bounty, especially people who have been historically left out of conservation efforts, such as people of color and people with disabilities.

OUR CONNECTED WATERS

Boats on Lake Michigan. © Fauna Creative

CASE EXAMPLE

Saving key fish species by restoring and mapping the reefs of the Great Lakes

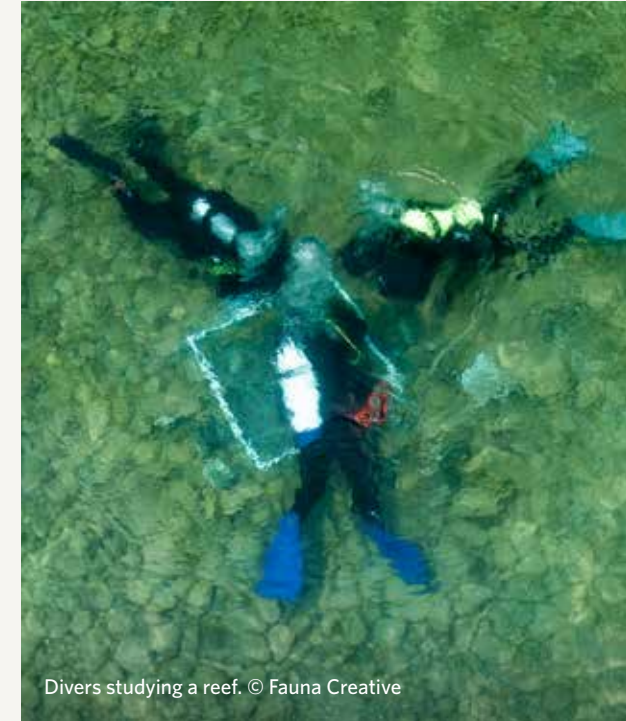
The reefs in the Great Lakes—composed of rock piles left by ancient glaciers—are just as critical to aquatic life as coral reefs in our oceans. Many fish converge on the lake reefs to spawn. Whether their eggs survive high waves and other dangers to hatch and become young fish depends, in part, on the reef's condition. On degraded reefs with limited rock layers, eggs often wash away or are eaten by predators, contributing to declines in fish populations.

Thanks to donor support, TNC is working with partners, including state, federal and Tribal agencies, to restore and study reefs. This work is critical to helping two vulnerable fish species in the Great Lakes—whitefish and cisco—which are vital to fisheries, tourism and food webs.

REBUILDING REEFS

450 tons of limestone rocks. That's what it took to restore one reef site within the Elk Rapids Reef complex in Grand Traverse Bay, Michigan. Load after load of rocks were strategically placed into the lake to create a healthy reef with multiple rock layers and in-between spaces for fish eggs to hide.

The result? Scientists at TNC and partner organizations found that the number of eggs retained on the reef increased. We need to conduct more reef work to determine if the improved egg retention can be directly tied to an increase in whitefish and cisco numbers. However, TNC and our partners have documented that the cisco population has dramatically increased around the Elk Rapids Reef and is gradually spreading across Lake Michigan.



Divers studying a reef. © Fauna Creative

“It’s shocking how little we know about the reefs in the Great Lakes. That’s why our reef mapping project is so important. TNC is helping to bring together state, Tribal and federal agencies and other partners from across the Great Lakes to increase our knowledge of reefs.”

MATT HERBERT
TNC SENIOR CONSERVATION SCIENTIST

MAPPING THE GREAT UNKNOWN

With our partners, we have recently begun the immense job of mapping the hundreds of reefs in the Great Lakes. Donors can help with this revolutionary work. Many of the reefs have never been studied or even visited by aquatic scientists. So we don’t know which reefs are healthy or degraded or what fish spawn on which reefs.

At the end of this multi-year project, we intend to have a digital map of the surveyed reefs with detailed characteristics on each reef, along with a process that others can use to assess additional reefs and add that information to the digital map. This work will be invaluable for protection and restoration efforts ahead.

For more on Great Lakes reefs, visit [nature.org/greatlakesfish](https://www.nature.org/greatlakesfish).



A diver in Lake Michigan. © Fauna Creative

Great Lakes to Great Lakes

The Great Lakes in North America and the African Great Lakes share more than a name. Collectively, they support millions of people and habitat for wildlife found nowhere else in the world. They also share challenges, from water quality issues to invasive species.

TNC’s Great Lakes to Great Lakes Initiative is helping TNC staff, scientists and partners from the two continents effectively manage their Great Lakes systems—together. In the United States, we’ve brought delegations of scientists from the African Great Lakes to conduct research side-by-side with our Great Lakes team, ensuring the exchange of knowledge that benefits the health of both freshwater systems.



A woman gathers water from Lake Tanganyika in the village of Mgambo, Tanzania. © Ami Vitale

BUILD CLIMATE-RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

To keep global warming in check, the world needs to shift quickly from fossil fuels to renewable energy. However, we must pay attention to how and where clean energy projects are built to ensure that the new infrastructure does not result in unnecessary harm to native species and natural landscapes.

Energy planning that considers the big picture can help prevent many impacts to nature, while also optimizing outcomes for people and climate. Smart renewable deployment takes advantage of building on degraded and marginal lands, like abandoned mines or landfills, in lieu of developing on natural habitats or productive farmlands.

TNC's approach encourages stakeholders to consider the long-term impacts of proposed renewable energy projects on people, economies, biodiversity, and carbon emissions.

We call this approach the "3C" model:

- **CONSERVATION:** Protect wildlife and habitat.
- **COMMUNITIES:** Support an equitable transition that considers the needs of people and communities.
- **CLIMATE:** Optimize the carbon reduction impact.

With support from donors, TNC is pursuing three avenues to increase adoption of the 3C approach:

- **PROVIDING FOUNDATIONAL INSIGHTS.** We are developing guidance and tools to help energy planners and developers adopt the 3Cs.
- **INFLUENCING KEY DECISION-MAKERS.** We regularly meet with legislators, state agencies, energy developers and businesses to encourage them to consider nature and people in the renewable buildout.
- **CONVENING PARTNERS AND PILOT PROJECTS.** With our partners, we are pursuing pilots of solar and wind projects that demonstrate 3C principles.

Growing flowering plants around solar panels can benefit pollinators. © Fauna Creative

“The world is tackling two major environmental crises at the same time: climate change and biodiversity loss. To solve them both, we have to think creatively about the solutions we’re using.”

KAREN PETERSEN
TNC GLOBAL STRATEGIES CLIMATE ADVISOR

Here's a sampling of TNC resources and tools designed to ensure that nature and people are prioritized during the renewable energy transition.

Access these at [nature.org/ilclimate](https://www.nature.org/ilclimate).



Power of Place

Key takeaway: Following purposeful siting strategies can cut in half the amount of land needed for renewable installations to attain net zero emissions in the U.S.—while also avoiding most impacts to sensitive natural and agricultural lands.



Pollinator-Friendly Solar Energy

Key takeaway: Planting a diverse mix of native flowering plants under and around solar panels—instead of the typical turf grass—benefits pollinators and other wildlife.



Charting a Clean Energy Future

Key takeaway: Illinois is ahead of other Midwest states in generating electricity from solar and wind—but far behind states like Iowa at the forefront of the buildout.



Mining the Sun

Key takeaway: Siting new energy infrastructure on degraded lands, like mining sites, landfills and other brownfields, can transform these sites into clean energy hubs.

PROTECT LAND FOR NATURE & PEOPLE

CASE EXAMPLE

Bringing buffalo home

On November 12, 2022, staff at TNC's Nachusa Grasslands loaded 10 buffalo from the preserve's herd onto a trailer. The destination: The Menominee Tribe of Wisconsin. The transfer of the buffalo supported a community effort by Medicine Fish, an Indigenous-led nonprofit striving to connect youth and community to land, water and buffalo.

Menominee community members who gathered to watch the transfer—from elders to young children—were eager to be reunited with their buffalo relatives, who occupy an essential role in their culture and spirituality. The buffalo from Nachusa were the first to reconnect with the Menominee people in over 250 years, since the animals were wiped out in the Midwestern United States.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



Buffalo with a calf at Nachusa Grasslands Preserve, Illinois. ©Charles Larry

“Conservation lives in our identity. It is weaved throughout our cultural values and first languages in ways that undeniably demonstrate our inter-relation with the natural world.”

BRYANT WAUPOOSE JR.
FOUNDER, MEDICINE FISH

“It was an emotional moment to see the arrival of the buffalo,” says Jason Baldes, board member, InterTribal Buffalo Council, which represents 82 sovereign Tribes and has led buffalo restoration to Indigenous communities for the past 30 years. “We circled up to sing, and the Menominee people prayed in their own language. Tears were flowing.”

CONSERVATION BENEFITS

TNC has much to learn about living reciprocally with the land from Indigenous Peoples, who were the original stewards of the Americas. One lesson is the important role that buffalo play in restoring grasslands.

With their grazing and other natural behaviors, buffalo are creating critical habitats that support all prairie wildlife. For example, by selectively eating grasses, buffalo balance the prairie ecosystem for wildflowers to thrive, which also creates a heterogeneous structure ideal for nesting spots for grassland birds. And when buffalo wallow (roll) on the ground, they create depressions that fill with rainwater, providing pools for breeding amphibians.

REMATRIATION OF BUFFALO

Every spring brings new buffalo calves to TNC preserves. By transferring buffalo to Indigenous communities, we maintain adequate size herds that, in return, maintain the ecological health of our preserves.

Most important, we are playing a supportive role in repairing the relationship between buffalo and Indigenous Peoples that was severed by colonization and the ensuing violence against Native Americans and buffalo. “It’s healing to see these animals come back and be a part of us again,” says Baldes. “It’s bringing home our long-lost relative.”

For details about TNC’s Buffalo Restoration Program, visit [nature.org/buffalo](https://www.nature.org/buffalo). To learn more about Medicine Fish’s mission and approach, go to [medicinefish.org](https://www.medicinefish.org).

CASE EXAMPLE

Addressing inequities to help Chicagoans engage with nature

Spending time outdoors provides a bevy of health benefits, as TNC donors know first-hand. Even a 10-minute nature dose has been shown to improve blood pressure and lower stress. In Chicago, TNC has been working to ensure that city dwellers of all races, ethnicities, ages, abilities and income levels have access to green spaces and outdoor activities.

A new endeavor adds to our cities work. TNC was recently selected to lead the Outdoor Foundation's Thrive Outside initiative in Chicago. The goal: To reduce barriers to the outdoors and increase meaningful outside opportunities for Chicago youth and adults, including people of color and LGBTQIA+ communities.

CONVENING EXPERTISE

As we launch Thrive Outside Chicago, TNC is following our well-practiced playbook and collaborating with partners that are already providing outdoor experiences to Chicagoans.

Our steering committee includes a variety of local organizations, including groups that arrange outdoor adventures for underserved youth and a nonprofit that serves people with disabilities. "They know best what their communities need," says TNC's Brooke

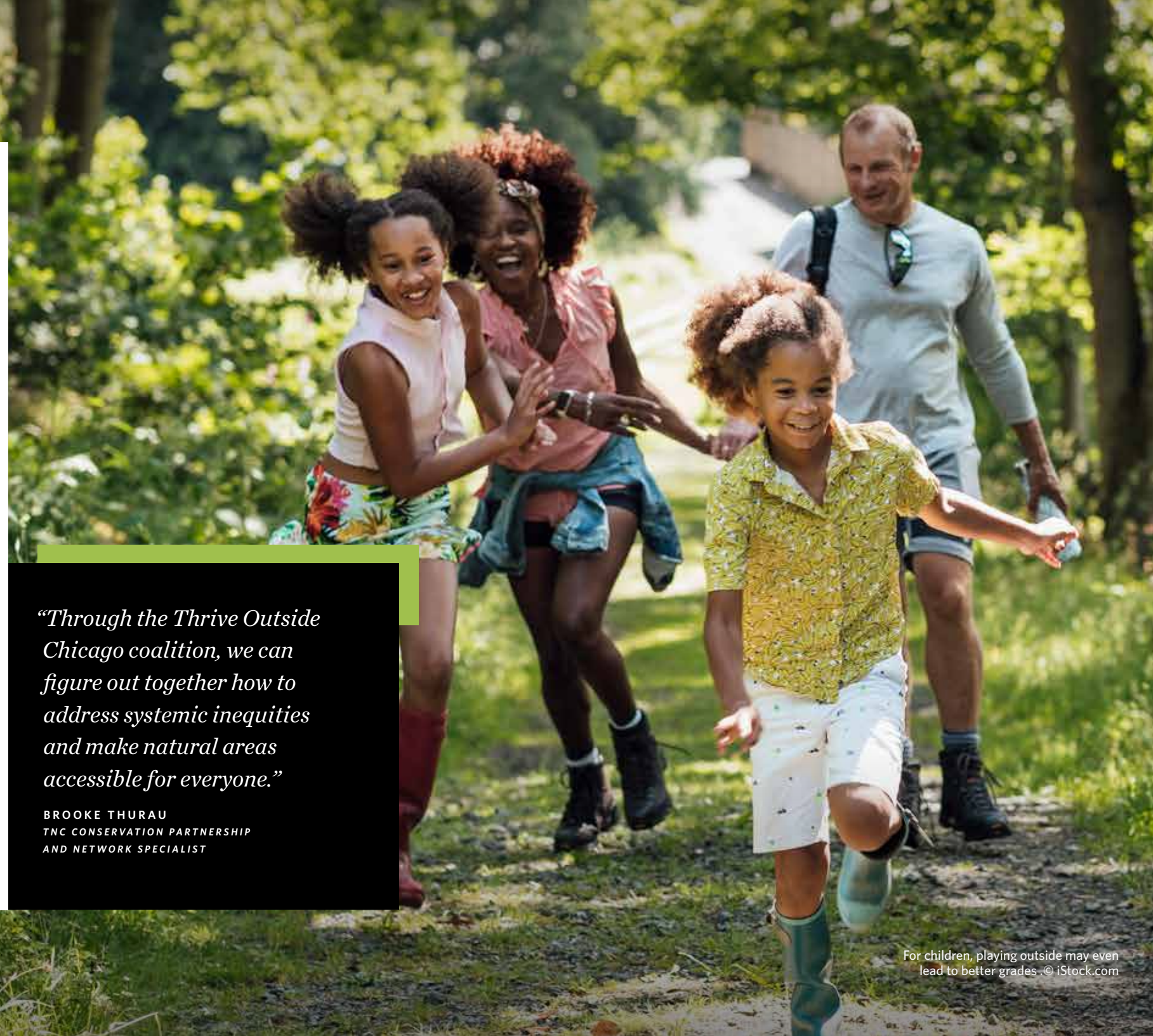
Thurau, conservation partnership and network specialist. "They will guide us in what Thrive Outside Chicago should look like and how we can best provide support."

RIGHTING INEQUITIES

TNC will receive grants for three years from the Outdoor Foundation to build Thrive Outside Chicago. To sustain the program, TNC needs to raise a 1:1 funding match.

The money will be used to assist local organizations in providing outdoor experiences and to support Thrive Outside Chicago's collective work, which is aimed at addressing inequities that impede Chicagoans from getting out in nature. For instance, our partners point to Chicago River access as a challenge. Walking or kayaking along the river is easy for many on the city's northside, which has river trails and boat launches. But on the south and west sides, river access is difficult or impossible. Thrive Outside Chicago is working to address barriers like this and ensure that all Chicagoans can easily enjoy outdoor activities.

Learn about TNC's other work in Chicago at nature.org/chicagoconservation.



"Through the Thrive Outside Chicago coalition, we can figure out together how to address systemic inequities and make natural areas accessible for everyone."

BROOKE THURAU
TNC CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP
AND NETWORK SPECIALIST

MEETING CHALLENGES HEAD ON

The challenges of our lifetime—climate change and biodiversity losses—are playing out before our eyes, here in Illinois, across the Midwest and around the world.

TNC is uniting grassroots organizations, policymakers, agencies, Tribal partners and donors like you to find solutions that ensure the people and places we all love can continue to thrive.

TNC needs your continued support. Together, we can make a difference.

For children, playing outside may even lead to better grades. © iStock.com



A generous gift of any kind to The Nature Conservancy would help us advance our vital work.

nature.org/donateil



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Suite 1100
Chicago, IL 60611
nature.org/Illinois



A tiger swallowtail butterfly (*Papilio glaucus*) at Nachusa Grasslands. © Charles Larry

“This is what you shall do; Love the earth and sun and the animals ...”

WALT WHITMAN
PREFACE OF LEAVES OF GRASS

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The Nature Conservancy in Illinois is grateful for the vision, leadership and generosity of our trustees.

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