



Kylie Paul monitoring burn during WTREX at Piney Grove Preserve © Daniel White/TNC

Meet Trailblazer  
**Nikole Simmons**  
...  
SEE PG. 34

## Trailblazers

### Supporting women who work in wildland fire

The Nature Conservancy created the Prescribed Fire Training Exchange (TREX) program in 2008 to provide fire workers with badly needed training opportunities and to promote cooperative burning among diverse partners. Recognizing the need to diversify the fire management workforce and engage underserved communities in local wildfire adaptation efforts, TNC also helped form the Indigenous Peoples Burning Network and, in 2016, the Women-in-Fire Training Exchanges (WTREX). Virginia's Nikole Simmons joined with five other women fire workers in conceiving and organizing WTREX as a support network for female fire practitioners working to advance their skills and leadership opportunities.

In 2022, Virginia hosted the fourth WTREX, with participants traveling

from across the United States, the Canadian Rockies and South Africa. The women worked together through two weeks of intensive workshop and field experiences, which included three training burns at TNC's Piney Grove



WTREX co-organizer Nikole Simmons © Lexey Swall

Preserve near Wakefield. The program continues to grow, with 2023 WTREX events slated to be held in southeastern North Carolina and South Africa. Learn more at [nature.org/trailblazersva](https://nature.org/trailblazersva).



Michael Lipford (left) at WTREX © Bill Kittrell/TNC

### Thank You, Michael Lipford!

"It's not going to wink out on my watch," Michael Lipford declared when TNC established Piney Grove in 1998 to protect Virginia's last population of the red-cockaded woodpecker. The species' rebound is one of many legacies of a remarkable conservation career. Lipford retired this past December after 36 years with TNC—25 as Virginia executive director and the last six as director of the Southern U.S. Division.

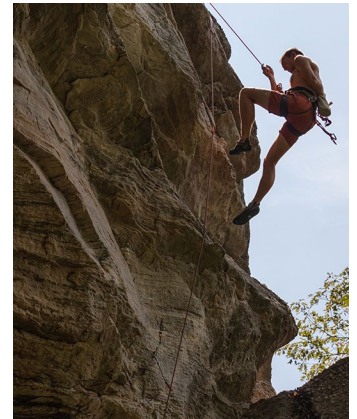


### SUPPORT NATURE

To learn more and support our work in Virginia, use the QR code or go online to [nature.org/virginia](https://nature.org/virginia).

## Investing in Appalachia

The Cumberland Forest Limited Partnership, managed by The Nature Conservancy, owns more than 250,000 acres in the coalfields of Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee. Cumberland Forest uses impact investments in managing these lands for sustainable forestry, renewable energy, climate resilience, recreation and economic opportunities for people and communities. Through



Rock climber © Travis Dove

the Cumberland Forest Community Fund, the partnership provides local grants for nature-based economic and community development. TNC is pleased to partner with UVA Wise and with the Clinch-Powell Resource Conservation and Development Council to administer the fund for projects in Virginia and Tennessee, respectively. Since summer 2021, the fund has provided resources for projects touching down in at least a dozen counties. Funded projects range from developing community trails to expanding rock climbing opportunities at Breaks Interstate Park. "I'm excited that we are utilizing our natural resources in a different way than we have in the past, shifting from extraction towards an economy based in outdoor recreation," says park superintendent Austin Bradley. Explore the projects at [nature.org/cfcommunityfund](https://www.nature.org/cfcommunityfund).



The Nature Conservancy's Virginia team at Twin Lakes State Park © Daniel White/TNC

# Nature's Workforce

## Supporting conservation means investing in people

A world where nature can thrive is one where people, too, can thrive. And while people around the world depend on conservation, the opposite also is true: Conservation depends on people. The Nature Conservancy would like to introduce you to some of the dedicated people on our Virginia team who—with your generous support—are making conservation happen from the Atlantic Ocean to the Appalachian Mountains. Fisheries scientist Kate Wilke, for example, collaborates with a range of stakeholders to protect marine habitats. "One of my favorite parts of my job is working with people who have spent their entire lives earning a living from the ocean," Wilke says. In addition to working on our lands and waters, our Virginia team also engages in the policy arena. "I enjoy working with coalition partners and communicating with people about solutions to tackling climate change," says Lena Lewis, who focuses on state climate and energy policies. Learn more about our Virginia team at [nature.org/vastaff](https://www.nature.org/vastaff).

### Interns Broaden Support for Conservation

Our most recent cohort of Virginia interns conducted historical research on the enslaved community at TNC's Brownsville Preserve, analyzed Indigenous lands that intersect with the places we work, and developed outreach materials and programs for Spanish-speaking communities. Explore their work at [nature.org/learningVA](https://www.nature.org/learningVA).



Intern Claudia Moncada (far left) guiding student tour on Parramore Island © Suzanne Noseworthy