

impact report

Highlights From The Nature Conservancy's Conservation Work in Tennessee

FISCAL YEAR 2017

JULY 1, 2016 - JUNE 30, 2017

THE BIG PICTURE

PROTECT



Treasured Places and Irreplaceable Natural Systems in Tennessee

Impact: More than 5,500 acres in Tennessee protected in FY2017

TRANSFORM



Policy and Practice to Guide Future Growth

Impact: Guiding the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency's 10-year wildlife habitat conservation priorities through cowriting the 2017 Tennessee Wildlife Legacy Plan

INSPIRE



More Tennesseans to Connect with Nature

Impact: Tennessee donors increased 4% and social media followers grew 51% in FY2017



PROTECT



Innovative New Program Helps Private Landowners Conserve Forests

This past fiscal year, we introduced an innovative new program to Tennessee to engage the many landowners who own large private forests. It's called Working Woodlands.

The program provides forest landowners who own 2,000+ acres opportunities to ensure sustainable forest management while gaining new revenues through improved timber management and the growing carbon market.

The Shafer-Tuuk family was the first to enroll in this Tennessee program. The family's patriarch, John Shafer, was 106

and co-owned a 3,000+-acre property in White County. The land had been in the family lumber business since the 1940s.

In 2016, after talks with Nature Conservancy staff, Mr. Shafer, his daughter and her husband enrolled their property in our Working Woodlands program. "We were looking to keep the property undeveloped and intact," said Mr. Shafer. However, the family also needed the property to continue to produce income.

Working Woodlands ensures that

this family's forest will be preserved in perpetuity while his family can continue to generate income from selective and sustainable timbering and carbon credits.

"This agreement protects our land forever," said Shafer's daughter, Rebecca Tuuk. "I highly recommend Working Woodlands to forest owners."

Looking ahead, we have identified key private forest landowners in Tennessee and have been in touch with many of them already with individually tailored plans for enrollment in Working Woodlands. We're off to a strong start, and we feel confident we will have 17,000 Tennessee forest acres enrolled in the program by June 30 next year.



Other Significant Land Protection Successes:

SOUTHERN CUMBERLANDS FORESTS - The Nature Conservancy and The Conservation Fund transferred joint ownership of 4,372 acres in the Southern Cumberlands to the state of Tennessee to be managed as public land. Since 2004, the Conservancy has protected more than 20,000 acres in the Southern Cumberlands in Tennessee, including the Walls of Jericho, which was featured in August 2017 by *Reader's Digest* as a Top 20 hiking destination.

APPALACHIAN ACQUISITION - In FY2017, The Nature Conservancy and The Conservation Fund acquired the Howell Tract, 616-acres adjacent to the Cherokee National Forest. The Howell Tract's most significant feature is Taylor Branch, a pristine tributary that meets the Conasauga River just upstream from a biologically rich part of the river. Overall, the Conservancy has protected more than 28,000 acres in the eastern quarter of Tennessee.

TRANSFORM

Changing the Way Key Federal Lands Are Managed in Tennessee

With a lean staff of 22 in Tennessee, how can The Nature Conservancy ensure that we guide transformational conservation at the largest possible scale in our state? One method we use is by providing advice on management and restoration policies across more than 1 million acres in the Appalachians of Tennessee.

We've been doing that by working closely with the staffs of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Cherokee National Forest. Both staffs requested The Nature Conservancy's assistance in developing forest restoration and management plans.

Both public lands endured two centuries of logging, livestock grazing and other man-made impacts prior to becoming protected areas. Once acquired and protected, natural fire cycles were largely suppressed. The result of these activities has been very even-aged forests, which are not as healthy and resilient as forests with trees of varying ages.

We began working with the U.S. Forest Service in the North Zone of the Cherokee National Forest (340,000 acres) in 2010. At their request, we brought multiple stakeholders into the process to gain consensus recommendations for restoration of the Cherokee.

The Forest Service not only implemented our stakeholder group's recommendations, treating 7,000 acres annually with controlled fire and targeted mechanical thinning in the highest priority locations, but in 2016 the Forest Service asked us to tackle the process of



restoration planning for the South Zone of the Cherokee (300,000 acres) as well.

Success begets success. In 2015, the National Park Service asked us to help with their restoration needs in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. In this past fiscal year, we completed the forest restoration planning process for the national park. The Park Service now has specific, targeted recommendations for

forest restoration.

The Conservancy has introduced similar restoration plans for the Forest Service in the Appalachian region's National Forests in Virginia (2012), North Carolina (2013) and Georgia (2013). The cherry on top? In the fall of 2016, the Forest Service recognized The Nature Conservancy in Tennessee and partners with its Regional Forester's Honor Award.

Other Transformational Successes:

MODEL CORRIDOR FOR FISH - Working with the West Tennessee River Basin Authority, we are testing a novel stream stabilization structure at Reelfoot Lake. It not only halts erosion but also includes an innovative fish passage that allows fish to travel upstream and downstream around the stabilization structure. If our tracking of fish at the site shows success, we will be able to implement versions of this innovative structure elsewhere in Tennessee and beyond.

CRUCIAL WHITE-NOSE SYNDROME RESEARCH - Partnering with Bat Conservation International, we funded three scientific research projects that are aimed at fighting White Nose Syndrome (WNS) in bats. WNS is the devastating bat epidemic that has killed more than six million cave-dwelling bats in North America and which often kills more than 95 percent of bats in caves where it has been found. Learn more about our work on White Nose Syndrome at nature.org/savebats.



Driving Forest Health by Inspiring New Businesses

Behind the scenes, since 2015, The Nature Conservancy has been quietly changing firewood policies in parks across Tennessee. Our aim: to prevent campers from unwittingly transporting invasive insect pests hundreds of miles in firewood brought from home.

Our results: The Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Tennessee State Parks and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers-Nashville District campgrounds have all enacted firewood policies to restrict visitors from bringing in firewood that might be infested with tree-killing pests. Instead, park visitors burn either downed wood within the parks or purchase certified, heat-treated firewood. The heat treatment kills pest insects.

To ensure plenty of heat-treated firewood is available, we've partnered with the Division of Forestry of the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, the Tennessee Department

of Environment & Conservation, the Army Corps of Engineers, the University of Tennessee and the federal Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service to hold free public workshops for budding firewood producers.

"This demand is creating new opportunities for local entrepreneurs to gain a new source of income and help protect our forests at the same time," said Trish Johnson, Director of Forest Conservation.

During the workshops, participants learn about the pests that can travel in untreated firewood, about business opportunities in selling certified, heat-treated firewood and about the methods used in preparing the firewood. In FY2017, The Nature Conservancy and partners held four well-attended workshops in Murfreesboro, Jackson, Cookeville and at Fall Creek Falls State Park.

More than 250 retailers now sell heat-treated firewood in Tennessee. To find locations near your campgrounds, visit firewoodscout.org and select Tennessee on the interactive map—developed in cooperation with The Nature Conservancy.

Other Inspiring Successes:

URBAN CONSERVATION SOLUTIONS – Terry Cook, our State Director, and former U.S. Senate majority leader Bill Frist, M.D. coauthored an op-ed for Earth Day 2017 on how our cities can improve public health by improving their environmental health. It ran in both *The Tennessean* and the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*

PERSONALIZING LOCAL WATERWAYS – In partnership with the Cumberland River Compact, we launched iCreek. It's a desktop web application that people in the Cumberland River watershed in Tennessee can use to learn details about the health of their local stream and how they can take action to improve it. Start using it at cumberlandriverbasin.org/icreek.

ABOVE LEFT Participants in our certified firewood workshop at Fall Creek Falls, Nov. 2016. © The Nature Conservancy. ABOVE RIGHT Our staffers Katherine Medlock, Trish Johnson and Alex Wyss after a meeting with staff at Great Smoky Mountains National Park. © The Nature Conservancy.



Thank you to each and every one of our members for your continued support of The Nature Conservancy in Tennessee. Your investment is critical to the impact of our conservation work, communications and operations. With your help, we are protecting Tennessee for people and nature.