impact report

Highlights from
The Nature Conservancy's
Work in Tennessee.

FISCAL YEAR 2019
JULY 1, 2018 – JUNE 30, 2019

THINKING BIG

Cumberland Forest Project Makes History

This year, The Nature Conservancy acquired 253,000 acres of working forestland in the Central Appalachian coalfields of Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia. The project represents one of the largest and most innovative land conservation and ecological restoration efforts ever pursued by TNC in the eastern United States. It also marks the first time TNC has employed private investment and impact capital to secure, conserve and demonstrate the economic and ecological benefits of sustainable forest management.

The Nature Conservancy

Protect. Transform. Inspire. Support.
NATURE.ORG/TENNESSEE

PROTECT TREASURED PLACES AND IRREPLACEABLE NATURAL SYSTEMS.

Impact: Piloted new technology that tracks animal movement before rolling it out statewide.

Collaborating With a Global Network to Track Moving Wildlife

A grant from the Berglund Family Foundation made it possible for The Nature Conservancy to install Tennessee's first MOTUS Wildlife Tracking Tower, which "recycles" older VHS technology into a radio telemetry tool used to gain information about aerial wildlife.

"MOTUS towers are part of an international network that enables us to study wide-ranging, fast moving animals like never before," says Cory Holliday, TNC's cave and karst manager in Tennessee. "We are just introducing this in Tennessee and chose Chestnut Mountain intentionally because there is a very important Indiana bat cave near there."

According to Holliday, data generated by the tower informs TNC and a consortium of state partners—Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA), Metro Nashville Parks and Recreation, Friends of Warner Park and the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga—about species that spend all or part of their life cycle at Chestnut Mountain. In the coming year, TNC plans on working with the partners to establish up to 30 more MOTUS towers around Tennessee.

MORE SUCCESS

The Conservancy led a collaborative effort that resulted in recommendations for restoring more than 60,000 acres of the 300,000-acre South Zone of the Cherokee National Forest. The effort also built and strengthened trust among stakeholders and provided a blueprint for program effectiveness and efficiency that federal agencies intend to duplicate in other parts of the nation.

Nature Conservancy scientists and colleagues from the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency and Copperhead Consulting executed a ground- and air-based radio telemetry study that revealed that gray bats travel between their hibernacula and summer roosting spots in a straight line. The information will guide future efforts to protect gray bats at every point in their life cycle, especially in light of wind development projects proposed in the state.

The Conservancy celebrated National Public Lands Day at the Piney Falls State Natural Area (SNA). Thanks to support from the Tucker Foundation and the Open Space Institute, TNC partnered with the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation's Division of Natural Areas and The Conservation Fund to acquire parcels—in two separate transactions—that more than doubled the size of the 440-acre SNA.

COVER The Cumberland Forest's Ataya property along the border of Tennessee and Kentucky © *Byron Jorjorian;* ABOVE Tennessee's first MOTUS Tower located at TNC's Bridgestone Nature Reserve at Chestnut Mountain © *The Nature Conservancy*; South Zone Stakeholders © The Nature Conservancy; Gray Bat © *The Nature Conservancy*; National Public Lands Day © *The Nature Conservancy*

TRANSFORM POLICY AND PRACTICE TO GUIDE FUTURE GROWTH.

Impact: Joined government and non-profit partners in advocating for permanent reauthorization of the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund.

Solidifying a National Commitment to Conservation

Last winter, The Nature Conservancy and our partners in the public and private sectors celebrated a bi-partisan effort by Congress to permanently reauthorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)—our nation's most important conservation and recreation program. For more than half a century, the LWCF has:

- Increased recreation opportunity for all.
- Protected national parks from being sold off to the highest bidder.
- Connected and completed national, regional and local trail networks.
- Provided close-to-home playgrounds and ballfields to support healthy kids and families.
- Expanded sportsmen's access and wildlife habitat.
- Safeguarded drinking water supplies.
- Kept working forests and ranches in sustainable operation instead of subdivided and developed.

In Tennessee, the LWCF has helped TNC conserve natural and cultural treasures like the Obed River and Walls of Jericho—at no cost to taxpayers. Most recently, Congress appropriated $4 million in LWCF funding for the Cherokee National Forest in the coming year.

While worth celebrating, there is still work to do beyond reauthorizing LWCF. Although the LWCF has been around for more than 50 years, more than half of its intended funding has been raided for other, non-conservation purposes during that time. Now it is time to fight for full, permanent and dedicated funding.

The wild and scenic spaces that surround us here in Tennessee are more than just lands and water; they reflect our history, our character and our way of life.

MORE SUCCESS

During a controlled burn on more than 4,000 acres in the South Zone of the Cherokee National Forest, fire crews from the National Park Service, the United States Forest Service and TNC tended to the 240-acre Lynn Hollow parcel within the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, which since the 1700s, has required regular fire disturbances to maintain the health of a forest that supports numerous 200-400 year-old trees.

Ten years ago, TNC and partners worked with a local dairy farm to secure a conservation easement on their property and upgrade waste treatment operations to prevent cow manure from reaching a key stretch of the Duck River known to harbor exceptional mussel habitat. These actions made it possible to reintroduce rare Pale Lilliput mussels, which a decade later, are thriving and even starting to reproduce naturally—a huge marker of success in recovering a federally endangered species.

ABOVE Walls of Jericho is one Tennessee natural area that has benefited from the LWCF. © *Byron Jorjorian;* Southern Blue Ridge Fire Team © *The Nature Conservancy/Adam Warwick;* Duck River Mussels © *The Nature Conservancy*

INSPIRE MORE TENNESSEANS TO CONNECT WITH NATURE.

Impact: Welcomed scientists and students to explore and study at TNC's newest Tennessee nature preserve.

Working With Partners Who Take Our Work to the Next Level

Thanks to Tennessee scientists and students from a variety of academic institutions and disciplines, The Nature Conservancy has had a great start to inventorying plants, animals and natural habitats found at the Bridgestone Nature Reserve at Chestnut Mountain. Studies currently in process at the Reserve examine diverse flora and fauna, including:

- Shortleaf Pine Forest
- Timber Rattlesnakes
- Butterflies and Moths
- Pollinator Plants
- Wetlands
- Birds
- Salamanders

The inventory received another boost last fall with a grant from the Barbara J. Mapp Foundation to support the acquisition and installation of 35 cameras now located throughout the 5,700-acre Reserve. The cameras are gathering valuable images and videos on the movements and activities of wildlife on the property.

"The passion and excitement we are seeing from researchers, students and land management partners speaks to the amazing opportunities for learning that abound at Chestnut Mountain," says Trisha Johnson, TNC's director of forest conservation in Tennessee. "We look forward to building our knowledge in ways that can be transported beyond this property to other public and private forests.

MORE SUCCESS

The Nature Conservancy's Global Board of Directors met in Nashville for their quarterly meeting. Thank you to Senator Bill Frist, who serves on the Board, for being a generous host and representative of Tennessee.

The Conservancy's Tennessee State Director, Terry Cook, moderated a panel discussion, sponsored by Nashville Health, that focused on how to better incorporate nature and green infrastructure into Nashville's continued growth and expansion.

ABOVE A Tennessee Tech student advances his thesis at Chestnut Mountain. © *The Nature Conservancy;* Bill Frist talks to members of TNC's Global Board © *The Nature Conservancy;* Terry Cook Moderates Nashville Health Panel © *Courtesy Nashville Health*

SUPPORT

THANK YOU

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.