

LOUISIANA

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The Nature
Conservancy 
Southern Deltas



© Mitch Reid

The Nature Conservancy marks 75 years of protecting nature for all generations.

As TNC celebrates its 75th anniversary, we want to recognize the conservation work that is happening across the lands and waters of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. Throughout this region, TNC has protected hundreds of thousands of acres of land, used prescribed fire to improve the health of forest habitat, and built barrier islands and oyster reefs to complete more than 100 coastal restoration projects. TNC believes in the conservation potential and opportunities in these states, and together with our partners and supporters, is committed to ensuring that our human and natural communities can prosper and thrive for generations to come. Thank you for your continued support.



Mitch Reid
TNC's executive director in
Louisiana, Mississippi and
Alabama



TNC staff and supporters visit an old-growth bald cypress tree at Cat Island National Wildlife Refuge. © TNC

Legacy Win

Helping to establish Cat Island NWR represents TNC's science-based, collaborative and visionary work in Louisiana.

On the east bank of the Mississippi River is an old-growth bottomland hardwood forest that stands as a testament to time, adaptation and resilience. Within that forest are cypress trees that were already hundreds of years old when René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, claimed Louisiana for France in 1682. Native peoples of the Tunica and Choctaw tribes likely enjoyed their shade by the mid-17th century as they moved into the region.

The forest is protected by the Cat Island National Wildlife Refuge, which was formed thanks to The Nature Conservancy's efforts to unite private

"The health of the area shows the importance of this natural river flow and illustrates why TNC is working to reconnect floodplains across the Mississippi River Valley."

Will deGravelles, TNC's director of land protection in Louisiana

donors and public entities to protect vital habitat. The founding of the Cat Island NWR, and its continued role as a valued public land in Louisiana, represents a big conservation win for TNC in the state.

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Back in the 1990s, TNC recognized the opportunity—and the imperative—to protect this fragile old-growth forest near St. Francisville, which, at the time, was still privately owned. The landowner was interested in selling the property to become a refuge, but the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) wasn't positioned to make the purchase.

Thanks to donor support, TNC negotiated to buy nearly 10,000 acres from The Timber Company, a subsidiary of Georgia Pacific Corp., with a plan to transfer it to the USFWS as a new refuge. The deal was supported by Louisiana's congressional

delegation, as well as by local and state leaders. The Cat Island National Wildlife Refuge was officially established in 2000 and grew to its current 13,000-acre size by 2003.

TNC sought to protect this tract because it is believed to feature one of the highest densities of old-growth bald cypress trees still standing in the Mississippi River Valley. Without levees, and thanks to the area's unique topography of ridges and swales, the forest seasonally floods from the Mississippi River, an example of a natural process that is rare along the river in Louisiana today.



A visitor takes a photograph of an old-growth cypress tree at Cat Island. ©TNC

BEYOND OUR BORDERS

TNC leverages public and private support around the region.

Unparalleled Ecology in Alabama

When a local botanist discovered a handful of new species along a stretch of the Lower Cahaba River, TNC and Alabama's congressional delegation took notice, eventually establishing a new national wildlife refuge that encompassed the 480-acre "biological wonderland" and connected with TNC's Kathy Stiles Freeland Bibb County Glades Preserve.



The Cahaba lily (*Hymenocallis coronaria*) only grows in Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina. © Altairisfar/Wikipedia Commons

Free-Flowing Waters in Mississippi

Over the years, TNC played a key role in securing approximately 70,000 acres of public and private lands and waters to connect with the Pascagoula Wildlife Management Area. As one of the largest undammed rivers in the contiguous United States, the Pascagoula supports hundreds of bird species and endangered Gulf sturgeon that depends on the free-flowing waters for spawning.



Boneyard Lake is an oxbow lake and rookery located in the Pascagoula River WMA. © Becky Stowe/TNC