



Karen Gautreaux © TNC

Director's Note

The Nature Conservancy's steady focus, monitoring and caring for our projects in Louisiana is paying off for nature and communities. Those efforts include implementing carefully planned prescribed burns at several TNC preserves and monitoring the quality of waters going into and out of the Mollicy Farms floodplain restoration project. We also recently marked one year of Louisiana Treesilience, which is helping to restore tree canopies in urban forests affected by hurricane damage. One thing these activities have in common is that it takes time to see the results of our work. We are working at the pace of nature, and it's worth it. It wouldn't be possible without your support.

See you outside,

Karen Gautreaux, State Director

SUPPORT OUR WORK

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A controlled burn takes place at TNC's Lake Ramsay Preserve in St. Tammany Parish. © TNC

Delivering 'Good Fire'

Longleaf pines benefit from careful, controlled burns.

Three white-tailed deer dart out from a stand of longleaf pines and sprint across the forest floor as The Nature Conservancy's fire manager Bill Rivers ambles down a trail adjacent to TNC's Talisheek Pine Wetlands Preserve in St. Tammany Parish.

"Isn't that cool? You could watch them the whole way through the trees," says Rivers, smiling as he follows the deer's progress, jumping through native bluestem grass and across the sun-dappled landscape.

It's just been a few weeks since a TNC contractor conducted a controlled burn in the area. Singed bark twists up some of the pines, but the treetops remain green and lush. The sun-filled woodlands, with stands of longleaf and slash pines, cypress trees and small ponds, are thriving thanks to TNC's "fire prescriptions" that mimic natural, low-intensity burns.

This year, TNC has been working with contractors to conduct controlled burns

at several preserves, including some in southwest Louisiana as well as those at Talisheek, Abita Creek Flatwoods and Lake Ramsay in St. Tammany Parish. The goal is to burn about 1,500 acres in 2025.

Maintaining longleaf pine savannas in this way benefits species of conservation concern, including the monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*), dotted blazing star (*Liatris punctata*) and prairie warbler (*Setophaga discolor*). The burns are key to restoring the landscape and reducing flammable vegetation that can accelerate wildfires.

Walking through the forest, Rivers points out a gopher tortoise burrow, bog button flowers (*Lachnocaulon*) and toothache grass (*Ctenium aromaticum*), among other species. "You turn around here and see an ocean of native grass and longleaf and some slash pine," he says. "And you see the real functional benefit of fire."



Mollicy Farms Flood Connection Project © Ian Shive; Chris Rice collects a water sample at Mollicy Farms. © TNC

Monitoring Water Quality

Data guide efforts to reconnect a floodplain.

Every couple of years, The Nature Conservancy's Louisiana biologist Chris Rice visits TNC's Mollicy Farms project in Monroe to test waters flowing into and out of the largest floodplain reconnection effort in the Mississippi River Basin—and likely in the entire United States.

“We are working to tell the story of how restoring and reconnecting floodplain habitat—which acts as a natural filter—affects water quality in large river systems,” says Rice, who leads this project that launched in 2009. “There is a lot to learn about how the site affects the water quality in the Ouachita River,” he adds, “even if it takes decades to see the results.” The site is 16,000 acres (25 square miles).

Around the world, the construction of dams, levees and other human-made infrastructure has compromised forested floodplains like Mollicy Farms. These actions damage biodiversity, water quality and productivity on land, while increasing the risk of flooding that sends nitrogen, phosphorus, sediments and other pollutants downstream.

In response, TNC works with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality and other partners to reconnect the Ouachita River with the floodplain at Mollicy Farms. Together, we have breached levees and rerouted formerly channelized tributaries to reinstate the river's natural flow and restore the floodplain's hydrology. We have also planted approximately three million trees, potentially the largest afforestation effort in U.S. history.

When Rice checks in at Mollicy Farms, he visits the same four locations and measures sediment, nitrates, total Kjeldahl nitrogen (TKN) and phosphorus levels. While results are encouraging, he is cautious about making any strong statements just yet.

“We are still in the early stages in the floodplain recalibrating itself; this is not a quick fix,” he says. “However, we do see hopeful signs as trees and vegetation become more established throughout the floodplain.”

NATURE LOUISIANA

As The Nature Conservancy's Louisiana Treesilience program approached its one-year anniversary, several members of the Louisiana Conservation Corps, part of TNC's GulfCorps program, headed out to Sam Houston Jones State Park to check on longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*) saplings planted to restore the park after its forest was severely damaged during hurricanes Laura and Delta in 2020. Since then, Louisiana Treesilience, TNC's Plant a Billion Trees and other programs have planted approximately 11,745 seedlings at Sam Houston Jones.



A member of TNC's GulfCorps crew plants trees at Sam Houston Jones State Park. © Sydney Finn/TNC

These longleaf pines will be more resilient to future stressors than other types of trees. Their deep root system makes them more tolerant of drought conditions, and the open canopy helps the forest survive high winds. Longleaf pines are also adapted to pests and fire, which represent a threat to many forests in the southeastern U.S.

Support this work!

Visit nature.org/lagiving to support The Nature Conservancy's efforts to implement burns, monitor water quality and conserve forests around the state. Thank you, Louisiana!