TREES TO THE RESCUE!
A growing national program branches out into Louisiana.

Thanks to a three-year grant from the USDA Forest Service, The Nature Conservancy is launching Treesilience in Louisiana. An offshoot of TNC’s national initiative, the Louisiana Treesilence Program (LTP) is funded with generous support from the USDA Forest Service, in collaboration with the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry, for restoring and expanding community forests located in cities and towns in southeastern and southwestern Louisiana hit hardest by the 2020 and 2021 storm seasons. Scientists predict that such storms will be more frequent and intense with our planet’s rapidly changing climate.

Through the LTP, TNC is working with local governments, non-profit organizations and community groups to identify areas of greatest need for creating or rebuilding resilient tree canopies by removing dead/dying/dangerous trees and planting native tree species to provide benefits such as shade, beauty and wildlife habitat. In addition to local expertise, TNC is tapping into tried-and-true scientific approaches to inventorying tree canopies on the ground and through aerial imagery and remote sensing to inform decision-making.

Together with our partners, TNC is also working with local communities to create or revise forest management plans, and choosing tree species known to be most effective in standing up to increasingly harsh weather and thriving in densely populated environments. Most of the work will occur on public lands, although private lands are eligible for assistance if the outcome will provide a public benefit. At the conclusion of the three-year cycle, TNC hopes to expand this effort statewide (and beyond hurricane affected areas) if a more permanent funding stream can be secured.
GOOD FIRE

Rare plants respond to recent targeted burning

Like the tale of the mythical phoenix emerging from the ashes renewed, an impressive array of plants responded in a similar fashion after our Nature Conservancy staff and partners delivered fire to 2,022 acres last spring. These seasonal burns—conducted during late winter through late spring to mimic historic fire patterns—maintain the region’s native longleaf pine woodlands and stimulate flowering and seedling for many of the hundreds of plant species making up this open savanna system.

Within weeks of prescribed burning at TNC’s Abita Creek Flatwoods as well as at Talisheek and CC Road preserves in Allen and St. Tammany parishes, a collection of night-blooming wild petunia (*Ruellia noctiflora*) was observed for the first time in years. Pollinated by Sphinx moths, this state-rare and globally vulnerable plant shows off its ghostly white flowers only on a single night before they shrivel and drop the next day.

In addition to the rare petunia, Louisiana’s only known protected population of Georgia tickseed (*Coreopsis nudata*) demonstrated the outcomes of beneficial fire with an impressive showing of bright purple-pink flowers. Other rare plant species that responded within a month of the burns included parrot pitcher plant (*Sarracenia psittacina*) and pale grass pink orchid (*Calapogon pallidus*). And while less showy and not considered rare, a number of sedges and warm-season grasses greatly benefited from a dose of “good fire.” These plants, like Little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), Whitetop Sedge (*Rhyncospora latifolia*) and Gulf Muhlygrass (*Muhlenbergia expansa*), form the foundation of these savannas and serve as a strong indicator of the ecosystem’s health.

Prescribed fire is an indefinitely recurring management need and practice that reaps incredible rewards for biodiversity. Next winter and spring, TNC intends to oversee more prescribed fires on another 3,000 acres. Some of these will occur in different portions of the same preserves, and also at Persimmon Gully Preserve (Calcasieu Parish) and Ft. Polk Buffer Preserve (Vernon Parish).