

FIELD NOTES

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Aerial view of the Mississippi River system near Rosedale, Mississippi. ©Rory Doyle

FROM THE DIRECTOR

When it comes to conserving nature, the only constant is change.

Dear friends,

As the new executive director for The Nature Conservancy's Southern Deltas, an area encompassing Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, I want to express how excited I am to partner with you in shaping the future of conservation for this remarkable region. Although each of these states has its own character and ecological story, what inspires me most is how deeply connected they are. Our future depends on strengthening those connections even further.

TNC is working closely with communities throughout this region to provide science-based solutions to complex conservation challenges. From the Atchafalaya River Basin Initiative in Louisiana, to floodplain reconnection projects in Mississippi, to land protection efforts in Alabama, we are building a conservation strategy that is comprehensive and integrated.

My goal for the Southern Deltas is simple and ambitious: to weave together the lands, waters, and coastlines of our three states into a resilient system that supports healthy ecosystems and strong communities. As you'll read on the following pages, we're already making great strides toward realizing these goals and gaining big wins for both nature and people.

Our work is only possible because of partners like you who understand that conservation at this scale requires collaboration, trust, and long-term commitment. I look forward to working together to accelerate the impact we can make across this remarkable region.

With gratitude,



Mitch Reid
Executive Director, Southern Deltas

THE SOUTHERN DELTAS BY THE NUMBERS

- TNC has placed 500,000 acres into conservation across Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama.
- 50% of North America's freshwater flows across these three states.
- The Mississippi River Delta and the Mobile Tensas Delta comprise the largest delta systems in the continental United States.
- The Mississippi Sound encompasses more than 400,000 acres of ocean.
- The majority of the coastline in the northern Gulf stretches across Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama.
- The Atchafalaya River Basin is the largest floodplain forest in North America. TNC owns 10,000 acres within the basin.

NATURE'S DIVIDENDS

A new report highlights the economic benefits of protecting, restoring, and enhancing nature.

The natural systems of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama are the economic engines of the region, powering everything from commercial fisheries and port operations to timber management, agricultural production, and outdoor recreation. While many of us recognize the economic impact of nature instinctively, a new report issued by The Nature Conservancy provides quantitative proof. According to *Nature's Dividends: The Economic, Health, and Safety Benefits of Investing in Nature*, every \$1 spent by the federal government on conserving nature generates \$4 for the economy. The report compiled research from nearly 1,500 studies.

More than half of all residents in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama participate in outdoor recreation,

according to *Nature's Dividends*. Hunting, fishing, and visiting parks and preserves generates \$19.8 billion annually in these three states and supports approximately 156,000 jobs.

Additionally, our region's farms, forests, and fisheries support more than 1.1 million jobs. While managed for productivity and profit, they also serve as a natural buffer against extreme weather, flooding, and pollution that can jeopardize local communities.

Here in Mississippi, we are putting our natural areas to work to support wildlife and local livelihoods. TNC's Save Our Shells Program collects oyster shells for recycling from 16 restaurants and two aquaculture companies — from Pass Christian to Ocean Springs — to use for building new oyster reefs along the Gulf

Coast. In addition to supporting diverse marine life and building resilience along the coast, this effort supports a seafood industry that employs 7,000 people and generates \$2 billion for the state's economy. Also, since a single oyster can filter up to 50 gallons of water a day, healthy reefs benefit water quality anywhere they occur.

Nature's Dividends also highlights how investing in nature benefits our own health and well-being. Research shows that access to nature is linked to lower rates of heart disease, asthma, and diabetes, and can alleviate symptoms of mental health conditions such as ADHD, PTSD, and depression. From the Appalachians in North Alabama to the Louisiana and Mississippi bayous, investing in nature is investing in ourselves.



TNC's scientific dive team does frequent monitoring to check the health of the Tony Trapani Oyster Reef in Bay St. Louis. ©Sport Fishing Championship



TNC's Save Our Shells has collected more than 389,000 pounds of oyster shells to be recycled for uses that can range from living shorelines to new oyster reefs. ©Sport Fishing Championship

LEVERAGING LONG LEAF PINE PROTECTION

Working across three states helps us manage, restore, and advocate for this symbol of the south.



TNC's new Southern Deltas Fire Manager Kevin Mock will coordinate prescribed burns across Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. ©Matt Purdue

Vast longleaf pine forests and their open savanna ecosystems once dominated the southeastern coastal plain, covering 90 million acres across the South. To thrive, the longleaf habitat, one of the most biologically diverse habitats on the planet, needs occasional, low-intensity fire that removes competing trees, clears debris, and prepares the soil for optimum growth.

After 20 or 30 years, a longleaf pine tree begins to send seeds into the wind and down to the forest floor, where they will be ingested and distributed by squirrels, birds, mice, and other wildlife. Once a seedling sprouts, it requires fire to take it from a short bushy tree to the tall pine that dominates the landscape.

Fire. Wildlife. Wind. These are the ingredients for healthy and thriving longleaf pine forests and savanna habitats. None of them recognize boundaries on a map, and neither should we when it comes to restoring these forests to their original grandeur.

To better support the unique interconnectivity of the longleaf forests stretching across Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, TNC recently hired a new Southern Deltas Fire Manager Kevin Mock who will oversee prescribed

burns across the three states. This new position will benefit from the deep staff expertise across Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama and combine resources to better mimic processes that once occurred naturally in the landscape.

"By merging into one unit, we are able to more strategically work in alignment with nature, and that's good news for the plants, animals, and landscapes across the region," Southern Deltas Executive Director Mitch Reid said.

TNC will also coordinate staff around the science, stewardship, advocacy, and fundraising required to restore longleaf pines in our southern states.

"From Flagg Mountain in Alabama to TNC's Abita Creek Flatwoods Preserve in Louisiana and Camp Shelby in Mississippi, we're following paths guided by nature, forged by fire, wildlife, and wind."

— Mitch Reid



A longleaf pine in the bottlebrush stage.
©Rich Reid

AROUND THE SOUTHERN DELTAS



Participants in TNC's Legacy Club trip to the Mobile-Tensaw Delta this spring enjoyed casual cocktails overlooking the Tensaw River hosted by Kellee and Graham Tujaque. ©TNC



The new Southern Deltas Board of Trustees held its inaugural meeting in Biloxi, Mississippi. The new leadership team includes Chair Mary LaVigne of Louisiana; Vice Chair Tom Yeilding of Alabama; and Immediate Past Chair Alan Sudduth of Mississippi. ©TNC



Mitch Reid, Leslie and Lance Estrada and Mary LaVigne shared TNC's mission with guests during the recent Cocktails and Conservation event hosted by the Estradas in New Orleans. ©Dinah Rogers



Mitch Reid and Merritt Lane at the recent Cocktails and Conservation event in New Orleans. ©Dinah Rogers



TNC Southern Deltas Deputy Director Seth Blitch led several bird walks during the annual Grand Isle Migratory Bird Celebration. ©Sara Head/TNC



TNC staff and partners surveyed 74 gopher tortoise burrows to monitor conservation efforts at a 400-acre portion of TNC's Splinter Hill Bog Preserve. ©TNC

JOIN THE LEGACY CLUB

Naming The Nature Conservancy's Southern Deltas as a beneficiary in your estate plans or establishing a life income gift is a powerful way to support nature for generations to come.

If TNC is already included in your estate plans, please tell us about your gift. We would love the chance to recognize you and to ensure your wishes are honored.

Questions? Contact Celeste Richard to let TNC know about your plans or to learn more about making a forward-thinking gift for conservation.

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