

Prairies

News from Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota | Spring 2025

to Pines

One Million Acres Protected

A milestone moment for people and nature

Thanks to you, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is celebrating a major accomplishment in conservation—**1 million acres protected across Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota!**

For more than 65 years, we've collaborated with partners, private landowners and Native Nations to protect and restore grasslands, forests and fresh water across our three states. As we reflect on the moments that have led up to this milestone, it's clear that our work is only possible through strong partnerships, the support of countless donors like you and vital public investments in conservation.

TNC owns and manages just one-tenth of the million acres we've helped protect. Some land remains under private ownership, and many acres have been transferred into the safe hands of partners and agencies that continue restoration and management. Today, these 1 million acres include state parks,

a national wildlife refuge, TNC nature preserves, voluntary land protection agreements with private landowners and acres returned to Native Nations.

Here are just a few of the special places we've helped protect with your support:

Bluestem Prairie Preserve

Moorhead, Minnesota | 6,078 acres
Home to vast native prairies that once covered much of western Minnesota and the Dakotas. Visitors can experience the "booming" of prairie chickens in spring.

Whitney Preserve

Hot Springs, South Dakota | 4,588 acres
This preserve in the southern Black Hills protects sage lands, pine forest, mixed grasslands and unique freshwater systems.

Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge

Polk County, Minnesota | 24,000+ acres
Initiated by TNC and partners, Glacial Ridge is now part of the

National Wildlife Refuge System and is the largest prairie and wetland restoration project in United States history.

Cross Ranch Preserve

Washburn, North Dakota | 5,593 acres
Located on the Missouri River, this preserve provides floodplain forest and prairie habitat for roaming bison, migrating whooping cranes, piping plovers and more.

Our work doesn't stop here. With the support of people like you, we're on our way to achieve ambitious 2030 goals, including protecting 250,000 acres of grasslands, reconnecting and restoring 1,500 miles of rivers and streams, and planting more than 2 million trees each year. Together, we can find a way to achieve even more.

Learn more at [nature.org/millionacres](https://www.nature.org/millionacres).

Prairie near Glacial Lakes State Park, Minnesota
© Richard Hamilton Smith



White pines, like this seedling, are an important species in boreal forests. © Derek Montgomery

The Need for Seed

A day in the life of a seed scout

On a sunny September day, Natalie Kim, seed scout at The Nature Conservancy in Minnesota, is crawling on hands and knees beneath a red oak tree, picking up acorns and tossing them into a five-gallon bucket.

It's not a common job, but it's an important one. Kim is carefully collecting and storing seeds from oak, black walnut, yellow birch and black cherry trees to help power ambitious reforestation efforts throughout Minnesota.

Nearly half of Minnesota's original forests have been lost to logging, development and conversion to agriculture. Our forests are critical habitats that provide clean water, support rich biodiversity and local economies, and reduce the impacts of climate change. That's why we are working with partners toward a collective goal of **reforesting a million acres in Minnesota**.

To plant enough trees to meet this goal, we need a steady supply of tree seedlings—more than we're currently able to collect or acquire. With partners, we're working to overcome this challenge by investing in seed collection and seedling production. We're training seed collectors to revive the pipeline of workers who know how to properly collect seed. We're tracking seeds throughout the supply chain to ensure genetic diversity of seedlings. And we're employing seed scouts, like Kim, who work to collect seeds that are the foundation of our tree planting efforts.

Seed scouting requires year-round work and planning. Scouts must locate sites with trees of the desired species and adequate genetic diversity. They need permission from the landowner and must collect seeds at just the right time—when they're ripe and beginning to fall, but before they become infested with bugs or eaten by wildlife.



Seed Scout Natalie Kim © Katelyn Campbell/TNC

To support this work, we plan to recruit 40 new growers and 350 new seed collectors by 2028. We're also working with partners to study and create a more efficient tree seed supply chain by connecting seeds and seedlings with the organizations and individuals who will help plant them where they're needed most.

By improving the supply of tree seeds, we can meet our reforestation goals and help restore Minnesota's iconic forests for people and nature. To learn more and support this work, visit [nature.org/mnseed](https://www.nature.org/mnseed).

Meet Peg and Lee Skold

Peg and Lee Skold have been close friends of The Nature Conservancy since 2019, but their love of forests and grasslands goes back decades.

The daughter of a citizen conservationist who planted white pines around the family's cabin in northwest Wisconsin, Peg learned early on how to set her imagination free outdoors. At just nine years old, she frequently took the family rowboat for solo paddles, docking at an abandoned resort to explore. Its gnarled pines and overgrown trails were the perfect place for a young naturalist to dream up possibilities of what she might do with land of her own. Lee, too, enjoyed a free-range childhood, camping with the Boy Scouts and duck hunting with his father and three brothers.

"The people...are what keep us coming back."

—Lee Skold

Today, the Skolds are deeply invested in the urgency of the climate and biodiversity crisis—and not just philanthropically. Years ago, the couple purchased a small farm in

southwest Wisconsin and, slowly but surely, restored it to prairie with native flowers. "Holding the tide of climate change and loss of biodiversity is the most important thing that I can do," says Peg of her commitment to the natural world.

A 2019 meeting with TNC scientists and on-the-ground staff sparked a deep partnership between Peg, Lee and The Nature Conservancy. TNC's commitment to collaboration and nonpartisanship "aligns with our values," says Lee. Their support has only deepened with time—both Skolds serve on a fundraising committee, with Peg in a leadership role and on our chapter's Board of Trustees.

"It's humbling," Peg says, to witness the work of "passionate, committed people out burning prairies and creating beaver dams." Both Skolds have a high degree of trust in TNC's ability to follow through on our ambitious goals for nature, and the foundation of that trust is our dedicated conservation staff. "The people...are what keep us coming back," Lee says. "There are many environmental organizations we could support, but the genuine, dedicated people at TNC are truly one-of-a-kind."



Courtesy of the Skolds



Bald eagle © Richard Hamilton Smith

Advocating for Nature

The Nature Conservancy works across borders, aisles and sectors to advance policy solutions that benefit people and nature. Our non-partisan approach, commitment to science and collaboration with local partners and colleagues around the region help us achieve our mission of conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends.

In 2025, TNC is continuing to advance policy solutions that allow people and nature to thrive. We are advocating for public investment in protection and restoration of land and water—like tree planting and prairie restoration—and elevating policies that advance sustainable agriculture and energy production while aligning with climate and biodiversity goals.

We can't do this alone. Get to know our policy priorities and learn how you can use your voice to make a difference.

Read updates on the 2025 legislative session in your state at:

- Minnesota: nature.org/mnadvocacy
- South Dakota: nature.org/sdadvocacy
- North Dakota: nature.org/ndadvocacy



Grasslands in Focus

In the heart of the Great Plains, TNC is protecting and stewarding imperiled grassland habitat

A prairie in any season reveals a spectrum of wild color. The impossible green of switchgrass in spring—a convention for songbirds—purple blazing star in summer, the deep brown of bison wallows in the fall, white snowdrifts, and above it all, the endless, undulating blue sky.

But the colors of our grasslands are fading. Droughts are intensifying, threatening new growth. Grassland birds are declining faster than other bird species. And habitat fragmentation has cut off age-old migratory pathways. Since 2016, the Northern Great Plains, crossing parts of Canada, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming, have lost more than 45 million acres of grassland—an area larger than all of North Dakota.

TNC has a vision for our grasslands: protected and connected from North Dakota to Texas, a magnificent stripe of waving gold. Our Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota chapter has a unique opportunity to protect native grasslands across multiple states. We're increasing the pace and scale of protection and focusing on key habitats, including the prairie potholes of North Dakota and the rangelands of western South Dakota. Through strong partnerships with landowners, government partners and Native Nations, and with your critical support, we'll protect 250,000 grassland acres by 2030.

Globally, conserving grasslands is a critical strategy for achieving TNC's 2030 goals of conserving 1.6 billion acres of land and storing 3 gigatons of CO₂ emissions annually. Every acre protected stems the tide of climate change and biodiversity loss—and brings color back to our prairies.

Bison herds roam parts of TNC's Cross Ranch Preserve. © Richard Hamilton Smith



Monarch on blazing star © Richard Hamilton Smith

Legacy Club Celebration

From North Dakota's badlands to the Tallgrass Aspen Parkland of northwestern Minnesota, prairies and grasslands are unsung heroes in the movement to tackle climate change. Your support powers our work to protect this iconic ecosystem!

Join fellow Legacy Club members and Nature Conservancy experts to learn how TNC and our partners are advancing grasslands conservation to sequester carbon, restore habitat and protect biodiversity on the Great Plains. *Formal invitation to follow.*

Monday, October 27, 2025

Silverwood Park Great Hall
2500 County Road E
St. Anthony, MN 55421

Interested in learning more about the Legacy Club? Reach out to legacy@tnc.org.

Yes! I want to protect the iconic grasslands and wildlife of the Great Plains.

Contact our development department at 612-331-0700.

Visit nature.org/P2P to learn more and donate.