

2026 Legislative Session

TNC in Tennessee



Executive Summary

The Nature Conservancy in Tennessee champions policy and legislation to strengthen conservation efforts and protect healthy lands and waters.

Our nonpartisan and evidence-based approach guides our collaboration with local landowners, communities, businesses, and government agencies to implement practical conservation solutions that benefit both people and nature.

We engage with city, county, state and federal lawmakers, making recommendations to influence policy and keep nature at the forefront of decision-making. Healthy natural systems are the foundation of Tennessee's economy, security, and way of life and we seek to uphold our state's strong natural heritage for future generations.

Legislative Priorities

Secure funding for land conservation

Tennessee is the most biologically diverse inland state in the U.S., and protecting its most critical lands is essential for wildlife habitat, recreation access, economic opportunity, and clean air and water. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a longstanding partner of the State of Tennessee in planning for and achieving conservation outcomes. To date TNC has helped secure over 450,000 acres of land in Tennessee for recreation and natural resource values, and we aim to conserve an additional 50,000 acres by 2030 by working with willing landowners. This work is resource-intensive, and sufficient funding is essential to achieving land conservation goals.

TNC will advocate for strong funding for state agencies managing lands and natural resources, and will support continued state investments in grant programs like the Heritage Conservation Trust Fund and the Farmland Preservation Fund, which provide funds for permanently conserving land with voluntary landowners.

Secure recurring funding for Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA)

TWRA plays a vital role in managing and protecting Tennessee's fish, wildlife and natural habitats. As a critical partner in conservation, TWRA helps safeguard clean water, preserve healthy landscapes, and ensure the State Wildlife Action Plan protects species of greatest conservation need across the state. Unfortunately, increased operational costs and insufficient revenues from fishing and hunting permits have led to funding gaps that threaten TWRA's ability to achieve its mission.

TNC supports establishing a secure and dedicated funding source for TWRA.

Support freshwater conservation in Tennessee

TNC is working to secure and safeguard the quality and abundance of fresh water across Tennessee. TNC seeks to achieve these goals through the restoration and maintenance of ecosystem processes to improve floodplain, wetland and river habitats.

We will work to support barrier removal in waterways across Tennessee, Duck River and Cumberland River conservation efforts, maintaining environmental flows, and reducing sediment erosion. TNC will participate in stakeholder planning processes and advocate for regulatory approaches that better manage our freshwater resources in these times of unprecedented demand on them.

Urge strong protections for wetlands

Streams, rivers, lakes and wetlands are critical to the well-being of people and nature, providing valuable—and often irreplaceable—sources of drinking water, flood control, groundwater recharge, and habitat for fish and wildlife. They also power local economies and thriving communities. Approximately sixty percent of wetlands in Tennessee have already been lost to ditching, draining and development. Since the 2023 United States Supreme Court decision *Sackett vs. EPA* removed federal protections for isolated wetlands, Tennessee state legislators have been debating how the state should regulate, permit and require mitigation of isolated wetlands.

For the 2026 Session, TNC will advocate for continued state wetland protections and science-based definitions for wetlands and management.

Support resilient and healthy forests

Forests cover approximately 53% of Tennessee and are under threat from urbanization, fragmentation, a changing climate, wildfire, loss of diversity, invasive insects and disease. TNC is working to enhance forest resiliency in Tennessee through restoration, improved forest management, and permanent protection of private forestland.

TNC will encourage policies and legislation that incorporate science and data from the Tennessee Forest Action Plan and State Wildlife Action Plan to guide priorities for implementation and funding. We support maintaining adequate funding and capacity for active forest management, including prescribed fire.

Provide food and water through healthy floodplains and sustainable agriculture

Floodplains and wetlands in west TN have been severely degraded over the past 100 years, and TNC is dedicated to restoring and conserving these ecosystems to benefit water quality and wildlife habitat. Efforts are being made to reduce nutrient runoff from agriculture and improve farming practices to result in improved water quality and healthier soils.

TNC supports funding for restoration projects on the Lower Mississippi River and throughout Tennessee. We will participate in planning efforts for integrated floodplain management, and we urge state support for agricultural conservation practices that make financial sense for farmers.

Contact: Lindsay Hanna
Director of Government Relations
The Nature Conservancy in Tennessee
lindsay.hanna@tnc.org
615-922-5496