

INDIANA UPDATE

Fall 2025 / Winter 2026



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BOARD CHAIR'S MESSAGE

From the Chair: Announcing our new state director

By Jane Stautz, Chair, Board of Trustees



Change is a constant in conservation—on the land, in our communities and within our organization. This fall, we mark a significant transition as our state director Larry Clemens retires and we welcome Cassie Hauswald as his successor.

New challenges and opportunities are before us. The Nature Conservancy's ambitious goals for 2030 demand bold action, and Indiana is rising to meet the moment.

Through our successful *Human:Nature* campaign, we raised more than \$51 million to support our first five-year plan. Now,

we are implementing the next phase—an even more ambitious and

focused strategy to protect lands and waters, improve soil health and accelerate natural climate solutions.

This decade is pivotal. Indiana's recent designation as the worst state for pollution and natural environment, according to U.S. News & World Report's annual rankings, highlights the urgency and necessity of our work. Rather than discouraging us, this recognition strengthens our resolve to lead change, to build partnerships and to inspire action across the state and beyond our borders.

As we begin implementing our next five-year strategic plan, I invite you to remain engaged and committed to our mission. Your support—whether through advocacy, volunteering or philanthropy—makes this work possible. Together, we can ensure that Indiana's natural heritage thrives for generations to come.

Thank you for being a vital part of this journey.



Jane Stautz
Board of Trustees Chair
The Nature Conservancy in Indiana

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COVER PAGE An Eastern box turtle (*Terrapene carolina*) at Twin Creek Valley in Washington County, enjoying new plant growth that was spurred by a prescribed fire from the previous season. © Chris Neggers/TNC; THIS PAGE LEFT TO RIGHT The fall migration of the iconic monarch is celebrated each year at TNC's Festival de la Monarca. This year's event attracted more than 800 people! © Fauna Creative; Jane Stautz and Cassie Hauswald © Fauna Creative

Protecting Indiana's last best places

Indiana staff have maximized opportunities across the state to protect our state's last best places. These projects help lift up local communities, creating a sense of pride in place while safeguarding biodiversity, cleaning waterways, mitigating flooding, and absorbing greenhouse gases.

Direct TNC acquisitions:

Addition to Clark State Forest in Scott County

Located just north of the 24,000-acre Clark State Forest, this 40-acre property will be managed with forestry techniques that promote recovery and reforestation, extending critical habitat for migratory songbirds such as cerulean warblers, worm-eating warblers, scarlet tanagers, and Louisiana water thrushes.

Addition to Brock Sampson-Hardin Ridge Nature Preserve in Floyd County

This 41-acre property exemplifies Floyd County's rugged terrain, where high ridgetops and steep slopes give way to deep ravines. After a steep trek to the high point of the property, a hiker can clearly see the skyline of Louisville just across the Ohio River.

Financial assists to local land trust

Addition to Fern Cliff Nature Preserve in Putnam County

TNC provided a financial assist to Central Indiana Land Trust, Inc. (CILTI) toward their acquisition of 23 acres located between TNC's 157-acre Fern Cliff Nature Preserve and CILTI's 573-acre Fern Station property. As the 23-acre property is transitioned, restored and reforested, it will help form a "bridge" between Fern Station and Fern Cliff, protecting habitat for at-risk species, such as the eastern box turtle, red-shouldered hawk, and interior forest-breeding songbirds such as the cerulean warbler and Kentucky warbler.

TOP TO BOTTOM The Louisville skyline is visible from Brock Sampson-Hardin Ridge in Floyd County. © Braun Budell; The Clark State Forest addition provides habitat for worm-eating warblers, as well as several other songbird species. © Matt Williams; Foundations from an old sand quarry add to the colorful history of Fern Cliff in Putnam County. © Ron Leonetti; Kentucky warblers are a common sight at Fern Cliff. © Matt Williams.





Volunteer spotlight: Andy Thieneman

Andy serves many volunteer roles with TNC and has been involved with monitoring and stewarding Green's Bluff Nature Preserve, conducting prescribed fires, serving on the volunteer program steering committee and more! Andy is based in southwestern Indiana but frequently visits TNC sites across the southern third of the state.

What is your role with The Nature Conservancy and how did you get started?

I am a volunteer with TNC. I first started volunteering in the late 1980s but because of work obligations I could not do a lot. Since retiring I have become much more active with TNC.

Can you share a little bit about your background and your relationship to Indiana's natural areas?

I grew up on a small farm in southern Indiana, and I have many fond memories of playing in the woods and creeks. Our family would go car camping at various state parks when I was a child. I remember many educational encounters with park naturalists which probably piqued my interest in the outdoors.

What do you look for in a volunteer opportunity that makes it worthwhile?

When I look for volunteer opportunities I usually look for ones with a specific goal. Now that I have more time to volunteer some of these goals can be long term. For instance, I find it rewarding to work on ongoing projects to remove invasive plants.

Do you have advice for folks who are interested in volunteering with TNC, but who aren't sure yet about getting involved?

If you are interested in volunteering, I would suggest reviewing the available projects and choosing one that sounds interesting. Even if you do not know much about what is being done, it doesn't matter. The staff and other volunteers are always eager to teach. A lot of my knowledge of nature has come from interactions with people at volunteer events. In addition to being educational, these events are a great opportunity to meet and interact with like-minded people.

GET INVOLVED!

Read the full Q&A with Andy and check out our volunteer opportunities at [nature.org/indianavolunteer](https://www.nature.org/indianavolunteer).

TNC volunteer Andy Thieneman © Carolyn Small/TNC



Partnering with the Indiana Landmarks Black Heritage Preservation Program

In 2023, TNC reviewed our nature preserves' names to ensure that these names reflect our organizational values. Boone Cave, located within Green's Bluff Nature Preserve in Owen County, is rumored to have been used by a man named Daniel Boone (not the famous frontiersman) as a place to harbor enslaved people before they were illegally sold. TNC recognized the need for more thorough research and partnered with the Indiana Landmarks Black

Heritage Preservation Program to research the history of Boone Cave and its ties to the slave trade. This research is scheduled to be completed soon and has led to a larger partnership with the Black Historic Preservation Program to research TNC preserves statewide and uncover untold stories about the people who have been part of the history of the land.

LEFT TO RIGHT Green's Bluff Nature Preserve © Jesse Moore/TNC; Indiana Landmarks Black Heritage Preservation Program interns (left to right) Ahmaud Carroll-Tubbs, Sierra Ivy and Mesgana Weiss visited Boone's Cave in Owen County, a Black history site documented in partnership with The Nature Conservancy. © Melissa Moran/TNC



Put stock in nature

Gifts of stocks, bonds or mutual funds are a smart and simple way to support The Nature Conservancy.

When you donate appreciated securities to TNC, you may deduct the gift as a charitable donation and avoid capital gains taxes. This dual benefit allows you to leverage a larger donation for nature. For more information, visit [nature.org/stockgifts](https://www.nature.org/stockgifts) or email stock@tnc.org.

The Nature Conservancy cannot render tax or legal advice. Please consult your financial advisor before making a gift.

Wabash River in southwestern Indiana © Fauna Creative

FIRE SPARKS HEALTHY HABITAT

Many Midwestern species depend on fire to maintain their habitats or help them grow. Look for these species at the following TNC preserves!

Learn more about TNC's prescribed fire work at [nature.org/MidwestFire](https://www.nature.org/MidwestFire).



1. American Bumblebee
Grand River Fen Preserve
Photo credit @ Chris Helzer

2. Karner Blue Butterfly and Lupine
Central Sands Project Area
Photo credit @ Ian Adams

3. Smooth Green Snake
Indian Boundary Prairies
Photo credit @ ondreicka

4. Lark Sparrow
Prairie Border Nature Preserve
Photo credit @ Fauna Creative

5. Wild Blue Lupine
Kitty Todd Preserve
Photo credit @ Ben Bomlitz

*Prescribed fire background
@ Chris Helzer*



Policy progress is *fire*

Despite the proven benefits of prescribed fire for habitat restoration, wildfire prevention, and forest health, Indiana was one of only a few states that did not have a certification program or liability clearly defined through legislation. That all changed this past April when Governor Mike Braun signed new legislation into law that provides liability protections for certified practitioners and removes key barriers to using this essential ecological tool. The Indiana Prescribed Fire Council led this effort with partners over the past three years, including TNC in Indiana, shepherding the bill through the legislative process.

“For more than 40 years, TNC has worked with its conservation partners on safe, prescribed fires throughout the state, but those are only on lands we own and manage. This new legislation will facilitate private landowners to also use this essential tool to manage their property and improve habitat,” says Stuart Orr, fire manager for TNC in Indiana.

In addition to supporting the new legislation, TNC’s own prescribed fire practices are helping restore the oak-hickory forest at the Hitz-Rhodehamel Woods in Brown County, the unique mesic and wet sand prairies, sand blows, sedge meadows, black oak savannas at Kankakee Sands in Newton County, and many other sites across the state.

Prescribed fire fuels renewal

For thousands of years, Indigenous Peoples have supported the health and diversity of natural landscapes by practicing controlled burns. Fire, after all, is a natural disturbance that can help improve wildlife habitat, manage invasive species, and restore nutrients to the soil. By regularly reducing decaying material and other fuel sources, the application of prescribed fire—the intentional, careful use of fire under the right conditions in a designated area—also helps prevent catastrophic and destructive wildfires that burn hotter and last longer.

In the Midwest, many ecosystems, such as tallgrass prairies, oak savannas, woodlands, and pine barrens, are adapted to fire to maintain their health and species diversity. In addition to supporting Indigenous-led prescribed fire applications, TNC collaborates on controlled burns to manage many of our preserves, as well as the natural areas stewarded by our partners.






The burn is the word

Ever wonder what it’s like to be part of a burn crew? From 5 a.m. surveys to hours of on-the-ground fire applications to strolling through resulting fields of blooming lupine, join the Indiana burn crew as they work to bring fire back to Midwest ecosystems in our “Return the Burn” video.

Visit [nature.org/Indiana](https://www.nature.org/Indiana) to watch and learn more.

TOP TNC’s Prairie Border Nature Preserve in northwest Indiana greened up quickly after a prescribed fire. © Stuart Orr/TNC; BOTTOM Members of TNC’s Indiana burn team at a prescribed fire © Fauna Creative



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Join TNC on Thursday, January 22, 2026, for our sixth annual *Exploring Indiana* webinar.

We'll dive into many of the important highlights and milestones from 2025 and give an outlook for what's to come in 2026. Follow TNC on Facebook or Instagram or visit nature.org/events for more information and to register.

Cover crops for the win!

Over the past five years, TNC has partnered with the Indiana State Department of Agriculture to pilot a program that rewards farmers for planting cover crops by reducing crop insurance premium costs.

The partnership enrolled...

 100,000+ acres

which saved the loss of...

 300,000 pounds of nitrogen

 920 million gallons of water

 240,000 tons of sediment

an amount of topsoil that would fill more than...

 1,000 train cars

which would wrap around the Indianapolis Motor Speedway almost...

 **4 times!**

