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DIRECTOR'S NOTE

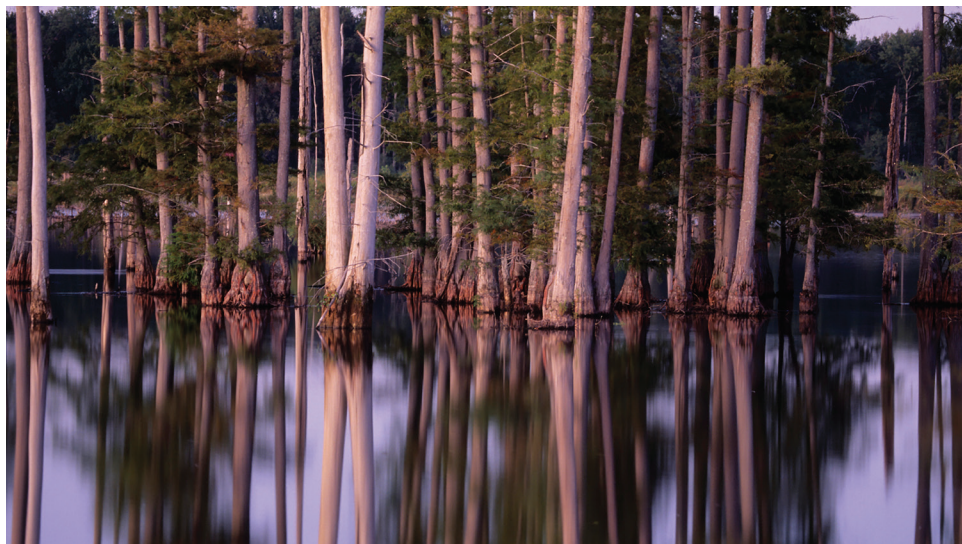
In our fast-paced world, it can be easy to overlook the value of face-to-face interactions for advancing The Nature Conservancy's mission. That's why we've been looking forward to gathering with colleagues from across the Mississippi River Basin in Memphis this winter. Together we will exchange information and align efforts around safeguarding this resource that is key to protecting diverse wildlife, supporting local communities and fueling the global economy. Whether we're sharing stories at a conference or interacting with visitors at Tennessee's newest state park located in the heart of the Mississippi River floodplain, these personal relationships collectively move the needle on conserving the "Mighty Mississippi" in Tennessee.

Laurel Creech

Laurel Creech
Tennessee State Director

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Bald cypress trees grow along the Hatchie River. © Byron Jorjorian

Mississippi River Basin

Tennessee projects support a healthy, functioning and productive ecosystem.

The Nature Conservancy supported an effort by state agency partners and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to craft a plan for restoring and reconnecting natural areas in the Hatchie to Loosahatchie portion of the Mississippi River located along the Tennessee-Arkansas border. Over time, alterations to the river channel have compromised this 39-mile stretch, hindering the surrounding landscape from naturally absorbing and filtering seasonal water flows and supporting the life cycles of numerous fish, birds and other species. This project is the first of eight conservation reaches identified as priorities within the Lower Mississippi River to be studied. It serves as a model for comprehensive, large-scale restoration across the lower basin, helping to improve the environmental, economic and social impact of this globally important river system.



Middle Fork Bottoms

Tennessee's newest state park at Middle Fork Bottoms represents another model for restoring Mississippi River habitat in ways that reduce flooding, build natural resilience, and benefit wildlife and people. The Nature Conservancy looks forward to further collaborations with federal and state government partners, nonprofit organizations and local communities that can duplicate this effort in other parts of Tennessee.

© Middle Fork Bottoms State Park



© Courtesy Nick Ohde; Hatchie-Loosahatchie Meander Scarp and Oxbow Lake © USACE

Q&A: Nick Ohde, Mississippi River Program

Nick Ohde facilitates TNC’s collaborative effort around increasing the pace and scale of its work along the Mississippi River.

Our nation’s goals for the Mississippi River are shifting. What’s behind that?

We know more about the harm caused by changing a river’s flow. Locks, dams and other structures built to meet demands for irrigation, flood control, power and commerce have become outdated and, in some cases, unsafe. Many hinder the life cycles of wild-life and jeopardize communities that are prone to flooding. The biggest water manager on the Mississippi (and in the nation) is the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). Working with them is an opportunity to have the biggest possible impact on the river.

What goes into improving such a vast infrastructure to meet current needs?

In the Upper Mississippi, growing awareness of the environmental impact of navigation infrastructure spurred the creation of the Upper Mississippi River Basin Association and the USACE’s Upper Mississippi River Restoration Program. For more than 40 years, these programs have advanced a multi-state effort to mitigate environmental threats, enhance ecological health and accommodate the river’s many uses.

Where does that leave the Lower Mississippi? The Lower Mississippi River (LMR) faces similar challenges. It’s just that the Upper Mississippi River programs had a head start in generating funding and an on-the-ground presence. We have just as much potential to develop partnerships and policies to improve river health and protect biodiversity on the LMR.

What priorities are emerging in the LMR? The USACE is spearheading a five-year, \$25-million Comprehensive Management Study to evaluate long-term management options in the portion of the river flowing from Cape Girardeau in Missouri to the Gulf of Mexico. This study represents an opportunity to create a system-wide approach to operating and managing the LMR with consideration for modernizing navigation and flood control and fostering a healthier and more sustainable lower river system to benefit all interests. TNC is grateful to have a seat at this table to influence the study and advocate for a comprehensive approach to managing the LMR.

The prospect of joining efforts in the Upper and Lower Mississippi River must be exciting. Yes, and rewarding. Conservation doesn’t stop at state borders, especially river work. Such work even informs TNC’s other big-picture efforts like conserving wide-ranging species and mitigating climate change.

NATURE TENNESSEE

TNC Mississippi River Basin Goals

40% reduction of nitrogen and phosphorus reaching the Gulf of Mexico by 2035

2 million acres of floodplains protected and restored by 2030



Pallid sturgeon © Ryan Hagerty/USFWS

The pallid sturgeon (*Scaphirhynchus albus*) is an endangered species that is endemic to the waters of the Missouri and Lower Mississippi River basins. Considered an indicator species, its presence suggests that conditions are favorable for many other species.

“Our work, from partnering with farmers across the agricultural Midwest to reduce fertilizer runoff, to protecting and restoring floodplains in the lower river, and improving waterway monitoring across the entire basin, aims to benefit water quality, reduce flood risk, and protect biodiversity.”

The Nature Conservancy’s Testimony to the Mississippi River Commission, April 12, 2024