

OHIO

Annual Report 2024

DEAR FRIEND OF CONSERVATION,



Shana Byrd

Shana Byrd

Ohio Conservation Lead

As the new Conservation Lead for Ohio, I am excited to build on an impressive legacy of achievements.

Rooted in restoration, research and community engagement, my passion for conservation has evolved over the past 25 years. Early experience in sustainable forestry showed me the difference we can make by choosing strategies that prioritize sustainable resource use, while balancing our needs. Considering ecosystems holistically, a decade spent in mineland restoration taught me how innovation and forward-thinking can bring about wins for both people and nature—even in degraded landscapes. This setting crystalized my resolve that we cannot gain back what is lost, focusing my new work priorities on saving the rarest of species and preserving the habitats on which they depend.

Looking back on last year's accomplishments, it is clear that the outcomes we're celebrating in agriculture, stream and wetland restoration, prescribed fire, land protection and more, rest upon successful partnerships, generous donors and talented teams working in unison. The more I discover about our real-world achievements, the more motivated I am to do my own part to support of our team's big vision for conservation.

When I think about what comes next, my hopes for conservation in Ohio are inspired by the talented team of individuals fully committed to our ambitious goals. Ohio's impressive strides are thanks to the genuine dedication of the people who make this work possible. Together, we can change lives for the better.

As we look at the year ahead, we're energized to build upon the lessons learned and progress made to reach even higher. It is a true honor to lead the Ohio Conservation team as we aspire to achieve even more milestones in the year to come.

The Nature Conservancy in Ohio

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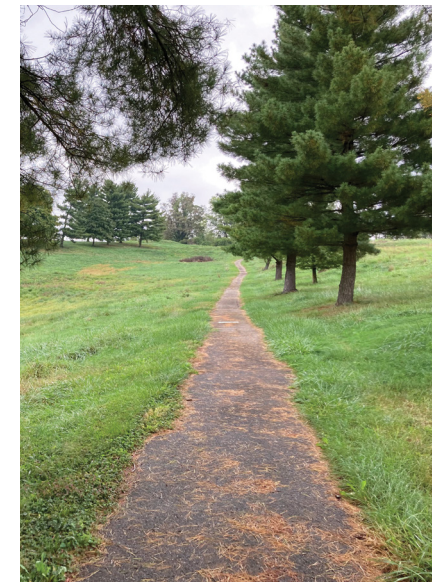
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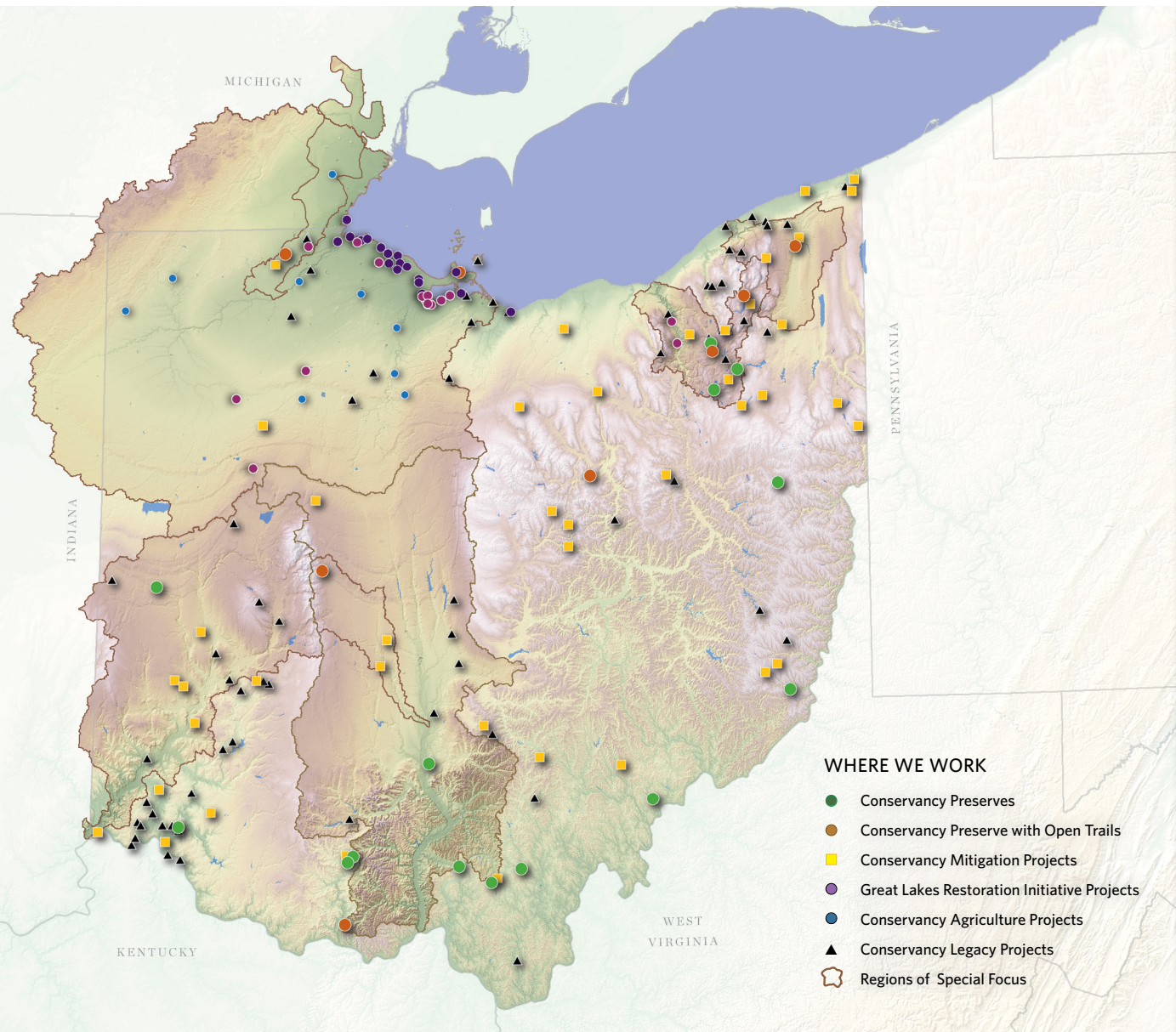
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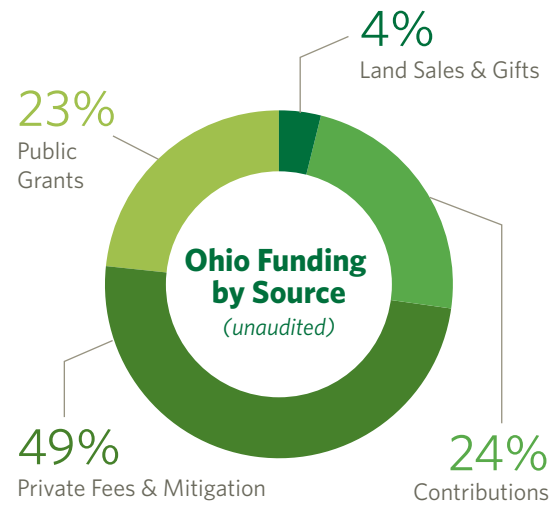




ONE CONSERVANCY

We carry out our work with a deep commitment to accountability and transparency. As a leading global charity, we hold ourselves accountable to our members, the public and all the creatures that rely on the world's natural resources.

While TNC is one 501(c)(3), the Ohio chapter, along with you, its dedicated supporters, is critical to the organization's overall success in creating a livable climate, healthy communities and thriving nature. We rely on private donations and competitive public grants to positively impact Ohio's lands, waters and communities. In turn, the effects of those contributions—some of which you'll read about in this report—help catalyze more funding and strengthen relationships to accelerate conservation across the state and the Midwest, making you an integral part of this collective effort.



“We know that equitable conservation is durable conservation. Our commitment to regenerative agriculture and supporting BIPOC farmers is crucial for cultivating a thriving ecosystem of farmers, communities and sustainable food systems. Our work in Ohio demonstrates that when we prioritize equity, we don't just protect nature—we nurture more robust, more connected communities.”

—FRED WILLS, director of equitable conservation for The Nature Conservancy in Ohio

➔ ONLINE

To view TNC's consolidated financial statements, visit [nature.org/annualreport](https://www.nature.org/annualreport).

Building Trust for Lasting Conservation



ONLINE

To learn more about TNC's priority conservation efforts worldwide, visit [nature.org/solutions](https://www.nature.org/solutions).

Respect for people, communities and cultures is a core value of The Nature Conservancy (TNC). For our conservation work to endure, it must actively involve those whose well-being and livelihoods are deeply connected to the healthy oceans, fresh water and lands we seek to protect.

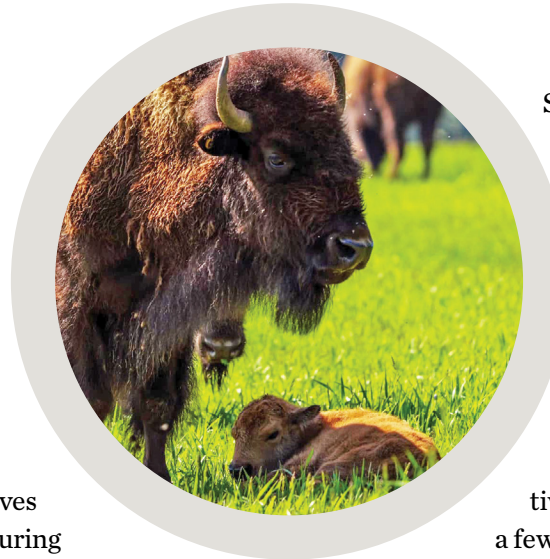
That's not lip service. Our 2030 goals include a commitment to thriving communities, aiming to support 45 million land stewards globally. Indigenous Peoples and local communities have been Earth's protectors since time immemorial. How we learn from and support their leadership in environmental stewardship, securing rights to natural resources, and improving economic opportunities will shape the future.

Thanks to your generous support, we're striving to meet this goal in Ohio and the Midwest by building and deepening relationships with Indigenous Tribes. In Wisconsin and Michigan, we work with Indigenous Tribes on forest management. In Illinois, we're working with

tribes to restore buffalo to their traditional prairies. In Ohio, where there are no federally recognized Tribal Governments, we work with people like Logan York to bridge the divide between place and people with cultural ties to the land.

"I first met with representatives from TNC a few years ago, during the Ohio Tribal Nations Conference," says York, tribal historic preservation officer of the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma. "That's when we started thinking about potential relationships with TNC and the good we could do together."

Spring 2023 offered the first project for TNC and the Miami Tribe to collaborate. When TNC's Ohio Mitigation Program (OMP) partnered with Great Parks of Hamilton County to restore the



Shawnee Lookout golf course to its natural state, York was invited to assess the area for archaeological sites and offer guidance on adding culturally meaningful native plants.

York has since visited other sites that TNC is set to restore. "Our perspectives and knowledge go back a few more generations than most," says York, smiling. "We have about 20,000 years of cultural wisdom to draw from which gives us unique and crucial insights on stewardship and conservation. We're looking forward to the work we can do together to protect and restore our ancestral lands and waters in Ohio and beyond."

That sentiment goes beyond TNC's ambitious goals; our shared vision of the future depends on it.

"We have about 20,000 years of cultural wisdom to draw from...we're looking forward to the work we can do together to protect and restore our ancestral lands and waters in Ohio and beyond."

—LOGAN YORK, tribal historic preservation officer of the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma

OUR GOALS FOR 2030



Reduce or store
3 gigatons of CO₂
emissions yearly



Benefit 100 million
people



Conserve nearly 10
billion acres of ocean



Conserve 1.6 billion
acres of land



Conserve more
than 620,000 miles
of rivers



Support 45 million
local stewards



OPPOSITE PAGE Welcoming Back Buffalo: Since 2022, TNC has worked with Medicine Fish, a nonprofit organization based on the Menominee Reservation in northern Wisconsin, and the InterTribal Buffalo Council to return buffalo to the Menominee Nation after a 250-year absence. This past May, Medicine Fish announced the birth of the first buffalo calf on the Menominee Nation's reservation since the return of buffalo, an incredible milestone for the Nation and this work. © Medicine Fish

THIS PAGE Restoring Nature: When Shawnee Lookout was developed as a golf course in the 1970s, the natural streams that flowed through the area were dammed to create artificial ponds like the one pictured here. As part of restoring the site, TNC's Ohio Mitigation Program will restore the streams, improving water quality, enhancing in-stream headwater habitat for a diversity of plants and animals, and reestablishing habitat connectivity with existing natural areas. © Devin Schenk/TNC

LAND

Harvesting Conservation throughout Ohio and the Midwest

If you picture a drive across Ohio, you'll likely think of fields of corn and soybeans lining the roads. Agriculture has deep roots in Ohio, starting with Indigenous communities growing crops like squash and beans, and continuing with today's farmers producing a variety of vegetables, fruits, grains and livestock. Our connection to the land often begins with food and farming.

However, agriculture is at a critical crossroads. We know that conventional farming practices contribute significantly to greenhouse gas emissions and damage soil health and water quality. But growing the food we need has also become more complicated and unpredictable due to climate change impacts, including droughts, disrupted supply chains and changing growing seasons. As our population grows, the pressure on farmers to produce more food and in ways that positively contribute to the environment is increasing.

In Ohio, The Nature Conservancy works with farmers to implement regenerative practices that benefit nature, communities and the climate. "We know that farmers want to hear from other farmers," says Stephanie Singer, agriculture outreach specialist. "That's why TNC initiatives like Farmer Advocates for Conservation are so important—they empower and support farmers to ensure their farms remain profitable and viable far into the future."

These photos highlight how our work on sustainable agriculture is making a difference for farmers in Ohio. Learn more at nature.org/ohioag.

1 | Nature-Inspired Solutions for Ohio Farms: Implementing edge-of-field solutions like two-stage ditches, cascading waterways or prairie strips helps Ohio farmers combat climate impacts, improve field conditions and protect waterways. These systems capture, store and filter water, reducing soil and nutrient loss. Our collaboration with The Ohio State University and local partners is building awareness and documenting the effectiveness of these innovative practices.

2 | Farmer Advocates for Conservation: Now in its third year, Farmer Advocates for Conservation is an innovative peer-to-peer learning network where farmers share knowledge on soil health and sustainability. With U.S. EPA Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Funding, 20 Farmer Advocates have connected with over 9,500 other farmers, influencing over 1,023,367 acres. We aim to help farmers transition to regenerative agriculture through shared knowledge and collaboration. Key accomplishments include engaging 44 women through Women's Learning Circles and developing 8 training modules.

3 | Farmers for Soil Health: TNC supports farmers in adopting regenerative practices to restore soil health and enhance farm resilience. Through partnerships and donor support, we help farmers implement cover crops, diverse rotations and nutrient stewardship practices. Over the last year, our efforts have reached 960 people through soil health events and enrolled 4,500 acres of cover crops. Through the Farmers for Soil Health partnership, we aim to see Ohio farmers growing 65,000 acres of cover crops by 2027.

4 | Supporting Black Farmers: In September 2023, TNC sponsored Ohio's Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) Food and Farming Network's Black Farming Conference, reaching 200 attendees. This event, now in its fourth year, provides crucial connections and education on topics from farming practices to applying for grants. Black farmers in Ohio, both urban and rural, are reconnecting with their agricultural heritage and addressing food deserts through regenerative practices. TNC's support helps foster community-driven efforts to sustain and grow Black farming initiatives, ensuring a resilient and connected future.



ONLINE

These photos highlight how our agricultural work is making a difference for farmers in Ohio.

Learn more about our sustainable agriculture work: [nature.org/ohioag](https://www.nature.org/ohioag).

1



2

“These urban and smaller growers approach food production through a lens of environmental justice that has been intrinsically connected from the start. Supporting them advances the work we’re all trying to do.”

—A.J. BOYCE, agriculture conservation practitioner for The Nature Conservancy in Ohio



4



3

WATER

Celebrating a Decade of Restoring Ohio's Waters

In 2021, against the backdrop of Cincinnati's skyline, a yellow backhoe rumbled on the floodplain of Mill Creek. Unlike typical construction scenes in Ohio, this one wasn't clearing nature for new developments—it was restoring the stream and re-creating the wetland habitats of the Rialto Marsh area.

Ohio has lost 90% of its original wetlands, and we must prevent further loss. That's where The Nature Conservancy's Ohio Mitigation Program (OMP) comes in. Unlike traditional approaches, the OMP was founded on federal and state laws to restore wetlands and streams that have been historically damaged from land use activities. By combining funds from many small, permitted impacts, the team implements well-designed restoration projects that have a higher chance of ecological success.

With oversight from federal and state partners, each site is selected within the watersheds affected by development, using The Nature Conservancy's priority freshwater and land protection maps. Upon project completion, the OMP provides financial and on-the-ground support for a decade, ensuring the long-term success and sustainability of the restored systems.

"Before the OMP launched, the Ohio EPA found a 60% failure rate of mitigation. We turned that around," says Devin Schenk, Mitigation Program manager. "By supporting our partners long after the project ends, we ensure that sustainability and longevity are integral to our ecosystem restoration."

Launched in 2014, the OMP has completed 17 restoration projects in 15 counties. Rialto Marsh is just one example of the program's impactful work, which ranges from rivers to small urban park systems. These partnerships also open avenues for TNC to engage with new communities and help us build connections throughout the state.



SINCE ITS BEGINNING IN 2014, THE OMP HAS...

COMPLETED

17 restoration projects in 15 counties

RESTORED

7.2 miles of streams

RESTORED

155 acres of wetlands

BEGUN WORK ON

more than 23 additional restoration projects currently in various implementation or evaluation stages

THIS PAGE **Rialto Marsh**: In 2021, TNC collaborated with an engineering consultant to transform Rialto Marsh from a large field of invasive plants divided by a narrow drainage ditch into a thriving urban wetland, recontouring the stream back to its natural flow, digging shallow pools for wetland habitat and planting nearly 12,000 native trees and shrubs. When heavy rain impacted Cincinnati in 2022, the excess rainwater flowed into the restored marsh, sparing nearby homes and businesses from flooding. © Dana Ohman/TNC

“I get excited about the OMP’s ability to partner with diverse conservation entities in ways that affect the health and well-being of waterways throughout Ohio...I can’t wait to see what the next 10 years bring.”

—DEVIN SCHENK, Ohio Mitigation Program manager



THIS PAGE LEFT TO RIGHT A First for OMP: In December 2023, OMP began removing Brinkhaven Dam on the Mohican River—its first-ever dam removal. By restoring the river’s natural flow patterns, removing the dam restored the river’s natural flow patterns and was a huge win for people and wildlife. © Amelia Harris/TNC; **Before and After Restoration:** In 2019, the OMP restored 1.3 miles of stream and 1.7 acres of wetlands at Strait Creek, recontouring its straightened channels, restoring banks, and reconnecting it to the surrounding natural habitats. Today, this stream in the Appalachian foothills is teeming with life as it meanders through abundant wetlands and forest. © Dana Ohman/TNC

2024

Our Year in Photos

Slithering into Fun: In December 2023, we added a special piece to the Nature Play Area at the Grand River Conservation Campus at our Morgan Swamp Preserve—a gorgeous 3,000-lb. eastern massasauga snake head to complete the snake body balance beam constructed of logs and boulders. A local artist carved the head from a large tree trunk. © Ann Gilmore/TNC



Protecting Land in Ohio: Acquiring the 11-acre McCarty Track at our Edge of Appalachia Preserve was vital for protecting the last of the three knobs of Burr Hill. This unique area supports pitch and Virginia pines, lush mosses, mountain laurel and chestnut oaks. Thanks to donor support, TNC now safeguards this landscape, including Lynx Prairie at the base of the left knob. © Terry Seidel/TNC

Prescribed Fire Is Back in Ohio: For the first time since 2019, prescribed fire touched down again in Ohio at Kitty Todd and Edge of Appalachia Preserves. In total, around 72 acres were burned and we helped partners burn an additional 227 acres in Ohio. We're thrilled that fire is, once again, a regular tool for stewardship in our preserves. © Alex Goetz

Landscape-Scale Restoration: In fall 2023, TNC and partners completed the Pickerel Creek Riparian H2Ohio project—a first step in an ambitious plan to revitalize natural function and habitat throughout Sandusky Bay. This project reconnected the creek to its floodplain, restoring more than 50 acres of wetland habitat. © Alexis Sakas/TNC



Restoring Habitat for Endangered Wildlife: The Ohio Mitigation Program's removal of the Brinkhaven Dam on the Mohican River enabled staff and volunteers to install breeding structures for state-endangered hellbender salamanders in the river. © Amelia Harris/TNC

Volunteers Improve Edge of Appalachia: Over three months, volunteers replaced a 25-foot bridge in the Wilderness area at Edge of Appalachia Preserve. Led by Martin McAllister, they dismantled the old bridge, packed in new materials, and constructed the new bridge, ensuring that the trail remains safe and accessible. Three cheers to everyone who contributed! © Martin McAllister



State-Endangered Black Bear Spotted: Thanks to conservation and reforestation efforts throughout the state, sightings of state-endangered black bears have been increasing—including one spotted last year at Morgan Swamp Preserve! © Robyn Strickland/TNC Photo Contest 2023

CLIMATE

Empowering Families in Conservation



ONLINE

Learn more about FFCP
nature.org/familyforestcarbon

In the 1980s, David Funk began planting trees in Athens County, aiming to restore abandoned farmland to historic oak-hickory forests and inspire future conservationists. Decades later, thanks to the Family Forest Carbon Program (FFCP), his vision is coming to life.

“It’s very exciting that through this program, we’re bringing the next generations into the process around woodland conservation,” says Funk. “Our family’s participation in FFCP is a formal recognition that Southeastern Ohio’s woods are to be treasured.”

THE FAMILY FOREST CARBON PROGRAM

Ohio has just shy of eight million acres of forest, 70% of which are family-owned. Nearly half are 50 acres or less, making private forest owners crucial for conservation. The FFCP, developed by the American Forest Foundation and The Nature Conservancy, offers landowners annual payments and professional forester access. These foresters help landowners implement practices that enhance carbon sequestration, improve forest health, and provide ecosystem benefits.

In return, FFCP enrollees commit to the program for 20 years, ensuring long-term investment in Ohio’s forests. This commitment leads to healthier woodlands, better wildlife habitats, improved water quality, and increased carbon sequestration, securing a brighter future for forests and communities.

LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

Funk was the first to enroll when the FFCP launched in Ohio this past March. Since then, the program has enrolled over 2,500 acres in Ohio with 20 landowners, and nearly 40,000 more are ready to join.

Forest carbon projects like FFCP help landowners diversify revenue and boost forest value. “So many woodland owners just want to do what’s right,” says Tom Rooney, sustainable forestry director at TNC in Ohio. “This program is designed to provide the funding and technical expertise to help keep their forests healthy for years to come.”



THIS PAGE LEFT TO RIGHT David Funk © David Ike; **Family Forest Carbon Program:** Launched in Ohio in March 2024, the Family Forest Carbon Program aims to help Ohio landowners protect and preserve their forests by connecting them with professional foresters. So far, the program has enrolled 20 Ohio landowners and more than 2,500 acres of forest. © David Ike



MINING THE SUN

The United States must invest heavily in clean energy options to mitigate climate change and meet future energy needs. However, developing and locating clean energy projects can create local conflict and negatively impact nature, especially if we continue to look only at undeveloped sites for these projects.

In 2024, The Nature Conservancy unveiled a report, *Mining the Sun*, which showcases that installing clean energy infrastructure on degraded lands like mining sites, landfills and brownfields can be a win-win solution for climate, conservation and communities. In Ohio, there are more than 567,000 acres of mine lands and another 50,000 acres of brownfield sites are suitable for renewable energy development.

This strategy not only provides ample opportunity for renewable energy projects but also protects the state's strong agricultural heritage and critical natural areas by prioritizing siting on lands that are already degraded.

➔ Read the full *Mining the Sun* report at [nature.org/miningthesun](https://www.nature.org/miningthesun).

CONSERVATION SUPPORT

The Nature Conservancy in Ohio is deeply grateful to the many individuals, corporations and foundations that have generously supported our conservation efforts, both locally and globally.

The following supporters contributed \$5,000 or more to TNC between July 1, 2023 and June 30, 2024. The list reflects gifts received during this time and does not include the full value of multi-year pledges. Although space does not permit us to list all gifts to TNC, each contribution, no matter what size, has a direct impact on our critical work to protect people and nature.

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We regret any errors or omissions and ask that you bring them to the attention of the Development Department at 380-206-2172 or ohio@tnc.org.

Nearly 40 years ago, Linda Busken Jergens and Naomi Gerwin crossed paths at church and quickly became friends. For almost that long, they have supported TNC.

Both have a deep passion for the environment. Linda still remembers the high school paper she wrote on Ohio soil conservation, a topic that sparked her life-long interest. As a young mother of three, Naomi and a fellow volunteer developed and led Urban Wildlife, an outreach program for inner-city public schoolchildren to pique their curiosity about the natural world.

Today, meetings with TNC representatives keep them updated on TNC programs and gifting opportunities. Linda and Naomi find it gratifying to show their commitment to TNC's mission through substantial stock donations, which help provide TNC with the necessary resources to continue our crucial and often time-sensitive conservation work in Ohio and elsewhere.

Now they are sharing their passion with others. With support from TNC staff members Kyle Forrester and Martin McAllister, Linda and Naomi hosted a presentation at their retirement community about TNC.

"We were excited to offer this to our neighbors," Naomi says, her eyes lighting up. "It was a privilege, and there was a big turnout. It was heartening to see the interest."

"I enjoy sharing my commitment to the organizations I support with others, and TNC is at the top of the list," says Linda with a warm smile. "We only have one earth. Let's take care of it," adds Naomi.

Their story is one of passion, mentorship, and the joy, passed on from others, of preserving our natural world.



LINDA JERGENS

"We only have one Earth. Let's take care of it."



NAOMI GERWIN

WINNERS OF THE 2023 PHOTO CONTEST



**Grand
Prize**
WINNER



Landscape CATEGORY WINNER



People in Nature CATEGORY WINNER



Wildlife CATEGORY WINNER