

INDIANA UPDATE

FALL 2024



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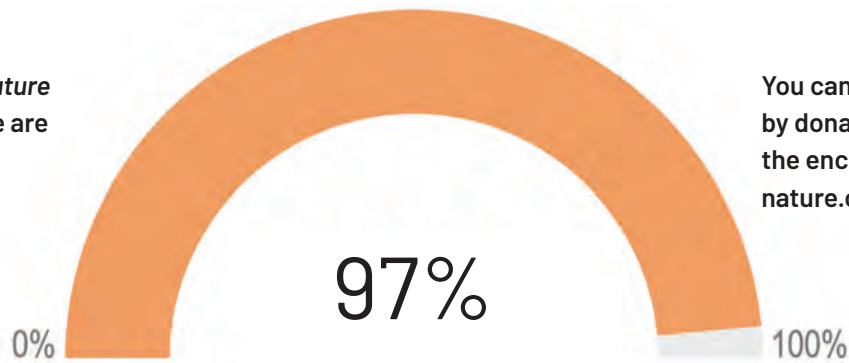
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The Nature
Conservancy



Crossing the Finish Line for Conservation

With 97% of our *Human:Nature* campaign funds raised, we are almost to the finish line.



You can help us reach our goal by donating today. Please use the enclosed envelope or visit nature.org/indiana.

Our *Human:Nature* campaign is almost complete! With your help, over the last four years, we have:

- Permanently protected another 10,000 acres in Indiana
- Partnered with the agricultural sector to set a cover crop record three years in a row, improving both water quality for Hoosiers and habitat for countless plants and animals.
- Enhanced visitor amenities and accessibility at our most popular preserve, Kankakee Sands in northwest Indiana
- Developed a tool to engage with Indiana's clean energy buyers and developers to help transition to renewable energy without conflicting with communities, conservation or agriculture.

Right now, your gift will be doubled!

To honor the legacy of Dan Efroymson, the Efroymson Family Fund is matching all gifts to our organization, up to a total of \$300,000!



Our People

After 26 years with TNC, Matt Williams has left his position as Indiana Conservation Program Leader. In addition to leading our conservation work statewide, Matt provided us with countless amazing bird images. Birding and photography are passions of Matt's, and he is featured in TNC's new Belize video (see page 7). Matt is headed to the Sam Shine Foundation, where he will have the opportunity to create a new bird conservation program. We're excited for Matt to tackle this new challenge!

We're also excited to announce that Cassie Hauswald has returned to TNC as Matt's replacement. Cassie was a TNC employee from 2000 through 2022, holding a variety of positions on our conservation team, which will serve her well in her new position. Welcome back, Cassie!



Matt Williams and Cassie Hauswald

Additional New TNC Staff in Indiana

Emily Glover

Little Calumet River Crew Leader

Mel Hendrickson

Grand Calumet River Field Crew Member

Jordan Houlihan

Grand Calumet River Assistant Crew Leader

Danielle Randles

Regenerative Agriculture Manager

Shay Seibring

Kankakee Sands Field Technician

Maddie Thompson

Grand Calumet River Field Crew Member

COVER: Belize Maya Forest © Fauna Creative; Scarlet tanager, prothonotary warbler, wood thrush © Matt Williams

ABOVE: Matt Williams © Fauna Creative; Cassie Hauswald © Matt Williams

Printed on 100% PCW recycled, process chlorine-free paper, creating the following benefits: 23.4 trees preserved for the future, 604.2 gallons water saved and 3513.6 lbs. CO₂.



Under Dan Efroymson's leadership, TNC in Indiana was one of the first state programs to embrace global conservation by supporting the protection of the Condor Bioreserve in Ecuador. © Bart Culver

Leaving a Legacy

The next time you're hiking the Wet Prairie Trail at our Kankakee Sands Preserve, be on the lookout for a rock. But not just any rock—this one has a special name on it: Efroymson. In fact, you'll see that name on the new signage, because the official name of the preserve is the Efroymson Prairie at Kankakee Sands. You'll also see that name attached to our building in Indianapolis as well as countless other places throughout the state and even in faraway places such as Belize and Ecuador.

The Efroymson Family and their commitment to The Nature Conservancy (TNC) have spanned 50 years. In fact, Dan Efroymson not only served as chair for the Indiana Chapter Board of Trustees, but also as chair for TNC's Global Board of Governors. He followed in the footsteps of his father Robert and his Uncle Clarence—two of TNC's first supporters in Indiana.

I met Dan back in 1992 at one of my first trustee meetings as a new employee. Over the years I accompanied Dan on

several donor and partner meetings; at every meeting I learned something about developing great relationships and partnerships. I also witnessed how a passion for nature can motivate people to do great things.

Denny McGrath, former state director of TNC's Indiana Chapter, reflected on Dan's impact: "During meetings, speeches and donor calls, Dan said something both profound and prescient. 'Humanity is engaged in one of the biggest experiments ever; how we live on this planet.' Dan was ahead of most in his thinking."

Dan was taken from us much too soon in 1999, yet his legacy lives on through his family foundation. Today, his widow Lori carries on the tradition by serving as a life trustee, keeping the family's connection to TNC strong. To honor Dan 25 years after his passing, the Efroymson Family Fund recently gave a \$1 million gift to TNC. Just as Dan would have done, the Efroymson Family Fund gift is offering a match to

challenge the rest of us to close out our \$48 million *Human:Nature* campaign.

All gifts to our organization will be matched, up to a total of \$300,000.

Their generous gift is a springboard for us to finish the job.

Your legacy for conservation may not be a rock at Kankakee Sands, but we can—and must—all do our part to shape a healthy future for Hoosiers. Dan's family continues the legacy of the Efroymson family. I hope you will join me along with many other supporters to start our own legacies for conservation.

Yours in conservation,



Larry Clemens,
Indiana State
Director

© Fauna Creative



In March, TNC staff used prescribed fire at Prairie Border Nature Preserve to thin out the preserve, creating more suitable habitat for grassland birds and other native species. © Stuart Orr/TNC; Stuart Orr © Fauna Creative

Return the Burn

By Stuart Orr, Fire Manager, The Nature Conservancy in Indiana

We're in the middle of The Nature Conservancy's fall burning season. A typical prescribed fire day begins with TNC staff and volunteers filling engines, gathering tools, and driving to the burn unit. I'm there, measuring temperature, winds, relative humidity and fuels to make sure all conditions are right for a safe fire. Depending on how many acres we're burning that day, we may not finish until well after dark. Then we get up the next day and do it all over again. Our fall prescribed fire season typically runs through mid-December, so we have many days left to burn.

Why put so many resources into a prescribed fire? Fire is a natural part of most of the world's terrestrial ecosystems and has been a part of Indiana's landscape for thousands of years. Here in the humid Midwest, lightning-caused fires were relatively

uncommon. Most fires were set by Indigenous Peoples, and the cultural use of fire to manage the land is well documented. The natural systems that coevolved with this human management—prairies, savannas, fens, and oak woodlands—depend on fairly frequent fire.

With the colonization of Indiana by Europeans, and the subsequent transformations of the landscape, this vital force has been mostly eliminated from the land. We have seen what a century of fire suppression has done, and TNC and our partners are using the best science and training to bring good fire back to restore these natural areas.

History of TNC's Prescribed Fire Program

Since our first prescribed burn in 1986, TNC has revitalized thousands of acres of fire-dependent land. We have been steadily building up our fire program by

investing in our staff and equipment and forging partnerships with other groups such as the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and the Hoosier National Forest. Last year, the Indiana Chapter led 31 burns on a record 3,456 acres and assisted our partners on 11 burns on another 3,594 acres.

Think of the Birds

Only a very small percentage of Indiana's grasslands remain. Not surprisingly, grassland birds are the fastest declining bird group. If the prairies and grasslands that are left are not managed with regular fire, they could easily fill in, becoming a shrubland or forest. Shrublands and forests are appropriate in many places, but they're not what grassland birds need. Keeping fire on the ground at these special places helps maintain plant and animal diversity. Prescribed fire is one of the most effective tools for controlling invasive species, allowing native species to thrive. With your help, we will continue growing this important program.



Katey Powell © Fauna Creative

“Anywhere we can restore these grasslands, the grassland birds can come find them and say ‘Ah yes, I can have a home!’ Then we can give them a fighting chance to survive for the long run.”

— **Katey Powell**, Northwest Indiana Land Steward and Burn Crew Member, The Nature Conservancy



Scan this QR code to view our new prescribed fire video!

Midwest Stories of Hope— for Nature and People

Positive achievements can—and are—happening right in your backyard.

The twin threats of climate change and biodiversity loss can feel overwhelming at times. At TNC, we know that we can make a difference because we have a long history of success in helping both people and nature thrive.

Below is just one example of how TNC and our partners are making a difference in the Midwest and beyond—and providing hope for the future.

Restoring Buffalo to Indigenous Tribes

TNC manages more than 7,000 buffalo (also known as bison) at 11 preserves throughout the United States, including at Kankakee Sands in Indiana and Nachusa Grasslands in Illinois. On TNC preserves, buffalo help maintain the health of grasslands. Their grazing and other behaviors help a wide range of wildflowers, plants, insects and amphibians flourish.

For Indigenous Peoples, buffalo represent much, much more. The animals are a cultural keystone and core to the identity and lifeways of many Indigenous communities.

In 2022, TNC established its Buffalo Restoration Program whereby more than 1,600 buffalo, born and raised on TNC preserves have made the long journey—over time and distance—back to their



The Kankakee Sands bison herd is part of TNC's Buffalo Restoration Program, which is helping to repair the relationship between buffalo and Indigenous People

ancestral lands. The transfers from TNC herds follow the leadership of Indigenous organizations, including the InterTribal Buffalo Council (ITBC) and Tanka Fund, and are part of a growing partnership to help drive the largest restoration of buffalo to Indigenous Peoples.

Most important, we are playing a supportive role in repairing the relationship between buffalo and Indigenous Peoples that was severed by colonization and the ensuing violence against Native Americans and buffalo in the 1800s.

From Nachusa to Wisconsin

In October 2022, TNC's Nachusa Grasslands, a 4,000-acre restored prairie in northern Illinois, transferred 10 buffalo to the Menominee Tribe in Wisconsin after a 250-year absence. The transfer supported a community effort by the Indigenous nonprofit Medicine Fish to connect Menominee youth and community to land, water and buffalo.

"It was an emotional moment to see the arrival of buffalo, says Jason Baldes, board member, ITBC. "We circled up to sing, and the Menominee people prayed in

their own language. Tears were flowing."

In 2023, an additional five buffalo were transferred from Nachusa and welcomed home by the Menominee Nation.

From Kankakee Sands to Minnesota

In 2016, TNC brought 23 bison to Kankakee Sands to help manage the restored prairies at this northwestern Indiana preserve. Historically, bison were found across the state of Indiana and were an integral part of its grasslands.

Kankakee Sands soon followed suit, transferring four buffalo to the White Earth Band of Ojibwe in Minnesota in 2023. When the bison arrived, there was a small drum group and a spiritual advisor to capture the spiritual and cultural integrity. "The return of bison is symbolic," said one tribal member.



To read more Midwest Stories of Hope, visit nature.org/MidwestHope.

Belize © Lucas Bustamante

A Midwest Priority: Belize Maya Forest

From the Forests of Belize to the Midwest and Back Again

When you see a wood thrush this fall, you're likely seeing one at the tail end of the fall migrations, when millions of birds move from their spring and summer breeding grounds to their winter homes.

These small animals that weigh about the same as this publication you're holding will travel more than 2,000 miles. During our winter, they keep warm in the tropical evergreen forests of Mexico and Central America. During this lengthy migration, they will need to



Wood thrush © Matt Williams

rest and refuel, which can be challenging given the increasing fragmentation of suitable habitat.

Toward this end, TNC has protected more than 90,000 acres of land, lakes and wetlands, as well as over 200 miles of river systems, across the Midwest in just the past 4½ years. Recognizing the need on the other end of the migration route, five Midwest states banded together to help protect 236,000 acres of Belize's Maya Forest—prime habitat for not only the wood thrush, but thousands of other species from the howler monkey to the jaguar.

Saved in the Nick of Time

A few years ago, the Belize Maya Forest was up for sale. Block by block, local conservationists had seen the area being deforested for agricultural expansion.

"Had it not been for TNC and its partners coming together to purchase this land, this would have been an agricultural field. There was a lot at stake," said Alana Godoy, Executive



Alana Godoy © Fauna Creative

Lead for The Nature Conservancy in Belize. With swift action and funding from TNC in the Midwest and others, the land is protected in perpetuity. Since then, TNC created the Belize Maya Forest Trust, the organization charged with stewarding the newly-protected Belize Maya Forest property.

"A forest that takes hundreds of years to grow into a primary forest can be lost in minutes. Once a bulldozer comes in, acres and acres of forest can go down in one day," said Elma Kay, Belize Maya Forest Trust Director.



Belize deforestation © Fauna Creative

“A forest that takes hundreds of years to grow into a primary forest can be lost in minutes.”

— **Elma Kay**, Belize Maya Forest Trust Director

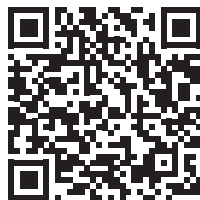


Elma Kay © Fauna Creative

Kay continued, “By protecting habitats that these birds need, we are also protecting habitats for the iconic jaguar, the endangered spider monkeys, tapirs—all this incredible biodiversity.”

Watch Online

What do these beautiful birds and the places they fly to look like? Get a glimpse and learn more about this story in our new Belize video on YouTube, featuring some of the people who helped make this happen.



Go to youtube.com/@thenatureconservancyindiana or scan this QR code.



Franklin's ground squirrel released onto the Kankakee Sands prairie. © Justin Moore, M.Sc. Candidate, Purdue Fort Wayne

State-Endangered Franklin's Ground Squirrel Back on the Kankakee Sands Prairie

Exciting news back here in Indiana! TNC partnered with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and Purdue Fort Wayne to release 25 Franklin's ground squirrels onto the Efrogmson Prairie at Kankakee Sands this summer to help bolster its numbers in the state. This has always been the goal of the Kankakee Sands restoration—to create a grassland conservation area where all prairie plants and animals can thrive. Go to nature.org/Indiana for more details!

Gift Matching Opportunity

We have another matching opportunity, courtesy of several of our Indiana trustees. Your gift to support TNC's work in Belize and our Belize partnership will be matched up to \$50,000! To make your donation or learn more, please contact Stephanie Collins at s.i.collins@tnc.org or (317) 829-1826.

Maximizing Indiana's Low-Conflict Renewable Energy Potential

By Sean Mobley, Senior Policy Associate for Climate & Clean Energy,
The Nature Conservancy in Indiana

This past spring and summer—with many sunny days and the total solar eclipse observed throughout much of Indiana—many looked to the sky and marveled at the sun's power. Stakeholders in the energy sector, too, have spent the last year considering how the sun can power our communities and our economy more sustainably. Indiana is a leader in this arena: we've tripled our solar installations from 2021 to 2022, and Indiana now ranks eighth in the nation for projected solar energy growth by 2025.

With thousands of megawatts of solar energy projects currently under construction or in development—and overall demand for renewable energy still growing—the coming months will be critical to ensuring community and conservation are considered equally with climate outcomes. Indiana and the Midwest region are particularly rich with opportunities to expand our solar capacity by advocating for low-conflict renewable energy development through robust community input and avoiding the unintended impacts to nature, wildlife, habitat, and our rural landscapes.

One such strategy is The Nature Conservancy's *Mining the Sun*. It is designed to bring life back to degraded lands—like mine lands, brownfields, and landfills—through renewable energy projects. Analysis by TNC shows that more than 300,000 acres of mine lands and brownfields in Indiana could host



Sean Mobley © Fauna Creative

solar and other clean energy technologies. These lands hold tremendous promise for low-impact development, and they often have preexisting transmission lines and roads that make them relatively easy for clean energy development.

Creating clean energy hubs on these lands would help keep project costs down while also giving new life to them. New federal incentives, including those in the Inflation Reduction Act, can also help reduce costs for renewable energy developers. The Indiana Department of Natural Resources has \$385 million in federal grants available to reclaim abandoned mine lands, which could be used to prepare these sites for clean energy development.

Revitalizing mine lands with new clean energy projects can also drive economic development. As coal usage declines, mines are no longer providing jobs and tax revenues. Repurposing this land for clean energy development can generate

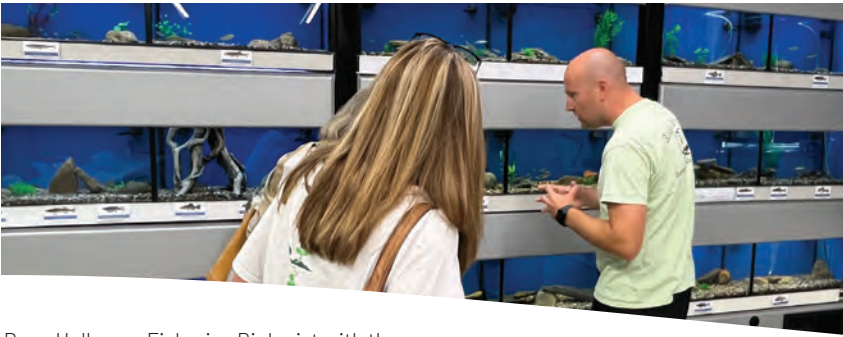
new revenue streams for landowners and local governments and create jobs in construction and maintenance.

And rather than disrupting natural areas and agricultural lands by building solar sites, using existing mine lands and brownfields to host solar projects can help us meet our renewable energy goals and electricity demands without further harm to plant and animal habitats.

Indiana communities agree with this path forward. A recent survey commissioned by TNC found that 64% of Hoosiers are favorable to solar energy and 68% of Indiana residents support adding state incentives to facilitate solar and wind development on brownfields and mine lands.

TNC is embarking on a robust education and outreach effort with state and local decision-makers to make clean energy development on degraded lands easier and more streamlined. In partnership with the Conservation Law Center, TNC is drafting model legislative language to be considered in the 2025 Indiana General Assembly and will continue to advocate for policies that prioritize the interests of communities and conservation in clean energy actions.

TNC is committed to keeping Indiana a leader in the clean energy transition by maximizing these critical projects' climate, community, and conservation outcomes.



Did You Know?

Reproduction is a tricky process for our native freshwater mussels, with fish being a critical part of the reproductive strategy. Each species of mussel can only propagate with the help of a specific species of fish. For example, the wavy-rayed lampmussel can only be hosted by largemouth and smallmouth bass.

Drew Holloway, Fisheries Biologist with the Muncie Bureau of Water Quality, shows visitors the new mussel rearing facility, created in partnership with TNC and the Indianapolis Zoo. © Muncie Bureau of Water Quality

Improving Water Quality in the Upper White River

By Sarah Reilly, White River Project Director and Joe Schmees, Freshwater Strategy Manager



Joe Schmees and Sarah Reilly © TNC

Adding More Mussel Power

Did you know that just one mussel can filter up to 15 gallons of water per day? Mussels also stabilize the river bottom where they live. Thus, healthy mussel populations can help improve habitat and water quality.

According to local lore, in the 1800s, it was impossible to walk across the White River near Muncie without landing on a mussel with every step. Now, about 70 percent of freshwater mussels in North America are extinct or imperiled.

To help increase imperiled mussel populations, TNC has partnered with the Muncie Bureau of Water Quality and the Indianapolis Zoo to construct a

mussel-rearing facility in Muncie, Indiana. This facility is the first of its kind. Located adjacent to the White River, it uses water flowing directly from the river.

Once the mussels have grown to approximately 4-5 mm in diameter, they will be placed either in the White River or in nearby Prairie Creek Reservoir. Monitoring will continue over the next three years, and data will be analyzed to determine which sites result in the fastest growth and highest survival.

With this facility, TNC and partners are boosting struggling mussel populations and protecting these amazing and underappreciated animals that continuously clean our rivers and lakes. While we may never walk on a bed of mussels again, the Muncie rearing facility is here to give them a much-needed boost back into the river.

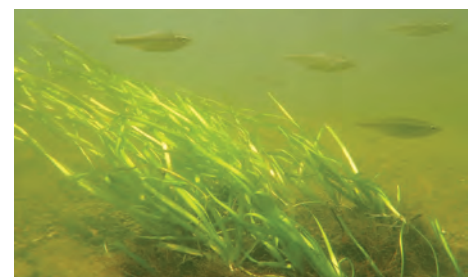
Nature's Nursery: Planting Habitat in the White River

Submerged aquatic vegetation is an important component of stream ecosystems. It helps anchor stream beds and provides essential cover, especially for recently-hatched larval fish, which are critical to mussel

populations. Unfortunately, submerged vegetation levels have declined with urban development and increased agricultural runoff.

To reverse this trend, The Nature Conservancy is partnering with Ecosystems Connections Institute (ECI) to reintroduce submerged vegetation in the Upper White River. With support from the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust, ECI planted five experimental submerged vegetation plots this year. ECI will monitor fish and mussel species populations at each site.

TNC recently received funding from the George and Frances Ball Foundation to expand this work to include the introduction of lab-reared mussels at established submerged vegetation sites.



Submerged aquatic vegetation bed in the Eel River in Northern Indiana © Ecosystems Connections Institute



Students from William McKinley Elementary School journal about the different bird species they saw. © Jessica Fernandez/TNC

Grand Calumet Stewardship Day

by Jessica Fernandez, Grand Calumet River Crew Leader



Fifth graders from William McKinley Elementary School and Grand Calumet Stewardship Day partners pose for a silly picture. © Joel Zavala/TNC

Each spring, The Nature Conservancy partners with the Illinois Indiana Sea Grant to host the Grand Calumet Stewardship Day—a field trip designed to increase awareness about the restoration occurring within the Grand Calumet River region. Designated as an Area of Concern by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency due to past heavy industrial use, the area is being remediated by TNC and partners.

This year, 60 fifth graders from East Chicago’s William McKinley Elementary School visited the Grand Calumet River.

Students got to hold preserved fish collected before the remediation, identify macroinvertebrates, learn about water quality, explore the preserve, and journal about what they experienced. As the event organizer for the day, I got to see all the students learning and having fun that day!

For many, it was their first time seeing the Grand Calumet River or spending time in a nature preserve, despite living in the area.

It’s inspiring to see the students experience nature for the first time. My favorite quote from the day was “This place is mysterious. There’s a lot of bugs!” Yes, lots of bugs, and thanks



Jennifer Johnson (far right) with Audubon Great Lakes Wild Indigo program teaches fifth graders how to use binoculars for the first time. TNC’s Nathan Herbert (ballcap) joined the fun. © Jessica Fernandez/TNC



Jessica Fernandez © TNC

to the remediation work, lots of birds to eat the bugs!

Grand Calumet Stewardship Day Partners

- Illinois Indiana Sea Grant
- US Fish and Wildlife
- Dunes Learning Center
- Audubon Great Lakes
- Shirley Heinze Land Trust
- Environmental Protection Agency
- Student Conservation Association
- United States Army Corp of Engineers
- Indiana Department of Natural Resources
- Department of Nature Preserves
- Lake County Parks & Rec Department
- Indiana Department of Environmental Management



More than 600 people celebrated the monarch through art and dance at this year's Festival de la Monarca. © Marino Solario/City of East Chicago

Festival de la Monarca

In September, the seventh annual Festival de la Monarca was held in East Chicago, Indiana. This year's Festival was attended by more than 600 people, surpassing last year's numbers. The monarch butterfly and its ties to the Latino culture were celebrated through food, dance, art and butterfly releases.

The Festival would not be a success without staff and volunteers from TNC and our Lakeshore partners, including the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and Lake County Parks. Everyone made all the planning pay off. See you at next year's Festival!



New improvements at the Bison Viewing Area offer greater visibility of the Kankakee Sands herd. © Trevor Edmonson/TNC

Kankakee Sands Improvements

Just in time for National Bison Day on November 2, we unveiled the improvements at Kankakee Sands, all designed to improve access and the visitor experience at Kankakee Sands. These improvements will help make Kankakee Sands a more welcoming, inspiring and educational destination for

all visitors. Improvements include new bison viewing decks with spotting scopes, picnic areas, improved parking areas and interpretive signage. We can't wait for you to visit and enjoy these new features!

Volunteer Spotlight

Chris Donohue is an active volunteer and member of the Hoosier Hikers Council. Chris and his Hoosier Hiker teammates have built trails at TNC's Big Walnut, Hitz-Rhodehamel and Green's Bluff nature preserves. These new trails are helping connect more people to nature and to TNC.

We chatted with Chris about what motivates him to volunteer for nature, and you can read the Q&A with Chris at [nature.org/indianavolunteer/](https://www.nature.org/indianavolunteer/)






Chris Donohue is also a prescribed fire crew member for TNC. In this photo, Chris is helping out during a prescribed fire on a trail he helped build! © Chris Neggers/TNC

INDIANA UPDATE

FALL 2024



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Create your conservation legacy.

What better legacy is there than your commitment to protecting the Earth for future generations? Whether you are taking the first steps toward planning your estate or are in the process of updating your estate plans, The Nature Conservancy is here to help.

For a truly remarkable story of a commitment to conservation, turn to page 3 to learn about Dan Efroymsen and his enduring legacy.

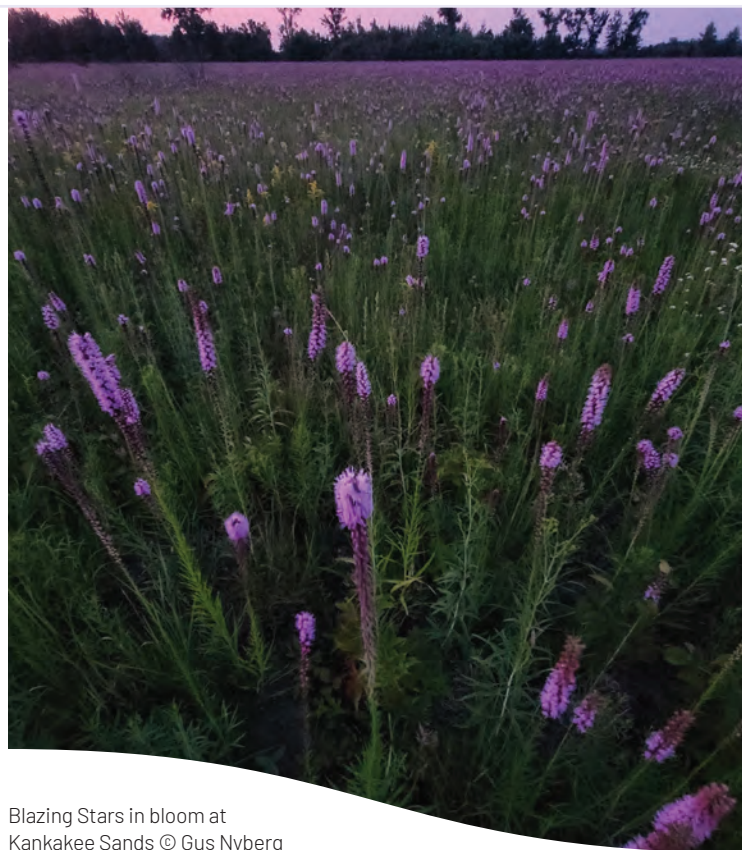
Contact us today.

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 [nature.org/legacy](https://www.nature.org/legacy)



Blazing Stars in bloom at Kankakee Sands © Gus Nyberg