

DELAWARE ACORNS

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Letter from the Director



March 25, 2020 — Today and always, I am especially grateful for your support as we work together to create a world where all of nature, including humanity, thrives. With the COVID-19 pandemic affecting our lives in profound ways, I've been reminded daily of the peace, tranquility and restorative power that nature provides. We remain as committed as ever to our mission and continue our work to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. We know a brighter future lies ahead, and to that end I'm pleased to share some chapter news with you.

The beginning of this year marked an exciting milestone for The Nature Conservancy in Delaware. In January, the Delaware and Pennsylvania chapters of TNC combined our programs, staff, and Boards. Our Board and staff unanimously supported this decision—it will result in more resources for conservation efforts on the ground in Delaware.

Combining our back-office operations reduced redundancies in roles performed in both states and will add capacity and depth to specific areas of our work in Delaware, specifically on-the-ground conservation and government relations. Over time, the combined chapter will also take advantage of our shared landscapes to increase our conservation impact at an ecosystem scale. As always, our TNC supporters will be able to direct their gifts to the places and projects they care most about—in Delaware or across the globe.

I'm happy to announce that Lori Brennan has been hired as executive director to lead these efforts in Delaware and Pennsylvania. Lori joined TNC in late March and is based in our Conshohocken, Pa. office. Lori has over 20 years of experience working in leadership roles with regional and national non-profit organizations. We look forward to great things to come under her leadership.

I also wanted to let you know that the *Acorns* newsletter will be replaced with a two-page quarterly update that will feature articles about TNC's efforts across Pennsylvania and Delaware. You'll find this quarterly newsletter inside the front cover of *Nature* magazine. Look for the first edition of the new magazine insert in the summer edition, arriving in your mailbox soon.

As my time in Delaware concludes, I leave confident that this merger is in the best interest of TNC's ability to deliver lasting, tangible conservation results in Delaware and Pennsylvania. We look forward to more great conservation to come in 2020 and the years ahead.

For now, as we navigate these difficult waters together, I hope you are finding some solace in nature. The events of the past few weeks have only strengthened my deep appreciation for why our work to safeguard the natural world is so important. Thank you for your commitment to our mission during this challenging time.

Sincerely,

Allison Vogt
Interim Director, Delaware
Deputy Executive Director, Maryland/DC



Lessons Learned on the Front Lines

A FIREFIGHTING WORKSHOP IN BELIZE PROVIDES UNIQUE TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Attending a wildfire suppression workshop in Belize might initially sound like a cushy work getaway but Natasha Whetzel, land steward for Delaware's preserves, would tell you that the reality was far from relaxing. The days of fighting flames on the pine savannah were long, hot and exhausting.

The trainings are conducted on a forest reserve that has a sustainably harvested timber operation and sawmill. Local workers indicate where they would like to do timber harvests and then spot arson fires are set there for training purposes. The burned vegetation makes accessing the site easier for heavy equipment. It's a win-win for the TNC staff members who are building their skills and for the natural landscape, which is a fire-dependent system similar to the longleaf pine ecosystem found in the southeastern US.

TNC coaches and local experts taught the trainees how to extinguish wildfires employing techniques that relied mostly on simple hand tools and

minimal usage of water. In addition, the workshop participants took turns performing different leadership roles to gain the experience required to advance their firefighting careers.

Here on the East Coast we're lucky that we rarely face large wildfires capable of destroying entire communities and landscapes, especially when compared to the reality facing many of our colleagues who live in drier climates in the West. Most of TNC's state-based chapters now use prescribed fire to naturally manage lands but managing a prescribed burn can be quite different from managing a wildfire. Since our region provides limited opportunities for staff to gain real-life experience fighting wildfires, the workshop provides valuable exposure to new scenarios and approaches.

Natasha attended the workshop as a trainee in Belize last year and was invited this year by TNC's Belize Fire Suppression Workshop overhead [supervisor] to assist as a crew coach.

"This year I was there to support the workshop and the participants," says Natasha. "This experience helped build my understanding of the tasks that overhead staff encounter while they're planning and managing workshops and trainings."

Natasha explains how TNC has made greater efforts recently to better support women in fire—a job that has traditionally been dominated by men, especially in management roles.

"I'm working on my leadership skills thanks to TNC fire management," Natasha explains. "This coaching experience will help me support fire trainings here, in the mid-Atlantic region. It's not just a benefit to Delaware and Pennsylvania, it's beneficial for others in the region who work in prescribed and wildland fire."



For more stories about fire visit nature.org/delaware.

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TO CONSERVE THE LANDS
AND WATERS ON WHICH
ALL LIFE DEPENDS



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Restoring Habitat in Sussex County

In December 2019, 22 acres of former agricultural fields at our Middleford North Preserve in western Sussex County were reforested with 7,150 native trees and shrubs. This project, funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, aims to increase and improve headwater forest habitat in the Nanticoke River watershed. Ultimately, this increased forest cover will help improve water quality in the Gravelly Branch of the Nanticoke River, which is a tributary of the Chesapeake Bay.

Land steward Natasha Whetzel says that the trees planted include a mix of shortleaf pine, southern red oak, blackjack oak, black oak, white oak, chestnut oak, mockernut hickory and persimmon as well as highbush and lowbush blueberries.

Funding for this project is provided by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.