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Conservancy 

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When we decided to focus this issue on our water work in Missouri, we quickly realized there was no way to cover it all in 16 pages.

Water flows through almost everything The Nature Conservancy does, often literally. No surprise there. Our mission is to “conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.” But sometimes even I can forget how far that extends.

TNC in Missouri has been working since its inception on the health of the rivers, streams, lakes and wetlands that spiderweb across the state.

Given Missouri’s location in the middle of the Mississippi River Basin, the good and bad of what happens to water here affects people and ecosystems all the way down to the Gulf of Mexico. Our task is to amplify the good and limit the bad. Simple, right?

Well, maybe not so simple in practice, but the increasing variety of our methods is encouraging. It seems like every year—sometimes every month—brings another tool for water conservation. Read on to learn about why we are getting into mitigation banking and how it can blunt environmental damage to water resources. Or see the way we’re supporting organizations that are implementing nature-based solutions in cities to reduce stormwater runoff in the Mississippi River.

Even encouraging more people to get out and enjoy the state’s rivers and streams can be a catalyst for conservation. I recently spoke to Roo Yawitz of Big Muddy Adventures on our podcast, *It’s in Our Nature*, about Missouri’s growing outdoor recreation scene and the enormous potential it holds for environmental and economic benefits. (See excerpts on pages 12-13.) For a lot of us, it was an early experience outdoors that sparked our interest in our natural surroundings. There’s just something about canoeing the Missouri River or casting a line in the cold, clear waters of the Current River that stays with you. Roo and his crew see it every time they introduce someone new to the river.

“I think the more people that care about the river, the better,” Roo said. “There’s plenty of room out there for everybody.”

How could I not agree with that? If there’s one thing that I’ve learned from this work, it’s that our rivers need allies, as many as they can get.

This report highlights some of the partnerships and projects underway. We were never going to be able to cover them all, but that’s good news. Thanks to your support, there are always more on the horizon.

Adam McLane
Missouri State Director



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THIS PAGE Adam McLane © Kristy Stoyer/TNC

COVER Gar feed in a canal off of the Missouri River in Atchison County. © Doyle Murphy/TNC



Tributaries

The Nature Conservancy's water work in Missouri flows from a wealth of partnerships

A construction crew's heavy machinery cranks into action shortly after sunrise in the northwest corner of Missouri. Startled, a great blue heron bolts from a shallow pool at the edge of a soybean field and scrambles into the air. After a couple ungainly flaps of its long wings, it climbs high enough to clear the rise of a new levee and then glides over the bottomlands below.

This stretch of Atchison County along the Missouri River has undergone an overhaul during the past three years.

Flooding that wracked the middle of the country in 2019 swamped 56,000 acres of land in Atchison County alone, forcing nearly 300 people from their homes. An estimated \$25 million in agricultural revenues were lost as water sat for months on top of fields and roads.

"It was an ocean—grain bins spilled, the interstate closed," recalls Barbara Charry of The Nature Conservancy.

It wasn't just the damage. The 2019 flood was the latest in a string of major floods, dating back to what some called the "Great Flood" of 1993, that seem to be hitting more often than ever before. As the water receded, residents

re-examined their increasingly fraught relationship with the river. They came to two conclusions: Something had to change, and the solution would require a lot of help.

Today, those early conversations have yielded not only a bulwark against a repeat of 2019, but also a national model for the ways a small community and a host of partners can accomplish something huge.

Agencies at the local, state and federal levels have collaborated with Atchison County Levee District No. 1, local farmers and TNC on the multi-year project to move five miles of the 71-year-old levee inland. The new alignment swings wide from the river, creating more than 1,000 acres of additional floodplain to accommodate high waters.

Regan Griffin, a levee district board member and farm manager, says it is clear now that the new levee is largely finished, that choosing to do the project was the right decision. But it wasn't easy. It required a lot of trust from locals who were willing to compromise and work with agencies and organizations they hadn't in the past.

"There wasn't the pushback," Griffin recalls. "It was, 'OK, let's see how this goes.'"

The Nature Conservancy served as a convener in the levee repair project, pulling together nearly a dozen partners to sort out the complexities of an approximately \$107 million, multi-year project to realign the levee.

It's a role TNC has often played while expanding its freshwater work in Missouri in recent years. Around the state, there are miles of rebuilt streambanks, healthier fish habitats and flood-fighting systems that bear the Conservancy's fingerprints. But none of the projects was a solo mission. Embedded in all the work is a spine of collaborations.

It's a strategy rooted in two simple truths: There is more work to do than TNC could ever complete on its own, and people closest to a problem are the most likely to know what's needed. That's as true of the overarching fight against climate change—the ultimate group project—as it is of the smallest stream restoration.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

In Missouri, you can trace a progression of relationship-building through the Conservancy’s freshwater projects, says TNC’s Steve Herrington. He points to an early collaboration on LaBarque Creek in Jefferson County as a starting point.

LaBarque is by far the most biodiverse of the Meramec River’s tributaries. Researchers have recorded more than 50 species of fish within its six miles, but a bend belonging to Washington University was rapidly eroding, losing more than 400 tons of stream-clogging sediment in just a few years.

In 2017, TNC partnered with the university’s Tyson Research Center to repair the streambank using bioengineering techniques. It was an opportunity to do important conservation work on a jewel of biodiversity, and it also allowed TNC to strengthen a partnership and offer a real-world demonstration of how nature can be used to solve an infrastructure problem.

Washington University and TNC invited representatives from state and federal agencies, including the Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Army Corps of Engineers, as well as a television camera crew, to tour the site in progress. The restoration included rebuilding the bank with layers of tree roots, earth, natural-fiber cloth and live plantings—a departure from riprap,

which is more common but adds little ecological value.

“If you want to influence other agencies’ approach to conservation, it makes sense to demonstrate those techniques,” Herrington says. “People don’t believe it until they see it.”

In the five years since the LaBarque Creek restoration, TNC has worked with all the agencies who visited the site that day and scores of other partners.

A major restoration on the Elk River with the Missouri Department of Natural Resources followed LaBarque, showcasing even more nature-based solutions to stop erosion that was eating 8,000 tons of privately owned ground every year. Some 60 people attended a tour of that site shortly after completion. Next came a string of projects on Huzzah Creek—another high biodiversity and economically important stream in the Meramec River Basin.

As momentum builds for nature-based solutions in Missouri, TNC has helped replace dangerous low-water crossings with free-standing bridges and worked with farmers to protect riparian corridors and use fertilizer efficiently so it doesn’t wash into streams. In St. Louis, TNC has supported green infrastructure projects to reduce harmful runoff in the Mississippi River.

In some cases, TNC leads the projects. In others, the Conservancy is supporting cast. But one of the great successes is to see bioengineering and other nature-based solutions spread beyond TNC projects. The larger goal of all the demonstration sites has always been to share the lessons.

In August, Herrington hosted a two-day tour of restoration sites for representatives of the Army Corps of Engineers’ Kansas City district who were doing research as federal authorities prepare guidelines for restorations. They visited a just-finished restoration at Kiefer Creek in Castlewood State Park in St. Louis County and a few spots in the Ozarks.

One of the highlights was a return to LaBarque where the work done a half-decade ago is bursting with life. Bald patches where a previous landowner had cleared trees are now covered in shoulder-deep greenery, cooling the water in its shade and providing food for bugs and the tiny fish that eat them. The hands-on work at LaBarque is done, but it’s still producing results—for the life of the creek and as a model for future restorations.

The lessons learned through years of collaborating on freshwater projects and planning across Missouri paid off in Atchison County.



The complex nature of realigning five miles of federal levee across a patchwork of properties—some privately owned, others part of federal lands and state conservation areas—would have prevented anyone from pulling it off alone. It combined a major feat of construction and engineering on the part of the Army Corps of Engineers with the dogged efforts of the Atchison County Levee District and partners, including TNC, Natural Resources Conservation Service and the State of Missouri.

Together, they navigated guidelines for land acquisition funding and worked with farmers and local, state and federal agencies on floodplain land deals. There were land surveys to conduct and government programs to work through. TNC mediated complicated real estate transactions with private landowners, helping ensure the project moved forward and owners were fairly compensated. Underlying it all were the residents who were counting on the project to protect a way of life for generations.

“It was a huge partnership effort, and all the partners had skin in the game,” TNC’s Barbara Charry says.

She recalls the first partner meeting TNC convened of more than two dozen people in August 2019 in St. Joseph, Mo. There were so many barriers back then that moving the levee seemed nearly impossible. But Charry, who has since joined TNC in Massachusetts, coordinated smaller weekly meetings and stayed with the project as the collective power of the partnerships steadily worked through issues.

“As far as I’m concerned,” says Dave Crane, Environmental Resources Specialist with the Army Corps of Engineers, “those projects don’t happen without partners.”



Crane has been involved in two other levee setbacks farther north on the Missouri River in Iowa. Those projects relied largely on federal lands, but that was not the case this time. Everyone involved in the project was dedicated to ensuring private landowners were compensated fairly, so they could replace farmland that was ultimately transferred to floodplain. Much of that land had been part of family farms for generations, and it was not an easy decision for owners.

“Growing up, it used to be, you don’t give an inch,” Regan Griffin of the Atchison County Levee District says.

But attitudes have shifted through the years. Griffin says farmers along the bottomlands recognized changes in the river and came together for the good of the community. As a result, the levee is not only in a better location, the updated version is built to modern design standards. Instead of a slope of three lateral feet for every foot in height, the levee is now more gently angled, at a ratio of five to one—should the water reach the top.

Heading into the fall, the levee had yet to be tested, but the area is already transforming. Thick vegetation, flecked with sunflowers, blankets the river side of the levee. Wild birds disappear into tall grasses, and the ground is

marked with the footprints of raccoons and deer. Manmade depressions form the base of upward of 400 acres of wetlands.

Griffin sees a restored peace of mind in his neighbors through the region—and confidence to tackle other problems along the river in the future.

“I think we feel hopeful for the future that any things that are coming, that we’re set up really well for it.”



THIS PAGE TOP Farmers in northwest Missouri worked with TNC and an array of other partners to make the levee project happen. © Dan Videtich

THIS PAGE RIGHT Frogs and American goldfinches are among the wildlife taking over the expanded floodplain along the Missouri River in Atchison County. © Doyle Murphy/TNC

A New Home for Research

TNC's conservation innovation program is growing across Missouri



There is something about the place.

Perched above the Missouri River, 20 minutes southwest of downtown Columbia, the wedge of former farmland is lined with tall silver maples and red mulberries, their branches and the grasses below hiding warblers, red-winged blackbirds and the occasional indigo bunting on a spring visit. Pockets of wetland speak to the small floodplain and hint at the natural habitats that past generations of river explorers would have traversed.

Two creeks—Terrapin and Grocery Branch—form the northern and southern borders. And cyclists cruise past on the Katy Trail, their tires crunching softly over dirt and gravel as they cut a diagonal along the back border of the property.

The showstopper is the river itself, spread out in a gorgeous panorama.

“Everything is there,” says Steve Schnarr, director of Missouri River Relief.

After a couple of decades on the Missouri, Schnarr knows the river intimately. He can tick off a list of a half-dozen prime spots and attractions within a quick paddle of the site. He mentions caves a few miles upstream where the traces of American Indian pictographs remain among the rocky walls of Manitou Bluffs. Across the river, a series of dikes clustered along Tadpole Island steer floating larvae of endangered pallid sturgeon to calmer, less dangerous waters, creating something akin to a sturgeon nursery. There are eagles and sandbars and other conservation sites.

“When I want to introduce people to the Missouri River,” Schnarr says, “this is the reach of the river I go to.”

A Community Asset

In April 2022, Larry and Brenda Potterfield donated the 164-acre site to The Nature Conservancy in Missouri. It sits at the end of Sarr Street at the edge of the small town of Huntsdale. TNC now owns the site and is partnering with Missouri River Relief and others to create a place where people will always be able to connect with nature. Continued access for the community was important to the Potterfields, Larry says.

In recent years, the site operated as Katfish Katy’s—first as a campground with a little store and later as a seasonal restaurant with an outdoor stage. A boat ramp was accessible through memberships, and the spot has long been a popular stop for cyclists along the Katy Trail.

Larry says he and his wife had grown fond of the land since buying it in 2015. They had both grown up as “country kids,” and he recalls hunting there decades before. But the couple has reached a point in their life where they are assessing their holdings with an eye toward a future that will live on when they’re gone, Larry says.

“We’re in the fourth quarter, and there are no timeouts,” he quips.

The restaurant closed after the 2021 season, and a number of people wanted the riverfront property solely for those facilities, Larry says. There were a lot of different ideas, even a duck-hunting club and other commercial ventures. “You think, ‘What would be the right thing to do?’” Larry says.

Ultimately, the Potterfields decided to ensure the property remained an asset for the community and donated it to TNC.

With its partners, TNC is figuring out the details of the site's future. The work will include high-quality restoration of natural habitats across the acreage, likely to focus on the wetlands and eroding riverbank to protect the land and the river. Plans also include using the former restaurant building as an outreach center for Missouri River Relief. The boat ramp, previously operated through memberships, has reopened to the public. Community access, education, outreach, research and conservation will be key components of the site.

same year at Little Creek Farm, near the Iowa border in Harrison County, where TNC is working on solutions for sustainable grazing that help ranchers and the environment. Work is underway for another CCI at TNC's Mill Creek property near Van Buren in the Ozarks. And with the addition of the new property near Huntsdale, TNC envisions another cornerstone of the CCI program.

"Our research and that of our peers is producing real data that can lead to solutions and transform the way people use and value nature," says Adam McLane, The Nature Conservancy's Missouri state director. "But there's more that can

The Missouri River CCI has the potential for numerous research projects tied to floodplain and wetland restoration, such as the effects on carbon sequestration, soil health and the lives of fish and birds. The floodplain is relatively small in the context of the massive river system that is the Missouri, but it could tie into larger research projects in the area.

One of the Missouri River CCI's greatest assets is its potential as a place where everyone from school kids to adults can learn more about the river and the state's unique habitats. Our partners at Missouri River Relief are already doing outstanding work teaching people about the importance of the river's health.

Along with a long history of river cleanups and stewardship, Missouri River Relief's educational paddle trips, camps and workshops have become essential tools for progress. More than 30,000 students and teachers have taken part in its programs.

As the organization has grown, Schnarr says, it began looking for a permanent base along the river. They even held a charette in the spring of 2022 to create a vision for that plan.

Their timing was uncanny. The Potterfields' donation offered the perfect opportunity to marry the complementary work of Missouri River Relief and TNC on the property. Now, the two organizations and other partners are working on new visions to turn the site into a place where generations of people can come to learn about and enjoy the river and the surrounding habitat.



Missouri River Center for Conservation Innovation

In 2021, The Nature Conservancy in Missouri launched a new program to create demonstration and research facilities on its properties to help boost the type of scientific innovation needed to protect the land and water we all depend on.

The first Center for Conservation Innovation (CCI) was created the

be done to speed up the pace and impact of those results—and that's the gap we're hoping to fill with our CCIs."

McLane notes that science-based conservation is in TNC's DNA. "We've been protecting critical landscapes in Missouri since 1956," he says. "And as a science-based organization, we want to learn everything we can about those places—and encourage others to learn from them, as well."



SCAN THIS CODE or visit nature.org/missouririvercci to learn more about this new TNC property.

A Gift That Keeps Giving

Enterprise Rent-A-Car Foundation is doubling down on TNC's water work

Five years ago, Enterprise Rent-A-Car Foundation pledged \$30 million to The Nature Conservancy, a gift that has traveled around the world, improving rivers and watersheds to benefit both nature and people in nearly 30 countries. It went so well that the foundation is doing it again.

In August, Enterprise committed another \$30 million through the foundation's Routes & Roots: Enterprise Healthy Rivers Project. The combined \$60 million is the single largest gift to TNC's global water work and supports a broad portfolio of critical freshwater work. The gift is helping identify natural solutions to protect drinking water in dozens of European cities, supporting Indigenous-led conservation of lands and waters in the vast boreal forests in Canada, and boosting key projects in the Mississippi and Colorado river basins. And that's just a sampling.

"At Enterprise, we are passionate about supporting causes and initiatives that positively impact the communities where our employees and customers live and work," says Carolyn Kindle, president of the Enterprise Holdings Foundation. "Our 'Routes & Roots' program is a shining example of this sentiment. Our employees are deeply passionate about this initiative, and we look forward to seeing the continued progress that this program will have on many of the world's most vital waterways."

In Missouri, where Kindle's grandfather started Enterprise Rent-A-Car 65 years ago, examples of conservation impact are blooming.

Jubilee Oasis Farm in north St. Louis has turned a vacant lot into an innovative agriculture operation that also helps keep the Mississippi River healthy. Thanks to Enterprise's backing, TNC became an early supporter of Jubilee.

Today, the 1.5-acre farm provides fresh food and teaches agricultural skills in a neighborhood that has endured decades of disinvestment. It's also a model of smart conservation, capturing rainwater from the roof of Jubilee Community Church and funneling it into a 150,000-gallon underground tank used to irrigate crops. Instead of contributing to stormwater runoff that washes pollutants into the Mississippi, rainwater is piped to organically grown vegetables and even a fig orchard.

Pastor Andy Krumsieg of Jubilee says the project has been a conduit.

"The farm gives us an opportunity to love people," he says. "When you're in there weeding, when you're moving the dirt, when you're planting the plants, when you're harvesting the crop—all of that leads to relationships, and relationships lead to the rebuilding of people's lives."

Missouri state director Adam McLane says the determined group at Jubilee would have found a way to succeed on its own, but the added support acts as a catalyst for the church's work.

"I get really excited looking back at the tangible conservation impact that has taken place in the past five years—not just here in Missouri, but really around the world," he says. "It can be measured in acres. It can be measured in people. It can be measured in river miles that are improved. Enterprise Rent-A-Car Foundation's continued support to improve the health of rivers and freshwater ecosystems, and foster resilient communities is going to either scale or magnify the impact in really powerful ways."



THIS PAGE TOP Volunteers at Jubilee Oasis Farm in St. Louis stretch an irrigation line to water crops. © Doyle Murphy/TNC

THIS PAGE BOTTOM Blackberries grow in the orchard at Jubilee. © Doyle Murphy/TNC

The Burning Case for Clean Water

Fire plays an important role in protecting water quality



Fire is usually cast as water's oldest enemy, but the two are allies when it comes to conservation.

"It's all about the watershed," TNC's Steve Herrington says.

For millennia, fire has worked its magic on our ecosystems—rolling across prairies and creeping over forest floors to clear debris. In its footprint, it leaves rejuvenated grasslands, bursts of wildflowers and openings for an array of plants and animals.

All that biodiversity influences how water works its way through a landscape.

Using controlled burns to clear a forest floor of dead leaves and open the canopy to new plant life is just one example of fire's impact, says Ryan Gauger, Missouri fire and stewardship manager for TNC. The freshly uncovered ground also offers pathways for water looking to seep into the dirt.

"The soil then acts as a kidney, filtering the water and sucking out nutrients," Gauger says. "Some soil types, such as

floodplain prairies, are better filters than others, but all have an impact."

Indigenous peoples understood the critical function of fire and developed controlled burning techniques long ago as early stewards of the land. Informed by those traditions, The Nature Conservancy adopted the practice more than 60 years ago, recognizing its power to increase and protect biodiversity. At the same time, federal policies focused largely on suppressing fire. Billions of dollars have been spent to stamp out wildfires on lands where periodic burns had long been a component of the ecosystem.

When fires do finally break out, they can be uncharacteristically intense, fueled by excess debris that's been allowed to build up unchecked. Those kinds of fires can have devastating consequences for people and cause all sorts of ecological damage, including the destruction of even deep-rooted plants and heating streams and rivers to temperatures fatal for aquatic life.

In Missouri, TNC has championed well-managed prescribed burns for nearly 40 years. That has recently included hosting training sessions for a new, diverse generation of land stewards and working with partners, such as the Missouri Department of Conservation, on burns across the state. TNC has also supported the passage of new legislation that removes significant barriers to insurance for prescribed burn contractors, making it easier for private landowners to have their properties burned.

The benefits to watersheds are extensive. As an example, Herrington notes the way a mix of native plants, some with roots 15 feet deep, protect Missouri's tallgrass prairies from harmful erosion while also filtering water.

"Those plants like fire," Herrington says. "Now, you're enhancing rooting depth and density post-fire long term in these prairie systems."

Even the burned plant material contributes, floating into small streams where tiny, water-dwelling bugs feast on the particles. Fish eat the bugs, and the benefits continue up the food chain.



Channeling Passion into Smart Giving

The anonymous backers of a Healthy Cities matching gifts program explain their strategy for getting the biggest bang for their buck



They wanted to help.

A Missouri couple, anonymous longtime donors to The Nature Conservancy, had done better as entrepreneurs than they had ever imagined when they were middle-class kids growing up in the St. Louis suburbs. As they saw it, their success came with the responsibility to make the world a little more just. But where to start? The number of causes was infinite, and the number of organizations dedicated to working on them was nearly so. Figuring out where to focus was more complex than just writing a check they quickly realized.

“We want to get the best return on the money that we can,” says C. “It’s an investment.”

Today, C and M are the backers of a matching gift to TNC’s Healthy Cities strategy in Missouri, a program that tackles urban conservation issues, such as deteriorating air quality and river-polluting stormwater runoff, while working to

make life healthier and more equitable for people who live there. For every donation of \$10,000 or more to Healthy Cities, the husband and wife have promised a dollar-for-dollar match. The idea is not only to support important work but to offer a signpost to others who are looking to help but unsure about what to do.

C and M have worked through those types of questions themselves. Over the years, they’ve developed their own rules and strategies for making the greatest impact.

It Starts with Passion and Curiosity

“Find something that you’re passionate about and that you want to make better, and then research organizations and talk to the people who work there,” M advises.

She had grown up camping and fishing with her father, and her love and concern for nature only grew as an adult. M’s enthusiasm rubbed off on C. He remembers going along

with her years ago to a presentation by Doug Ladd, the now-retired conservation director for TNC in Missouri. C says he was pulled in because the discussions were fascinating and the solutions Ladd described seemed smart.

“I’m attracted to smart,” C says.

As C and M learned more, they became convinced the best way to help was to focus their philanthropy on one or two big strategies, rather than spread it among numerous projects and organizations. They started with turtles because, well, they liked turtles. They had taken their family on vacation to Florida when their kids were young, and they remember vividly their wonder at seeing loggerhead sea turtles lay their eggs. They ultimately decided to support a project in the Solomon Islands where TNC was working with local communities to protect the largest hawksbill sea turtle rookery in the South Pacific.

Another interest followed a similar path. On a trip to Kenya, a Masai guide had introduced C and M to people in his village. The couple felt an instant connection and returned home looking for ways to help people in the region. They eventually settled on a TNC project that safeguarded a vital water source in Nairobi, improving the lives of the women who went each day to collect the water.

Aside from being of personal interest, the projects and TNC fit within other criteria the couple had set for their giving.

“We’re looking for, ‘Here’s a good idea that’s underfunded, and we can execute it,’” C says.

Finding those really good ideas can be difficult, the couple adds. In the beginning, they started by trying to answer two simple questions when considering whether to donate to an organization: “Is what they do good? And do they need the money?”

The questions gave them a basic framework for their research. The answers helped them get started with TNC, and the yearslong relationship has evolved from there. C and M say the relationship is important. They look for organizations that prize those connections, not just the money. They recommend getting involved—talk to the people doing the work and see what’s happening in person, if possible.

Starting with that first presentation by Doug Ladd, they began attending TNC events and lectures because they found them interesting. They’ve learned about tallgrass prairies and biodiversity, the lives of caterpillars and, of course, turtles. M says learning about nature—and its

vulnerabilities—draws people in and moves them to action.

“You think that if more people knew stuff like that, they’d care more,” she says.

When C and M sat down this year to make their annual plan for their philanthropy, they did something different. Both of the main projects they had been funding were doing well enough for others to take over, and they decided to ask their contact at TNC in Missouri where the money would make the biggest difference. It’s not something they would have done without that long-running relationship, and they still planned to do their homework on the proposal. But they stress that building trust like that is critical.

“We’re at the point with TNC that we’re impressed with everything we’ve seen,” C says.

The suggestion of funding a matching gift for the Healthy Cities strategy in Missouri appealed to them. The strategy’s potential to not only achieve conservation goals but to do so in ways that helped St. Louis’ historically disenfranchised populations fit the couple’s growing interests in social justice. And the matching component seemed like a smart way to leverage their gift to encourage others to develop their own relationships with TNC. Already, it’s doing just that.

The first gift as part of the matching program came from a couple who find themselves in the same place C and M were years ago: They’re figuring out the best ways to focus their giving to create the largest impact. They, too, are looking for those smart ideas in need of funding.

When C and M heard about the couple, they seemed encouraged. It is easy to look at a world beset by problems of climate change and widespread injustice and feel overwhelmed, but they have learned through experience how careful, targeted support can make real, measurable change. It is an antidote to feeling helpless. That’s why they continue to give and work with TNC toward a future that will carry on beyond their own lives.

“It’s a place where there’s a sense of really moving past the sense of being overwhelmed,” C says.

“Hope,” M says. “It’s hope.”



SCAN THIS CODE or visit nature.org/mocities to learn more about the Healthy Cities matching gift program.

A Paddler's Paradise

Learn more about Missouri's untapped adventure potential with Roo Yawitz on TNC's *It's in Our Nature*



Ever paddled the Mississippi River? Have you ever even thought about it?

For much of Roo Yawitz's life, his answers mirrored those of most St. Louisans: no and never. Then came a chance encounter in 2008 with a local river legend. Now, Roo is the owner of Big Muddy Adventures and an evangelist for Missouri rivers, especially the Mississippi. He joined The Nature Conservancy's Missouri state director Adam McLane on *It's in*

Our Nature to talk rivers, paddling and overlooked adventures.

So, my first time in a canoe, well, I don't know if it was a paddling trip. I know that when I was in fourth grade, having just moved back to St. Louis from New Jersey, I went out to the Huzzah with a friend's parents. We had a pop-up camper that everybody slept in, where the mesh windows were not tight enough, so they kind of fell on you while you were sleeping. On that trip, I was probably in an innertube. I did that a bunch of times with that family, which turned out to be a formative part of my life—getting out on some of

the small creeks and streams that are within a day's drive of St. Louis.

How I got involved in Big Muddy Adventures and my first trip on the Mississippi is all the same story. And it all goes back to Big Muddy Mike, the founder of Big Muddy Adventures. So, March of 2008, I had just opened a live music club called the Gramophone in the Grove neighborhood. We opened on a Friday. That Sunday night, we had a young blues player named Marquise Knox. And there were about 18 people at the show because we were brand new and no one knew we existed. A guy pulls up in a four-wheel drive Astro

van with a canoe strapped to the top of it and walks in with some calf-high neoprene boots that were covered in mud. It was our third day of ever being open. So, the floors were, like, brand new, and he tracked mud into the Gramophone, walked up to the bar, ordered a beer, and we started chatting. And that was the beginning of my now decade-and-a-half-long friendship with Big Muddy Mike. I think two years later, he finally got me to go out on the river with him.

We went over to Mosenthein Island, which is now like a second home. Mike wanted to gather driftwood for a fence that he was building around his house. So, it was kind of like a Tom Sawyer mission. We were picking up massive pieces of driftwood, putting them back in a canoe, ferrying back to North Riverfront Park and then ferrying back. We did multiple trips back and forth. It wasn't necessarily a river trip, but we were out there on the river, and it was great. I felt like I had left St. Louis and I had gone and had an adventure, even though I hadn't been more than 20 minutes from my house. That was the "aha" moment.

A lot of people ask us, "Where is everyone else?" Once they realize that they're having a good time and that paddling on the Missouri or the Mississippi is an awesome thing to do, they immediately wonder where everyone else is. And it's like, "Well, earlier today you didn't even think you could do this."

The rivers are an asset to this city that can never be taken from us. We talk a lot on these trips about how Fortune 500 companies can come and go, and the city takes a big emotional hit when we find out that some company got bought out by some other company and things like that. There are things to St. Louis that are permanent, and the rivers are those.

We already have the opportunity to have these rivers be something we all feel good about, about why we choose to live in St. Louis. You can see other cities doing that with their natural resources. But we don't do it here. It's like we're leaving it on the table.

The Bourbon Trail is an interesting thing. It's like, one day, Kentucky has

seven amazing distilleries, and they do X. The next day, they call it the Bourbon Trail, and it automatically becomes three X, even though they didn't change anything. They just started talking about it in a new way. And then people from all over the country want to go to Kentucky and bike or drive or do whatever, you know? I think there's the opportunity for Missouri to do that. I don't know exactly what that looks like, but it's all there already.

In the fall we opened a store. So, now we have the outfitting side of the business and a retail presence. The store is called the Guide Shop, because the guides built the store and stocked it, and are working at it and stuff like that, partly because we don't have anybody else but guides.

We are already an outdoor recreation city that doesn't know it. You see it all over the place, whether it's people out on mountain bike trails or driving around with boats on their cars. And I think that St. Louis has a really great range of outdoor recreation opportunities.

You can wake up on a sandbar on the Jacks Fork and have dinner at Busch Stadium, eating a hot dog, watching a Cardinals game.

We need to get outside here and do awesome outdoor stuff. And then other people around the country will hear about it and want to come here and do the same.



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Understanding Mitigation

The strategy is new for TNC in Missouri, and it has a lot of promise for conservation

Ideally, building a factory would never fill in a wetland. A new housing development would not affect a nearby stream. But construction doesn't always play out that way. That's where mitigation comes in.

Mitigation is a way to offset damage to water resources when better options are not possible. That might involve building new wetlands or restoring a streambank at another location to help compensate for the ecological harm.

"Mitigation is third in the hierarchy of what we're looking at," explains Wes Hauser, mitigation strategy manager for The Nature Conservancy in Missouri. "First, you want to avoid your impacts to the extent possible and then minimize your impacts where they are unavoidable."

If government regulators conclude a project can't be changed to avoid or minimize its impact, the federal Clean Water Act allows for those responsible to buy mitigation credits, which represent restored or enhanced water resources—usually wetlands, stream or open water—near where the impacts occurred. An emerging mitigation industry is growing to meet the demand for those credits. TNC in Missouri has been working toward establishing its first mitigation bank—a site where the Conservancy would do high-quality restoration work, or even create new wetlands, and then sell credits to fund more work.

Hauser, who joined TNC in 2021 to head up the mitigation strategy, has been visiting conservation partners in the Kansas City area and touring the Blue River. The Blue, with its mix of impacts from nearby development and outdoors

opportunities, is an example of a place where mitigation can make a big difference.

"Building wetlands and building streams and preserving parts of the Blue River that folks can access through a highly developed trail system provides an excellent opportunity for connecting folks with nature, which is what we like to do at The Nature Conservancy," Hauser says.

Much of the mitigation banking industry runs through private companies, but Hauser says it is important for TNC to be involved. Not only does it give TNC another avenue for doing conservation work and blunting ecological harm, it can help influence an emerging industry for the better.

A team comprising the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, and state regulatory agencies review mitigation plans, but the process still allows for private companies to push forward projects that maximize profits while doing only the minimum for conservation. There are private companies doing good work, Hauser says, but TNC can model best practices and raise the bar for everyone.

"Hopefully, with TNC being engaged in this work, we're reigning in any bad actors that may exist in the mitigation banking space," he says.



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'Captivated by Soaring'

Remembering Lou and Carol Matustik

A machinist for 31 years, Louis “Lou” Matustik labored next to packaging machines in industrial facilities. So, when he was on his own time with his family, he turned to the outdoors.

“If you can imagine what it’s like working in that environment, with these millions and millions of containers flying by, you know you’d want to get out and get some relief in nature,” says his son, Louis Matustik III.

Lou and his wife, Carol, were world travelers and longtime supporters of The Nature Conservancy. Louis says his parents usually aimed somewhere warm on their bigger trips. They loved the beaches in the Caribbean and Mexico. On weekends, they found refuge in the woods near High Ridge, where they kept a cabin. Louis remembers barbecuing and birdwatching there, observing nature’s changes through the seasons. His father was an “eyes open” kind of guy who paid close attention to the world around him, Louis says. Lou’s formal education ended after high school, but his lifelong enthusiasm for learning fed an array of hobbies and interests. He loved auto racing, aviation and watching birds. He passed his decadeslong fascination with remote-controlled airplanes on to Louis.

“He was very captivated by soaring and flying,” Louis says of his dad.

In addition to their gifts to TNC, Lou and Carol were dedicated supporters of The Wild Bird Sanctuary, Shriners



Hospital for Children and Cardinal Glennon Hospital for Children. Carol was born with disabilities that affected her legs and feet. She lived at Shriners for large parts of her first years, and Louis says that she had to work hard to live the life she did. His parents “came from virtually no money,” Louis says. Middle-class careers, simple living and an interest in investing allowed them to travel and give back. In 37 years, they gave \$1.2 million to TNC and significant amounts to other organizations. Considering where his parents started, Louis marvels at their philanthropy. “It’s incredible,” he says.

Their support went beyond money. Carol shared experiences of her childhood and the care she received to promote children’s hospitals. Lou championed donation strategies to TNC supporters. He was particularly

fond of charitable gift annuities—gifts that provide donors and/or beneficiaries fixed annual payments for life.

The couple was married for nearly 60 years. Carol died in November 2021, and Lou followed four months later in March 2022.

“I had the pleasure of meeting with Lou a few months before his passing and recall the warmth, wit and charm that came naturally to him,” says Adam McLane, TNC’s Missouri state director. “Both Lou and Carol were kind and generous supporters of not just TNC, but of conservation and humanity more broadly. Their memories will be cherished, and their legacy of bettering this world will live on and continue to inspire others.”