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We have a saying around our (virtual) watercooler in Missouri...hope is not a strategy. As a leader of a science-based organization, I get it—I do. We base our conservation strategies and goals on data, research and facts. We have metrics that tell us the percentage of pollutants we need to reduce from our waterways and how many tons of carbon we need to offset. Data. Research. Facts.

However, I challenge you to read through these pages and not find hope.

This year we created a map—filled with data—that will help drive resources to communities who have been underserved for decades when it comes to environmental and socioeconomic opportunities. This map is hope.

We're working on a playbook to help guide communities who have been ravaged by repetitive floods to seek new solutions—solutions that are backed by science and demonstrated as a new levee in northwest Missouri. That playbook is hope.

In southwest Missouri, we're working with partners to replace low-water crossings that can be hazardous to the rural communities who rely on them for medical and emergency services. Those crossings are also impeding fish migration and spawning. To those rural communities and fish populations, the new crossings are hope.

My list could go on.

So, I get it. We do not and cannot rely on hope as a strategy because hope by itself won't work on the urgent issues our environment is facing, but paired with strategic action, hope can be a beautiful partner and motivator.

I've been with The Nature Conservancy for 13 years, many of you have been with us longer. On behalf of our staff and trustees, I thank you for your dedicated support of our work in Missouri. Your partnership and trust that we use the right combination of science and hope continues to push us forward and inspires us to think globally and locally.

With gratitude,

Adam McLane, Missouri State Director

Expanding Partnerships for Equitable Conservation

The complex layers of community, infrastructure and natural systems in cities present new challenges and opportunities for conservation work. Focusing on the human impacts of conservation strategies must be central to how we define success in conservation work in cities. The opportunity to make inclusive decisions today to plan for more sustainable cities will impact our communities and natural resources for decades to come.

The Nature Conservancy established the Growing Green Solutions Program to support and co-create community-driven green infrastructure partnerships and projects with special attention to the social impact areas of justice and fairness, community engagement and community resilience in St. Louis.

Growing Green Solutions in Action

Growing Green Solution Program projects seek to increase equitable access to nature and to invest in practices that reduce harmful nutrients that flow into the Missouri and Mississippi rivers – increasing the overall health and resilience of the region. Following are some examples of the Growing Green Solutions Program in action.

With your support, together, we can expand the reach of the Growing Green Solutions Program to change the way we approach and collaborate on projects that impact our youth, neighborhoods and natural resources.

Growing Faith-Based Partnerships

Current Growing Green Solutions Program recipients, all from St. Louis congregations, have taken on projects



that address a wide range of challenges, from food security and sovereignty to youth programming, energy efficiency and creating Green Teams.

Greener Schoolyards for Our Youth

Green spaces play a key role in the development of sustainable, vibrant and livable communities, providing positive social, economic and environmental outcomes. Access to nature can also provide numerous health benefits. In the urban core, welcoming, naturalized outdoor spaces can be limited, especially for children. TNC has partnered with Saint Louis Public Schools, the Missouri Department of Conservation and other stakeholders to launch a green schoolyard pilot program.

Equitable Parks in Our Neighborhoods

College Hill is the only neighborhood in the City of St. Louis without its own official city park. Neighborhood residents, along with over 20 partner

organizations including TNC, are working to acquire and repurpose 14 vacant lots that will become the future Peace Park. The park will provide access to recreational areas, native trees and plants, pollinator habitat, and a place for residents to feel safe and more connected to the natural world and to each other.

Growing Green Jobs & Conservation Career Pathways

The many green spaces and green infrastructure best management practices that are currently being planned and implemented will also need a trained workforce to properly care for and maintain the sites. A green workforce development program can increase economic opportunity by creating a pipeline of skilled and trained workers, particularly young people, people of color, and those who are earning low-to-moderate incomes, to work on public and private projects that are built to improve the local environment and enhance an area's climate resilience.

More Than Just a Map

New tool visualizes environmental challenges and opportunities in the St. Louis region



This year, The Nature Conservancy collaborated with local partners to create the St. Louis EcoUrban Assessment—a StoryMap and interactive tool that visualizes several social, economic, ecological and public health factors in the four-county study region of St. Louis County and City in Missouri, and St. Clair and Madison counties in Illinois.

Informed by the findings from the Environmental Racism in St. Louis report, the Assessment includes data on air quality, asthma rates, flooding and stormwater issues, food access, tree canopy coverage, and other environmental and socioeconomic factors.

“Our goals were to make the data included in the study more readily accessible and user-friendly to the public, increase awareness and visibility of local challenges to prioritize action, and drive resources to the frontline communities being impacted,” says Rebecca Weaver, TNC’s cities program manager in Missouri.

Additionally, the Assessment not only lends itself to TNC’s work but can also be used by partners and other community stakeholders to build support for change.

Rebecca states that often this data is only visible to the organizations that have financial resources and access to ArcGIS or other mapping systems. Since this tool is publicly available, users can access the map and visualize multiple types of data to see which locations in the study area have, for example, the least amount of tree canopy, or which communities are most vulnerable to flooding. “Seeing the data can inform and prioritize the work happening on the ground,” she says.

The Assessment moves beyond challenge-mapping and also includes community asset mapping to point out where there are organizations and initiatives working, and where collaborations can be built to co-create solutions. “In order to be successful, our conservation work must be intersectional,” says Rebecca.

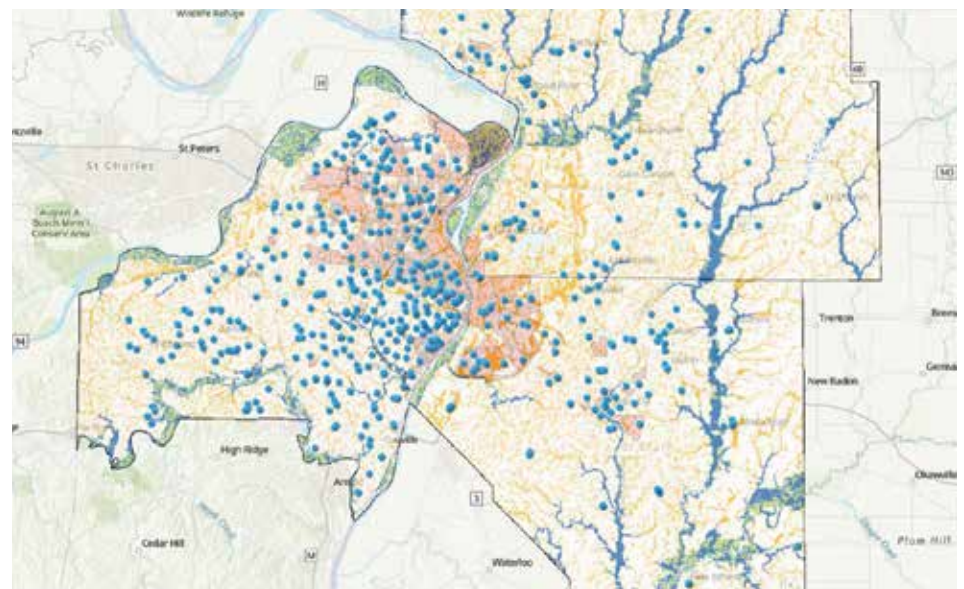
Jenny Connelly-Bowen, executive director for Community Builders Network of Metro St. Louis (CBN)

agrees and says one of the most important features of the tool is the way it maps place-based assets like schools, faith-based institutions and community-based organizations alongside the environmental data—since these local partners are critical for creating community-driven solutions.

“CBN recognizes that environmental justice issues intersect with place-based community development work on many levels,” says Jenny. “This new tool will help all of us better understand the unique challenges that each neighborhood in our region is facing, and serves as a sobering reminder that communities of color remain on the front lines of the climate crisis.”



LEARN MORE about the St. Louis EcoUrban Assessment and access the tool, go to nature.org/EcoUrbanToolSTL



Sharing Lessons Learned

Developing a guide for community flood resilience



“The L-536 levee project is a great demonstration for how communities can use nature-based approaches to reduce their flood risk,” says Barbara Charry, The Nature Conservancy’s floodplains and nature-based solutions strategy manager in Missouri. “This Playbook is our way to help make it easier for communities to pursue these approaches.”

The development of the Playbook is supported by The Nature Conservancy with experience-based

In March 2019, abnormal weather patterns in Nebraska, Iowa and South Dakota caused record-setting flooding along the Missouri River, resulting in widespread catastrophic damage throughout the river valley including the farming town of Rock Port, in Atchison County, Missouri.

Ryan Ottmann, president of the Atchison County Levee District recalls the 2019 flood as the worst he can remember. “The flood of ’93 was bad, and the flood of 2011 was a little worse,” he says. “But the flood of 2019 was exponentially worse than all the other floods combined. It was water from bluff to bluff for 200 days—and damage beyond belief.”

Following the historic flood, a multi-agency team worked with leadership from the Atchison County Levee District to complete a highly complex \$100 million levee setback, literally moving the levee back from the river to provide increased future protection and reconnect over 1,000 acres to the historic floodplain. The new levee footprint reduces the flood risk to the local community and increases the habitat complex to more than 7,000 acres.

Determined to share their lessons learned, the partner group is collaborating once again, but this time it’s to develop the L-536 Levee Setback Playbook, a how-to guide for communities interested in pursuing similar nature-based solutions that enhance flood resiliency.

contributions from project partners involved in the L-536 setback project including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources.

“One of the key takeaways illustrated in the Playbook is the power of local leadership demonstrated by the Atchison County Levee District, which took a holistic approach with their entire levee system,” says Dru Buntin, Director of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, “I believe this Playbook can be a great resource to our river communities in Missouri and beyond that have dealt with repetitive flood events and want to look at more resilient and protective solutions.”

The Playbook will be organized in four distinct but complementary sections to tell the story, share the challenges, present policy recommendations and illustrate the how-to for communities ready to take action.

“When we set out to move back the levee in Atchison County, we didn’t have a guide or checklist, but we had a group of partners committed to the same goal,” says Barbara. “Our goal with this Playbook is to decrease barriers, offer solutions and provide a guide for both pre- and post-disaster actions that would make this process easier for the next community.”



LEARN MORE about the L-536 project and playbook, at nature.org/MoRiverLevee.

Missouri Legislative Wins in 2021

Supporting policy that protects our planet



Missouri’s legislative session runs roughly 20 weeks from January through May. According to the Missouri Press Association, over 2,270 bills were filed during the 2021 legislative session, with 69 crossing the finish line to Governor Parson’s desk. Among those that were signed, were three priority bills for TNC, focused on prescribed fire, floodplains and renewable energy.

“This was a big year for conservation in Missouri,” says Holly Neill, director of conservation policy. “We had three top priorities going into the session and we are thrilled that all three made it to the end.”

Prescribed Burning

For over 30 years, TNC has been using prescribed fire in Missouri to keep our forests and grasslands healthy. Fire is a natural event that has been shaping our landscape for thousands of years. It

plays an important role in the health of many habitats—and without fire, many plant and animal species would disappear.

Beyond the ecological benefits of prescribed burns, they can also enhance community safety by reducing the buildup of dead wood

and other debris that can contribute to unnaturally intense wildfires.

The Prescribed Burning Act (House Bill 369) sets a negligence standard as it relates to prescribed fire, which helps remove current barriers that individuals and contractors face when obtaining insurance coverage to utilize prescribed burning as a conservation land management tool.

“Missouri was one of five states in the country that didn’t clearly define who has liability as it relates to prescribed burning,” says Holly.

With near-unanimous support from both sides, the bill passed the Senate in a 31-2 vote and the House in a 150-1 vote.

The bill was sponsored by Sen. Mike Bernskoetter, R-Jefferson City and Rep. Tim Taylor, R-Bunceton.

Floodplains

Beginning January 1, 2022, Senate Bill 22 will be put into action. Sponsored by Sen. Andrew Koenig, R-Manchester, this bill modifies



THIS PAGE TOP Governor Parson (left) signs the Prescribed Burning Act as TNC MO Trustee, Carl Freiling (4th from right) watches © Office of the Missouri Governor
THIS PAGE BOTTOM Prescribed burn in the Ozarks © Tom Fielden



several provisions related to tax increment financing, or TIFs, and restricts the use of TIFs to subsidize new developments in areas designated as a floodplain by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

TIFs are used to benefit companies and developers by refunding or diverting a portion of their taxes to help finance the development of an area or project site.

“Floodplains are a crucial part of our river systems,” says Holly. “Not only do they provide much needed habitat for fish and wildlife, but they also give natural flood and erosion control while increasing water quality.”

With bipartisan support, this bill passed the Senate with a vote of 31-0 and the House with 147-2.

“We were excited to see this bill signed,” Holly says. “Protecting our floodplains will have a positive impact for nature and our communities.”

Renewable Energy

The Missouri Electricity Bill Reduction Assistance Act (House Bill 734 and Senate Bill 202) enables a financial process known as securitization.

Often compared to loan refinancing, securitization helps reduce utility debt to minimize financial burdens

on utilities and consumers. Utility securitization legislation is implemented in some form in 25 other states where it has been used to save consumers hundreds of millions of dollars.

“This bill is important because it provides a new tool to support Missouri’s transition to cleaner and diversified energy,” says Holly. “This process has been used to help retire coal plants and increase a state’s development of more sustainable energy such as wind and solar.”

This bill was sponsored by Rep. Michael O’Donnell, R-Oakville, and Sen. Mike Cierpiot, R-Lee’s Summit, passing the Senate with a vote of 33-0 and House with 146-1.

Victories in Defeat

Sometimes playing defense is harder than passing a bill. Every year, TNC must also work to defeat potentially harmful pieces of legislation that threaten our natural resources or wildlife. “In Missouri, we are constantly reviewing bills that are filed and assessing their impact on conservation,” says Holly.

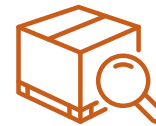
“It’s really important to not only pursue new legislation that improves the planet, but to also be ready to react to legislation that can cause harm.”

Advocacy in Action

Throughout the legislative session, The Nature Conservancy’s government relations committee, which includes staff and trustees, participate in various activities to support our policy efforts. Here’s a peek at some of the activities from the 2021 legislative session.



We hosted a Virtual Advocacy Day and met with state representatives and senators to speak up for nature and our priority bills.



We tracked 66 House and Senate bills on a weekly, and often daily, basis.



We strengthened relationships with organizations including the Natural Resources Defense Council, Missouri Energy Initiative, Missouri Local Science Engagement Network and more.



We conducted virtual field trips and site visits for legislators to see the work in action.



We submitted written testimony in support of our priority bills and against bills we opposed.

An Ozark Gem

TNC's newest property on the banks of Mill Creek



What makes a piece of property worth protecting? It could be any number of things. Often it comes down to the history a person or group has with an area. It could be a family farm passed down for generations, or a natural area where parents watched their children play and grow. At The Nature Conservancy, we invest in precious ecosystems, vulnerable natural communities, and properties that can be used to demonstrate ecologically beneficial management practices for partners and landowners.

We look for lands that keep biodiversity on the landscape, protect water quality, or connect to other protected areas. Many places only provide one or two of these features. However, sometimes we get an opportunity to acquire a property that meets all our needs—and even exceeds them. That place is TNC's newest property, Mill Creek.

At 163 acres, Mill Creek isn't the largest property around, but it has a lot packed within its boundaries. The area is



located north of Van Buren and shares a border with the Ozark National Scenic Riverways. It is a collection of oak and pine woodlands, glades, springs, fens and riparian forests.

Large rock outcrops, small bluffs and even a small shelter cave are found on the property. The site is home to over 200 species of native plants and surrounds both banks of its namesake, the perennial and crystal-clear Mill Creek.

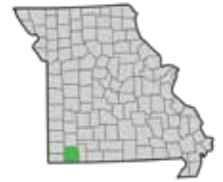
Earlier this year, TNC purchased the property from a friend in conservation, Renata Culpepper. Having been family friends with the previous owners and knowing the property well, Renata and her late husband Bryan had always dreamed of living on-site and protecting the property. After his passing, Renata was able to purchase the land in 2012. Both strongly valued conservation, and thus she invested in restoring the glades, woodlands and

fens that call the property home. She worked with friends from the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC), the National Park Service, the L-A-D Foundation, the U.S. Forest Service, and The Nature Conservancy, utilizing incentive programs from MDC and the Natural Resources Conservation Service to restore the woodlands, glades and fens.

Mill Creek offers an opportunity to showcase natural features of the Ozarks that are usually spread over much larger areas. Like other TNC properties, we believe this property can serve as a high-quality demonstration site and research facility to inform critical conservation strategies. With the ability to host researchers and partners on-site, we can engage in restoration and land-management research projects that will help improve our ecosystems.

Low-Water Crossings on the Upper Shoal

New designs that benefit people and nature



The spring-fed headwaters of Shoal Creek, located in Barry County in southwest Missouri, are part of the larger Spring River basin. For years these waters have been a conservation priority for many partners, including the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC), Missouri Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and The Nature Conservancy.

“The importance of the Spring River system is driven partly by its aquatic biota,” says Drew Holt, TNC’s western Ozark waters coordinator. “Eighty-six species of fish, thirty-five species of mussels and five species of crayfish have been documented in the system.” Included in that count is the federally endangered Neosho Mucket (mussel) and the state species of conservation concern, the Arkansas Darter (fish).

Historically, Shoal Creek has had higher densities of the Arkansas Darter, but due in part to stream fragmentation caused by low water crossings acting as barriers, the species struggle to migrate up and downstream as needed.

Now, thanks to a grant from the USFWS’s National Fish Passage Program, TNC has partnered with MDC and the Barry County Commission to replace three low-water road crossings in upper Shoal Creek with new free-span bridges to facilitate natural water flows and aquatic organism passage.

“We’re excited to get these projects underway,” says Drew. “Not only will they allow the Arkansas Darter and other

species to reoccupy nearly 9 miles of habitat, but they’ll also provide a service for local communities.”

Replacing the current crossings will decrease the frequency of overtopped roads during high-water events, reducing hazards with vehicles attempting to cross when it’s not safe. “In addition to increasing safety, the new crossings should result in reduced maintenance costs and improved structural resilience,” says Drew.

The new bridges will also reduce the risk of catastrophic failure during a flood, and the associated safety and environmental impacts that such an event would cause.

Pre-project monitoring will take place during fall 2021 and into spring 2022, with construction projected to start in summer 2022. Once complete, MDC will continue to monitor the fish populations throughout Shoal Creek and the three project sites.

“Low-water crossings like these are not limited to Barry County,” says Drew. “We plan to use the new crossings as demonstration sites for other landowners and partners in the area and throughout the Ozarks to show how nature-based solutions can be used for resilient infrastructure and improved habitat.”



Expanding the 4Rs

Nutrient reduction program is gaining partners across the state



When the 4R program was launched in Missouri in 2018, it brought together a diverse group of partners—the Missouri Fertilizer Control Board, Missouri Agribusiness Association, Missouri Corn Merchandising Council, Missouri Soybean Merchandising Council, and The Nature Conservancy.

4R focuses on nutrient, or fertilizer, management and conservation practices to improve soil health and limit the amount of harmful runoff into our rivers and streams. The 4Rs refer to the right fertilizer source, at the right rate, at the right time, and in the right place.

TNC is working with MFA, Inc.—a Missouri-based agricultural cooperative retailer—on this effort. “MFA has a very comprehensive Nutri-Track program that aligns well

with the 4R principles and goals,” says Kent Wamsley, TNC’s grasslands and sustainable agriculture strategy manager in Missouri. “Our goal is to work with ag retailers, such as MFA, who can utilize their own nutrient management systems and interlink them with the 4R principles.”

To begin, landowners work with their ag retailers to analyze baseline soil samples which informs them of their current soil conditions. They then work together to make management decisions so the right fertilizer (source) can go on the land in the right place, at the right time, and at the right rate. This process not only ensures they are protecting their soil and water resources, but are also being responsible managers of the land and the crop production they want to maximize.

“Healthy soil and water are connected,” says Kent. “Practices that increase soil health, lead to healthier water supplies for people, plants, fish and other wildlife.”

4R nutrient stewardship also helps improve agricultural productivity and the farmer’s bottom line. “Optimizing nutrient management can help increase farmers’ crop yields and decrease operational costs by improving fertilizer efficiency,” says Kent. “These practices also allow farmers to grow more on less land while reducing the amount of harmful nutrients that escape into the environment as pollution.”

TNC recently completed 4R pilot projects in the Elk River and Spring Creek watersheds in southwestern Missouri. Plans to further expand the program within the state are underway—specifically in northeast Missouri and into the Osage Plains region of the state.

“TNC’s 2025 goal is to have 250,000 acres 4R verified, or meeting the 4R principles, in the state of Missouri,” says Kent. “Although we are not there yet, there is great momentum that can lead to this goal being achieved through the private and public partnerships that continue to form.”

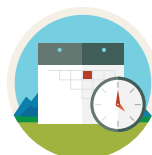
 **LEARN MORE** about TNC’s 4R program in Missouri at nature.org/Missouri4R



RIGHT SOURCE
Matches fertilizer type to crop needs.



RIGHT RATE
Matches amount of fertilizer type to crop needs.



RIGHT TIME
Makes nutrients available when crops need them.



RIGHT PLACE
Keeps nutrients where crops can use them.

Growing Trees, Training Youth

A new initiative in St. Louis aims to do both



Over the next three years, a new Treesilience program will be growing in St. Louis City and North St. Louis County. The Nature Conservancy and Forest ReLeaf of Missouri have been awarded an Urban Forest Resilience grant from the National Association of State Foresters, and a Landscape Scale Restoration grant from the USDA Forest Service. These grants together have helped to establish Treesilience: St. Louis, a tree health and youth green jobs initiative.

“We’re experiencing a great deal of canopy loss in St. Louis due to the Emerald Ash Borer” says Rebecca Weaver, TNC’s cities program manager. “Through public-private partnerships with conservationists, local governments, community organizations, and the public health sector, this new initiative will support a youth green jobs program, and conduct science-based, community-driven and equitable canopy restoration throughout St. Louis.”

The program will address dead or dying trees on public lands in the City of St. Louis and on private lands of interested homeowners in North St. Louis County. Trees will be removed and replaced through local contracting and community-based replanting.

“The costs of tree removal are prohibitive for many homeowners,” says Rebecca. “And standing dead trees pose threats to homes and people as major weather events continue to increase due to climate change.”

The program kicks off this fall with a tree assessment, as well as an outreach and prioritization process to determine focus areas for the program. “Our Canopy Crew will train emerging conservation professionals to evaluate the health of standing ash trees to identify trees to be replaced, and communities interested in stewarding replacement trees,” says Meridith Perkins, executive director of Forest ReLeaf of Missouri.

She says Treesilience will help to support the Canopy Crew Program and will hire local youth to advance this project’s goals and increase green jobs training opportunities in the region.

Removal of the trees will be completed by project partner, Davey Tree Expert Company, and stump grinding will be completed through local contractors from the community. As part of the work, Davey staff will engage the Canopy Crew in career exposure activities during the removal and treatment process.

For every tree removed, the team will replant two trees through Forest ReLeaf of Missouri’s tree nursery and giveaway program. The Canopy Crew will continue to support the community throughout the tree planting process and afterward through the replacement trees’ establishment period.

Due to the statewide organizational reach of both TNC and Forest ReLeaf of Missouri, the partners hope this program can be replicated across the state. “There are many communities throughout Missouri that stand to lose tree canopy, and that suffer from inequitable access to tree canopy already,” says Rebecca. “We hope the Treesilience pilot program inspires other communities to proactively pursue similar initiatives that enhance urban landscapes and provide learning opportunities for young people.”





Not Dunn Yet

Dunn Ranch Prairie receives upgrades to increase visitor experience

For over 20 years, The Nature Conservancy’s Dunn Ranch Prairie has been a hub for prairie restoration and research. The 3,475-acre preserve is located in Hatfield, Missouri and is part of the larger Grand River Grasslands region—more than 70,000 acres spanning parts of Missouri and Iowa.

Now, thanks to some generous funding, Dunn Ranch Prairie has undergone a transformation that will significantly advance our goals, improve our operational efficiency, expand our capacity for outreach, and enhance our ability to host groups and tours.

“Dunn Ranch Prairie has always been a popular destination for people wanting

to immerse themselves in Missouri’s prairie heritage,” says Brandon Cox, TNC’s conservation coordinator in Missouri.

The new infrastructure updates make those trips more convenient for everyone from individuals to families, and increases opportunities for larger groups who were not able to utilize the preserve before.

“Parking for buses and public restrooms were two limiting factors that were keeping groups, such as school children, from being able to visit without significant advanced planning,” says Brandon. “This is

something that we’ve been wanting to do for years.”

Additional projects include an interpretive trail and kiosks, expanded parking lots and two viewing platforms. “The new additions will make visits more interactive and enjoyable for everyone, while also helping to share the story of the prairie and why this landscape is so important to protect,” Brandon says.



A two-story observation tower looking south into the bison-grazed prairie with beautiful vista views has been constructed near the trail and will be a great spot for bird watching, viewing the prairie chickens in the spring or scouting out the bison herd.

The new trail provides visitors a deeper engagement and added educational components, and will be maintained for year-round access.

South Parking

On the southern end of the prairie, a parking lot off Highway M has been constructed allowing access to an elevated area with great views of the prairie to the north and to the south towards TNC's Little Creek Farm, which is our sustainable grazing demonstration site. Future plans for this parking lot include constructing a footpath that meanders around Little Creek Farm, with views of grazing pastures and prairie, as well as our future Little Creek fish passage project.



Interpretive trail, kiosks and overlook

Located just across from the pavilion area is a newly constructed 2,300-foot ADA-accessible prairie trail that encourages self-guided recreation and education on the prairie. The trail will include informational kiosks with attached benches and plant species identifiers that provide the scientific name, common name and fun facts of the plants along the trail.

Expanded parking and restrooms

A pavilion, which was constructed in 2015, sits on the northern end of the preserve and serves as an event and gathering space for many who visit Dunn Ranch Prairie. This area has been significantly improved to better support both large and small gatherings and allow for self-guided tours throughout the year. The new ADA-accessible parking lot provides plenty of space for buses to park.

Also in this area, our new ADA-accessible restrooms provide necessary amenities for visitors who want to make a day of their trip to the prairie.



LEARN MORE or plan your visit at nature.org/DunnRanchPrairie

Doretta Youngman

In gratitude we recognize Doretta Madison Youngman of Bethany, Missouri for leaving a Legacy gift to support Dunn Ranch Prairie.

Growing up on a nearby farm in Harrison County, Doretta led a unique and interesting life. After completing her second year of teaching, Doretta was among the first women to join the United States Marine Corps during WWII. She chose a role as a transporter and traveled cross country from coast to coast before being stationed in Hawaii. After returning home, Doretta continued her commitment to her students and referred to teaching as "a joy, not a job."

Doretta had a strong faith, love of country and sharp wit. She is remembered for being a caring mother to her son Darryl Lee Youngman, and her sincere love for her family, friends and students.

Her generous gift is helping to fund educational kiosks and youth outreach—continuing her spirit and dedication to teaching and life-long learning.

Strike Team, Go!

New team protecting the Osage River Hills



Since the early 1980s, The Nature Conservancy, the Missouri Department of Conservation and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources have identified the Osage River Hills as a high priority conservation landscape due to its biological integrity and the unique recreational opportunities it offers the public. The landscape features an exceptional ecosystem that is made up of dry oak savanna, and woodlands with glade openings.

Now, thanks to a Cohesive Strategy Grant from the USDA Forest Service's Eastern Region, a new collaborative initiative, the Osage River Hills Habitat Strike Team, is hitting the ground to increase fire management and stewardship practices that cross jurisdictional boundaries of state and private land ownership.

"While this is not the first time each of our organizations have worked together to increase our restoration goals, this is the first time that we have attempted to coordinate our activities collectively utilizing an inter-agency planning methodology," says Ryan Gauger, TNC's prescribed fire and stewardship manager in Missouri. "Our goal is to step back and look at this landscape in a holistic manner as opposed to focusing within our respective boundaries."

In this landscape, high-quality habitat management and wildfire risk reduction are one in the same. "These savannas, woodlands and glades are overgrown and need to be thinned of eastern red cedar trees and excessive deciduous species to reduce future fuel buildups and the risk of a catastrophic wildfire," Ryan says. Fuels include everything from pine needles, leaves and twigs to larger fuels such as shrubs, branches and downed trees. A buildup of fuels on the forest floor intensifies the threat of uncontrollable wildfires.

Expanding the use of prescribed fire as an integral management tool is a goal of the initiative. "We plan to create wildland fire management demonstration sites and work with interested landowners who want to engage in this practice to observe our fire operations and tour areas where fuels have been thinned," he says.

The group would also like to establish a Prescribed Burn Association (PBA), which is made up of private landowners who can independently conduct prescribed burns and simultaneously create a positive sense of community. The Missouri Prescribed Fire Council actively promotes PBAs throughout Missouri and has offered to help ensure that any efforts towards this goal is sustainable and safety oriented.

For Gauger, partnerships are the backbone of this project. "When conservation partners, including private landowners, come together with a unified vision, the successful implementation of conservation practices at the landscape level becomes much more attainable," he says. "No one organization has the capacity to adequately conserve at the landscape level. Each partner will bring its resources and expertise to the table, and in combination with this grant, we will be able to show significant conservation benefit within this landscape."

The Osage River Hills Habitat Strike Team will serve as a pilot project to test how a landscape-scale collaborative effort can increase the impact of individual organization or agency efforts. "Our goal is to test this within the Osage River Hills landscape and eventually launch additional Habitat Strike Teams throughout Missouri's priority landscapes," says Ryan.



Meet Joel Pugh

Joel Pugh is a self-described continuous learner with an obsession for Wikipedia. He recently joined the board of The Nature Conservancy in Missouri and has already made lasting impacts and lots of new friends.

Growing up in Altoona, a small rural town in the middle of Pennsylvania, Joel says he was always playing outside and was an energetic child. After high school he and a group of friends backpacked across the U.S. from Altoona to San Francisco. “It was really a foundational trip for me,” says Joel. “Growing up in a small town was great, but I didn’t really get to experience the world outside of Altoona until that point.”

When he returned home, Joel served in the AmeriCorps for a few years before earning a degree in political science and public policy from Washington University in St. Louis. After that, he went on to earn an MBA in social justice and business from the Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University in Massachusetts.

It was there that Joel was introduced to The Nature Conservancy. “While at Brandeis, I was given the opportunity to participate in a board fellows program,” says Joel. “I searched the list for available environmental organizations and that’s where I found TNC.”

After graduation, Joel found himself—along with his wife, Morgan, and newborn, Evelyn—back in St. Louis and reconnected with TNC. “I’m really impressed with everything The Nature Conservancy has going on in Missouri



and I wanted to be a part of it,” he says. The levee setback project on the Missouri River, the Cities Program and Missouri’s expressive greater prairie-chickens were just some of the things that drew him in.

Recently, Joel and his family made another commitment to TNC in the form of a planned gift. In fact, they were the 400th Legacy Club member in Missouri. The Legacy Club is TNC’s recognition society for members who have included the Conservancy in their estate plans or who have established a life-income gift with TNC.

“Legacy gifts have a two-fold effect for us,” says Adam McLane, Missouri state director. “The funds provide support at critical times that help drive our work. But also, it’s the spirit behind the gifts—that we’ve been entrusted to be a part of someone’s legacy. It’s just a boost to our energy and fuels our passion for this work.”

Joel hopes to instill his love for learning and inquisitive nature in his daughter who has already begun bird watching, learning about snails and yelling at squirrels. “We love squirrels, too,” laughs Joel. “Just not the ones trying to infiltrate our bird feeders.”



WANT TO KNOW MORE? Head over to nature.org/MoPodcast to stream the entire conversation between Joel and State Director, Adam McLane.

If you’re interested in learning more about the Legacy Club, please contact Mona Monteleone at (314) 501-1521 or at mona.monteleone@tnc.org.

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The Nature Conservancy's Great Western Checkerboard Project in Montana. © Steven Gnam

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