

INDIANA UPDATE

SPRING 2024



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Land Protection Successes

With your help, over the past 16 months, we protected more than 4,000 acres at these beautiful and important sites.

- Forest Bank Properties**
Lawrence and Warren Counties
- Green's Bluff**
Owen County
- Harrison County Glades**
Harrison County
- Brock Sampson-Hardin Ridge**
Floyd County
- Big Walnut**
Putnam County
- Patoka National Wildlife Refuge**
Pike County
- Sugar Creek**
Montgomery County
- Brown County Hills**
Brown County
- Stay Tuned for Land Protection in:**
Harrison County
Sullivan County
Porter County
Perry County
Putman County

Our People

TNC's Indiana Chapter has ambitious goals for its 2025 plan: protect forests, prairies and wetlands; connect more Hoosiers to nature and volunteerism; ensure sustainable agriculture; and tackle climate change. To help meet our vision for the future where people and nature thrive together, we've added the following members to our team.

Samantha Carroll
Development Coordinator

Josh Egenolf
Stream Restoration Project Manager

Sanketh Menon
Northeast Indiana Assistant Steward

Brian Dickinson
Donor Relations Manager

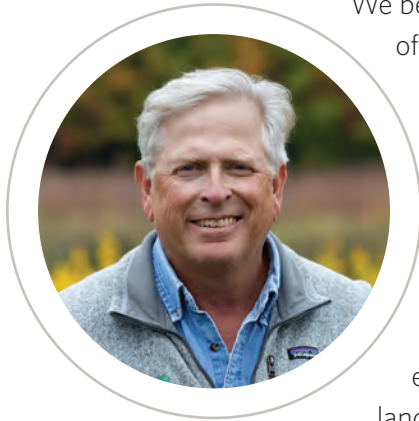
Valerie Magana
Associate Director of Development

Sherri Zimmerman
Conservation Executive Assistant

COVER: Least bittern at Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge © Elie Tabet
Brown County Hills © Christopher Jordan; Forest Bank Properties © Chris Neggers/TNC; Green's Bluff © Fauna Creative; Harrison County Glades © Vince Garmon/TNC; Brock Sampson-Hardin Ridge © Braun Budell; Big Walnut © Christopher Jordan; Patoka National Wildlife Refuge © Fauna Creative; Sugar Creek © Christopher Jordan; Harrison County Glades © Christopher Jordan

Hope In Action

As I look back over the past year and a half, I'm proud to say that it has been one of the most successful in terms of land protection in Indiana.



We began 2023 with the protection of 1,700 acres adjacent to Patoka River National Wildlife Refuge. More than 80 plant and animal species considered threatened, endangered or of special concern in Indiana are found here, including Indiana bats and nesting bald eagles. This acquisition adds to land already protected by the Refuge, creating more than 20,000 acres of connected wildlife habitat.

Then we ended the year with 200 acres protected at the Harrison County Glades. Located in southeast Harrison County, the Glades are a top conservation priority for TNC, where large blocks of forest buffer rare glade communities and provide habitat for sensitive species such as forest interior breeding birds.

Land protection was also furthered by important state and federal programs, such as Indiana's President Benjamin Harrison Conservation Trust (PBHCT), which received \$10 million from the General Assembly in 2023. The PBHCT acquires

and protects land in Indiana that represents outstanding natural resources and habitats. TNC was a leader in getting that \$10 million secured.

Since January 2023, we've protected nearly 4,000 acres, and I'm pleased to say we've got more in the pipeline, which we'll announce in our fall newsletter.

These conservation wins were made possible because of people like you donating to our \$48 million *Human:Nature* campaign, which focuses on the connection between humanity and nature, creating an Indiana where nature and people thrive.

This campaign is all about hope. We have hope in a healthy and vibrant future—one where Indiana's forests, prairies and wetlands are protected. While we're thrilled with our results to date, we're looking forward to even greater conservation wins in 2024 and beyond.

Yours in conservation,

Larry Clemens, State Director
The Nature Conservancy in Indiana

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Conserving Indiana Wetlands Despite Regulatory Roll Backs

By John Ketzenberger, Director of Government Relations

Indiana’s wetlands remain a top priority for The Nature Conservancy, especially considering another regulatory setback in the General Assembly this year.

House Bill 1383 rocketed through the Indiana Legislature earlier this year and was signed by the governor before the legislative session hit the halfway point. The bill redefines the top two classifications for wetlands, which makes more acreage available for development without mitigation requirements.

TNC and others advocated for an alternative that would have removed classifications and aligned wetland designations with federal definitions as part of a streamlined permitting process. The alternative also would have restored a general permit for smaller projects and set a 90-day deadline for the state to make a determination on all permit applications.

It is the third time in four years lawmakers attempted to reduce regulations and the second time they succeeded. In 2021 an attempt to fully repeal the law was amended to remove regulations from Class 1 wetlands, which is the

largest segment of state-regulated acreage. During the 2023 session, an amendment to repeal the law was withheld at the governor’s request so the Indiana Department of Environmental Management could engage developers in negotiations to redefine wetlands. House Bill 1383 this year was the result of those talks.

The law’s passage means the state retains regulatory oversight of important wetlands. The North Carolina Legislature recently repealed its state wetlands regulations. The U.S. Supreme Court also narrowed the definitions of wetlands under federal regulations, further reducing protection.

Developers in Indiana threatened to pursue a “North Carolina solution,” leaving the IDEM no option other than working with them to redefine wetland classifications or face a full repeal.

Meanwhile TNC and other conservation groups have successfully advocated for Senate Bill 246, which creates a property tax incentive for landowners who voluntarily preserve wetlands. The bill was passed after garnering

unanimous support in the Senate and overwhelming support in the House, an encouraging first step in convincing lawmakers that wetlands have value even beyond their function on the landscape.

For TNC in Indiana, this is part of a decades-long pursuit of wetlands preservation, both in the field and in the Statehouse. We remain committed to this important task, especially considering our efforts to persuade the General Assembly to enact comprehensive water policy to ensure all Hoosiers have abundant clean water for their families and the economy well into the future. And TNC will continue to acquire critical wetlands across the state.


Update on Senate Bill 246

Despite the setbacks associated with House Bill 1383, Indiana legislators passed Senate Bill 246, which gives landowners who protect wetlands on their property a modest property tax break. This is a win for wetlands and a win for all Hoosiers!



Every acre of wetlands is valuable.

Maintaining wetlands now can prevent further regulation and costly infrastructure investment in the future.

-  **One acre of wetlands annually provides:**
- \$248** in purification services for fresh drinking water
- \$2,270** in water storage services
- \$1,055** in erosion prevention services
- Nitrate removal from runoff of **100 acres of cropland**, an area equivalent to about **75 football fields**

- In Indiana, which has just over 800,000 acres of wetlands, this translates to:**
- \$202 million** in purification services
- \$1.8 billion** in water storage services
- \$850 million** in erosion prevention services
- 81 million** acres of cropland runoff purification services

SOURCE: Indiana Dept. of Natural Resources



Indiana's wetlands provide critical rest stops for birds migrating along the Mississippi Flyway, which is flown by more than 325 bird species every year.



In 2023, TNC received funding from the Olive B. Cole Foundation to support added staff capacity in northeast Indiana. Sanketh Menon has joined TNC Indiana and is working with Nathan Herbert as a permanent part of the stewardship team. Sanketh and Nathan’s work focuses on controlling invasive plants, restoring native habitat, and maintaining trails, signs, and parking areas at our preserves in this part of the state.

A particular focus will be enhancements to TNC’s 1,370-acre Douglas Woods Nature Preserve as we upgrade it to one of our flagship preserves.

Thank you to the Cole Foundation for their generous gift!



Plans for Douglas Woods Underway

TNC is once again working with the National Park Service’s Rivers Trails and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) Program, this time at our Douglas Woods Nature Preserve in northeastern Indiana. Expected improvements include new trails, new signage and improved parking at the site. The RTCA is finishing their report so that the design phase may begin. Stay tuned!

About Douglas Woods

Containing one of the last remaining mature forest stands in northeast Indiana, Douglas Woods boasts almost 400 acres of mature forest with hundreds of additional acres of younger forest and restored wetlands. Fish Creek, a high-quality stream that is home to several species of rare fish and mussels, runs through the preserve. TNC’s wetland and forest restoration is increasing habitat for species that need a mix of upland forest and wetlands to survive, including great blue herons, Blanding’s turtles and Blanchard’s cricket frogs.

TNC is once again working with the National Park Services’ Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program to make visitor enhancements to Douglas Woods Nature Preserve, located in Steuben and Dekalb Counties in northeastern Indiana. © Fauna Creative; Sanketh Menon © Stephanie Collins/TNC



The Wabash River: A Midwest Priority

By Carrie Parmenter, Lower Wabash Project Director

The Wabash River has served as a vital conduit for trade, travel, and settlement in the Midwest for centuries. The Wabash also provides habitat for more than 400 aquatic species, including several mussel species that are federally threatened or endangered. In addition, the river and its floodplains form critical habitat and an important migratory pathway for waterfowl and other wetland-dependent wildlife. Up to 300,000 ducks and geese have been reported to winter on the Lower Wabash River, and the watershed has the highest density of wintering federally endangered whooping cranes of any other area in the Midwest.

However, 62% of the Wabash River watershed is in row crop agriculture, causing the Wabash to be a leading contributor of excess nutrients to the Mississippi River. While representing only 3% of the Mississippi River's geographic area, the watershed produces 11-18% of the nutrient load that ends up in the Gulf of Mexico. These factors make the Wabash an ideal location to develop improved systemic planning processes in support of floodplain restoration and regenerative agricultural practices.

The Lower Wabash River has been a focus area for The Nature Conservancy for more than 30 years, and it has recently been elevated as one of the focal areas for TNC's Midwest Division.

This prioritization has already resulted in increased funding to continue building upon the work TNC and partners have done to restore floodplains and improve water quality. In January, TNC received funding to create a plan for site-specific restoration and conservation efforts that can be scaled up and provide a template for future restoration projects across the Mississippi River Basin.

The work currently being accomplished in the Lower Wabash includes implementing a Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership (WREP) with The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) in Indiana and Illinois. The funding will allow us to restore up to 1,000 acres of wetlands and provide outreach about conservation practices to historically underserved audiences.

TNC is also working with local conservation partners to provide cost-share and mini-grants for both urban and agricultural practices to improve water quality and promote soil health in key sub-watersheds, including White River and lower Pigeon Creek.

• The Wabash River (right) empties into the Ohio River (left) in far southwestern Indiana. Why the color difference?
• The Wabash is laden with excess sediment from erosion occurring in fields, urban areas and along streambanks.
• These sediments, along with nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus, can travel down the Ohio to the Mississippi River, where they'll eventually empty into the Gulf of Mexico; Carrie Parmenter © Fauna Creative



Indiana's Time to Get Renewable Energy Right is Now

By Sean Mobley, Senior Policy Associate for Climate & Clean Energy

Last December, business leaders, scientists, activists and more gathered in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, for the United Nations climate conference known as COP28. A bright spot on the agenda is widespread diplomatic support for tripling the deployment of renewable energy capacity by the end of this decade. That's a huge win for states like Indiana, where up to 75% of America's large renewable energy projects are projected to take place as our nation works to meet these ambitious yet attainable global climate goals.

Indeed, Indiana is primed to be a leader in America's efforts to accelerate the clean energy transition. Large, utility-scale renewable energy development requires a lot of land, and fortunately, Indiana has it in abundance. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) estimates there are 4.25 million acres of non-prime farmland that can be used to empower farmers to

cultivate the sun and wind just like they do soybeans and corn—creating new “crops” for which the Hoosier state can be world-renowned.

What's more, the state has thousands of acres of degraded land—such as landfills, brownfields or former mine lands where clean energy hubs can make use of existing infrastructure while driving economic development and revitalization to communities across the state. Consider that Indiana has more than 86,000 jobs in clean energy—the second-most clean energy jobs in the Midwest—and that number is sure to rise as more wind and solar projects are initiated. Or that wind energy has created \$6.8 billion in capital investments for the state, as well as \$23 million in annual tax revenue.

TNC's new Mining the Sun report suggests that strategically siting new energy infrastructure on degraded lands like mining sites, landfills and brownfields can cost-effectively transform these sites into clean energy hubs that contribute significantly to the nation's clean energy goals. © Steve Proehl/Getty Images

These myriad potential economic benefits are why Hoosier voters across the political spectrum view wind and solar projects positively and want to see an increase in renewable energy production. More than seven in 10 voters want the state to increase solar energy production, while three in five voters call for an increase in wind energy. And Hoosiers in counties that are primed for solar and wind development—even those where renewable energy moratoriums currently exist—support the transition. Sixty-four percent of voters in southern, solar-dominant counties and 55% of voters in northern, wind-dominant counties are favorable to these projects.

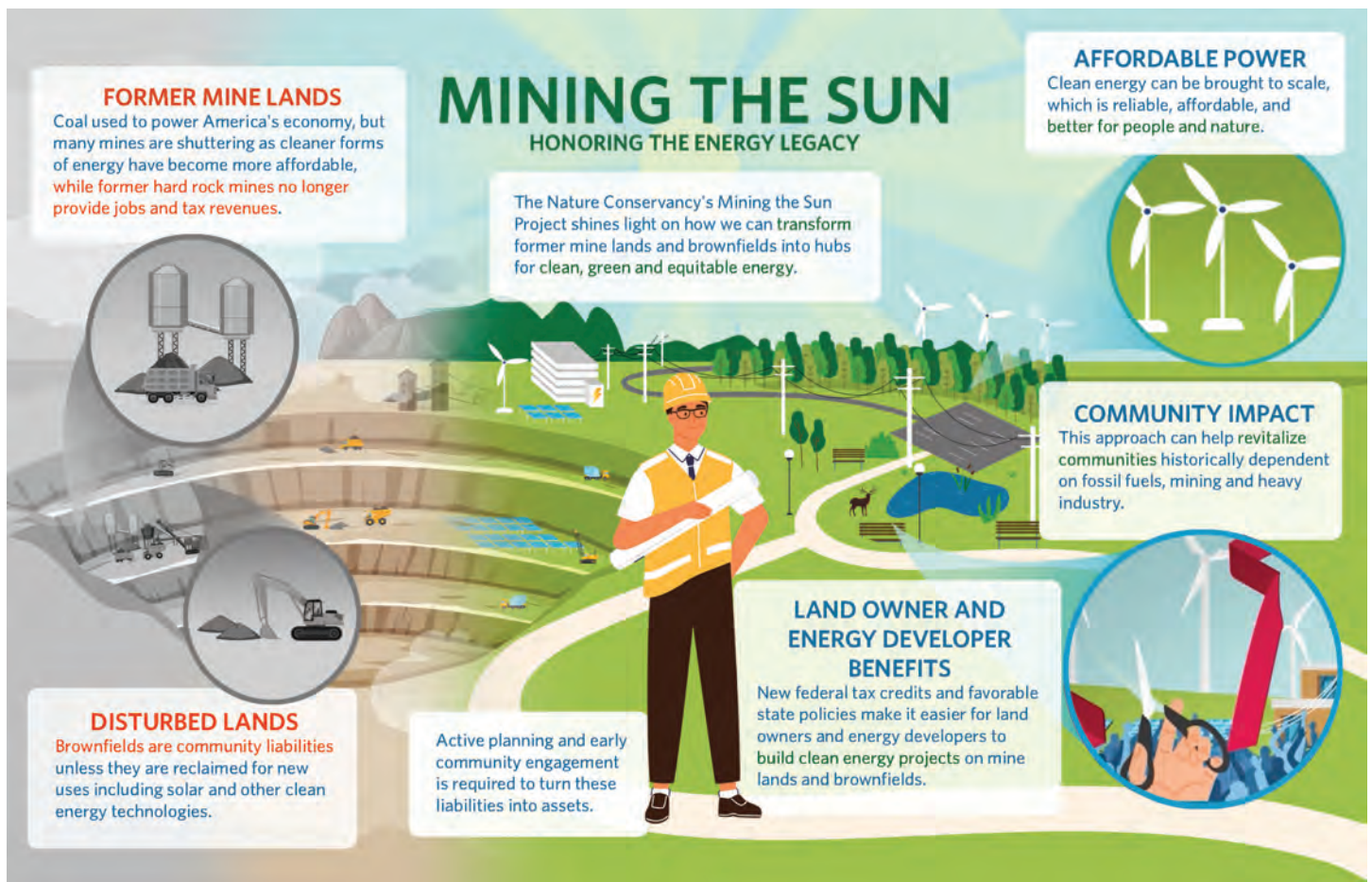
It's clear that Indiana's window of opportunity is now, but the question is whether we can transition to renewables fast enough—or smart enough—to meet demand. Half of Indiana's largest employers and all five of the state's investor-owned utilities have publicly announced carbon-emission reduction targets, but the generation of wind and solar energy in Indiana needs to dramatically pick up speed to meet their goals.

To help build out Indiana's clean energy infrastructure quickly and responsibly, TNC is engaging with renewable

energy companies, utilities, landowners and policymakers around the state to identify the most promising places in Indiana to quickly develop renewable energy while avoiding impacts to important wildlife and habitats. We estimate there are approximately 300,000 acres that are least likely to pose a conflict with the state's natural treasures and surrounding communities, and developers should prioritize this land when scouting locations for Indiana's next big wind or solar investment.

Developing renewable energy in these low-risk areas will have tremendous benefits to climate, conservation and communities while avoiding costly project delays and reputational risk.

It will take all of us, working together, to smartly leverage Indiana's vast renewable resources. As the world's eyes were on Dubai for climate leadership on the global stage, the real work of meeting our state's and nation's energy needs will take place here at home. Let's commit to getting renewables right in Indiana so we can power a future where people and nature thrive.



Indiana has seen rapid growth in solar development in recent years. Most projects have been sited on croplands, which has given rise to controversies over the transformation of croplands into large-scale solar projects. With Mining the Sun, we have significant opportunities, instead, to focus future clean energy development on mine lands and brownfields.

Volunteer Spotlight: Bill Cummings



What is your role with The Nature Conservancy and how did you get started?

I volunteer with prescribed fires, sign making, and monitoring at Cedar Bluffs Nature Preserve near Bloomington. I retired a couple of years ago and offered at that time to help as needed.

Can you share a little bit about your background and your relationship to Indiana's natural areas?

My family and I have camped and hiked at the Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary, some of Indiana's state parks, and several national parks since the mid-1990s. In the early 2000s we teamed with eastern Indiana's Red-tail Conservancy to buy ~100 acres of mixed-use land near the reservoir in Delaware County that the local water company was selling with intent to keep the surrounding watershed as clean as possible.

We signed a conservation easement on our half and converted the formerly tilled 20 acres into prairie, the remainder being woods and wetlands. I keep bees there and every year harvest a nice light wildflower honey. We are currently converting some invasives-dominated acreage into oak savanna and this year began collecting wildflower seeds for Project Wingspan.

What drew you to volunteering with TNC specifically?

I had enjoyed bridge designing and building, trail maintenance, invasives work, and the observation of wildlife for many years and thought some of those skills might be useful to TNC. Also, Denny McGrath, a former state director of TNC in Indiana, is a long-time friend and former neighbor here in Indianapolis, so I've kept an admiring eye on TNC for quite a while.

Have you had a particularly memorable moment or significant experience while volunteering with TNC?

Peter Bauson, Esmé Barniskis, my son Joe, and I were taking an exploratory hike through Cedar Bluffs, and we decided that a fallen tree needed to be removed from the trail. As often happens, the chainsaw bar got pinched when the cut allowed the log to settle. Despite lots of driving wedges, heaving, and grunting, the bar was firmly stuck, and this large log was too heavy to roll or slide. We hit upon the idea of using a car jack to lift the log from beneath at the cut plane. That opened the slice enough to liberate the saw, and there was much rejoicing. Even though I designed jet engines for a career, I have a soft spot in my heart for Fred Flintstone engineering.

How do you see volunteerism fitting into your overall life at this time?

I'm spending a lot of my retirement time volunteering, mostly outdoors. Just as I did in my working years, I'm building a network of people with similar interests, and it's great to meet people so enthused about nature and its well being.

When you aren't volunteering, what do you like to do for fun?

I've taken up windsurfing in the last four years, an exhilarating way to spend time with friends on the water. I run a pickup game of soccer in Indianapolis that began with a few friends from the Indy Symphony 20 years ago and is now frequented by a load of youngsters who enjoy a good game (and allow a couple of old goats like me to run around with them). I quite enjoy music, too, so I sing in the choir at our church. I ride my bicycle to as many of these things as I can to keep in shape and enjoy the scenery and personal interactions on the trails and streets.



Learn more about volunteer opportunities by visiting nature.org/IndianaVolunteer/



Wet Prairie Trail

A half mile of wetland vegetation

The Wet Prairie Trail is an easy loop trail featuring water-loving sedges, wildflowers, amphibians, birds and insects. Depending on the time of year, you may find the trail dry (July–November), a little wet (December–January) or completely covered in water (February–June). Rubber boots are recommended during the wet season or expect wet and muddy shoes.



Boot Brush Station

Please use the boot brush to remove invasive seeds from your shoes before hiking.

Be mindful of hunting seasons and notices of prescribed burning when visiting the Kankakee Sands area.

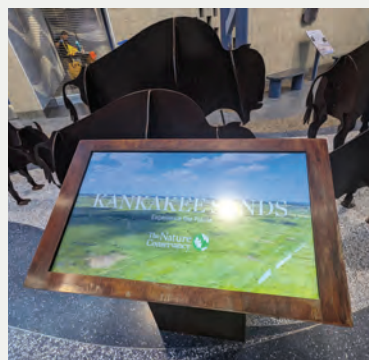


Efroymsen Prairie at Kankakee Sands



Improvements Happening at Kankakee Sands!

As reported in previous newsletters, we partnered with the National Park Service’s Rivers Trails and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) Program and Purdue University to plan for improved access and visitor experience at Kankakee Sands in northwestern Indiana. The design of these improvements is complete and will help make Kankakee Sands a more welcoming, inspiring and educational destination for all visitors. Construction is now underway at the Kankakee Sands welcome area on U.S. 41, bison viewing area and native seed nursery. These improvements include dozens of new interpretive signs. We anticipate that these initial improvements will be completed this fall, in time for National Bison Day on November 2!





Did you know that TNC is featured prominently at the new Kankakee Welcome Center on I-65 southbound in northwest Indiana? Visitors can walk among bison metal art, read about Kankakee Sands on an information panel and watch a condensed version of our 25th anniversary video. Our bison herd will certainly be capturing the eyes of people passing through the area.

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SPRING 2024



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anytime

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Indiana's *Human:Nature* Campaign

The Nature Conservancy in Indiana is in the final stretch of our *Human:Nature* campaign. We need your help to successfully meet our goal! By engaging more people, impacting more places and building more partnerships, we are having a profound impact on Indiana's future. We have the right science, partners and projects to make a difference, but we need you. Nature needs you.



Scan the QR code or visit nature.org/Indiana to give to our *Human:Nature* campaign. Indiana's future thanks you!