



LUPINES BLOOMING AFTER PRESCRIBED FIRE ©TISHA TOLLE

Due to COVID-19, our Kankakee Sands office is currently closed and will remain closed until at least September 2021. We thank you for your patience and understanding. While our office may be closed, our conservation work continues.

Big Planting Plans This Year

Twenty five years ago, we embarked on a long and exciting journey to plant 8,000 acres to prairie with the goal of connecting Conrad Savanna and Conrad Station Savanna with Beaver Lake Nature Preserve and Willow Slough Fish and Wildlife Area for a total of 20,000 acres of contiguous natural area. This year, we are meeting the ambitious goal that we set for ourselves all those years ago as we retire our last agricultural field and plant it to prairie this coming winter!



Unit E's planting will make more habitat for reptiles like the state endangered Blanding's turtle, photographed at Kankakee Sands this spring. ©Mike Kinsel

In partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and Indiana Department of Natural Resources, we will seed the 541-acre field north of the bison pasture with 160 native plant species. We will also create a shallow 12-acre wetland that will attract a wide variety of waterfowl and migratory songbirds.



Sign marking the southern boundary of Unit E, just north of the bison pasture, currently in soybeans and will be planted this fall to prairie. ©A.Nyberg/TNC

In the years ahead, we will continue to improve our prairies by removing invasive plants, trees and shrubs; increase native plant diversity by adding more native plants and seeds; and monitor to better understand the plant, animal and insect communities we support.

Welcome 2021 Restoration Technicians

We are excited to welcome two returning members and two new members to our Kankakee Sands 2021 Field Technician crew. Maria Egyed and Emma Lord are in their second season at Kankakee Sands - their experience and knowledge of local conservation management is invaluable. Kade Sheffield and William (Billy) Hoffmann have just begun their term with us - each brings relevant experience and skills that will contribute to the success of Kankakee Sands. Kade is from Greentown, Indiana and graduated from Purdue with a degree in Wildlife Biology. Billy is from Evanston, Illinois and graduated from Denison University with a degree in Philosophy, Political Science and Economics. Thanks for spending the 2021 year with us Billy, Emma, Kade and Maria!



Kade Sheffield, Billy Hoffmann, Maria Egyed and Emma Lord ready to head out for a morning of seed picking. ©A.Nyberg/TNC

Fire and Feast

Grazing bison and fire are two incredible forces that were part of the prairie long before European settlers arrived. The two forces create large-scale disturbances that either knock back or benefit different plant species, depending on the timing and intensity of the grazing and fire. The burning and grazing combination leaves the more aggressive grasses weakened and shorter and allows more space for flowers and sedges. This ultimately leads to a greater diversity of plants, and in turn, all the wildlife that depends on plants such as insects, birds, amphibians, reptiles and mammals.



Bison grazing in the previously burned south east corner of the bison pasture. ©Trevor Edmonson/TNC

At Kankakee Sands, we try to mimic the natural sequence of fire followed by grazing; we burn portions of our bison pasture each year. Our goal is to tempt bison to graze different areas from year to year, creating more heterogeneity of the prairies.



Unit K prescribed burn ©Olivia Schouten/TNC

You can see this relationship at work right now at Kankakee Sands! Last fall we burned 160 acres in the south east corner of the bison pasture which is where we usually find the main herd of bison. Early in the spring these acres were the bison's favorite grazing spot because the fire had removed accumulated sticky thatch and exposed tender lush vegetation. Next year we will burn another location in the bison pasture, and watch as the bison move to their new favorite spot, leaving the flowers and sedges in the previously burned area to thrive.

There is so much to do and see at Kankakee Sands. Come enjoy it all!
Kankakee Sands is free and open to everyone for hiking and exploring every day of the year for non-consumptive use.

Indianapolis Zoo Conducts Turtle Research at Kankakee Sands

This past spring, Indianapolis Zoo staff conducted research at Kankakee Sands to determine the baseline health of freshwater turtles in a restored ecosystem. Forty wild painted turtles were collected from three sites using live hoop-net traps baited with canned sardines. Each trapped turtle had a complete physical exam, with a blood sample drawn and measurements taken on body weight and carapacial (shell) length. After all diagnostics were performed, each turtle was released at the location where it was found. Indianapolis Zoo staff will run several diagnostic tests including Complete Blood Counts, chemistry profiles, mineral panels, vitamin D levels, lactate levels and viral disease testing. The results from this study will give the conservation community a better understanding of turtle health in restoration areas so that we can better understand how to support healthy reptile communities.



Working with turtles in the field.
©Emily Vincent, DVM



Painted turtle.
©Emily Vincent, DVM



Zookeeper Andrew Ahl with painted turtles in a hoop-net trap. ©Emily Vincent, DVM

Exciting New Development with the National Park Service

Our Kankakee Sands office has been selected as a recipient of the National Park Service's Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) program! With guidance provided by the National Park Service, we will create a plan for updating and developing the Kankakee Sands property for better accessibility, improved signage and an enhanced visitation experience for people of all ages and abilities. In 2021, we will begin the planning, research and discovery phase. We will be seeking input from the community, so please be thinking about improvements you would like to see. We look to the end of 2022 to begin implementing the upgrades. To learn more about the RTCA program visit: <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/rtca/community-projects.html>



Kankakee Sands Wish List

As we all know, using the right tool for the job makes the work so much easier! Below is a listing of tools that would help us increase our efficiency in managing the prairies and savannas of Kankakee Sands. Thank you!

- **Kestrel Fire Weather Kit** – Extremely useful during Kankakee Sands prescribed fires to measure weather conditions, view weather trends, and export weather observations quickly and remotely while on the fireline. \$550
- **Echo Meter Touch 2 PRO for iOS** – This bat detection device would allow us to hear, record, and identify bats as they fly the Kankakee Sands night skies. \$350
- **Milwaukee M18 FUEL 18-Volt Lithium-Ion Brushless Cordless SAWZALL Reciprocating Saw Kit W/one 5.0 Ah Battery, Charger and Case** – Convenient, efficient and versatile cordless tools allow us to get jobs done more quickly and easily. \$350
- **Milwaukee M18 18-Volt Lithium-Ion High Output 12.0Ah Battery Pack** – Quick charging battery pack would be useful with our grinder, circular saw and impact wrench. \$219
- **Garden Wagon** – A new or used open-sided heavy-duty wagon/cart would be useful for moving potted plant material between the greenhouse and shade tarp. New \$200
- **Table and Chairs for Crew House** – Looking for a new or lightly used small to medium sized kitchen table with four chairs for the Kankakee Sands crew house dining area.

If you would prefer to make a financial donation to our work, you can do so by visiting support.nature.org/Indiana or contacting Trevor Edmonson at trevor.edmonson@tnc.org. As a small token of our BIG thanks, we will send you our annual Indiana chapter newsletter and our quarterly Nature Conservancy global magazine.

Volunteering at Kankakee Sands

Our Kankakee Sands office, as well as all of our Nature Conservancy offices around the globe, will remain closed to the public through at least September 6, 2021. However, we are very excited to begin hosting a select number of pre-approved outdoor workdays. Join us for summer or autumn seed harvest workdays, or for wildflower walks throughout fall at Kankakee Sands. People of all ages and with all levels of plant identification skills are welcome to all of our activities.

For more information and to RSVP, contact Alyssa Nyberg at anyberg@tnc.org or 219-866-1706.

- **Summer-time Seed Harvest on the Prairie:** Saturday, July 17 & August 14, from 9 am to noon central time
- **Wildflower Walks & Plant Surveys:** Saturday, August 14 & September 25, 9 am to 11 am central time
- **Autumn Seed Harvest Workdays on the Prairie:** Saturday, September 11, September 25, & October 9, from 10 am to noon, central time



Volunteers harvesting seed in 2019 at the Kankakee Sands Nursery ©A.Nyberg/TNC

Want to volunteer, make a donation or learn more about Kankakee Sands?

If you would like more information about our conservation work and/or how you can be involved, visit us online at nature.org/kankakeesands or contact Trevor Edmonson at 219-285-2184 or trevor.edmonson@tnc.org. Thank you!