

NATURE

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Karen Gautreaux © JCW Creative

The Power of People

During this age of technology, it can be easy to forget the value of personal relationships to advancing The Nature Conservancy's mission in Louisiana and around the world.

For example, after a lengthy hiatus, TNC staff working throughout the Mississippi River Basin gathered to align efforts to safeguard this important resource for wild-life habitat and local economies.

In a more intimate way, we also checked in with a longtime member about the motivation behind her late sister's generous bequest to TNC. Whether conversing at a big conference or one-on-one with members-who-become-friends, every personal relationship moves the needle forward on behalf of nature in Louisiana.

Karen Gautreaux, State Director



Bryan Piazza, Karen Gautreaux and Seth Blitch attend the Mississippi River Program In-Person Meeting. © TNC

Meeting of the Minds

The Nature Conservancy convenes staff around conserving the Mississippi River

Earlier this year, our staff in Louisiana hosted more than 100 Nature Conservancy colleagues from the 31 states comprising the Mississippi River Basin—from its origins in Minnesota all the way to the Gulf of Mexico. At this gathering, TNC staff connected about recent accomplishments, challenges and opportunities for elevating this important cross-boundary effort.

“You could really feel that energy at this meeting, and what better place to do it than in Louisiana where the whole Mississippi River comes together?” says Nick Ohde, Mississippi River Basin program director for TNC.

Meeting attendees also checked in about TNC's ambitious goals for the Basin, which include 1) reducing 20% of nitrogen and phosphorus reaching the Gulf of Mexico by 2025 and 40% by 2035, and 2) protecting and restoring 2 million acres of floodplains by 2030.

Participants departed from the four-day gathering focused on the importance and urgency, of restoring and connecting floodplain habitats throughout the Basin, especially in areas where landowners are seeking solutions or incentives for retiring frequently flooded lands from farming. For most, pursuing these goals are an easy “sell” since restoring the Basin's wetlands and forests helps with sequestering carbon, supporting wildlife, mitigating dangerous floods, and capturing pollution and nutrients before they flow farther downstream.

Ohde adds, “At TNC and in the conservation field, we have gotten really good at protecting important local places. Looking at the entire Mississippi River Basin provides an opportunity to step back and think about what is possible when we work together to make a change at a larger scale.”

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Camille Coates kayaking on Lake Martin in St. Martinville © Courtesy of the Coates Family

Q&A: Cathy Coates

Cathy talks about her late sister, Camille Coates, and her love of nature and legacy.

How did Camille come to love the outdoors? From our mother and her mother, both of whom deeply appreciated the natural world. Our grandmother was an adventurous traveler long before her time, eager to experience the landscapes of other continents. She was also a lifelong casual birder. Our mother took after her, always ready to explore her natural surroundings, whether on an adventure or working in her garden.

What do you want our members to know about Camille's commitment to conservation? It came from a strong belief in the natural order of the universe and a fear that that order is in danger. Camille was spiritual. She studied many traditions of faith. She believed in a higher power, in the unity of existence and in the inherent goodness of all beings. As a devoted student and teacher of yoga, she practiced her beliefs on both a physical and a spiritual level. Her desire to protect the environment was a desire to protect the universal order of balance, beauty and goodness.

How would you describe the significance of Camille's bequest to TNC? Camille's bequest was large and completely unrestricted because she had faith that TNC would make good use of it. We are beyond pleased that the gift has been used both for immediate land conservation in Louisiana and for an endowment to benefit future generations. It is a balance she would have liked: land saved in the here-and-now and, taking from our father's more conservative inclination, the reassurance of funds set aside for the future.

Why has TNC's mission resonated with the multi-generational support provided by your family? We appreciate that TNC works on so many levels—land acquisition and protection, scientific research, collaboration with stakeholders often holding different views, governmental and political advocacy, and more. Through Camille's gift, we have learned about and grown to further respect TNC's efforts in our Louisiana back yard. We pay more attention to details versus simply making donations. As a result, we're supporting conservation on a landscape scale, such as conserving longleaf pine savannas.

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Camille Coates Tract

The 288-acre Camille Coates Tract, adjacent to The Nature Conservancy's CC Road Savanna Preserve, provides an opportunity to restore additional longleaf pine forest habitat, which once covered more than five million acres of our state. Today this diverse and productive forest ecosystem has been reduced to less than 5% of its original range across the southeast. Restoring longleaf pine forest brings back trees that are more resistant to hurricane winds, drought, disease and non-native pests than other pine species. The trees also store carbon and filters air and water to benefit wildlife and people.



American Kestrel © Jeff Lewis

Key Species

- American Kestrel and other grassland birds
- Oklahoma Grass Pink Orchid (state-rare)
- American Chaffseed (federally endangered)
- Louisiana Bluestar (state-rare)

A primary focus of TNC's efforts at the Camille Coates Tract involves strategically and carefully delivering low-intensity fire to portions of the property. This conservation tool promotes the diverse mix of longleaf pines and open grassland habitat that characterizes this forest, which supports a variety of birds, reptiles, amphibians and insects. Many of these species are in decline without a healthy ecosystem.