

An aerial photograph showing a dense forest of various green trees along the shoreline of a dark, calm lake. The forest is thick and extends from the top right towards the bottom right of the frame. The water is dark and occupies the left side of the image.

2023

MICHIGAN
ANNUAL REPORT

Together, We Find a Way



AT THE NATURE CONSERVANCY (TNC) we have set truly ambitious goals for ourselves. Science has shown us that if we meet these goals in the next seven years, we can significantly help the world reverse climate change and biodiversity loss. But we know that we cannot do this alone. We rely on the partnerships and community we've built over the years to accomplish important wins for Michigan's lands and waters. Together, we find a way to move the needle, making critical changes and improvements in managing these tremendous natural resources that surround us.

As you can see in this year's Annual Report, 2023 was full of exciting conservation moments. In late 2022, we shared exciting news about the protection of more than 32,500 stunning acres of forests in the Keweenaw Peninsula, and this year we set out with partners to document the ecological, cultural, timber, carbon and infrastructure features of that land (see page 5). We planted 40,000 trees across 127 acres and are partnering with the U.S. Forest Service to expand work into northern Wisconsin (see page 13). And after 12 years of work, we have completed a four-phase project to restore 946 acres of high priority wetlands in southeast Michigan (see page 10).

In fact, our entire, incredible freshwater home—the vast system we call the Great Lakes—is impacted by TNC's conservation work, from northern headwaters and forests to the sandy shores of our treasured lakes and coastlines. And we couldn't do it without you.

From the bottom of my heart, thank you for everything you do to support TNC's mission. Time and time again, I am deeply inspired by how much I see people coming together to protect the natural world we love. I hope you, too, are inspired by what we have achieved together.

Wishing you all the best in the New Year, and I look forward to achieving more exciting conservation impact together.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Helen Taylor".

Helen Taylor | State Director, Michigan

2023 TNC PHOTO CONTEST
MICHIGAN GRAND PRIZE WINNER

"A Foggy Cloud Lake" by Chong Q Wu

Visit [nature.org/photocontestmichigan](https://www.nature.org/photocontestmichigan) to view all winners.

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY'S GLOBAL 2030 GOALS

3Gt CO₂e

AVOIDED OR
SEQUESTERED
PER YEAR

TACKLING CARBON EMISSIONS

WHAT: We will avoid or sequester 3 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions (CO₂e) annually—the same as taking 650 million cars off the road every year.

HOW: Using the power of nature and strength of policy and markets to store carbon, support the renewable energy build-out, and reduce emissions equivalent to nearly 10% of global emissions from fossil fuels.

100M

PEOPLE
BENEFITTED

HELPING PEOPLE ON THE FRONT LINES OF THE CLIMATE CRISIS

WHAT: We will help 100 million people at severe risk of climate-related emergencies such as floods, fires and drought.

HOW: Protecting and restoring the health of natural habitats—from mangroves and reefs to floodplains and forests—that help protect communities from storm surge, extreme rainfall, severe wildfires and sea level rise.

4B

HECTARES
CONSERVED

DEEPENING SOLUTIONS FOR OUR OCEAN

WHAT: We will conserve 4 billion hectares of ocean—more than 10% of the world's ocean area.

HOW: Making sure the ocean thrives through new and better-managed protected areas, global-scale sustainable fishing, innovative financing and positive policy changes to how the world governs the seas.

650M

HECTARES
CONSERVED

SAVING HEALTHY LANDS FOR A HEALTHIER PLANET

WHAT: We will conserve 650 million hectares of lands, such as forests and grasslands—an area twice the size of India.

HOW: Partnering with communities across the globe to restore and improve management of working lands, support the leadership of Indigenous Peoples as land stewards, and conserve critical forests, grasslands and other habitats rich in carbon and biodiversity.

1M

KM OF RIVERS
CONSERVED

CONSERVING THE WORLD'S FRESHWATER

WHAT: We will conserve 1 million kilometers of river systems and 30 million hectares of lakes and wetlands—enough river length alone to stretch across the globe 25 times.

HOW: Engaging in collaborative partnerships and promoting innovative solutions and policies that improve the quality and amount of water available in freshwater ecosystems and to communities.

30M

HA OF LAKES
& WETLANDS
CONSERVED

45M

PEOPLE
SUPPORTED

WORKING ALONGSIDE LOCAL LEADERS WHO ARE LIGHTING THE WAY

WHAT: We are supporting the leadership of 45 million people from local and Indigenous communities whose well-being and livelihoods depend on healthy ocean, freshwater and lands.

HOW: Partnering with Indigenous Peoples and other communities to learn from and support their leadership in stewarding the environment, securing rights to resources, improving economic opportunities, and shaping their future.

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Land

2030
GOAL

SAVING HEALTHY LANDS FOR A HEALTHIER PLANET

In the Midwest, we will conserve 350 million acres of lands, such as forests and grasslands—an area twice the size of Texas.



Michigan the Beautiful

This year, TNC launched a partnership with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Sault Tribe Wildlife Program and Ducks Unlimited on a new statewide “Michigan the Beautiful” initiative, supported in part by the Fred A. and Barbara M. Erb Family Foundation. Together, we are producing conservation planning tools intended to help Michiganders more effectively preserve the natural systems and resources that give our state its unique beauty. These tools include an interactive data viewer, coming in 2024, that will help users make more informed conservation and management decisions.

Michigan the Beautiful is not just about protecting and managing public lands like state parks. We also need well managed forests, fisheries, farmlands, urban green spaces and privately owned lands to make sure Michigan’s natural world continues to thrive. That’s why the diverse voices of many other groups and communities are so important in helping us

shape these tools, including state utility companies, outdoor recreation coalitions and the agricultural sector. Together, we can ensure that the right data and information get shared with the right people, so we can all be part of achieving the most important outcomes for healthy lands, waters and communities here in Michigan.

A GLOBAL EFFORT

Science tells us that people need to be managing at least 30% of the world’s lands and waters for their health and resilience by 2030—“30x30”—in order to protect the species that depend on them and address the worst impacts of climate change. Nations around the world are committing to the “30x30” initiative and in Michigan, we’re developing tools and partnerships as part of Michigan the Beautiful that will help contribute to this global goal.

Learn more: nature.org/30x30

↑ TNC’s [Resilient Land Mapping Tool](#) identifies the most climate-resilient, highly connected lands and waters across the country that represent extraordinary natural diversity. This is one tool that contributes to Michigan the Beautiful as a starting point for conversations on coordinating conservation efforts and increasing collective impact across Michigan.



↑ At the Michigan the Beautiful Summit, 118 participants from 61 different organizations and sectors discussed the importance of conservation for people and nature and shared ideas on how to map Michigan’s natural assets and better contribute to 2030 conservation goals. © Tracy Melvin/TNC

Keweenaw Heartlands Stewardship and Protection

In 2022, TNC secured a historic conservation deal on the Keweenaw Peninsula with the purchase of more than 32,500 acres—known as the [Keweenaw Heartlands](#). But years before TNC purchased the Heartlands, we have focused on being good neighbors to the Keweenaw community. This includes learning as much as we can about the forests and waters of the Heartlands, so we can make sure the land is well cared for and appropriate access is preserved—both now and once we transfer the property to its long-term public owners.

This summer, we began the process of documenting the ecological, cultural, timber, carbon and infrastructure features of the property, in consultation with partners including the DNR, the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community (KBIC), Michigan Technological

University (MTU) and the Michigan Natural Features Inventory (MNFI). For example, we've used remote sensing data and roughly 5,000 acres of ground-truthing to learn more about the natural communities on the land and the presence of any rare species. We're also working with Green Timber Forestry—who have covered an additional 6,000 acres on the ground—to do a carbon inventory so that any future carbon projects can be based on the most accurate projections.

After completing each inventory, we will develop recommendations for the long-term managers of the property and ensure that the right protections are in place to conserve the most sensitive ecological and cultural features while also supporting the economic and social benefits that are critical to a sustainable future.

To learn more about how we're supporting the Keweenaw community, turn to page 18.



↑ One of the most rewarding finds of our surveys were multiple stands of old growth trees, like this huge white pine near the Montreal River. © Doug Pearsall/TNC



WE NEED YOUR HELP!

Our bold, swift action to protect these lands required significant loans, and we are now fundraising to pay them back. Please consider giving to support this exciting conservation effort. Call TNC's Development team at (517) 316-0300 to learn how.

© Devin Leonarduzzi/Quinn / Aerial

KEWEENAW HEARTLANDS PROJECT:

32,541

acres protected

11,000

acres surveyed

300

year old trees

16

occurrences of seven
rare plant species

13

different natural
community types,
including boreal forest,
bog, mesic northern
forest and hardwood
conifer swamp

GIVING SPOTLIGHT:

HARRY A. AND MARGARET D.
TOWSLEY FOUNDATION

HARRY A. & MARGARET D.
TOWSLEY FOUNDATION

The support of the Harry A. and Margaret D. Towsley Foundation allows for TNC to pursue the conservation solutions necessary to help put Michigan and our world on a more sustainable path, ensuring that Michigan's natural legacy will continue for generations to come.

"We are proud to partner with The Nature Conservancy so that our grandchildren and great grandchildren can enjoy the wonders of nature in Michigan as we have, such as knowing trees and salamanders and all that nature provides!"

— Lynn White, Board Chair

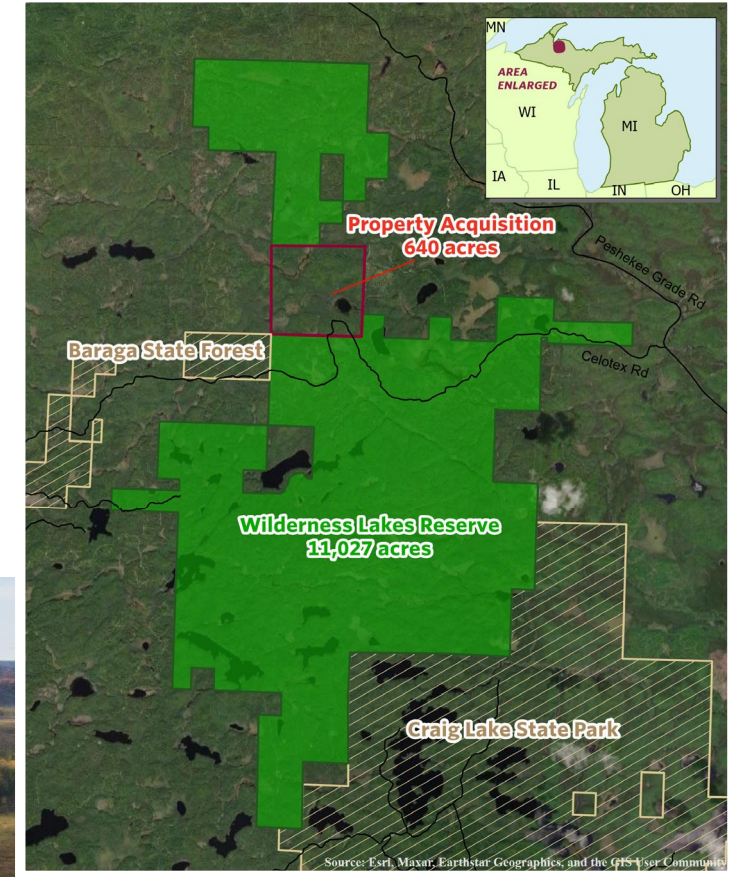
Wilderness Lakes Reserve

TNC's [Wilderness Lakes Reserve](#) comprises more than 11,600 acres of protected forest, lakes and wetlands at the heart of the Michigamme Highlands, one of the most remote and beautiful stretches of forest and wetlands in Michigan. This reserve helps us demonstrate restoration and sustainable management practices that keep forests healthy, store more carbon and promote biodiversity—and we do a lot of work behind the scenes to ensure it continues to live up to its potential.

Made possible by a generous gift from John and Cyndi Woollam, we are excited to have acquired a vital tract of 640 acres that now connects the northern and southern portions of the reserve, resulting in 11,667 acres of connected, protected lands for wildlife to inhabit and move through. And, we have continued to update the reserve's roads and infrastructure, such as bridges, to maintain safe access and protect waterways and wetlands within it.

“Acquiring this land connects more than 11,600 acres at Wilderness Lakes Reserve for wildlife like wolves, bears and moose to move through and thrive.”

— HELEN TAYLOR, STATE DIRECTOR



Celebrating North Point

This summer, TNC joined Huron Pines and Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary, and the Friends of the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary in welcoming 130 community members and supporters to the “grand opening” of North Point Nature Preserve, which we transferred to Huron Pines at the end of 2022. This celebration provided the community with its first opportunity to see the preserve, which had historically been privately owned and inaccessible. The event, sponsored

by the DTE Energy Foundation, included field trips where guests learned about the history of the peninsula and its ecological significance to the Great Lakes region, and saw its unique beauty firsthand.


Now protected in perpetuity, the 1,384-acre North Point Nature Preserve offers incredible habitat to migratory birds and coastal fisheries and features four miles of spectacular Lake Huron shoreline. Making the preserve available for youth education has long been a goal, and Huron Pines and the Thunder Bay sanctuary have already hosted several educational field trips.



© Chris Engley/Huron Pines



© Jason Whalen/Big Foot Media

 Guests got a first look at the preserve, including new interpretive signage and special species like carnivorous pitcher plants and the globally rare Pitcher's thistle (right).

PARTNERSHIPS THAT PROTECT

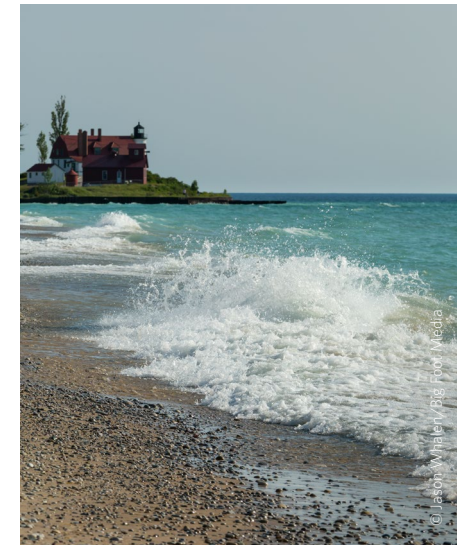
By connecting protected lands and waters, we can help wildlife more easily move to find the habitat they need in a changing climate. That's one reason TNC works with partners to protect lands and waters of all sizes—often they add up to significant sized protected areas and corridors. In 2023, that included working with the U.S. Forest Service to acquire small inholdings in and around the Ottawa National Forest (approximately 100 acres in total) that we will transfer to the U.S. Forest Service once they are prepared to take on their management.



© Scott Sullivan/TNC Photo Contest 2019

ZETTERBERG PRESERVE AT POINT BETSIE

When TNC protects a new preserve, we also identify the surrounding areas that would support the ecological integrity or management of that preserve if acquired in the future. Whenever possible, we seek to complete these aspirational site designs. In March 2023, we acquired six acres along the access road to [Zetterberg Preserve at Point Betsie](#), filling in another piece of the preserve and forever protecting the natural drive into the preserve and Point Betsie Lighthouse.



© Jason Whalen/Big Foot Media

A Comeback Story

The persistence of rare species like the Mitchell's satyr butterfly is one important sign of a healthy, diverse habitat. TNC's Grand River Fen Preserve has one of the largest remaining populations of this endangered butterfly, thanks to TNC's ongoing restoration work here. In 2023, TNC treated 71 acres of habitat at Grand River Fen Preserve for invasive species and plans to continue this restoration work next year using prescribed fire. Reintroducing fire to this preserve's prairies and wetlands helps native plants like swamp milkweed and tuberous Indian plantain to rebound, providing a food source for the Mitchell's satyr. This more diverse habitat benefits many other species as well, including the endangered Poweshiek skipperling butterfly.

Led by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, a consortium of federal partners, state wildlife agencies, zoos and land conservancies like TNC are working together to support the recovery of both butterfly species, beyond the havens they have found in places like Grand River Fen Preserve.



In the Spotlight: Ross Coastal Plain Marsh Preserve

TNC's preserves are not just places where Michigan's many plants and wildlife thrive, they're also great places to experience our state's abundant natural beauty. The 1,448-acre Ross Coastal Plain Marsh Preserve in southwest Michigan is an excellent example of what our preserves have to offer. Conveniently located off I-196 and the Blue Star Highway, visitors can enjoy more than five miles of scenic trails for hiking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing and birdwatching.

Come see a forest in regeneration, after a restoration effort removed a former red pine plantation and replaced it with diverse native species. Explore a newly expanded trail, which re-opens the northern trail section that was blocked by a significant tree blowdown and takes visitors through a part of the preserve that was formerly inaccessible. View the unique Great Lakes coastal plain marsh and learn interesting facts by listening to the audio tour. Ross Preserve is worth a visit in all four seasons!



PARTNERSHIPS THAT RESTORE

Invasive non-native plants can completely change the ecosystems that native species rely on. TNC's collaborations with other organizations allow us to tackle the threat of invasive plants more comprehensively across the Michigan habitats we manage.

This includes working with Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA) and Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA) partners across the state. For example, TNC has partnered with the Detroit River-Western Lake Erie CWMA to survey and remove Phragmites and 19 other invasive plants across the Western Lake Erie region. This work continues to demonstrate success in the regeneration of native plant species, including rare plant species that had not been observed in these areas for years. We also initiated a partnership with GEI Consultants and DTE Energy to safely treat and eliminate 150 acres of Phragmites at the DTE Fermi Nuclear Power Plant.

Naturalists at Work

This year, TNC joined iNaturalist, a social network of naturalists and community scientists that identify, record and share observations in nature. We put a request out to our members to join us in this effort, and the response was incredible; to date, 163 observers have made 1,249 observations of 611 species on TNC preserves and reserves in 2023.

iNaturalist is a place to record nature findings, meet other nature enthusiasts and learn about the natural world. By connecting different nature enthusiasts, we hope to increase community awareness of local biodiversity and encourage the exploration of nature—wherever you happen to be! And by visiting TNC lands, you can help our land stewards and scientists gather information on rare and threatened species, detect potential invasive species early and more.

To join in, just snap a few photos and upload your finds to iNaturalist, where the community will help you identify the species you've found. Go to [inaturalist.org](https://www.inaturalist.org) to learn more, create an account and download the (optional) app. Then, find a TNC preserve near you at [nature.org/miexplore](https://www.nature.org/miexplore). Thank you to everyone who has participated!



© Devan King/TNC



© TNC

CONNECTING WITH NATURE

One of TNC's goals is to provide as many people as possible with opportunities to connect with nature, and our network of 36 preserves in Michigan plays an important role. For example, this year we hosted field trips at [Paw Prairie Fen Preserve](#) and [Nan Weston Nature Preserve at Sharon Hollow](#), where attendees learned about the preserves' unique habitats and wildlife from our field staff.

We also continue to update preserve infrastructure across the state with new features. This year, we added new educational signage at [McMahon Lake Preserve](#) and installed boot brush stations at nine different preserves to help prevent the spread of key invasive species. At [Erie Marsh Preserve](#), we received feedback that accessing the preserve can be confusing. To improve the visitation experience, we installed new signs at the entrance that explain how you can access and enjoy the area.

2023 PROTECTION AND RESTORATION IMPACT:

671

new acres protected
in Michigan

514

acres of invasive
species removal

110

acres of fire-adapted
habitats where prescribed
fire was introduced

18

miles of trails
maintained

18

partners with which TNC
collaborated to improve TNC
and partner-owned lands

Freshwater

2030
GOAL

CONSERVING THE WORLD'S FRESHWATER

In the Midwest, we will conserve 36,000 miles of rivers and 23 million acres of lakes and wetlands—enough river length alone to wrap around the Earth nearly 1.5 times.

Erie Marsh, Restored

After 12 years of hard work, TNC has completed an ambitious four-phase, multi-million dollar project aimed to restore 946 acres of high-priority coastal wetlands at our [Erie Marsh Preserve](#), near Monroe. This includes extensive restoration of wetland habitat, rehabilitation of degraded levees and engineering a new water management system, enabling the return of a rich diversity of aquatic species and wetland types that had all but disappeared in recent decades.

For the first time in more than 60 years, the marsh is fully reconnected to North Maumee Bay. Now, the rejuvenated

wetlands provide native fish and other aquatic life with the marshy habitat they need to breed and spawn, offer food and shelter to many birds and help filter the waters of Lake Erie. With the final 198 acres now restored, including levee construction and the installation of a water control structure, TNC's ongoing management of the preserve will include manipulating water levels to maintain healthy wetlands and prevent invasive plants like Phragmites from taking hold.

Michigan has lost about half of its coastal wetlands, which provide important benefits to water quality and wildlife as well as protection from storms and floods. This makes places like Erie Marsh even more special.



Restoration doesn't always look pretty, but prescribed fire and the construction of a dike and levee system have helped TNC manage invasive species and restore wetlands at Erie Marsh. © Kim Steinberger/TNC



TNC often uses Erie Marsh for outreach events due to its proximity to the metro Detroit area and its excellent opportunities for birdwatching, particularly during the spring migration season. © Deb Allen

**THIS
YEAR
AT ERIE
MARSH:**

198

acres of wetlands restored through the construction of a dike and levee system

135

acres managed for invasive plant species

130

acres of coastal wetlands burned for vegetation management

THANK YOU to everyone who has helped protect and restore Erie Marsh, including DTE Energy Foundation, Ducks Unlimited, Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy, Erie Shooting and Fishing Club, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, NOAA and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

GIVING SPOTLIGHT:

HANK MEIJER OF THE MEIJER FOUNDATION

For years, the Meijer Foundation has been a consistent supporter of TNC's work, from protecting land and water to addressing sustainable fisheries.

"We live in the midst of a unique global treasure with the Great Lakes. It's hard to be a Michigander and not want to help improve and protect the vitality of the lakes. My hope for the future is that more people will realize how precious and fragile the Great Lakes are and make sure we do everything we can to protect their legacy." — Hank Meijer



Whitefish Restoration

In the fall of 2022, TNC and partners launched our first experiment to develop and test methods for restoring river runs of whitefish by "overwintering" whitefish eggs in tributary rivers. We hope this process will help fish imprint on the river at an early stage of development, so they return upstream to the same habitat when they are ready to spawn.

Working with the Sault Tribe of Chippewa Indians, Little Traverse Bay Band of Odawa Indians and Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR), we placed 100,000 whitefish eggs in the Carp River in November of 2022, and larval fish in the Pine River the following spring. We repeated the egg overwintering experiment this fall, and our next step is to detect the "out-migration"—the larval fish that drift downriver to nursery habitat—to measure success.

TNC plans to expand the effort in a Lower Peninsula river, the Jordan River, which flows into Grand Traverse Bay. Our goal is to refine the restoration methods, scale up the work in key tributaries, and develop and share a cost-effective approach that fisheries managers can use to restore declining Great Lakes whitefish populations.



↓ Fertilized whitefish eggs are seen in an egg mat, which are then stacked together and placed in a river. © Matt Herbert/TNC



↑ This year, TNC staff organized and participated in a dive training with the DNR, the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians and the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, to prepare for reef research dives. © Fauna Creative

Mapping Great Lakes Reefs

After five years of studying and restoring a rocky reef in Lake Michigan near Elk Rapids, TNC, DNR and Central Michigan University scientists have gained new insights into how cisco and lake whitefish, two native Michigan species, use reefs to spawn. For example, we've found that each species largely uses different parts of the reef, with whitefish preferring shallower waters nearer the shore. This research is vital as we continue to learn more about reef spawning dynamics, share our findings with partners and see growing numbers of reef restoration projects underway across the Great Lakes that have been informed and inspired by our work.

Scaling up from our work in Elk Rapids, we are assessing additional reefs to develop a comprehensive map and database of Lake Michigan spawning reefs. This research will include information on the reef size, habitat, condition, whether they are still productive and whether they need protection or restoration. TNC and our partners are studying the condition of strategically selected reefs using drop cameras and divers. This year we expanded this survey work to include six northern Lake Michigan reefs (along the south shore of the Upper Peninsula) and two reefs further south near Saugatuck. We are also collaborating with partners to promote similar survey initiatives across the Great Lakes, using consistent methods and data.



Clean and Affordable Water for All

TNC continues to work to protect Michigan’s freshwater resources by advocating for and helping promote a state septic repair and replacement financing program that will be delivered to our communities by Michigan Saves. Recently funded, this program will launch in 2024. The approach supports the most cost-effective way to treat wastewater in rural areas, ensuring that faulty septic systems do not pollute local streams and groundwater.

At the same time, we want to make sure all Michiganders have equitable access to the clean water we all depend on. Over the past several years, with

support from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, we conducted three rounds of statewide polling that showed strong public support for a statewide water assistance program to help lower income households pay their water bills.

In October, a new legislative package informed by TNC and other collaborators was introduced in the Michigan Legislature. This legislation would include a statewide water assistance program, along with a funding mechanism and shut-off protections. TNC’s Policy Director Rich Bowman, recently emphasized the need for such a program in a guest article in the Michigan Municipal League’s member magazine, “The Review.”

Sharing Knowledge Across Watersheds

After working for more than a decade in the Saginaw Bay Watershed to sustain long-term soil health and reduce nutrient runoff, TNC is broadening our impact by sharing lessons learned across watershed boundaries. This includes the Western Lake Erie Basin, where high levels of nutrient runoff from farmland contributes to water quality challenges—such as algal blooms in Lake Erie.

In 2022, with support from the Fred A. and Barbara M. Erb Family Foundation, TNC began a two-year project aimed at strengthening information exchange between conservation practitioners working in Michigan’s Saginaw Bay Watershed and the Western Lake Erie Basin. This project included a three-part workshop series that brought

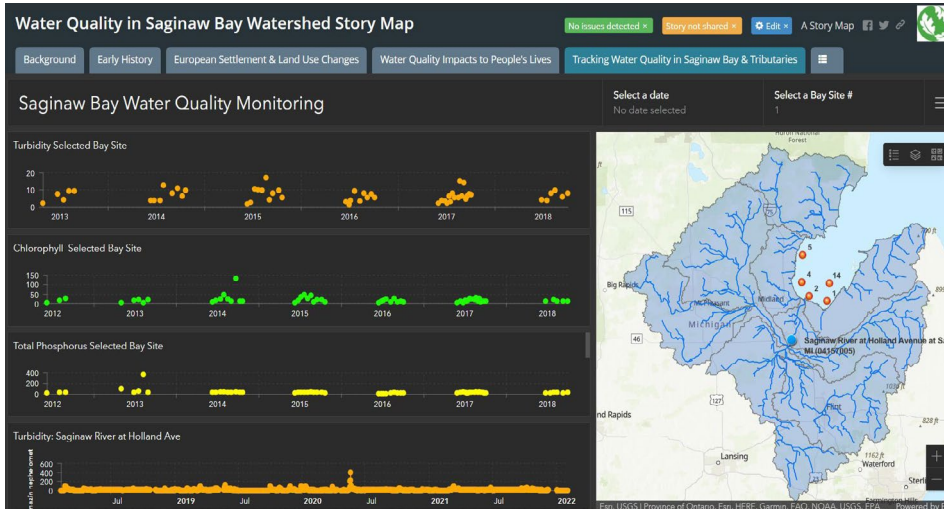
together conservation professionals from both watersheds to share insights from strategies that have (or have not) been effective, and to brainstorm future approaches that could work in either geography.


This series was unique because it exclusively targeted the people working on the ground to improve freshwater outcomes in both watersheds and represented 20 different conservation organizations at the workshops. Brainstorming “big ideas” at these meetings produced seven different project ideas that are proposal-ready, making it easier for these organizations to secure needed funding.

TNC is also gathering data about conservation adoption in both watersheds that will be shared with participants through an online conservation practice dashboard, helping to inform their work.



↑ More than 30 conservation professionals gathered at the Devries Nature Conservancy in Owosso this May for the third and final knowledge exchange workshop. © Rebecca Hagerman/TNC



 TNC staff are putting the final touches on the online dashboard, which will be publicly available in early 2024. A preview of the unpublished dashboard can be seen here. © TNC

Saginaw Bay Monitoring Consortium

Over the past five years, TNC and partners have come together through the Saginaw Bay Monitoring Consortium (SBMC) to understand and monitor how water quality is changing throughout the Saginaw Bay Watershed to better inform land management practices.

This year, TNC made a significant contribution to the SBMC with the construction of a new online dashboard that makes data on the watershed's water quality widely available. The SBMC's goal is to establish a comprehensive water quality monitoring system and associated tools and resources for this watershed. With the inner Saginaw Bay identified as "impaired waters" this year by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy, due to its

ongoing water quality issues and algal blooms, the consortium's work is more important than ever.

We also helped partners secure the federal funding they needed to put in new stream gauges and monitoring stations in the watershed and bay. The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) has installed 11 new stream gauges at strategic points throughout the watershed, in addition to seven existing gauges. Combined with 10 monitoring sites in the bay itself—five of which are newly enabled by funding to NOAA—these tributary monitoring stations will provide a comprehensive network of data collection points.

As this data is collected, it will be made available through the dashboard produced by TNC, creating an increasingly useful and robust tool for resource managers and conservation professionals.

THE PROJECT USES

18

stream gauges and

10

bay monitoring stations to collect data that will help TNC and partners better protect the

7,000

miles of rivers and streams in the watershed and the

1,143

miles² of Saginaw Bay

THE SBMC COMPRISES

9

partner organizations with

20

organizations on the advisory committee



REPLANTING FORESTS FOR FRESHWATER

Freshwater protection starts at the source. Michigan's northern forests help filter Great Lakes waters and keep stream temperatures cool for fish, but spruce budworm—a forest pest—and other challenges threaten the streamside trees that perform this important function.

That's why TNC has committed to a long-term partnership with the U.S. Forest Service that includes planting trees in impacted areas in the Ottawa National Forest—contributing to more than 1,200 acres of restoration to date. Staff use both remote and on-the-ground surveys of forestland to identify the sites where planting additional trees is most important for overall forest health, diversity and pest resilience.

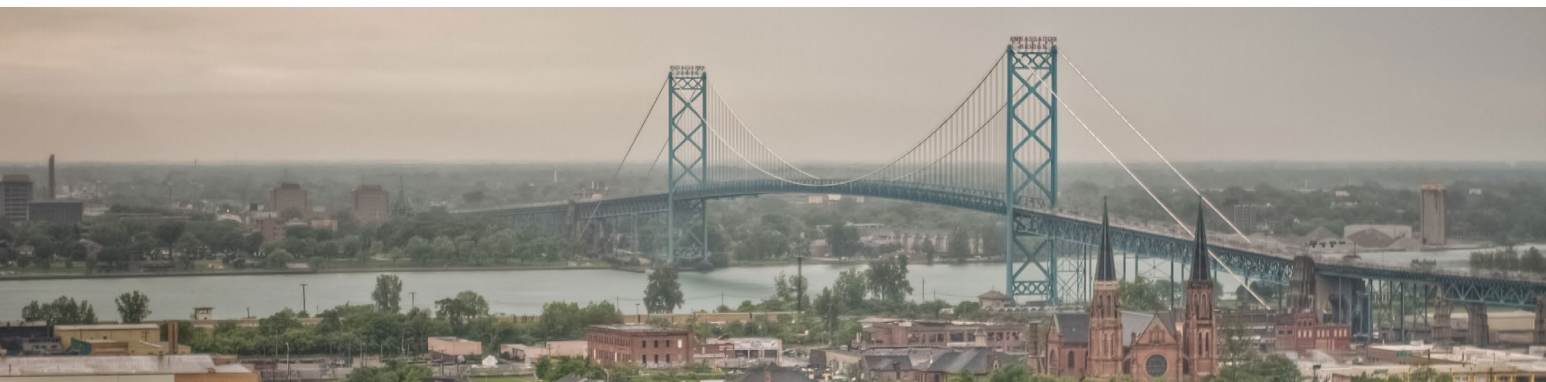
This year, we planted 40,000 trees across 127 acres in the Paint River watershed, including white pine, red pine, white spruce, hemlock, tamarack, and eastern white cedar. Based on the success of the partnerships to date, we are also working with the U.S. Forest Service to expand our collaboration on other projects elsewhere in the Northwoods, in Wisconsin as well as Michigan.

Climate

2030
GOAL

TACKLING CARBON EMISSIONS

In the Midwest, we will avoid or sequester 6.5 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions annually—the same as taking 1.4 million cars off the road every year.



Sustainability in Manufacturing

In 2021, as part of TNC's goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, TNC launched a partnership with the Michigan Manufacturers Association (MMA) to elevate carbon technologies and practices that reduce carbon emissions in the industrial sector. This year, we held our second workshop series for manufacturers.

These in-person sessions were hosted by three Michigan corporations—Steelcase, Consumers Energy and Hemlock Semiconductor—at their facilities. Attended by manufacturers from across the state,

these targeted, interactive workshops provided sustainability professionals with a chance to ask questions, share advice and equip themselves with tools to help their companies become cleaner and greener in the ways that work best for their unique circumstances.

Such opportunities to share and glean practical insights are important to help Michigan companies lower their carbon footprints, anticipate how they can be part of a constructive conversation about Michigan's clean energy future and connect with other businesses on this journey.

30

companies were represented in at least one workshop

44%

of participants were represented by the manufacturing sector, followed by engineering firms and related business services and consultants

GREAT LAKES LEADERS UNITE

TNC staff from across the region attended the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Governors and Premiers 2023 Leadership Summit in Cleveland, Ohio, this October. The summit brings together leaders from Michigan, Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, Minnesota, New York, Pennsylvania, Ontario and Quebec to collaborate on environmental and economic issues in the Great Lakes region. Patrick Doran, TNC's Midwest director of strategies, measures and science, spoke on a panel about the governors and premiers' ambitious goal to plant 250 million trees across the region by 2033.

Trees provide so many benefits to our everyday lives. They filter clean air, provide fresh drinking water, help curb climate change and create homes for thousands of species of plants and animals. According to Patrick, reaching the goal of 250 million trees will require science, attention to equity and swift, large-scale action. Trees must be planted in the locations that will have the biggest impact, including densely populated and low-income areas that tend to have less canopy cover.

BACK TO THE HILL

This year, TNC staff and trustees journeyed from Michigan to Washington, D.C., for Great Lakes Day in the spring and Advocacy Day in the fall, to speak with U.S. lawmakers about some of the most important conservation issues for the Great Lakes region.

These were vital opportunities to meet members of Congress and their staff and to build relationships that allow us to share TNC science and expertise on key topics, such as:

- The Farm Bill, which is due for renewal, and why it's important to conservation here in Michigan.
- The Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA) and its long-term potential to benefit state economies as well as biodiversity.
- The U.S. Foundation for International Conservation Act that would fund public partnerships that support international conservation and its economic and security benefits.

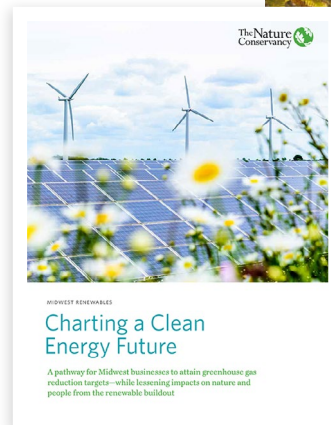


CHARTING A CLEAN ENERGY FUTURE

This year, TNC released a new report on “Charting a Clean Energy Future” that assessed the challenges of increasing renewable energy production in five Midwestern states, including Michigan. The report highlights principles for Midwest businesses to adopt as they seek more renewable energy resources while also managing the impacts on nature and communities.

TNC tools and research like “Site Renewables Right” and “Power of Place” are available to help governments and businesses make science-based decisions on where to site renewable energy to ensure it's located in the right places to reduce land-use conflicts. We continue to share these resources and strategies on purpose-driven energy procurement practices with Michigan business and policy leaders, so that we can all be part of a sustainable vision for our future.

Read the report: nature.org/midwestrenewables



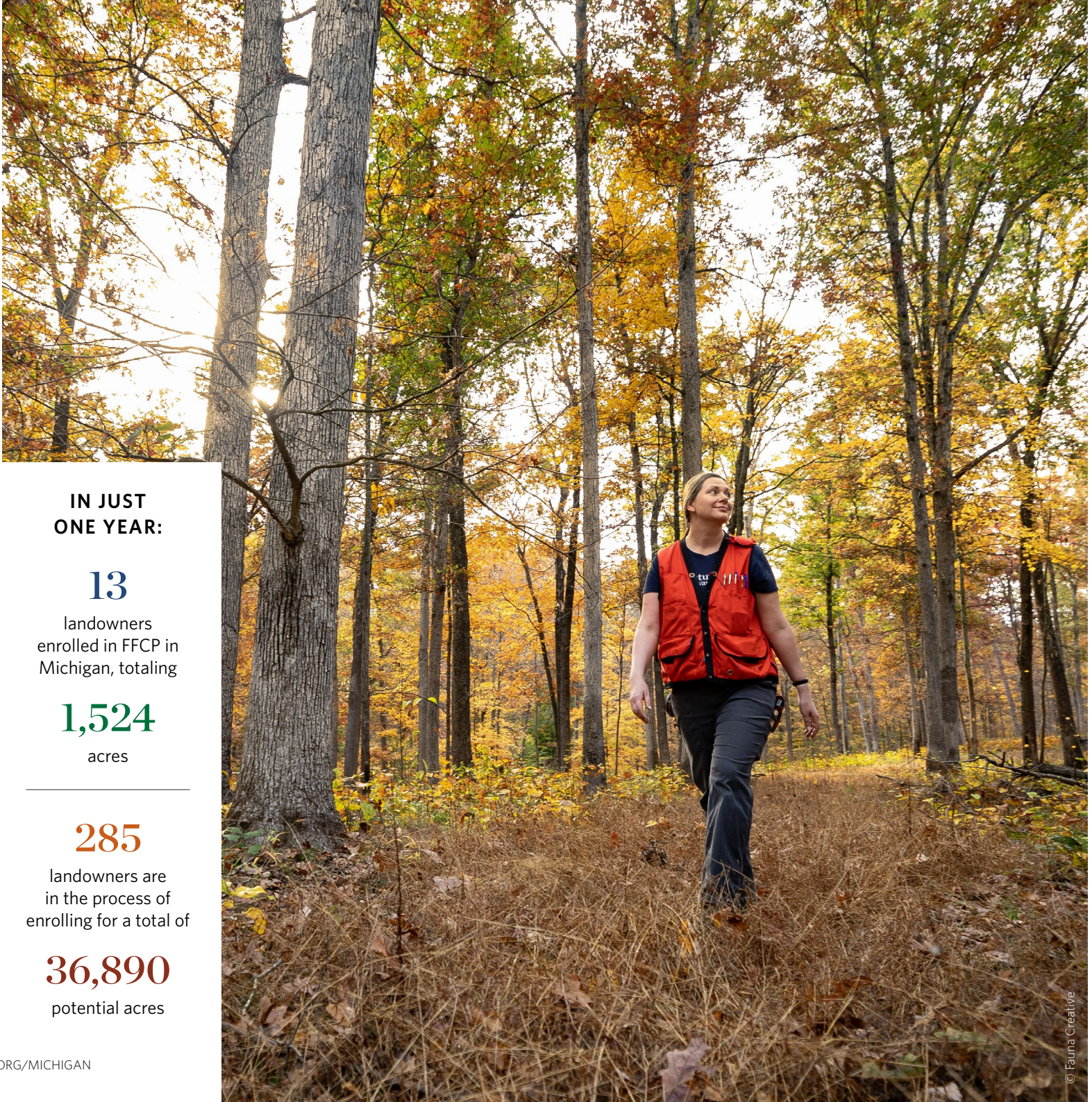
Reducing emissions is essential—but we also need nature-based solutions to help get us the rest of the way to a carbon-neutral future. TNC continues to advance the inclusion of nature-based solutions like wetland restoration and improved forest management in the MI Healthy Climate Plan and other statewide initiatives through participation in public forums, presentations to interested stakeholders, such as the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, and by offering our expertise to implementation workgroups. © Drew Kelly

Family Forest Carbon Program

After its public launch in select Michigan counties in the spring of 2023, the [Family Forest Carbon Program](#) (FFCP) service area has now expanded to include all of northern Michigan. This rapidly growing program provides family forest owners with annual payments, resources and support in exchange for a commitment to use forest management practices that keep their forests healthy and increase carbon storage and sequestration.

FFCP is a partnership between TNC and the American Forest Foundation (AFF), that is also available in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Maryland, Vermont, New York and Massachusetts. In Michigan, TNC helped refine climate-smart practices and eligibility requirements for landowners that are most applicable to Michigan's maple/beech/birch and aspen forests. These practices have been shown to store and sequester carbon beyond typical forest management scenarios for the area, while supporting wildlife habitat, forest health, water quality and recreation.

TNC's 10-year goal for Michigan is to enroll 95,000 acres in this program, and we're already well on our way.



**IN JUST
ONE YEAR:**

13

landowners
enrolled in FFCP in
Michigan, totaling

1,524

acres

285

landowners are
in the process of
enrolling for a total of

36,890

potential acres

SLATE RIVER TIMBER HARVEST

TNC uses our protected forest reserves in Michigan to demonstrate sustainable forestry practices and share our learnings with public and private landowners. Our 10,000-acre [Slate River Forest Reserve](#), acquired in 2021, provides a powerful example of how to manage a mature forest for health, diversity, connectivity and carbon sequestration. Well-planned timber harvests are one important tool that help us meet these conservation goals.

This year we led our first timber harvest at the Slate River Forest Reserve. The 74-acre harvest area was chosen due to its overabundance of sugar maple, causing the area to be less diverse than the surrounding forest. TNC staff and contracted foresters individually selected trees whose removal would allow the forest to naturally return to a more diverse state. This was also TNC's first timber sale in Michigan where all the selected trees were hand felled—without the use of large machinery. Hand felling has a much lighter impact on the forest floor and protects the value of high-quality trees.



↑ Some of the highest-quality hardwood was transported to a local mill and processed into veneer, and a large portion of the remaining timber was processed into lumber for furniture, flooring and more. Sustainably produced timber helps sequester and store carbon in these lasting products while playing a vital role in the long-term economic well-being of northern Michigan communities. © Alex Helman/TNC



MI5 Partnership

This year, TNC launched a collaborative effort called MI Five: Climate-Smart Rotations (or “MI5”) to accelerate wide-scale and long-term adoption of climate-smart agricultural practices such as cover crops, nutrient management, equipment emissions reduction and reduced tillage. This market-based incentives program aims to develop a framework of climate-smart farming practices compatible with the top five row crop commodities produced in Michigan: corn, soybeans, wheat, dry beans and sugar beets.

Together, we hope to reduce the impact of greenhouse gas emissions, build partnerships across the supply chain and increase farm resiliency. The exciting results of this effort would include a protocol for quantifying climate benefits and environmental outcomes, which could be replicated in future projects. Our goal is to continue growing the initiative going forward through public funding.

Resilience

2030
GOAL

HELPING PEOPLE ON THE FRONT LINES OF THE CLIMATE CRISIS

In the Midwest, we will help 3 million people at risk of climate-related emergencies, promote resilient nature-based economies, help our communities become more resilient and ensure equitable conservation outcomes.

Keweenaw Heartlands

Community Engagement

When TNC acquired the Keweenaw Heartlands property at the end of 2022 (see page 5), we saw an opportunity to go beyond just protection. We aimed to facilitate the community's vision of a future based on the sustainable use and management of the peninsula's rivers, lakes and forests, and their economic and environmental benefits.

TNC invited community input through a series of public meetings, interviews and an online survey that together engaged roughly one-quarter of the adults in Keweenaw County, as well as many who live beyond the county border. Next, a local planning committee—made up of 17 community leaders, including elected officials; leaders of the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community; and local representatives from outdoor recreation, tourism and conservation organizations—led a process to create a Blueprint for the Keweenaw Heartlands, now available online.

As TNC facilitates the community's refinement of its long-term ownership, management and governance plan for the Keweenaw Heartlands property, we also continue to fundraise and build support for the project and related community needs. This includes partnering in atypical ways, such as with the Keweenaw Community Foundation and the Keweenaw County Sheriff's Office to secure a Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development (MDARD) Rural Readiness Grant for an emergency operations center in Keweenaw County. Such public services and infrastructure are vital for the community's successful accommodation of increasing tourists and expanding outdoor recreation activities resulting from the vast, accessible forestland.

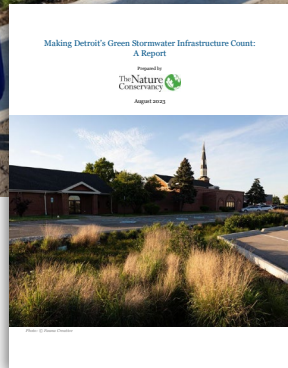
Read the blueprint:
bit.ly/keweenawblueprint

GIVING SPOTLIGHT: HERBERT H. AND GRACE A. DOW FOUNDATION

"The Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation has been a long-term partner of The Nature Conservancy and its initiatives. We continue to support The Nature Conservancy as they increase their focus on community-centered conservation practices throughout the state of Michigan, including their work in the Saginaw Bay watershed region. The synergy of TNC's ecological, economic and recreational efforts align with The Foundation's signature gift of Dow Gardens, a public, botanical garden that is shared with the community and its visitors." — Ruth Alden Doan, President

→ Ruth Alden Doan and Helen Taylor, Michigan state director, hug a huge hemlock tree on a recent trip to the Northwoods.





Making Green Stormwater Infrastructure Count

This year, TNC released a report entitled “Making Detroit’s Green Stormwater Infrastructure Count” that shares findings from our study looking at barriers and opportunities for green stormwater infrastructure (GSI) in Detroit. To inform this report, we interviewed a total of 21 design practitioners across 11 firms, collected detailed data on local stormwater management projects, modeled stormwater management performance and analyzed information about the cost effectiveness of GSI projects in Detroit.

The report outlines common themes around the barriers and trends surrounding GSI in Detroit, as perceived by stormwater management designers. Unit rate cost examples and benefit valuations also provide

useful, localized benchmarks for future projects and for calculating their benefits. The research shows that GSI can likely be cost-competitive with traditional “gray” stormwater infrastructure in certain circumstances, and that there is significant economic impact for every dollar spent on stormwater construction projects of any type—of note for planners or developers who seek to have positive impacts on their communities.

Through this work, and by sharing this information widely with developers and designers, TNC aims to increase the implementation of proven, cost-effective GSI practices that deliver worthwhile benefits to the Detroit community.

Read the report: bit.ly/detroit-gsi

GSI HAS A STRONG Foothold IN DETROIT:

As of December 2023, the Detroit Stormwater Hub shows

280

projects managing runoff from

833

acres of the city

The Hub was designed by TNC and partners to help the city track GSI projects.

Visit detroitstormwater.org

IN AUGUST, the Detroit Stormwater Hub, led by the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department with TNC, held an event at which we shared the findings of our “Making Detroit’s GSI Count” report. Thirty-three people came together at the event—representing builders, engineers, advocates, nonprofits, academic institutions, municipal staff and philanthropic funders—to discuss the benefits and challenges of implementing GSI in Detroit.

TNC CONTINUED TO WORK with incoming businesses in Eastern Market to ensure that new developments incorporate GSI features into their footprints, as part of the City’s Framework Plan for the area. We also worked with Eastern Market to develop GSI concepts for two parking lots at the core market.



NATURAL CLIMATE SOLUTIONS HELPING HOMEOWNERS IN DETROIT

For the second year, TNC worked with the 48207-11 Grassroots Detroiters and the Eastern Market Development Corporation to support the Grassroots Detroiters’ community-led home repair program in 2023. This includes helping to fund home repairs for five houses, in addition to eight houses in the previous year, by redirecting funds from carbon credit sales on our working forest reserves in the Upper Peninsula. This ensures that income from climate solutions is reinvested where climate impacts are most felt.

The Grassroots Detroiters program is designed to improve the quality of life for long-term residents, instill a sense of pride in the neighborhood, improve climate change resiliency and increase eligibility for additional home repair and weatherization programs, by providing repairs such as roof replacements, insulation, plumbing, electrical and other critical updates.

Leading by Example

TNC has more than a decade of experience collaborating with farmers to improve water quality and soil health in the Saginaw Bay watershed, giving us the opportunity to share our strategies and lessons learned that can be helpful to other geographies.

For example, the Conservation Technology Information Center (CTIC), a national organization founded to support beneficial agricultural practices, recently held its annual “Conservation in Action” tour in Frankenmuth for CTIC members and featured many of the farmers we work with and three of our projects. CTIC members

include farmers, policy makers, agencies, academic researchers and agribusiness leaders from around the country. The CTIC also provides TNC with remote sensing data on conservation practice implementation to enable us to track our progress and impact.

We are also partnering with Michigan Corn in the newly launched “Farmers for Soil Health” program in Michigan, which provides technical and financial assistance to farmers implementing cover crops on corn or soybean acres. This indicates a growing recognition of how the work we’re doing in the Saginaw Bay watershed has broader applications for regenerative agriculture.



REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE IN MIDLAND

Over the past four years, TNC has helped launch several farmer-led watershed groups in Michigan’s Saginaw Bay watershed. These are community groups of farmers interested in talking with other farmers about improving soil health on their farms, which provide a network for widely sharing learnings, resources and conservation solutions.

This year, with the support of the Rollin M. Gerstacker Foundation, we launched a new group in the Midland area, within the Tittabawassee River watershed. This area was heavily impacted by flooding in 2020, so the group’s objectives are to explore the use of water-saving farming practices such as reduced tillage and drainage water management. These practices will help improve groundwater storage and reduce the risk of future floods, while also protecting water quality. The project will also assess and prioritize lands in the region suitable for surface water storage practices, such as wetland restoration and floodplain reconnection.



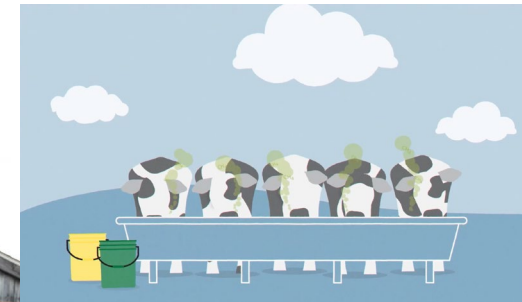
Dairy Feed-in-Focus

With the Michigan Milk Producers Association (MMPA), TNC is delivering a three-year pilot program to help 30 Michigan dairy farmers implement feed management and production practices that reduce dairy cattle methane emissions and support soil health.

In the first year of this Feed-in-Focus program, we enrolled three farms, all within the Cass River watershed. Thanks in part to an extensive promotion effort by MMPA, we were able to grow enrollment significantly this year, with 14 farms now enrolled in total. We also identified two farms for a new USDA Conservation Innovation Grant research trial that will provide further insight into the methane reductions achieved through the Feed-in-Focus program.

Some of the innovative aspects of Feed-in-Focus include its individualized approach that works with farms of any size, its streamlined use of financial incentives and its integrated focus on the entire dairy supply chain, including milk suppliers and buyers, as well as farmers.

→ This year, we released an animated Feed-in-Focus video that highlights this innovative program and how it works. Watch the video: bit.ly/feedinfocus



Sustainable Option Wheat

Sustainable Option Wheat is one of several programs TNC is piloting for farmers in the Saginaw Bay watershed to increase adoption of conservation practices. The program is a partnership with Star of the West Milling Company, providing farmers with “nature-based bonuses” for wheat that they grow using sustainable practices.

This program has proved immensely popular—in 2022, the first year, it took TNC’s team just two weeks to fill all the available spots and enroll 970 acres. In its second year, participation nearly tripled, to 2,800 acres enrolled. To date, the program has produced more than 238,600 bushels of sustainably grown wheat.

This success is encouraging, but we want to make sure the incentives program

↑ In August, we held a “farmer enrichment” event for participants in Sustainable Option Wheat. The participating farmers provided a lot of crucial feedback. © Joel Leland/TNC

has longevity as well. Thanks to a market feasibility assessment conducted by Dow Fellows at the University of Michigan’s Graham Sustainability Institute, we are identifying how to successfully embed this model within the wheat supply chain. For example, we learned that wheat buyers are interested in having the program ask farmers for more rigorous in-field monitoring, in exchange for higher bonuses, in order to make the product more appealing. We will continue to adapt the program to enhance its economic and conservation value for all parties.





GOING GLOBAL

The conservation practices we implement in Michigan reflect strategies TNC uses around the world. With a grounding in rigorous science, we scale innovative conservation approaches, while adapting them to local needs and circumstances. Our aim is to have meaningful impact around the world, for both nature and people, to achieve our global 2030 Goals. See how TNC's conservation practices are being deployed around the world.

TNC WORKS IN 77 COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES:

- 41 by direct conservation impact
- 36 through partners

Restoring Diversity by Planting Native Species

- **MICHIGAN** | See "Replanting Forests for Freshwater" on page 13.
- **MARYLAND** | Over the past 23 years, TNC staff and volunteers have planted more than 62,000 red spruce trees in the forests of Western Maryland to restore their diversity.

Reshaping Cities Around Nature

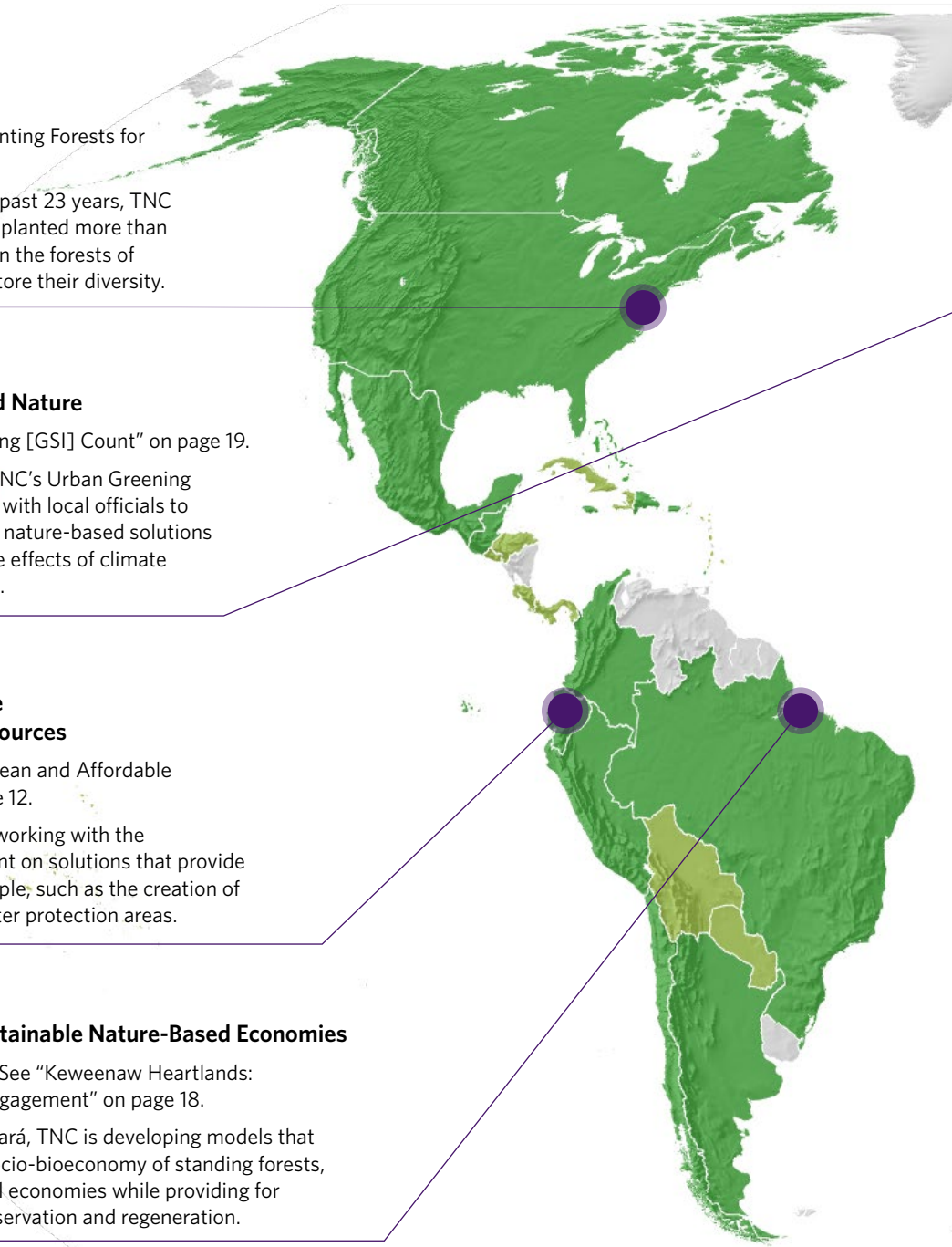
- **MICHIGAN** | See "Making [GSI] Count" on page 19.
- **GERMANY** | Through TNC's Urban Greening Program, we are working with local officials to identify opportunities for nature-based solutions that can help mitigate the effects of climate change, such as flooding.

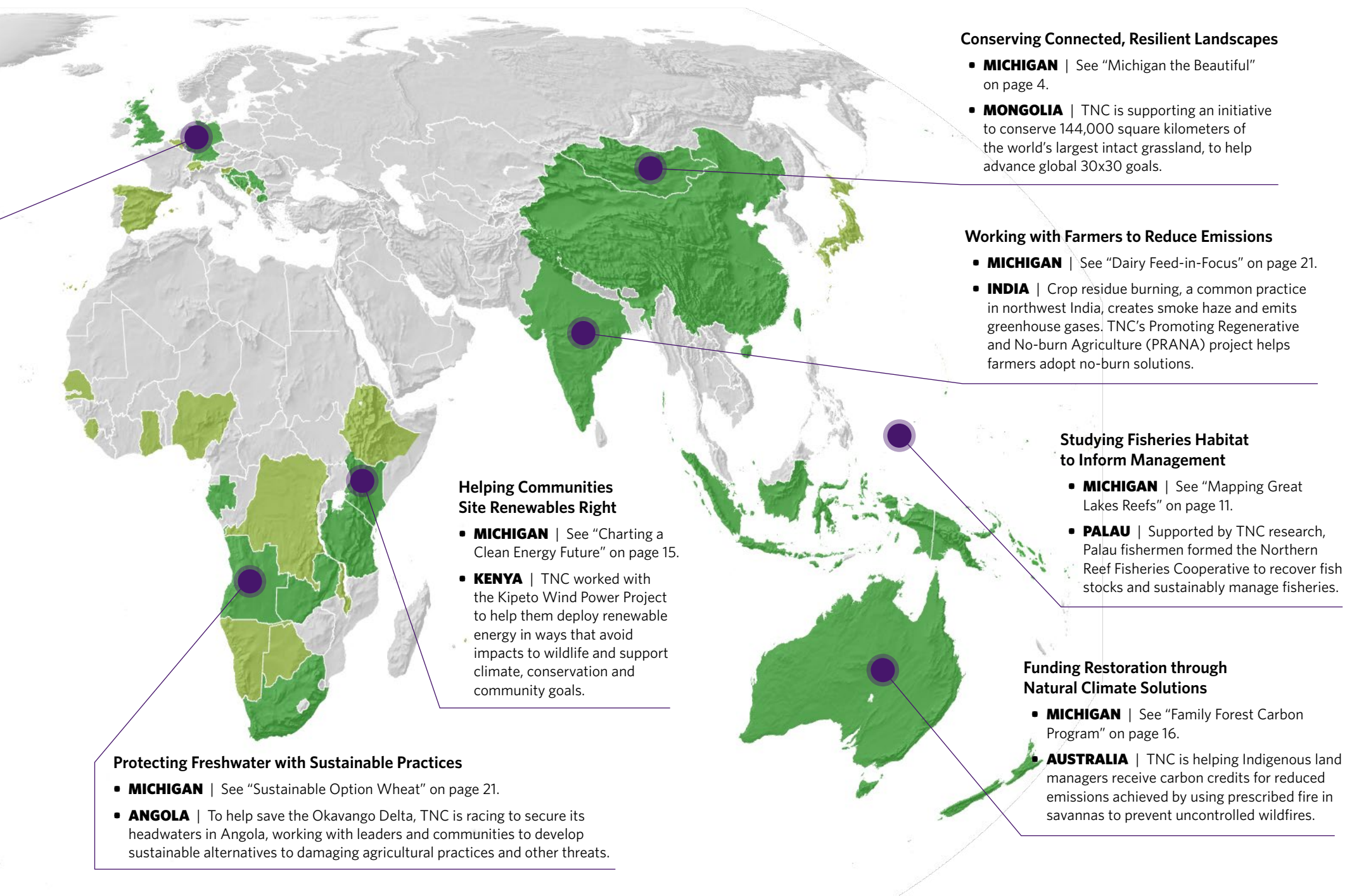
Identifying Innovative Solutions for Water Sources

- **MICHIGAN** | See "Clean and Affordable Water for All" on page 12.
- **ECUADOR** | TNC is working with the Ecuadorian government on solutions that provide water security for people, such as the creation of legally designated water protection areas.

Supporting Sustainable Nature-Based Economies

- **MICHIGAN** | See "Keweenaw Heartlands: Community Engagement" on page 18.
- **BRAZIL** | In Pará, TNC is developing models that invest in the socio-bioeconomy of standing forests, benefiting local economies while providing for ecological conservation and regeneration.





Conserving Connected, Resilient Landscapes

- **MICHIGAN** | See “Michigan the Beautiful” on page 4.
- **MONGOLIA** | TNC is supporting an initiative to conserve 144,000 square kilometers of the world’s largest intact grassland, to help advance global 30x30 goals.

Working with Farmers to Reduce Emissions

- **MICHIGAN** | See “Dairy Feed-in-Focus” on page 21.
- **INDIA** | Crop residue burning, a common practice in northwest India, creates smoke haze and emits greenhouse gases. TNC’s Promoting Regenerative and No-burn Agriculture (PRANA) project helps farmers adopt no-burn solutions.

Studying Fisheries Habitat to Inform Management

- **MICHIGAN** | See “Mapping Great Lakes Reefs” on page 11.
- **PALAU** | Supported by TNC research, Palau fishermen formed the Northern Reef Fisheries Cooperative to recover fish stocks and sustainably manage fisheries.

Funding Restoration through Natural Climate Solutions

- **MICHIGAN** | See “Family Forest Carbon Program” on page 16.
- **AUSTRALIA** | TNC is helping Indigenous land managers receive carbon credits for reduced emissions achieved by using prescribed fire in savannas to prevent uncontrolled wildfires.

Helping Communities Site Renewables Right

- **MICHIGAN** | See “Charting a Clean Energy Future” on page 15.
- **KENYA** | TNC worked with the Kipeto Wind Power Project to help them deploy renewable energy in ways that avoid impacts to wildlife and support climate, conservation and community goals.

Protecting Freshwater with Sustainable Practices

- **MICHIGAN** | See “Sustainable Option Wheat” on page 21.
- **ANGOLA** | To help save the Okavango Delta, TNC is racing to secure its headwaters in Angola, working with leaders and communities to develop sustainable alternatives to damaging agricultural practices and other threats.

Faces of TNC



In October, Michigan staff gathered at Crystal Mountain for our first all-staff retreat since 2019. We enjoyed reconnecting, exploring nature, learning from one another and participating in team-building activities.



This year, in an effort to increase staff connections, we held “cross pollination” events where staff from different departments and strategies came together in the field or in the office for a learning opportunity or social event. Outings have included a tour of a local dairy farm and an exploration of restoration efforts at Grand River Fen Preserve.



↑
→
 Our restoration staff kept busy this year with invasive species removal, trail maintenance, monitoring for threatened and endangered species, prescribed burns and trainings. This included a chainsaw safety training and a prescribed fire “refresher” field day with staff from the Ohio chapter of TNC.

2023 PUBLICATIONS

In 2023, TNC’s Michigan science team published two peer-reviewed papers, which helps ensure the broader scientific community has access to our recent findings.

These papers were both authored by former TNC Bailey Fellows, Catherine Henry and Matthew Jurjonas, underscoring the significance of the Bailey Conservation Fellowship Program designed to develop future conservation leaders.

- Henry, C. R., & Walters, M. B. (2023). Tree species size class patterns portend compositional shifts and low resilience in managed northern hardwood forests. *Ecosphere*, 14(7). doi.org/10.1002/ecs2.4621
- Jurjonas, M., May, C., Cardinale, B., Kyriakakis, S., Pearsall, D., & Doran, P. (2023). The perceived ecological and human well-being benefits of ecosystem restoration. *People and Nature*. doi.org/10.1002/pan3.10558

GIVING SPOTLIGHT:

MENAKKA & ESSEL BAILEY



Menakka and Essel Bailey provided a generous gift to endow the Bailey Conservation Fellowship. The fellowship is designed to provide recent graduates and early career conservation professionals with the opportunity to

dive into a conservation project while gaining an introduction to conservation issues and nonprofit operations. Not only does this create a lasting career opportunity for emerging leaders, it also provides TNC with valuable capacity and expertise to augment our science and resources.

“Education and the environment are important to us and providing funding for a scholar supports both TNC in advancing research and young scholars in exploring their interests in environmental issues.”
 — Menakka and Essel Bailey

Current-Year Supporters

We would like to recognize the following individuals, companies, foundations and organizations who have supported our work in Michigan, as well as Michigan-based donors who supported other domestic and/or international conservation projects with cumulative gifts of \$5,000 or more between July 1, 2022 and June 30, 2023.

We extend our deep appreciation to the thousands of donors not listed here whose commitments make our conservation results possible.

\$1,000,000 – \$4,999,999

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Anonymous – 1
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MICHIGAN LANDSCAPE WINNER

"Middle Hungarian Falls" by Karen Farrell

(cont.)

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A planned gift is one of the most impactful ways you can support The Nature Conservancy's critical conservation work. Some planned gifts have an impact now, some after your lifetime. Many offer tax savings, and some even provide you with income for life.

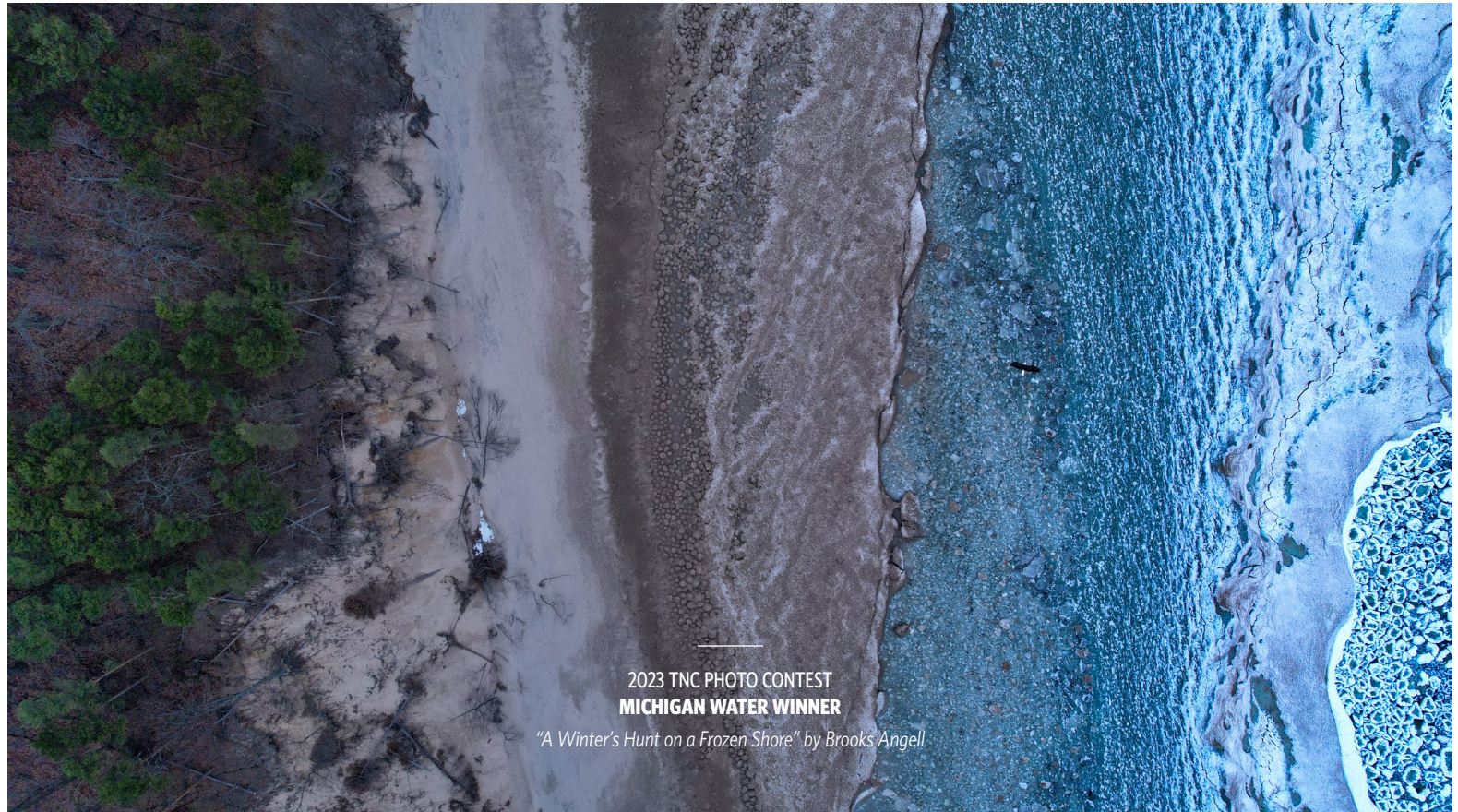
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2023 TNC PHOTO CONTEST
MICHIGAN WATER WINNER

"A Winter's Hunt on a Frozen Shore" by Brooks Angell



The Nature Conservancy
101 E. César E. Chávez Ave.
Lansing, MI 48906

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MICHIGAN FLORA & FAUNA WINNER

"The Hitchhiker" by Leslie Marr



2023 TNC PHOTO CONTEST
MICHIGAN PEOPLE & NATURE WINNER

"No Wake" by Steven Jessmore