



OHIO

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

DEAR FRIEND OF CONSERVATION,



Amy L. Holtshouse

Amy Holtshouse

Associate State Director,
Agnes Andreae Director
of Conservation

This June, I experienced one of nature's wonders at our Edge of Appalachia Preserve—synchronous fireflies! I had assumed by their name that synchronous fireflies flashed in perfect sync, but instead, they flash chaotically. Then suddenly, they stop together. One moment, the dark forest is like a fireworks show—with lights emanating from all around, streaking right to left before stopping in unison and turning the forest pitch black. Then, one firefly begins flashing; moments later, the area is again a riot of flashes. I sat mesmerized by this cycle, reminded of the glories of our natural world.

These moments in nature rejuvenate me and keep me energized for our conservation work. As I reflect on our accomplishments, I'm thrilled to see years of research and planning beginning to take root. From restoring Sandusky Bay to seeing the larger impact of H2Ohio to leading stream and wetland mitigation projects, each initiative plays a role in revitalizing water resources across the state. Our land-based efforts are also coming into harmony. Our agricultural team continues working closely with farmers to build soil health while pioneering innovative practices like agroforestry. Throughout Ohio, our preserve management teams are setting an example for maintaining diverse habitats, which harbor a wide range of wildlife species—including synchronous fireflies, but also elusive species like fishers and black bears.

Decades of conservation work made possible by those who care about these natural areas and the benefits they provide, like clean air and water, resilient communities, jobs and recreation, have paved the way for us to build upon past achievements and expand our efforts year by year. Our mission also extends to involving more people in our work, from place-based volunteer opportunities to advocating for policy that supports our natural resources. Much like the synchronous fireflies, our journey is an intricate orchestration, a collaborative endeavor that promises a healthier world for all.

Thank you for believing in our work and for contributing to the betterment of our planet.

The Nature Conservancy in Ohio

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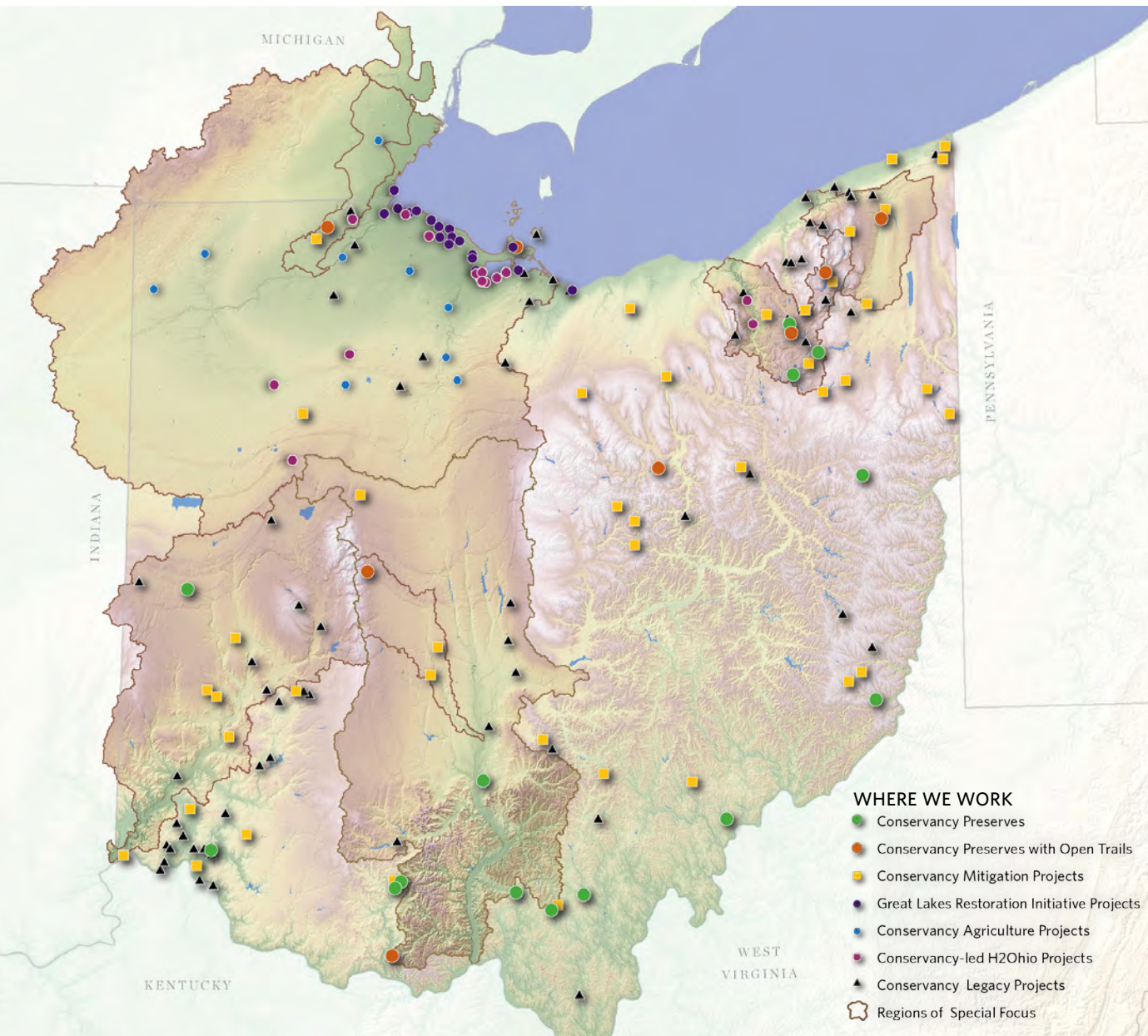
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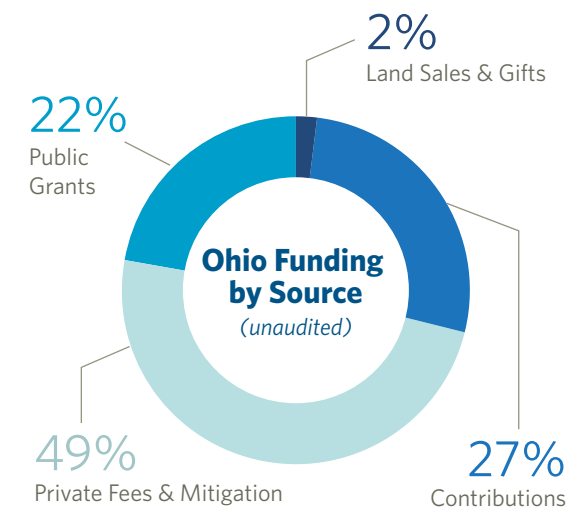




ONE CONSERVANCY

As a leading global charity, we hold ourselves accountable to our members, the public and all creatures that rely on the world's natural resources.

While TNC is one 501(c)(3), the Ohio chapter is critical to the organization's overall success in conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Each year, we rely on private donations and competitive public grants to positively impact Ohio's lands, waters and communities. In turn, those stories—some of which you'll read in this report—help catalyze more funding and political inroads for conservation across the state and the Midwest.



Our vision is of a world where people and nature thrive together. The Nature Conservancy encourages people of all ages, races, ethnicities, religions, gender expressions, and abilities to visit our preserves and has a zero-tolerance policy for racism and discrimination.

➔ ONLINE

To view TNC's consolidated financial statements, visit [nature.org/annualreport](https://www.nature.org/annualreport).

Bold Goals & Collaboration Lead to Big Outcomes



ONLINE

To learn more about TNC's priority conservation efforts worldwide, visit [nature.org/solutions](https://www.nature.org/solutions).

The Nature Conservancy has worked steadily over the last 70+ years to protect, connect and restore lands and waters worldwide. These places serve as strongholds for biodiversity, research, livelihoods, and recreation. But they are not places that exist in isolation. The preserves for which TNC has become known are part of more extensive, connected natural systems, communities and economies.

TNC is not just working within global systems—it is a part of them. As the world's largest conservation organization, we have an obligation and opportunity to effect change at a scale that unequivocally contributes to halting climate change and biodiversity loss.

That recognition led to the development of organization-wide 2030 goals. The pathways to achieving these goals (page 5), among other ambitious outcomes, include creating regenerative food systems that provide for people *and* heal the land.

Recently, with funding through the USDA's *Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities Initiative*, TNC and multiple partners launched a project to scale agroforestry practices—the integration of trees into crop and animal farming—across the United States. The program, which

includes targeted efforts to address the needs of underserved farmers, will create 30,000 acres of new agroforestry plantings over five years.

Ohio was one of 29 states selected to participate. The project aims to increase food production and incomes for farmers, including those with limited resources, Veterans, and people who are socially disadvantaged. It will also deliver significant environmental benefits, such as enhanced carbon sequestration, soil health, biodiversity and water quality.

Turning federal programs into on-the-ground conservation projects requires influence, deep collaboration and, most of all, a bold yet actionable vision for the future.

Ohio has modeled this philosophy through initiatives like the 4R Nutrient Stewardship Certification Program. Ten years ago, TNC worked with agribusinesses to create a program to support farmers'

bottom line and improve Ohio's water quality. It has evolved to illuminate the steep climate and community benefits of a whole-farm approach to nutrient and water management. That innovation—at a time when conservation and agriculture were unlikely bedfellows—is today a global nutrient stewardship certification program operating in six states and Canada.

Importantly, it represented a pivotal step in the direction of TNC's work. Fostering relationships across the state, region and world with industries, communities, government, agriculture and other nonprofit partners toward mutually beneficial outcomes centers conservation as a necessity rather than a luxury.

And it is a proof of concept from which we continually learn to make progress on 2030 goals and build a better world. You—our donors and partners—are critical to this success.

Agroforestry
currently
represents

< 1%
of U.S. agriculture

A dramatic increase in agroforestry will help move the entire agriculture sector toward carbon neutrality, and will expand markets that support farmers and create long-term, nature-based solutions for a healthier world.

OUR GOALS FOR 2030



Reduce or store
3 gigatons of CO₂
emissions yearly



Benefit 100 million
people



Conserve nearly 10
billion acres of ocean



Conserve 1.6 billion
acres of land



Conserve more
than 620,000 miles
of rivers



Support 45 million
local stewards



ONLINE

Visit nature.org/sanduskybay to dive deeper.

WATER

Partnership and Policy Help to Restore Ohio's Waters

On the shores of Lake Erie, a vision of restoration is taking shape—a vision years in the making that aims to restore more than 1,000 acres of habitat and associated ecological function to the 40,000-acre Sandusky Bay. This year, TNC broke ground on restoration work at Pickerel Creek Wildlife Area, the first of more than a dozen planned projects that will collectively restore critical wildlife habitat and improve water quality in the Bay.

Nestled in Lake Erie's western basin, Sandusky Bay was once a thriving and diverse ecosystem. Symphonies of birdsong filled the air each spring as migratory warblers and waterfowl made their way north from overwintering grounds. Northern pike used the Bay's shallow, vegetated waters as spawning grounds. And Indigenous Peoples fished the Bay's productive waters. While remaining wetlands in the Bay still host a variety of birds

and fish, development over the last two centuries has seen forests and coastal wetlands give way to farms. Today, Sandusky Bay is marked by armored and inflexible shorelines built to protect the now-developed coast, resulting in isolated habitats that lack diversity.

TNC's work to restore ecosystem function to Sandusky Bay represents more than just habitat restoration. It signifies how lasting conservation is made possible through partnership and policy. The project's vision started in 2016 when TNC and partners like the Ohio Department of Natural Resources coalesced around the idea of creating a water fund that would help make projects of this size and scope possible. That fund would later become H2Ohio, a major driver of water restoration projects in the state. Additional funds made available through the passage of the \$1.2

trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act in 2021 and the Inflation Reduction Act in 2022 are also helping to support TNC and partner efforts to ensure Ohioans have access to clean water for generations to come.

“Sandusky Bay is a complex system, and we’re looking at a lot of science to inform what restoration should look like for the area. It’s completely novel work for TNC in the Midwest as we work to create nature-based solutions to climate change.”

—ALEXIS SAKAS, Natural Infrastructure Director



Governor Mike DeWine created the H2Ohio program in 2019 as a comprehensive data-driven approach to improving water quality in Ohio by enhancing water infrastructure and reducing harmful algal blooms. TNC played an important role in designing the concept for H2Ohio and mobilizing support from a broad constituency for the program. Today, TNC is helping to identify and implement practical and effective on-the-ground H2Ohio projects, like those at Sandusky Bay.

2023

Our Year in Photos

Highlights from July 1, 2022–June 30, 2023

► This year, OSU researchers successfully trapped a spotted turtle (*Clemmys guttata*) inside the Morgan Swamp Preserve. This is the first record of the state-threatened species at the preserve, which relies on the increasingly rare wetland habitat TNC is helping to protect.

© Derrick Cooper/TNC



► Last spring, TNC staff and volunteers braved 20 mph winds and thick mud to **plant over 150 redbud, yellow buckeye, Kentucky coffee and white oak trees. The project, at the Rialto Marsh in Cincinnati**, was led by TNC's Ohio Mitigation Program. These native trees will help to stabilize the stream bank as well as provide critical habitat in this recently restored wetland.

© TNC



► **The Bilyeu tract**, one of several properties added to the Edge of Appalachia Preserve last year, is adjacent to Shawnee State Forest, aiding in our efforts to connect these two forested systems. The 164-acre property is heavily wooded and protects over 3,600 feet of the headwaters of Long Lick Run, an exceptional warm water habitat tributary of the Ohio River.

© Terry Seidel/TNC



► **A Hudsonian godwit (*Limosa haemastica*) feeds at Sandhill Crane Wetlands Restoration Area.**

May marked one year since the public opening of the site, one of the largest wet prairie restoration efforts in northwest Ohio. The project completed by TNC is improving the capacity for the land to hold water, and with it, a plethora of wildlife.

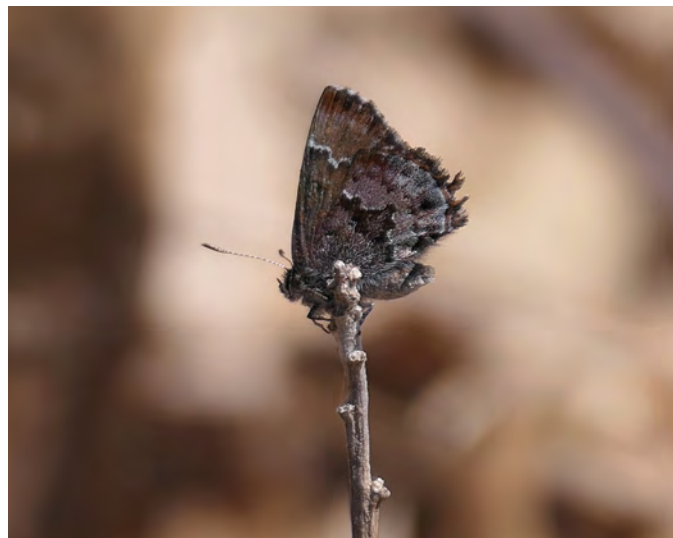
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◀ **Painted trillium**

(*Trillium undulatum*) is the rarest of the eight trillium species naturally occurring in Ohio. Thanks to staff efforts, individual numbers have steadily grown at the Morgan Swamp Preserve. The 2023 count revealed 786 plants for a record-breaking year.

© Derrick Cooper/TNC



◀ **2023 marks the 50th anniversary of the Endangered Species Act,**

a critical piece of legislation that helps protect biodiversity. For species like the frosted elfin (*Callophrys irus*), annual butterfly monitoring at Kitty Todd—the only known Ohio site where the state-endangered species occurs—may help determine whether it should be granted federal protection.

© Angie Cole

“The Sagamore Hills project exemplifies our strong partnerships in the area. We are working with the township and have a subaward to engage volunteers from the Conservancy of Cuyahoga Valley National Park in tree plantings, tree survivorship studies, bird and pollinator monitoring and invasive species removal.”

— ANN GILMORE, Northeast Ohio Restoration Manager



LAND

Achieving Tangible, Lasting Results

In Cuyahoga Valley National Park (CVNP), two ongoing restoration projects are building upon years of work by TNC and our partners in northeast Ohio.

The first project site, located on an outside river bend of the Cuyahoga River, is one of many places where the Crooked River Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA), currently housed at TNC, has been improving natural areas in the watershed through invasive species management. Over the past two years, the CWMA has treated the site for reed canary grass, an invasive grass which outcompetes native wetland plants that stabilize soils and filter pollutants from water. TNC's current project, funded by H2Ohio, will further enhance the health of this floodplain with the restoration and reforestation of 32 acres.

Slightly north, a second restoration project is underway straddling CVNP and Sagamore Hills Township Park. The property was purchased from the Department of Mental Health over 20 years ago, with the help of the Trust for Public Land and with partners CVNP and Cleveland Metroparks. With funding from H2Ohio and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Sustain Our Great Lakes Program, TNC's projects are transforming former agricultural fields back to forests and restoring important headwater habitats.

Once completed in 2024, the projects will improve fish and wildlife habitat, reduce erosion, and capture more than 600,000 gallons of stormwater annually. Both tie into the region's broader efforts to remove the Cuyahoga River from the U.S. EPA's Areas of Concern list. Project by project, TNC and our partners are achieving a cleaner, healthier future for people, wildlife and the planet.



Guided by science, TNC continues to strategically conserve the most biodiverse natural areas in Ohio. Over the past year, nearly 600 acres were added to preserves in each corner of the state, with a majority of the newly protected acres located within the Edge of Appalachia Preserve System.

In May, Jan and Wym Portman generously donated 154 acres of land in southern Ohio. Their donation strengthens our network of connected lands surrounding Ohio Brush Creek, which possesses rare levels of biodiversity and exceptional water quality.

“Twenty-three years ago, Wym and I began to piece together a farm that had been roughly divided into many small parcels. The property is now a mix of biologically rich habitats—open prairie, dense forest, vernal pools and the wet bottomlands of Ohio Brush Creek. We hope our donation not only preserves the integrity of the watershed and corridor, but also inspires more conservation in this extraordinary landscape.”

— JAN PORTMAN, TNC Ohio Honorary Life Trustee

CLIMATE

A Model for Purpose-Driven Energy

Corporate buyers are a pivotal force in the transition to clean energy. Since 2014, corporate sustainability commitments have driven nearly 40% of renewable energy procurement in the United States, and the demand is only expected to grow. In Ohio, 18 of the state's top 25 corporate employers had already announced greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction targets by 2022.

In collaboration with Rivian, a U.S.-based electric vehicle manufacturer, TNC's Climate team developed a new model of renewable energy procurement. Together, we set out to demonstrate that businesses can fulfill their GHG reduction commitments with cost-effective, low-risk renewable energy projects that also prioritize communities, conservation and the climate.

TNC and Rivian received proposals across 18 states for more than 100 projects totaling over 14 gigawatts in multiple technologies. In eastern Kentucky, the chosen project will repurpose 7,000 acres of former mine land into an 810-megawatt solar project, generating \$100 million in tax revenue and enough power for 500,000 homes.

Afterward, the team released a comprehensive report and a customizable toolkit featuring a sample Request for Proposals and scoring matrix. These tools, which integrate with resources like TNC's Site Renewables Right tool, can help industry leaders bridge the gap between company values and tangible environmental outcomes.





Nature offers powerful solutions, too. The sustainable management of forests, wetlands and grasslands can achieve up to 1/3 of the carbon emission reductions needed to avoid the worst climate-related impacts. In southern Ohio, TNC is using the Edge of Appalachia Preserve System as a demonstration site for sustainable, climate-smart forestry.

Inflation Reduction Act Invests in Ohio's Communities

Industry is at the heart of Ohio's modern heritage. Since 1800, more than 3.6 billion tons of coal have been extracted from the state's coal-bearing regions. At its peak, the industry also employed over 50,000 people in Ohio, serving as the backbone of many Appalachian economies. Today, the same communities are grappling with the long-term environmental and socioeconomic impacts of their coal mining legacies, with over 6,000 underground mines and 450,000 acres of surface mines left abandoned.

Flooding from clogged streams, water contamination, landslides and deforestation are a few of the lasting environmental impacts caused by early, unregulated coal mining activities. While mine land reclamation programs have existed since the 1970s, the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 unlocked an unprecedented wave of federal investments in the rehabilitation of coalfield economies.

TNC's Mining the Sun initiative offers a blueprint for Ohio to honor its industrial roots without the toxic consequences of coal extraction. The initiative promotes the use of flat, deforested surface mines for utility-scale solar energy generation. These mines are ideal locations for solar, especially when they already have existing transmission lines and access roads.



CONSERVATION SUPPORT

The Nature Conservancy in Ohio is deeply grateful to the many individuals, corporations and foundations that have generously supported our conservation efforts, both locally and globally.

The following supporters contributed \$5,000 or more to TNC between July 1, 2022 and June 30, 2023. The list reflects gifts received during this time and does not include the full value of multi-year pledges. Although space does not permit us to list all gifts to TNC, each contribution, no matter what size, has a direct impact on our critical work to protect people and nature.

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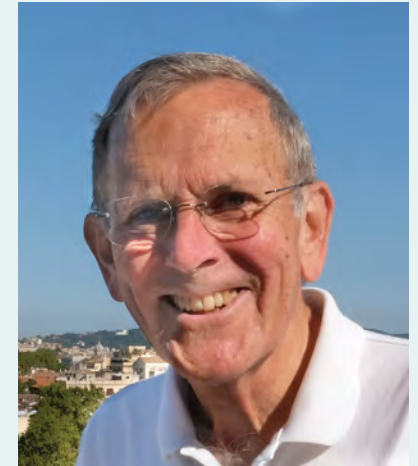
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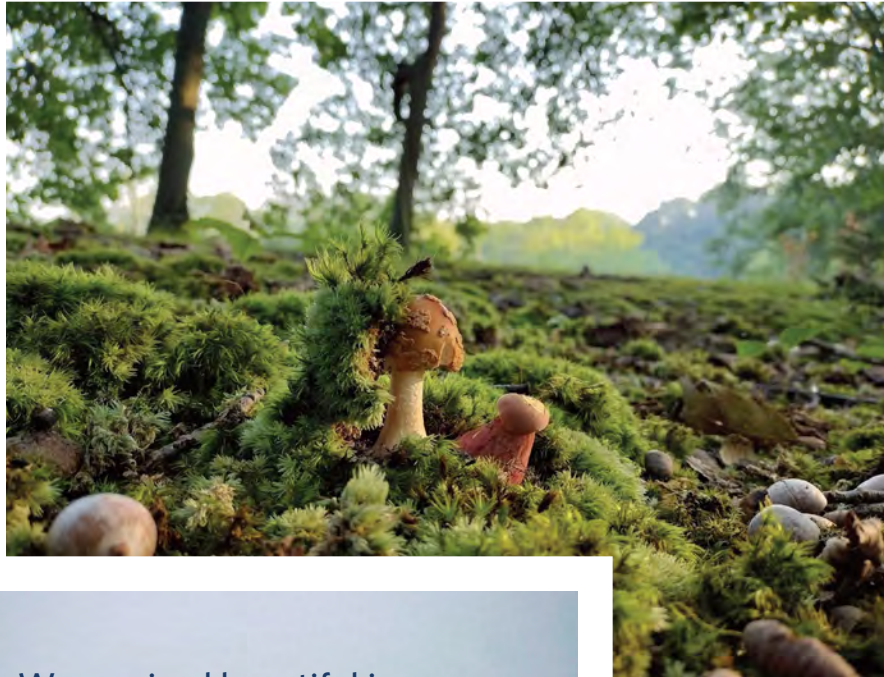
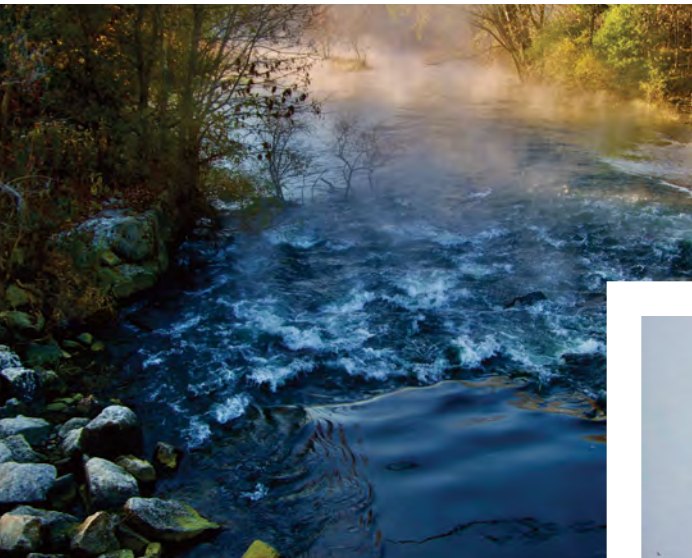
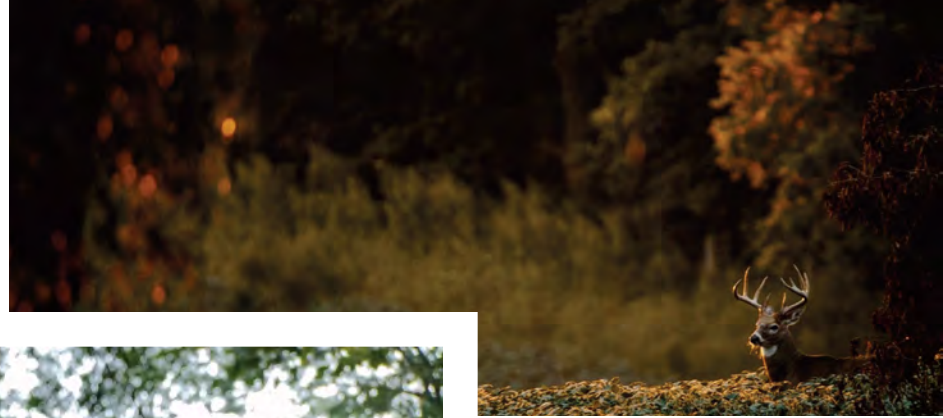
Dr. Tom Carpenter's philanthropic life began in a unique way. Fifteen years ago, his first major gift—a donation of 150 acres in rural New Hampshire—was entrusted to a local land conservancy. As a Classics professor at Ohio University, teaching classes and traveling abroad to study ancient cultures left him little time to return to the forests where his love for nature flourished.



Nevertheless, Tom's connection to the earth has never wavered. As a distinguished archaeologist and scholar, he has spent his life interpreting human culture through the objects people left behind. His passions for the humanities and the natural world converged in Mediterranean caves and tombs, studying how the Italic peoples lived before Greek colonization.

Now in retirement, Tom's interests back home similarly underscore the inextricable connection between people's livelihoods and nature. As a long-time resident of Appalachia, he has witnessed the consequences of extractive fossil fuel economies firsthand and believes deeply in the power of education to unlock meaningful work opportunities. With the help of a financial advisor, Tom has donated inherited stock to The Nature Conservancy's initiatives in southern Ohio, where our blossoming engagements with youth are expanding access to conservation careers.

Done right, conservation can safeguard much more than land, water, and air—it can preserve memories, educate the next generation and improve lives. The same can be said for philanthropy. "You don't have to be rich to be philanthropic. It's not about the amount but the idea of giving back," shares Tom.



We received beautiful images through this year's photo contest. Visit [nature.org/ohiophotocontest](https://www.nature.org/ohiophotocontest) for updates on the winning images.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT © Robert Myer; © Rachel Kuhen; © Debbie Shuman; © William Shackelford; © David Bowie; © Brittany Foister; © TJ Vissing; © Vicky Zipfel (All) TNC Photo Contest 2023 Submissions

