# Protecting Nature for Tomorrow's Texas

2022 ANNUAL REPORT





# From The Director



s 2022 winds down, I've had the opportunity not just to reflect on another impactful year, but to look ahead at 2023 with excitement. Already, The Nature Conservancy is approaching a historic marker in our conservation work: we've nearly protected one million acres of Lone Star land and more than 200 miles of Texas' rivers and streams, ranging from prairies and forests to marshes and mountains to caves and headwaters.

Along the way, we've created lasting partnerships and carried out land purchases, easements, and assists. With the support of people like you, we've protected biodiversity, helped address climate challenges, and invested in our communities to create a more resilient tomorrow. This includes developing innovative science and restoring our most imperiled landscapes while also assisting cities and residents in preserving our natural resources.

But in a way, protecting one million acres will just be the beginning. While this achievement will be no small feat, we won't stop here because the stakes have never been higher for conservation. Texas is the fastest growing state in the nation, and with this growth, we're seeing a significant loss of our beloved wild acreage. It's time to reimagine development and invest in a different type of growth that allows our cities, lands, skies, and waters to all thrive together and remain healthy—because when we empower nature, its effects overwhelmingly benefit our resources, our economies, and our lives.

With this momentum propelling our work, it's time to look to the next million acres and continue forward. This means ensuring that the natural legacy of the Texas we know today will flourish long into the future; that our favorite outdoor places and spaces to explore are expanded and well-managed; that our cities are mapped out and planned using nature as a tool; and that the iconic species of Texas' vast landscapes don't fade into lore and legend.

Let's take a moment to reflect on this year's conservation wins and the great work TNC is doing around the state, thanks to the help of our supporters and partners. Here's a look at just a few of the milestones that we accomplished and the priorities that are guiding our conservation efforts as we focus on the coming year. Together, we can help make tomorrow's Texas even better.

Sincerely,

Suzanne B. Scott

# 2022: Bright Spots



JANUARY: We collaborated with partners and landowners to conserve Honey Creek Spring Ranch in Comal County, which protects Texas' largest cave system and adjoins the Honey Creek State Natural Area.



MARCH: TNC teamed up with the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas to complete the first prescribed burn of the season on Tribal lands. Watch a video about the cultural and ecological importance of longleaf pine restoration for the Tribe at nature.org/texasprescribedfire.



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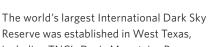
APR

FEBRUARY: The Witness Series, created for residents to explore connections between African Americans and the lands of southeast Texas, kicked off in February; TNC worked with community members to plan and execute these events, which included a guided hike at the Houston Botanic Garden, a historical hike at the Hill at Sims, and a prairie planting at Houston's Clinton Park.



wildflower tours resumed! More than 200 people attended four walks during the springtime.

**APRIL:** Clymer Meadow Preserve





JUNE: Deep in the Heart, a wildlife documentary featuring footage from TNC's preserves, premiered in theaters across the state. More than 130,000 Texans have seen the film, which was one of the top five documentaries in the U.S. for 2022.

Groundbreaking took place at the future Judge Charles R. Rose Community Park, where TNC will install new green stormwater infrastructure and lead a prairie restoration effort.







**NOVEMBER:** We completed a prefeasibility study to assess the potential for a blue carbon market in Texas to protect and restore coastal wetlands.

JULY: Ten young women and 19 female conservation professionals attended our first West Texas Women in Conservation Retreat at TNC's

Davis Mountains Preserve.

AUG

JUL



Residents voted YES to approve a ballot initiative we supported, which sets aside \$20 million for parks and open space in Kendall County.

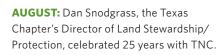


**SEPTEMBER:** TNC staff delivered over 100,000 native plant seedlings grown at our Lennox Foundation Southmost Preserve to the Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge.

SEP

VOV

**OCTOBER:** The Texas Chapter's prescribed fire team burned more than 500 acres of native prairie at Clymer Meadow Preserve; so far, we've burned over 5,000 acres and counting on TNC properties in 2022.





Visit nature.org/donatetexas and make your end of year donation by December 31 for it to count for the 2022 tax year.

**DECEMBER:** 

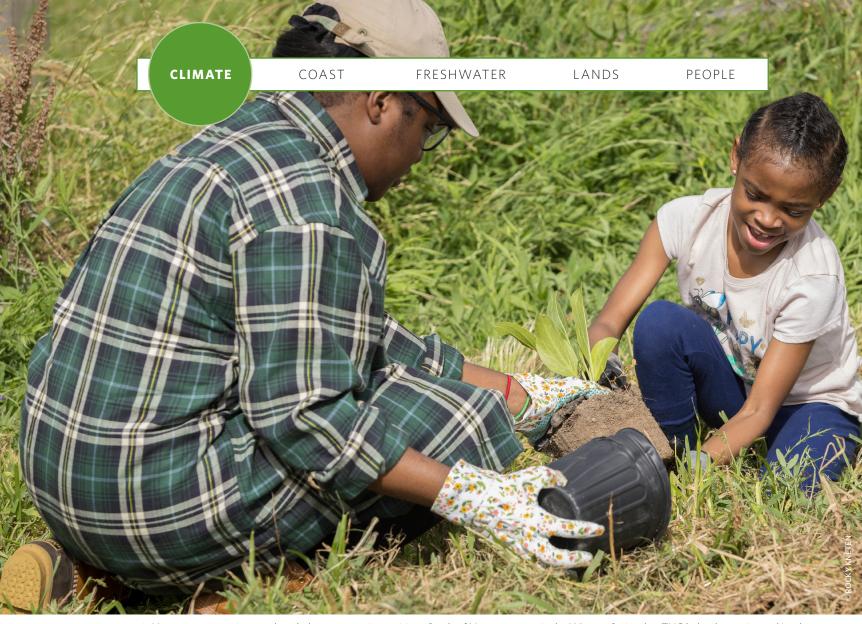
DEC

TNC partnered with Texas Water Development Board and Texas Water Trade to purchase and deliver freshwater to the estuaries at our Mad Island Marsh Preserve during drought conditions.









▲ Houston community members help restore native prairie at Seeds of Hope, an event in the Witness Series that TNC helped organize and implement.

# Climate-Ready and Resilient Communities

limate change is our new normal, affecting everything from the health of Texas' natural resources to the strength of our economy and our very quality of life. Across the Lone Star State, we're feeling the effects of more frequent and intense hurricanes, wildfires, and flooding events, along with their impacts on air and water quality. Temperatures are climbing, and habitats are migrating or disappearing altogether, with serious implications for biodiversity. Over the past 70 years, relative sea levels have risen up to 18 inches along parts of the coast, making Gulf communities and economies more vulnerable than ever as this trend worsens. By imagining bold, new climate solutions that scale across the state and beyond our borders, we can collaborate with people and partners to make our communities stronger, more equitable, and better prepared for when the next big catastrophe hits.

Climate change touches everyone in Texas—and we must all have a hand in finding solutions. From rural to urban areas, TNC is harnessing the power of nature to provide critical infrastructure that improves the health and resilience of our communities. This means influencing policy and planning efforts to include more equitable, nature-based solutions that can help Texans adapt to and mitigate against the impacts of climate change. With a strong spirit of partnership and co-creation, we're dedicated to turning our vision for Texas into reality. We envision communities that recover faster and with fewer losses when extreme weather hits and that have enough clean, safe drinking water for a growing population. From protecting floodplains to conserving greenspaces, nature benefits the environment and community living alike. Many lives and livelihoods are at stake and no cure-all exists, so action is needed now.

# Planning Resilient Communities for People and Nature

#### **GREEN STORMWATER INFRASTRUCTURE**

Nature-based solutions are an important tool in the fight against climate change. Research conducted by TNC and Texas A&M AgriLife identified substantial cost-effective options to enhance flood management in Dallas by deploying green stormwater infrastructure (GSI)—engineered plant and soil systems that mimic nature's ability to absorb and filter water. The research has provided important data on how and where decision-makers and investors can best leverage the benefits of GSI here, with the methods and many of the findings from this study being transferable to other cities.



#### **BLUE CARBON ASSESSMENT**

Coastal wetlands, such as tidal marshes, seagrass meadows, and mangrove forests, absorb billions of tons of carbon—known specifically as "blue carbon"—from our atmosphere at concentrations up to five times greater than forests. This stored carbon can remain in the soil for thousands of years, making coastal wetlands one of our longest-term climate mitigation solutions. TNC is currently conducting a study to assess the feasibility of sites identified along the Texas Coast serving as blue carbon offset projects.



## TRINITY FLOODPLAIN PLANNING & PRIORITIZATION TOOL

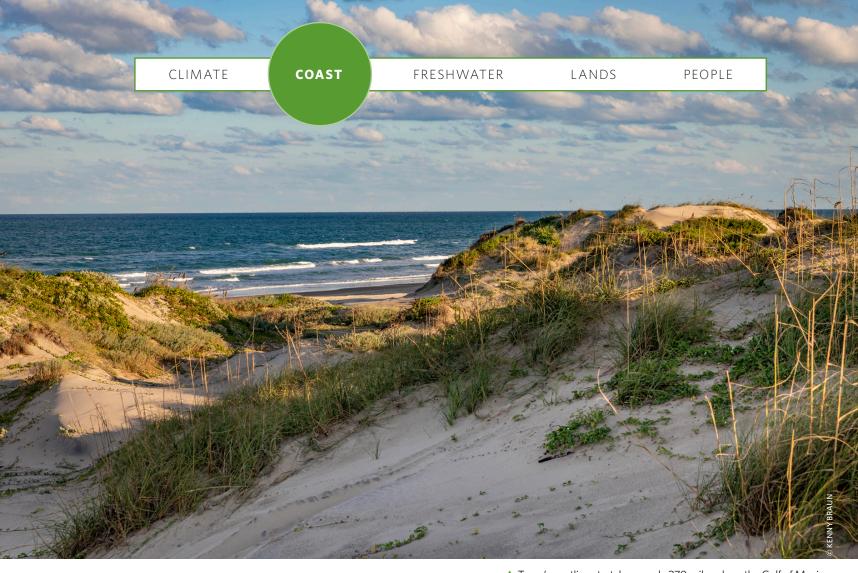
TNC is collaborating with the Army Corps of Engineers—Silver Jackets and regional stakeholders to support the protection and restoration of greenspace in the Trinity River floodplain. The goal of this work is to mitigate flood impacts, reduce risk to communities, and improve the water quality and health of ecosystems while providing added benefits for people and nature. As a part of the project, TNC is adapting its Floodplain Prioritization Tool to the Trinity Basin to identify and prioritize fundable, high-impact floodplain and restoration projects. This initiative supports regional and state planning efforts to reduce flood risk through nature-based solutions.



▲ GSI, like bioretention raingardens, placed in parking lots offers many benefits for people and nature.

Restoring coastal wetlands is critical to capturing and storing blue carbon.

The Trinity River flows for 710 miles before emptying into Trinity Bay.



▲ Texas' coastline stretches nearly 370 miles along the Gulf of Mexico.

# Resilient Coastal Ecosystems and Communities

t least half of the planet's oxygen originates from marine organisms, but today, marine and estuarine environments are some of the most imperiled in the world. In our Gulf waters, only 20 to 50 percent of oyster reefs remain today. These beneficial bivalves do everything from filtering water to supporting marine aquatic species to serving as buffers during storm surges. Similarly, coral reefs—the nurseries of our seas—are under threat from warming waters, while more and more of our wetlands are lost each year, to the detriment of nearly 400 bird species.

The Gulf is a powerhouse, supporting commerce like fisheries and tourism while providing numerous benefits like natural storm protection; but years of development, land fragmentation, and unprecedented natural disasters have put all of this in jeopardy. The

last decade has brought some of the most devastating environmental catastrophes in history to the Texas Gulf Coast, particularly in communities already having to combat a historic lack of resources. Texas needs the Gulf, and right now, it needs us. Environmental, scientific, and government organizations have rallied together to improve the health and resilience of the region—but resilience doesn't just start at our coasts. Our Texas rivers ultimately flow into Gulf bays and estuaries, so investing in their wise management is essential. TNC is at the forefront of these efforts, protecting and restoring lands and waters that safeguard iconic Texas species, constructing oyster reefs that boost our Gulf's ecology and economy, and examining nature's role in buffering coastal communities from extreme weather.

# Building the Resiliency of Coastal Ecosystems and Communities

#### **OYSTER REEF RESTORATION**

Oyster reefs may be one of the most threatened marine habitats on Earth, but there's still hope. The Gulf is considered our last, best chance for fully restoring healthy oyster populations. By constructing a series of oyster reefs as well as bay-wide restoration, TNC is aiming to do just that. In Matagorda, Copano, and Galveston bays, we have restored 55 acres of harvestable reef and nearly 100 acres of sanctuary reef, for a total of roughly 155 acres. Our vision for the Gulf involves a landscape-scale approach to oyster restoration that will create a network of oyster reefs that, while spatially separate, are ecologically connected. Taken together, efforts like these are supporting sustainable, productive fisheries for industry and recreation in Texas, while protecting marine environments and enhancing water quality, proving that we don't have to choose between ecological health and economic prosperity.



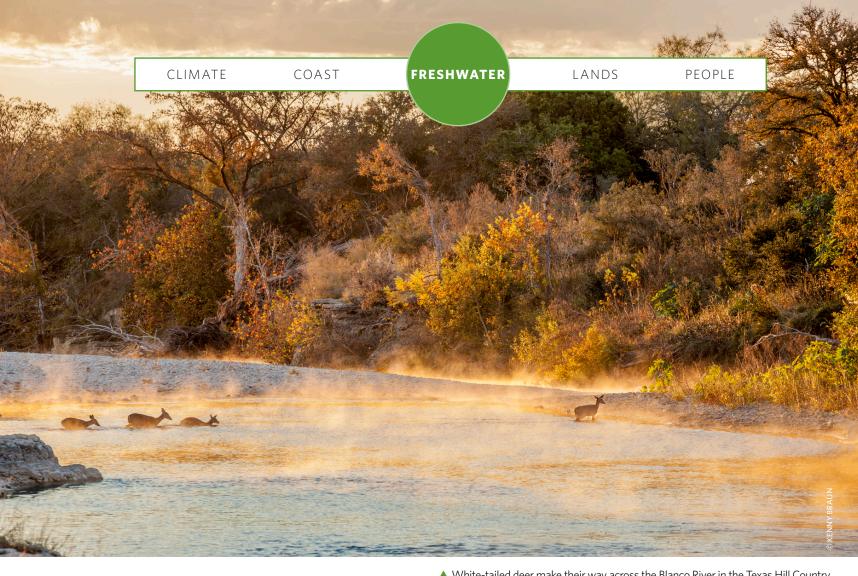
## **WETLAND MIGRATION MAPPING**

As the sea level rises and alters the coastline we know today, TNC is working with colleagues in the Gulf of Mexico to map the position of current and future coastal wetlands. This involves harnessing the latest science to analyze and prioritize at-risk land in the Gulf. Our collective work will ultimately inform where protection and restoration efforts should be focused to ensure that wetlands can continue to deliver benefits to people and nature.



▲ Volunteers use oyster shells to restore shoreline habitat in Beach City, Texas.

Over 600 species of birds rely on Texas' coastal wetlands.



▲ White-tailed deer make their way across the Blanco River in the Texas Hill Country.

# Healthy Rivers, Aquifers, and Watersheds

ater—it's the lifeblood of our planet and a driving force of nature for millions of years. In Texas, our rivers, aguifers, and watersheds do it all: power our cities, support fishing and farming economies, and sustain people, nature, and biodiversity. Freshwater flows from the ground to the taps of the millions of Texas residents, running through our beloved spring-fed creeks and swimming holes and sustaining nearly 250,000 farms and ranches across the state. But it's also a finite resource. In the next 50 years, the demand for water in Texas will soar as our population doubles to 55 million. Conserving water—and changing how we use it—is the simplest and most cost-effective way to safeguard our water supplies.

Big water challenges like these require creative solutions, and TNC is leading the development of novel, adaptable strategies to address the increasing threat of water scarcity and related freshwater conservation issues across Texas. We're working with partners and landowners to lease water rights, implement agricultural efficiencies, and modify dam operations—all to ensure that there's enough water flowing in our rivers and streams to support people and nature. At the state and federal levels, we're using science to advance more sustainable water management and policy practices, from groundwater to river systems. Through good stewardship, we're preserving land around lakes, rivers, and streams, and protecting source waters with an eye for restoring river connectivity. Together, these efforts equal improved water quality, quantity, and resilience for Texas' watersheds.

# Improving the Health and Flows of Texas' Rivers, Aquifers, and Watersheds

# LLANO RIVER ENVIRONMENTAL WATER TRANSACTION

On the Llano River, TNC is working with multiple water right holders to develop conservation agreements that will restore and protect approximately 500 acre-feet of water back to the river each year. So how does it work? In periods with below-average flows, we can request that our conservation partners refrain from diverting water, protecting this resource for environmental flows and the freshwater species that depend on the river. Environmental water transactions like this help keep water flowing from our rivers and streams, all the way to our bays and estuaries along the Texas Coast.

# OKENNY BRAUN

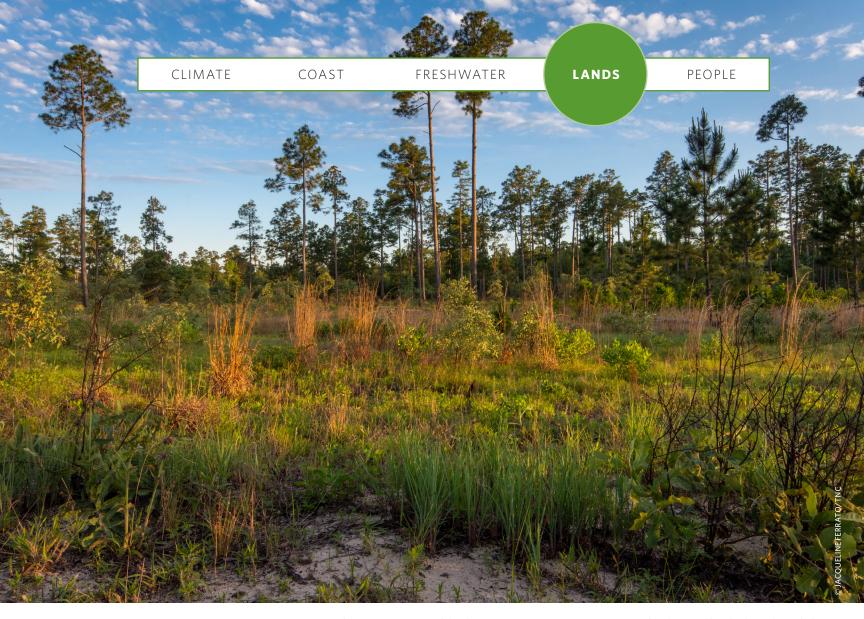
## **SUSTAINABLE RIVERS PROGRAM**

As part of our Sustainable Rivers Program partnership with the Army Corps of Engineers, TNC, the Caddo Lake Institute, and other organizations are restoring flows to the Big Cypress Bayou and Caddo Lake in Northeast Texas and Northwest Louisiana. Already, the Army Corps has adopted most of our ecological flow recommendations into their operation of Lake O' the Pines dam. Now, TNC is evaluating the ecological response to these flow releases to better inform our work here. Building on this successful partnership, the Sustainable Rivers Program is expanding to three other Texas river basins to ensure that dam operations meet current needs of people and nature.



▲ Partnering with local landowners is essential to preserving the quantity and quality of water in our rivers and streams.

Caddo Lake is made up of bottomland hardwood forests and shallow bald cypress swamps.



▲ The Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary protects over 5,600 acres of endangered longleaf pine forest habitat.

# Thriving, Connected Landscapes and Working Lands

here's a whole lot of land to love in the Lone Star State—roughly 270,000 square miles comprised of grasslands, forests, shrublands, wetlands, deserts, mountains, and much more. Yet nearly 95 percent of Texas land is privately held. For conservation, this increasingly means collaborating with landowners, ranchers, businesses, and other partners to protect key tracts—especially as development and land fragmentation occur statewide at unprecedented rates. While 86 percent of Texans live in cities, about 83 percent of state lands are rural areas like farms, ranches, and forests. With Texas losing over a square mile of land to development every day, preserving and stewarding these open spaces will be more critical than ever if we hope to provide enough food, water, and energy to support our rising population.

Our path forward hinges on protecting, managing, and restoring our lands to preserve the natural resources we depend on while recognizing that industries like farming, ranching, and timber production are integral to our Texas heritage. That's why TNC is accelerating conservation in Texas and creating a network of resilient, connected lands and waterways that will allow nature to adapt to a growing state and a changing climate. We believe that all Texans—no matter where in this great state they live—deserve to enjoy and benefit from the dark skies, open spaces, and cherished natural areas that make Texas so special.

# Sustaining Thriving, Connected Landscapes and Working Lands

#### **REFUGIO-GOLIAD PRAIRIE PROJECT**

Refugio-Goliad Prairie, which spans 500,000 acres along the Gulf, represents some of the largest and highest-quality expanses of coastal tallgrass prairie remaining in Texas. The region is also home to many of Texas' largest and oldest cattle ranching operations. To keep this legacy alive and restore the prairie's functionality, we're working with landowners and ranchers to incorporate prescribed fire along with sustainable grazing practices that maintain this vast habitat and support native species, including the critically endangered Attwater's prairie chicken.



#### **DAVIS MOUNTAINS PRESERVE**

Each year, TNC's Davis Mountains Preserve receives more visitors than any other TNC property, offering public access to several trails and summits. Here, the McIvor Conservation Center helps connect researchers, scientists, volunteers, and students to West Texas ecology and history. The preserve also protects some of Texas' most iconic landscapes, including Sawtooth Mountain, and biodiversity ranging from black bears and mountain lions to short-horned lizards and Montezuma quail. While TNC owns and manages the 33,075-acre preserve, we've helped safeguard more than 110,000 acres of the Davis Mountains region in general through land purchases, conservation easements, and partnerships with local landowners.



#### **SEED HARVESTING FOR GRASSLAND RESTORATION**

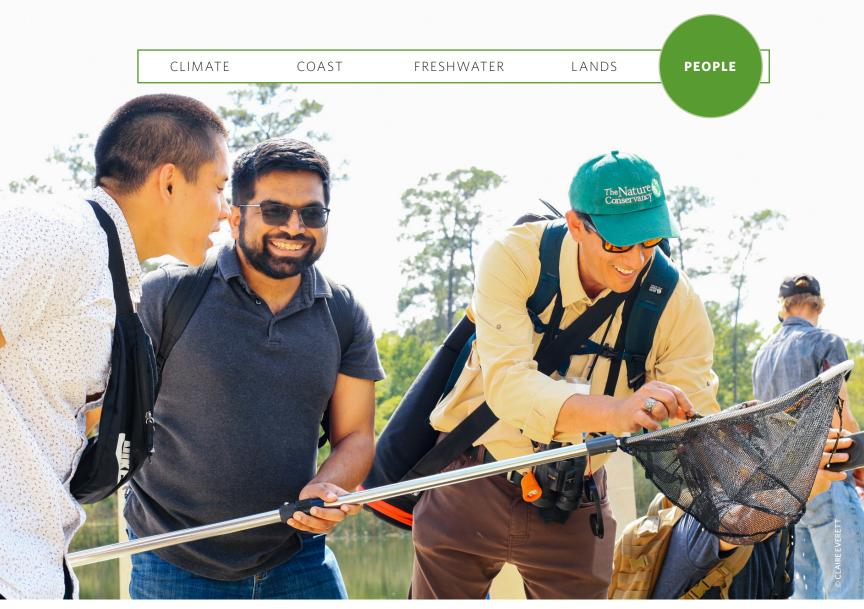
Native seed is essential to restoring Texas' grasslands, which once spanned along much of the Texas Coast. Our TNC preserves are not only providing crucial protection for some of the best remaining remnants of these grasslands, but are also serving as key sources to further regional conservation efforts. Between our Mad Island Marsh Preserve, Nash Prairie Preserve, Texas City Prairie Preserve, and Clymer Meadow Preserve, we harvest thousands of pounds of native seed every year, which are dried, processed, and stored until planting season arrives. Together, these seeds represent some of our best hopes for restoring our lost Lone Star landscapes.



▲ The critically endangered Attwater's prairie chicken is native to Texas' coastal prairies.

TNC's Davis Mountains Preserve is one of only three sky islands in the state—a cooler, wetter landscape surrounded by arid lowland desert.

Each year, the seed harvested from our prairie preserves is used to restore acreage both on and off TNC properties.



▲ TNC Healthy Communities Director Jaime González teaches visitors about aquatic biodiversity in Houston's Memorial Park.

# **Engaging and Supporting Our People and Partners**

exas is one of the most diverse states in the nation. As a melting pot of many cultures, we represent a variety of different ethnicities, races, and beliefs. Together, our differences knit a distinctly Texan mosaic unlike any other. But across the board, one simple truth remains: we all depend on nature. From providing resources and recreation options to enhancing mental health and resiliency, our natural world excels. Sadly, inequities still exist around nature. Time after time, we've seen that underserved communities are disproportionately impacted by environmental and climate challenges like heat islands, storms, and air and water pollution. Historical disinvestment in such communities has also resulted in limited access to greenspaces and parks, along with their many-layered benefits.

When it comes to communities in need of nature, TNC aims to be a catalyst for change. We're creating on-the-ground projects with a coalition of partners to enhance outdoor access, whether via bike paths, trails, and pocket parks or greener schoolyards and bus stops. As these initiatives are taking form, we're engaging local communities and Indigenous peoples to seek diverse input and uplift their conservation leadership. We're also helping leaders rethink the role that nature can play, not only in terms of improving the ecological function of our communities and green spaces, but in terms of nature's benefits to human health and well-being.

# Maintaining and Building Supportive and Engaging Partnerships

#### **JEFFERSON EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER**

When it comes to schools, nature has often been an afterthought. But TNC aims to shift this paradigm by partnering with Alief and other districts in the greater Houston area on improving local schoolyards. The goal is supporting equitably distributed, scalable, and resilient infrastructure. In doing so, we can embed these greenspaces into communities to provide more access to nature, increase climate resilience, reduce carbon emissions, and provide wildlife habitat in the heart of the city. TNC's key partner in this effort is leading school architecture firm PBK, and the project will showcase the Jefferson center as a learning laboratory to help school districts across the state switch to greener grounds that fully integrate nature-based solutions while engaging children through nature.

#### **OUTDOOR ACCESS**

Each year, thousands of visitors and volunteers of all ages recreate in and explore TNC's preserves and properties in Texas through open day events, clean-up efforts, and educational field trips. As we work to expand these opportunities, we are providing more equitable access to nature so Texas' diverse population can build knowledge, affinity, and advocacy for nature and its many benefits. Our protected lands also serve as living laboratories for groundbreaking ecological research and first-rate stewardship—approaches that can be scaled up and applied statewide to further conservation efforts and better manage our public spaces.

#### **INDIGENOUS PEOPLES BURNING NETWORK**

Many of Texas' landscapes are fire-adapted, meaning that they require regular intervals of fire to thrive. The longleaf pine forest is a prime example of a fire-dependent system that TNC is working to preserve with controlled burns. When the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas and TNC recognized that each was working toward the same goal of restoring the longleaf forest, a unique partnership was formed. With support from the Indigenous Peoples Burning Network, TNC staff and others established an agreement with the Alabama-Coushatta to implement longleaf restoration on tribal and on collaborator lands. TNC is also helping to provide training, equipment, and gear to the tribe's Wildland Fire Management crew as part of this partnership. Together, the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas and TNC hope to elevate restoration efforts, so that longleaf forest can thrive throughout Southeast Texas.





▲ The Jefferson Early Childhood Center will serve as a replicable model for other schools seeking to incorporate nature and its benefits into their framework.

TNC and the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas are working together to put more flames on the ground to restore longleaf pine tree populations.















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# Financial Summary

FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2022

REVENUES		2022 ACTUAL	2021 ACTUAL	92% YOY increase in Temp Restricted
	Dues and Contributions- includes Membership Government Grants and Contracts Private Contracts and Mitigation Investment / Interest Income (Loss) Other Income All Other Transfers from/(to) other TNC Mgmt Units  TOTAL REVENUE & SUPPORT	13,305,016 3,243,926 485,925 (3,362,712) 306,304 (26,198) <b>13,952,261</b>	9,056,879	\$2.3 Million towards Honey Creek Acquisition
EXPENSES				\$1.7 Million:
	Personnel & Fringe Benefits Contractual Other Expenses Intra-Co EBA Transfer-Out	4,933,279 1,575,847 2,834,680 1,115,529	4,664,036 3,307,270 ← 2,140,906 1,036,503	Gavelston Bay Oyster Reef Project in FY21  -6.2%: Expense
	TOTAL EXPENSES BEFORE LAND	10,459,335	11,148,715 ←	decrease YoY
	Land Sales & Gifts Cost of Land Sold and Expense Intra-Co Loan Interest	15,578,367 (5,264,317) (292,775)	672,000 (494,328) (457,569)	
	TOTAL LAND RELATED INCOME/(EXPENSE)	10,021,275	(279,897) ←	= \$6.8 Million: closed the Rio
	TOTAL NET ASSET RECLASSIFICATION	614,727	200,000	Blanco easement
	SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)	14,128,928	7,886,019	
ASSETS		2022 ACTUAL	2021 ACTUAL	
	Cash & Investments Government Grants & Contracts Receivable Pledges Receivable Property & Equipment-Net of Depreciation Conservation Lands & Easements Other Assets	39,245,086 226,428 2,354,107 2,212,013 320,434,516 591,806	37,297,265 148,597 1,860,831 2,556,301 317,160,921 1,375,130	
	Total Assets	365,063,956	360,399,045	
LIABILITIES				
	Internal LPF Loans Deferred Revenue & Refundable Advances Accounts Payable & Accrued Liabilities Lease Liabilities	- 1,921,533 410,803 616,359	9,135,593	LPF debt has been paid in full
	Total Liabilities	2,948,695	11,775,232	
NET ASSETS				
	NET ASSETS (UNRESTRICTED)  NET ASSETS (TEMPORARILY RESTRICTED)  NET ASSETS (PERMANENTLY RESTRICTED)	345,394,888 11,020,788 5,699,584	333,353,098 9,636,131 5,634,584	
	Total Net Assets	362,115,260	348,623,813 ←	20% Operating Net Assets Increase YoY and \$13.5M
	Total Liabilities and Net Assets	365,063,955	360,399,045	
Fundraising Expenses as Percentage of Total Operations Fund and Land & Trade Land Funds Conservation Expenses as Percentage of Total Operations Fund and Land & Trade Land Funds Administration Expenses as Percentage of Total Operations Fund and Land & Trade Land Funds		9% 79% 12%	14% 73% 13%	increase in Net Assets overall

# Celebrating Our Supporters

Thank you to our supporters and friends from FY22 (July 1, 2021 - June 30, 2022) who helped make this incredible work possible.

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Rachael and John Vegas Danna and William Volk Cindy and Jack Waldrip

Judith W. and Andrew B. White Jr.

Charline Von Heyl and Christopher D. Wool

Heather Wright





▲ A female bobcat bounds through a gap in a wire fence.

# **Leap Into Action**

The Nature Conservancy believes that a world where people and nature thrive is still possible. With the support of partners across the state, we've spent the last six decades making positive change happen in Texas. As a leading conservation organization, we have helped secure some of the state's biggest conservation wins, but we know there is more to be done. We're developing breakthrough tools and ideas, amplifying local knowledge and leadership, influencing decision-making to scale change, and creating new funding paths to accelerate our conservation efforts—because no matter the odds, TNC is dedicated to finding the people, partnerships, and tools to ensure a healthy and resilient future for the Lone Star State.

Help us protect nature for tomorrow's Texas. Visit nature.org/donatetexas



## HAVE QUESTIONS OR WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Contact one of our philanthropy representatives directly:

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