

# Arkansas

2020 IMPACT REPORT

THE HEALING POWER OF NATURE

The Nature  
Conservancy



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## Thank You for Your Support

**Dear Friend of Nature,**

As this tumultuous year comes to a close, I've spent some time reflecting on the role of nature while we navigate life's changes.

For many Arkansans, nature became a safe space for physical and mental well-being. Parents sent kids outside to explore their backyards. Hikes and paddles replaced trips to the gym and summer sports. Walks around the neighborhood helped ease the monotony of working from home—or the stress of losing work. It was truly a breath of fresh air, a constant companion in an ever-changing world. I am more thankful than ever for your support of the natural world that gives us so much.

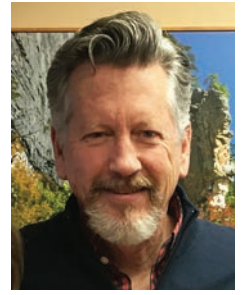
Over the years, my family has come to love a quiet spot on Lake Hamilton and many of our state parks and public lands to experience the hills, rivers, hikes, and views. There, we can tune out the buzz of the daily grind and enjoy life's simple pleasures: clean air, beautiful scenery, abundant wildlife, and quiet togetherness.

I realize not everyone has equal access to the outdoors. The Conservancy's staff and Board of Trustees are committed to putting your continued support to work, creating more welcoming spaces and experiences so people throughout our communities can share a sense of belonging and confidence in nature.

One thing is for sure: The lands and waters you helped conserve have been—and continue to be—invaluable to Arkansans. You helped protect these places for everyone and now, more than ever, we need them.

Thank you for your continued support of conservation.

**Hugh McDonald**  
Chair, Board of Trustees

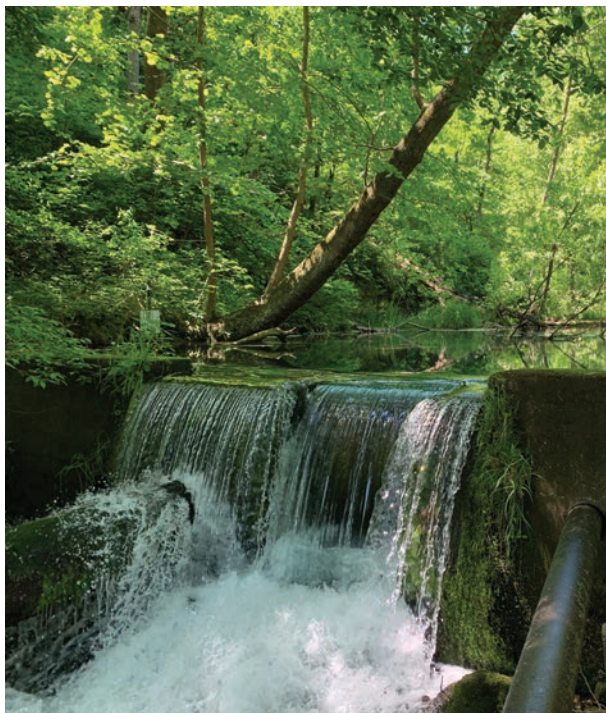


## Coming Soon: Logan Springs

Preserve in NW Arkansas to Offer Unique Features

If you're itching for a new space for outdoor adventures, we have an exciting opportunity on the horizon.

With help from the Walton Family Foundation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, several donors and a discount from a conservation-minded seller, the Conservancy recently purchased Logan Springs, a 210-acre property in Northwest Arkansas. This beautiful place nestled in the Ozarks features large springs and an oxbow lake, among other features.



Eagles, uncommon songbirds, beavers, raccoons, deer and more use Logan Springs for feeding, breeding, nesting, and seasonal migration. And an estimated 12,000 gray bats—which raise their babies in a nearby cave during summer months—have ample space to forage here.

With your support, we will open to the public and bring new, low-impact recreational opportunities to this part of the Natural State. If this piques your interest, we'd love to hear from you! To provide feedback or donate to the future of Logan Springs, contact **Kim Dutton** at 479-439-1574 or [kimberly.dutton@tnc.org](mailto:kimberly.dutton@tnc.org).

### YOUR GIFTS AT WORK



#### PROTECTING WATER

Ensuring clean, abundant water for people and wildlife



#### LIVING WITH FIRE

Improving habitat for wildlife and keeping people safe from wildfire



#### INSPIRING PEOPLE FOR NATURE

Cultivating a love for the outdoors that encourages taking care of our natural world.



#### RESTORING THE DELTA

Planting trees, reconnecting rivers to wetlands, and encouraging innovation in agriculture



## Nature Therapy

You Helped Arkansans Step Outside When They Needed It Most

Katie Bridges and her family moved to Fayetteville in mid-February, just a month before COVID-19 hit Arkansas.

With social gatherings and in-town activities severely limited, the family of four took the opportunity to continue a lifestyle they started while living in Phoenix, Ariz., the previous year—going outside as much as possible and “getting lost in the woods.”

“We’d pack a bag, pack up the car, not knowing where we were going,” Katie said (pictured top right, with her family). “We call it ‘having adventures.’ It’s what we do. We go on hikes. We ride our bikes. We get lost in the woods. It’s made all the difference in keeping our family sane during the pandemic.”

For many Arkansans, spending time in nature has been a welcome escape from the uncertainty and unease brought on by the pandemic’s disruptions to everyday life. Because of you, Conservancy preserves have been a source of much-needed “nature therapy” for many visitors.

That’s true for Kenneth McNeil of Little Rock. Hiking and cycling helped him take a break from the constant flood of information.

“The outdoors has been a lifesaver,” Kenneth said. “The beauty of nature takes us away from the news and numbers of COVID cases. My circle of friends is very small right now to be safe, and we love and need the outdoors, especially now.” Some of his favorite places to get away are Rattlesnake Ridge Natural Area, Bluffton Preserve, and a variety of state parks.

Many Arkansans agree. According to Google COVID-19 Community Mobility Report data for Arkansas, trips to parks, recreational spaces, and other public lands were consistently double or more since the pandemic hit, compared to the baseline. From July to early September, that increase averaged 165% statewide.

For the Bridges family, waterfall hunting led them to Elise Falls at the Conservancy’s Smith Creek Preserve. But they came back for the wildflowers.

“We learned how to motivate our daughters to experience the outdoors in a way that resonates with them,” Katie said. “For Wren (3), she’s fine with picking up sticks, throwing rocks and getting her feet wet. For Elliott (5), learning was a key part of her enjoyment—so we started identifying wildflowers. Together we found over 150 kinds of flowers. Now she’s identifying them on her own.”

Because of you, outdoor enthusiasts like Kenneth have access to fresh air and healthy activity to help them tackle life’s stresses. And because of you, budding botanists like Elliott have wild places to discover the natural world’s infinite beauty.







## A Safe Passage, Thanks to You

### New Bridge Key Feature of Creek Restoration

Late one night, a homeowner deep in the Ozarks was startled awake by pounding at his front door. He opened it to find a frightened, injured woman, desperately seeking safety and medical help. He called 911, but the water was high on Rockhouse Creek Road and the ambulance couldn't make it across the old, low concrete slab crossing the creek. After an hour had passed, another ambulance had to be sent in from the opposite direction.

Thankfully, the woman survived, but the ordeal was a stark reminder of what this man and his neighbors already knew—lack of reliable road access could mean life or death in an emergency.

Not only was the crossing a safety concern, it created a dam that made it impossible for fish to reach critical habitat and caused erosion of the streambanks.

“This part of the creek had terrible erosion and instability,” said Kim Dutton, the Conservancy’s director, Northwest Arkansas. “It was one of our highest priorities for restoration because of the amount of sediment it was sending into the Kings River. And when we learned of the community safety issue, it made it that much more urgent.”

Thanks to you, project manager John Chapman and partners at Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Madison County were able to improve the crossing and restore the surrounding creek. Now, cleaner water flows into the Kings River.

Using healthier, upstream sections of Rockhouse Creek as a guide for what the channel should look like, the restoration team carefully rebuilt the damaged area using natural materials. Then volunteer groups helped plant nearly 3,000 native trees and shrubs to stabilize the soil. Finally, the new bridge took shape up and over the creek, water flowing freely beneath it.

Now fish can swim upstream and downstream as their life cycles dictate, and people can get across the creek safely—no matter the weather.

Because of you, Rockhouse Creek is safer and healthier for people and nature.





## Cavefish Out of Water

New Population Discovered at Construction Site



Northwest Arkansas construction crews became impromptu conservationists after a surprise discovery at their work site.

While excavating a deep trench, the crew saw groundwater flowing through small openings in the rock. The next day, they saw something swimming in the trench's pools—an Ozark cavefish, a species that lives its entire life in underground caverns. The Conservancy and partners were called in to respond.

“Thanks to the quick actions of the construction crews and their help spotting the cavefish, we captured six alive,” said Mike Slay, the Conservancy’s Ozark karst program manager. “Unfortunately, we couldn’t return them to their home because the water flow was too great for them to swim back upstream from where they came out.”

Luckily, he has friends who love cave creatures as much as he does. Researchers from the San Antonio Zoo who specialize in maintaining captive populations of rare and endangered U.S. cave species agreed to care for the escapees. This is a win-win: Scientists can study the captive population, and the information they learn helps us better conserve the species. You make this kind of collaboration possible.

Mike traded his caving helmet for a chauffeur’s cap and drove the six rescued fish to San Antonio, where they are now settling into their new home at the zoo!





## A Good Year for Good Fire

Positive Outcomes for Quail, Rare Plants

Thanks to you, another successful year of prescribed fire is in the books with nearly 5,500 acres treated.

This year, the crew and partners extended their controlled burns to the growing season (May through September). Making this change reflects a more historical fire regime and also helps speed up the restoration process.

“We were very fortunate to be able to work with partners and volunteers on prescribed burns this summer after our own crew’s season ended,” project manager Clint Harris said. “It wouldn’t have been possible without them.”

And the effects of your support on Arkansas landscapes are bountiful. During one prescribed fire operation near Felsenthal National Wildlife Refuge in south Arkansas, Clint and partners couldn’t contain their excitement when they heard a distinct whistle—*bob WHITE*.

They jumped 50 quail in two days.

“To hear a pair of quail is pretty unheard of in south Arkansas. To see one is unreal,” Clint said. “It was a small ray of sunshine for us that day.”

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Another inspiring outcome of your investment in prescribed fire is finding rare plants rebounding in restored areas. Each year, a team of Conservancy staff, partners, and volunteers braves the summer heat to hike into restoration sites, pore over one-meter-square blocks of ground, and make note of every plant and its frequency within each block.

This incredibly detailed work, made possible by your generous support, tracks changes in plant communities over time and ensures our management activities are working. And it allows us to keep tabs on rare sightings like *Tradescantia longipees* (lower right), one of this year’s fantastic finds in the Ouachita National Forest.







## Youth Engagement Reimagined

Your Support Helps Pivot Program

Conservancy youth leader Devan Schlaudraff was just three weeks into the Mann Magnet Middle School mountain biking program when the Little Rock school closed in response to COVID-19.

As the pandemic took hold, Devan knew although the youth engagement program would have to look different, it had to continue and was more important than ever—kids and parents needed the healing power of play in nature. Your support helped the program go virtual, offering fun, engaging, safe outdoor activities that encouraged physical movement, learning, and creativity.

Today, the youth engagement program is safely back outside, with families kayaking, kids fishing, and students hiking after school.

“I’m excited to be with my adventurers again,” Devan said. “Because kids absolutely need outdoor time, and nature needs future guardians.”

## Happy Trails to You

Fun at Bluffton Preserve, Rattlesnake Ridge

Sweeping views of a steep Ozark valley and the Archey Fork’s blue waters. This is The Overlook, just one of the features along six miles of hiking and biking trails being built at Bluffton Preserve outside Clinton, thanks to your support. The full trail system is anticipated to be complete in spring 2021, but several miles are ready for use now.

“Building the trails at Rattlesnake Ridge Natural Area helped us shape our vision at Bluffton,” said Mitchell Allen, recreational use manager. “But Bluffton has a completely different feel—it’s much more wild.”

The 6.5 miles of trail at Rattlesnake Ridge are kept in shape by a dedicated team of volunteers. They work independently or in small, safely distanced groups to maintain the trails that some 2,000 visitors a month enjoy.

“Our stewards are amazing,” trails specialist Leah Beck said. “They’re passionate about taking care of this special place. We’re so grateful for them.”

### Volunteer Info

If you would like to volunteer at a Conservancy preserve, email [ARvolunteers@tnc.org](mailto:ARvolunteers@tnc.org) or call **501-614-5077** for information. Keep an eye on our Facebook and Instagram pages, too!



RESTORING THE DELTA

## It's All About Timing

Farmers Harvest Wins with Timers, Trees

Time is on our side! Thanks to you, Arkansas rice farmers, Syngenta, and Kellogg Company, a project to conserve scarce groundwater using irrigation timers is reaping rewards in its second year.

To date, the Conservancy, with your help, has installed 162 timers on 30 rice farms across the Delta. And according to farmers, they're seeing savings of up to 650,000 gallons of water a year—nearly enough to fill an Olympic-sized swimming pool—on every single acre.

Because the timers turn off automatically, crops get just the right amount of water and farmers see savings in cost, time, and energy.

“Some farmers no longer have to drive as much around the farm, to hard-to-reach wells during inconvenient times,” said Gui Prezotti, Delta project manager. “Fewer hours driving, along with well engines running less, saves time and money. Plus, with the timer shutting off on its own, that's one less thing to worry about.”

And the benefits don't stop on the farm. All that water saved is groundwater, which is falling to dangerously low levels across the Delta. Other conservation wins include reducing excess soil and nutrient runoff into nearby rivers.



That's a powerful impact for a small, simple device—and your generosity made it possible!

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Your support took root in another big way this year, with 1.7 million trees planted in the Delta.

Spanning 5,894 acres, the planting is part of the federal Wetland Reserve Easement program, which pays farmers to reforest marginal or unusable farmland. Because of you, these trees will improve air and water quality and provide habitat for ducks and other wildlife for years to come.

So the next time you find yourself driving across the Delta, paddling through its cypress and tupelo bottomlands, or watching the sun rise on a chilly morning from your favorite duck blind, you can take pride in knowing you are helping sustain this bountiful landscape for future generations.



## Donors Leave Legacy for Nature

Beth Keck and Ken Leonard

Beth and Ken moved to Bentonville when Beth was recruited by Walmart. “We never dreamed we would live in Arkansas, but once we got here, we fell in love with the landscapes,” Beth said. They enjoy hiking, camping, and canoeing. Ken, a Master Naturalist, volunteers time propagating native plants.

“The Nature Conservancy has been part of our annual giving for a long time,” Ken said. “When we learned about charitable gift annuities, it made sense to choose the Conservancy as the beneficiary.” The gift offers an immediate tax deduction and fixed income for life, after which the remainder passes to the Conservancy.

“We believe in saving land, so we dedicated our gift to acquiring property in Arkansas,” Beth said. “Animals and natural habitat need space too. It’s important to set aside greenspace so nature can thrive.”



Lynn Makarick

Lynn, originally from New Jersey, moved to Batesville 14 years ago. She lives on 10 acres where she raises chickens, fosters shelter dogs, and is converting her pasture into pollinator habitat. An office administrator at Edward Jones, Lynn recently decided to finalize her estate plans. She wanted to support nature locally, and a family member suggested the Conservancy could help her fulfill her wishes. Lynn decided to make the Conservancy’s Arkansas program and another favorite charity beneficiaries of her trust and a retirement plan, allowing her to pass on her values through the causes that are important to her. Lynn said, “I do not have a lot, but I want to see whatever I leave behind matter in some way.”

### We Celebrate YOU!

Taking a few minutes today can help protect the Earth for generations to come. To learn more about ways of giving, contact Susan Borné at 501-614-5071 or [sborne@tnc.org](mailto:sborne@tnc.org), or visit [nature.org/gift-planning](https://nature.org/gift-planning).

However you choose to give, YOU are helping protect the Earth for generations to come.

To conserve resources, we have moved our donor recognition list online. Find it, along with a digital version of our 2020 Impact Report, at [nature.org/arkansas](https://nature.org/arkansas).

What is unmovable is our gratitude for your commitment to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. From the treetops to the bottom of our muddy boots, THANK YOU!



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# Arkansas

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The Nature  
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