

# KENTUCKY FIELD NOTES

FALL/WINTER 2018





# Remembering Tom Dupree



At the end of the summer, I met three old friends for our annual weekend camping trip in the mountains of western Virginia. After what felt like weeks of rain, we enjoyed two days of brilliant blue skies and lots of stars at night. And after a year of little contact, we quickly fell back into an easy rhythm of stories and laughter. The four of us first met while working for the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation in Washington, D.C. Twenty-two years later, passion for conservation and a shared love of being outside—hiking, biking, swimming, and relaxing in front of the fire—hold us together.

Forests bring one welcome solitude from the bustle of our days, but I prefer to share that peace with friends.

On the drive home, heavy, wet clouds closed in around the mountains, and soon I was back in the rain. Already feeling a bit melancholy with the end of the all too brief reunion, my thoughts turned to a much more significant goodbye from earlier in the year. I was driving the back roads of Alleghany County thinking of Tom Dupree.

Tom Dupree passed away peacefully on Sunday morning, April 29 at his home in Lexington. I won't try to summarize everything Tom did for The Nature Conservancy, but as a former Board Chairman, Trustee Emeritus for Life, and one of our most generous donors, Tom's influence and contribution to The Nature Conservancy here in Kentucky were profound.

I knew Tom for less than four years, but our friendship developed quickly. And it too was forged by conservation. Tom's Parkinson's made time outside together rare, but my colleague, Alan, and I were able to take him fishing at Dupree Nature Preserve on a perfect fall day in 2017. Tom had a profound and uplifting impact on me. His kindness, intellect, humor, faith, and generosity were an inspiration, and all were shared with a simple humility that belied his tremendous success and accomplishments. Hours spent with Tom went quickly. And our time with him ended too soon. I still miss him deeply.

Tom was someone who made the world and the lives of those around him brighter. Somewhere in West Virginia, the sun came out again, and I drove on towards home, family, and good work in Kentucky.

See you outside.

David Phemister, State Director

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# The Unusual Nature of MANTLE ROCK

## NATURE PRESERVE

For most people, western Kentucky brings to mind images of vast flat bottomlands and wetlands that stretch all the way to the Mississippi River. A visit to The Nature Conservancy's Mantle Rock Nature Preserve, however, presents an entirely different view of this part of our state. Unique geological features and dense woodland make Mantle Rock an unusual feature in the region.

"This type of landscape is a rarity, and is found in only a few areas of western Kentucky," says Shelly Morris, the Conservancy's western Kentucky project director. "This landscape is more typical of the Shawnee Hills of southern Illinois."

Mantle Rock is known for its 30-foot high arch that spans 188 feet, the largest free-standing arch east of the Mississippi River. The arch is iconic, but for Morris, it's just the beginning of the unique experiences the preserve has to offer. If visitors take the 2.75-mile loop trail counterclockwise, they can enjoy the immensity of the arch and then continue along a cliff line, with honeycomb rock formations, rock shelters, and enormous boulders where the trail climbs up between the rocks.

"It makes you think about the passage of time and geological processes," Morris says. "All of these features were formed by erosion and weathering. When you see these huge boulders and crevices, you think, 'How long did it take to get that way?'"

Continuing down the trail, hikers have an opportunity to see rocky streams with

clear-flowing water, a sight unusual for an area of Kentucky that usually features flat, slow-moving creeks with more sluggish, murky water. Here, rock-lined McGilligan's Creek tumbles around boulders too big to put your arms around. "As you move along the trail, things just keep getting better and better," Morris says.

Next, visitors walk through a forest and see rare sandstone glades. The Nature Conservancy has used prescribed fire in this area to keep the unique landscape open for the plant species that thrive there. Visitors are often surprised to find native prickly pear cactus growing in the openings in the woods. Wildflowers can also be seen in the parking area, where a pollinator planting attracts butterflies and bees.

On the north side of the loop trail, hikers will walk along an original segment of the Trail of Tears, where interpretive signs tell the story of 1,766 Cherokee who camped here for two weeks waiting for the Ohio River to freeze before continuing on their forced march west. This history makes Mantle Rock and its unusual natural features an even more unique and worthwhile place to visit.

### Visiting Mantle Rock

Mantle Rock Nature Preserve is located in Livingston County. The 367-acre preserve is open from sunrise to sunset, and the preserve's 2.75-mile trail is rated as 'easy'. Visitors should note that rock climbing is not allowed at Mantle Rock.





# Wetland RESTORATION

## STUDY EXPANDS

A five-year, \$1.36 million wetland monitoring study recently received a big boost with \$3 million in additional funding from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The new influx of funding will enable researchers to expand this study of the nutrient reduction, water quality, and wildlife benefits of wetland restoration efforts.

“We are so grateful to the NRCS for their partnership and for their investment in this critical science,” says Shelly Morris, the Conservancy’s western Kentucky project director. “The total

investment for this study is now \$4.36 million. We couldn’t be happier about this study expansion.”

The study brings together The Nature Conservancy, the NRCS, and multiple

**“After all this work, we want to know the effect we’re having on reducing nutrient pollution.”**

– Shelly Morris, western Kentucky project director

universities to measure the results of restoration efforts that have spanned more than a decade. An intact floodplain wetland acts like a sponge, holding

water after a heavy rain or flood event and slowly letting it drain back to the river. Many wetlands within the Mississippi River floodplain, however, have been ditched and cleared to allow for farming and development.

As a result, water quickly runs off the land, taking excess fertilizer nutrients (chiefly nitrogen and phosphorus) and sediments into the river. This nutrient



pollution makes its way down the river all the way to the Gulf of Mexico, where it contributes to a dead zone—a low-oxygen zone nearly devoid of life—that can grow to cover an area the size of New Jersey. Conservation organizations have worked for years to restore wetlands so the land can hold water longer, reducing the nutrient pollution going into the Mississippi River. The Conservancy, the NRCS, and other partners have enrolled more than 7,300 acres of western Kentucky wetlands in restoration programs through the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) and Wetland Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP).

“We work with farmers to take frequently flooded land out of agricultural production, plant native trees in the area, and where possible, restore the hydrology,” says Morris. “In some cases, we plug ditches that were installed decades ago to drain the land or install levees to retain

water seasonally. After all this work, we want to know the impact we’re having on reducing nutrient pollution.”

The monitoring project will study the restored wetlands’ potential to reduce nutrient pollution and will measure water and soil quality and wildlife response. The Conservancy and the NRCS have contracted with Murray State University to do the initial monitoring work; the \$3 million in additional funding allows for a study expansion and the Conservancy to partner with researchers at Tennessee Tech University and the University of Missouri on the larger project.

“With the Kentucky portion of the study, we will expand the number of study sites and allow for an in-depth hydrology study of our St. Arbor restoration project,” Morris says. “The additional funding greatly increases

the number of study sites, allows us to conduct better analysis of soil samples and other data, and overall makes the science more robust.”

Results of this five-year study will clarify the effects of restoration and help conservation groups conduct better restoration projects in the future. It may also help secure funding for future projects.

“As we work to improve water quality both locally and in the Gulf of Mexico, it is critical that we document the nutrient reduction effects of our projects. This study will help us do exactly that,” says Jeff Fore, The Nature Conservancy’s western Tennessee project director and the Conservancy’s Mississippi River Basin Project floodplain team lead. “We thank the NRCS for funding this work and look forward to collaborating with the Kentucky chapter.”

# A \$2 MILLION GREEN HEART PROJECT INVESTMENT

The Nature Conservancy has made an initial \$2 million investment in the first-of-its-kind Green Heart project. The funding will support initial air quality monitoring work and the start of greening in the study area.

The five-year Green Heart project seeks to measure the health benefits of urban greening. Seven hundred study participants will be recruited from the project area, and their health data will be measured before and after thousands of trees are planted in the study portion of four Louisville neighborhoods. The \$2 million in funding will be invested in Green Heart in the form of a reimbursable grant to the University of Louisville, which is leading the health study portion of the project. The grant centralizes leadership with the university and with principal investigator Dr. Aruni Bhatnagar.

“We trust Dr. Bhatnagar and his team at UofL to guide this project,” says Chris Chandler, director of urban conservation for the Conservancy’s Kentucky chapter. “This was the right time to lift up our principal investigator to be the project manager and ensure the project gets off on a strong foot.”

The grant was celebrated at the University of Louisville with a standing-room-only event in August. The university’s new president, Dr. Neeli Bendapudi,

welcomed the gift. “All of us at the University of Louisville are grateful for the generosity of The Nature Conservancy,” Bendapudi says. “The public-private collaboration that UofL is fostering with The Nature Conservancy and others reflects the importance of the work being conducted by Dr. Bhatnagar and his team. It truly has the potential to change things globally.”

The grant also represents an investment in the University of Louisville’s new Envirome Institute, which brings together several programs and centers that study human health and the social and natural environments in which people live. The Green Heart project is one of the flagship projects in the



Envirome’s Center for Healthy Air, Water & Soil. The Envirome Institute is led by Dr. Bhatnagar.

“For years, researchers have recognized that there is a nexus between the environment and a person’s health,” Bhatnagar says. “I am extremely grateful to The Nature Conservancy for its generous support and essential partnership as we explore the links between a healthy environment and people’s health and well-being.”



THIS PAGE FROM TOP Kentucky state director David Phemister speaks at a press conference announcing the \$2 million grant. © University of Louisville; A child examines a leaf in Wyandotte Park in the Green Heart study area. © Mike Wilkinson



## New Faces: Regan Clauson

**1** The Kentucky chapter welcomes new donor relations manager Regan Clauson, who joins the Conservancy after seven years with Papa John's International. "I wanted to do something I was passionate about," says Clauson. "I wanted to work for an organization that prioritizes the planet."

Clauson says the relationship management skills she honed as a business development manager at Papa John's will transfer well into her new position with the Conservancy. "A lot of relationship management is about collaborating with people to make sure the opportunity is a success for everyone," she says.

## Saying Goodbye: Lisa Morris

**2** Lisa Morris was first introduced to the Kentucky chapter in 1991 as a Conservancy member. She became a volunteer in 2001 and has served as the chapter's office manager for 14 years. Lisa's work goes far beyond what her title may imply, however. In addition to keeping the office running smoothly, Morris has been part of the prescribed fire team, mapped nature preserves, treated hemlocks to keep them healthy, managed our vehicle fleet, and provided assistance for a host of financial, board management, and conservation projects. Now she is beginning a new phase of her life with retirement.

"I loved getting the opportunity to see the properties we've protected," Morris says. "I'll really miss being plugged in to what we're doing."

Morris says retirement will give her the freedom to travel with her husband Jack, and to spend more time with her two children Kelly and Sam. She will stay a member, of course, and with any luck, we may get her back occasionally as a volunteer. Thank you, Lisa, for your significant contributions to our work and our mission.

## New Faces: Brian Wells



**3** Brian Wells joins the Kentucky chapter as the new associate director of development. Wells has worked in nonprofit development for 20 years, most recently as the chief development officer for the Speed Art Museum.

"I've had a long respect for The Nature Conservancy and its work as a collaborative, nonpartisan conservation organization," Wells says. "I think we're at a critical period where what we do in the next decade will have consequences for generations to come. I wanted to work for an organization at the center of that work."

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West Kentucky wetland © MIKE WILKINSON

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