



SECURING A BRIGHTER FUTURE:

Hope for People and Nature



© Steven David Johnson

Our planet and all its inhabitants face two accelerating crises—biodiversity loss and climate change. Together, these crises threaten millions of species and our own health, safety, and security. But these losses are not inevitable, and no one future is preordained.

Because we also face a choice. A choice between despair, withdrawal, and apathy and hope, investment, and action. The Nature Conservancy, both globally and here in Kentucky, emphatically chooses the latter. We know that a greener, healthier, and more vibrant future remains possible if we make the right investments and enact smart policies for people and nature.

The Nature Conservancy's 2030 goals (learn more at [nature.org/priorities](https://www.nature.org/priorities)) represent our organization-wide commitment to securing that brighter future. Here in Kentucky, our new strategic plan will deliver meaningful solutions for people and nature locally and make significant contributions to the Conservancy's 2030 goals.

Highlights of our plan include expanded protection, restoration, and management in Kentucky's iconic natural systems—the Central Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River Basin. Our plan also recognizes that public policy provides a path to scaling our work, from addressing the longstanding need to increase state investments in conservation to advancing nature's role in making communities more resilient in the face of floods and other natural disasters. Lastly, virtually all our conservation strategies—from land conservation to wetland restoration to sustainable agriculture—have direct climate benefits, either through reduced greenhouse gas emissions, increased natural carbon sequestration, and/or increased resiliency of natural systems and human communities. Additionally, we will continue to advance a nonpartisan dialogue on the urgency of confronting climate change in Kentucky to complement the Conservancy's ambitious national and international climate policy efforts.

None of this work is quick or easy. But success is not only possible, it is imperative. Choose action and join us in this most critical time to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.

Conserving a Resilient and Connected Corridor in the Appalachian Mountains

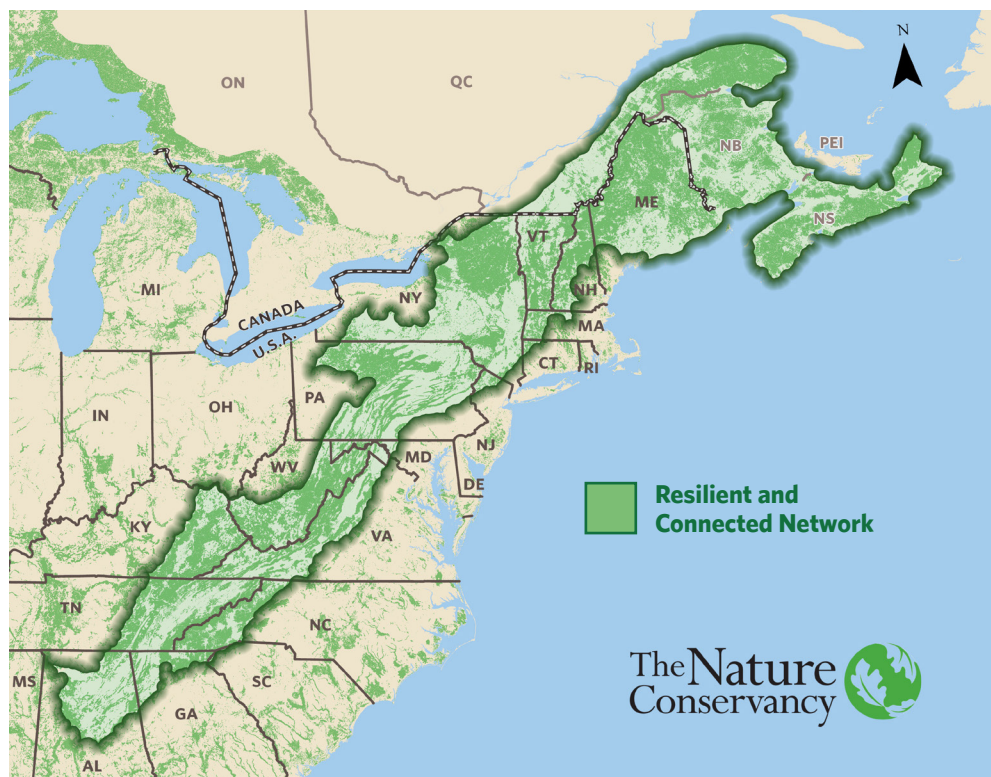
The vast forests and fog-covered mountains of Appalachia are more than just beautiful—they are essential for people and nature. From Alabama to Canada, the Appalachian Mountains span 2,000 miles through a mostly intact network of forested mountains, valleys, wetlands, and rivers. These mountains provide a continentally important migratory pathway for wildlife as the planet warms and clean air and clean water for tens of millions of people. The Appalachians also provide natural carbon storage and support biodiversity of globally recognized significance. In fact, The Nature Conservancy has designated the Appalachian Mountains as a global priority landscape for addressing climate change and biodiversity loss, alongside the rainforests of Borneo, the northern Serengeti in Kenya, and the Brazilian Amazon. Our eastern Kentucky mountains stand in good company.

Our work in eastern Kentucky complements a set of shared strategies with our colleagues across this landscape to conserve a resilient, connected corridor through these mountains, while ensuring our work supports strong and vibrant local communities.

Over the next five years, our conservation work in the Appalachian Mountains of Kentucky will:

- Protect 92,000 acres of forest and 250 miles of streams and rivers, and transfer 10,000 acres of land into public ownership.
- Secure a conservation easement on the 54,583-acre Ataya property (part of the larger Cumberland Forest Project) to ensure permanent protection and public access.
- Establish our first-ever project with Native American tribes, protecting 500 acres and returning these lands to indigenous ownership.
- Restore 100,000 acres with prescribed fire, including 15,000 acres in wildland/urban interface areas—reducing risk for the most dangerous and damaging wildfires.
- Reforest 2,500 acres of former mine lands on the Ataya property.

THE APPALACHIAN MOUNTAINS





Restoring the Mississippi River, Tributaries, and Floodplains

© Mark Godfrey

The Mississippi River is the world's fourth largest river basin, touching 31 states and two Canadian provinces and covering 1.245 million square miles. Kentucky's portion of the Mississippi is unique as one of the few unlevied sections of the river. The Mighty Mississippi is a river steeped in storytelling, a river that has moved America's goods for generations, and a river facing critical challenges. Wetlands, which provide critical flood storage and wildlife habitat, have been drained and converted to farmland. This fertile farmland in the river's floodplain frequently floods and contributes to serious nutrient pollution. This polluted runoff makes its way downriver, eventually producing a "dead zone" in the Gulf of Mexico, an area where aquatic life cannot survive. The Nature Conservancy is working here in Kentucky and throughout the basin to promote better agricultural practices and restore wetlands—critical efforts to clean our rivers and restore the Gulf of Mexico.

Over the next five years, our conservation work along the Mississippi and its Kentucky tributaries will:

- Restore three miles of stream channel and reconnect it to the floodplain.
- Conserve another 5,000 acres of wetlands, restoring former frequently flooded farm fields to young and growing bottomland hardwood forest.
- Increase cover crop acres in target watersheds by 30 percent (27,600 acres), increase edge of field practices in target watersheds by 30 percent (acres target under development), and increase nutrient application efficiency in target watersheds by 10 percent (acres target under development).

Addressing the Climate Crisis and Securing Transformative Funding

Our work in the Appalachians and along the Mississippi River represents an increase in the size and scope of our investments in longstanding priority places. The scale of the challenges we face demands new approaches as well, and one critical element of our work is an expanded focus on public funding and policy.

Kentucky has long lagged far behind virtually all other states in its public investments in land and water conservation. This chronic underinvestment in our natural resources must change if we are to protect Kentucky's most critical landscapes and take advantage of growing federal investments, many of which require a state match. We are committed to building the relationships, forging the coalition, and making the case to elected officials that increased state funding represents an essential investment in securing the healthy and vibrant future we all deserve.

Additionally, while acknowledging political headwinds, we will make connections with key constituencies, including agriculture and other industry leaders, to advance bipartisan and solution-oriented conversations on climate change. We believe meeting people where they are and building the economic, social, and environmental case for cleaner energy and more sustainable investments creates the foundation for changing attitudes and delivering different policies. Our on-the-ground conservation efforts, which deliver real and measurable natural climate solutions, bolster this communication strategy.

Over the next five years our climate and public funding work will:

- Avoid emissions and/or sequester 5 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO₂e) on the Cumberland Forest Project with verified carbon offsets.
- Launch the Family Forest Carbon Program, with 10,000 acres enrolled, 75 landowners receiving carbon payments, and 500,000 tCO₂e emissions reductions via carbon sequestration.
- Reduce potential emissions of 375,000 tCO₂e by reducing the risk of the most destructive wildfires.
- Complete six community solar projects in Cumberland Forest communities, avoiding emissions of 4,000 tCO₂e through rooftop solar.
- Create a new state funding stream of at least \$5 million per year for land and water conservation in Kentucky, benefitting climate, outdoor recreation, local economies, and public health.
- Place joint op-eds on climate and energy issues with three influential entities.
- Organize one public forum with a prominent nontraditional partner that brings diverse, bipartisan stakeholders together to discuss climate impacts and ways to address them.



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A full-page photograph of a mountain biker riding a wooden trail in a forest. The biker is wearing a red and black jersey, a helmet, and is leaning forward on the handlebars. The trail is made of wooden planks and curves through a dense forest with many green trees. The lighting is bright, suggesting daytime.

Nature Works for Kentucky Communities

© Travis Dove

This summary of our strategic plan highlights our commitment to human communities and our belief that nature and people can and will thrive together. All of our work benefits people, from providing places for hikers, hunters, and anglers to enjoy the outdoors in eastern Kentucky to reducing downstream flood risk through wetland restoration in western Kentucky.

We are supporting solar projects via the Cumberland Forest Community Fund, reinvesting mineral royalties back into local communities to reduce community energy costs and to demonstrate the feasibility and benefits of clean energy in a region long characterized by extractive energy use.

We are also embarking on our first partnership with Native American tribes to return long lost ancestral lands to their ownership. We are working to keep communities safer by using prescribed fire at the wildland/urban interface to reduce the risk of deadly wildfires. Finally, the Family Forest Carbon Program will pay forest owners to better manage their lands, increasing carbon storage and enabling Kentuckians with small family forests to benefit from the growing market for forest carbon credits.

People and communities are central to our work. There is not a natural world and a human world; there is simply one world, one shared planet. The nature we depend on depends on us. Demonstrating nature's indispensable role in our lives is essential to driving the larger investments, policies, and system changes necessary for a greener, healthier future. This plan enhances our longstanding approach of conservation for nature and people, with a special emphasis on ensuring our work benefits everyone, regardless of race, culture, identity, physical abilities, or wealth.

In closing, we want you, as a donor, volunteer, or partner, to see this document as inherently about hope. Hope that through focus, hard work, and authentic relationships with key stakeholders and decision makers, we can and will make a real difference in the world we call home and the world we will leave to our children and grandchildren. There is a lot wrong in the world right now, including and perhaps most starkly on the environmental front. But The Nature Conservancy works for our mission not simply because we recognize the dire need for action but because we fundamentally believe that our work makes a real difference. We won't solve biodiversity loss or climate change by ourselves, but we are part of something much bigger, both in The Nature Conservancy globally and in the even larger community of people, organizations, businesses, and governments working for that brighter and healthier future. Hope is a powerful ingredient in any strategy, and it is at the very heart of this strategic plan.

Of course, hope alone is not enough. We have an ambitious and achievable plan, but our success, as always, depends on the generosity of both longstanding and new supporters. You provide the critical resources that drive our work. Thank you for choosing hope, believing in our mission, and investing in our work.



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LAND

- **92,000 Acres** of Protected Lands in the Central Appalachians
- **5,000 Acres** Mississippi River Floodplain Protected
- **54,583 Acre** Public Recreation Easement on Cumberland Forest
- **100,000 Acres** of Prescribed Fire
- **2,500 Acres** Improved Habitat on Mine Lands



WATER

- **253 Stream Miles** Restored or Protected
- **27,600 Acres** of Cover Crops in Target Watersheds
- **30% increase** in Edge of Field practices; **10% increase** in nutrient application efficiency in target watersheds
- **Lock and Dam** Removal Completed



CLIMATE

- **5M tCO2e** sequestered on Cumberland Forest
- **500k tCO2e** sequestered through Family Forest Carbon Program
- **800 tCO2e** avoided annual emissions through community solar projects
- **10,000 Acres** Enrolled in Family Forest Carbon Program



COMMUNITY

- **Permanent public** recreational access on Cumberland Forest
- **6 Community Solar Projects** in Eastern Kentucky
- **Launch 1** Indigenous Lands Partnership Project
- **75 Landowners** enrolled in Family Forest Carbon Program



PUBLIC INVESTMENT

At least **\$5 million per year** in dedicated funding for land and water conservation in Kentucky



From plan to action,
help us create a better future for all.



The Nature Conservancy

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