



Partner Spotlight – May 2021

The Land Trust for Tennessee

Emily Parish, Vice President for The Land Trust for Tennessee, answered questions to share more about her affiliation's work, her role in aquatic conservation, and why she and The Land Trust for Tennessee participate in the TRBN. Thanks for sitting at the table with us, LTT!

What part of our freshwater aquatic ecosystem do you really admire?

I most admire the abundance and diversity of our aquatic ecosystems in Tennessee. Our creeks, streams, and rivers provide tremendous benefits to our citizens and communities. I personally enjoy spending time in the water with my family, from exploring creeks and flipping over rocks to canoeing some of the state's most scenic rivers.



What is your role with The Land Trust for Tennessee?

I am the Vice President of the organization. I oversee our conservation and stewardship program, including the work of 9 staff members in two offices. I also work closely with our leadership team and Board of Directors to set strategic and programmatic goals to carry out the mission of The Land Trust. I have been with the organization for 17 years in a variety of roles on the conservation and stewardship team.

What is the mission of The Land Trust for Tennessee?

Our mission at The Land Trust is to conserve the unique character of Tennessee's natural and historic landscapes and sites for future generations. We permanently conserve land across Tennessee, including family farms, thriving forests, public parks, scenic views, wildlife habits,

and historic landscapes. We protect private and public land of all sizes, from urban pocket parks to thousands of acres of forested wildlife habitat.

How did The Land Trust for Tennessee come about?

The Land Trust for Tennessee was founded in 1999 by former Tennessee Governor Phil Bredesen and a group of visionary conservation leaders. Jean C. Nelson served as the organization's first Executive Director. The organization was born from the understanding that no matter where you live or visit in the state, natural areas, scenic vistas, working farms, forests, and greenspaces are all at your doorstep. It's a unique bounty that we can all enjoy—but it requires vigilance and a continued investment if we want it to exist for future generations. The Land Trust is committed to protecting Tennessee's irreplaceable landscapes forever. Our first conservation project was in Leiper's Fork in December 1999, and our organization has since expanded its successes across the state of Tennessee, having now protected over 130,000 acres through 423 projects in 70 counties.

How can people get involved or connected with The Land Trust for Tennessee? What type of assistance could they provide to you (volunteering, citizen science etc.)?

There are a number of ways people can be involved with The Land Trust and support the work we do, even you don't own land yourself to conserve. As a non-profit, financial gifts of any amount are appreciated to help support our work across Tennessee.

We also welcome volunteers to help us visit protected properties, support our education programming for students across the state, and do trail and garden work at Glen Leven Farm. And of course, please follow us on our social media channels to share and amplify our posts about the importance our work. Every little bit helps, no matter the level of your ability to contribute.

What has been your favorite project?

That is pretty much impossible to answer! I have worked on over 400 projects during my time at The Land Trust, and there are so many places and people that jump to mind. I have enjoyed visiting countless hidden gems and hearing stories from landowners on why they love their land. I have been on many backroad adventures and made lasting friendships along the way.

What has been your proudest moment for The Land Trust for Tennessee?

There are so many accomplishments to be proud of, but I would say, most recently, I am proud of The Land Trust for being named the winner of the National Land Trust Excellence Award through The Land Trust Alliance. Out of over 1,000 member land trusts across the country, we are only the 20th organization to receive this great honor since 2007. I am so proud of our staff, our board, and all our supporters who made this recognition possible.

Anything special happening this year?

During the last week of April, we closed on our 423rd conservation project, and we have many more active projects that will close in 2021. As we do every year, we are conducting annual monitoring visits to all our protected properties across Tennessee (due to the pandemic, we are conducting many of these visits using a satellite imagery program so that we can safely 'visit' these places from our computers. But we will be back on the land next year!). We are also undertaking an extensive master planning process for Glen Leven Farm, our 64-acre historic farm in Nashville-- home to our middle Tennessee office.

How did you hear about the Tennessee River Basin Network?

I believe that we were originally contacted about the network in 2015-16 through our partnerships and network in the Chattanooga region where we have an office. We already worked closely with several of the other partners, so it was a natural fit for us to get involved.

Why does The Land Trust for Tennessee participate in the Tennessee River Basin Network?

The Tennessee River basin makes up such a huge part of Tennessee and overlaps with 8 of our 10 priority areas across the state. To date, we have protected 73,500 acres in the basin, and the ongoing protection of Tennessee's rivers and watersheds are woven into all our projects. We see the network as a great way to stay engaged with other partners who care about the basin and its future.

How could The Land Trust for Tennessee support others in our Network?

We are happy to be a resource for any land conservation project in the basin. We can provide our expertise on conservation options for landowners and communities, including conservation easements, land donations, bargain sales, acquisition/sale for public projects, trail and conservation corridors, strategic conservation planning, and more. We are happy to present to a group or meet one-on-one with landowners or partners in the basin.