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The State of Species

Already, we're feeling the effects of the climate and biodiversity challenges facing our planet. One-quarter of the globe's plant and animal species face extinction; yet, over half of global GDP is dependent on nature. The abundance of plants and wildlife—the biodiversity that underpins every aspect of life—is in danger, and to face this crisis, we need quick, collective action.

The good news is that we don't have to start from scratch. Science tells us we have until 2030 to prevent a planetary tipping point, and we have decades of success that we can continue to build from, including the Endangered Species Act. Through collaboration and key conservation policy, like The Recovering America's Wildlife Act, we have the power to make change possible and ensure a future where both people and nature thrive together.

DONATE NOW:

Go to nature.org/donatekansas to make a donation, or mail your check to:

The Nature Conservancy
PO Box 4345
Topeka, KS 66604



River otters had disappeared from Kansas entirely in the early 1900s, but thanks to conservation efforts they can now be found throughout eastern Kansas and portions of central Kansas. © Aaron Peterson

Nature's Comebacks

Celebrating 50 species central to conservation efforts

Who doesn't love a good comeback story? While many of the iconic plants and wildlife that inhabit our natural places and spaces are disappearing at an alarming rate, nature boasts some of the most remarkable comebacks on the books. To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Endangered Species Act this year, we're celebrating the underdog species that are bouncing back from low population numbers, thanks to conservation efforts by The Nature Conservancy and partners. From river otters and bison to leopard frogs and eelgrass, discover species from across the nation that are on the uptick or hitting the road to recovery. By managing protected areas to support biodiversity, restoring degraded habitats and advocating for more public investment in conservation, we continue to work to safeguard at-risk species. Explore 50 species from 50 states at nature.org/comebacks.

The Legacy of the Endangered Species Act

On December 28, 1973, the Endangered Species Act became the primary law in the United States for protecting endangered or threatened plant and wildlife species. Its purpose: to prevent species from disappearing and to recover them to the point where the law's protections are no longer needed. This piece of legislation has helped save 99% of listed species from extinction, thanks to the collaboration between federal and local governments, Indigenous leaders, conservation organizations, communities and businesses.



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In Kansas, least terns use sandbars in rivers, salt flats and gravel islands to nest. Photos clockwise from left © Andy Morffew, © U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, © U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Nature's Comeback: Kansas

Recovering the Interior Least Tern

The least tern is a small seabird, reminiscent of a gull but with a straight beak. On the eastern and western coasts, least terns stick to sandy beaches, but in the interior United States, least terns use sandbars in rivers, salt flats and gravel islands to nest. The interior population was listed as an endangered species in 1985, and thanks to recovery efforts was delisted in 2021. Now, least terns can be observed every summer along Kansas River, where sandbars provide critical nesting habitat and abundant fish feed adults and chicks alike.

Key to recovery for the least tern was determining what the species required for habitat and then preserving and enhancing that habitat. Managing water levels, such as from dam releases, helps prevent the loss of chicks and nests on river sandbars. Restricting human and vehicular access and modifying construction activities within the river system were managed through U.S. Army Corps of Engineers programs. In 2021, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service removed the inland population of the least tern from the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife due to its recovery.

Much like a canary in the coal mine, the decline of birds is often an early warning that something in our natural world needs attention. With least terns, it was clear that the way humans were managing rivers was impacting the bird's population—but least terns weren't the only victim. Bringing back more natural conditions for these rivers saw the recovery of the terns but it also benefits other wildlife and improves water quality.

NATURE KANSAS

Hiking Trails in Cassoday Now Open!

For the first time in 50 years, the Flint Hills Tallgrass Prairie Preserve in Cassoday is open to the public. Enjoy a leisurely half-mile stroll to the South Fork Cottonwood River or hike the 2.5-mile and 4-mile trails.

Trails are open during daylight hours and are for pedestrian traffic only (except for wheelchairs). Access is limited to marked hiking trails within the fenced pasture.

Flint Hills Tallgrass Prairie Preserve
16999 NE 150th Street
Cassoday, KS

Plan your visit at nature.org/kspreserves.



Rough blazing star (*Liatris aspera*) at Flint Hills Tallgrass Prairie Preserve © Laura Rose Clawson/TNC