

The Nature
Conservancy
Kentucky



Kentucky

2019 YEAR IN REVIEW

Conservancy Journey

This is my first letter to you as Kentucky Board Chair for The Nature Conservancy. I am honored to have the role, and I would like to share a few thoughts on how I got here and where we are heading as an organization.

Like many of our supporters, my path to the Conservancy was a personal one, with deep family connections. I had always felt at peace in the woods and loved the natural beauty of Kentucky. But it was a special gift that my dad, Dr. Richard Crutcher, gave to my mom, Dorothy, that sealed my connection to the Conservancy. Wanting to do something special for their 50th wedding anniversary, my dad funded the creation of a new Conservancy property in the Kentucky River Palisades, now named the Crutcher Nature Preserve, in honor of Mom. My parents have both been gone for over a decade, but when I walk through the preserve in early spring, with the forest floor blanketed in bluebells, phlox, and other spring ephemerals, I am so inspired and humbled by their legacy gift.

After many years as a supporter, I felt compelled to engage at a deeper level and welcomed the Conservancy's invitation to join the Kentucky Board of Trustees in 2013. Just about a year after I joined, our then new state director, David Phemister, asked me to serve on a committee drafting our strategic plan. While inspired to be involved, I also remember feeling overwhelmed by the size of the task and the complexity of the work. Simply translating all the acronyms was hard enough, let alone understanding the phenomenal depth and breadth of the Conservancy's work. But I eagerly stuck with it because I believed in the people and knew the work was vital to our mission. Looking back some six years

later, I know that I have never invested my volunteer time in a more worthy and rewarding cause.

Ultimately, the greatest reward is seeing how the Conservancy is making a real difference. As I hope is clear from this report, we are tackling the key challenges facing people and nature and the size and complexity of our efforts would have been virtually unimaginable less than a decade ago. From the state's largest wetland and stream restoration projects, to a groundbreaking scientific study in Louisville, to a collective effort to acquire over a quarter of a million acres in the Central Appalachians, I am tremendously proud to see us achieve so many of the ambitious objectives we established in early 2015.

Nature provides us great respite and comfort from a busy and demanding world. Saving that sanctuary requires a lot of hard work, however. I am honored to play my part, along with my fellow Board members, Conservancy staff, and our incredible supporters. Thank you for your ongoing commitment and generosity to our vital work.



Dottie Cordray
Board Chair



All Connected

"When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe."

—John Muir

John Muir's reflection on the inherent connectedness of our world is perhaps an overly ambitious place to start my short essay, not least because I cannot hope to match his eloquence. After reviewing our 2019 Year in Review, however, I cannot help but offer my own reflections on connections—in nature and within the Conservancy.

First, I hope you will notice how much our Kentucky staff is working outside the state to help our colleagues boost the size and effectiveness of their conservation efforts. Shelly Morris, long a mainstay of our work in western Kentucky, provided critical leadership and expertise to Conservancy staff in Illinois working to protect and restore thousands of acres of frequently flooded farmland at Dogtooth Bend on the Mississippi River. Thanks to years of success across the river in Kentucky, Shelly knows how to work with our partners at the Natural Resources Conservation Service and how to leverage millions in federal investments in wetland restoration. Thanks to Shelly, the Conservancy and partners now have \$25 million to start restoration efforts at Dogtooth Bend on a massive scale.

Similarly, Chris Minor, with 20 years of service to the Conservancy in Kentucky and a growing reputation as one of the Conservancy's foremost prescribed fire experts, traveled south in 2019 to help the Conservancy's Tennessee program start its own fire program.

And thanks to the incredible generosity of one of our



"big picture" donors and some on-the-ground assistance from Will Bowling, our Central Appalachians project director, West Virginia is launching its Working Woodlands program in a landscape ripe with opportunity for large scale forest protection.

I am quite proud of our Kentucky staff for thinking and working beyond our borders. I am also quite cognizant that the assistance frequently comes the other way. Most notably, we would never be celebrating the 100,000-acre Ataya success were it not for the expertise and resources of our colleagues at NatureVest and in Tennessee and Virginia.

Working beyond our borders is not new, but 2019 felt different in frequency, scale, and impact. Ultimately this work is mission driven. Faced with growing challenges to both nature and people, we are compelled to work at



nature's scale, with abundant recognition that all things are connected. A Kentucky farmer's fields and sea turtles in the Gulf of Mexico. A landowner's forest in Letcher County and a warbler flying north from South America. A backyard tree and the health of a community.

Of course, our critical work is not possible without another connection—namely our organization to supporters like you. Your generosity makes our success possible and is crucial to our sustained efforts to secure a future where people and nature thrive. As always, I am truly grateful to you for your support. Thank you.

David Phemister
Kentucky State Director



OUR RIVERS AND STREAMS

Protect the health of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers and key tributaries to secure clean and abundant freshwater for wildlife and people in Kentucky and communities downstream.

- Completed the second year of an ambitious, five-year, \$4.36 million Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) restoration monitoring project to quantify a host of benefits of this ongoing work.
- Helped secure \$25 million in federal funding through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for the Dogtooth Bend project in Illinois, a top floodplain restoration priority of the larger Mississippi River Basin project.
- Utilized cutting edge science in the Conservancy's newly developed Floodplain Prioritization Tool to demonstrate that the Mississippi River bottomlands of western Kentucky, long a priority for our chapter, are one of the most important places in the entire Mississippi River basin for floodplain conservation.
- Secured NRCS approvals for several innovative program adjustments to ensure more lands along the upper Green River are eligible for permanent Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE).
- Developed a promising new partnership with the Soil Health Partnership (SHP), a National Corn Growers Association program that uses strong science and a data-backed approach to advance our understanding of soil health practices on Kentucky farms and help accelerate the adoption of promising soil health conservation practices within key watersheds in Kentucky.
- Completed an intensive two-year effort to analyze and address potential water supply impacts related to the removal of Green River Lock and Dam #5.
- Held five soil health education outreach events for more than 600 schoolchildren in partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, NRCS, and Daviess and Ohio County Conservation Districts.



LOOKING AHEAD



- Secure funding for the removal of Green River Lock and Dam #5 and Barren River Lock and Dam #1, with a goal of removal in 2020.
- Enroll the first Soil Health Partnership farm sites, with contributions from NRCS, SHP, the Conservancy, and participating farmers.
- Gain valuable insights on wetland restoration designs and associated benefits from the WRP restoration monitoring project.
- Pursue the next round of WREP wetland restoration project funding for western Kentucky.
- Help NRCS deliver at least \$2.5 million in disaster funding to restore wetlands and eliminate future cropland losses on Kentucky farms affected by historic Mississippi River flooding.
- Advance critical floodplain efforts at the Dogtooth Bend project in Illinois and share knowledge and expertise with colleagues in western Tennessee to increase their own Mississippi floodplain restoration work, all as part of our increasing integration with the larger Mississippi River Basin project.

OUR FORESTS AND GRASSLANDS

Conserve thousands of acres of vital, connected lands to ensure these natural habitats can withstand global environmental challenges and continue to provide irreplaceable benefits to nature and people.

- Facilitated the acquisition of the 100,000-acre Ataya property, part of the 253,000-acre Cumberland Forest Project, beginning the largest land conservation and ecological restoration project in our chapter's history and one of the largest ever for the Conservancy in the eastern United States.
- Enrolled the Ataya property in Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification, setting the stage for sustainable timber harvest now and in the future, and increasing Kentucky's total FSC acreage by 23 percent.
- Enrolled the Ataya property in the California Air Resources Board carbon offset market and began selling forest carbon credits from the property to advance key natural climate solutions strategies.
- Leased a portion of the Ataya property to the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources for public recreational use.
- Identified experienced, local partners to help us advance community-based economic development projects using mineral royalties from the Cumberland Forest Project.
- Acquired the largest private inholding on the Kentucky side of the Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area, a critical 466-acre tract within a larger conserved and connected network of Appalachian forestland.
- Acquired a strategic 23-acre parcel of land in Pulaski County that connects state wildlife management lands and the Daniel Boone National Forest.
- With partners, employed prescribed fire on 17,000 acres of land to improve wildlife habitat, forest health and composition, and reduce wildfire risk.
- Taught introductory fire classes at Eastern Kentucky University, preparing new personnel for wildland fire work.
- Participated in the spring seasonal firefighter employee program, hosting visiting fire fighters from Montana.
- Helped Conservancy colleagues in Tennessee develop a prescribed fire program.
- Restored rare and declining habitats at several Conservancy preserves using a grant from the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program.
- Secured funding for our colleagues in West Virginia to hire a forester to develop a number of high priority forest carbon projects through the Working Woodlands program.
- Advance best in class management on the Cumberland Forest Project, including Ataya, through FSC-certified forest management, forest carbon project development, and recreational access, all while generating returns for the project's investors to demonstrate the viability and replicability of a new model for conservation in the Central Appalachians.
- Collaborate with community partners to evaluate and implement the community reinvestment of mineral royalties derived from the Cumberland Forest Project.
- Continue to work with eastern Kentucky landowners to develop forest carbon projects through the Working Woodlands program.
- Begin enrolling landowners in the Working Forests for Wildlife program with a goal of protecting 15,000 acres of priority forestlands.

LOOKING AHEAD







GREEN HEART TREE PLANTINGS BEGIN

October 5 marked the beginning of planting for the Green Heart project, a first-of-its-kind scientific study that seeks to quantify the human health benefits of urban greening. Approximately 130 trees and shrubs were planted by 145 community volunteers in the project's south Louisville neighborhoods, a small but important start to much larger planting efforts over the coming 18 months.

"People who received trees were genuinely happy," says Chris Chandler, urban conservation program director for The Nature Conservancy in Kentucky. "There was a lot of positive energy in the neighborhood."

Drought conditions made the planting challenging. Louisville had not received rain in six weeks before the planting, and the ground was very hard and dry. Temperatures had consistently remained in the 90s and the first three days of October set all-time high temperature records.

"Everyone who participated knew it would be some of the hardest ground to work with," says Chandler. "We used mattocks, pickaxes, and landscape bars to dig out the holes. But folks showed up and put in the work to get the job done."

Thankfully, the drought broke the day after the planting, with a steady 24-hour rain to water the trees. Louisville Grows, the community nonprofit that organized the event, hired someone to steward the trees post-planting. The Nature Conservancy also donated hoses to some landowners to help them take care of their new trees.

"I just have an immense amount of gratitude to Louisville Grows and the community members who showed up and worked so hard to get these trees in the ground," Chandler says. "There were people of all ages, all willing to put in the work needed. Seeing everyone working together with a common purpose was inspiring."

OUR CITIES

Deliver nature-based solutions that benefit air and water, human health, and quality of life to promote and protect the resiliency of Louisville.

- Assisted partners with their completion of all baseline environmental monitoring and clinical recruitment for the Green Heart project.
- Began planting hundreds of trees and shrubs in the Green Heart project area.
- Working with community partners, trained six urban youth to be community foresters for the Green Heart project, inventorying and conducting preliminary health assessments on more than 700 existing trees in the project area.
- Granted more than \$100,000 to community-based organizations to assist with community engagement and tree planting for the Green Heart project.
- Continued to treat ash trees in the Green Heart project area for the emerald ash borer, bringing the total conserved trees to more than 100.
- With partners, conducted feasibility assessments and initiated conceptual planning for a park in the Mill Creek watershed, which, with up to 1,000 acres of floodplain and 15 miles of stream, could be one of the largest urban stream restoration projects in the country.
- Served on the Louisville & Jefferson County Environmental Trust Advisory Committee.

LOOKING AHEAD



- Plant thousands of large trees on public and private property for the greening portion of the Green Heart project.
- Engage hundreds of community volunteers in urban greening.
- Build a team of people from the Louisville community to provide tree care for both newly installed trees and existing street trees.
- Cultivate the Mill Creek partnership by contributing to community engagement, park amenities conceptual planning, and agency coordination for the proposed park, with goals of protecting up to 1,000 acres of publicly-owned floodplain, transforming up to 15 miles of stream through restoration and creation of a natural area park, and inspiring people to connect with nature by providing new access for traditionally underserved communities.
- Explore opportunities to incorporate nutrient reduction and climate resilience into how Louisville addresses ongoing challenges from stormwater and other urban water issues.



OUR FUTURE, OUR PEOPLE

Expand and diversify our network of donors, members, partners, and volunteers by connecting them with our work, build our chapter's capacity for policy work, and secure a more sustainable future by increasing our endowment.

- Hired the chapter's first-ever director of external affairs, enabling greater engagement and big impacts on state and federal conservation policies and funding.
- Expanded the geographic coverage of the board of trustees by adding two new members from western Kentucky.
- Hosted 395 students at Dupree Nature Preserve for educational field trips in partnership with Bluegrass Greensource.
- Enhanced the visitor experience at Sally Brown and Crutcher nature preserves with new interpretive signage and newly marked and extended trails.

LOOKING AHEAD



- Continue to utilize the Dupree Nature Preserve as a premier outdoor classroom for hands-on experiences with nature in partnership with Bluegrass Greensource.
- Expand our policy work on climate, clean energy, conservation funding, and other key issues.
- Enhance the visitor experience at Mantle Rock Nature Preserve with new interpretive signage.







What comes next in the Central Appalachians?

Never ones to rest on our laurels, even before we had closed on the first phase of the 253,000-acre Cumberland Forest Project, Conservancy staff were talking about what comes next. This is not to say that we are looking past the immense body of work on the Cumberland Forest. Rather, it is simply a reflection that we have both an immense opportunity and a clear responsibility to do much more. The Cumberland Forest Project is a tremendous step forward, but we must protect additional lands to truly secure a conserved and connected network of resilient forestlands throughout the Central Appalachians and the larger Appalachian range from northern Alabama into the boreal forests of Canada.

“The science points toward the Central Appalachians as one of the most important migration corridors in North America,” says Danna Baxley, director of conservation for the Conservancy in Kentucky. “As climates change, it’s well documented that species

need to be able to shift their ranges. Protecting the Central Appalachians safeguards biodiversity not just today, but into the future as well.”

But the Central Appalachians are a big place and at least 21 million acres lie within our identified Resilient Connected Network—the top tier of climate resilience and connectivity in all of North America. To focus our efforts further, Conservancy scientists brought new science and a collaborative spirit to identifying the highest priority tracts—regardless of state—that we needed to protect to stitch together what would otherwise be potential gaps in the network. Ultimately, we identified 14 additional land parcels—representing several hundred thousand acres—as absolutely critical for maintaining continuity among existing protected lands. These strategic parcels were chosen not only for their conservation value but also for the opportunity the Conservancy has to acquire them, the cost,

and existing threats to the land. Seven of the 14 parcels are located in Kentucky, with focus areas in the Pine-Black Mountain corridor and a span of unique forest types connecting West Virginia to that corridor.

Securing these additional lands represents an incredible challenge, but the Cumberland Forest Project provides a model for demonstrating more sustainable economic models, including novel revenue streams from CO₂ sequestration, sustainable timber management, and outdoor recreation. Additionally, it provides a model for how Conservancy programs can work together to deliver results far greater than what we could ever achieve working alone. Baxley concludes by adding, “I think the team really recognizes that the best way we can contribute to ambitious conservation goals is to work together, at a regional scale, leveraging our time, talent, and resources towards shared priorities.”

STAFF & TRUSTEES

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Kellie Adkins
Protection Administrative Assistant

Kim Barton
Agriculture Program Specialist

Danna Baxley, Ph.D.
Director of Conservation

Will Bowling
Central Appalachians Project Director

Chris Chandler
Urban Conservation Program Director

Regan Clauson
Donor Relations Manager

Catherine Fitzgerald
Cities Program Manager

Abigail Joyce
Development Program Specialist

Mike Hensley
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Jemma Kaluski
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Chris Minor
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**Trustees who served on Kentucky Board at
any time during 2019*

***On leave of absence during work
assignment overseas*

IN MEMORIAM

We extend recognition to the following
former board members who passed away
recently:

Dr. Bill Bryant
Dr. Monica Kern
Clara Wieland

Trustee Spotlight: Gordon Dabney and Susan Lavin

Siblings Gordon Dabney and Susan Lavin grew up appreciating nature thanks to their father, a hunter, fisherman, outdoor enthusiast and former board member for The Nature Conservancy in Kentucky. Samuel Gordon Dabney served on the board from 2000-2005.



“Dad was an inspiration to me,” Lavin says. “He would talk to us about the work that he was doing with the Conservancy, and it was all so interesting.”

Dabney followed in his father’s footsteps as a hunter and fisherman, enjoying the outdoors in Kentucky and around the world. Eventually he would join his sister on the Conservancy’s board.

“As I have gotten more involved and learned more about what the Conservancy is doing, I became more excited about all of the chapter’s projects,” Dabney says. “The Green Heart project, for example, has the potential to become a model for cities across the U.S. and around the globe. If a material correlation can be scientifically documented between human health and the amount of tree canopy in urban environments, I think there is great opportunity to see substantial funding redirected to such environmental projects.”

For Lavin, who also served on the board from 2006-2013, returning to the Conservancy now coincides with an exciting time in the chapter’s history. She says the Ataya acquisition has been particularly groundbreaking.

“Looking forward, I hope we continue to make big contributions to the Conservancy as a whole,” she says. “What we do here in Kentucky makes a real difference.”

**Why I give:
Richard Rosen**



To Richard Rosen, nature is therapeutic. Everyday life, with cars and traffic, noise and light pollution, can take its toll on a person over time, he says. For Rosen, nature and nurture are very similar.

“There’s something about watching things grow and watching animals interacting with their ecosystem,” Rosen says. “When I can’t get out into the woods for a hike, I work on creating my own slice of the natural world in our backyard. I enjoy my garden like I enjoy visiting natural spaces.”

Rosen is concerned with global environmental issues, including the loss of tropical rainforest, species extinction, development, and pollution. “Being part of the human race, we have an obligation to preserve and even restore some of those ecosystems,” he says.

Alongside his wife Anna Marie Pavlik, he has given to The Nature Conservancy’s global priorities as well as to Kentucky’s conservation projects. The Conservancy’s work in the Central Appalachians is particularly inspiring to them because of the region’s global importance as a migratory corridor.

“As an individual, it is sometimes easy to feel somewhat powerless,” Rosen says. “But as a part of an organization such as The Nature Conservancy, I am able to do more. The Conservancy is really focused on making it happen, so it is a really good fit for me.”

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Whippoorwill Family Foundation

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Tom & Rebecca Wade
Jane Welch
Harry T. Wilks
Justin & Molly Yandell

*Legacy Club Member

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BY THE NUMBERS

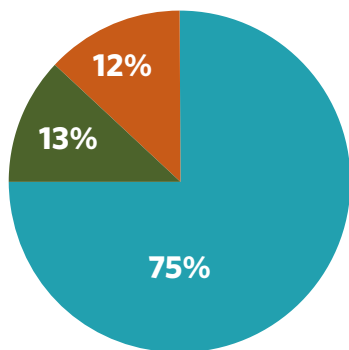
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ASSETS	at June 30, 2018	at June 30, 2019
Conservation Land & Easements	\$12,559,476	\$13,663,847
Investments Held for Conservation Projects	\$6,120,668	\$6,328,183
Endowment Investments	\$4,327,559	\$4,491,813
Property & Equipment - Net of Depreciation	\$409,833	\$327,833
Current Assets	\$2,273,417	\$3,089,763
Other Assets	\$8,737	\$8,641
Total Assets	\$25,699,690	\$27,910,080

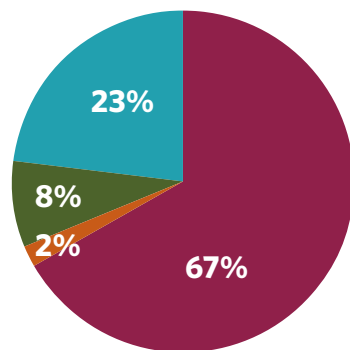
LIABILITY & NET ASSET SUMMARY

Liabilities	\$854,630	\$2,138,504
Net Assets	\$24,845,060	\$25,771,576
Total Liabilities & Net Assets	\$25,699,690	\$27,910,080

EXPENSES

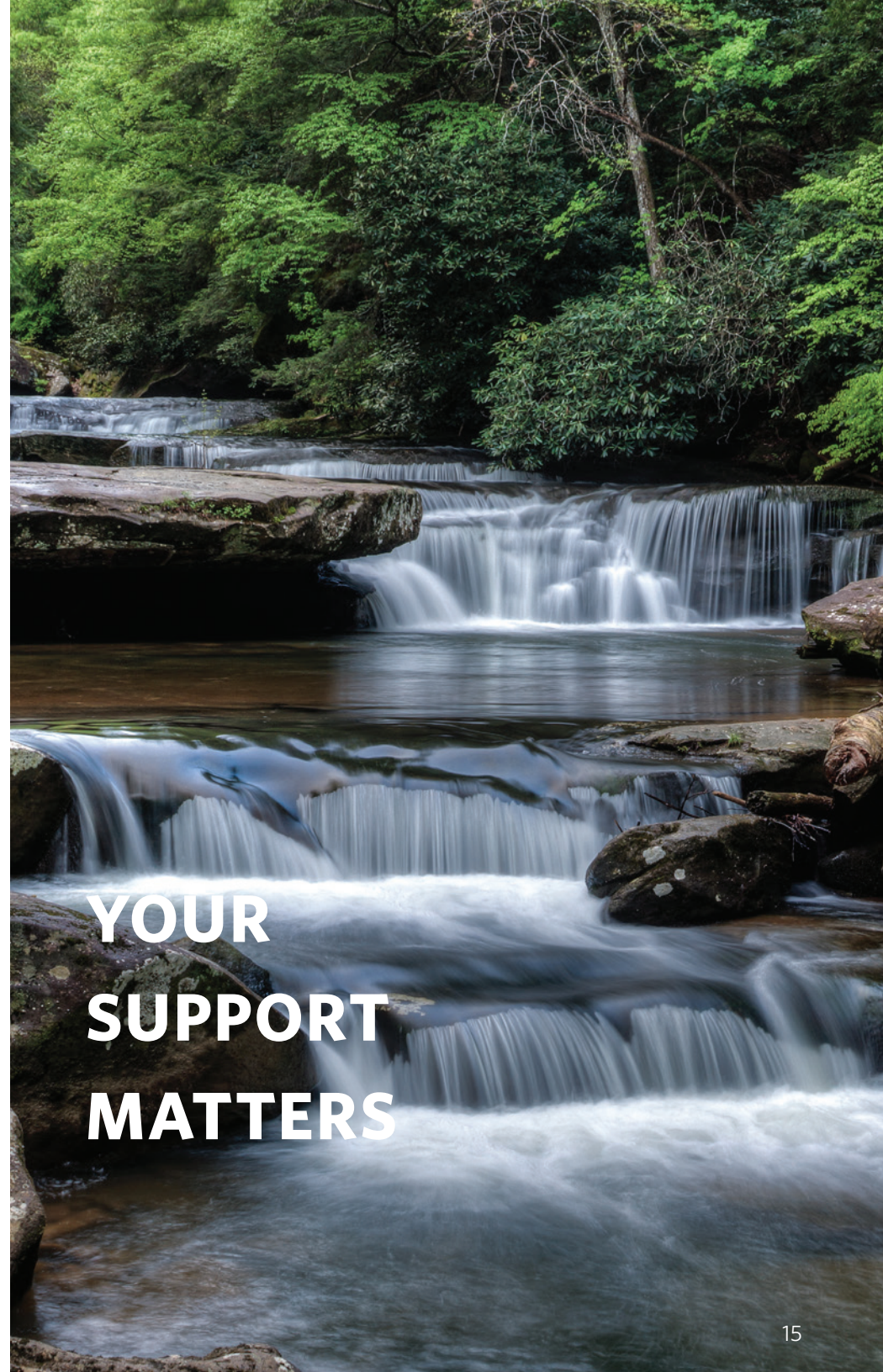


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