

NATURE

KANSAS

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Ben Postlethwait has been named Kansas State Director for The Nature Conservancy. © Katie Roby/TNC

Q&A With State Director Ben Postlethwait

The Nature Conservancy has named Ben Postlethwait as State Director in Kansas. He brings two decades of experience in the electric utility industry and a background in biology to his role at TNC. As state director, Ben leads a team of conservation experts and support staff focused on large-scale, lasting land, water and biodiversity conservation in the Sunflower State. We spoke with Ben about his new role and vision for TNC in Kansas.

What made you want to work at TNC? Humans interact with the natural world around us every day, and the mission to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends is critical. I am excited to work in a role that allows me to focus those interactions with the landscapes and help ensure my children—and someday grandchildren—have the opportunity to experience and understand Kansas's great natural resources.

What projects are you most excited to work on at TNC? We have big goals to protect and improve the stewardship of thousands of acres in the Flint Hills, and newer work in the Southern High Plains allows us to work across state borders in vast landscapes. I am also impressed with the innovative, science-based work of the Sustainable Rivers Program. Given my previous work in the energy sector, I look forward to facilitating collaboration between conservation agencies and the utility industry. We must address growing energy demands while protecting sensitive ecosystems and mitigating climate change impacts. TNC's Site Renewables Right tool is an award-winning way to do that.

How were you introduced to TNC? I remember helping as a volunteer at the Anderson County Prairies Preserve in 2013. It was a wonderful experience,

and I really enjoyed working with staff and other volunteers. I will also always cherish the memories of working with TNC and the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP) at Little Jerusalem Badlands State Park. In my previous role, I provided equipment and volunteers to help with construction at the park. During that project, I worked alongside a group of volunteers that included my wife and daughters. We will never forget the work we contributed to bring that park to life.

How do you see TNC's work in Kansas evolving? Transitioning to new leadership is always a heavy lift for an organization. At first, our staff and trustees will focus on continuing the outstanding work that was already underway: protecting prairies and streams; promoting regenerative agricultural

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Ben with his wife Kacy and daughters Linkan and Palmer; Ben in a bald eagle's nest. Photos courtesy Ben Postlethwait.

practices; advancing renewable energy development while protecting ecologically sensitive areas; and engaging partners, supporters, and others in our work. As the United States transitions to more renewable energy, TNC's work to ensure that wind and solar resources in Kansas are developed responsibly and sustainably will become increasingly important.

What's one thing any Kansan can do to support TNC's mission to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends? I have always believed that conservation depends on people experiencing nature and interacting with the natural systems around them. For some, that might be a float trip on the Kansas River or a drive along the Flint Hills Scenic Byway. For others, it may be visiting a nature center in their community. Beyond that, we are all responsible for spreading the word about the impressive conservation initiatives underway in Kansas. We should all be talking to our neighbors and coworkers. If resources allow, support conservation partners by volunteering or making a donation. Convenient, equitable access to nature in Kansas is the key to conservation success.

Do you have a favorite Kansas species? For the past several years, I've had the opportunity to band bald eagle chicks as a volunteer with KDWP and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. I was able to interact with these incredible birds and even peer inside their nest to see them on their turf. They are amazing creatures and a major conservation success story, thanks to direct action to save our national symbol when it was on the brink of extinction.

Explore the Work Ben Highlights

Discover the deep-rooted prairie grasses that nurture some of the greatest biological diversity in the world at [nature.org/flinthills](https://www.nature.org/flinthills)

Read about the Kansas River and Sustainable Rivers Program—a nationwide partnership between TNC and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers—at [nature.org/kansasriver](https://www.nature.org/kansasriver)

Find out how five states are working together to protect the nation's grasslands at [nature.org/southernhighplains](https://www.nature.org/southernhighplains)

Learn how TNC is accelerating a clean and green energy future at [nature.org/siterenewablesright](https://www.nature.org/siterenewablesright)

Plan a visit to Little Jerusalem Badlands State Park at [nature.org/littlejerusalem](https://www.nature.org/littlejerusalem)

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Research Drones at Cheyenne Bottoms

At Cheyenne Bottoms Preserve in Barton County, TNC staff and researchers are now using drones to monitor bird populations and their movements. The aerial perspective captured by drones offers a unique vantage point, allowing researchers to survey large areas quickly, efficiently and precisely.

Drones can also collect high-quality imagery that provides detailed information about bird populations, nesting sites, feeding areas and habitat usage. By covering vast territories in a fraction of the time, drones save resources while increasing the accuracy and scope of bird survey data. Technology also helps to monitor areas that surveyors can't reach by foot or car. The non-intrusive approach minimizes the disturbances to birds while enabling accurate population assessments.

Learn more about Cheyenne Bottoms, the largest wetland in the interior United States, at [nature.org/cheyennebottoms](https://www.nature.org/cheyennebottoms).



Student researcher at Cheyenne Bottoms
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