

A Natural Beauty: Toyota Tennessee Celebrates New State Park

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JACKSON, Tenn. (June 11, 2025) – Kids and conservation are the center of a new, \$150,000 donation on behalf of Toyota Tennessee. Today, Toyota, the National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF) and other community partners kicked off a three-year, \$150,000 grant project at one of the Volunteer State’s newest state parks, Middle Fork Bottoms.

The park, which opened in 2022, is an 860-acre floodplain restoration project and officially became a state park in 2024. The funding will support the Tennessee State Parks Conservancy (TSPC) to promote educational programs—including the creation of an outdoor classroom—and to The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to aid in their conservation initiatives. In honor of the new partnership, Toyota and the park hosted 50 elementary school students at the park from the Boys & Girls Club of Jackson.

“Toyota believes in creating a positive impact on society and our planet. There’s no better way to accomplish that than to help local students connect with and learn about our environment and the importance of conservation,” said Todd Williams, president of Toyota Tennessee. “Toyota Tennessee and our 450 team members are excited to have such an incredible park in our community where the young and young at heart can connect with nature.”

This grant is the latest in a series of multi-year grants from NEEF in partnership with Toyota to improve access to high-quality parks and trails in communities across the country.

“Toyota has been an excellent partner in our mission to improve outdoor access for all,” said Sara Espinoza, president and CEO of NEEF. “We believe multi-year projects like the one at Middle Fork Bottoms will have a transformative effect on their local communities, connecting residents to nature and fueling a desire to protect not just their local parks, but all public lands.”

Kids and Nature

The Tennessee State Parks Conservancy was awarded a grant for the educational component of the project. This grant will support the construction and activation of an accessible outdoor classroom near Bulrush Lake, providing a permanent learning site for Kids in Parks and other TSPC programs. Additionally, TSPC will bring their Kids in Parks program to Middle Fork Bottoms State Park. This program aims to bridge the outdoor equity gap by supporting Title I schools with transportation funding, enabling educational field trips to state parks where students learn STEM, history, art and writing. In the 2023-2024 school year, the Kids in Parks program facilitated field trips for more than 5,000 kids, many of whom had never previously been on a hiking trail.

“This partnership with Toyota and NEEF has allowed us to support the staff at Middle Fork Bottoms State Park to deliver different types of educational experiences. Middle Fork Bottoms State Park is new to the state park system, and we are excited to help them build out their programming,” said Alex Wyss, Executive Director of Tennessee State Parks Conservancy.

Wildlife Restoration

The Nature Conservancy will focus on improving the ecology of two landscape features. Plans include restoring approximately 10 acres on the north side of the river with wet-site native grasses and wildflowers, including milkweed. This will help address the severe decline in grassland birds and provide habitats for various wildlife. The area will be accessible via an ADA-compliant paved trail.

Additionally, a five-acre wildflower pocket meadow will be established to support pollinators and act as a demonstration area for the public to learn about the benefits of native planting. TNC and state park staff are seeking volunteers for various aspects of these restoration projects.

“Toyota’s support of this project has been ongoing for many years, building on a strong foundation of partnership and commitment to conservation. Alongside NEEF and other community partners, this grant will

further enhance our efforts at Middle Fork Bottoms State Park, restoring vital habitats and promoting biodiversity. We are excited to see the park continuing to thrive as a community space, attracting visitors and supporting local wildlife,” said Laurel Creech, Tennessee State Director for The Nature Conservancy.