

# Fall Newsletter

2025



# Questions FOR Our Team?

We wanted to answer some questions we are often asked as we interact with Hoosiers across the state.

## What does the INRF do?

At the INRF, we celebrate and preserve Indiana's natural legacy by raising funds for the Indiana DNR and its programs. We are proud to support the DNR's work and serve Hoosiers across the state by supporting conservation efforts, programs that create more opportunities for outdoor education and recreation, and projects that protect more of Indiana's natural resources.

Thanks to our generous partners, we're able to help the DNR make a lasting impact on Indiana's natural resources and Hoosiers like you who enjoy our parks, forests, and natural areas.



**Erika Janak**  
*South Development Coordinator*

## What are your goals?

Because we exist to support the DNR's projects and programs, our goals ultimately reflect their priorities. A few current goals include increasing Indiana's public lands, growing Indiana's State Forests through the Indiana Tree Project, and funding outdoor educational experiences for children in Indiana State Parks through the Discover the Outdoors program.

We continue to see how each of these successfully serve the DNR, and we're privileged to be a part of such meaningful efforts to impact Indiana's natural resources and the people who enjoy them.

As we pursue these goals, we depend on the generosity of individuals – like you – who also value our natural resources and the collaboration it takes to care for them. If you're already part of our team in this way, thank you. And if you're interested in joining us, please consider making a tax-deductible donation today. Your investment will have an immediate and lasting impact!



**Todd Wenninger**  
*North Development Coordinator*

## What kind of projects do you support?

The INRF has supported the DNR since 1990 when we were formed by the Indiana General Assembly. Current programs such as the Indiana Tree Project and Discover the Outdoors are actively expanding Indiana's forests and introducing Hoosier students to Indiana's outdoors. In addition to these programs, we have supported a variety of special projects over the years. Recent examples include acquiring the 158-acre Buchanan Unit of Mallard Roost WCA, supporting habitat restoration efforts at Willow Slough FWA, and introducing Hoosiers to mountain biking at Brown County State Park. Each of these projects and programs is strategically aimed at enhancing Indiana's natural resources and expanding outdoor recreation opportunities.



**Ethan Foster**  
*Communications Manager*



**Indiana  
Natural Resources**  
FOUNDATION

# Celebrate & Preserve

## INDIANA'S NATURAL LEGACY

With a donation to the INRF, you're making a long-term impact on Indiana's outdoors. Your generosity acquires new public land, restores critical habitat, educates Hoosier students on the importance of conservation, and so much more. Together, we can celebrate and preserve Indiana's natural legacy for generations to come.

*Donate Today*



[indiananrf.org/donate](http://indiananrf.org/donate)

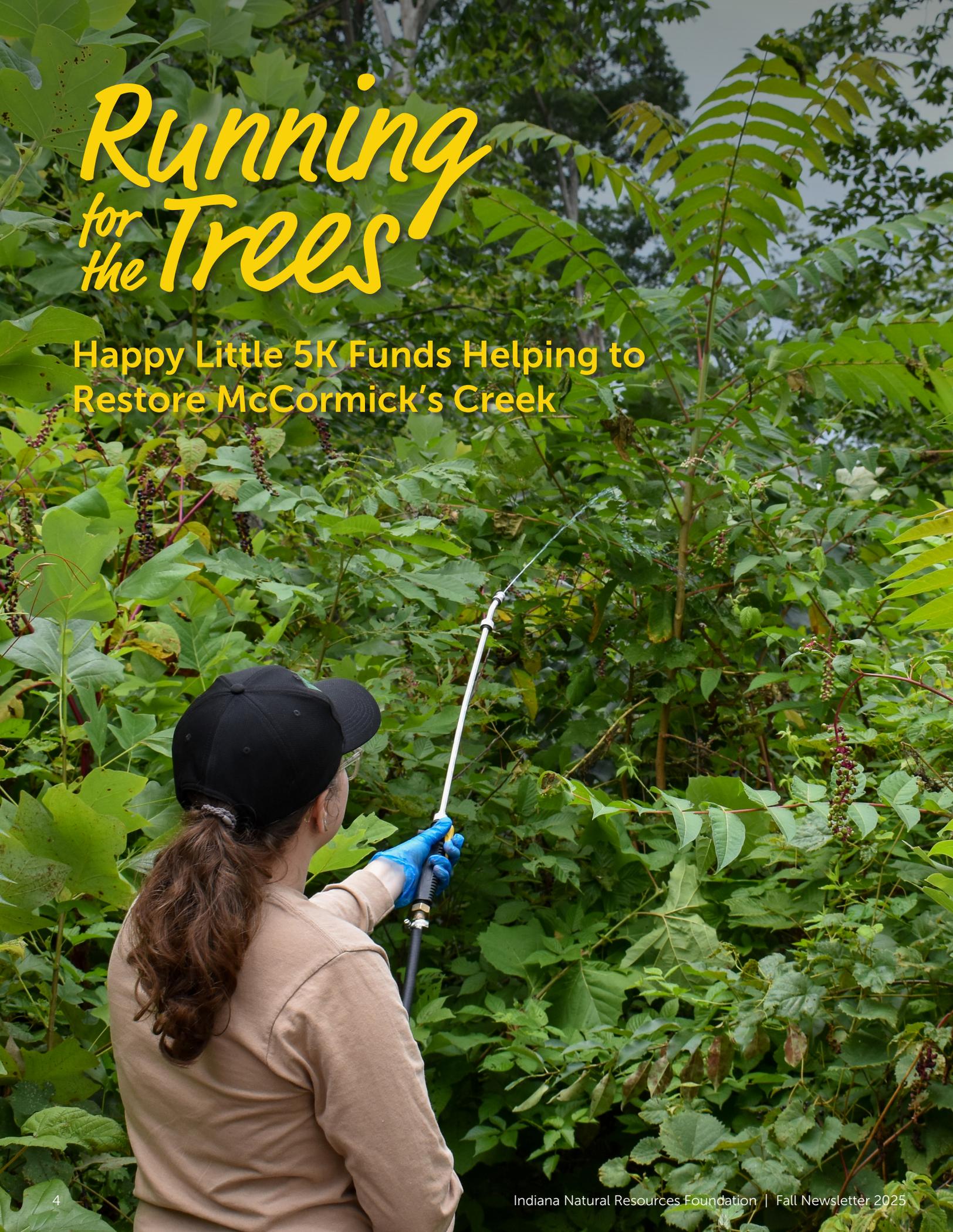
Donations are tax deductible under section 170 (c)(1) of the IRS code.

## Tree Shirts are back this November, and they have a new look!

Every purchase supports the Indiana Tree Project and our efforts to reforest Indiana.

For updates, follow us on social media:  
**@IndianaNRF on Facebook and Instagram**





# Running for the Trees

Happy Little 5K Funds Helping to  
Restore McCormick's Creek

The 2023 tornado that tore through McCormick's Creek State Park left trees uprooted, forced trails to close, and disturbed habitats. With park staff diligently working to restore the property's ecosystems, a different force emerged that will help them do so.

Generous support from the participants of the Happy Little 5K is providing the park with new resources that will help manage invasive species in its Wolf Cave Nature Preserve, an area that was heavily damaged and left vulnerable.

It's common for invasives to attempt to take over an area after a heavy disturbance, and at McCormick's Creek, tree of heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*) is doing just that. A rapidly growing tree native to China, tree of heaven is an aggressive and quickly reproducing species.

As we explored McCormick's Creek, property staff pointed out other invasive species they're also trying to manage, but tree of heaven's unique attributes make it the primary focus right now.

"Many of the invasives we regularly deal with just destroy native ground cover, but tree of heaven is unique," said Jessica Filer, the park's interpretive naturalist. "It outgrows native trees and will smother out their necessary sunlight very quickly."

Tree of heaven requires focused management prac-

tices because of its aggressive root system. With the ability to spread its roots hundreds of feet, sprout a seemingly unlimited number of new shoots, and change the acidity of the soil, it must be managed using both cutting and herbicide.

Using a portion of the Happy Little 5K funds, McCormick's Creek hired seasonal staff specifically trained to take on the rapidly expanding tree of heaven problem. Ultimately, their work will help support healthy forests on the property, giving native trees the time and space they need to grow.

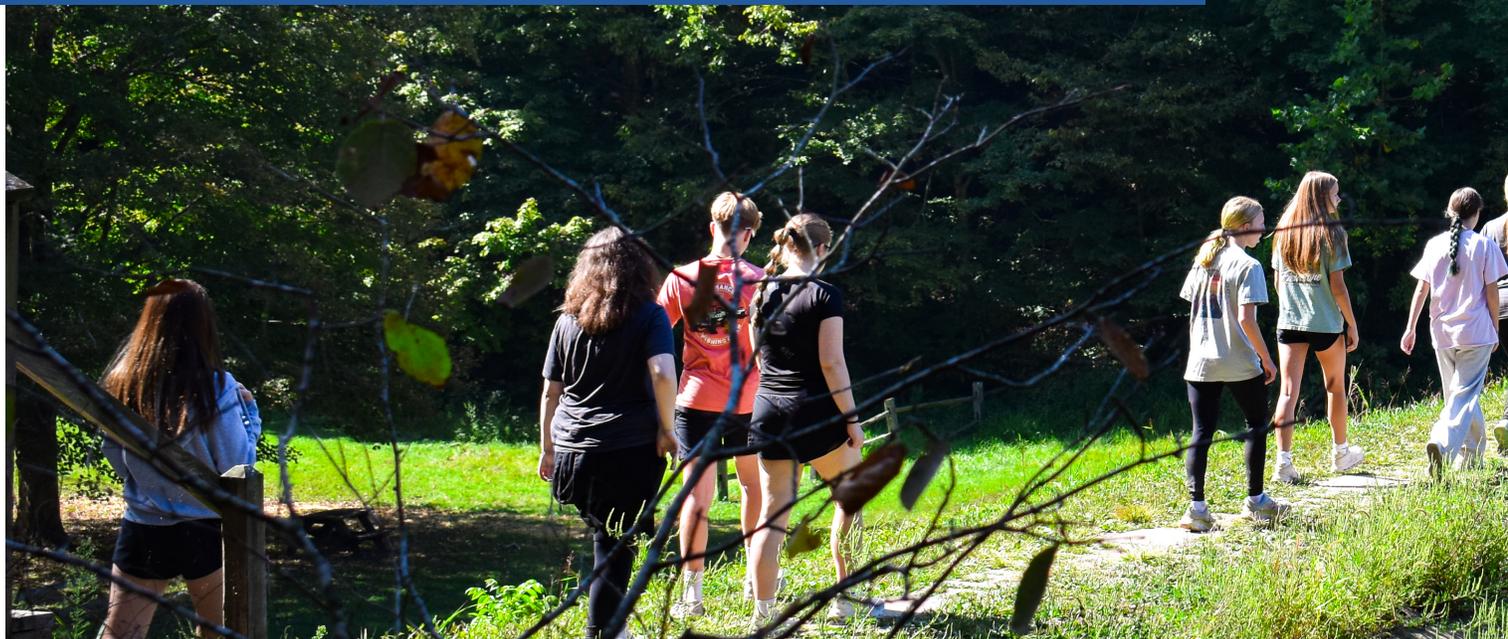
"We are grateful to Hoosiers' support for this important work," said Brandt Baughman, director of State Parks. "The work funded by the Happy Little 5K will help champion healthy forests at Indiana's oldest state park."

While portions of Trail 5 are still closed due to tornado damage, the Wolf Cave Nature Preserve section of the trail, including access to Wolf Cave, is open and ready for you to explore.

As you look out at the hillsides filling up with dense new growth, you can envision the challenging work required for McCormick's Creek staff to remove the tree of heaven. Their continuous efforts, in combination with your support of the Happy Little 5K, are allowing McCormick's Creek to slowly heal and let native species begin to thrive once again.



# Students Discover the Roots of Brown County's Natural History



As the mid-September sun crested over the trees behind Brown County State Park's nature center, Whiteland High School students stepped off the bus and began their journey through the rugged hills, deep gullies, and dense forests that the park is known for. The Discover the Outdoors trip they were embarking on would take them on a journey through the history, both natural and human, of the park.

Guided by interpretive naturalist Eli Major, the students began their trip with a trek down a dusty Trail 6. Along the way to Strahl Lake, the group encountered the usual collection of robins, cardinals, and a few frogs. But the students took special interest in one distinctive group of other trail users. A large collection of beech blight aphids, also appropriately called boogie-woogie aphids, coated a branch overhanging the trail, giving the students a great opportunity to observe the insects and their "dancing" ability.

While the party among the aphids was a welcome stop, the journey to Strahl Lake continued with the day's main objective of learning about erosion and natural history. In the mid- 1800s, people began farming and clearing the area of trees that is now Indiana's largest state park. Agriculture was a difficult endeavor on the



steep hills and ravines, and in the early 1900s, a group of farmers sold their properties for the area to become Brown County State Park.

Standing among the towering white pines on Strahl Lake's east side, the students discovered the history of the Civilian Conservation Corps and how these non-native trees got there. The CCC planted thousands of trees in Brown County, including black locust, black walnut, and various pines. With the knowledge that the white pines were accustomed to growing on disturbed hillsides, they planted those trees to help reduce the extreme erosion the area was experiencing.

Strahl Lake is near the lowest elevation in the park, providing a perfect backdrop for the day's lessons. While walking along the dam, Major highlighted the geology of the park in a place where you can see the exposed sandstone changing into shale.

Before the students' return to the nature center, one last natural feature caught their attention. Jewelweed is abundant near the park's lakes this time of year. Its fruit bursts open at the slightest touch when ripe, part of the plant's self-seeding process, and a feature the students enjoyed interacting with.

From learning about the history of the park to interacting with wildlife and plants, these students returned to Whiteland with new knowledge and experiences they are sure to remember. More than 5,600 students will have similar experiences during the 2025-26 school year thanks to our generous donors and partners like you.



# Sign-up

for our Monthly Newsletter

We're making waves for conservation and outdoor recreation in the Hoosier state, and so can you. Keep up with us by signing up for our e-newsletter. Receive feature stories, news and photos in your inbox each month.

Sign up by visiting [IndianaNRF.org](https://IndianaNRF.org) and click **Subscribe**.



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