



Cleveland Museum of Natural History Announces Strategic Plan to Protect Ohio's Natural Diversity

New vision for the Museum's Natural Areas Program focuses on protecting critical habitats, restoring rare species, connecting people with nature, and advancing conservation science

CLEVELAND, OH—October 19, 2026—The Cleveland Museum of Natural History has announced a new 10-year strategic plan for its Natural Areas Program, establishing a roadmap to protect and restore some of Ohio's rarest wildlife, plants, and natural habitats while strengthening the connections between conservation, healthy communities, scientific research, and the region's future.

For over 70 years, the Museum's Natural Areas Program has protected and studied northern Ohio's forests, wetlands, coastlines, riverways, and other landscapes that help define the region's natural heritage. Today, the Museum stewards nearly 13,000 acres, supporting an exceptional concentration of biological diversity, including rare plants and animals that may have few other places to thrive.

"The Natural Areas Program is an essential part of who we are as a Museum," said Meenakshi Sharma, the Museum's Acting President & CEO. "Our mission extends beyond our walls—from the research we conduct and the collections we steward to the natural places we protect. This strategic plan advances that shared vision, bringing together science, education, and conservation to help ensure Ohio's natural heritage thrives for generations to come."

The new strategic plan builds on that work at a time when biodiversity is declining rapidly around the world, and when many of Ohio's most vulnerable species face increasing pressure from habitat loss, invasive species, and other environmental changes. The plan establishes a shared direction for the



coming decade, aligning conservation priorities, scientific expertise, organizational capacity, and partnerships to create lasting benefits for both people and nature.

“Ohio’s extraordinary natural biodiversity is what makes our region unique,” said Julia Ross, Executive Director of Impact and Engagement. “This 10-year strategic plan gives us a clear, ambitious roadmap—not only to protect our most vulnerable species and habitats, but to connect communities with these vital landscapes and ensure their resilience for generations to come.”

Four priorities for the decade ahead

The strategic plan centers on four interconnected priorities:

Protect the lands that define Ohio’s natural and local heritage.

The Museum will work to expand and connect preserves, with particular attention to core forests, fens, barrens, bogs, and other habitats that provide the large, uninterrupted landscapes many rare species require.

Restore the region’s natural diversity.

The Natural Areas Program will strengthen stewardship and restoration efforts on behalf of prioritized rare, endangered, and threatened plants and animals, while expanding the use of monitoring, mapping, and scientific data to guide conservation decisions.

Inspire a passion for nature.

The Museum will create new opportunities for people to understand Ohio’s biodiversity, connect with the natural world, and participate in conservation. Plans include expanded storytelling, partnerships, educational programming, and increased public access to selected preserves.

Leverage science and collaboration for a sustainable future.

The Museum will convene researchers and conservation partners to develop a research agenda tied directly to the needs of Ohio’s rare species and habitats, while making its preserves and collections more accessible for scientific study and monitoring.

Conservation that reaches beyond preserve boundaries



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According to wildlife experts, the average size of monitored wildlife populations has shrunk by 73% over the 50-year period between 1970 and 2020, and approximately one million species are now facing extinction. One example is the cerulean warbler, a migratory songbird that depends on large, mature forests. As those habitats have declined, so have cerulean populations. The Museum's forested preserves in Ohio help protect the habitat these birds—and other sensitive species—need to survive.

But, the plan also emphasizes that protecting biodiversity has benefits far beyond individual species.

Healthy natural systems contribute to clean water, healthy soils, pollination, productive farmland, and resilient communities. Protecting Ohio's natural landscapes also helps preserve the rural character and natural heritage that have shaped the state for generations. And by providing greater access to native wildlife, habitats, collections, and field research, the Museum can expand opportunities for science education and discovery.

Goals of the Strategic Plan

Building on the four strategic pillars outlined above, the plan carries each forward through a corresponding 10-year goal. Together, those goals focus on protecting and connecting habitat for rare species, strengthening science-based stewardship and restoration, increasing public understanding of and engagement with Ohio's natural diversity, and expanding research partnerships that can advance conservation across the region. Each 10-year goal is supported by three-year priorities, implementation strategies, and measurable indicators of success, creating a clear path from long-term vision to near-term action.

That work begins in the plan's first three years, with priorities that include identifying habitat requirements for prioritized rare species, mapping invasive plant cover, creating new opportunities for public engagement, and developing an infrastructure for field research that is accessible to partners. Together, these efforts are designed to turn the Museum's long-term vision into measurable progress for Ohio's wildlife, wild places, and communities.

To learn more about the Natural Areas Program and view the strategic plan, visit cmnh.org/conservation.

About the Cleveland Museum of Natural History

The Cleveland Museum of Natural History illuminates the world around us and inspires visitors to engage with the natural forces that shape their lives. Since its founding in 1920, the Museum has pioneered scientific research to advance knowledge across diverse fields of study and used its



outstanding collections, which encompass millions of artifacts and specimens, to deepen the public's understanding of the dynamic connections between humans and nature. Through its Natural Areas Program, the Museum stewards more than 12,500 acres of protected ecosystems across northern Ohio. A community gathering place, educational center, and research institution, the Museum is a vital resource that serves Cleveland and the nation. For more information, visit CMNH.org.

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