



## APSU PHILANTHROPISTS OF THE YEAR

# THE BAND FOUNDATION

Clark Mitchell, secretary and Nick Lapham, founding member of the Band Foundation

A chance invitation to the 2016 Mid-South Prairie Symposium at Austin Peay State University sparked Clark Mitchell's interest in the Southeastern Grasslands Initiative (SGI), a collaboration of leaders in international biodiversity conservation led by the APSU Center of Excellence for Field Biology.

Mitchell serves as the secretary for the Band Foundation, located in Washington, D.C. At the time of the symposium, his organization was seeking to invest in an upstart conservation organization that would be the catalyst to a conservation movement. With an initial \$20,000 planning grant in 2016, the BAND Foundation instructed SGI Executive Director Dwayne Estes to create a multi-year plan and to "dream big."

The BAND Foundation's support of SGI has now reached over \$1 million in matching challenge grants since 2017, which has established SGI as one of the most important conservation movements in the Southeastern United States. Assistance from the BAND Foundation provided unrestricted dollars that allowed SGI staff to travel to 65 destinations and speak to over 10,000 individuals and agency personnel over the past four years. Each speaking engagement helped grow awareness of the mission and vision of SGI, created partnerships and attracted private donations to meet the BAND Foundation challenge grant, and funded essential conservation work by SGI staff in 23 states.

Band Foundation funds have also helped to create SGI's seed banking program, in which staff identify and collect rare seeds in the Southeastern region. The seeds will serve as building blocks for restoration, thereby protecting endangered species and restoring native biodiversity.

The SGI team has grown to include 12 staff members and three graduate assistants in 23 states, with each of those individuals having some portion of their position funded by BAND Foundation contributions. These individuals protect grassland remnants and develop grassland projects in multiple states through partnerships with various private and public entities, such as the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), Google, North Carolina Botanical Gardens, Dunbar Cave-City of Clarksville, Davidson County Parks Department, Bill and Tracey Frist, Norfolk Railroad Foundation, George Lindermann, Jr. and the Lynhurst Foundation

Recently, the work of SGI was featured in the Yale Environment 360, a publication of Yale University. Negotiations are underway to feature SGI in a fall 2021 edition of National Geographic. The growth and opportunities of SGI would not have been possible without the support of the BAND Foundation.