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EDITORIAL: Master Conservationists Extraordinaire

Missourian Editorial

Jun 26, 2026



Missouri Conservation Commission Chair and Washington native Margy Eckelkamp, center, presents Dan and Connie Burkhardt with the Master Conservationist Award in the Washington City Council Chambers.

Christopher Parker/Missourian



Congratulations to Dan and Connie Burkhardt on being named Master Conservationists by the Missouri Department of Conservation last month. We can't think of two more deserving people to receive this prestigious honor. It is even more fitting they received the award in Washington, their adopted hometown, which is located in the heart of the area they have championed for so long.

Few have done more to promote this region's natural assets than Dan and Connie. Whether it be preserving the legacy of the Missouri River, encouraging the use of land trusts and conservation easements, their remarkable stewardship of the Katy Trail and now the Rock Island Trail, their support of campaigns to eliminate invasive plant species and promote native species and their poignant philanthropy, the Burkhardts' passion for protecting the best part of our state is unmatched.

Their love of the outdoors and their steadfast commitment to preserving it is why their names will always be synonymous with conservation. They not only embody the term conservationist, they define it. And perhaps their greatest legacy is reminding us all of the splendor that surrounds us in our own backyard and challenging us to not take it for granted.

Tyler Schwartze, Conservation Federation magazine executive director and editor, hit the nail on the head when he called the Burkhardts "extraordinary conservationists" in a recent tribute. He said the couple just know how to get things done.

"More importantly, they are people of action," Schwartze said in a piece that appears in the July/August edition of the magazine. "For years, they have poured their hearts into protecting and improving the Katy Trail corridor, preserving historic landmarks, supporting rural communities, and helping Missourians connect to nature in meaningful ways."

The Burkhardts are truly people of action, pouring their hearts and resources into organizations like the Katy Land Trust, which they founded in 2010 and Magnificent Missouri, which they co-founded in 2012.

They have published books and magazines, saved historic buildings, created artwork, sponsored bluegrass music, created campaigns to eliminate invasive species, planted trees and hosted countless events — all to introduce non-conservationists to conservation as the National Wildlife Federation pointed out in 2019 when it presented them with the National Conservation Leadership Award.

Nature is nonpartisan, and one of the things we've always admired about this couple is the way they have pursued their passion without getting mired in the political pitfalls that can hamper so many conservation efforts. They have gone about their work by first always seeking common ground and by following the simple principle that conservation works best when people come together with a shared purpose. They recognize that nature is one of the few things that connects us all and that conversation is an issue that can and should bring people together, not divide us. In the end, conservation is about what kind of world we want to leave behind.

We salute Dan and Connie Burkhardt, newly minted Master Conservationists, and two of the best Missourians we know!