



## The Landscape Conservation Catalyst Fund 2021 Grant Awards

*August 2021*

The Network for Landscape Conservation is pleased to announce 15 Landscape Conservation Catalyst Fund grant awards for Partnerships working to implement community-grounded conservation at the necessary landscape scale. Each of these Partnerships will work over the next one to two years to accelerate their collaborative efforts to build enduring, place-based conservation progress in protecting the ecological, cultural, and community health of the landscapes they call home. In the face of large-scale challenges like habitat fragmentation and climate change, conservation efforts at the landscape scale are imperative—and investing in robust Partnerships is essential for success at this scale. For more information on the Catalyst Fund, please see: <http://landscapeconservation.org/catalyst-fund>.

Generous support for the Catalyst Fund has been provided by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and a portion of the Fund is specifically dedicated to supporting Indigenous leadership in landscape conservation.

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### **Black River Water Trail and Park Network, \$25,000 over two years**

South Carolina's Black River, part of the Pee Dee Basin, is a 151-mile-long Coastal Plain river that winds through forests and swamps before discharging at Winyah Bay near Georgetown, SC. Passing through a largely rural landscape of forests and farmlands, its banks are lined with ancient cypress and tupelo trees that infuse its translucent waters with the dark, organic tannins that give it its name. The river system supports rich biological communities: On its banks, amphibians emerge from the inky waters to lay their eggs in damp hardwood forests while upland native longleaf pine forests within its watershed are home to colonies of endangered red-cockaded woodpeckers and flatwoods salamanders. In 2001, a 75-mile segment of the river was designated by the state of South Carolina as a Scenic River in recognition of its significance from historical/cultural, ecological, and recreational perspectives.

The Black River Water Trail and Park Network works to create a series of public and private parks along the Black River. Funding will support the coordination capacity of the Network, with a primary goal of strengthening direct community engagement so that community voices, knowledge, needs, and desired outcomes are interwoven into short- and long-term conservation and recreation planning along the

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The Network for Landscape Conservation advances cross-border, collaborative conservation as a vital approach to sustain nature, culture, and community. The Network is a fiscally sponsored project of the Center for Large Landscape Conservation in Bozeman, MT.

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Black River. In a landscape in which decision-making processes around natural resources do not always include those most directly affected, this support will empower the Network to create space for those voices and ensure meaningful community engagement in ways that strengthen human communities and the river ecosystem.

### **California Central Coast Joint Venture, \$25,000 over two years**

California's Central Coast—stretching from Santa Cruz and Monterey south of San Francisco down toward Point Conception north of Los Angeles—boasts superlative ecological diversity and is a landscape where beaches, estuaries, mountains, deserts, chaparral, and forests converge. Home to the southern extent of old-growth redwoods, the state's largest stands of coastal oak woodlands, and some of earth's rarest dune ecosystems, the landscape's diversity of soil regimes, geophysical variation, climatic factors, and millennia of human land uses have resulted in some of the highest measures of biodiversity and endemism in North America.

The California Central Coast Joint Venture (C3JV) works through inclusive partnership to advance strategies that steward healthy and resilient habitats for birds, wildlife, and people. Funding support will enable the C3JV to complete its Conservation Implementation Plan, expand efforts to build trust and collaboration with Indigenous communities, and build a communications plan to strengthen communication both internally and externally. As the newest Joint Venture launched in 2020, this Catalyst Fund investment is intended to provide critical capacity to bridge the gap between formation and the ability to access congressionally allocated Joint Venture funding—while also elevating the C3JV's effort to adapt the Joint Venture vision to see conservation and social well-being objectives as interwoven.

### **East Yellowstone Collaborative Working Group, \$20,000 over one year**

Laying along the eastern boundary of Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming, the Absaroka Mountains are a crucial geographic feature of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem—one of the world's largest nearly intact temperate ecosystems. Where the rugged mountains of the range give way to the Bighorn Basin and lower plains of eastern Wyoming, the Absaroka Front is marked by sagebrush steppe foothills and grassy plains. The landscape of the Front is a mix of public and private lands but has remained largely intact ecologically and is a critical linkage point for the movement of key wildlife species between national parks, wilderness areas, and private working lands.

The East Yellowstone Collaborative Working Group works to restore, protect, and steward the lands of the Absaroka Front to support healthy wildlife populations and sustain private working lands. Funding will support continued facilitation of the Working Group, including monthly partner meetings. Funding will also support targeted work with landowners to explore and prioritize potential conservation projects as the Working Group moves into implementation of its Vision Plan. Targeted investments in sustaining the collaborative capacity of the Working Group will accelerate its ability to achieve landscape-scale conservation outcomes in a landscape of global significance while maintaining the economic viability of ranches and private working lands.

### **Kittatinny Coalition, \$15,000 over one year**

Running for more than 250 miles from southern New York State through northern New Jersey, and across Pennsylvania to Maryland, the Kittatinny Ridge is a critical habitat linkage in the magnificent Appalachian Forest that stretches across the eastern United States. Across Pennsylvania the ridge extends for 185 miles and is one of the state’s most climate-resilient landscapes. It provides clean and reliable drinking water; offers extensive hunting and fishing opportunities; shelters many endangered and threatened species; is a Global Important Bird Area; serves as a migration corridor used by tens of thousands of hawks, eagles, and falcons each fall; and hosts a wide range of hiking and camping adventures, including the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. In 2018, in recognition of the landscape’s significance, the Ridge was designated as one of eight “Conservation Landscapes” by the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

The Kittatinny Coalition works to protect the unbroken forests—and all of the services that the forests provide—of the globally important and locally cherished Kittatinny Ridge Conservation Landscape. Funding support will enable the Coalition to complete a Conservation Plan for the landscape, and an associated work plan to guide the Coalition moving forward. In a landscape of recognized significance for climate resilience in the eastern United States, this investment will unify the Coalition’s work around a common conservation strategy and provide a framework for accelerated conservation action.

### **The Kali'uokapa'akai Collective, \$25,000 over one year**

The Hawaiian Archipelago is a complex of more than 100 volcanic islands that lays some two thousand miles west of the mainland United States, and has been inhabited for nearly two thousand years. The “wahi kūpuna” landscape of Hawai’i refers to the physical sites, areas, or landscapes that are significant to Kānaka ‘Ōiwi (Native Hawaiians). While every place in Hawai’i could be considered significant, this term encompasses ancestral landscapes where kūpuna (ancestors) repeatedly and purposefully interacted, including such places as burial sites, heiau (places for observation and ceremony), agricultural field systems, fishponds, trails, and shrines. Wahi kūpuna encompasses ancestral connections to landscape through intangible evidence such as genealogies, stories, chants, and songs. Wahi kūpuna hold special prominence for Kānaka ‘Ōiwi who understand these spaces to be imbued with mana (divine power) and meaning, representing an inseparable relationship between people and land. These spaces weave together the interconnectedness of community, ancestral knowledge, and devotion to place in ways that shape identity, and inform and inspire living values, traditions, and practices.

The Kali'uokapa'akai Collective works to activate and fulfill the responsibility to protect, steward, and safeguard the cultural landscape of wahi kupuna across Hawai’i—and the ancestral knowledge that is represented in this landscape. Funding will support the coordination of working groups for the Collective’s four focus areas, and will support the development of best management practices around wahi kupuna stewardship processes and areas of concern. Additionally, funding will support a multi-day “Think Tank” working conference to discuss a range of challenges, opportunities, and solutions for wahi kupuna stewardship. While natural and cultural resource management in Hawai’i has historically marginalized Native Hawaiians, these investments will significantly accelerate the Collective’s capacity to protect and steward Hawai’i’s landscapes in a way that honors the holistic nature and Indigenous intellect embedded in these landscapes.

### **The Lands Between Partnership, \$25,000 over one year**

Between Bears Ears, Canyons of the Ancients, and Hovenweep National Monuments in present-day Southeast Utah lies the cultural, ancestral, and traditional lands of the Hopi, Zuni, Rio Grande Pueblos, Ute, Diné, and Paiute peoples. Encompassing roughly 500,000 acres of public, state, and private lands, these “Lands Between” are an integral part of a larger, contiguous cultural landscape that connects Chaco Canyon, Mesa Verde, and Bears Ears. These homelands preserve a history of human habitation dating back to at least the Archaic period (6,000 to 2,000 BC), and contain more than a dozen immense ancestral Puebloan community centers—some of the largest archaeological sites in Utah—along with countless smaller sites. The landscape also is marked by celebrated dark night skies, expansive views, one-of-a-kind paleontology, and important biodiversity and critical wildlife corridors.

The Lands Between Partnership works to achieve long-term protections of the culturally, historically, and ecologically significant federal, state, and private lands that make up the Lands Between landscape. Catalyst Fund support will provide dedicated funding to empower active Tribal participation in the Partnership, and will support continued coordination of core partner meetings and an annual Partnership-wide meeting. Given the Tribes’ cultural connection to these ancestral homelands, partners have recognized the importance of ensuring this effort centers and reflects Indigenous leadership, with NGO partners fulfilling a supporting role. Indigenous peoples have been long been marginalized in local land management decisions here, and this Catalyst Fund investment provides critical resources to allow Tribal participation and leadership to grow in this Partnership in ways that accelerate efforts to protect this unique landscape and reaffirm the inherent rights of Tribes.

### **Little Sioux Watershed Conservation Partnership, \$20,000 over two years**

The 1.5-million-acre Little Sioux River Watershed in northwest Iowa and southwest Minnesota is a unique, glacially carved valley. The watershed contains some of the largest concentrations of prairie in Iowa, as well as such unique habitats as oak savanna, glacial kettle lakes, and rare calcareous fens, providing habitat for declining grassland birds, rare prairie obligate butterflies, and migratory and breeding waterfowl. The watershed also contains extensive archaeological sites ranging from 8,000-year-old bison kill sites to compact villages, including the ancient settlements of the Mill Creek Culture. These important features are embedded in an agricultural landscape important for corn, soy, and livestock production.

The Little Sioux Watershed Conservation Partnership works to identify and develop opportunities for the protection, enhancement, and enjoyment of the unique watershed for all who live, work, and play therein. Funding will support the creation of two Watershed Management Authorities within the landscape—entities authorized by Iowa lawmakers as mechanisms for cities, counties, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and other stakeholders to cooperatively engage in watershed planning and management across political boundaries. In leveraging these Authorities, the Partnership will build a foundation for sharing resources at scale and gaining access to a steadier flow of funding to advance watershed objectives. These outcomes will better position the Partnership to secure a future in which the watershed blends protected and private working lands that support sustainable agriculture while also promoting and protecting wildlife habitat, water quality, natural floodplain and grassland ecosystems, and the rich cultural heritage of the area.

### **Lower Gila River Collaborative, \$25,000 over two years**

The Gila River is a major tributary to the Colorado River, flowing generally eastward across the state of Arizona. Southeast of Phoenix, the Gila drops from the mountains of its headwaters and emerges into the valley; its lower reaches are surrounded by agricultural lands and expanding communities, and the river is essential for wildlife habitat, economic opportunities, critical health and safety benefits, and community amenities and character. Along a forty-mile stretch from Phoenix to the Gillespie Dam, the river flows through a mix of urban and rural lands, where population growth is projected to reach twice the national average over the next five years. In this urban desert landscape in particular, the river offers critical habitat and rare opportunities for fishing, boating, and other outdoor recreation.

The Lower Gila River Collaborative works in this forty-mile stretch to ensure the Gila River system remains healthy and supports functioning habitat, engaged and resilient communities, a vibrant local economy, and quality of life for present and future generations. Funding will sustain the continued coordination of the Collaborative, as well as the development of a strategic conservation action plan. Funding will also provide resources to strengthen Indigenous participation in the Collaborative. These investments are intended to better position the Collaborative to achieve conservation outcomes at an accelerated pace and in a manner that is more inclusive to all who live in the Lower Gila landscape.

### **Moloka'i Wetlands Partnership, \$25,000 over two years**

Moloka'i, the fifth-largest of Hawai'i's eight main islands, covers 260 square miles. While Hawai'i has lost 44% of its original coastal wetland acreage statewide, Moloka'i has avoided much of the coastal tourism and residential development that has driven this loss and has some of the best wetland restoration potential in Hawai'i, especially along the island's southern shore. Historically, Moloka'i was famed for its once-abundant lo'ipūnāwai (spring-fed, irrigated agricultural pondfields), but these too have largely been lost. lo'ipūnāwai historically served a variety of biocultural functions, including increasing water quantity and quality, providing essential habitat across the marine-to-terrestrial transition zone, and providing critical community food security.

The Moloka'i Wetlands Partnership works to restore the coastal wetland landscape on the island in a way that recognizes climate change and provides habitat for endangered waterbirds, incorporates local knowledge, and integrates traditional agriculture and fishpond restoration. Funding will support continued core coordination of the Partnership and the convening of regular Partnership meetings. Further, funding will allow the Partnership to develop a Partnership Strategic Action Plan to guide its future work, and develop and implement a shared communications campaign to engage local communities. These collaboration investments will accelerate the Partnership's ability to implement "climate safe" wetland and lo'ipūnāwai restoration on Moloka'i and realize all of the ecosystem services and food security benefits that this brings to the local communities.

### **Ohio River Basin Restoration Partnership, \$20,000 over one year**

The 204,000-square-mile Ohio River Basin is extraordinarily biodiverse and is home to 25 million people who depend on the river's waters for their drinking water, health, jobs, recreation, and quality of life. Unfortunately, the Ohio River faces serious threats, including mining waste, toxic pollution, farm and

city runoff, habitat destruction, insufficient water infrastructure, harmful algal blooms, invasive species, and climate change—problems that have made parts of the river and its tributaries unsafe to swim in, containing fish unsafe to eat, and—in some cases—water that is not safe to drink. These threats, which have led the EPA’s Toxic Release Inventory to list the Ohio River as the most polluted river in the United States, have also taken a toll on fish and wildlife: Some species are no longer found in the river and others are struggling to survive with populations so low that they are listed as threatened or endangered.

The Ohio River Basin Restoration Partnership works to establish and implement a roadmap for healing the Ohio River and the communities that depend on it. Funding support will allow for continued core coordination of the Partnership, and support the development of coordination hubs in Ohio and West Virginia, two strategically important portions of the landscape for prioritizing the inclusion of front-line groups in urban and rural areas that have been historically excluded from decision-making. These investments will allow the Partnership to develop a visionary restoration plan for restoring and protecting the Ohio River Basin that centers environmental justice—and build the public support and community engagement that will allow accelerated implementation of the plan.

#### **Taos Valley Watershed Coalition, \$25,000 over one year**

Taos Valley is located along the western slope of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, and is one of the most culturally rich and ecologically vulnerable areas in the country. The streams and rivers that emerge from the western slopes of the mountains are the primary sources of water for towns, villages, tribal communities, and traditional irrigators in the Valley. This landscape is marked by a history of conflict over land and water rights that goes back centuries. From inter-village squabbling over irrigation water rights, to multiple invasions by colonial powers, exploitation of land and people by corporate interests, and sometimes violent rebellions against federal authorities, Taoseños have a well-earned reputation as fierce defenders of their land-based culture and identity. This conflict is continuing into the modern era as the area experiences increasingly frequent catastrophic wildfires and devastating post-fire effects.

The Taos Valley Watershed Coalition works to protect the landscape’s forests and water by restoring the ecological function of the frequent-fire forest types that dominate the western slope of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Funding support will allow the Coalition to update its landscape restoration strategy to better reflect the needs and objectives of all residents within the landscape, especially those who have suffered under layers of colonialism and exploitation and have been excluded from the lands so critical to their land-based cultures. In a landscape marked by the culture and traditions of land-based Hispano and Indigenous residents, these strategic planning and engagement investments will enable the Coalition to accelerate restoration efforts in a more equitable fashion as a response to the impending crisis posed by uncharacteristic wildfire and its impacts of the region’s water.

#### **Tribal Alliance for Pollinators, \$25,000 over one year**

Oklahoma's 39 federally recognized Tribes control more than one million acres of land in Oklahoma, the majority of which have been stripped of native grassland ecosystems by decades of overuse of herbicide and pesticide, over-grazing, and the introduction of numerous non-native grasses. The area underwent grassland conversion after the Dust Bowl, during which the most of the native prairie remnants were

replaced with non-native fescue and Bermuda grasses. This loss of grassland habitat threatens the health of the native bee population as well as native butterfly populations. The grasslands of Oklahoma are a critical juncture along the migratory path of the monarch butterfly, playing an essential role in providing both the milkweed needed to produce the first generation of monarchs in the spring and the nectar to fuel the migration in both directions.

The Tribal Alliance for Pollinators works to restore grassland habitats in Oklahoma to benefit threatened monarch and pollinator populations and to serve as a foundation for Indigenous cultural, medicinal, and culinary traditions. Funding will support the hiring of a coordinator for the Alliance, and the delivery of training workshops and technical support on grasslands restoration on Tribal lands in Oklahoma. These investments are intended to accelerate the groundbreaking inter-tribal collaboration that the Alliance is building within this landscape and push forward the Alliance's work to restore healthy grasslands ecosystems for the benefit of pollinators, butterflies, and the cultural, medicinal, and culinary traditions of the Tribes.

### **Tulare Basin Watershed Partnership Network, \$25,000 over one year**

The Tulare Lake Hydrologic Region—or Tulare Basin—is over 16,500 square miles and is bounded on the east by the Sierra Nevada mountain range, the west by the California Coast range, the south by the Tehachapi Mountains, and the north by the San Joaquin River. It contains four distinct river watersheds—the Kern, the Tule, the Kaweah and the Kings—that converge on the floor of the agriculture-dominated San Joaquin Valley, where they merge into the historic Tulare Lakebed. The Basin includes the cities of Fresno and Bakersfield, multiple rural towns, Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, portions of two national forests and numerous mountain towns. Water-stressed and challenged by climate change, the Basin faces recurring drought, decreased snowpack and storage capacity, severe tree mortality, wildfire damage, extreme weather, groundwater overdraft, and groundwater-dependent ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss.

The Tulare Basin Watershed Partnership Network works to implement integrated, inclusive, and innovative solutions to advance ecosystem and watershed resilience and socio-economic sustainability within the Tulare Basin. Funding will support the continued coordination of the Network as well as the development of a Comprehensive Strategic Conservation and Funding Action Plan; funding too will enable the Network to deepen its outreach and engagement with additional communities and stakeholders within the landscape. Building upon the strong foundation of collaboration already developed, these investments will allow the Network to move forward with greater speed, scale, and depth to achieve equitable conservation successes in this unique landscape.

### **Western Apache Working Group, \$20,600 over one year**

The Ndee (Western Apache) Territory spans more than 17,000 square miles in present-day Arizona, and is delineated by the “Holy Mountains”: Dził Cho (the San Francisco Peaks) on the northwest, Dził Ligai Si'án and Ya'íldih (Mt. Baldy and Rose Peak) on the north and east, Dził Nchaa Si An and Nadolzhaak (Pinaleño and Santa Catalina ranges) on the south, and Tseghá Tsik'ed and Iya'ái Yanchj'é (Superstition and Mazatzal ranges) on the west. These and other Holy Mountains are the homes of sacred power (diyí'), and are “go-to places,” literally and figuratively, to the Ndee when they need help, inspiration,

and health. The mountains define not only the Ndee homeland geographically but also the Ndee peoples' cultural and spiritual lives; the Holy Mountains define how the Ndee see their roles in both biophysical and metaphysical "ecosystems." Yet since the 1860s the Ndee have been forcibly excluded from most their homelands, confined on reservations, and forced to witness the systematic commodification of their ancestral land. Today, the beautiful upper reaches of the Ndee Holy Mountains are under assault by climate change, recreation, and invasive species.

The Western Apache Working Group works to sustain and steward Ndee religion, culture, and lands into the future. Funding support will provide continued coordination support for the Working Group as it strives to secure additional protections for the Holy Mountains, including the nomination of the Holy Mountains for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. These Catalyst Fund investments are intended to accelerate the Working Group's efforts to proactively steward a healthy Holy Mountains landscape using blends of Ndee and Western science and stewardship—and in doing so make powerful assertions of inherent Tribal sovereignties in these landforms that have always (and will always) determined Ndee movements, economies, cultures, and spiritualities.

### **Wind River Conservation Office Working Group, \$25,000 over one year**

The Wind River Indian Reservation contains Wyoming's highest peak, Gannett Peak (13,808ft), in the Wind River Range to the west, and the lowest point (4,282ft) to the east. This is a landscape dominated by sagebrush and grasslands, with more than half the land area comprised of mixed grass prairie, Wyoming big sage, and desert shrub habitats. The Wind River Basin is part of the largest ungulate migration path in the United States, and is critical for populations of elk, deer, antelope, and bison. The Reservation, however, experiences frequent and severe drought events. Such events, combined with livestock overgrazing, has put the reservation's forests and grasslands at risk of conversion to non-native species. The invasive plants that would take over grassland and desert shrub would not support the native wildlife species, and the loss of the ungulates would have detrimental impacts on bear, mountain lion, bobcat, wolverine, and wolf populations.

The Wind River Conservation Office Working Group works to support integrated, proactive natural resource management and conservation planning on the Wind River Indian Reservation. Funding will provide support to develop and launch a newly created central Wind River Conservation Office, and help fund an initial staff position for this Office. This investment in an Office with Intertribal Resolution rights to advise the Tribes is intended to provide an accelerated means to collaboratively promote conservation, preserve natural resources and traditional ways, and create long-term continuity in conservation and agricultural resource management planning and progress in this important landscape.