



Catalyst Fund 2024 Grant Awards

August 2024

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

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

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Algonquin to Adirondacks Collaborative, \$25,000 over two years

The eight-million-acre landscape that spans the United States/Canada border between Algonquin Park (Ontario) and Adirondack Park (New York) is one of the last large-scale, intact forest and wetland linkages in eastern North America, connecting the temperate forests of the Northern Appalachians and the boreal forests of the Canadian Shield. The underlying geology connecting this landscape influences the diverse array of plants, animals, and people who live here. Indeed, this unique biodiverse region lies at the intersection of two continental migration pathways. As development infringes on wildlife habitat and climate change pushes species ranges northward, this area provides one of the best opportunities for north-south wildlife movement in eastern North America.

For more than two decades, partners have been convening to conserve and enhance this critical region, working towards an ecologically-connected landscape that sustains a full range of wildlife and enhances people's quality of life. This collaboration has coalesced as the Algonquin to Adirondack Collaborative; the original focus of the Collaborative was on the Canadian portion of this landscape, but in recent years a renewed focus has emerged across the border—and a recently completed action planning workshop has identified areas of need. Funding from the Catalyst Fund will enable the Collaborative to hire a U.S. coordinator, and to convene two in-person partner gatherings to refine shared vision, goals, and strategies. Funds will also support travel to expand partner engagement and relationship-building. In a time of accelerating change, these investments will strengthen the foundation that allows

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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partners to work throughout a binational landscape that serves as a vital link in wildlife habitat in eastern North America.

Alliance for the Mystic River Watershed, \$25,000 over one year

The Mystic River Watershed in southeastern Connecticut is a unique overlapping ecosystem of forests, wetlands, and riparian and tidal waters, and is a biologically and culturally significant landscape. This is the ancestral homelands of the Eastern Pequot and Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nations, and contains the oldest continuously occupied Tribal Reservations—created even before the formation of the United States. Spanning from the Reservations and Tribal lands near the heights of Lantern Hill in North Stonington to the Long Island Sound, the Mystic River watershed that once connected and defined the Tribes biologically, culturally, and historically as coastal and maritime people now separates and divides people—from one another and from the landscape and water. The landscape is heavily impacted, with land use conversion and development impairing waterways and drinking water, closing oyster beds, and leaving communities prone to flooding.

Since forming in 2023, the Alliance for the Mystic River Watershed has been bringing together organizations, towns, and Tribal Nations (Mashantucket and Eastern Pequot) in a collective effort to care for, repair, and strengthen life in this landscape. Focusing on ecological health and climate resilience of all communities—human and beyond—the Alliance strives to build trusting relationships that unify Tribal and non-Tribal communities. Drawing upon those relationships, the Alliance is moving into the development of a collaborative and living Watershed Resilience Action Plan to guide its conservation and stewardship decision-making. Catalyst Fund support will enable the Alliance to create a dedicated staff position to coordinate the development of the Action Plan. These collaborative capacity investments will boost the Alliance as it continues forward in seeking to shift the trajectory of the Mystic River watershed—from one of division and fragmentation and uncared-for borderlands, to one of overlapping and regenerative caring communities that support improved land stewardship, water quality, and reconnected habitats.

Bristol Bay Guardians, \$25,000 over two years

The Bristol Bay region in Southwest Alaska is characterized by large, intact watersheds and diverse ecosystems, including the world's richest salmon habitat, vast wetlands, and unique tundra landscapes. Inextricably linked to its ecological significance is the landscape's cultural significance: this region supports Indigenous communities whose lifestyles and economies are deeply intertwined with the land and water. Accelerating environmental changes and development pressures threaten this landscape though, making its conservation a priority for ecological integrity and community resilience.

In this context, the Bristol Bay Guardians initiative aims to empower regional Tribes in land relationship planning and environmental monitoring and stewardship. Striving to emulate thriving Indigenous Guardians networks in Canada, Igiugig Village—a federally recognized Tribe—is convening partners to advance Indigenous-led stewardship as a means of enhancing regional resilience and well-being through a Guardians network. Catalyst Fund support will enable the initiative to participate in the comprehensive update of the Southwest Alaska Salmon Habitat Partnership conservation plan, ensuring that the goals of the Guardians initiative are incorporated and elevating Indigenous participation and expertise into fish habitat monitoring and protection. Support will also enable the initiative to develop robust monitoring frameworks to integrate Indigenous values and knowledges in efforts to assess the effectiveness of habitat conservation efforts. Finally, funding will allow the initiative to bolster

communications and outreach efforts, including the development of a regular newsletter, the hosting of community forums, and the development of a digital platform for sharing resources. These investments are intended to bolster partners as they collectively work to build a robust foundation for this Guardians initiative—with the recognition that a holistic weaving together of Indigenous knowledge and western science offers a pathway towards land relationship strategies that are both ecologically sustainable and culturally respectful.

Green Heart of the Everglades, \$25,000 over one year

The Florida Everglades is a globally significant landscape, serving as a biodiversity hotspot, crucial carbon sink, and irreplaceable water resource. Within the broader Everglades, the 729,000-acre Big Cypress National Preserve provides habitat to over 160 threatened or endangered species, holds approximately 60 million tons of stored soil carbon, and provides clean drinking water and flood protection to over nine million south Florida residents. This landscape is also a deeply significant cultural landscape: The Miccosukee and Seminole Tribes of Florida have inhabited this region since before governmental protected areas were designated, finding refuge in the impenetrable swamps to survive the persecution and assaults of colonization. Today, both Tribes maintain traditional camps in and around Big Cypress National Preserve, and are dedicated to safeguarding the cultural significance and ecological uniqueness of the Everglades.

In this context, the Miccosukee Tribe is working to convene the Green Heart of the Everglades initiative to safeguard Big Cypress National Preserve and the broader Everglades—while elevating the role of Indigenous communities in the stewardship of their ancestral lands. A diverse range of partners are working together to support the Miccosukee and Seminole Tribes in securing co-management agreements for Big Cypress National Preserve. Support from the Catalyst Fund will enable continued coordination support and travel costs for partners to convene and navigate the process of developing and securing the co-management framework. Funding will also support the continued implementation of a communications and outreach strategy. In a complex landscape with a contentious land management history, these investments will bolster ongoing work by the Tribes to reclaim stewardship of their sacred ancestral lands and to inform conservation and stewardship throughout the broader Everglades.

Kodiak Archipelago Regional Leadership Forum, \$25,000 over one year

The Kodiak Archipelago, located south of Anchorage in the Gulf of Alaska, includes 16 major islands and over 500 miles of coastline. A distinct geographic and cultural region where land and sea intersect, the Archipelago is the homeland of the Koniag Sugpiaq or Alutiiq people. In this dynamic landscape, communities—many only accessible by air or water—are dependent on a healthy marine and land environment, and for centuries have enjoyed a rich subsistence lifestyle. In more recent times, this subsistence lifestyle has transitioned to family-based commercial fishing, but federal and state privatization programs have eroded community access to fisheries, with detrimental impacts for the ecology, community livelihoods, and traditional Indigenous knowledge of the region.

Established in 2005, the Kodiak Archipelago Regional Leadership Forum aims to develop the collective voice of Kodiak's rural and Alaska Native leadership. The Forum brings together community leaders from throughout the archipelago to work towards the long-term well-being of the region's communities. The Forum historically has focused on community development, but is now recognizing that Indigenous stewardship and conservation must lead community development efforts. Catalyst Fund support will

allow the Forum to convene for two in-person dialogues in the coming year, to focus on development of a regionally agreed-to set of conservation and stewardship goals and implementation strategies and project prioritizations. At a pivotal moment where the Forum is shifting its trajectory, these investments will bolster a deep democracy process and chart a forward course that centers Indigenous conservation and stewardship as necessary to communities' long-term well-being.

La Red de las Islas del Cielo, \$25,000 over two years

The Madrean Sky Island landscape spans the international border from southeastern Arizona to northwestern Sonora, Mexico, and is dramatically defined by outstanding biodiversity and a complex and rich human history. Cultures, species, climates, and land use convene here, with ecosystems from the Rocky Mountains and Sierra Madre meeting with the Subtropics and the Sonoran and Chihuahuan Deserts. With 55 forested mountain "sky islands" surrounded by desert "seas," this landscape is at the heart of a continental migratory corridor for wildlife, and more than two million residents depend on this beautiful landscape for drinking water, clean air, and quality of life. Accelerating climate change threatens this already isolated landscape, and habitat fragmentation from mining, transportation infrastructure, agriculture, human development, and broader infrastructure is accelerating as well in this complex landscape.

Since 2022, La Red de las Islas del Cielo has sought to span the cultural and political borders that characterize this landscape, in the interest of cultivating a more resilient and thriving Sky Island landscape and binational community. Working on both sides of the border, Catalyst Fund support will enable the partnership to develop a Plan Maestro (or strategic framework) to guide the partnership's governance, strategies, and operations moving forward. Additionally, support will enable the convening of two in-person partnership meetings per year over the next two years, and the development of a communications strategy and products. In a highly complex landscape, these investments will enable La Red de las Islas del Cielo to solidify its foundation as it seeks to build a unified, holistic pathway for working together to advance conservation across cultural and political boundaries.

Lowcountry Native American Heritage Corridor Coalition, \$25,000 over two years

The South Carolina Lowcountry is characterized by its low-lying flat terrain and proximity to the Atlantic Ocean, encompassing millions of acres of salt marsh, estuaries, forested wetlands, longleaf pine forest, and meandering rivers that support a dynamic and biodiverse coastal ecosystem. The Lowcountry is significant in particular for its wetlands, including tidal marshes and freshwater swamps that provide critical habitat as well as serving as buffers against the storm surge and flooding that is a growing risk to communities in the region due to climate change. This is also a deeply significant cultural landscape to the Tribes that have inhabited it since time immemorial. The Lowcountry has carried cultural and economic importance to these Tribes, and continues to serve as a place to connect modern Indigenous communities with ancestors through place-centered stories and practices handed down over generations. This dynamic and culturally and ecologically rich landscape though faces a number of environmental threats, including sea level rise, habitat loss and fragmentation due to rapid development, and pollution and water quality degradation resulting from agricultural runoff, industrial processes, and urbanization.

In this context, the Waccamaw Indian People are working to convene eight additional state-recognized Tribes and one federally recognized Tribe into the Lowcountry Native American Heritage Corridor Coalition. The Coalition seeks to envision regional collaboration around common goals in conservation

and stewardship that integrates Traditional Ecological Knowledge. Catalyst Fund support will provide dedicated coordination and leadership capacity for the Coalition, and will enable the Coalition to develop a comprehensive strategic plan that identifies and prioritizes common conservation and stewardship goals—to be developed in conjunction with a two-day workshop for Tribal representatives and partners. Support will also enable training to expand grant-writing and administrative support capacity. As it works to empower Tribal leadership in conservation and stewardship efforts in the Lowcountry, these investments bolster the Coalition’s foundation as it builds a unified voice for land stewardship that honors the cultural values and priorities of Tribes in this ecologically and culturally significant landscape.

Metrowest Conservation Alliance, \$25,000 over one year

The watersheds of the Sudbury, Assabet, and Concord rivers cover a 400,000-acre region between Boston and Worcester, Massachusetts, and are home to 740,000 people across 36 cities and towns. The region’s urban and suburban communities are intertwined with rural areas that feature picturesque farms, scenic rivers, and undeveloped woodlands. The natural areas include rare ecosystems, such as pine barrens, and support a variety of habitats that foster threatened species, including the eastern box turtle and blue-spotted salamander. Its proximity to Boston places this landscape squarely on the “sprawl frontier” and it faces significant development pressures—a challenge that is increasingly compounded by climate change and inequitable access to nature.

Since 2009, the more than 25 partners of the Metrowest Conservation Alliance—including municipal governments, area land trusts, and conservation groups—have been coming together to advance land conservation and stewardship across this landscape. Last year, the Alliance finalized a rigorous conservation and stewardship priority mapping analysis to guide collaborative efforts moving forward. Support from the Catalyst Fund will secure dedicated coordination support for the Alliance. Additionally, funding will support the development of the Alliance’s first-ever strategic plan, the development of a fundraising case statement, and the strengthening of its web presence to be a community-grounded regional information hub for conservation and stewardship. As is often the case, this region’s natural amenities and proximity to urban areas is spurring growing development pressures; the strengthened collaborative capacity that emerges from these investments will allow the Alliance to capitalize on renewed energy and accelerate efforts to advance conservation and stewardship at this critical juncture.

Piscataway Land Collaborative, \$25,000 over one year

The landscape around the Potomac, Patuxent, and Patapsco rivers—tributaries to the Chesapeake Bay—is often considered the “lungs of Maryland,” as it represents one of the state’s last largely intact ecologically important and biodiverse areas. This landscape of flowing waters, abundant marshes, rich soils, and sheltering forests is also the ancestral homeland of the Piscataway people, and has been indispensable since time immemorial in sustaining Piscataway culture. In the face of increasing development pressures though, the ecological integrity of the region is threatened, which in turn is threatening the sources of Piscataway life, community, and culture.

The Piscataway Land Collaborative works to conserve and restore this critical ecologically and culturally significant landscape through the meaningful application of Indigenous stewardship methods. Catalyst Fund support will enable the Collaborative to leverage its strong connections between Tribal leaders, community organizations, and federal and state agencies to formalize relationships, solidify the creation of long-lasting consultation structures, and develop Indigenous values-based stewardship protocols and

methodologies to advance conservation actions that holistically restore the landscape. This grant award will also support intergenerational sharing of Traditional Ecological Knowledge to empower the next generation of Piscataway land stewards. With growing societal acknowledgment and appreciation for Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Tribal leadership in landscape conservation and stewardship, these investments bolster the Collaborative at this key moment as it advances approaches that respects and follows the leadership of Indigenous knowledge keepers and facilitates the revitalization of landscapes and people for generations to come.

Pueblo Caja del Rio Coalition, \$25,000 over one year

The Caja del Rio is an ancient volcanic plateau that spans more than 100,000 acres in north-central New Mexico, west of Santa Fe. Surrounded by cliffs and escarpments, it is rich in diverse plant and animal species, serving as a habitat for many sensitive and declining grassland bird species. This landscape has been inhabited and stewarded by Pueblos from time immemorial, and is host to thousands of traditional cultural properties, including ceremonial structures, petroglyphs, sacred sites, and cultural resources not archaeological in nature, including plants, springs, wildlife, and other natural features. Managed under multiple federal and state jurisdictions, the Caja del Rio faces ongoing challenges such as cultural site vandalism, misuse of off-highway vehicles, refuse dumping, poaching, unregulated shooting, and threat of wildfire—all of which pose significant and irreversible impacts on Pueblo culture and natural resources.

In response, Tesuque Pueblo is convening a coalition to advance holistic Pueblo-led preservation of the Caja del Rio. The Pueblo Caja del Rio Coalition brings together a diversity of leadership, expertise, and perspectives on the political, legal, legislative, land management, resource conservation, energy development, climate, and socio-cultural considerations of the landscape. Support from the Catalyst Fund will secure dedicated coordination capacity for the Coalition, with the intent to formalize its governance and structure, and to develop a strategic plan. In an increasingly vulnerable landscape, this will mark a critical juncture for the Coalition as it empowers Pueblos to work collaboratively to develop an actionable plan that ensures cultural integrity and ecological health of the landscape for future generations.

Ribbons of Life, \$25,000 over one year

From its headwaters in the San Juan mountains of southern Colorado to Cochiti Pueblo in New Mexico, the Upper Rio Grande watershed and its associated riparian areas are vital to life in the San Luis Valley. Encompassing approximately 200 miles of the Rio Grande, the Upper Rio Grande watershed sustains a diverse, multi-jurisdictional land base including Pueblo, Tribal, private, and public lands. It has long been a connector of ecosystems, culture, and tradition, and is home to people with a variety of perspectives, values, and languages—people who share connections to the land, water, wildlife, and plant communities that make the valley so unique. In an arid landscape, the riparian corridors are incredibly important ecologically, and the Upper Rio Grande represents one of the best-connected wildlife migration landscapes in the country. However, warming and drying trends in the landscape associated with climate change—compounded by sedimentation from higher intensity forest fires and floods, habitat conversion, and the spread of invasive species—makes this landscape one of the most threatened ecosystems in the Southwest.

In this context, a network of Tribes and Pueblos; non-profits; private landowners; and state, local, and federal agencies began coming together in 2020. Working together as the Ribbons of Life initiative,

these partners are striving to restore, reconnect, enhance, and conserve riparian corridors while protecting and respecting the key cultural and traditional values of the people of the Upper Rio Grande watershed. Catalyst Fund support will secure a dedicated staff position to coordinate the initiative, with the intent to develop a formalized structure, including steering committee, working groups, and meeting schedule. Efforts will also focus on expanding engagement to new strategic partners in the landscape, and ensuring Tribal and Pueblo voices guide the process. With a recently completed action plan providing forward direction, these collaborative capacity investments will position the initiative to function as a truly diverse and inclusive coalition of partners to advance watershed conservation and restoration efforts at scale over the long term.

Russian River Confluence, \$25,000 over one year

The Russian River watershed is nearly one million acres in size, with the mainstem river flowing 115 miles through Northern California to enter the Pacific Ocean north of San Francisco at the town of Jenner. A mix of redwood and fir/pine forests, oak woodlands, and alluvial valleys, the watershed is a matrix of rural and urban areas, with agriculture—vineyards, wineries, dairies, and field crops—a dominant influence. The river contains critical habitat for endangered populations of federally threatened California Coast Chinook salmon and Central California Coast steelhead, in addition to the state and federally endangered Coho salmon. This landscape though is increasingly impacted by climate change, and has experienced catastrophic fire in recent years; indeed, the watershed is considered impaired by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency due to sediment, altered temperature regimes, pathogens, mercury, and nutrient loading.

The Russian River Confluence is a collaboration of partners working to restore the health and resiliency of this landscape and the communities that depend on it. Initially launched in 2017, the collaborative brings together stakeholders—state regulatory staff, local county and municipal government representatives, special district staff and board members, Tribal members, businesses, non-profits, and other community-based organizations—to build collective capacity to drive community action towards a healthy, resilient, and regenerative Russian River watershed. With support from the Catalyst Fund, the Confluence will secure dedicated coordination staffing for the first time. Building on this dedicated coordination support, the Confluence will develop a governance structure and expand stakeholder engagement, including prioritized recruitment of additional Tribal partners. These collaborative capacity investments offer the opportunity for the Confluence to solidify a foundation for the long-term work of cultivating a healthy, vibrant, and accessible Russian River watershed that serves as the economic, environmental, recreational, and spiritual heart of the region.

Southern Appalachian Landscape Conservation Coalition, \$25,000 for one year

In Southern Appalachia, the Appalachian Trail, Blue Ridge Parkway, and Great Smoky Mountains—three of the most iconic and visited national parks in the U.S.—are the backbone of a broader landscape spanning nearly six million acres across eastern Tennessee and western North Carolina. This landscape contains biodiversity on par with the Amazon Rainforest and Kenyan grasslands, and includes the highest freshwater biodiversity in North America. The region is also home to the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, who have stewarded these lands for time immemorial. Climate change is directly affecting Southern Appalachia's natural resilience through shifts in temperature, rainfall, and extreme weather events. Rapid and expanding development is exacerbating the challenge, with ongoing

construction on undeveloped lands between protected spaces accelerating negative impacts by decreasing biological connectivity.

Since 2022, the Southern Appalachian Landscape Conservation Coalition has brought together nonprofits, Tribes, land trusts, and other key community members to develop a shared vision for the future of this important landscape. Catalyst Fund support will enable the Coalition to develop a strategic plan to guide its future direction. Additionally, funding will support the continued coordination of the Coalition, with a focus on convening a Leadership Council, convening multiple partnership-wide meetings, integrating JEDI values into the structure and dynamics of the Coalition, and developing a communications and outreach plan. In one of North America's most biologically diverse landscapes, these investments will bolster the Coalition's ability to tell the shared, multidimensional story of the landscape, and to create the collective power necessary to respond to threats the region faces from development, climate change, and biodiversity loss.

Wabanaki Commission on Land Stewardship, \$25,000 over one year

Wabanakik, or Dawnland, is the ancestral and continuing home of Wabanaki people in what is now the State of Maine. This landscape is one of the earliest places of colonization on Turtle Island/North America. Colonization disrupted and continues to disrupt Wabanaki lifeways and land care; and indeed, in a landscape that is experiencing rapid environmental and climate change, the entwined histories of colonization and conservation have resulted in the Wabanaki Nations holding just 1.2% of their traditional land, while non-Native conservation groups control 25% of the land.

In this context, the Wabanaki Commission of Land and Stewardship works to improve the health and well-being of the Wabanaki people through a sustained effort to expand access, management, and ownership of lands. Working in partnership with the non-Native conservation community, the Commission orients towards two major activities: Land return and access/rematriation of lands to Wabanaki peoples. Following the launch of the Wolankeyutomone kisi apaciyewik ("Let's take good care of what has returned") Fund in the last year, Catalyst Fund support will allow the Commission to convene a community dialogue and planning process to articulate a set of principles and practices of land return so that it will best meet Wabanaki community needs. With momentum building and support for land return activities from within the non-Native conservation community, this is a pivotal moment to boost the Commission as it continues to elevate Indigenous leadership, knowledge, and decision-making in conversations around land relationship, climate resilience, and biodiversity conservation.

Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts, \$25,000 over one year

The forests and watersheds of the northern Berkshire Mountains and foothills of western Massachusetts are a unique, important natural landscape. This is a largely intact and relatively unfragmented landscape, and is often described as the most rural and heavily forested corner of the Commonwealth. Indeed, 83% of the landscape is forested, and multiple forest types converge here, giving the region a remarkably high biodiversity for an area its size. The forests are natural assets in this geography: The region's forests are crucial to maintaining ecological services, the rural character, and economic stability.

The Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts is a collaboration between rural municipalities, land trusts, planning agencies, and others working across this 21-town landscape. The Partnership is working to attain a Special Federal Designation to recognize the region as a crucially important forested region, and to create an innovative new public-private model for forest conservation and natural

resource-based economic development. This effort first came together in 2014, was formally created as a public body in 2018 by authorizing state legislation, and is now advancing private lands forest conservation, natural climate solutions, and sustainable forest and natural resource economies. Support from the Catalyst Fund will enable the Partnership to develop a three-year fundraising and organizational infrastructure plan that will guide the Partnership as it moves toward operating as an independent entity. As this Partnership continues to work to pioneer an innovative new model for advancing resource-based economic development and municipal needs in tandem with private land conservation, the collaborative capacity investments are intended to set the Partnership on a trajectory towards long-term sustainability.