



## The Future of Landscape Conservation – A Virtual Policy Forum – July 31, 2020

In July 2020, the Network for Landscape Conservation (NLC) hosted a Virtual Policy Forum featuring a distinguished speaker panel of conservation leaders and policy makers. This forum was the first in a policy series hosted by the Network. Stay tuned for additional forums on cultivating landowner engagement and the power of diversity in conservation.



Nearly 1,000 landscape conservation enthusiasts participated in the virtual forum with some as far away as Australia and Zimbabwe. With successful outreach and funding breakthroughs, Ernest Cook, then Co-Chair for Network, opened the session and acknowledged that, “This is clearly an important and timely issue that deeply touches us all.” Cook recognized NLC’s 3,000 members, 300 organizational partners, and the leadership team of 30 nonprofits, agencies, tribes, academic institutions, private and resource-based companies. Julie Regan, the Co-Chair of NLC and Chief of External Affairs/Deputy Director at the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, spoke of NLC as “a leading voice and national convener in collaborative conservation.” Participants were invited to revisit [Pathways Forward](#) which was generated during NLC’s last convening in W. Virginia.

### Speaker Panel



**Sacha Spector PhD**, Program Director for the Environment, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation

**Tony Wasley**, Director of the Nevada Department of Wildlife and Chair of the Executive Committee of the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies

**Dr. Mamie Parker**, former Assistant Secretary for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

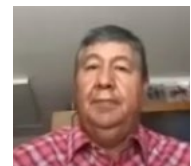
**Lynn Scarlett**, Chief External Affairs Officer at The Nature Conservancy and former Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior

**Collin O'Mara**, President and CEO of the National Wildlife Federation

**Sally Jewell**, former U.S. Secretary of the Interior

**Terry Tatsey**, Member of the Amskapi Pikuni, Blackfeet Nation  
*Special thanks to Terry for his invocation.*

We ask the creator for a special day for guidance and direction as we move forward. This is a great opportunity and great people that we will be sharing our thoughts and discussions with you. Much appreciated to be asked to be a part of this.” – Terry Tatsey



## A time of great potential

This is a time of enormous political opportunity with recent passage of federal and state legislation with others in the pipeline ensuring funding which gives us all a chance to think ahead and make longer plans.



“We’re convening today at a moment of national turmoil. This is a moment of incredible potential for landscape conservation and the kind of collaborative place-based work it represents and how critical nature and equitable access to the outdoors is for health, for healing, and for societal well-being.” – Sacha Spector



“I would argue there is no smarter investment to build our economy than investments in conservation. We know that every million dollars we spend is going to create about 33 jobs – one of the highest job ratios you can make. I see huge opportunities ahead. This is an opportunity for landscape conservation to lead the COVID recovery.” – Collin O’Mara



“Now is the time. An unprecedented number of people are turning to nature right now whether they know why or not. There’s never been a better connection to nature with an opportunity to foster this stewardship mentality and forever instill collaborative landscape conservation core values.” – Tony Wasley

## Recognize place and diverse voices in every setting

“Every organization on this call struggles with having diversity in the people you work with. We have got to change that. We have so much to learn if we would just listen. It’s not because people don’t care or aren’t interested; it’s because they haven’t been asked into our conversations. It’s not just having a person at the table that is expected to represent an entire group of people. We must get more critical mass, listen, show respect, and genuinely learn.” – Sally Jewell



## Landscape connectivity is key



Connectivity and corridors are so important in intact ecosystems. We have people who live and operate the majority of their lives within a few city blocks. This constrains their concept of landscape, connectivity, corridor, and home range. It’s hard to comprehend the “magnitude of movements in animals; we’re talking about epic migrations of birds, caribou, and the Monarch butterfly. Using technology can help people shift their views of what constitutes a landscape.” – Tony Wasley

## Revitalize urban landscapes too

With the funding we have, we can revitalize inner city, urban communities, and neighborhoods everywhere that have always been at the bottom of the list of what’s left over. Tony noted that an unprecedented number of people are turning to nature right now whether they even know why. Now is the time to make a better connection to nature with an opportunity to foster this stewardship mentality forever.



“Equity is about all landscapes – urban and rural landscapes too. I hope this is an opportunity to look with a different lens. I was called to do this work, but it’s not easy. It’s about speaking up and stepping out and relearning and unlearning traditional ways we have done business. It means you’ve got to let people know you are there. It’s about people like me.” – Mamie Parker

Collin pointed out that conservation organizations have to be careful – that it’s not just about ecologically rich places. “We have to be doing work everywhere.” What he likes about the 30x30 land and water conservation concept is it’s scalable – to 30% of your county or 30% of your zip code. An international movement is gaining momentum to prevent future loss of land, plants, and wildlife calling for conservation of 30% of the world’s land and oceans by 2030.

## Landscape Conservation and Climate Change



“We can’t solve our way out of the climate problem without scale. Whether it’s adaptation or mitigation, big is better and essential. Work by the Conservancy in partnership with others shows about a third of the emissions reductions needed by 2030 to be on a pathway to meet the Paris goals can be done through nature. High on that list is reforestation, improved forest management, avoided deforestation here and around the world.” – Lynn Scarlett

Sacha added, “Managing, protecting, and restoring our land is a huge part of the solution for climate. In the US, agriculture accounts for 9% of our emissions and at the same time our forests draw down 15% of our emissions at the national scale. We know that natural climate solutions are a big part of how we go forward.”

## People Power

Sally hopes that with additional funding and challenges to our economy, we have an opportunity to bring back the Civilian Conservation Corps and to make sure it is inclusive of the people that represent this country. Tony echoed that the lessons of history on public lands helps us learn how we might do better going forward.

Mamie asked that we, “not forget conservation police officers and make sure we are working together and using some of the same techniques and training that we are advocating in our cities [with police]. We need coalition building and diversifying jobs and a just transition with climate equity and environmental justice.



“Make sure there is true government to government consultation that honors treaties and reserved rights. When working with tribes, don’t come to them sharing a one-side story and hope the tribe will rubberstamp it. Tribes have a voice, a science background, a traditional perspective, and a responsibility to help things be durable – durability as we define it as tribes.” – Terry Tatsey

Mamie advocated to carve off some funding to grow new movements especially those that attract people of color and women to conservation. She told the story of 15,000 black women who are excited about building gardens, promoting pollinators, and working toward environmental justice. Recently, “1,000 black women participated in an online webinar to talk about birds and pollinators!”

## Funding and political support



“Funding that lasts is key to help groups know they have durability from one moment to the next. All the solutions aren’t in Washington. The problems are bigger than municipalities. We need something like resilience districts. We have these with roads. We can promote a network of networks where not everyone does everything, and we ensure small organizations are there too.”

Collin highlighted that the Land and Water Conservation Fund piece of the Great Outdoors Act is, by far, the most successful land conservation program in our history. He went on to add, “We can’t underestimate the ability to plan, the ability to focus on true ecosystems of greatest need, the ability to invest in some places that haven’t had the same level of attention... or as much investment.” Conservation without conflict and investment-led conservation is a way to bring the parties together.

## Next Steps and Lessons Learned...

**Durable Governance:** A common refrain from all of the speakers emphasized the value in creating durable governance models for the landscape conservation movement, continuing to build legislative support for funding based on a restoration economy, and building meaningful coalitions within our community to weather changes in administration and priorities.

**Invite New Perspectives:** Another common theme emphasized the need to invite new perspectives from more people of color and walks of life to the table with support for startup initiatives that bring more diversity to the field. This includes honoring traditional ways of knowing and supporting and harnessing interest.



**Progress Breeds More Progress:** A shared excitement permeated the forum in light of recent funding successes. Progress in securing consistent long-term funding and legislation and others in the pipeline cannot be underestimated to transform our work. Additionally, the potential of new technologies and applications such as ESRI is informing better decisions and transforming our ability to monitor change, assess current conditions, see landscape-level patterns, and make decisions based on that science and economics.

**Conservation without conflict** is gaining respect and support. A mindset of inclusivity and engaging partners at the table from the beginning is key. Collin captured it well when he said, “One of the only ways to get the work done at scale is to be better at the front end so you don’t have the slowdown in the backend.”

**Collaborative Approaches:** Sally Jewell spoke about the benefits of funding communities that are working collaboratively. After Superstorm Sandy, money was put to work to make landscapes more resilient in the future. They learned how to use the right kinds of policies and incentives to encourage the right kind of long-term

behaviors that build resilience. An educational component also brought a community knowledge base to increase their fundamental understanding of why ecosystems and landscapes are important.

**Protecting Species and Land and Grassroot Efforts:** In terms of targeted funding, protecting species at risk was an important topic. Terry shared success in the restoration of buffalo herds that transcended borders in their work with Canada and applied traditional knowledge. A co-benefit of this project was the reestablished relationships within the Blackfoot Confederacy. This success inspired momentum and acceptance not just by sister tribes but by federal agencies who also wanted to see the bison back. Terry concluded by saying, “This was done at the grassroots level and is now rippling out to other tribes. This was an opportunity to heal the land and people and respect nature, culture, and place.”



**Conservation is a tool for a restoration economy.** There is growing consensus that conservation and restoration are key drivers in regenerating our economy and tackling climate change. This bi-partisan support did not happen overnight and is the result of longstanding advocacy efforts. Now we are really seeing a path forward on policy and long-term funding mechanisms to support landscape conservation at the scale that is required.

## Community response to the forum

Of the 1,000 people who attended the forum, we thank those many people who took the time to fill out our survey. Overwhelmingly, their responses reflected a high degree of engagement and appreciation for the optimistic tone as well as the caliber of the speakers. Input like this helps NLC and our partners to plan high-quality, relevant, and timely events in the future and to be responsive to suggestions for improvement. As with the respondents, NLC looks forward to future forums on a number of topics they recommended.

## Landscape Legislation\*

- [Great American Outdoors Act](#)
- [Land and Water Conservation Fund](#)
- [1 Trillion Trees Executive Order](#)
- [REPLANT Act](#)
- [Recovering America's Wildlife Act](#)
- [National Wildlife Corridors Conservation Act](#)

## Organizations Working at the Landscape Scale\*

- [Doris Duke Charitable Foundation](#)
- [Nevada Department of Wildlife](#)
- [Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies](#)
- [National Wildlife Federation](#)
- [Tahoe Regional Planning Agency](#)
- [National Caucus of Environmental Legislators](#)
- [US Fish and Wildlife Service](#)
- [The Nature Conservancy](#)
- [US Department of the Interior](#)
- [Blackfeet Nation](#)

\*mentioned in the forum

## Thank you to all our supporters!

A recording of the forum can be found [here](#).

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