



Catalyst Fund 2023 Grant Awards

September 2023

The Network for Landscape Conservation is pleased to announce 15 new Catalyst Fund grant awards for Partnerships working to implement community-grounded, landscape-scale conservation and stewardship visions. 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 well-being of the landscapes they call home. In the face of large-scale challenges like biodiversity loss, climate change, and environmental injustice, efforts at the landscape scale are imperative—and investing in the collaborative capacity of Partnerships is essential for success. 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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Bears Ears Partnership, \$25,000 over two year

A desert landscape full of spectacular rivers, canyons, and mountains—and home to some of the most culturally and archaeologically rich lands in the United States—the region around Bears Ears National Monument in Southeast Utah is a sacred cultural landscape. The traditional lands of the Hopi, Diné/Navajo, Zuni, Ute, and other Tribes and Pueblos, the landscape contains more than 100,000 ancestral sacred sites and draws hundreds of thousands of visitors each year. Bears Ears is a landscape that provides an invaluable window into America’s cultural past, present, and future.

The Bears Ears Partnership works to bring together Tribes, Pueblos, and local communities around the shared goal of protecting the region’s natural and cultural resources. With the Tribes and federal partners committing to co-management of the National Monument, the Catalyst Fund grant will support the coordinating of a multi-agency, Tribal, and NGO partner stakeholder group to identify needs and opportunities, and advance implementation of on-the-ground conservation while the formal collaborative management plan is in development. Specifically, funding will support the convening of strategic planning sessions to identify recommendations for resource management and ecosystem resilience in the greater Bears Ears landscape. In a landscape that is bringing co-management into the forefront of our approaches to land management and stewardship, these investments will provide a foundation to accelerate on-the-ground Tribally-led conservation and restoration projects that protect the region’s unique natural, cultural, recreational, scientific, and historic resources.

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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Cacapon Watershed Collaborative, \$25,000 over two years

The Cacapon and Lost Rivers Watershed in the Central Appalachian Mountains of eastern West Virginia is nationally recognized as one of the most ecologically beneficial tributaries to the Chesapeake Bay, as functional, largely intact natural ecosystems still characterize much of the watershed. The watershed is nearly 85% forested, and the north-south orientation of its characteristic ridges and valleys offer resilience against a warming climate as well as myriad microclimates and important habitat for rare and threatened species. The watershed though is adjacent to some of the nation's fastest-growing areas and less than two hours from Washington DC; the pace of land conversion is accelerating and unplanned development threatens this landscape.

The Cacapon Watershed Collaborative formed in 2021 to bring partners together to protect the watershed's valuable ecology and its residents' rural way of life. Catalyst Fund support will enable the Collaborative to complete a strategic Watershed Plan to guide collaborative efforts moving forward. Support will also enable the regular convening of Partnership meetings to assess and monitor progress, and the development of information-sharing systems within the Collaborative. In the face of mounting development pressures, these investments will create a "living plan" that allows the Collaborative to continually assess and adapt as it strives to steward the watershed's health while bolstering community resilience.

Cooper River Task Force, \$25,000 over 2 years

Located just north of Charleston, South Carolina, the Cooper River is a coastal river that boasts an ecologically diverse watershed of mature bottomland forests and wetlands filled with various species of pines, hardwoods, and native grasses and forbs. The watershed supports many rare and declining species, including breeding and roosting grounds—as well as migratory stopovers—for countless neotropical songbirds, the threatened wood stork, and the endangered northern long-eared bat. Recognized by the National Register of Historic Places in 2003, the Corridor also encompasses some of America's earliest European and African American settlements. Yet, given its proximity to the city of Charleston, the river transects one of the fastest-growing counties in the nation: Berkeley County is experiencing a population growth rate that exceeds 3% annually. Intense development pressures threaten the natural and cultural legacy of this landscape.

Recognizing the imperative for protecting the watershed, the Cooper River Task Force unites a diversity of partners behind efforts to safeguard the landscape's cultural and historical assets, bountiful forests, clean water, beautiful wildlife, and ample recreational opportunities. The Catalyst Fund grant will support a dedicated coordination position for the Task Force. A particular emphasis of the expanded coordination capacity will be developing and implementing a comprehensive outreach and communications plan, with the intent of growing the partnership and deepening engagement with historically marginalized, predominantly African American communities within the landscape. These investments will allow the Task Force to accelerate its efforts to empower local communities to shape and own a holistic vision for the protection of this ecologically, historically, and culturally significant landscape into the future.

Driftless Area Conservation Partnership, \$25,000 over 2 years

Covering 24,000 square miles in southwestern Wisconsin and parts of neighboring Minnesota, Iowa, and Illinois, the Driftless Area is one of the most biodiverse landscapes of the Midwest. Due to its unglaciated past, the region contains a high concentration of unique topographical and geological features, including spring-fed cold-water streams, cliffs and algal talus slopes, and coulees and caves. Such features support numerous regionally and globally rare natural communities, such as oak savanna, dry prairie, and hemlock and pine relicts. Development, habitat loss and fragmentation, invasive species, and climate change are threatening not only the wildlife and natural communities found here, but the human communities that call the Driftless home as well.

Recognizing the uniqueness of this landscape, partners came together as the Driftless Area Conservation Partnership in 2021 to work towards a resilient, connected ecosystem in the face of a changing climate. Building upon a two-year planning process to develop a conservation plan for the landscape, Catalyst Fund support will secure dedicated coordination time to continue convening and facilitating the Partnership as it transitions into implementation. Specifically, efforts will focus on expanding participation and engagement, especially amongst historically marginalized communities. The coordination time will also enable the Partnership to conduct a gap analysis to better understand how the breadth of current strategies within the landscape align with prioritizations within the conservation plan, and to develop implementation plans to scale regional strategies to more local needs. Such investments will enable the Partnership to move forward with implementing its conservation plan in a fashion that achieves landscape-scale impact through authentic engagement with local communities.

Escalante River Watershed Partnership, \$25,000 over 2 years

Traversing a patchwork of private and public lands—including the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument—the Escalante River runs 90 miles through south-central Utah and into Lake Powell. It is a landscape of sandstone canyons and springs and hanging gardens. Across its course it drops more than 7,000 feet, and this dramatic range in elevation supports a rich biodiversity. It is a remote landscape and was one of the last rivers in the lower 48 to be mapped after colonization, yet numerous Tribes and Pueblos have ancestral ties to the region and the landscape contains significant cultural resources. This unique landscape is increasingly facing threats from invasive species, climate change, and water withdrawal.

The Escalante River Watershed Partnership emerged in 2009 to restore and maintain the natural ecological conditions of the Escalante River and its watershed. Catalyst Fund support is focused on deepening engagement with Tribal partners in the landscape. Specifically, the funding will support two annual Tribal gatherings within the landscape, to focus on listening and working to understand the needs, interests, and priorities of Tribes with ancestral ties to the region. Funding will also enable Tribal member participation at bi-monthly Partnership meetings as well as an annual science symposium. In a moment when the pattern of omission and exclusion of Indigenous voices in our broader conservation and land management conversations is rightly being acknowledged, these investments will enable the Partnership to accelerate its work by weaving together western science and Traditional Ecological Knowledge to formulate a collective vision that supports the ecological integrity and cultural significance of this dramatic landscape.

Greenspace Alliance, \$25,000 over 1 year

The Greater Cincinnati metropolitan region stretches across ten counties in southwest Ohio, southeast Indiana, and northern Kentucky, and is home to more than two million people. One of the fastest-growing Midwest economies, Cincinnati sits within the Ohio River Valley and is surrounded by a mix of hilly deciduous woodlands and farmland. Impressive stands of old-growth trees continue to flourish in a number of area parks and extensive nature preserves, yet Greater Cincinnati is becoming more vulnerable to extreme rain events, heat and humidity, impaired air quality, and flooding. And according to the EPA's EJScreen, an Environmental Justice data tool, Cincinnati ranks above the 80th percentile nationally for harmful environmental indicators.

The Greenspace Alliance works to bring together conservation stakeholders to protect and restore greenspace throughout the Greater Cincinnati landscape, and to connect people to the land for the benefit of all. Funding will support the hiring of an Alliance Manager. This expanded coordination capacity will enable the Alliance to undertake targeted stakeholder engagement activities to broaden Alliance participation. Expanded capacity will also enable the Alliance to formalize its governance structure and develop a project prioritization framework. With the influx of federal funding for natural climate solutions, these investments will accelerate the Alliance's community-grounded efforts to create a climate resilient future for the Greater Cincinnati region and its people, plants, and animals.

linnii-Waterton-Glacier Working Group, \$25,000 over 1 year

Since time immemorial the Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) people have lived where the plains meet Miistakis—'the backbone of the world'—in a present-day Montana and Alberta. In this transboundary landscape where water flows to three oceans, the four nations of the Niitsitapi—the Amskapiiikani (Blackfeet), the Apatohsippikani (Piikani), the Siksika (Blackfoot), and the Kainah (Blood)—have followed seasonal rounds between the mountains and plains to harvest food, hold ceremony, and engage in trade. Nested within the Crown of the Continent, one of the largest intact ecosystems in North America, this landscape today is home to Tribal reservations as well as the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, non-Indigenous communities, and agricultural lands. linnii (buffalo) are central to Niitsitapi way of life and to this landscape—but the legacy of colonialism has driven the iinnii to functional extinction locally and have isolated the Indigenous people from the few remaining herds.

The linnii Initiative emerged in 2009 to reconnect people, buffalo, and the land, with a goal of returning a free-roaming, transboundary buffalo herd to the homelands of the Blackfoot Confederacy. Within this context, the linnii-Waterton Glacier Working Group focuses on collaboration and co-creation between the linnii Initiative and Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park. With the release of a pilot herd on Ninnaastakoo (Chief Mountain), a sacred Niitsitapi space on the border of the Blackfeet Reservation and Glacier National Park, the Catalyst Fund grant will support dedicated coordination capacity to facilitate the Working Group and sustain collaboration between Niitsitapi Elders and Tribal government partners and US and Canadian Agency partners. The grant award will also support the co-creation of a Blackfeet Bison Stewardship Plan and continued community engagement. At a pivotal moment when the first steps towards restoring right relations between people, buffalo, and the land are unfolding, these investments will enable the Working Group to build on the momentum of the pilot release to continue its work to overcome historical dispossession and advance social and environmental justice.

Lake Superior Headwaters Sustainability Partnership, \$24,900 over 2 years

A tributary to Lake Superior, the St. Louis River is the largest freshwater estuary in North America and also home to the continent's busiest and largest bulk inland port. The surrounding watershed spans the Minnesota and Wisconsin state lines and is situated between the urban areas of Duluth, Minnesota, and Superior, Wisconsin. Boasting unique wetland and wildlife habitats, the setting is often described as a wilderness in the heart of an urban area.

Over the last four years the Lake Superior Headwaters Sustainability Partnership has emerged to improve the ecological integrity and resiliency of this landscape while furthering a sustainable relationship between humans and the environment. As the Partnership begins to develop restoration visions for prioritized focal areas within the landscape, the Catalyst Fund grant will support efforts to center environmental justice and community engagement considerations. Specifically, funding will allow the Partnership to develop an environmental justice toolkit and provide DEI training for partners, and support community engagement workshops in the restoration visioning process. Through these investments, the Partnership will advance a just, equitable framework for working towards a sustainable landscape that balances natural resources management, economic development, and community well-being.

North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership, \$16,600 over 1 year

The North Quabbin landscape is comprised of the Worcester Plateau and Connecticut River Valley ecoregions of Massachusetts—it draws its name from the Quabbin Reservoir, formed in the 1930s to supply clean drinking water to Boston. This landscape is characterized by the quintessential ecological history of New England: Small scale clearing and burning of forests for farming and ease of hunting by the Nipmuc and other Indigenous people was succeeded by intensive forest clearing by settler-colonists for agriculture and grazing by the 1850s. As these settler-colonist farms were abandoned, the land returned to forest. Today, this is an “accidental wilderness,” with tens of thousands of protected acres offering a biodiversity hotspot in the middle of a densely populated state—but the western edge of metropolitan Boston's sprawl is increasingly threatening the region.

The North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership came together in 1997 and remains a voluntary association of local conservation NGOs, public agencies, and landowners working together to increase the pace and scale of land conservation and stewardship in the region. Since 2019, the Partnership has been developing relationship with the Nipmuc Tribe, and Catalyst Fund support will expand upon this collaboration. Specifically, funding will support a Nipmuc Cultural Steward in the training and mentoring of a Nipmuc apprentice cultural steward; the support will also enable the Nipmuc Cultural Steward and apprentice to work with non-Indigenous partners in the region to identify and remove existing barriers to working appropriately with Indigenous partners. Building upon early efforts to deepen relationship and trust with the Indigenous communities within the landscape, this support will allow the Partnership to reorient the traditional land conservation model locally to explore new, more inclusive approaches that center justice and expand Indigenous sovereignty.

Obtawaing Biosphere Region Partners, \$25,000 over 1 year

Obtawaing is the Anishinaabek word for “at the halfway place.” Standing at the confluence of three Great Lakes—Superior to the north, Michigan to the west, and Huron to the east—this landscape stretches across Michigan's northern Lower Peninsula and southeastern Upper Peninsula. The interplay

of the landscape's history of glaciation and the interconnected and complex Great Lakes hydrology has yielded a landscape that boasts a diversity of unique ecosystems, including dunes, forests, wetlands, and marshes. For millennia, the Anishinaabe [including the Odawa (Ottawa), the Ojibwa (Chippewa) and Bodowadomi (Pottawatomi)—collectively the people of the Three Fires Confederacy] have inhabited this landscape where land meets water. More recently too, the landscape has been heavily influenced by human activities, such as agriculture, logging, mining, and urbanization.

The 13,000 acres of land managed by the University of Michigan Biological Station (UMBS) had been designated a biosphere reserve in 1979. Over the last five years, partners have worked together to expand thinking beyond the bounds of that small reserve though—this resulted in the 2021 re-designation of the UMBS Biosphere *Reserve* as the Obtawain Biosphere *Region*, and a shared commitment from partners to advance environmental, cultural, and socio-economic sustainability and well-being across a larger landscape at the heart of the Great Lakes region. Catalyst Fund support will allow the partners to secure a part-time dedicated coordination position to advance collaborative efforts. This coordination capacity will support the facilitation of monthly steering committee meetings, the development of a five-year action plan for the network, the development of communications materials, and the convening of an annual network-wide meeting. These investments in coordination capacity and network structure will enable partners to accelerate efforts to advance a holistic vision of what landscape conservation can be, one that is rooted in recognizing and celebrating the foundational interconnections that exist amongst natural systems, human livelihoods, and diverse cultures and communities that weave together to make place.

Ruby Valley Strategic Alliance, \$20,000 over 1 year

Just northwest of Yellowstone National Park, the Ruby Valley is a key wildlife corridor in southwest Montana that helps connect the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem to the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem. A refuge for flora and fauna, the valley is comprised of a mix of public and private lands, with 39% of the landscape privately owned and 61% managed by state and federal agencies. Many multi-generational working ranches throughout the valley rely on adjacent public land grazing permits—some of which date back a century—and working lands in turn provide open space and habitat connectivity for wildlife along the valley bottoms; indeed, the people and wildlife of this landscape rely upon these interdependent public and private lands to survive and thrive.

Recognizing this reality, in 2015 ranchers, conservationists, elected officials, businesses, and community members came together to form the Ruby Valley Strategic Alliance. The Alliance works to protect the greater Ruby Valley landscape to ensure it remains intact to support essential wildlife habitat, clean water, and thriving rural communities. The Catalyst Fund grant will support a part-time coordinator position. This expanded coordination capacity will enable the Alliance to strengthen partner and community engagement and communications. The Alliance is working to build strong relationships and trust across diverse perspectives, and these investments will allow partners to build upon forward momentum in working towards holistic, integrated conservation solutions that reflect ecological science and the needs of rural economies.

Siuslaw Coho Partnership, \$25,000 over 2 years

From headwaters in the coniferous forests of the Oregon Coast Range, the Siuslaw River runs more than 100 miles west to an extensive estuary system on the central Oregon coast. This watershed is a remarkably rich and productive ecosystem. Historically it supported one of the largest salmon runs on

the Oregon coast, second only to the run on the Columbia River. The ecological abundance on these lands and waters have drawn human communities to the landscape—for generations the Siuslaw Tribal people have called this landscape home. Following European settlement however, streams were straightened, forests logged, and salmon numbers greatly reduced in the face of a natural resource-based economic system premised on extraction from the Siuslaw's most important features: rivers, forests, and floodplains.

Recognizing that this landscape's restoration needs are not confined to single-ownership geographies and that single organizations do not have the expertise and resources necessary to maximize multi-resource restoration opportunities, partners came together in 2015 to form the Siuslaw Coho Partnership. The Partnership works collaboratively to restore and protect a highly productive and resilient watershed that promotes social and economic well-being for local residents. The Catalyst Fund grant will support the expansion of dedicated coordination capacity. This expanded capacity will enable the Partnership to prioritize strengthening relationships and cohesion amongst partners; accelerate integration of a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion plan; and create mechanisms for adaptive management and the integration of climate change action in the restoration program. With the Partnership at the beginning of a six-year restoration initiative that will benefit from more than \$16 million in public funding for direct restoration project implementation, these investments will allow the Partnership to build adaptive and equitable collaborative infrastructure so that it can capitalize on this opportunity to take concrete steps toward securing a healthy, resilient ecological and cultural future for this dynamic landscape.

Swinomish Wildlife Co-Management Partnerships, \$20,200 over 1 year

The Greater North Cascades Ecosystem, located in northwestern Washington State, encompasses one of the most dramatic and ecologically intact ecosystems in the contiguous United States. Anchored at its center by North Cascades National Park and the Cascades Mountain Range, the Greater North Cascades Ecosystem also encompasses the mountain flanks, foothills, and river valleys to the east and west of the alpine and subalpine areas. From times immemorial, members of the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community and their forebears have ranged over the western portion of the Greater North Cascades, hunting and gathering in support of their subsistence and cultural traditions.

In 1855, the Swinomish—along with other regional tribes—signed the Treaty of Point Elliot with the nascent state of Washington; through the Treaty the Swinomish retained harvest rights on their ancestral lands, which has been deemed to include co-management authority. In recent years, the Swinomish (and other Treaty of Point Elliot tribes) have begun to develop partnership with state and federal wildlife agencies. An early focus within this partnership is the opportunity for the Swinomish to work collaboratively with the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife on the management of recolonizing gray wolves in the Greater North Cascades. Catalyst Fund support will enable dedicated Tribal staff time for partnership development and relationship building. This expanded staff time will also focus on improving communication and information flow channels amongst partners. As the Tribe has increasingly exercised Treaty-reserved rights and have grown technical proficiency, these investments will allow the Swinomish to maintain cultural traditions through co-management of the shared natural resources of their ancestral lands.

Wind River Water & Buffalo Alliance, \$25,000 over 1 year

The Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho Tribes today call home the 2.2-million-acre Wind River Indian Reservation in western Wyoming. The reservation is a fraction of the land originally promised to the Tribes under the initial treaties with the United States government—which itself was just a fraction of the ancestral lands of the Tribes. Today the Reservation is an important part of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem; approximately the same size as Yellowstone National Park, the Wind River Indian Reservation is marked by innumerable lakes, hundreds of miles of rivers and streams, remote mountains, and extensive sagebrush and grassland prairies—all of which supports robust wildlife communities. The legacies of colonialism persist though: The Big Wind River, which traverses the Reservation, has been significantly degraded and diverted to non-Tribal users; and Buffalo, which has been an essential component of the Tribal diet for millennia and which holds ecological and spiritual importance beyond their contribution to food sovereignty, were locally extirpated from the landscape.

In this context, the Wind River Water & Buffalo Alliance has emerged over the last two years, working to restore a buffalo herd to the Reservation and to repair the ecological health and cultural connections to the Big Wind River. The Catalyst Fund grant will enable the Alliance to build upon momentum from its efforts to convene the 2022 Wind River Inter-Tribal Gathering by engaging in outreach and community engagement efforts with Tribal communities within the Indian Reservation. Specifically, grant funds will support the creation of communications materials, the hosting of community meetings, and the development of a community-grounded strategic plan for the Alliance. As the Alliance has emerged out of shared vision from Tribal leaders in the landscape, these investments will enable it to successfully bridge “grassroots to governance,” ensuring that the community drives actions to promote sovereignty, buffalo conservation, river restoration, and ecosystem health on the reservation.

Yampa River Collaborative, \$25,000 over 1 year

The Yampa River is the sole remaining great free-flowing river on the Colorado Plateau, its course interrupted only by a pair of small dams in its upper waters. Traversing a 210-mile course through northwest Colorado, the Yampa flows down out of the Flat Tops Wilderness and through Dinosaur National Monument before joining the Green River near the Colorado-Utah border. Along its verdant riparian corridor it supports one of finest cottonwood forests in the West. Yet climate change and intensifying drought are threatening the health of the river, its surrounding landscape, and the communities that depend on both.

Over the last four years the Yampa River Collaborative has emerged to advance multi-benefit efforts towards sustaining a resilient and balanced Yampa River floodplain corridor. With an Integrated Water Management Plan recently completed, the Collaborative is now pivoting into action, with the Catalyst Fund grant supporting ongoing coordination and facilitation support and the development of a two-year work plan for the Collaborative. The support will also enable the Collaborative to engage in coordinated community outreach. As climate change intensifies tensions between competing water needs in the western United States, these investments will enable the Collaborative to demonstrate the value of working across a diversity of interests and perspectives in this last, best example of a western river that balances ecological function with human needs.