

Conservation Working For America

Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, MN
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CONNECTING PEOPLE AND NATURE

Conservation and healthy food go hand-in-hand

Conservation of land and water resources is inextricably tied to food production and human health. We believe that food sovereignty—the basic right of people to choose the food they consume and to determine where and how it is produced—is a vital part of achieving social, economic and environmental justice for all.

With funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the Agua Fund, we are partnering with First Nations Development Institute, Land Loss Prevention Project, McIntosh SEED and Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative on a multi-year initiative that uses conservation tools to advance food sovereignty in vulnerable communities. Our Community Food Sovereignty (CFS) initiative focuses on engaging communities in all aspects of the food system—from the soil the food is grown in, to those that distribute it, to community members who consume it. To date, we have supported 19 community and tribal food sovereignty projects across the country and have helped grantees leverage more than \$3.5 million in additional grants and loans.

For example, Valley Verde in San Jose, California, assists Silicon Valley's low-income residents in growing their own organic vegetables. The nonprofit has served more than 380 families through its community food systems model, providing supplies needed to grow organic vegetables at home. It also offers monthly workshops on sustainable agricultural practices and healthy eating and one-on-one mentorship. Recognizing Valley Verde's innovative approach to food insecurity, we provided two CFS grants to help the group ramp up its good work and support the "Super Jardineros" program, which helps participants grow commercial-quality seedlings to generate earned income while providing food for their families.

[See interview on p.2](#)



How can growing food change lives? Ask Raul Lozano.



Raul Lozano
Founder, Valley Verde

Q. What is Valley Verde's Mission?

A. Valley Verde promotes the widespread practice of home gardening with the intent to drive self-sufficiency within our families. We want to give them enough knowledge to become decent gardeners so they can grow vegetables for the rest of their lives for themselves and their children and to model for the next generation.

Q. Valley Verde is based in San Jose—the heart of Silicon Valley. What are some of the challenges people in this area face, and what are some of the benefits?

A. The serious issue of living in this area is the income disparity. It's really difficult. It's almost impossible to buy or rent a home if you're not making six figures. Our clientele are all low-income families, and so they're faced with a widespread disparity in cost of living. Teaching them to grow their own vegetables makes (fresh food) accessible at about a third of the cost; organic vegetables would be nearly out of reach to most of our families financially.

A benefit of operating here is that San Jose passed a law called the Urban Agriculture Incentive Zone, where any landowner can lease property that's not being utilized to any urban agricultural organization at no cost. In turn, these landowners will not have to pay property taxes. Valley Verde was able to lease 11,000 square feet of property at \$1 a year and signed a five-year lease with a three-year option [to renew].

Q. How has the Community Food Sovereignty grant that you received from The Conservation Fund impacted your work?

A. We have increased program capacity to serve more families. We were also able to hire a greenhouse manager, and now we grow our own seedlings for our programs to sell wholesale and generate earned income. The grant also helped support the Super Jardineros program, which teaches participants how to operate backyard greenhouses to grow seedlings, which can be sold, generating a revenue stream for themselves. These programs allow each family to become more self-sufficient by growing their own vegetables, and Valley Verde is becoming more self-sufficient as an organization.

Safeguarding Minnesota's prized Boundary Waters while contributing to the local economy

Spanning more than 1.1 million acres in northeastern Minnesota, the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) is an outdoors lover's paradise. It offers over 1,200 miles of canoe routes, 11 hiking trails and 2,000 designated campsites. And the area is home to wildlife, including bears, moose, ospreys and Minnesota's cherished walleye.

A mixture of Northwoods forests, glacial lakes and streams, the BWCAW's preservation as a primitive wilderness began in the 1900s and culminated in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness Act of 1978. It is a popular recreational destination for canoeing, hiking and fishing and is the most visited wilderness area in the United States.

But the ecological integrity of Minnesota's crown jewel is fragmented by a patchwork of School Trust lands within the BWCAW. School Trust lands are constitutionally mandated (since the 19th century) to generate revenue for the students of Minnesota. To preserve one of the world's last great wild places, we worked with our partners to develop a multiyear effort that would trade non-revenue-producing School Trust lands from within the BWCAW for lands that would significantly expand revenue for Minnesota's 337 public school districts.

The project will secure more than 40,000 acres outside the BWCAW for sustainable timber harvesting and increased School Trust revenue, while protecting 50,000 acres within the BWCAW. Local governments, environmentalists, school districts, timber companies and communities have embraced this strategy, ending decades of dispute over the use of these lands. This solution not only safeguards Minnesota's prized Boundary Waters, but it also consolidates working forestlands outside the BWCAW, ensuring the forest products industry a sustainable wood basket and associated jobs.

Earlier this year, The Conservation Fund purchased 8,000 acres of forestland, initiating the first phase of the effort. The project benefits everyone: The state's public schools will be able to finally obtain financial support from what was previously a nonperforming asset, working forestlands outside the BWCAW will be consolidated, and recreational access for the public will be expanded.



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ECONOMIC VITALITY



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Supporting New Hampshire's outdoor recreation economy

One of the goals of The Conservation Fund is to help communities get the most value out of their natural resources. For a lot of communities, that means a focus on ecotourism and recreation. But how can communities best map out and take advantage of these opportunities to build lasting recreation revenue?

The answer? With a value chain approach. Value chains encourage economic stakeholders—i.e., local business owners—to make decisions that benefit themselves and the local economic system, rather than focusing solely on their own bottom lines. For example, a community using the value chain approach might encourage biking as a means of recreation and transportation while also supporting the growth of bike repair shops, local bike part manufacturers and health care access for cyclists.

The power of this approach can be seen in Coos County, New Hampshire, where we're working with the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) to lead the Human Powered Recreation Value Chain initiative. This value chain engages a range of human-powered recreation—such as hiking, paddling and mountain biking—as drivers of outdoor activity in the region. Together with AMC, we've started building the value chain by interviewing economic stakeholders, designing an economic model for recreation demand, and hosting workshops for county residents to map out local assets, such as trails and climbing areas. Now, we're helping support multiple task groups, including one that's training skilled workers in the outdoor guide industry. By honing in on the values and economic goals of this community, we're able to support Coos County in its efforts to ramp up its outdoor economy and grow local businesses.

LAND, WATER AND WILDLIFE

Kansas

Forty miles south of Kansas City, along the Kansas-Missouri border, the Marais des Cygnes National Wildlife Refuge is uniquely situated where bottomland hardwood forests converge with tallgrass prairies. This is where a coalition of climate champions committed to addressing climate change and habitat loss—including Dell, MaCher, New Jersey Natural Gas, Philadelphia Eagles, The North Face, U-Haul and others—are planting trees to offset carbon dioxide gas emissions. The restoration efforts clean our air; improve water quality along the Marais des Cygnes River; and benefit hundreds of bird species, fish, freshwater mussels and other wildlife that call this area home.

Montana

The Crabb family has managed ranchlands on the eastern edge of the Rocky Mountain Front for more than a decade. When the opportunity arose for them to acquire 8,586 acres to establish and expand their own ranching business, they turned to The Conservation Fund and our partners. Together, we helped the Crabbs purchase the ranch along the Front and place a conservation easement on the property with support from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund. Protecting these lands helps to safeguard habitat for fish and wildlife, including grizzly bears, while ensuring a way of life for ranchers and others who depend on the land for their livelihoods.

Pennsylvania

For decades, the 1,054-acre Girl Scout camp in the Pocono Mountains known as Camp Hidden Falls was a place where kids and families could experience nature in a deeply personal way. With help from The Conservation Fund and Natural Lands, a local land trust, the former camp's beautiful land is now protected as part of the National Park Service's Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area. Featuring 2 miles of pristine streams, eight waterfalls and wetlands teeming with wildlife, this land, which holds a special place in the hearts of many, will forever be protected from development and open to public access for nature walking and hunting.

Vermont

Our nation's history is inherently connected to the land. Over the summer, a group of high school students participated in an archaeological effort to analyze and catalogue artifacts unearthed from a late 18th century and early 19th century settlement on Egg Mountain. The site sits within 6,000 acres of working forestland currently owned by the Fund. Using photography and 3D modeling, the students' findings will inform the growing body of research on the remote site and its former residents, who survived by cutting timber, raising livestock and growing small quantities of food. Our Working Forest Fund is seeking to ensure that the entire 6,000-acre tract remains a working forest, while protecting its unique cultural resources and the heritage of the area and the people who once lived there.

THE CONSERVATION FUND

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Forest certification has fundamentally changed, for the better, the way forests are managed across the U.S. We are proud that this newsletter is printed on paper from a forest we have protected—certified to Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) standards.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Keeping nature close and accessible

The United States is a country with amazing landscapes, from the northern forests in New England, south to the unparalleled wetlands of the Everglades in Florida, to the beaches along the Atlantic and Pacific oceans and the bayous that run to the Gulf of Mexico. In the West, we have canyons so deep that they seem impossible to behold. Everyone should be able to experience the wonder of our natural treasures.

But for many people, access to nature—even close by—is limited. Good city planning is essential for urban dwellers as they face the obvious challenge of ensuring green space is nearby. And they aren't the only ones to face an access issue—hikers, fishermen, mountain bikers, horseback riders and wildlife enthusiasts need access to rivers, trails and open lands to enjoy their favorite pastimes.

That's why when The Conservation Fund works in a community, we start by listening to local partners and civic leaders to understand what the community needs and which lands are most important to those who live there. One of the goals of our work is to open access to lands that previously have been off-limits.

Protecting our country's fresh air, clean water and food sources requires a commitment to smart conservation, and everyone in every community must have a voice in this mission. When people have a relationship with the land, they have an opportunity to fall in love with the outdoors and are more inclined to advocate for its protection. We appreciate the support of our friends and donors who help us make that happen.

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