

Underserved Populations

We envision a future of resilient communities, sustainable economies, and a healthy environment for all. Today, many American communities do not experience the benefits and advantages of this vision. Our Conservation Loans program helps organizations of all sizes and backgrounds acquire land and water rights, address issues of environmental justice, and empower their communities.



Nibezun - Passadumkeag, Maine

Along the Penobscot River in Maine sits an 85-acre property that is part of the ancestral homelands of the Wabanaki people and contains the only land bridge to the Penobscot Nation's treasured Olamon Island. In 2016, access for the Wabanaki People and the public was put at risk when the property was listed for sale on the open market.

In response, a small and courageous group of tribal members and allies planted the seed of an idea to permanently secure this sacred place for all people. This group became Nibezun, a Native-led organization that seeks to revitalize and preserve Wabanaki culture, traditions and life-ways. That same year, The Conservation Fund provided Nibezun with technical assistance and a \$355,000 bridge loan (a significant portion of the need) to acquire the property. In 2018, Nibezun raised the funds to pay off the bridge financing and has reclaimed their historic ceremonial ground and cultural gathering place. Nibezun will use the land in a sustainable manner to promote traditional healing, education, and empowerment to people in need, while ensuring the health and safety of the land and river.

“The substantial obligations required to purchase and permanently secure the property all within a limited time frame would have been enough to overwhelm even the most well-established non-profit organization. For a new and unknown non-profit this seemed almost impossible. But, the planters of this seed and the dreamers who tended it remained steadfast and people of shared vision were naturally drawn to this effort.”

- Nibezun



Ekvn-Yefolecv - Weogufka, Alabama

Ekvn-Yefolecv [ee-gun yee-full-lee-juh], which means Returning to the Earth, Returning to Our Homelands in Maskoke language, is an Indigenous nonprofit organization and ecovillage community materializing on Maskoke ancestral homelands in central Alabama. This area was home to thriving Maskoke villages prior to the forced removal of the people in the 1830s. Almost 200

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years later, members of Ekvñ-Yefolecv had a dream to return and reclaim their ancestral lands to ensure their people's linguistic, cultural and ecological knowledge—which is severely threatened—is sustained for generations to come.

After extensive searching, when 577 acres of forested rolling hills, open fields and coursing waterways—on the site of a historic ancestral village—was listed for sale, the members of Ekvñ-Yefolecv knew they had found their home. With support from The Conservation Fund, Ekvñ-Yefolecv negotiated the purchase, raised funds for a down payment, and took out a bridge loan of over \$1.5 million through our Conservation Loans program to complete the purchase; buying the nonprofit several years to raise the remaining funds necessary to secure their homelands.

“Although we were forcibly removed from our Indigenous homelands, our ancient origin stories remind us that we still have an inherent ethical responsibility to care for this specific bioregion through both biophysical and spiritual stewardship. Because of The Conservation Fund's loan, trees who stood 182 years ago, with whom our ancestors communed, are hearing the Maskoke language spoken to them once again.”

- Marcus Briggs-Cloud, Executive Director, Ekvñ-Yefolecv



Not Forgotten Outreach - Taos County, New Mexico

Not Forgotten Outreach (NFO) is a nonprofit organization that provides farming, therapeutic and recreational services to military veterans and their families. Based in Taos, New Mexico, NFO has a vision to engage and train veterans to grow food for their fellow citizens. With gaining momentum, NFO recently identified and purchased a 28-acre working farm as a base of operations and partnered with Rocky Mountain Youth Corps to launch VetCorps—a paid national service opportunity and agricultural eco-therapy program for veterans, that would take place on the farm.

To successfully open VetCorps to participants, NFO needed to make immediate improvements to the farm's infrastructure. However, NFO's funding to make those improvements would arrive in the next several years from the sale of tax credits (credits generated from permanently protecting the property as a working farm with partner Taos Land Trust). In 2018, to bridge this cash-flow gap, NFO used a loan of \$200,000 from The Conservation Fund to prepare the farm for production: installing greenhouses, trails and irrigation systems. Now, the VetCorps program is up and running, and will train 45 veterans who are new to farming in agricultural and agribusiness skills over the next several years, while providing organically-raised, healthy food to local school children and other community members.

About The Conservation Fund

At The Conservation Fund, we make conservation work for America. By creating solutions that make environmental and economic sense, we are redefining conservation to demonstrate its essential role in our future prosperity. Top-ranked for efficiency and effectiveness, we have worked in all 50 states since 1985 to protect over 8 million acres of land.

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