

THE CONSERVATION FUND



BALANCING NATURE AND COMMERCE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Forging Communities that are Thriving, not just Surviving!

Our Numbers:

700

Communities we have worked in across the United States.

Over 16 years of experience working with more than 700 communities nationwide reinforces our conviction that rural communities are special places worthy of investment. America's towns and small cities, together with the surrounding rural landscapes, are striving to increase opportunity while maintaining their unique community character. From Astoria, OR, to Anniston, AL, Lufkin, TX, to Latrobe, PA, the Balancing Nature and Commerce program draws on a wealth of success stories and lessons learned to help rural and gateway communities capitalize on existing assets and create new ideas and actions for growth.

Our Approach:

We help rural communities thrive. Through our Balancing Nature and Commerce in Rural Communities Program, we create on-the-ground solutions by helping towns and regions engage diverse constituencies and achieve strong conservation, community, and economic development outcomes. Our focus is on strengthening rural communities: places defined by landscapes and natural resources—farming, forestry, ranching, renewable energy, rural manufacturing, recreational destinations, and the gateway communities to our great American parks, forests, and other public and private resource lands.

The Balancing Nature and Commerce Program works with communities to capitalize sustainably on local assets, helping them safeguard their unique sense of place, create and retain jobs, and attract entrepreneurs, while commanding the attention of new funders, resources, and partners.

In rural communities across the country, The Conservation Fund's Conservation Leadership Network's field of experts start by asking the questions to help communities frame solutions that are right for them, then create the infrastructure to implement their vision. Each community is unique, so we tailor our services to complement local qualities and needs, thus ensuring that the community is "thriving, not just surviving."

Our Impact:

We believe that our partners' success provides the best proof of our work.

- The result of a team action plan developed at a Balancing Nature and Commerce workshop, Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia received a \$3 million transportation grant to revitalize a downtown corridor, connecting to the Chickamauga Battlefield park. The project is expected to leverage another half-million dollars in private investments, benefitting business growth and expansion and creating walking and bicycling infrastructure for local residents and visitors.
- The 12-county Pennsylvania Wilds region topped \$1.7 billion in visitor spending in 2013. Additionally, The PA Wilds Artisan Trail doubled in 2012, up to 30 locations from 15. Since 2008, 56 small businesses have started up and 57 small businesses have expanded, creating 264 jobs. The PA Wilds leadership also worked with officials from the oil and gas industry to create a set of voluntary design standards to minimize negative visual effects of drilling on their rural landscapes.
- A recent program evaluation of our multi-year work in more than 100 counties across Appalachia indicated enhanced partnerships, creation of new attractions and resources, launch of new marketing and branding strategies, leveraging of additional funding, increase in tourism, creation of new jobs, and a notable contribution in encouraging a community to recognize a difficult chapter in their past.



Pennsylvania Wilds

©PA DCNR



Unicoi County, TN

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Our Services:

Your needs drive our services. We listen to you.

We provide a suite of national and on-site programs as well as specialized offerings such as entrepreneur workshops, economic analysis, seed grants, strategic and action planning, visioning, and other services that ensure results.

Courses and workshops

The Balancing Nature and Commerce for Rural Communities program offers national courses and place-based workshops that focus on the economics, community character, natural and cultural resources and partnership building skills necessary for creating sustainable communities. We offer an annual national course for rural communities and design and lead place-based, customized workshops to build community capacity and develop tailored outcomes by request.

Livability and sustainable tourism assessments

The Balancing Nature and Commerce program also conducts livability and sustainable tourism assessments, evaluating community livability or sustainable tourism capacity and providing recommendations to create new opportunities and strengthen existing assets.

Resources

We draw from a broad book of work and connections across the country to provide relevant case studies, strategies, lessons learned, contacts, funding ideas and techniques, and other technical assistance based on local needs. We help communicate these ideas to communities and partners to generate buy-in and results.

Testimonials:

“I still appreciate the assistance you provided in Union County. The net results from (the workshop) is easily measured by a 43% increase in tourism revenue in a three-year period; a doubling of payroll; and a steady increase of 10% growth in visits per year. The largest private business investment in the county has been for tourism. Interestingly, tourism now represents 16% of the county’s net revenue, almost equal to property tax revenue.”

—Julie Graham, Executive Director, East Tennessee Quality Growth, regarding Union County, Tennessee Balancing Nature and Commerce workshop

“In 2011 the Heart of the Continent Partnership (HOCP) held a Community Congress facilitated by The Conservation Fund. ... it was the collaboration and leadership development that happened as a result of the project that might have the greatest effect. Bringing together public land managers, counties and cities, private businesses, parks and historic attractions to make this region, on both sides of the border, a place to live, buy a house, and raise a family will have a real effect for us all.”

—Frank Jewell, 1st District Commissioner, St. Louis County, Minnesota and Chair, Heart of the Continent Partnership (northern Minnesota into Ontario, Canada)



Unicoi County Strawberry Festival

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“The Livability Assessment was an excellent process that not only allowed us to identify the important part that the Refuge plays in our region, but also to expand and integrate the Refuge into the community as an asset for sustainable economic development”

—Steven F. Kahl, Manager, Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge, Michigan, and Co-Lead of Livability Assessment of Saginaw and other communities surrounding the Refuge

Our Core Competencies:

- We frame the questions to shape the program that serves you.
- We bring people together to find common ground.
- We help you create your vision and develop action plans for implementation

We help our partners see their communities and resources in a new light:

- As a result of a recent Livability Assessment, Sweet Home, Oregon saw an opportunity to use its existing bus transit system—well-used by laborers, college students, and senior citizens—as a means to pilot a weekend transit service, ferrying bikes to connect residents and visitors to summer recreation areas rich in campgrounds and trailheads. The city and Linn County secured a Rural Transportation Assistance Grant, funds provided by the City of Sweet Home for the Downtown Shopper service, and donations from Senior Center members.
- Grand Lake, Colorado used their Livability Action Planning workshop to develop plans for turning their shuttered elementary school into a reborn community asset. Now under the town's control, the Grand Lake Community Center is generating new energy with plans as a year-round environmental education center.

We engage a broad range of partners:

Whether you're from a county or town, economic development agency or housing authority, transportation department or convention and visitor bureau, small business or public land management, faith community, school, or other group ... we welcome partnership with you.

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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 more than 7.5 million acres of land.