

# Conservation Working For America

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## CONNECTING PEOPLE AND NATURE

### Small Farms Can Make A Big Community Impact

“We didn’t plan to be farmers when we moved back to Henderson, North Carolina to retire. Our neighbor had a garden in her backyard and said that if she had more space she could do even more. We had an empty lot, and began working together to create the area’s first community garden.

But we didn’t stop there; we also set up aquaponics and beehives, and then the community caught on. Henderson is a food desert, or an area where residents lack access to healthy, affordable food. With the help of The Conservation Fund’s Resourceful Communities program and our partners, we transitioned to a micro-market farm, completed Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification so that we can sell to school systems and restaurants, and are sharing what we know with others. Our farm school is helping give budding farmers in the area the skills and resources they need to grow and sell their own fresh produce at farmers markets and farm-owned stands in the area, and our partnership with the city and county will make 15 empty lots available for even more micro-farms. We couldn’t have predicted that our small farm would turn into a sort of community center, with neighbors and volunteers pitching in to help. But seeing the growth, not only in the food that we are producing, but in the community—from increased health and civic activity to reduced crime rates—has been the most rewarding part.”

—Henry and Ardis Crews,  
Green Rural Redevelopment Organization



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## How Does A Personal Connection To Farming Help Advance The Work Of Others? Ask Julius.



Julius Tillery  
Farm Resources Coordinator,  
Resourceful Communities

**Q** How did the partnership with the Green Rural Redevelopment Organization (GRRO) and the Fund's Resourceful Communities (RC) program come about?

**A** The partnership started when we met Henry Crews, GRRO's Executive Director, at a local resource fair. Mr. Crews was excited about the positive developments in his community from building a community garden. The Fund's RC program provided seed funding to support GRRO's innovative model of developing micro-market farms, delivering fresh food access to food deserts in Henderson, North Carolina, and surrounding areas.

**Q** How did your background in farming help prepare you for this project?

**A** Farming has been a tradition that has kept my family working for and with each other for more than 100 years. It's made us value nature and what we can gain from being good stewards of our land. Similarly, GRRO has used their small land plots to teach new farmers skills that do more than just feed their communities; they also protect and conserve their environment. These values are consistently shown in GRRO's mission of community redevelopment using "green" strategies and tools.

**Q** Can the concept of "micro-market urban farms" be replicated in other areas around the country?

**A** Definitely. GRRO utilizes federal programs that help small and new farmers. They've shown that communities can invest in themselves to fight crime, poverty, and health related issues by working small land plots, none larger than one acre, for fresh healthy food. Many towns and cities have plots of land just like these; why not turn them into something profitable, equitable, and good for the environment?

## Nature And Economics Working Together In Florida

Instead of the sandy beaches and amusement parks that are common to the Sunshine State, Florida's Big Bend region on the northern Gulf Coast is very different. The rural region brims with an array of natural resources: tall pine forests, salt marshes and freshwater springs, fisheries, working ranches and farmlands. In fact, these natural resources account for a quarter of the region's economic output.

Recognizing these vital natural assets, the Fund's Conservation Leadership Network (CLN) collaborated with local leaders and residents on how best to preserve the ecological health of the area while also ensuring a bright economic future. Working with the Fund's Florida staff, CLN began by compiling an economic analysis of the region with the help of Southwick Associates, a natural resource analyst. The economic analysis was a valuable tool to help local leaders decide how best to utilize the natural resources of Big Bend. This led to a community-focused seed grant program, where local organizations could apply for funding for ready projects that bring to life ideas that promote both the economic and ecological health of the region.

Five grantees received seed grants, including the University of Florida, under the leadership of Jack Payne, the senior vice president for agriculture and natural resources. The project, through the university's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences and the Nature Coast Biological Station, focused on a tagging study of spotted seatrout. Recreational fishing attracts anglers from near and far to the Big Bend region. Many anglers rely on guides to take them to the best fishing spots. Payne and biological station staff recognized an opportunity to connect dots by bringing science closer to local residents. The grant funds hired veteran fishing guides to take graduate students out to catch fish. The guides and students tagged each seatrout they caught with a phone number for anglers to call. Each angler who provides the tag location and time of their catch is paid \$100. The anglers play an important role in this study: helping the graduate students determine what percentage of the spotted seatrout is fished each season. "The Conservation Fund's seed money has been a key to jump-starting a project that can help develop the Big Bend area's economy while protecting the natural resources on which that economy depends," Payne noted. What a grand opportunity where nature is working for a community!



The Grant program awarded \$85,000 to five area projects that support the forest industry's need for workforce development, ensure sustainable and productive fisheries with oyster reef rehabilitation and spotted seatrout harvests, and facilitate nature-based tourism through a new shellfish trail and wildlife watching opportunities.

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### ECONOMIC VITALITY



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## Solutions For Los Angeles

Southern California is well known for its picture-perfect beaches and sunny days, but it's no secret that this area is also experiencing a severe water crisis. The state is in its fifth year of drought, and 2015 was the state's warmest year on record. Increasing heat puts

tremendous pressure on urban trees, augmenting the urban heat-island effect threatening the area's imported water sources and impacting the health of residents.

TreePeople, a Los Angeles-based environmental nonprofit, is on the frontlines of this pressing issue. It engages 7,000 volunteers and 230,000 students a year to restore damaged watersheds around the city and bring people together to grow and sustain enough tree canopy to keep even the most asphalt-covered parts of the city shaded, healthy and thriving. Urban trees cool areas by up to 10 degrees, ultimately lowering energy use.

We are big fans of this work and have provided TreePeople with a line of credit through our Land Conservation Loans program. This allows advancement of key programs, including the Greater LA Water Collaborative—a historic collaboration among the city's major water agencies to identify and resolve barriers to joint water management. Now, demonstration residential landscapes are providing valuable information on how the city could change its water infrastructure from "gray" to "green," by using cisterns and landscape transformations. The cisterns are networked to the cloud—allowing them to anticipate future storms and release water to rain gardens before the next storm to provide more room in the tanks to capture the newly falling rain. This effort has received national attention from the White House, and federal agencies recognized it as an example for increased governmental collaboration to improve green infrastructure and community resilience.

### LAND, WATER AND WILDLIFE

## Georgia

Our Parks With Purpose efforts in Atlanta are growing—park by park. In May, together with Mayor Kasim Reed and our partners, we celebrated the newly expanded Vine City Park. The new features include an expanded playground, new exercise equipment and green infrastructure features, like a rain garden, a dry creek bed and a microforest that will help to mitigate the flooding caused by stormwater runoff that has plagued the Vine City neighborhood. The Environmental Protection Agency recently recognized the Fund and our partner Park Pride, an Atlanta nonprofit, with a 2016 EPA Rain Catcher Award for excellence in the implementation of stormwater green infrastructure practices at nearby Lindsay Street Park.

## Kansas

Nearly 70 years ago, the University of Kansas established a biological research station near Lawrence where faculty, students and visiting researchers have used the diverse open savanna and oak-hickory forest habitats to foster scholarly research and environmental education. The Fund led efforts to more than double the Baldwin Woods Forest Preserve portion of the station by protecting three properties with funding from a variety of partners, including the U.S. Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program, local funds from the Douglas County Natural and Cultural Heritage Fund and mitigation funding. The protection of this biologically rich and unique forest was the first project in Kansas funded by the Forest Legacy Program.

## New Hampshire

The Beebe River watershed, in central New Hampshire, offers one-of-a-kind fishing opportunities. Together with Trout Unlimited and the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department, we are using funding from the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service to remove and replace stream crossings that compromise fish passage in five tributary streams. These efforts on more than 5,400 acres that the Fund owns and is working to protect through our Working Forest Fund will improve water quality across 27 percent of the watershed. The result will be cleaner water and healthier populations of wild brook trout, which New Hampshire identifies as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need.

## North Carolina

Our Natural Capital Investment Fund (NCIF) was one of 15 Community Development Financial Institutions selected in the spring to receive funds from Wells Fargo through its Diverse Community Capital program—a three-year, \$75 million program aimed at serving diverse small businesses. NCIF will use the funding to help disadvantaged African-American farmers and business owners in eastern North Carolina diversify their enterprises and build greater financial stability, resulting in increased employment, stronger local communities and the responsible use of natural resources.

# THE CONSERVATION FUND

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## HOW YOU CAN HELP

# Your Commitment To Conservation Matters

Americans overwhelmingly care about the environment, according to a comprehensive survey by the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. They vote for bond initiatives to fund open space and conservation; they recognize that climate change is happening and is caused by human activity; they would like to see more public park space; and they've changed their daily habits, conserving energy at home, recycling and buying local and organic, the survey found.

Americans know that to improve the planet, action must start at home.

Yet only 11 percent of Americans regularly volunteer with, or donate money to, environmental charities. Even those at the far end of the spectrum, the most concerned about environmental impacts, aren't giving at the rates to which they believe we must act now to protect the environment.

Our country is divided on a number of issues now, but Americans agree that our lands are vital. At The Conservation Fund, we have worked in all 50 states to preserve every type of landscape, including those of historic significance—from Civil War battlefields to the hallowed ground of Flight 93. The places we've protected tell the story of America.

You have partnered with us, giving time and money to make conservation happen, and we thank you for taking action now to protect what we will all need for generations to come. You stand with us at the forefront of this critical issue. Our hope is that many others join us in making an impact today.

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