

# Conservation Working For America

Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, NV  
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Gilchrist, OR, where we helped establish the first state forest in over 60 years—contributing to a healthier ecosystem and economy. © Justin Baillie

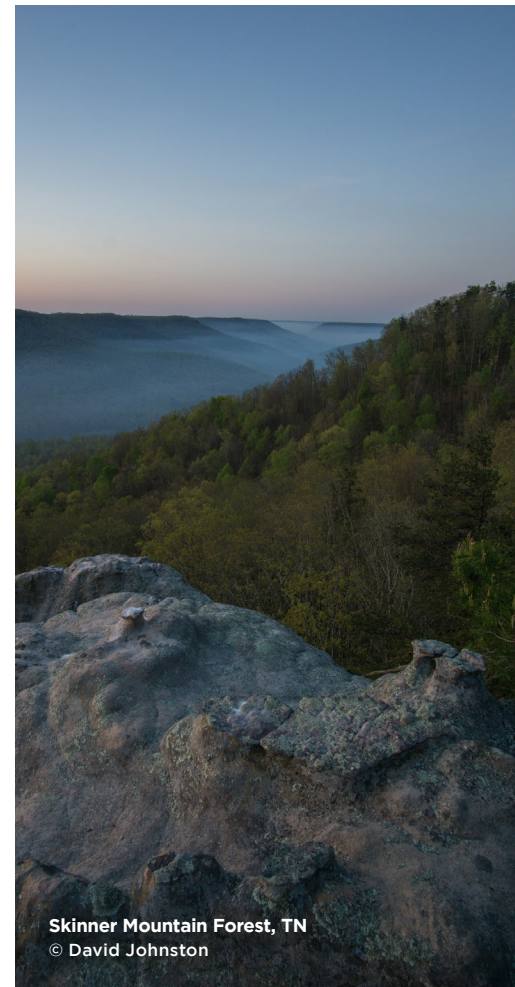
## CONNECTING PEOPLE AND NATURE

# Habitat, Jobs And Forestland Protected In The Cumberland Plateau

Bats sometimes get a bad rap, and we don't give them enough credit for the significant role they play in our daily lives. As nature's pest control, bats eat vast amounts of mosquitos, beetles, moths and other insects that are a nuisance to us and damaging to crops. And while they are out at night eating insects, bats also are busy pollinating: bananas, peaches and mangoes are among the hundreds of plant species pollinated by bats. Even bat guano is prized by gardeners and farmers as a nutrient-rich fertilizer.

But bats also are fragile creatures, and nine bat species found in America's lower 48 states currently are listed as threatened or endangered, mostly as a result of impacts to their habitat. Through our Working Forest Fund, we recently purchased the nearly 14,800-acre Skinner Mountain Forest in the Cumberland Plateau region of Tennessee, which features an intricate maze of caves, some of which house the endangered Indiana bat. This working forest also ensures the long-term viability of approximately 100 timber-related jobs, contributing nearly \$5 million to the local economy each year.

Across the country, 45 million acres of working forests like Skinner Mountain are at risk of being lost to development. We pioneered the Working Forest Fund to buy time for these forests. As temporary owners, we develop and implement sustainable forest management plans and put in place conservation safeguards before returning them to public or private ownership.



Skinner Mountain Forest, TN  
© David Johnston

# How Can You Make A Difference For The Places You Love? Ask Claire.



**Claire Cooney**  
Senior Major Gifts and Communications Officer  
The Conservation Fund

**Q.** What inspires your work at The Conservation Fund?

**A.** *I grew up in the green, lush foothills of the Smoky Mountains in eastern Tennessee. As a child, I spent afternoons outside with my family, exploring the nearby lake and rolling fields. We moved to Knoxville when I was 13, and my backyard became very different. I missed the abundance of nature I'd known previously. Years later when I was advancing in my career, I came across The Conservation Fund and its proactive approach to protecting treasured outdoor spaces like the ones I loved from my childhood. This mission resonated deeply with me and I'm so fortunate that in my role as a fundraiser for the Fund's Southeast region, I'm able to help our donors every day connect their passion for the outdoors with the projects we're doing.*

**Q.** What is the Skinner Mountain Forest project and why is it important?

**A.** *Skinner Mountain Forest is in the northeastern region of the Cumberland Plateau in Tennessee, an ecologically sensitive area bursting with biodiversity. At nearly 14,800 acres, it's a haven for several species of bats, freshwater mussels and migratory songbirds. The land also includes hardwood forests that are vital to the local forest-based economy. Through our Working Forest Fund program, we are partnering with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency and are actively fundraising to secure the forest's permanent protection.*

**Q.** How can people help?

**A.** *Financially supporting a conservation organization like the Fund is an important way to make lasting change in communities across America. We must act quickly to save amazing properties like Skinner Mountain Forest as soon as they come on the market, and then we need time to put together a plan to ensure long-term protection. Our donors buy us that time. Supporting The Conservation Fund is an investment in a bright future for us all.*

## From Abandoned Railway To Downtown Gem In Durham, North Carolina

Built in the 1890s as a rail spur to downtown tobacco facilities, the Duke Belt Line extends along the western edge of Durham, North Carolina. Abandoned since the 1980s, this 2-mile historic railway corridor now has the potential to become a vital part of the city's greenspace network.

In 2001, the city of Durham first proposed converting the railway to a recreational trail as a way to link the South Ellerbe Creek Trail with the American Tobacco Trail, connecting the Duke Park and Old North Durham residential neighborhoods to a vibrant downtown area. Over the years, elected officials, civic groups, neighborhood associations and downtown business leaders have enthusiastically supported the project.

The vision for this rail trail project is ambitious and has great potential for success—much like the High Line in New York City and the BeltLine in Atlanta—spurring economic, environmental and health benefits as well as a revived sense of community pride and identity. This greenway in Durham could do the same.

Unfortunately, the momentum for this project took a downturn due to lack of funds to purchase the land and stalled for many years. But that's when The Conservation Fund stepped in. Earlier this year, we purchased the entire 18.53-acre corridor from Norfolk Southern and are now working with the city and community organizations to acquire public and private funds to transfer property ownership to the city, ensuring its permanent protection.

This 2-mile corridor will help improve the quality of life for Durham residents by providing a vibrant walking and biking path while contributing to a safer community. It also will allow for connections to future pocket parks and greenways, and create the opportunity to act as a gateway to engage residents and visitors with the region's water resources.



Two-mile historic railway in Durham, NC  
© Whitney Flanagan

### ECONOMIC VITALITY



**Tootie Jones**  
© Bill Bamberger



Swift Level Land and Cattle  
© Bill Bamberger

## Local Food And Farms Build Strong Economies In West Virginia

Tootie Jones, owner of Swift Level Land and Cattle in West Virginia's Greenbrier Valley, is committed to humanely raising high-quality, grass-finished beef. But today, raising cattle to sell beef is only one of several facets of her business. She sells pasture-raised poultry, pork and lamb, runs educational programs on topics related to farming and conservation, soil and pasture management, and hosts events such as weddings, corporate retreats, farm-to-table dinners and fundraisers for her community. Over several years, financing and technical assistance from The Conservation Fund's Natural Capital Investment Fund (NCIF) has helped Tootie's business continue to grow. The most recent addition to her accomplishments is the opening of Swift Level Fine Meats, a retail store where she will sell her beef along with other locally sourced meats from farms that meet her standard and protocol—addressing strong consumer demand.

Building a local farm-to-table food economy is a multifaceted effort. Tootie's contributions to a strong network of local meat producers and the high-quality protein she provides support a range of local businesses—from the economy of producing animals for meat to processors, distributors and restaurants—keeping jobs and wealth in the Greenbrier Valley. And her commitment to sustainability and education is helping connect people to the land and to the food they eat.

"I believe we're all responsible for our environment. If you're eating anything, you're part of it. If you're not growing it, you're consuming it and driving why it's being produced. My hope is for people to feel responsible for our planet and hopefully commit themselves to become more conservation-minded and less wasteful."

### LAND, WATER AND WILDLIFE

## Arkansas

Bats are Arkansas' most endangered mammal. While some people consider them to be pests, bats play an essential role in nature. They eat thousands of insects every night and pollinate hundreds of plant species. With funding made available to address potential impacts caused by construction and maintenance of the Diamond Pipeline Project, the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission protected more than 460 acres in northern Arkansas that directly benefit habitat for both federally endangered and threatened species of bats. The Conservation Fund serves as the administrator of the funding and works with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Diamond Pipeline LLC to achieve mitigation solutions with the highest conservation value.

## Georgia

The Altamaha River watershed is one of the largest on the East Coast, featuring a diverse ecosystem teeming with plant and animal species, many of which are rare and endangered. In 2014, through our Working Forest Fund, we purchased 19,515 acres of hardwood and pine forests, including 12 miles of frontage on the Altamaha River and habitat for one of the largest known populations of gopher tortoises. This fall we transferred the final portion of this property to the Georgia Department of Natural Resources to become part of the Sansavilla Wildlife Management Area. The protection of this large landscape ensures connectivity in the ecosystem and provides tremendous potential for restoring longleaf pine and public recreational access.

## Minnesota

The U.S. Forest Service for years wanted to acquire a 42-acre parcel within Chippewa National Forest for its undeveloped shoreline on Clubhouse Lake and My Lake. The site also provided important nesting habitat for bald eagles and the common loon. However, the Forest Service could not acquire the property with existing structures on it, and the owners didn't want their father's log cabin, which he built by hand on the property, to be destroyed. After a seven-year standstill, the Fund found a solution that would enable the cabin to be deconstructed and reused in the construction of new cabins elsewhere so that the sale and protection of the property could move forward. The Minnesota Outdoor Heritage Fund provided funding, as appropriated by the Minnesota Legislature, to donate the property to the Forest Service.

## Nevada

Southeast of Lake Tahoe—one of Nevada's most iconic and environmentally sensitive locations—the historic 1,233-acre Jacks Valley Ranch provides valuable wildlife habitat, complements the area's scenic character, and serves as a buffer from potentially catastrophic fires and floods. The Fund is working with the U.S. Forest Service and the Nevada Land Trust to protect the site from the increasing threat of development. With funding made available through the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act, protection of this land under a conservation easement will offer improved non-motorized recreation access for the public to the adjacent Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest and secure important greenspace in the area known as the Carson Front.

# THE CONSERVATION FUND

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## HOW YOU CAN HELP

# The Gift Of Nature Is A Gift Of Hope

The past year has been a trying time for America’s lands. Over the summer we watched swaths of our nation’s West Coast fight raging wildfires exacerbated by record-breaking heat; a weeklong deluge of rain from Hurricane Harvey created unprecedented flooding in Houston—our nation’s fourth-largest city; and the destruction that Hurricanes Irma and Maria—strengthened by the ever-warming waters of the Caribbean—caused across Florida, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and all neighboring islands. These same scenes have played out across the globe, and it’s reasonable to think our only opportunity to lessen these disasters has passed us by.

But nature is resilient. If we restore prairies, the birds return. If we clear a dam and let the river flow again—as it did for centuries—fish return, spawn and flourish. When a forest is burned, it will regrow and provide us once again with a dynamic ecosystem.

We marvel at the brilliance of the natural world that enables it to adapt to astonishing changes, while acknowledging that a permanent change in climate will have devastating ramifications for many species and landscapes. There is still time for optimism, but we need to continue to innovate and bring conservation solutions to communities across the country.

This year, and every year before, The Conservation Fund has helped nature recover, restore and thrive. Your generosity and support help us continue to make these moments a reality. Together we add to our public lands system, save wetlands, restore waterways and help communities become stronger through nature’s protection. You have always trusted us to put your contributions to use wisely and succeed in finding the right conservation solution for every community. We ask that you join us again this year to give a gift of optimism, a gift of nature.

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