

Conservation Working For America

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CONNECTING PEOPLE AND NATURE

How A Loan From NCIF Propelled My Business

As a family with ties to mountain biking, when we were first introduced to downhill biking it was easy for us to get behind the new sport. After taking our son to downhill races around the country, we realized that there was a real void for this sport in the Southeast. There was demand, but nowhere for people to go. So we decided to create one in North Carolina.

That's where the Natural Capital Investment Fund (NCIF) came in with a loan and creative financing that allowed us to purchase the 140-acre parcel of land—previously approved for residential development—that would become Bailey Mountain Bike Park, the first year-round downhill mountain bike park in the U.S. We haven't just built a business, we have created a community where people can both enjoy their passion and appreciate the beautiful landscape around them. Since opening in July 2015, we have expanded to 15 trails and counting, and attracted visitors from around the country and around the world. In addition to providing a solution that does not diminish the natural beauty of the land, the Park will invigorate Madison County's economy by continuing to attract global bike enthusiasts.

We might not have gone into this with the intention of being conservationists, but in pursuing it, that is what we have become. NCIF was able to see the big-picture benefits of our vision, both economic and environmental, to help make it happen.

—Jennifer Miller, CFO, Bailey Mountain Bike Park



Jennifer Miller, her family and other gravity bike park enthusiasts at Bailey Mountain Bike Park in Mars Hill, N.C.

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How Does A Community Forest Benefit People And Nature? Ask John.



John Littles
Executive Director, McSEED

Q How did the partnership with McIntosh County Sustainable Environment and Economic Development (McSEED) and The Conservation Fund develop?

A McSEED and Resourceful Communities (RC) met at community gatherings and found we shared similar values and approaches to addressing social, environmental and economic (triple-bottom-line) challenges in the communities we work, and looked for opportunities to partner. McSEED's previous experience with land-based community development and RC's knowledge and resources helped us lay the foundation for community forest ownership.

Q How would you describe the benefits of a community forest to someone who's never heard of the concept?

A Community forests are important to help landowners and community members see and understand all the benefits forests provide, from clean air and water, to reforestation and healthy habitats, to enhanced economic benefits. Forests also create valuable educational opportunities—especially in rural and low-wealth areas—for landowners to learn about resources that are available to retain family lands, and demonstrate best forestry practices that create financial returns.

Q Once the McIntosh SEED Community Forest is established, how will community members be able to get involved and utilize the forest?

A We are starting a nature trail and archery range, and faith leaders will help develop a meditation camp. Ecotourism, birdwatching, outdoor education and recreation programs also are high priorities to us. The local school systems are interested in using the forest to help high school students learn and practice forest management, and there will be landowner education to help African-American landowners, especially, access public agency resources. The future of McSEED Community Forest is bright.

McIntosh SEED Community Forest: A Win For All

Many of our nation's most precious and unique natural resources are found in rural communities where there are few economic opportunities. To address this challenge, the Fund has partnered with McIntosh County Sustainable Environment and Economic Development (McSEED), a Georgia-based nonprofit, to help establish that state's first community forest. McSEED supports communities in the rural South to ensure that they have the power and resources necessary to preserve their land, honor their heritage and culture and raise themselves out of poverty.

Before McSEED purchased the 1,148-acre forest in Long and McIntosh counties last year, the board and staff members of McSEED engaged community members, landowners of color, faith groups, conservation groups, graduate students and the U.S. Department of Defense in developing a master plan. The resulting plan blends community economic development, cultural preservation, landowner education, environmental protection and restoration and community education and recreation. The Fund brought its expertise in land acquisition, sustainable forest management, strategic financing and community building to the project.

The result of this partnership is the McIntosh SEED Community Forest. A community forest is a working forest that is permanently protected—offering the community value and benefits from the land, access and rights to the forest resources and involvement in decision-making. During the planning process, community leaders wanted to ensure that key aspects of the region's cultural heritage remained intact in the forest, including the cultivation of sweetgrass, which is used to make baskets. This craft was used by enslaved Africans in rice production and has evolved into an important cultural tradition and significant economic driver in the region.

The McSEED Community Forest is a new rural model for economic progress—one that will conserve natural resources and use them sustainably to create jobs, support small business development, preserve lands and reduce encroachment on military training at nearby Fort Stewart. It will also enhance outdoor recreational access and provide educational opportunities in agriculture, forestry and landownership.

McSEED Community Forest is a great example of how conservation can, and should, work for America. By creating solutions that make environmental and economic sense, we are redefining conservation to help rural communities create lasting prosperity.



Cheryl Peterson and John Littles from McSEED, with Mikki Sager, Director of Resourceful Communities at McIntosh SEED Community Forest, GA.

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ECONOMIC VITALITY



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A New Day For Coal Fields

What happens to coal fields and dependent communities when mining operations decline? In southwest West Virginia, the Fund is working with the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources to create and diversify economic opportunities by using conservation, forestry and wildlife management to address this challenge.

In early 2016, we purchased more than 32,000 acres of reclaimed mine lands that will provide opportunity for the state to own the land while allowing permanent recreational access—including the restoration of the state's largest conserved block of elk habitat. While elk have not been seen in West Virginia since the Civil War, they were once native to the eastern United States. Similar reintroduction efforts in Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia have created economic boosts for each state with increased tourism and outdoor recreation.

Purchased through our Working Forest Fund, the land will be sustainably managed as working forestland and transferred in phases to the Division of Natural Resources, supporting forestry-based jobs and increasing tourism opportunities for public hunting and other forms of wildlife-associated recreation. This conservation effort also protects more than 10,000 acres of lands currently leased by the Division of Natural Resources at Laurel Lake Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and Big Ugly WMA, ensuring permanent public access and enhancing connectivity with other important conservation lands in the region.

LAND, WATER AND WILDLIFE

American History

For the second year, The Conservation Fund has collaborated with Google Street View Trekker to provide virtual tours of some of America's most renowned and treasured places. From the hallowed Civil War battlefields of Gettysburg to the rugged trails that Lewis and Clark explored on their journey west and the stunning and otherworldly beauty of Arabia Mountain in Georgia, people can now explore, hike and paddle—via their digital devices—important historic and cultural sites protected by the Fund and our partners.

Delaware

One of the state's most rapidly developing areas lies in the heart of Delaware Bay's fragile coastal zone. So when one of the largest unprotected tracts in this sensitive area was under threat we quickly moved to protect it. Support from the Mt. Cuba Center enabled us to purchase the 1,250-acre Roberts Farm near Odessa—creating 10,000 acres of contiguous and protected wildlife habitat that supports water quality in the upper part of the Bay. Roberts Farm was then donated to Delaware Wild Lands for permanent ownership. The tidal wetlands, marshes and forestlands that make up this coastal zone will help improve air and water quality for surrounding communities, and offer opportunities for farming, hunting, trapping, wildlife tours, bird walks and educational research for years to come.

The West

Wide open spaces are essential for wildlife to range, roam and survive, but they also need to support the economic growth of communities and a way of life for private landowners. In partnership with local ranchers and federal, state and private partners, The Conservation Fund reached a milestone for sage grouse habitat conservation, protecting more than 100,000 acres of critical habitat in Wyoming, Idaho and Colorado. With 40 percent of the greater sage grouse range on privately owned grazing lands, our efforts focus on the needs of private landowners to maintain and grow their ranching operations while preventing habitat fragmentation that threatens sage grouse and other species.

West Virginia

Many great ideas are hatched over drinks. For Josh Bennett and Will Lewis, their idea was the drinks themselves—creating a business that produces cider and mead. They needed help getting their business, Hawk Knob Hard Cider and Mead, off the ground, and turned to our Natural Capital Investment Fund for support developing a business plan and a loan for working capital to purchase equipment and cover start-up costs. In 2015, they officially opened as West Virginia's first cidery, offering old time variety blends made from apples and honey from local farms in the Greenbrier Valley—a business solution that advances working land conservation locally.

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

Leave A Legacy Through Planned Giving

Each year, you make a thoughtful decision about your charitable giving. You research options, consider your giving capacity and ultimately choose an organization with a mission you believe in—an organization that’s also committed to strong financial stewardship of your contribution. That’s why you choose to support The Conservation Fund.

You can and should put that same thoughtful planning toward your legacy giving as it’s never too early to consider these decisions and there are many options. You could consider a charitable gift annuity, donating gifts of property or stock, or even list us as a beneficiary of your retirement plan, life insurance policy, bank or brokerage account.

If you own an individual retirement account (IRA) and are 70 or older, you can give directly from your IRA to the Fund! You can make a gift up to \$100,000 directly from your IRA and the gift will count against your Mandatory Minimum Distribution from your retirement account.

We understand this might not be an option for everyone, but planned gifts can take many forms. They are the result of a passion for our work and an intention to leave a legacy for future generations. No matter your financial circumstances and charitable objectives, there are planned giving options that can meet your goals and make a big impact.

We welcome the opportunity for a one-on-one conversation with you about creative ways to maximize your giving today and in the years to come.

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