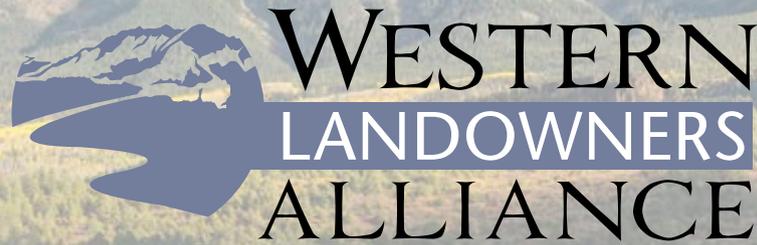


Stewardship with Vision



2022 POLICY PLATFORM

Western Landowners Alliance (WLA) is a landowner-founded, landowner-led non-partisan organization that advances policies and practices to sustain working lands, connected landscapes and native species. As landowners and land managers, we recognize that well-managed working lands are the cornerstones of both human communities and the ecosystems on which we all depend. We have a deep, vested stake in these lands and the lived experience of what it means to own and manage land, produce food and fiber, and to steward wildlife and natural resources on a daily basis. The Western Landowners Alliance was created to ensure that public policies are informed by people with first-hand knowledge of land stewardship and who share a commitment to conserving our natural heritage for future generations.

There are many threats facing working lands in the West today, from drought and fire to economic challenges to increasingly intense development pressure. With every acre of land lost, we lose another piece of our shared future. Yet there are also many success stories of landowners restoring forests and watershed, innovating grazing management, helping to recover wildlife species, working with neighbors to develop water sharing agreements, and much more.

We are at a pivotal point in deciding how we move conservation policies, the economy and our food systems forward. The right mix of pro-active investments and policies can ensure the scales tip towards a more sustainable future for both agriculture and conservation. Engaging landowners early and meaningfully when developing land and natural resource policies and plans is essential to creating practical, well-supported and enduring solutions.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Lesli Allison".

Lesli Allison
Executive Director
Santa Fe, New Mexico

PAYING FOR STEWARDSHIP

Working lands provide a wide range of vitally important public benefits, including food and fiber, water, and wildlife habitat, among others. However, these lands disappear when they cannot sustain reasonable livelihoods and when they are not economically competitive with other, more intensive land uses such as development. Meaningful economic drivers are needed to conserve family farms, ranches and forest lands and to enable those who steward them to earn a reasonable livelihood delivering these essential values.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop and promote conservation leasing on private lands. These multi-year agreements make it economically feasible for landowners to manage for both production and conservation values and can be tailored to address a range of needs.
- Build strong, competitive markets for forest and range products to ensure food security, improve forest and range health, and ensure an economic future for agricultural producers.
- Improve the structure, delivery and accessibility of Farm Bill Conservation Title and other federal conservation programs. These programs are important, but many are overly complex, underfunded, difficult to access and not adequately promoted.
- Utilize and further expand federal and state wildlife and natural resource trust funds or endowments to support multi-year conservation, restoration and stewardship agreements and initiatives. State natural resource trust funds have proven to be effective, locally-supported conservation delivery vehicles, leveraging federal, state and private investment for greater impact on the ground.

- Secure water for agricultural production along with the flexibility and support needed to conserve water resources, including investments in watershed health and water infrastructure.

PRIORITIES

- Utilize the 2023 Farm Bill to address conservation program delivery barriers and better support working lands in coping with drought and other impacts of climate change.
- Improve federal conservation programs with the expertise and partnership of landowners and local community leaders.
- Pair meaningful economic support with conservation of wildlife migrations and at-risk species habitat stewardship and restoration on private lands.
- Build upon improvements to the Grasslands Conservation Reserve Program and address barriers to enrollment.
- Utilize federal initiatives such as America the Beautiful to increase economic support for ecological stewardship and encourage greater interagency and interdepartmental coordination to target investments in key landscapes.

Below: A range rider camp on a public land grazing allotment in Idaho. Photo by Melanie Elzinga.



IMPROVING PUBLIC LANDS MANAGEMENT AND CROSS-BOUNDARY COORDINATION

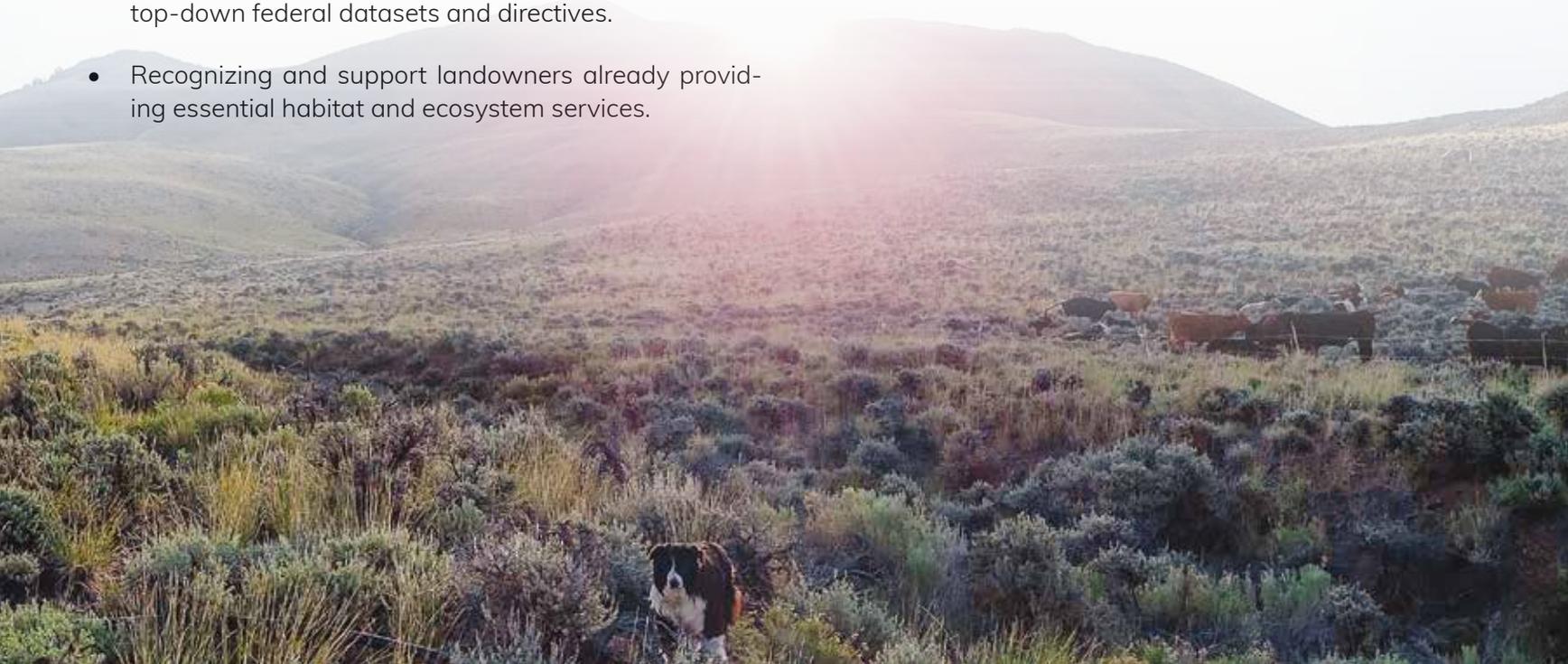
Public land management is inextricably linked with the economic viability of livestock producers and overall health of western landscapes. Policy and management decisions on both public and private lands create cascading impacts beyond jurisdictional boundaries. Through updating policy and guidance, federal land management agencies have the opportunity to manage for both ecological health and economic prosperity. Flexibility with retained accountability in land management, achieved through managing for outcomes rather than rulesets, and removing barriers to active forest management is the path to holistically improving landscape health across large, dynamic natural and human systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Reform NEPA to support conservation and stewardship on public working lands and on private lands via the federal nexus.
- Ensure that grazing regulations provide flexibility and resources to meet a range of ecosystem health goals across large landscapes of matrixed ownership including private, state and federal lands, while valuing economic stability of permittees and rural communities.
- Meaningfully involve landowners and managers early in land planning and land management decision-making, and ensure that large-scale federal conservation initiatives are defined by local needs and priorities, not top-down federal datasets and directives.
- Recognizing and support landowners already providing essential habitat and ecosystem services.

PRIORITIES

- Protect landowners' private property rights and private investments in conservation and restoration with respect to public access.
- Develop an agency-wide BLM restoration policy to establish a consistent approach to restoring BLM administered lands and ensure conceptual alignment with similar policy or guidance at other land management agencies for maximum impact.
- Advocate for updated BLM grazing regulations that promote flexibility in livestock management on BLM administered lands, including regulatory revisions emphasizing flexibility with retained accountability, transparency and codifying permitting frameworks developed through outcome-based grazing pilots.
- Integrate principles of flexibility with retained accountability into updated U.S. Forest Service grazing regulations including livestock-wildlife conflict reduction work.
- Refine and expand joint cooperative monitoring pilot agreements on federal grazing allotments.
- Elevate and transfer the success of collaborative public-private partnerships in planning and managing federal allotments.



REDUCING CONFLICT ON WORKING LANDS

In some cases, the presence of wildlife threatens the economic viability of the very working lands on which they depend. Migrating wildlife can damage fencing, increase forage competition or introduce the risk of disease transmission. Large carnivores - expanding in range and abundance - can create direct livestock loss or introduce indirect losses through their presence. Effective conflict reduction work will depend on expanded and effective deployment of conflict prevention, compensation, lethal control and collaboration (the four Cs).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Better support landowners in implementing cost-efficient and potentially effective conflict reduction practices through increasing access to technical, financial and operational assistance, expanding conservation practices to encompass conflict reduction and increasing state and federal agency capacity.
- Support the development of depredation compensation programs that capture the true cost of wildlife-livestock conflict, increase funding and training for depredation investigators and explore opportunities to expand federal funding for depredation compensation.
- Clarify regulatory structures regarding the use of lethal control to provide increased transparency for livestock producers and public and increase consultation between state wildlife management agencies and USDA-Wildlife Services.

PRIORITIES

- Expand technical and financial assistance for conflict prevention practices through NRCS, USDA-Wildlife Services and Extension and support ongoing practices that are necessary to adapt to the evolving challenges posed by conflict on working lands.
- Secure federal appropriation of \$15 million annually for conflict reduction and depredation compensation grants to states authorized by the America's Conservation Enhancement Act.
- Utilize the USDA Livestock Indemnity Program as a complement to state livestock loss compensation programs and the Wolf Livestock Demonstration Project Grant.
- Further integrate the four Cs into USDA and DOI policy and practice.

Below: Ranchers in Montana inspect an electrified mat that prevents grizzly bears from bypassing electric fence barriers when gates are left open. Photo by Matthew Collins.



EMPOWERING LOCALLY-LED CONSERVATION

Successful models of place-based or community-based conservation often have strong and trusted local leadership, intimate knowledge of local challenges and stakeholder dynamics and deep connections to both the surrounding communities and landscapes. These examples underscore the value of conservation supporting traditional livelihoods and rural communities. There is tremendous untapped potential to support and expand this network of community-based groups' capacity to assemble large-scale conservation projects, conduct educational outreach, provide technical assistance and connect landowners with federal and state resources and programs. However, many of these organizations lack human, technical and financial capacity to grow and sustain these efforts over time.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create jointly-funded resource coordinator positions – housed within community-based organizations, land trusts or local NGOs – to work across agencies and provide support and technical assistance to landowners.
- Develop more predictable, consistent and accessible funding streams aimed at supporting the development, growth and ongoing operation of community-based organizations.
- Invest in the human capacity needed within the federal workforce and the communities they serve to support community-based conservation, leverage resources and deliver technical assistance.
- Establish meaningful pathways for on-the-ground knowledge and expertise to inform federal policymaking, break down institutional silos across agencies and departments and expand opportunities for co-production of science of and information between land stewards and researchers.
- Recognize the diversity of land stewards, increase access to technical and financial assistance for underrepresented or marginalized agricultural producers.

PRIORITIES

- Ensure that federal grants for capacity building, community development and conservation planning and implementation are accessible to community-based organizations, including examining non-federal match requirements as a limiting factor.
- Develop and expand structures that enable true bottom-up, collaborative governance by utilizing local priorities as a guide for distributing federal resources and informing policymaking.
- Protect and expand investments in NRCS conservation technical assistance and employ stewardship-contracting or other third-party technical assistance arrangements to better link federal assistance with local expertise and relationships.
- Explore flexibilities within the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) to pilot innovative models of collaborative conservation based in local, state and federal partnership.



Right: A crew works on a riparian restoration project on a private ranch in western Colorado. Photo by Kenyon Fields.

CONSERVING AND RECOVERING WILDLIFE AND BIODIVERSITY

The owners and managers of private working lands are essential partners in the conservation of wildlife. The Endangered Species Act (ESA) is an important safety net for wildlife; however, the ESA should not serve only as a last stop measure to prevent species extinction but a tool for species recovery and driver of proactive conservation of at-risk species. While effective against preventing species extinction, the ESA's protective measures at times create disincentives for species conservation on private land. Assurance agreements designed to address these disincentives and burdens are limited by complex, costly and cumbersome processes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Enhance regulatory certainty for voluntary, landowner-driven conservation through improved access to voluntary conservation agreements, on federal and private lands, including expanded applicability of such agreements to cover at-risk species.
- Address structural gaps in long-term implementation of regulatory assurance agreements, including dedicated funding for third party entities to develop and monitor agreements.
- Increase dedicated capacity within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and state wildlife agencies to initiate and support proactive, voluntary conservation agreements.
- Increase synergy between landowner-facing programs like Partners for Fish and Wildlife, Working Lands for Wildlife and similar state-led initiatives and the ecological services program at the FWS.

PRIORITIES

- Secure increased dedicated funding for the FWS to conduct proactive conservation of at-risk species and conduct outreach to landowners with partner organizations and agencies.
- Establish pathways for qualified third-party entities, such as conservation NGOs or conservation districts, to develop and implement – including monitoring and reporting – conservation and assurance agreements.
- Improve NEPA, ESA and other regulations to further promote and remove barriers to habitat conservation and restoration work, while supporting working lands and rural communities.
- Complete a comprehensive regulatory assurance agreement to protect threatened and endangered fish and other species in the Upper Rio Grande region of New Mexico and Colorado as a learning project to improve implementation of ESA agreements throughout the West.
- Ensure that ESA regulatory amendments do not reduce certainty and assurances for landowners implementing voluntary conservation and restoration efforts.

Below: Rare San Juan cutthroat trout are released into a breeding pond along a stream on private land as part of partnership between Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the landowners to restore the fish to its former habitat. Photo by Day's Edge Productions.



February 2022