

THE SCALE OF LANDOWNER INVESTMENTS IN CONSERVATION ACROSS THE AMERICAN WEST

SUMMARY

This report answers a basic but often overlooked question: **How much are landowners already investing, out of their own pockets, to care for land, water, and wildlife?** We surveyed owners of 500+ acre parcels in Western states about their conservation spending, above and beyond normal operating expenses. The results make visible the scale and importance of private landowner investment in conservation across the American West.

The findings show that landowners are not passive beneficiaries of conservation programs—they are lead investors and frontline stewards. Western landowners are already investing hundreds of millions of dollars each year to care for the land, and our policies should recognize, support, and build on that reality.

\$407.5M

invested by landowners in conservation in 2024 in 11 Western states, above and beyond normal operating expenses.

WESTERN LANDOWNERS' CONSERVATION SPENDING IS COMPARABLE TO OTHER MAJOR FUNDING SOURCES

SCALE OF INVESTMENT

Landowners in the West spent at least \$407.5 million on conservation in 2024. This is comparable or exceeds many other widely cited sources of conservation funding.

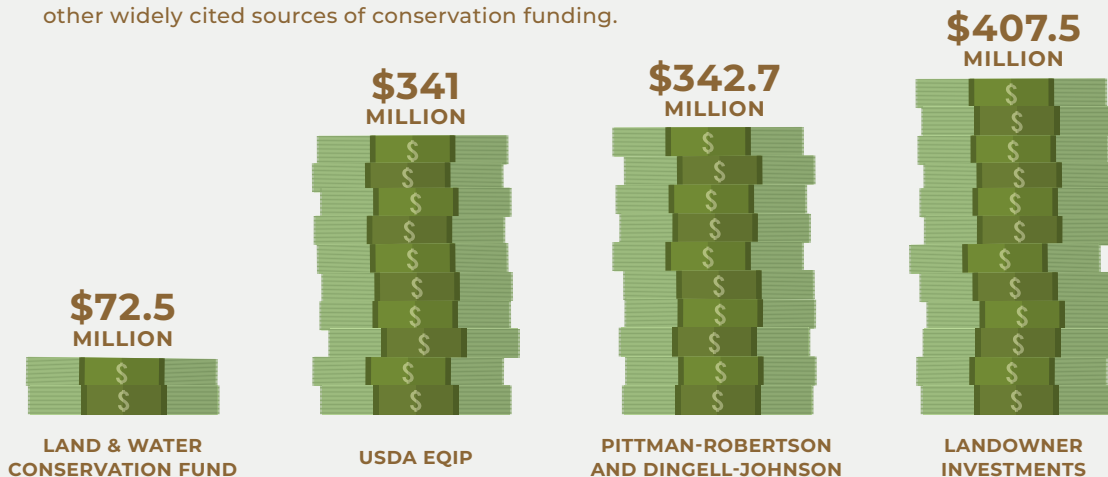


Figure 1. Conservation spending by major sources in 2024 in the 11 Western states

IN ADDITION TO DIRECT INVESTMENT
MOST LANDOWNERS FORGO INCOME
OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONSERVATION

59% of respondents intentionally gave up income-generating opportunities to benefit conservation. Common forgone opportunities include: Agricultural expansion; Residential or commercial development; and Recreation or access-based income. While many losses were under \$50,000, one in five exceeded \$1 million.

This reflects another finding of the study, that landowners strongly value and prioritize conservation outcomes for their land. Most surveyed landowners ranked conservation as a top management priority. They identified that their investments are driven by stewardship values, long-term land health, and responsibility to future generations.

WILDLIFE COSTS LANDOWNERS BUT
THEY KEEP INVESTING IN IT

For many Western landowners, sustaining wildlife comes at a high cost. Survey results revealed that in 2024, landowners experienced an estimated \$101 million in losses from crop, forage, water, and livestock damage caused by wildlife and spent an additional \$37.6 million repairing this damage. But costs do mount up, and expense was cited as the predominant reason most landowners don't do more conservation work on their land.

Table 1.
Landowner conservation investments per acre and total spending

CONSERVATION CATEGORY	PER ACRE	TOTAL
Wildlife management	\$0.79	\$62,229,000
Range management	\$1.58	\$124,196,000
Water resource management	\$1.18	\$93,112,000
Forest management	\$0.88	\$69,025,000
In-kind contributions	\$0.42	\$32,998,000
Other contributions that benefit wildlife and land conservation	\$0.33	\$25,960,000
OVERALL	\$5.18	\$407,520,000



DAY'S EDGE PRODUCTIONS

A Colorado Parks and Wildlife biologist prepares to release endangered San Juan cutthroat trout on a private ranch. Native cutthroat trout restoration projects often rely on private lands because private stream reaches can provide refuge for fish from angling pressure. Collectively, landowners are spending millions of dollars out of pocket to restore riparian health, improve fisheries, and recover native trout.

READ AND DOWNLOAD THE
FULL STUDY, including the
methodology and complete
references:

westernlandowners.org/
landowner-investment

