

# Conservation Working For America

Crabb Ranch, MT  
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Residents stroll along the eventual  
Belt Line corridor in Durham, NC.  
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## CONNECTING PEOPLE AND NATURE

### A New Life for an Old Railroad Corridor in Durham, North Carolina

Built in the 1890s as a rail spur to downtown tobacco buildings, the Durham Belt Line extends along the city's western edge. Abandoned since the 1980s, this 2-mile, 18-acre historic railway corridor now has the potential to become a vital part of the city's greenspace network.

City leaders first proposed converting the railway to a recreational trail in 2001 to link the South Ellerbe Creek Trail with the American Tobacco Trail and connect the Duke Park and Old North Durham residential neighborhoods to the vibrant downtown area. Over the years, the project has gained widespread support from elected officials, civic groups, neighborhood associations and downtown business leaders.

The city of Durham worked for many years to acquire the rail corridor from its owner, Norfolk Southern, but a deal seemed difficult to reach. As the Belt Line hung in the balance, The Conservation Fund stepped in to help with negotiations and purchased the property in 2017, becoming the interim owner while the city secured the necessary funding. This effort was largely funded by a U.S. Department of Transportation-Federal Highway Administration grant in partnership with the state of North Carolina. The property recently was transferred to the city, marking a pivotal victory for the Belt Line.

The city now aims to engage the communities around the Belt Line in the planning and design process to better understand their needs and address concerns about gentrification, displacement and inequity. This community-led process ensures the Durham Belt Line will benefit all of Durham.

*See our interview with the mayor of Durham, Page 2.*



"Bull City," nickname of Durham, NC  
© Robin McKinney

## How will the Durham Belt Line Inspire a Greener City? Ask Mayor Steve Schewel

**Q** How do you see the Durham Belt Line adding to the quality of life in the city?

**A** We have to make sure that we are providing people with places—trails and parks—where they can play, where they can exercise, where they can enjoy themselves, and everybody has access. The Durham Belt Line project, right in the heart of the city, is going to accomplish that. People who work downtown will be able to take a walk on this trail during lunch. In terms of the quality of life for people living and working downtown, I think it's going to be a tremendous asset.

**Q** The city struggled for about 20 years to make the purchase of the unused rail corridor. In your opinion, what was the turning point that helped move this project forward?

**A** One major turning point was when Bill Holman, The Conservation Fund's North Carolina State Director, and David Proper, the Fund's Urban Program Director, got involved. They brought with them important experience and trusted relationships—especially with the railroad—and knew the steps that we needed to take to get to “yes.” They went through a whole new round of appraisals, and David brought his negotiating skills to the table.

**Q** What do you see as some of the challenges the Belt Line project faces moving forward?

**A** All of the physical work to create a great trail and the design work is one challenge. It's a big task to engineer and design this type of trail, build it, and then to create wonderful greenspaces around it. An equally big challenge is to have the trail serve people in Durham equitably. We need to make sure that every neighborhood is well served by the Belt Line.

*I believe preserving land in an urban area where it's scarce is an amazing gift.*



Steve Schewel  
Mayor of Durham,  
North Carolina

## The Conservation Leadership Network Celebrates 20 Years of Conservation and Economic Development

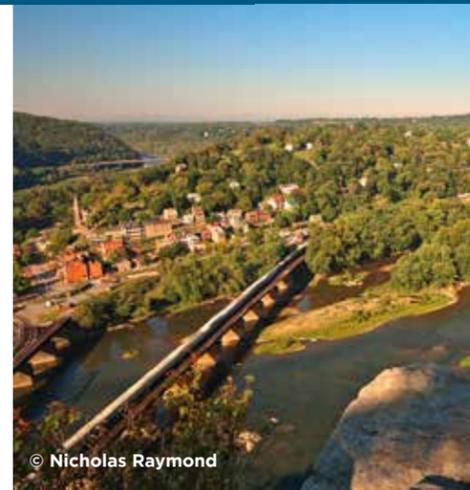
For many people, it may be hard to remember a time when building connections was more difficult than logging on to social media. But 20 years ago, there wasn't a space to discuss innovative conservation strategies outside of annual conferences and academia, and The Conservation Fund recognized this as an opportunity.

In 1998, The Conservation Fund established the Conservation Leadership Network (CLN). Its goal: to create a national network that connects people and organizations in order to build new approaches to conservation and serve as a catalyst for collaborative learning. CLN's workshops, events and grants have brought together perspectives from conservation nonprofits, corporations, infrastructure developers and multiple levels of government to share knowledge and achieve conservation that's good for people and the environment in communities across the nation. CLN's 20 years of work is proof that conservation and economic development can and should operate side by side. Since its beginning, CLN has distributed over \$3.6 million in grants and community services and helped more than 3,500 communities in 45 states create on-the-ground conservation solutions.

These partnerships have led to many meaningful success stories. Through help from CLN and its Balancing Nature and Commerce course, the Pennsylvania Wilds, one of the largest greenspaces between New York City and Chicago, has had steady increases in visitor spending over the past 10 years, contributing to a 25 percent increase in tourism jobs. And a partnership started in 2014 with transit company CSX to deliver food to underserved communities is projected to provide over 350,000 families with more than 42 million pounds of food.

Following on the success of its Gateway Communities initiative, CLN this past December launched the National Summit for Gateway Communities. This inaugural summit brought together 150 participants representing 27 states and one foreign country, Chile, for a two-day program. Participants celebrated and discussed the role of the cities and towns that sit just outside major tourist attractions, such as national parks and wilderness areas, as well as opportunities for growth. Gateway communities not only play host to America's most cherished landscapes, but also often serve as a microcosm of broader community impacts. They are the testing ground for the future of our country's communities—determining how to create solutions for economic development, affordable housing, natural resource stewardship, public land access, local food development and other issues.

CLN knows that diverse perspectives are essential for greater environmental and economic success and is committed to continuing its innovative approach to conservation for the next 20 years and beyond.



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### ECONOMIC VITALITY



The Crabb Family  
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Crabb Ranch, MT  
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## Helping Ranchers Protect a Way of Life and Key Habitat in Montana

When you think about Montana, majestic mountains, extraordinary wildlife and working ranches might come to mind. Cattle ranching has been part of the state's rural economy for generations. It's a unique way of life that Matt and Stacy Crabb know about firsthand. They already were longtime ranch managers when they got the opportunity of a lifetime—the chance to buy an 8,586-acre ranch along the Rocky Mountain Front. While many people dream about purchasing and running their own ranch, it can be a very difficult and expensive process.

From subdivisions to recreation development, growth is fragmenting Montana's vast landscape, affecting both habitat and the ranching community. And as the west grows, this type of development is driving up land costs, and that makes it complicated for folks like Matt and Stacy to purchase their own ranches. But The Conservation Fund shared the family's vision to keep the land working, intact and pristine for future generations. With support from the Land and Water Conservation Fund, we helped place a conservation easement on the property and transferred the easement to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, who will manage the easement in perpetuity. This was a viable solution for the Crabbs because, paired with a bank loan, it lowered their purchase cost and enabled them to own and operate the ranch while permanently protecting it from development.

The Crabb Ranch is now a family business that Matt and Stacy will build and share with their two children. Ranches like this are important to the economic viability of local communities, play a critical role in protecting open space and provide important wildlife habitat for grizzly bears, trumpeter swans, long-billed curlews and more. This story is a win-win for the Crabb family and for conservation.

### LAND, WATER AND WILDLIFE

## Florida

Two hundred years ago, longleaf pine forests—among the most diverse ecosystems on the planet—stretched across 90 million acres from Virginia to Texas. But these forests were significantly overharvested throughout the 19th century, with the sturdy lumber used nationwide in the construction of bridges, buildings, railroads, homes and ships. Today, only 4.7 million acres of longleaf forests remain. The Conservation Fund has partnered with Resource Management Service and the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service in the largest single longleaf restoration effort on private lands to date. The partners recently placed a perpetual conservation easement on 3,719 acres in Florida's Gulf Coastal Plain, protecting it from development, requiring longleaf pine restoration, and allowing the land to remain a sustainable working forest supporting the local economy.

## Maine

Maine's North Woods is an oasis for outdoor lovers. This past winter, The Conservation Fund acquired nearly 27,000 acres of working forestland—known as the Pleasant River Headwaters Forest—that provides critical watershed protection and regional economic benefits through expanded recreation opportunities and sustainable forestry. The forestland is in the center of the 100 Mile Wilderness near the Appalachian Trail and eventually will be conveyed to the Appalachian Mountain Club. The club has developed a robust nature-based tourism operation on adjoining land that includes a series of lodges, 130 miles of trails for hiking and skiing, an environmental education program for schools throughout the region, and a significant sustainable forestry operation.

## Michigan

Hiawatha National Forest's lakeshores, lighthouses, islands and winter snow are within a day's drive of several urban and rural areas in Michigan and Wisconsin, making it a welcome natural respite for nearby residents. Here a seemingly small conservation acquisition is providing significant benefits to people and wildlife. The Conservation Fund recently facilitated the purchase of 11.25 acres of critical shoreline habitat for the U.S. Forest Service. Now part of the Hiawatha National Forest Research Natural Area, the newly conserved site ensures better management and protection of an exceptional wetland and dune ecosystem for at-risk plant species and wildlife, like the federally endangered piping plover, while opening new public recreation opportunities for nature viewing along an uninterrupted six miles of Lake Michigan shoreline.

## Mississippi

The Deepwater Horizon oil spill was the largest marine oil spill in U.S. history. In the nine years since the spill, The Conservation Fund has teamed with federal, state, local and private partners to expand the permanent protection of critical ecosystems along the Gulf Coast. In Mississippi, we utilized funding from the Mississippi Trustee Implementation Group's Natural Resource Damage Assessment to conserve more than 1,500 acres of essential coastal wildlife habitat at Grand Bay National Wildlife Refuge, Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve and Grand Bay Savanna Coastal Preserve. Protecting these lands improves management and public access, while securing habitat for threatened and endangered species.

# THE CONSERVATION FUND

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## HOW YOU CAN HELP

# Leaving a Legacy through Planned Giving

Consider the values you hold dear ... ensuring your children and grandchildren have special outdoor places to play, helping protect the wild havens that so many species call home, or making sure all Americans have access to nature.

Each year, you make a thoughtful choice about your charitable giving. You research options, consider your giving capacity and choose an organization with a mission you believe in—one that is also committed to using your donation wisely. That’s why you choose The Conservation Fund.

That same level of thoughtful consideration should also go toward researching your planned giving options. A planned gift to The Conservation Fund is a flexible and creative way to give charitably while meeting your personal, family or financial goals. And it doesn’t have to be difficult. Creating a legacy gift is an especially meaningful way to help us continue to build parks, conserve open space, protect wildlife habitat and more. Your planned gift, regardless of size, leaves a legacy. It ensures generations of Americans will benefit from your support.

No matter your financial circumstance or charitable goals, there are planned giving options available to meet your needs. The most practical way to make a legacy gift is through your estate plan, by means of a will, living trust or beneficiary designation. You could consider a charitable gift annuity; donating gifts of stock or property; or designating a portion of your retirement plan, life insurance policy, bank or brokerage account.

It might sound daunting, but thoughtful planned giving is actually an easy way to make a lasting investment in the special places you love. Planned gifts are the result of a passion for our work and an intention to leave a legacy of nature for future generations. We welcome the opportunity for a one-on-one conversation with you to discuss the options that best suit your needs.

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