Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park expanded by 2,500 acres!

In 1853, while searching for a railroad route through the Rocky Mountains, explorer and Army officer John W. Gunnison came across a landscape in western Colorado he called “the roughest, most hilly and most cut up” he had ever seen. The Black Canyon is every bit as formidable as Gunnison first described, with the whitewater of the river that now bears his name surging through vertical canyon walls so deep that the base of the canyon sees little daylight, exposing dramatic spires and unique rock formations built over millions of years.

Much of this rugged landscape is part of Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, which gives the public access to the canyon’s incomparable recreation opportunities and awe-inspiring views. Last year alone, more than 300,000 people visited the park, which is not surprising in light of the $28 billion contribution made to Colorado’s economy from outdoor recreation each year.

The Conservation Fund recently partnered with the National Park Service (NPS) to acquire 2,500 acres near the park’s visitor center and along the South Rim of the canyon. Those additional acres will better preserve the viewshed, increase access for additional recreation opportunities and create potential utility improvements in the park.

Better access to the canyon amplifies the experience and gives visitors a better understanding of the true magnitude of this intense landscape and its history. In Colorado and across the country, we all have a stake in our public lands, and we are working to ensure current and future generations of Americans can enjoy them.

See interview with project lead on p.2
Investing in the vitality of the Northern Forest economy by protecting working forests

Never before have we experienced such a rapid loss of our large working forests; over the past 15 years, more than 20 million acres have been lost. And when we lose our forests, we lose more than the trees. Our forests provide a means of livelihood for loggers and mill workers, as well as clean water to drink, clean air to breathe, habitat for wildlife and limitless outdoor recreation opportunities. To address this challenge, we’re actively working across the country to protect some of our most precious and dwindling forests.

Last fall, as part of our national effort to prevent the fragmentation and potential conversion of America’s last large intact working forests, The Conservation Fund purchased the 23,000-acre Cowee Forest, made up of several parcels of what was privately owned forestland along the borders where New York, Vermont and Massachusetts meet. The forest is home to critical wildlife habitat and rich recreation opportunities for the public, such as hiking, biking, fishing, snowmobiling and cross-country skiing. As a working forest, it also provides more than 300 forestry-related jobs, serving as a key driver of economic vitality in the region. The Conservation Fund will sustainably manage the land over the next several years, raising funds and buying time to determine the best conservation strategies that support both recreational access and local economies.

The purchase of Cowee Forest is a win-win, addressing the loss of our last large working forests, while marking a tremendous save for local communities, helping the rural economies not just survive, but thrive.

Maryland

Over the summer the state established the Harriet Tubman Rural Legacy Area to protect and conserve the natural, cultural and historic landscape of Harriet Tubman’s life and legacy. The Rural Legacy Area encompasses the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad State Park and Visitor Center and will bolster visitation to this area. Working in partnership with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and Dorchester County, we will lead acquisition efforts to protect key historical sites and one of the last remaining examples of a 19th-century agrarian landscape that tell the story of the celebrated abolitionist’s work facilitating the Underground Railroad.

New Hampshire

We recently celebrated the completion of a decade-long effort to secure a 24,000-acre landscape of working forestland adjacent to the Appalachian National Scenic Trail in the Mahoosuc Mountains. Conservation easements on the privately owned land ensure that the forests will be sustainably managed for the production of responsibly harvested timber and will be open for diverse public outdoor recreation into the future. The forestland will continue to support local and regional jobs by providing timber to mills in New Hampshire, Maine and Canada. Through our Working Forest Fund, we are working in the Northeast and across the country to protect these ecologically and economically important forests.

North Carolina

Elk were reintroduced into the Appalachian Mountains of western North Carolina in 2001. Since then the population has grown, and with it the need to ensure habitat for the species. We are working with the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission and local partners to secure elk habitat and water resources, while providing economic development opportunities to Haywood County and surrounding communities. We recently celebrated the protection of 2,030 acres at the William H. Silver Game Land, including the conservation of the Hempfl Field and Tributaries and tributaries of the Beaver Creek. An investment in the vitality of the region’s forest economy, which is the largest natural resource-based economic sector in the state of New York. Our goal is to protect forestland of community- and state-wide importance, and we look forward to implementing conservation solutions at Cowee Forest that meet the needs of people, protect wildlife habitat and provide economic benefits.

Wyoming

Immediately west of Casper, the North Platte River winds around plateaus and sagebrush near the historic pioneer trails early settlers used as they journeyed west. We recently helped the Bureau of Land Management acquire 646 acres and 1.5 miles of the river with support from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund. Now part of the North Platte River Special Recreation Management Area, the newly conserved site creates opportunities for fishing and public recreation adjacent to town in an area that boasts Blue Ribbon trout fishing—with the most trout by weight per mile of any stream in Wyoming—while also securing a historic battlefield site from the Indian Wars of the northern Great Plains.

Strengthening Louisiana’s environment, economy and culture

What does jambalaya have to do with environmental and economic health? A lot! In Louisiana, rice is a staple of many Cajun dishes, as well as a top agricultural export. It plays a key role in the economy and supports thousands of local jobs. But perhaps surprisingly, this important ingredient also is critical to the state’s wildlife. Every winter, Louisiana rice farmers flood their fields in preparation for the next season’s crops. These flooded fields become temporary wetlands, providing much-needed resting and feeding habitat for migrating birds and other wetland-dependent species. With these economic and environmental benefits in mind, we are working with private landowners to protect Live Oak Farm, a 100-year-old, family-owned rice farm in Vermilion Parish, Louisiana. Rice fields have been disappearing in this parish over the past 20 years, and Live Oak Farm is one of the southernmost remaining rice farms in the state. In Louisiana, wetlands also have been suffering significant losses, largely due to sea level rise and coastal erosion. This makes Live Oak Farm, which also produces cattle, a conservation easement on part of this 5,800-acre working farm, which will allow it to remain under private ownership. We’re proud to play a small part in sustaining this rich cultural, economic and environmental industry.
Making the gift of nature a family affair

A group of summer campers ran a lemonade stand, a young girl sent in her birthday money, and a boy asked that donations be made to his favorite charity instead of gifts for his bar mitzvah. These contributions to The Conservation Fund are some of my favorites from the past year—future philanthropists in the making, doing their part to protect the places they love.

Giving as a family is a great experience. It teaches young people about the importance of generosity. In my own family, we talk about what our values are, what we care about and how we are going to put those values into action. We take on projects in our own community and research and make contributions to the charities that are doing good work for the causes that matter to us.

Kids are endlessly curious about the natural world. They love rock collecting and chasing frogs and butterflies; they’ll spend hours exploring a pond or running on a sandy beach. It’s easy to explain to them the importance of protecting our natural world and all of the benefits nature provides to people.

That’s why The Conservation Fund works every day in communities across the country to find smart solutions that protect our country’s natural resources and save the places that matter most—properties with ecological, historic and cultural significance. We have accomplished so much, conserving over 8 million acres, but we have much more to do. We hope you and your family will continue to support us along the way.

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