

Western Conservation Strategy: 2018-2023

July 2018 | Environment Program



INTRODUCTION: CONSERVING THE NORTH AMERICAN WEST

People in the North American West depend on healthy rivers, national parks, forests, monuments, and other public and working lands to sustain their families, their communities, and their economic well-being. The majestic landscapes of the West provide refuge and inspiration, and fulfill cultural, spiritual, and commercial needs. Since its founding in 1966, the Hewlett Foundation has supported grantees working to sustain this heritage. Along the way, we set an ambitious long-term goal, based on science and informed by practical considerations, to conserve biodiversity and protect the ecological integrity of half the North American West.¹

This is, of course, easier said than done. Despite much progress and many successes, we are still losing the equivalent of a football field of natural land in the Western United States every 2 1/2 minutes. Research conducted as part of our strategy refresh identified the most pernicious risks to Western communities and ecosystems:

- Accelerated energy and mineral development, especially oil and gas, in sensitive areas near homes, sacred landscapes, and critical wildlife corridors and protected areas.
- Water scarcity due to climate change, unfettered commercial and residential development, and industrial-scale agriculture.
- Land conversion that severs the connectivity of wild and working lands and waterways and the human communities that rely on them.
- Insufficient funding and incentives for public and private land conservation.
- The lack of a diverse, durable, and empowered constituency for conservation that withstands the nation's political polarization and well-funded actors seeking deregulation and development.

These challenges threaten to undermine the economic vitality of Western communities and affect political and social stability – creating unique challenges in advancing culturally- and economically-relevant conservation solutions.

¹ These materials were prepared as part of the Hewlett Foundation's internal planning process and do not represent actions to be taken by Hewlett Foundation staff or by grantee staff at the Foundation's direction. Although some of the implementation markers, for instance, may reflect the passage of legislation (based on inputs from grantees and experts in the field), the Hewlett Foundation does not lobby or earmark its funds for prohibited lobbying activities, as defined in the federal tax laws. The Foundation's funding for policy work is limited to permissible forms of support only, such as general operating support grants that grantees can allocate at their discretion, and project support grants for non-lobbying activities (e.g., public education and nonpartisan research).

Our last five-year grantmaking strategy did not address these challenges head-on, but rather took advantage of a wide range of opportunities at the federal level to make substantial gains in land and water protections. Unfortunately, some of these gains have proved less durable than we hoped and expected. Progress has been halted, and in many places, it is being undone or is threatened with reversal. We have learned an important lesson about the need to enable socio-economic growth in affected communities alongside, and as part of, protecting vulnerable ecosystems. We need to strive toward outcomes that generate economic, community, and conservation benefits all at once. People and policy-makers should puzzle about *how* to advance conservation outcomes, not *whether* to advance them. This, in turn, has important implications for our strategy and approach to Western Conservation. In short, our current grantmaking strategy must be modified to focus more on collaborating with local communities and earning support from state and local authorities.

A. Renewing Our Long-Term Goal.

But to what end? As noted above, the five-year strategy we adopted in 2013 set an ambitious long-term goal of ensuring that at least 50 percent of the 1.5 billion-acre North American West “is either strictly protected or is in a mix of strictly protected and lightly used (and well-regulated) areas.” We based this goal on a review of the best available scientific evidence, which indicated that protection to this extent was necessary to preserve essential biodiversity and sustain the ecological integrity of the North American West.

Nothing in the intervening years has occurred to undermine or weaken that conclusion, and we believe the long-term goal of our Western Conservation grantmaking should remain to preserve biodiversity and conserve the ecological integrity of half of Western North America. We believe it is possible to meet this ecological goal while at the same time helping enable sustainable communities.

B. Updating Our Theory of Change.

Also unchanged is our continued focus on public policy (as opposed to financial or technological innovation) as the primary and most efficacious tool for advancing outcomes toward this goal. We do, however, need to update our theory of change to account for what we learned during the refresh process. The volatility of national politics teaches us that we must not count on easy wins at the federal level, and any conservation win is subject to politically and ideologically-motivated reversal. More, it teaches that *enduring conservation of the critical lands, waters, and wildlife of the North American West will be achieved when it reflects the values of engaged communities*. To achieve that, we must support new fronts in conservation — supporting the building of stronger, deeper, and wider coalitions, including with rural and indigenous communities, to set the stage for significant success down the road. To that end, we propose to focus more on pursuing community-driven, collaborative conservation solutions. This entails a shift from a focus on securing federal public land policy and protections toward supporting grantees advancing economically and ecologically relevant solutions at the state and local levels.

We are not alone in recognizing the need to make this shift. Place-based, collaborative conservation is increasingly seen as the future in ecosystem-based or large landscape management, as it balances natural and social values at large scale. This kind of slow but critical labor helps ensure that policy wins deliver long-term benefits for both nature and communities.²

We are proposing a process-intensive approach in this strategy revision. Enduring land and water protections require time and effort to build systems and structures that can withstand the roiling currents of national politics. Organizing and mobilizing a diverse range of constituents and communities will generate durable conservation solutions that benefit wildlife and people of the North American West. To be clear, we expect to continue making gains in land and water conserved, but the main effort in this next phase of our work will be to develop the conditions needed to yield more stable, lasting success. This approach may result, at least at first, in slower progress, but in light of recent rollbacks of some key federal conservation policies and protections, we believe is a worthy investment for enduring conservation outcomes.

II. LOOKING BACK: WESTERN CONSERVATION, 2013-2018.

Our 2013 grantmaking strategy endeavored to take a very large step toward our long-term goal of conserving half of the North American West: Over its five-year life, we sought to support work that protects 320 million acres of land in the U.S. and Canada, and that curtails energy development on an additional 100 million acres. Our strategy also aimed to improve 10,500 river miles during its five-year run.

While our grantees did not fully achieve these ambitious targets, they still had extraordinary success. They conserved 198 million acres in the U.S. and Canada, while balancing conservation and energy development on an additional 40 million acres. Grantees surpassed our goal for rivers by improving 11,500 river miles.

A retrospective evaluation completed in May found that Hewlett Foundation grantees achieved these results by displaying outstanding shrewdness with respect to policy, communications, and outreach, and by moving nimbly to take advantage of conservation opportunities on national public lands — engaging “where and when it [was] most effective to do so.” In many instances, this meant grantees worked outside our priority geographies to create momentum for federal policymakers to act on conservation opportunities within the West.

Highlights of grantee activities over the past five years include:

- In one of the most successful conservation collaborations in U.S. history, plans to proactively conserve nearly 70 million acres of public land across 11 U.S. states for the

² We are not so naïve as to think this work succeeds in a vacuum. The foundation will also support grantees exercising the many levers of policy change, including persuasive communications and civil litigation, to defend and advance multi-benefit policies from conception through to implementation.

greater sage-grouse were finalized with the support of bipartisan governors, scientists, ranchers, sportsmen, industry, and conservationists, benefitting more than 300 other species.

- Effective advocacy helped persuade President Obama to conserve 550 million acres of ecologically and culturally significant public lands and waters, including the first Native-led national monument at Bears Ears. (Most of these acres are ocean monument designations; 6 million acres are in the West.)
- New Master Leasing Plans were adopted on 3.2 million acres of public land across the American West to balance oil and gas development with recreation and conservation.
- Additional protections were afforded via federal land-use plans on 17.6 million acres of public land in the Rocky Mountains and Alaska.
- Dozens of potentially damaging state bills to seize and develop or dispose of federal lands were defeated.
- Congress designated 523,000 new acres as fully protected wilderness, including the Boulder-White Clouds Wilderness in Idaho, an expansion of the Bob Marshall Wilderness in Montana, the creation of the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness in New Mexico, the Pine Forest Range and Wovoka wildernesses in Nevada, and the Hermosa Creek Wilderness in Colorado.
- For the first time ever, states adopted policies to ensure that flood control efforts include habitat restoration.
- The largest river restoration effort in U.S. history was launched in an agreement among the dam operator, tribes, irrigators, sportsmen, commercial fishermen, conservationists, and local communities to remove four derelict dams on the Klamath River in California and Oregon.

It in no way diminishes the scope or scale of these grantee accomplishments to take note of some reasons we fell short of our goals. To begin, setting a 320-million-acre goal was probably too ambitious given our primary focus on conserving public land in the U.S. as Congress' normal inertia has been severely aggravated by mounting political polarization, and our grantees did not have adequate strategies to induce federal legislative action. A great deal of conservation was accomplished by the executive branch through its administrative and rule-making authority, but such powers are necessarily limited. Plus, as we have since learned to our dismay, it has been all too easy for the new Administration to roll back some administrative protections, even in spite of public support.

Second, too much of the work we supported took place in silos. Our land, energy, and water sub-strategies intersect in myriad ways, yet we tracked and managed them as independent efforts. As a result, we missed potential learning opportunities and failed to capture available synergies among grantees working on the same issue in different geographies or on different issues in the same geographies, not to mention among intermediaries working with the same community groups. We plan to remedy this going forward by self-consciously promoting greater coordination and collaboration among our grantees and other partners.

Finally, the retrospective review of our last five-year strategy identified practices we should adopt going forward to achieve more durable conservation gains. These include:

- Building inclusive coalitions by working locally and forming durable partnerships with tribal governments and rural communities.
- Taking a more holistic approach that addresses the needs and expectations of people alongside protecting nature — conserving working lands, for example. We recognize that conservation is just one of many priorities of Western communities and will need to be mindful of cultural and economic factors at play in the landscapes where we work.
- Expanding grantee capacity for effective communications, systems thinking, values-based communications, and digital strategy.
- Pursuing conservation outcomes through local land-use planning. This means grantees start small and focus on implementing as well as securing new policy, as such an approach can deepen public support for conservation outcomes and generate successes that can be leveraged in other states or at the federal level.

We have incorporated these lessons into our new strategy and will use them as we turn to implementing it.

III. LOOKING FORWARD: THE NEXT FIVE YEARS, 2018-2023.

A. New Strategic Imperatives: Changes in How We Work.

Before turning to substantive plans for advancing the foundation’s long-term conservation goals, we touch briefly on some changes we are making in how we work with grantees and other partners. These process-oriented adjustments follow from the lessons described above and will be important in guiding our grantmaking as it evolves over time. Specifically, we plan to:

1. Listen more to grantees, partners, and communities to obtain new perspectives, identify innovative solutions, and capture and share best practices. As per the recommendations of a report we commissioned to inform our strategy refresh, [Rural Perspectives on Western Conservation](#), we will encourage and support grantees to take time and make greater efforts to build authentic partnerships with affected constituencies.

2. Prioritize equity, inclusivity, and diversity for ourselves and for our grantees.³ Progress is most likely to endure when it rests on a broad foundation, which is why it is essential to hear from and work with the full range of affected people and groups across the North American West. This straightforward idea — most often honored in the breach — is reflected in the influential [Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing](#), which aim to uplift common values and improve cross-cultural organizing.

³ We have intentionally listed “diversity” last in this sequence to discourage tokenism in recruitment, hiring, and outreach strategies.

Applying these principles to grantmaking will help ensure that our efforts accurately reflect the world in which we operate — a world being reshaped by things like the Truth and Reconciliation process now underway between aboriginal people and other Canadians; the changing demographics of the American West (where an increasing number of states are majority-minority); and the increasing recognition by U.S. and Canadian courts of indigenous peoples' sovereignty, water rights, hunting and fishing treaty rights, and rights to land and title. Both pragmatically and as a matter of principle, we and our grantees must engage a broader range of stakeholders and constituencies — forming an inclusive conservation movement that comprises ranchers and farmers, hunters and anglers, indigenous and Latino communities, and people of diverse political persuasions. This is not simply a moral exercise. Rather, it is critical to finding and advancing conservation outcomes that are enduring because they are politically, culturally, and economically relevant to the diverse communities of the North American West. The Jemez Principles, for instance, approach organizing in a way that ensures that community voices are heard and reflected in proposed conservation solutions.

It follows that our grantmaking portfolio should (and will) be more diverse under the new strategy. Equally important, we should (and will) support grantees' efforts via Organizational Effectiveness grants and other tools to integrate these values into their hiring, retention, program, and partnership work, as well as supporting the internal development necessary to ensure that both we and they live by them. We believe this will bolster grantees' capacity to partner effectively with diverse communities, which is critical to achieving durable conservation outcomes.

3. Take a systemic approach to policy change. To accomplish the kind of policy changes we look for, an organization or coalition must be able to collaborate and connect authentic community voices with key policymakers and influencers. Delivering meaningful policy outcomes often requires pulling change levers (including persuasive communications and civil litigation) at the local, state, and national levels, and working with people who have diverse economic or cultural connections to the landscape. We must recognize these complexities and implement a cohesive approach to policy change that allows grantees to capture, and leverage, this sort of interconnectedness or connective tissue between communities and organizations.

B. Advancing Conservation in New Directions.

It is necessary toward our long-term goal of conserving biodiversity and protecting the ecological integrity of half the North American West to spend time and resources defending bedrock conservation policies and established protected area designations in the western U.S. — something we will, of course, continue to support grantees to do via persuasive communications and civil litigation. Importantly, what our grantees do in defense of our heritage can be foundational for proactive work, especially that which builds and/or expands local and regional coalitions.

But we cannot make progress toward long-term conservation goals if we don't also undertake proactive efforts. Given the White House's distinctly different approach to conservation than the last Administration, coupled with a largely dysfunctional Congress, we will shift from a focus on securing national public land policy and protections toward advancing

policy at the state level. And given the states' broad power when it comes to the regulation of real property (both land and water), we will pay increased attention to advancing conservation on private and public lands and waters — aiming to make conservation an “ongoing profit center” that gives ranchers and farmers viable incentives to help improve habitat protections across an entire ecosystem or watershed. In this way and when possible, federal policy can help advance conservation solutions on private lands so the public/private land distinction is not necessarily also a state/federal one, which allows for impactful coalition-building toward integrated policy solutions.

As noted above, we also will press grantees to break down silos among conservation issues (energy/land/water) and work together, with communities, toward integrated policy solutions. Finally, we will return our focus to the priority geographies identified by environmental science as most critical for the future of Western ecosystems.

Our substantive objective to preserve intact landscapes and biodiversity remains unchanged, as does our emphasis on using public policy to require or incentivize land and water protections. We bear in mind, however, that the process of building broad-based coalitions to advance state conservation solutions is necessarily slower and messier than working nationally. Examples of the kind of work we will support grantees in doing over the next five years include:

1. Identifying and advancing the protection of fish and wildlife corridors. Connectivity — the ability of plants and animals to move between intact habitats — is key to conserving species biodiversity. Such connectivity is particularly important today in helping species adapt to rapid climate change. But protecting and restoring corridors also provides a prime opportunity to build new coalitions and public support, as new research about the importance of corridors for everything from big game to salmon to monarch butterflies has brought new public attention to conservation. We will support grantees working to conserve corridors in our proposed focal areas (see Section IV), via both defensive and proactive activities:

- On the defensive side, we will continue to support grantee efforts to uphold protections for national parks and monuments. These designations contribute to the ecological integrity and connectivity of the Western landscape; some shelter migration corridors from development threats. We will, at the same time, promote efforts to conserve essential buffer lands adjacent to national parks and other protected areas.
- We will support grantee efforts to challenge development proposals that put corridors at risk and defend recently established state and federal protections for greater sage-grouse habitat, which also benefit migration corridors and winter range for big game wildlife.
- More proactively, we will support grantees collaborating with scientists, ranchers and landowners, nonprofit organizations, fish and game commissions, and other state and tribal government agencies (and, where feasible, federal) to identify priority land and river corridors, study the economic benefits of corridor protection, issue guidance regarding corridor protection and management, and secure protections as warranted.
- We will support grantees aiming to secure new state (and, where feasible, federal) public funding for sustainable working lands, easements, invasive species removal where it

affects corridors, and transportation solutions to mitigate wildlife mortality and promote human safety.

- We will continue to support community efforts to remove obsolete, costly, and unsafe dams and restore river-floodplain connectivity in focal areas.
- We will continue to support monitoring of big game and other species to ensure there is adequate and up-to-date information about migration patterns and ecosystem connections.

In the coming year, we will begin working with grantees, scientists, and others in philanthropy on new efforts to protect corridors in the North American West. We believe that collaborative partnerships among diverse groups could, in the near term, motivate policymakers in two or three of our proposed focal areas to formally recognize corridors used by big game, salmon, or other key species, including at least one action to protect corridors, winter range, and associated crucial habitats (like wildlife stopover areas) in each geography within the next 18 months. This work could result in hundreds of thousands of acres of protected and well-managed habitat on public, tribal, and private lands.

2. Promote state policies at the intersection of water, land, energy, and where possible, climate. As noted above, we will be shifting emphasis to focus on achieving conservation gains at the state and local level in our priority geographies, including California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, and Wyoming (see Section IV).

Pursuing such opportunities will not be easy, as diverse, local coalitions require long-term support, grantees are siloed, state policymakers are not well informed on conservation issues or networked for action, and policy research is nascent. Moreover, the U.S. policy landscape is presently dominated by special interests advocating on behalf of energy, irrigation, and utility industries. As a result, the policy narrative in both Washington, D.C., and state capitols across the West is jam-packed with calls for deregulation or the development of harmful new projects like dams. Yet while conservation progress has largely ground to a halt at the federal level, new policy solutions may receive a more sympathetic hearing in the states. Conservation and development interests are more balanced at that level, and important groups feel the consequences of both.

Water, in particular, touches every aspect of both environmental protection and economic development in ways that cut across conventional political divisions. Scarcity of water has implications for conservation and communities, so the opportunities for collaboration and action are significant. We believe wide-ranging interests collaborating to conserve water can inspire broader conservation policy in the states. Examples of the kind of work we will pursue in this connection include:

- Building on the foundation's California Drought Initiative, we will support grantees to promote water management policies that have been demonstrably successful, such as data transparency and sharing, and nature-based management solutions like floodplain restoration. These, in turn, can form the basis for an integrated policy agenda in Western states.

- We will support grantees to form new alliances with ranchers and farmers to advocate for greater inclusion of ecosystem services (such as maintaining wildlife habitat) into federal and state policies and funding streams. Grantees may similarly collaborate with indigenous communities and hunters and anglers to require consideration of the impact of new development projects on fish or big game species. These coalitions and alliances can then be used to increase social, economic, and public policy support for other forms of proactive voluntary conservation.
- State water boards, agriculture departments, fish and game and parks commissions are potential collaborators if and when their missions include habitat conservation and outdoor recreation as key outcomes, and their membership reflects the diverse communities they represent.
- We will support the education and engagement of county commissioners and state policymakers in priority geographies.

3. Secure new public funding for conservation. We will focus support for grantees advocating for state and local financing incentives, mechanisms, and models that support landscape-scale conservation. These may take many forms and can differ from state to state, which leaves room for creativity. The decline in state conservation revenues from duck stamps and other hunting permits too, can be a useful impetus for identifying new funding solutions. This past year, for example, an alliance of sportsmen’s groups and conservationists successfully advocated for a new license plate in Wyoming, the proceeds of which will be used to protect migration corridors and reduce costly and deadly car crashes with wildlife on state highways. Grantees may likewise work to enhance support for payments to ranchers and farmers for ecosystem services and conservation easements, and promote matching funds for agricultural easements to sustain working lands in perpetuity.

Should the Administration or U.S. Congress become more amenable to conservation outcomes in coming years, there may be opportunities for new funding at the federal level. The Farm Bill or new infrastructure legislation could be an opportunity for funding habitat protection, including corridors. Grantees will also likely work to boost public awareness of the need to reauthorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund — the federal government’s most successful recreation and conservation program, which directs a small portion of federal offshore oil and gas drilling fees toward the voluntary acquisition of new hunting and fishing access areas and checkerboard inholdings in national parks and forests, and that also supports improvements to fish and wildlife habitat, community trails, and parks via state matching grants.

Finally, we will also support grantee efforts to direct resources toward conservation in Canada, where work with indigenous communities can advance sustainable development and Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas, indigenous Guardian programs, and protections for species at risk, with a major focus on caribou.

C. Creating Enabling Conditions.

We have already explained why achieving our desired policy outcomes requires working with new groups and in new ways — building “enabling conditions” in western states for more effective public engagement in conservation policymaking. Doing so will encompass the following sorts of activities:

1. Advancing collaborative, local land use and watershed planning processes that address human needs, as well as the needs of the natural landscape. As noted in Hewlett Foundation Environment Program Officer [Erin Rogers’ blog series](#), research points to two conditions for achieving systems and policy change: 1) building and enhancing collaboration and 2) strengthening partnerships. Collaboration is essential to managing the West’s multiple-use, working landscapes, and conservation solutions are unlikely to endure if they do not address the perspectives and concerns of the people and groups most affected. Successful collaboration, meanwhile, requires a degree of understanding and trust among the cooperating stakeholders. With that in mind, we will work to establish new and support ongoing place-based collaboratives in our proposed focal areas, with an emphasis on following the Jemez Principles. We will, at the same time, support training to strengthen partnerships among public land managers, tribes, and public land users; and support facilitation, mediation, and convenings to build relationships and share best practices among diverse stakeholders and partners.

2. Building a broader, more inclusive conservation movement. Many important voices have been overlooked or underutilized by conservation advocates. Bringing these into the movement is important, both ethically and pragmatically. The metropolitan areas of the North American West are the locus of population growth and will likely emerge as the political drivers of change in the future; any place-based conservation outcomes will require the support of local communities but also the diverse residents of growing suburban and urban areas, who depend economically, culturally, and socially on western rivers, and public and working lands. To engage and empower these new advocates, we will:

- Provide direct support to conservation organizations serving people of color and encouragement to intermediaries to deepen partnerships with diverse communities.
- Empower First Nations, tribes, and Native-led organizations to identify, advance, and uphold conservation outcomes in proposed focal areas, including the now-threatened Bears Ears National Monument.
- Support convenings to facilitate leadership development and networking among women and people of color working in the conservation movement.
- Support broader research and understanding of the application of social and ethnographic science on conservation outcomes, including strategies for advancing corridor protection, bolstering collaboration, and upholding public support over time.

3. Supporting research and elevating discussion of opportunities to diversify state and local economies. Many Western communities are reliant on fossil fuel extraction for their economic survival. Other communities are facing involuntary economic transitions driven by market forces, as well as challenges associated with population decline, health crises, and climate change. While some western communities have found that outdoor recreation for instance can

help revitalize an area by attracting new businesses and residents, this approach may not be feasible, culturally-relevant, or welcomed in all indigenous and rural communities. Research to identify new opportunities and best practices in economic diversification, including how communities can proactively approach development in a sustainable way, may benefit these communities while simultaneously protecting land, water, and wildlife. We will need to be flexible in developing grantmaking strategies that support those communities with complex challenges, which may entail working toward holistic solutions by partnering with others that are addressing health crises or other critical community issues.

4. Supporting civil litigation and persuasive communications. Litigation, persuasive communications, and journalism can be invaluable tools not just for upholding existing laws and regulations, but for building and maintaining broad public support for conservation efforts. We will support grantee capacity for effective communications, particularly with diverse communities; systems thinking; values-based messaging, and digital strategy via Organizational Effectiveness grants.

IV. PROPOSED FOCAL AREAS.

Not all places have the same ecological value. Given limits on our and our grantees' resources, which are being further stretched by the urgent need to defend existing protected area designations, we must prioritize key geographies where we can support grantees working to advance collaborative conservation solutions. To identify these focal areas, we asked the Conservation Biology Institute (CBI) to work with us on a mapping and assessment exercise to guide future grantmaking.

We began by developing a set of criteria to evaluate candidate landscapes. Consistent with our existing strategy, we prioritized landscapes and watersheds in the North American West that are still mostly intact, ecologically important due to spatial relationships with existing protected areas, and likely to provide landscape linkages to support wildlife movement and other ecological processes in the face of climate change. We then overlaid additional lenses for biodiversity and representativeness. Over 150 spatial datasets were aggregated and evaluated across the North American West, from the boreal forest in Canada to the U.S. border with Mexico. From these, we selected eight areas in which to potentially focus our efforts in the Western United States, identified in Map 1: (a) Idaho's High Divide, (b) the Snake River basin, (c) Southwest Wyoming, (d) the Klamath-Siskiyou watershed, (e) Nevada's Great Basin, (f) Southern Utah, (g) the San Juan Mountains, and (h) the Southwest Borderlands⁴. Maps 2 through 4 identify additional areas of intactness in Alaska and Canada for conservation efforts.

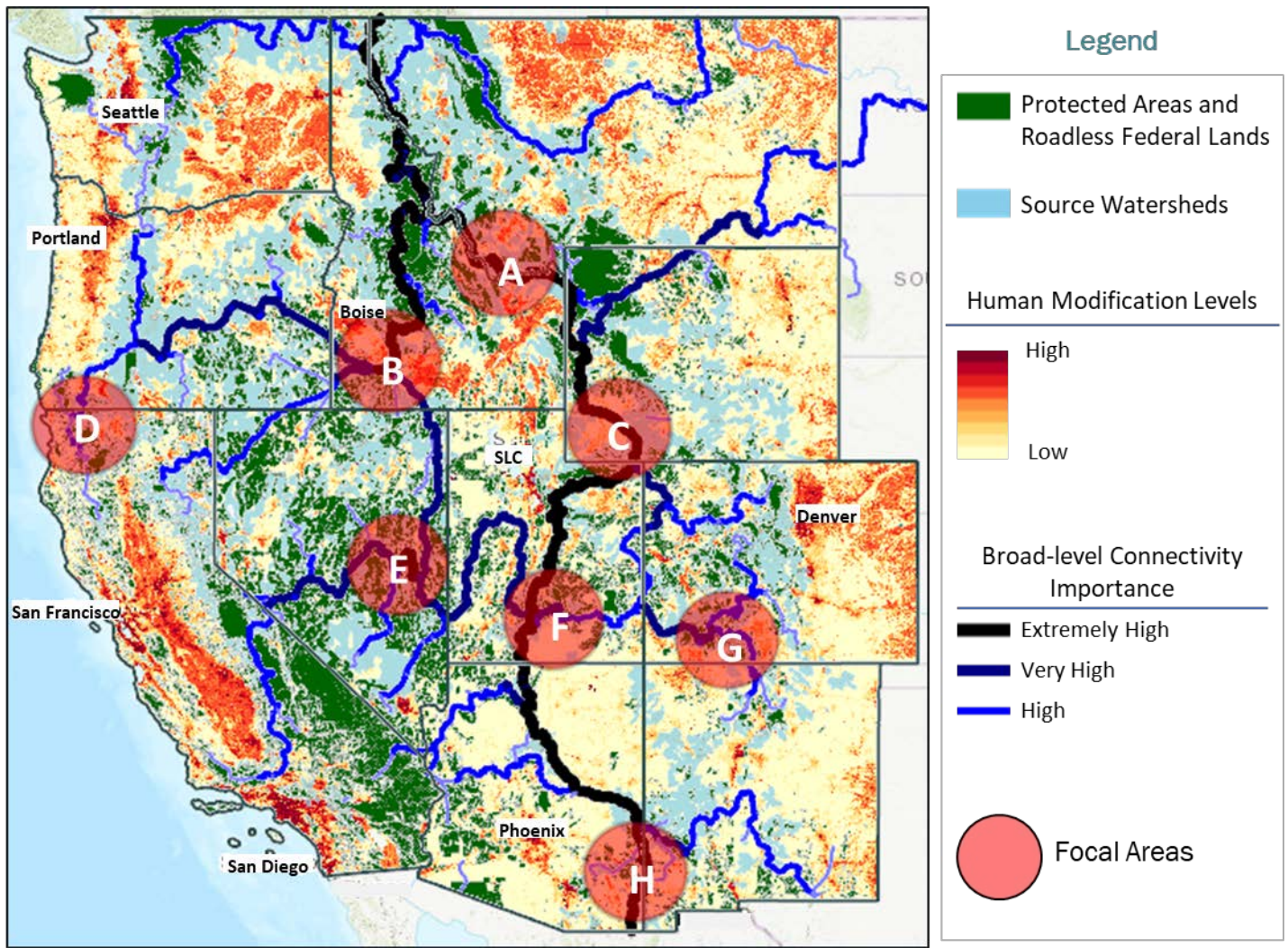
⁴ As researchers continue to identify new critical corridors and areas of connectivity, we must remain open to altering or enlarging these priority geographies based on new or emerging evidence. In addition, we remain open to supporting grantees that seize important conservation opportunities that may arise, particularly in Canada.

Additional criteria will be applied to inform place-based investments, including ripeness of conservation opportunities, existing or potential community leadership and public support for conservation measures, and potential replicability of conservation solutions.

At a broad planning level, these proposed focal areas represent some of the most important places that have the best chance to hold the West together ecologically (though ongoing development, resource use, and climate change continue to reshape the region in ways that are difficult to predict with precision). They are best viewed as a collection of sites that, with proper conservation and taken together, can contribute significantly to protecting the long-term integrity and viability of communities and remaining intact natural landscapes, including preservation of significant biological diversity across the North American West.

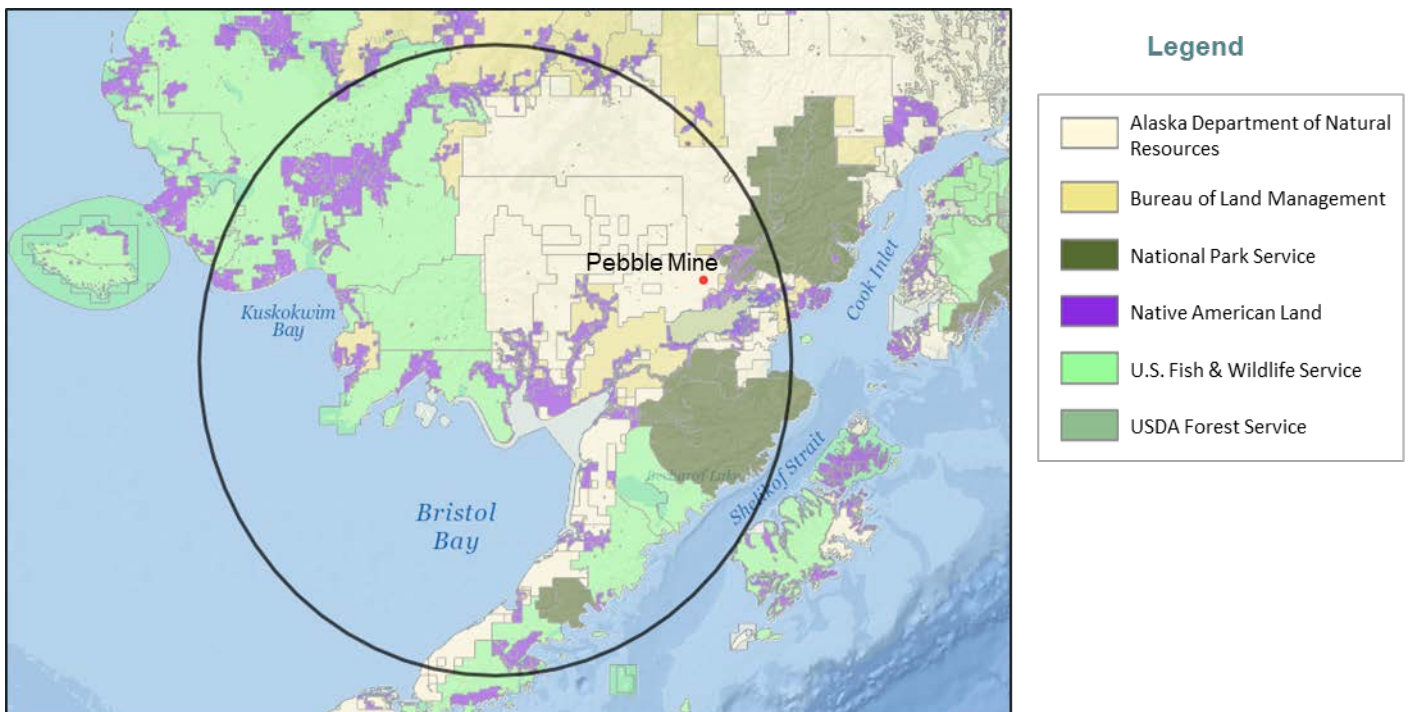
MAP 1. US West recommended priority geographies: (A) Idaho’s High Divide, (B) Snake River basin, (C) Southwest Wyoming, (D) Klamath-Siskiyou watershed, (E) Nevada’s Great Basin, (F) Southern Utah, (G) San Juan Mountains, and (H) Southwest Borderlands. Source watersheds identified on this map are those least impacted by water use by agriculture, urban areas, and industry, regardless of water volume. Mountain locations account for the majority of freshwater recharge throughout the West.

The full datasets for this map can be found on the Conservation Biology Institute website: <https://databasin.org/maps/e2eaf4029aef4ebaae92067150f8f017>

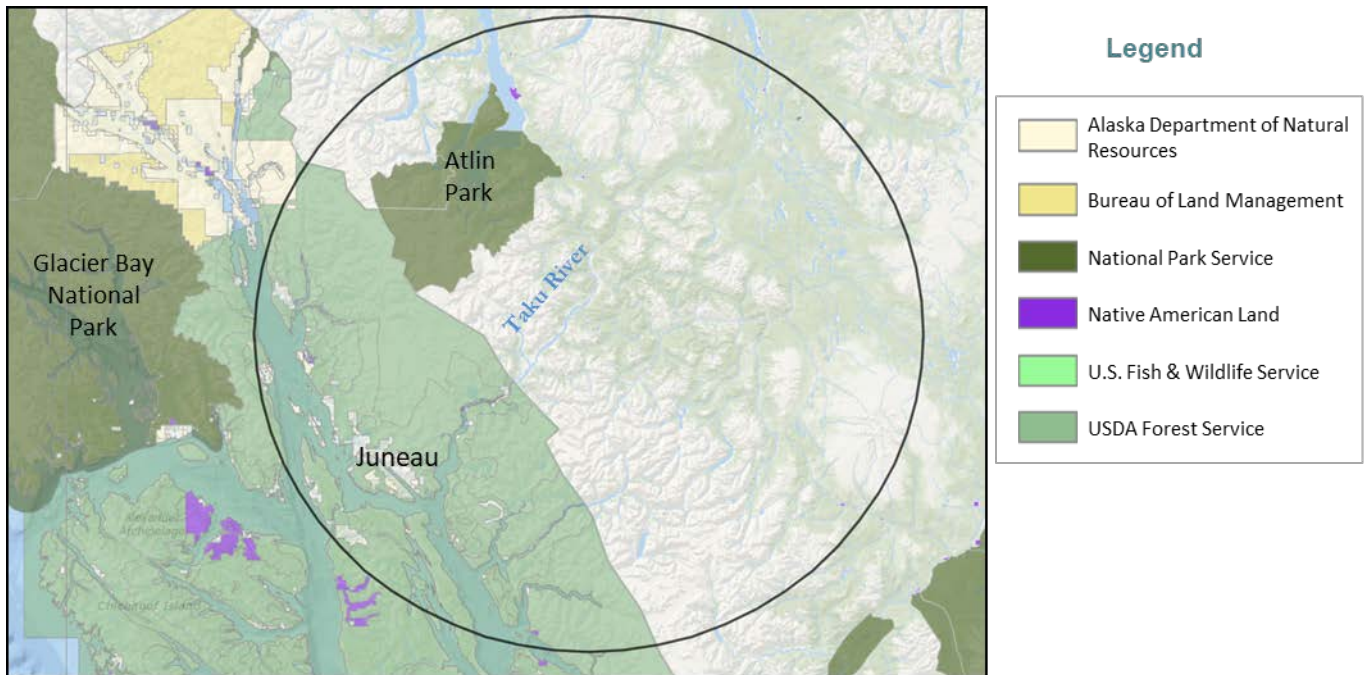


MAP 2. Bristol Bay, Alaska. To protect the ecological integrity of this intact, globally significant marine ecosystem — home to the world’s largest salmon fishery — it is critical to protect the Bristol Bay watershed as a whole (indicated by the circle). The watershed includes interconnected stream and river systems, vast wetlands and tundra, and alder and spruce forests. The proposed Pebble Mine, which would be the largest open pit copper and gold mine in North America, is located at the headwaters of the watershed on the Nushagak and Kvichak rivers, which empty into Bristol Bay.

The full datasets for this map and the next can be found on the Conservation Biology Institute website: <https://databasin.org/maps/d95c1cd5177942ba90c6b6f2c95ebdf0>



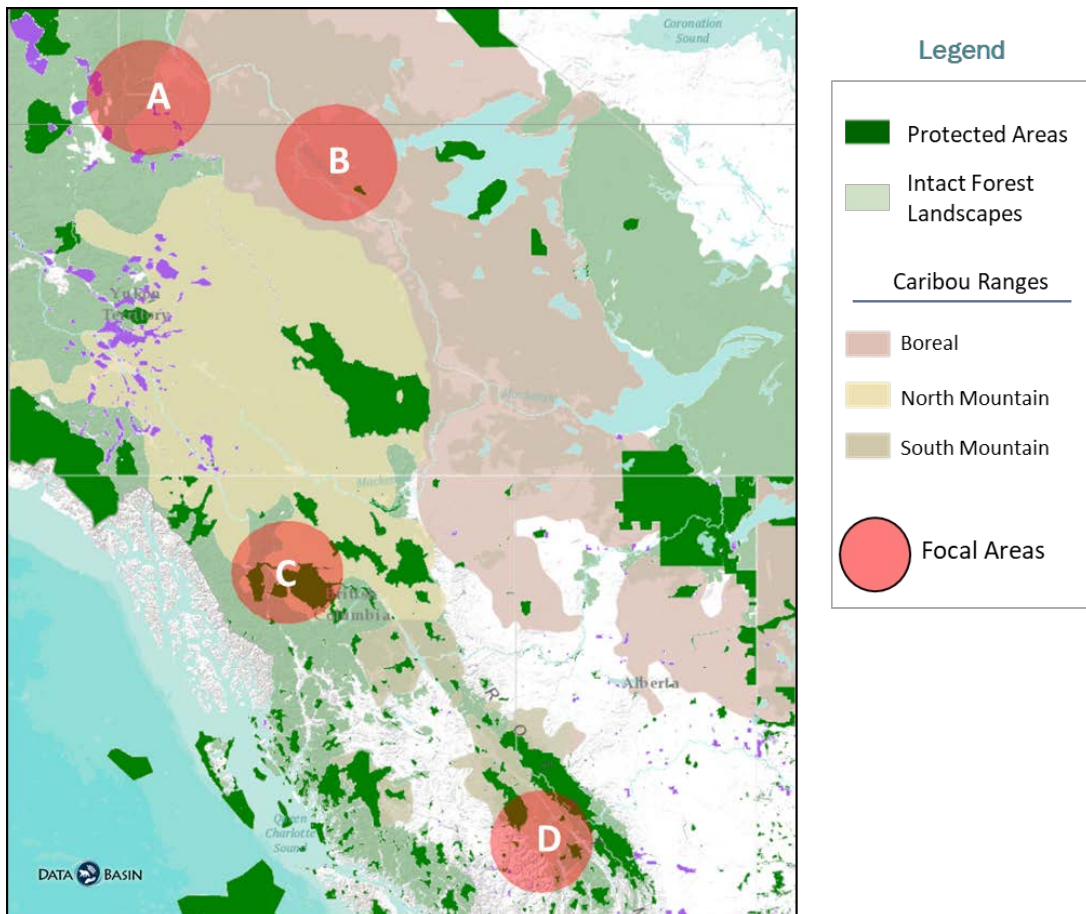
MAP 3. The Taku River watershed, a focal area proposed to conserve the critical transboundary rivers flowing from Canada to Alaska.



MAP 4. Four areas in Western Canada are identified as potential focal areas based on intactness and ecological importance for key indicator species — especially caribou, whose range is shown on the map. These geographies include the (A) Peel watershed, (B) Mackenzie watershed, (C) Sacred Headwaters, and (D) B.C.’s Inland Rainforest. Several of these areas have active land-use planning processes underway, led by First Nations and supported by the provincial and territorial governments — making places like the Peel watershed, in the Yukon Territory, likely candidates for the creation of new Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas if momentum is maintained.

Beyond the geographies highlighted in the map of Canada, we are also exploring opportunities to advance a new body of work in the Hudson Bay Lowlands of Northern Ontario, as this intact boreal landscape, primarily peatlands, provides an opportunity to pilot strategies that empower indigenous communities to pursue conservation goals and benefit financially from carbon sequestration. This synergy between indigenous leadership, conservation, a sustainable economy, and climate is a relatively new idea in philanthropy so additional research is underway.

The full datasets for this map can be found on the Conservation Biology Institute website: <https://databasin.org/maps/ca6733ab215447fea677d8936133a3cd>



VI. CONCLUSION.

The foundation's Western Conservation strategy made enormous progress over the past five years, however, political and ideological motivations now threaten that progress, and a new approach is needed.

Our goals remain the same, but to achieve them now, we must look to policymakers at the state and local level and secure the backing of a broader and more diverse base — both to move state-level officials and reduce the likelihood that any gains our grantees make will be easily reversed when the political winds change direction. Making progress in this fashion will be slower, and gains will be harder fought, especially at first. Over time, however, philanthropic investments along these lines should yield higher and more lasting returns.