



CONSERVATION
WITHOUT CONFLICT

2024 **Summit Report**

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Executive Summary

The Conservation Without Conflict 2024 summit served as an important gathering of representatives from various private and public organizations. They united with the common goal of advancing collaborative conservation efforts and fostering a culture of enduring trust and partnership nationwide. The main objective of this summit was to gather direct feedback from the attendees and establish priorities for the future of the coalition. Each session emphasized a thematic focus on the future, covering topics such as a **roadmap for the future, collaborative conservation in action, harnessing the power of private lands in conservation partnerships, innovative approaches and incentives, visions for the future, and strategies for moving forward**. Key strategies for advancing conservation goals that emerged include building trust, embracing cultural change, leveraging market mechanisms, and utilizing appropriate solutions and tools. As the panelists and participants emphasized, achieving conservation without conflict requires a collective effort—engaging all stakeholders in a dialogue that respects diverse perspectives and seeks common ground. It was clear that by building trust through prioritizing understanding, collaboration, and innovation, we can navigate the challenges of landscape conservation. This approach works to keep working lands productive and fish and wildlife resources healthy. Looking forward, the coalition will focus on implementing specific recommendations in the short-, mid-, and long-term.

Conference Program

All speeches, presentations, and panels aimed to expand our communication and innovation toward the future of collaborative conservation and achieving conservation without conflict.

Keynote Presentations

- **A Roadmap for the Future: The Wildlife Conservation Initiative and Q&A**
- **Harnessing the Power of Private Lands Partnerships in Conservation**
- **A Vision for the Future of Conservation Without Conflict**

Panel Discussions

- **Collaborative Conservation in Action and Q&A**
- **Innovative Approaches and Incentives - Why Not?**
- **How to Move Forward with Conservation Without Conflict?**



A Roadmap for the Future: The Wildlife Conservation Initiative and Q&A

Summary

Conservation is more successful through partnerships, collaboration, or membership efforts to conserve habitats and species. The gray wolf species, listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 48 states and awaiting action, exemplifies this. Challenges such as climate change, wildlife diseases, and invasive species hinder conservation efforts. However, collaboration and trust can lead to more effective tools for conservation, overcoming these physical barriers. Future collaborations aim to create a network of lands and waters, requiring proactive rather than reactive efforts from every person, agency, and legislative act.

Q&A Outcomes:

Question: What is the most effective way to demonstrate flexibility in the ESA?

Answer: Innovation, building trust with individual landowners, and getting things done can inspire community-wide engagement.

Question: How can we change the culture and advance Conservation Without Conflict?

Answer: Creating an NCTC course or program to advance the collaborative conservation framework, possibly in collaboration with academia and AFWA, is suggested.

Question: Where is Conservation Without Conflict heading, and what engagement is needed?

Answer: Expanding into sectors beyond private forest success, increasing diversity and participation, sharing experiences, and celebrating successes are key.



Panel Discussion

Wednesday, February 21



Collaborative Conservation in Action and Q&A

SPEAKERS:

Mike Leahy, Senior Director of Wildlife, Hunting and Fishing Policy, NWF (Moderator)

JJ Apodaca, Executive Director, Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy

David Gonzalez, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partners, Coastal and At-Risk Species Programs

Healy Hamilton, Chief Scientist, Sustainable Forestry Initiative

Amy Wolfe, Director, Trout Unlimited Northeast Coldwater Habitat Program

Summary

The speakers introduced themselves and their organizational goals. There was consensus on the importance of speaking your partners' language to achieve collaboration. Finding common ground fosters the mindset of "I get to work with the Service" and opens new possibilities for collaboration. Effective communication, characterized by active listening and understanding different perspectives, builds trust among organizations, landowners, and partners, facilitating the exchange of information and innovative ideas for collaborative conservation.

Q&A Outcomes:

Defining conservation: It encompasses on-the-ground actions, using regulatory flexibilities, overcoming regulatory barriers, and implementing a collaborative conservation framework to build durable working landscapes.

The role of environmental markets in collaborative conservation: Biodiversity attributes can be quantified to leverage environmental markets, with scalable incentives (e.g., biodiversity credits) being crucial.

Mitigation conflicts over stacking credits: Currently, there is no issue, but potential conflicts may arise in larger markets as resources become stretched. Reliable biodiversity data and new forms of conservation investment must be credible and transparent.



Harnessing the Power of Private Lands Partnerships in Conservation

Summary

The keynote featured an inspirational video where families and landowners shared the significance of their lands, highlighting the deep connections and sentiments they hold toward their property. Leslie Allison addressed the concerns of landowners by asking and answering, “Why do landowners get worried?” The discussion emphasized that potential collaborations should recognize that for many landowners, their land is more than just property; it is their home, a place they deeply care for. Leslie underscored the message that effective conservation must involve people at every stage of planning and implementation, acknowledging the integral role of human involvement in conservation efforts.





Panel Discussion

Wednesday, February 21



Innovative Approaches and Incentives - Why Not?

SPEAKERS:

Cindy Dohner, President,
Cindy K. Dohner LLC
(Moderator)

Michael Brennan,
Program Manager, Texas
A&M Natural Resources
Institute

Erik Kalsta, Western
Landowner Alliance

Jerome Ford, Assistant
Director Migratory Birds

Chuck Sykes, President,
AFWA

Summary

Moderated by Cindy Dohner, each panelist introduced themselves and provided summaries of their work and aspirations within their organizations. The discussion centered on the importance of integration, listening, and collaboration, with a consensus that “we are better together.” The panelists advocated for recognizing commonalities over differences and practicing flexibility to facilitate connections and collaboration. They called for bold innovation in overcoming barriers and promoting the collaborative conservation framework fundamental to the Conservation without Conflict Coalition.

Q&A Outcomes:

Question: How do you build trust with someone entrusting their livelihood to a stranger, especially when you cannot control others?

Answer: Trust-building is a gradual, patient process that requires commitment. It involves taking small, consistent actions to foster relationships and prove trustworthiness. Providing tangible cooperation opportunities and demonstrating reliability can help build trust. This process is most effective in person, allowing for direct interaction and the development of genuine connections. Establishing meaningful relationships and aiding partners in understanding the ESA and MBTA can build the necessary trust for Conservation without Conflict. Additionally, the Summit emphasized engaging young future conservationists, preparing them to carry forward the conservation mission.

Q&A Outcomes Continued:

Question: Where are the opportunities to build trust?

Answer: Trust-building opportunities arise during the legislative change process. Drafting new legislation offers a foundation for trust, but adaptability is crucial. If legislative changes do not produce the expected results, working within the existing framework is vital. Flexibility and willingness to work within the current legislative landscape can foster trust-building.

Question: What can this community do to mainstream and scale up innovative solutions?

Answer: Leveraging the field of wildlife conservation is essential to promoting and expanding innovative solutions. Highlighting success stories and conservation achievements can motivate and engage the community. Publishing positive news and using targeted communication strategies can draw attention to innovative practices. By setting clear communication objectives and reaching out through various channels, the community can mainstream and scale up innovative solutions, focusing on the positive impacts of conservation efforts and maintaining open communication lines.





A Vision for the Future of Conservation Without Conflict

Summary

Jimmy Bullock initiated the session with a slide presentation outlining the foundational principles of conservation without conflict, setting the stage for the discussion. Key principles highlighted include durable and scalable sustainability, leveraging the flexibility of the ESA, embracing science and innovation, and fostering enduring trust. The future of this conservation approach hinges on multiple factors, but prioritizing the development of relationships and common goals is crucial. To enhance these relationships, the organization should consider regular meetings, either annually or biannually, to strengthen bonds among members. An example activity, such as a group outing, could enhance cohesion, making the Conservation without Conflict approach the standard for conservation efforts across various landscapes. Organizing a second “Wild Goose Chase” was suggested as a priority.





Panel Discussion

Thursday, February 22



How to Move Forward with Conservation Without Conflict?

SPEAKERS:

Leo Miranda, Executive Director, Conservation Without Conflict (Moderator)

Deb Rocque, Assistant Director Science Applications, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Dave Tenny, CEO, NAFO

Jody L. Bickel, CEO Creek Bank Associates

Lucas Cooksey, TAMU Natural Resources Institute

Summary

The speakers each provided an overview of their roles and objectives within their organizations. A significant point of discussion was the decreasing budget for the Science Applications program within the USFWS, attributed to a diminishing trust stemming from past initiatives like the implementation of Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCCs). A proposed short-term solution is the creation of a platform for sharing information and ideas to rebuild trust. An “innovation summit” could be instrumental in identifying forthcoming challenges and solutions. Other proposed solutions include acting as agents of change and creating a marketplace to enrich the conservation toolkit.

Q&A Outcomes:

Question: What are the perceived weaknesses of joining Conservation Without Conflict, and what areas could see improvement?

Answer: The focus should be on building upon existing funding and social awareness, improving the organization’s presentation and engagement diversity, and increasing exposure to youth earlier since cultural influence is stronger than policy or law.



Breakout Groups: The Path Forward

Thursday, February 22

Summary

Setting clear goals for expanding the Conservation Without Conflict organization was identified as a critical step toward the future. Attendees were divided into groups to discuss short-term (within 1 year), mid-term (2-3 years), and long-term actions (3-5 years). Short-term discussions included creating intimate, campfire-style technical meetings, expanding the organization's reach among colleagues, youth, and the public, and sharing knowledge through cataloging tools showcasing success stories. Mid-term strategies focused on launching a new marketing campaign to foster diversity, inclusion, and broader engagement. Long-term objectives called for stronger state engagement and the development of a clear roadmap for success, including necessary policy changes and relationship building. The creation of academic programs related to conservation was also proposed for long-term implementation.

Networking & Collaborative Opportunities/Awards

During the three-day summit, multiple breakout and social networking sessions provided a platform for attendees to share their work, expand their collaborative conservation networks, and develop new innovative ideas and initiatives. These sessions offered valuable opportunities for building and strengthening trust among participants. These sessions also allowed the Conservation without Conflict interns to familiarize themselves with various organizations and their leaders and, perhaps, potential future employment. The networking sessions enabled participants to expand their contacts and explore new collaborative project opportunities.

Key Findings and Recommendations

Throughout this summit, numerous discussions have centered on the future trajectory of Conservation Without Conflict and strategies to maintain its relevance. The primary insights and discoveries supporting the success of this coalition emphasize the importance of building upon communication as the foundation, regardless of its simplicity or complexity. Trust and effective communication are critical to ensuring this coalition's ongoing relevance across the United States. Attendees have proposed annual meetings to build and strengthen relationships, create more opportunities for public engagement with this organization, and embrace a fearless approach toward innovation. A detailed list of all recommendations is presented in Appendix 3.

Conclusion

The Conservation Without Conflict Coalition envisions voluntary collaboration as the leading approach to wildlife conservation on working lands throughout the U.S. Realizing this vision requires contributions from a diverse array of groups and individuals to support progress. The main goal is to facilitate collective discussions that introduce new perspectives and strategies for future successful collaborations. Topics covered include a roadmap for the future, collaborative conservation in action, harnessing the power of private land partnerships in conservation, innovative approaches and incentives, visions of the future, and strategies for moving forward. Key strategies for advancing conservation goals include building trust, embracing cultural change, leveraging market mechanisms, and utilizing appropriate solutions and tools. As emphasized by the panelists, achieving conservation without conflict necessitates a collective effort—engaging all stakeholders in a dialogue that respects diverse perspectives and seeks common ground. By prioritizing understanding, collaboration, and innovation, we can navigate conservation challenges and work toward keeping working lands productive and fish and wildlife resources healthy across the landscape.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to all the organizers, speakers, sponsors, and attendees for contributing new perspectives to this coalition's future. Special thanks to Delaney Event Management for their organizational efforts.

Meet Our Student Interns

The future of conservation lies in the hands of emerging new leaders. Conservation Without Conflict is committed to providing students with unique opportunities to network and excel. Below, we highlight three student interns who were instrumental in making this Summit a success.

Hailey Avalos:

“Hello, I am Hailey Avalos, an undergraduate Environmental Science major with a specialization in Aquatic Sciences at The University of Texas at San Antonio. I am currently working as a Student Conservation Association/Science Applications Intern with the Conservation without Conflict coalition and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Southeast Region. My professional aspirations lie in contributing to conservation management initiatives to ensure the optimal health of our diverse environments and species. I have been fortunate enough to attend the Conservation Without Conflict 2024 Summit in Arlington, VA. This opportunity allowed me to expand my knowledge of the organization’s mission and the significance of collaborative conservation across the landscape. I was also tasked with drafting the Summit’s report for the coalition’s leadership. Additionally, I engaged with seasoned professionals and conservation leaders during the Summit’s social events and breaks, facilitating meaningful discussions and gaining valuable insights for my future as a conservation leader.”

Gracie Lugo:

“Howdy from Texas A&M University! My name is Gracie Lugo, and I am a current first-year master’s student pursuing a degree in Natural Resource Development. My project focuses on a landscape assessment in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Texas A&M Natural Resources Institute, and Texas A&M Department of Rangeland, Wildlife, and Fisheries Management, which will contribute to management plans for conserving at-risk and listed species in Puerto Rico. My interests include the beauty of biodiversity, the importance of both private and public lands in conservation, and herpetology. I hope to continue building relationships with federal and state agencies, industry leaders, and private landowners who are essential to managing our nation’s natural resources. Attending the Conservation Without Conflict Summit in Arlington, VA was an incredible experience. It was special to hear different perspectives, success stories, and new ideas looking towards the future. I believe that every young professional, or anyone involved with natural resources, would benefit from Conservation Without Conflict as it is essential for effectively and proactively conserving wildlife and natural landscapes. It is particularly relevant in today’s landscapes where there are many stakeholders involved. The Summit was a valuable learning experience about the latest happenings in the conservation field from a variety of amazing people. I’m excited to see what the future holds for Conservation Without Conflict and its partners!”

Luis Lopez:

“My name is Luis Lopez, and I was born and raised in Dallas, TX. I have a bachelor’s degree in Wildlife & Fisheries Science: Wildlife Ecology and Conservation, and I am attending Texas A&M University to obtain a master’s in Natural Resource Management. While working on my master’s degree, I’m also in a fellowship program with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under my co-advisors Dr. Roel Lopez, Mr. Michael Marshall, and Leo Miranda-Castro. During my time with the agency, I hope to complete and present my project, which includes creating a matrix/guide comprising ESA-related programs and tools for private landowners in the Southeast Region of the United States. By creating this matrix/guide, I hope to incentivize them to utilize these programs and tools on their land to meet their personal needs while supporting the agency’s goals and mission within the region.

Having the opportunity to attend the Conservation Without Conflict Summit in Arlington, VA was not only wonderful for the many connections I made with various attendees but also for the chance to hear the unique perspectives and experiences they shared from their time in the field of conservation. We currently live in a world where much of our wildlife, natural resources, and ecosystems are in a less-than-desired and degraded state due to various reasons, all of which seem to have persisted over time. However, it’s Conservation Without Conflict that serves as a medium and provides an outlet for a community of individuals who all aspire to cultivate trust and partnership, bringing these like-minded people together to share information, insights, experiences, challenges, and dreams, and to continue fostering newfound discoveries and innovations, all for the promise of achievements in conservation.”



From left to right:

Hailey Avalos, Jerome Ford (Assistant Director Migratory Birds USFWS), Luis Lopez, Gracie Lugo, and Leo Miranda-Castro.

Appendix 1: Summit Agenda

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 20TH		
4:00 PM – 6:00 PM	Registration Open	<i>Ballroom Pre-function</i>
4:00 PM – 6:00 PM	Executive Committee Meeting	<i>Senate Ballroom</i>
6:00 PM – 8:00 PM	Welcome Reception & Keynote: Towards a Future of Implementing Conservation Without Conflict & Awards Ceremony - Sponsored by RMS (Heavy hors d'oeuvres / dinner) • Tony Wasley , President, WMI	<i>Awbrey & Sons</i>
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21ST		
7:30 AM – 8:30 AM	Coffee Break and Networking (Light breakfast snacks available; full breakfast available for purchase at the restaurant)	<i>Ballroom Pre-function</i>
8:30 AM – 9:00 AM	Opening Remarks and Introduction Overview of Conservation Without Conflict Coalition's mission and goals; Status of the coalition and path forward with implementation of collaborative conservation actions • Leo Miranda , Executive Director, Conservation Without Conflict	<i>Senate Ballroom</i>
9:00 AM – 10:00 AM	Keynote Presentation: A Roadmap for the Future: The Wildlife Conservation Initiative and Q&A • Gary Frazer , Director of Operations, USFWS	<i>Senate Ballroom</i>
10:00 AM – 10:30 AM	Coffee Break and Networking	<i>Ballroom Pre-function</i>
10:30 AM – 12:00 PM	Panel Discussion: Collaborative Conservation in Action and Q&A • Mike Leahy , Senior Director of Wildlife, Hunting and Fishing Policy, NWF (Moderator); JJ Apodaca , Executive Director, Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy; David Gonzalez , USFWS At Risk Partners, Coastal and At-Risk Species Programs; Healy Hamilton , Chief Scientist, Sustainable Forestry Initiative; Amy Wolfe , Director, Trout Unlimited Northeast Coldwater Habitat Program	<i>Senate Ballroom</i>
12:00 PM – 1:30 PM	Buffet Lunch	<i>Senate Ballroom</i>
1:30 PM – 2:30 PM	Keynote Presentation: Harnessing the Power of Private Lands Partnerships in Conservation • Leslie Allison , Executive Director, Western Landowner Alliance	<i>Senate Ballroom</i>
2:30 PM – 4:00 PM	Expert Panel Discussion 2: Innovative Approaches and Incentives - Why Not? • Cindy Dohner , President, Cindy K. Dohner LLC (Moderator); Michael Brennan , Program Manager, Texas A&M Natural Resources Institute; Erik Kalsta , Western Landowner Alliance; Jerome Ford , Assistant Director Migratory Birds; Chuck Sykes , President, AFWA	<i>Senate Ballroom</i>
4:00 PM – 4:30 PM	Coffee Break and Networking	<i>Ballroom Pre-function</i>
4:00 3M – 5:00 PM	Recap of the Day, Closing Remarks, Overview of Next Steps • Leo Miranda , Executive Director, Conservation Without Conflict	<i>Senate Ballroom</i>
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 22ND		
7:30 AM – 8:30 AM	Coffee Break and Networking (Light breakfast snacks available; full breakfast available for purchase at the restaurant)	<i>Ballroom Pre-function</i>
8:30 AM – 9:00 AM	A Vision for the Future of Conservation Without Conflict • Jimmy Bullock , Senior Vice President Forest Sustainability, RMS	<i>Senate Ballroom</i>
9:00 AM – 10:00 AM	Panel and Open Discussion: How to Move Forward with Conservation Without Conflict? • Leo Miranda , Executive Director, Conservation Without Conflict (Moderator); Deb Rocque , Assistant Director Science Applications, USFWS; Dave Tenny , CEO, NAFO; Jody L. Bickel , CEO Creek Bank Associates; Lucas Cooksey , TAMU Natural Resources Institute	<i>Senate Ballroom</i>
10:00 AM – 10:15 AM	Coffee Break	<i>Ballroom Pre-function</i>
10:15 AM – 11:00 AM	Breakout Groups: The Path Forward • Short-Term Actions (within 1 year) • Mid-Term Actions (2-3 years) • Long-Term Actions (3-5 years)	<i>Senate Ballroom</i>
11:00 AM – 12:00 PM	Report Out and Open Discussion	<i>Senate Ballroom</i>
12:00 PM	Adjourn	

Appendix 2: Detailed summary of sessions

Keynote: Navigating the Future of Wildlife Conservation: Insights from the Wildlife Conservation Initiative

In the keynote address by Gary Frazer, Deputy Director of Operations, the Wildlife Conservation Initiative (WCI) was spotlighted as a beacon of hope and a roadmap for the future of conservation. This voluntary, collaborative partnership between the National Alliance of Forest Owners (NAFO), the USFWS, and the National Council for Air and Stream Improvement, Inc. (NCASI) exemplifies how coordinated efforts can lead to substantial progress in conserving fish and wildlife species on private working forests.

The WCI's journey from regional collaborations to an agency-wide initiative underscores the power of partnership in achieving conservation goals. By focusing on conserving common, at-risk, threatened, and endangered species through active forest management, the initiative addresses the pressing challenges posed by climate change, wildlife diseases, and invasive species. These efforts are crucial, as they not only preserve biodiversity but also ensure the sustainability of forests for future generations.

Collaboration lies at the heart of the WCI's strategy, emphasizing the importance of sharing information, experiences, and insights. This collective approach fosters innovation, leading to new discoveries and achievements in conservation. By working together, agencies, tribes, and communities can leverage their unique strengths and resources, creating a united front against the environmental challenges that threaten our planet.

The initiative's call for better tools for conservation and the establishment of a trust that could "change the world" reflects a deep understanding of the complexities involved in wildlife preservation. As Frazer highlighted, confronting climate change and its impact on biodiversity requires a multifaceted approach, integrating climate action with biodiversity conservation. This dual focus underscores the interconnectedness of environmental challenges and the need for comprehensive strategies that address climate and biodiversity crises. However, achieving these ambitious conservation goals is not without its challenges. The need for state agencies and additional resources and staff is a significant barrier, emphasizing the importance of support from all levels of government. The question of how to gain wider recognition of the effectiveness of the ESA also looms large. Overcoming skepticism and building trust through firsthand experiences and success stories can demonstrate the ESA's impact, encouraging more landowners and stakeholders to participate in conservation efforts.

The WCI's roadmap for the future highlights the critical role of collaboration, innovation, and trust in advancing wildlife conservation. By drawing on the collective experience and knowledge of all stakeholders, the initiative aims to navigate the challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss, paving the way for a more sustainable and resilient future. As the conservation community moves forward, the lessons learned from the WCI can serve as a guiding light, inspiring continued progress and fostering a deeper commitment to preserving our planet's natural heritage.

Panel: Collaborative Conservation in Action: Bridging Gaps and Building Trust

In a world where the environment is increasingly under threat, the importance of conservation efforts cannot be overstated. A panel discussion featuring great conservation leaders Mike Leahy, JJ Apodaca, David Gonzalez, Healy Hamilton, and Amy Wolfe provided a deep dive into collaborative conservation, sharing success stories, best management practices, and addressing the prevailing challenges in conservation efforts. The discussion underscored the essential role of cooperation among private landowners, government agencies, municipalities, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in achieving impactful conservation outcomes.

Amy Wolfe of Trout Unlimited highlighted the organization's commitment to achieving the best conservation results through collaboration with various stakeholders. Despite the potential for significant conservation achievements, numerous issues impede progress. A critical barrier is the lack of trust in NGOs and government agencies, often stemming from fears that funding could lead to more stringent government regulations on private property. Additionally, apathy and concerns over liability for passive treatments on properties further complicate conservation efforts. Wolfe's experience points to a crucial lesson: the importance of speaking the language of partners to foster understanding and cooperation.

Healy Hamilton from the Sustainable Forestry Initiative shed light on the potential of the vast expanse of forest land (over 70 million acres) in expanding proactive collaborative conservation solutions. The need for more comprehensive data on these working lands was emphasized as a prerequisite for collaborative conservation. The availability of accessible data can open opportunities for 'Conservation without Conflict' and enhance the effectiveness of conservation strategies.

JJ Apodaca of the Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy discussed the organization's commitment to work with private landowners, government agencies, and other NGOs to develop collaborative conservation solutions driven by a shared passion for biodiversity and strong science. This passion is a common thread that binds various nonprofits in their conservation endeavors, keeping species populations in healthy conditions and working lands working.

David Gonzalez, representing USFWS Risk Partners, addressed the challenge of working in a region where 90% of the land is privately owned. It is crucial to change the perspective of those interacting with the USFWS to view collaboration as an opportunity rather than an obligation. By focusing on relationships, understanding stakeholders' needs, and building trust with landowners and other partners, the USFWS aims to serve as the 'connector piece' in collaborative conservation efforts.

The panel also explored the concept of environmental markets and the potential use of 'biodiversity credits' as a tool for conservation. This approach could direct resources more effectively by making

decisions based on broad biodiversity data. However, it is essential not to overlook the human element in conservation, recognizing the role of human stewardship and human needs in conserving biodiversity.

Addressing the hypothetical scenario of unlimited funding, the panelists discussed prioritizing the documentation of biodiversity, understanding the contributions of various landscapes to local communities, and ensuring the effectiveness of these landscapes in conservation. Trust-building remains a significant challenge, necessitating active listening, learning, and understanding without immediate reactions or overreactions. Accepting that control over all variables is impossible, especially concerning media perceptions, is vital. Understanding personal responsibility within the broader context of conservation efforts is crucial for forward momentum.

In conclusion, collaborative conservation requires bridging gaps between various stakeholders, building trust, and focusing on shared goals for biodiversity preservation. By addressing the challenges head-on and leveraging the strengths of each partner, the path forward can lead to successful and sustainable conservation outcomes.

Keynote: Harnessing the Power of Private Lands for Conservation: A Call to Action

In a compelling keynote presentation, Leslie Allison of the Western Landowner Alliance illuminated the untapped potential of private lands in the conservation arena. The presentation, themed around “Harnessing the Power of Private Lands Partnerships in Conservation,” delved into the complex relationship between landowners and conservation efforts, particularly in the context of endangered species. Allison’s insights shed light on the nuanced fears and challenges faced by landowners while also charting a path forward that honors the critical role of human stewardship in maintaining the balance of our ecosystems.

The presence of endangered species on private lands often triggers apprehension among landowners, stemming from concerns over regulatory restrictions and potential impacts on land use. However, Allison emphasized that landowners do care deeply about the land and the native wildlife it supports. This paradox highlights a critical gap in our current conservation framework—a disconnect that, if unaddressed, threatens to perpetuate misunderstandings and conflicts for years to come.

Allison argued for a paradigm shift in conservation efforts, advocating for a greater focus on working lands—those engaged in agriculture, recreation, and energy production. These lands represent a vast yet underutilized arena for conservation practices that can simultaneously support human livelihoods and biodiversity. The call to action is clear: We must embrace the concept of human stewardship, recognizing that our survival and well-being are inextricably linked to the health of the ecosystems we inhabit.

The keynote underscored the importance of education and awareness in fostering a sense of belonging within a living community. Allison eloquently stated, “We’ve co-evolved with the environment and the species we hold dear,” reminding us of our deep-rooted connection and mutual dependence on the natural world. This perspective challenges us to rethink our role in the environment, not as separate or superior entities but as integral components of a complex web of life.

Addressing the contentious issue of overregulation, Allison advocated for solutions that balance environmental needs with the rights of landowners. The goal is to foster collaborative conservation efforts that respect the multifaceted values of working lands. By engaging landowners as partners rather than adversaries, we can craft policies and practices that enhance ecosystem function while also supporting the economic and cultural values tied to the land.

In conclusion, Leslie Allison’s presentation serves as a clarion call to harness the power of private lands in conservation. By bridging the gap between landowners and conservationists, we can unlock innovative solutions that respect both ecological and human needs. The path forward requires us to recognize our place within the living community, to educate ourselves and others about the interconnectedness of all life, and to strive for a regulatory framework that empowers rather than hinders conservation success. In embracing these principles, we can ensure that private lands play a pivotal role in safeguarding the biodiversity and ecological integrity that sustain us all.

Panel: Innovative Approaches in Conservation: Building Trust and Embracing Flexibility

During the second panel discussion on “Innovative Approaches and Incentives - Why Not?” at a recent conservation conference, experts Cindy Dohner, Michael Brennan, Erik Kalsta, Jerome Ford, and Chuck Sykes engaged in a compelling dialogue about innovation in conservation. The discussion covered a spectrum of topics, including the importance of building trust, overcoming barriers, and the critical role of good relationships in achieving conservation goals. Each panelist brought unique perspectives to the table, highlighting the complexity of conservation efforts and the need for innovative approaches to address current challenges.

Chuck Sykes, president of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and the Director of Wildlife for the State of Alabama, emphasized the foundational role of trust and relationships in conservation work. He pointed out that by continuously engaging with each other—listening and speaking—successes will naturally emerge. Sykes’ optimism is grounded in the belief that despite the differences among conservation stakeholders, the commonalities in goals and values far outweigh these differences. Recognizing each other’s objectives and finding common ground is essential in the grand scheme of conservation.

Erik Kalsta, representing the Western Landowner Alliance, shared insights from his personal experience living in close proximity to wildlife. This interaction fosters a deep appreciation for nature,

underscoring the valuable contributions of ranchers and forest owners to conservation. Kalsta's perspective shifts the focus from sustainability to ensuring that land provides a better life for families, highlighting the importance of economic viability in conservation efforts.

Jerome Ford, Assistant Director for Migratory Birds USFWS, reminded the audience that birds, which are found virtually everywhere, symbolize the potential for coexistence between humans and wildlife. The key lies in initiating conversations on how to achieve this coexistence, fostering an environment where humans and wildlife can thrive together. He highlighted that the key to implementing the Coalition's Collaborative Conservation framework is trust. Understanding and respecting each other's needs, resources, and authorities is critical.

Michael Brennan, Program Manager at Texas A&M NRI, challenged the conventional wisdom around the ESA, suggesting that the act's flexibility is often underutilized. Brennan argued that innovation in conservation requires more than just trust; it demands creativity, flexibility, and the freedom to fail. This approach encourages a culture where trial and error lead to groundbreaking solutions.

The panel collectively acknowledged the need for new conservation tools while also advocating for the refinement and reformatting of existing ones. This dual approach recognizes that solutions to current conservation roadblocks may already exist within the tools at our disposal, waiting to be unlocked through innovative thinking and practices.

In conclusion, the panel discussion underscored the critical importance of trust, good relationships, and flexibility in advancing conservation efforts. By fostering open communication, allowing for creative problem-solving, and focusing on common goals, conservation stakeholders can navigate the challenges ahead. The insights shared by the panelists highlight the need for a collaborative approach that embraces both innovative solutions and the optimization of existing tools. In doing so, the conservation community can move forward together, breaking down barriers and achieving meaningful progress in preserving our natural world.

Keynote: A vision of the Future of Conservation Without Conflict

Jimmy Bullock, the Senior Vice President of Forest Sustainability at RMS, presents a groundbreaking vision for the future of conservation—a future where conflict is a thing of the past, and harmony between landowners and conservation efforts is the new norm. His vision, centered on the principles of Conservation Without Conflict, offers a blueprint for sustainable, scalable, and economically viable conservation strategies that can transform the way we protect our planet's biodiversity.

At the heart of Bullock's vision is the understanding that landowners play a pivotal role in conservation. He emphasizes the importance of listening to and understanding the diverse reasons landowners hold for owning land. This initial step of engaging and acknowledging their perspectives is crucial for developing conservation strategies free from conflict. By increasing predictability and ensuring

economic viability, conservation efforts can align more closely with the interests of landowners, thereby fostering a cooperative rather than confrontational relationship. Bullock advocates for sustainable and scalable conservation practices. This approach is not only about creating solutions that last but also about ensuring these solutions can be replicated across different contexts. A key aspect of this scalability is the ability to provide greater certainty with less risk. Through private landowner engagements, it is possible to achieve significant milestones, such as the downlisting or delisting of species from endangered status. This success underscores the importance of trust and the potential for enduring cultural change within communities.

Capitalizing on the flexibility of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) is another cornerstone of Bullock's strategy. By focusing on the opportunities the ESA presents rather than its restrictions, conservation efforts can become more innovative and effective. This mindset opens the door to new tools and methods for conservation, such as reintroducing species, conducting surveys, and promoting research. Bullock's motto, "If you can imagine it, you can make it a reality," encapsulates this spirit of innovation and the belief in the power of creativity to solve complex conservation challenges.

Trust is identified as a critical element in the vision for Conservation Without Conflict. Building enduring trust between conservationists and landowners lays the foundation for long-term success. Trust fosters an environment where meaningful dialogue and collaboration can occur, leading to enduring cultural changes that support conservation goals. However, building trust is not an overnight process; it requires time, effort, and a genuine commitment to understanding and addressing the concerns of all stakeholders involved.

Bullock's vision also introduces the concept of conservation as a circular process, emphasizing the continuous and interconnected nature of conservation efforts. This holistic perspective reinforces the idea that Conservation Without Conflict is not just a goal but the future of conservation itself. It represents a flexible, innovative, and collaborative approach that prioritizes the meaningful conservation of species before they reach the brink of extinction.

In conclusion, the path to Conservation Without Conflict, as outlined by Jimmy Bullock, is challenging yet immensely rewarding. It necessitates a paradigm shift in how we approach conservation, urging us to embrace flexibility, innovation, and collaboration. By building trust, engaging landowners as partners, and leveraging the full potential of laws like the ESA, we can forge a future where conservation efforts are harmonious, sustainable, and successful. This visionary approach is not just a dream but a practical blueprint for achieving a world where humans and nature coexist in balance and peace.

Panel: Navigating the Path to Conservation Without Conflict: Insights and Strategies

In a pivotal panel discussion titled “How To Move Forward with Conservation Without Conflict,” moderated by Leo Miranda-Castro, experts Deb Rocque, Dave Tenny, Jody Bickel, and Lucas Cooksey offered insights into overcoming barriers to conservation efforts. Their dialogue illuminated the complexities of conservation in today’s world, focusing on the critical issues of trust, culture, regulatory mechanisms, and the application of science and technology. He used several innovative examples from the military implementing proactive collaborative conservation measures.

Deb Rocque, the Assistant Director of Science Applications at the USFWS, highlighted a pressing concern: the declining budget for science applications, a trend largely attributed to diminishing trust. Rocque suggested that fostering trust requires time and strategic short-term actions, such as organizing summits or creating platforms to disseminate information and ideas. This approach aims to bridge the knowledge gap and build a foundation of trust by engaging communities and stakeholders in meaningful conversations about conservation.

Dave Tenny from NAFO emphasized the necessity of embracing cultural change to advance conservation efforts. According to Tenny, being agents of change is not optional; success is the only acceptable outcome. This perspective underscores the need for a paradigm shift in how conservation is perceived and implemented, advocating for a culture that wholeheartedly supports conservation objectives.

Jody Bickel, CEO of Creek Bank Associates, further explored the concept of culture in conservation. Bickel stressed the importance of fostering a deliberate culture that views environmental markets as an essential tool in the conservation toolbox. The idea is to remove skepticism and mistrust surrounding conservation efforts within market spaces, thereby facilitating more effective and widespread conservation practices.

Lucas Cooksey from Texas A&M NRI brought attention to the dynamic landscape of conservation, acknowledging the myriad changes and challenges that conservationists face. Cooksey pointed out that while numerous solutions and tools are available, the key lies in identifying and implementing the ones best suited for each unique situation. This approach calls for flexibility, creativity, and a deep understanding of the specific contexts within which conservation efforts are deployed.

The panel collectively addressed the importance of not only having access to information but also ensuring that it is comprehensible to diverse audiences. The perception of conservation efforts—whether it pertains to the concept of Conservation Without Conflict, an organization, or individuals involved—plays a significant role in their success. Each stakeholder has a unique perspective, influenced by their experiences, values, and knowledge base. Recognizing and respecting these varied viewpoints is crucial in moving forward with conservation efforts that are inclusive, effective, and free from conflict.

In conclusion, the panel discussion on “How to Move Forward with Conservation Without Conflict” provided valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of conservation today. In the realm of conservation, listed or at-risk species serve as crucial catalysts, driving efforts to protect and restore biodiversity. Yet, it is the concept of Cw/oC that acts as the catalyst for meaningful conversation among stakeholders. Establishing trust is a gradual process, necessitating initiatives like innovation summits to foster dialogue.

Embracing a culture that values differing viewpoints, encourages learning from opposition, and praises positive contributions is fundamental. Cw/oC emphasizes the creation of deliberate cultures and market opportunities, urging consideration of community values and the promotion of solution awareness. Leadership in Cw/oC is called to provide clarity in conservation efforts, ensuring integrity in all endeavors. Challenges such as time investment, relinquishing control, relevance, funding, and engagement diversity are recognized. The proposal to replicate the Wild Goose Chase” model through stakeholder, government, and NGO symposiums underscores the importance of collaborative dialogue, youth involvement, and the recognition that culture influences conservation more profoundly than policy or law.

Building trust, embracing cultural change, leveraging market mechanisms, and utilizing appropriate solutions and tools emerged as key strategies for advancing conservation goals. As emphasized by the panelists, achieving conservation without conflict requires a collective effort—engaging all stakeholders in a dialogue that respects diverse perspectives and seeks common ground. By prioritizing understanding, collaboration, and innovation, we can navigate the challenges of conservation and work towards where we keep working lands working and fish and wildlife resources healthy across the landscape.



Appendix 3: List of Specific Recommendations

These are some of the principles and specific strategic actions identified by the Summit participants to advance the Conservation without Conflict (Cw/oC).

Strategic Partnerships and Education

- Partner with organizations that offer training to agencies and industries to develop tailored Cw/oC training, incorporating it into existing programs like “Radical Collaboration” training.
- Create continued education courses, academic programs, and other educational modules focused on Cw/oC, potentially through institutions such as Texas A&M Department of Rangeland, Wildlife and Fisheries Management, Texas A&M Natural Resources Institute, and the National Conservation Training Center.
- Connect partners with resources to promote a unified approach to conservation.

Enhancing Tools and Approaches

- Identify and address problems and barriers at any level to add value.
- Serve as a facilitator and convenor for collaborative conservation through site-based initiatives, creating a “strike force” or “Community of Practice.”
- Develop new tools and approaches for collaborative conservation, including a Cw/oC toolkit or website.

Summit and Report Development

- Compile a comprehensive report detailing summit discussions, findings, and proposed actions.
- Organize an “innovation summit” to discover new ideas and strategies for conservation without conflict, using insights from Deb Rocque.

Promotion and Outreach

- Catalog products and initiatives that have advanced Cw/oC, such as Integrated Natural Resources Management Plans (INRMPs), Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs), Crediting Programs, and Biological Opinions (BiOps).
- Sponsor a WCI video highlighting successful conservation efforts and the significance of collaboration.
- Employ storytelling to enhance relatability and engagement, featuring case studies like the Lykes Ranch agreement in Florida and discussing narrative crafting with Gian.

Advocacy and Policy

- Advocate for Cw/oC as the preferred approach among young professionals and the wider conservation community.
- Rekindle the connection between people and the landscape, emphasizing the necessity of community involvement in conservation.

- Advocate for the comprehensive integration of social and economic sciences with community input in conservation decisions, aligning with the landscape conservation framework/initiative.

Building Trust and Community Engagement

- Encourage agencies to actively listen to stakeholders and communities, going beyond passive listening.
- Position Cw/oC as a trusted and diverse thought leader capable of overcoming barriers through collaboration.
- Highlight trust, risk-taking, and flexibility as essential elements of successful Cw/oC initiatives.
- Stress the significance of private working lands in sustaining species and ecosystems, advocating for agencies to reassess their perspectives toward these lands.

Learning and Innovation

- Acknowledge the importance of science and values in wildlife and conservation policy decisions, building trust in the process and acceptance of outcomes.
- Foster innovation in tools and initiatives that can be replicated across different contexts to hasten conservation successes.
- Value learning from on-the-ground projects, including Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), to enhance grassroots knowledge.
- Encourage the exploration of private financing options beyond traditional regulatory compliance, with Cw/oC serving as a catalyst for attracting investment.

Policy and Regulatory Framework

- Treat the ESA as a flexible tool for fostering conservation incentives.
- Increase state agency involvement in ESA implementation, leveraging their closeness to species and ecosystems without necessitating legal amendments.
- Cultivate a culture of cooperation and proactive engagement in collaborative conservation, moving beyond compliance.

Wild Goose II / Innovation Summit

- Consider the integration of Wild Goose II with an Innovation meeting, potentially including a separate technical session, but keeping them distinct if needed.
- Explore the formation of cohorts for these meetings and the potential inclusion of the Natural Conservation Leadership Initiative (NCLI).

Expand Universe: Young People Engagement

- Collaborate with academic youth groups, including TWS student chapters, AFWA & NCTC curricula, and universities such as Texas A&M, UT-San Antonio, and CSU.

- Organize university weeks to introduce Cw/oC, utilizing platforms like Zoom for remote sessions. These could be facilitated by FWS and SCA and include university social events.
- Provide both formal and informal professional mentoring.
- Initiate a cohort program for focused development.
- Partner with undergraduate and graduate programs.
- Design curricula tailored to young audiences.

Industry Involvement

- Encourage more industry representatives to participate and exchange insights.
- Connect with trade associations and organizations like ESRI, NCASI, and ACP.
- Present at industry conferences to enhance awareness and encourage collaboration.

Diverse Representation

- Incorporate tribal representatives and environmental/conservation NGO communities.
- Broaden the scope to encompass water, climate, and all-natural resources.
- Engage with entities not yet aligned with Cw/oC, including NGOs, litigants, and communities affected by natural resource pressures.
- Outreach to conservation underserved communities, considering dedicated conferences or meetings.

Knowledge Transfer

- Develop a catalog of tools and resources, including a secure repository showcasing successful initiatives like the salamander agreement and WCI MOU.
- Clarify the ESA's flexibility and incentives.
- Provide ready-made presentations highlighting successes and the Cw/oC approach in underrepresented areas.
- Create an NCTC curriculum and a community of Cw/oC practitioners for advisory services, inspired by the NPS Rivers & Trails strike team.
- Start a "Wildlife Mythbusters" podcast to aid in trust rebuilding.

Funding and Support for Collaborative Approaches

- Launch a Cw/oC funding initiative for collaborative project applications, assisting with costs, travel for youth, or initiative support.
- Establish a funding pool from Cw/oC member contributions, potentially named Theodore Roosevelt Genius Grants.

Driving Clarity in Environmental Markets

- Push for clear federal and state support for environmental markets, enhancing their conservation benefits.

Overall Vision

- Prioritize building relationships as the core business, with conservation as a natural result of strong, trust-based partnerships.
- Transition from confrontation to cooperation, then to collaboration, via cultural change and mutual understanding.
- Advocate for a culture where “trust becomes infectious,” creating a widespread network of cooperation and collaboration.

Big Picture: Bridging Understanding Between Groups

- Seek a balance between public perception and scientific insight to improve mutual understanding.
- Bridge understanding between different stakeholders by reaching a broader audience.
- Focus on integrating the landowner perspective to help Cw/oC widen its message.

Identifying and Addressing Weaknesses

- Address the relevance of the group to an evolving audience, adapting to fit the changing needs of landowners.
- Consider a new marketing campaign to bridge engagement gaps, moving beyond traditional “science” levels.

Agency Support Variability

- Recognize varying levels of agency readiness, with some needing assistance to articulate their goals effectively.

Taking a Public Relations Approach

- Implement a robust public relations strategy, acknowledging the significant investment of time, effort, and resources required.
- Address current relevancies to America, ensuring strategies are translated and adapted to contemporary realities.
- Emphasize effective marketing and messaging to reach targeted audiences.

Prioritizing Diversity, Inclusion, and Expansion

- Transition from transactional to transformative relationships, highlighting the necessity of diversity, inclusion, and expansion in our efforts.

Shifting Perceptions as the Go-To Approach

- Work to overcome institutional resistance to make Cw/oC the preferred conservation method.
- Recruit influential champions to advocate for Cw/oC during this pivotal phase.

Accelerating Change

- Acknowledge that change is happening at a tolerated pace rather than the necessary speed.
- Inspire a cultural shift and create opportunities for the “middle group” to actively engage in resolving conflicts.

Understanding Success Drivers

- Cultivate genuine, on-the-ground relationships to foster success stories.
- Tackle mistrust in locally led conservation initiatives.

Empowering Action Through Structure

- Establish and empower a structured approach to apply Cw/oC principles effectively.

Enhancing State Engagement

- Strengthen state engagement by formalizing partnerships.
- Organize field tours and discussions involving state officials and landowners.
- Co-host meetups with Cw/oC for wider community engagement.

Developing a Strategic Roadmap

- Clearly define what success looks like, including necessary policy and relationship changes.
- Identify key participants for meaningful collaborative efforts.

Expanding Organizational Participation

- Broaden participation in Cw/oC to include a wider array of organizations, such as the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Indigenous groups, and the USDA.

Repeating Successes and Storytelling

- Duplicate previous successes and utilize storytelling to motivate individuals early in their careers and various organizations.
- Gather industry leaders and sportsmen/environmental groups for Cw/oC meetings, with a focus on conservation and storytelling.

Incorporating a Vision Problem Solution Framework

- Recognize the importance of economic factors and other drivers, such as climate change and carbon sequestration, in conservation efforts.
- Craft a strategic roadmap and create a power map to outline learning, action, and movement networks.

Appendix 4: Speakers

Leo Miranda, Executive Director, Conservation Without Conflict

Tony Wasley, President Wildlife Management Institute and Chair Conservation without Conflict

Gary Frazer, Director of Operations, USFWS

Mike Leahy, Senior Director of Wildlife, Hunting and Fishing Policy, NWF

JJ Apodaca, Executive Director, Amphibians and Reptile Conservancy

David Gonzales, USFWS At Risk Partners, Coastal and At-Risk Species Programs

Healy Hamilton, Chief Scientists, Sustainable Forestry Initiative

Amy Wolfe, Director, Trout Unlimited Northeast Coldwater Habitat Program

Leslie Alison, Executive Director, Western Landowner Alliance

Cindy Dohner, President, Cindy K. Dohner LLC

Michael Brennan, Program Manager, Texas A&M Natural Resources Institute

Erik Kalsta, Western Landowner Alliance

Jerome Forde, Assistant Director Migratory Birds

Chuck Sykes, President, AFWA

Jimmy Bullock, Senior Vice President Forest Sustainability, RMS

Deb Rocque, Assistant Director Science Applications, USFWS

Dave Tenny, CEO, NAFO

Jody L. Bickel, CEO Creek Bank Associates

Lucas Cooksey, TAMU Natural Resources Institute

Hailey Avalos, SCA Intern; B.S. Undergraduate at The University of Texas at San Antonio

Gracie Lugo, Masters of Natural Resource Development, Natural Resources Management and Policy

Luis Lopez, Masters of Natural Resource Development

Summit Sponsors



Appendix 5: 2024 Conservation without Conflict Summit - Attendee List

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Appendix 5: 2024 Summit Attendee List

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