



# REFRESHED WESTERN CONSERVATION STRATEGY

Prepared for The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation  
by The Redstone Strategy Group, LLC

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Introduction .....	3
<b>1.</b> The Program will continue to pursue preservation and restoration of the ecological integrity of the West through work on land, water, and energy.....	4
<b>2.</b> Three newly emphasized strategies are expected to deliver major conservation gains.....	8
<b>3.</b> Continuation of several successful strategies will complete the program’s portfolio.....	13
<b>4.</b> The program’s Western strategies will be strengthened by new support for sophisticated advocacy.....	16
<b>5.</b> The Program will rely on an effective monitoring and evaluation approach.....	19

WESTERN CONSERVATION HAS BEEN ONE OF THE PILLARS OF THE HEWLETT FOUNDATION'S WORK for more than four decades. Since 1969, the Foundation has invested more than \$250 million to preserve the vast open spaces of the American West as an unspoiled landscape where wildlife thrives, world class recreational opportunities abound, diverse communities flourish, and western ranchers and landowners maintain their history of stewardship (fig. 1). The Foundation's support has played a crucial role in protecting the West's biodiversity achieving important successes in land and water protection and reducing the impact of fossil energy development on sensitive lands. Now, new opportunities are emerging for the Foundation's Environment Program to build on its past successes. Key elements are in place for major policy victories across the West—from protecting public lands from damaging energy development to saving the planet's largest intact temperate forest. Yet, the conservation movement is only beginning to gear up to gather the strength it needs to win more consistently.

To increase that momentum and improve the chances for success, the Program is revising and updating its Western Conservation Strategy. This refreshed plan positions the Hewlett Foundation not only to secure major conservation victories in the coming years, but also to build the requisite advocacy power to sustain the movement in the future.

The following elements form the core of this strategy:

1. The Program will continue to pursue preservation and restoration of the ecological integrity of the West through work on land, water, and energy.
2. Three newly emphasized strategies are expected to deliver major conservation gains.
3. Continuation of several successful strategies will complete the Program's portfolio.
4. The priority western strategies will be strengthened by new support for sophisticated advocacy.



**FIGURE 1** The West

# 1

## THE PROGRAM WILL CONTINUE TO PURSUE PRESERVATION AND RESTORATION OF THE ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY OF THE WEST THROUGH WORK ON LAND, WATER, AND ENERGY.

FIVE YEARS AGO, THE PROGRAM ESTABLISHED A VISION FOR ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY IN WHICH western ecosystems and species would be protected within a mosaic of open lands and natural waters for the benefit of both people and wildlife. The Program understood that the grandeur, diversity, and integrity of the natural landscape play a critical role in the vitality and economic health of the communities of the region and the well-being of the entire nation; and that, likewise, the communities and landowners of the West play an integral role in sustaining its habitats. The goal was to ensure that a healthy and economically vibrant North American West is passed on to future generations.

Conserving the ecological integrity of the West requires that ecosystems and species are protected through a medley of representativelands and waters, and that social and cultural support for that protection are strengthened. More specifically, a review of current scientific literature concluded that “at least half of each ecoregion [should be] either strictly protected or [in] a mix of strictly protected and lightly used (and well regulated) areas,” and that goals should be met for individual species.<sup>1,2</sup>

This review also concluded that this large-landscape approach to conservation is the best overall response to climate change. While individual species may migrate in response to shifting climates, these moves are unpredictable. The best way to ensure resilience in the face of climate change, then, “is to ameliorate all the stressors that [ecosystems] currently experience.” Protecting “a diverse set of large, highly connected natural areas,” as the Program seeks to do, will build resiliency to climate change as well.<sup>1</sup>

The Program’s objective remains unchanged. By protecting natural landscapes, restoring freshwater flows, reducing fossil energy development while shifting toward renewables, and building broad-based support for conservation, the Foundation is creating a more sustainable future for the communities and habitats of the West. These policies are also fundamentally important to a sustainable economic future for the region.<sup>3</sup> Figure 1 shows the geographic extent of this work, which stretches from the southwestern United States to Alaska, with

<sup>1</sup> Malcolm L. Hunter, Jr., and David S. Wilcove, “Western Conservation Strategy Science Review for the Hewlett Foundation” (internal document, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Much of this goal can be achieved through public land management plan designations that are sensitive to ensuring ecological function while allowing for traditional recreational, grazing and other uses. We anticipate that additional national park, wilderness and other protective designations will also be needed.

<sup>3</sup> See generally reports from the Outdoor Industry Association and Headwaters Economics, among others.

the eastern edge defined primarily by ecosystems rather than political boundaries. The eastern edge is purposefully soft to emphasize that partnerships with neighboring regions can be an important way of achieving success within the Program's geography.

Even with stable goals, the Program recognizes that its strategies and tactics must adapt to shifting circumstances in order to be effective. As a first step, it commissioned a formal evaluation of its original strategy, reviewing what has and has not worked as expected, how the world in which it operates is changing, and challenges and opportunities ahead. This evaluation weighed the science undergirding the past strategy and the effectiveness of its policy initiatives. Based on the lessons from the evaluation, the Program refreshed its Western Conservation Strategy to guide the next five years of this work.

## 1.1 The Program has made great progress, but many challenges remain.

Since 2008, grantees funded through the Foundation's Western Conservation Strategy have conserved land and water on a scale almost unimagined when the strategy was put in place, increasing protection for more than 230 million acres and nearly 3,500 river miles. These gains were all the more impressive since the overall political context was difficult. The Program's evaluation noted that the recession, the push for an "all of the above" energy policy, and increasing anti-conservation pressures in the U.S. Congress and elsewhere made the Program's successes far from given.

Yet much remains to be done to reach the Program's goal of protecting 764 million acres—50 percent of the landscape—across twelve U.S. states and three Canadian provinces. Despite progress during the past five years that brought the Program 15 percent closer to its goal, conditions in the West still fall short of that goal. The evaluation noted a few important challenges that the Program must overcome, including:

- **Building sufficient advocacy strength.** The Foundation's evaluation concluded: "While the conservation community has built considerable advocacy strength, it is not sufficient to make adequate progress in the next five years in the face of considerable political and economic obstacles." Currently, the conservation movement is not able to mount a sufficiently strong, sustained effort to fully engage on conservation issues, challenges, and opportunities and to fight back against increasingly strident anti-conservation voices.
- **Expanding the Boreal strategy to the Pacific Coast and Alaska.** The evaluation noted that coastal ecosystems were generally underprotected and that the Program should develop strategies to address this. While the strategy to protect the Boreal Forest stretching across Canada and Alaska was securing hundreds of millions of acres to the east, that strategy lacked the capacity to expand into Alaska and made only minimal investments in British Columbia.

- **Conserving the Southwest’s fragile desert ecoregions and rivers.**

While West-wide policy successes can improve a wide range of conservation values such as biodiversity and habitat for rare species, they do not always benefit some of the most threatened ecoregions. Such is the case with southwestern deserts and their rivers, which are not well protected and which the Program did not help significantly in the past five years. The evaluation recognized that more than five years might be needed to make meaningful progress. At the same time, it encouraged the Program to lay the groundwork for conservation in the Southwest whenever possible.

While the Program expects to make major progress in addressing these challenges in the coming five years, it does not expect to meet its ultimate goal of conserving 50 percent of priority western lands in that timeframe. The next few years may provide fertile ground for significant gains, but political and economic headwinds likely will continue and require investment in defensive strategies.

## 1.2 Strategies will conserve land, protect water, and reduce reliance on fossil energy.

After careful study and advice from its evaluators, the Program has opted to retain the fundamental framework of its work. It will continue to invest in a set of strategies under three major components—land, water, and energy—to achieve its overall goal.

Given the Program’s success over the past five years, many of the proven strategies used to achieve these goals will remain consistent, such as building local support for Wilderness Areas and restoring crucial river systems. These strategies remain an integral part of the Program’s overall approach. However, the Program is also increasing investment in new and evolving areas and innovative strategies to maximize its effectiveness, such as engaging in a broad energy strategy and building a new generation of grantees with sophisticated policy advocacy skills.

These new investments demonstrate a greater emphasis on the policy-focused strategies that have proven most effective over the previous five years. There are five main assumptions underpinning this policy focus:

- **Large gains in ecological integrity will be principally achieved through public lands policy.** The Program’s greatest impact in the last five years has come through four successful policy strategies aimed at improving the conservation of public lands writ large, rather than at protecting specific privately held parcels or public land areas. Given that the great majority of western land is publicly owned, much of the Foundation’s work will focus on public land and water conservation. Because connections between large publicly conserved areas, as well as other critical habitat areas, are often on private land, some of the Foundation’s efforts will be directed toward increasing public funds available for private land conservation.

- **There is a window of opportunity for major victories.** The next few years may represent the best chance in more than a decade for conservationists to secure supportive policies and establish a strong legacy of public lands protection.
- **Planning needs to be balanced with flexibility in order to take advantage of policy windows.** Favorable timing is essential for success, yet often unpredictable. While the Program should articulate its grantmaking plans and carefully consider strategic alternatives, it also must be prepared to apply its strategy where and when it will be most effective to do so.
- **A strategy based in science will result in better policy objectives.** A science-driven Program will be able to promote policy proposals that are more effective at conserving the West and carry more influence with the agencies that manage the West's public lands.

# 2

## THREE NEWLY EMPHASIZED STRATEGIES ARE EXPECTED TO DELIVER MAJOR CONSERVATION GAINS.

THE REFRESHED WESTERN CONSERVATION STRATEGY PROPOSES EMPHASIZING THREE STRATEGIES that pick up where previous victories left off: minimizing the environmental impact of energy development, conserving important lands in the western United States, and protecting at least half of the 1.2 billion-acre Boreal Forest in Canada and Alaska. Each strategy will include a mix of new and old approaches, enhancing conservation values and creating an environment receptive to more traditional protection efforts.

These three strategies were chosen for special emphasis among a number of alternatives. To select these focus areas, the Program sought expert opinions, analyzed potential ecological benefits, and estimated the risks and costs of each strategy. These three stood out for their potential to deliver major conservation benefits and the urgent need to invest in them before a window of opportunity closes. The Program will also maintain investments in other successful land, water, and energy strategies, described in Section 3.

### **2.1 The balanced energy development strategy will sharply diminish the largest threat to the West.**

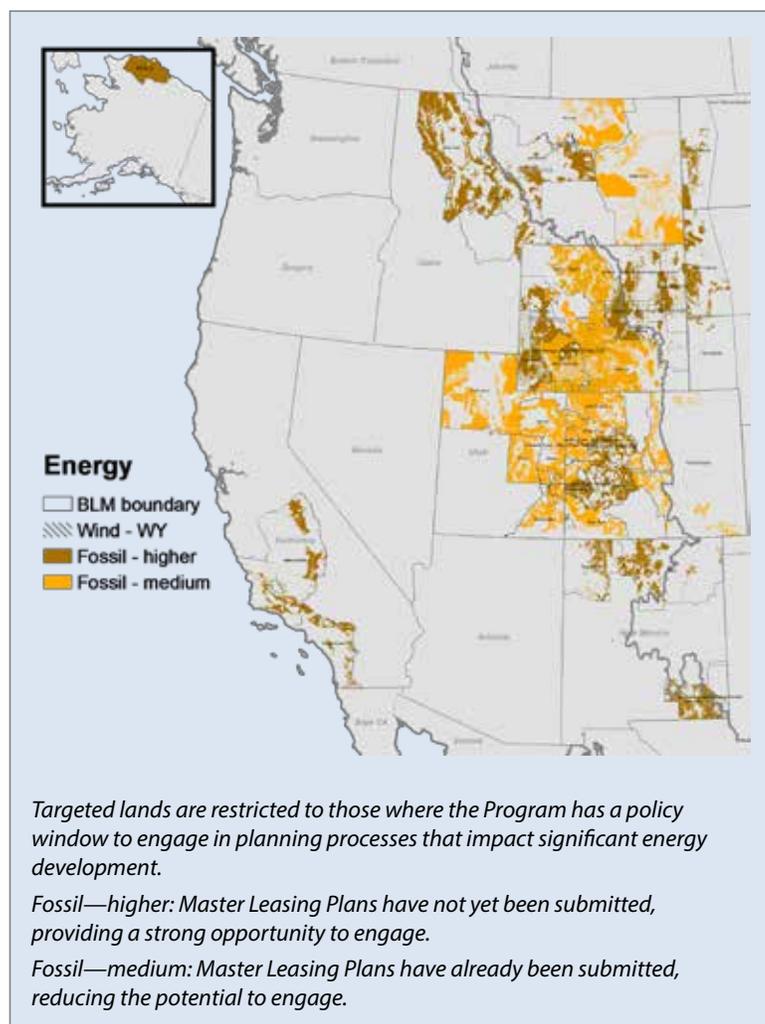
The exploration and production of energy from fossil fuels is the largest driver of habitat loss in the West. Already a spiderweb of roads and well pads fragments the landscape, breaking up the large, connected, and undeveloped tracts that plants and animals need to thrive and increasing air and water pollution. New technologies and pressure for more domestic energy production is dramatically increasing pressure to open up more public lands to development as the oil and gas industry seeks to drill in basins never before considered under threat. With hyperbolic promises of job creation and energy independence, the industry is attempting to define public lands exclusively as a resource to be fully developed, attempting to elevate oil and gas development above all other uses of the lands.

This strategy will work to balance energy development with smart planning and projects designed to increase ecological integrity across the region. The aim is not only to protect a share of the millions of acres directly threatened by energy development (fig. 2), but also to lay the foundation for placing millions of additional acres of undeveloped lands into strict protection through related conservation strategies. Doing so will directly refute the notion that public lands are merely resources to be exploited.

Three main actions will achieve this goal:

- Institutionalizing Master Leasing Plans (MLPs) across the West, reducing the fossil fuel threat on 50 to 100 million acres.** MLPs are a tool that the Bureau of Land Management has in place to zone oil and gas development to maintain or improves the natural values of the landscape. Prior to MLPs, an oil company could nominate most parcels of land for development and trigger only a site-specific review. Developed by the BLM with conservationists, communities, and industry as a “smart from the start” approach, MLPs, stipulate phased leasing, minimal surface disturbance, withdrawal of sensitive areas before the lease auctions, and reclamation across an entire region; they may also demand mitigation that can generate funding for offsetting conservation on other lands. If institutionalized by the BLM, the MLP approach would bring a landscape that balances development with conservation.
- Ensuring that renewable energy projects are properly sited on public lands, speeding the transition to carbon-free energy.** With Foundation support, conservationists succeeded in establishing a model for responsible solar development in the Southwest that is making possible a rapid rise of renewable energy development on public lands. The Program shifted the focus of activists from reacting to particular projects to identifying appropriate locations for development across a broad landscape. This strategy will seek to lock in the gains promised by this new model and extend the approach to major wind developments and associated transmission corridors. Initially, the strategy will focus on Wyoming, where the BLM is forming a statewide wind plan that likely will set the framework for development nationwide.
- Setting the conditions to protect millions acres of public land by giving equal ground to conservation and energy development.** This strategy makes clear the need to both restrict drilling to where it is appropriate and increase protection of treasured public lands..

This strategy will also include coordination related to a few areas of overlap between the Western Conservation Strategy and the Environment Program’s investments in energy and climate. One example of such a link is the effort to



**FIGURE 2** Potential focus areas for reduced energy development

reduce coal mining, which will protect important habitat while reducing access to high-carbon coal.

## 2.2 The conservation lands strategy will place conservation at the heart of public land management.

The Program has three broad strategies to conserve public lands: engage with public agencies to improve the management of specific areas; seek executive proclamations that permanently protect lands as National Monuments; and support efforts that result in congressionally designated Wilderness Areas. In the next few years, the Program's greatest opportunity is the first strategy: improving the BLM's oversight, management, and protection of the public estate. The Program will focus on BLM planning in the near term, while continuing efforts to empower communities to champion National Monuments and maintaining the flexibility to rapidly ramp up Wilderness strategies when a policy window opens.

The BLM directly manages 250 million acres and controls mineral rights on over 700 million acres. Yet, at a time when the need for landscape-scale conservation has never been more apparent, much of the BLM bureaucracy continues to see resource development as its primary function. More than 85 percent of its land remains unprotected. The result is vast swaths of BLM land that are not managed to protect their ecological values. Fortunately, 70 percent of the lands the BLM manages will be involved in planning processes over the next five years, (fig. 3), affording ample opportunities for progressive land management plans to take hold.

Conservationists will improve BLM practices by engaging in Resource Management Plan (RMP) revisions. Approximately 160 RMPs govern BLM lands across the West, each covering an average of several million acres of territory and guiding management for a few decades. The Foundation will leverage its support by targeting West-wide policies that benefit multiple BLM districts and engaging on the ground in priority regions (e.g., the under-protected southwestern deserts).

To engage the BLM across the West, the Program will employ a suite of tactics:

- **Restricting off-road vehicle access to protection ecologically important lands.** Foundation grantees succeeded

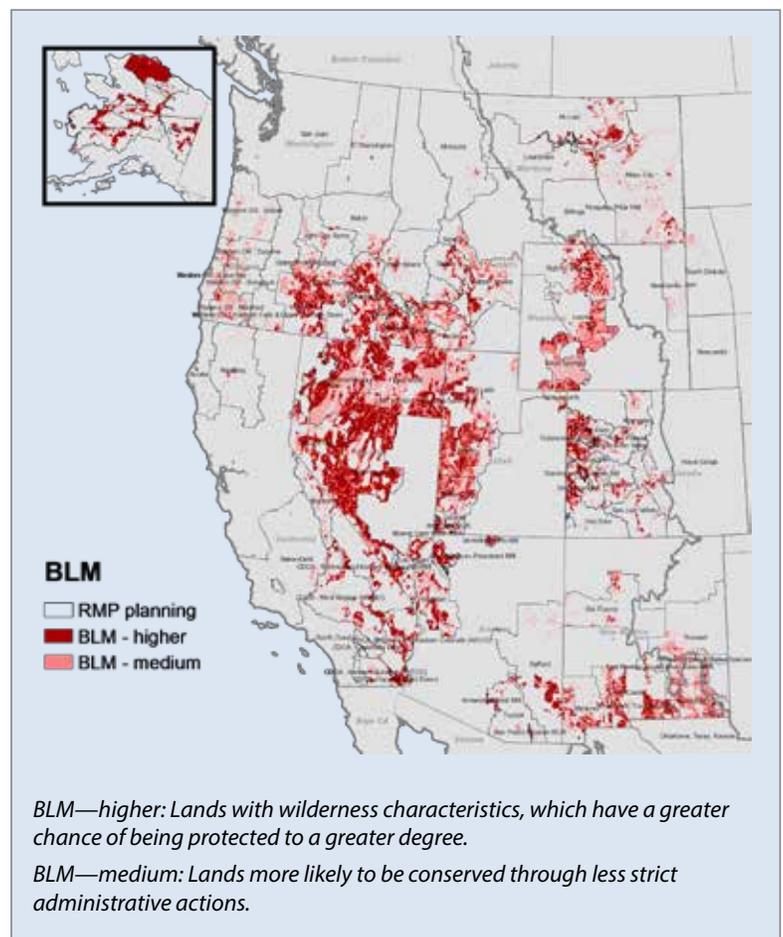


FIGURE 3 BLM lands that are a conservation priority

in greatly limiting to off-road vehicles on public lands in places detrimental to important ecological resources. Yet, off-road vehicles still make use of an extensive network of legacy paths that fragment the West. The Foundation will continue to support efforts to protect fragile lands from ORV impacts through better enforcement of existing regulations and adoption of new BLM management plans.

- **Inventorizing and protecting lands with Wilderness characteristics.** Although advocates have consistently argued that the BLM is required to protect public lands suitable for Wilderness protection, the official inventories of these lands are outdated and incomplete. Conservation groups can ensure that the BLM rectifies its undercounting and mismanagement of Wilderness areas and protects all of the appropriate land.
- **Protecting core areas of sage grouse habitat on public land.** One of the Foundation's major successes in the past five years was securing guidelines to protect strongholds of the sage grouse—a bird that was once ubiquitous in the West but is now on the brink of being listed as an endangered species. Sage grouse also serve as an important, if imperfect, indicator species for the fragile sagebrush ecosystem. Generally, if the sage grouse population is doing well, then the rest of the plants and animals in the ecosystem are also. While agency-wide BLM policy guidelines are important, identifying and securing protection of these areas still requires convincing individual BLM offices to alter their management.
- **Promoting Backcountry Conservation Areas.** The Program will invest in introducing and expanding Backcountry Conservation Areas to strengthen sportsmen's voices for conservation and create a tool that can be deployed throughout the West. Backcountry Conservation Area policies give the BLM a way to protect undeveloped public lands important to sportsmen and other recreational interests by improving habitat integrity and preventing new development that would hinder later strategies for permanent protection.

The Program will develop a strong National Monuments strategy in the coming years. The Program expects a natural policy window for large-scale National Monument designations to be open through late 2016. Grassroots organizing is needed now to build the support for new declarations. Many new Monuments covering several million acres are possible over the next few years.

In contrast, there is a relatively low likelihood of success in the coming two to three years for major strategies to protect sensitive areas under the federal Wilderness Act. Wilderness gains in Congress tend to come in short bursts after many years of preparation, and congressional dynamics will likely prevent major bills from passing in the next two years. Still, the Program will continue to invest at a sustainable level. It is only a matter of time before pressure and support for new designations leads to a breakthrough. In addition, the field must maintain its expertise and experience so that it can rapidly ramp up capacity to respond whenever a policy window opens.

### 2.3 The Boreal Forest Conservation Initiative will expand protection of the largest intact temperate forest on earth.

Supported by the Hewlett Foundation and directed by The Pew Charitable Trusts, the International Boreal Conservation Campaign has led to conservation on an unprecedented scale. More than 150 million acres of Canadian forest are now under strict protection, and nearly as many additional acres have been placed in sustainable management. The long-term goal is to see half of the 1.2 billion-acre forest in strict protection and the remainder managed in a sustainable manner. The Boreal campaign estimates it can secure another 150 million acres of protection across the Boreal by 2018 if commitments hold. These gains will expand protection to the Pacific coast, helping to preserve those threatened ecoregions as recommended by the evaluation.

The Program will continue to support the Boreal campaign across Canada in recognition of the nationwide scope of the environmental threat: restricting support to the West is neither practical nor likely to result in the scale of protection needed. The campaign has five strategies to protect the remainder of the Boreal: (1) securing large-scale conservation commitments from provinces; (2) supporting local land use planning, working closely with and supporting First Nations and local communities; (3) reforming antiquated mining laws that subject the Boreal to damaging claims without significant oversight; (4) improving management of existing timber tenures through agreements with forest product companies and other key constituencies; and (5) building public support.

# 3

## CONTINUATION OF SEVERAL SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES WILL COMPLETE THE PROGRAM'S PORTFOLIO.

IN ADDITION TO THE THREE STRATEGIES DESCRIBED IN SECTION 2, THE PROGRAM WILL CONTINUE TO invest in several others that will achieve important land, water, and energy goals. These strategies also will lay the foundation for important future conservation gains.

### 3.1 Local land conservation work will complement West-wide land protection efforts and focus on increasing conservation funding and building capacity for conservation advocacy in highly threatened areas.

The Program's land conservation goal primarily relies on national policies in the United States and national and provincial policies in Canada to protect public land. While these policy strategies can protect millions of acres of land, they do not obviate the need for complementary targeted work in threatened areas.

The Program's evaluation highlighted two such areas:

In southwestern deserts, which lack significant protected areas, the Program will seek to create long-term conservation opportunities and gains by building conservation advocacy capacity and exploring innovative mechanisms for securing private land and river conservation, such as mitigation resulting from energy development in other regions.

On key private lands across the West that provide riparian and other critical habitat and connections between landscapes, the Program will fund efforts to increase public sources of conservation funding. This funding would allow grantees to work across public and private lands, adding them to the public estate where appropriate, and supporting sustainable landowner stewardship practices.

Increasing conservation funding is especially important for conserving lands that form the connections between larger wildland areas—the majority of which are publicly owned. Priority strategies include:

- **Advancing conservation in southwestern deserts.** The Program will invest to create future opportunities in southwestern deserts, ecoregions the evaluation highlighted as among the highest-priority targets, partially because only about 10 percent of the land is protected now. The evaluation also underscored the need to build a diverse base of support for Southwest conservation. The Program's past work did not engage in the Southwest

due to a shortage of promising opportunities. Under the refreshed plan, the Program will make small investments now to identify potential areas for engagement later and begin to build the requisite base of support.

- **Increasing conservation funding via the Land and Water Conservation Fund.** The Program will continue to support a strategy to guarantee \$900 million a year for the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, the largest single source of money to conserve private lands for conservation purposes. Advocates have continued to build gradual support and have prevented major funding cuts despite strong pressures to decrease spending. Conservationists will be tested further in 2015 when the Fund must be reauthorized by Congress if it is to continue. Despite these headwinds, advocates have gathered significant support for full funding. Small investments in this strategy may lead to major conservation victories.
- **Increasing conservation funding via mitigation mechanisms.** Establishing new sources of mitigation funding will channel resources to private land conservation from development of energy resources or other uses.
- **Increasing conservation funding via state and local initiatives.** The Program will maintain small investments in state and local conservation funding efforts, helping advocates educate voters on the value of conservation. Since state and local governments are a large source of private land easement and acquisition funding, relatively small philanthropic investments can produce major increases in funding and affect how well it is spent. The Program has been successful in this area, and the evaluation found a high likelihood of future progress.

## 3.2 Water strategy will continue to prioritize river flows and riparian habitat protection.

The Program recognizes that healthy freshwater and wetland habitats are essential to the ecological integrity of the West. If the Program cannot meet its freshwater aims, it will not achieve its overall conservation goals. Progress has been made in the past five years, with nearly 3,500 river miles conserved and about half of them under strict protection as Wild and Scenic Rivers. However, as the evaluation noted, freshwater conservation tends to be dispersed across the West, and care is needed to ensure that incremental gains result in widespread improvements for the region.

The Program will maintain its freshwater investments as a critical part of the overall strategy to conserve half of the region's forty-eight targeted ecoregions. Funding will be focused on conserving 10,500 river miles through continued support for grantees that advance policies to increase river flows and protect riparian lands. Staff will monitor the water policy environment and consider expanding support if major new policy opportunities arise.

The Program also will work with grantees and the scientific community to identify tools and strategies that can focus work where most needed, avoiding a patchwork of gains. Priority strategies include:

- **Restoring crucial watersheds for cold-water fisheries.** The Program's investments in watershed restoration continue to pay dividends. Engaging anglers and hunters in reconnecting and restoring native fish habitat in coldwater fisheries has led to marked improvements in local conditions and built an important constituency for conservation. In the coming five years, these efforts will be concentrated in a few priority basins, focusing on approximately 4,500 river miles (colored areas in fig. 4).

- **Reforming hydropower.** The best opportunity to reform dam management is to participate in the federal process to relicense privately owned dams. The Foundation's engagement helped restore more than 1,000 river miles in the past five years, and taking part in the coming years' relicensing opportunities could improve conservation on nearly 5,000 river miles (orange lines in fig. 4).

- **Increasing Wild and Scenic Rivers.** The closest equivalent to federal Wilderness protection that a U.S. river can obtain is a Wild and Scenic River designation. This legislative protection is typically the result of many years of local organizing efforts. The Program will support these local efforts in priority watersheds in preparation for such congressional opportunities (purple lines in fig. 4).

- **Exploring opportunities to improve water conservation in southwestern deserts and in state water management.** In addition to continuing proven strategies, the Program will explore two less-certain ones. The first will be seeking opportunities for freshwater conservation in southwestern deserts in line with the evaluation's recommendations: freshwater work is particularly important in desert ecoregions, and the Southwest is underprotected. The second will be supporting policy work to improve water management at the state level. Doing so is difficult, but the lack of West-wide federal policy opportunities means that only state-by-state efforts can significantly improve the underlying frameworks of water management in the West.

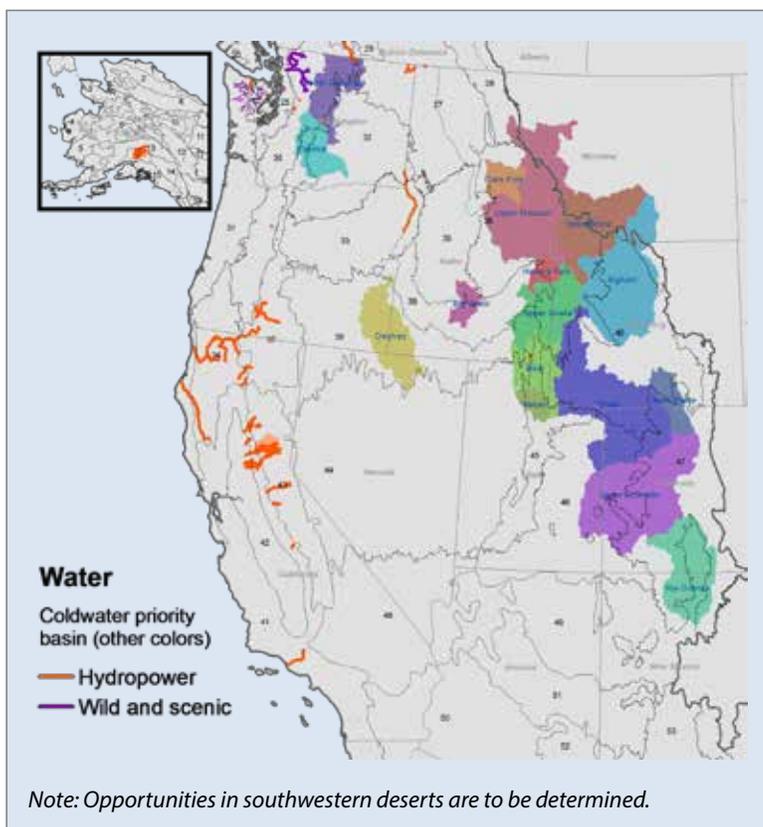


FIGURE 4 Priority areas for water work

# 4

## THE PROGRAM'S WESTERN STRATEGIES WILL BE STRENGTHENED BY NEW SUPPORT FOR SOPHISTICATED ADVOCACY.

THE HIGH-PROFILE FAILURE OF CLIMATE CHANGE LEGISLATION IN 2010 LAID BARE THE environmental movement's inability to secure major policies in the face of well-funded opponents and a challenging external environment. The days of the 374–1 House vote for the Clean Air Act in 1970 are long gone. The Program's evaluation concluded that while the conservation community has built considerable advocacy strength, it may not be sufficient to make adequate progress in the next five years in the face of considerable political and economic obstacles.

The Hewlett Foundation has played a significant role in expanding the conservation movement's capacity for advocacy. With targeted support, the Program's grantees have led strategies in conservation, energy, and climate. However, lessons from the past few years suggest that the Program must now take the next step: bringing together policy experts and established organizations to speak with one voice in targeted strategies and strengthening coordination among different strategies.

### 4.1 The Program will bolster established conservation organizations.

Established conservation groups excel where broad community support is needed for conservation victories, such as strategies to designate land for federal protection. These strategies build on a strong foundation of grassroots support, which then allows local constituencies and decision makers to support conservation aims. Grassroots strategies are necessary as well for success in large-scale policy changes across the West. As an example, sportsmen made their voices heard in the successful drive to protect the 1.2 million-acre Wyoming Range. Now, the same voices are being heard in broader debates about the proper use of public lands. Two evaluations of the failure to enact climate change legislation in 2010 dramatically illustrated the need for deep grassroots support. They noted that high-level policy support dissolved when there was no sustained pressure from influential grassroots organizations.

The Program will bolster established conservation organizations by:

- **Providing focused support for organizational effectiveness.** Support for developing organizational effectiveness is most beneficial when limited to a few key priorities. The Hewlett Foundation has numerous ways of doing this, including a unique fund specifically targeted for outcome-oriented capacity building.

- **Championing outreach efforts to constituencies that influence policy.** The Program’s evaluation highlighted the need for advocates to help give voice to the broad array of constituencies concerned about the future of the public lands. Therefore the Foundation will help support groups that work with important constituencies, including Latinos, young people, women, outdoor industry leaders, and urban and suburban families. In addition, the Foundation will continue its significant investments in sportsmen organizations.
- **Supporting organizations striving for greater policy acumen.** A few established organizations are seeking to adopt some of the innovative techniques of next-generation groups to further develop policy skills, and the Program will support these efforts.

## 4.2 Expanding the capacity of next-generation organizations and promoting experimentation will help give strategies needed savvy.

The Program has helped pioneer development of next-generation organizations that take the country’s most effective advocacy strategies and apply them to conservation. These new organizations have demonstrated the power of sophisticated policy advocacy both by catalyzing policy wins and by providing tactical support to established groups.

These groups have succeeded by developing unified messages, seeking out wider coalitions and more diverse messengers, and providing policymakers with reasons to act. They have helped the conservation movement secure, for example, strong oil and gas leasing reforms, anti-oil shale leasing regulations, new National Monuments, and increased funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

## 4.3 Increased coordinating capacity is needed within and across priority strategies.

To succeed in the major policy areas described in this plan, the conservation movement now needs to combine the strengths of its next-generation and established groups. Coordinating strategy and capacity will bring the different types of expertise described above under a single framework, assembling the comprehensive resources a strategy needs to succeed.

The Program has also identified a need for greater coordinating capacity across each of its priority strategies and plans to devote more time and resources to this work. Increased cross-strategy coordination is particularly important because the major U.S. federal policy opportunities in energy development and land conservation will rely on many of the same decision makers and elected officials.

## **4.4 Strategic plans will provide pragmatic and flexible guidelines.**

The Program will work with grantees to develop high-level plans to guide their efforts in priority strategies and will ensure funds are deployed to those most likely to deliver identified policy priorities. These blueprints will be used to guide conversations with grantees, setting forth the Program's expectations about the ingredients for a plan's success without being prescriptive about the methods and tactics needed to execute it.

# 5

## THE PROGRAM WILL RELY ON AN EFFECTIVE MONITORING AND EVALUATION APPROACH.

TRACKING AND EVALUATING PROGRESS ARE CRUCIAL FOR ADAPTING THIS STRATEGY AS CONDITIONS change and planned activities succeed and fail. The Program will develop its monitoring and evaluation plan with the assistance of the Foundation's Effective Philanthropy Group.

### **5.1 Consistent progress monitoring will support grantees' use of easy-to-deliver, easy-to-collect metrics.**

The Program is developing its monitoring plan so it can use data collection to refine assumptions and answer useful evaluation questions. Considering how and when the Program will track the outcomes of grantee activities as part of this refreshed strategy will allow staff to collect useful baseline and longitudinal data, establish convenient reporting formats, and communicate expectations to grantees.

For most of its grantees' work, the Program will primarily track three characteristics: the size of the area conserved (expressed in either acres or river miles); the location of that conservation (in particular whether it is in one of the forty-eight target ecoregions); and whether a given conservation success moves an area into the "complete protection" category, indicating that additional conservation gains are no longer needed and that focus can shift to defending previous gains.

The Program will also track progress toward its goal of permitting 10 GW of renewable energy on public lands, promoting a transition from fossil fuels to clean energy. This monitoring will allow the Program to quickly assemble detailed charts showing how it is progressing in its West-wide goals and in particular target ecoregions.

Most grantees are prepared to report this information, in part because the Program has developed an easy-to-use online tool to collect it. The Program has invested in its grantees' use of this online tracking tool and will work with them to improve their facility with it where needed. Staff takes this data and regularly analyzes it with respect to the Program's ecological integrity goals, much as was done for the Program-wide evaluation.

At the same time, the Program will not lose sight of its important work to build deep and broad support for conservation. While this progress may be more difficult to track, it is no less important to achieving western conservation gains. The Program will ask its grantees to provide short descriptions of

support-building successes, failures, and challenges. This qualitative data will help illuminate where funding strategies have been effective and where adjustments are needed.

## 5.2 Periodic detailed evaluations will assess the main assumptions behind each major strategy.

The Program will develop its evaluation plan to maximize what it can learn from its experiences and improve its grantmaking. The presumptive evaluation priorities are the three major strategies to be funded in the coming years: energy development, conservation lands through BLM planning, and the special Boreal Forest conservation initiative. In addition, the Program will evaluate the area of greatest innovation, and therefore the greatest potential for learning: development of sophisticated advocacy capacity.

The Program chose these top priorities based on a set of factors, including:

- **Opportunity to change the Program.** Will the evaluation results change the Program's grantmaking? In most cases, this factor most strongly determines an evaluation's importance, especially if the Program is facing a key decision, such as a major grant renewal.
- **Opportunity to change the field.** Will the evaluation results change the broader field? Sometimes evaluations serve to shape policy and practice of a field by bringing new information to a broad audience.
- **Importance to the goal.** How important is the investment to the Program's overall goal, and how large is the investment? If an investment is central to the overall success of a strategy, it is more important to evaluate it. The size of the investment can often serve as a proxy for its importance.
- **Uncertainty of the theory of change.** How risky is the strategy underlying the investment? Newer, less-tested investments are more important to evaluate than long-standing ones whose strong theories of change have proven successful.

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Western conservation is a pillar of the Hewlett Foundation's commitment to solving social and environmental problems. The Program's success over the past five years provides great reason for optimism, and with this updated strategy, the Program is poised to capitalize on the opportunities emerging over the coming years.