

**Western Conservation
Subprogram Strategy
2008–2013**

April 2008

This document presents a five-year strategic plan for the new Western Conservation subprogram in the Conservation and Science Program. For the past year, the Foundation has been engaged in a significant planning process, which has included input and commissioned papers from more than a hundred grantees, experts, consultants and Trustees.

Background

The North American West contains some of our country's greatest natural treasures and last remaining wild landscapes. For over a century, the West has been America's last frontier—a place of hope and opportunity for pioneers, immigrants, explorers and entrepreneurs alike. But the once bountiful riches of the West are becoming increasingly limited and today these limits are subject to some of the most significant threats the region has ever faced. The impact of climate change upon this arid region is already undeniable. It is estimated that the West will likely experience more profound impacts from climate change than any other part of the continent except for the Arctic. Explosive population growth within the West has put even more stress on already fragile and often antiquated land and water management systems. The growth is also fueling broad-scale development which in turn is converting thousands of acres of farm and ranchland into exurban sprawl. In Northwest Mexico, the growth is driven by tourism and once pristine coastal areas are now being developed for hotels, condominiums, and golf courses.

Across the region, the very qualities that make the area so special—the beauty, the open spaces, the wildness—are attracting a huge influx of development. The region is, quite literally, being loved to death. Finally, on public lands in the West, even more acres of Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management land are being developed for energy production, including tar sands, oil shale, and coal bed methane. The West is transforming before our eyes and the direction of this transformation is not sustainable.

Goal

We propose a set of strategies that are designed to collectively build the strength, capacity and resilience for both ecosystems and communities against this backdrop of multiple threats. Our ultimate goal is **to protect and restore biologically important and iconic regions of Western North America in ways that help create sustainable communities and build broader and effective conservation constituencies.**

In order to maximize the potential of grantmaking impact, we will focus the bulk of our resources on three key regions of the North American West for the next five years: California, the Colorado Plateau and Northwest Mexico.



Strategy and Key Objectives

(1) Protect:

Permanently protect ecologically and culturally important public and private lands.

The West contains some of the most iconic and biologically diverse lands in North America. Continuing the long tradition of land conservation at the Foundation including the Conserving California Landscapes Initiative (CCLI) and the Great Bear Rainforest project, we propose a new set of major land protection initiatives focused on three geographic priority areas that collectively will conserve some of the most important lands in the West.

Objectives:

- **California:** Our home state is recognized as a global hotspot of biological diversity due to a large number of distinct ecosystems that support high numbers of endemic species. These ecosystems, however, are increasingly threatened by both climate change and population growth (according to the U.S. Census Bureau, the state's population is expected to grow from 33 million to over 46 million over the next 20 years). We will protect key threatened and biologically diverse landscapes (private and public), specifically targeting the Sierra Nevada region and the Central Valley.
- **Colorado Plateau:** The 108 million acre Colorado Plateau is one of the world's most diverse and distinctive landscapes. The high plateaus, mountain ranges, deserts and river canyons provide an extraordinary range of habitats that shelter the interior West's greatest diversity of native species, including unusually high numbers of endemic and imperiled organisms. Our protection strategies in this region will capitalize upon opportunities to conserve private landscapes but we will also pursue the establishment of new wilderness or other protective designations for the millions of acres of public land in the region.

- **Northwest Mexico:** The five states that surround the Gulf of California—Baja California, Baja California Sur, Sonora, Sinaloa and Nayarit—contain some of the richest and most unique collection of biodiversity in the world. The pressures for development of this landscape are considerable, as its beautiful beaches and close proximity to the U.S. provides ideal conditions for major new tourism development. As a natural extension of our long-term marine conservation work in the Gulf, we will focus our resources on key coastal protection opportunities.
- **PRIs and Potential PRI Loan Fund:** One of the unique tools that the Packard Foundation brings to its grantmaking portfolio is use of Program Related Investments (PRIs). To date, we have facilitated the protection of more than 1.2 million acres throughout the country using PRIs. We will leverage our western conservation protection strategies to use both grant dollars and/or PRI funds for western land acquisitions.¹

(2) Reconnect and Restore:

Restore degraded river and water systems and reconnect these natural corridors to local communities through new public and private partnerships.

The West is the most arid region of the country and the early settlement of the region was inexorably tied to the life-lines of the major rivers and waterways. The challenge of creating communities and arable land in desert landscapes resulted in the creation of one of the largest and most complex systems of water infrastructure (dams, levees, canals, pipelines) in the world. This Byzantine infrastructure provided the fundamental platform for westward expansion and growth, and enables the very existence of places like Los Angeles, Phoenix and Las Vegas. Today, however, these water management systems and the rivers upon which they depend are at their breaking points. Obsolete dams, inefficient irrigation systems and state water laws that discourage water conservation all can be corrected to conserve sources of drinking water for people while improving the likelihood that fish and wildlife can survive and thrive. Moreover, a fully reconnected river system means that surface waters will recharge and replenish underground aquifers – important sources of municipal drinking water.

Objectives:

- **California Delta:** The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta represents the foremost water management problem facing California today. The Delta forms part of the largest estuary on the West Coast, providing a home to 55 species of fish and nearly 300 species of birds, mammals and reptiles. It also serves as a hub of California’s water supply, channeling water from Northern California watersheds to two-thirds of the state’s households and millions of acres of San Joaquin Valley farmlands. Today, the Delta’s ecological and water supply functions are in crisis, with massive declines in native fish populations and increasing risks of a

¹ There will be limited land acquisition opportunities where we will recommend both PRI and grant support, but they will be distinct from each other in terms of PRI repayment.

catastrophic failure of fragile levees—an event that could severely disrupt the state's water supply.

The goal for the Delta is to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the litigation, planning efforts, and conflict over how to manage the Delta to create a healthy, functional ecosystem and enable its continued viability through sustainable land and water use. Our approach will be to ensure that conservation interests are effectively engaged in the ongoing planning processes; to support sound science for decision makers; to develop strategies for long-term implementation of reforms. We will also support work to restore other important California rivers such as the San Joaquin River and the Tuolumne River which play key hydrological and ecological roles in the watershed feeding the Delta. Our goal here is to create scientifically sound, publicly supported and financed restoration plans and to connect these two rivers to their local communities creating a constituency to support the long-term protection of these natural resources.

- **The Colorado River:** The Colorado Basin is one of the world's largest, and is the principal lifeline for more than 30 million people and their economies in the West. Connecting the states of Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada and California, and ultimately draining into the Gulf of California, the River is 1,450 miles long and drains more than 240,000 square miles of land. While the ecological conditions of the Basin vary greatly, the integrity of the whole system is increasingly compromised. It is expected that the flows in the Colorado (in large part due to climate change) could be reduced by nearly 25 percent by 2030 further jeopardizing the supplies particularly for the growing regions of Las Vegas, Phoenix and southern California.² Ecologically, 30 percent of the native fish in the River are already endangered or imperiled.³

The overall goal is to maintain the freshwater biodiversity while meeting the growing needs of water supply. We propose support to launch this extraordinary campaign for one of the most important river systems in the world, tailoring long-term support consistent with our geographic and thematic priorities. We will seek to improve water laws and policies, develop greater capacity for Basin-wide science, and leverage significant new state, federal and private financing for Colorado River conservation efforts. We will also prioritize land protection efforts in the Colorado Plateau to increase protection of this watershed.

² Hoerling, M., 2007. Southwest Hydrology, p. 18.

³ TNC analysis of natural heritage databases

(3) Transform and Strengthen:

- *Transform land and water management systems to address the impact of climate change.*
- *Strengthen the role of emerging constituencies to ensure the movement's long-term relevance, durability and power.*
- *Expand the capacity and the efficacy of the land trust movement.*

The West is undergoing a series of major transformations in climate, demographics and attitudes toward the environment. To address these challenges, we have developed a set of strategic interventions that focus specifically on some of the most important areas of change and potential transformation of the West.

Objectives:

• **Climate Change Adaptation:**

The likely impacts of climate change threaten many of the conservation successes that have been achieved in the West and require major changes in how conservation is pursued in the coming decades. Building resilience of the conservation infrastructure to withstand the impacts of climate change is an overarching goal that cuts across all of our strategies. We will support tailored science and analysis on the impacts of climate change on the West and efforts to incorporate this information into management plans for both land and water systems.

• **Emerging Constituencies:**

In California, we will support organizations that serve to expand the base of support for conservation activities within the scope of our grantmaking. We will work to ensure that emerging conservation constituencies (Latino, Asian, hunters and anglers, faith-based, and public health) are engaged in local and state conservation projects and policy development.

In the Colorado Plateau, we will look for opportunities to support local Native American tribes to pursue conservation objectives compatible and complementary to our grantmaking strategies. Native Americans represent nearly 25 percent of the population base in the Plateau, and own and manage roughly the same percentage of land. Specifically, we will support efforts to more effectively engage tribes in conservation efforts including opportunities with tribal land protection and renewable energy development.

In Northwest Mexico, we will focus our support on bolstering the capacities of local organizations working on conservation activities within the scope of our grantmaking. The capacity building needs of the local NGOs are considerable, as are the needs to develop and enforce stronger laws and regulations for coastal land-use policies. Combined with our protection strategies, our capacity-building support will be critical for creating a durable framework for sustainable development in the region.

West-wide, we will focus on specific efforts to expand the base of the broader environmental movement by supporting organizations representing local ranchers, farmers, and sportsmen and women engaged in efforts complementary to our regional grantmaking activities.

- **Land Trusts:**

We will increase land trust sophistication and practices to create significant, systematic conservation results, build broader support for and confidence in their efforts, and develop new public and private funding. We will focus on strengthening existing conservation tools, such as the conservation easement and federal and state tax benefits for conservation and on devising new ways for land trusts to improve collaborations among themselves and with other conservation organizations and government entities.

- **Federal Land Policy⁴:**

More than fifty percent of the entire land base in the West is owned and managed by the federal government. These lands contain some of our country's last remaining wild and open spaces and provide critical habitat for fish and wildlife. In recent years, energy development on public lands in the West has resulted in the destruction of hundreds of thousands of acres of once pristine landscape and the limitations on where and how this development has occurred have been woefully absent. We will focus on strengthening multi-stakeholder coalitions to advancing solutions for vital public lands issues such as responsible energy development, backcountry protection, and management of off-road vehicles (ORVs).

⁴ As a private family foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation does not advocate for candidates, legislation, or ballot initiatives. All grantmaking under this strategy will be carried out in accordance with appropriate federal and state rules concerning lobbying.