



Outdoor News Bulletin

Private Lands are the Key to Success in Conservation

By Leo Miranda-Castro | February 2025 | Volume 79, Issue 2

In the United States, where roughly 60% of the land is privately owned, the survival of threatened, endangered, and at-risk species largely depends on the stewardship of these private lands. Traditional conservation has often relied on strict regulations, which can be seen as burdensome by landowners, much like being dictated on how to manage your garden without considering your unique situation. However, a more collaborative approach is gaining traction, exemplified by the efforts of the Conservation Without Conflict Coalition.

The [Conservation Without Conflict Coalition](#) unites both private and public entities with a shared passion for conserving fish, wildlife, and plants while ensuring that working lands remain productive. This coalition operates under the guiding principle that conservation should not come at the expense of land use but should instead be part of it. They focus on collaboration and incentives, recognizing the vital role landowners play in conservation. By promoting common goals and mutual gain, the coalition believes this approach will lead to more sustainable and widespread conservation efforts compared to solely regulatory methods.

Central to the coalition's strategy is the sharing of successes and best practices, the development of new conservation tools, and the enhancement of communication about their achievements. The coalition advocates for proactive, science-based conservation to recover species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and to prevent the need for such listings by conserving at-risk species early on. When ESA listings are unavoidable, they leverage the Act's flexibility to create innovative incentives and assurances for landowners, ensuring that conservation efforts are predictable and sustainable.

The coalition's approach is about keeping America's forests, farms, ranches, and even military installations productive while simultaneously serving as habitats for wildlife. This model doesn't dismiss the necessity of regulations but complements them with



incentives that encourage landowners to be stewards of biodiversity. This balanced approach is the key to recovering and conserving species on a scale that's both meaningful and enduring, ensuring that America's natural heritage thrives alongside its communities.

The Challenge of Endangered Species

Endangered species, like those rare butterflies or perhaps a shy forest animal, need places to live safely, eat, and reproduce. Much of this habitat is on private land. Traditional methods focus heavily on regulations — telling landowners what they can't do on their property to protect wildlife. While these rules are important, they can sometimes feel like a heavy burden, especially if they limit how land can be used for farming or building.

Here's a different idea: what if we could motivate landowners with benefits for conservation? Here's how this could work:

Financial Incentives: Landowners could receive payments for maintaining or enhancing habitats for wildlife. Programs like the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Conservation Reserve Program already do this by paying farmers to leave land fallow for wildlife.

Tax Benefits: Offering tax reductions for land that's managed for conservation purposes can make it financially appealing for landowners to keep their land wildlife-friendly.

Flexible Regulations: Instead of very specific rules, we could have guidelines that give landowners space to innovate in how they conserve their land. This might mean allowing certain activities if they don't harm wildlife or even rewarding landowners for coming up with their own conservation methods.

Why This Approach Makes Sense?

Efficiency: When landowners see direct benefits from conservation, they're more likely to do it well. They know their land best, so they can manage it in ways that work for both wildlife and their livelihood.



Community Engagement: By involving landowners, we turn them into partners in conservation rather than adversaries. This can lead to broader community support for conservation efforts.

Sustainability: Working lands can continue to be used for forestry, agriculture, or other purposes while still serving as habitats. This dual use supports both the economy and wildlife.

Adaptability: With general guidelines, landowners can adapt practices to local conditions or species needs, which can be more effective than a one-size-fits-all regulatory approach.

This doesn't mean we throw away regulations. They're crucial for ensuring basic protections for species at risk. However, these regulations should set broad boundaries rather than micromanaging every detail of land use. The key is balance — ensuring there's enough freedom for landowners to be creative while still protecting our wildlife.

The Path Forward

By shifting our focus to incentivizing good land stewardship, we can make conservation a win-win situation. Landowners maintain their economic activities, local economies thrive, and our fish, wildlife, and plants have better chances of survival. It's about working together.

In conclusion, while regulations have their place, moving toward a system that rewards conservation efforts on private lands, as advocated by the Conservation Without Conflict Coalition, could be the key to more effective and sustainable wildlife protection in the USA. Let's empower those who manage most of our land to be the heroes our endangered species desperately need.

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