



IMPACT REPORT

# SUSTAINABLE WATER IMPACT FUND

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We believe private capital can advance environmental and social outcomes while enhancing value for investors.





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PHOTOS OF SUSTAINABLE WATER IMPACT FUND ASSETS CAPINERO CREEK (TULARE COUNTY, CALIFORNIA, USA) COVER, 2, 3, 6, 10, 11, 14, 21, 22

PERSEA (VALPARAÍSO REGION, CHILE): 10, 23, 24 AZUL SOLAR (METROPOLITAN REGION, CHILE): 2, 10, 18

## LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVE

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We believe in the power of RRG's investment approach and its goal of delivering competitive financial returns and impactful outcomes for people and the environment.

Ari Swiller & Cole Frates, RRG Capital Management

RRG CAPITAL MANAGEMENT AND THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

### LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVE



Friends and Colleagues,

When we founded Renewable Resources Group together nearly 20 years ago, we focused on water, agriculture, and renewable energy because we saw opportunities in the market to do well for both people and the environment. We believed then, as we do today, that scaled, pooled capital, when combined with expertise, creativity, and shared values, can generate both competitive financial returns and meaningful impact locally, as well as globally. And since our founding, we and the team from Renewable Resources Group, with our affiliate RRG Capital Management (together, RRG), have done our best to prove this to be true.

Today, the risks facing the earth's natural systems and the people who depend upon them are only intensifying, including climate change, global water scarcity, increasing demand for food, shrinking arable land, disappearing species, and damaged ecological systems. We strongly believe that these threats, amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic and persistent inequities, require an "all hands on deck" response from all sectors — governments, non-profits, and businesses alike. We, like many of you, recognize a clear urgency to strategically deploy capital to deliver impactful and sustainable outcomes. The Sustainable Water Impact Fund (the Fund) is a response to this challenge.

Together with our partner, The Nature Conservancy, RRG aims to demonstrate a scientifically rigorous and scalable model that shows private capital can advance land, water, and agricultural outcomes while enhancing value for investors. Launched in 2019 and closed in 2020 at \$927 million<sup>1</sup>, the Fund invests in water acquisitions and sales, groundwater recharge and development, habitat conservation, agriculture, and renewable energy in California, Australia, Chile, and other regions around the globe. While still in its early stages, we're excited to share the story of this Fund, its investments, and its current and anticipated impacts.

Kind Regards,

Ari Swiller Principal and Co-Founder RRG Capital Management

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Cole Frates Principal and Co-Founder RRG Capital Management

<sup>1</sup> Includes RRG's commitment.

## LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVE

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Investments in nature-based solutions for agriculture offer a triple benefit when done right: supporting agricultural production and resilience, mitigating climate change, and enhancing nature and biodiversity.

— Jennifer Morris & Eric Hallstein, The Nature Conservancy

RRG CAPITAL MANAGEMENT AND THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

### LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVE



Friends and Colleagues,

For more than seven decades, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) has worked to build a better future: one that values and protects the natural systems that underpin our societies, our health, and our economies.

Over the past year, the devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic — along with raging wildfires, prolonged droughts, and other climate-related emergencies — have underscored the urgency of this work, bringing into sharp focus the inextricable link between human and planetary health.

At TNC, we recognize that the complexity and depth of the threats to our natural systems demand bold approaches. We need bigger investments, more innovative models, and meaningful outcomes. TNC has a deep history of collaborating with the private sector to pilot new ways to scale conservation. These engagements, while diverse in scope, are all rooted in our commitment to applying robust science, measurement, and transparency to learn from the outcomes of our joint efforts — both the successes and the limitations.

One strategy that we think holds enormous potential is leveraging private capital to scale the effective management and stewardship of working lands. Investments in nature-based solutions for agriculture offer a triple benefit when done right: supporting agricultural production and resilience, mitigating climate change, and enhancing nature and biodiversity.

The Sustainable Water Impact Fund seeks to demonstrate new ways of investing in land and water assets that deliver meaningful conservation outcomes, such as protection and restoration of ecosystems or making water available in streams and wetlands at critical times for wildlife. By pairing RRG's capital markets and operational experience with TNC's scientific acumen, we aim to demonstrate how institutional-scale investments can tackle human-induced water stress and deliver ecological outcomes.

We believe the reallocation of investment capital to protecting the earth can be a key component of 21st century conservation. We will apply a critical eye and offer detailed analyses of our performance, just as our colleagues and peers have come to expect of TNC across all of our work.

The Sustainable Water Impact Fund's annual Impact Report offers investors, the conservation community, and other stakeholders insights to educate and inspire. We are excited to share this detailed look at the Fund's vision, progress, and outcomes to date.

Warm wishes,

Jennifer Morris Chief Executive Officer The Nature Conservancy

Eric Hallstein, Ph.D. SWIF Partnership Director and Deputy Managing Director for NatureVest, The Nature Conservancy

## ABOUT THE SUSTAINABLE WATER IMPACT FUND

The Sustainable Water Impact Fund aims to demonstrate how water and land can be managed to better meet the needs of both people and nature. The Sustainable Water Impact Fund (the Fund) aims to demonstrate how water and land can be managed to better meet the needs of both people and nature. The Fund intends to deliver competitive financial returns and generate meaningful, measurable progress against global challenges, including water scarcity, climate change, habitat and biodiversity loss, food insecurity, and labor inequity.<sup>2</sup>

THE FUND SEEKS TO ADVANCE THE UNITED NATIONS' SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



## LEADERSHIP



Founded in 2002, RRG owns, manages, and develops water, agriculture, land, and renewable energy assets in the U.S. and internationally. As a Certified B Corporation, signatory to the United Nations Principles for Responsible Investment, and active member in numerous impact investing and agriculture initiatives, RRG is committed to innovative approaches to support a more sustainable economy. The company is headquartered in Los Angeles, California, with offices in Bakersfield, California; Mexico City, Mexico; Santiago, Chile; and Adelaide, Australia.





The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a global conservation nonprofit that, since 1951, has worked to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. Grounded in local experience and deep scientific expertise, TNC leverages science, real-world solutions, and partnerships to protect land and water and support climate action. TNC works in 72 countries and territories, and in all 50 U.S. states. Its global headquarters is located in Arlington, Virginia.

<sup>2</sup> There can be no assurance that the Fund will meet its investment and impact objectives.



RRG CAPITAL MANAGEMENT AND THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

The Fund's mission is to do more than traditional investment models to generate environmental good, social benefits, and competitive financial returns. The Fund invests in regions where a convergence of trends like climate change, tightening environmental regulations, rising demand for food, and increasingly erratic weather are likely to have material impacts on water supplies, agricultural production, renewable energy demand, and conservation needs. What we believe sets the Fund apart from other impact funds, in particular, is its high aspiration for delivering ecologically meaningful results — protecting land where it matters and providing water for species that can directly benefit.



Innovative approaches to water management, such as groundwater recharge, can support water system resilience in areas with high water stress.

For example, in California, the Fund's primary investment geography, unsustainable groundwater overdraft led to <u>policies</u> that are changing the way these resources are managed and distributed. In order to achieve sustainable groundwater management, which is now mandated by the state, some irrigated agricultural lands will be fallowed. Arid and semi-arid growing regions in Latin America and Australia are also struggling with competing demands for limited or increasingly unpredictable water supplies. The Fund's leadership believes that these dynamics open the door for scaling of RRG's investment and management strategies that promote co-benefits for the

environment, people, and the economy.

**Governance:** The Fund's governance structure integrates RRG and TNC's teams with complementary diligence and asset management roles. RRG is the Fund's Investment Manager and controls the Fund's General Partner, making it responsible for fund operations, investment execution, and asset management. With a focus on the Fund's conservation and ecological outcomes, TNC holds a limited interest in the General Partner and is a voting member on the General Partner's Investment Committee. Together with a thirdparty expert, Buzz Thompson, TNC and RRG personnel serve on the General Partner's Technical Advisory Committee. To further incentivize environmental outcomes, a portion of the carried interest distributed by the Fund to the General Partner is held by the General Partner until achievement of positive conservation impacts."



Barton "Buzz" Thompson, Jr. Technical Advisory Committee Member

Robert E. Paradise Professor of Natural Resource Law, Stanford University; Senior Fellow and Founding Director, Stanford Woods Institute for the Environment

## GENERATING ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL BENEFITS

The Fund aims to generate benefits for people and nature. This starts with setting guidelines for the kinds of investments that the Fund will pursue. Building on RRG's Responsible Investment Policy, the Fund further sets rigorous standards for minimizing negative impacts on species and ecosystems. Furthermore, the Fund intends to deliver outcomes in the areas of water and habitat conservation, agriculture and labor sustainability, and climate and renewable energy. In order to support transparency around the outcomes, the Fund is developing robust and replicable approaches to monitoring and reporting.

## **ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES**



### WATER & HABITAT CONSERVATION

Permanent protection and improved ecological function of freshwater and terrestrial habitats.



### AGRICULTURE & LABOR SUSTAINABILITY

Testing and implementation of sustainable and regenerative agricultural practices and creation of quality jobs.



### CLIMATE & RENEWABLE ENERGY

Reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, development of renewable energy, and adaptation of agricultural systems to a changing climate.

## WATER & HABITAT CONSERVATION



The health of global ecosystems is <u>deteriorating</u> at an alarming rate. Water stress and habitat loss, amplified by changes in climate and land use, are key drivers and also targets for interventions.

There is a clear need to find durable and sustainable solutions to support a more resilient water future. Freshwater ecosystems, like rivers, wetlands, and lakes, offer critical services for people and nature, yet more than 30 percent of the water sources that people depend upon are unsustainably managed. The agricultural sector currently accounts for an estimated 70 percent of freshwater use globally, with demands for food and fiber expected to grow over time. To support water supply resilience and the prosperity of farming communities, stakeholders must find better ways to adequately value water, invest in systems that manage it, allocate it to the most important uses, and protect the health of ecosystems that sustain it.



RRG staff analyze options to maximize potential co-benefits for both water resilience and habitat conservation.

The Fund targets investments in specialty crop growing regions where it finds the need for improved water management and where better outcomes for humans and ecosystems are the way forward. <u>California's Central Valley</u> produces roughly a quarter of the U.S.'s food, including an estimated 40 percent of fruit, nuts, and fresh produce, much of which is irrigated. Most of this region is designated as <u>'critically overdrafted</u>,' which means it is at risk of land subsidence, ecosystem loss, and aridification due to unsustainable groundwater extractions. The Fund aims to help address these challenges by building infrastructure for water conservation, water use efficiency, and groundwater banking. These efforts can help to increase water supply reliability at the local and system levels, while at the same time manage water to provide needed habitat for species.

In the semi-arid Central Valley of California and on properties with similar climates in South America and Australia, water is also a critical factor in shaping habitat availability and function. Management of Fund properties seeks to optimize water use to support both agricultural and environmental needs. Furthermore, careful onsite land use planning opens opportunities to protect native habitat and create habitat within working lands.



RRG CAPITAL MANAGEMENT AND THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

## **CALIFORNIA WATER: CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES**

California's freshwater comes in the form of surface and groundwater supplies. The majority of California's precipitation falls north of the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta, while the majority of California's water demand is in the south. Significant infrastructure was built in the form of the State Water Project, the federal Central Valley Project, and other agricultural and municipal district projects to address this imbalance of water supply and demand and move water hundreds of miles to where it is needed. But infrastructure is aging and has lost capacity and reliability, and in the absence of available surface water, groundwater has been unsustainably pumped in many parts of the state. Better management of groundwater, surface supplies, and infrastructure is key to enabling sustainable water use in California.



Trinity Da

Black Butte Dam

asta Dam

Red Bluff Pumping Pl

O Chico

Yuba City

Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta

**Oroville** Dam

Isom Da

Camanche

Sacramento

Redding

Fureka

## AGRICULTURE & LABOR



In addition to better water management, the Fund strives to invest in agriculture that improves livelihoods and advances more sustainable food production. Globally, food demand is <u>projected</u> to grow by an estimated 50 percent by 2050, with anticipated higher consumption of protein, fruits, and vegetables relative to grains.

To meet this demand, better farming practices are needed to produce more food without the commensurate increases in greenhouse gas emissions, land conversion, and natural resource degradation. Additionally, farm operators must work to break the patterns of <u>inequity</u> in the agricultural labor sector and support quality jobs.



**A regenerative approach:** The Fund is testing <u>regenerative farming practices</u> to realize benefits for producers, people, and the planet. Many regenerative farming techniques — such as crop rotations, cover crops, no-till agriculture, and integrated grazing — were developed and are used by local and indigenous communities. These practices are now being adopted for larger-scale farms by growers worldwide. Technical teams within RRG and TNC will assess how regenerative practices can provide habitat for biodiversity, enhance soil carbon storage, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and support ecosystem health in permanent specialty crops, as well as quantify the financial benefits of such practices.

### AGRICULTURE & LABOR



The driving mission behind California Harvesters is to create quality jobs for farmworkers — jobs that improve day-to-day working conditions, offer robust benefits, and facilitate opportunities for professional growth.

**Quality Jobs:** The Fund's leadership is committed to supporting quality agricultural jobs and workplace experiences for workers employed by Fund properties. This starts with focusing on basic tenets around wages and working conditions and extends to supporting efforts that give workers a greater voice in farm operations, investing in training, and providing services to increase quality of life for workers and their families.

RRG brings expertise in farm labor management through its experience helping build <u>California Harvesters, Inc.</u> (CHI). CHI is an innovative model for farm labor contracting that aims to raise standards and improve production in the agricultural industry. CHI is an employee benefit trust, structured to provide workers



with the tools to participate in company decision-making and benefit from the company's financial success. These activities are designed to contribute to a more supported workforce and address operational risks and challenges in areas facing labor shortages, a lack of skilled workers, or high turnover. The Fund is working to apply lessons learned from the CHI model to its various farm operations.

## CLIMATE & ENERGY





Solar energy installations in Chile are sited on land with otherwise low conservation or agricultural value.

While water is at the core of the Fund's investment thesis, mitigating climate change and adapting systems to be more resilient to the negative impacts of climate volatility is also a top priority.

Global scientific consensus is that much work is <u>needed</u> to reduce global emissions to more sustainable levels. Reliable water supplies, functioning ecosystems, sustainable agricultural production, and protection of human health <u>all depend</u> on the global community's ability to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

**Reducing greenhouse gases:** One of the Fund's biggest near-term opportunities to reduce emissions of <u>greenhouse gases</u> (GHGs) is through improved agricultural practices. Upon acquisition of new properties, on-the-ground teams, supported by RRG and TNC's expertise and experience around the world, identify options for improvement, such as energy efficient pumps and farm equipment, fertilizer and pesticide use optimization, and agriculture practices that can improve soil health and mitigate soil carbon loss.

Given the highly dynamic nature of its portfolio anticipated year-over-year, one challenge the Fund is working to solve is how to fully account for its greenhouse gas footprint. In 2020, the team began building a new data tracking system to support the Fund's efforts to quantify its GHG emissions, identify GHG drivers, and adopt interim and long-term climate targets.

To support a shift away from fossil fuels, the Fund also aims to develop on-farm and utilityscale renewable energy projects. Investments target new solar developments on degraded lands with otherwise low conservation or economic value.

**Adapting agricultural systems to a changing climate:** Extreme climate events are already having impacts on global agricultural systems — through stressors like droughts, floods, changes in crop viability, and the spread of pests. Many of the agricultural practices implemented on Fund properties aim to demonstrate how permanent crop systems can be made resilient to these challenges. In particular, the Fund aims to build regional resilience to unpredictable water availability for agricultural producers and nature.

## THE FUND'S GROWING **INVESTMENT PORTFOLIO, 2020**



## The Fund's global investments

target opportunities in the United States, Chile, Australia, and other global regions where water, habitat conservation, agriculture, and renewable energy co-benefits are possible.

### **MAP KEY**





## 2020 IMPACTS

In 2020, the Fund continued its growth, bringing the number of deals in the portfolio to six. At the time of this publication, most of the Fund's investments are still in the early stages of implementation. However, two investments, Capinero Creek and Persea, are illustrative of the impact areas the Fund will track and report on.

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Birds utilizing temporary wetlands created during a groundwater recharge event.

Located in California's Central Valley, Capinero Creek was the first asset in the Fund's portfolio. Acquired in 2019, it consists of 6,886 acres (2,786 hectares) of land - in a region facing increasingly severe water stress - that was historically used for large-scale dairy operations and feed crop cultivation.

The property is located in an area of strategic importance for agriculture, habitat conservation, and improved water management. The team retired both dairies on the property and is nearly done remediating the footprints of the facilities and the effluent ponds. The property offers an opportunity to implement other land uses such as groundwater banks, protected wildlife habitat, and high-value crops with smaller footprints.

Water Impacts: Capinero Creek is located in one of California's critically over-drafted groundwater basins. Areas of the Tule Sub-basin in which the property is located have descended 12 feet over the past three decades. This land subsidence is caused by historical over-pumping of groundwater for farming and changes in winter snowpack. Therefore, the California Department of Water Resources prioritized the region for sustainable water management action. To help improve

districts to repurpose significant portions of land from cultivation of feed crops to groundwater recharge facilities that capture and regulate surface water flows. The intended outcome is to create new water supplies and help mitigate the negative impacts of regional groundwater overdraft while creating wildlife habitat. These improvements aim to benefit the local and regional agricultural community.

### SUPPORTING WATER SYSTEM **RESILIENCE AT CAPINERO CREEK**

Water recharge facilities capture surface water during periods of abundance and percolate the water into groundwater aquifers. Water can be extracted months or years later when it's needed. If managed at the right depths and seasonality, recharge basins can also provide important habitat for migratory birds.



RRG CAPITAL MANAGEMENT AND THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

#### CASE STUDY: CAPINERO CREEK

Habitat Creation and Protection: Capinero Creek is located in a critical wintering region for millions of migratory birds traveling on the <u>Pacific Flyway</u>, a major migratory bird route extending from Alaska to Patagonia. Migrating birds, including many species of conservation importance, depend on the presence of wetland habitat along the Flyway. However, <u>up to</u> <u>90%</u> of natural wetlands in some areas have been converted to agriculture, leading to severe habitat deficits and population declines.

In 2020, the Fund team built 140 acres of groundwater recharge basins to assess the potential for water banking on the property. Learning from BirdReturns, the pop-up wetland model that TNC and its partners pioneered elsewhere in the Central Valley, the Fund's Technical Advisory Committee provided guidance on the design and operation of the recharge basins so the basins could also act as temporary wetland habitat for migrating birds during peak periods of migration. During the first recharge event in July, the Fund team and technical advisors created temporary wetlands that, according to third-party biological surveys, provided habitat to numerous bird species, including 23 species of conservation importance. The property has the potential for developing numerous acres of these kinds of multi-benefit recharge basins.

## BIRDS OF CAPINERO CREEK

IN 2020, TEMPORARY WETLANDS ON CAPINERO CREEK PROVIDED HABITAT TO NUMEROUS BIRD SPECIES, INCLUDING 23 SPECIES OF CONSERVATION IMPORTANCE.



#### **SHOREBIRDS**

American Avocet Black-bellied Plover Black-necked Stilt Greater Yellowlegs Killdeer Long-billed Dowitcher Least Sandpiper Lesser Yellowlegs Red-necked Phalarope Semipalmated Plover Western Sandpiper Wilson's Phalarope WATERBIRDS

Caspian Tern Cinnamon Teal Great Blue Heron Great Egret Green-winged Teal Mew Gull Northern Shoveler Pied-billed Grebe Ring-billed Gull Snowy Egret White-faced Ibis

<u>Capinero Creek</u> is also in an area of strategic importance for upland desert conservation. If restored, portions of the property could provide valuable habitat for species of conservation importance in the region, such as the <u>blunt-nosed leopard lizard</u>, giant kangaroo rat, and San <u>Joaquin kit fox</u>. The Fund is pursuing sales of portions of Capinero Creek to public and nonprofit entities who would restore and put the land in permanent protection.



White-faced Ibis on a temporary wetland during a recharge event.

2020 IMPACT





Located in Chile's Aconcagua Valley, Persea is the Fund's first investment outside of the United States. The initial Persea acquisition consisted of 3,506 acres (1,419 hectares), one-third of which is planted with avocados and walnuts. An additional acquisition added 1,231 acres (498 hectares).

**Agriculture:** Persea is located in an <u>important ecological</u> and growing region of Chile. The Fund team recognizes that maximizing yields while minimizing inputs and native habitat disruption is key to sustainable agriculture. Upon acquisition, property managers outlined and began to implement a plan to improve water use efficiency across the property, in particular for irrigation. In addition, they are working to improve farm management practices by optimizing agrochemical use, redeveloping low-producing trees, and testing new approaches to pollination.

Since the onset of the global pandemic, the Fund's team has worked to implement clear policies and protocols aimed at protecting workers and reducing the spread of the virus. These measures have included requiring and providing personal protective equipment (PPE) and regular COVID-19 safety trainings for the workforce to reinforce protocols and share best practices around handwashing, social distancing, and proper PPE usage.

### CASE STUDY: PERSEA

**Habitat:** Chile's Mediterranean ecoregion, which includes the <u>Aconcagua Valley</u>, is one of 34 global hotspots of <u>biodiversity</u> and is home to significant acreage that is still in natural or semi-natural states, yet unprotected. Since Mediterranean ecosystems are also highly desirable locations for human use, they face <u>high rates</u> of land conversion. The Fund aims to minimize conversion and help protect this ecosystem before it is gone.

A significant portion of Persea is undisturbed Mediterranean habitat with meaningful conservation potential. The Fund team is exploring strategies to protect the landscape and its ecosystem services in ways that benefit farm operations and future owners. For example, while <u>conservation easements</u> are a relatively new legal instrument in Chile, the Fund team has significant experience with them in the U.S. context. The Fund aims to demonstrate the potential applications and benefits of this tool to farm operations and environmental goals in Chile.

**Community:** A key operating principle for Persea, like all Fund investments, is to be a supportive member of the local community and to work with local leaders to affect ongoing engagement. As part of this effort, Persea participates in a food box distribution program for local families facing food insecurity during the pandemic. In addition, farm managers are working with the local potable water association to construct a reservoir on the property to store water for the local community, which has historically faced a lack of access to clean and reliable drinking water. This past year, Persea also initiated a process to create a communal garden on the property where its employees have the option to grow crops for themselves and their families.



The Aconcagua Valley in Chile supports a diversity of native flora and fauna.

## SUMMARY OF ANTICIPATED FUND IMPACTS

	OUTCOME CATEGORIES	OUTCOMES
	BIODIVERSITY AND HABITAT CONSERVATION	Protect terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems
		Restore terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems
		Create temporary habitat through improved management of working lands
		Improve environmental flows and water quality in rivers and streams
	CLIMATE AND ENERGY	Develop renewable energy
		Develop renewable energy
		Reduce greenhouse gas emissions
	GOOD GOVERNANCE	Advance corporate social responsibility
		Promote diversity, equity, and inclusion
	QUALITY JOBS	Provide workers with quality support services and benefits
		Increase occupational health and safety
		Improve day-to-day and long-term opportunities
		Improve employee satisfaction and retention rates
	RESPECT FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES	Respect local cultures and needs
		Support local economies
	SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION	Implement regenerative agriculture practices
		Reduce agrochemical use
		Reduce waste
WATER STEWARD	WATER	Develop groundwater recharge facilities
	STEWARDSHIP	Improve regional water resilience
		Use water eniciently

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## **ON THE HORIZON...**

The Fund is in the early stages of its journey to demonstrate the transformational power of private capital when paired with rigorous science and accountability. Over the next several years, investors, partners, and interested stakeholders can anticipate ongoing evaluation and acquisition of properties that meet the Fund's financial, environmental, and social investment guidelines. They also should expect an annual accounting of progress towards the Fund's bold ambitions, illustrative case studies, and thoughtful analyses of the lessons learned along the way.

We sincerely hope you'll join us.

**RRG and TNC** 

2020 SUSTAINABLE WATER IMPACT FUND IMPACT REPORT

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