



IDAHO

2020 IMPACT REPORT

The Nature Conservancy in Idaho

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Director's Letter

November 1, 2020

Last month, The Nature Conservancy announced the completion of a breakthrough project. Our scientists have identified and mapped a network of the most climate resilient landscapes across the United States, creating a roadmap of “natural highways and neighborhoods” where plant and animal species have the best chance to find refuge from the growing threats of a changing climate.

In a year with so many challenges for the natural world and our human society, I am struck by the parallels of resiliency I've witnessed. Amidst the new reality of working remotely and the backdrop of cultural upheaval, TNC staff and volunteer leaders continue to find innovative ways to engage and to further our mission-critical work, just as you, our valued supporters, have continued to invest in Idaho's future. I am truly inspired by this commitment and tenacity to advance conservation.

In this impact report, you'll read about our work in the Pioneers to Craters area, a prime example of a connected and resilient natural landscape. With your support, we are close to realizing an ambitious vision to protect this critical habitat and landscape for people and wildlife in perpetuity.

You'll also learn more about our three priority conservation initiatives that will serve as the pillars of our strategic plan over the next five years. We are removing the barriers for food producers to adopt sustainable practices, conserving the lands and waters essential to Idaho's natural and human communities, and accelerating climate change solutions with a nonpartisan approach.

While uncertainties abound, the need for our work is clearer than ever and I am energized by our collective resiliency. Thank you for continuing on this journey with us.

Yours in conservation,



Mark Menlove, Idaho State Director



“By focusing on climate resilient and connected places, we can conserve plants and animals where they are found today and where they may be found tomorrow.”

—NATHAN WELCH
Conservation Scientist





“We’ve been able to protect this land at this large scale while it was still whole and unfragmented . . . We’ve done this work in a really solid area that will continue to provide conservation benefit over time.”

—TESS O’SULLIVAN
Land Conservation Strategy Lead

IMPACT AT SCALE

Pioneer Mountains to Craters of the Moon

Landscape-scale protection project nears a major conservation milestone

By Christine Peterson

Stretched in the middle of south central Idaho—where rolling sagebrush plains flow into pitch black lava beds and high, snowcapped mountains—is an ambitious effort to protect 100,000 acres of private lands from fragmentation and ensure the landscape supports wildlife movement for generations.

The project is called Pioneer Mountains to Craters of the Moon, and now that 95,000 acres have been conserved, the goal is within reach.

The average observer would never know it took over 15 years, countless hours of work and dozens of willing landowners to get this far. But that's the point. When it's protected, the land will remain much the way it is today and has been for centuries.

“We've been able to protect this land at a large scale while it was still whole and unfragmented,” says Tess O'Sullivan, The Nature Conservancy's land conservation strategy lead in Idaho. “We've

done this work in a really solid area that will continue to provide conservation benefit over time. Our hope is that it will be durable for wildlife and continue to sustain people's livelihoods.”

The 100,000-acre goal is the center of a much larger, nearly 2.4 million-acre expanse of mostly public land managed by the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service, and the state of Idaho. The project evolved out of a collective recognition by a group called the Pioneers Alliance, which wanted to safeguard these critical working lands. From there, local conservation groups began working with area landowners to conserve the land in a way that supported local agriculture and benefited wildlife.

In the process, O'Sullivan and a team began trapping and collaring pronghorn to track their movements through the landscape. One of the many discoveries they made was a line

where pronghorn funnel between lava and a highway, the evidence of an 80-mile pronghorn migration corridor.

“We can't protect one piece of land and expect those animals to stay in one place,” says O'Sullivan. “We need to keep these private and public lands connected so wildlife can move across the landscape to reach seasonal habitat and have access to vast open space.”

With the completion of this project comes, among many things, protection for the imperiled greater sage-grouse. Beyond its importance to the area's wildlife, the project also conserves clean water and working lands. Scientists have also projected this landscape to be more resilient to the effects of climate change.

As this significant conservation milestone approaches, TNC will continue to identify protection projects and locations where stewardship work will have the most benefit.

PROVIDING Food & Water Sustainably

Our Healthy Soils, Clean Water Initiative is rooted in the belief that it is possible to sustainably feed a growing population while promoting a healthy environment and supporting thriving communities.

Update by Brad Johnson, agriculture strategy manager

Regenerative agriculture practices hold the potential to unlock solutions for some of our most complex conservation challenges—water quality and scarcity, soil health and climate change.

Since The Nature Conservancy launched the Healthy Soils, Clean Water initiative, we've had the opportunity to meet with hundreds of Idahoans across the Snake River Plain and work directly with farmers to test practices like planting cover crops, using no-till methods and reducing fertilizer input. The benefits of scaling-up this program could be profound, including enhanced water quality and soil health, carbon storage, and higher rates of productivity.

In 2020, we implemented regenerative farming practices and water conservation at projects across southern Idaho, bringing the total number of enrolled acres to 1,500. Such direct, on-the-ground projects will be the foundation of our initiative in the coming years and bring us closer to seeing regenerative agriculture practices spread across the 2.1 million acres of irrigated lands in the Snake River Plain and transform the way we grow food.



Keeping Water in Our Streams

Growing demand for limited water resources, historically low flows and changing conditions have a direct impact on our freshwater ecosystems. Water conservation agreements developed by TNC provide a valuable tool to address these challenges.

Building on agreements made with the Cove Ranch in 2019, TNC is negotiating two new opportunities that will be used to recharge aquifers and increase stream flow around Silver Creek. These types of innovative arrangements catalyze local water management and regulatory solutions to meet community-based needs.





Removing Barriers to Sustainability

Farmers are facing unprecedented challenges, from water supply uncertainties to market pressure for increased yields. With your support, TNC is taking steps to eliminate barriers to implementation of practices that improve the sustainability of food production and help producers adapt.

A 40-acre demonstration farm launched with partners this year in Magic Valley will give TNC a place to ground truth the economic and environmental benefits of regenerative agriculture practices in a real-life situation, growing the same crops and facing the same challenges as farmers in the region. Throughout the next growing season, and beyond, TNC will lead tours to share data and showcase successes and lessons learned to foster adoption of improved agriculture practices at a scale of impact that matters.

COLLABORATION

Recognizing that water solutions require taking a whole watershed perspective, TNC has joined the **Southern Idaho Water Quality Coalition**.

This diverse group of stakeholders is focused on improving water quality in the Middle Snake River.



TNC scientists have estimated that regenerative farming practices could remove up to **10%** of Idaho's current greenhouse gas emissions each year.

LEARN MORE at nature.org/idahoagriculture

CONSERVING Land & Water

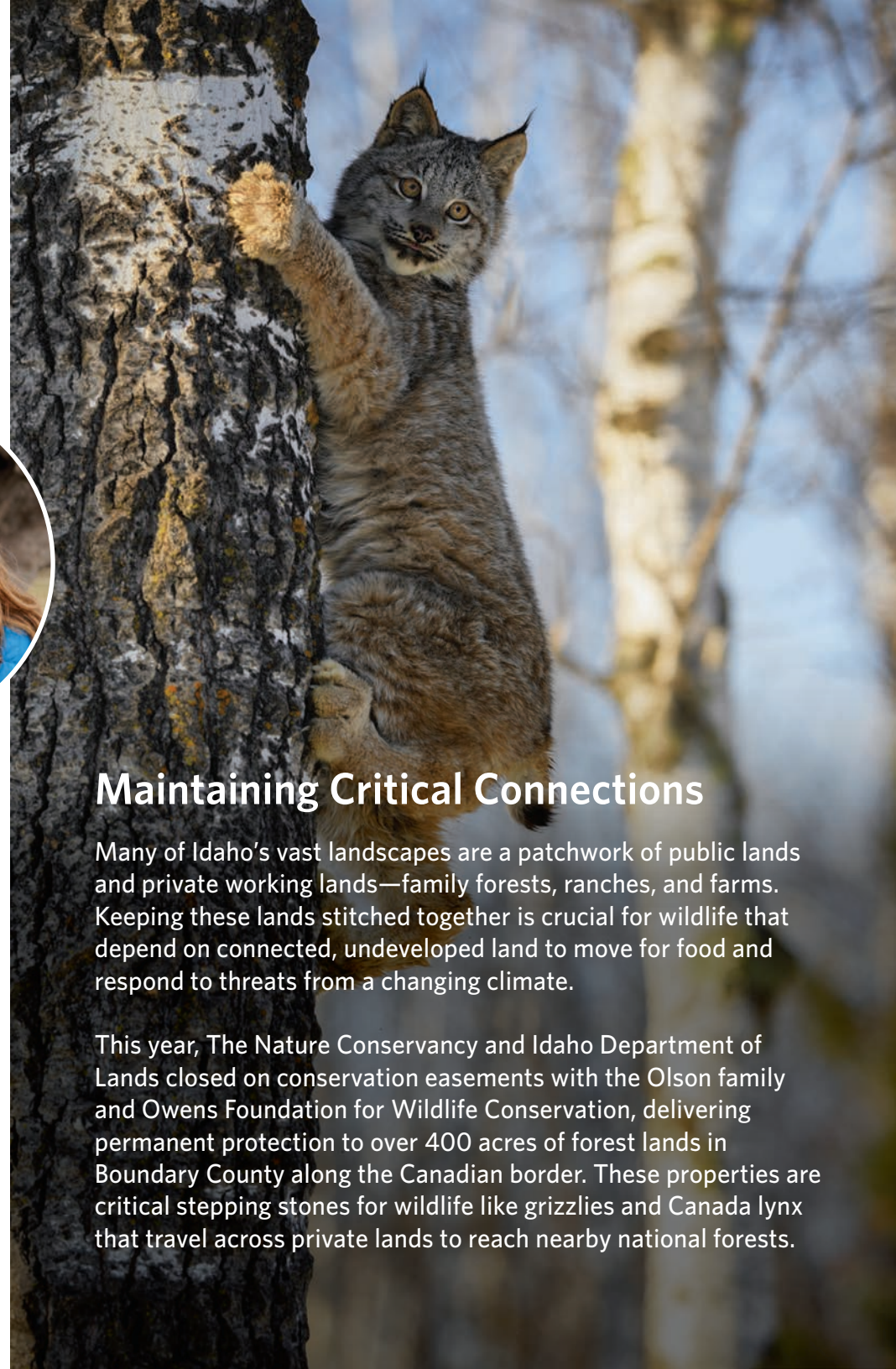
Grounded in science, the Land and Water Initiative drives bold solutions to conserve and restore the lands and waters that are most critical to sustaining Idaho's iconic wildlife and local communities.

Update by Robyn Miller, deputy state director

At its core, Idaho is wild. We have more miles of whitewater rivers than any other state in the Lower 48, and we have America's deepest river gorge. Salmon swim over 900 miles to spawn in Idaho's waters, and wolverines still traverse our snow-capped peaks. With over 19,000 miles of trails, Idaho provides a rare opportunity to experience wild and rugged nature.

Idaho's lands and waters are the lifeblood of people and nature, providing both critical habitat for wildlife and serving as the resource base for local communities. Over the past 45 years, global fish and wildlife populations have declined an average of 60 percent due to threats such as habitat loss and degradation. Without conservation, our natural areas will no longer be able to support our fish and wildlife—or our people.

This year, you made it possible for us to conserve vital land and water in the heart of the Boundary Area of north Idaho, Pioneers of central Idaho, and upper Henrys Fork in eastern Idaho. Thank you for helping deliver significant benefits to fish and wildlife, protect iconic rivers, and leave tangible and lasting outcomes for the places and people of Idaho.



Maintaining Critical Connections

Many of Idaho's vast landscapes are a patchwork of public lands and private working lands—family forests, ranches, and farms. Keeping these lands stitched together is crucial for wildlife that depend on connected, undeveloped land to move for food and respond to threats from a changing climate.

This year, The Nature Conservancy and Idaho Department of Lands closed on conservation easements with the Olson family and Owens Foundation for Wildlife Conservation, delivering permanent protection to over 400 acres of forest lands in Boundary County along the Canadian border. These properties are critical stepping stones for wildlife like grizzlies and Canada lynx that travel across private lands to reach nearby national forests.

POLICY WIN

The Land & Water Conservation Fund has received full and permanent funding through the landmark passing of the bipartisan **Great American Outdoors Act**.

TNC advocated for this funding for over two decades. It expands opportunities to protect land and water in Idaho and nationwide.



Growing Resilient Forests

After years of collaboration with the U.S. Forest Service, a project is underway to regenerate aspen trees on over 40,000 acres in the Caribou-Targhee National Forest. In addition to providing critical forest habitat, aspens have high moisture content that makes them more difficult to burn, potentially reducing the intensity of fires and improving fire resiliency. Aspen has seen a 79 percent decline in the area. This project will help us reverse that trend.

Since 2013, TNC has been working with partners in the upper Henrys Fork watershed to improve forest health, protect critical wildlife habitat and reduce the community's risk of catastrophic wildfire. Over \$1 million in public funding has been secured to build support for restoration and reduce fire fuels on private land.



In North America, species are moving an average of **11 miles** north and **36 feet** higher in elevation each decade to adjust to rising temperatures and other climate impacts.

LEARN MORE at [nature.org/naturalhighways](https://www.nature.org/naturalhighways)

TACKLING

Climate Change

Our Climate Action Initiative is focused on building nonpartisan support for climate solutions, working hand-in-hand with communities and partners, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote natural climate solutions.

Update by Kari Kostka, director of external affairs

Climate change is affecting Idaho in countless ways. We are experiencing rising temperatures, changing precipitation patterns, more intense wildfires and smoke impacts, increased water temperatures and degraded wildlife habitat. With so much at stake, advancing our Climate Initiative is more important than ever. Our primary objectives are to move beyond skepticism, identify Idaho solutions, and build support with policymakers and partners for beneficial outcomes for our landscapes and communities.

This past year, we commissioned a survey of registered voters to gauge Idahoans' thinking about climate change and possible solutions in our state. The survey results are illuminating and provide strong footing for climate action in Idaho. The survey denotes strong support for conservation-focused policies and funding and natural solutions to climate change, such as working with farmers, ranchers, and forestland owners to store carbon.

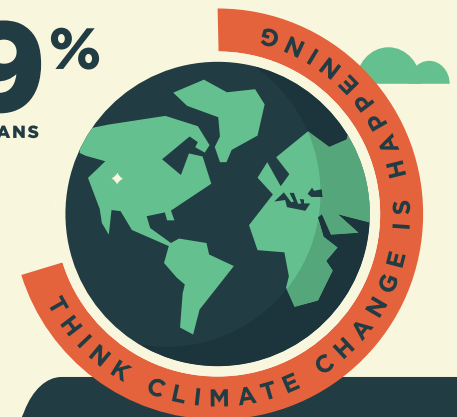
Our survey is evidence of shifting attitudes on climate change across the political spectrum and is just one reason for optimism. We are well-positioned to leverage this public sentiment through our work on the ground across Idaho to accelerate meaningful climate change solutions.



Shaping Idaho's Future

According to a poll of registered voters fielded by TNC, 69 percent of Idahoans think climate change is happening. Nearly two-thirds think climate change will harm future generations but agree climate change can be solved if everyone works together. Further, respondents think failing to address climate change will be more costly financially.

69%
OF IDAHOANS



A strong majority of Idaho voters think climate change is happening, including a majority of Republicans, Independents and Democrats.

Nearly 2/3 of Idaho voters think climate change will harm future generations.



THE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

A majority of voters in Idaho say they are worried about climate change and that it is an important issue to them personally.

62%

• THINK IT CAN BE SOLVED BY •
WORKING TOGETHER



Building Capacity for Climate

Building broad-based support, motivating business and political leaders to act, and identifying policy solutions are key strategies for the Climate Action Initiative. However, much of TNC's conservation work provides climate benefits for nature and people—regenerative farming practices can increase carbon storage in soils and land protection aims to help plants and animals adapt to climate change.

Thanks to your investment in this work, TNC has added capacity to enact climate solutions. In the newly created position of climate program manager, Jillian Hanson will help broaden support for climate action and accelerate efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.



Between 2015 and 2019, TNC in Idaho reduced the CO₂ emissions of our vehicle fleet by **30%** and reduced miles traveled by **25%**.

LEARN MORE at nature.org/idahoclimate

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

TNC has joined the City of Boise as a lead partner of the **City of Trees Challenge**. This effort includes a goal to plant 235,000 seedlings in forests around Idaho, one for every Boise resident, over the next 10 years.

Planting trees reduces greenhouse gases that cause climate change and helps our communities adapt to a changing climate.



THANK YOU!

The Nature Conservancy's accomplishments are only made possible by the many individuals, organizations, businesses and foundations that made gifts to our vital conservation programs during fiscal year 2020 (July 1, 2019—June 30, 2020). Every gift, regardless of size, plays a crucial role in our work—for people and nature. We thank you for your commitment to our mission.

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To learn more, contact Melissa Masucci at (208) 578-4221 or melissa.masucci@tnc.org.

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