American Rivers

Project Lead: ***John Cain (jcain@amrivers.org)***
Project Duration: ***Three years***

Project Title: Central Valley Habitat Exchange: Scaling Pay for Success Opportunities in California's Central Valley

Project in a Sentence: Create a market based program that provides financial incentives for farmers, ranchers, and other landowners to produce measurable habitat benefits for fish and wildlife.

Project Elevator Pitch:

California will spend billions of dollars over the coming decade to recover endangered species and mitigate impacts from transportation, water supply, and flood management infrastructure improvements in the Central Valley. A new scale and approach for conservation is required to meet these objectives; but existing institutions and efforts are constrained by a project-by-project funding model with limited ability to leverage private capital or integrate different public investments. This project will enable public and private conservation buyers to implement pay for success at scale, and significantly increase ecological return on investment. We will engage buyers to understand and use pay for success vehicles and contract templates that work within their legal constraints, engage private impact investors to develop financing terms that align conservation and financial outcomes, and enable EQIP-eligible producers to benefit from habitat restoration by creating and selling credits. As a result, this project will build out a supply chain of participants capable of financing and developing investable conservation outcomes, and establish the Central Valley Habitat Exchange as a pay for success hub capable of facilitating transactions at scale.

Deliverables:

1. Ten end buyers meetings, two buyer-investor learning network meetings, and one producer focus group to develop and refine investment and financing strategies;
2. Template pay for success contracts, project finance terms and request for proposal language;
3. Two cross-sector pay for Success workshops to share learning and build relationships;
4. Three pay for success user guides for all participants – buyers, producers, investors;
5. Opportunities & constraints analysis with recommended investment strategies for each buyer;
6. Five credit ready projects, including conservation easement appraisals, performance contracts, habitat assessments, and management plans.

Participating Partners: American Rivers, Environmental Defense Fund, Environmental Incentives, Metropolitan Water District, California Department of Water Resources, Allotrope Partners, S.D. Bechtel Jr. Foundation, Sacramento & West Sacramento Area Flood Control Agencies, Davis Ranches, Tule Basin Farms, University of California Cooperative Extension, Audubon California, California Riparian Habitat Joint Venture, Point Blue Conservation Science, the California Delta Conservancy, Farmland LP, the Sacramento River Forum, Trout Unlimited, Tule Basin Farms, River Garden Farms, Northern California Water Association.

How We Are Advancing Conservation Finance: The CVHE will socialize and train buyers and sellers to respectively procure and produce conservation outcomes using new habitat measurement, tracking and investment tools.

Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay

Project Lead*: Craig Highfield (chighfield@allianceforbay.org)*
Project Duration: *Three years*

Project Title: Sustainable Conservation Investment Fund: An impact investment Approach for Chesapeake Farms and Forests

Project in a Sentence: This project will develop, pilot, and promote new approaches to advancing landowner access and participation in existing and emerging environmental markets in Maryland and Virginia that both accelerate whole farm conservation and improve the quality of water flowing to the Chesapeake Bay.

Project Elevator Pitch:

While a variety of mitigation banking efforts have been underway in Maryland and Virginia for some time, the advent of new water quality regulations is expanding interest in these tools. The Alliance and its partners will develop, pilot and promote new approaches to advancing landowner access to existing and emerging environmental markets that will accelerate whole farm conservation and improve the quality of water flowing to the Chesapeake Bay. We will establish conservation investment mechanisms that can help offset the barriers associated with participating in three current mitigation banking and trading programs in MD and VA. This project will place particular emphasis on building partnerships with the land trust, investment and banking communities, local governments and others for the delivery of market based conservation to agricultural landowners.

Deliverables:

1. Establish a conservation revolving loan fund to help offset the cost barriers associated with participating in ecosystem markets in Maryland and Virginia.
2. Bring together investors and the conservation community by hosting Impact Investing Roundtables that introduce investors to market opportunities on private lands and seek insight about their financial and social impact investment needs.
3. Work with specific Maryland local governments and other public entities to allocate public in-lieu mitigation fees for the purchase of high quality private land conservation credits.
4. Create tools for working with landowners that translate market opportunities into an investment plan for conservation on the farm.

Participating Partners: Green Trust Alliance, GreenVest, Arabella Advisors, Inc., Land Trust Alliance, Maryland Agricultural and Resource Based Industry Development Corporation, MD Forest Service, MD Environmental Trust, MD Critical Area Commission, VA Department of Environment, USDA Forest Service, MD Counties FCA Programs.

How We Are Advancing Conservation Finance: The proposed project will create a model Conservation Investment Prospectus and framework for a self-sufficient Sustainable Conservation Fund that will support agricultural land conservation efforts and enhance income generating opportunities. The *Prospectus* can serve as a business plan for a landowner, helping them determine the financial costs and benefits of participating in both public conservation programs and private markets. The *Fund* will invest in environmental market projects that improve water quality and provide income through the sale of “credits” to developers and other buyers. As producers earn income from credit sales, they pay back bank establishment costs plus interest to the Fund.

American Forest Foundation

Project Lead: ***Tom Fry (tfry@forestfoundation.org)***
Project Duration: ***Three years***

Project Title: Piloting the Forest Resilience Bond

Project in a Sentence: The American Forest Foundation (AFF) and partners will accelerate the pace and scale of forest restoration on EQIP-eligible producer lands through the development of the Forest Resilience Bond.

Project Elevator Pitch:

Building off decades of research which establishes the economic benefits of forest restoration, this partnership is developing a new financial instrument, called the Forest Resilience Bond (FRB), to turn a systemic crisis into an investment opportunity. The FRB is an innovative platform leveraging private investor capital to fund forest restoration treatments while collaborating with landowners, utilities and water-dependent companies to repay investors over time based on the benefits received. Targeted benefits such as decreased fire severity, protected water quality, and increased water yield are monetized through contracts based on a pay for success model that is designed to share cost savings among beneficiaries while providing competitive returns to investors. What differentiates the FRB from existing restoration financing is not only the use of private investor capital to fund upfront restoration costs, but also cost sharing among disparate beneficiaries. By bringing together multiple payers to share the cost of restoration and monetizing a diverse set of benefits, the FRB creates compelling economics for landowners as well as investors.

Deliverables:

1. Demonstrate that the Forest Resilience Bond (FRB) is a viable instrument to unlock private capital for restoration activities.
2. Strengthen the capacity of local stakeholders and engage new conservation partners, to leverage new forms of finance for forest restoration.
3. Test and improve new conservation investment decision support tools and metrics of forest restoration outcomes associated with investment strategies.
4. Through documentation of our experiences and creation of FRB roadmaps, the result of this work will serve as a platform for future FRB transactions, ensuring replicability.

Participating Partners: Blue Forest Conservation and World Resources Institute

How We Are Advancing Conservation Finance: Taking public-private financial partnership to market through a strong stakeholder engagement process which brings together private landowners, utilities, water-dependent companies, state governments, and banking, finance, and legal resources to implement pay for success contracting.

Ecotrust Forest Management (EFM)

Project Leads: ***Amrita Vatsal (amrita@ecotrustforests.com) & Bettina von Hagen (bettina@ecotrustforests.com)***
Project Duration*: 20 months*

Project Title: Catalyzing Public, Philanthropic and Private Capital to make Impact Investments in Forestland

Project in a Sentence: Designing a public-private investment vehicle that is capable of aggregating private capital at scale, and combining that capital with public and philanthropic dollars to achieve measurable impact goals around forestland productivity and conservation across Oregon and Washington.

Project Elevator Pitch:

As the Pacific Northwest's population has grown, the demand for food, fiber, and fuel has increased, alongside demand for clean air and water, carbon storage, unspoiled landscapes and other environmental services provided by forests. Maintaining such services poses a challenge to owners of private forestland, especially where there are trade-offs between the production of timber and the provision of environmental services, as well as unprecedented challenges from real estate development and increased risk from drought, climate change, and invasive species. The magnitude of the investment needed to incentivize conservation practices and adoption of best practices has risen beyond the capacity of public and philanthropic conservation funding providers alone. In recognition of this challenge, EFM is developing a forestland investment strategy that is capable of aggregating private capital at scale, and combining that capital with public and philanthropic dollars to increase the pace and scale of improved conservation practices on forestland.

Deliverables:

1. *Summary of Terms:* Summary of investment terms, and key risks for philanthropic and private capital providers' feedback.
2. *Impact Metrics Framework*: An impact metrics framework for proposed sustainable forestry investments that identifies the key impact categories, the impact metrics, and goals targeted by a sustainable forestry investment.
3. *Investment Strategy Summary:* A synthesis of the lessons learned from market analysis, investor feedback, and a description of the investment structure, strategy and conservation financing gaps.
4. *Grant Reporting and Project Management:* Submission of quarterly reports, as well as annual reports, as required by NRCS guidelines. A final presentation will be submitted at the conclusion of the project.

Participating Partners: The U.S. Forest Service, EcoPartners, Coquille Indian Tribe, The Trust for Public Land, The Jefferson Land Trust, The North Fork John Day Watershed Council, and the U.S. Endowment for Forests and Communities.

How We Are Advancing Conservation Finance: By bringing together public, private and philanthropic capital to achieve measurable impact goals around forestland productivity and conservation across Oregon and Washington.

Encourage Capital

Project Lead: ***Eron Bloomgarden (ebloomgarden@encouragecapital.com)***
Project Duration: ***Three years***

Project Title: Jumpstarting Working Lands Carbon Offset Markets

Project in a Sentence: Accelerate investments to producers who implement emissions-reductions practices from a fund that guarantees compensation, thus incentivizing producer participation and scaling up agricultural carbon markets.

Project Elevator Pitch:

Encourage Capital and partners will create a Working Lands Investment Fund (WLIF) to mobilize philanthropic and impact investments into the agricultural carbon market. The goal is establish guaranteed purchase agreements to ensure that producers who implement emissions reductions practices are compensated. The project aims to guarantee the purchase of 100,000 working lands carbon credits on 140,000 acres of land generated by the efforts of six 2015 NRCS Conservation Innovation Grants awardees. Partners in the project also include two project developers who will pilot agricultural protocols. The project will produce a business case to clarify the financial benefits and risks associated with developing projects, as well as handbooks to guide developers in the protocols. Educational materials for investors to take advantage of market opportunities will also be developed.

Deliverables:

1. Design of the Working Lands Investment Fund based on existing frameworks for financing carbon offset projects from avoided deforestation; disseminate the strategy to the public.
2. Purchase at least 100,000 tons of carbon credits over the next three years from agricultural projects.
3. Develop education materials and a portfolio of investment options to guide investors in understanding opportunities to participate in the agricultural carbon market.
4. Create two handbooks and training classes to guide project developers through agricultural protocols.
5. Create a business case for project developers to understand financial benefits and risks associated with developing projects.

Participating Partners: Encourage Capital, Environmental Defense Fund, American Carbon Registry, Climate Action Reserve, Baker & McKenzie, Bluesource, ClimeCo, Ducks Unlimited, Indian Land Tenure Foundation, and The Nature Conservancy.

How We Are Advancing Conservation Finance: By guaranteeing payments to producers for reducing emissions, this project will lower the risk for producers participating in working lands carbon offset practices and scale up their adoption. The project will also educate and bring new project developers and investors into the agricultural carbon market, increasing the flow of capital into conservation practices. The result will be growth of the market and increased confidence from all participating parties.

Fresh Coast Capital

Project Lead: ***Laura Kimes (laura@freshcoastcapital.com)***
Project Duration*: Three years*

Project Title: Creating working landscapes from former urban lands in legacy cities: applications and scale with revenue generating stormwater infrastructure and impact investing.

Project in a Sentence: Planting revenue-generating green stormwater infrastructure on vacant land in Peoria, creating a wraparound program for community engagement, and developing the tools to transfer the concept to other cities facing similar issues.

Project Elevator Pitch:

The City of Peoria, Illinois has a combined sewer system that creates water quality issues in the Illinois river, which is part of the Mississippi River watershed. The City is negotiating a consent decree for its combined sewer system that, if approved, would be the nation's first 100 percent green stormwater infrastructure compliance plan. Fresh Coast will work with partners AKRF and the City of Peoria to install absorptive plant and tree-based landscapes that also generate revenue and create community engagement opportunities. In particular, landscapes will include stormwater tree farms and harvestable microenterprise (agriculture and native floriculture) rain gardens on vacant and right-of-way land to form a complete streetscape of "green fingers" in the South Peoria neighborhood.

Deliverables:

1. Demonstrate successful design, construction, and maintenance practices for revenue generating stormwater installations;
2. Deliver data on metrics for stormwater management on sites through maintenance and monitoring program;
3. Demonstrate further enhancement of land productivity with social co-benefits. This includes community outreach, educational programs, and microenterprise program; and
4. Develop a toolkit of resources necessary for scaling green stormwater infrastructure forestry projects on vacant land in other legacy communities, including: partnership agreements, a model for stormwater forestry, cost effectiveness and savings data, maintenance and monitoring plan, and community engagement plan.

Participating Partners: Fresh Coast Capital, AKRF, City of Peoria, Gifts in the Moment (gitm) Foundation

How We Are Advancing Conservation Finance: The successful demonstration of these plantings and related monitoring program will support the expansion of Fresh Coast's model with privately funded impact investment capital throughout Peoria and other cities facing land vacancy and stormwater issues.

i2 Capital

Project Lead*: Ashley Allen (aallen@i2capitalcorp.com)*
Project Duration*: 18 months*

Project Title: i2 Capital Co-Op Conservation Bank Model

Project in a Sentence: i2 Capital has formed the Upper Green River Conservancy ("UGRC") to advance a model Co-Op Conservation Bank in Wyoming's Upper Green River watershed. This project will establish a replicable standard for landscape scale conservation banking across the American West.

Project Elevator Pitch: The Upper Green River Conservancy ("UGRC" or the "Project") is an innovative partnership between ranchers, energy companies, impact investors, and conservation stakeholders in the ecologically and energy rich Upper Green River watershed in Wyoming. An estimated 54 percent of the Nation's greater sage grouse live in Wyoming. Wyoming also ranks fifth in natural gas production in the US, and is home to 16 of the nation's largest natural gas fields, making the State ground zero for the energy/sage grouse conflict. This dynamic intersect of resource extraction and conservation objectives sets the stage for development of the UGRC. The Project encompasses more than 100,000 deeded acres of ecologically sensitive habitat that also provides home and critical migration routes to elk, mule deer, raptors, and additional Western species.

Deliverables:

1. Create a Co-Op Conservation Bank™ model that incentivizes ranchers to join together to form un-fragmented landscape -size conservation banks that achieve sustainable ranch productivity and natural resource management objectives.
2. Develop a process to predict the market for landscape-size conservation banks.
3. Improve metrics and measurement of discrete conservation outcomes.
4. Engage diverse segments of the private investment community.
5. Provide more than 10-to-1 leverage on public funding from private capital to achieve critical conservation goals in species protection and enhancement, soil and rangeland resilience and watershed protection.

Participating Partners: Ranchers holding title to more than 100,000 contiguous acres of land in the Upper Green River Watershed; Live Jackson Hole, B&H, WRA, Inc., private impact investors.

How We Are Advancing Conservation Finance: i2 Capital is advancing conservation finance through (i) development of a robust, conservation adoption incentive system that provides equitable allocation of economic benefits to ranchers; (ii) adaptation and demonstration of best management practices and incentive systems to improve performance and replication of landscape scale conservation banks; and (iii) demonstration of return-on-investment (ROI) that achieves a compelling balance of financial and environmental returns on private capital.

Iroquois Valley Farms

Project Lead: ***Teresa Opheim (topheim@iroquoisvalleyfarms.com)***
Project Duration: ***Three years***

Project Title: Innovative Financing to Help Restore Soil Health: Iroquois Valley Farms' Soil Restoration Notes

Project in a Sentence: Iroquois Valley Farms (IVF) will expand the number of acres under certified organic management, thereby increasing farmer—and company—profitability and environmental impact, through the issuance of Soil Restoration Notes, a new investor offering focused on supporting farmers during the organic transition period.

Project Elevator Pitch:
Iroquois Valley Farms invests, in part, in agricultural land that farmers want to transition to certified organic production. Transitioning land to organic production is challenging, because crops cannot be sold for the organic premium at the same time that additional capital is required to restore soil health. Through this grant, IVF will develop and sell to impact investors "Soil Restoration Notes" so that the company can reduce rental rates for farmers during the difficult organic transition period. Due to this reduced rental rate and the additional technical assistance these farmers will receive during transition, IVF farmers and the company will report increased profitability and environmental benefits. Delta Institute will help the company evaluate the company's environmental impact and the scalability of this project.

Deliverables

1. 10 farmers will become more profitable because they received reduced rental rates and additional technical support during the years they transition to organic production;
2. Investors in Iroquois Valley Farms will receive better information on the environmental impact of their investment;
3. A scalable structure for this innovative financing strategy will be developed and shared broadly.

Participating Partners
IVF farmers, impact investors, financial advisors, Delta Institute, local NRCS offices, technical service providers and other soil health consultants, farmer organizations like Practical Farmers

How Are We Advancing Conservation Finance
This project will develop and then use a scalable model of an innovative conservation finance strategy that focuses on the difficult transition-to-organic period.

K·Coe Isom, LLP

Project Lead: ***Brian Kuehl (bkuehl@kcoe.com)***
Project Duration: ***Three years***

Project Title: Catalyzing Private Investment in Habitat Mitigation Markets

Project in a Sentence:

This project seeks to increase private investment in habitat mitigation markets in seven western states by creating a pilot-scale catalyst fund to ensure landowners' cost recovery for early-stage credit-development activities.

Project Elevator Pitch:

K·Coe Isom will work to dramatically increase the amount of private capital available to finance habitat conservation projects on private lands in critical habitat areas across seven western states. The project will accomplish this goal by creating a pilot-scale catalyst fund to finance early-stage activities necessary for development of habitat mitigation credits. By reducing early-stage risk to landowners and investors, the catalyst fund will attract private capital into habitat mitigation markets and will serve as a model for the creation of additional catalyst funds in these and other environmental markets.

Deliverables:

1. Development of draft and final eligibility guidelines for landowners to participate in the pilot-scale catalyst fund.
2. Development of draft and final contracts for participation in the catalyst fund.
3. Development of a draft and final report analyzing the success of the pilot-scale catalyst fund and its ability to attract private-sector capital. The analysis in the report will be based on seven quantitative and three qualitative metrics.
4. Outreach to impact investors and philanthropic foundations to convey the findings of the draft report, gather input on improvements for future catalyst funds, and encourage the establishment of additional catalyst funds.

Participating Partners: The Wildlife Management Institute

How We Are Advancing Conservation Finance:

By providing cost recovery guarantees to landowners, this project will encourage landowners to begin participating in habitat mitigation markets. By incentivizing landowners to finance these early-stage costs, the pilot-scale catalyst fund will encourage investors and credit buyers to finance full implementation of conservation projects. Finally, by demonstrating the effectiveness of this approach and gathering input for improving catalyst fund design, the project will encourage impact investors and philanthropic foundations to establish additional catalyst funds for habitat mitigation and other environmental markets.

National Corn Growers Association

Project Lead: ***Nicholas J. Goeser (goeser@ncga.com)***
Project Duration: ***Three years***

Project Title: Scalable On Farm Greenhouse Gas Reductions and Water-Quality Improvements: Development and Implementation of an Economical and Verifiable Insetting and Accounting Framework

Project in a Sentence: This project will integrate recent advancements in precision agriculture data platforms--designed to help growers optimize farm enterprise profitability, reduce greenhouse gases (GHGs) and improve water quality--into an advanced decision system support tool and framework that enables carbon "insetting".

Project Elevator Pitch: The Soil Health Partnership (SHP), in conjunction with project partners, are proposing to develop a framework that draws on existing offset standards, emerging low-cost verification technologies (e.g. remotely sensed data), and proven precision business planning methods to drive conservation adoption and achieve GHG reductions and water quality co-benefits.

Deliverables:

1. Carbon Accounting and Insetting Framework (CAIF): An adaptable set of systems and processes for measuring, monitoring and reporting carbon insets in a verifiable and cost effective way. The framework will be designed to accommodate a number of different quantification methods using models that are well documented and accepted (e.g. COMET, DNDC, etc).
2. Water Quality Co-Benefits: a document outlining the models and methods used to quantify water quality metrics; a document demonstrating how these metrics have been built into the modeling platform.
3. Low-Cost and Low-Touch Verification System: demonstration of a process to prove in a gapless way that tillage disturbances/cover crops can be tracked/verified (for permanence purposes); demonstration and validation of the OpTIS system for the project sites; linkage of the outcomes of the OpTIS system with the models being used and a procedures document outlining how to use the data in a verification.
4. Integration of Precision Business Planning: a document showing that all SHP participants are in the precision business planning framework along with associated outcomes (e.g. ROI, enhanced economic performance, etc.) for a total of approximately 200,000 acres.
5. Framework Demonstration: the production of credible, defensible insets that take a pragmatic approach to meeting conventional carbon offset policy criteria (e.g. incrementality, uncertainty, permanence, etc.).

Participating Partners: Soil Health Partnership, AgSolver, Applied GeoSolutions, DNDC-ART, Monsanto, Climate Smart Group and CropGrowers

How We Are Advancing Conservation Finance: By providing businesses with a quantifiable method to reduce their carbon footprint by increasing adoption of on-the-ground conservation practices, the end product will advance understanding of how to incentivize and achieve large scale greenhouse gas mitigation actions in North American cropping systems.

The Nature Conservancy

Project Lead: ***Cullen C. Foley (Cullen.foley@tnc.org)***
Project Duration: ***One year***

Project Title: Restoring the Gulf: Leveraging Deepwater Horizon Funds with Impact Investment

Project in a Sentence: TNC will develop impact investment blueprints for Gulf of Mexico restoration that outline how public funding can be used to attract private impact investment funds to conservation, which could greatly expand the environmental impact of various Deepwater Horizon settlement funds.

Project Elevator Pitch: Public funding can be a powerful tool for attracting private investment capital that can help scale conservation in new ways. TNC will partner with the RESTORE Council to develop impact investment blueprints for Gulf of Mexico restoration that outline how public funding can be used to attract private impact investment funds to conservation. The impact investment blueprints will address conservation needs in four key areas of Gulf restoration: sustainable agriculture, large landscape forest conservation, water quality/water management and coastal restoration.

Deliverables:

1. Up to six investment blueprints and associated term sheets and project pipelines that can support substantial private impact investment in a resilient Gulf system by leveraging RESTORE funds. Additionally, at least three case studies will be developed to illustrate how investment terms and project execution capabilities can be paired in specific places in the RESTORE footprint to implement the investment blueprints.

2. A pipeline of specific deal opportunities to execute in cooperation with the RESTORE Council and with other state and federal agencies that would test the investment blueprints and provide further information on replicability.

Participating Partners: RESTORE Council

How We Are Advancing Conservation Finance: Two of the major obstacles to investing in conservation at scale are 1) the size and bespoke nature of most transactions; and 2) the lack of risk-adjusted returns. Public capital can leverage private investment by providing credit enhancement, first-loss guarantees, and project preparation costs that help buy down risk for investors. At the same time, transaction blueprints that establish a standard set of cash flows, returns, and conservation outcomes and metrics can begin to develop a repeatable transaction structure that better lends itself to receiving institutional capital at scale.

The Nature Conservancy

Project Lead: ***Dayna Gross (dayna_gross@tnc.org)***
Project Duration: ***Two years***

Project Title: Agriculture Viability Loan Program- Impact Investing (Sustainable Farm Loans)

Project in a Sentence: Developing a business case for a low interest loan program for producers who implement certain conservation practices.

Project Elevator Pitch:

Every year, producers take out big operating loans. TNC believes that if a farmer uses more sustainable soil health and water conservation practices, the farmer presents a lower risk to lenders by improving the health of their land and reducing inputs (e.g., fertilizer and water). In some cases, producers can also lower their liability of harming or "taking"[1] endangered species. Often, however, the practices farmers are being asked to implement have not been tested and measured in ways that document the cost/benefit ratio and the related return on investment. Farmers and ranchers are frequently asked to change their operations without a clear business rationale for doing so. Even when they do believe in the business rationale of such changes, the cost of doing so can be investment prohibitive since a large system overhaul often requires a significant upfront, multi-year investment before a producer realizes any returns.

For this pilot project TNC will work with impact investors to provide low interest loans to producers at a reduced rate of return (ROR). Farmers in Idaho and ranchers in California will apply for loans with The Nature Conservancy (through a partner bank) and these loans would come with the stipulation that the producers must implement conservation practices using some of the money saved from the lower interest rates.

Deliverables:

1. Core financial model, quantifying the cost and the risk of proposed interventions in relation to current business practices.
2. A brochure for farmers outlining the technology and improvements, how they work, and how to get more information about data collection and the loan program.
3. An amplification strategy will be developed to identify how the program can be scaled up.
4. Communications tools for producers outlining costs/ benefits/ proof of effectiveness/ return on investment for all practices identified in the outlined objectives.

Participating Partners: EQIP-eligible producers, lenders

How We Are Advancing Conservation Finance: By defining business cases for certain conservation practices and then creating impact investment opportunities coupled with incentives for producers, we hope to expand the adoption of conservation practices through an innovative conservation finance approach.

[1] "take" means to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or to attempt to engage in any such conduct of an endangered species

The Xerces Society

Project Lead: ***Scott Black (sblack@xerces.org)***
Project Duration: ***Three years***

Project Title: Bee Better Certified™: A Marketplace Incentive for Pollinator Conservation

Project in a Sentence: Bee Better is third-party verified certification that promotes pollinator conservation in agriculture through a consumer-facing certification seal that serves as a market-based incentive program.

Project Elevator Pitch:

Bee Better Certified, in partnership with major food companies, agricultural investors, and conservation-minded farmers, is a first-of-its kind third-party verified certification program that incentivizes the large-scale adoption of pollinator conservation through a marketing-driven platform. Bee Better's scalable production standards will accelerate and expand conservation on private lands, creating a new model for rewarding biodiversity protection by some of the largest food companies in the world, while simultaneously providing new marketing opportunities for farmers of all sizes. To provide a credible third-party inspection and verification process, Bee Better leverages the expertise of Oregon Tilth, a leading national certifier of organic farms. To accelerate the adoption of Bee Better Certified, and pollinator conservation in general, this project will also develop a new web-based conservation planning tool and refine pollinator habitat restoration methods. Each of these additional components will result in faster and lower cost pollinator conservation delivery. The outward facing certification seal will enable consumers to differentiate between products containing ingredients grown in a way that supports pollinators, and enable agribusinesses to incorporate sustainable production methods into their supply chains.

Deliverables:

1. Develop robust science-based, pollinator-protective certification standards.
2. Launch the certification program with Oregon Tilth as the 3rd-party inspection authority.
3. Work with EQIP-eligible and corporate farms across the country to demonstrate proof of concept.
4. Test practices that accelerate pollinator habitat implementation, including solarization and cover-cropping, to facilitate adoption of Bee Better habitat standards.
5. Develop a web-based habitat assessment guide that will assist with adoption of Bee Better standards.

Participating Partners: Oregon Tilth, General Mills, Whole Foods Market, Häagen-Dazs USA (owned by Nestlé), White Wave Foods, Organic Valley, Agriculture Capital Management, Vilicus Farm, Scott LaRowe, Bob Pankan, Calvin Mack, Open Hands Farm, York Farm, Klickitat Canyon Vineyard, Nezinscot Farm, Tadlock Farms, Gallagher Farms (Arbuckle, CA), Luz Del Valle Farms, Simple Gifts Farm, Waxwing Farm, Stone Creek Farm, Del's Orchard, Longdale Farm, Prairie Drifter Farm, Uproot Farm, Spring Wind Farm, and Lavoie's Farm.

How We Are Advancing Conservation Finance: By creating a certification program farms and agricultural corporations can invest in to make their operation or supply chains more sustainable, we target shareholders and customer bases. Bee Better Certified also can deliver a guarantee that investments in support of pollinator conservation meet rigorous and meaningful criteria.