

RESEARCH BRIEF

Development of a Fund to Support Working Lands in Colorado

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The Need.

The student team worked with the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT) to explore options for the development and implementation of an internally managed Agricultural Resiliency Fund (ARF). This fund aims to provide landowners with financial support for projects that contribute to the long-term ecologic health and economic viability of their farm and rangelands that have a conservation easement. CCALT's portfolio represents over 450 conservation easements on working lands throughout the state of Colorado - this fund will support additional conservation projects on these lands that will remain undeveloped despite the continued urban sprawl occurring the American West. This is an opportunity to further support the resiliency of these working lands and make implementation of projects more attainable for private landowners.

The Project.

Through informational interviews and online research, the student team investigated sustainable finance models and fund structures to inform the development and implementation of CCALT's new resiliency fund. Organizations that were interviewed include the Conservation Fund, the Quivira Coalition, and the USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, among others. The team collaborated with CCALT to design options for a fund that will enable sustainable and efficient use of funds for stewardship projects on working lands related to watershed restoration, wildlife-friendly fencing, weed management, fire mitigation and more. Students identified funding sources and program models that CCALT could learn from in order to develop the best model for initially funding, structuring, and sustaining their fund. They also leveraged interviews and research to understand the most effective models for fund deployment once the ARF is established.



Photo Credit: Brendan Boepple

The Findings.

The student team provided a final report to the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust that highlighted findings on the development and implementation of the Agricultural Resiliency Fund. This report – Development of a Fund to Support Working Lands in Colorado - will help guide CCALT in designing a viable and strategic fund that aligns with the organization's mission. The report outlines in detail the ecological need and landowner demand that the Agriculture Resiliency Fund will address. It then assesses different seed funding sources and sustainable fund structures, identifying the potential benefits and challenges for each for CCALT considering their specific circumstances and project foci. The team also provided recommendations for conservation project criteria to help CCALT decide what types of rangeland improvement and habitat restoration projects to prioritize. Finally, the report wraps up with recommendations for how CCALT can best promote the fund to gain support and interest from potential participants and funders alike.

The Impact.

This team's research and report will support CCALT reach their additive conservation goals by expanding their conservation efforts beyond establishing easements which prevent future development and into more proactive and restorative conservation projects on their easements. With this report, the team at CCALT will be able to elicit support and funding from their board as well as potential grantors. The report will also help to guide decision making at CCALT as they begin to officially develop and implement their Agriculture Resiliency Fund. As ecological crises including climate change, biodiversity loss, and habitat fragmentation continue, we are quickly learning that parks and protected lands alone are not sufficient to conserve entire functioning ecological systems. This report and the subsequent creation of the ARF will enable critical investments in conservation on private working lands. The ARF will lead to conservation gains on working lands in Colorado and may serve as a model for other regions and land trusts to follow.

The Student Team.

Annie Miller, Research Assistant | Annie Miller is a Masters of Environmental Management candidate. She focuses on biodiversity and land conservation in the West with a particular lens toward community-based conservation as a means to sustainably and justly address climate change. She received her B.S. in Biology and Environmental Science from Tufts University.

Wyatt Klipa, Research Assistant | Wyatt Klipa is a Master of Environmental Management candidate. He is interested in exploring the ways in which approaches of equity and engagement for local stakeholder groups most impacted by conservation policy and implementation of local knowledge can enhance effective community management of large ecosystems. He holds a BS in Environmental Studies with a focus in Conservation Ecology from the University of Michigan.

Christina Kohler, Research Assistant | Christina is a Master of Environmental Management Candidate studying environmental policy and collaborative solutions to protect wildlife. She holds Bachelor of Science degrees in Molecular Environmental Biology and Environmental Economics & Policy from the University of California, Berkeley.

