

Quantify Economic Benefits of Conservation with Blackfoot Challenge and Ucross High Plains Stewardship Initiative

Job Listing: # 36564

UCROSS - Research Fellow - Blackfoot Challenge- YSE

Employer at Yale: Ucross High Plains Stewardship Initiative

Partner Organization: [The Blackfoot Challenge](#)

Project Title:

Assessing the Economic Benefits of Public-Private Conservation Investments in the Blackfoot Watershed, Montana.

Short Project Description:

The Blackfoot Challenge's (BC) long-standing efforts in collaborative conservation have been founded on the premise that building partnerships between private landowners, NGOS, and state and federal agencies produces tangible conservation gains that benefit the public good. Our work has generated significant conservation impacts for grizzly bears, wolves, native fisheries, forests, grasslands, and watershed resilience in the face of climate change. Given the changing political landscape for public land management agencies, we believe that it is imperative to offer a data-driven example that quantifies the positive economic ripple effects of public investments in rural western landscapes.

We seek an analysis of our organization's investments of private funds that have been leveraged with state and federal public funding through grants and agreements to produce numerous conservation and community economic impacts. [This analysis will offer a powerful and empirically based case-study that shows the role of government agencies and NGO partners, the impact of public and private conservation, and the value of current practices of collaboration and leveraged investments.](#) The project will also provide a methodological template for conducting such analysis so that it can be replicated elsewhere.

Optional: Blackfoot challenge will pay for a motivated student to visit them in Montana for 8-10 days

Long Project Description:

The Blackfoot Challenge is a globally recognized leader in cooperative conservation based in Western Montana's Blackfoot watershed. While officially incorporated as an NGO in 1993, the Blackfoot Challenge's origins date back to the early work of visionary landowners in the 1970s who saw opportunities to conserve and manage land, water, and wildlife in a more holistic way ([Landscape of Hope](#)). This approach was based on the premise that cooperation is central to effective conservation. This is particularly important in the American West where landownership is comprised of large public and private holdings—and not surprisingly, an array of different and often competing interests result. In turn, unchecked development, habitat fragmentation, and loss of open spaces have become common footprints in many western landscapes.

Blackfoot Challenge has taken a different path and has played a central role as *the organization* in the 1.5-million-acre watershed that has brought people together and facilitated respectful conversations. This has generated bottom-up solutions embedded in public and private partnerships. Noteworthy conservation successes include: 1.3 million acres of land permanently protected from development, creation of a 5,600-acre community-owned and managed forest, restoration of native trout habitat, a drought response plan to maintain in-stream flows in the Blackfoot River, conservation of grizzly bear and wolf populations through conflict reduction, restoration of native trumpeter swans, and improvements to native grasslands and soil health across dozens of working ranches. These conservation successes have relied on private and public investments that have undoubtedly generated economic benefits including increased productivity of working lands, full-time and seasonal jobs, high quality recreational opportunities, and tourism. However, we have never quantified these investments and seek an analysis to do so. Additionally, we hope that the methods used to quantify these economic benefits can be replicated and scaled to other communities throughout the West.

This project is a timely and important opportunity to illustrate positive benefits of public-private, partnership-oriented investments in conservation in the rural West.

Objectives:

1. Produce an analysis that quantifies BC conservation activity with public-private projects. Specifically, the analysis will measure how private funds leverage public money and result in multiplier effects in terms of numbers and types of jobs created, how local contractor businesses benefit, and other economic gains for rural communities.
2. Develop a simple and robust methodology and data collection process that others can use to replicate the analysis in other rural communities with similar public-private collaborations.
3. (Optional) BC aims to conduct a facilitated process led by a practitioner of the Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) methodology to understand and illustrate the economic impact of specific BC programs, such as Forestry or Wildlife Program. If student interests and skills align, the economic analysis will complement the REM process. The interested student may participate and support the REM.

Deliverables:

1. A 15–20-page report detailing the economic analysis and findings that is easily understood by a layperson audience.
2. A compelling, formatted 1-page info-graphic or similar that distills the analysis.
3. A replicable methodology (3-5 pages) that can be effectively used by other NGO practitioners.
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4. (Optional) A Ripple Effects Map(s) and attendant qualitative descriptions/testimonials (REM)*

* Yale research assistant would be trained in REM methods if interested and an external expert would conduct the REM workshop / map for the Blackfoot Challenge; If interested, Yale

research assistant could spend 8-10 days in Montana during winter break, spring break or after the semester ends to finalize economic analysis, build connections with BC staff/board, and take part in the REM workshop.

Qualifications Needed:

- Strong quantitative analysis and research skills.
- Willingness to work closely with BC staff and partners.
- Experience or familiarity with economics, data visualization, is preferable but not required.
- Knowledge of and/or interest in conservation in multi-use, working landscapes.

Commitment:

- 3-8 hours/week during September 22, 2025 - May 8, 2026.
- BC will be available to research assistant for bi-weekly check-in zoom meetings.
- The research assistant will also have the opportunity to collaborate with the Yale Success Lab, a research initiative led by Dr. Amity Doolittle that aims to understand the impact of place-based environmental NGOs in the United States.
- **If interested, Yale research assistant could visit Montana for 8-10 days (with all expenses covered by the Blackfoot Challenge).**

Pay Rate: \$17.50/hour

How to Apply:

Apply using the central [Yale Student Employment application systems](https://yalestudentjobs.org) (yalestudentjobs.org) and search for **job listing # 36564 UCROSS - Research Fellow - Blackfoot Challenge- YSE**

- You will be asked to upload your resume and a statement of interest as one document.
- In your statement of interest, we would like to learn more about 1) why you are interested in this opportunity and 2) what makes you a good fit for this role.