



Land Trusts and Wildlife Conservation

Examples of land trusts conserving wildlife



With two-thirds of land in the Lower 48 under private ownership, many species of conservation concern depend on private land. Following are examples of land trusts conserving wildlife.



New England Cottontail. The Avalonia Land Conservancy (avalonialandconservancy.org) in Connecticut works to conserve habitat for the New England cottontail. Avalonia created early successional, brushy cottontail habitat with guidance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, and with funding and support from federal and private sources and volunteer labor. Educating preserve visitors about why older forests are converted to younger stands to create habitat is crucial to the success of the project. USFWS cited private and other investment in land acquisition and habitat restoration in its decision not to list the cottontail under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).



Bull Trout. The Columbia Land Trust (columbialandtrust.org) conserves and cares for the lands, waters and wildlife of the Columbia River region through sound science and strong relationships. Using USFWS Section 6 grants, the Land Trust has conserved more than 30,000 acres of forestland across two conservation areas in Washington: Pine Creek on the southern slopes of Mount St. Helens and Klickitat Canyon in the East Cascades. Both Pine Creek and the upper Klickitat River serve as critical habitat for federally listed populations of bull trout. In the Klickitat system, the Land Trust's conservation work benefits bull trout range-wide by protecting habitat within the only basin that hosts known, natural, resident and fluvial populations in the Lower Columbia River.



Migration Routes and Wildlife-Friendly Fencing. The Jackson Hole Land Trust (jhlandtrust.org/) in Wyoming conserves privately owned land that connects federal parks, forests, wildlife refuges, and other public land. The Land Trust uses conservation easements to address barriers to migration for species such as pronghorn antelope, and wildlife-friendly fencing that helps prevent collisions from sage grouse. It also partners with the Green River Valley Land Trust to set up a conservation easement and a wildlife-friendly fencing program to address the loss of historic family ranches, wildlife habitat, and corridors due to pressures in natural gas fields from well pads, access roads, fences, and sprawling housing developments.



Saltmarsh Sparrow. The New Haven Land Trust's (newhavenlandtrust.org) Quinnipiac Meadows Nature Preserve in Connecticut is habitat for the saltmarsh sparrow, an imperiled species that USFWS may list under the ESA. Sea level rise has rendered fewer and fewer saltmarshes available to birdlife that are located high enough above rising waters to avoid complete inundation during certain times of the year. Quinnipiac Meadows is one of a few suitable areas remaining for sparrow breeding because its tidal marsh can support nests during the highest tides. The Land Trust promotes its preserve as a fascinating opportunity for the public to view saltmarsh sparrow and other wildlife from bird blinds overlooking the marsh.



Threatened Salmon Species. The Nisqually Land Trust (nisquallylandtrust.org) in Washington acquires and manages critical lands to permanently benefit the water, wildlife, and people in the Nisqually River Watershed. As the Land Trust's work benefits federally listed species such as Chinook salmon and steelhead, their funding has included federal and state sources. The Land Trust emphasizes conservation solutions to restore habitat to its full ecological value, which is important for salmon recovery. The Land Trust has also expanded its reach to marine habitat by joining a coalition of 14 land trusts and conservation organizations to form the Shoreline Conservation Collaborative, a project of the Washington Association of Land Trusts that seeks to conserve Puget Sound shorelines.



Golden-winged Warbler. The Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy (appalachian.org) in North Carolina worked with partners to protect a network of more than 25,000 acres in the Roan Highlands for conservation of the golden-winged warbler and other species along the border between North Carolina and Tennessee. The golden-winged warbler has one of the smallest populations of any songbird not listed under the ESA, with only 400,000 breeding adults nationwide. The Conservancy has tapped a variety of funds to support its work, including allocations made under the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act and stewardship grants from conservation organizations, including the National Forest Foundation and the Audubon Society.



Southern Plains Land Trust
GAINING GROUND FOR PRAIRIE WILDLIFE

Shortgrass Prairie for Wildlife and Carbon Sequestration. (southernplains.org) The Southern Plains Land Trust in Colorado is dedicated to protecting rare and fragile shortgrass prairie, conserving grassland species and building habitat resilience to climate change, while earning additional revenue for their conservation investments. When grasslands are tilled and converted to agriculture, they release large amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Landowners can earn offset credits that can be sold in a carbon market by conserving grasslands rather than converting them to cropland. Using a Conservation Innovation Grant from the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Land Trust generated carbon credits that it sold to Natural Capital Partners on behalf of their client, Microsoft, which was seeking to offset their carbon emissions. Prairie dogs, burrowing owls, Texas horned lizards and bison all benefit from this innovative program.



SYCAMORE
LAND TRUST

Indiana Bat. The Sycamore Land Trust (sycamorelandtrust.org) conserves wildlife by acquiring habitat and undertaking restoration projects on seasonal wetlands and forestlands in southern Indiana to conserve the federally protected Indiana bat, the state-protected Kirtland's snake and other species. Projects include removing invasive plants, planting native species, and improving water quality by protecting and restoring riparian buffers. Sensitive and imperiled species benefit from large protected areas that provide food and cover, and buffer against threats posed by development and disease. Multiple sources support the Land Trust, including member donations, state and federal agency grants, private foundation grants, and a robust corporate giving program.



VITAL GROUND
FOUNDATION

Grizzly Bear. The Vital Ground Foundation (vitalground.org) in Montana conserves land for grizzly bears and other wildlife in the northern Rocky Mountains. The Foundation uses conservation easements to provide grizzlies with the room they need to roam and connect corridors between large blocks of habitat on public land. The Foundation also purchases land that supports wildlife. As the grizzly bear is a federally threatened species, the Foundation Trust receives support from state and federal agencies, local initiatives, private foundations and individual donors. The Foundation also implements practices that reduce conflicts between bears and people through fencing, livestock carcass removal, retirement of grazing leases, and educational efforts to create safe "bear aware" communities.



Imperiled Species and Coastal Wetlands. The Weeks Bay Foundation (weeksbay.org) supports the Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve by preserving bogs, wetlands and estuaries along Alabama's coastline. The Weeks Bay Reserve is home to approximately 19 threatened or endangered species, as well as many other species that support commercial and recreational fishing industries. The Foundation raises private funds to purchase or secure conservation easements on ecologically valuable properties, some of which has become part of the Research Reserve.