

David and Lucile Packard Foundation Western Conservation Evaluation

SUMMARY

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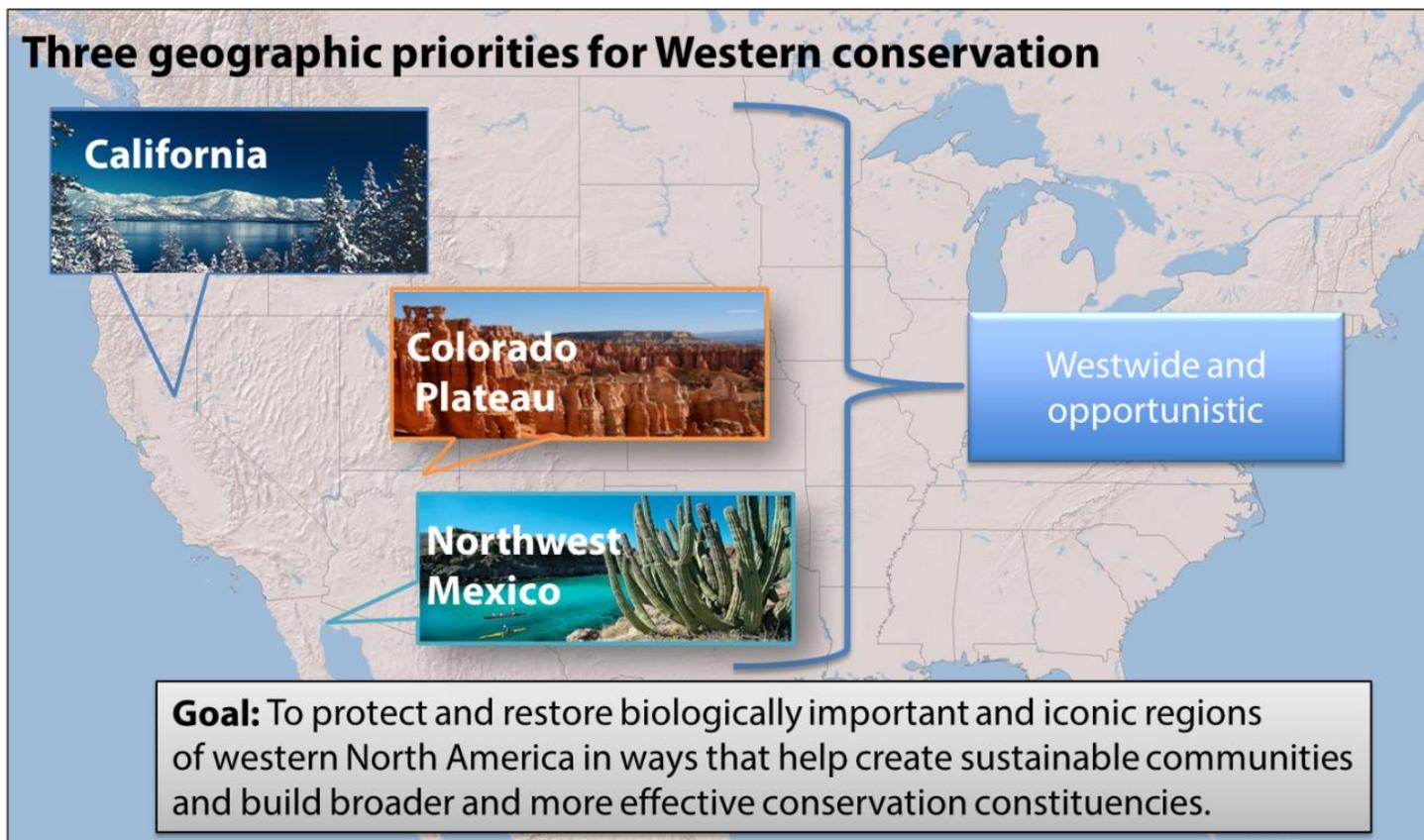
Western Conservation subprogram overview

From 2008 to 2014, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation granted more than \$122 million to advance conservation in Western North America. The Foundation’s Western Conservation subprogram was one of the largest environmental initiatives by philanthropy in the region’s history. Designed from the start to be a time-limited subprogram, Western Conservation pursued nearly five-dozen outcomes in three priority regions—California, the Colorado Plateau, and Northwest Mexico—as well as several Westwide initiatives. Grouped into 21 clusters of activity, these grants supported a broad range of environmental advocacy and conservation, including direct purchases of important habitat, communications campaigns, technical input for policymakers, and the creation of new NGOs.¹

Overall, California Environmental Associates (CEA) believes the Western Conservation subprogram and its grantees did an impressive job of securing wins and advancing progress across a diverse set of critical issues, especially given that some external events, such as the fall of the economy, created unforeseen obstacles and challenges. The subprogram also confronted internal changes, including loss of its key architect and a sharp budget reduction, but staff were agile and able to achieve an enduring set of conservation gains across Western North America.

In addition to supporting a number of policy victories, ranging from administrative protections for remote public lands to implementing smart growth measures in California’s biggest cities, the subprogram helped protect hundreds of thousands of acres of important habitat, open space, and natural resources through land purchases and conservation easements.

Figure 1: Geographic priorities of Western Conservation subprogram



¹ As a private family foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation does not advocate for candidates, legislation, or ballot initiatives. All grantmaking under this strategy was carried out in accordance with appropriate federal and state rules concerning lobbying.

CEA's role and methodology

From 2010 to 2014, CEA served as a third-party evaluator of the Western Conservation subprogram. We conducted numerous investigations of the Foundation's work in the region and produced deeper dives on specific grantmaking clusters. In our engagement with the Western Conservation subprogram and in this final evaluation, CEA used a blend of quantitative and qualitative analysis. On the quantitative side of spectrum, we developed and analyzed three databases:

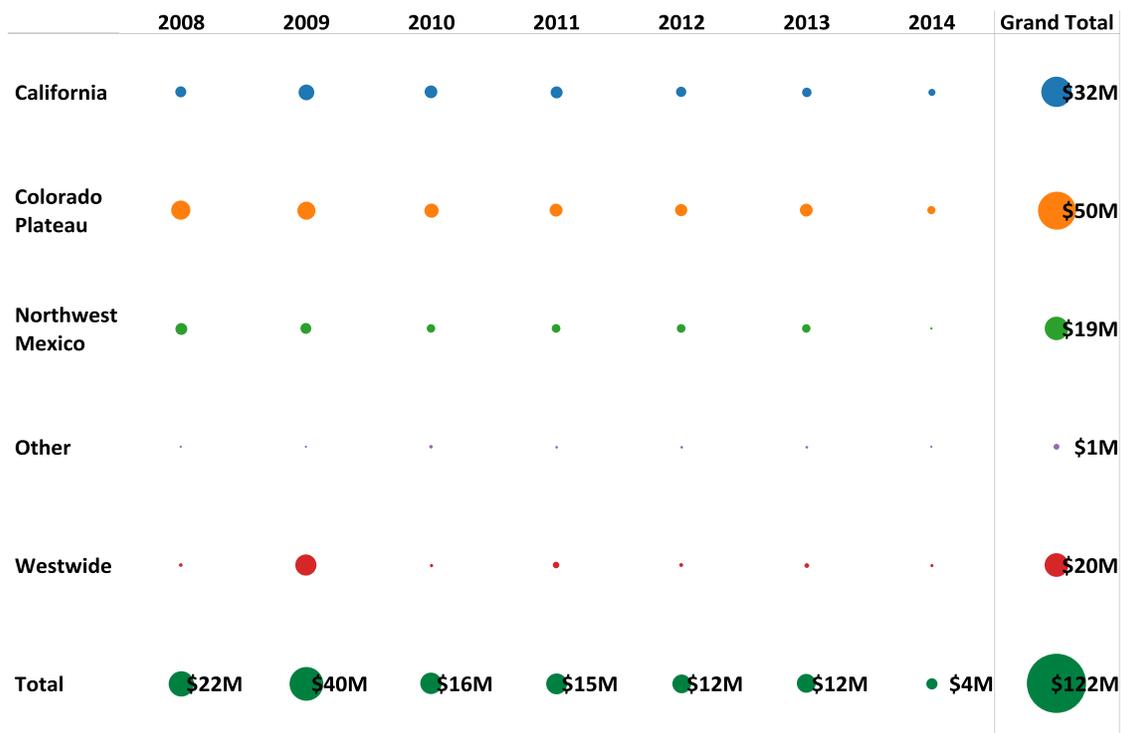
- 1) **Dashboard:** CEA created an Excel-based tracking tool that estimated the rough likelihood of success for each of the 56 targets and was updated quarterly or semi-annually based on program officer input.
- 2) **Grants:** The Foundation and its intermediary, Resources Legacy Fund (RLF), made more than 600 grants. In many cases, a grant was directed toward just one of the 21 clusters, but in cases where the investment affected more than one cluster, program officers allocated the total by percentage. PRIs are not included in this database.
- 3) **Acres under better management:** Across Western North America, the Packard Foundation invested tens of millions of dollars in direct protections for land and water, including funding land and conservation easement purchases. In addition to these private lands transactions, the Foundation also supported a number of policy-related efforts that led to public lands being managed in a more sustainable manner. In many cases, the Foundation's grantees were not the only factor behind the change in management.

On the qualitative side of the spectrum, we conducted interviews with more than 150 individuals, including Foundation staff, grantees, experts, and other stakeholders, in order to produce periodic written evaluations on the grantmaking results, as well as this final report. Our research also included analysis of the subprogram's foundational documents and grantmaking files. During the course of our evaluation, we frequently employed a journalistic approach that relied on extensive quotes from interviewees, narrative techniques, and visual tools, such as photos, maps, and graphics.

Overall findings

The Foundation's Western Conservation subprogram supported more than 200 grantees from 2008 through 2014. Using a balanced portfolio approach, those investments were spread across a spectrum of risk that included relatively safe bets, such as direct purchases of land and conservation easements, and some longshots, such as trying to break decades of stalemate over Utah's wilderness-quality lands. Figure 2 summarizes the grantmaking by year and region.

Figure 2: Grantmaking by year and region



Wins and losses

As one would expect with a balanced portfolio approach, the subprogram experienced a mixed set of outcomes. Major victories and accomplishments included:

- **Targets achieved for private lands protections.** The subprogram's biggest investment was a \$15 million grant and \$30 million PRI provided in support of the Montana Legacy Project, but the Foundation also helped close numerous important transactions in Northwest Mexico, the Sierra Nevada, and the Colorado Plateau. The recession made the Foundation's job tougher in many realms, but at times it helped on the private lands front because prices fell as the development potential of key properties declined.
- **Native Americans have stronger voice on Colorado Plateau.** Despite only having six years to engage, the Western Conservation subprogram was able to create an enduring legacy in the Four Corners region by helping support creation of the Native American-led Colorado Plateau Foundation. The subprogram also helped Native Americans become more powerful voices in the ongoing debate about Utah's wilderness.
- **Land trusts gain sophistication and security.** An increasing number of nonprofit land trusts have been accredited. The subprogram also helped support a first-ever captive insurance program for land trusts that helps protect conservation easements against legal challenges. Grants also supported a successful leadership training program.
- **Smart growth advances in California.** Grantees played an important role in advancing implementation of the state's SB 375 land-use law, which has resulted in regional transportation plans that favor urban infill, reduce per capita greenhouse gas emissions, and promote alternatives to driving, such as walking, biking, and public transit.
- **Drought leads to reforms.** An epic dry spell in California and other parts of the West heightened awareness of water-related issues, such as the Colorado River's precarious supply and the need for stronger conservation. Despite the drought, flows returned to formerly dry sections of the San Joaquin River and the Colorado River Delta as part of restoration efforts.
- **Gains made in human capital and institutional capacity.** The ability of environmental NGOs and advocates to press their case and fight for positive social change is harder to measure than the outcome of a specific campaign or land transaction. But increasing this capacity was an important, underlying goal for the subprogram. Many organizations grew in size and sophistication during the subprogram, but some are finding it difficult to secure funding to replace the Packard Foundation investments.

Some of the subprogram's challenges and disappointments included:

- **No new wilderness, but Utah public lands still in play.** One of the subprogram's biggest bets was an effort to break the decades-old logjam over wilderness-quality lands in Utah. At the start of 2015, success remained elusive, but efforts and grantmaking are ongoing as stakeholders continue to engage in a public lands initiative led by Utah Representative Rob Bishop, so this strategy may eventually pay off.
- **Conservation issues and funding suffer during recession.** The plunging real estate market allowed the Foundation and its grantees to complete some great transactions while protecting private lands, but the economic crisis hurt the budgets of many resource agencies and dried up funding for habitat protection. More generally, efforts to jumpstart the economy overshadowed environmental protection, making it even harder to secure gains.
- **Progress is slow on many water-related issues.** In many parts of the West, the environmental community continues to have challenges engaging with farmers, who control the vast majority of the region's water, and with water managers, who are charged with implementing an antiquated legal system in a changing climate. As noted above, grantees did record important gains and helped halt harmful proposals, such as the Flaming Gorge Pipeline, but in some watersheds and regions, such as the Dolores River and Bay Delta, progress was harder to come by.

Internal changes

The subprogram was rocked by major internal changes over the course of its duration. Initially, the subprogram was planning to grant about \$200 million over five years, but the Great Recession caused a plunge in financial markets and the Foundation's endowment. The result was a halving of the annual budget for Western Conservation starting in 2010 and a contraction of the subprogram's geographic and issue focus. Although the annual grantmaking in later years was about half of what was originally planned, the subprogram's total investment was about three-fifths of the initial plan of \$200 million because funding had yet to be cut in 2009 and the subprogram was extended by one year.

Another major change at the Foundation was the departure of one of the subprogram's primary architects and managers. Overall, the Foundation did an admirable job of adapting to the severe budget cuts and the subprogram's personnel loss. But the reduced funding colored the field's perception of the subprogram. A recurrent theme in interviews was that the Foundation had come in with ambitious plans and had inspired grantees to think big. That expansive vision no doubt led to extensive planning, prioritization, and strategizing across the region—the results of which may be beneficial for years to come. But when the actual grantmaking levels turned out to be smaller than originally hoped, some in the field were disappointed, even though the subprogram still would be one of history's largest philanthropic efforts in Western Conservation.

Montana Legacy Project and Great Western Checkerboard

Before the cuts took place, the subprogram made its biggest single investment. A \$15 million grant and \$30 million program-related investment (PRI) in 2008 helped close on the [Montana Legacy Project](#), a 310,000-acre acquisition of timberland owned by Plum Creek Timber in the Crown of the Continent region. This landmark effort, which cost nearly \$500 million and involved numerous other funders, was situated far from California, the Colorado Plateau, and Northwest Mexico, but all along, the Packard Foundation had been on the lookout for special opportunities that would merit investments beyond the three priority regions.

The 310,000 acres protected by the Montana Legacy Project and by a related \$8 million PRI in 2014 for the 165,000-acre Great Western Checkerboard project in Washington and Montana was more than double the total acreage of all other private land transactions supported by the subprogram. Overall, Foundation support, including both grants and PRIs, helped protect 746,617 acres of private lands. Grants for direct land protections totaled \$37 million and PRIs totaled \$129 million, for a total investment of \$166 million.

External forces

From the subprogram's onset in 2008 to its close in 2014, the West and the wider world experienced a turbulent six years. Some of the major external forces that affected the grantmaking included:

- President Barack Obama was wasn't seen as personally engaged in Western environmental issues, and his first Interior Secretary, Ken Salazar, disappointed many on these issues.
- When the global financial crisis hit in 2008, the administration became focused on avoiding the next Great Depression. On the federal, state, and local levels, battered economies led legislators to zero-out conservation budgets as environmental protection plummeted on the political agenda.
- The Department of Interior, the West's biggest landowner, was consumed by the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico and ensnared in controversy because its Minerals Management Service had overseen the drilling.
- In 2010, a decline in congressional support for conservation efforts made any federal environmental legislation more difficult to pass.

These external forces had varying impacts across the Foundation's clusters of activity, in some cases making success nearly impossible. This was especially true of efforts on the federal level in such realms as enacting full and permanent funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund or enacting new wilderness protections on the Colorado Plateau.

Grants analysis

The Packard Foundation and its intermediary, RLF, made a total of 622 grants and sub-grants to 202 grantees as part of the Western Conservation subprogram for a total investment of \$122.3 million. RLF made about three-quarters of the total number of grants and sub-grants; in terms of grantmaking dollars, it managed 43% of the portfolio.

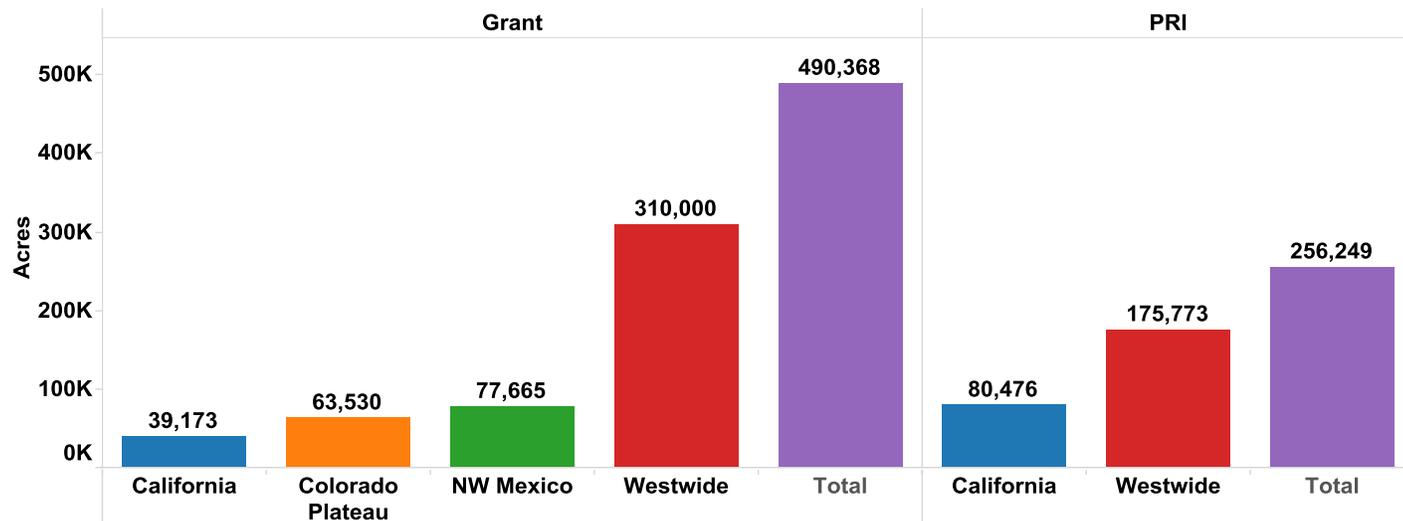
Acres under better management

Across Western North America, the Packard Foundation invested tens of millions of dollars in direct protections for land and water, including funding land and conservation easement purchases. In addition to these private lands transactions, the Foundation also supported a number of policy-related efforts that led to public lands being managed in a more sustainable manner. To be included in our analysis, the Foundation needed to be at least partly responsible for the win, but the level of support varied dramatically. With private lands transactions, the Foundation’s share ranged from 100% to less than 1%, with an average of 31%.

Figure 3 summarizes the private lands that are under better management, but we have excluded the Montana Legacy Project and Great Western Checkerboard Project. The administrative protections are summarized in Figure 4, which excludes the 78 million acres that were included in solar energy zones designated by the U.S. government.² Lands under better management due to administrative changes total more than 3 million acres. Major wins included:

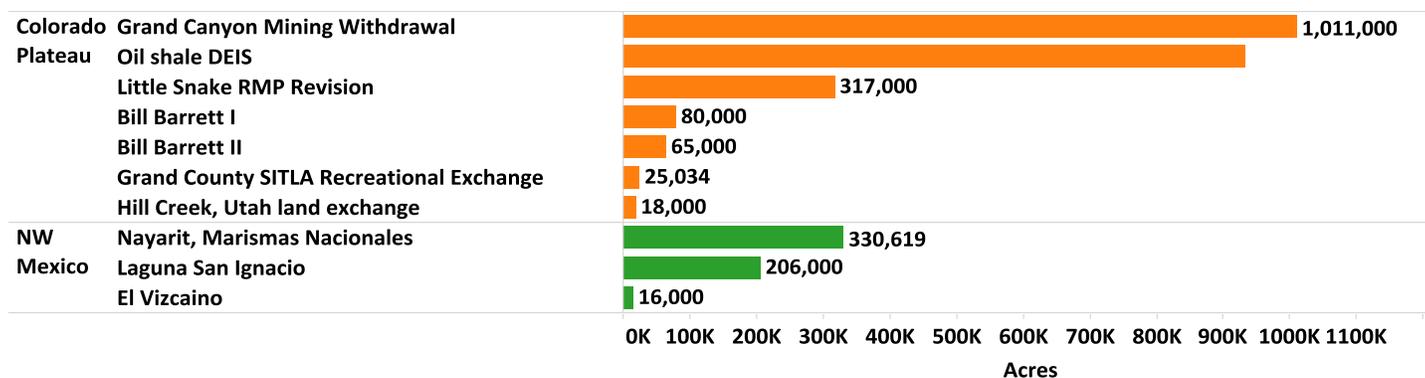
- 1) The BLM’s oil shale environmental impact statement, governing development of this carbon-intensive fossil fuel.
- 2) The Grand Canyon uranium mining withdrawal that restricted new claims and development around the park.
- 3) More than 500,000 acres and 440 miles of coastline protected in federal administrative actions in Northwest Mexico.

Figure 3: Private lands under better management by source and region



² This win was excluded because of the Packard Foundation’s relatively small contribution to the outcome and because the huge number of acres involved didn’t receive the same level of protections enjoyed by other lands in the database.

Figure 4: 3 million acres under better management due to administrative protections



Target outcomes

The framework for CEA’s evaluation is our target dashboard, which organizes the subprogram into four regions (California Colorado Plateau, Northwest Mexico, and Westwide) and 21 grantmaking clusters, which in some instances revolve around particular places or watersheds, but which also cover crosscutting themes, such as conservation funding.

Out of 56 total targets, 24 were achieved by the end of 2014, for an overall success rate of 43%. Six targets from the Colorado Plateau were abandoned or considered to have failed prior to 2014. We have classified the remaining 26 targets as “in progress.” In some cases, success may not be far away, and in a few instances, some limited grantmaking continues.

While the 24 targets rated as successes are the clearest victories for the subprogram, at least some conservation gains were achieved in pursuing many of the other targets, even if the ultimate goal was not attained. The 24 successful targets were spread throughout the geographic priority regions and included relatively safe bets that paid off, such as private land protections in the Colorado Plateau and Sierra Nevada, and some unlikely wins, such as progress on management of the Colorado River. There were also cases in which progress was slower than expected, such as efforts to solidify federal conservation funding and secure new protections in the Dolores River Basin.

Below we summarize the goals and outcomes in each of the 21 grantmaking clusters.

California

Northern Sierra Partnership (NSP)

Goal: Priority landscapes in the Northern Sierra Nevada are preserved.

Summary: NSP has made significant progress toward its goal of raising \$340 million to protect 180,000 acres and has already completed numerous important transactions. As of July 2014, NSP had protected some 40,000 acres of high-priority habitat. But the collaborative’s shared fundraising model created tensions, took time for the partnership to work out, and may not be the best model for similar endeavors.

Southern Sierra Partnership (SSP)

Goal: Priority landscapes in the Southern Sierra Nevada are preserved.

Summary: While NSP has been able to build on the Packard investment and attract significant funding, SSP has had a much tougher time, largely due to the region’s limited fundraising potential. However, SSP still achieved land protection and policy advances despite the difficult funding environment. From 2009 through July 2014, SSP partners protected almost 26,000 acres, and its members contributed to the protection of the 240,000-acre Tejon Ranch.

Tejon Ranch

Goal: An important biological corridor is protected.

Summary: A 2008 deal between the Tejon Ranch Company and five environmental groups permanently protected 90% of the property through conservation easements and created the Tejon Ranch Conservancy to steward those easements, in exchange for allowing development to proceed on the remainder. Although some Western Conservation funds were used to assist the Tejon Ranch Conservancy and Audubon California, the groundwork for protecting the area had been laid before the creation of the subprogram.

Sierra Nevada National Forests

Goal: National forests are managed according to best conservation science.

Summary: The Packard Foundation continued its long-term commitment to conserving the Sierra Nevada by supporting the engagement of a strategic coalition of NGOs in the national forest planning process that will impact management of about 11 million acres. Although none of the three early-adopter forests has completed their plans yet, the conservation coalition's scientific work has directly informed the process, as well as existing management documents, and helped move the agency toward a more sustainable approach.

San Joaquin River

Goal: The San Joaquin River ecosystem is healthy.

Summary: The Foundation sought to ensure that the restoration plan that emerged from nearly two decades of litigation was both conservation-oriented and sufficiently funded. Although opponents have repeatedly tried to scuttle the program, grantees have made significant progress and annual funding for the project has been close to the target of \$50 million. Restoration flows began in 2009, salmon were reintroduced, and many observers believe the ecosystem is improving.

Bay Delta

Goal: The Delta ecosystem is protected and provides a reliable water supply.

Summary Packard Foundation funding sought to take advantage of the emerging policy discussions over management of the Bay Delta to advance conservation objectives by supporting NGOs working through a variety of venues. Grants also supported underlying scientific research. But progress has been slow in resolving the conflict, and conservative House members have used California's record drought to undue conservation protections, causing parties to revert to their entrenched positions of conflict and making the challenge even greater.

Water Initiative/Efficiency

Goals: 1) Water initiative implemented by 2020; 2) Water use is reduced, thus benefiting freshwater ecosystems.

Summary: California passed major water reforms during the course of the subprogram, including an efficiency measure and new regulations for managing groundwater. The Packard Foundation and other funders supported creation of a new entity, the California Water Foundation. This RLF initiative supports innovative water projects and policies, and brings together experts, stakeholders, and the public to work on solutions.

Smart growth

Goal: Urban and suburban development preserves open space and reduces pollution.

Summary: The state's groundbreaking efforts to tackle climate change include state land-use laws that are meant to encourage smart growth by making urban areas more compact. The Sustainable Community Strategies that have emerged from this process have generally exceeded expectations. These plans favor transit, active transportation, and urban infill rather than auto-dependent suburban sprawl. Besides reducing emissions and protecting important habitat by limiting the footprint of development, these strategies will also improve public health and save the state's residents money by reducing energy, water, and transportation costs.

Renewable Energy

Goal: Renewable energy development in the desert increases and enhances land protection.

Summary: With pressure mounting to develop the Southeastern California desert for large-scale solar farms, the Packard Foundation and other funders supported a collaborative effort to find common ground in the siting of renewables. The Foundation made a relatively small investment, but it was able to help RLF leverage other funds to support a working group, which developed a set of standards for balancing renewable energy and ecosystem conservation. The group's work played a pivotal role in the federal government's framework for developing solar power on Bureau of Land Management property, and the group's recommendations helped shape state plans for accelerating green energy deployment.

Colorado Plateau

Private lands

Goal: Important private lands and associated waterways are protected.

Summary: The Packard Foundation sought to directly protect some of the most ecologically valuable and vulnerable private parcels, primarily through conservation easements that will permanently prevent harmful development and activities. The bulk of the activity was in Colorado, where an established state funding source, Great Outdoors Colorado, and a well-developed land trust community made finding matching funds much easier than in other states. The Foundation helped protect 63,530 acres of biologically significant land on the Colorado Plateau.

Colorado River

Goal: The Colorado River is managed and used more sustainably.

Summary: Grantees achieved at least partial wins in three of their four initial campaigns they pursued. Restoration flows in the Colorado River Delta have shown early signs of success and the federal government's Basin Study eschewed costly new infrastructure projects in favor of stronger conservation measures. A proposed pipeline from Wyoming's Flaming Gorge Reservoir to Colorado's Front Range was turned back and federal funding for Colorado River management increased.

Native American lands

Goal: Tribes are better able to steward their ancestral lands and resources.

Summary: Funding for a series of gatherings among tribal elders led to the creation of the Colorado Plateau Foundation. The subprogram also supported Native Americans' efforts to protect public lands that were once the tribes' homes and are still used for ceremonies, hunting, and collecting plants. It remains to be seen if tribal advocacy will play a major role in securing new protections in Utah, but in general, the subprogram has increased the capacity of tribal NGOs and conservation advocates on the Colorado Plateau.

Utah wilderness

Goal: Federal wilderness designation.

Summary: Utah is home to some of the lower 48's largest remaining unprotected wilderness areas. Although no new legislation has been introduced, by early 2015, Utah appeared closer to resolving the wilderness issue than at any time in recent memory. Some grantmaking will continue in 2015 with hopes of sealing a final deal, but any legislation must still move through a Congress with many members hostile to wilderness designations.³

Yampa and White Rivers

Goal: The Yampa and White rivers are permanently protected; public lands in both watersheds are protected.

Summary: Grantees scored a win when the BLM reversed itself and decided to protect 77,000 acres of wilderness in Northwest Colorado's Vermillion Basin, but the process for amending the Resource Management Plan in the White River

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didn't offer the same opportunities for conservation gains. In the headwaters of both rivers, Trout Unlimited has made significant progress with projects to restore habitat for native fish such as the Colorado River cutthroat trout. Downstream, grantees have made some inroads with the agricultural community and remain engaged in a federal recovery effort for endangered warm-water fish that remain at risk, especially from non-native predators. Proposals to pump back the Yampa River to Colorado's Front Range cities and use the White River for oil shale and other energy projects are quiet for now.

Dolores River

Goal: The Dolores River and its watershed are protected.

Summary: Despite the efforts of three major funders, success remained elusive in three key areas: 1) protecting wilderness-quality BLM lands in the Lower Dolores River Basin; 2) generating environmental flows for the oversubscribed river with a market-based water transaction; and 3) reforming the management of McPhee Dam to improve the downstream aquatic ecosystem. For the funders and NGOs, a lack of legal leverage and some strategic miscalculations hindered progress, but it seems that residents in the Dolores River watershed aren't necessarily ready for the three changes described above.

Uranium mining

Goal: Reduced pollution and land degradation from unfettered uranium mining on the Colorado Plateau.

Summary: The Colorado Plateau is home to one of the greatest concentrations of uranium ore on the planet, and the boom in mining during the Cold War has left a toxic legacy in the region. The Foundation and its grantees succeeded in a key target: the federal government enacted a moratorium on new mining claims around the Grand Canyon and the Colorado River. But efforts failed to change the status of uranium under federal mining law and to apply CERCLA (the "Superfund" law) to former uranium mines.

Northwest Mexico

Goal: Conservation of important coastal ecosystems.

Summary: In response to requests from Mexican and international conservation organizations and leaders for increased and ongoing conservation funding in the region, the Packard, Marisla, and Sandler foundations developed a multi-year regional conservation initiative in Northwest Mexico. The resulting program focused on land protection, supported by complementary strategies to enhance organizational capacity, strengthen conservation policies, increase strategic legal action, develop more effective and sophisticated communications, and advance sound conservation science. The program worked with numerous conservation organizations in the region to support various conservation initiatives that led to federal natural protected area designations, better awareness and protection of mangroves, and increased capacity among key grantees. RLF staff played a critical intermediary role, translating and communicating between grantees and funders while using in-country advisors to guide the effort.

Westwide

Land and Water Conservation Fund

Goal: Federal funding for conservation increases.

Summary: The LWCF is a major source of federal support for conservation in the American West and around the nation, but over the past few decades Congress has repeatedly failed to fully fund the program at its \$900 million annual allocation. To solidify LWCF funding, the Packard Foundation and other funders supported education and advocacy by a broad-based, bipartisan coalition.⁴ Although full funding and permanent reauthorization of LWCF has not been achieved, the coalition has turned back attempts by the House of Representatives to zero-out the fund and has achieved some funding increases in recent years. Despite these setbacks, there is some optimism that the LWCF will continue to maintain support in Congress and eventually have its funding secured.

⁴ No Packard Foundation funds were used to support lobbying.

Tax Incentives

Goal: The tax code incentivizes conservation.

Summary: The Foundation made a relatively modest investment in trying to promote conservation in the federal tax code through education and advocacy.⁵ Congress had not approved a permanent enhanced tax deduction for farm and ranchland conservation easements by the end of 2014, but has repeatedly approved short-term extensions and there is a reasonable chance it will act in the coming session to approve a permanent or longer term extension. As with the LWCF campaign, supporting new constituencies and conservative voices for conservation were key parts of the strategy.

Land Trusts

Goal: Land trusts are more effective.

Summary: More than 1,700 U.S. land trusts have already protected some 37 million acres—an area the size of Illinois—but these nonprofits face many challenges in the 21st century, ranging from increased scrutiny by policymakers to mounting threats from climate change. With relatively modest but strategic investments, the subprogram helped the land trust community make significant strides by increasing accreditation and building leadership capacity. Foundation funding also helped start the first-ever captive insurance program to defend conservation easements against legal challenges.

Lessons learned

Before delving into the specific lessons and issues, we offer some overarching thoughts. When CEA began serving as evaluator in 2010, the subprogram had already been scoped, initiated, and contracted. An initiative originally designed to invest about \$200 million over five years saw its annual budget halved after just one year of grantmaking and the subprogram was extended to six years. One obvious lesson is that it is poor grantmaking tradecraft to design a program for one annual budget and then implement at half that level. The Foundation did a good job of adapting to the budget cuts by shrinking the program geographically and thematically, but doing so invariably involves writing off some sunk costs. By dashing hopes it had raised, the budget reductions also may have hurt the Foundation's image in the field of Western conservation. The budget reduction, combined with the time-limited nature of the subprogram, led some interviewees to wonder about the Foundation's commitment to Western conservation issues.

Another general lesson emerging from the subprogram is that external events and forces can demolish initial plans and expectations. From the subprogram's inception in 2008 to its close in 2014, the field of Western Conservation and the wider world were shaken by changes that were hard if not impossible to predict. In addition to those external shocks, the subprogram also had to contend with the loss of its key architect and the budget cuts. It is an interesting counter-factual exercise to imagine how the subprogram would have played out absent these exogenous and endogenous forces. Minus the economic crisis, BP oil spill, and congressional challenges, would a \$200 million initiative have broken the logjam on Utah wilderness or significantly boosted federal conservation funding? Would different presidential leadership have provided more opportunity or more challenges? We'll never know the answers, but the lesson is that any grantmaking initiative, even one limited to six years, is bound to run into major real-world changes that cannot be predicted. Accordingly, flexibility and adaptive management are essential, but that requires Foundation staff to acquire, analyze, and act on real-time intelligence.

Designing a time-limited approach

One of the defining features of the Western Conservation subprogram was its limited duration. A time-limited approach was a prerequisite for starting the subprogram, so whether it was the right approach is something of a moot point. But a recurrent theme in our interviews was that five or six years is just not enough time to make major progress on many of the issues facing the West. Incremental gains were possible; transformational change was not. Especially with water-related issues, the world seems to move at a glacial pace. That said, the time-limited nature of the subprogram injected a greater sense of urgency into the grantmaking.

⁵ No Packard Foundation funds were used to support lobbying.

If a subprogram will only last for a limited time, how should it be designed? Western Conservation's experience offers some insights and lessons:

- 1) **Start planning for the exit on Day One.** At its inception, a five- or six-year grantmaking subprogram may seem like an eternity, but program officers stressed that the time flies by. From the outset, it is important to emphasize to grantees that the funder will be exiting the space in order to set expectations and help NGOs plan for the future. The Foundation did a good job of communicating its intentions, though some grantees harbored hopes the subprogram would continue.
- 2) **Filter strategies by time needed to make progress.** The time-limited nature of the subprogram was a crucial screen in deciding what issues and strategies to pursue. Time and again, program officers had to turn down compelling opportunities because the timescale for achieving success extended beyond the subprogram's lifespan.
- 3) **Emphasize attracting new funders.** If a foundation's engagement in a region or issue will only last for a limited duration, it behooves the funder to devote energy to finding other donors who can continue and amplify the work.
- 4) **Consider increasing general support and capacity building grants toward end of program.** On the Colorado Plateau and in the Northern Sierra Nevada, the Foundation increased its general support grants to key grantees as the subprogram drew to a close, which ensures continued engagement in the U.S. Forest Service planning process in California and provides more flexibility and can facilitate a softer landing in the Colorado Plateau.

Balanced portfolio approach: focus versus breadth

The subprogram's balanced portfolio approach was one of its strengths. By placing a variety of bets on a host of places and issues, the Foundation was at least able to harvest the lower-hanging fruit and make progress where opportunities were ripe. At the same time, it was worth gambling on some longshots with high risks of failure but high potential rewards. Even if some of these riskier bets didn't pay off by the time the subprogram ended, in many cases they have paved the way for other funders to build on progress and avoid dead-ends. Failures can be instructive by teaching the field what *doesn't* work.

Venture-style philanthropy will invariably place bets on losers as it invests across a spectrum of risk and seeks winners that deliver high rates of return. Importantly, the Foundation did abandon a few targets, such as two of the three related to uranium mining on the Colorado Plateau, after it became clear success was unreachable by the end of 2014. This move freed up resources to pursue more promising opportunities. Knowing when to give up on something is just as important as figuring out how to engage in the first place. A challenge in evaluating the Western Conservation subprogram's balanced-portfolio approach is that one of its biggest bets—protecting Utah wilderness—is still up in the air and will continue to receive some Foundation support after 2014.

As evaluators, CEA had a positive view of the subprogram's balanced portfolio approach, but the geographic and issue diversity was a challenge for both managing and evaluating the subprogram: there were 21 grantmaking clusters and 56 targets. Such a multifaceted system makes adaptive management more difficult because so much learning is needed just to keep up with new developments streaming in from around the West. The subprogram's complexity was one of the motivations for creating the CEA dashboard, and we would recommend using such tools to track progress in similar grantmaking subprograms.

It wasn't ideal to design the Western Conservation subprogram to invest \$40 million per year and then halve the annual grantmaking after just one year. Had the subprogram been designed for the actual budget, the Foundation probably would not have chosen to work in all three geographic regions, as well as pursue the Westwide initiatives. But given that important targets were achieved in California, Northwest Mexico, the Colorado Plateau, and the Westwide initiatives, it looks like the Foundation made the right decision to remain engaged in all of the regions and Westwide work after the cutbacks. Had one or more of the regions produced no real wins or progress, hindsight would offer a different view of the decision to continue investing in all of the regions. Other factors also militated against dropping one of the regions after the cutback, including the sunk costs and the potential damage to the Foundation's reputation.

Outsourcing has drawbacks, but team excelled

The subprogram relied on an unconventional staffing model, including a senior advisor, a temporary fellow, and a sub-contracted nonprofit intermediary, RLF. Although harder to depict in an organizational chart, this arrangement appeared to work well. Even on matters that demanded extensive teamwork with many moving parts, such as managing the private lands transactions on the Colorado Plateau, distance and dispersed resources weren't insurmountable obstacles. By engaging RLF, the Foundation may have ceded some control over the grantmaking to an intermediary, but RLF provided expertise and capacity that the Foundation would have had difficulty creating in-house for a time-limited subprogram.

One drawback of this outsourced model is the potential for the Foundation itself to be less connected to work, both in reality and in the eyes of the field. Because the Packard Foundation was using RLF as an intermediary in California and Northwest Mexico, grantees and others may not fully appreciate that the Foundation was supporting their efforts. Feedback about RLF's staff and professionalism was overwhelmingly positive, but some grantees and other stakeholders are unclear about the linkages between RLF and the Packard Foundation.

Monitoring, evaluation, and learning should start early in subprogram

From the evaluator's perspective, it was difficult to assess the subprogram's evolution because we arrived on the scene long after the biggest changes had occurred. Our target dashboard is based on the subprogram as restructured by the budget cuts, but in conversations with both program officers and grantees, it was sometimes difficult to answer questions about whether the subprogram had lived up to expectations because those expectations had changed so dramatically when the budget was slashed. Real-time intelligence is especially important for a subprogram that is placing many bets across a broad landscape riven by tectonic shifts. An evaluation partner can help meet this need by helping collect data from grantees, researchers, and other sources, but that requires a more intensive engagement.

Through EcoWest.org, we gathered information about the status of higher-level trends through such metrics as the status of endangered species, acres in various classes of protection, the health of rivers, and wildfire activity. This macro-level information is needed to evaluate progress toward the subprogram's overall goal, but it had little to no bearing on the day-to-day decisions of program staff. Instead, it was probably most useful at a higher level in identifying ecosystem-wide drivers and threats that the subprogram was grappling with.

Finding common ground requires leverage

The Foundation supported some litigation and assertive advocacy, but many of the strategies hinged on more collaborative, multi-stakeholder approaches and processes. The Foundation can point to a number of concrete victories as a result of this approach. But one of our key findings is that such a collaborative strategy is only likely to bear fruit if there is pressure, such as lawsuits or restrictions on economic development, that is compelling the other side to come to the table. Without this leverage, there may be little incentive to negotiate or move from positions. For a limited-duration subprogram, there may not be enough time to build leverage by funding litigation or other advocacy. For grantmaking that will only last a few years, the enabling conditions must already be set, and the warring factions probably need to have been fighting long enough that they're willing to try another way.

Collaborative conservation: weighing costs and benefits

In addition to seeking common ground with traditional foes, such as ranchers, developers, and energy developers, the subprogram's grantees collaborated among themselves in a number of partnerships. In some cases, such as the Northern Sierra Partnership, collaboration was a fundraising vehicle and the partnership was meant to endure. In other instances, such as the California Desert and Renewable Energy Working Group, participants came together to solve a specific problem and then disbanded once the effort was completed.

The key question in evaluating these partnerships is their synergistic value: is the whole greater than the sum of the parts, and are the costs of collaborating worth it? By banding together, participants can potentially raise more money than they would acting alone. They can also share knowledge, increase coordination, enhance networking, and complement one another's skills. Big, national NGOs, for example, may need local land trusts and conservation groups to provide reality checks and build support in the community. But an effective collaboration demands a commitment from its individual members and their organizations. There are also opportunity costs: time and resources devoted to the collaboration might be redirected

toward higher value opportunities elsewhere. Sharing donors and conducting joint fundraising can create tensions. And the will of the group may come into conflict with a participant's interests.

In general, we found these efforts to be worthwhile and effective, largely because they helped increase communication, coordination, peer review, and landscape-level thinking. They also allowed NGOs to present more expansive, ecosystem-based plans to other funders and public agencies, increasing their attractiveness and conservation potential. At the same time, many interviewees stressed that these collaborations took more time and effort than they expected.

Maximizing the value of funder partnerships

Collaborations with other funders were also common in the subprogram. In some cases, the Packard Foundation was in the lead; elsewhere, other funders were the driving forces and biggest funders. The funding partnerships included pooled grantmaking, shared strategy setting, and the use of intermediaries. Overall, these efforts seemed productive and avoided unnecessary duplication, but at times, a multitude of foundations could create tensions for grantees who were trying to navigate donors' competing priorities. One way to mitigate these problems is to have an intermediary manage grants for a group of foundations. For Northwest Mexico, RLF played this role by serving as a single point of contact for grantees who were receiving support from a group of foundations. For the Colorado Plateau, New Venture Fund served this function by administering collaborative funding from the Packard and other foundations to support clean energy work on tribal lands.

As discussed above, attracting new funders to the West and increasing investments by existing funders were not explicit goals of the subprogram. Similarly, there was not a concerted campaign to engage wealthy individuals who might start to give or increase their giving. But given the limited duration of the subprogram, investing more resources in the development capacity of key NGOs would have been money well spent.

Innovative grantmaking: risk vs. reward

The Foundation and its grantees pursued some innovative approaches and tried to blaze new trails that other philanthropists may follow. Some of these efforts revolved around adaptation to climate change, such as the Southern Sierra Partnership's award-winning framework to enhance ecosystem resilience. On the Colorado Plateau, the Foundation supported the first-ever indigenous-led community foundation in the region to support conservation on tribal lands. Grants also supported boot camps and executive training for land trust leaders across the West, as well as a captive insurance program meant to support defense of conservation easements. The willingness to experiment and take chances on new approaches has, ironically, elevated the Foundation's leadership in a region from which it is stepping back.

One of the Foundation's original goals was to broaden the constituency for conservation beyond the usual suspects. Cultural chasms remain between environmental NGOs and other stakeholders. A half-dozen years of grantmaking, regardless of the budget, isn't enough to bridge deep gaps that involve core values and lifestyle choices. But the Foundation did help push the environmental movement to be broader and more powerful. Many NGOs and foundations are continuing to pursue this strategy, which appears to be gaining some traction, but some opponents remain intent on driving wedges between the various stakeholders.

Pulling back from a region sends a message

A time-limited subprogram is almost surely better than no subprogram at all, but the Foundation and other funders should remember that coming into a region and then pulling back or out entirely can create a perception that the philanthropy has lost interest in the problems or confidence in the ability of NGOs to solve them. In Western Conservation, this issue was compounded by the fact that some other funders were also withdrawing from the region. The Foundation did a good job of communicating to grantees about the time-limited nature of the subprogram, so NGOs shouldn't have been surprised when the funding dried up. As external evaluators, we did not have the answers, but interviewees sometimes asked us about the Packard Foundation's future plans for the region and wondered why it was exiting, given its strong history of funding in the West. One lesson is that funders should think through the implications and optics of relatively short-term subprogram durations and how start-and-stop funding may create issues for grantees.

Looking ahead

It was already a stretch to think a five- or six-year engagement could create large-scale transformational change in a complex, dynamic region where the economic interests are entrenched, where the environmental problems have been decades to centuries in the making, and where most of the legal and institutional structures for governing land, water, and other natural resources were established in the 19th century. Once the subprogram's budget was halved, the odds grew even slimmer.

No philanthropist or foundation, no matter how wealthy, can “fix” Western water or “save” even one of the West's many ecoregions. These are generational efforts that the Foundation can contribute to by leveraging its limited resources. But if new foundations do not enter the space or existing funders do not step up their grantmaking, it is hard to see how we can progress on many of these issues since philanthropy is the main funding source for so many of the region's NGOs and environmental advocates. If there was a leitmotif to the scores of interviews we conducted, it was a simultaneous deep gratitude to the Foundation for investing its resources in a region facing a frightening future, but also a profound disappointment that so few other funders are doing the same.