

Aligning conservation and community development in 'Sentinel Landscapes'

 greenbiz.com/article/aligning-conservation-and-community-development-sentinel-landscapes

By Kendra J. Briechle

October 6, 2020



Many communities with abundant land and natural resources function as gateways to parks, forests and waterways — and even military installations. Holistic community planning and engagement concerning these economic and community assets can increase the jobs, outdoor recreation, business opportunities and important cultural connections they provide. But striking the balance between nature and commerce can be difficult, and imbalance can lead to negative outcomes.

In over half a dozen regions across the United States, a coalition of federal agencies, state and local governments and nonprofit organizations are working in collaboration with private landowners to advance sustainable land management practices around military installations and ranges. These partnerships, or "Sentinel Landscapes," connect private landowners with voluntary assistance programs that jointly support the interests of

defense, conservation and agriculture. Although these collaborations are often grounded in transaction-oriented project work, there is great potential for the economic development of surrounding communities to complement — and not counteract — the conservation and compatible land-use goals of Sentinel Landscape Partnerships.

Where alignment between community objectives and conservation occurs, it can unlock economic benefits for the community, its businesses and industry, and conservation, restoration and stewardship efforts alike. It can garner increased creativity, capacity and financial support for the projects and initiatives that matter most. Coupling land conservation and compatible use could lead to layered and blended capital stacks that strengthen an easement or fee-simple transaction. When the objective is restoration or stewardship, financial incentives or business opportunities could deliver practices that reinforce broader landscape-scale objectives.

Breweries that serve as stewards of our lands and waters provide a great example of partnerships that serve business and community.

In areas surrounding military installations, this dynamic is even more explicit. These bases are often a primary economic driver for the region, if not the state. The communities nearest to bases often fuel their growth by on-base operations. Installations in turn rely on the community to sustain their workforce and operations. Yet, to maintain the military mission, the installation must remove or avoid potential conflicts with the community and comply with regulatory restrictions concerning the use of land and natural resources and the conservation of critical habitat.

The following examples are meant to hint at the extent of potential engagement models that bridge the interests of community economic development and conservation, especially where those models have increased the financial support for the partnerships and efforts.

Zion Park Forever field guide

In late 2016, Mark Preiss left the wonders of Glacier National Park Conservancy and headed south to serve as the director of the Zion National Park Foundation, the development arm of the Zion Natural History Association. Tucked in his bags was a great tool: the Glacier Conservancy Field Guide.

In absence of federal funding, the field guide garners support from entrepreneurs — such as local businesses that contribute through voluntary surcharges that they donate to the park, the National Park Foundation, foundations, private donations, and local and national sources. In addition, front-line staff ambassadors in the Park store raised \$150,000 last year, with funds directed to the field guide priorities. The guide is united with an annual

impact report, which delivers public transparency that is critical for ongoing support and investments in the park — to address problems, develop successful results, and close the loop on project needs.

During his tenure with the Glacier Conservancy, Mark and his staff and partners developed criteria, a vetting process and an internal application designed to lever partners, money and the mission of the park. The strategic design process helped ensure the separation of park operations and management from the funding opportunities of private philanthropy. This encouraged a "margin of excellence" beyond the park's ability to navigate funding options. The Conservancy provided the bridge between the park, the public and private outside supporters.

Project selection is based on the superintendent's priorities of three strategic pillars: education; visitor experience; and protection forever. These pillars are expected to provide the foundation for funding and for an inclusive approach that supports sharing outcomes and success stories to provide continuous learning that challenges people to serve as education and engagement tools.

Together with Zion National Park's superintendent Jeff Bradybaugh, Mark and his colleagues focus on the park's values, resources and criteria for funding, such as whether a project meets environmental compliance, readiness to take on a project, the ability for a division to engage and the internal vetting process, including ties to foundation documents. All this strengthens credibility and collaboration in the community and the park.

Emerging successes in Zion include the ongoing restoration of the Emerald Pools Trail, a path that has been closed for a decade. The National Park Foundation secured a Centennial Grant for half of the funding needed to move forward, along with the Eccles Foundation, the National Park Service and other partners moving dirt this spring. Pandemic impacts aside, Zion may have the trail open this season for a total \$900,000 package. Given that the trails date from the 1930s, partnership is critical to success.

Another important but earthy example comes from a funder who offered to support a "plain" project. The funder paid for the construction of the Scout's Lookout Comfort Landing, allowing sanitary conditions at a high mountain area near Angel's Landing.

Now, the Zion National Park Forever Project and park staff conduct an annual review each fall of prospective projects along with an analysis of projects and stories. Their efforts have moved from a "here's what we're going to do" approach to "here's what happened," encouraging park leaders to prioritize partnerships that matter to multiple constituencies including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Parks Conservation Association, universities and other partners.

While many field guides in use are crafted by managers of the crown jewels of the National Parks, Mark notes that the mechanisms can be scaled for a range of communities with similar impact. Applying grassroots support and identifying community needs helps other communities find tools, easements, trails and other methods to protect the historical and natural resource integrity forever.



Chesapeake Bay, Maryland

Devils Backbone and a brewery partnership

Tucked up at the headwaters of the Chesapeake Bay are a number of breweries along what is called the Brew Ridge Trail. Attracted by the clean water needed to brew great beer, brewers have welcomed visitors seeking places to enjoy the recreational attractions.

Water is a key component of the outdoor recreation offerings as well as a vital brewery input. In general, breweries use seven gallons of water to produce one gallon of beer. At less efficient breweries, the ratio can go as high as 10 to one. As in other industries and other communities, partnerships are key to working better together. Breweries that serve as stewards of our lands and waters provide a great example of partnerships that serve business and community.

Elizabeth Tual, corporate social responsibility manager for Devils Backbone Brewing Company, is charged with upholding the company's approach for integrating good business practices with stewardship. Tual joined the business in 2016, with the introduction of a strategic plan, and acquisition and partnership by Anheuser Busch. Since then, Devils Backbone has sought balance between growing a successful brewpub and ensuring that

sustainability and stewardship stand together as core business values.

Devils Backbone has a nine-year-old partnership with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) and a partnership to support conservation within the Appalachian Trail Conservancy's (ATC's) landscape since 2017. Its interest in water aligns with CBF's efforts to keep the bay's water as clear and clean as possible to preserve the watershed. And the ATC's national hiking trail has a direct connection to Nelson County, home to Devils Backbone's flagship location. A campground in town allows thru-hikers support on their way through the winding 2,200 trail miles along the Appalachian ridge.

Volunteers from Devils Backbone experience conservation firsthand by participating in staff days devoted to oyster clean-ups on the Bay or local field work along the Appalachian Trail and its surrounds. The company also provides beer sponsorship for events.

The community rallied toward a focus on asking businesses who intended to market their closeness to the monument to also pay for conservation. This furthered a sense of community ownership ...

Each year, the brewery reports on how much it donates to each organization in its annual Impact Report. For the past two years, Devils Backbone has donated a total of \$127,000 to CBF and over \$76,000 to the ATC, including donations from the sales of Striped Bass and Trail Angel and other fundraising events. Recently the company retired both beers but remains committed to the partnerships.

The company's impact reports provide more information and resources including its most recent commitment to improve the results for measuring the beer-to-water ratio. Devils Backbone intends to reduce the ratio by 20 percent by 2020's end.

The company also plans to promote wilderness through its Chief Hiking Officer (CHO) program, launched in June as a partnership with the ATC. Next year, the company will sponsor a lucky hiker to complete the Appalachian Trail thru-hike. The CHO will be an ambassador of Leave No Trace principles and responsible hiking as he or she traverses the trail while Devils Backbone elevates their stories and experiences.



Organ Mountains, New Mexico

Creating a green chamber of commerce — blending conservation and commerce in New Mexico

In 2010, the arrival of an Olive Garden Restaurant in Las Cruces jarred Carrie Hamblen. Many in her community shared their excitement about the restaurant — Las Cruces had become a "real city." Yet Carrie knew that the city of nearly 100,000 had three successful Italian restaurants already.

Instead of thinking success was rooted in chain stores, she determined to elevate locally grown business. Thus came the birth of the Las Cruces Green Chamber of Commerce, an independent nonprofit that has woven together a focus on people, planet and profit, based on the "Triple Bottom Line — that investing in people; protecting our air, land and water; and promoting profit through sustainable business practices will build a thriving community for today and for generations to come."

The backdrop of the green chamber was a 10-year movement to support the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks as a federally designated National Monument. The OMDP National Monument efforts moved forward with an economic impact study under the Obama administration and non-partisan backing from community leaders who saw economic opportunity in designation. The result was the realization that businesses' investment in conservation could be mutually rewarding, and a recognition that the community was ready to "take over" the monument by committing to make it theirs.

For example, local business Beck's Coffee created a coffee blend to support "our

monument." Ideas blossomed to create the initial structure of the Green Chamber of Commerce — by creating a tool kit on cross-marketing and to thoughtfully steward the connections between protecting the monument and carefully engaging in commercial opportunities. The community rallied toward a focus on asking businesses who intended to market their closeness to the monument to also pay for conservation. This furthered a sense of community ownership for the nearly 500,000-acre desert landscape and creation of the Green Chamber in September 2010.

The Las Cruces Green Chamber of Commerce inspired other local Green Chambers to sprout in New Mexico, including Santa Fe and Silver City (not associated with the national Green Chamber of Commerce organization). However, this balance between conservation, commerce and community stewardship practices can be adopted in other locations. The challenge is that the melding of these elements must link to the place.

Carrie shared a few examples. Residents of the community surrounding the Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument were upset about the loss of traditional logging jobs and traditions. Carrie coached them to talk about these issues, and helped residents realize that the community had a crown jewel in their midst which they should capitalize on honestly, coupling natural resources with commercial opportunities and community benefits. In Butte, MT, John and Courtney McKee, the owners of Headframe Spirits, wanted to create spirits imbued in the area's history. They talked with employees to suss out local tales about the city and its historic mines, which lead to naming drinks such as the Orphan Girl Bourbon Cream Liqueur for Butte's mines. This cultivates the experiential nature of the place and provides beverages to enjoy in the saloon or to bring back home. Headframe is also a Certified B Corporation, committed to redefining success by using business as a force for good and considering stakeholder interests through social and environmental performance.

Such connections can be small or grow to larger commercial and community programs. Still, it's important to realize boundaries. Carrie noted that during a turn at the SHIFT Conference she spoke with tribal members from Bears Ears National Monument who had specific concerns about visitors coming to these traditional landscapes. Businesses and communities need to talk with one another, so they understand what's sacred space and steward it properly.

Carrie hopes that local businesses continue to be strong, resilient and creative. A second surge in the pandemic can wipe out these business and community efforts. Instead, Carrie urges communities and businesses to increase their social media presence, market themselves, and safely create new opportunities.

Community alignment to capture synergy and grow support

At the end of the day, the power of community alignment is that a more holistic approach to partnerships and initiatives can lead to mutually beneficial relationships — and increased financial support — for communities, their economies and their shared land and natural resource conservation priorities.

Finding creative ways to align work across sectors, whether gateway communities, military bases, municipal government, nonprofit organizations or the spectrum of public and private leaders increases capital resource conservation priorities and the potential impact of collaborative efforts.

This article was produced as part of CFN's Sentinel Landscapes Initiative. Support for this effort comes from the U.S. Department of Defense's Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Program and the United States Endowment for Forestry and Communities, Inc. (the "Endowment"). The Endowment is a not-for-profit corporation that works collaboratively with partners in the public and private sectors to advance systemic, transformative and sustainable change for the health and vitality of the nation's working forests and forest-reliant communities.

This story first appeared on:

[Conservation Finance Network](#)

More on this topic

- [Finance & Investing](#)
- [Conservation](#)

