



THE SALAZAR CENTER
for NORTH AMERICAN CONSERVATION

2025 INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM
ON CONSERVATION IMPACT

*Realizing a nature-positive future in North America:
No more business as usual*

“The secret of change is to focus all your energy not on fighting the old, but on building the new.”

– Socrates

The Salazar Center staff dedicate this report to our many friends and partners who have shaped the Symposia over the last seven years into the powerful confluence of people and ideas that it is today. We'd especially like to acknowledge our founders, former U.S Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar and Colorado State University Chancellor Tony Frank, whose vision for the Salazar Center sparked the creation of the Symposia and has guided us ever since.

We are deeply grateful to all the sponsors who helped make the 2025 Symposium a success. Their generosity and support made it possible to bring together North America's vibrant conservation community to learn, debate, and reimagine the future of our world. This year we give special thanks to the Doris Duke Foundation, our lead sponsor, and the RBC Foundation.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

- Letter from Executive Director Leslie Harroun 2
- About this report 4

Key themes and takeaways

- 2030: A waypoint, not an endpoint 6
- Transboundary connectivity: Mi casa es tu casa 8
- The land has rights, we have responsibilities
- Generations, not administrations 12
- Investing in nature: Pathways to equitable and sustainable economic development 15

Discussion

- Reimagining our systems to catalyze change for people and nature 18

References

21

Attendees gathered at the University of British Columbia's Anthropology Museum (left) and Beaty Biodiversity Museum (right) during the event.



DIRECTOR'S LETTER

The Salazar Center's 2025 Symposium centered on a collective question: how can North America meet the ambitious 2030 targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework within a political context that increasingly undermines environmental protection, democratic decision-making, and nation to nation cooperation?

We feared the response to this moment would be defensiveness and despair. Yet what we witnessed was something different: clear-eyed realism paired with determination, creativity, and resolve, alongside the recognition that we cannot plan for administrations alone; we must plan for generations.

A recurring insight throughout the Symposium was that conservation cannot succeed if it is confined to a narrow set of tools, institutions, or timelines. Achieving biodiversity goals by 2030 matters deeply, but the way we pursue those goals may matter even more. If our approaches reinforce extractive economic systems, marginalize communities, or treat nature solely as a commodity, then even apparent successes will prove fragile.

This tension surfaced repeatedly in our discussions around finance and valuation. Many participants acknowledged the pragmatic appeal of translating nature's value into economic terms that decision-makers understand. At the same time, Indigenous leaders reminded us that land, water, and life hold value far beyond markets—they are relatives, responsibilities, and sources of moral obligation. Rather than seeing these perspectives as incompatible, the Symposium challenged us to hold them together within an ethical space: one that recognizes both the value and limits of monetization while engaging the systems of power that shape policy and investment today.

Indigenous-led conservation offered some of the clearest examples of what this integration can look like in practice. From Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas to Project Finance for Permanence initiatives, we heard how stewardship grounded in reciprocity, cultural continuity, and community well-being can deliver enduring ecological outcomes—often at scales that conventional conservation has struggled to reach. These models do not treat hectares protected as the primary objective; they understand protection as a byproduct of caring for land, culture, and people together.

Another powerful theme was connectivity—ecological, cultural, and political. The biodiversity crisis does not respect borders, and neither can our solutions. North America is a mosaic of nations, subnational governments, and more than a thousand Indigenous Nations, all linked by shared watersheds, migratory routes, and histories. Speakers emphasized that landscape connectivity will only succeed if it is matched by cultural connectivity: humility, trust, and collaboration across worldviews. In an era when federal leadership is faltering, subnational and transboundary cooperation is not simply a fallback—it is a cornerstone of resilience and evolution.

What emerged from the Symposium was not a single prescription, but a recognition that progress will require multiple pathways operating simultaneously. Some will focus on defending existing protections. Others will build new financial mechanisms, policy

frameworks, or community-driven models. Still others will mobilize public will and redefine how society understands its relationship with nature. These approaches are not in conflict; they are interdependent. Like interlocking gears, each becomes more effective when aligned with the others.

This report is not intended as a definitive roadmap, but as a resource and a provocation—a synthesis that practitioners, policymakers, funders, and communities can draw from as they navigate their own contexts. If it succeeds, it will do more than document a moment; it will help seed the next phase of conservation leadership across the continent.

The 2025 Symposium reaffirmed why that mission matters now more than ever. In a time when forces beyond our control are reshaping the landscape, we retain agency over how we respond: whether we retreat into silos, or whether we use this moment to reimagine systems that are more just, resilient, and aligned with the living world.

The work ahead will not be easy. But neither is it optional. Future generations will not judge us by the political headwinds we faced, but by whether we had the courage to adapt, to listen, and to act with responsibility toward the lands and waters that sustain us all.

Leslie A. Harroun
Executive Director
Salazar Center for North American Conservation

(From top to bottom) Salazar Center Director Leslie Harroun; Center founders Ken Salazar and Tony Frank; and Katisha Paul of the Coastal Wolf Pack (Tsatsu Stalqayu), who led an Indigenous welcome and blessing for the Symposium.



ABOUT THIS REPORT

The sixth International Symposium on Conservation Impact facilitated many new experiences for the Salazar Center. It marked the first time we hosted the Symposium outside the United States. In our commitment to better align with our mission geography, Vancouver, B.C. offered an exceptional opportunity to convene participants from across North America in a beautiful setting where innovative conservation actions have been flourishing.

It also was the first time we incorporated field trips into our programming. We continually strive to create more opportunities for attendees to engage in novel experiences, build meaningful relationships, and deepen their understanding of nature. Additionally, we experimented with new ways to engage participants—including a Town Hall format—and adopted a more analytical approach to our breakout sessions.

As we started planning the sixth Symposium in the fall of 2024, we envisioned building on the conversation started at our 2023 Symposium about how we can collectively foster a resilient, nature positive future for North America. We imagined exploring two questions: What does impact mean in terms of achieving our biodiversity goals? And can we rethink our economic systems to better support those goals?

However, political shifts early in the year prompted our planning team to refocus the agenda. Recognizing that these changes could result in tectonic shifts in our ability to meet major biodiversity targets, our planning team created space in the program for all attendees and speakers to discuss these emerging concerns.

Symposium participants attended local field trips in Vancouver, including (from top to bottom) a canoe tour led by Takaya Tours, a walking tour of Stanley Park with Talaysay Tours, and a ferry tour with False Creek Friends Society.



Ultimately, the Symposium offered a wealth of insights and perspectives from across our diverse, continental community. From grassroots conservation practitioners and advocates to Indigenous experts and high-level policy leaders, we explored tactical approaches and innovations and showcased where progress continues despite political headwinds. Together, we laid a strategic foundation to help our community move forward in these turbulent and uncertain times.

In writing this synthesis report, we seek to provide a high-level overview of the core ideas and questions raised during the Symposium and to offer a foundational tool for exploring how to incorporate some of the ideas into our community of practice's work. We hope this report inspires deeper thinking about where our leverage points lie and what short- and long-term steps we can take as we collectively work to halt and reverse biodiversity loss in ways that benefit all peoples and the ecosystems upon which we all depend.

“I am feeling reinvigorated and vulnerable. There is a conservation community despite the current climate, and we are charting a path forward for all peoples, wildlife, water and climate. Community resilience is achievable.”

● 2025 Symposium attendee

THREE PERSPECTIVES ON BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION STRATEGY

During Symposium planning, we wondered how our conservation community was feeling about the political changes sweeping across the continent. To understand this, we partnered with Dr. J. Gooden, a conservationist working at the intersection of philanthropy, practice, and research. We developed a short set of questions to survey the Salazar Center's e-newsletter readers about their levels of optimism and concern regarding these political changes. We then used those responses as inputs for an interactive exercise with attendees at the Symposium and other Salazar convenings. The goal was to understand and interpret any common patterns among participants' perceptions regarding the inputs. Three clusters of perceptions emerged from this statistical analysis: **Pragmatic Conservationists**, **Strategic Reformers**, and **Public Mobilizers**. You can read the full analysis and detailed methodology [here](#).

PRAGMATIC CONSERVATIONISTS

landscape connectivity, communication, place-based work, collaboration, apolitical, local action, community networks



STRATEGIC REFORMERS

power building, subnational planning, system ownership

PUBLIC MOBILIZERS

civic mobilization, education, protest, protected area defense





KEY THEMES AND TAKEAWAYS

2030: A WAYPOINT, NOT AN ENDPOINT

In 2022, the global community united around the ambitious vision articulated in the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (Framework): to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030. With just five years remaining, the Salazar Center convened leading voices from across the conservation landscape to assess our collective progress. Central to the discussion was the Framework’s Target 3—the goal to equitably conserve 30 percent of terrestrial, inland water, coastal, and marine areas by 2030.

The 30x30 Biodiversity Framework target is bold by design.

As our speakers emphasized, the Framework’s ambition purposefully matches the urgency of the crisis. Given the rapid pace and scale of biodiversity decline, speakers reinforced the idea that our goals must be commensurate with the risks we face. Despite the short timeline and the magnitude of the challenge, North American countries have made meaningful strides. On-the-ground progress is evident: Canada, the United States, and Mexico have each advanced toward their respective targets. Importantly, some of the most significant gains have come not just from acres protected, but from the relationships and trust built across borders and communities.

Current federal dynamics across North America make achieving the 2030 targets uncertain.

Our community expressed deep concern that shifting political and institutional dynamics across North America threaten to derail momentum. Symposium participants pointed to declining financial resources and weakening institutional support for natural resource protection, conservation, and public lands as changes that will likely impede continued progress. Despite these challenges, speakers recognized that the urgency of the crisis will not recede despite



DIG DEEPER

If you’re looking for more Symposium content related to this theme, we recommend...

- [North America at a crossroads: Keynote address by Dr. Thomas Homer-Dixon](#)
- [Halfway to 2030: Is North America on track to meet the Global Biodiversity Framework targets?](#)
- [Are we getting it right?](#)

weakening political will and financing, and that we will face real impacts and irreversible losses if we don't meet that deadline. Although political will will always waver, the stakes for our future remain unambiguous.

While the 2030 deadline is critical, it is a waypoint, not an endpoint.

Clarity of purpose will be essential in the years ahead. Part of the intention of the 2030 targets was to reset our conservation ambitions and align them with the scale of the challenge. The Framework has successfully reshaped the conservation narrative, elevated equity as a core principle, catalyzed philanthropic engagement, and inspired new partnerships. Despite our current political maelstrom, our ability to remain steadfast to and creatively engage with our goals will be crucial to meeting them ... in 2030 and beyond. We must stay focused on what we stand for, not just on what we stand against.

To drive meaningful change, we must first understand our starting point.

Evaluating progress towards our collective biodiversity goals requires beginning with comprehensive baseline information. Data assessments and frameworks are powerful tools. They compel us to align around shared baselines, trends, and confidence levels. But assessments must be thoughtfully designed. Without clear purpose and structure, they risk conflating activity with impact.

Speakers underscored the need for robust, holistic, and inclusive frameworks that help us evaluate our effectiveness across ecological and physical systems, culture, and time. Speakers also noted that our current assessments and frameworks often still lack qualitative community-centered knowledge and values and often fail to include indicators that capture the underlying, root causes of biodiversity decline. When grounded in shared values and designed with attention and intention, assessments can help us navigate complexity, build consensus, and stay accountable to the future we're working toward.

“What is the long-term agenda that we all stand for? Will we be a speed bump in Trump’s agenda, or will his policies be a speed bump in ours?”

● Brian O’Donnell, Campaign for Nature



(Opposite page) Panelists discuss progress toward 30x30 goals; (above) Dr. Tad Homer-Dixon delivers his keynote address; panelists explore different frameworks for assessing impact.



KEY THEMES AND TAKEAWAYS

TRANSBOUNDARY CONNECTIVITY: MI CASA ES TU CASA

Continental connectivity—both in the ecological and the human sense—was a common thread that wove together many Symposium conversations. Over the course of three days, we discussed connectivity through multiple lenses.

For lands and waters, connectivity depends upon bridging jurisdictional boundaries.

Physical, on the ground connectivity is the first and most obvious way in which most of us think about and experience connectivity, or the lack of it. For many people and organizations, landscape connectivity and the 30x30 goal represent the heart of the Framework and the focus of their efforts. Because human borders historically ignore ecosystem functions, however, one of the greatest challenges we face in reaching Target 3 is working across jurisdictional boundaries. These political walls create both physical and human barriers to reaching our land and water protection goals by 2030.

Understanding the complexity of connectivity will lead to better solutions.

Meanwhile, our ambitious intentions have not always included paying attention to the quality and diversity of what we protect, or to the how of protecting it. Our living landscapes will only flourish if they are “well-connected and equitably governed” (CBD 2026). The good news is that a consortium of international connectivity experts are working to scientifically define habitats that are “well-connected”, a complex task for a continent as vast and diverse as North America. Led by the Center for Large Landscape Conservation, this collaborative effort will inform local conservation practice, policy, and governance

“If we cannot collaborate across borders, across cultures, no amount of landscape connectivity [is] going to do species much good. The next frontier is...incorporat[ing] into our measurements these layers of cultural connectivity.”

● Juan Carlos Bravo, Wildlands Network

to make sure connectivity solutions are working for the species and communities that share landscapes across North America.

Mi casa es tu casa: We are connected to and by our landscapes.

Beyond the complexity of ecosystem connectivity lies human factionalism and tribalism. North America is larger and more geopolitically diverse than most of us realize—it is the third largest continent on Earth and home to 23 independent states, 23 non-sovereign territories, and over a thousand Indigenous Nations. Working collaboratively across cultures and political boundaries is challenging even in the best of times; working together during era-defining cultural and political change to reverse biodiversity loss and build climate resilience will require a collective ground shift. But this is the moment we are in, and transformative change is what we seek. Fortunately, there are emerging policy, science, and practice options designed to generate large-scale ecological and cultural resilience that are laying the foundation for such a shift (Alaska Conservation Fund et al 2022).

Meanwhile, our presenters spoke to several transboundary connectivity essentials: let local communities' lead; support and co-create with Indigenous-led efforts; plan and engage at multiple spatial, political, and cultural scales. Most importantly, by working with intention to practice cultural humility, curiosity, and openness to different ways of knowing we will accelerate our success.



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If you're looking for more Symposium content related to this theme, we recommend...

- [Keystone ideas and imperatives: Connectivity and biodiversity targets](#)
- [Creating a future of hope and possibility that transcends boundaries: Keynote address by the Honorable Ken Salazar](#)

Resolution 45-2: A model of transboundary cooperation

In this current moment of shifting federal priorities, the role of state and local leadership is more important than ever. The long-standing collaboration of New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers along the U.S.-Canada border offers a model of both transboundary and subnational leadership that others can learn from and emulate. Recently, the Premiers and Governors signed **resolution 45-2** that acknowledges the need for action and collaboration to support ecological connectivity for the region's ecosystems, biodiversity, and communities (NEG-ECP 2024). The resolution commits the Premiers and Governors to work across landscapes and borders to advance connectivity efforts and instructs relevant agencies to elevate ecological connectivity, conservation, and restoration through regional collaboration. By working at different scales, solutions can be better sustained.

(Opposite page) Panelists discuss landscape connectivity from the perspectives of the U.S., Canada, and Mexico.



KEY THEMES AND TAKEAWAYS

THE LAND HAS RIGHTS, WE HAVE RESPONSIBILITIES

Nature as family: prioritizing mutual abundance and reciprocity

Indigenous communities have long viewed nature through a lens of abundance and reciprocity, valuing the fundamental role that plants, waters, and animals play in sustaining human well-being, while embracing the equally important role that humans play in ensuring nature's well-being. This starting point is different from the dominant view, which sees nature primarily as a resource from which to extract profit and consolidate wealth.

Acting with familial responsibility toward nature is a core element of how Indigenous communities approach their stewardship practices. Western approaches to conservation could benefit by centering a similar sense of responsibility. Shifting the extractive mindset towards a worldview that values our relationship as mutually beneficial and strives to create shared abundance could make conservation more effective and durable.

Centering responsibility and accountability will drive innovation.

While challenging, a transition to collective responsibility could surface additional ways of valuing and interacting with the living world, especially when it comes to the design and outcomes of our economies. Our systems and paradigms tend to induce environmental degradation as an unavoidable "externality". Centering our systems around responsibility to nature could help identify economic innovations that help maintain biodiversity, support land restoration, and prioritize resilience.

Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs)

IPCAs are a model that integrates economic and community development opportunities with Indigenous-led conservation. They deliver success for local communities and nature by incorporating three interconnected dimensions: harnessing large financial flows, scaling community investments, and revitalizing traditional economies and subsistence.

Pushing our conservation and economic frameworks towards models that incorporate responsibility need not be an either-or choice between economy and nature. A healthy environment is the foundation for a resilient economy and human well-being. As we begin to value biodiversity more holistically and learn how to produce natural abundance as an outcome, we will generate better outcomes for our communities and economies as well. Linking conservation with community and economic development through a responsibility-based model can increase the chances of reaching our goals to better serve both nature and humanity.

“The only way we are going to reverse colonial history and policies...is by breaking down and removing what was created as a structure of economies. Nature has never been valued by the colonizers until they destroyed nature and made a product out of it.”

• Steven Nitah
Indigenous Leadership Initiative



(Opposite page) Panelists discuss marine biodiversity; (above) panelists explore the intersection of community wellbeing and the economy; the Symposium leads off with a conversation with members of Canadian First Nations to ground the event in place.



DIG DEEPER

If you're looking for more Symposium content related to this theme, we recommend...

- [Rooting our conservation in place](#)
- [Keystone ideas and imperatives: North America's marine biodiversity](#)
- [Where community meets economy](#)
- [We can do hard things: Responding to recent political shifts through bravery, courage, and community](#)



KEY THEMES AND TAKEAWAYS

GENERATIONS, NOT ADMINISTRATIONS

Federal power and politics are changing across North America.

The United States government is not only withdrawing financial support from key conservation and climate initiatives but actively weakening environmental protections, policies, and institutions that study and safeguard biodiversity. Impacts from this will persist and ripple across the conservation community and the continent long after the current administration's term has ended.

We must protect what we have while drafting our future playbook.

A key question raised at the Symposium was: what would an effective response to today's political pressures look like and achieve? Two related strategies emerged. One focused on defensive actions to protect our existing intact ecosystems and conservation policies, while the second advocated for incubating new finance- and reciprocity-related policies that accelerate and democratize ecosystem protection and restoration instead of trying to manage externalities. Several speakers encouraged reorienting environmental policy around outcomes as opposed to our current emphasis on process. For example, the UK has ratified a Nature Positive framework that guides implementing its Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) policy (Humphrey et al 2025).

We can learn and take courage from our ability to overcome past challenges.

Although this moment feels fraught, previous periods of political pressure similarly challenged our ability to protect and restore nature. Speakers encouraged us to think about how we successfully moved through these periods of instability. There are important lessons on organizing and power building from past political challenges in North America (Turner, 2017) that can inform our strategy



DIG DEEPER

If you're looking for more Symposium content related to this theme, we recommend...

- [Policy round-up: The role for subnational leadership in meeting biodiversity and climate goals](#)
- [Rethinking our policy approaches to reversing biodiversity loss in North America](#)
- [A vision for the future](#)

and resilience moving forward. Staying alert and prepared, and creating windows of opportunity to advance our agenda can help us confront threats at the federal level while preparing the ground for positive future change.

Conservation must reinvent itself to persist and succeed.

This moment also offers an opportunity to reassess mainstream approaches to conservation. The broader and more difficult question is: how do we establish a conservation vision that is more resilient to political fluctuations and that results in more durable outcomes for people and nature? Speakers emphasized that long-term success depends on the conservation community's ability to build—or rebuild—its power and cohesion. Although nature enjoys widespread public support, it has increasingly become a partisan issue, particularly in the U.S. (Brady 2022). Reversing this trend is crucial to restoring unity and influence within the conservation movement. Focusing solely on gains within a single political term will not yield lasting change. Instead, we must collaborate more intentionally and reach across the aisle to expand our coalition of support and foster deeper, more sustainable solutions.

Innovation often emerges from where the stress is most acute.

In the U.S., the federal well of support for 30x30 during the former administration generated significant momentum toward our 30x30 goals. While that well has dried up, there are others we can draw from. We can maintain momentum by driving innovative change at the subnational level—whether grassroots, municipal, or state/provincial. Communities are stepping in to fill gaps left by the withdrawal of federal funding, crafting their own visions and priorities. Grassroots' organizing has long been a catalyst for change, and in times of federal uncertainty its importance is magnified. State and provincial governments regularly lead in advancing climate and nature goals. Strengthening partnerships at these levels will play an important role in keeping our biodiversity goals moving forward.

For example, we heard from speakers at the Symposium how both Quebec and California are deeply committed to and making real progress towards meeting the 2030 targets. Both Quebec and California also have been leaders in the [High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People's](#) Subnational Government Task Force helping states and provinces around the world accelerate their 30x30 commitments.

● *“We are going to lose some really important things [in the next four years]...and we’re going to have to think about how we want to rebuild those laws, institutions, and norms to deliver conservation and climate success more quickly and more effectively. And while it is a hard moment, and we need to be doing a lot of other things right now, we also need to take a pause and figure out that future vision.”*

● Stephenne Harding, Great Northern Strategies



Power will come from a new narrative of value.

As federal changes continue to affect the continent, we have an opportunity to reimagine our approach to conservation and its policy infrastructure. We can build a more powerful conservation movement by building a broader base of political support. Key to achieving this is figuring out how to communicate the value of an intact and healthy environment. While the conservation community understands nature’s immense value, including its monetary value which is estimated in the trillions of dollars, we must improve how we articulate this to broad audiences, including the private sector and national security. Building a strong foundation for communicating nature’s value across sectors can unlock cross-sector support and power for change, while accelerating the integration of biodiversity’s full value into policies, regulations, and other planning and development decision-making (NBSAP Forum 2026).



(Page 13) Panelists discuss the role of subnational leadership in effective conservation; (above) panelists explore new policy approaches to reversing biodiversity loss; CSU Chancellor Tony Frank listens to the next generation’s vision for the future of conservation.



KEY THEMES AND TAKEAWAYS

INVESTING IN NATURE: PATHWAYS TO EQUITABLE AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The world’s most wicked challenge: Closing the biodiversity finance gap.

Federal investments in conservation have been a major driver of conservation ambition and activity in recent years. However, an enormous gap persists between what is needed and actual investment levels. This was true across the continent before political dynamics shifted in early 2025. Meeting biodiversity targets demands a major increase in financial mobilization from all sources: international and domestic, public and private. Closing the estimated \$700 billion annual global biodiversity finance gap requires a systemic shift in financial flows (Paulson Institute et al, 2022). This is a huge challenge for the continent and globally—indeed, the need to increase financial flows has been a key part of COP 16 discussions. (UNEP-WCMC 2023).

We can’t wait for government to act.

Current funding models that depend on federal investments fall short of supporting biodiversity outcomes. We need financing that sustains long-term planning, builds capacity, and reflects community values. Speakers stressed that capital must follow community-defined goals. Nature protection should not be seen as a burden to, and separate from, community and economic development. Conservation efforts need to integrate with sectors like economic and community development, rather than operate in isolation. A holistic approach is essential to scale and sustain impact.

We cannot wait for governments to fill in gaps—we need more ingenuity and innovation to unlock new revenue streams to sustain and grow impact. Over two days, we heard several examples of financial innovations driving progress and creating impact at scale. These approaches protect nature while advancing equitable social and economic development



DIG DEEPER

If you’re looking for more Symposium content related to this theme, we recommend...

- [Shifting the paradigm](#)
- [Scale and durability: Reenvisioning conservation finance](#)
- [PPPs as a model for scale and durability](#)

rooted in local and cultural values. We can invert traditional financial tools, like insurance tools or municipal asset management, and apply them in innovative ways that tie local economic growth to sustainability objectives. We can weave in ideas from conventional systems like credit markets or blended finance approaches, to radically scale up our impact.

Crucially, communities must lead with their vision and ingenuity.

In Canada, Project Finance for Permanence (PFP) initiatives have made some of the largest contributions to Canada’s Target 3 successes to date. These Indigenous-led projects started when communities came together to identify shared values, goals for protecting important ecosystems, critical harvesting areas, and culturally/spiritually significant areas. Their collective vision generated community buy-in and community-driven success metrics (workforce, decreased addiction, increased jobs, etc). Protecting acres to help reach 30x30 was an outcome that followed these social-community drivers.

Private finance for nature investments increased eleven-fold between 2020 and 2024 (UNEP-FI 2024), and even more could be leveraged. But securing ongoing revenue streams to keep the work going—with all its myriad social, ecological, and economic benefits—represents the proverbial ‘nut that conservation finance needs to crack’ if we are to truly reach lasting outcomes for nature and people.

“For the first time in history, nature is being accounted for in a more holistic way. And I know it is not going fast enough, but [I] see pension funds, like the Norwegian Wealth Fund, re-evaluating their entire portfolio...to understand the value of nature and [determining] that 90% of their pension fund investments are reliant on nature.

● Kim Neale, Manitoulin Climate Collaborative

(Page 15) Panelists discuss PFPs as a model for scale and durability; (below, from left) panelists discuss conservation finance; a still from Trees, Water & People’s documentary In the Right Hands, which was screened at the Symposium as part of the discussion around shifting the philanthropic paradigm toward trust and community leadership.



INNOVATIVE FINANCE SOLUTIONS FOR WEAVING MARKETS AND NATURE

NATURE STEWARDSHIP CREDITS

HOW: Channels private sector funding into sustainable management, conservation, and restoration of ecosystems using standardized units of environmental credits.

BENEFIT: By rewarding restoration, biodiversity enhancement, and socioeconomic benefit, NSCs enable businesses to reduce their footprint and support regenerative practices.



PARAMETRIC INSURANCE

HOW: Leverages insurance tools for funding and managing the impacts of environmental disasters by triggering pre-agreed payouts when specific environmental disasters occur, rather than assessing actual losses.

BENEFIT: When tied to concession loans and capacity building in sustainable practices, PI can lead to durable outcomes for ecosystems while benefiting local economies.

NATURAL ASSET MANAGEMENT

HOW: Assesses the value of ecosystem services provided by natural assets to municipalities, often using natural capital to inform decision-making and ensure the true costs and benefits of development and land use changes are considered.

BENEFIT: Identifying, measuring and managing natural assets as part of an asset management strategy can save costs and reduce risk, and can allow for pooling funding into a common asset trust.



PROJECTS FOR FINANCE PERMANENCE (PFPs)

HOW: Secures long-term funding for ambitious conservation projects through a structured finance model that commits stakeholders to a comprehensive plan that blends public and private investments to protect ecosystems, create jobs, and support community health.

BENEFIT: PFPs bring together Indigenous governments and communities with other governments and the philanthropic sector to work on a shared vision, identify collective goals for halting biodiversity loss, and realize sustainable resource development.



DISCUSSION

REIMAGINING OUR SYSTEMS TO CATALYZE CHANGE FOR PEOPLE AND NATURE

During the Symposium, we engaged deeply with the complex challenges facing the conservation movement across North America. Through diverse perspectives and cross-sector dialogue, we explored innovations, tensions, and ideas for change. As we reflected upon the wisdom shared by our attendees and speakers, a consistent theme emerged: we cannot achieve our biodiversity goals without addressing the spectrum of drivers behind biodiversity loss.

The Symposium's conversations pointed clearly toward the need for a holistic reimagining of the interconnected systems that shape outcomes for both people and nature. While the challenges we face—climate disruption, pandemics, and widening inequality—continue to intensify, our institutional responses remain slow, fragmented, and often ineffective. This mismatch is eroding public trust and legitimacy in core governance structures.

To be successful in flipping the script on biodiversity loss, we need to pursue system-level interventions that are collaborative, cross-sectoral, and rooted in shared knowledge, policy innovation, and strategic communication. In this moment of political and social transition, we have a unique opportunity to reflect, reframe, and shift the narrative.

“There is a large hungry monster out on the landscape...which is our unsustainable economy and the underlying worldviews of disconnect and domination... And I think the conversation [is] focusing so much in a sense on the effect of the large hungry beast; we ignore the monster and collected the droppings... [We ask,] how do you adapt to the hungry monster, or how do you clean up the droppings. Meanwhile it is killing people, it is eating nature, and it is running amuck.”

● Dr. Darcy Riddell, RAD Network

Transformative systems change is happening—with or without us. It's incumbent upon us to step up and contribute to the direction and impact of that change. Speakers highlighted several frameworks that can guide our thinking, including the Cascade Institute's Framework for defending democracy (Cascade Institute 2025) and the IPBES Transformative Change Assessment (IPBES 2024). They also offered cornerstone ideas for catalyzing change for North American conservation.

First, while there is growing recognition that nature underpins global GDP—providing an estimated \$58 trillion worth of value—this has yet to permeate mainstream policy and planning (PwC 2023). We must communicate nature's economic value to decision-makers and leaders in other sectors. We have the data, knowledge, and expertise to help integrate biodiversity considerations into cross-sector policies and strategies and to help end the siloing of nature's needs. We must craft policies that incentivize positive environmental outcomes from government and business, rather than regulating negative outcomes. If done well, this would provide long-term funding and deep connection to other sectors, like the economy and technology.

Second, we must continue to increase our ability and willingness to co-create solutions with communities that hold different worldviews. While progress has been made in how and when Indigenous voices are included, much work remains to reconcile past harms and support Indigenous-led conservation. As one of our speakers noted, there is 'wind in our sails' in bringing together Western approaches with Indigenous knowledge and we need to keep investing in that momentum. Equally important is amplifying local voices from all types of communities and building trust from the earliest stages of conservation efforts. Communities must be at the helm of transformative change.

Third, the conservation community plays a vital role in defining the biodiversity crisis and communicating its stakes. We can help leaders across sectors understand what is at risk—and how they can contribute to meaningful action. Together, we must articulate a compelling vision for the future—one that emphasizes what we stand for, rather than what we oppose.

How we navigate a path to this vision matters.

[Our Q sort analysis](#) was a small but powerful snapshot of our conservation community and revealed that our community will not retreat in the face of political headwinds. However, opinions differ on how best to address what is

“We are in a profoundly political moment... This is about power, who uses it, who gets to cut the grants, who gets to provide the resources to whom. And if you try to isolate yourselves from that, if you try to deny that it is a political moment and it's about the distribution and use of power within our societies and what normative ends that power is used for, then you are electing to be out of the game.”

Dr. Tad Homer Dixon, Cascade Institute

happening in North America today. And that is okay—we will need multiple paths operating on different timeframes for us to succeed. It is up to us to provide the tools, resources, and space to catalyze those pathways into meaningful action. The Q sort analysis revealed three clusters of perceptions that interlink in an overall system of change, with each contributing at the right time and spatial scale for the others to be effective.

The analysis also highlighted strong areas of commonality, particularly with respect to the value of supporting Indigenous-led conservation, a key element throughout the symposium dialogue. The question before us is how we continue to build the necessary social, political, and financial infrastructure to operationalize Indigenous-led conservation in our charged and rapidly changing political landscape.

Bridging Indigenous and Western approaches to conservation—finding a middle way between Indigenous reciprocity and interconnectedness and Western production and utilitarian management—can help create a roadmap for understanding and transition. Ethical space frameworks can help foster equitable collaboration by respecting the integrity of both worldviews and addressing underlying social and political differences. Examples from Canada, such as Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs), demonstrate how these frameworks can generate innovative solutions that honor Indigenous knowledge while addressing global conservation challenges.

Bringing people together across sectors is important and necessary for effective change. The current political challenges are straining relationships and longstanding commitments continent-wide, even as landscape fragmentation continues to disrupt ecological connectivity and separate Indigenous nations from ancestral lands. And yet this moment also demonstrates that cross-sector, transboundary conservation is more important than ever. Deepening conservation collaboration across borders will improve outcomes for people and nature.

By the end of the Symposium, it was clear attendees were leaving energized and renewed. Everything we do at the Salazar Center is focused on enabling people to achieve amazing outcomes for nature and our communities. We remain committed to engaging our community as we shape strategies that propel us forward.



The Honorable Ken Salazar deliver remarks about his hopes for the future of continental unity and friendship.

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