

THE SALAZAR CENTER
for NORTH AMERICAN CONSERVATION

PEREGRINE ACCELERATOR
FOR CONSERVATION IMPACT

*A report on the 2025 program in the
North Atlantic Transboundary Landscape*

“*We are like islands in the sea, separate on the surface but connected in the deep.*”
– *William James*

The Salazar Center staff dedicate this report to our many friends and partners who have shaped the 2025 Peregrine Accelerator program. We’d especially like to acknowledge the funders whose generosity made it possible: Waltons Trust, Echo Foundation, VF Foundation, Sewall Foundation, Jim Kelley and Amie Knox, and Ken and Hope Salazar. We’re also enormously grateful for the time, expertise, and contributions of our program advisors, proposal evaluators, mentors, and trainers, and the project teams themselves. Thank you.

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On the cover: an aerial view of the Little River estuary in Wells Estuarine Reserve, Maine.



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(Opposite page) Exploring the dunes of Prince Edward Island National Park; (at right) Jacques Cartier river park, Quebec, Canada.



INTRODUCTION

We wish to express our deep gratitude to all the donors who generously supported the Salazar Center’s North Atlantic Accelerator for Conservation Impact. This work would not have been possible without you. Thank you for your trust and your willingness to invest in the Salazar Center and the people and organizations that formed the Accelerator’s 2025 cohort.

The North Atlantic Peregrine Accelerator (Accelerator) brought together eight talented and complementary project teams—representing 30 NGOs, Tribes and First Nations, and universities—from across the transboundary [New England-Acadian Forests ecoregion](#). We chose this region for two reasons. First, it’s highly fragmented, both in terms of ecological connectivity and jurisdiction, and characterized by a high proportion of privately owned lands. More importantly, our research indicated that the creative and determined people already working on the ground to protect North Atlantic lands and waters possessed considerable potential to scale landscape connectivity, biodiversity regeneration, and climate resiliency across the region.

Over the course of six months, we provided each team with \$20,000 USD in seed funding and engaged them in an intensive bespoke curriculum based on their unique projects, challenges, and goals. The curriculum included sessions on fundraising, communications, Indigenous engagement, network building, and strategic planning. Awardees were provided with expert mentors to support their individual needs and regularly engaged in peer-learning sessions. The Accelerator program was book-ended with in-person gatherings on Prince Edward Island and in Montréal, Quebec.

The work of our eight project teams and their cohesiveness as a cohort proved exceptional. Each team walked away with a case statement ready to share with funders, complemented by additional deliverables that support their unique goals and needs, such as theories of change, strategic plans, project implementation plans, and agreements to support the formalization of coalitions and networks. We believe each of their individual projects show great promise, and that conservation across the region will benefit from this newly connected and highly capable community.

Thank you again for your visionary and generous support to protect and restore one of North America’s most extraordinary and threatened landscapes by investing in the remarkable people and communities who live there. We look forward to seeing what they achieve over time and to sharing their stories and successes with you.

Yours in gratitude,
From all of us at the Salazar Center

This report is broken into three sections and includes several appendices with detailed information about the program.

Section 1 summarizes the evaluation of the Accelerator program based on its three primary objectives. The evaluation was completed by all project team members and includes feedback received during and after the program’s final event in Montréal. You can read detailed information about the program evaluation in Appendix C.

Section 2 addresses the expected long-term impact of individual projects, the cumulative impact of the Accelerator projects across the ecoregion, and the impact of coordinated landscape-scale efforts that emerge from the program. The Salazar Center will use ongoing feedback and information about project challenges, outcomes, and impact to continue to refine and improve the Accelerator program.

Section 3 provides the stories of each project team. Each team’s story lays out their vision and goals and the challenges they brought to the table, and describes how the Accelerator helped them focus and strengthen their strategy, solidify their networks, and increase their confidence and ambition to meet their challenges.

- Appendices:
- A. Overview of the Peregrine Accelerator
 - B. 2025 Program in Detail
 - C. Evaluating 2025 Indicators of Success



(At right, from top) Eel grass on the coast of Nova Scotia, photo courtesy of Ecology Action Centre; moose in Baxter State Park, Maine.

2025 ACCELERATOR DELIVERABLES AND EXPECTED IMPACT

Although only a few months have passed since the conclusion of the 2025 Accelerator, the program has already delivered meaningful results for participants and their work. Based on participant evaluations and reflections gathered at the final in-person convening in Montréal in December 2025, the Accelerator successfully met all three of its primary deliverables.

Program Indicators of Success

1. Accelerating project implementation

Project teams credited the program with helping them move from ideas to action faster and with greater confidence. Nearly all participants reported that the program significantly accelerated their timelines, in some cases by many months, and several shared that their projects may not have advanced at all without Accelerator support. By the program’s end, participants felt substantially more prepared to implement their work, and equipped with stronger skills, fresh ideas, and a bolder vision for what their projects could achieve.

“I’ve really felt the acceleration. This would have taken a long time to get to where we are now, if we had just done it through organic conversations and, over time, fitting it into our jobs. But having this dedicated time and focus and sense of purpose, shared with everyone, it was really inspiring, and I think motivating for us to recognize the importance of our work, and to keep it going.”
– Tatia Bauer, Maine Coast Heritage Trust, Schoodic Institute team

“The program has allowed me to become an expert in this part of my work. I would never have devoted this level of time to being able to talk about the project the way that I’m now able to, without having that devoted time set aside. It’s been really wonderful to be able to move things forward and develop my own expertise and understanding, on behalf of a project that was half-baked when we first applied.”
– Anne Herteis, Community Forests International, Wabanaki Land Back Partnership team

The Peregrine Accelerator is a conservation program unlike any I’ve participated in. It puts the organization, and the cause it champions, at the heart of everything it does. My team and I felt truly supported in our mission. The Accelerator provided us with access to the expertise and support we needed to move our project forward.”
– Josee Breton, CRECA

“It’s unlikely we would have been able to develop this strategy without dedicated time spent together, funding, and a specific timeline to pull the work together. We were all passionate about the work, but being from six different organizations, didn’t have the right “glue” to bring us together before the Accelerator.”
– Helena Tatgenhorst, TNC Maine, Schoodic Institute team

“The project went from a nascent set of powerful ideas into a streamlined effort that clearly addresses a huge governance gap, and the program allowed me to see that. The work of Eels Back was affirmed as a legitimate, important effort that has a enormous potential for impact.”
– Leora Gansworth, Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nation, Eels Back team

“The Accelerator gave us the imperative to focus in on our project and take the time it deserves to move it forward. While this has been a priority at our organization, it is easy to be pulled in multiple directions, so having to deliver something at the end of six months combined with the support (mentors, cohort and trainings) helped us get to a point we couldn’t have imagined at the start of the program.”
– Julia Rogers, Housatonic Valley Association



The 2025 North Atlantic cohort kicked off their six month journey together with a retreat on Prince Edward Island in June 2025.

2. Fostering conservation’s social fabric across borders and cultures

The program succeeded in building relationships across a region where many participants initially felt isolated from one another. By the conclusion of the Accelerator, nearly all participants reported feeling more connected to a broader conservation community. Just as importantly, teams described a deeper appreciation for the time and care required to build lasting relationships, particularly with Tribes, First Nations, and new cross-border partners. These connections will continue to strengthen conservation efforts long after the program’s close.

“Seeing our projects evolve together has been incredible, and getting to know everyone individually, the one-on-one conversations I’ve gotten to have with everyone, seeing how inspired and driven everyone is, it’s humbling and grounding. Just to be part of this like-minded networking community fills my cup in a big way and drives me forward, and the knowledge that everyone has shared, just big thanks to that.”
–Nancy Patch, Cold Hollow to Canada

“I didn’t expect to feel as invested in everybody else’s project as I do, and I’m feeling really, really excited to see where everything goes and to find ways that we can continue to support each other and collaborate.”
– Adam Cheeseman Nature NB

“The Accelerator journey was like nothing I have ever experienced in my 20+ years working in conservation. Joining with peers from across the region for six months of learning and getting to know one another was incredibly valuable to accelerating our local conservation work. We now have an expanded set of tools and knowledge to advance this work, and are connected to a network of individuals that inspire you and make you feel part of something much bigger.”
– Dave Erickson, Cold Hollow to Canada

3. *Investing in long-term organizational leadership and impact*
The Accelerator also strengthened each team’s ability to sustain and grow its work over time. Twenty thousand dollars in seed funding provided immediate support, while coaching and practical tools built lasting organizational capacity. Participants finished the program far more prepared to fundraise, diversify revenue sources, communicate their impact, and engage key stakeholders and audiences. By the end of the Accelerator, every team felt confident telling the story of its conservation work and was better positioned to secure the resources needed for long-term success.

“We applied to the Peregrine Accelerator as our project was facing a funding cliff after 5-6 years of consistent funding and we were grappling with what to do. The Accelerator program helped us take this scary reality and turn it on its head. Coming out of the program, we now have a concrete, tangible plan for diversifying our funding sources and partner networks. The care, support, and guidance provided by all cohort members, Accelerator staff, mentors, and others greatly helped in setting us on the right path with confidence.”
– Adam Cheeseman Nature NB

“Overall, this program started a bigger conversation in our organization regarding how to diversify our funding sources and how to properly sell and communicate the impact we have in conservation and environmental protection to possible funders.”
– Audrey Paquette, CRECA

Expected Transboundary Impact

A relatively small financial investment in the Accelerator program generates long-term returns for donors, awardees, biodiversity, and climate change across important transboundary landscapes, particularly compared with similar contributions to individual projects. Support for this program doesn’t just upskill people and advance individual projects. The Accelerator helps create the relationships and landscape-scale vision to protect and restore the living and physical infrastructure of an entire ecoregion—the interdependent forests, wetlands, waters, coasts, soils, and wildlife—that together deliver climate resiliency, clean air and water, healthy food, outdoor recreation, and economic stability to its human inhabitants.

While the Salazar Center has little direct control over the outcomes and successes of the North Atlantic Accelerator projects, we will provide ongoing support to the cohort over the next two years to help them achieve their ambitious goals. As we continue to assess the ongoing effectiveness of the program to the cohort, we’ll also begin reporting on the outcomes and progressive impact of individual projects, the cumulative impact of the projects considered together, and any coordinated landscape scale efforts that emerge from the program.

Compounding conservation outcomes

With adequate funding, we expect to see the North Atlantic “nest” projects begin to shift the region away from today’s fragmented, site-specific model of conservation toward a new integrated model that spans landscapes and seascapes and is grounded in connectivity, community governance, and long-term stewardship finance.

Individually, each project targets a critical ecological and social leverage point—forest connectivity, Indigenous land rematriation, coastal governance, species recovery, or human behavior change. But when taken together, cohort projects outline the architecture of a regional system capable of delivering what we anticipate will be four compounding conservation outcomes.



Increased landscape connectivity

Most projects focus on rebuilding landscape connectivity across multiple corridors, from Vermont’s Cold Hollow to Canada linkage and Quebec’s Chaudière-Appalaches corridor, to the multi-state “Follow the Forest” initiative to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions. Complementing these efforts are the Wabanaki Resilient Forest Funds’ plan to protect and steward thousands of acres of Wabanaki forests in New Brunswick, and the large-scale expansion of coastal protection across Nova Scotia and the Bay of Fundy underway by the Ecology Action Centre and Nature NB. At the same time, projects like Eels Back extend connectivity into aquatic systems, aiming to restore migratory pathways across international watersheds.



Governance transformation

Multiple initiatives—particularly the Wabanaki Resilient Forest Fund, Eels Back, and the Schoodic Institute partnership—advance Indigenous leadership, co-management, and stewardship authority. In parallel, community-driven models such as Coast Check and Healthy Coasts NB build civic capacity, shifting conservation from institution-led to publicly owned and advocated. These governance innovations will be reinforced by new financial mechanisms, especially long-term stewardship funds and sustained programmatic funding, designed to ensure permanence beyond initial land protection.



Changes to human behavior

Several project plans emphasize behavior and knowledge as drivers of ecological outcomes. Public engagement campaigns, community science, and shared data systems appear across projects, from coastal monitoring in Nova Scotia to road ecology interventions in New England and to corridor planning in Quebec. These efforts aim to align human behavior—whether driving speeds, land-use decisions, or political advocacy—with ecological connectivity goals.



Increased collaborative interest and capacity

As expected, some of the project teams already have spun-off new partnerships and collaboration-oriented initiatives and are using what they learned in the cohort to transform their own organizations. For example...

- Nature NB and the Ecology Action Centre have launched a new partnership to develop a bi-provincial coastal resilience network focused on addressing shared policy and regulatory challenges across Atlantic Canada. This collaborative effort aims to unite diverse stakeholders—including government, Indigenous groups, and NGOs—into a coordinated regional working group to streamline actions and tackle coastal issues more effectively.
- Building on the projects they each developed with support from the Accelerator, Cold Hollow to Canada and CRECA (Conseil régional de l’environnement Chaudière-Appalaches) are combining efforts to advance ecological connectivity across the Vermont-Quebec border. These two teams are aligning their respective conservation strategies and creating a shared vision for a transboundary corridor that integrates local land trust efforts with regional biodiversity goals.
- Following the Accelerator’s Indigenous engagement and collaboration training, and working alongside Indigenous-led teams in the cohort, the Housatonic Valley Association team has launched an internal “learning journey” to transform their approach to Indigenous engagement from individual interest into organizational action. This effort includes a monthly staff accountability group that focuses on collective education through historical research, shared readings, and site visits to build the necessary foundation for meaningful, long-term regional partnerships.

Anticipated impact over time

In combination, we believe these initiatives have the potential to generate outcomes that exceed the sum of their parts across the nest ecoregion.

For example, we anticipate that the cohort’s collective efforts to establish a contiguous network of connected habitats spanning terrestrial, freshwater, and coastal ecosystems across the North Atlantic will protect ecological function and diversity while enabling species movement at a bioregional scale, contributing to the region’s climate resiliency and long-term health.

We also expect that the interoperable governance models being established—particularly Indigenous-led and co-managed systems—will propagate across jurisdictions, accelerating both conservation effectiveness and reconciliation outcomes. Most of our Accelerator awardees work in partnership with multiple nonprofits, community organizations, and government agencies and will lead the way in modeling governance practices that produce the best outcomes for nature and people.

Finally, we have confidence that the distributed financing and capacity structures being built by cohort members will sustain local stewardship through long-term funds, regional collaboration, and shared tools.

Perhaps most importantly, we believe that the projects collectively reduce key systemic barriers to conservation: fragmentation of landscapes, fragmentation of governance, and fragmentation of public engagement. By addressing these simultaneously, the Accelerator’s cohort of projects can position the region to achieve durable and equitable outcomes

aligned with global biodiversity targets (e.g., 30x30), while also enhancing climate resilience, cultural revitalization, and community well-being.

Whether this leveraged potential is achieved will depend in large part on access to the full suite of government, philanthropic, and private sector investment needed to fuel each project’s outcomes and goals. Together, the North Atlantic cohort seeks approximately \$9.7 million USD (or \$13.4M CAD) in grants and investments by 2030 to achieve their goals. This is a small investment to make in the long-term future of the North Atlantic’s ecological and physical infrastructure and the health and stability of its communities.

WHY WE HAVE HIGH EXPECTATIONS

If the exceptional trajectory of our Peregrine “alumni” is any indication, the 2025 cohort is poised to achieve remarkable things. Since completing the 2023 Accelerator, the Rio Grande-Rio Bravo cohort has turned ambitious project plans into highly celebrated, multi-million-dollar realities across North America:

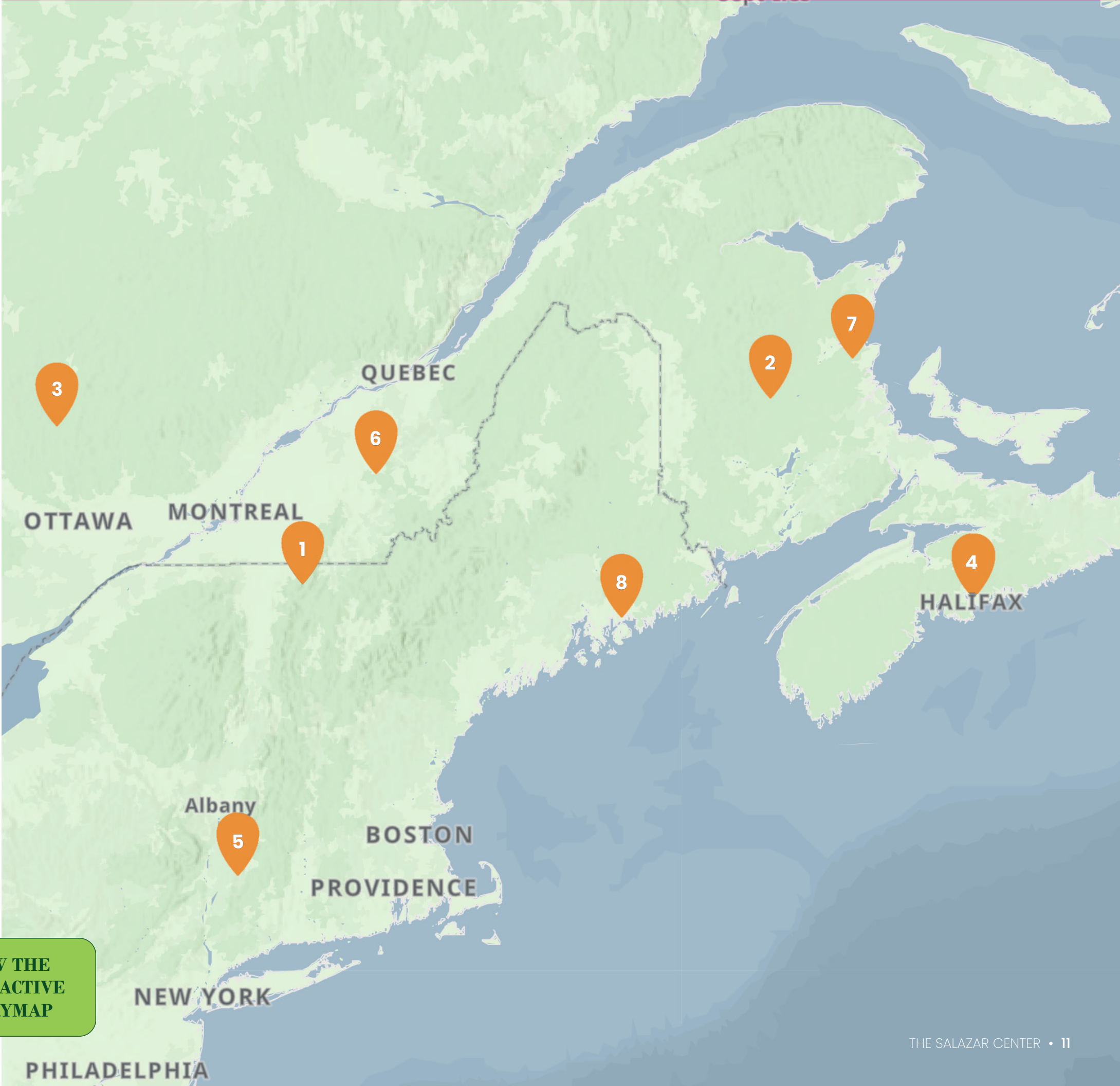
- In May 2025, the project team led by Bat Conservation International received the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s prestigious [Recovery Champions award](#) in recognition for their outstanding work supporting the recovery of the endangered Mexican long-nosed bats. More recently, their Agave Restoration Initiative has been [nominated for the global Earthshot Prize](#).
- Shortly after completing the Accelerator, the American Forests team in the Rio Grande Valley secured \$10M from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for their Tamaulipan thorn forest restoration efforts. Today, they’re leading a large coalition of agencies and organizations working to restore over 81,000 acres—ambitious work that was [featured in Grist](#) in 2025.
- The Hispanic Access Foundation successfully partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to redesignate the first of multiple refuge parcels in the Lower Rio Grande Valley for public access. New infrastructure including shade structures, trail benches, and bilingual signage was [completed in early 2026](#)—a significant milestone for this community, which is one of the poorest in the nation, with a 92% Hispanic demographic, high obesity rates, and severe green space inequities.
- Capitalizing on federal momentum in 2023, the Colorado Rio Grande Restoration Foundation [secured over \\$1.2M through the Biden-Harris Administration’s](#) Investing in America agenda to upgrade critical water infrastructure.
- On the policy front, Pronatura Noroeste and its partners successfully advocated for nature’s water rights in the 2024 river treaty minute, resulting in the historic signing of [Minute 331](#) by the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC)/Comisión Internacional de Límites y Aguas (CILA) and establishing a dedicated Rio Grande Environment Work Group.

Our 2023 alumni have proven that the Peregrine Accelerator is a powerful launchpad. We cannot wait to see how the 2025 cohort expands upon this legacy.

2025 PROJECT TEAMS

- 1. Strategic Forestland Conservation and Community Resiliency in Northern Vermont
Team: Cold Hollow to Canada
- 2. The Wabanaki Resilient Forests Fund
Team: Community Forests International, Wolastoqey Nation in New Brunswick, Mi'gmawe'l tplu'taqnn Inc., Fort Folly First Nation Habitat Recovery, Passamaquoddy Recognition Group Inc., and Nature Trust of New Brunswick
- 3. Inter-Regional Connectivity in Southern Quebec
Team: Conseil régional de l'environnement Chaudière-Appalaches (CRECA), Conseil régional de l'environnement de l'Estrie (CREE), and Conseil régional de l'environnement du Centre-du-Québec (CRECQ)
- 4. Coast Check
Team: Ecology Action Centre
- 5. Follow the Forest
Team: Housatonic Valley Association, Staying Connected Initiative, Litchfield Hills Greenprint Collaborative, and The Nature Conservancy
- 6. Eels Back
Team: Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nation, St. Francis Xavier University, Canadian Wildlife Federation, SUNY ESF, River Institute, and the Centre for Evidenced-Informed Conservation
- 7. Wele'k Pemjajika'q Sikniqt – Côtes en santé N.-B. – Healthy Coasts NB
Team: Nature NB, Anqotum Resource Management, Birds Canada, Nature Trust of New Brunswick, Nature Conservancy of Canada
- 8. Roadmap to Restoring Wabanaki Sweetgrass Harvesting Access in Maine Tidal Marshes
Team: Schoodic Institute, Maine Coast Heritage Trust, Sipayik Climate Resilience Committee, Friends of Acadia, and The Nature Conservancy

VIEW THE
INTERACTIVE
STORYMAP





Photos courtesy of Cold Hollow to Canada

Strategic Forestland Conservation and Community Resiliency in Northern Vermont

Seventeen years ago, a group of neighbors in northwestern Vermont looked at the northern Green Mountains connecting their seven rural towns and saw a shared legacy at risk. While Vermont’s forests had staged a miraculous recovery over the last century, these community members noticed a troubling reversal: their woods were being carved into smaller and smaller parcels, threatening wildlife and the rural way of life they cherished.

Rather than waiting for a top-down solution, these residents founded **Cold Hollow to Canada** (CHC). At its heart, CHC is a story of neighbors talking to neighbors. Through their Woodlots program, which now includes 73 participating properties, CHC has turned private landowners into collaborative stewards who manage their forests together across property lines. This peer-to-peer model recognizes that while one person can care for a single lot, it takes an entire community to protect a globally important wildlife linkage that stretches all the way to the Canadian border.

CHC’s first-ever full-time Executive Director participated in the Accelerator alongside a long-time board member and co-founder to bridge the gap between their local grassroots success and their ambitious 2030 goals. For this leadership team, the program provided the mentorship and peer-learning needed to professionalize their operations—from mastering donor relations and marketing to tackling systemic hurdles like the regional shortage of qualified easement appraisers. The experience helped the first-time Executive Director fully step into his role, building



Northern Appalachian-Acadian-Wabanaki Ecoregion from Northern Vermont to Quebec



Implementation will take place 2026-2030



\$675,000 USD needed to complete this work

the capacity to manage the complex relationships that drive regional change. During the program, they formalized a three-pronged approach to strategically double the amount of conserved forestland in their region—an additional 23,000 acres:

- Empowering communities: Moving from visioning exercises to helping citizens lead their own local conservation commissions.
- Sustainable stewardship: Expanding wildlife tracking and community science programs that connect the 10,000 residents of the region to the land they call home.
- Strategic conservation: Developing a bigger, bolder vision that aligns with Vermont’s Community Resilience and Biodiversity Protection Act (Act 59) and facilitates the jump from interested landowner to permanent protection through their dedicated Conservation Fund.

CHC is now well-positioned to protect at least 50% of their region’s forestland by 2050. By centering the people who live, work, and play in these forests, CHC is ensuring that both wildlife and human communities can thrive alongside one another in a changing climate.

POISED FOR IMPACT



If funded, this work will...

- Enhance the resilience, connectivity, and ecological integrity of Vermont’s forests and those of the surrounding ecoregion by 2030.
- Facilitate the conservation of at least an additional 7,600 acres of forest land, in addition to the 15,400 acres already conserved to reach the 30x30 commitments.
- Ensure that at least 50% of the forestland that defines the region will come under permanent conservation and be managed in alignment with Vermont Conservation Design practices and targets by 2050.



Through the program, the partnership moved from conceptual uncertainty to a concrete operational plan. They spent the duration of the program:

- Defining the mechanism, mapping out the financial structures and investment policies needed to house a long-term fund.
- Securing a fiscal host, transitioning from “how do we start?” to preparing for the fund’s inception with a dedicated fiscal partner to manage the initial capital.
- Cultivating internal expertise and building the internal capacity within the partnership to facilitate complex, technical conversations about conservation finance—ensuring that the Nations have the knowledge to lead these processes.

With the Wabanaki Resilient Forest Fund now moving toward launch, the partnership is creating a new regional standard for land care. This fund will create long-term employment for Earth Keepers and Land Guardians, ensuring that as the forest recovers, the communities who call it home thrive alongside it.

The Wabanaki Resilient Forests Fund

For the Wabanaki people, the forest is a relative who has sustained their communities for millennia. But today, the Wabanaki forest is an endangered ecosystem vital for climate resilience that is being carved away by clearcutting and fragmentation. The Wabanaki Land Back Partnership was born from a simple premise: the best way to heal this land is to return it to the care of the Mi’kmaq, Peskotomuhkati, and Wolastoqey Nations.

Prior to participating in the Accelerator, the **Land Back Partnership** had already achieved strong momentum, protecting over 10,000 acres of Wabanaki Forest and securing \$23 million to protect 13,000 more. However, a systemic barrier threatened to stall their progress. While traditional funders are often willing to pay for the purchase of land, they rarely provide the long-term stewardship funding required to sustain it. This leaves Indigenous communities with the immense responsibility of restoring habitats and reviving cultural practices without the dedicated capital to fund that work in perpetuity.

This team joined the Accelerator with a vision to create a first of its kind stewardship fund but faced daunting questions about how to make it a reality. How do you build a financial vehicle that respects the absolute sovereignty of three different Nations while benefiting from a pooled investment?



31,000 acres of the Wabanaki Forest in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick



Implementation will take place 2026–2031



\$650,000 CAD needed by the end of 2026; \$4.1 million CAD by 2031

POISED FOR IMPACT

If funded, the Wabanaki Resilient Forests Fund will...

- Set the bar for regional, collaborative land care in the Wabanaki forest in New Brunswick.
- Continue to conserve land in the partners’ respective territories, creating a network of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) and rematriated lands across the Wabanaki region.
- Provide economically for the Wabanaki Nations and communities that are participants in the Fund through funding Land Guardians or Earth Keepers and making payment for ecosystem services more lucrative and accessible, among numerous other activities for the benefit of lands and communities.
- Lead to awareness of the benefits of Indigenous-led conservation in the Wabanaki region, with proven examples of healthy forests under Indigenous care.
- Lead to a landscape-scale conservation accomplishment similar to the Great Bear Rainforest Agreement in BC or the Our Land for the Future Agreement in NWT.



Photos courtesy of CRECA.

Inter-regional connectivity in southern Quebec: Working across municipal boundaries for long term results

The Chaudière-Appalaches region of Quebec is a working landscape home to nearly half a million people. It supports a variety of land uses, from maple syrup production and cranberry farms to foresters and recreational users. The health of this corridor is woven into the identity and economy of the community. This region also forms a continental ecological pathway, the largest and most vital corridor in the Saint Lawrence River Valley. However, decades of development—ranging from agricultural expansion and logging to roads and wind farms—have fragmented this heritage. These changes have impacted wildlife movement and the natural richness in which local citizens take great pride.

CRECA's mission is rooted in the belief that environmental protection succeeds only through collaboration. To address the challenges facing the corridor, the team launched a first-of-its-kind tri-regional partnership with their counterparts at the Conseil régional de l'environnement de l'Estrie (CREE) and the Conseil régional de l'environnement du Centre-du-Québec (CRECQ). Their approach centers on "concertation"—bringing together diverse stakeholders to co-create a unified conservation plan.



Chaudière-Appalaches region, spanning over 15,000 km²



Implementation will take place 2026-2028



\$325,000 CAD needed to complete this work

CRECA staff participated in the Accelerator alongside leadership from their two regional partners to turn their ambitious vision into a reality. The Accelerator was the catalyst for the project's launch, providing structural guidance to move from a great idea to a feasible game plan. During the program, the team:

- Refined a dual-scale narrative to better tell the story of their work and its importance, shifting their messaging to simultaneously highlight local and regional pride while emphasizing the corridor's continental importance and linking the Saint-Lawrence River directly to the Appalachian Mountains.
- Built a strategy for fundraising, solidifying this "local-to-continental" narrative to more successfully approach foundations on both sides of the border.
- Streamlined the scope of their work, narrowing their focus to high-impact, realistic goals that ensure long-term, tangible conservation results.

By centering the community's connection to their natural heritage and aligning their strategy across three regions, CRECA is ensuring that from the mountains to the river, the landscape remains connected, valued, and resilient for generations to come.

POISED FOR IMPACT



If funded, by 2035, this work will...

- Improve forest connectivity in the corridor from the Appalachian Mountains to the Saint-Lawrence River.
- Increase recognition of the corridor's importance among key target groups (citizens, organizations, municipalities, provincial and federal governments and American counterparts) and build regional pride within the general population.
- Fill in knowledge gaps regarding key locations for wildlife road crossings and the importance of landscape diversity and the thresholds in the corridor.
- Enable CRECA and its partners to adaptively manage the conservation plan in collaboration with stakeholders to include new targets, objectives, and priority actions as needed.



Photos courtesy of Ecology Action Centre.

Coast Check

Nova Scotia’s 13,000-kilometer coastline is the lifeblood of the province, sustaining 70% of its population and providing a vital link between land and sea. Yet, this landscape faces a “coastal squeeze”—a phenomenon where essential ecosystems like saltmarshes and dunes are trapped between rising sea levels and encroaching human development. With 80% of the coastline privately owned, protecting these spaces has become a complex challenge of balancing individual rights with the collective need for climate resilience.

Following the recent abandonment by the government of the provincial Coastal Protection Act, the **Ecology Action Centre** (EAC) recognized a critical need for a panoptic understanding of coastal degradation. Their response, Coast Check, is a community-based monitoring initiative that empowers residents to act as the eyes and ears of the coast. By documenting shoreline modification and habitat loss, these citizen scientists provide the evidence-based data necessary to advocate for the protection of Nova Scotia’s natural heritage.

The EAC team utilized the Accelerator to refine Coast Check from a localized monitoring pilot into a high-impact advocacy strategy. A defining element of their progress was the opportunity to work with mentors who brought deep expertise in provincial government perspectives and goals. This strategic guidance allowed the team to align their community-led efforts with broader policy needs, ensuring that the data collected by residents can effectively inform government decision-making.

During the program, the team:

- Developed an advocacy framework, moving beyond data collection to help residents translate their findings into clear, actionable requests for improved provincial legislation.
- Aligned their coastal protection goals, shaping their strategy to support the provincial target of protecting 20% of Nova Scotia’s land and water by 2030, using Coast Check to identify high-conservation-value areas currently at risk.
- Strengthened their collaborative networks and began integrating their work with existing conservation efforts—such as shorebird protection and saltmarsh restoration—to create a more unified front for coastal resilience.

By equipping communities with the knowledge to monitor change and the strategic tools to advocate for systemic protection, EAC is leading the charge to ensure that the protection of Nova Scotia’s coast is no longer a fragmented effort and is rooted in a shared vision for a sustainable future.

POISED FOR IMPACT



If funded, by 2030, this work will...

- Build a transformative grassroots network and movement for coastal protection that will be necessary to sustain a long-term coastal protection discourse.
- Help realize the implementation of the originally proposed Coastal Protection Act (2019) or, alternatively, a renewed political commitment for coastal protection legislation to be implemented.



Coastal Nova Scotia



Implementation
will take place
2026–2030



\$200,000 CAD
needed to
complete this work



Follow the Forest’s Rest of Road Campaign: “Critters Commute, too!”

Across the 2,000 square mile Housatonic watershed—from the Berkshires south to Long Island Sound—the road network that connects rural towns and economic centers is the same infrastructure that fragments one of the most resilient forest corridors in the Northeast. While significant investments have been made in wildlife bridges and tunnels, the reality is that most wildlife movement occurs where no such infrastructure exists. This “rest of road” is where the most dangerous and costly collisions occur, impacting both the ecological integrity of the region and the safety of its human residents.

The **Housatonic Valley Association** (HVA) recognized that protecting the “Follow the Forest” corridor, which stretches from the Hudson Valley to Canada, required a new approach to reducing vehicle-wildlife collisions that goes beyond traditional land conservation strategies. To ensure wildlife can move freely between forest blocks, the HVA team realized they needed to engage drivers. This insight led to the development of the Rest of Road Campaign, “Critters Commute, Too!,” a pilot behavior-change campaign that moves beyond sharing wildlife data to focus on altering motorist behavior at specific, high-risk crossing sites, turning a routine drive into a conscious act of stewardship.

HVA utilized the Accelerator as a dedicated strategic space to move this vision from a conceptual idea to an operational campaign. While HVA has long been a leader in technical



Four-state region
in New England
including parts of CT,
VT, MA, and NY



Implementation
will take place
2026–2029



\$335,000 USD
needed to
complete this work

watershed science, the program provided the imperative and the focused time needed to bridge the gap between land conservation and the science of human behavior change. During the program, the HVA team:

- Integrated diverse perspectives into their work, by moving away from partnerships in which land trusts were only talking to one another and beginning to build a framework to bring together artists, storytellers, and transportation experts in support of a new campaign.
- Refined their focus to behavior-change mechanics, moving from general awareness to a targeted strategy that encourages lower speeds and more attentive driving in priority wildlife zones.
- Built a regional toolkit, including a unified visual identity and branding strategy, to provide partners across four states with the shared language needed to champion connectivity as a regional priority.

HVA is proving that the future of conservation lies in our ability to share the landscape with other species. By centering the residents and drivers of the valley in the solution, they are building a movement that ensures both people and wildlife can navigate the region safely

POISED FOR IMPACT



- If funded, by 2030, the Rest of Road Campaign will lead to...
- A 40% increase in residents and communities understanding that protecting and connecting habitat is their responsibility, not just a conservation challenge, with hundreds of citizens participating in community science, art events or planning meetings.
 - A 20% reduction in wildlife-vehicle collisions at priority sites because of measurable behavior changes in drivers such as adopting lower speeds and safer driving behaviors .
 - An increased capacity in local partners to help lead these initiatives using shared language, visuals, and data to champion connectivity in their communities.



Photos courtesy of
Stephany Hildebrand.

Eels Back

The American Eel is one of nature’s most enduring mysteries. Born in the Sargasso Sea, these silver travelers navigate thousands of miles of open ocean to reach the rivers and creeks of the Northeast. For the Anishinaabeg and other Indigenous Nations, the eel—or Pimazi—is a vital cultural relative, a source of sustenance, and a central figure in ceremonial life. Yet for decades, this migration has been foreclosed by a landscape of colonial barriers: dams, turbines, and privatized waterways that have extirpated the eel from much of its historic range.

The Eels Back initiative is a response to this systemic fragmentation. Led by the **Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nation** (KZA), this interdisciplinary network brings together Anishinaabe knowledge keepers, scientists, artists, and policy experts to transform how freshwater systems are governed. The work is grounded in the understanding that a single large female eel can carry 10 million eggs; protecting just one individual is an act of intergenerational restoration. This was recently illustrated when a young Lenape man, participating in an Eels Back gathering supported by the Accelerator program, purchased a large female eel from a private weir owner specifically to release her back to the ocean—an act of “inspired change” that the network seeks to replicate across the continent.

The Eels Back team utilized the Accelerator to move from a shared concern to a structured, operational vision for an interconnected web of practitioners. The program provided the focused space



Coastal Nova Scotia
and New Brunswick,
Ottawa and St.
Lawrence River
Watersheds, parts of
NY



Implementation
will take place
2026–2030



\$300,000 USD
needed in 2026;
\$2.48 million USD
by 2030

to move beyond local outreach and toward a coordinated strategy for broad-scale, transformative change. During the program, the team focused on:

- Developing a five-year growth strategy to help them move beyond ad-hoc gatherings to design a scalable model for a 200-person network, including a phased plan to increase staff capacity in both the U.S. and Canada, which would ensure the network can support the complex needs of Indigenous attendees and practitioners.
- Re-establishing Indigenous governance roles by creating a strategic framework that upholds Indigenous self-determination in freshwater management—an approach that moves the needle from consultation to active governance and responsibility over aquatic habitats.
- Coordinating multi-jurisdictional action by bridging the gap between academic research and Indigenous science, with a refined strategy to address specific threats—such as turbine mortality and overharvest—across multiple provincial and state borders.

The work of Eels Back is about habitat restoration rooted in centering Indigenous knowledge and governance, and the initiative will ultimately create an open path from the Sargasso Sea to the St. Lawrence for eel migration. This effort is not just a benefit to the eel, but a roadmap for how we can fulfill our collective responsibilities to the waters and the species that have survived against all odds.

POISED FOR IMPACT



- If funded, by 2030, the Eels Back initiative will lead to the...
- Formation of a highly collaborative, interdependent initiative that shares strategies and knowledge across a wide geographic range.
 - Re-establishment of American Eel populations throughout their historic range to restore Indigenous cultural connections to eels and associated cultural practices, while providing direct benefits to ecosystems and non-indigenous people.
 - Re-establishment of Indigenous governance roles and responsibilities to aquatic species and habitats in the northeast.



Photos courtesy of Nature NB.

Wele’k Pemjajika’q Siknikt – Côtes en santé N.-B. – Healthy Coasts NB

The Bay of Fundy is a landscape defined by extremes, home to the highest tides in the world and a coastal way of life that has sustained communities for generations. However, these iconic shorelines are increasingly vulnerable to the dual pressures of unsustainable development and a rapidly changing climate. While there is no shortage of local passion to protect these spaces, many communities in the Fundy region have historically lacked the coordinated support, technical data, and funding needed to move from concern to on-the-ground action.

To bridge this gap, **Nature NB** is scaling its flagship Healthy Coasts NB model (Wele’k Pemjajika’q Siknikt) to the Fundy coast. Unlike top-down conservation approaches, this model is built on a community-first philosophy: asking local watershed groups, municipalities, and Indigenous Nations, “What do you need to succeed?” Nature NB acts as the backbone organization, providing the strategic planning and financial resources—including a unique re-granting program—that allows local partners to lead their own restoration and monitoring projects.

Nature NB utilized the Accelerator to transition from a successful pilot in northeastern New Brunswick to planning for a permanent, large-scale operation in the Bay of Fundy. The program provided



Bay of Fundy,
New Brunswick



Implementation
will take place
2026-2030



\$2.5 million CAD
needed to complete
this work

the focused environment necessary to operationalize the complexity of a multi-partner, regional expansion. During the program, the team focused on:

- Developing multi-tiered funding scenarios, moving beyond year-to-year planning to create a robust three-year growth strategy and flexible roadmap that allows them to communicate clearly with funders about the scale of impact possible at different investment levels.
- Codifying their collaborative model and formalizing the pillars of their approach: community-led planning, participatory science, capacity building, and implementation.
- Strengthening partnership approaches by refining how they facilitate collaboration among diverse stakeholders, and ensuring that Indigenous knowledge and local expertise are not just included, but are the driving forces behind conservation decisions.

Going forward, Nature NB’s work will ensure that the Bay of Fundy remains a resilient, working landscape, and the Healthy Coasts program is designed to be a permanent regional fixture, providing the stable infrastructure and funding needed for New Brunswick’s communities to safeguard the shorelines they call home.

POISED FOR IMPACT



If funded, by 2030, this work will...

- Have consistently secured \$500,000/year to maintain and expand the Healthy Coasts program in New Brunswick.
- Be well established and operating in the Fundy region of New Brunswick.
- Positively impact coastal biodiversity and communities in New Brunswick.
- Lead to stronger, more coordinated local governance around coastal conservation and enhanced community understanding and ownership of local coastal health.



Roadmap to Restoring Wabanaki Sweetgrass Harvesting Access in Maine Tidal Marshes

In coastal Maine, salt marshes are ecological buffers against a rising sea. For the Wabanaki people, they are also the living relatives and ancestral homelands that they have nurtured for countless generations. For centuries, sweetgrass beds—vital to both cultural practice and marsh health—were tended with the same care one would give a family member. However, beginning in the 1600s, Wabanaki people were systematically pushed away from these lands, and today, while 20major restoration projects are underway across the state, Wabanaki leadership is present in only two. This disconnect means that decisions about these cultural landscapes are often made without the voices of the people who know them best.

To address this imbalance, a unique collective was formed between Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners, including the **Schoodic Institute**, Sipayik Resilience Committee, Kiwenik & Kasq Indigenous Knowledge Institute, Maine Coast Heritage Trust, Friends of Acadia, and The Nature Conservancy in Maine. This partnership represents a move beyond consultation toward a model of parity, where Wabanaki caretakers and restoration practitioners work as equals to guide the future of the coast.



Coastal Maine



Implementation
will take place
2026-2035



\$965,000 USD
needed to complete
this work

The team utilized the Accelerator to move from a shared vision to a concrete operational framework. The program provided the dedicated space needed to address the “parity gap” within the Maine Tidal Marsh Restoration Network (MTMRN), turning a group of six individuals from different organizations into a unified force for systemic change. During the program, the team focused on:

- Establishing protocols to ensure data sovereignty via the proposed Wabanaki Data Trust, an infrastructure that will ensure that Indigenous knowledge remains under the control of the Tribes, allowing for the safe sharing of information with restoration practitioners without compromising cultural intellectual property.
- Identifying the critical need for a full-time Wabanaki-Restoration Liaison, a position designed to facilitate the complex, long-term dialogue between Tribal leadership, sweetgrass gatherers, and the hundred-plus practitioners within the restoration network.
- Creating tools for access, including practical frameworks to ensure Wabanaki people have safe, unencumbered access to salt marshes for cultural practices, ensuring that restoration outcomes prioritize both ecological health and Indigenous values.

Now positioned for durable, long-term collaboration, this collective aims to be a model for correcting the power dynamics of land management in Maine. By establishing the legal and social infrastructure for co-stewardship, the team is ensuring that Wabanaki voices are no longer guests in conservation spaces, but the primary architects of the landscape’s resilience.

POISED FOR IMPACT



If funded, this work will...

- Develop a framework for functioning relationships between Wabanaki communities and salt marsh restoration practitioners.
- Establish a framework and process for co-management/co-stewardship of salt marsh restoration projects.
- Develop and implement Indigenous data protection tools.
- Expand safe access to salt marshes for Wabanaki people.

APPENDIX A

OVERVIEW OF THE PEREGRINE ACCELERATOR

Who we are

Founded in 2018 at Colorado State University by former U.S. Senator and Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar and CSU Chancellor Tony Frank, the Salazar Center serves as a vital bridge between people and nature. As an externally facing center of the university, we work to unite diverse stakeholders across jurisdictions, cultures, and sectors to meet the most pressing environmental challenges of the 21st century. Our mission is to spark conservation innovation and action, securing a thriving future for North America’s lands, waters, and the life they support.

At our core, the Center is a trusted connector, convener and incubator. By leveraging CSU’s world-renowned sustainability expertise and our own extensive cross-sector network spanning Canada, the U.S., and Mexico, we revitalize landscape integrity and bolster climate resilience. We believe that by bringing together great thinkers and actors and investing in compelling ideas, we can ignite collective care for nature that transforms society’s relationship with the natural world.

The Peregrine Accelerator for Conservation Impact

The Salazar Center’s flagship initiative, the Peregrine Accelerator for Conservation Impact, acts as a searchlight for place-based conservation solutions with breakthrough potential. Inspired by the tech-sector model of rapid incubation, the Accelerator is an intensive six-month program designed to bridge the gap between a pilot project and its potential for transformative, durable impact. Each year, the program focuses on a specific high-leverage transboundary “nest” landscape, supporting a cohort of unique and complementary project teams through a blend of seed funding, tailored training, individualized mentorship, and peer learning.

The Accelerator is more than a grant-making program; it is a capacity-building engine that generates landscape-scale change. By providing the specific resources and networks that local leaders often lack, we help project teams—comprised of nonprofits, Indigenous communities, municipalities, and researchers—refine their strategies, improve project design, and increase their fundraising preparedness. Since 2019, the program has engaged over 60 organizations, fostering durable relationships that continue to drive impact long after the formal curriculum concludes.

Our approach is defined by three core pillars:

1. Accelerating project implementation

We identify place-based solutions with breakthrough potential in ecologically significant landscapes, then invest tailored resources into the groups developing them.

Through an intensive six-month program, we provide the training, mentorship, and seed funding necessary to put nascent conservation ideas into action faster and more effectively. Every journey begins with identifying the specific barriers and challenges faced by each project team. This multi-stage process informs the design

of a custom curriculum that addresses shared challenges like fundraising and impact measurement, supplemented by one-on-one mentorship and consultation from experts from our continental network, as well as peer learning within the cohort.

We move beyond the “planning trap,” with the goal of at least 75% of teams beginning project implementation within 12 months of completing the program, effectively accelerating project timelines by at least half a year. Not only does a team’s participation in the program help them launch their projects sooner, it also provides them with the right strategies, tools, and connections to ensure their work is impactful, durable, and fundable

2. Strengthening the social fabric of conservation

We recruit a cohort of diverse but complementary project teams, fostering new connections across jurisdictions, sectors, and cultures within a shared landscape.

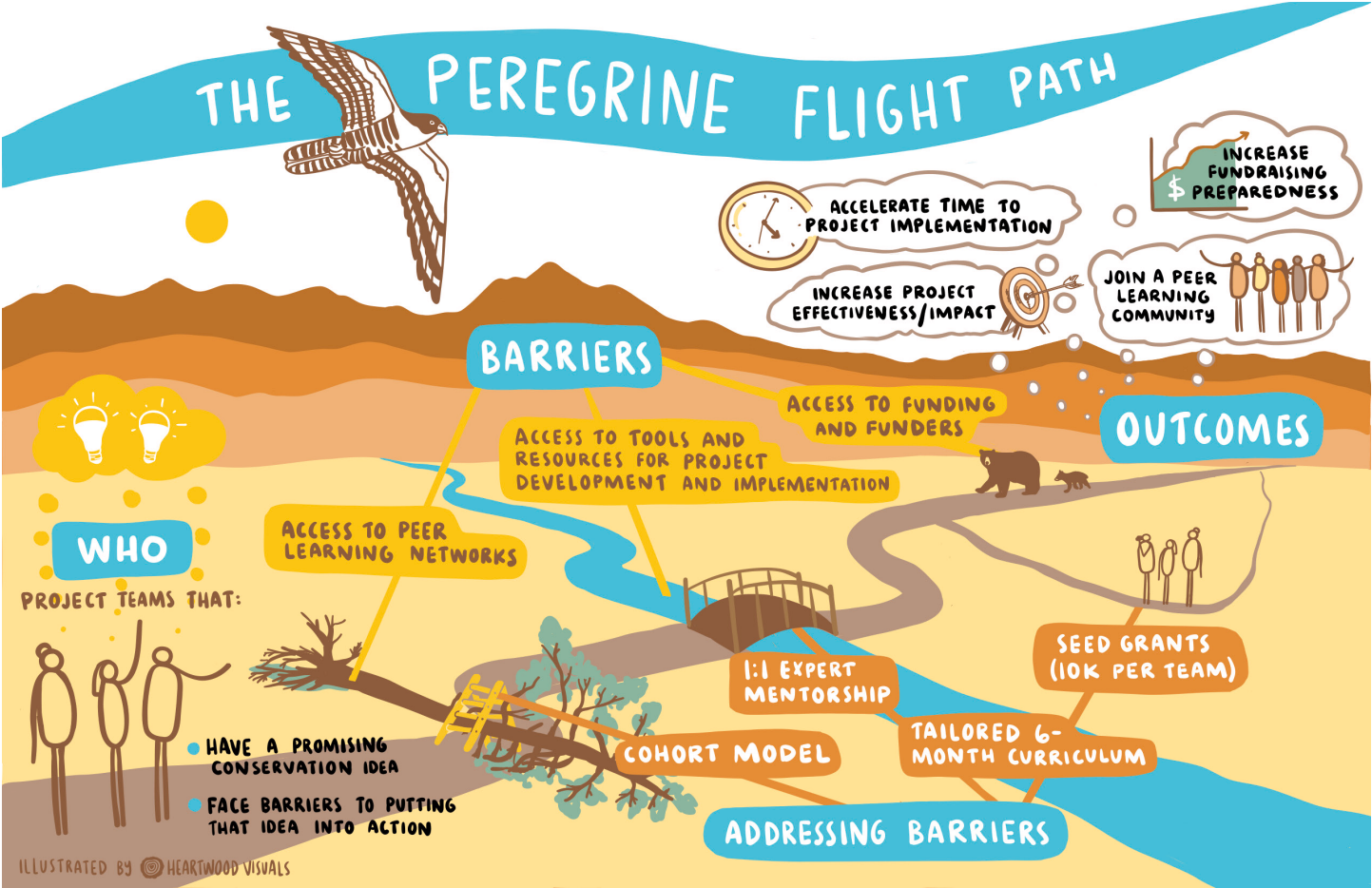
From the cohort kickoff retreat to the final presentation and wrap-up event, we prioritize face-to-face connection between regional leaders across jurisdictions and cultures. In between these bookend in-person gatherings, dedicated time is built into the virtually delivered curriculum for ongoing dialogue and peer support between teams. After the program ends, we continue to facilitate this peer community through ongoing resource sharing, “alumni” gatherings, and financial assistance for teams to collaborate with one another. We aim to keep at least 75% of participants active in the peer network long after their program concludes.

Not only does this model nurture new connections during the six-month program, it lays the foundation for a robust peer-learning community rooted in trust and landscape-level awareness that enhances the potential to achieve durable and equitable conservation outcomes.

3. Making a leverageable investment

We provide each project team with \$20,000 in seed funding to support their project development costs.

At the same time, we deliver in-depth fundraising training and support teams in developing the materials and relationships they need to successfully pursue funding upon completion of the Accelerator program. Combined, these elements create a multiplier effect on the initial investment made in each team: for every \$10,000 in seed funding provided, we anticipate that teams will raise an average of \$40,000 in additional support within a single year. And after the end of the program, we continue to amplify team successes and connect them to new resources through our broader community of practice, tracking their long-term fundraising success to ensure these “nests” remain resilient.



	Accelerate project implementation	Strengthen the social fabric of conservation	Make a leverageable investment
Focus	High-leverage, place-based solutions in target landscapes	A cohort of diverse but complementary project teams	Seed funding, plus fundraising training, materials, and connections
Mechanism	Tailored training, mentorship/consultation, and resources	Intentional, in-depth facilitation of a peer learning community	Financial and strategic “multiplier effects”
Outcome	Projects implemented faster and more effectively	Long-lasting regional, transboundary, and cross-sector collaboration	Timely and sustainable project financing

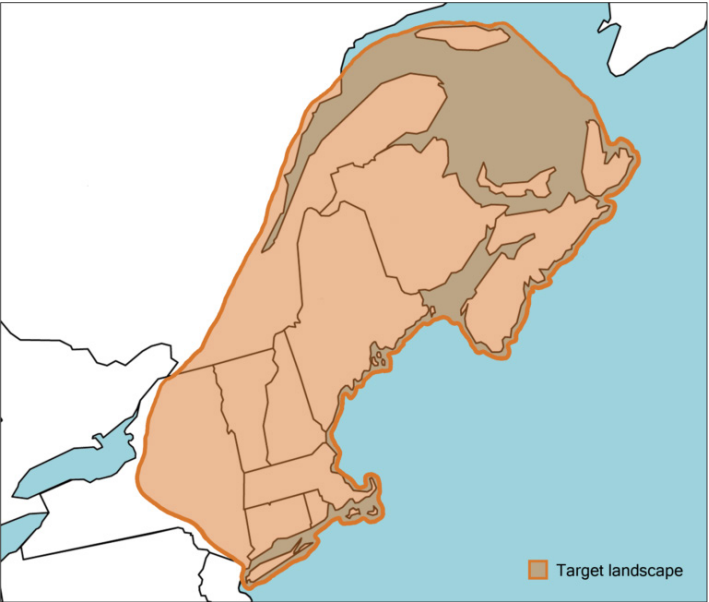
APPENDIX B
2025 PROGRAM IN DETAIL

Why the North Atlantic Transboundary Landscape?
“In America, the Northeast is the place where the sun first rises.” – Maya Lin, What is Missing?

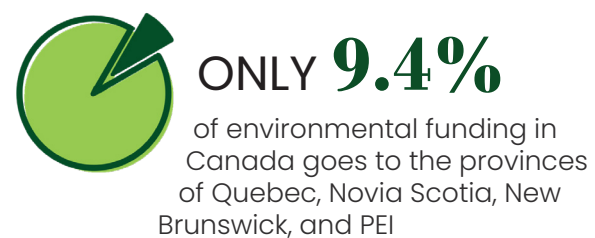
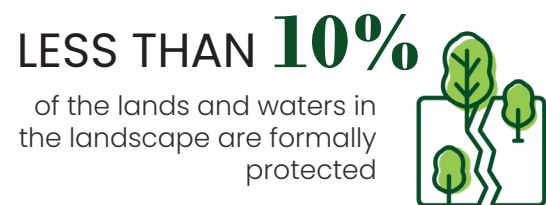
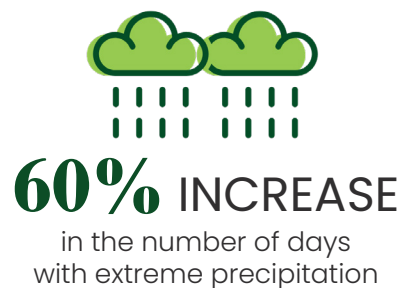
Each year, we identify a landscape or “nest” that offers significant opportunity to contribute to national and global targets for biodiversity and climate change, to advance community wellbeing, and to address environmental inequities and injustice. The Peregrine Accelerator’s nests are chosen for multiple reasons: they are transboundary with a strong track record of and/or ample opportunity to coordinate across borders, and they are well positioned to achieve impact as determined by conservation value, lack of attention, and need. Ecologically, Peregrine Accelerator nests possess several characteristics:

- They contain a high and/or unique biodiversity of plants and wildlife that remains intact but is highly threatened; has a history of degradation with the potential to be restored; has potential for large landscape connectivity; and/or is essential for cultural subsistence, recreation, spiritual enrichment, and aesthetic pleasure.
- They are vulnerable to and have potential to mitigate climate change impacts.
- They have high potential to contribute to global biodiversity targets, such as the Kunming–Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework.

In alignment with these characteristics, and following in-depth consultation with dozens of partners, the Center selected the North Atlantic Transboundary Landscape for the 2025 Accelerator program. This nest is defined primarily in accordance with the [New England-Acadian Forests ecoregion](#), as outlined by OneEarth. Additional consideration was given to the inclusion of Indigenous territories and to the Center’s desire to recruit a cohort with a shared ecology and common socio-cultural ground, but from a large enough swath to bring together groups from two countries in a context where they might not otherwise interact. The result is a landscape defined to uniquely suit the needs and aims of the Accelerator program.



The region holds great potential to increase landscape connectivity, reverse biodiversity loss, and achieve targets like 30x30 in the region. Yet it is highly fragmented, both in terms of ecological connectivity and jurisdiction, and is characterized by a high proportion of privately owned lands. This dearth of large tracts of federal and crown lands, especially



compared with the Western half of the continent, often translates to structural exclusion from primary national conservation budgets. This funding gap is worsened by the administrative friction and high costs of trying to coordinate fragmented, cross-border environmental grants.

In sum, the North Atlantic Transboundary Landscape embodies an array of complex challenges to and opportunities for ecological and community health. By focusing the 2025 Accelerator here, the region received much needed monetary and non-monetary support to set the stage for outstanding on-the-ground impact and ensure the long-term resilience of this critical corner of North America.

External guidance

Nest refinement

Beginning in early 2024, the Center engaged in conversation with actors from across this landscape to deepen our understanding of place and the challenges and opportunities it presents for new and different place-based conservation solutions. Staff conducted informal interviews with more than three dozen individuals and organizations from both countries who represent regional, national, and multinational interests, and who include funders, NGOs and on-the-ground groups both big and small, Indigenous-led efforts, government agencies, and research. This process confirmed that the North Atlantic would benefit from a program like the Peregrine Accelerator, and that the Center would be able to recruit a diversity of well-poised project proposals while at the same time building upon and complementing a number of efforts and networks already gaining traction in the region.

Advisor role

Prior to the 2025 program getting underway, the Salazar Center recruited five informal advisors to contribute to shaping and refining key components of the program to ensure it effectively recruited, engaged, and supported both participants and the broader community

of interest that interacts with the program. Advisors each had a background in biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, community-led conservation, environmental justice and equity, and/or monitoring and evaluation, and provided their expertise and experience to:

- Inform program metrics and impact, curriculum design, and the re-granting/funding model.
- Help promote the call for proposals through respective networks; recommend applicants.
- Provide recommendations for, and introductions to, relevant experts to be recruited across the lifespan of the program to serve as evaluators, mentors, and workshop facilitators/trainers.

2025 advisors

Jennifer Gooden
Biophilia Foundation, Accelerator “alumna”

William Labich
Highstead Foundation

Jessa Rae Growing Thunder
Native Americans in Philanthropy

Laura Rose Day
Penobscot River Restoration Trust

Phil Huffman
Quebec Labrador Foundation

Cohort selection process

Project teams are selected through a competitive, multi-stage evaluation process with the help of expert evaluators. In 2025, we recruited 32 evaluators to review, provide feedback on, and score the 24 eligible applications we received through the request for proposals (see more about the evaluator role and who supported the process in 2025 on page 36). Each of these proposals was reviewed by five evaluators, and regardless of whether they moved onto the next stage in the process, each applicant received substantive, actionable feedback from their assigned evaluators. We heard again in 2025 from multiple applicants that our proposal process was transparent, accessible, and thoughtful, and that the feedback we provide is unparalleled compared to other funding opportunities they’ve pursued.

Using the input from evaluators, we then selected 15 “semi-finalist” project teams, who we interviewed in order to select the final cohort of eight project teams. This interview process is an opportunity to better understand each team’s needs, challenges, and goals and how and to what degree we anticipate their work will benefit from the Accelerator program. It is also an opportunity for teams to ask questions and learn more about the program. When selecting project teams, we considered each team’s geography, project approach, interdisciplinary composition, and anticipated impact to ensure that the cohort represents a rich mix of people, places, and projects that will support a unique and robust peer-learning community.

Eligibility criteria

- The project team must be based and currently working in the target “nest” landscape (as defined in the annual RFP) and comprise organization(s) based in the U.S., Canada, and/or Mexico.

- The project team’s proposed solution must be designed to deliver multiple benefits for nature and people, specifically regarding biodiversity, climate resilience, community well-being, and environmental equity and justice. The project team’s proposed solution cannot carry on propaganda or otherwise attempt to influence legislation within the meaning of U.S. Code Section 4945(d)(1); the proposed project cannot aim to influence the outcome of any specific public election or to carry on, directly or indirectly, any voter registration drive within the meaning of U.S. Code Section 4945(d).
- If selected, at least one representative of the project team must be willing and able to participate in the 6-month Accelerator program, including attending bi-weekly workshops. We anticipate a minimum commitment of 2-3 hours during most weeks of the program. The majority of a project team’s members must be paid staff of the organization(s) represented within the team. If selected, at least one of the team’s primary participants in the Accelerator program must be paid staff.
- Project teams should comprise at least one small- to mid-sized organization (though we do not prescribe specific cut-offs regarding operating budgets or staff size to define this); project teams are not required but are encouraged to represent multiple organizations and diverse perspectives and sectors.
- Project teams should have demonstrable organizational capacity and some track record of success but still face significant, specific barriers/challenges to successfully implementing their proposed solution.
- A project team’s primary organization is not required to be a legally tax-exempt entity; municipalities, university centers and institutes, and Tribal and First Nations are encouraged to apply.
- Proposed solutions may be “on the ground” work, but they may also be rooted in community engagement, actionable research, policy approaches, or technological or finance tools.

Proposal evaluation criteria

Each criterion is comprised of the elements described below it; a high score means a proposal demonstrates most or all of those elements, and a low score means a proposal demonstrates few or none. These criteria are equally weighted, with a maximum score of 5 and a minimum score of 1 for each criterion. In addition to scores, evaluators had the opportunity to provide comments on each criterion, as well as make a final recommendation, raise questions for staff to potentially pursue in the semi-finalist interview process, and include feedback that might not align directly with a specific criterion.

1. Designed to deliver multiple benefits* for people and nature
 - The proposed project seeks to deliver outcomes that sustain or enhance biodiversity native to the region
 - The proposed project seeks to deliver outcomes that increase climate resilience and/or mitigate or adapt to the impacts of climate change for natural systems and human communities
 - The proposed project seeks to deliver outcomes that support community wellbeing, and that address environmental inequities and injustices if/where they exist

- Anticipated outcomes and impacts of the proposed solution are responsive to and will benefit diverse and under-recognized communities; benefits will be equitable in their distribution and impact, with consideration given to both racial and socioeconomic equity
- Where the above outcomes are uncertain or not fully defined, the team articulates a desire to explore and expand how their project can deliver positive impact through the Accelerator experience

**What are multiple benefits? We define multiple benefits as the different positive outcomes generated by a proposed project or approach, which may address multiple objectives across various domains, such as environmental, social, and economic goals. We use “multiple benefits” to emphasize the full spectrum of potential positive outcomes to be derived from a single initiative, and we value different impacts for nature and people equally, rather than prioritizing some outcomes as primary and others as secondary, ancillary, or incidental. For example, restoring a wetland provides multiple benefits such as improved biodiversity, flood control, water filtration, carbon sequestration, and recreational opportunities, and each of these outcomes may be considered primary or equal benefits.*

2. Collaborative, inclusive, and community-centered
 - Frontline communities are meaningfully engaged and will be involved in project development, decision-making, and implementation throughout the lifespan of the proposed project
 - Multiple ways of knowing and working are recognized and included in the proposed project design, implementation, and impact to drive a textured* outcome(s) that is inclusive and contributes to multiple benefits
 - Where the above relationships and frameworks are lacking or under-developed, the project team recognizes its shortcomings and articulates an authentic desire to intentionally address gaps and opportunities for deeper engagement as part of the Accelerator experience

**What is a textured outcome? A “textured” outcome is nuanced and multidimensional, achieved by incorporating diverse perspectives, approaches, and methodologies. It should reflect that the project is designed to be inclusive and holistic, accounting for the complexity of social, cultural, environmental, and technical factors involved.*

3. Feasible
 - The team demonstrates the collaborative capacity and stability necessary to work well together and to design and execute the defined, agreed-upon outcome of their specific project; this may be exemplified by an already established protocol, strategy, or other evidence of working together effectively
 - The team has some track record of success in the region
 - The team has demonstrable expertise, relevant experience, and relationships that position them for success
 - The barriers/challenges they enumerate are surmountable, and the team has reasonable expectations of how much the Accelerator can help address them

Proposal evaluators

Evaluators have experience/expertise in the target landscape, and/or bring a relevant national or international perspective; evaluators should have a background in biodiversity protection or restoration, climate resilience, community-led conservation, environmental justice and equity, conservation funding and finance, and/or monitoring and evaluation. We strive to include individuals with diverse backgrounds, identities, interests, areas of expertise, and perspectives.

Each evaluator scores and offers feedback on 4-6 proposals using an online review portal. The Center offers a one-hour training session for evaluators, conducted via webinar, and provides a detailed rubric (see evaluation criteria, above) and standard application format. Each evaluator commits 4-7 hours to the role during the proposal review process, for a total of more than 150 hours volunteered in support of the Accelerator program in 2025.

2025 evaluators

Laurel Atkinson Waltons Trust	Jessa Rae Growing Thunder Native Americans in Philanthropy	Ellie Oldach First Light
David Browne Birds Canada	Lara Hansen EcoAdapt	Jonathan Peterson Network for Landscape Conservation
Dawn Carr Nature Conservancy of Canada	Brian Houseal United States Biosphere Network	Conrad Reining Darmouth University
Ela Chapin Vermont House of Representatives	Deb Kleinman Lupine Collaborative	Hallie Schwab Open Space Institute
Carrie Clingan National Fish and Wildlife Foundation	Robin Lawson Center for Landscape Conservation	Shelby Semmes The Trust for Public Land
Deb Davidson Center for Large Landscape Conservation	Jim Levitt International Land Conservation Network	Peter Stein Lyme Timber
Paul Elconin	John Lounds Center for Landscape Conservation	Alexa Sutton Landberry Foundation
Nathan Fey Mighty Arrow Family Foundation	Katie Michels Conservation Finance Network	Kristen Sykes National Parks Conservation Association
Curtis Fisher National Wildlife Federation	Chris Miller Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society	Sam Tucker Colorado River Sustainability Campaign
Andrew Fisk American Rivers	Chandni Navalkha Lincoln Institute of Land Policy	Benjamin Tuggle US Fish and Wildlife Service
Jocelyn Forbrush Mass Audubon		Amy Wolfe Trout Unlimited

Accelerator Curriculum

Accelerator curriculum comprises workshops, informal expert conversations, and 1:1 mentorship from subject matter experts, and is tailored each year to address both the goals and needs shared across the cohort by all project teams and those unique to each team. To deliver this bespoke curriculum experience, we rely on a number of different kinds of partners.

Workshops and informal expert conversations

Workshops and informal expert conversations addressed topics and themes relevant to all project teams in the cohort. Workshops were designed to be instructional, and many included pre-reading or other prep work assigned to Accelerator participants in advance, as follow-up work, or as deliverables. They were also structured to include opportunities for small group discussion and peer learning. Expert conversations were more informal, and panelists spoke to their own work and experience as it related to the topic and offered lessons learned. From these offerings, Accelerator participants took away strategies, knowledge, and/or other resources to inform their implementation plan, evaluation strategy, fundraising efforts, and/or other key elements of their work. In many cases, the individuals who led workshops or conversations were also available on a 1:1 basis to teams for any needed follow-up or deeper dives.

2025 curriculum overview (June-December)

Kickoff Retreat

Multi-day, in-person gathering for project teams to connect and lay the foundation for a peer-learning community; included opportunities to connect with local Indigenous leaders and regional thought partners.

Fundraising Bootcamp

Facilitated by ForImpact at the kickoff retreat, two half-day workshops focused on fundraising strategies, prospect research and cultivation, and effective messaging.

Conservation Standards & Healthy County Planning

A two-part series led by Conservation Coaches on adaptive management principles to create a project-specific results chain and identify risks, assumptions, and key activities for projects.

Building a Theory of Change; Metrics and Evaluation Planning

Facilitated by Corona Insights, a two-part series on building a theory of change, and articulating, measuring, and evaluating project impact.

Biodiversity and Cultural Indicators for Impact Facilitated by the Biodiversity Indicators

Program, the RAD Network, and Conservation Metrics, a workshop providing resources and strategies for contextualizing local and regional impact within global frameworks and in the context of systems/transformational change.

Community and Participatory Science

Facilitated by CitSci, a workshop providing the mechanics and frameworks for collaborative scientific research to help practitioners understand the practical requirements and potential impacts of participatory methods.

Communicating to Diverse Audiences

Facilitated by Spitfire Strategies, a workshop introducing frameworks and resources for tailoring communications to target audiences, and highlighting sector-specific approaches shared by additional partners from the National Caucus of Environmental Legislators and Texan by Nature.

Conservation Finance 101

Facilitated by the Conservation Finance Network, a workshop presenting an overview of different funding sources and market-based

mechanisms for financing conservation efforts and including time for teams to ask questions in preparation for the Dolphin Tank.

Dolphin Tank

Developed by the Conservation Finance Network and facilitated in partnership with funders and finance experts, an opportunity for each project team to practice their funding pitch to a panel of “dolphins” (like Shark Tank but friendlier) for feedback and refinement.

Changing Human Behavior for Conservation Impact

Facilitated by Global Conservation Solutions, a workshop providing the “Know, Enable, Motivate” framework and psychological insights for moving beyond simple awareness toward meaningful human behavior change to support biodiversity and climate outcomes.

Indigenizing Collaboration

Facilitated by Native Americans in Philanthropy, The Network for Landscape Conservation, and Mending Mountains LLC, a workshop offering strategies and perspectives for more durable and meaningful collaboration with, and leadership by, Indigenous communities.

Final Presentation Event

Multi-day, in-person culminating event for project teams to present implementation-ready projects to an audience of funders and regional leaders, with the goal of creating new relationships and pathways for funding, partnership, and other resources; included dedicated time for cohort reflection and program wrap-up.

Mentors

Each project team was matched with at least three subject matter experts (some of whom also supported the delivery of the curriculum described above) to address issues that were unique to their proposed project, pairing specifically recruited individuals with a team based on a defined need, challenge, or goal of the project. “Mentorship” includes supporting a team as an advisor, connector, and/or with technical assistance, with a time commitment ranging from a few hours to 20–30 hours during the six-month Accelerator program. Examples of mentorship for the 2025 cohort include:

- A community development manager with deep experience building resident capacity to envision and implement community-centered initiatives, working with a team to refine their strategies for grassroots political advocacy, public engagement, and developing clear indicators for local community-readiness.
- An institutional policy strategist familiar with the specific government entities a team aimed to influence, providing key insights into high-leverage intervention points and the data needed to shift agency perspectives, allowing the team to strategically align their project design.
- A collective of conservation finance specialists with diverse expertise in different funding mechanisms, working with a single team to break down the pros, cons, and real-world applications of various financial structures to help them determine the optimal model for the fund they were developing.
- An Indigenous council advancing similar initiatives in another region of the country, meeting with a team working on land repatriation and cultural access frameworks to share lessons learned, operational challenges, and strategies for navigating complex relationships with different types of landowners.

2025 mentors

Heather Barna
Collaborative Conservation Planner

Paul Collier and Jane Klinger
Corona Insights

Ross Dixon and Audrey Popa
Coast Funds

Melissa Ann Ehrenreich and Desiree Shelley
Indigenous Conservation Council of the Chesapeake Bay

Nick Fellers and Mike Brown
For Impact

Gemera Gifford
Mending Mountains Collective

Nicole Gross Camp
A.R.C. Conservation Consulting

Jens Hawkins-Hilke
Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department

Peter Howell and Katie Michels
Conservation Finance Network

Phil Huffman
Quebec Labrador Foundation

Melinda Laituri
CSU Geospatial Centroid

Kristen Lear and Ana Ibarra
Bat Conservation International

Pierre-Laurent Macridis and Sila Agiroglu
Rally Assets

Moey Newbold
Groundwork USA

Josh Noseworthy
Global Conservation Solutions

Kristin Oloffson
CSU Department of Political Science

Gape Oppler
Center for Large Landscape Conservation

Carly Quisenberry
Dancing Quill Consulting

Terri Schulz
Nature Conservancy of Colorado

Bryan Van Stippen
National Indian Carbon Coalition

Melyssa Watson
Horizonline Solutions LLC

Aketa Williams
Spitfire Strategies

George Wittemyer
CSU Center for Human Carnivore Coexistence

APPENDIX C

EVALUATING 2025 INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

Although only a few months have passed since the 2025 Accelerator program concluded, we can already demonstrate its positive return for participants and their work. After spending six months with the North Atlantic’s talented and determined cohort, we have high expectations for their long-term success across the region based on the following.

Accelerating project implementation

- 93% of participants reported that the Accelerator sped up their team’s time to project implementation by, on average, up to nine months, while multiple participants reported that their projects may never have taken shape at all without support from the Accelerator.
- 87% felt prepared or very prepared to implement their project upon completing the Accelerator—a 73% increase in confidence compared to when they started the program.
- 87% of participants reported that the Accelerator sparked new ideas to make their conservation project stronger or more effective.
- 73% reported that the Accelerator built their team’s capacity to make their conservation project a reality.
- 60% reported that the Accelerator helped to develop a bigger, bolder vision for their project.

Strengthening the social fabric of conservation

- Before the program, 67% of participants felt disconnected or extremely disconnected from the rest of the region, compared to 93% who felt connected or extremely connected after the program.
- Many reported learning to value building and maintaining relationships versus linear timelines and just getting the work done, specifically with Tribes/First Nations and new partnerships.
- Tools and language gained throughout the program helped participants connect with new partners.

Making a leverageable investment

- Each team received \$20,000 USD in seed funding from the Accelerator.
- Only 13% of teams felt prepared to fundraise for their project at the beginning of the Accelerator, compared to 87% feeling prepared or very prepared at the end. (87% reported neutral or not confident at the beginning of the Accelerator).
- Groups reported feeling more prepared to fundraise, diversify funding sources, create more compelling messaging and narratives tailored to their specific audiences, and use new tools and resources to make fundraising easier.
- 93% reported that creating deliverables (e.g., Theory of Change, Fundraising Pitch, Strategic Plan, Impact Report) was a valuable use of time and improved the confidence and skills they would need to tackle challenges in the future.
- At the beginning of the Accelerator, only 33% of the teams reported confidence in their ability to tell a compelling story about their conservation project to target audiences, compared to 100% feeling confident or very confident at the end of the Accelerator.

Other key themes from the feedback

- Having dedicated time, space, and funding to work on project planning was essential to helping projects be successful; the Accelerator held space not normally available for groups working together on projects. Many teams went from an idea to an actionable plan.
- For collaborative teams that were newer to working together, the Accelerator and associated activities created the vessel that they need to identify a shared vision and plan for their work.
- Preparing fundraising pitches and learning new techniques for communicating impact helped bolster fundraising preparedness and confidence.
- The opportunity to meet other project teams from across the region, particularly in a transboundary context, allowed teams to look at, frame, and message their work as part of something bigger.
- Having the opportunity to explore both Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews in the context of their work helped teams reframe how projects can be successful.
- Accountability that is built through “homework” and deadlines really pushed teams to move their projects forward.
- Many of the resources, strategies, and frameworks provided by the program are relevant not only to teams’ current projects, but to groups’ other work and long-term goals—a secondary benefit that many felt will strengthen the pipeline of conservation leaders in the region.
- Every group reported that the number one challenge they face and need ongoing support for is fundraising.



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