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## December 2025



### A Note from the CCC Director

For many of us working in conservation, 2025 has been hard. I have heard stories of federal grants being terminated that total 70% of an organization's budget. In some regions, personnel at federal agencies responsible for vast areas of public land have had staff reduced by 50%. At universities—including CSU—faculty have lost research funds and, as one result, there are fewer graduate student opportunities

Many times this year, friends and colleagues have expressed to me a deep concern that we are headed in a terrible direction. This concern reminds me of a quote from Barry Lopez's *Arctic Dreams*: "A more productive, certainly more engaging view, is that we have the intelligence to grasp what is happening, the

composure not to be intimidated by its complexity, and the courage to take steps that may bear no fruit in our lifetimes.”

At the CCC, we have the privilege of seeing people—you!—doing exactly this every day. Among those of you who participate in the Western Collaborative Conservation Network and the Colorado Forest Collaboratives Network, I hear about your work protecting land and water as well as your care for local communities and culture. Our CCC Fellows—working on different continents, in different cultures, and speaking different languages—walk similar paths to engage communities, navigate conflict, and build trust, taking steps toward conservation that endures into the future. In the applied work the CCC facilitates, we see people who weren’t even talking five years ago now working in partnership to solve problems. We were especially inspired by two days of dialogue at CSU among colleagues from across the West on collaborative conservation as an act of small “d” democracy. You can read more about all this work below.

Many times this year I have also heard people say that collaborative approaches to conservation—and many other challenges—are needed now more than ever. I am grateful to all of you who are embracing this approach to care for our shared lands and to make meaningful change. I am grateful, too, for the partnerships we have with so many of you. Thank you!

To hold myself in the mental space that strong collaboration requires, I am pausing as the year ends to look backward and forward, for the CCC and for myself. This year, I am using a framework new to me, [A Year of Conscious Reflection](#), by the team that wrote a book I still recommend, [The 15 Commitments of Conscious Leadership](#). I also listened recently to a podcast by Pico Iyer, an author I have admired for years, titled [“Living with Fire.”](#) Iyer reminds us that “Every one of us has a choice every day about whether we’re going to attend to what opens us up or to what cuts us up, and everything that follows will be a result of that choice.”

My best wishes to you for a peaceful end to your 2025 and a wonderful 2026,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

## 2025 with the CCC

### The Fellows Program



**We continue to be amazed by the extraordinary professors, students, and practitioners--**from Colorado to Brazil to Mongolia--who participate each year in the [CCC Fellows Program](#). This year, we celebrated the 14th cohort of CCC Fellows closing out their Fellowships. Even though these five projects were located on three different continents and four countries, the challenges of collaboration and conservation were similar.

You can see what this cohort did, what they found were effective practices, and

what they learned in the [Cohort 14's end-of-project presentations](#) video!



In May, we spent several days at Colorado State University's Mountain Campus with [Cohort 15](#), connecting with each other and learning about principles and practices of collaborative conservation. [We cover a lot of ground](#) at these retreats—stakeholder engagement, navigating conflict, working with Indigenous communities, and more—and we are thrilled when the retreat evaluations indicate it was worth the time. This year, one Fellow told us, **“Every single topic felt so important, and I already have ideas on how to modify my future work based on this.”** With Cohort 15, too, despite working with communities in four countries, core themes tie their projects together: incorporating different knowledge systems into land stewardship; intergenerational aspects of land stewardship systems; and the role of women as stewards of the landscape.

Stay tuned for an announcement (soon!) about Cohort 16. **Side note: it's not too early to be thinking about your own application next fall!**



## The Western Collaborative Conservation Network

In the years between Confluences, the Western Collaborative Conservation Network can seem to be a bit quiet, but as the end of the year draws close, **I want to share a few special things that WCCN partners have been working on.**

This year, as with every year, we focus on providing two things for anyone who may want to join us – **community and skill-building opportunities.** This year, our community was exemplified by our amazing working groups, particularly the Emerging Leadership Working Group and the Capacity Building Working Group. Our chairs, Jessica Archibald, Challie Facemire, and Barb Kipreos, have not only created spaces for connection and support, but they have also helped us move several projects forward.

One of these, done with the leadership of Nicole Reese and Paula Short of Crowd Conservation, is the [Mentorship Toolkit](#). The idea for this toolkit was in the works at the Emerging Leadership Working Group when I was hired in 2022, and so, seeing it come to fruition now through extensive interviews and literature review is absolutely exceptional. On that note, **the toolkit is nearing completion, and we are planning on hosting a mentorship workshop on the Monday before [Confluence 2026 – May 18<sup>th</sup>](#).**

Our Capacity Building Working Group is also experimenting with weaving together some of the emerging frameworks for collaboration, and we've recently started thinking about how we might align with the work of the [Network for Landscape Conservation](#).

Speaking of community, I've been so humbled this year by the connections that WCCN has and has formed with a variety of sister networks including the [California Landscape Stewardship Network](#), the [Network for Landscape Conservation](#), the [Highstead Foundation](#), and more. I am so grateful for the collaborative conservation community that we are all building together, and to which WCCN belongs.

**Finally, looking forward into 2026, the biggest project on WCCN's horizon is [Confluence 2026](#),** which will be held in Fort Collins, on May 19-21, 2026. In partnership with [Trees, Water, and People](#) and our planning committee, we are in the midst of planning a gathering that I feel will carry forward all the special elements of past Confluences, while also improving on them. We are creating space for art and connection, alongside skill-building, and we have a special emphasis this year on Indigenous engagement, which is being led by James

Calabaza, Zoe Bashkin, and the Confluence 2026 Indigenous Engagement Subcommittee. When I say I am excited for what we have planned... I am SO excited for what we have planned.

I really hope to see you all at [Confluence](#) in May, and/or joining us in one of our working group meetings.

And thank you so so much to everyone that is a part of this community – you make WCCN such a wonderful place to grow and work together.

- Aireona Bonnie-Raschke

### WCCN Homepage



**COLORADO'S 2025 VISION FOR FOREST HEALTH:**

Colorado forest health manifests as functioning forest ecosystems, resilient watersheds, and landscapes and communities adapted to fire through a mindset and culture shift, cross-boundary collaboration, and diverse and consistent funding, including forest product markets.

**Mindset and Culture Shift**  
Understanding and appreciating forest ecosystems is grounded in lifelong learning, often rooted in forest experiences. Coloradans and visitors embrace active stewardship roles as they live in and enjoy our dynamic, ever-changing forests. We support forest management, nurture resilient communities, and coexist with fire.

Colorado leads the nation in stewarding our forests for long-term forest health and the diverse services forests provide, including clean water, habitat, carbon storage, forest products, and sustainable recreation opportunities.

**Functioning Forest Ecosystems and Resilient Watersheds**  
Colorado's healthy forests represent a colorful Colorado with glistening snow-packed peaks, golden aspens, vibrant green growth, striking wildflowers, and clear streams.

Land managers recognize the complex and dynamic nature of forest ecosystems, tailoring approaches to ecological needs, elevating the role of natural processes, and continually evaluating and improving management strategies based on evolving science. The resulting forests are a mosaic of growth and disturbance with a range of tree species, ages, and sizes and native understories that provide vibrant habitats supporting abundant wildlife, signaled by singing birds, and jumping fish.

Forests continue to serve as Colorado's largest natural filter and reservoir, recognized as the primary water source for the American West. As the snowpack in high-elevation forests slowly melts, it is filtered through soils, recharging groundwater, filling reservoirs, and flowing downstream to farms, ranches, cities, and industrial users. Strategic forest and watershed management create thriving, biodiverse forests, watersheds, and riparian corridors that are resilient to changing climate conditions and disturbances (wildfire, pest-free flowering, forest insects, and diseases). These healthy landscapes support clean air, reliable, high-quality water, and safe communities while sustaining the state's natural beauty and economic vitality.

**Fire Adapted Forests and Communities**  
Innovative, proactive, and holistic approaches to fuels management, forest health activities, and development enable communities and infrastructure to experience wildfires without devastation or disproportionate impacts, reducing forest-type conversion and supporting active forest regeneration. Wildfires burn within preplanned perimeters among a mosaic of forest treatments, natural and maintained fuel breaks, and past fire footprints. Strategic approaches to fuel reduction combine hand and mechanical thinning, grazing, and safe and effective use of fire. As a result, Colorado experiences fewer days of extreme smoke, with favorable winds dispersing light smoke and fire managers restoring the ecological role of fire safely.

Through voluntary and regulatory approaches to fire-safe construction, development, and vegetation management, buildings and infrastructure seldom ignite from flames or burning embers. Utilities have upgraded and hardened infrastructure to prevent ignitions and substantially maintain power service during passing wildfires. When fires escape forest and community readiness, rapid response and ample recovery resources, including climate-adapted seeds and seedlings and cross-boundary analysis, user swift rehabilitation and reforestation.

**Cross-Boundary Collaboration**  
Diverse partners, including those beyond the forestry sector, address forest health needs across scales and administrative boundaries through coordinated, adaptive management and collaborative decision-making. This collaborative, shared stewardship approach ensures that work happens where needed, regardless of jurisdiction.

Efficient environmental planning enables nimble implementation in Colorado's publicly managed forests. State, federal, and community programs actively and equitably support healthy forests and fire-adapted communities by creating a culture of collaboration, removing internal agency barriers, building capacity, and sharing resources.

**Diverse, Consistent Funding and Forest Product Markets**  
Stable and diverse baseline funding and a mix of revenue streams sustain forest collaborative groups and enable efficient and effective progress on local forest management priorities. Coordinated funding and mixed revenue streams leverage carbon and innovative markets, the beneficiaries of the many ecosystem services provided by Colorado's healthy forests, and the avoided costs realized by prepared communities.

Diverse and innovative forest product industries and the associated workforce facilitate active, sustainable forest management and have rebounded as indispensable base industries. Local markets and wood processing facilities throughout the state provide outlets to utilize forest fuels as carbon-smart alternatives for construction, heating, manufacturing, and more while offsetting treatment costs.

## Colorado Forest Collaboratives Network

It was a big year for the [Colorado Forest Collaboratives Network!](#) We are so thankful for the many people who came together to support forest collaboratives and each other. Here are a few of our highlights from 2025:

### The 2025 Colorado Forest Collaboratives Summit

In early 2025, when organizations were facing change and uncertainty about policy and funding, the CFCN advisory group earnestly asked, “with so much uncertainty, should CFCN even host a Summit this year?” From thoughtful discussion, the answer became clear – yes, *now*, more than ever, we needed to have the Summit to provide an opportunity to gather and support one another and to keep things moving in positive and meaningful ways. From that, our theme was found: ***Designing for Uncertainty, Thriving in Community.*** Fourteen planning team members from 10 different organizations, including a team of co-coordinators, helped make this year’s Summit happen. Here are some survey responses answering the question “Tell us two things that were good about Summit”:

- *Networking, including conversations about financing opportunities.*
- *Great to reconnect with friends. Feels different and more impactful than ever.*
- *Really enjoyed lots of time to chat, connect, and build relationships. Great table conversations.*

- *I appreciated having a chance to dive in with experts, especially around wood and biomass utilization. Connecting with partners.*

Check out our [Summit Summary!](#)

### **[Branching Out](#)**

Branching Out learning events sustained good momentum during the past year, with more events and more participants, including a session almost every month. Find [Branching Out recordings and follow-up resources here](#)

### **Forest Health Council**

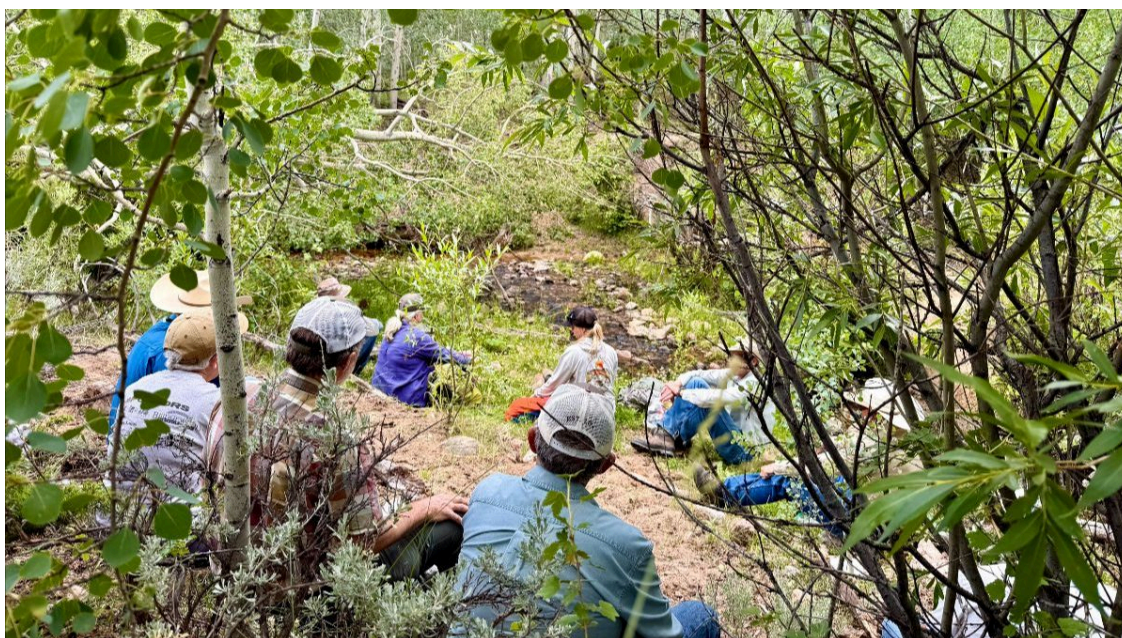
The CFCN Coordinator continues to serve on the [Colorado Forest Health Council](#) (CFHC), representing place-based forest collaboratives. Through focus groups, Branching Out sessions, Summit discussions, and inviting individuals from collaboratives to share their perspectives directly to the CFHC, collaboratives' perspectives are woven throughout relevant CFHC products from this year:

- [Colorado Forest Resilience Planning Guide](#) – the CFCN hosted a focus group to inform development of this Guide, and a Branching Out session to share the Guide upon its completion. The Guide builds on the 'Collaborative Stages of Readiness' framework.
- [Colorado's 2055 Vision for Forest Health](#) - 'Cross-Boundary Collaboration' is one of the 5 key themes in the Vision!
- [Colorado Statewide Strategy for Prescribed fire on Non-Federal Lands](#) - this document was informed by focus groups, including one hosted by the CFCN, and several of the case studies featured in the document feature collaboratives.
- [Federal Impacts to Forest Collaboratives](#) presentation at the April CFHC meeting – the CFCN Coordinator shared a summary of what we learned at our CFCN All-Partners Meeting to the CFHC.

As always, you can read summaries of CFHC meetings on our [Keeping up with the Colorado Forest Health Council webpage.](#)

**Can't get enough of forest conservation?! Remember to [subscribe](#) to the CFCN newsletter** to stay up-to-date on our latest events and resources!

**CFCN Homepage**



## A Student's Reflection: North Sand Creek Restoration Partnership

For the past year I have served as the **Project Assistant** on the [North Sand Creek Restoration Partnership](#). What a year of growth and perseverance it has been! At the beginning of the year, I felt that 2025 couldn't possibly come with many positives. Many conservation and social programs were losing funding while friends were worried about the status of their jobs. And to be honest, it was certainly discouraging when those things happened - it still is. But there is nowhere I would rather be, and no one with whom I would rather be weathering this storm, than the Center for Collaborative Conservation. **These people are something else.** My fellow staff have shown me what it means to put forth your best work, to dedicate precious time to things that matter, to cling to optimism, and to keep strengthening relationships when things seem dire. I will not soon forget the conversations we have had in the CCC weekly team huddle, in our

partnership meetings, and in 1:1s that have shaped my attitude and resilience to setbacks.

**The CCC is built for times like this.** For many of you, that manifests in the connections and communities of practice you engage in with the CCC: the [Western Collaborative Conservation Network](#), the [Colorado Forest Collaboratives Network](#), and the Fellows program. For me, this has meant **building relationships with the people engaged in the CCC and the North Sand Creek Restoration Partnership** beyond just our work. These folks have different philosophies about what it means to conserve our shared resources and how we get there, and **they all contribute these unique perspectives to make something beautiful and new.** They make me want to walk confidently into change and innovate for it. I have not always felt this way, but I know impactful conservation is possible with these people around me.

-- Julia Lankisch, North Sand Creek Project Assistant



## **New in 2026: the Collaborative Conservation Institute**

Natural resource challenges are more complex and urgent than ever. And working with landowners and communities to face these challenges is more important than ever. Working with communities requires approaches and skills that most of us are not taught in school. This is why, in partnership with the [Colorado State Forest Service](#), [CSU Extension](#), and the [Colorado Forest Restoration Institute](#), **we are launching the Collaborative Conservation**

**Institute in spring 2026.** The Institute will offer practitioners training in community engagement, communication, facilitation, conflict management, collaborative leadership, and more.

**This first training will focus on forest health and wildfire in Colorado.** If you work for CSFS or Extension, please consider joining us. If you work for a community-based collaborative in Colorado that works on forest issues, there may be an opportunity for you to participate, too. Thanks to generous funding from [Confluence Collaboration](#) and CSU's Warner College of Natural Resources, tuition will be waived for the 2026 Institute. To learn more, contact [Allison Brody](#).

In tandem with the Institute, we are also launching the [Common Ground Fellowship](#), a new program that we are co-creating with students from the [CSU chapter of the Society for Conservation Biology](#). During this Fellowship, CSU students (undergraduates and graduates) will learn practices in collaborative conservation, interview practitioners, and create a product that tells the story of collaborative conservation.

***If you are a CSU student and you are*** interested in learning principles and skills for solving conservation challenges involving people with different values, perspectives, and experiences, please consider applying for one of the twelve slots in the 2026 cohort. All students will be eligible to apply to the Common Ground Fellowship, regardless of major or academic level.

[Learn More and Apply Here](#)

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## Collaborative Conservation as “d”emocracy





In September, the CCC partnered with the University of Wyoming and the University of Montana to host a workshop on **Advancing Conservation and Reducing Conflict through Democratic Governance, Processes, and Practices**.

Half of the twenty participants were from universities, and the other half were from community-based organizations ranging from the [International Sonoran Desert Institute Alliance](#) in Arizona to [Winnett ACES](#) in Montana. Grounded in tangible examples, we explored factors enabling and constraining the success of collaborative work and democratic decision-making around natural resources. **Themes that reappeared throughout our dialogue included connection to place, relationships, trust, and belonging.** Soon we will share a summary report from the workshop, and we are exploring other ways to share major themes and insights.

**For a taste of the dialogue**, check out this podcast featuring [founding members of Winnett ACES](#) and [What's Next for Nature: Perspectives on Political Ecology](#) from the Salazar Center for North American Conservation, including [Bridging the Great Divide: Reconnecting Rural and Urban Communities by Building Democracy](#), [Landscapes and the Geography of Democracy](#), and [Collaborative Conservation: Building Habits of Democracy](#).

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## Notes From the Field



*Reflecting on 2025*

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Interwoven throughout my writings this year has been an ongoing consideration, often stemming from my own emotional needs, about how to survive these difficult times. **With that in mind, I want the beginning of my reflection here to be – we made it.** At the beginning of this year, I didn't know how we would get here, or what it would look like when we did, and now we are here. It's a reminder to me that we are strong, and even stronger together. I'm so grateful to our whole community for how we came together.

In that spirit, I think that a powerful theme that has threaded throughout the year has been **in-person connection**. Conferences and gatherings felt different this year – less about insular groups and more about reaching out to new people, and cultivating relationships. Because of this, every time that I was gathered together with folks this year, I felt such immense gratitude for the community-building that we were able to do together.

Some of the really special gatherings that I went to this year included our first ever [Wildflower Soiree](#), which highlighted our amazing [Fellows Program](#) through creating a space for our current and alumni Fellows to connect with one another, and CCC friends and donors. The ripple effects of this gathering are still being manifested today, and I'm so happy that my idea for this event has resulted in the fostering of new and existing partners as well as support for the Fellows Program.

**The Center has also been building new relationships through our engagement projects**, of which we have done several this year, and we have more ready to go for 2026. Among these is our [North Sand Creek Restoration Partnership](#), which worked together to get so much exciting work done this year – gathering data on the hydrology of our focal area, connecting with the OHV

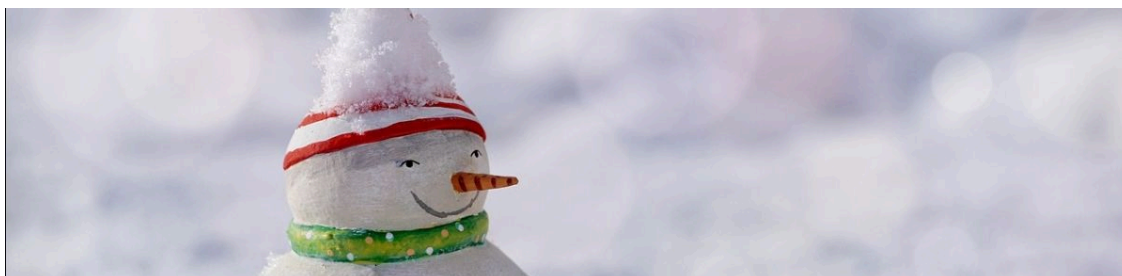
community about their role in protecting this landscape, and getting restoration work done on the ground. None of it would be possible without the partners and friends who have joined us in leading this effort.

Now, I'm looking to carry all of this forward into 2026, and for me and my programs, that will be manifested in Western Collaborative Conservation's [Confluence 2026](#) (May 19-21, 2026 in Fort Collins, CO – **put it on your calendar!**). Along with [Trees, Water, and People](#), as well as the many amazing folks on our planning committee, we are building out an event that will celebrate togetherness, create space for community building, all while providing collaborative skill-building opportunities.

I can't wait to carry forward all of our successes and the things that I've learned this year into 2026. And I am so grateful to everyone who has been on this journey with us this year.

**- Aireona Raschke, PhD**

*Our Associate Director of Practice*



## Other News and Opportunities

**Schnitzer Prize of the West** | This year, the High Desert Museum will launch this award to celebrate visionary leaders whose work is shaping our shared future. They honor extraordinary individuals—or a small group of individuals—whose efforts combine collaboration, innovation, and social impact to address the region's enduring challenges! We encourage you to submit a nomination for a deserving recipient of the inaugural \$50,000 prize. [Learn more](#)

**Seeking board members for the Outdoor Equity Grant** | Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) is searching for individuals passionate about providing youth with transformative outdoor experiences to join the [Outdoor Equity Grant](#)

[Board](#). Board members are responsible for the governance of the Outdoor Equity Grant Program created by bill [HB21-1318](#). The deadline for the [application](#) is Dec. 21, 2025. [Virtual info session - Jan 6 2026](#)

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## Jobs

**Check out the CCC's [Job Board](#) for a list of jobs focused on natural resources and collaborative conservation!**

Here are just a few postings shared through our board:

**Invasive Species Specialist, Cabeza Prieta NWR** | American Conservation Experience, a nonprofit Conservation Corps, in partnership with US Fish and Wildlife Service, is seeking 3 Members to assist the USFWS with invasive plant management duties at Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge in southern Arizona. *10 week minimum commitment. Location: Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge in Ajo, AZ.* [Learn more](#)

**Dryland Restoration Coordinator for Colorado Open Lands** | Colorado Open Lands (COL) seeks a Dryland Restoration Coordinator to join our team. As a member of the Stewardship and Restoration team, the Coordinator is responsible for collaborating with partners and landowners to implement dryland restoration projects in the San Luis Valley and statewide. *This position is full-time.* [Learn more](#)

**Local Integrating Organization Program Manager** | The Puget Sound Partnership is seeking someone to lead a statewide network advancing Puget Sound ecosystem recovery. This role oversees strategy, operations, partnerships, and local recovery plans while supporting staff and regional collaborators. Based in Washington State, this *full-time, in-person position* blends leadership, collaboration, and impact-driven work to protect and restore one of the region's most vital natural systems. [Learn more.](#)

*If you have job openings that are aligned with our work on collaborative conservation and you want us to share them, submit them to our [job board](#).*

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If you think a colleague would find value in reading CCC news, please forward this email to them and invite them to subscribe to our email list using the form at the bottom of the [CCC home page](#).

If you feel moved to support our work supporting conservation, please consider [donating to the CCC](#).

Questions? Ideas? Opportunities? Please email the CCC Director [John Sanderson](#).

Be well,  
*The CCC Team*



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