



INTERNATIONAL
LAND CONSERVATION
NETWORK

NEWS FROM OUR PARTNERS

Advancing Collaborative Leadership to Achieve Conservation Outcomes

Shawn Johnson, ILCN Regional Representative for North America

Like many of you, I tend to start a new year reflecting on the past and looking toward the future. I try to be honest about the challenges facing the conservation community and realistic about what is possible. As someone who spends part of my professional life on a university campus, I also think about the generational dynamics of the conservation profession. Where were we a generation ago? Where will we be a generation from now?

As I go through this habitual exercise at the start of 2021, it's hard not to see conservation challenges in the United States through the lens of our social and political divisions. We seem more divided than ever, not just in the positions we take, but also in our worldviews and in our facts. Even before the most recent episodes, capped by the dramatic attack on the US Capitol on January 6, our social and political divisions were mounting. As Michael Whitfield noted in his 2019 Working Paper on holistic landscape conservation, "The barriers to our work together are multitude: rural versus urban, rich versus poor, working land owners versus recreationists, and on and on." To address these barriers, Whitfield suggests "[w]e need more bridges and fewer barriers." Moreover, he notes that our time is "a critical time for finding ways to couple stewardship of our natural landscapes with stewardship of our society." (Michael Whitfield, "Toward Holistic Landscape Conservation in the 21st Century," Working Paper WP19MW1, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2019, p. 1). I couldn't agree more.

As I look back on 2020 and ahead to 2021, I am eager to address barriers and build bridges through the work of the ILCN and other partnerships focused on collaborative approaches to conservation and stewardship. These efforts recognize our connections and interdependence. They build shared knowledge and inform collective action. They aim to work for both people and nature over the long term. To be sure, this isn't easy work. As Bob Bendick, The Nature Conservancy's Gulf of Mexico Program Director once reflected, "Collaboration and from-the-bottom-up processes are essential in today's world, but it takes a lot of time and energy to do collaboration right." (Network for Landscape Conservation, "Pathways Forward," 2018, p. 8). Recognizing that we must do more to grow our collective knowledge, abilities, and skills, I am joining forces with representatives from networks across the continent to create and pilot a new training program focused on collaborative leadership skills. In the coming weeks and months, we will be developing content that can help everyone engaged in collaborative conservation advance their skills and abilities, starting with four key content areas: (1) systems thinking; (2) interpersonal dynamics; (3) collaborative process design; and (4) issues connected with justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. I'll be sharing more with this community as those training opportunities comes forward. For now, I wish you much success in the year ahead.