

Tribal Nations Climate & Conservation Funding Collaborative



NATIVE AMERICANS
IN PHILANTHROPY

Introduction

For thirty five years, Native Americans in Philanthropy (NAP) has advanced equitable and effective philanthropy in Native communities through leadership development, education, research, strategic partnerships, and a strong network of relatives and relationships.

In 2021, Native Americans in Philanthropy (NAP) and Biodiversity Funders Group (BFG) launched the Tribal Nations Climate & Conservation Funding Collaborative (The Collaborative) to:

- Strengthen the field of climate and biodiversity conservation projects led by Tribal Nations;
- Dramatically increase funding to Tribal projects; and
- Catalyze and leverage new sources of funding for these projects from federal, state, and private sources.

The Collaborative includes a funder learning and engagement series, a pooled fund housed at NAP, and a philanthropic pledge. It has created opportunities for direct funding in addition to a forum to strategize, learn from Tribal leaders, and share knowledge and resources to support Tribal self-governance and conservation and climate efforts.

Through these mechanisms, NAP has worked with our partners to:

- Directly leverage \$4.5 million in philanthropic investments to access \$145.8 million in new federal funding for Tribal conservation projects, including 62 National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) projects and the Gravel-to-Gravel Keystone Initiative.
- Secure a commitment from 15 foundations for \$102.5 million in new funding to Tribally-led conservation and climate projects over five years.
- Award conservation and climate grants directly to Tribes, beyond the NFWF America the Beautiful Challenge, totaling \$900 thousand.
- Invest \$1.5 million in capacity building for Native non-profits supporting Tribal Nations through intergovernmental coordination, technical assistance, employment and leadership development, and philanthropic relationship-building.

Here is an overview of our collective impact, key lessons from the Collaborative, and our vision for building on our success.



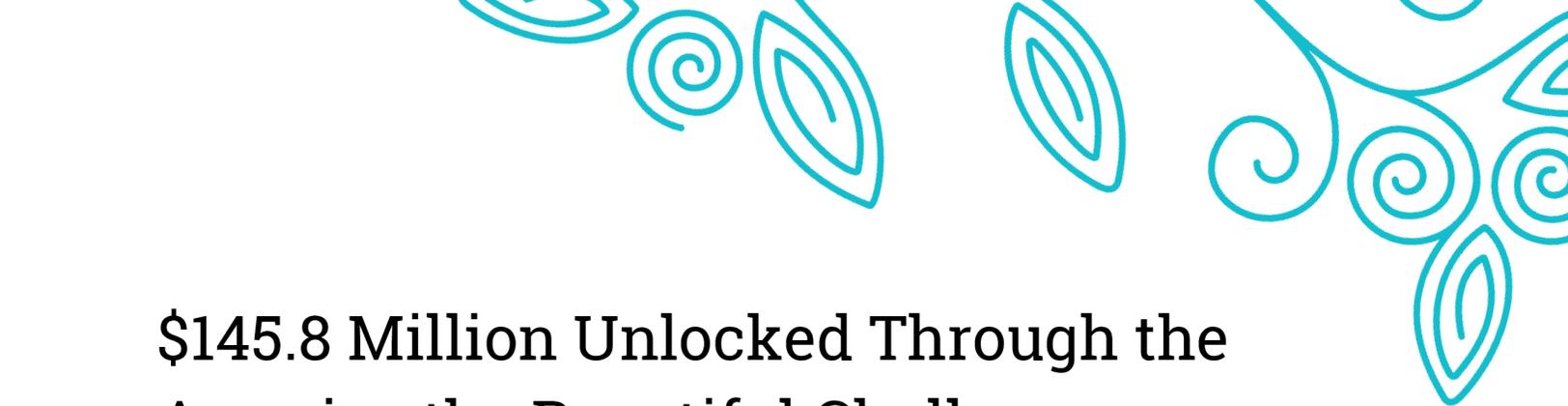


Building Public-Private Infrastructure to Support Tribes

Public-private partnerships are a crucial mechanism to support Tribally-led climate and conservation work. Tribes face unique challenges due to the number of complex federal funding streams they must navigate, their lack of a tax base and access to capital, and the sheer breadth of their responsibilities as sovereign governments. At the same time, there is unique opportunity for philanthropy and conservation advocates to collaborate with Tribes because of Indigenous cultural values and knowledge, legal and political power, and partnerships with government agencies.

For too long, Tribes and Native People have been a blind spot for philanthropy. There is now growing recognition of the unique value Tribes can offer as partners. Because of their deep and longstanding connection to the land, Tribal Nations serve as enduring stewards of environmental investments, with distinct legal and political authority to sustain this work for future generations. For Tribes to engage more effectively in conservation work, we must develop programs, systems, and infrastructure that can facilitate multi-sector solutions.

We are proud of the recent public-private initiatives we've built together and the resulting impacts.



\$145.8 Million Unlocked Through the America the Beautiful Challenge

A part of the Biden administration's America the Beautiful Initiative managed by the National Fish and Wildlife Fund (NFWF), the America the Beautiful Challenge (ATBC) is a public-private grant program for locally-led ecosystem restoration projects. It invests in initiatives that promote resilience, collaborative conservation, watershed restoration, workforce development, and wildlife corridors and connectivity.

NAP has been instrumental in helping Tribal Nations access these funds. In collaboration with philanthropic allies and NFWF, NAP developed a pooled fund that leveraged private funding and engaged Tribal leaders to ensure Tribally-led conservation initiatives received the necessary resources to meet the terms of ATBC grants, using \$4.5 million in private funds to unlock over \$127.7 million in federal dollars over three years, plus an additional \$18 million in projects.

From 2022 to 2024, ATBC has directed substantial funding into a broad range of Tribal communities, strengthening conservation efforts and Tribally-led stewardship. These awards have been equitably distributed to ensure Tribes in all regions have the resources to advance habitat restoration and climate resilience. ATBC investments have empowered Tribal Nations to lead projects that enhance ecosystem connectivity, protect at-risk species, and improve public access to conservation lands.

Amount leveraged over three years to meet the required cash match

\$4.5M

Amount awarded directly to Tribes

\$145.8M

Total of Tribally-led conservation projects funded

62





*AlexAnna Salmon, President of the Igiugig Village Council, gives a presentation on the village's history
Image: NAP Staff*



Our ATBC results reflect a growing recognition of Tribes' expertise in conservation and the growth in interest for sustained investment in Tribally-led environmental initiatives. In its first year (2022), NAP successfully leveraged private funding to support the Igiugig Village Council in Southwest Alaska. This investment empowered six rural Alaska Native communities in the Lake Iliamna region to launch a community-led environmental monitoring program. Partnering with the Indigenous Sentinels Network, they co-developed monitoring plans and toolkits, creating scalable models for future initiatives in other communities.

As a 2023 ATBC recipient, the Penobscot Nation advanced conservation goals outlined in its forest management plan while restoring fish and wildlife habitat across Tribal lands and forests impacted by timber extraction in the Penobscot River watershed. The award enabled habitat assessments for moose, wood turtles, vernal pools, and fish passages, leading to restored riparian habitats and improved aquatic connectivity through stream crossing replacements.

Building on this success, the Penobscot Nation secured additional ATBC funding in 2024 to further expand its efforts. This funding will enhance aquatic organism passage, improve public access to conservation areas, and support data collection for adaptive management of at-risk species. The project will restore connectivity to 280 miles of the Piscataquis River, strengthening cultural ties and boosting economic vitality in the region.

*Penobscot Indian Nation's project, "Prioritizing Habitat Restoration and Aquatic Connectivity in the Penobscot River Watershed"
Image: Penobscot Indian Nation*





Strengthening the Network that Supports Tribal Climate & Conservation Stewardship

CAPACITY BUILDING

We are strengthening the capacity of key Tribal and ally organizations to tackle climate and conservation challenges. The fund has assisted several key organizations that have contributed to our work.

In collaboration with the Native American Rights Fund (NARF), NAP is supporting efforts to develop the Homelands Coalition—a dedicated space for Tribal Nations, non-profits, grassroots organizations, and individuals to connect, build relationships, and advance land and water protection efforts across Indian Country.

NAP has facilitated funding opportunities that will allow NARF to develop co-management tools for Tribal Nations. Key successes for NARF during the grant period included:

- **Woven Lands Initiative:** Created a central hub for Tribes to access conservation strategies, funding, and technical support.
- **Tribal Conservation Toolbox:** Developed a one-stop resource for legal, financial, and policy guidance, and documenting effective Tribal conservation tools.
- **Collaborative Think Tank & Coalition:** Built a practitioner network to support Tribal conservation efforts, exploring models like conservation easements, land repatriation, conservation finance, and carbon sequestration.
- **Capacity & Funding Mobilization:** Established a coalition-building strategy to align resources with Tribes' conservation priorities.



The National Caucus of Environmental Legislators (NCEL) has worked with NAP to update and expand its resources about Tribes and Indigenous issues, including a forthcoming toolkit for states on how to advance critical work with Tribal Nations. Key areas of work under this agreement included:

- **State Policy Resources:** Developed materials on state policy opportunities for Tribes, including bill tracking, fact sheets, and case studies like Oregon’s Tribal Affairs Advisor.
- **Offshore Wind & Coastal Collaboration:** Strengthened Tribal-State partnerships on offshore wind and coastal issues, with a focus on California, Oregon, and Washington.
- **Strategic Engagement:** Integrated NAP and its network into key events, including the National Forum, Biodiversity COP, and Capitol Hill Ocean Week.
- **Expanded Learning Series:** Continued grantee-led learning events.
- **Policy & Advocacy Support:** Connected NAP’s philanthropic and Tribal partners with lawmakers and tracked state policy trends.

NAP also played a key role in launching the U.S. Department of the Interior’s (DOI) Office of Strategic Partnerships (OSP), with two team members transitioning to federal employment to help lead the initiative. As a vital link to the federal government, OSP focuses on conservation, economic development, and cultural preservation. NAP has committed to a five-year relationship and sees this partnership as instrumental to the long-term success of public-private collaboration. NAP also provided support to the Environmental Policy Innovation Center (EPIC) for staffing on environmental issues, working with Tribal communities and OSP through an Interpersonnel Agency Act agreement.

Multiple grants to the United South and Eastern Tribes (USET) fueled the national Tribal Infrastructure Development Program, empowering Tribal Nations across the country to maximize federal funding opportunities under the Inflation Reduction Act and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. This initiative delivered:

- **Targeted advocacy and outreach** to expand Tribal access to federal resources.
- **Comprehensive training sessions** to enhance understanding of infrastructure funding.
- **Educational materials** designed to simplify complex funding processes.
- **A dedicated national presence** through the Inflation Reduction Act landing page, ensuring broad Tribal engagement with historic funding opportunities.

Through these efforts, USET strengthened Tribal capacity to secure and utilize critical infrastructure funding.



TRIBAL CO-MANAGEMENT PROJECTS

Several recent demonstration projects have provided an opportunity for the Collaborative to unlock additional federal investments in Tribal conservation initiatives and gain insights about future investments. These included projects involving the Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area and the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe, as well as several awards to Tribes under the Gravel-to-Gravel Keystone Initiative, which focuses on salmon restoration in Alaska.



Image: Jackie Johnson/Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe

Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe Enters Into USFW Agreement For National Wildlife Refuges

The Collaborative's philanthropic support for Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe in 2024 made it possible for the Tribe to enter into an agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to co-steward the Dungeness and Protection Island National Wildlife Refuges. The agreement and associated funding allowed the Tribe

to have direct access and oversight to an area where the Tribe's ancestors lived and hunted for generations. Since March 2024, the Tribe has procured equipment, attended trainings, supported staff wages, managed windstorm debris, opened vault restrooms, hosted approximately 40,000 visitors, expanded the volunteer program, provided aid to visitors experiencing injury, and started updating interpretive kiosk displays. None of these pivotal accomplishments would have been possible without the Collaborative.

Gravel-to-Gravel Keystone Initiative Partners DOI with Alaska Native Tribes for Salmon Restoration

The Gravel-to-Gravel Keystone Initiative was announced by the DOI in March 2023. It represents a new effort to improve the resilience of ecosystems and salmon in Alaska's Yukon, Kuskokwim, and Norton Sound regions through co-stewardship with Alaska Native communities. Each Gravel-to-Gravel project is shaped and guided by at least one of the following goals: improving the resiliency of Pacific salmon, renewing commitments to strengthening relationships through co-stewardship, and responding to ecosystem threats to food security. Since the initiative was announced by the government, more than \$44M has been committed towards the effort.



Image: Katrina Liebich/USFWS

REGIONAL IMPACT: GREAT LAKES INITIATIVE

The Collaborative has also leaned into initiatives to bolster regional conservation efforts. Regional initiatives allow Tribes and funders to strengthen regional relationships and projects and to better understand localized impact.

For example, our Great Lakes initiative supports Tribal capacity building and Tribally-led conservation projects that promote Traditional Ecological Knowledge. We began by developing an internal database that maps the 44 Great Lakes Tribal communities, intertribal consortia, and a growing network of organizations serving them. To help shift power and impact in the region, NAP has also actively built relationships with the Great Lakes Funders, a network of over 50 organizations committed to supporting the region.

We are crafting a network that brings together Tribal communities and philanthropic funders within the Great Lakes region through a series of conversations and learning sessions. The goal is to allow Tribal communities to maintain control of their narratives while strengthening respect and collaboration between Tribal Nations and funders.

As meaningful connections and trust grow over time, NAP will begin to facilitate opportunities for the two groups to gather and work to create a healthy ecosystem built on mutual respect and support.

Focusing on regional initiatives provides opportunity to support exciting work like Ohe-láku (“Among the Cornstalks”). Established in 2016, Ohe-láku is made up of intergenerational members of Haudenosaunee families committed to relearning how to care for their ancestral corn varieties using Traditional Ecological Knowledge methods on 10 acres of Oneida Nation Reservation trust land in Oneida, Wisconsin. The organization depends on volunteer labor. With 4,000 hours invested each year, they have harvested and distributed 40,000 pounds of corn to community members since inception. While Ohe-láku continues to serve its community, it is also investing in an intertribal trade system across the state of Wisconsin that will promote food security, cultural preservation, education, and economic development.



Image: Roderico Y. Díaz 2016



Image: © Charles Larry, The Nature Conservancy

BUFFALO

The Tribal Buffalo Lifeways Collaboration (TBLC) is a new philanthropic and non-profit endeavor founded by Intertribal Buffalo Council (ITBC), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), World Wildlife Fund (WWF), and NAP. Officially launched in June 2024, this historic alliance was created to stabilize, establish, and expand Tribally-led buffalo (bison) restoration while fostering cultural, spiritual, ecological, and economic revitalization within Native communities.

Although TBLC is still early in its tenure, some impressive accomplishments have already been achieved. These include:

- **Infrastructure & Grasslands Management:** With support from the TBLC, ITBC applied for and won more than \$62 million from the USDA Regional Conservation Partnership Program. This program provides reimbursement for conservation work done on behalf of Tribal herds, including water infrastructure, fencing, prescribed fire, prescribed grazing, grasslands restoration, and management and conservation infrastructure projects. To our knowledge, this is the largest federal investment ever awarded for Tribal buffalo programs.
- **Land & Leasing:** Under TNC's leadership, the Collaboration worked together to purchase and protect the Dakota Partnership Ranch to further Tribal buffalo conservation. The 26,276-acre ranch is located near the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation and the South Unit of the Badlands National Park in South Dakota and is of great cultural and ecological significance to the Lakota. With WWF's support, the matriarchs of the ranch's existing buffalo herd were protected and will remain on the land to lead future members of the herd. In the future, the ranch and herd will be transferred to Indigenous leadership for management.



Expanding our Impact/Supporting Tribes on Critical Minerals

Funding provided by the Collaborative provides Tribal communities critical financial support to navigate the early stages of potential mining projects. While federal law mandates Tribal consultation before mining can occur on or near Tribal lands, many Tribes struggle with capacity challenges that hinder their ability to fully engage in these processes, regardless of their stance on a project.

Even though Tribal Nations have the sovereign legal authority to govern their communities and approve mining projects, unequal access to the resources needed to participate fully in decision-making processes can undermine this authority. NAP's Tribal Nations Engagement team has reached out to Tribal communities, federal agencies, and non-profit organizations to learn about these challenges, what resources are available for Tribes, and where philanthropy can assist. Key barriers include limited resources, rapid consultation timelines, and a lack of accessible information.

NAP's funding seeks to bridge these gaps and provide Tribal Nations the tools needed for fair and effective engagement in decisions that impact their communities. By leveraging philanthropic dollars, we are able to assist Tribal Nations that are engaged in consultation and review of mining activities on Tribal territories. Grants range from \$50,000 to \$200,000 and can support legal and environmental assessments as well as research. These funds may not be used for advocacy or marketing campaigns.

Through this grant program, NAP and the philanthropic sector empower Tribes, ensuring that any decision-making process around natural resource exploration on Tribal land involves fair and equal representation and meaningful discussions. To date, initial awards have been granted to the San Carlos Apache Tribe, Fort McDermitt Shoshone Paiute, Chilkat Indian Village, and Yukon River Intertribal Watershed Council.





Building a Committed Community of Funders

In 2023, NAP, BFG, and our funders organized a pledge of \$102.5 million in newly committed direct investments from 15 different funders over five years, which we announced at that year's White House Conservation Day. BFG and NAP actively consult with the funders who committed to the Pledge to understand how they are meeting their commitments, to support their future investments through the Pledge, and to track overall progress.

As of the 4th quarter 2024, funders who pledged support have moved \$42M to Tribally-led conservation efforts. Our pledge partners illustrate the diverse ways in which this funding has been allocated, including direct support for specific initiatives, increasing access to Federal resources, creating collaborative networks, capacity building, Tribal co-management, and land acquisitions.

A demonstration of this strategic investment helped to build capacity for Tribal collaboration with ally organizations to secure the designation of Tribally co-managed National Monuments Avi Kwa Ame in Nevada and Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni in Arizona. The Monument designations protect these sacred places from any future industrial development, preserving the world-class habitat and cultural resources found within.

Direct support for Tribal conservation projects came in many forms but was exemplified by a significant grant to the Klamath River Fund which invests in restoration and revitalization efforts of the entire Klamath River Basin following the largest dam removal in U.S. history. This is a long-term investment in climate resilience, community resilience, and restorative justice for Tribes.



*Before and after photos of dam removal on the Klamath River in California.
Image: Swiftwater Films*





What We've Learned

When NAP began the Tribal Nations Collaborative, the need was clear and undeniable. Tribes required support and proper resources to lead their own conservation and climate efforts. At the same time, they held knowledge that could help the U.S., and the world address the impacts of climate change and impacts to our biodiversity. Tribes have been caring for Mother Earth since time immemorial, and that knowledge needed to be deployed to protect our critical resources, land, air, and water.

Our funders and partners recognized both the need and the opportunity and stood with us to address the long history of Tribes being overlooked and underfunded. The partnership we envisioned was built to right these historical wrongs, ensuring Tribes have the support and resources they deserve to drive meaningful, lasting impact.

While the need was clear, we knew that we had a lot to learn as we forged a new path. As we contemplate the next iteration of the Collaborative, here are some of insights, lessons, and outcomes that will guide our future work in this space:

- **Public-Private Partnerships = Greater Impact.** By leveraging private resources to access public resources, we can unlock more funding and expand opportunities for Tribal-led conservation and climate initiatives.
 - **Strength through Partnership.** United with partners in this work, the ability to leverage resources strategically leads to exponential growth. This has been demonstrated through projects like the America the Beautiful Challenge and the Dakota Partnerships. The coordinated efforts of our partners led to deeper impact and incredibly meaningful outcomes for Tribal communities. Having expert Native staff who are focused on supporting the field has also been vital.
 - **Partner Capacity is Crucial.** Progress is impossible without strong Tribal Nations and partners in the field. Tribes and non-profits supporting the work need to have appropriate resources, tools, and funding, and they must be supported in their work to fully engage in conservation efforts. Investing in capacity ensures a stronger, more resilient field of partners and a higher likelihood of successful outcomes.
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- **Transformation is the Key.** Success is often measured in financial terms, but for this work the metrics are far broader. We all win when Tribes are successful in managing Earth's resources, so success includes the transformation of Tribal communities. We are looking at whether and how power is transferred, impactful ecosystems are created, and Tribal sovereignty is upheld. Our expansive reach has helped to strengthen Tribal governance structures and revitalize Indigenous communities focused on deep, meaningful, and sustaining work.
- **Funder Tours Inform the Field.** In-person visits offer funders firsthand insight that comes from being in the field and engaging with Tribal communities. These tours foster meaningful relationships and can transform our collective thinking on how to solve problems. But they must be co-designed with community so that they are built on trust. Having Tribal engagement staff has also been crucial to this effort.
- **NAP as a Bridge.** NAP is committed to its role as a philanthropy-serving organization, but we have adapted as we have identified unmet needs, developing into a vital intermediary connecting Tribal Nations and funders. We did not envision this role to be critical at the inception of this work, but now we embrace it as it ensures that philanthropy and Tribes across the U.S. can find each other. We are the connective tissue that enables collaboration, iteration, and sustained support for Tribally-led initiatives. We believe philanthropy can do its best work when it has an Indigenous field partner that serves as this bridge between sectors.



NAP and the Alaska Venture Fund led a partner tour to Alaska in July 2024. Over the week, funders heard from local experts and community leaders about Alaska Native history and culture. Image: NAP Staff

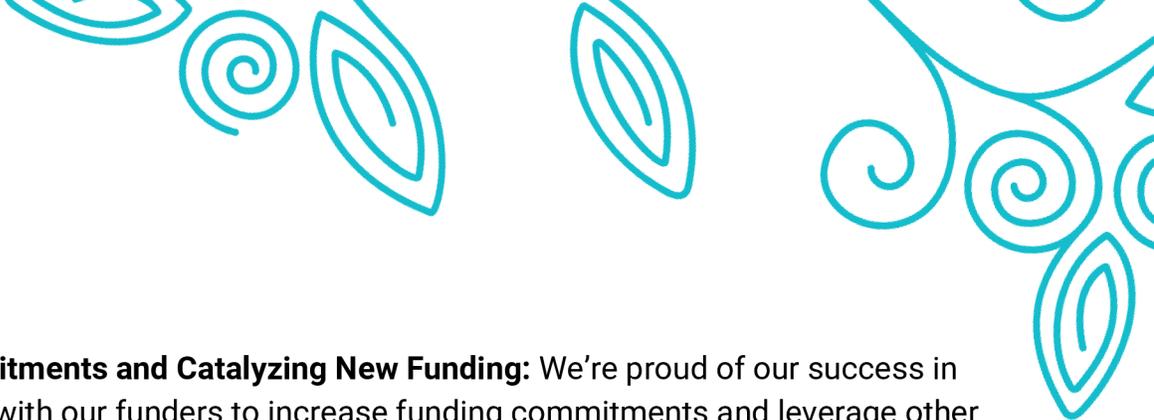


The Way Forward

Over the next three years, the Collaborative will shift its work to build on what we've learned while adapting to the very different political landscape our country finds itself. Our work moving forward will continue to safeguard ancestral lands and waters while ensuring Tribal Nations are at the forefront of conservation, thereby strengthening Tribal capacity and advancing sovereignty-driven environmental solutions.

The new DOI Secretary understands and supports Tribal sovereignty. While the new administration continues to organize, we will leverage capacity like our Office of Strategic Partnerships to further elevate Indigenous leadership in land and water protection while identifying any opportunities for support and coordination with federal agencies. By integrating traditional knowledge with modern practices, we are building a future where Indigenous leadership guides and shapes conservation strategies for generations to come. Here are some areas of focus for us for the next three years:

- **Strengthening Coordination and Expanding Technical Assistance:** We continue to believe one of our most important roles is as a coordination and field support partner. Improving coordination and alignment between Tribes, Native non-profits, non-Native non-profits, and funders deepens effectiveness, impact, and accountability toward Tribal communities. Improved tools and resources can help Tribal Nations achieve their conservation and land stewardship goals and strengthen support for Tribally-led conservation initiatives. By uplifting Tribal leadership in the field of conservation, we will drive innovative, culturally rooted solutions and reinforce Tribes' role as the original stewards of their ancestral lands.

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- **Increasing Commitments and Catalyzing New Funding:** We're proud of our success in working together with our funders to increase funding commitments and leverage other forms of funding such as federal investments. Funders are often the best advocates and catalyzers for other funders. We will work together to set new goals and targets for the Pledge and identify other mobilization opportunities with BFG and its network.
 - **Sustaining and Increasing Support for Tribally-led Conservation Infrastructure:** Together, we have identified investments directly in Tribes, Native non-profits, and consortia that are crucial to leading, protecting, and sustaining national monuments, emerging guardian programs, co-stewardship partnerships, and more. While much of the field will understandably shift its resources to defending what we have achieved in biodiversity conservation—funders should not do this to the detriment of Tribal infrastructure. We will work closely to continue to platform the need for this infrastructure to funders and show why it is critical to defend much of the progress already made.
 - **Strengthening Regional Approaches, Strategies, and Public-Private Infrastructure:** We have learned a lot from our regional focus areas in the Collaborative. In some regions—and with certain ecosystems—there's significant opportunity to work with funders to help them align and leverage their funding to make a deeper impact in partnership with Tribes. Thanks to our partnership with NCEL, there are other opportunities to deepen investments in public-private partnerships between states and Tribes. With partnerships like our Buffalo Lifeways Partnership, we will continue to grow our understanding and relationships in a specific region so that we can continue to support work already underway. During a transition from significant opportunity at the federal level to a range of uncertainties, it's important to focus on areas of impact at the local level.
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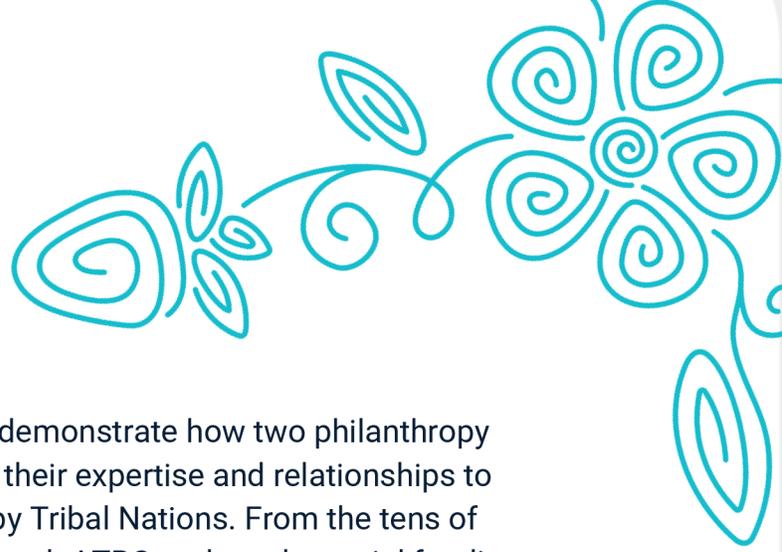
Conclusion

NAP and BFG formed the initial Collaborative to demonstrate how two philanthropy infrastructure organizations could best leverage their expertise and relationships to transform how philanthropy invests in work led by Tribal Nations. From the tens of millions of dollars awarded to Tribal Nations through ATBC to the substantial funding secured for buffalo programs and other initiatives, the returns on our investments are undeniable.

These successes are a good start. We recognize that much remains to be done. Now more than ever, NAP is engaging the philanthropic sector to advance Tribes' critical environmental work. With both existing and new partners committed to sustaining and increasing their contributions, we believe our impact will continue to grow, ensuring that Native communities remain empowered and prepared to lead conservation efforts.

Thank You To Our Partners

We extend our deepest gratitude to the Partners of the Tribal Nations Conservation Pledge & Fund Collaborative. Through this collective effort, we honor the sovereignty, wisdom, and stewardship of Indigenous peoples in protecting our lands, waters, and all living beings for future generations.





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