

Open Space Institute Expands Appalachian Landscapes Protection Fund to Support Conservation of Climate Critical Pennsylvania Forests



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On July 28, seeking to further harness the capacity for strategic land protection to counter climate change and its impacts, the [Open Space Institute](#) announced a major new effort of its [Appalachian Landscapes Protection Fund](#) to conserve key forested areas in western and central Pennsylvania.

The new \$4 million expansion, catalyzed with a \$2 million commitment of grant and loan funds from the Richard King Mellon Foundation that is being matched by other private funders, seeks to protect forests within a 10-million-acre focus area that contain Pennsylvania's largest reserves of forest carbon and habitat prized for its ability to serve as a haven for wildlife, even withstanding a changing climate.

The targeted area stretches from the [Pennsylvania Wilds](#) in the state's northern tier southward through the Allegheny Front, and from Laurel Highlands to the Maryland border ([see map and photos](#)).

"The Open Space Institute is proud of its role in harnessing land protection to secure the forests that are so critical to Pennsylvania and to us all," said Peter Howell, OSI's Executive Vice President of Conservation Capital & Research Programs. "Increasingly, science and higher resolution carbon data are highlighting just how important forests are in combating climate change. OSI sincerely thanks the Richard King Mellon Foundation for its significant commitment, and Doris Duke Charitable Foundation whose early support helped to launch the Fund."

"The work of the Open Space Institute and other conservation partners have helped to create greater understanding and awareness of the extraordinary ecological value of Pennsylvania's forests and waters," said Sam Reiman, Director of the [Richard King Mellon Foundation](#). "Protecting these habitats provides critical refuges for wildlife, while also allowing us to address climate change by storing carbon naturally. We are pleased to partner with the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and others to protect these important ecosystems in our backyard."

“We’re thrilled to partner with Richard King Mellon Foundation to grow the Appalachian Landscapes Protection Fund and expand its footprint to central and western Pennsylvania,” said Sacha Spector, program director for the environment at [Doris Duke Charitable Foundation](#). “The Fund is dedicated to conserving areas that play an outsized role in safeguarding biodiversity, facilitating carbon sequestration and bolstering climate resilience in eastern North America’s mega-corridor, and this new expansion does just that.”

Launched in 2021, the ALPF provides grants and loans to conservation organizations, tribes, and municipalities with the goal of conserving 50,000 acres along the spine of the Appalachian Mountains.

In addition to this new western and central Pennsylvania focus area, funding from the ALPF is aimed at three additional focus areas, ranging in size from three to eleven million acres: the Middle Atlantic, Cradle of Southern Appalachia, and Northern Appalachians.

Funders of the additional ALPF focus areas include Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the Lyndhurst, Tucker, Riverview, and William Penn Foundations, Jane’s Trust, two additional anonymous foundations, and individual donors.

To date, the ALPF has supported the protection of 37,000 acres of land including an addition to the Windmill Hill ridgeline in Vermont; the Grafton Forest property in Maine; additions to Yard’s Creek Preserve in New Jersey; the [Penrose Swamp property](#) in Pennsylvania; and an addition to Cumberland State Park in Tennessee.

Additionally, OSI through the ALPF has approved planning grants to 15 organizations to integrate climate science in conservation plans; and is partnering with the Thrive Regional Partnership to help rural communities in the tri-state region of Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee prepare for climate change.

Pennsylvania: A State Critical for Climate Change

In addition to providing critical watershed protection, recreational opportunities, and wildlife habitat, forests are a critical front-line defense against climate change.

In 2019, forests in the United States stored 59 billion metric tons of carbon — the equivalent of more than 33 years of U.S. economy-wide emissions.

Every year, forests remove 15 percent of the country’s carbon dioxide emissions, equal to removing more than 673 million cars from the road.

Of all the country’s forests, the Appalachian Mountains — which contain the world’s largest broadleaf forest — are responsible for the majority of U.S. forest carbon sequestration.

Located in the north-south center of the mountain range, the forests of western and central Pennsylvania contain vast swaths of healthy, large, and contiguous forests that are critical in combating climate change.

Furthermore, the region represents the most intact remaining north-south migration routes in the region for species and populations of animals moving up and down the

mountain chain; and was also identified by the [US Forest Service's Forest to Faucet study](#) as a priority watershed to secure at-risk drinking water.

Yet despite their critical importance, the region's forests face significant threats, including development, poor management, and energy extraction.

Funding Criteria

In considering lands in Pennsylvania for conservation, the ALPF is harnessing cutting-edge climate science and decision support tools developed by The Nature Conservancy to identify and protect places that are “climate-resilient” — in that they will continue to protect habitat for sensitive plants and animals, even as the climate changes.

A property's climate resilience will be the major selection criteria, and within these areas OSI's ALPF aims to protect places with the highest carbon storage potential by 2050, to help meet Paris Accord climate goals for carbon neutrality.

The ALPF will also consider a project's co-benefits, such as community access, water quality, or flood hazard mitigation.

Recognizing that communities within the focus area struggle with de-population, disinvestment, and poverty, and that the impact of climate change has a disproportionate impact on these communities, the ALPF will lower the required match on acquisition grants to organizations whose leaders identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

The ALPF is the second large-scale, climate-resilient land protection effort championed by OSI. From 2013-2020, [OSI's Resilient Landscapes Initiative](#) (RLI) also supported by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, provided a total of \$11 million to conserve 55,000 acres across Eastern U.S.

Through the RLI's “Catalyst Program,” OSI also integrated climate science into more than 41 conservation plans by land trusts and public-private partnerships and disseminated training materials and case studies to more than 1,300 practitioners.

Additionally, the ALPF builds on more than 79 grants and loans to local land trusts and conservation groups, assisting in the protection of more than 27,000 acres of land that OSI has completed within Pennsylvania.

For more information on the program and applying for funding, visit the [Appalachian Landscapes Protection Fund](#) webpage.

The [Open Space Institute](#) protects scenic, natural, and historic landscapes to provide public enjoyment, conserve habitat and working lands, and sustain communities. Founded in 1974 to protect significant landscapes in New York State, OSI has been a partner in the protection of more than 2.3 million acres in North America.

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