

## Stewardship of Natural Resources

*As a primarily arid state and one in which meaningful portions of revenue are derived from outdoor and adventure tourism, New Mexico relies heavily upon its natural resources to support its economy and quality of life. Key natural resources (including water, air, wildlife, pristine landscapes and well-managed rangeland, among others) should be protected, managed and utilized in ways that support their viability in perpetuity. The Foundation supports organizations and initiatives focused on these objectives.*

— from the McCune Charitable Foundation Strategic Plan 2014-2016

The McCune Charitable Foundation recognizes that it must identify and prioritize the most important natural resource issues affecting New Mexico and its residents, particularly in this time of climate change, extended drought and evolving environmental concerns. The Foundation identified priority issues in the state but recognizes that natural resource relationships are complicated and the issues inescapably interconnected. The Foundation also recognizes that stewardship of natural resources overlaps with most, if not all, of its other identified funding priorities. The land and its resources figure into almost every sector of life in our largely rural state with very old land-based traditions.

Based on its research, the Foundation has identified the following long-term concerns, short-term priorities, and key leverage points to maximize potential positive change. Most of the natural resource work currently underway in New Mexico is directly or indirectly related to these priorities and this list in no way precludes funding of other specific issues:

### **Long-Term Concerns**

**Climate Change** is the critical issue of our day and it has a major influence on a range of natural resource issues that organizations are addressing in New Mexico. We cannot address water quantity, quality and streamflow, forest health and fires, ecosystem resilience, wildlife habitat, the health of our state's acequia systems and many other concerns without taking climate change into account. With the most southerly snow-fed rivers in North America flowing through our state, New Mexico is the "canary in the coal mine" that will feel the inescapable effects of climate change sooner and more extremely than other areas of the West. The Foundation will consider projects that are New Mexico-based that address the causes of climate change or mitigation of and adaptation to the effects of climate disruptions.

**Water** is a perpetual and multifaceted concern in an arid state like New Mexico and challenges associated with water will only get worse as temperatures increase and precipitation decreases in the coming decades. Quantity and quality of groundwater and surface water resources, stream flows and the healthy watersheds that produce robust stream flows, are all critical to protect through multiple legal, regulatory and planning processes. The Foundation will consider projects that protect existing water resources, seek to improve water quality, protect and restore watersheds, and advance rational, long-term water policy planning that builds resiliency to respond to future water challenges.

**Environmental Education** is an identified priority, but it is also a key leverage point to address what has become known as “nature deficit disorder”. We need to connect the next generation to nature so that when they become adults they will be better equipped to care more about the stewardship of natural resources. In New Mexico, we have a tremendous opportunity to build on and validate centuries-old traditional knowledge and land ethics in a way that is relevant to local communities and cultures. Environmental education includes educating adults about natural resource issues through public education, quality independent journalism and accessible outdoor recreation. The Foundation will consider all educational activities related to stewardship of natural resources, with an emphasis on coordinated efforts providing access to diverse populations.

**Ecosystem Restoration.** Restoring forests, riparian areas, streams, habitat and wildlife populations is important for its own sake, but also for the ecological services that natural systems provide for humans, including watershed health and more robust runoff, food production, carbon sequestration to mitigate climate change and the beauty of healthy, open lands. Restoration projects have great potential to engage traditional local knowledge and skills and create local jobs. The Foundation will consider ecosystem restoration projects on a watershed or bioregional scale that engage a diversity of community members and stakeholders, and can leverage additional funding and create local jobs.

### **Short-Term Priorities (three to five years)**

**Save the Gila River.** The Gila River is the last “free-flowing” river in the state but it is currently threatened by a proposed dam and diversion system. As well as the important symbolism of protecting this wild river and bringing together a broad range of organizations and interests from around the state in a common cause, the project is considered a financial and technical boondoggle and has been plagued by a lack of transparency and civic engagement. The Foundation will prioritize projects that contribute to protecting New Mexico’s Gila River from dams or diversions.

**Protect State Environmental Rules.** Existing environmental protection rules, particularly those affecting groundwater quality, are threatened by industry interests. Allowing the so-called “copper rule” and “dairy rule” to go into effect will directly and permanently impact groundwater quality and create dangerous legal precedents. Other similar attempts to weaken existing rules may emerge in the near future, especially in the areas of nuclear waste storage. The Foundation will prioritize projects that strengthen existing state environmental protection rules or challenge attempts to weaken rules.

**Prohibit Water Speculation.** Test-case applications to allow private groundwater permits for the express intent of selling to the highest bidder are currently being considered by the New Mexico State Engineer’s Office. This would essentially privatize a critical public resource and create a dangerous legal precedent. The Foundation will prioritize challenges to water speculation permits and efforts to educate New Mexicans about state laws to eliminate this option in the future.

**Reduce Coal Pollution Impacts.** Coal-burning power plants in the Four Corners area emit the greenhouse gases that fuel climate change and are implicated in one of the highest rates of childhood asthma in the country, as well as various neurological disorders related to mercury emissions. This inordinately affects impoverished Navajo children and communities, who in some cases do not even have access to the electricity being generated by these polluting plants. Various regulatory processes regarding these emissions are currently underway under the New Mexico Public Regulations Commission, the U.S. EPA, and NEPA. The Foundation will prioritize projects that address the causes and effects of these power plants, with an emphasis on direct support to and involvement of affected communities. Additionally, projects that provide support for renewable energy programs such as solar and wind, will be prioritized.

### **Key Leverage Points**

**Engaging Diversity.** Cultural diversity is a core value that the Foundation seeks to promote in the organizations and projects it supports. It is also, fortunately, a strong reality for the citizens of New Mexico. Engaging that diversity not only expands the conservation movement with a broader base, but also strengthens it with a diversity of values, perspectives and land-based wisdom. Reflecting local diversity in organizations, working in authentic relationships, being responsive to community priorities and leveling the playing field for vulnerable communities all contribute to building a stronger conservation movement. The Foundation will prioritize organizations and projects that reflect and engage local diversity in meaningful ways.

**Successful Alliances and Coalitions.** Working collectively in alliances and coalitions can be more effective and create a synergy that is greater than the sum of its parts. Successful alliances and coalitions develop organically around a specific campaign, critical need or clearly identified common ground — people and organizations find each

other when they need to and they tend to get things done. The Foundation will consider support for established alliances and coalitions with a track record of success, emerging alliances and coalitions, and will consider larger grants for ongoing alliances and coalitions that have clear strategies and goals.

**Intersection with Other Funding Priorities.** In our rural state, and truly in the modern world at large, it is not possible to separate stewardship of natural resources from many of the Foundation's other funding priorities. The most direct and obvious intersection is with Local Food Industry Development. In terms of natural resource-based jobs or outdoor and adventure tourism jobs, there is also a potentially powerful intersection with Economic Development & Family Asset Planning, Strategies for Rural Development and Opportunities in Health Care. The Foundation will encourage and support projects that create new partnerships, engage multiple sectors and use a comprehensive systems approach to addressing these and other interconnected issues.

**Networking.** Engaging diversity, creating successful alliances and coalitions, and finding workable ways to intersect with other sectors and funding priorities require building relationships with other organizations and individuals. Networking through a variety of venues is an important investment in social capital of the natural resources community, in reducing counterproductive competition, and in building partnerships for greater efficiency and effectiveness. The Foundation will support and sponsor a variety of networking opportunities for grantees.

**Communications and Ancillary Support.** How organizations communicate is a key component of engaging the public and educating decision-makers regarding stewardship of natural resources. Assistance with media, messaging, marketing and general communications is a strategic leverage point for most conservation organizations. Similarly, many natural resource organizations work extensively in the legal or legislative arena but do not have internal expertise in those areas. The Foundation will support communications services for nonprofits and will support organizations that provide free or subsidized communications, legal and legislative support to a broad range of conservation organizations and communities.

**Fostering Innovation.** Risk-taking and innovation are another one of the Foundation's core values and it recognizes that it is important not only to support existing innovation but also to foster the fresh innovation needed to solve our evolving natural resource challenges. The Foundation will continue to identify and support successful approaches and to trust the perspectives, local knowledge and approaches of those working most directly with the issues at hand. The Foundation also seeks to harness the wealth of innovation and creative thinking in New Mexico and encourage new approaches through its grant making.