



Tribes as Strategic Partners

June 22, 2026

Host Committee:
Tory Dietel, Dietel & Pickering
Partners
Ann Mills & Mo Pasternak, Agua
Fund
Ricshawn Adkins Roane,
Weissberg Foundation

Indigenous Conservation Council
www.indigenous-chesapeake.net

Founded with a Purpose to Serve: Indigenous Conservation Council

Our Vision: Tribal Nations in the Chesapeake region are leading rematriation efforts of ancestral landscapes in ways that **support the care, repair, and Indigenous connections** needed to protect cultural heritage for future generations.

Our Mission: To build the capacity of Tribal Nations to rematriate and care for their lands in a manner that reinforces **sovereignty and self-determination**.



Our Theory of Change

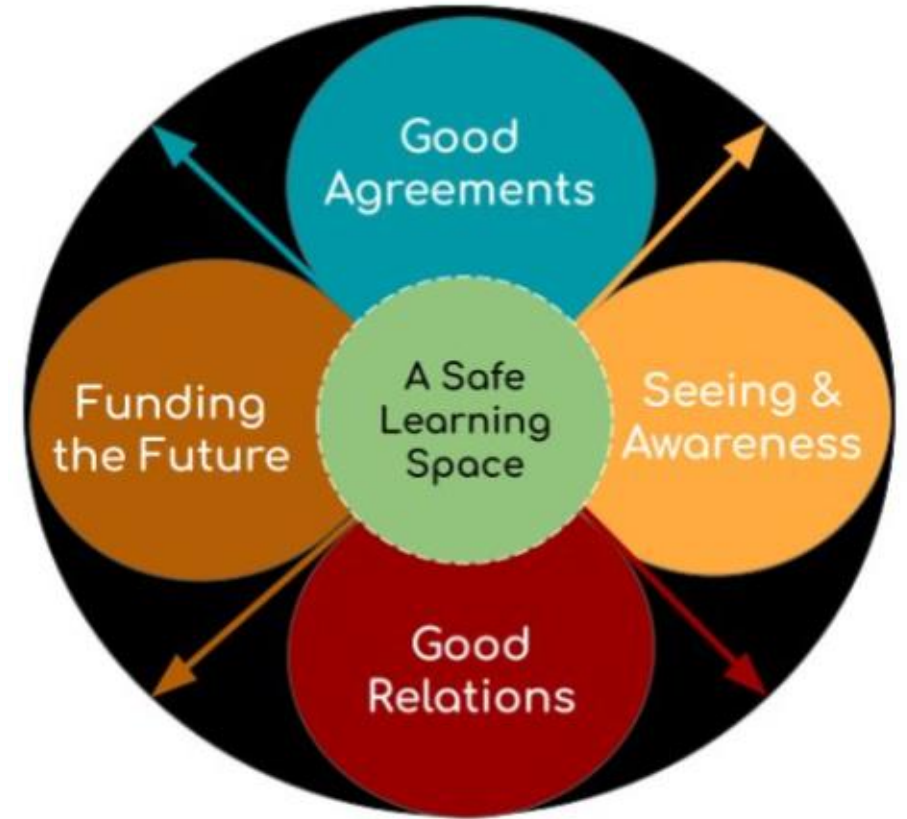
When Indigenous people are on the land and able to care for their ancestral territories using their Indigenous Knowledge; lands, waters, and all relations will become whole and healthy.

Harnessing Tribal Sovereignty to Protect Ancestral Lands

In April 2024, the Indigenous Conservation Council's Board approved its first three-year strategic plan.

The Plan's four priorities:

- 1 Supporting stronger agreements to recognize treaty rights and Indigenous tenure,
- 2) Using Indigenous knowledge and science to identify threats and opportunities for protection and partnership,
- 3) Advancing leadership in regional partnerships and supporting tribal communities to steward ancestral landscapes
- 4) Supporting fast, flexible funding that reinforces tribal sovereignty including a Peoples Fund.



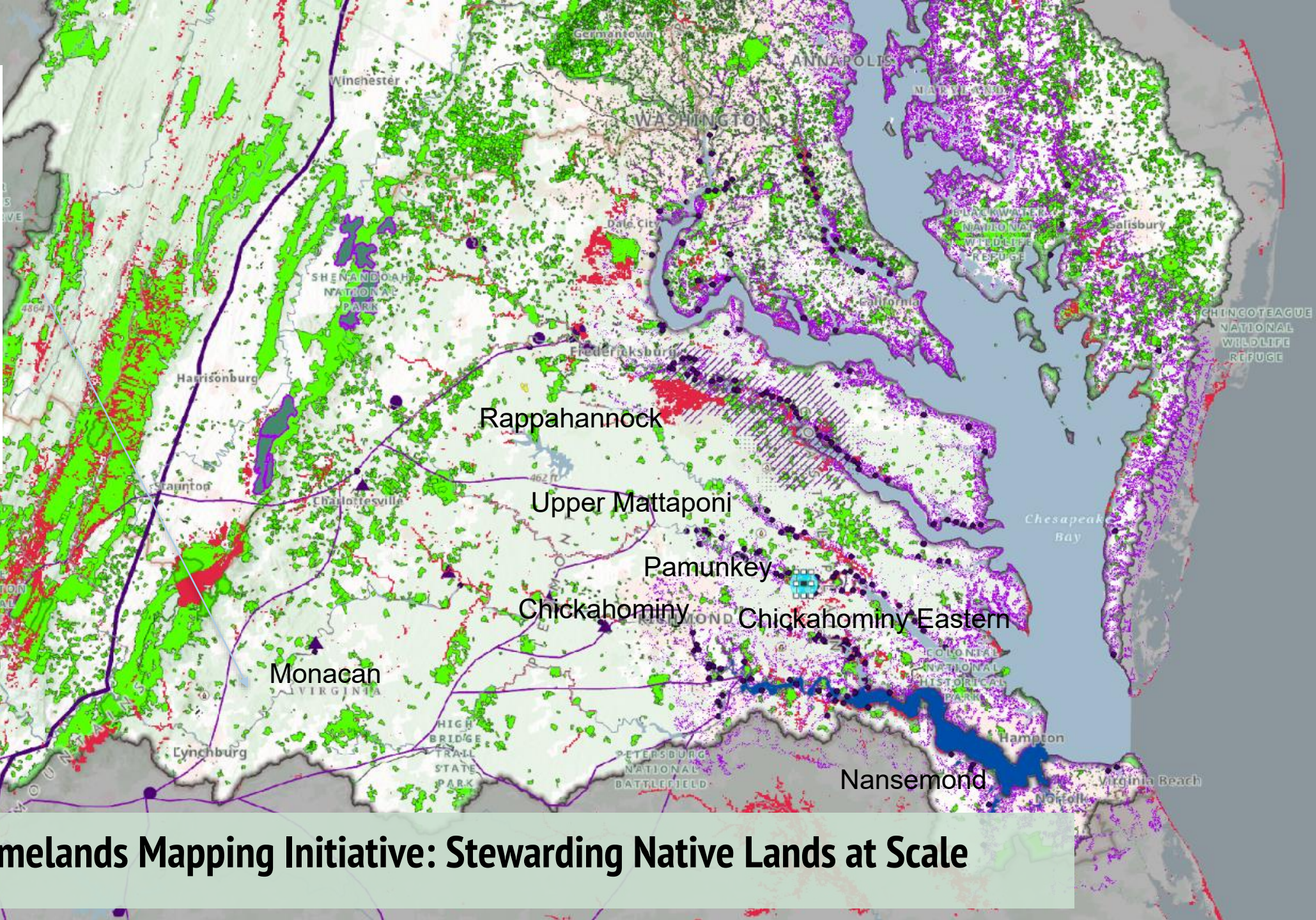
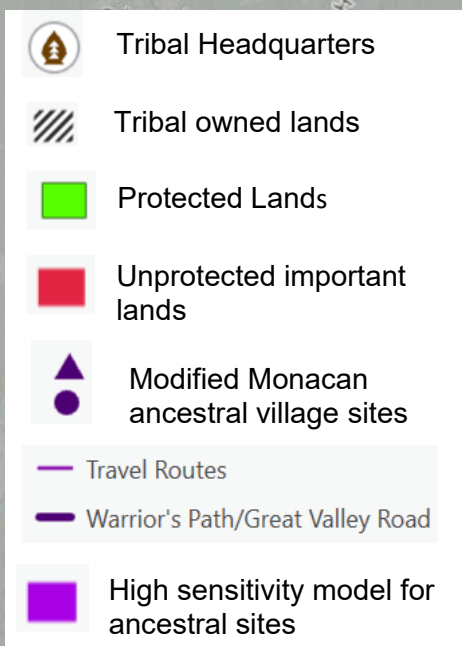
A Declaration

A Declaration of Tribal Nations as Sovereign Governments Committed to the Protection and Restoration of Ancestral Lands and Waters through the Chesapeake Bay Program Partnership, Approved January 15, 2025

The resolution advances sovereignty, recognizes the unique political government-to-government relationships federally recognized tribes hold with the US federal government and states and key opportunities to meaningfully boost restoration and conservation efforts in the Bay region by:

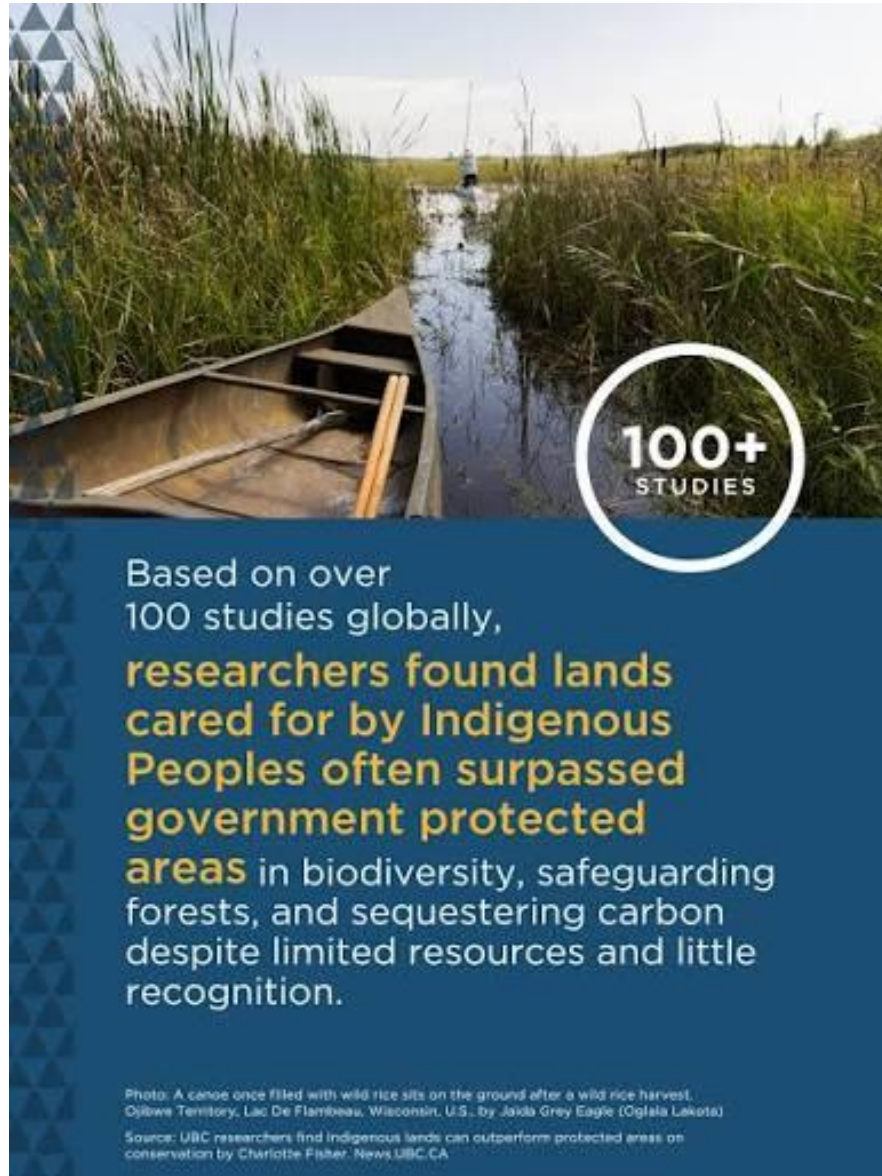
1. Developing a true partnership with Sovereign Nations to reinforce a mutual duty of care for ancestral landscapes and the Chesapeake Bay watershed by **creating a signatory status for Tribal Nations via the Indigenous Conservation Council**;
2. **Creating a new Indigenous Guardians Program funding program** with Tribal Nations as the recipients to inspire new models of conservation that around the world have proven to accelerate the pace, effectiveness, and participation in conservation; and,
3. **Honoring Indigenous Knowledge across the Chesapeake Bay Program** as on par with western science to restore biodiversity, clean drinking water, and protect cultural resources.

[Full Resolution](#)



Homelands Mapping Initiative: Stewarding Native Lands at Scale

Indigenous Stewardship Creates Better Outcomes



GREAT LAKES TRIBAL RESTORATION INITIATIVE

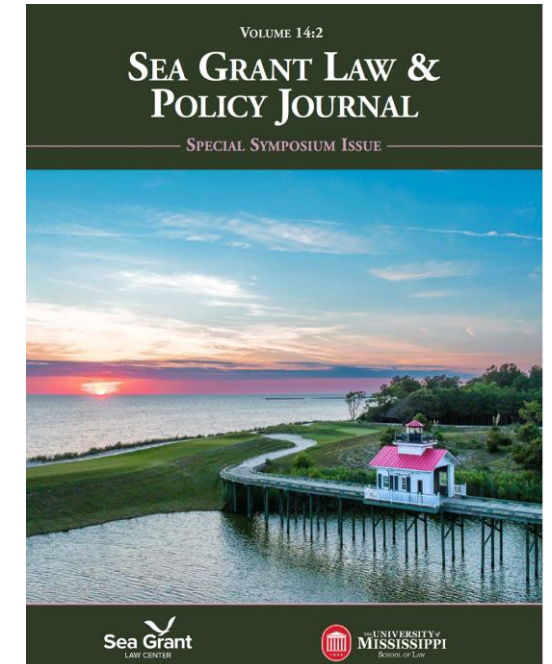
(Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission)

PUGET SOUND PARTNERSHIP

(Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission)

CALIFORNIA

(Tribal Marine Stewards Network)



March 2026: [Returning to Indigenous Knowledge: Coastal Preservation Success Stories in Tribal-Federal-State Partnerships](#)

Authors: Lauren Wiederkehr and Connor Tupponce (Upper Mattaponi)

A Chesapeake Bay Hope Spot that Honors Indigenous Knowledge



"The merger of new technology and ancient wisdom. It's the right time to put them to work to save the ocean."

-- Dr. Sylvia Earle

The Chesapeake Executive Council's Call to Action

Tribes as a Formal and Enduring Partner to the Chesapeake Bay Program

[Executive Council Charge](#), December 2, 2025



Tribal Leadership

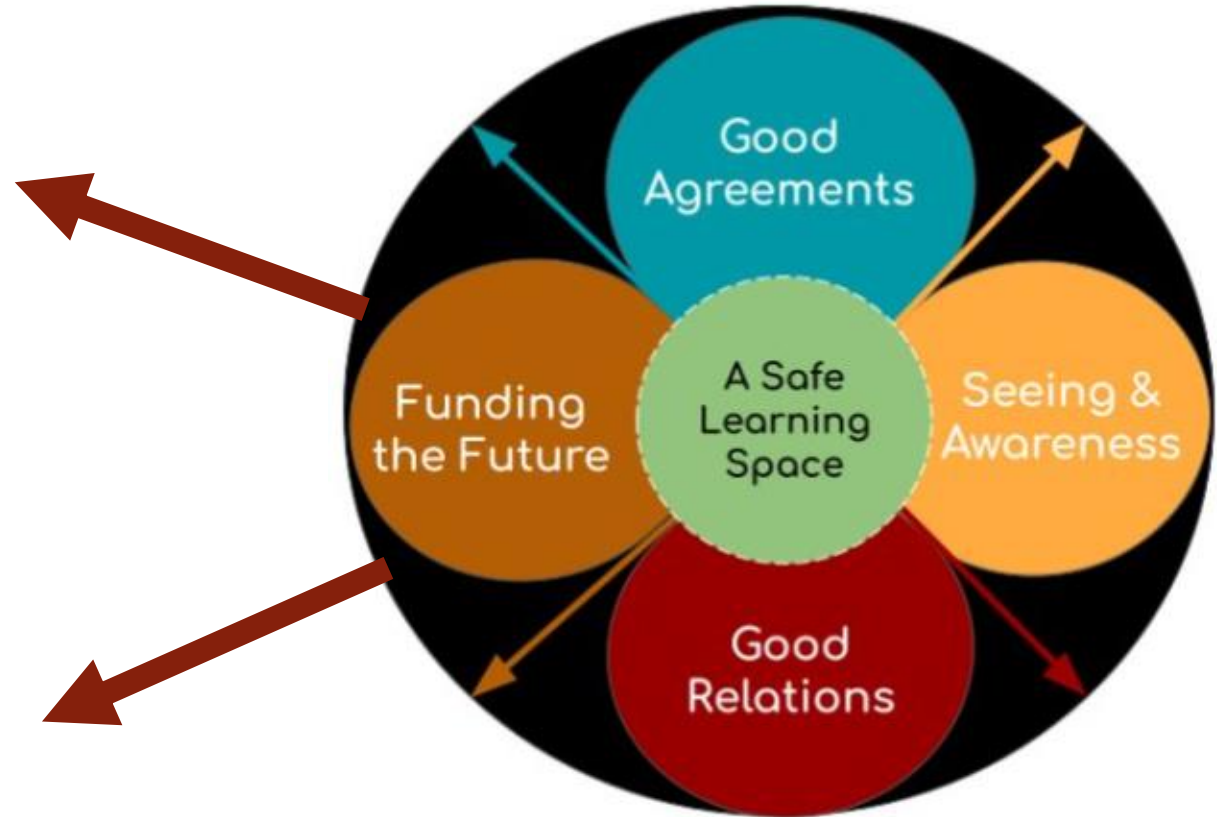


Funding for the Future that Respects Tribal Sovereignty

Develop a Native-led, Native-controlled fund to support tribal sovereignty and stewardship

Removing barriers to public sector funding and advocating for direct funding to Tribal Nations

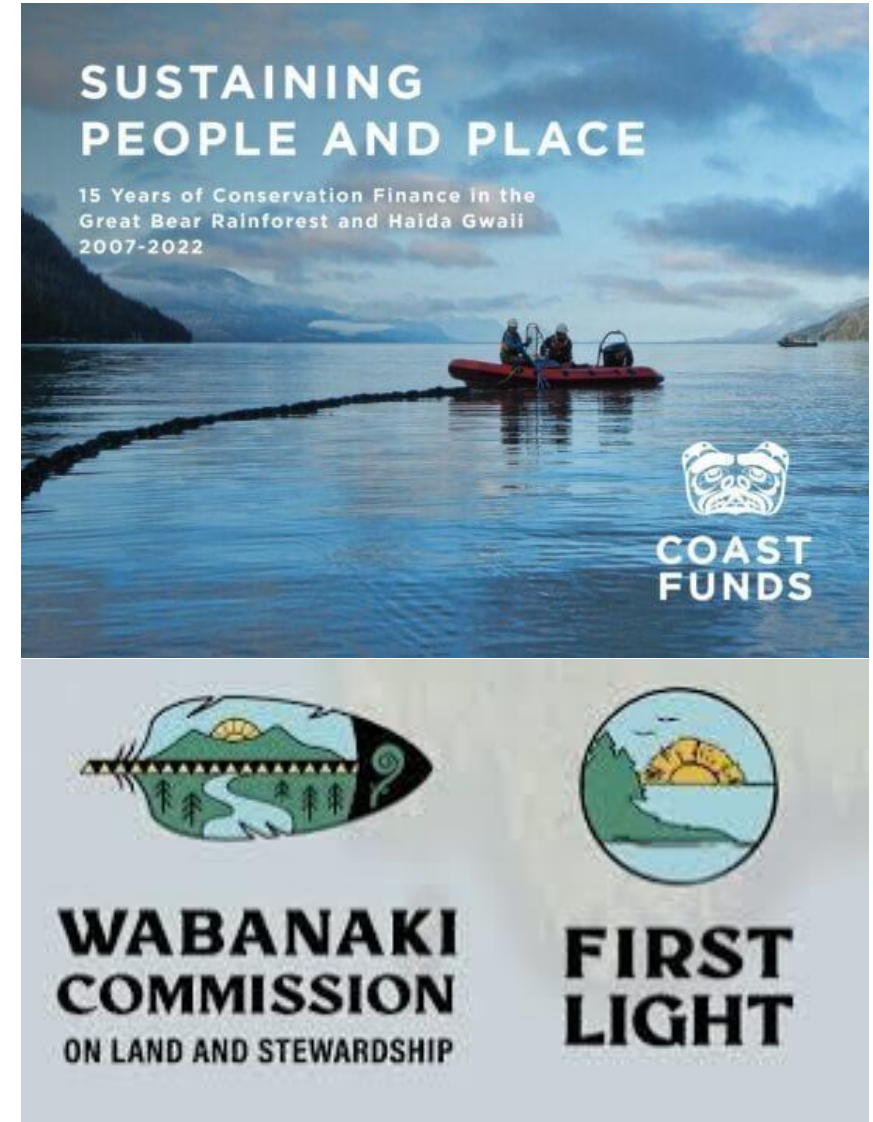
Collective strategies to secure more and diverse funding streams for tribal capacity and land reclamation



The Importance and Success of Native-Led Funding

Indigenous Guardian programs are culturally responsive approaches to revitalize language, culture, and heal ancestral lands.

They generate a return of **\$3 for every \$1 invested**



Fund Mechanics & Proof of Concept

- 1) Supports annual funding directly to Tribes and designated organizations approved by ICC Board and managed by an Advisory Council that is appointed by the ICC Board
- 2) Ensures support for tribal citizens and youth to uphold tribal and customary laws, practices, and treaty rights to heal tribal lands and revitalize connections to land, water and culture through programming
- 3) Seeds the capacity needed to develop capacity and open doors to secure new funding for Tribal Nations for land management

The ICC:

- Supports collective learning across member Tribal Nations using the fund
- Provides expanded capacity for defense, co-stewardship agreements, and tribal capacity to expand major initiatives (land transfer, etc.)
- Advocates for matching funding (state, federal or otherwise)
- Holds the responsibility of impact reporting in ways that support data sovereignty and demonstrates successes

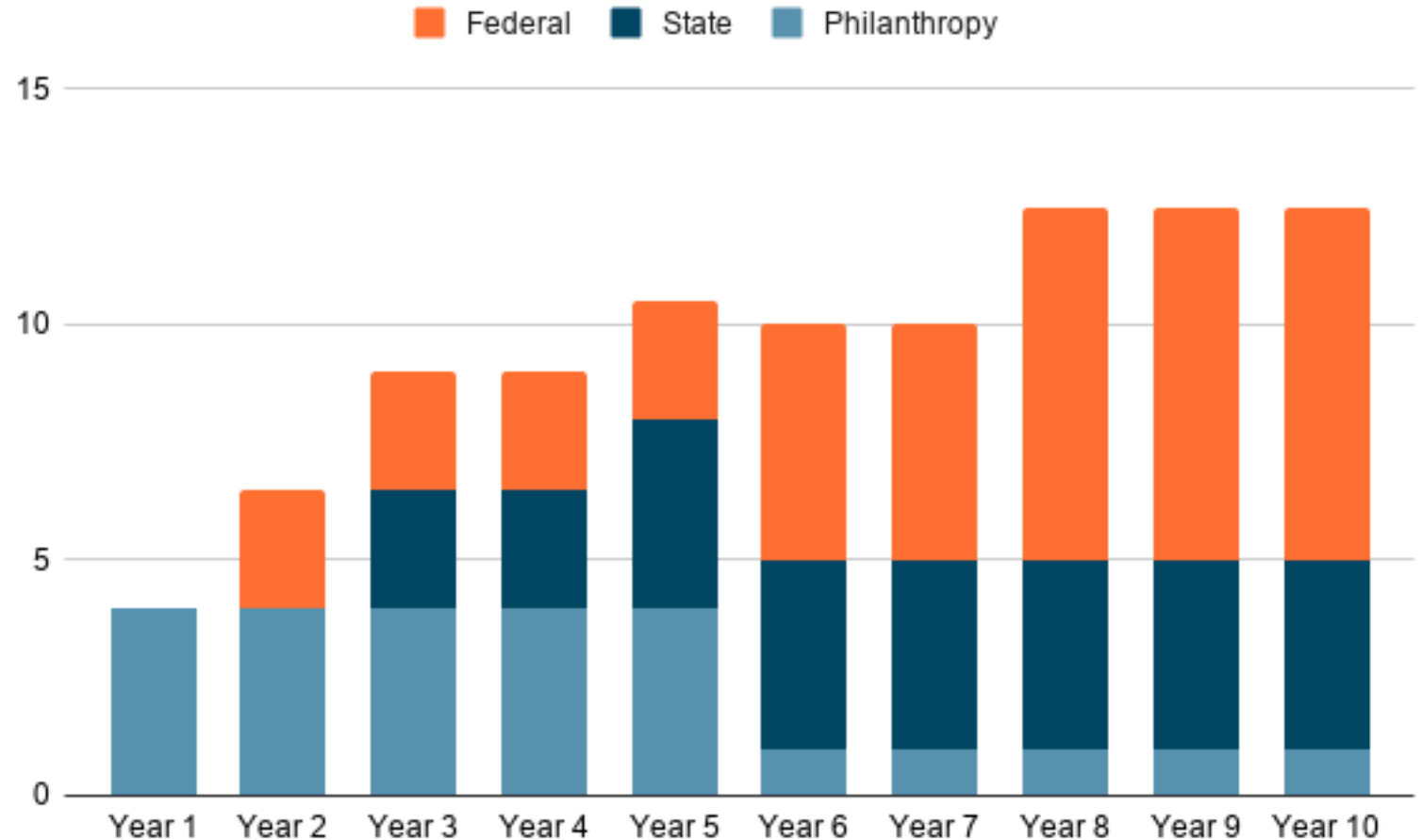


Fund Structure

Goal: Multi-year unrestricted philanthropic support of \$25M over 5 years.

The Fund will be focused on establishing tribal capacity and Indigenous Guardians for the first five years through philanthropic commitments that can be expanded through advocacy for state and federal commitments over time.

Projected growth: \$100M/10 years



ICC Feasibility Study Guardians Fund



- What We Learned
- Universal Support for an Indigenous Led Fund
- Initial Test and Value
- Strategic Partnerships are needed
- Call to Action



Tribal Leadership Perspectives of Environmental Work

- Core Values
- What is important to Tribal Leaders
- How to best partner and support Tribes
 - **Capacity**
 - **Programs**
 - **Land**

“Indigenous-led environmental work is not just a theory of change, or an environmental program, for Indigenous People, it is a way of life.”



Environmental Funders

Universal Support

- 87% have funded or partnered with a Tribal program
- 73% Identified Indigenous knowledge in direct alignment with their goals

Funding Themes

- Community
- Shared Goals
- Leadership
- Transformational



Philanthropic Sector Alignment for Environmental Work

Justifications to Fund Tribally led Environmental Work (Top 10)

- Indigenous Knowledge
- Land Stewardship
- Leverage Tribal Sovereignty
- Direct Alignment and Shared Goals
- Supports Larger Environmental Movement
- Leadership
- Equity
- Purpose, Mission
- Support Organization
- Support Planning and Development

“Time-honored knowledge and time-tested practices have shown that Indigenous-led approaches provide many of the solutions for today’s environmental challenges.”

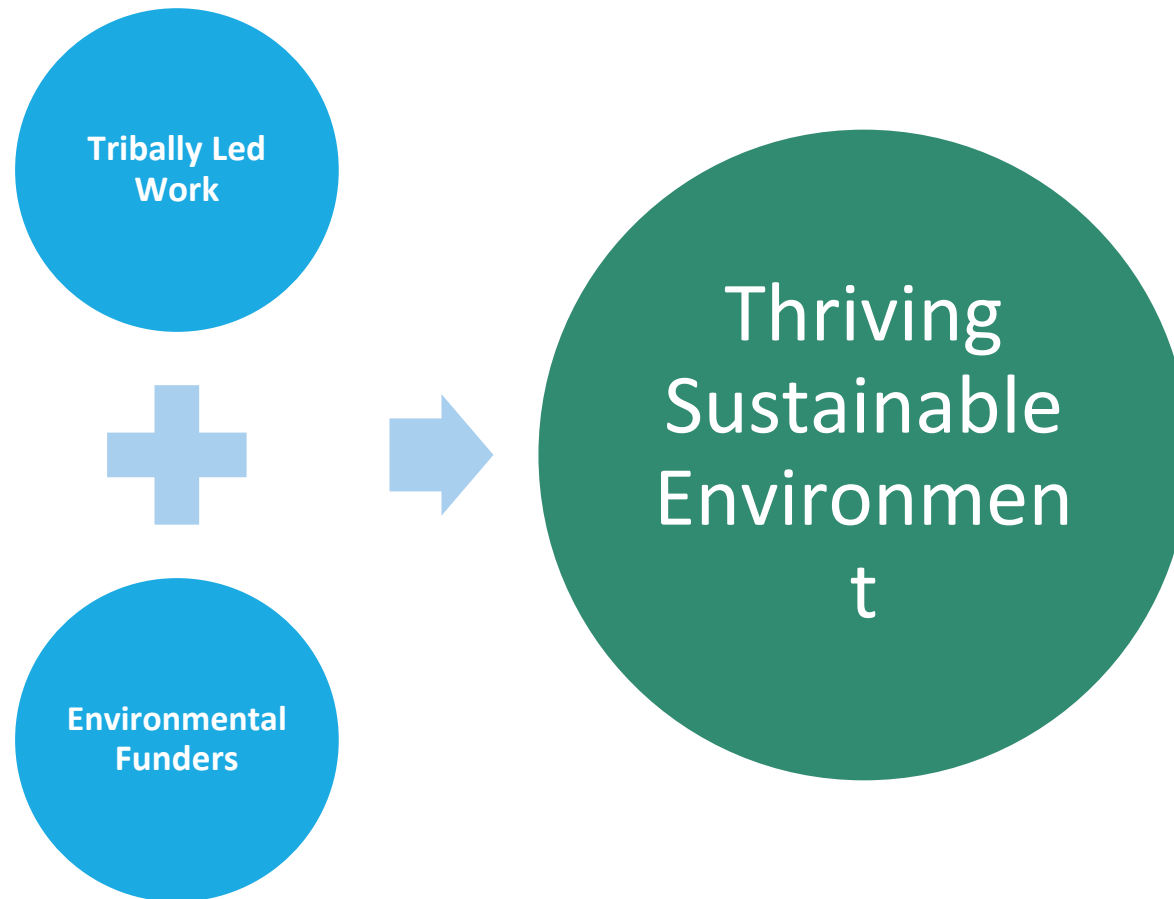
Align Funding Opportunities

- It is estimated that nearly \$2 Billion in funding was designated to support the Chesapeake Bay.
- Current Funding Targets 4 Categories
 - Habitat Restoration
 - Pollution Reduction
 - Land Conservation
 - Community Impacts



MAJOR GAP: No specific data point could be found to determine what percentage of the Chesapeake Bay funding is allocated to support Indigenous-led work.

Value: Meaningful, Transformational, Indigenous Led Approaches



“Initial testing showed interest in giving more to support a higher goal ”

Recommendations



Key Findings:

1. Indigenous Knowledge should be at the core of Chesapeake Bay environmental strategies.
2. Partnership is the essential for lasting and sustaining stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay area.
3. The Indigenous Conservation Council is key for coordination, collaboration and marshalling resources for Tribally led environmental work on the Chesapeake Bay.

Recommendations

Moving Forward:

- 1. Strong Need for an Indigenous Led Fund to “appropriately” support their work for the Chesapeake Bay Region**
- 2. Strong Need for more education and collaboration about Indigenous Led Work and how to partner with and leverage Tribal Sovereignty**
- 3. Partnership is needed from the philanthropic sector to help launch the Indigenous Guardians Fund**

Call to Action

- Summer 1:1 discussions
- Fall: Co-design fund meeting
- Winter-Spring launch

