



GLOBAL
LANDSCAPE
STEWARDS

2022 AUSTRALIA EXCHANGE SUMMARY REPORT





PHOTO: MICHELLE O'HERRON

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INTRODUCTION

Global Landscape Stewards is a group of western U.S.-based stewardship practitioners who are connecting with others in this field worldwide to exchange best practices and accelerate the pace and scale of this work. In fall 2022, we held the first Global Landscape Stewards Exchange (Exchange) in Australia, where we began weaving a diverse network of on-the-ground stewardship practitioners and catalyzed an exchange of effective collaborative approaches. This summary report describes what we learned. It begins by exploring the conservation contexts of the western U.S. and eastern Australia, including the common challenges and distinct differences that shape stewardship efforts in both regions. It then explores the eight main themes that emerged during the Exchange; in each of these themes, examples of best practices and areas of ongoing exploration are highlighted. It concludes by pointing to future opportunities for peer exchange and movement-building to help accelerate landscape stewardship across the planet.



PHOTO: SHARON FARRELL



WHY BUILD A GLOBAL STEWARDSHIP NETWORK?

Worldwide, people are coming together to steward the landscapes communities depend upon for clean air and water, sustenance, and joy. And yet, many stewardship practitioners continue to struggle alone with the common challenges of funding, capacity, and a loss of human connection with both nature and each other. We believe that by building relationships across boundaries—be they borders or business models—we can more effectively address our most pressing and complex challenges.

This is our theory of change: Connecting practitioners doing collaborative stewardship in diverse contexts accelerates learning and problem solving such that place-based work can feed into a global scale movement for inclusive, effective stewardship. We began testing this theory in Australia.

In October 2022, ten landscape stewardship practitioners from the western U.S. co-convoked a peer exchange with dozens of conservation organizations across eastern Australia. Through three weeks of meetings, conversations, events, and time together in the field, we built relationships

“Nothing beats being together in person—walking on Country, sitting in a circle, sharing stories, knowledge, and ideas ... I gained more resources, connections, and friendships from this experience than I could have hoped for.”

CECILIA RIEBL, TRUST FOR NATURE

HIGHLIGHTS

Peer exchange is a powerful tool for sharing knowledge and solutions with individuals, organizations, and communities.

In October 2022, ten U.S.-based landscape stewardship practitioners co-convoked a peer exchange across eastern Australia with dozens of conservation organizations to build relationships and learn about stewardship best practices.

Exchange participants explored the eight core themes summarized in this report, along with associated challenges, effective solutions, and opportunities for shared action.

Together, exchange participants and others are now building a global network to connect stewardship practitioners with one another.



PHOTO: SKEVIN WRIGHT

“**People are ready to work together but are still challenged to break out of ‘business as usual’ approaches. By facilitating forums that build positive relationships across human sectors and communities, these exchanges promise to provide the connectivity needed between people and the environments they depend on for survival.”**

KEVIN WRIGHT,
MARIN COUNTY PARKS

and identified a range of best practices and shared questions grounded in our varied stewardship practices and cultural perspectives.

Australian farmers, ecologists, government officials, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, funders, educators, facilitators, volunteers, conservationists, and local community members shared their innovative approaches to building partnerships and advancing on-the-ground stewardship. The visit provided an opportunity for Australian practitioners who had not yet met to come together and build new relationships. It also brought Australian funders and conservation practitioners together in a first-ever national meeting, boosting the Australian Environmental Grantmakers Network’s understanding of the needs and priorities of place-based stewardship.

Our emerging U.S. and Australia practitioners’ network continues to grow and to strengthen the relationships we created in person. Through virtual meetings, email, and intentional network weaving, we continue to learn more about how to tackle global and local landscape stewardship challenges such as climate change, biodiversity conservation, and the best ways to support thriving communities. This report is not only a summary of what we learned on our trip, but also, a case for this kind of ongoing exploration and connection so that we may meet our conservation challenges together.

WHY ENGAGE IN PEER EXCHANGE?

Peer exchange is a powerful tool for sharing knowledge and solutions across a spectrum of individuals, organizations, and communities. Rather than crafting solutions to pressing challenges in isolation, peer exchange promotes the transfer of ideas and experiences in a variety of contexts and perspectives. By learning from each other, we can enhance relationships, foster mutual understanding, and enable new ideas to emerge in ways that one-way learning often cannot. Importantly, peer exchange recognizes the value that lived experience and diverse perspectives bring to addressing the challenges and opportunities facing our landscapes and communities.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY STEWARDSHIP PRACTITIONERS?

Central to advancing collaborative stewardship are the doers—the people on the ground in our landscapes and communities who are caring for and restoring nature and creating the relationships needed to work across boundaries and at scale. Practitioners have direct connections to the lands and communities where stewardship is happening.

WHY CONNECT STEWARDSHIP PRACTITIONERS FROM THE U.S. AND AUSTRALIA?

The western U.S. and eastern Australia have much in common. Both regions are defined by vast landscapes containing incredibly diverse ecosystems, wildlife, and natural resources. Their economies depend heavily on agriculture, resource extraction, recreation, and tourism. They both have large and culturally diverse population centers that shape trends in land use, policy, and resource consumption. The national identities that influence both regions are partially defined by a history of rugged individualism, rural heritage, and the impacts of settler colonialism, all of which shape how people relate to the land and to one another.



Both regions also face immense challenges, including climate change, biodiversity loss, shifting economic pressures, and increasing human populations. Their democratic governments, which have brutal histories of dispossessing Indigenous peoples of their land and cultural practices, are taking long-overdue steps to address social inequities and recognize Indigenous land rights and practices. They are also increasingly recognizing that the status quo is not working, and that we need to increase the pace, scale, durability, and inclusivity of stewardship and conservation to meet the threats we collectively face.

When we began exploring opportunities for international peer exchange, it became clear that we had a lot in common with our Australian peers. Shortly after planning began, the Australian government released its 2021 [State of the Environment](#) report, which assessed the deterioration of the country's environment and outlined pathways to prevent a catastrophic collapse of its ecosystems and communities. Early conversations revealed that collaborative stewardship was a common approach in both countries, with partnerships, place-based groups, community-led efforts, and networks working across perspectives, jurisdictions, and cultures to address these challenges.

We also explored our differences, identifying ideas and approaches that have emerged in response to our respective contexts. Many of the lessons learned and best practices shared by Australians were connected to their country's leadership in biodiversity science, unique community-based conservation efforts such as the [Landcare movement](#), and efforts by [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities](#) to steward land and sustain cultural practices. Those of us on the U.S. team often found ourselves speaking to the significant role philanthropy plays in supporting landscape stewardship, the importance of collaborative leadership and capacity to sustaining cross-boundary work, and local and national efforts to advance stewardship practices that are carried out by and for everyone.

While each group faces distinct and specific challenges and has had individual successes, the exchange revealed that we have enough in common to make best practices transferable and opportunities for ongoing connection immensely valuable.



PHOTO: MICHELLE O'HERRON

THEMES

A number of themes emerged during our time in eastern Australia. Nearly every conversation touched on the value and role of *First Nations-led stewardship, private lands conservation, and landscape connectivity* in both countries. Many communities we visited were grappling with how to increase wildfire and disaster resilience in the face of climate change and biodiversity loss. And many practitioners were seeking new ways to improve the *conservation finance, policy, and governance* supporting our work; implement more effective *collaborative approaches*; and expand *community engagement*.

The following section explores these themes by highlighting common challenges and opportunities, transferable solutions, and next steps for continued connection to advance stewardship practice across the western U.S., eastern Australia, and beyond.

FIRST NATIONS-LED STEWARDSHIP

Despite tens of thousands of years of occupation by First Nations Australians and their deep connections with the country's lands and waters, the British concept of *terra nullius*—nobody's land—rationalized the invasion and settlement of Australia, including the Torres Strait Islands and Tasmania. It is impossible to consider the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in landscape stewardship today without understanding the impacts of this history on the land and its people. Much has been written about the history of settler colonialism, genocide, and land theft in Australia, which we will not cover here. Suffice it to say that it left an indelible mark on the country's landscapes, its people, and its culture. Like the U.S., Australia is grappling with the absolute necessity of recognizing the dispossession, murder, and *resilience* of its First Nations people as inequity and racism continue to perpetuate the legacy harms of colonialism.

In 2008, Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd formally apologized to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, especially to the Stolen Generations whose lives have been devastated by forced child-removal and assimilation policies. In the U.S., we are relieved and heartened by efforts such as the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative; the Governor of California's formal apology to the state's Indigenous communities; and the recent [Katimiin and Aameekyáaraam Sacred Lands Act](#), which returns sacred lands to the Karuk Peoples, signed into law by President Biden. Yet, while Indigenous self-determination and healing are gaining more traction and visibility across the U.S., there has been no formal apology for the historical harms done to the nation's First Peoples. Surely, this meant that Australia was further along in its work to acknowledge and heal the past?

Of course, what we discovered in our intentional yet (by practical necessity) cursory examination of this issue was far more complex. As discussed in the Community Engagement section that follows, we saw a mix of bright spots and



PHOTO: SHELANA DESILVA

challenges to centering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stewardship in the context of land conservation. We noted evidence of real partnership between white-led conservation organizations and First Nations stewards, in particular with the use of cultural covenants to protect lands with biological and cultural importance. We saw First Nations community leadership on issues of climate adaptation, land stewardship, climate disaster response, habitat and water resource protection, and conservation financing through carbon and cultural credits, with self-determination and community-led prioritization guiding all these efforts. Yet, the handful of First Nations practitioners we met often remarked that tokenism and surface-level changes continue to stymie real progress.

While the ubiquitous acknowledgments shared in a variety of contexts—from business meetings to street signs and pre-flight announcements—were beautiful and important, they were not necessarily evidence of meaningful change. This was underscored by the fact that non-Indigenous people of color in Australia remained largely invisible in the conservation world. This led us to understand that while the conversation is changing (which is indeed critically important), as in the U.S., Australia’s systems and culture have a long way to go.

First Nations-led land stewardship functions differently in Australia for many reasons, some of which are referenced here. However, recognition of First Nations peoples at various levels of Australia’s government does create pathways for Indigenous-led stewardship that those communities here in the U.S. do not benefit from. This includes statutory rights that have broad impact on land ownership and management as well as economic development, cultural projects, co-management of national parks, and consultation roles (see [Australia’s Native Title Act 1993](#)).

An increasing understanding and use of cultural burning is another inspiring example of Australia’s First Nations leadership in landscape stewardship, with cultural practitioners carrying out wildfire resilience and habitat

restoration projects using cultural burning practices nationwide. Additionally, First Nations practitioners are creating self-determined financing sources for intersectional projects that combine job training, economic development, cultural benefits, and education. One amazing example of this is the [Aboriginal Carbon Foundation](#), which employs a First Nations-owned verification framework to realize financing for cultural fire, carbon farming, and “strengths-based” community development.

When the Global Landscape Stewards Exchange plans its next trip, we will be more intentional about connecting directly with the host country’s First Peoples and will seek to build those relationships through as many personal and professional connections as possible. We are very grateful to our hosts in Australia, who, as representatives of predominantly white-led organizations, generously introduced us to the First Nations practitioners with whom they have been purposefully developing stronger relationships.

NEXT STEPS

With permission, share tools and resources developed by Indigenous partners in both countries with other stewardship practitioners.

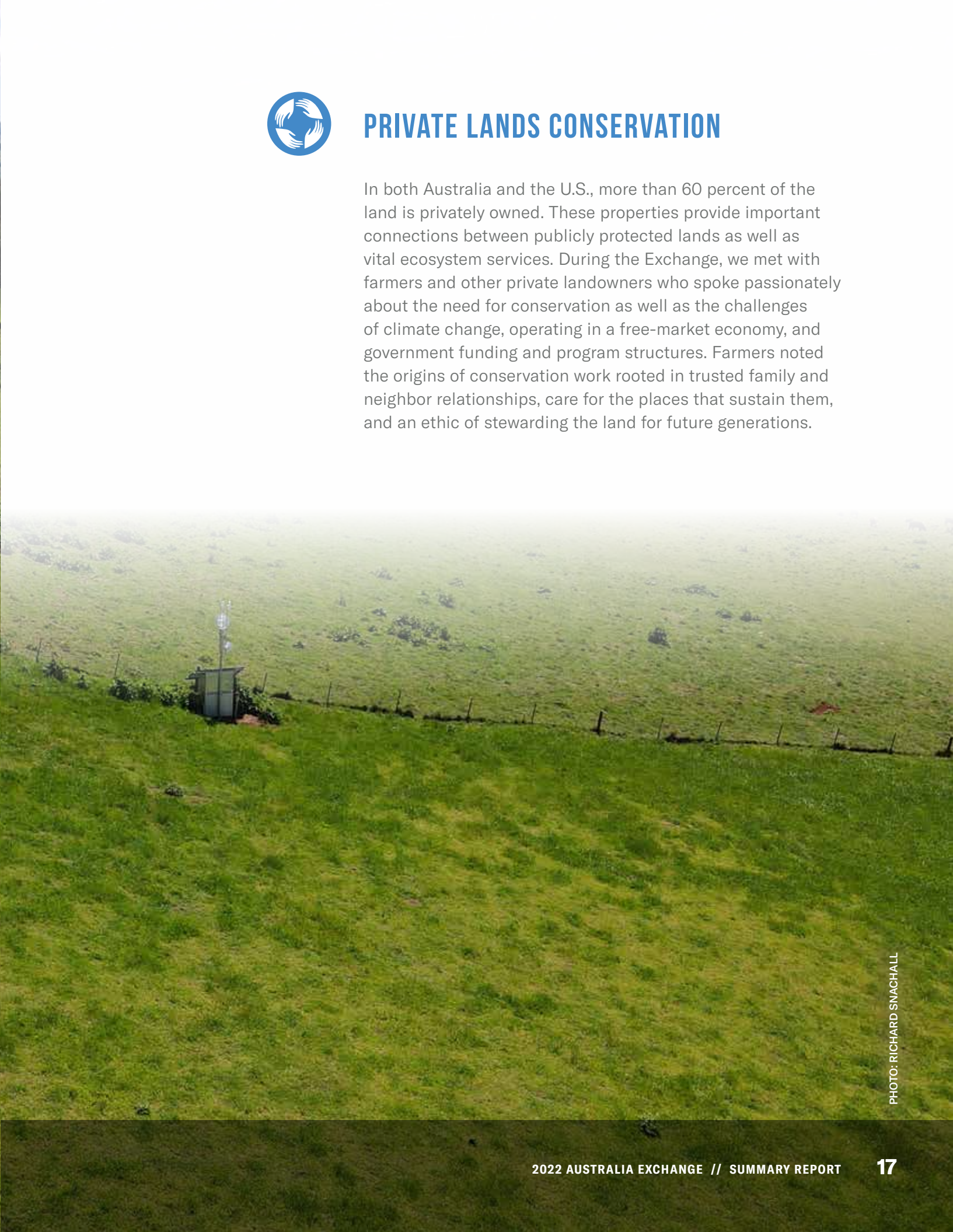
Host virtual roundtables to connect Indigenous stewardship practitioners and foster solidarity and knowledge sharing.

Connect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander park rangers with Indigenous National Park Service employees to share successes and lessons from [Indigenous Ranger Programs in Australia](#).



PRIVATE LANDS CONSERVATION

In both Australia and the U.S., more than 60 percent of the land is privately owned. These properties provide important connections between publicly protected lands as well as vital ecosystem services. During the Exchange, we met with farmers and other private landowners who spoke passionately about the need for conservation as well as the challenges of climate change, operating in a free-market economy, and government funding and program structures. Farmers noted the origins of conservation work rooted in trusted family and neighbor relationships, care for the places that sustain them, and an ethic of stewarding the land for future generations.



One of the most influential forces in Australian private lands conservation has been the Landcare movement, which has supported the proliferation of community- and place-based conservation efforts. [Landcare originated](#) in the southeastern state of Victoria during the 1980s through a partnership between the state government and local farmers, both of whom sought to reverse land degradation through community-based collaboration. As the success of these groups in Victoria became more widely known, nationwide support from farmers and conservationists catalyzed bipartisan legislation that provided funding to expand this program across Australia. For decades, these groups—often led by coalitions of farmers, conservationists, and community members—have advanced place-based stewardship on private lands and supported productive farms across Australia.

Understanding the Landcare movement in Australia provides many transferable lessons for the U.S., including models to advance bipartisan funding and policy, create community-based efforts on private lands, and sustain healthy collaborative groups over time. While there are over 500 known community-based collaborative conservation groups in the U.S., there are nearly 4,000 Landcare groups in Australia. Landcare has achieved what few programs in the U.S. have by creating a common movement that is inclusive of individuals and organizations across the political spectrum, community-led, and adaptable to local contexts.

Private lands conservation in Australia is also shaped by environmental organizations that are leveraging philanthropic and government dollars to buy land, secure conservation easements, and manage resources for conservation values. Organizations such as [Bush Heritage Australia](#), [Trust for Nature](#), and the [Tasmanian Land Conservancy](#) have created effective models. Similar to land conservancies in the U.S., these organizations utilize conservation easements as powerful tools for individuals to retain ownership while committing to protecting their land. Efforts are also underway to develop cultural covenants that would give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities access to private lands,

enabling the return of traditional cultural and stewardship practices to those landscapes.

Many Australian conservation organizations are grappling with challenges similar to those faced by U.S. land conservancies; they underscored the need for sustainable funding, more supportive government policies, and enhanced staff capacity to build relationships and partnerships with neighboring jurisdictions. Australian organizations were keen to learn more about U.S. policies and tax-based incentives that both provide funding for private lands conservation and are widely supported by local voters.

There is also an ongoing need to connect farmers, ranchers, and other private landowners with one another to build networks of support and share practical solutions to conservation and community challenges. The Australian farmers we met highlighted the impact that drought and economic struggles have on their mental health and livelihood, emphasizing the intersections between healthy land and healthy communities. Many private lands conservation organizations also expressed a need to improve their approaches to partnering with First Nations stewards, neighboring landowners, and governments, underscoring the value international peer learning can bring to advancing new and effective approaches to stewardship.

NEXT STEPS

Cohost virtual webinar(s) with Australian and U.S. government officials and land trust leaders on tax frameworks that support private lands conservation easements.

Connect Landcare groups and U.S. community-based conservation groups with one another through virtual workshops.

Share resources on Landcare with U.S. community-based conservation groups.



LANDSCAPE CONNECTIVITY

We knew that Australia's long history of habitat connectivity and wildlife corridor conservation would offer opportunities for deep dives into these topics. Protecting wildlife corridors and addressing the need for connected habitats for both wildlife and people are critical steps to improve landscape resilience in the face of climate change. This is particularly important in a country such as Australia, which has a highly variable climate, relatively high temperatures, forested cover of less than one-third of the country, and arid rangelands or outback for the balance.

Similar to the western U.S., climate change is exacting a toll across eastern Australia: Native forests are suffering from disease and stress, wildfires and drought are prevalent, and invasive species are increasing their ranges. Add a rapidly expanding human footprint throughout its forested regions and it is clear that habitat fragmentation is damaging biodiversity across Australia.

Australian and U.S. Exchange participants, all of whom have deep expertise in connectivity conservation, were excited to learn from one another and share best practices. Our first

major event in Australia was in Brisbane at the [Great Eastern Ranges Initiative's](#) (GER) conference "Connecting People and Connecting Nature." GER has been a leader in wildlife corridors, connectivity, and fostering a large landscape vision within Australia since the early 2000s. This gathering had been postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic but was rescheduled to coincide with our visit. We were fortunate to join 100+ people from around Australia and New Zealand to explore the state of connectivity science, planning, and policy. Alongside other practitioners, we were able to bring the global and U.S. context into the conversation, especially related to the 30x30 initiative, which emphasizes both connected and protected landscapes, cultural land management, and connectivity science.

Australia has a long legacy of not only having a community of conservationists and researchers working to protect wildlife corridors, but also, having one of the first [nationwide corridors plans](#), adopted in 2012. While funding for this program was discontinued not long after it was adopted—and many of the goals remain unmet—it serves as an excellent blueprint around which conservation partners can organize. This is particularly important now that the Convention on Biological Diversity has signed the ten-year [Global Biodiversity Framework](#), in which three of the twenty-two global targets place a strong emphasis on connected and protected landscapes. Other national and state connectivity efforts in Australia are very limited at this time, though there is hope that the new federal government will be increasingly focused on these topics. We also are discussing with our Australian colleagues ways to reinvigorate the nationwide

corridor plan, which has the potential to be a global model for other countries—including the U.S.—to follow as they address the goals of the Global Biodiversity Framework.

It is not only the lack of national and state plans and funding that limits connectivity conservation in Australia. At the GER conference, during field visits and in conversations, we heard an underlying need for a more coordinated and comprehensive approach to conservation and stewardship efforts, one that includes connectivity conservation. It was clear that landscape connectivity in both Australia and the U.S. is being hindered by our limited capacity to support coordination and knowledge-sharing. In the U.S., we are seeing significant federal investment in increasing habitat connectivity, addressing the impacts of roads on wildlife movement, and the importance of taking a large landscape approach, but this is not currently happening in Australia. And unfortunately, private philanthropy in Australia has yet to catch up on funding landscape-level collaboratives and connectivity efforts. Luckily, private lands conservation efforts, such as through GER's collaboratives and [Bush Heritage Australia](#)'s prioritization of critical connectivity habitat within their conservation easement and stewardship work, are strong and growing in number.

NEXT STEPS

Support Australian partners as they work with the new federal government to fund connectivity projects.

Continue engaging with the Australian Land Conservation Alliance and others as they work with the new government to implement the Global Biodiversity Framework and meet 30x30 targets regarding protected and connected landscapes.

Identify, evaluate, and share best practices and regional/national frameworks with connectivity specialists and stewardship practitioners in the U.S., Australia, and other global regions.

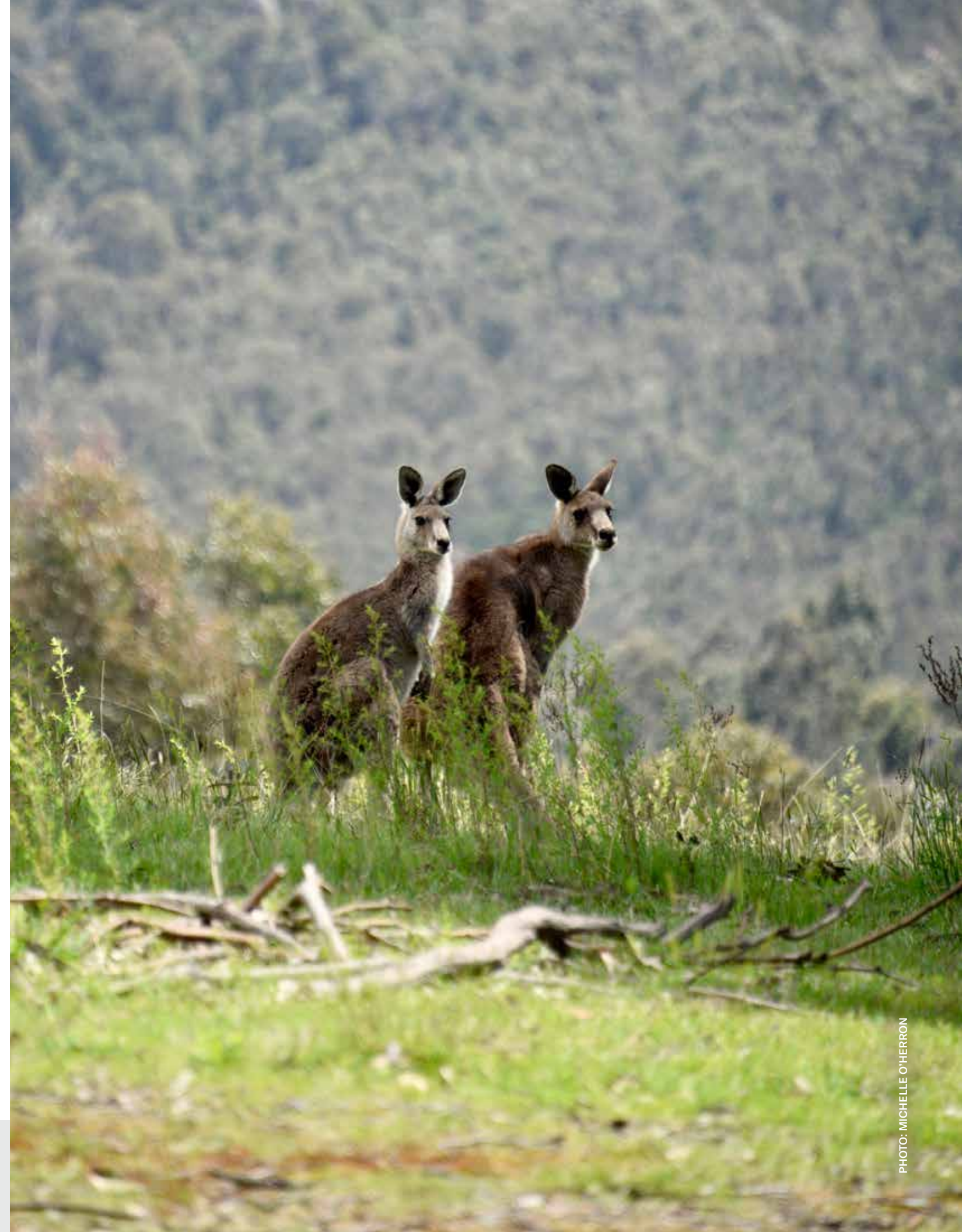


PHOTO: MICHELLE O'HERRON



WILDFIRE & DISASTER RESILIENCE

Australia is no stranger to catastrophic fires similar to those we are experiencing with increasing frequency in California and across the western U.S. Shared challenges around wildfire resilience and response were among the reasons we initially considered Australia for this exchange.

Although our landscapes and ecology differ, as does wildfire behavior in our respective regions, conversations about fire preparedness and community impact resonated with both Australian and U.S. Exchange participants. Given how widespread fires have become in both countries, it was not



surprising that the need for management at a greater scale once again emerged as a core theme. Another topic that surfaced was cultural burning practices and the ways they could be used to improve both ecological health and fire resiliency. Traditional burning practices—including extensive and frequent cultural burns on both private and public lands—are more widely embraced and adopted in Australia than in the U.S. Fuels management in both countries is another major challenge. However, perhaps because of their cultural burning practices, our Australian counterparts do not rely on forest thinning the way we do in the western U.S. Considering that our biggest challenge with forest management is biomass removal, this is an area worthy of further exploration.

Across many regions, Australian First Nations leaders and landscape managers are using established cultural burning practices for landscape-scale fire management. Interestingly, much of this work is funded through the carbon market. [Arnhem Land Fire Abatement](#) (ALFA), an entirely First Nations-run nonprofit organization, is one example of a group that has taken advantage of these markets, offering membership to communities who are the Traditional Owners of certain areas. ALFA offers an interesting model for resourcing fire resiliency through cultural burning practices.

One of the biggest roadblocks to improving forest health and preventing catastrophic wildfires here in the U.S. is our inability to increase the pace and scale of restoration due to permitting challenges. Our Australian partners, who were shocked by our processes and the barriers they create, acknowledged their own smaller, yet similar, roadblocks to returning cultural and prescribed fire practices to their own landscapes.

NEXT STEPS

Explore successes and transferable approaches for cultural burning with stewardship practitioners in Australia, the U.S., and other countries.

Identify and share lessons learned regarding streamlining permitting and policies to support cultural and prescribed burning.

Identify and share successful models for community engagement and getting buy-in for prescribed burning as a management tool.



CONSERVATION FINANCE

Increasingly, climate risk is raising private finance conversations to the company board level, and a number of sectors are searching for a workable common framework.

During the Exchange, entire days were dedicated to meeting with Australian private finance, philanthropy, and conservation professionals. All noted that they were rarely (or never) invited to meet one another, and it became clear that this lack of collaboration is financially wasteful. At the same time, finance professionals and philanthropists expressed a conviction that they could play a significant role in bridging resource gaps and addressing the biodiversity and climate crises—and could do so in amounts that exceed governmental capacity, regardless of size.



PHOTO: SHARON FARRELL

Our hosts shared many examples of productive partnerships between private investors or philanthropists and conservation organizations and First Nations groups. Though most conversations described the current lack of partnership between these worlds and the need for greater collaboration, strong positive examples do exist, including [North Queensland Airports](#), [APN Cape York Land Restoration Fund](#), and the [Pollination Group](#). In general, investors are increasingly interested in making more environmentally friendly investment choices, even at the potential cost of a reduced rate of return.

A dizzying array of existing and emergent financing mechanisms exists, but few outside the finance community understand them. One of the greatest barriers to conservation financing is project scale. Scaling up biodiversity and climate efforts could create incentives for private finance to become involved. Another viable strategy is to increase the currently tiny number of finance professionals nested within regional conservation efforts, individuals with the skill set to utilize these tools and take advantage of appropriate opportunities.

The Aboriginal Carbon Foundation supports wealth-building for Traditional Owners by allowing options for public investment in peer-verified carbon credit trading. These investments support projects with demonstrated

environmental, social, and cultural benefits that verifiably sequester carbon emissions. Emergent biodiversity credit markets drive money directly to the resources instead of offsetting negative impacts (such as mining) elsewhere. Many professionals emphasized that adding private finance and philanthropic funding to government investment can scale up impact, provide greater flexibility to meet changing needs, and foster independence from traditional grantmaking with predefined deliverables.

NEXT STEPS

Identify and share transferable models for biodiversity, carbon, and cultural credit markets that advance landscape stewardship in California, the U.S., and other parts of the world.

Look to Australia's innovative approaches, such as the Aboriginal Carbon Foundation's cultural credits program, for models for funding Indigenous culture, wealth, and stewardship.

Connect leaders across sectors to develop shared language and priorities, partnerships, financial





POLICY & GOVERNANCE

Connectivity is required for both landscape-scale ecological health and for people to take action together. However, from the start of the trip and at every stop along the way, we heard familiar complaints about disconnection: between science and policy, biodiversity and climate, government policy and work on the ground, and governments and local practitioners. There seem to be many promising opportunities for California, the U.S., and Australia to collaboratively lead the way in solving these issues. We also heard an urgent desire on the part of government and local partners to work together.

With the 30x30 initiative, Australia and California are at the forefront on the international climate stage in recognizing the importance of biodiversity and landscape connectivity. The U.S. leads in working lands conservation, a critical link between public lands. All three governments are prioritizing Indigenous reconciliation, specifically, the integration of Traditional Knowledge and practices with science when stewarding landscapes for a resilient future.

The science of a decade ago cannot keep pace with climate change today. Across water, forest management, disaster preparedness, and other disciplines, government partners are exploring how real-time data collection can improve coordinated decision-making. There are also opportunities to explore more flexible and responsive funding policies that provide better capacity-building support to regional and local networks and organizations.

Our Australian partners noted the challenge of getting people to care about conservation. It can be especially difficult when it competes with other important issues, such as economic development, disaster protection and preparedness, and private landowner interests. However, the U.S. has many examples of partners across the political spectrum finding common ground. While political systems function differently in each country, campaigns and communication tools can be shared to inspire support for conservation objectives. (For an example of an idea that has catalyzed a worldwide movement, see [30X30](#).)



Australian government partners indicated several areas of particular interest:

Utilizing tax-based financing to fund both public- and private-lands conservation work.	Strengthening regional models to improve trust and connectivity between practitioners working on the ground and government leaders making policy and funding decisions.	Developing appropriate roles and strategies for governments to support First Nations reconciliation, stewardship, and the return of traditional lands.	Championing “all of government” approaches, in which government departments work together to achieve a shared outcome.
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Finally, this area of policy and governance could be strengthened by including state and federal government leaders from the U.S. in future exchanges as a way to foster key relationships and facilitate knowledge-sharing.

NEXT STEPS

Cohost virtual webinar(s) on tax frameworks that support private lands conservation easements with Australian and U.S. government officials and land trust leaders.

Create peer-exchange opportunities around challenges and successes to implementing the Global Biodiversity Framework, 30x30, and carbon emissions reduction targets in Australia, the U.S., and around the globe.

Identify best practices for building partnerships with and across governments that support stewardship practices.





COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES

Many eastern Australian individuals, organizations, and partnerships champion a range of collaborative approaches that are making a difference for both their landscapes and their communities. At the same time, structural silos between organizations, jurisdictions, and sectors pose significant challenges to their success. Competition for funds and a lack of resources further hamper efforts to work together.

In addition to expanding funding and policy support for collaboration in Australia, many practitioners named a need to enhance their ability to forge partnerships, build relationships, and work collaboratively with one another. As in the U.S., most of the practitioners and stewardship leaders we met were originally trained as scientists and land managers rather than as bridge-builders, conflict-resolvers, and cross-cultural-connectors. There was honest acknowledgement that the field currently lacks skills and capacity to collaborate at the scale needed to adequately address the challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, and severed cultural connections to the land.

Many exchange participants from both countries shared a desire to enhance their capacity to forge partnerships, build their collaborative leadership skill set, and engage in cross-cultural stewardship with Indigenous communities. While emerging programs like Collaborating Well can play an important role, the exchange highlighted a need in both countries for widespread investments in these skill sets. Networks and support organizations such as the Australian Land Conservation Alliance are playing a key role by elevating the necessity of working together across boundaries while providing sector- and geographic-spanning opportunities for peer learning.



PHOTO: MICHELLE O'HERRON

Making partnerships more inclusive was also recognized as necessary to expand the knowledge and experience being infused into collaborative stewardship efforts. Organizations like [Bush Heritage Australia](#) have demonstrated their commitment to supporting First Nations self-determination and stewardship, investing significantly in their capacity to hire and partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and purchase land for those communities to own and manage. While both countries have a long way to go, there is growing recognition that the success of collaborative efforts often rests on how inclusive and community-based those efforts are.

Regardless of the challenges they face or the context in which they work, exchange participants acknowledged the value peer learning and exchange plays in identifying effective partnership and network models, boosting their capacity to collaborate, and connecting efforts across regions and scales to support landscape stewardship.

NEXT STEPS

Create peer-learning opportunities for Australian and U.S. practitioners around best practices for developing collaborative leadership in the conservation sector.

Identify and share effective and inclusive collaboration and partnership models across diverse regional and cultural contexts.

Work with the Australian Land Conservation Alliance and other partners to determine if an Australian [Catalyst Fund](#) could be developed to boost organizations' capacity to advance landscape stewardship.



PHOTO: MICHELLE O'HERRON



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

As a field of practice, we recognize that the conservation community has a long way to go to meaningfully engage local communities and connect with those who are not in the “choir,” including people who have been historically marginalized and even displaced by environmental work. Though conservation is linked to colonial constructs, it also provides a powerful opportunity to heal the past, both for landscapes and for people.



The history of Australia's invasion and settlement is a painful legacy of land theft and genocide for its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Unfortunately, as in the U.S. and other countries, exclusionary practices continue despite ongoing efforts to learn from and connect to the original custodians of the land. Furthermore, the White Australia policy—enacted in 1901 and not completely dismantled until the 1970s—has had lasting effects on the country's demographics and attitudes towards (relatively new) non-white immigrants and their descendants.

We spoke with a variety of stewardship partners and stakeholders who were working in partnership with their communities. However, how successful these efforts have been was not always clear. In some cases, it seemed that the notion of engaging with non-white, immigrant, or even urban communities was something to which they were unaccustomed. While there were examples from organizations such as Landcare, community-based stewardship and engagement appears to happen primarily in First Nations communities but not with settler and immigrant populations.

A huge opportunity to connect with both Australia's immigrant and First Nations communities seems to exist. Global-scale education and engagement around the biodiversity and climate crisis can only happen if all people—BIPOC, low-income, youth, urban, rural—are included and have a chance to lead. Unfortunately, we did not observe this in our limited time there. As in the U.S., we found ourselves in conferences and meetings populated by a white conservation community, while just outside, their cities teemed with rich cultural and ethnic diversity.

Donors and supporters come from predominantly white communities. By definition, people who participate in land covenants are those who own land—something that new immigrants or previously displaced First Nations people are less likely to do. However, in a country where voting is

mandatory (unlike in the U.S.), these communities are helping choose leaders who make policy and funding decisions for the environment. Engagement is not only the right thing to do, but also appears to be imperative for the field's own interests.

While none of us believe the U.S. has dismantled the conservation field's barriers to meaningful and equitable community engagement, we can share some bright spots. For example, extensive Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion training and requirements for environmental organizations, grant programs that support and prioritize community engagement, and stewardship job opportunities that benefit low-income and diverse communities are taking shape in the U.S. and can provide a roadmap for change in Australia. In addition, early signs of environmental justice solidarity with conservation, America the Beautiful, and California's 30x30 "locally led" and voluntary initiatives are also nascent opportunities to learn and share principles and practices. Equally, we could learn from Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities about the methods and priorities they hold for community engagement, such as intersectional prioritization of projects/programs, self-determined funding sources like carbon credits, and statutory authority to provide relief and community support after climate disasters.

NEXT STEPS

Create peer-exchange opportunities with Australian and U.S. practitioners around best practices for broadening inclusivity and community engagement in landscape stewardship.

Identify and share best practices for addressing historic injustices and marginalization through landscape stewardship.



PHOTO: LATARNIE MCDONALD

NEXT STEPS: GROWING A GLOBAL STEWARDSHIP NETWORK

After engaging with hundreds of stewardship practitioners across eastern Australia, one thing is abundantly clear: We need more. More resources and connections; more innovative ideas and best practices; more meaningful relationships, solidarity, and inspiration; and more shared solutions that lead to collective action. In the words of one Exchange participant:

“With today’s complex and interlinked social, environmental, and economic issues—which drastically impact the most vulnerable among us—we must come together to share knowledge, learn history, and dream up the solutions that will endure for generations for the sake of our health, our environment, and the future of this planet.”

To meet these needs and continue weaving a global network of stewardship practitioners, we are creating outreach and engagement opportunities (e.g., articles, webinars, and workshops) as well as ongoing opportunities to connect and build an international community of practice. Taking lessons from the 2022 Australia Global Landscape Stewards Exchange, we will continue to develop deep, durable relationships that support the continued flow of tools and practices around the globe. We will also continue to explore opportunities to broaden participation in future peer-exchanges to answer a need for enhanced connections among stewardship leaders from working landscapes, Indigenous communities, and government agencies.

Looking ahead, we see many pathways to support international connection and solution-sharing. We see a range of opportunities to continue building connections between existing local, regional, national, and global efforts to identify best practices and build networks of practitioners.

JOIN US.

Help us build a global network to increase the pace, scale, and inclusivity of landscape stewardship.



Donate to support our work



Share, enhance, and adapt the lessons in this report to help grow this movement



Connect with our team so we can continue to accelerate this work around the world, together

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of lands across eastern Australia, including the Country where we visited and learned together. We pay respect to their Elders—past, present, and emerging—and honor their enduring stewardship of people and place.

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