

Introduction to the USDA Forest Service

CONSERVATION FINANCE PROGRAM

The US Forest Service (USFS) Conservation Finance (CF) Program leads the way in positioning the agency to leverage capital other than USFS appropriations for priority projects. Housed in the National Partnership Office, we bring innovative funding and financing approaches to bear on the agency's biggest challenges, including wildfire risk, watershed health, and recreation infrastructure. Our vision is to spark a new way of doing business at USFS, one in which we work with partners to routinely leverage external capital at a scale that matches agency challenges and opportunities. To advance conservation finance, we work to:

I. Develop a pipeline of projects that demonstrate proof of concept for leveraging external capital.

We support units/programs and partners developing innovative finance models and projects with:

- **Technical assistance** and **best practices** for scoping, developing, and implementing CF projects
- Support **articulation** of economic, social, and ecological benefits derived from USFS projects
- Strategic **match-making** between USFS units/programs and CF partners

II. Build capacity and expertise of USFS personnel to develop projects that leverage external capital.

We raise awareness and build expertise around CF across all levels of USFS through:

- **Trainings** that expose personnel to CF content and provide workshopping opportunities for project ideas
- **Static resources** that overview CF models, case studies, authorities, and best practices
- **Communities of practice** that build knowledge and relationships across CF practitioners

III. Create an operating space that positions personnel and partners to leverage external capital at a scale commensurate with USFS challenges.

We identify agency-wide barriers and pursue opportunities to address those barriers through:

- Changes and clarifications to **agency-level policy and guidance** (e.g. USFS Handbook and Manual)
- Assist Congress with **legislative requests** related to CF

Innovative Finance for National Forests (IFNF) Grant Program

The IFNF program provides financial support and technical assistance to USFS partners developing and implementing finance models that leverage capital other than USFS appropriations to support the resilience of the National Forest System. Since 2020 IFNF has provided \$6M in grant funding to 26 projects, piloting approaches to financing wildfire resilience and recovery, sustainable recreation, and watershed health. The IFNF Program is run in partnership with the US Endowment for Forestry & Communities.

Want to Learn More? USFS personnel and partners interested in being added to the USFS CF listserv or setting up a conversation to learn more can email Carmen Young, Conservation Finance Partnership Coordinator (carmen.young@usda.gov).

