

THE TRUST for PUBLIC LAND



CONSERVING LAND FOR PEOPLE

Creating Conservation Funding

An Approach for State Fish and Wildlife Agencies

Seeking Technical Assistance: Securing new funding for conservation (for wildlife conservation, habitat or any purpose) is a challenging and complicated process. As a leader of a state fish and wildlife agency, you may want assistance from experts who are experienced in advising public officials on how to approach this challenge. The Trust for Public Land (TPL) is a national organization that has worked closely with public officials and members of the conservation community in many states to design successful strategies to secure funding for land conservation. TPL has developed a multi-phase technical assistance approach that includes the following elements (discussed below in more detail):

- Feasibility Research
- Public Opinion Polling
- Program Design – Legislation or Ballot Measure

During the technical assistance process, it is advisable to have the leadership of the state's fish and wildlife agency form a small core-working group to assist staff from TPL in the process of research and data collection. In addition, this core group will be part of the process of deciding whether (and how) to move forward with a conservation funding effort. If an existing coalition is working in the state to increase land conservation funding, collaborating with such on-going efforts would also be beneficial. The Nature Conservancy often plays a very important leadership role. The Conservancy is TPL's primary national partner in conservation finance efforts.

If feasibility research and polling provide evidence that a finance measure is viable, it will likely be necessary to build a broader coalition to move forward. It is natural that an effort to secure funding for wildlife conservation would include traditional supporters of your Teaming with Wildlife coalition, such as sportsmen, outdoor enthusiasts, land conservationists and retailers and outfitters serving the fish and wildlife community. However, to gain legislative support, it may be necessary to reach beyond traditional constituencies to include local elected officials, environmental advocates, leaders from the business, tourism and real estate industries, etc.

Feasibility Research:

Based on TPL's successful experiences, the key to securing legislative or voter approval of a funding measure is designing a measure that is both informed by current fiscal realities and responsive to voter concerns. Feasibility research provides the critical foundation of knowledge that is essential to good measure design. Even with a good understanding of public policy and thorough knowledge of your state, the process of feasibility research can often reveal new information to individuals considering a conservation finance effort.

Research will provide insight into the state's fiscal health and whether it can afford new funding for conservation. It will examine revenue and expenditure trends, capital spending

priorities, debt capacity, and election history on fiscal measures. Based on the revenue options that have been successful in other states, research will examine the range of possible conservation funding mechanisms, their revenue generating capacity, and the legal pathways to implementation in your state. Feasibility research will also help inform subsequent polling and guide the design of legislation/ballot measure that reflects conservation needs and public priorities. Finally, this process may also lead to a decision that the time is not right to pursue a funding effort.

Public Opinion Survey

A professional, scientific public opinion poll can help in the design of a ballot measure or the crafting of legislation and can also be used later on in the development of a communications and outreach strategy to voters. More specifically, a well-designed, well-executed poll can provide the following information.

- Can a measure win (this will involve testing proposed ballot language) and how much new taxing and/or spending voters will accept?
- The public's conservation priorities, for example, the conservation of wildlife habitat, wildlife education programs, and improving knowledge of declining wildlife so action can be taken. It would also be useful to measure other conservation priorities such as watershed protection, parks, and preservation of farmland to help assess possible successful funding packages and coalition opportunities.
- Objective data necessary to design a conservation ballot measure, build political support, and launch a winning campaign.

It is essential to work with a professional pollster that has the experience on fiscal measures and whose findings will be found credible by key government officials in your state – the governor and legislative leaders. Crafting an effective public opinion poll requires both specific knowledge on fish and wildlife issues (from agency staff) and an understanding of how to frame the questions (technical assistance partner – TPL). While the pollster will direct the polling process, it is essential for the “client” – TPL working with the state fish and wildlife agency leadership-- to keep them on track. Finally, the pollster can play a valuable role in disseminating the results (if they are favorable) to elected officials, community leaders and the media, among others.

Measure Design

If research and polling indicate that success is possible, it is time to consider designing legislation or a ballot measure. Among the questions that will be examined are:

- What funding mechanism is most suitable and politically feasible?
- How much money should the measure/legislation attempt to raise?
- How should the measure be worded?
- What fiscal safeguards should be included?
- How what types of conservation actions should be funded?
- On which ballot should the measure be placed?

For More Information

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