

Conservation Cooperative Leadership Incubator



An Innovative approach to Conserving Wildlife Habitat

With 7 of the 15 fastest growing cities in the nation, Texas and Oklahoma are poised to face fundamental resource challenges revolving around the ability to maintain working landscapes where production of livestock, oil and gas, and crops takes place in a manner that also maintains ecosystem integrity and services that provide the clean water, clean air, and healthy wildlife populations that our growing population enjoys and depends on.

Collaborative stakeholder groups are one way to address this need. There are a number of examples nationwide of successful stakeholder groups that achieve real conservation results. The Blackfoot Challenge in Montana, and the Oklahoma Prescribed Burn Association being two successful examples of landowner-centric groups that engage industries, governments, and various NGO's in meaningful ways.

The potential for a similar effort to take hold in Texas is high. By collectively working towards a common goal across ownership and jurisdictional boundaries, large scale conservation outcomes are able to be reached. Often these groups pool equipment, resources, and expertise to enable stakeholders to accomplish tasks while also changing the "coffee shop conversation" in their communities, which can have a significant impact on landowner decision-making at the local level.



The Oaks and Prairies Joint Venture

The Oaks and Prairies Joint Venture (OPJV) is a regional, self-directed partnership of government and non-governmental organizations and individuals working across administrative boundaries to deliver landscape-level planning and science-based conservation, linking on-the-ground management with national bird population goals. The OPJV activities focus on a broad spectrum of bird conservation activities including biological planning, conservation design, conducting "on-the-ground" conservation delivery projects, organizing outreach, research, and monitoring, creating decision support tools, and raising money for these activities through partner contributions and grants within the Oaks and Prairies Bird Conservation Region (BCR) and the Edwards Plateau BCR.



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The challenge that this presents to governments/large organizations is how to encourage formation of these groups when in many cases their involvement is either not desired, or can decrease the sense of ownership and empowerment that members feel as a result of the local origins of these programs; a component that is often essential to their success.

The OPJV partnership believes professional agencies and organizations can play a role in the success of these stakeholder groups. The role is in the development and capacity building, or “growth stage”, of these organizations rather than in the formation. In effect, we cannot provide the “why”, but possibly can assist with the “how”, of building an effective organization. We propose to borrow from the technology startup world’s playbook and develop an “incubator” for conservation cooperative leadership, modeled after the successful approach increasingly employed by venture capitalists in places like Silicon Valley, Boulder, London, and throughout the world’s various other tech centers.

Private industry has long recognized the value of supporting entrepreneurs with promising ideas through the fragile early stages of starting a new business. In the past decade this idea has taken the shape of incubators or accelerators which provide not only capital, but mentors and networks of similarly positioned individuals, that can provide an environment conducive to successful development of new ventures.

Our proposal is to use the previously mentioned models of success to build a Conservation Cooperative Leadership Accelerator that will provide independently formed stakeholder conservation groups with expert guidance, involved mentoring, a network of peers, and financial resources to assist groups into becoming successful and effective organizations.

We envision a year-long term in which leadership from two to three newly formed landowner cooperatives throughout Texas and work through specific tasks with deadlines (e.g. achieve 501c3 status, launch website, host workshop) while also receiving training in these various aspects of organizational development. The year would likely begin and end with a three day retreat which would include training, networking, and presenting progress and results.

SUCCESSFUL MODELS

According to a newly published report by UK innovation experts NESTA the most successful accelerator models incorporate the following five factors.

- ◆ An application process that is open to all yet highly competitive
- ◆ The provision of pre-seed investment
- ◆ A focus on small teams not individual founders
- ◆ Time-limited support comprising programmed events and intensive mentoring
- ◆ Cohorts or ‘classes’ of startups rather than individual companies

Funding Needs

- ◆ Program Coordinator (2 yrs. @ \$55k per year = \$110k)
- ◆ Travel and fees for expert guidance and mentors (\$12k)
- ◆ Fire Equipment (34.5k) with 11.5k match
- ◆ In-kind coordination provided by OPJV (0.5 FTE for 2 yrs. @ \$23k per year = \$56k)
- ◆ Total cost of the program is estimated to be \$219,100 for the first two years

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