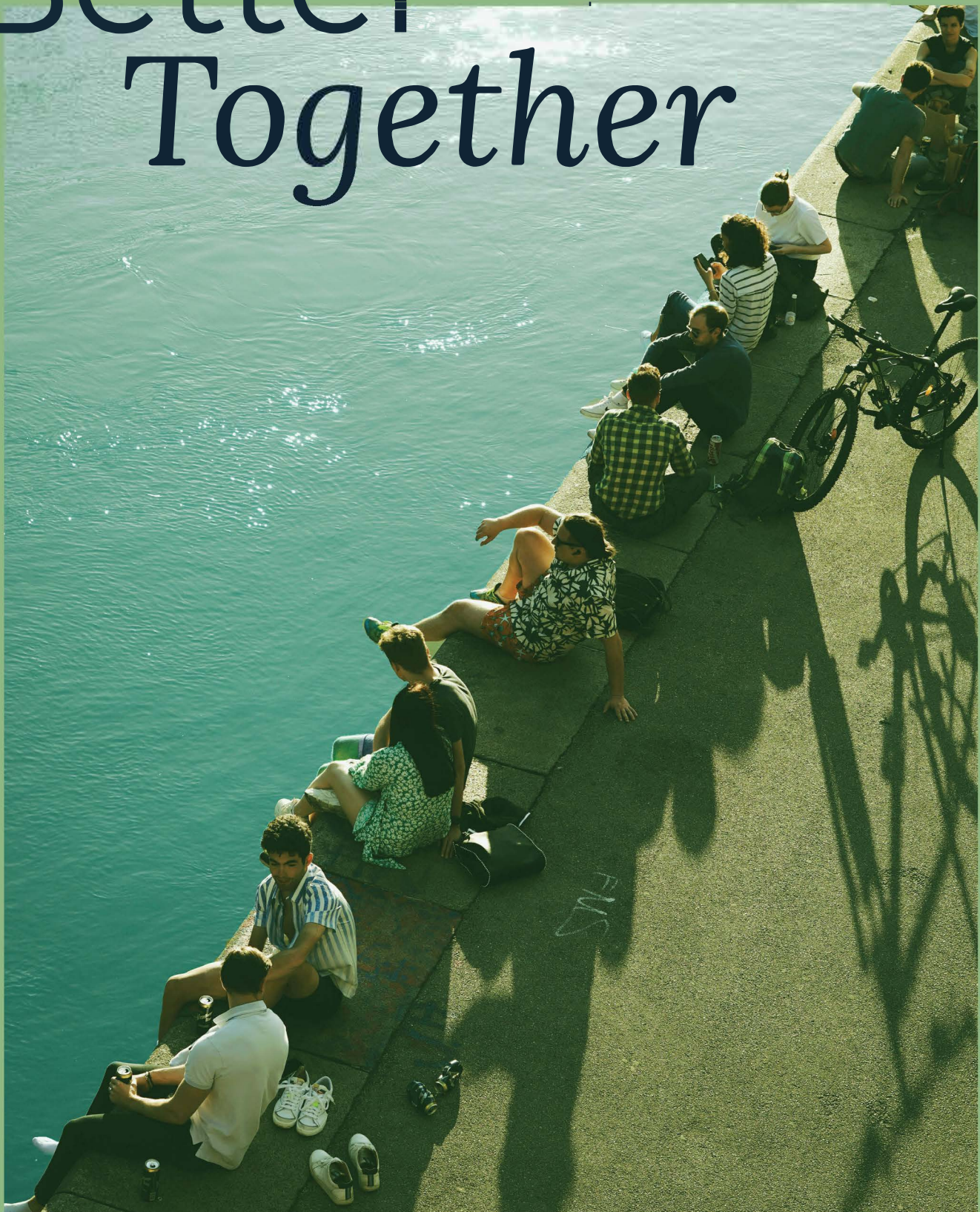


Better *Together*



Institute for Conservation
LEADERSHIP

2025 ANNUAL REPORT
Leading Change

From the President

What we witnessed through the roller coaster of chaos in 2025 and its impact on the environment can be summarized in a phrase – we are better together.

Federal disruptions shook funding timelines, agency partnerships stalled, and there were many days when we were left wondering what was next. And yet, the partners and networks ICL supported did not retreat. They leaned on each other and kept going. People showed up because they trusted the relationships in the room. They were better together.

Our partners reminded us that resilient work thrives when it is built on relationships that are invested in before they are tested. We witnessed this truth across various sectors such as agriculture, forest management, urban ecology, watershed restoration, and trail connectivity.

The turmoil and ICL's desire to support our partners demanded resilient new approaches, including:

- Providing regular resources and an online workshop to help leaders stay grounded and keep moving forward
- Offering **Energize Your Partnerships & Networks:** a new public collaboration training program for leaders building cross-sector partnerships
- Publishing our knowledge about collaboration in Patagonia's activists' anthology, **Tools to Save Our Home Planet**, alongside more than 50 authors

Your support and ideas fueled ICL to be the trusted partner for so many leaders across a very rocky road in 2025. We are better together! We hope the stories featured in this report help to fuel your work in the days ahead.

With gratitude,



Dianne J. Russell
President



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Strategic Achievements



In 2025, ICL deepened long-standing partnerships and extended new ones across the country and internationally through contracts, grants, and public programming – including the launch of a new online training designed to support leaders working in collaborations.



700+

Organizations & collaborations supported



1,500+

Leaders reached from coast to coast and internationally



90+

Leaders gained new facilitation & collaboration skills

Mission

To support healthy communities and a healthy Earth, the Institute for Conservation Leadership strengthens leaders, organizations, coalitions, and networks.

Vision

We envision a diverse set of leaders equipped to solve the most pressing issues that affect the well-being of our communities and the Earth. These leaders effectively engage others, work across sectors and boundaries, and choose and implement strategies that create positive change.



Featured in Patagonia's Changemakers' Guidebook

ICL contributed a chapter on collaboration to Tools to Save Our Home Planet – Patagonia's guidebook for activism in the age of climate chaos. It reflects our enduring belief that relationships built over time are what make environmental movements possible. In October, we marked the book's release with a celebration at the REI Flagship store in Washington, D.C. Fellow author and Fairfax County (VA) Supervisor Andres Jimenez helped ICL welcome over 50 environmental advocates and community leaders to the event.

Voices from the Field

ICL's partners reflect on what this work makes possible and what leaders need right now.

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Feeling connected and feeling that you have an impact is almost sometimes just as important as the impact itself, because it spreads, it has a ripple effect. What leaders in this work need right now is community and cultural support, because it's never just about ecology, it's also about culture and politics and all these other difficult things to navigate.

Kim Rivera

Network Coordinator, Urban Wildlife Information Network

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It's a really hard time to be in the environmental space. But it's also a time that necessitates innovative ideas and holistic collaboration to meet what our cities and towns need. In the moment we're in, it doubles down on why it's so important for this work to be cross-sector.

Erin O'Grady

Director of Community and Culture & DC Regional Director, Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay

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In order for us to be resilient to change—and that's the funding environment, the next generation of landowners, all of it—we have to stay flexible and leverage the superpowers of each of the organizations and groups in the partnership. In the face of change, it's really good to have a deep bench.

Andy Bingle

Coordinator, Southern Driftless Grasslands Partnership, Wisconsin

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IMPACT STORIES

Grounded In What Matters



Regional Network Development for Sustainable Agriculture

When the Virginia Soil Health Coalition and American Farmland Trust began building a regional network around a first-of-its-kind federal grant program, federal-level transitions made the project's future uncertain and timelines in flux. ICL partnered with the coalition's internal planning team and facilitated quarterly network meetings, helping the group stay anchored to outcomes even as the project shifted course multiple times. The result: a growing network whose attendance increased even as funding remained uncertain, with partners showing up because they truly see the value.

“ We say at the end of every meeting, wow, we could not have done that on our own. ICL knows where to allow room for conversation and where to keep us on track. They have the ability to help keep your eye on the ultimate goal, even when it takes a winding course to get there. We've had to switch course multiple times, and I don't think we could have effectively changed direction and stayed toward the goal without their support.

Our attendance has grown, which is notable because the program is still not on sure footing. A lot of these project partners don't have funding right now. They're doing this because they really see the value, which shows that what ICL is helping us focus on are the right things.

Mary Sketch Bryant
Director, Virginia Soil Health Coalition, Virginia Tech

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Designing Connection Across Borders

The Urban Wildlife Network (UWIN), an initiative of the Lincoln Park Zoo, has built something remarkable. UWIN unites an international collaboration of scientists studying wildlife in cities with aligned data methodologies that allow them to compare findings across regions. But as the network grows, so does its need for infrastructure to match the opportunities. For the network's second summit, UWIN partnered with ICL to create an event designed to build connections among international members.

What came out of it was concrete – a plan to redesign their website, making it more accessible for members, inviting for new collaborators, and better able to reach new partners.

“ Before working with ICL to plan the summit, I didn't necessarily think of connection as an outcome. ICL really helped us be intentional about it, shaping time to create meaningful connections through activities and breaks for reflection together. It can be hard to participate as a part of the group and facilitator at the same time.

Having someone there to facilitate so we could focus on being in the community was really meaningful. People felt heard, and felt like they had a role in everything, because it was so well orchestrated.

Kim Rivera
Urban Wildlife Information Network (UWIN), Network Coordinator

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Photo courtesy of Dianne Russell



Photo courtesy of Times Observer

A Landscape Approach to Forest Health

The Allegheny Forest Health Collaborative (AFHC) was formed to address threats to forest health at a landscape scale. Co-led by the Allegheny Hardwood Utilization Group and the Allegheny National Forest, the collaborative sought to convene in 2025 to rebuild post-pandemic momentum and capacity to address emerging priorities.

In 2025, ICL partnered with the collaborative AFHC leaders to design and facilitate a single, high-impact convening to realign the full group around a shared path forward. That day produced clear consensus on emerging priorities, new working groups already taking shape, and a critical shared realization: the collaborative needed to invest in its own capacity to sustain the work ahead.

“ICL brought an understanding of the human dynamics at play in a large group gathering. The tools and resources they brought to the table — we would not have been able to effectively think our way through that on our own. The best part was that we got to see what others in our collaborative valued that we may not have been emphasizing enough or didn't occur to the steering committee.”

The relationships ICL brought to the table led to folks being invited to the collaborative who probably wouldn't have been otherwise. They are now giving our group attention and potential opportunities for capacity building.

Amy Shields

*Allegheny Hardwood Utilization Group (AHUG),
Co-Lead, Allegheny Forest Health Collaborative*

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Common Language for Common Ground

Across Wisconsin's Upper Driftless Region, a partnership of agencies, nonprofits, and landowners works to maintain and increase grasslands through land protection and management. The Southern Driftless Grasslands Partnership has existed in various forms for decades, but its members were ready to align in a shared direction. After assessing their needs, the steering committee made a deliberate choice — they needed a facilitator with deep experience in how partnerships work.

ICL partnered with the group to develop shared language, a tiered framework the partnership now references weekly, and a structure for revisiting emerging priorities over time. The partnership has since launched five cross-agency working groups to carry the work forward.

“One of the biggest 'aha' moments came from developing the structure of using common language. We created perennial statements for the long term and biennial initiatives we'd revisit every two years with stakeholders. We didn't have to include every issue, because the rest could be figured out later. That was freeing for a lot of people. ICL specializes in partnerships, with national experience across diverse network types. They're not going to pigeonhole you into one way of working. Each network is different, and that's the whole point. It's a big lift to get to know the norms of a group, and ICL does that.”

Andy Bingle

*Coordinator, Southern Driftless
Grasslands Partnership, Wisconsin*

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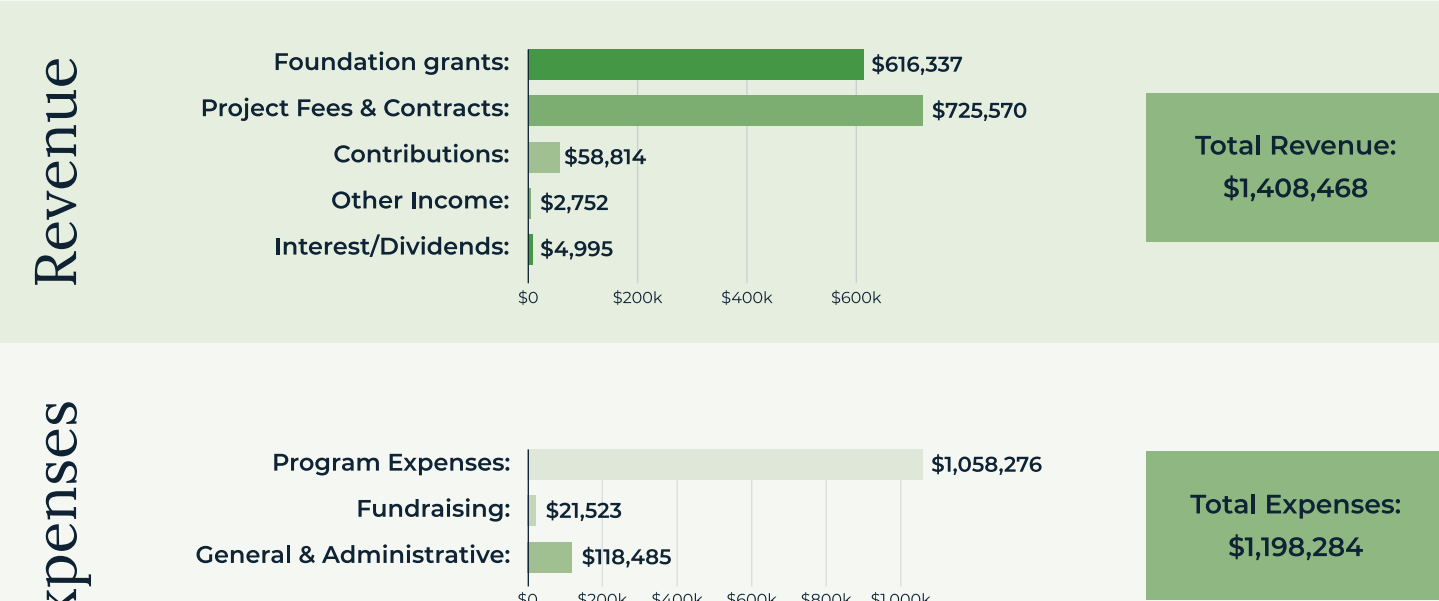
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