



WHC White Paper

Fostering Corporate-Community Relations through Meaningful Engagement

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Employees and community members at a Stellantis planting event

Message from our sponsor



Stellantis is proud to sponsor the Wildlife Habitat Council (WHC) white paper on community engagement and social license to operate. This is a responsibility we have always taken seriously, but even more so now with our recent investment in Detroit.

There is no question that corporations must coexist with local communities to enhance, lift up and support the neighborhoods in which they do business. That's why in 2019, when we announced the expansion of our manufacturing operations on Detroit's east side, we held more than 75 meetings with community members—and others around the city—to better understand the issues important to them. We knew that simply having an expansion plan was not enough. We needed to involve the community in our plans, gather input, understand how our actions might impact residents, and keep them meaningfully engaged as we built the first new assembly plant in the city in 30 years on Detroit's east side.

Listening to our neighbors enabled us to develop a community benefit plan with the city of Detroit that is tailored to the specific needs of the area, like blight removal, home improvement grants, and career development partnerships with local schools. Continuing the dialogue allows us to

enhance our plans to best fit neighborhood needs.

That's how we created "Detroit's Greenest Initiative", a master plan to make the neighborhoods surrounding the Detroit Assembly Complex the city's greenest, cleanest and most environmentally friendly area. It's an environmental impact plan, based on community input, that will transform the community for future generations. The initiative includes over a dozen actionable items that will help the eastside Detroit community enjoy more trees, beautified parks, less blight and more green space.

Thanks to our partnership with WHC, our neighbors also will enjoy a new park with an environmental education pavilion, pollinator gardens, natural vegetation and a walking path. Additionally, WHC is guiding us in efforts to add bat houses, beehives and other park features.

We're listening to our neighbors and working with them to improve the quality of life for people who live and work here. The commitment to being good corporate citizens is important to us as our social license to operate. Community engagement is vital to our plan to make a difference on Detroit's east side and in all the communities in which we operate.



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Introduction

Meaningful community engagement that goes beyond transactional interactions or conventional corporate philanthropy can greatly enhance a company's ability to establish, maintain or restore social license to operate (SLO). Obtaining SLO involves building trust with community members and leaders through environmental and socially responsible actions that are informed by local needs, and then communicated to community members. Once established, SLO needs to be maintained through ongoing community outreach, and engagement strategies should be kept current with an attention to new data, policy changes, and shifts in community opinions and needs. As the current biodiversity and climate crises become more dire, and more opportunities for the private sector to address these issues arise, expectations for companies to act quickly, transparently and in conjunction with scientific consensus will continue to grow.

Recent research on SLO has suggested that a company is rarely securing a single license, but rather multiple ones that speak to the distinct expectations of different groups. Obtaining SLO

with site employees (who typically live in nearby communities) may entail soliciting site-level input when developing corporate-level sustainability strategies. Local youth, including employees' children, may instead benefit from companies' investment in STEM education efforts.

Due to centuries of environmental racism, and zoning and housing policies that placed an undue burden of industry on communities of color, special care and cultural sensitivity must be taken when companies engage with these communities. Given the increased, and overdue, attention that environmental racism has seen in recent years, failure to obtain or secure SLO from these community members could bar a company from gaining a license or permit from government agencies or an SLO from the community at large.¹

The concept of SLO itself is constantly evolving — what was once an idea that applied to individual facilities is increasingly used to assess entire companies, or even industries. Even the most engaged site team may find its SLO challenged by association, should the public take issue with



Tree planting event at an Ontario Power Generation facility in Canada.

a less socially committed operation under the same corporate umbrella, a competing company or with the industry in general.² In these cases, a company or industry is only as strong as its weakest operation, but a history of meaningful community engagement can help a team or company set itself apart from others and maintain its license.

Benefits to Community

Recently, community engagement is moving away from the notion of transactional interactions (such as philanthropic giving) toward interpersonal relationships between companies, communities and natural spaces that benefit all involved. While SLO and other measurements of corporate citizenship are common drivers across the private sector, community needs can vary vastly, depending on geographic, environmental and socioeconomic contexts. Among the many ways that meaningful corporate community engagement efforts can benefit local residents are:

Access to green space

More biodiverse yards and neighborhoods

Educational opportunities for youth

Greater equity for marginalized groups

Empowerment in the face of environmental challenges

Nature-based solutions designed to alleviate community concerns

While the case studies featured in this paper are each framed around one of these benefits, it is important to recognize the potential for co-benefits in any community engagement effort; for instance, a single outreach event can provide children with both education and time outdoors, and a climate resiliency campaign can include targeted outreach to communities of color. From annual events that encourage community members to create backyard habitat to ecosystem restoration projects designed with stakeholder input, the highlighted engagement efforts also provide environmental resilience and biodiversity uplift in a variety of ways.

Access to Green Space



RAISING AWARENESS OF LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Time spent outdoors, whether for recreational, occupational or educational purposes, instills in individuals an affinity for nature and a drive to protect it, and offers co-benefits of improved physical³ and mental⁴ well-being. Research suggests that green spaces with high biodiversity are particularly beneficial to mental health.⁵ Due to urbanization and industrialization, however, communities across the globe have limited access to natural areas, especially those with high biodiversity. Companies with biodiverse natural areas, particularly where such space is rare, can use their lands and land stewardship knowledge to help community members develop a relationship with nature and inspire environmental action.

CONSERVATION IN ACTION
CEMEX | PUEBLA, MEXICO

To address local environmental challenges, and increase residents' knowledge of these issues, the team at CEMEX in Tepeaca, Puebla, Mexico

formed El Programa de Restauración Ambiental Comunitaria, an environmental stewardship program for local teens. Participants from Tepeaca and nearby Cuantinchán participate in lessons on local environmental issues and contribute to on-site restoration activities.

The municipalities of Tepeaca and Cuantinchán are located southeast of the city of Puebla, which is the capital of the Mexican state of the same name. In recent years, the population distribution in the Puebla area has shifted, with many residents moving away from Puebla proper into surrounding municipalities such as Tepeaca, which saw a 12.8% population growth between 2010 and 2015.⁶ The resulting increase in development has caused a marked decrease in the presence and health of natural areas.⁷

CEMEX operates a limestone quarry in Tepeaca on a property that features a forestland of acacia and mesquite trees, native plant nursery, outdoor classroom and space to explore sustainable agriculture techniques. Since 2016, these spaces have hosted local middle and high school students through El Programa de Restauración Ambiental Comunitaria



Students from El Programa de Restauración Ambiental Comunitaria at CEMEX in Tepeaca, Puebla, Mexico.

(The Community Environmental Restoration Program), to address the region's most pressing environmental issues and increase awareness of these issues.

Through classroom and virtual learning, as well as field research in their communities, students come to understand local environmental challenges. Educational activities have included bokashi composting (creating organic matter through fermentation instead of decomposition) and seed germination. Other lessons have helped preserve local traditions within the rapidly developing area: in one activity, students are instructed to interview older family members about culturally significant plants before researching, identifying and collecting samples of these species. Students also participate in habitat restoration, maintenance and monitoring activities and submit data to citizen science platform iNaturalist.

Pre- and post-program surveys indicate that participants leave with a stronger understanding of how human activities lead to environmental degradation, but also with a sense of empowerment to make positive environmental impact.

WHC-CERTIFIED SINCE 2018

CERTIFIED GOLD

SUPPORTING LOCAL COMMUNITY GROUPS

Youth organizations and Master Naturalist programs for adults provide locally focused, low-cost opportunities for community members to increase their environmental literacy through structured outdoor education. Participation in Master Naturalist programs, which are typically organized by state university extension services and are available in most U.S. states, have been shown to increase knowledge of a wide variety of environmental topics, with high levels of knowledge retention after program completion.⁸

Environmental lessons offered through youth organizations have likewise been shown to increase knowledge of environmental issues and the likelihood that young participants (and their households) will act in environmentally conscious ways.⁹ Many U.S. Scout merit badges are aligned with Next Generation Science Standards,¹⁰ providing youth with hands-on experiences to supplement classroom learning, and the Girl Scout Math in Nature Badge, released in 2021, helps to boost girls'



interest and confidence in STEM topics through in-field activities.¹¹

Completion of Master Naturalist training, and of environmentally focused merit badges, requires access to outdoor areas, creating barriers to participation for communities with limited green space. Corporate landowners have an opportunity to support these programs, and interested community members, by providing a venue.

CONSERVATION IN ACTION

EXELON CORPORATION | NEW YORK, U.S.A.

At the Exelon Nine Mile Point Nuclear Station in upstate New York, Scouts have helped design and implement multiple nesting box projects, providing environmental education and the opportunity to advance in rank while supporting local birds within critical avian habitat.

Exelon Corporation operates the Nine Mile Point Nuclear Station, a power plant just outside of Oswego, New York, on the Lake Ontario shoreline. The site is located adjacent to three important bird areas and within the Atlantic Flyway, a migratory pathway for North American birds that extends from Greenland into the Caribbean. To support resident birds and those passing through the region, the site's Environmental Stewardship Committee (ESC) has initiated a number of avian conservation projects, including activities that focus on wood ducks and bluebirds. The ESC consists of 24 site employees who perform various monitoring, maintenance and education tasks throughout the year. In 2015, a teenage Eagle Scout candidate presented a plan to construct six wood duck boxes on the Nine Mile Point property in order to fulfill his Eagle Scout Service Project. Once the designs were approved, the candidate worked with troopmates, ESC members and local Cub Scouts to construct the boxes. Between 2016 and 2017,

Boy Scouts also constructed ten bluebird boxes and a roost box, with the New York State Bluebird Society providing bluebird-themed lessons to the Scouts and ESC members. A local Girl Scout troop later repainted the boxes as part of regular maintenance work. These efforts have benefited both wildlife and local youth — ducks and bluebirds have been documented in the areas near their respective boxes, while Scouts of all levels have learned how to support local wildlife.

WHC-CERTIFIED SINCE 2017

CERTIFIED GOLD

CONSERVATION IN ACTION

WASTE MANAGEMENT | INDIANA, U.S.A.

After discovering that central Indiana lacked a sponsor for Indiana Master Naturalist trainings, Waste Management (WM) volunteered their space and resources to support the program.

WM operates the Twin Bridges Recycling and Disposal Facility in Danville, Indiana, a rapidly growing suburb of Indianapolis. The site features the Twin Bridges Wildlife Area, composed of wetlands, pollinator gardens, tallgrass prairie and 200 acres of mature forest habitat.

In 2009, after learning that Indiana Master Naturalist lacked a sponsor for programming in central Indiana, WM partnered with the Danville Parks & Recreation Department to sponsor workshops on environmental topics like botany, zoology, geology, natural resources, and soil and water health.

The region's Master Naturalist workshops are held on-site at the Twin Bridges Lodge and throughout the site's extensive habitat areas. The WM team organizes and promotes all programming, with individual lessons developed and taught by regional subject matter experts including the Indiana State Botanist, the executive director of the Indiana Audubon Society, and



The nest box project at the Exelon Nine Mile site in New York supports the eastern bluebird.

scientists from consulting and nonprofit organizations. The workshops entail classroom presentations and in-habitat activities such as tree identification. Participants must match each hour of instruction with an hour of in-field volunteer work before receiving their Master Naturalist certification, and many have chosen to contribute their time to the Twin Bridges site, allowing WM to bolster their volunteer base as they increase environmental awareness in the community.

WHC-CERTIFIED SINCE 2007

CERTIFIED SILVER

Biodiverse Yards and Neighborhoods



NATURE COEXISTING WITH INDUSTRY AND URBANIZATION

While conservation on corporate lands is a critical part of addressing the global biodiversity crisis, it is also important to consider potential for biodiversity uplift across private residences. This potential can be realized by using native vegetation in lawns and backyards, incorporating green design elements like living walls into buildings, and eliminating the use of chemical pesticides and herbicides for prevention or cosmetic purposes (and instead only applying these chemicals when invasive or harmful species pose an active threat to native plants and animals).

Despite the importance of these actions, many households do not take these steps. Due to social norms, many homeowners maintain lawns composed of manicured, non-native grasses¹² and residents of densely populated cities do not always see the potential for their homes to foster biodiversity. By planting native vegetation, however, a single backyard can provide significant habitat value and studies have suggested that some wildlife

(including vulnerable pollinator species like the monarch butterfly and rusty patch bumblebee) have even come to depend on niche habitats within urbanized areas, where pesticide use and competition for resources are often lower.¹³

Through robust outreach, companies can showcase how their operations operate in harmony with nature and inspire employees and community members to adopt similar practices.

CONSERVATION IN ACTION

GENERAL MOTORS | MICHIGAN, U.S.A.

Despite being a built environment in a downtown area, the General Motors (GM) World Headquarters site in Detroit supports a wide range of wildlife. Site employees use these habitat features to raise environmental awareness and encourage at-home action within an urban context.

The GM World Headquarters site is located within the Renaissance Center, a multi-company skyscraper complex in downtown Detroit, located along the



Employee volunteers at the rooftop pollinator garden at GM World Headquarters in Detroit, Michigan.

Detroit River and adjacent to the Detroit Riverwalk, a public promenade GM helped develop. The property encompasses 40 acres, about 37 of which are covered by buildings or impervious surfaces.

This urban headquarters provides important habitats to pollinators and bats. The rooftop gardens and living walls provide nectar and shelter for bees and butterflies (including the monarch butterfly, yellow sulphur, spicebush swallowtail, red admiral and American lady) and, to support vulnerable bat species like the little brown bat, GM engineers repurposed a Chevrolet Volt battery case to construct a bat house that can hold up to 150 individuals. These features serve as the backdrop for a successful community engagement program that reaches an estimated 20,000 community members a year.

Through twice-daily tours and special events, milkweed planting events, scheduled butterfly releases and community rain barrel workshops, visitors of all ages come to understand the importance of conservation and learn how nature can coexist with industry and urbanization. On-site events also provide attendees

with guidance on installing bat houses and pollinator gardens at their own homes, creating a regional network of urban habitat. The events reach a wide range of people, including GM employees, other Renaissance Center tenants, tourists and city residents — 90% of these attendees report learning something new through their on-site experiences.

WHC-CERTIFIED SINCE 2005

CERTIFIED GOLD

MAXIMIZING OFF-SITE PROGRAMMING

On-site programming gives community members firsthand opportunities to observe, and become inspired by, a company's conservation work and offers companies a readily available base of employee volunteers. Many facilities, however, restrict site access to employees and contractors for safety or security reasons. While transparency can help these operations maintain SLO, on-site engagement is not possible. To develop and maintain a relationship with the surrounding community, it is critical for these sites to find the



Green corridors

While the fragmentation of green space is often associated with its impacts on wildlife, urban development can also impede human movement and access to natural areas. Large facilities or industrial corridors can bisect communities and separate them from spaces like parks and waterbodies. As a result, residents may need to take a longer route to these spaces, creating barriers to access, particularly for community members with limited independence or car access. Green corridors, such as the Detroit Riverwalk (which is 3.5 miles long and expanding) can provide community connectivity while providing accessible green space.

right platform for engagement. In these cases, partnerships with local event organizers and advocacy groups can prove invaluable in developing meaningful, long-standing community engagement initiatives.

CONSERVATION IN ACTION

ONTARIO POWER GENERATION | ONTARIO, CANADA

As an access-restricted nuclear waste facility, maintaining SLO is important for Ontario Power Generation (OPG)'s Western Waste Management Facility & Bruce Complex, but hosting on-site outreach events is not possible. For over a decade, OPG employees have raised awareness of local environmental issues, and their site's response to these threats, through yearly participation in a popular regional event.

The Western Waste Management Facility & Bruce Complex is located near the Lake Huron shoreline in Bruce County, a region of western Ontario that annually attracts 2.5 million tourists and seasonal residents.¹⁴ Since the 1980s, the Bruce County town of Port Elgin has hosted Pumpkinfest during the weekend before Thanksgiving. The annual event has helped extend the regional tourist season into autumn while also engaging full-time residents — over 32,000 people attend each year. Since 2006, OPG employees have participated at the event with a tent exhibit, at which

they raise awareness of their site's wetland, grassland and forest habitats and the wildlife (including pollinators, snakes, frogs and birds) that they support. The exhibit features live science demonstrations, photographs documenting OPG's conservation efforts and an environmental quiz game. Each year, a different selection of community groups (including local NGOs, government agencies, community organizations and Indigenous communities) are invited to set up their own tables within the OPG exhibit, providing their unique perspectives and expertise on the area's environmental needs.

Participation in Port Elgin Pumpkinfest allows the OPG team to showcase their environmental stewardship to community members, particularly to young families, who OPG considers to be an important stakeholder. Festival attendees, meanwhile, have the chance to partake in unique, interactive science lessons — to attract visitors to the tent, OPG hires an entertaining feature presenter, such as a mad scientist or animal handler, each year. Visitors are also provided with tangible ways to address these issues — each year, OPG's programming includes a take-home element, such as seed paper or birdfeeders, which allows community members to extend OPG's conservation work by increasing the habitat value of their own properties, within both Bruce County and the permanent communities of its seasonal residents.

WHC-CERTIFIED SINCE 2020

CERTIFIED GOLD

Education Opportunities for Youth



INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDS

Instilling children with an appreciation for the environment, and a drive to protect it, is a critical piece of ensuring a sustainable future. Children's environmental attitudes are largely influenced by the viewpoints of their adult role models, especially their parents or guardians. In interviews conducted with environmental professionals, nearly every interviewee identified at least one childhood influence that shaped their career path, and 60% specifically cited a parent as a key influence.¹⁵ Studies have also indicated that, for maximum impact, parents need to convey their pro-environmental standpoints to children through imitable behavior, rather than by verbal instruction alone.¹⁶

However, many adults report partaking in fewer pro-environmental actions when they become parents. This has been attributed to a shift in priorities among new parents, prompted by time and financial restraints.¹⁷ Environmental awareness

initiatives that target employees and their children can address this drop in engagement by providing young families with free, convenient educational programming that encourages at-home action.

CONSERVATION IN ACTION

OPHEL AUTOMOBILE | POLAND

At Opel Manufacturing Poland, employees and their families are invited to attend environmentally themed events throughout the year, both on-site and at a nearby park.

Opel Automobile GmbH operates an assembly plant on a 180-acre property in Gliwice, a city in southern Poland. In 2016, employees began restoring on-site riparian habitat along the Dabrowa Stream through the planting of native oak and common hornbeam trees. The same year, they also began offering environmental education programming, both in the on-site habitat and off-grounds at the nearby Silesian Botanical Garden.

Every June, in observance of World Environment Day, the site's 2,000 employees are invited to a



Images submitted as part of Covia Huntersville's World Environment Day Scavenger Hunt.

presentation on the year's environmental theme and enter competitions that encourage pro-environmental behaviors outside of work, such as traveling by public transportation or gardening with native plants.

Throughout the year, Opel also hosts larger workshops directed at employees and their families. On-site workshops have focused on tree planting and assessing wetland health using aquatic insects and microorganisms, and botanical garden activities have included building birdfeeders and completing scavenger hunts. Attendees report gaining a stronger understanding of biodiversity through these events.

WHC-CERTIFIED SINCE 2019

CERTIFIED SILVER

PIVOTING TO REMOTE EVENTS DURING THE PANDEMIC

As workplaces and schools adopted virtual formats during the Covid-19 pandemic, many working parents found themselves balancing job duties with increased involvement in their children's education and extracurricular activities.

CONSERVATION IN ACTION

COVIA | NORTH CAROLINA, U.S.A.

After the Covia Huntersville office shifted to remote work in March 2020, the team pivoted from hosting on-site education events directed at staff to at-home activities for employees and their families.

Covia operates an office campus in Huntersville, North Carolina, a suburb just north of Charlotte, on a property that features a retention pond and trails lined with shrubbery and oak trees. The site is one of Covia's newest properties and many of its employees relocated to the Charlotte area to take up positions there. Employees frequently walk the trails or visit the pond but many, being new to the region, expressed concern about not being able to differentiate between venomous and non-venomous snakes as they encountered these species during their walks. In response, site staff formed an employee team to organize educational events about local snakes. The team worked with reptile experts from A Walk in the Woods Environmental Education Company to conduct educational programming about species identification,

and the important role that snakes play in local ecosystems, for 40 employees in fall 2019.

The programming was well-attended and participants wanted to see similar events offered regularly. The shift to remote operations, however, made on-site education unfeasible. Instead, office leadership and the communications department organized a scavenger hunt, scheduled during the weeks leading up to World Environment Day (June 5), for employees and their children. Participants were emailed weekly missions such as identifying the native flora and fauna in their neighborhoods. Points were granted for participating, with bonus points given for households that created small backyard habitats such as simple insect hotels or woodpiles. On World Environment Day, the event organizers announced the scavenger hunt winners and posted pictures submitted by participants to the company website.

The scavenger hunt missions provided an activity at a time when many extracurricular activities were canceled, and supplemented children's virtual schooling with hands-on, outdoor activities. Based on the positive feedback received on the event, the team is considering continuing the scavenger hunt in the future and adding more missions to create a longer event.

WHC-CERTIFIED SINCE 2020



UN World Environment Day

UN World Environment Day has been observed every June 5 since 1974 and provides a platform for individuals, organizations and over 150 participating countries to learn about environmental challenges and make commitments to addressing them. By starting a conversation about pressing topics, a day of awareness can lead to a year of action. Studies have suggested that well-executed awareness days can have as large of an impact on human behavior as longer-term media campaigns.¹⁸

Equity for Marginalized Groups



CREATING A STRATEGY ALIGNED WITH NEEDS AND VALUES OF RESIDENTS

Amid increased calls to address systemic racism, environmental justice has emerged as a key concern for many corporate ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) strategies. People of color have been disproportionately impacted by environmental issues — Black Americans are 75% more likely than white populations to live near commercial facilities,¹⁹ while the uneven burden borne by Indigenous communities from air pollution and water contamination is often compounded by negative impacts on mental wellness due to the degradation of lands with cultural and spiritual significance.²⁰

Different cultures, communities and socioeconomic classes have unique relationships with the land informed in part by histories of land ownership, exploitation and stewardship. An effective environmental justice strategy involves developing an understanding of a community or culture's values, understanding its real needs, involving

communities of color in decision making (ideally by hiring or promoting community members into leadership roles within the company), and by adding value to the community by creating jobs, constructing accessible infrastructure, and adding or enhancing local green space. Listening to a community is an essential element toward understanding and addressing legacy and exiting impacts.

CONSERVATION IN ACTION

CRESTWOOD MIDSTREAM | NORTH DAKOTA, U.S.A.

To ensure that pipeline projects within the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation (FBIR) were constructed with reverence for the needs and values of reservation residents, the team at Crestwood Midstream developed community-minded methods for land reclamation and maintained open lines of communication between corporate staff and tribal members.

Crestwood Midstream operates multiple pipeline rights-of-way (ROWS) in western North Dakota. The ROWs run through parts of the FBIR, inhabited by

the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara (MHA) Nation, also known as the Three Affiliated Tribes. Since initial construction of the ROWs, a small team of employees, including a tribal member in North Dakota and employees in Crestwood's corporate offices in Houston, have collaborated to develop an effective and culturally respectful reclamation strategy.

To minimize the impact pipeline construction had on reservation residents and lands, the team developed innovative techniques to restore the land. Rather than planting the standard grassland seed mix used in many local reclamation projects, the Crestwood team worked with consultants to develop their own seed mix. In selecting plant species, the team focused on native grasses that established quickly in disturbed soils (like wildrye and wheatgrass) and wildflowers to support pollinators, but also selected species with cultural significance to the MHA Nation. Maximilian sunflower, for instance, provides nectar for many pollinators but has also historically been used by indigenous cultures as a source of food, oil, dye and thread; stiff goldenrod provides for carpenter bees while also being used in traditional teas and antiseptic lotions.

Individual landowners within the reservation also provided input on the reclamation plans for their properties. In response to a landowner request, Crestwood constructed a road made of local stone, which provided the landowner with access across his property, preventing environmentally destructive off-road travel.

A Crestwood employee who is a member of the MHA Nation has overseen much of Crestwood's pipeline construction and reclamation work within the reservation, tracking the progress of plant establishment while also communicating tribal interests to the rest of the Crestwood team. The North Dakota State Wildlife Action Plan lists public education and outreach as a key conservation goal for oil and gas operations within the state. Having a tribal member in an instrumental position within the company has helped to facilitate this type of engagement.

Through these biodiversity and community-minded techniques Crestwood has successfully achieved their goal of achieving 70% vegetative cover along one ROW, with the other transects expected to reach the 70% threshold in the future.

WHC-CERTIFIED SINCE 2020



Easement agreements

Rights-of-way, such as pipelines and utility lines, typically entail easements that allow companies to build upon public lands or properties held by other private landowners. The need to prioritize communication with diverse landowners and the multi-regional nature of ROWs makes community outreach challenging. There is, however, a growing case for this type of broad engagement. Being transparent about easement agreements and welcoming insights of employees who live and work along a ROW help these types of operations secure SLO from the communities they transect.²¹

Community Empowerment Amid Environmental Challenges



BUILDING RESILIENCY IN THE WAKE OF CATASTROPHIC EVENTS

While proactive environmental action is key to resilient ecosystems and communities, appropriate reaction to contamination or storm events is equally, if not more important. Research has suggested that after acute disasters like destructive storms, people are more receptive to environmental messaging, open to natural climate solutions and likely to participate in habitat restoration activities.²² Companies in impacted areas can help drive this action by conducting conservation education and involving the community in their response. By doing so, companies can turn environmental challenges into opportunities for education and trust-building, improving community relations, and contributing to local resiliency.

Climate change will impact different individuals and communities in different ways, typically exacerbating existing challenges (e.g., job insecurity, lack of natural resources, urban heat island effect, property damage from floods or fires). By integrating local concerns into their climate responses, companies not only help communities

manage future risk, but also address these threats in the present, increasing overall resiliency.

CONSERVATION IN ACTION

BACARDI | PUERTO RICO

After learning about the impacts of Hurricane Maria on local ecosystems, the team at Bacardi in Puerto Rico created an on-site garden and mobilized this project for ongoing, ambitious community outreach, helping to build environmental and community resiliency.

Bacardi operates a distillery in Cataño, near San Juan. After Hurricane Maria caused widespread destruction on the island in September 2017, Bacardi learned about the significant loss of pollinator habitat the storm had caused, which threatened native bee populations that were already vulnerable due to human activities. In 2018 and 2019, Bacardi employees worked with consultants and contractors to design and construct a 38,535-square-foot pollinator garden featuring native, flowering plants including the autograph tree, Mexican petunia and common lantana. This habitat has become the backdrop for educational activities directed at 100+ site employees and the 200,000 visitors that tour the facility each year.



A native plant pollinator garden at the Bacardi site in Puerto Rico.

Employees and visitors are invited to talks regularly offered in the garden, and can also independently explore the habitat. Both experiences provide audiences with information about local pollinators and their needs. Bacardi employees have also traveled off-site to deliver conservation lessons to local schools, educating students on the threats pollinators face. Knowledge assessments administered before and after these events indicate that Bacardi's education efforts have been successful: most participants score about 50% on the pre-event quizzes but earn a score of 80-85% afterwards.

Bacardi's outreach efforts align with the Puerto Rico Wildlife Conservation Strategy, the Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources, and El Puente Latino Climate Action Network, which seeks to integrate climate change strategy with the cultural, education and social justice contexts of Latinos in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Through these alignments, Bacardi's locally focused efforts are contributing to larger-scale regional and cultural initiatives.

WHC-CERTIFIED SINCE 2018



Natural climate solutions

Natural climate solutions (e.g., using native vegetation for carbon sequestration; installing living shorelines to protect coastal areas) are emerging as not only a critical component of climate action, but also as a means of addressing eco-anxiety and empowering communities. The WHC white paper *Leveraging the Power of Nature*, published in spring 2021, explores how the conservation and outreach work of companies across the world help to address climate change.

Nature-Based Solutions Designed to Alleviate Community Concerns



When it comes to pollution or contamination, companies should adopt a dual approach, pairing proactive prevention matters with plans to respond to any pollution that does occur in a socially and environmentally conscious manner. When remediation processes are necessary, company-community relationships can become strained due to residents' health and environmental concerns.

This public resistance can make remediation processes more time-consuming and costly. Conversely, streamlined remediation projects supported by the community have the potential to exceed regulations, turning once-compromised lands into assets for local residents and wildlife. Welcoming the input of community members, local conservation groups and other external stakeholders, and providing transparent information about the site and its remediation process, can help address any tensions that arise and ensure that remediated lands ultimately provide local value.²³

CONSERVATION IN ACTION

BOEING | CALIFORNIA, U.S.A.

Boeing's Santa Susana Field Laboratory is currently undergoing remediation. As these processes occur, Boeing has maintained multiple lines of communication with nearby communities, welcoming resident input and providing transparent information on the project's progress.

The Santa Susana Field Laboratory is located in southern California, along the border of Los Angeles and Ventura counties. The property lies within the remote Simi Hills but is near populous areas within the Simi and San Fernando valleys. Most of the property's 2,850 acres are owned by Boeing, with 90 acres owned and administered by NASA. The site served as a testing site for rocket engines and nuclear technology for over 50 years; nuclear energy research ended in 1988 and rocket engine testing ended in 2006. Boeing, in conjunction with regulatory agencies, is now conducting a remediation project to address chemicals released into the site's soil and groundwater during operations.



A tagged cougar cub at Boeing's Santa Susana Field Laboratory.

In 2007, Boeing, NASA and the U.S. Department of Energy signed a cleanup agreement with the California Department of Toxic Substances Control — these organizations are currently working to develop a final remediation plan. During this process, Boeing has welcomed input and questions from community members, who have been able to read draft plans and share their insights through a website and during community meetings. Thousands of comments have been submitted and are being reviewed ahead of the final plan's release.

In the meantime, Boeing has performed many remediation tasks across the site. These actions have resulted in the removal of over 45,000 cubic yards of soil and the addition of over 10,000 native plants across 900 acres of land. During these processes, special care has been taken to not disturb species of concern (including the Santa Susana tar plant and Braunton's milkvetch) and to protect found Native American artifacts. Boeing has also entered a conservation easement with the North American Land Trust so that the Santa Susana property will be preserved into perpetuity, providing green space for the community and habitat for wildlife.

In order to showcase their remediation and conservation efforts, Boeing regularly offers on-site community programming, including bus tours, nature walks and lunch-and-learns. Many of these events have been planned with the help of local conservation groups such as the San Fernando Audubon Society and Southwestern Herpetologists Society (which each developed field guides used during bus tours) and the Santa Susana Mountain Parks Association, which has provided docents for public nature walks. The events have been largely well-received and have drawn large crowds — survey responses indicate that most attendees come away with a stronger understanding of the remediation process and greater awareness of how the site serves as a local conservation asset.

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A Call to Action for Corporate Landowners

The case studies in this white paper and the many other examples in the WHC Index demonstrate that corporate teams worldwide have the potential to conduct robust community outreach to address local needs and encourage pro-environmental behavior while obtaining or preserving their own social license to operate in the area.

Third-party recognition programs for these activities, such as WHC Conservation Certification®, can be beneficial to companies in managing risk, communicating outcomes, and meeting biodiversity and community engagement goals. The WHC standard is designed to provide tangible data on a company's conservation and education activities that go above and beyond compliance. In doing so, WHC Conservation Certification helps companies demonstrate a long-term commitment to quality habitat for wildlife, conservation education and community outreach initiatives.

Corporate landowners can engage in the following actions to engage and empower communities:

- Download [WHC Project Guidances](#) to assist you in designing an outreach program with maximum benefit for the company and

community. These documents provide guidance on how to build impactful education and awareness projects and strategies to help achieve stronger outcomes.

- Perform research or meet with community leaders to identify community needs (e.g., lack of green space, climate-related concerns), and assess how on-site habitats could address these needs.
- Determine if conservation content can be incorporated into existing community outreach efforts (e.g., STEM education or internship programs, participation at local festivals).
- Form relationships with community partners (e.g., schools, youth organizations, gardening or naturalist groups) that can provide an audience for the company's educational offerings.
- Form relationships with knowledge partners (e.g., NGOs, local universities) that can help develop or deliver educational content.
- Review regional conservation plans and consider how to align site initiatives with the plans' community outreach goals.
- Share your story of a successful conservation or education project by seeking WHC Conservation Certification.

Download
WHC Project
Guidances at
wildlifehc.org/pg



Endnotes

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WHC can help support a wide spectrum of conservation activities from the design and planning, to the implementation and management of a program. We do so through a framework that connects business drivers, stakeholder and community relations, and ROI to positive environmental and conservation education outcomes. For more information, please contact us at whcconsulting@wildlifehc.org.

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