

2025 Conservation Connect Fellowship Program With Practicum

The National Forest Foundation (NFF) invites graduate students (pursuing a master's or doctoral degree) to apply to the 2025 Conservation Connect Fellowship Program. The fellowship includes a summer 2025 and/or academic year 2025-26 practicum associated with a National Forest Foundation program of work. Location and opportunity to work remotely varies by practicum project.

What Fellows Gain

- Applied experience with a national leader in conservation through a hands-on practicum project.
- Mentorship from skilled conservation professionals from the NFF and its partners, including the USDA Forest Service.
- Trainings in collaborative leadership, including facilitation, stakeholder engagement, managing projects, and more.
- Real-world understanding of forest and public lands management.
- An expanded personal and professional network.

About the National Forest Foundation & Conservation Connect

Congress chartered the National Forest Foundation (NFF) with a simple mission: bring people together to restore and enhance our National Forests and Grasslands. The NFF is the leading organization inspiring personal and meaningful connections to our National Forests, the centerpiece of America's public lands. Working on behalf of the American public, the NFF leads forest conservation efforts and promotes responsible recreation on the 193-million-acre National Forest System. We believe these lands, and all they provide, are an American treasure and are vital to the health of our communities.

In 2006, the NFF established Conservation Connect to serve community-based groups and Forest Service employees working on collaborative stewardship of National Forest System lands. Conservation Connect is a leader in engaging people to find shared solutions to our nation's most pressing forest stewardship challenges. We work with communities, National Forests, Indigenous people, and others to lead, foster, and build capacity for partnerships, engagement, and collaborative stewardship that benefit our nation's forests and people. We support the inclusion and participation of diverse groups and voices including those historically excluded from equitable access to National Forests and their benefits. The objectives of Conservation Connect are to:

- Support the success of place-based collaboration and engagement that fosters inclusion of diverse voices and leads to shared solutions for forest stewardship and recreation;

- Lead regional and national engagements that give communities, partners, and others a voice in decision-making and stewardship of our National Forests;
- Build the capacity of the NFF, partners, communities, and the Forest Service to work together to achieve shared goals and include diverse voices in these efforts; and
- Be a leader in growing and supporting the evolving field of collaborative stewardship and engagement.

About the Conservation Connect Fellowship

NFF believes in the value of matching the cutting-edge knowledge acquired at the graduate level of universities with practical, hands-on experience. The purposes of the Conservation Connect Fellowship Program are to align NFF's collaboration and conservation work with a practicum and experiential education opportunity, and to build a cohort of next generation leaders in the field of collaborative conservation. The NFF will strive to meet each fellow's learning objectives while also effectively extending the capacity of NFF and its partners to deliver community engagement and conservation results for National Forests and Grasslands.

We are looking for students with a collaborative mindset who are enthusiastic about working with diverse staff and partners to make a meaningful contribution to our work. Applicants should have an academic background and/or interest in public lands conservation, excellent written and verbal communication skills, experience managing projects and timelines, and the ability to commit to the necessary project hours. Each practicum requires a specific skill set, as described in the project table. Successful fellows come from a variety of academic programs, including natural resources management, conflict resolution, forestry, communications, journalism, non-profit management, law, business, and more. Please note that this is not a research fellowship.

Fellowship Components & Requirements

Practicum (at least 245 hours)

The NFF will interview candidates and strive to match selected fellows with one of their preferred projects, as indicated in the application. Practicum work will take place over the summer and/or the academic year, with specific dates to be determined individually. The summer practicum schedule will require the fellow to complete their 245 hours over eight to ten weeks during the summer of 2025. The academic year practicum is the same number of hours spread over a longer timeframe. As part of their practicum, fellows may spend a portion of their time (up to 20%) performing tasks associated with nonprofit administration, such as meeting agenda development, notetaking, or organizational support.

Professional Development and Networking (estimated 55 hours)

- Fellows Retreat: The NFF will host a paid, in-person retreat June 8-12, 2025, near North Bend, Washington. The retreat will provide an orientation to a variety of topics, including collaboration, best practices for neutral facilitation, NFF's approach to engaging community interests, working with the Forest Service, and more. This is also an

opportunity for fellows to get to know one another, meet NFF staff and partners, and participate in a field trip.

- Peer Networking and Trainings: Fellows are asked to participate in monthly virtual meetings where the NFF offers trainings and supports fellows as a group to discuss issues that arise, share accomplishments, and solicit feedback from both their peers and guest speakers.
- All-Staff Opportunities: Fellows are invited and encouraged to attend NFF trainings and events, such as those hosted by the NFF's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging Shared Learning working group. Previous opportunities have included guest lectures by Dr. Cristina Eisenberg and Dr. Brinda Sarathy as well as workshops from Seventh Sovereign.

Mentor Support

The NFF will match each fellow with a mentor from the NFF who functions as the practicum supervisor. Fellows and mentors will schedule regular meetings to talk through questions and ideas as they connect their practicum work to the theories and methods they are studying in their graduate programs.

Evaluation

Fellows are required to participate in a post-fellowship evaluation process conducted by NFF. NFF will collect feedback and metrics on fellows' experiences and accomplishments throughout the 12-month period.

Fellowship Award

Fellows will be hired as temporary, part-time employees and compensated at a rate of \$20/hour for their time (with no benefits offered). Fellows will be reimbursed for approved travel expenses associated with participation in the fellowship program and practicum, including the in-person retreat in June.

Eligibility

Graduate students pursuing a master's degree or doctorate are eligible for the Conservation Connect Fellowship. We anticipate students will have taken coursework related to the study of natural resources, conflict resolution, collaboration, non-profit management, communications, or other field related to the specific practicum. Fellows must be enrolled in a graduate program during the 2025-26 academic year.

Important Dates	
Applications due	February 2, 2025
NFF review of applications (with interviews for finalists)	February 2 – March 7, 2025
Notification of fellow selections with practicum matches	March 14, 2025
Program kickoff and orientation session (virtual)	May 2025 (day TBD)
Fellows retreat and training (in person)	June 8-12, 2025
Practicum work begins	Depends on project
Fellowship year ends	April 30, 2026

Selection Process

The NFF will select Conservation Connect Fellows based on their readiness to take advantage of what the fellowship offers, both in terms of professional development and practical experience, and the strength of their application materials. A review committee will assess written materials and conduct candidate interviews. The National Forest Foundation welcomes a diverse pool of applicants and maintains a policy of nondiscrimination.

Application Materials

The Conservation Connect Fellowship application has five components: a cover letter, résumé, and personal statement; selection of project preference; and one letter of recommendation submitted by a faculty member. Applications that do not include all components will not be considered. Please [click here to apply](#).

1. **Cover Letter:** In one page, describe in a compelling narrative your interest in being a Conservation Connect Fellow and how your studies and career plans fit the intent of the fellowship.
2. **Résumé** of academic and professional experience.
3. **Personal Statement:** In 1,000 characters or less for each response, address each of the following three questions:
 - a. What life experiences have led you to choose your current field of study?
 - b. What is the focus of your graduate degree and how would a Conservation Connect Fellowship complement your studies?
 - c. How would this fellowship support your professional development and career goals?
4. **Practicum Selection:** Please review the [2025 project descriptions](#) and indicate your top 3 preferences.

5. **Letter of Recommendation:** The fellowship application requires one letter of recommendation from a member of the faculty in the student's academic program. The letter must address the merits of the applicant and their fit for this fellowship. The NFF requests the **letter writer** email a signed copy of their letter directly to conservationconnect@nationalforests.org by February 2, 2025, with FELLOWSHIP and the applicant's name in the subject line.

Questions? Contact Jane Mandala, Conservation Connect Coordinator, at jmandala@nationalforests.org or 406-830-4795.