

US LANDCARE: ANSWERS TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

[Updated November 1, 2004]

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The following Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) are geared towards US Landcare, with some details differing from the experiences of Australia—where the Landcare movement began—or other countries where the Landcare model is being adapted.

If your question is not answered here, then please visit the Council for US Landcare Initiative website at <http://www.uslandcare.org>, or send an email to info@uslandcare.org.

CONCEPT AND CONTEXT

What is Landcare?

Landcare is a private-public partnership of people who work the land with other community members, businesses, and governments. Through group action people can strengthen the nation's ability to have healthy lands, water, and wildlife; vital communities; and enhanced economic prosperity and profitability.

In addition to harnessing the collective power of farmers, forest landowners, and neighbors to care for the environment, Landcare also seeks to rally broad public participation for conservation-based actions among diverse people and groups in the United States. It promises to expand and enhance the effective conservation infrastructure in the United States and involve more people by building on existing organizational or institutional structures, not competing with them. It also promises to involve people of all ages through schools and other means.

Landcare serves as an umbrella that encourages and allows individuals and communities to communicate, coordinate, and link actions. It pulls disparate efforts together to achieve broader, more cohesive environmental, social, and economic results. It can unify, empower, and develop broader support for conservation; and has the potential to become a community-based conservation movement in the United States as it is in Australia. While it may be a conduit for implementing projects, it should not be viewed as an organization per se or just another funding source.

In Australia, where Landcare began, it is now a national movement and a brand supported by corporations and government. There is status and pride among Landcare members by belonging to a well-respected national, and now international, movement. Australians have learned that group action by Landcare members generates more energy, greater progress, and a broader outlook than other approaches that depend on individual action as the basis for conservation.

How does Landcare add value to what already exists in the United States?

There is a need for integrated natural resource management and related solutions that encourage individuals and communities to think and act together, that inspire leaders to come forward, and that allow a greater attitude of stewardship to flourish within the context of working lands. Local people and communities are faced with many complex issues today that require working together in new and different ways to tackle natural resource issues and achieve sustainable solutions.

These challenges might not exist if current efforts were entirely successful, or if organizations were not polarized. Today many issues confronting the United States demand collective attention. Some of the most pressing issues are water quality and quantity, land use conversions, invasive species, fires, drought, and more. The big issues result in flooding and runoff, loss of working farms and forests, impaired watersheds, loss of wildlife habitat, increased costs of services, loss of revenues, and other local challenges. Upstream land-based activities also affect downstream river and coastal conditions.

There are many existing Landcare-like efforts in the United States and some newly emerging ones in both urban and rural places. Some involve neighbors working together on local projects while others are community-level efforts involving many private citizens or large-scale watershed or ecosystem efforts also involving government agencies and private organizations.

What concerns exist in the United States about Landcare?

Although Landcare is not a government program or dictated by federal or state environmental requirements, some people worry that Landcare is “another federal, state, or even local attempt to tell people what to do with their own lands.” Private property rights are well protected in the United States. In addition, local governments are equally adamant about retaining land use and any related planning and/or zoning authority within their boundaries or jurisdictions. Actions taken by Landcare groups, however, will need to comply with such requirements as with any project they pursue. In some instances, projects may be affected by federal and state environmental regulations, particularly if any part of that project is funded with federal or state money.

Within the current framework of activities around environmental issues, Landcare allows local citizens, businesses, large land owners and local governments to address their unique environmental problems in cooperative ways or simply to enhance the environment around them in concert with each other.

Landcare may also face criticism from groups who feel that the approach does not go far enough in strengthening environmental laws and regulations or in addressing what these groups see as the major environmental issues of the day. The politicizing of the environment in any fashion is not the purpose of Landcare; rather it seeks to overcome perceived threats and build strong coalitions among private landowners, community residents, businesses and local officials and any others with a deep seated commitment to conservation.

LOCAL / COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE

What does US Landcare look like at the local level?

Landcare is a way for individuals—farmers, forest landowners, residents, business owners and workers, community leaders, school teachers and students, scientists, retired people, and others—to organize their efforts, find local solutions, and voluntarily take group action.

Landcare participants define what “local” means. Landcare connects people to get the job done. You and your neighbors describe the geographic context and scale and develop the vision that naturally connects the right people to the issue or task at hand. For instance in Australia, where most of the people live within 50 miles of the coast, some ‘Landcare’ groups describe themselves as ‘Coastcare’.

You will join with others locally or regionally to connect the relevant rural, suburban, and urban interests and develop a working partnership of the community with government and business as desired. Businesses and industry along with other private sector organizations may support local projects along with government agencies. Also the private sector may help raise awareness about issues and visibility about your work locally and nationally.

A facilitator may help you locally and/or connect your group with other existing or emerging groups to tackle issues and achieve more integrated environmental, social, and economic results.

How can US Landcare help foster sustainable approaches to development?

Local governments and citizens struggle with the desire to grow socially and economically while improving environmental conditions. Studies have shown that environmental issues such as water quality, air quality and recreational opportunities play a major role in any business or industry's decision to locate in a community. Environmental improvements – like improving water quality through stream buffers; planting trees and flowers along Main Street and in parks; and providing fishing, biking and hiking opportunities – have frequently played a major role in a community's economic development strategy, preceding actual business and industry recruitment efforts.

Landcare is a comprehensive approach that brings together all segments of society to care for the land and other natural resources on which we depend. It is an approach that can build broad support for conservation-based planning and a wide array of results. It also can be applied to local government's land use and zoning decisions, to expanded regional decisions that connect environmental efforts across municipal and state boundaries, and to activities of civic groups and business organizations as well as private landowners.

Does US Landcare apply in areas dominated by public lands as well as private lands?

Landcare applies to all communities and natural resource situations including areas dominated by public lands, private lands, or a mixture of the two.

GETTING ORGANIZED AND INVOLVED

Who are local Landcare coordinators and what do they do?

There are a number of private organizations and public agencies in the United States who use or employ coordinators, facilitators, or others to accomplish organizational and program goals. Landcare coordinators may be these very same people; and will seek in the name of 'Landcare' to better coordinate actions among existing or emerging efforts and thereby multiply the effectiveness of individuals and various groups through more coordinated use of human, technical, and financial resources available.

Landcare focuses on people working together locally – landowners, neighbors, and businesses – to address issues that cross boundaries. It is a community-based approach. Coordinators serve as facilitators to help groups get organized, plan together, and take group action. They are people-oriented, encouraging individuals to take group action and helping them avoid isolation. They also provide information and professional assistance as needed and help local groups access the resources they desire and need.

In Australia most Landcare coordinators are funded through the local group with some additional funding from the federal government through grants. Some coordinators also extend their reach by working with multiple groups, connecting their actions on a catchment or watershed scale.

How do US Landcare groups get organized and work with other groups and organizations?

Landcare is proactive. Any number of individuals can form a Landcare group or organizations can begin a Landcare-type partnership without the need to apply for any official designation.

A variety of resources have been developed over time in Australia by Landcare group facilitators and coordinators to help people interested in organizing and/or getting involved in

Landcare groups. Much of the information about group dynamics is transferable to the United States and elsewhere. In addition some local people in the United States interested in the Landcare approach have begun to interact directly with facilitators and groups in Australia.

The Landcare Australia website (www.landcareaustralia.com.au) is a good place to start. Also the Australian Landcare Council which serves as the Australian Government's main policy advisory body on Landcare and related natural resource management has a useful website (www.auslandcarecouncil.org).

What does it mean to be 'involved' in US Landcare?

Landcare harnesses your power as an individual with the power of your neighbors and other members of your community. Together you will catalyze others to act. Your involvement will result in collective actions that will change the larger area in which your community exists in positive ways.

You define what it means to be "involved." You will learn from others, and others will learn from you. You will lead on some efforts and follow on others. You will decide and select what you want to do or how you want to contribute your time in conjunction with others. And your efforts will be multiplied because others will join you in both doing the work and telling others.

How do I get involved in Landcare in the United States?

The recently organized Council for US Landcare Initiative is a good place to start. The Council has established a website at <http://www.uslandcare.org> with contact information for learning more. Mike Brubaker is the Executive Director/CEO and is the first point of contact for Council activities. He, working with and through others, can link you to other private and public sector individuals involved in national as well as local Landcare activities.

PARTNERS AND FUNDING

How is the private sector involved?

The new Council for US Landcare Initiative is working to support and recognize a national Landcare movement and brand in the United States, and establish strategic business links based on the concept of social responsibility and corporate citizenship. Many corporations recognize the importance of a shared commitment to sustainable development and want to identify with a conservation ethic. Because local groups determine how they want to move forward, they will help determine corporate participation locally.

Corporate sponsorship on a national level will create the opportunity to help fund and bring other new resources to local and regional Landcare projects to deliver environmental, social, and economic benefits. The Council will help match sponsors with on-the-ground projects as appropriate. Criteria will be determined for what qualifies as a Landcare project, and priorities will be established for funding.

What is the origin of the Council for US Landcare Initiative?

Since the mid-1990s a number of people representing various organizations in the United States have visited Australia to learn about Landcare Australia and study its applicability and adaptability to the United States. The World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 served as an opportunity for individuals representing the private and public sectors to work in partnership toward community- and watershed-based solutions.

A group in the United States, commonly referred to as Pioneers, rallied together to foster dialogue with diverse groups and interests in the United States about the Landcare approach and learn more from Landcare-like efforts here. Based upon these interactions the Pioneers worked to establish a formal Landcare initiative in the United States led by the private sector.

On July 21, 2004, a Council for US Landcare Initiative with a founding Board of Directors and an Executive Director/CEO was announced. Now the Pioneers, as well as a growing network of Friends, continue to be involved in the Landcare activities at the local as well as the national level.

Is government involved in US Landcare?

A private-public partnership is being established through the Council for US Landcare Initiative, with the private sector taking the lead in the partnership. There is a clear and important role for government agencies that already are actively involved in a wide range of conservation activities from environmental, social, and economic perspectives. The partnership will seek to engage government entities at all levels, along with individuals, organizations, and businesses whose interest is in cultivating and expanding a community conservation ethic. Present federal funding which goes to farmers, forest landowners, rural and urban communities, or others will not be redirected.

The Council's mission to rally broad public participation for conservation builds upon a variety of existing stewardship and sustainable development activities in the United States.

Is US Landcare nonpartisan?

Landcare is nonpartisan and its voluntary efforts will be primarily at the grassroots level. As a private-public partnership it will not be limited to any political persuasion, but will be inclusive as it seeks to build a stronger conservation ethic throughout the country.

Will US Landcare threaten my existing funding from foundations and other private sources?

The new Council for US Landcare Initiative does not want to pose a threat to existing funding for conservation and related projects aimed at achieving environmental, social, and economic benefits, either from foundations or from other private sources. It will work with corporations and other businesses to enhance existing projects, working cooperatively to bring recognition and support from the general public.

Where can I get funding for my local Landcare group or project?

A wide variety of private and public sources of funding already exists in the United States to support local groups undertaking projects. In order to help build and expand on the success of existing conservation efforts in the United States the Council for US Landcare Initiative will recruit corporate sponsors interested in launching community action projects. Contact the Council for US Landcare Initiative to learn more about opportunities for local support through the Council.

PROJECTS AND RESULTS

What are typical Landcare activities?

Landcare is actively forging a private-public partnership among people who work the land, communities, businesses, and governments to achieve a vision of healthy lands and waters, sustainable communities, and economic viability. So a wide variety of projects are possible.

In the United States, as in Australia, on-ground projects typically include planting native grasses and trees and pulling invasive weeds. A variety of other activities aimed at improving land and water, income and profitability, and community well-being involve energy and water conservation, wildlife habitat, and pollution prevention through local and regional planning, organizing and training citizens, and working with school teachers and students.

Although on-ground and in-community work can be hard, effective local groups find ways to involve families and children through fun and rewarding activities and recognize volunteers and voluntary efforts.

What results is Landcare trying to achieve in the United States?

Landcare seeks the following two results from actions aimed at achieving two overarching goals.

One: *Expand on success* – build on existing conservation efforts by connecting people who work the land with communities, businesses, and governments to overcome current and growing challenges in ways that achieve environmental, social, and economic benefits.

Two: *Involve more people* – engage and connect rural, suburban, and urban people and interests in on-ground work and ensure it is broadly understood, recognized, and supported by most interests in our society.

Farmers and other landowners, conservationists, communities, and businesses foresee a variety of Landcare benefits in the United States over time. Actions will likely increase:

- Measurable conservation benefits on-the-ground;
- Application of science and evidence-based technologies;
- Corporate support for and recognition of successful conservation work;
- Broad public understanding of conservation needs and accomplishments;
- Number and scope of people involved in a grass-root driven, conservation movements;
- Economic viability; and
- Leveraging of taxpayer dollars with private resources at local and national resource conservation goals.

GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

What other countries are interested in Landcare?

The Landcare approach has grown since its beginning in Australia over 15 years ago and now is being adapted by a number of developed and developing countries. Several countries have Landcare efforts underway, most notably Australia, New Zealand, Philippines, South Africa, Iceland, and now the United States. A number of other countries have indicated interest, including Kenya, Indonesia, Germany, Jamaica, Uganda, Tanzania, Ghana, and probably others. Each country is learning from and adapting the Australian Landcare model and experience to its own reality.

Landcare is an approach that will be unique for every country, relying entirely on each country's own challenges, institutions, and other realities. The fact that it has spread so far and wide is testament to the soundness of the approach.

What is the United States learning from the Landcare Australia experience?

While Australia has had challenges that were unique to Australia, the concept is still appropriate for the United States as a means of addressing our own environmental, social, and economic issues in integrated ways. Landcare is a concept that encompasses all segments of society from big city dwellers to small towns to farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners.

Increased public awareness is one of Landcare Australia's greatest successes. Recent surveys showed that 85 percent of all Australians recognized the Landcare Australia's "caring hands" logo and the environmental achievements it represents. This recognition is based on measurable results, as well as great public relations and marketing of those results.

Implementing the "triple bottom line" philosophy is another lesson learned. The triple bottom line philosophy advocates doing work that conserves natural resources, enhances economic prosperity and profitability, and cultivates social outcomes through community-based actions by groups – altogether expanding a conservation ethic throughout the country.

Landcare Australia is nonpartisan and inclusive. The motto "Landcare is for everyone everywhere" is more than words. It describes how solutions are developed for a community through collaborative, voluntary problem solving. While Landcare Australia takes a middle-of-the-road approach, it has successfully dealt with extreme positions.

Landcare Australia works. Recent evaluations of the Landcare Australia movement indicate that there is increased adoption of sustainable practices by farmers and others when they have an association with and/or are involved in local Landcare groups and activities. Peer-to-peer learning is effective, especially when accomplished through group action and supplemented with the technical expertise of Landcare facilitators.

How do Landcare efforts in the United States connect with similar efforts in Australia and other countries?

Landcare provides an opportunity to connect community-based efforts on a global scale, build bridges among countries, and foster learning through people-to-people exchanges or sister projects between countries.

Australia has launched an International Landcare Clearinghouse, which serves to provide advice, information, and news. This international perspective is an important one as the universal promise of Landcare means sustaining environmental, social, and economic benefits for people and places through community-based action. Global communication and information sharing are keys to building a supportive global network of people taking action to solve their problems at home.

In addition, the development of an International Landcare network and alliance is being explored. For more information, or to join this effort, please contact the International Landcare Clearinghouse at landcare.contact@daff.gov.au.