

Legacy Lands
Workgroup

ACTION PLAN

**Solutions Centering
Black, Indigenous, and
People of Color Land
Stewardship**

September 2026



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WHO WE ARE

Nationwide, roughly 60 percent of the land in the U.S. is privately owned, and much of the water, food, and wildlife everyone depends on comes from it. How this land became private is not incidental to our work. We recognize that private land was assembled through the displacement of indigenous peoples and BIPOC land loss, and it shapes who federal agricultural and conservation policy reaches today.

Land trusts and federal programs have worked to protect private land for decades, but their tools were built for owners with clear title, lawyers, and a use for tax breaks. That leaves out many of the families and Nations who have cared for this land the longest. **This is exactly where our workgroup comes in.**



Our Legacy Lands workgroup members at Pearlstone Retreat Center, June 25, 2026.

The Legacy Lands Workgroup of America the Beautiful for All is a collective of farmers, ranchers, heirs' property attorneys, land trust practitioners, Tribal representatives, and faith leaders, most of us women and people of color, who steward and protect private land. All of us have watched federal conservation policy either reach us or pass us by. It mostly passes us by.

So we work together to keep land in the hands of Black, Indigenous, and people of color stewards. This is our plan for the next twelve months, written by the people doing the work.

WHY LAND IS A HEALTH ISSUE

Indigenous Nations have lost 98.9 percent of their historical land base. Black farmers went from 16 million acres in 1910 to fewer than 5 million today, a loss valued at \$326 billion. Latino workers are 78 percent of the people who labor on American farms and 3 percent of the people who own them. And nearly a quarter of federal conservation field staff are gone, leaving 141 counties without a single one.

That loss shows up in our health. When an heirs' property parcel is forced into a partition sale, a family loses its foundation for food sovereignty. When conservation field staff disappear, fewer farmers get help to evaluate soil health, identify resource concerns or to develop a conservation plan to reduce water use, erosion or water runoff. Conservation field staff also help landowners manage fertilizer and manure, to reduce the risk that more nitrate reaches rural wells. The Senate farm bill draft now names nitrate and nitrite as rural drinking water contaminants. When a Tribal Nation cannot steward its homelands, ceremony, medicine, and diet are cut off together. That's why our coalition holds nature conservation, environmental justice, and public health as inseparable. Land is a body, and it cannot be cut into pieces without harming land and people.



WHAT WE'VE BUILT TOGETHER

We began by organizing as a small circle of practitioners and began meeting online in July of 2024. Each month, we share policy intelligence, surface what our organizations are seeing on the ground, and coordinate across issues that are usually siloed: heirs' property, Tribal stewardship, conservation access, and food sovereignty. Since then, we've been building our relationships and taking collective action together.

Some highlights:

- In September 2025, we released, at Climate Week NYC, our first shared agenda: [Farm Bill recommendations](#) for reaching underrepresented and Tribal landowners, the frontline stewards of this country's working lands.
- In October 2025, our coalition launched its [story directory](#), and we keep adding BIPOC and Tribal stories, including [stories of Black stewardship for Black History Month](#).
- From June 24 to 26, 2026, we the farmers, lawyers, ranchers, Tribal stewards, and advocates, the people who keep our lands and the people working to protect them, [came together for three days](#) at our member Adamah's Pearlstone Retreat Center to refine our shared priorities.
- Then we put those priorities to work. We launched our [We Are Watching the Farm Bill](#) campaign, and garnered media attention via [our op-ed on why the farm bill is a health bill](#).
- We amplify and encourage peer learning among our members, and celebrate the wins in their own organizations. The Center for Heirs' Property helped [pass a bipartisan South Carolina law that protects families](#) from a sudden tax increase when they divide inherited land among themselves. NDN Collective and Oceti Sakowin Tribes [stopped graphite drilling near Pe' Sla](#), a sacred site in the Black Hills National Forest.

We look forward to growing our small, powerful circle into a larger one that keeps acting for the health of our land and our people.

OUR THREE PRIORITIES

TRIBAL STEWARDSHIP

land that returns

We follow Tribal leadership on treaty rights, land use, and fair access to the programs other landowners already use. We partner with Tribally led coalitions to connect them with the philanthropic, legal, and policy resources they identify, on their terms and timeline, without competing with their leadership. And we insist on free, prior, and informed consent as practice across our full coalition, not only a land acknowledgment at the start of a meeting.

SMALL TO MEDIUM FARMS, RANCHES, AND FISHERIES

land that stays

Families lose land not because they abandon it, but because legal systems, tax codes, and federal program designs make it nearly impossible to hold, while investors buy up the farmland families lose. An estimated 3.5 million acres of Black-owned land in the South is heirs' property, vulnerable to forced sale. We hold cooperatives, community agriculture, and heirs' property together, because they are together in people's lives. When land leaves a family, so do the food, the water, and the generational knowledge of how to grow it.

REGENERATIVE AGROECOLOGICAL STEWARDSHIP

land that heals

Our communities have practiced soil health, water stewardship, and climate-resilient agriculture for generations. Yet federal conservation programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) remain structurally inaccessible to small-scale producers, BIPOC landowners, and culturally rooted land practitioners. They often pay farmers back only after they cover the costs, and they depend on field staff who are disappearing. We work to redesign those programs, starting with the people who should benefit from them.

WHY THESE PRIORITIES NOW?

These priorities came from our members, through our virtual monthly meetings, one-on-one conversations, and the three days spent together on the land in June. The next twelve months make them urgent.

On September 16, 2026, the Senate Agriculture Committee advanced its farm bill, and the full Senate is not expected to vote on it until after the November 2026 elections. The current farm bill extension runs out September 30. Federal funding runs through December 11, and so does a temporary block on an OMB rule that would put federal grants under review by political appointees and let agencies cancel them midstream. We want that block made permanent. The biggest decisions on land, food, and conservation now come after the election.

Then comes January 2027. New members of Congress are seated, staff are hired in November and December, and committee assignments follow early in the year. Incoming staff may have no position yet on heirs' property, on land return, or on who federal conservation programs were built to reach. We intend to be first in the door.

Whatever Congress does, most of this plan moves anyway, because most of our work happens on the land and among our members.



OUR SIX STRATEGIES

Every strategy passes a three-question equity check before it moves: How does this show up in people's bodies? What happens to the land? Which communities are affected? The answers come back to the same place: who gets to stay, who gets to decide, and who gets to be well.

STRATEGY ONE

CONVENE A LEGACY LANDS LAND TRUST COHORT

We will invite five land trusts to spend a year working alongside our members, who will be paid for their expertise. Each takes on one project in its own region: Identifying opportunities for tribes to steward their ancestral homelands, integrate indigenous traditional ecological knowledge, gather medicinal plants, convene and hold ceremonies, and ultimately support land return through various mechanisms. Protecting an heirs' property family's land and paying the family for the easement rather than expecting a donation, or buying farmland, protecting it, and reselling it to a BIPOC farmer at a price they can afford.

OUTCOME: Five land trusts working with us, at least one project underway, and what we learned written up so any land trust can use it.

STRATEGY TWO

CO-CREATE A COALITION TRIBAL PROTOCOL

Our Coalition will model the change we seek in the world by considering how it would look to practice principles of free, prior and informed consent in our decision-making and convening structures. A standing Tribal engagement protocol adopted by our whole coalition, shaped by our Tribal and Indigenous members from the start. This protocol will include (but not be limited to) in-person events, when and how we identify and notify the Nations whose ancestral land we are on and invite them to the table, with their time compensated, going beyond a verbal land acknowledgment to identify and elevate their priorities among our members, and provide support.

OUTCOME: A protocol drafted with Tribal and Indigenous members, adopted by the coalition, and used at our convenings.

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STRATEGY THREE

CONNECT LAND RETENTION TO OCEAN AND WILDLIFE

Land loss does not stop at the fence line. Family land is also habitat, floodplain, and coastal buffer. When a family loses heirs' property on the coast, it is also an ocean conservation issue. When a rancher cannot access conservation programs, it is also a wildlife matter. We will build at least one joint project with our Ocean or Wildlife workgroup that connects land retention to the work they are already doing on state wildlife action plans and coastal community protection. At our regional network weaving convenings, we will also bring our members together for title and succession clinics, where families can get help clearing title and planning how land passes to the next generation.

OUTCOME: At least one clinic held and one joint project with another workgroup.

STRATEGY FOUR

BROADEN THE REACH OF OUR NARRATIVE

Our frame is health and home, and how land grabs and land loss threaten both. Our stories show what happens when a family keeps its land: a child eats, a well runs clean, a Tribe manages its own forest. They also show what is happening now to families and Nations who cannot. **To carry that frame further, we will:**

- Publish a one-page, story-based definition of regenerative agroecological stewardship.
- Equip our members to tell stories and garner media attention that name land loss as a health issue, backed by our messaging guidance so that everyone tells it in the same frame.
- Depending on more partners and resources, produce a health impact brief on regenerative practice and community health, covering soil, water, heat, and diet, building the evidence base that connects private land conservation to environmental health and rural well-being.

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STRATEGY FIVE

CONTINUOUS LEARNING AND UNLEARNING

Our members carry knowledge that conservation has spent two centuries overlooking, and some of what the field taught all of us has to be set down. Two members will teach three sessions for the workgroup, grounded in Tribal stewardship, Southern Black farming, and the acequia and land grant traditions of the Southwest, on what stewardship already looks like on their land, recorded for our story directory with their consent.

With more partners and resources, we will work toward shared ways to measure stewardship outcomes that hold Traditional Ecological Knowledge and community stewardship traditions alongside Western scientific metrics.

OUTCOME: Both sessions taught and recorded.

STRATEGY SIX

POLICY ADVOCACY

Before committee agendas take shape in early 2027, we will bring new and current members of the Agriculture, Natural Resources and Interior Appropriations Committee offices a one-page brief on heirs' property, land return, and conservation access, built from the recommendations we released in 2025 and sharpened for this Congress, with our members in the room to speak to them. Most people who walk into a Hill office are paid to represent a position and they can tell a staffer what a program does, from theory. Our members speak from lived experience and they carry the consequences of policy and federal programs. When a conservation program is cut, our members can tell them who was impacted, who lost the technical assistance, the cost-share, the farm, which acres and in what county.

We will keep watching the farm bill and keep building out our sign-on infrastructure, pressing Congress on SNAP cost shifts, on restoring the federal conservation field staff that small farmers depend on, and on heirs' property protections. wherever land, food, and health meet, we will insist they be treated as one conversation, not three.

OUTCOME: The brief in the hands of new offices, and member-led conversations with those offices underway.

HOW TO ENGAGE

If you grow food, steward land, or organize in your community

Join this workgroup. Bring your stories, your knowledge, and your organizing power. Share policy intelligence, co-sign campaigns, and connect us to communities you already serve. This coalition was built by and for people like you.

If you fund this kind of work

Invest in what makes the wins possible: backbone coordination, participation stipends so Tribal and frontline organizations can stay at the table, regional convenings that build the trust behind the policy, technical assistance so producers can actually reach federal programs, and communications that counter land-grab framing with the voices of the people being grabbed from.

If you make policy

Consult us. We bring more than 300 organizations and decades of lived expertise to Farm Bill provisions, conservation easement design, and incentive program structure.

You, reading this right now

What is one thing you will do in the next 90 days?

Make one commitment today and hold us to ours.

For commitment pledges or questions, please contact:

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The Legacy Lands Workgroup is one of the six working groups of the
America the Beautiful for All Coalition.

The America the Beautiful for All Coalition unites 300+ organizations
across missions, ecosystems, communities, and cultures to steward nature
while upholding environmental justice and defending public health.

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