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Wasa'tos: A Model for Indigenous Co-Management and Land Protection

Applying Organization	Indigenous Just Transition	Application Date	5/5/2026
Applying Contact	Chiara Rose	Status	Submitted
Record Type	Member Collective	Created By	Chiara Rose, 4/28/2026, 2:32 PM
		Create Account	<input type="checkbox"/>

Project Overview

Project Name	Wasa'tos: A Model for Indigenous Co-Management and Land Protection	Requested Amount	\$50,000.00
Project/Campaign Name	Wasa'tos: A Model for Indigenous Co-Management and Land Protection		
Type of Project	Acquisition	Project Multiple Locations	
Project Location (State or Territory)	WA	Longitude	-119.831878 <input type="checkbox"/>
Latitude	46.790421		

Organization Details

Organization Name	Indigenous Just Transition	Primary address for organization	2800 1st Ave PMB 408-00 Seattle, Washington 98921 United States
Contact Name	Johnny Buck	Contact Title	Executive Directors
Contact Email Address	chiara@indigenousjusttransition.org		
Annual Operating Budget	\$215,000.00	Tax Status/Organization Type	501c3 Organization
Staff Size	7	Main Phone	19077137036
Total Membership	124	Organization Website/Social Media Feed	https://www.indigenousjusttransition.org/
BIPOC-led	Yes	C-Suite Staff	100% Native American Board, Diverse staff 86% BIPOC

Grant Details

Awarded Amount		Awarded Date	
Funding Program			
Primary Project Type		Secondary Project Type	
Term Start Date		Term End Date	

Proposal Questions

Mission/History Of Organization	Indigenous Just Transition (IJT) is an Indigenous-led organization advancing	Location Details	The Wasa'tos landscape lies within the ancestral homelands of the Wanapum
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land protection, ecological restoration, and Indigenous stewardship to transition communities from extractive systems toward regenerative economies. Our work restores relationships between Indigenous peoples and the lands and waters that sustain life while securing long-term protection of culturally and ecologically significant landscapes.

IJT was founded to respond to intersecting climate, biodiversity, and economic pressures affecting Indigenous communities across the Columbia Plateau and beyond. We partner with Tribal leaders, conservation organizations, and public agencies to advance landscape-scale conservation, Indigenous co-management, and permanent land protection. Through initiatives such as Wasa'tos, IJT is building replicable models for Indigenous-led conservation that protect biodiversity, strengthen climate resilience, and sustain long-term community stewardship.

people in southeast Washington along the Columbia River corridor near Saddle Mountain, within the Columbia Plateau ecoregion. This region contains one of the largest remaining intact shrub-steppe ecosystems in North America, an increasingly rare landscape supporting high biodiversity, climate resilience, and culturally significant lifeways.

The initiative focuses on the permanent protection and restoration of approximately 25,000 acres of privately owned land, connected to hundreds of thousands of acres of adjacent public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Department of Energy (DOE), and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). Within this landscape are 9,600 acres of priority habitat for the Columbia Basin pygmy rabbit, one of Washington's most endangered mammals.

The Wasa'tos landscape also supports documented populations of greater sage-grouse, ferruginous hawk, and western gray squirrel, as well as migratory birds, native pollinators, and shrub-steppe dependent wildlife species that rely on intact sagebrush ecosystems.

This landscape includes intact sagebrush systems, groundwater-dependent ecosystems, and connected watershed networks that sustain wildlife movement, regional water stability, and long-standing Wanapum stewardship traditions, including traditional food gathering and plant management. Despite its ecological and cultural value, the region faces increasing threats from fragmentation, incompatible land use pressures, and climate-driven stress on water systems. Wasa'tos represents a rare opportunity to secure large-scale conservation before irreversible loss occurs while restoring Indigenous stewardship across a highly vulnerable ecosystem.

Final Success	Permanent protection of 25,000 acres of Wanapum ancestral lands, including 9,600 acres of priority Columbia Basin pygmy rabbit habitat, supported by Indigenous co-management planning across 5,000–15,000 acres of connected public lands.	Impact on Climate and Biodiversity
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Permanent protection of the Wasa'tos landscape will significantly strengthen climate resilience and biodiversity across one of the most imperiled shrub-steppe ecosystems in North America. Protecting 25,000 acres of intact habitat will prevent fragmentation, safeguard groundwater-dependent ecosystems, and maintain vegetation communities essential for wildlife survival under increasing climate stress.

This effort directly supports recovery of the endangered Columbia Basin pygmy rabbit by securing 9,600 acres of priority deep shrub-steppe habitat, while enabling restoration strategies that improve sagebrush structure, soil stability, and forage conditions necessary for long-term species recovery.

In addition to pygmy rabbit recovery, the Wasa'tos landscape supports documented populations of greater sage-grouse, ferruginous hawk, and western gray squirrel, along with migratory birds, native pollinators, and other shrub-steppe dependent species that rely on intact sagebrush ecosystems.

Protection of groundwater-dependent ecosystems will help safeguard regional water stability critical to agriculture, wildlife habitat, and long-term community water security.

The Wasa'tos initiative strengthens regional connectivity by linking protected private lands to hundreds of thousands of acres of adjacent public lands, supporting wildlife corridors, watershed resilience, and long-term ecological function.

By integrating land protection, restoration, and Indigenous stewardship, Wasa'tos establishes a durable conservation model that supports biodiversity recovery and long-term climate adaptation across a landscape of statewide ecological importance.

Indigenous Just Transition (IJT) is implementing a phased, landscape-scale conservation strategy integrating private land acquisition, Indigenous co-management planning, and ecosystem restoration to achieve permanent protection of the Wasa'tos landscape.

Private Land Protection

IJT is advancing permanent protection of approximately 25,000 acres of privately owned land through a phased acquisition strategy. The primary landowner, Gary Maughan, has provided written commitment supporting conservation-focused transfer aligned with long-term Indigenous stewardship goals. Parcel boundaries have been identified, and priority conservation areas, including 9,600 acres of pygmy rabbit habitat, have been mapped.

Initial funding support, including a matching grant from Earth Rising, has enabled conservation planning and transaction preparation. Phase One acquisition is scheduled to begin in 2026, positioning the project to move from planning into implementation.

Next steps include:

- > Completing due diligence and conservation transaction readiness
- > Securing additional capital and matching commitments
- > Preparing priority parcels for Phase One protection
- > Advancing restoration readiness aligned with habitat priorities
- > Public Land Co-Management
- > IJT is working with Tribal leadership

Expected Economic & Recreational Impact

Permanent protection of the Wasa'tos landscape will generate long-term economic and community benefits through Indigenous-led stewardship, restoration, and conservation management. These activities create local employment opportunities in ecological restoration, habitat monitoring, cultural stewardship, and land management, strengthening sustainable place-based economies rooted in conservation.

Protection of this landscape will support culturally appropriate outdoor access opportunities, including land-based learning, traditional ecological education, and low-impact recreation that deepens connections to land and water. These opportunities prioritize ecological integrity and cultural respect while expanding meaningful engagement with the landscape.

By protecting connected landscapes across private and public lands, the project strengthens long-term public access to healthy ecosystems while ensuring sensitive habitat areas remain protected. Communities historically excluded from conservation decision-making will benefit from expanded participation in stewardship and restoration.

Long-term protection also supports regional economic resilience by stabilizing water systems, protecting wildlife habitat, and sustaining landscapes that depend on healthy ecological conditions.

Strategy & Timeline For Final Success

and federal land management agencies, including BLM, DOE, and USACE, to initiate Indigenous co-management planning across connected public lands.

- > Formal consultation with agencies is anticipated to begin in August 2026, supporting identification of cooperative stewardship areas across 5,000–15,000 acres of connected lands.

Restoration & Stewardship

- > Restoration strategies are being developed using Wanapum ecological knowledge and contemporary habitat science. These strategies prioritize:
 - > Native shrub-steppe restoration
 - > Soil stabilization
 - > Habitat enhancement supporting pygmy rabbit recovery
 - > Long-term watershed resilience

Timeline (2026–2028)

2026

- > Initiate Phase One acquisition readiness
- > Begin federal consultation (August 2026)
- > Complete restoration planning
- > Secure additional conservation funding

2027

- > Advance additional phased land protection
- > Initiate priority restoration actions

2028

Continue phased acquisition

Expand long-term restoration implementation

Primary challenges include transaction complexity and multi-agency coordination. IJT mitigates these risks through strong partnerships, phased financing strategies, and early engagement with conservation partners.

Engagement from the business community strengthens long-term protection outcomes across the Wasa'tos landscape. Conservation Alliance member companies can support conservation finance partnerships, increase visibility of Indigenous-led conservation, and reinforce public support for long-term habitat protection.

Participation from outdoor industry partners strengthens shared responsibility to protect landscapes that sustain wildlife, recreation, and regional ecological health.

Key Decision Makers

Key decision-makers include federal land management agencies responsible for connected public lands, including BLM, DOE, and USACE, along with Tribal leadership and private landowners.

IJT engages these partners through relationship-building, cooperative planning, and technical collaboration to align conservation goals across connected landscapes.

Formal consultation with agencies is anticipated beginning in August 2026. Engagement with private landowners has resulted in strong alignment around conservation-focused transfer strategies.

Elevate Voices

water. IJT works in direct partnership with Wanapum leadership to ensure conservation strategies reflect cultural values and long-term stewardship priorities.

Working With Business Community

Measurable On-Ground Outcomes

- > Advance conservation readiness across 25,000 acres, including prioritized parcel protection pathways
- > Formalize co-management planning across thousands of additional acres of

Community participation is integrated throughout project planning and stewardship development. These pathways support long-term involvement in restoration, monitoring, and land management.

- BLM, DOE, DNR, WDFW lands
- > Complete integrated stewardship and restoration planning
- > Initiate habitat restoration planning supporting 9,600 acres of pygmy rabbit habitat
- > Secure additional conservation funding commitments supporting phased protection

TCA Funding Plan

TCA support will directly accelerate the transition from planning to implementation by providing critical funding for land protection, partnership development, and early-stage restoration.

This funding will help advance acquisition strategies, unlock matching funds, and support the development of co-management frameworks. At this stage, TCA's investment can catalyze permanent conservation outcomes and ensure that this project moves forward at the pace required to secure high-value habitat and prevent further fragmentation.

Confidential Items



Other Relevant Application Details
