



The Conservation Collective - Unique Value Proposition

OVERVIEW

The Conservation Collective (the Collective) serves to help DC-based professionals currently working in wildlife, forests, and water conservation, and those who recently lost their jobs in the government and non-profit sectors due to budget cuts and grant recissions. The Collective provides job placement assistance, professional development, and community gatherings – online and off, drawing on its members' "collective" connections to empower community members and promote cooperation over competition.

FISCAL AGENT

The Collective's fiscal agent is the [International Union for Conservation of Nature US Fund](#) (IUCN US Fund), mobilizing resources from the US to benefit global conservation initiatives. IUCN US Fund's strong backing strengthens the Collective's reach and resources.

PROBLEM

Fully half of recent federal workforce cuts affected federal agencies possessing conservation authority, swelling the ranks of conservation experts looking for work. As of June 2026, the District of Columbia had the [highest unemployment rate](#) in the nation. According to the [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), the DMV region (DC, Maryland, and Virginia), where many of the affected agencies are based, lost 103,900 jobs between January 2025 and January 2026, more than any other metro area in the country (the Boston metro area is a distant second at 30,200 jobs lost). While federal government cuts account for most of these job losses, many NGOs, including many environmental, conservation, and humanitarian organizations, laid off thousands of staff due to federal funding cuts and reduced investment from international partners.

Despite having a large, highly educated talent pool for employers to draw from, the hiring process is broken for both talent and hiring managers. Great candidates get lost in a saturated and competitive job market, their applications blocked by AI filters. At the same time, hiring managers are overwhelmed by a flood of applications. Unable to sift through everything to make a fully informed decision, they are relying on AI, which dilutes the selection process to keywords and years in the field. Humanity needs to be inserted back into the job application process.

What's more, this administration has deprioritized the conservation of our natural environment at a crucial time for species and ecosystem health. At this critical juncture, supporting our hard-working community is all the more urgent. The sudden dismantling of conservation programs that took years to orchestrate and implement has accelerated the problem these initiatives were created to solve. For example, the cuts to the National Parks Service and USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service have left fewer resources to protect conserved land, ecosystem health, and threatened species, such as trained personnel and specialized equipment. Without proper maintenance, our national heritage sites face accelerated deterioration, putting decades of conservation efforts in jeopardy.

We are losing critical conservation talent as professionals pivot to new careers to pay the bills or move out of the area altogether. By offering services that maintain skills, education, and knowledge, we can prevent talent and expertise from being lost and ensure continuity for the time when jobs do return. Otherwise, this lost knowledge base will lead to trickle-down effects for years to come:

- The field of conservation is built on interpersonal relationships, where sensitive information exchange is at the core. Many Collective members have institutional knowledge of historical politics around conservation: the objectives, actions, and situations that are paramount to understanding the current and future landscape. The insights available within the Collective cannot be gleaned through the use of AI, where answers are only generated from data that already exists online. The benefit of this closely held knowledge goes both ways - its existence apart from AI algorithms keeps this sensitive information from being manipulated, as well.
- In losing these dedicated public servants, the government and private sector stakeholders it relies on have lost critical infrastructure, the costs of which, while difficult to quantify acutely, will manifest for years to come. Detroit's predicament after the auto industry collapse - the city's major economic driver - is a prime example of what could happen in the DMV due to the collapse of the public sector workforce. Detroit's loss of engineers, managers, and skilled workers, led to a collapse of its tax base, and funding cuts to essential services like education, healthcare, and public safety. That brain drain triggered a negative feedback loop that has become nearly impossible to reverse, leading to a hemorrhaging resident population and diminishing the housing market. Due to these losses, the breakdown keeps residents and investors from returning, and the vicious cycle of societal degradation continues. The loss of expertise housed by the Collective will directly contribute to a similar failure of national and previously US-driven international conservation efforts.
- With the DMV's most involved residents (and their disposable incomes) driven out of the area, churches, athletic leagues, parent-teacher associations, and other community organizations, as well as commercial entities like coffee shops and restaurants, lose significant business and support. This hollowing out of civil society in the D.C. area limits opportunities for disparate groups to connect and reshapes the political landscape in ways that make the problem even harder to solve.
- The gap in skilled workforce left by federal cuts and the oversaturated job market it created has led to the selection of less seasoned, less committed, and less qualified workers over experts who are objectively better-suited. This lack of experience may also decrease the longevity of their employment due to job dissatisfaction.

SOLUTION

At this moment, it could not be more critical to innovate how people network, form connections and ultimately land jobs.

The Collective grew out of a genuine recognition that talented, mission-driven policy and advocacy professionals in the conservation space need connection, support, and community at a moment of profound uncertainty.

The Collective is also unique due to its collaborative rather than competitive approach. Members possess deep connections in the space, and by sharing these connections, members can help one another land interviews and ultimately new roles. As a crowdsourced resource for our conservation colleagues who thrive on lifting one another up, the Collective is working to meet the moment.

The Collective distinguishes itself through its focus on the niche federal, non-profit, and contracting professionals working in the conservation space specifically. The goal extends beyond individual placements to preserving institutional knowledge, maintaining subject-matter expertise, and boosting overall morale within Washington, DC and throughout the country.

The Collective focuses on unique, outside-the-box "speed-networking" events that support folks who haven't found success through traditional job search outlets, including resources and support spaces for introverted and neurodivergent job seekers. The Collective acknowledges individual talent and fosters connections through curated matchmaking events.

For these events, feedback is initially solicited among members to 1) learn what their needs are, then 2) identify relevant organizations to partner with to lend their time to speak with job candidates. The Collective then organizes events specifically curated to match job providers with relevant candidates. Providers are experts in the conservation space who volunteer their time to assist job seekers, either by sharing open positions, advice, or making connections that could ultimately lead to new roles. Candidates get one-on-one time with providers they otherwise would have never had the opportunity to meet.

Through this unique networking model, candidates have built strong relationships that contribute to their professional success.

The Collective also organizes skill-building webinars, and recently hosted one on AI in conservation with experts in the space, in an effort to keep members current on the rapid changes in tech that are taking place. Currently, the Collective is planning several 'round table' webinars to highlight how job seekers can transfer their skills via emerging tech. This kind of "upskilling" helps members excel in job interviews on hot topics in conservation, and is crucial for members while they navigate unemployment - a time when skill maintenance and advancement is in danger of falling by the wayside.

To build community, the Collective hosts a Signal [group](#) and a LinkedIn [page](#), where job postings are shared along with any connections to hiring managers. Everyone in the group posts jobs and offers to help candidates where they can.

In regard to non-traditional networking events, the intent is to solicit feedback among our members to learn what their needs are, and identify relevant organizations to partner with, to lend their time to speak with job candidates. This could be policy-focused, science-focused, etc.

Although the Conservation Collective was created as a stopgap measure during this unprecedented time, the goal is also to have staying power as there will always be a need to support out of work conservationists regardless of who is in the White House. The Collective envisions a time when it can be the shepherd of conservation talent in DC, and recruiters come to us to meet people face to face via mini interviews. Reversing the job search process would reward both sides, ending the frustration of sending resumes into black holes or missing out on great candidates.

STATISTICS

Within the first year of its founding, the Collective:

- Established a foundational network of over 400 followers on [LinkedIn](#) and 200 members who participate in the dedicated Signal chat.
- Orchestrated three professional speed networking events that strengthened and mobilized the existing conservationist network and garnered support for our cause.
- Produced a skill-building webinar focused on conservation tech
- Organized a [panel](#) during DC Climate Week entitled "Roots and Resilience: Supporting Conservation Careers in Transition," to remind job seekers that they are seen and validated.
- Hosted five happy hours
- Planned an all-day conservation-specific retreat in conjunction with the fired federal workforce support network, WellFed.

CO-FOUNDERS

The Collective was formed by two wildlife policy experts who lost their jobs due to federal funding changes post-election. One co-founder is a veterinarian who worked at the Department of State, and one co-founder comes from an NGO policy background. Together, they know how to tailor their support to different audiences. By being personally affected, they understand the stress their members are under and how to meet the moment.

The Collective co-founders noticed that there were support resources for displaced energy and climate folks, particularly for former USAID employees, but none for conservationists, specifically. They set out to fill that gap.

The Collective is entirely volunteer run. It does not collect commissions for job placements; rather, the Collective is driven by the desire to protect and promote conservation talent in DC and beyond.

TESTIMONIALS

- *"I attended the Conservation Collective's speed networking event in December 2025 after months of unemployment following my time in federal service, and I was nervous going in. Speed networking - yikes! I left energized, connected, and really glad I went. At that point, I was starting to think about a move into independent consulting, and the event gave me a chance to ask honest, practical questions about how people use consultants and what to expect. I followed up with the people I met and with a few of them had longer exchanges (telephone calls, emails) after. This event, and the work of the Conservation Collective across the board, provided me with important resources, helped me feel less alone at a tough time and reminded me how supportive this community can be."* - **Sasha G., Collective member**
- *"For me, the most beneficial part of this group has been the reminder that I'm not alone...having a supportive network of folks has been indispensable, especially in a personally hard year."* - **E.N., Collective member**
- *"Since the dismantling of USAID, the Conservation Collective has helped me expand my professional network and also connected me with a likeminded group of supportive peers that is actively sharing job posts, events and networking advice. The speed networking event that the Collective recently organized was a great opportunity to practice my elevator pitch, meet with potential employers and socialize with other job seekers. After a long, difficult year of job searching, I came away from that event feeling energized and with a renewed sense of purpose."* - **Shirin W., Collective member**
- *"Finding networks of support makes such a difference in dealing with this difficult job market. The Conservation Collective is just such a community. I appreciate, and am inspired by, the kindness, generosity, energy, and opportunities provided by the Conservation Collective."* - **Shira Y., Collective member**
- *"In these incredibly challenging times, we cannot move ahead in retraining the talent and commitment of DMV-based conservation professionals without the Conservation Collective. There is nothing else out there specifically dedicated to our sector, which seems particularly hard hit due to large dependency on both federal funding, and public sector employment."* - **Tracy Farrell, Director, North American Region, the International Union for Conservation of Nature**

CONSERVATION COLLECTIVE MEDIA

- New York Times profile in June 2025 [here](#)
- America the Beautiful for All Coalition [blog](#) January 2026
- DC EcoWomen [Newsletter](#) May 2026

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