



What is Landcare?

Landcare is the practice and ethic of caring for the land. It is locally-led, community-based land stewardship including sustainable farming, forestry, landscaping and related activities that improve economic, social, and environmental conditions: *the triple bottom line*. It engages landowners, businesses, NGOs, local governments, resource professionals, scientists, consumers and concerned citizens: “everyone, everywhere” as they say in Australia, where the term was coined. Federal and state government programs often are needed to support landcare programs, but the leadership and action occurs locally. Landcare is a response to the globalizing, urbanizing, complex, non-point and cross-boundary challenges of the 21st century. It is now thriving in more than a dozen countries worldwide where it is inspiring a lively public dialogue about what it means to care for the land as members and citizens of increasingly interdependent local and global communities.

Successful landcare has local as well as *long-term and large-scale outcomes*. By working together to achieve shared objectives it accomplishes what is increasingly difficult to do alone, such as quality food, fiber, energy, water, biodiversity, climate stability, and other life giving ecosystem goods and services that present management challenges because of institutional, property and political boundaries. Landcare is voluntary; people participate because doing so improves their lives, invigorates their communities, and increases their power to affect change and realize desired future conditions in an increasingly complex and changing world.

What is Community Landcare?

Community landcare groups and networks (groups of groups) are one form of landcare that has proven successful in Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines and several other countries where there

are now more than 6,000 active community landcare groups and hundreds of regional landcare networks (another form of landcare—the topic of a subsequent note—is a service industry offering land owners landcare management services). Community landcare groups are formed and led by neighboring landowners often with the assistance of local governments, state or federal agencies, philanthropic foundations, or other third parties that can provide technical support—typically funneled through a facilitator assigned to the group—that helps organize meetings, find resources, handle administrative chores, and overcome typical barriers to community group formation and empowerment.

In the United States and elsewhere, community groups with a focus on land and water stewardship have existed for many years. Such groups have much in common with community landcare and include: watershed groups, “Friends of...” groups, neighborhood beautification groups, and landowner associations. Urban landcare groups revitalize decaying urban green spaces and convert vacant parcels into community parks and gardens. Rural landcare groups invest in businesses and practices that keep working lands both financially and environmentally sustainable. Exurban landcare groups deploy smart growth to sustain scenery, solace, water, cultural and environmental qualities attracting people to the region. Landcare groups, therefore, have diverse goals, reflecting the diverse needs and interests of their members.

Landcare in Action

Landcare has assumed several forms in the US. Below are profiles of a few groups.



Grayson LandCare

www.graysonlandcare.org

Farmers, landowners and residents of Grayson County, Virginia organized around sustaining their agricultural lands and lifestyles threatened by development pressures and a globalizing marketplace. As a group, they have helped to establish two for-profit operations organized around landcare's triple bottom line. Grayson Natural Foods (GNF) raises, processes, and sells "natural" beef with the goal of keeping profits and people invested in the local economy. The Blue Ridge Forest Cooperative is a community-owned and operated integrated forest management business that adds value to members' timberland and jobs to the local economy through low-impact harvesting and local value-added processing of primary and secondary forest products.



Catawba LandCare

www.catawbalandcare.org

Historically an agrarian community, relatively isolated by high passages and steep mountain slopes, the farmed and forested acres producing traditional agricultural and forest crops in Catawba Valley are becoming more valuable as real estate investments for encroaching urban and exurban developments. Located at the headwaters of several nationally treasured watersheds, Catawba Landcare formed to help landowners restore and revitalize their many streams and springs and keep their farms and forests profitable, open, and working. The group brings experts and landowners together to discuss options and opportunities they can realize together, for example warm-season grass biofuel production, agritourism, stream restoration cost-share, and a virtual farmers market to link surrounding area restaurants and caterers with local growers to supply fresh meats and produce.



Community LandCare in Philadelphia

www.pennsylvaniahorticulturalsociety.org/phlgreen/vacant-CLC.html

The Pennsylvania Horticultural Society's *Philadelphia Green* program is a collaborative effort among city residents, community organizations, local businesses, and city agencies to develop and maintain green spaces within the city of Philadelphia. Greening, according to their strategy, is an "integral way to bring urban neighbors together and create a higher quality of life throughout the city." But with more than 35,000 vacant lots, it is beyond the reach of the organization to address them all directly. In response, the Community LandCare program was formed, which employs community service organizations to clean and maintain hundreds of parcels around the city. Through this effort, not only are vacant spaces made more attractive and secure, but valuable training and employment opportunities are provided to local residents.



Montreat LandCare

www.landofsky.org/planning/p_landcare.htm

The town of Montreat is an amenity-rich, tourist attracting, second home heaven located near Asheville, North Carolina and the Great Smokey Mountain National Park. The town commission, in conjunction with the Land-of-Sky Regional Council, promotes Montreat as the first "landcare town" in North Carolina. The Montreat Landcare Group encourages stream restoration, brook trout reintroduction, environmental education programs, smart growth, and even electric vehicle programs. The town wants to more fully incorporate sustainability and landcare principles into its organizational culture and policies because the landcare approach, as a compliment to regulations and land use restrictions, involves citizens and encouraging landowners to 'care' for the land rather than simply obey laws.



Successful Landcare

People in different places with different problems are coming to the same conclusion; we need to care for the land and the opportunities and services it provides. A healthy and thriving landscape relies on a healthy economy and a thriving community to sustain it. It requires not only the commitment and care of citizens, but also the cooperation of local, state, and federal agencies, elected officials, private industry, and nonprofit organizations to achieve results, in other words, the whole community. The concept of landcare captures this desire and direction in its emphasis on the triple bottom line of communities, and the means of achieving it through the formation of community landcare groups and networks.

Partnerships are key to successful landcare efforts because our problems and solutions cross institutional, professional, jurisdictional, disciplinary, and property boundaries. Individually we come up short on vision and resources. Collectively, working in partnerships, we make progress towards the goals we share. So many local, state, regional, and national agencies, organizations, businesses and foundations are involved supporting landcare that we can't mention them all here, but for illustrative purposes, some of the groups investing their time, talent, and resources into the landcare groups illustrated above include the following: land trusts such as the New River Land Trust; philanthropic foundations such as the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation; regional councils such as Land of Sky; planning commissions such as Grayson County Planning Commission; conservation districts such as the New River Soil and Water Conservation District; RC&D councils such as the New River Highlands Resource Conservation & Development Council; universities such as Virginia Tech; federal agencies such as USDA; state agencies such as Virginia Department of Forestry; business associations such as Carroll-Grayson Cattle Producers Association; politicians such as Virginia's US Congressman Rick Boucher's Office; businesses such as Food City; water utilities such as Western Virginia Water Authority; NGOs such as Appalachian Trail Conservancy and the

Pennsylvania Horticultural Society; local government programs such as Montreat's Parks and Recreation Committee and the City of Philadelphia's Neighborhood Transformation Initiative.

Forming a Community Landcare Group

As a community-based effort, it is important to have community support. Community members must be willing to lead it. Similar groups may already exist, promoting similar principles. Partnerships are crucial so goals must be inclusive and the process collaborative. Local land trusts, environmental organizations, hunting and fishing groups, civic organizations, watershed councils, municipal committees, and homeowner's associations may be able to lend organizational support. Many tools exist to help landcare groups form and make a difference. Resources and national partner agencies are listed below:

- National Association of Regional Councils - www.narc.org/activities/environment/green-infrastructure-and-landcare.html
- National Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils - www.rcdnet.org
- National Association of Conservation Districts - www.nacdnet.org
- Landcare Central - www.landcarecentral.org

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