

Village and Wilderness



YEAR IN REVIEW

Village &
Wilderness



LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear friend and supporter,

Thanks to your support, each year brings new insights and affirmation that the Village and Wilderness approach works. This year's pilot Incubator Fund, part of our broader *Microhabitat AcceleratorSM*, reminded us just how much possibility still lies ahead.

We launched the Incubator Fund to help new microhabitat initiatives take root in places where they're most needed but least likely to emerge on their own, from low-income urban neighborhoods to rural communities fragmented by agriculture. What we discovered was both humbling and inspiring.

We found national partners such as Pollinator Pathway and watershed alliances who helped spread our message and recruit new programs. We also saw programs that began in more affluent areas reaching across divides to support underserved communities, and Soil and Water Conservation Districts eager to serve the broader public beyond the traditional ranchers and farmers. With modest seed funding and shared purpose—and hundreds of offices—they are becoming some of the microhabitat movement's most promising new allies.

We were gratified to hear how much our *Microhabitat Program Manual* helped new programs design strategies that are equitable, evidence-based, and built to last. Yet what our participants valued most was the Practitioners Circle, where leaders pose questions and share practical experience and new ideas. An emerging sense of shared purpose is transforming small, local beginnings into a national movement of ecological and community restoration.

The pages that follow tell that story: of programs seeded, ideas tested, and communities connected. They show a growing network of independent microhabitat programs that believe restoring nature begins right where we live, and are strengthened when joined together.

With gratitude,

Tom Chase

Executive Director

Village and Wilderness





OVERVIEW

In 2025, Village and Wilderness deepened its role as a national catalyst for the microhabitat movement, uniting community-based programs across the country and helping them restore biodiversity, strengthen climate resilience, and build a culture of stewardship.

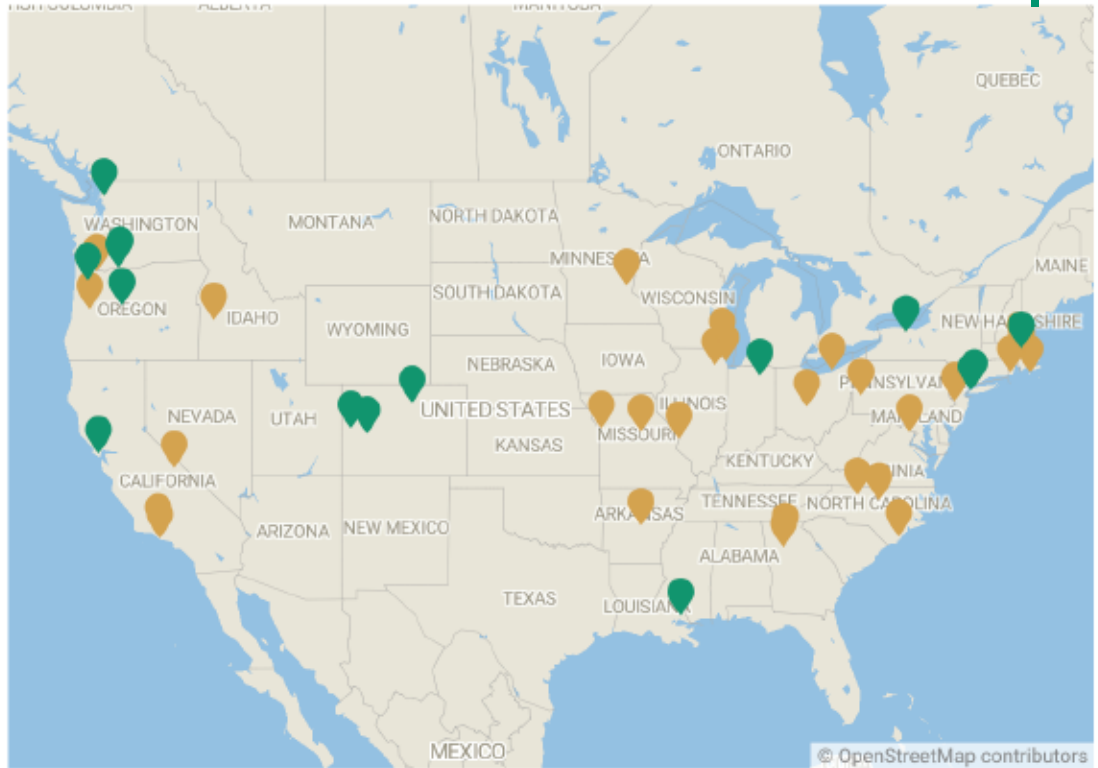
Through our flagship initiative, the Microhabitat AcceleratorSM, we are expanding the reach and effectiveness of locally led programs that transform small spaces—yards, school grounds, roadsides, and campuses—into connected networks for wildlife and people alike.

Our work this year focused on three key priorities:



- Incubating new microhabitat programs in communities across the country
- Incentivizing innovation to strengthen ecological and social impact
- Building training and peer-learning networks through workshops and our Practitioners Circle

Together, these efforts are shaping a coordinated, resilient, and hopeful model of community-based conservation.





Created with Datawrapper

SYMBOL	EXPLANATION	NUMBER
	Established microhabitat programs in Practitioners Circle	30
	Incubator Grant-supported programs (newly launched and under development)	15



THE INCUBATOR FUND

Launched in early 2025, the Incubator Fund helps new microhabitat programs take root in communities for the benefit of humans and biodiversity.

Each successful applicant receives a \$1,000 planning grant to develop a strong, equitable, and measurable program plan. Once that plan is complete, the group earns a \$5,000 startup grant to begin implementation and joins our national community of practice, the Practitioners Circle, where they learn alongside peers and veteran program leaders.

To date, about 48 percent of applicants have qualified for funding—many of them Soil and Water Conservation Districts, an especially promising partner network at a time when public conservation funds are shrinking. These small grants are proving remarkably catalytic, helping communities design practical, locally grounded responses to climate adaptation and biodiversity loss.

"V&W's Incubator Grant and guidance have been phenomenally helpful with starting our local microhabitat movement here in Southeast Louisiana. It allows us to engage with folks that we would have never been able to. The grant has helped us utilize technical assistance from professionals and create high quality informational materials that inspire homeowners to contribute to local conservation."

- Jacob Bopp, People's Forest Foundation, Abita Springs, Louisiana

THE



CATALYST FUND

Initiated in 2024, the Catalyst Fund supports Practitioners Circle members developing replicable, community-tested solutions to challenges that microhabitat programs commonly face. With our wide view across programs and regions, Village and Wilderness identifies emerging needs and invests in the most innovative ideas that can advance the field. The projects below give a sample of their innovation:

Bexley Habitat Triangle (Bexley, OH)

Created a volunteer-driven model to renaturalize entire blocks, boosting habitat and community ties.

"V&W's Catalyst Grant enabled us to elevate our microhabitat program to the next level for biodiversity, focusing on restoring habitat for an entire neighborhood rather than individual yards."

- Rebecca Ness, Bexley Habitat Triangle, Bexley, Ohio



MiniNature Reserve (Oxnard, CA)

Developed a toolkit for volunteers to rewild neglected roadsides in multi-ethnic neighborhoods.



Deep Roots (Kansas City, MO)

Designed a volunteer scheduling system that halved admin time while doubling enrolled sites.



The Conservation Foundation (Chicago, IL)

Built a sustainable high school microhabitat program with curricula and partnerships.





Openlands (Chicago, IL)

Designed comprehensive native-plant demonstration sites to track and publish cost data to benefit the region's landscaping contractor community.



New Hope Bird Alliance (Chapel Hill, NC)

Created a toolkit for Audubon chapters to launch bird-friendly programs.

"Because of a Catalyst Grant from V&W, we were able to work with the region's community of landscaping contractors to better understand how creating and tending microhabitats may be a profitable alternative to traditional landscaping."

- Gerardo Trujillo, Lands in Harmony, Openlands, Chicago, IL

THE



PRACTITIONERS CIRCLE

At the heart of Village and Wilderness is the Practitioners Circle, the national community of practice that connects both established and emerging microhabitat programs. Through bi-monthly video conferences, members share new strategies, learn from Catalyst Fund grantees, and engage directly with scientists and peers. This year, we augmented learning resources in several ways:

- **Fundraising Training Series** — “Rooted Resources” equips community leaders to cultivate community-based private philanthropy as government grants recede.
- **Fieldwide Innovation Pilots** — helping programs by developing resources such as a directory of microhabitat programs on college campuses, or “how-to” guidance for partnering with Master Gardener and Master Naturalist programs to recruit and train habitat advisors.
- **Peer Learning Tools** — new “office hours” virtual sessions and a listserv for real-time exchange.

Because Village and Wilderness has a national, multi-organizational perspective, we can recognize emerging opportunities that individual community programs may not see—and create shared resources that no single organization could develop alone.



“V&W has been instrumental in the rapid growth and remarkable success of Nature in My Backyard. Through their funding of exploration into best-fit scheduling systems, along with their support of a mentor who shared this learning, I was able to confidently implement a new scheduling platform that nearly tripled our program capacity. Beyond the platform itself, the free flow of information and resources, and the ongoing moral support that Village and Wilderness offers, have been key to our success.”

- Jane Ellison, Nature in My Backyard, Shaker Heights, OH



"Thanks to V&W, we've realized the impacts of our microhabitat program beyond our own community; we are part of a national movement"

- Chris Cardwell, Nature Advisors, Deep Roots KC, Kansas City, MO

LOOKING AHEAD: FROM LEARNING TO LEADERSHIP

Over the past two years, Village and Wilderness has built a strong national community of practice and launched pilot initiatives that are now transforming that community into a true microhabitat movement. From these collective efforts, we've learned powerful lessons—lessons that now guide our next chapter of growth.

INCUBATOR FUND: Growing Through Decentralization

One of the most effective ways to help new microhabitat initiatives succeed, especially in underserved communities, is through mentorship from nearby, experienced programs. Across the country, many startups already look to a handful of these leaders for guidance. These mentoring programs differ in ecology, culture, and structure, but they share a common strength: strong, proven, and replicable practices. Their challenge, however, is that their missions and resources are rightly focused on their own communities, leaving little time to support others.

Next phase: Through our Incubator Fund and direct coaching from Village and Wilderness, establish at least one “hub” program in every major ecoregion of the United States—each equipped not only to thrive locally, but also to mentor and empower emerging programs in neighboring communities, helping the movement grow from the ground up.

CATALYST FUND: Measuring Success by Culture, Not Just Acreage

Our Catalyst projects revealed a powerful truth: ecological restoration thrives where community relationships take root. In Bexley, Ohio, the Bexley Habitat Triangle project showed that renaturalizing an entire block doesn't just expand habitat—it builds belonging. When native landscapes become the neighborhood norm, stewardship becomes self-sustaining. Conversely, isolated yards often revert to conventional lawns when ownership changes. Sustainability, we've learned, is measured not only in acres restored but in the strength of a shared culture of care that keeps those acres alive.

Next phase: Develop more neighborhood-scale strategies—each adapted to its social and ecological context—and create practical metrics that measure how microhabitat programs nurture lasting stewardship within communities.



PRACTITIONERS CIRCLE: Knowledge Is the Catalyst

The Practitioners Circle has become the heart of the movement. Members come not for funding, but for learning—for access to scientists, innovators, researchers, and peers who help them solve problems and shape new ideas. Through this network, insights flow across regions, translating national trends into local solutions. Our Advisory Council has shown that emerging challenges—like climate adaptation, volunteer engagement, and social cohesion—are best understood collectively and applied locally.

Next phase: Expand the Advisory Council to include experts in community organizing, equity, fundraising, research partnerships, and urban wildlife management. Connect them directly to members through the Circle's listserv, newsletter, and workshops so their expertise can strengthen programs nationwide.



THE MOVEMENT: Leading by Learning

Working alongside community-based programs across the country gives Village and Wilderness a rare perspective—one that reveals opportunities and patterns invisible from the ground. We see how microhabitat programs can do more than restore nature: they can bridge divides, make neighborhoods more livable, and reconnect fragmented landscapes as the climate changes. We also see how stronger ecological, social, and economic metrics can earn lasting support from funders and policymakers.

Next phase: Take a visible leadership role in shaping the national conversation by sharing insights through articles, media features, and collaborations that inspire others to join, invest in, and strengthen this growing movement of local stewardship and renewal.

A CALL TO ACTION



"We support Village and Wilderness because a donation to them is not only a gift to our own community, but to many others around the country, including those who need it most."

- Anne and Brian Mazar

The microhabitat movement has reached a new phase. We now know what works—how small programs can take root, multiply, and endure. What we need now are the resources to bring these lessons to scale, deepen our partnerships, and ensure that every region in the country has access to the tools and networks that make community-based conservation thrive.

Your support can make that possible.



Scan here to donate

Village & Wilderness



Helping communities adapt to climate change through
small-scale restoration and a culture of stewardship.

Images throughout this report are courtesy of Village and Wilderness and our program partners, including The Conservation Foundation, the Bexley Habitat Triangle (Green Bexley), MiniNature Reserve, Deep Roots KC, Openlands, and New Hope Bird Alliance, unless otherwise noted.

www.villageandwilderness.org | info@villageandwilderness.org

Village and Wilderness Project Inc. is a nonprofit organization recognized as tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Contributions are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law.

EIN: 85-14868283