



ICC Presentation to the Principal Staff Committee

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Agenda

- Sovereignty 101 & Our Declaration
- Connections to CBP Goals
- Indigenous Guardians Programs
- Intertribal Consortia
- ICC Programs & Capacity
- Partnership Opportunities
- Q&A

Sovereignty 101: A Very, Very Short Primer

“Only tribes who maintain a legal relationship to the US government through binding treaties, acts of Congress, executive orders, etc., are officially “recognized” by the federal government. Once “recognized” a tribe has a legal relationship with the United States.”

–Native American Rights Fund

Federally recognized tribes are not stakeholders or the general public, they are Sovereign Nations.

“As the U.S. Supreme Court has affirmed, Indian Tribes are a unique political class, not a racial one, and their sovereignty and trust relationship with the federal government must be upheld.”

-Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), [February 5, 2025](#)

Want to learn more about Tribal Sovereignty? Attend the 5th Annual [Sovereign Nations of Virginia Conference](#) on September 18, 2025; [Resources to Learn About Tribal Sovereignty](#)

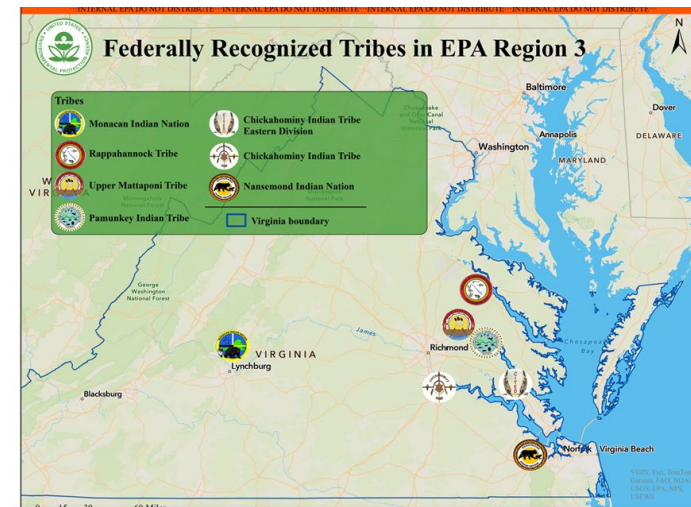


Sovereignty in the Chesapeake Bay Program

INDIGENOUS INVOLVEMENT IN ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION: AN ANALYSIS OF VIRGINIA'S SOVEREIGN NATIONS INVOLVEMENT IN THE CHESAPEAKE BAY PROGRAM

–Nicole Holmes Brooks (Passamaquoddy, Penobscot), UMCES, Master's Dissertation, Presented to the Indigenous Conservation Council Board of Directors on April 16, 2024

1. What is the current relationship between the Chesapeake Bay Program and the Sovereign Nations of Virginia?
2. How do the power dynamics between the CBP and stakeholders affect the involvement of Virginia Sovereign Nations in the Bay's restoration?
3. What aspects of government-directed environmental projects could be positively affected with more Virginia Sovereign Nations involvement and relationship improvement on the Chesapeake Bay?



A Declaration

A Declaration of Tribal Nations as Sovereign Governments Committed to the Protection and Restoration of Ancestral Lands and Waters through the Chesapeake Bay Program Partnership, Approved January 15, 2025

The resolution advances sovereignty, recognizes the unique political government-to-government relationships federally recognized tribes hold with the US federal government and states and key opportunities to meaningfully boost restoration and conservation efforts in the Bay region by:

1. Developing a true partnership with Sovereign Nations to reinforce a mutual duty of care for ancestral landscapes and the Chesapeake Bay watershed by **creating a signatory status for Tribal Nations via the Indigenous Conservation Council;**
2. **Creating a new Indigenous Guardians Program funding program** with Tribal Nations as the recipients to inspire new models of conservation that around the world have proven to accelerate the pace, effectiveness, and participation in conservation; and,
3. **Honoring Indigenous Knowledge across the Chesapeake Bay Program** as on par with western science to restore biodiversity, clean drinking water, and protect cultural resources.

[Full Resolution](#)



Connections to Chesapeake Bay Program Goals

Healthy Landscapes

Conservation
Restoration

Clean Water

Water quality
Toxins

Engaged Communities

Stewardship through
Education, Recreation,
Professional Opportunities

Thriving Habitat & Wildlife

Sustainable Fisheries
Wildlife & Recreation

Tribal Nations in Virginia are:

- Partnering to conserve and co-manage ancestral lands, farms, forests, wetlands
- Developing TMDLs via certification as Treatment as a State; EPA approved water quality monitoring for PFAS and pollutants
- Providing environmental literacy programming toward MWEs
- Partnering on research to expand knowledge to protect and restore cultural species of importance and enhance fish passage
- Supporting ecotourism and native plant and seed nurseries
- Helping to restore living shorelines, large scale oyster reefs, and freshwater shellfish
- And more...

Indigenous Guardians

Sometimes called Rangers or Sentinels, Indigenous Guardians help Indigenous Nations honor their responsibility to care for lands, waters, and species.

Guardians serve as the eyes, ears, hearts on traditional territories. They use their Indigenous Knowledge to revitalize and heal ancestral lands, enhance monitoring and restoration, and honor their heritage and culture. Indigenous Guardians are employed tribal citizens who are paid to be on the land and engage other tribal citizens in healing their landscapes and exercise their treaty rights. Guardians represent a way to build capacity supporting whole communities and ecosystems.

The new Tribal Stewardship & Sovereignty Network (TSSN) brings together Guardians programs across the U.S. to share knowledge, experience, and provide resources to make caring for their territories easier and more effective.

We are bringing Indigenous Guardians to the Chesapeake!



“They tried to get rid of the buffalo, and they tried to get rid of the Indian. Now our cultural ways are making a comeback and so are the buffalo.”

Credit: Darrell Hall (Blackfeet)

Tribal- Federal- State Coastal Watershed Best Practices & Intertribal Consortium

- Supporting Forest Health through Cultural Fire ([Yurok](#))
- Increasing the Resilience of Shellfish to Ocean Acidification through Clam Gardening ([Swinomish](#))
- Reducing Pollutants and Carbon Sequestration through River Cane Restoration ([Keetoowah Band of Cherokee](#))
- Increasing Biodiversity and Food Sovereignty through Indigenous Agro-Forestry ([Hoopa Valley Tribe](#))
- Enhancing Soil Health, Culture and Habitat through Native Seed Banks ([Cherokee Nation](#))



PUGET SOUND PARTNERSHIP

(Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission)



Supports Partnership-wide representation, co-management, and Indigenous leadership with specific governance structures to foster collaboration for shared objectives and priorities between Sovereign Nations, federal and state governments to honor treaty rights, trust obligations, and Indigenous Knowledge.

GREAT LAKES TRIBAL RESTORATION INITIATIVE

(Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission)



Co-management and engagement since 2010 resulting in the successful restoration of 150,000 acres of habitat, invasive species monitoring and removal, and cultural programming across 800 projects. \$113M in federal funding allocated to date for Indigenous-led projects.

CALIFORNIA

(Tribal Marine Stewardship Network)



First ever Indigenous Marine Stewardship Area declared to foster collaboration and affirm sovereignty over Indigenous territorial areas. The Network provides training, co-management support, and resources to support tribal- federal-state partnerships and co-management.

Founded with a Purpose to Serve: Indigenous Conservation Council

Our Vision: Tribal Nations in the Chesapeake region are leading rematriation efforts of ancestral landscapes in ways that **support the care, repair, and Indigenous connections** needed to protect cultural heritage for future generations.

Our Mission: To build the capacity of tribal nations to rematriate and care for their lands in a manner that reinforces sovereignty and self-determination.



Photo credit: Pamela D'Angelo



Our Programs & Capacity

GOOD AGREEMENTS: Enhance the use of and support for sovereignty-led solutions for rematriation.

-NARF Tribal Homelands Coalition; Protecting Mother Earth Collective

SEEING & AWARENESS: Boost the capability of tribal nations to harness their sovereignty to sense and protect ancestral landscapes from emerging threats.

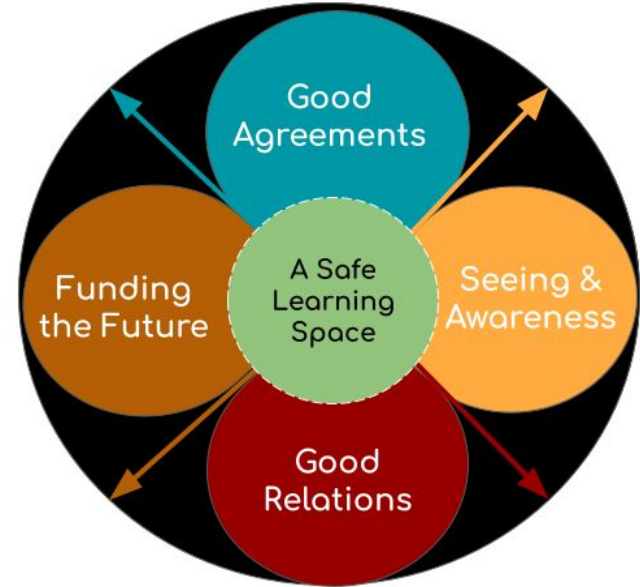
-Esri Native Nations; TribalGIS; USGS; Commonwealth of Virginia

GOOD RELATIONS: Develop leadership, training, and partnerships to protect and care for ancestral lands.

-Tribal Stewardship & Sovereignty Network; Chesapeake Conservation Partnership; Virginia Security Corridor Sentinel Landscape; Virginia Conservation Network; Choose Clean Water Coalition; Virginia United Land Trusts, Rappahannock River Roundtable; Shenandoah National Park Trust

FUNDING THE FUTURE: Create the flexible resources, both funding and non-extractive financing, needed to rematriate ancestral landscapes

-US Forest Service Private Ecosystem Markets; Conservation Finance Network; National Indian Carbon Coalition; First Nations Development Institute Reimagining Conservation Finance



[Strategic Plan 2024-2026](#), Approved April 2024

Our Theory of Change

Of the estimated total land area of Virginia, 25.27 million acres, over 4.28 million acres or 16.96% is "currently protected". June, 2023

GROUP	EASEMENTS	FEE-SIMPLE	TOTAL ACRES CONSERVED	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL
Federal	14,692.77	2,339,253.35	2,353,946.12	54.92%
State	986,712.51	450,121.80	1,436,834.31	33.52%
Local	48,599.35	110,463.06	159,062.42	3.71%
Non-Profit	234,067.59	101,815.69	335,883.28	7.84%
Tribal	0.00	504.00	504.00	0.01%
TOTALS:	1,284,072.21	3,002,157.91	4,286,230.12	100.00%

When Indigenous people are on the land and able to care for those lands; lands, waters, and communities will become whole and healthy.

To move toward a fully connected and healthy Indigenous cultural landscape, we are developing a **new tribal lands metric** to identify areas for protection, partnership, and care within the Chesapeake Bay Program Partnership...



Tribal Lands Methodology

Strategic
Measureable
Ambitious
Realistic
Time-bound

Inclusive
Equitable



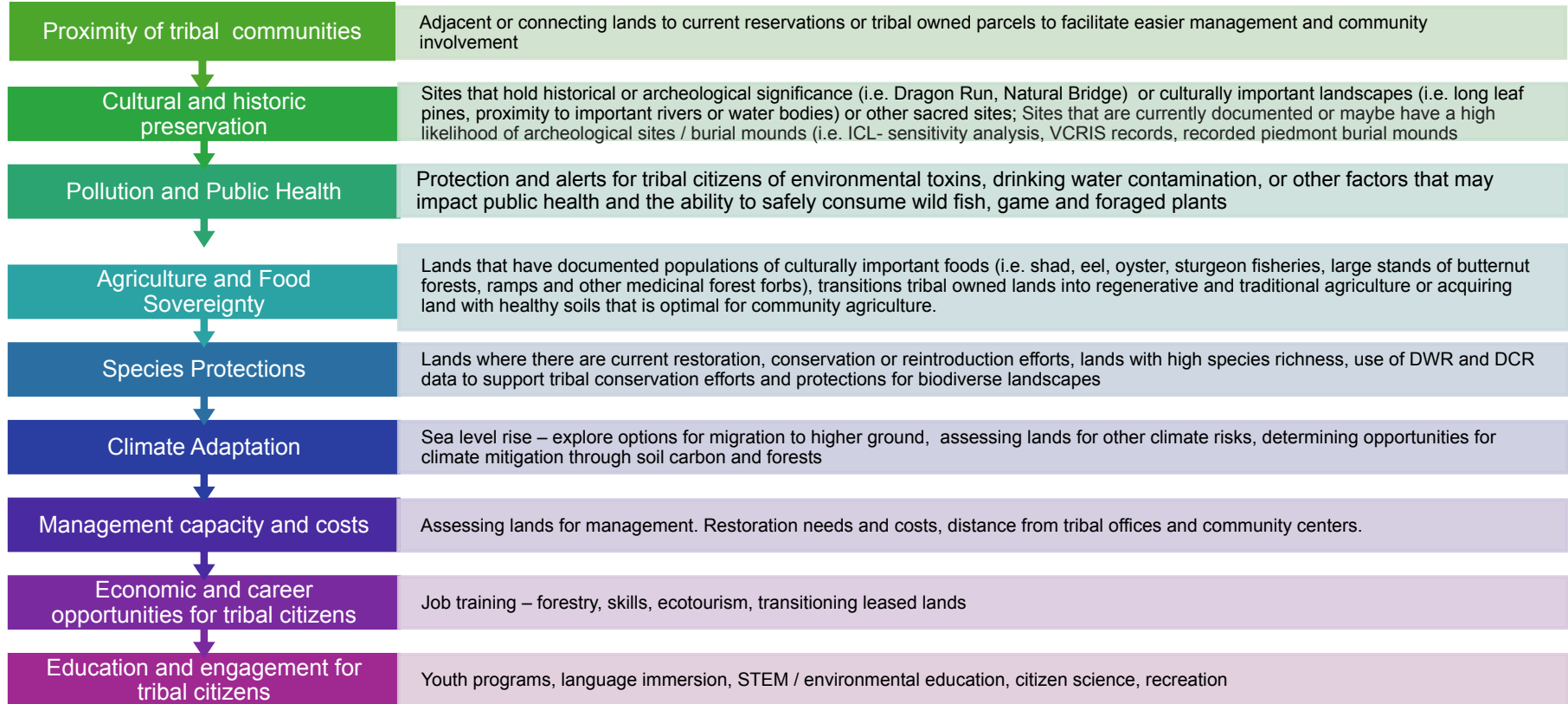
Title Ownership (Federal or State Trust, Fee Title, Reservation Designation)

Conservation Agreements and Cultural Access agreements on lands held by partners (land trusts, 501c3, etc)

Co-management, co-stewardship, cooperative federalism agreements on public lands

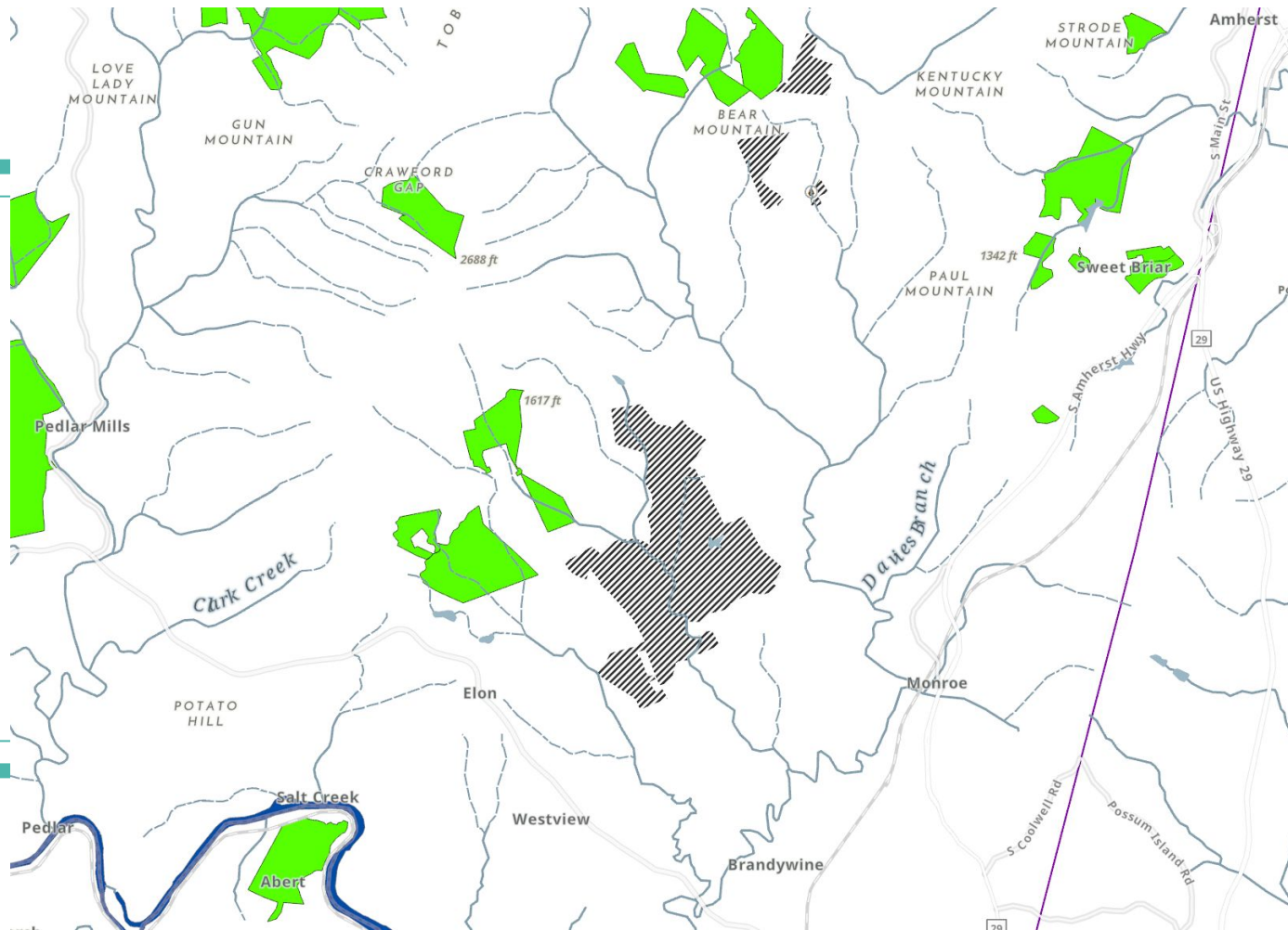
Combinations of 2 and 3

Support the sovereignty and duty of care of Tribal Nations and communities by securing protection status and/or co-management agreements for a total of XX acres of tribal homelands



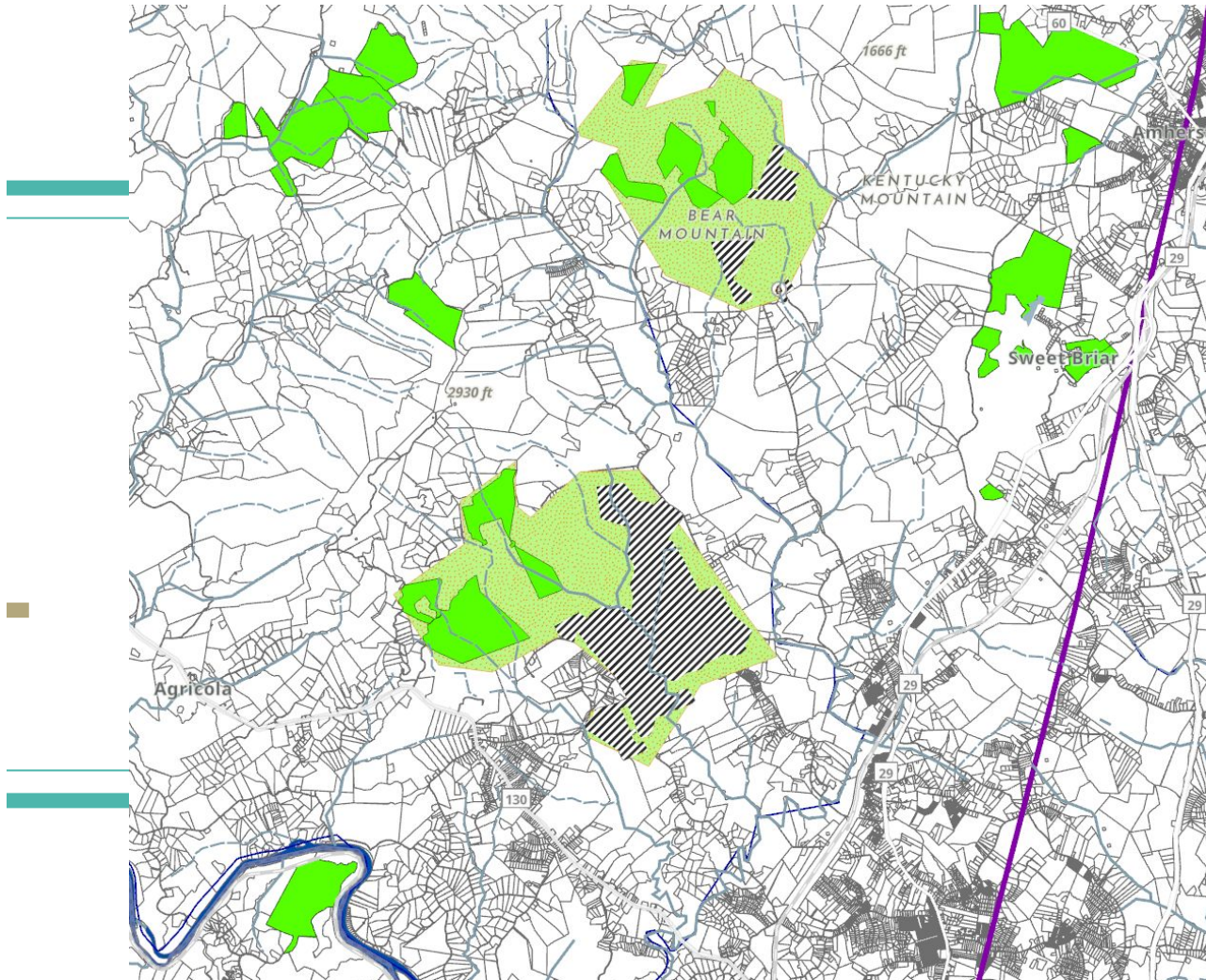
Step 1: Digitized
all current tribal
owned parcels

Spatialize with
protected lands
layer

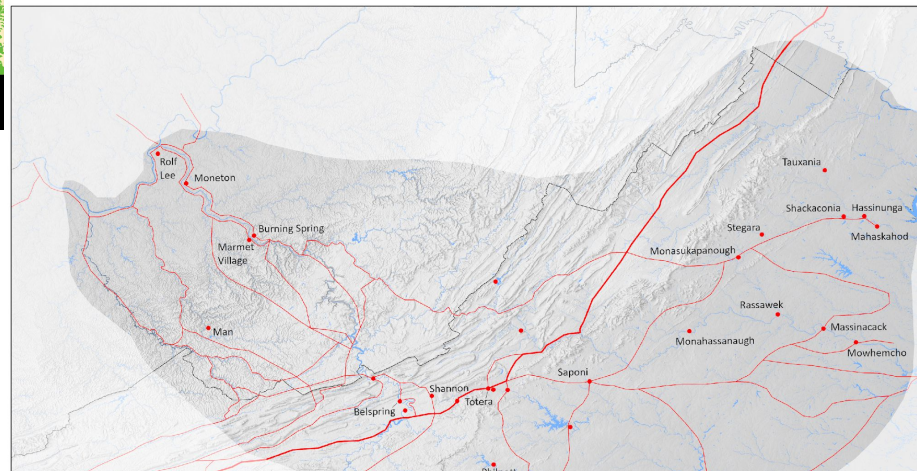
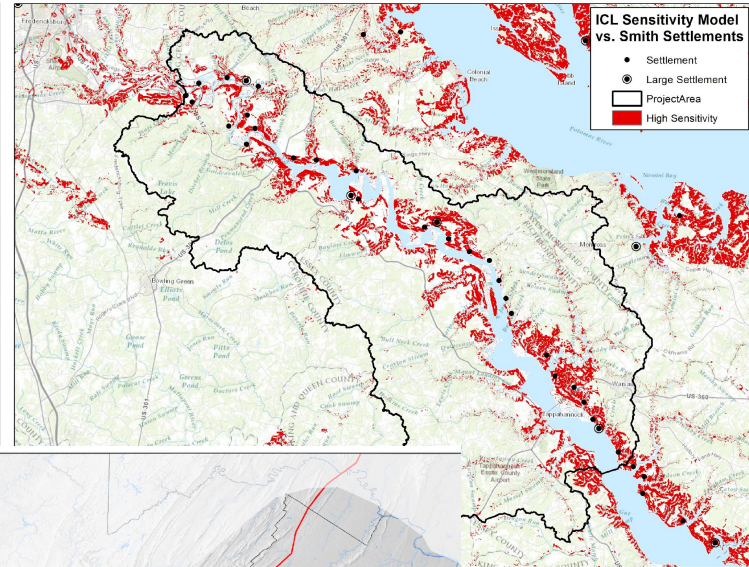
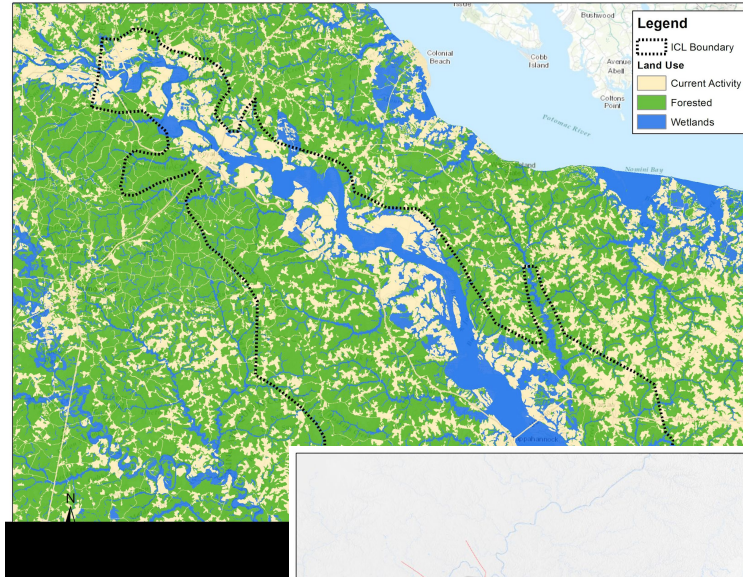


Step 2: Prioritize
interconnected
landscapes

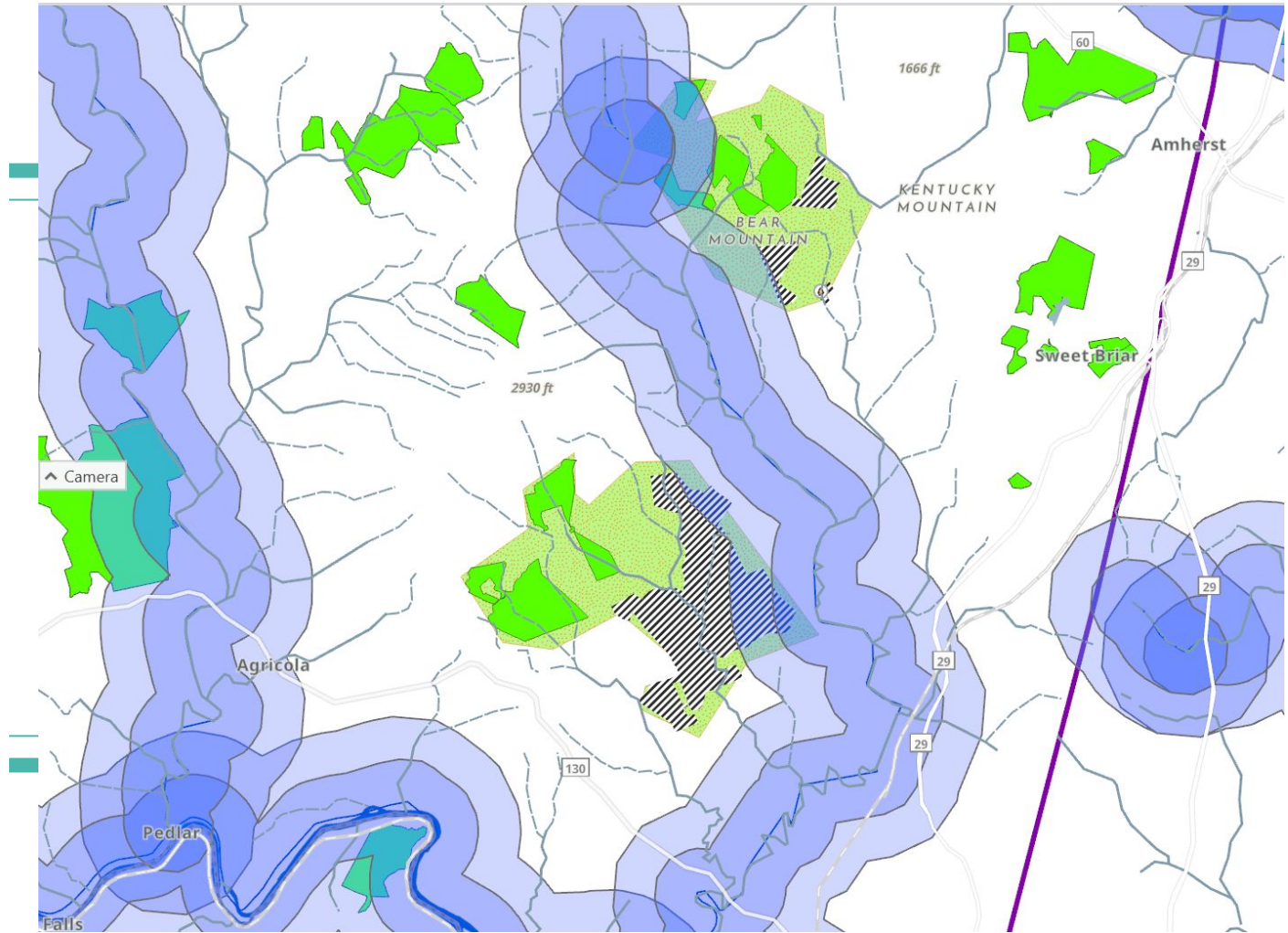
Create polygon
corridors to
connect tribal
owned lands
with protected
lands



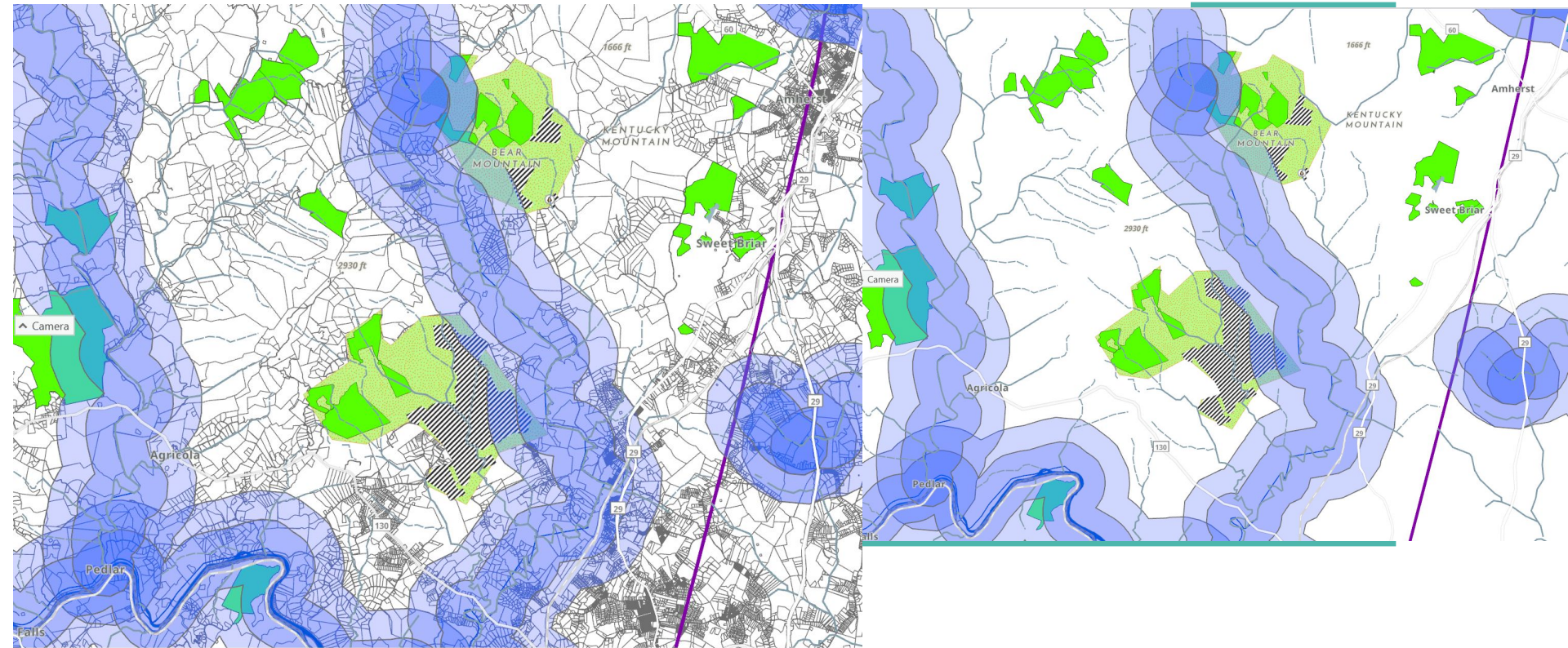
Step 3: Identify Indigenous Cultural Landscapes of Interest



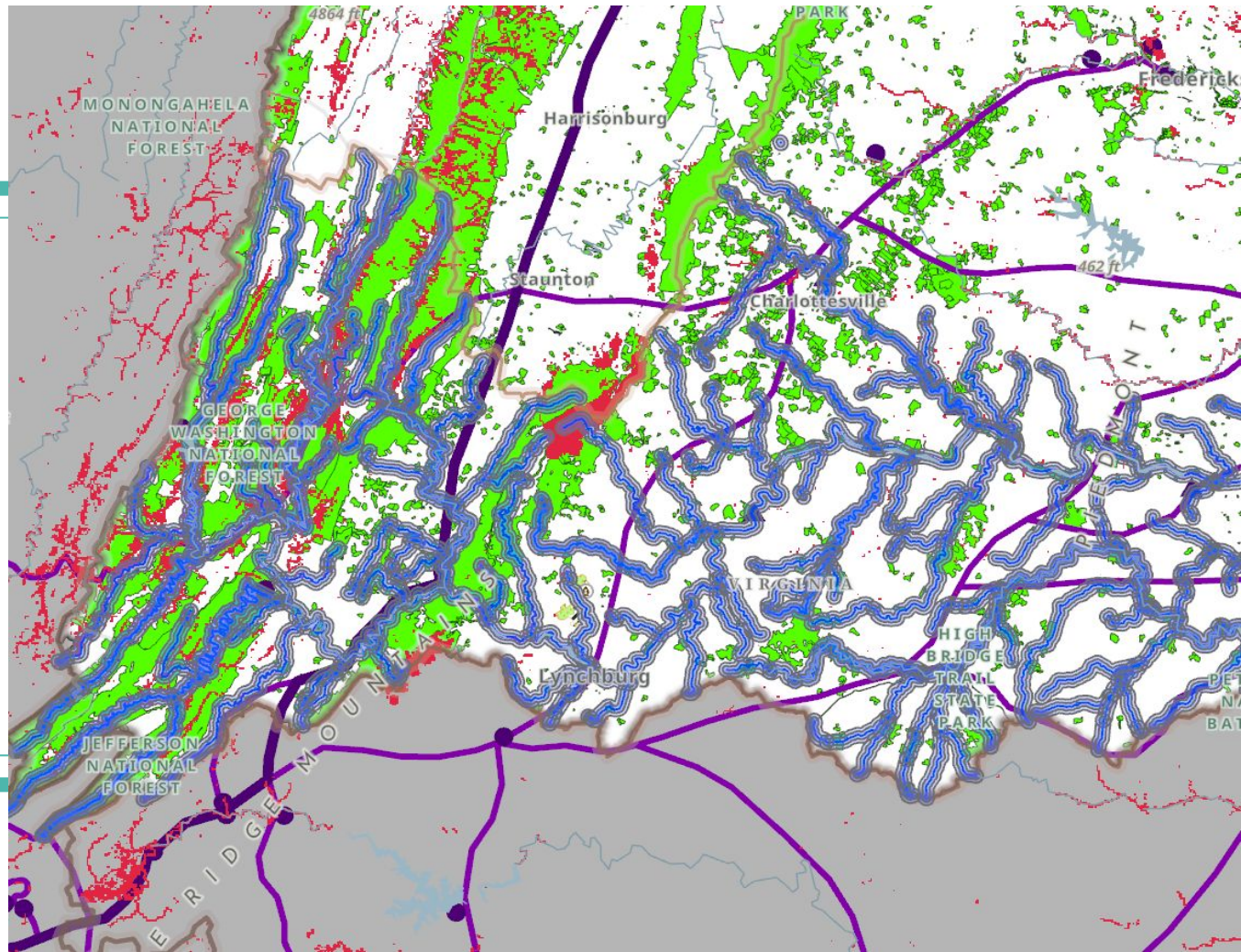
Step 4: Create boundaries to consider important land features for conservation priorities (e.g. riparian buffers)



Step 5: Analyze current parcels within the priority areas



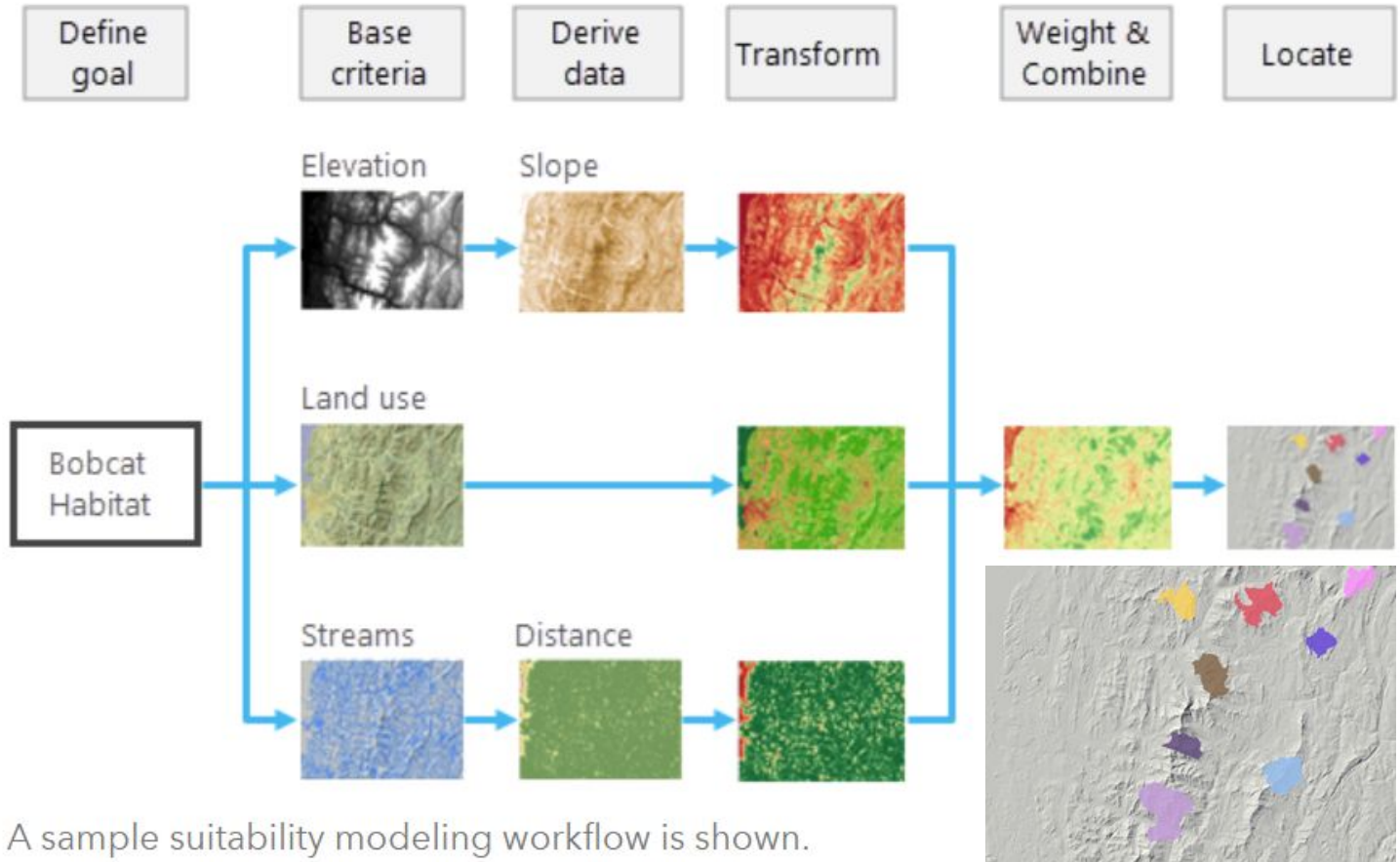
Step 6:
Explore
Biodiversity
and Land
Values



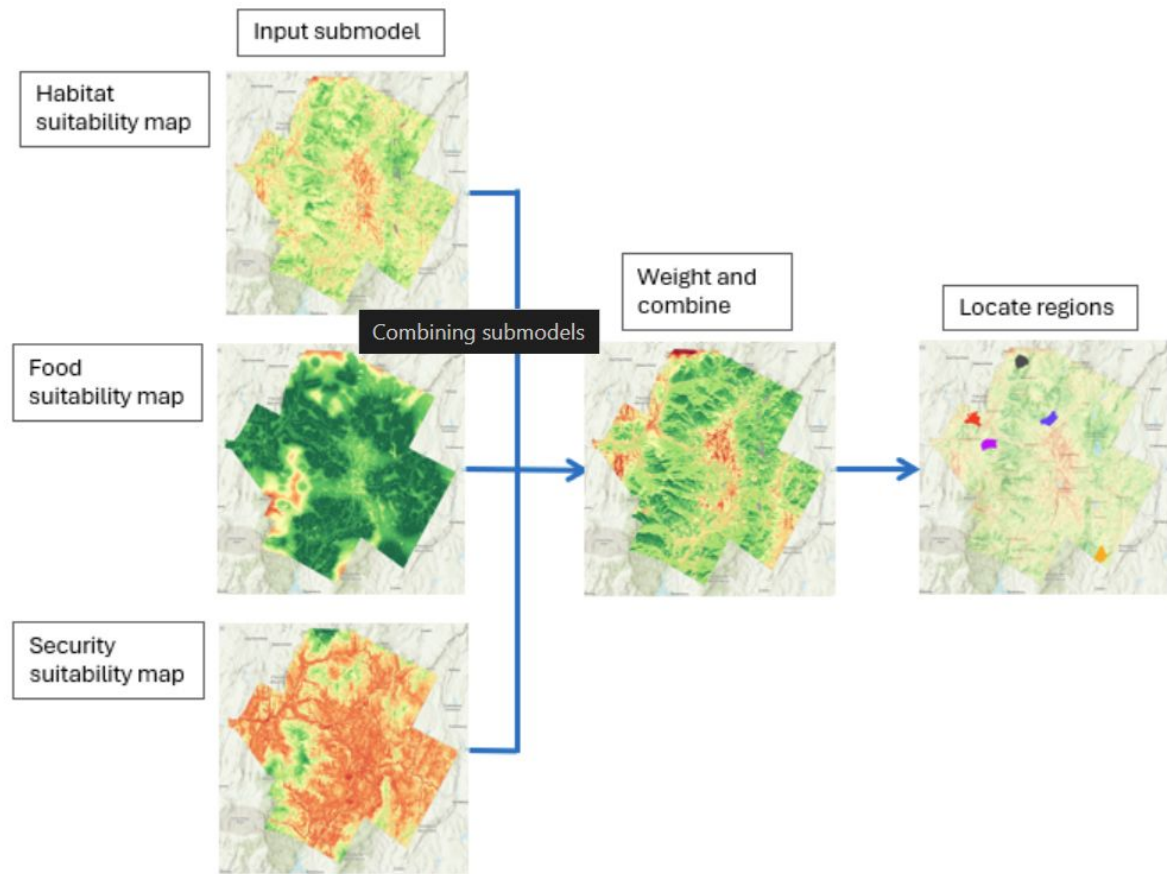
Possible Next Steps:

Suitability Modeler

The following image illustrates the sample suitability model workflow:

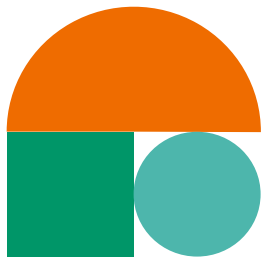


Can be applied to tribal priorities (i.e. wild rice suitability model for Great Lakes)



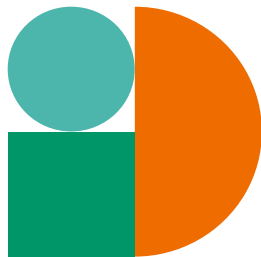
The habitat, food, and security suitability maps are combined to create a composite suitability map integrating the three objectives from which the locations to conserve are identified. In the suitability maps, areas shaded green are most preferred and the least suitable areas are in red. The regions in the Locate map clearly fall within the green areas.

What we want



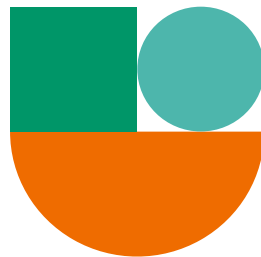
A SEAT AT THE TABLE

Agreement to add as a signatory; drafting a new Executive Charge to accomplish this



RESPECT FOR INDIGENOUS GUARDIANSHIP

Specific language on Indigenous Guardians, co-development of research, or commitment to increased tribal capacity building to actually care for ancestral landscapes



TRIBAL LANDS = LEGAL AGREEMENTS FOR TENURE

We want to advocate for tribal lands that get us to legal agreements that can delineate aboriginal title rights to enhance long-term connections, care, and treaty rights

“It's essential to emphasize that incorporating Indigenous Knowledge into decision-making is not just a best practice—it is both an ethical and legal responsibility.”

–Dana Adkins, Chickahominy Indian Tribe

