Partnering for Resilient Local Communities

Individuals and communities from the southern West Virginia coalfields to the coastal plain of North Carolina are struggling to find their footing as economic upheaval adversely impacts their livelihoods and future. Simply put, rural communities are being left behind.

In this shifting economic landscape, Natural Capital Investment Fund’s support for green small businesses and vital community services across Central Appalachia and the Southeast is more critical than ever. We’re providing the smart, transformational capital and assistance that enterprising individuals can marshal to address these challenges—one business at a time. We invite you to read their stories throughout this report.

You’ll also read about our recently launched strategic initiatives, which pair innovative capital with targeted business advisory services to “double down” for added impact in coal-affected communities. We believe capital alone is not enough; to make capital “stick,” we devote resources to assisting entrepreneurs so they can make the best possible use of our loans.

We can’t do this work alone. We rely on a wide range of partners (whose names are italicized throughout this report) to supplement our leadership with their advisory services, funding and sector knowledge. This report documents how together we’re helping grow enterprises that are building healthy local food systems; creating wealth for women and people of color; forging a just transition in coal country; and finding energy and value in waste streams.

We’re grateful for our financial partners—the impact investors, foundations and lending institutions who support NCIFund’s efforts. We welcome you to join them and invest in our work.

Marten Jenkins, CEO

Growing Impact (in millions)

Since 2001, we’ve invested $59.1 million in 392 loans to 301 businesses and nonprofits.

Since 2001, 5,368 jobs have been created and retained.

In 2018, we provided 4,058 hours of assistance to 510 businesses and farms.

In 2018, 75% of our loans supported businesses in economically distressed communities.

In 2018, 55% of our loans went to women and entrepreneurs of color.

In 2018, 69% of our loans supported rural businesses.

2014 2015 2016 2017 2018

Total Assets Loans Outstanding

Front cover photos: (left to right) © Bill Bamberger, Joe Klementovich, Robin McKinney, Bill Bamberger, Sam Levitan, NCIFund, mtvSolar Washington Homeopathic Products, Bill Bamberger, Bill Bamberger; Back cover photo: © Ivan LaBianca
Who We Fund:
Lending by Sector, 2001–2018

- Local Foods and Value-Added Agriculture
- Ecotourism and Heritage Tourism
- Breweries and Cideries
- Consumer Products/Services
- Health, Education and Community Services
- Production Agriculture
- Main Street Redevelopment
- Natural Medicine/Products
- Recycling and Environmental Services
- Manufacturing and Technology
- Secondary Forest Products
- Business Services
- Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency
Healthy, Local Meats

The only independent farm-to-table beef company in Morgantown, West Virginia, Working H Meats sells its beef locally, and its owners, the Hardesty family, have taught their Amish neighbors to raise cattle as a way to offset lost income from the declining dairy industry. With NCIFund loans and technical assistance, the family has purchased a butcher shop and opened a second store, leading to increased profitability.

Supporting Farmers of Color

NCIFund provides financing and targeted assistance to help retain black-owned farmland in North Carolina. Our Accounting Assistance for Disadvantaged Farmers program, funded by the NC Tobacco Trust Fund Commission, helps farmers obtain quality tax preparation services at a reduced cost.

We also facilitate access to programs like Natural Resources Conservation Service's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Wilbert Jeffries of Reidsville, North Carolina sells vegetables and pink oyster and turkey tail mushrooms to local retail markets. NCIFund’s “bridge” loan provided the upfront funding he needed to build a hoop house, obtain a reimbursable EQIP grant and expand production.

Helping Farmers Rebuild After Disasters

In 2018, Hurricanes Florence and Michael did more than $1.1 billion in damage to farms in North Carolina. To help small farmers recover and invest in new strategies to grow their farms, NCIFund joined the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (CFSA) and Rural Advancement Foundation International USA (RAFI-USA) to create the RESEED Recovery Fund. RESEED was able to provide loans at 1 percent interest thanks to funding from Wells Fargo, loan guarantees for farmers committed to sustainable practices from CFSA, and financial counseling from RAFI-USA.
After 18 years working for others, pharmacist Darius Russell was ready to start his own pharmacy. He and his wife, Terensia, opened Russell's Pharmacy & Shoppe in a historically underserved African-American neighborhood in Durham, North Carolina. We funded Russell's startup inventory and working capital. Located in an old bank building renovated by our sister CDFI Self-Help, Russell's provides East Durham with much-needed, personalized pharmaceutical care and four well-paying jobs.

In 2018, women and people of color received 55% of NCIFund's loans. Wells Fargo's Diverse Community Capital program helps NCIFund support historically underserved entrepreneurs.

Fostering Community Health

Preserving Asheville’s History of Music and African American Culture

The music scene in Asheville, North Carolina, is booming, but rehearsal space is hard to find. To ease the shortage, Claude Coleman Jr., drummer for alt-rock band Ween, and his business partner, Brett Spivey, are using an NCIFund loan to open SoundSpace, a recording studio and practice space. Sound Space breathes new life into Rabbit’s Motel, the only lodging available to Asheville’s African American visitors during Jim Crow; the business will feature a revamped soul food kitchen and gallery commemorating the entertainers, musicians and Negro Southern League ballplayers who stayed there.

“The loan to SoundSpace exemplifies the creative and flexible financing NCIFund is uniquely positioned to deliver. The rejuvenation of the property allows its history to be remembered and celebrated, while shaping the growing Asheville music scene.”

– J Deaver, Senior VP & Business Banking Manager, First Citizens Bank, NCIFund Board Member, and Asheville native

In 2018, the average loan in the U.S. for women-owned businesses was $48,341—31% less than the $70,239 average for male-owned businesses. – Biz2Credit Study, 2019

Based in economically underserved southern West Virginia, Kacy Korczyk’s On-Point Acupuncture Clinic offers alternative pain management and wellness services, from orthopedic acupuncture to massage therapy; doctors frequently refer veterans for treatment. NCIFund and partner United Bank funded Korczyk’s expansion to a new facility in Beckley with four times the space, creating four jobs.

“If it weren’t for NCIFund, I would have been facing this project half blind! The advice before the conception of the project was extremely beneficial, and the loan let me renovate the building and add the services that I have always wanted to offer.”

– Kacy Korczyk, Owner, On-Point Acupuncture Clinic
Facilitating a Just Transition In Coal Country
Partnering to diversify economies in communities historically dependent on a single industry

Profound economic changes are buffeting West Virginia as the state seeks ways to diversify an economy historically dependent on coal and natural resource extraction. The loss of jobs and hope have taken a toll on the health of individuals and the economies of small communities across coal country.

Sparking Downtown Redevelopment

We’re providing loans and hands-on support for commercial real estate projects to revitalize communities impacted by coal’s decline. Through our Downtown Appalachia Redevelopment Initiative, NCIFund is implementing this comprehensive impact investment strategy in partnership with the Brownfields Assistance Center at West Virginia University. The Appalachian Regional Commission POWER Initiative and the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation have helped seed a $4 million permanent revolving loan fund for these projects.

Show Me the Mon!

Each year, 3 million visitors travel to West Virginia’s Monongahela (“Mon”) National Forest. We’ve teamed up with Woodlands Community Lenders to spur recreation-based small business development in “gateway” communities through the Mon Forest Business Initiative. The Initiative seeks to improve the quality of life for residents by growing small businesses that provide vital products and services, strengthen the local economy, and capitalize on—and care for—the region’s natural and cultural assets.

Growing an Entrepreneurial Culture

For five years, we’ve partnered with the Hatfield-McCoy Regional Recreation Authority on the Southern West Virginia Tourism Initiative, with funding from the Appalachian Regional Commission POWER Initiative. Our combined capital and advisory services are building infrastructure for the Hatfield-McCoy Trails—used each year by 50,000 off-road enthusiasts—harnessing the region’s natural beauty to create jobs in coal-impacted communities. In 2018, NCIFund helped the Housing Authority of Mingo County in Williamson, West Virginia, fulfill its dual objectives of affordable housing and catalyzing economic development; we funded construction of cabins and campgrounds for Hatfield-McCoy trail users, while creating 11 local construction jobs. The Authority is redeveloping the old Sycamore Inn in town as a drug recovery facility in a local response to the state’s profound opioid epidemic. We helped the Authority secure a solar panel donation for the project, enhancing its environmental sustainability.
Finding Energy and Value in Waste

Fundamental to a greener economy is a “cradle to cradle” approach that mimics the many ways nature uses “waste” to generate new growth. NCIFund is a leader in helping entrepreneurs see and seize these opportunities.

Creating Jobs by Protecting Water Quality

For most of us, recycling means separating paper and plastic into bins at home. For Dylan Gehrken and his team at Greasecycle in Raleigh, North Carolina, it means collecting and processing over a thousand pumper trucks of used cooking oil and waste trap grease from restaurants every year. The company has demonstrated new ways to give these waste products a second life as biofuel or compost, while protecting water quality in the Neuse River watershed and creating jobs in the process.

Since NCIFund’s investment in 2012, the business has grown from four employees to 18 and from servicing 350 restaurants to 1,700 accounts in a 175-mile area. In 2018, Greasecycle was named to the Inc. 5000 list of fastest-growing private companies in the United States and is a true triple bottom line success story: outsized environmental impact, quality employment and financial success.

“NCIFund has been a fantastic partner to Greasecycle and an instrumental part of our success! They took a risk on us when traditional financing was not an option without three years of positive cash flow. NCIFund fills a much-needed gap in the market between angel/seed equity investors and traditional debt financing.”

– Dylan Gehrken, President, Greasecycle

Mining the Energy in Pig Poop

Hog farming is a cornerstone of eastern North Carolina’s economy, but the challenges of managing large amounts of waste have deepened concern about how to balance economy and the environment. In April 2018, a big step was taken toward putting hog waste to good use. The first pipeline-grade renewable natural gas from hog waste was generated by Optima KV’s Kenansville, North Carolina, operations and converted to electricity, reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 35,000 tons and powering 800 homes. NCIFund committed early to help fund the project, which drew on a range of funding partners: N.C. Department of Commerce, Live Oak Bank and the USDA Rural Business-Cooperative Services Rural Energy for America Program, among others. Taking calculated risks to vet potential triple bottom line solutions is a crucial role for NCIFund in our current environment.
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The Conservation Fund (CA)

Invest With Us
NCIFund offers investors the opportunity to earn a return while backing companies that create jobs and benefit the environment in distressed communities. By growing our pool of capital, investors can help mission-driven entrepreneurs achieve economic and environmental success.

NCIFund has invested more than $60 million in over 300 businesses, farms and nonprofit enterprises while maintaining low loss rates. We credit this success to our rigorous underwriting process and the business advisory services we provide to our borrowers. We maintain a ★★★★A+ rating from Aeris, a third-party rating agency for community development financial institutions. To inquire about investments in Natural Capital Investment Fund, contact Marten Jenkins, CEO, at 304-870-2207 or mjenkins@conservationfund.org.

2018 Funders and Investors
Loans / Capital Grants:
Appalachian Community Capital
Appalachian Regional Commission
Capital Bank
Clients of Fresh Pond Capital
Clients of Loring, Wolcott & Coolidge Trust LLC
Clients of Reynders, McVeigh Capital Management LLC
Eastern West Virginia Community Foundation
Golden LEAF Foundation
Hugh I. Shott Jr. Foundation
Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation
McKnight Foundation
Mercy Partnership Fund
New Vision Investments LLC
Northern Trust
Seton Enablement Fund
United Bank
U.S. Department of the Treasury CDFI Fund
USDA Rural Business-Cooperative Service
Intermediary Relending Program

Operating Grants:
Appalachian Regional Commission
BB&T CRA/Community Development
BB&T West Virginia Foundation
Central Appalachian Network
Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation
Educational Foundation of America
Gat Creek
Huntington National Bank
Just Transition Fund at Rockefeller Family Fund
Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation
NCIFund Board, Friends & Families
North Carolina Tobacco Trust Fund Commission
One Foundation
United Bank
U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development
Wells Fargo Foundation
Wells Fargo Diverse Community Capital Program
Woodforest National Bank

Founded in 2001, NCIFund is a business loan fund certified by the U.S. Treasury as a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI). NCIFund has been recognized under the Internal Revenue Code as a supporting organization to The Conservation Fund. The Conservation Fund is a 501(c)(3) organization that is dedicated to protecting land, water and cultural resources throughout the United States. The Conservation Fund works directly with governmental, nonprofit and other entities to find innovative conservation solutions that make economic sense and integrate economic development and environmental protection.

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