

Book Review

Saving Species on Private Lands: Unlocking Incentives to Conserve Wildlife and Their Habitats

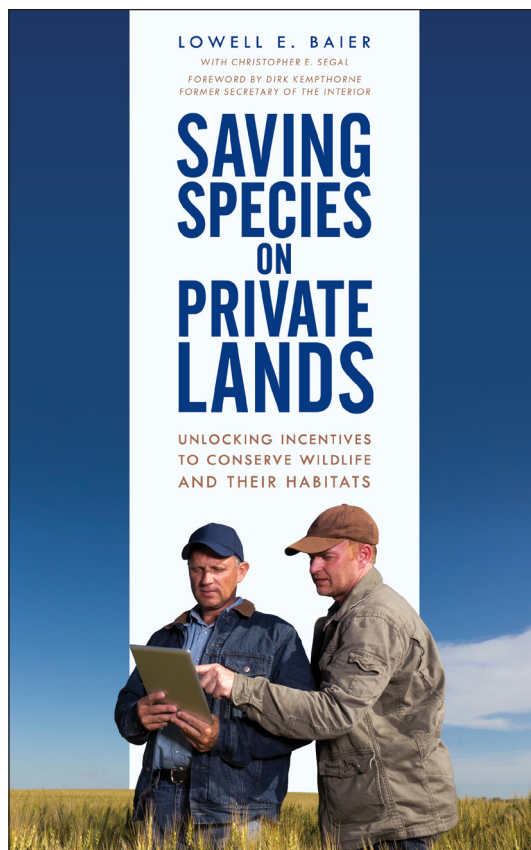
by Lowell E. Baier with Christopher E. Segal
2020, Rowman & Littlefield
Lanham, Maryland
376 pages

Review by Lorien Belton

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION on private lands is an extraordinarily important part of the equation for how wildlife and habitats are managed in the United States. Although there is a vast array of options for incentivizing or rewarding private landowners to promote wildlife values on their properties, the suite of programs, organizations, agencies, and financial opportunities for doing so can be dizzying. From individual incentive programs run by federal agencies to private grantmaking foundations, options for making a difference abound. So, too, do the complexities.

In *Saving Species on Private Lands: Unlocking Incentives to Conserve Wildlife and Their Habitats*, Lowell E. Baier provides a valuable and remarkably exhaustive resource for learning about these myriad opportunities. He presents history, regulatory context, case studies, and past program data in addition to information on kinds of conservation work funded, stipulations and restrictions of programs, and how to go about evaluating the fit with various goals. Despite being familiar with most of the programs he profiles, I also found many that were new to me.

The Table of Contents is very clear and detailed; however, the book is structured around types of programs, not types of habitat or particular wildlife issues on the ground. One might expect a publication of this nature to be more reference book than textbook. Due to its organization around key categories



of programs (federal Farm Bill incentive programs, non-Farm Bill federal incentives, non-federal resources, Endangered Species Act situations, etc.), though, it does not serve as a decision tree or step-by-step guide. Instead, history, program requirements, past successes, and examples are interspersed throughout the prose presentation.

I approached this review from the viewpoint of a private landowner—what would they find of value here, and how might it assist them in meeting their goals? I quickly concluded that the average rancher or conservation-minded forest property owner would find the publication overwhelming. The publication, while clearly written and presenting a formidable amount of information, is much more accessible for someone already familiar with the core types of programs. Only the most intellectually

curious individual landowner would probably read much of the content. I can imagine my grandfather, an ardent conservationist, absorbing every detail with relish. However, most individual landowners would most likely be best served going to someone else who has already read this book—someone in a Natural Resources Conservation Service office, at a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Partners Program, or a local land trust employee tasked with helping identify programs and policies on a potential conservation easement.

One reason for this: a significant component of Baier's finished product is information on funding available for entities other than individual private landowners, such as local governments, land trusts, and agencies who work closely with private landowners. For example, explanations of grants available from USFWS or the Environmental Protection Agency may provide a very useful window into new opportunities for grant seekers within tribes or state and local government.

For a landowner particularly concerned with endangered species issues, there is a section focused on explaining programs and addressing a variety of concerns. For the small-scale landowner with a focused concern, however, the book is probably not the best place to start. Key resources are often embedded inside long paragraphs (e.g., a website for all the conservation districts [p. 79] or a pointer to a self-screening checklist for the Conservation Stewardship Program [p. 94]). That is helpful if you already know what you are looking for. Someone with a general goal of improving riparian areas on their property, for example, will not find much guidance without extensive reading. It does not direct you to any programs based on who you are or what your particular conservation interests might be.

Saving Species on Private Lands does provide valuable context for anyone with doubts or questions about the history or sources of funding for each of these programs. It could also be used as an excellent starting point for determining whether a certain program was an appropriate match for the goals or circumstances of a particular project idea.

Comprehensive treatments of existing programs, such as this book contains, have inherent limitations. The cataloging of requirements,

conditions, priorities, and technicalities of numerous programs means that some details will inevitably become obsolete soon after publication, simply due to the changing nature of the programs—particularly those reliant on congressional funding. This in no way diminishes the value of the book, which makes clear that anyone actually interested in enrolling in a program will need to contact individuals with current information on the specific program of interest.

The book would be extraordinarily useful reading for a new land trust, conservation nonprofit organization, or agency employee seeking to understand the vast array of possible opportunities available to bring together for a landowner partner or client. This is true particularly because most of the programs described, such as National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grants, Regional Conservation Partnership Program, and Intermountain West Joint Venture are simply not accessible to private landowners without an intermediary structure or organization working with them or on their behalf. Applications are outside the scope of someone who simply wants to know what to plant or how to change harvesting techniques to support pollinators, local songbirds, or their favorite game species.

Baier's work provides those devoted to implementing private lands conservation with hope that there is an astounding number of resources devoted to their cause, many of which they may not have been aware. An individual landowner, however, is still best served just walking into the office of someone else who has taken the time to read this book.

LORIEN BELTON is a collaborative group facilitator at Utah State University (USU), based in Logan, Utah. She has degrees from Stanford University and USU. She has worked in the conservation field for her entire career—often on sage-grouse topics—with a wide variety of public and private groups. Her focus is on helping people with diverse perspectives connect and communicate about conservation topics.

