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Ricketts Conservation Foundation and National Loon Center Announce 2026 Grant Awards and Continued Research Partnership with Colorado State University

Bondurant, WY and Crosslake, MN – The Ricketts Conservation Foundation and the National Loon Center announced the award of multiple conservation and research grants for 2026, reinforcing a shared commitment to advancing freshwater ecosystem health and protecting loon populations across North America. The announcement also marks the continuation of a multi-year grant supporting ongoing research through the Common Loon Genoscape Project at Colorado State University.

The 2026 grant cycle supports a diverse portfolio of projects focused on habitat conservation, water quality, public education, and scientific research. These investments reflect a coordinated effort to address both immediate and long-term challenges facing loons and the freshwater systems they depend on throughout their migration corridors.

Through continued collaboration, the Ricketts Conservation Foundation and the National Loon Center are working to ensure that conservation strategies are grounded in science while remaining accessible and actionable for communities, policymakers, and conservation partners.

“The projects supported through this year’s grants reflect the kind of thoughtful, science-based work that is needed to sustain healthy ecosystems over time,” said Walter Wehtje, Executive Director of Ricketts Conservation Foundation. “We are proud to support efforts that not only advance research but also connect that knowledge to on-the-ground conservation and community engagement.”

A key component of the 2026 funding includes the continuation of a three-year grant to Colorado State University, supporting ongoing research into genetic variation and connectivity of loon populations across their North American range. This partnership aims to provide data that can inform conservation strategies, including the protection of critical breeding and wintering habitats.

“The continuation of this research partnership is critical to building the knowledge base needed to protect loons into the future,” said Jon Mobeck, Executive Director of the National Loon Center. “At the same time, this broader set of grant investments reflects a shared belief that conservation works best when it brings together science, education, and community involvement.”

With demand for conservation funding continuing to grow, both organizations emphasized the importance of sustained investment and collaboration. The 2026 grant awards represent a step forward in aligning resources with the scale of need, while maintaining a focus on measurable impact and long-term stewardship.

Grants include:

- Colorado State — \$ \$62,800
Bird Genoscape Project: Using cutting-edge genomic tools to expand the Common Loon genoscape and link breeding and wintering loon populations across multiple regions
- Glacier National Park — \$9,750
Developing genetic mapping methods and expanding collaborative survey efforts with the Blackfeet Nation in Montana
- National Loon Center — \$7,500
Field assessment evaluating the outcome and effectiveness of loon chick translocation efforts to restore breeding adults in southern Minnesota
- Birds Canada — \$16,000
Examine the impacts of declining water clarity from precipitation events on loon productivity across the southern breeding range in North America
- Québec/Oiseaux — \$18,000
Recruiting new volunteers, including First Nations communities, into the Canadian Lakes Loon Survey in northern Québec to restore productivity in this region.
- Tulane University — \$9,750
Develop a comprehensive, validated multi-isotope panel to estimate wintering strategy, wintering latitude, and winter diet of Common Loons.
- Tufts University — \$8,000
Produce an e-book and instructional video to enhance knowledge of Common Loon anatomy and standardize protocols for loon post-mortem studies.
- Independent Biologist — \$1,000
Synthesize and publish data from a study of Common Loon northern migration over the Florida Gulf Coast.

For more information about ongoing conservation initiatives, please visit the Ricketts Conservation Foundation and the National Loon Center online.

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About Ricketts Conservation Foundation:

The Ricketts Conservation Foundation is dedicated to protecting and preserving critical ecosystems through innovative research, sustainable development, and conservation initiatives. Focused on the Yellowstone Ecosystem and beyond, the Foundation partners with local communities, researchers, and conservationists to safeguard wildlife habitats and promote responsible land management. With a commitment to education and proactive stewardship, Ricketts Conservation Foundation works tirelessly to ensure that natural treasures, such as the common loon and other iconic species, thrive for future generations.
rickettsconservation.org

About National Loon Center:

The National Loon Center in Crosslake, Minnesota, is a national leader in loon conservation, research, and education. With a commitment to protecting loon habitats, the Center fosters innovative scientific studies and community outreach programs that inspire public engagement in conservation. Its world-class, interactive educational facility and research center will open to the public in 2027. Through immersive exhibits and educational initiatives, the National Loon Center connects visitors with the natural world, promoting stewardship and sustainable practices to ensure a thriving future for loons across diverse ecosystems for posterity.
nationallooncenter.org