

The Brainerd Foundation

Director's Message

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity...



So Charles Dickens opened *A Tale of Two Cities*. It seems an apt description for the here and now. The political climate for conservation (and many other issues) shifted dramatically in the recent election. We can rejoice that critical decisions about our region's resources will increasingly be made by policymakers who appreciate the importance of conserving water, wildlife and open land. At the same time, however, we are sobered by the fact that this region, this country, and indeed, the entire world are engulfed by economic turmoil.

The economic situation is hurting grantees and foundations alike. In the Brainerd Foundation's case, our endowment took a significant hit. Given our decision to spend-out our endowment over the next ten to 12 years, this is especially painful. We awarded approximately \$3.2 million in grants in 2008, and we had anticipated dispersing more in 2009 as part of our sunset strategy. Unfortunately, the economic downturn forces us to reduce our grantmaking in the coming year. At this point, we expect our giving in 2009 will be about half a million dollars less than what it was in 2008. While difficult, this decision reflects the economic reality most foundations face. Our annual payout remains far above the IRS minimum requirement; yet, we are painfully aware that this cutback, especially when combined with cutbacks by other funders, will seriously impact grantees.

Opportunities for conservation remain huge, but deciding where and how to seize them will require that we be even more creative and flexible than in the past. Making the most of these opportunities will require new levels of perseverance and accountability.

What does this mean for our grantmaking?

We expect we'll take a hard look at the strategic plans and goals of organizations seeking funds. We will ask of them and of us: How does one achieve meaningful conservation wins in an era of economic scarcity? How do we ensure our advances are durable and have the support of key stakeholders and communities? How do we continue to build the relationships we need if we are going to deliver the kind of environmental protections the people want? How do we make sure decision-makers are accountable to the people they represent when it comes to protecting shared values and the resources that belong to all?

We will ask grantees for their thoughts on how to achieve meaningful gains with fewer dollars. How do we creatively maximize efficiencies, we will ask, without our losing effectiveness? We will encourage groups to think about closer alignments with other organizations, where feasible.

The Brainerd Foundation hopes our grantmaking process will support the Northwest conservation community in seeking out the answers to such critical and unavoidable questions. As always, we are eager hear from you.

We have no doubt that conservationists will tap this new, largely more positive climate within our democracy, and despite the financial odds, will build on the momentum for change. The environmental challenges for the planet and for our own well-being are just too important, and if we are able to rise up and address them in this age of wisdom and foolishness, in this epoch of belief and incredulity, it will be a far, far better thing than we have ever done before.

Ann Krumboltz, Executive Director

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7 Mar 05 - 18 Feb 09



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