



**Mikki Sager**

Vice President and Program Director

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Mikki Sager was resourceful from the start. Growing up in suburban area of Pennsylvania, Sager and her three siblings turned the creek behind their house into an ice rink and converted the overturned tree in their backyard into a lookout tower. Sager kept on adventuring, ultimately becoming a competitive kayaker and canoe racer, selling whitewater apparel and working as a guide to the thrills of kayaking, hiking and climbing in western North Carolina.

This is a woman who gets the power of “place.”

But Sager also gets people. And it’s this combination—place and people—that has defined her role at The Conservation Fund for nearly two decades. Sager heads our Resourceful Communities Program (RCP), which helps North Carolina’s rural communities address persistent poverty by tapping natural resources to create jobs and strengthen economies. Sager and her team train community leaders and foster peer-to-peer learning to help communities create new economies that work on the so-called “triple bottom line”—environmental, economic and social returns on investment.

That bottom line suits us well. What makes the Fund different from most environmental organizations is our dual mission: to not only protect our environment but also strengthen our economy. “Rather than pitting people against each other and telling them they have to choose between jobs and development or clean air and water, we help them figure out ways to do both,” Sager says. “We help them balance the priorities in their lives, use limited resources more wisely and effectively and make better places for future generations to live and work well.”

Sager says her work is all about listening. She has negotiated in board rooms, walked farms with property owners, debated in parking lots, presented in community centers and spent enough time talking on road trips that the numbers on her cell phone were worn away. Through it all, she has gleaned some powerful lessons about how tightly people are connected to our land.

And still the conversations continue. There is much to do.