The Search

Rainforest Trust, a global leader in the protection of tropical ecosystems and endangered wildlife, seeks a Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Since its founding in 1988, Rainforest Trust has protected over 23 million acres of ecologically significant land across Latin America, Africa, and Asia. When combined with ongoing projects (totaling over 30 million acres), Rainforest Trust will have helped provide refuge for 65 percent of the world’s bird species, 41 percent of all mammal species, and 25 percent of all amphibian species. This significant conservation impact is made possible through Rainforest Trust’s focused strategy of collaborating with respected conservationists and effective in-country partners to identify the highest priority ecosystems upon which the world’s most threatened species depend, and then acting to protect them. Rainforest Trust maintains one of the most effective conservation models in the field, empowering local partners and indigenous communities to own and steward their land. Through these close relationships, Rainforest Trust-supported reserves are exemplars of sustained international conservation on behalf of the world’s most critical and threatened habitats.

Over the past decade, the organization has experienced significant evolution and expansion as the effectiveness of its model has gained attention, and in the context of escalating public awareness of imminent threats to vital rainforests and the catastrophic consequences of global climate change. As a result of the launch of the SAVES (Safeguarding Areas Vital to Endangered Species) Challenge, Rainforest Trust will have raised more than $100 million USD between 2016 and 2020 to protect 50 million acres in perpetuity. Throughout this period of growth and change, the organization has steadfastly adhered to its mission, and will continue to do so.

Reporting to a 14-member Board of Directors, the CEO oversees a current staff of 41, an annual operating budget of $5.3 million, and annual commitments of approximately $20 million supporting more than 100 projects. The position calls for a bold, strategic, and decisive leader and spokesperson with a passion for and experience in field-based wildlife and protected area conservation. Strengths in collaboration and partnership development are critical, particularly in an international context. The role requires demonstrated leadership and management experience, with particular expertise in leading a unit through growth and change.
Communications and fundraising skills and thoughtful staff leadership are essential, as is proven commitment to the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

A seven-member Board committee has been established to conduct this search. The search committee is assisted by the executive search firm Isaacson, Miller. All inquiries, nominations, and applications should be directed in strict confidence to the firm as indicated at the end of this document.

BACKGROUND

The Earth loses an estimated 50 acres of rainforest every minute to agriculture and extractive activities, such as logging and mining. It is a deep desire to mitigate this catastrophe, a passion for protecting threatened native species, and a commitment to effectiveness, efficiency, and science that have driven Rainforest Trust since its founding.

During the late 1980s, the endangerment of tropical forests and their myriad native species was receiving significant attention from the international community. Urgency about their conservation was only heightened by accelerating deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon. In 1988, in response to the need expressed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) for a fund to establish and monitor protected areas, World Parks Endowment (WPE), Rainforest Trust’s precursor, was created. A year later, the fledgling organization celebrated its first victory when it partnered with Defensores de la Naturaleza (Defenders of Nature) to protect the 11,000-acre Sierra de las Minas Biosphere Reserve in Guatemala. Over the next two decades, WPE would continue to support about one significant project per year, with an exclusive focus on the neotropical realm.

In 2006, WPE signed a partnership agreement with the UK-based non-profit World Land Trust, and subsequently changed its name to World Land Trust-US. In 2011, after several years of affiliation, the organizations parted ways, and World Land Trust-US changed its name to Rainforest Trust in 2013. The name change and associated rebranding, as well as reorganization under new leadership, marked a turning point for Rainforest Trust in terms of increased financial support and the achievement of its vision. Despite several name changes, the organization has not wavered from its core mission; it continues to pursue a high level of environmental stewardship and sustainability and has emerged as a leader in the protection of tropical habitats and their threatened biodiversity.

Rainforest Trust has undergone tremendous growth in recent years, both in terms of its fundraising and the number of conservation projects it pursues annually. It has broadened its geographic focus beyond Latin America, extending its reach into Africa and Asia, and has also undertaken a greater diversity of projects. These include, for example, the purchase and protection of critical corridors of habitat in Borneo for orangutans and pygmy elephants as well as assisting in the protection of the immense 2.2 million-acre Lomami National Park in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The organization has to date helped save over 23 million acres of threatened tropical habitat across 160 protected areas and boasts a network of 177 partners in 62 countries. Rainforest Trust is committed to help protect 30% of the planet by 2030.
CONSERVATION APPROACH

Rainforest Trust supports projects that conserve tropical and subtropical habitats, with an emphasis on tropical forests. Proposed conservation projects must either create a new protected area or expand an existing protected area. Critical for Rainforest Trust support is determining national, regional, and local backing for the creation or expansion of the particular site. Partners in Rainforest Trust projects are nearly always non-governmental organizations based in the country of the proposed protected area; the organization does not provide funding to government agencies and is careful with proposals from international NGOs. In all cases and no matter the project, Rainforest Trust carefully vets its prospective in-country partners to protect the investment made by the organization and its donors.

Rainforest Trust conserves habitat both through land acquisition and through the establishment of land designations. Land acquisition is often the quickest and most secure and straightforward approach to protected area conservation. For example, in Colombia Rainforest Trust has supported Fundación ProAves to acquire many private properties to establish a network of 20 nature reserves for critically endangered birds, mammals, and amphibians. Land designations are an alternative protective mechanism created through the collaboration of Rainforest Trust partners with their respective governments and communities to create national parks and public reserves. While the designation process can be lengthy, these projects can safeguard landscapes far larger than is ever feasible through outright purchase. For example, in Peru Rainforest Trust’s partner, the Center for the Development of an Indigenous Amazon (CEDIA), collaborated with local indigenous communities to petition the government to formally declare the 3.3 million-acre Sierra Del Divisor National Park. These communities participate in actively safeguarding the park, which secures the final link in a 67 million-acre Andes-Amazon Conservation Corridor.

Rainforest Trust is not a foundation – it engages actively with its partners and collaborates on projects, maintaining a direct link to conservation action on the ground. The organization is committed to working with its local partners to ensure lasting protection, which requires the ongoing support and participation of local communities. Rainforest Trust secures the future of all of its project sites through careful, science-based project design, through partner vetting, and the assurance of proper management, controls, monitoring, and community engagement. The organization builds the capacity of local groups by providing expertise and education on management plans, ecotourism operations, and organizational infrastructure. Rainforest Trust also maintains a Sustainability Fund to finance long-term, ongoing management at the organization’s already-established reserves, providing frontline wildlife defenders with access to training, equipment, salaries, and housing.

To ensure proper land management and to build current and future partner capacity, Rainforest Trust supports the career development of conservation leaders within its partner organizations through its Conservation Guardians and Conservation Fellows programs. Conservation Guardians are the dedicated employees of Rainforest Trust’s local partners who work to safeguard Rainforest Trust-funded projects on the front lines of deforestation. Rainforest Trust provides them with practical supports as they patrol, enforce, and monitor protected areas on a daily basis, often in rugged terrain and in dangerous circumstances. Conservation Fellows are project managers and coordinators who perform the work necessary
to implement protected area projects on the ground. The Fellows represent a variety of careers available within conservation; Rainforest Trust seeks to inspire these professionals to continue to apply their skills directly with the frontline conservationists working for partner organizations around the world.

**RAINFOREST TRUST TODAY**

In 2014, Rainforest Trust completed its 2014-2020 strategic plan. The plan outlined ambitious goals for the organization, including intensifying fundraising activities; increasing the organization’s visibility, reach, and range of supporters; and expanding and broadening its global reach, with the aim of establishing a 20 million-acre network of protected landscape. In 2016, it became clear that Rainforest Trust would meet this 20 million-acre goal far ahead of schedule. A passionate conservation supporter and donor took notice. To push the organization and its work even further, this supporter proposed a new initiative that was branded the SAVES (Safeguarding Areas Vital to Endangered Species) Challenge.

The launch of the SAVES Challenge, a $50 million matching gift, gave Rainforest Trust an extraordinary new platform and a rare opportunity to have an even more dramatic impact on preserving and protecting tropical biodiversity. As a result of the Challenge, a number of the organization’s strategic goals, including the goal for total acres conserved, have already been exceeded. The goal for total protected acreage has been adjusted upwards from 20 million to 50 million, a goal that the organization is well on the way to meeting.

Rainforest Trust’s protected areas are relied upon by countless species and by millions of people for fresh water and for food supplies. These intact landscapes, tropical forests in particular, are also increasingly important for climate resilience. Studies indicate that tropical deforestation accounts for up to 15% of net global carbon emissions each year and that halting this deforestation and allowing for regrowth could mitigate up to 50% of net global carbon emissions through 2050.

Rainforest Trust and its important role in climate mitigation have received unprecedented attention since the tragic fires in the Brazilian Amazon Rainforest that occurred during the summer of 2019. News of the fires attracted approximately 23,000 new donors to Rainforest Trust, with the organization receiving gifts totaling more than $1 million from 118 different countries in a matter of days. The organization continues to engage new donors every day and is experiencing an increase in requests for assistance from other NGOs, as well as support from businesses throughout the world. Rather than being motivated by direct responses to the crisis, such as firefighting, donors have been attracted to Rainforest Trust due to its powerful preventative message.

**Organization, Governance, and Finance**

Rainforest Trust is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization currently headquartered approximately 45 miles outside of Washington, DC in Warrenton, Virginia. In keeping with its chosen operating model of working with and through local, in-country conservation partners, Rainforest Trust does not have overseas program offices, although it maintains affiliates in the United Kingdom and Australia to help generate philanthropic support. The organization’s staff of 41 report to
the CEO through a senior team including the Chief Conservation Officer, Chief Philanthropy Officer, Chief Outreach Officer (currently vacant), and Chief Financial Officer. The CEO also works closely with Rainforest Trust’s President, distinguished ornithologist Dr. Robert Ridgely, to generate public interest and donor support for the organization.

Rainforest Trust is governed by a 14-member Board of Directors, which meets at least three times a year to review project proposals presented by the staff. Board committees include: Audit and Finance, Compensation, Conservation, Development, Governance, Investment, Nominating, and Outreach. The organization is also supported by a 22-member Advisory Council who attend the Annual General Meeting and whose members participate on Board committees.

Rainforest Trust has undergone significant financial growth over the past decade. Total giving to the organization has grown from approximately $4.6 million in FY2013 to nearly $20 million in FY2018. One important feature of the organization is that every dollar donated to the $50 million SAVES Challenge is directed to program support and does not fund Rainforest Trust’s overhead or operating costs, the majority of which are supported by the Board of Directors and a few foundations. In addition, donors are able to designate their support to specific projects or to the organization’s Conservation Action Fund, which helps to finance what the Board designates as it most urgent work around the world.

Rainforest Trust’s high standards of transparency and accountability, sound fiscal management, and significant growth in both revenue and projects have resulted in the organization receiving the coveted four-star rating from Charity Navigator for five consecutive years.

Leadership Transition

Dr. Paul Salaman, a passionate conservationist with 20 years of prior field experience, became Chief Executive Officer of Rainforest Trust in 2012. Under his leadership, the organization became the recognized force in international conservation that it is today. Rainforest Trust expanded into two new continents, broadened the diversity of its work, and saw its staff size, annual number of conservation projects, and its fundraising levels more than triple. After seven years of service as CEO, Dr. Salaman stepped away from the organization in the spring of 2019. Mark Gruin, Rainforest Trust’s former Senior Director of Partnerships, has since stepped into the role of Acting CEO.

Looking Ahead

Rainforest Trust benefits from its continuity of mission and niche and from the fact that the impact of its work can be defined and measured, both in terms of acreage and species protected. While Rainforest Trust has always hewn closely to its founding mission, the organization has also sustained a spirit of innovation and a willingness to adapt. In its early years, it acted primarily as a project funder, but has since built its capacity to bring substantial value to its in-country partners in the form of help and expertise needed for project design and implementation and ongoing protection. It has also recognized the value of expanding into new geographies, with the understanding that different regions require different methods and approaches for establishing lasting and effective protected areas.
Looking ahead, Rainforest Trust is exploring the viability of supporting an even greater diversity of protected areas. These include marine areas, which can be difficult to monitor but are home to some of the world’s most important and critically endangered species; large “intact” swaths of land not currently known to harbor endangered species, but that provide the opportunity to conserve vast areas in perpetuity; officially designated reserves that are not, in reality, protected (so-called “paper parks”); areas previously protected by Rainforest Trust that require additional support to maintain that protection; and areas used actively, but minimally and responsibly, by local communities for timber, farming, and the like. An immediate priority for the organization is to wrestle with these different approaches and engage in strategic planning to set direction and goals moving forward, including making choices among many worthy pathways to ensure Rainforest Trust’s continued and accelerated impact in the years ahead.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

The Chief Executive Officer of Rainforest Trust reports to its Board of Directors and is ultimately responsible for managing all aspects of the organization.

The key challenges for the new CEO include:

**Vision and strategy**
Lead Rainforest Trust Board and staff in developing a new strategic plan with clearly defined priorities, goals, funding expectations, and measures of success. Especially important will be to determine how best to identify opportunities for growth and scale, and to emphasize areas that have the greatest mission aligned impact. Once the plan is in place, the CEO will be expected to galvanize and coalesce staff, Board, and other stakeholders in ensuring its successful implementation.

**Development and donor engagement**
Cultivate and steward existing and new donors for Rainforest Trust. Serve personally as a dynamic and active fundraiser for the organization and ensure a strong and well-supported development team.

**Communications and public representation**
Champion Rainforest Trust’s vision, values, achievements, and potential to broad audiences, including donors, project partners, policymakers, and private sector leaders. Raise the profile of the organization and strengthen its messaging and media presence.

**Organizational leadership and management**
Serve as an inspiring, accessible, and supportive staff leader, promoting an organizational culture that attracts, retains, and motivates a diverse, highly talented team. Reinforce rigor, quality, clarity, and transparency of communication and decision-making. Promote constructive and collegial collaboration among departments.

Ensure the organization’s fiscal sustainability and continue its record of disciplined, lean financial management. Following upon strategic planning, assess its structure, operations, policies, staffing, business model, and funding requirements and make adjustments as
appropriate. Strengthen and creatively leverage the use of technology in all aspects of the organization’s work. Ensure exceptional stewardship and hold to very high standards to ensure the integrity of the organization’s operations on behalf of its public trust.

**Partnerships**
Reinforce and extend Rainforest Trust’s partnerships with in-country NGOs and governments, helping organizations working at the community level to design and implement projects that are rigorous and will succeed and endure. Build productive collaborations, where appropriate, with other international conservation organizations in such engagements as the Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) Partnership and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

**Board relations**
Engage the Board in helping to set organizational vision and serving as ambassadors for Rainforest Trust. Keep Board members well informed and energized about the organization’s ongoing activities and provide them with concise information to exercise sound policy and fiduciary oversight. Reinforce the important role of Board members in helping to cultivate potential donors.

**QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE**

For this pivotal CEO role, Rainforest Trust seeks a leader and spokesperson who is passionate about the organization’s mission and legacy, committed to its standards of excellence, and farsighted about its future potential. Rainforest Trust welcomes a CEO who is prepared to take calculated risks, will lead by example, and will make hard choices. At the same time, the organization requires an inspirational and diplomatic leader who will motivate, support, and coalesce staff, encourage a culture of transparency, and will ensure an operationally high-performing and fiscally strong organization. The CEO must be sufficiently knowledgeable about wildlife conservation and land protection to be a highly credible representative of Rainforest Trust with its partners and donors worldwide.

An ideal candidate for the CEO position at Rainforest Trust will bring many of the following professional experiences and personal attributes:

- 15+ years of work experience, ideally in wildlife conservation. Experience working on-the-ground outside the U.S. preferred. Experience negotiating land purchases or designations would be a distinct asset.
- Record of senior leadership and effective management within a complex organization. Experience managing growth and change. Proven business acumen, including discipline and focus in setting priorities and meeting or exceeding goals. Strengths in recruiting, developing, motivating, and retaining high-potential staff.
- Fundraising skills. Ideally significant experience raising funds from a variety of sources, especially individuals and private foundations. Without question, an enthusiasm for fundraising and willingness to be actively engaged in development.
- Very strong communication and presentation skills, including in public speaking. A keen sense of marketing. Experience with media, including social media, would be an advantage.
● Track record of building and participating in successful cross-sector partnerships.
● Experience working with or reporting to a volunteer board would be an advantage.
● Demonstrated commitment to and experience in advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion.
● An outgoing, open personality. Authenticity and approachability. The ability to connect with people at all levels, across cultures and communities.
● Entrepreneurial spirit and drive.
● High integrity, gracious self-confidence, and good humor.
● B.A. required; relevant postgraduate degree strongly preferred.
● Willingness to travel internationally as much as 30-50% of the time, to field locations, to meet with donors, and to otherwise represent the organization.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO APPLY

Inquiries, nominations/referrals, and applications (including resumes and 1-3-page letters of interest responding to the objectives outlined above) should be sent electronically to:

Karen Wilcox and Tatiana Oberkoetter
Isaacson, Miller
263 Summer Street
Boston, MA 02210
1-888-873-6989
www.imsearch.com/7259

Applications will be held in strict confidence.

In the administration of its employment policies and practices, Rainforest Trust does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, citizenship, age, personal appearance, family responsibilities, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, disability, veteran status, matriculation, political affiliation, or genetic information.

Rainforest Trust welcomes and actively encourages a diverse pool of candidates in this search.

November 2019