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CHIEF CONSERVATION OFFICER

Mojave Desert Land Trust seeks an experienced, visionary Chief Conservation Officer to lead its strategic conservation initiatives, ensure operational excellence, manage effective partnerships, and support overall mission impact.

ORGANIZATION

BACKGROUND

Mojave Desert Land Trust (MDLT) has cultivated a multi-faceted conservation strategy that uses land acquisition, restoration, stewardship, plant cultivation, and education to ensure the long-term preservation of the California desert. Its service area spans nearly 26 million acres—the Colorado Desert and the entire California portion of the Mojave Desert.

MDLT takes on the greatest challenges facing the California desert, permanently protecting land, restoring habitat, and preserving native seeds. Since its founding in 2006, MDLT has protected approximately 125,000 acres of ecologically significant land and grown over 120,000 native plants for restoration and community use. Its work defends the dark night skies, water, and critical species that make up a thriving desert ecosystem.

MDLT's \$5M annual operating budget is sourced through a combination of philanthropic support, memberships and individual contributions, contract and grant engagements,



and land conservation revenue. MDLT is governed by an active nine-member Board of Directors, served by a staff of more than 30 people across program, education, operations, and leadership roles.

MDLT recognizes that its work is only possible through collaboration with the wider community and by inspiring the next generation of desert stewards. Rooted in its belief in the transformative power of the desert landscape and that everyone deserves access, MDLT is determined to maintain the California deserts as an intact and biodiverse ecosystem for generations to come.

VISION & MISSION

Our vision for the California desert includes dark night skies, clean air and water, broad views and vistas, and an abundance of native plants and animals.

Our mission is to protect the Colorado and Mojave Desert ecosystems and their natural, scenic, and cultural resources.

MDLT VALUES INFORM ITS MISSION, WORK, AND CULTURE.

Solve for the Desert

We hold ourselves accountable to the mission; the desert's plants, animals, people, rocks, and soil depend on it.

Foster Trust

We center people and partnerships in our work, and we nurture those relationships by building trust.

Dig Deep

We're up against extraordinary challenges for which there is often no roadmap. We rise to these challenges with integrity and determination.

Seek Joy

The issues facing the desert and the planet are immense, but we seek joy so we can ground ourselves in hope.

POSITION OVERVIEW

The Chief Conservation Officer (CCO) provides visionary leadership for MDLT's conservation programs—the organization's largest branch. The CCO leads strategic conservation initiatives, ensures operational excellence within conservation activities, manages a talented team, and fosters partnerships to support mission impact.

As a core member of MDLT's organizational leadership and conservation work, the CCO plays a pivotal role in connecting all staff with work in the field and is a strategic thought partner for the Executive Director and others. It is essential that the CCO understands desert ecosystems, brings a strong academic and professional conservation background, and has demonstrated leadership skills and can mentor, inspire, and support a wide variety of people from diverse backgrounds and life experiences.

The CCO reports to the Chief of Staff and manages four direct reports, with a total team of 20 across three main functional areas:

1. **Community Conservation Initiatives Team.** Leads community conservation engagement, volunteer programs, and tribal engagement.
2. **Land Acquisition Strategy Team.** Manages acquisitions and handles approximately 45 transactions per year.
3. **Plant Conservation Team.** Oversees MDLT's Seed Bank, a full-scale native plant nursery for restoration contracts and community sales.
4. **Conservation Ecology Team.** Oversees monitoring, stewardship and restoration.



“A healthy work-life balance is essential to sustaining MDLT’s success and impact. We encourage employees to use their paid time off to recharge, explore, and enjoy this desert we work so hard to protect.”

– Kelly Herbinson, Executive Director

RESPONSIBILITIES



STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP & PROGRAM OVERSIGHT

- ✔ Lead MDLT's conservation branch, ensuring alignment with the organization's mission and strategic goals.
- ✔ Oversee Directors and managers across multiple conservation teams, providing mentorship and high-level leadership.
- ✔ Conduct staffing needs assessment to optimize team structure and leadership for restoration and stewardship.
- ✔ Drive major initiatives in climate resilience, policy advocacy, land acquisitions, and tribal engagement.
- ✔ Contribute to the execution and vibrancy of MDLT's existing strategic plan and overall strategic planning efforts.
- ✔ Foster a culture of operational excellence, collaboration, and accountability across all conservation programs.



PARTNERSHIPS & POLICY ENGAGEMENT

- ✔ Cultivate and manage relationships with governmental agencies, tribal nations, conservation organizations, and other constituencies to advance land protection and stewardship goals.
- ✔ Serve as a primary representative in collaborative negotiations, policy discussions, and high-level conservation planning efforts.
- ✔ Advocate for conservation policies at local, state, and national levels in coordination with MDLT's policy and advocacy team.



PUBLIC REPRESENTATION & COMMUNICATIONS

- ✓ Act as a high-profile ambassador for MDLT, representing the organization in media engagements, public speaking events, and strategic partnerships.
- ✓ Collaborate with philanthropy and communications teams to effectively articulate MDLT's conservation vision.
- ✓ Engage in key conferences, coalitions, and professional networks to position MDLT as a leader in conservation.




PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT & IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- ✓ Oversee conservation strategies, ensuring they are data-driven and scientifically informed.
- ✓ Implement monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess ecological impact and improve conservation outcomes.
- ✓ Work collaboratively across departments to align conservation priorities with MDLT's broader organizational goals.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT & OPERATIONAL LEADERSHIP

- ✓ Develop and manage program budgets, ensuring financial sustainability and strategic resource allocation.
- ✓ Collaborate with philanthropy, finance, and grants teams to secure funding through grants, partnerships, and donor engagement.
- ✓ Ensure compliance with regulatory requirements, conservation easements, and grant agreements.



EXPERIENCE AND ATTRIBUTES

The ideal CCO is an experienced conservation professional with the proven ability to navigate complex, changing conservation situations and provide topical expertise and ideas relevant to MDLT's core desert ecosystem focus.

The ideal candidate will have outstanding interpersonal and relational skills and excel at developing, leveraging, and sustaining MDLT's conservation work with integrity, accountability, and humanity. They must possess significant leadership skills, emotional intelligence, and an entrepreneurial approach to help MDLT advance its mission. The CCO will have significant experience managing teams and working collaboratively within a mission-focused conservation organization.

This position requires a combination of education and experience equivalent to an advanced degree, with at least 10 years of senior level experience. Specific experience in land management, environmental policy, or conservation programs is required.



EXPERIENCE

- ✔ **Expertise.** Deep knowledge of ecosystem dynamics, climate resilience, land conservation strategies, and policy advocacy.
- ✔ **Leadership.** Proven ability to lead large, interdisciplinary teams and drive strategic conservation outcomes.
- ✔ **Collaboration.** Strong relationship-building skills with government agencies, tribal entities, conservation groups, and funders, as well as with MDLT colleagues, leadership team, and board members.
- ✔ **Public Engagement.** Exceptional communication skills, with experience in public speaking, media representation, and stakeholder engagement.
- ✔ **Operational Acumen.** Experience managing budgets, securing grants, and ensuring program compliance.
- ✔ **On Site.** Regular regional travel to program sites, community engagements, partner locations, and funding opportunities is required; occasional national travel for conferences and other engagements is likely.
- ✔ **Varied Situations.** Experience and comfort working in various indoor and outdoor situations, including changing weather, terrain, and natural landscape situations.



ATTRIBUTES

- ✔ A genuine passion for desert conservation.
- ✔ Strong affinity for MDLT's culture, mission, vision, and strategic priorities.
- ✔ Enthusiasm for thinking about conservation with a visionary spirit.
- ✔ Strong systems thinking and problem-solving skills and approach.
- ✔ Proactive decision-making approach and courage in the face of difficult decisions.
- ✔ Adaptability and flexibility in the face of changing conditions and information; tolerance for adversity and uncertainty.
- ✔ Strong interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and ability to resolve conflicts, find common ground, and maintain and develop strong relationships among diverse perspectives and backgrounds.
- ✔ Integrity and a commitment to high ethics and standards.
- ✔ Strong self-directed work ethic and the energy to sustain long days managing a workload that involves balancing multiple competing tasks.



COMPENSATION

This is a full-time, exempt, benefit-eligible position. The CCO's anticipated annual salary range is \$105,000–\$120,000, commensurate with knowledge, abilities, and experience.

MDLT's comprehensive benefits package includes:

- Medical, dental, and vision benefits: organization pays 80% for employee, 50% for dependents
- 401(k) Retirement Savings Plan with 3% company match
- Paid time off, including vacation, holidays, administrative time, personal time, and sick time as well as a paid Winter Break between Christmas Eve and New Year's Day.
- Flexible 9/80 schedule in which employees work 80 hours over a two-week period with an extended weekend every other week

LOCATION

The CCO must be located within a reasonable commuting distance to MDLT headquarters in Joshua Tree, California.

Flex scheduling for occasional weekend and evening work, and eligibility for hybrid/remote work 1–4 days/month, are possible.

START DATE

Summer 2025

TO APPLY

Visit potrerogroup.com/mdlt and select “**Apply Here.**” Please include a resume and a cover letter describing your qualifications that match the position criteria.

Interested and qualified candidates should apply by **May 30, 2025**, for priority consideration. The position is open until filled.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

More information about Mojave Desert Land Trust can be found at mdlt.org.

For additional information regarding this opportunity, please contact:

Andrew Leider
Managing Director and MDLT Search Lead, Potrero Group
aleider@potrerogroup.com



EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

MDLT is a team of highly motivated and passionate people who care deeply about its mission and one another. MDLT believes in and supports workplace diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging; and that a diverse and inclusive workforce leads to better discussions, decisions, and outcomes for everyone. MDLT welcomes the unique contributions that individuals bring in terms of education, opinions, culture, ethnicity, race, sex, gender identity and expression, nation of origin, age, languages spoken, veteran's status, color, religion, disability, sexual orientation, and beliefs. MDLT is an enthusiastic work environment where differences of opinion and diverse backgrounds are respected and welcomed.



OUR DESERT AND OUR COMMUNITIES

MDLT is headquartered in Joshua Tree, California, a growing desert community in the Morongo Basin adjacent to Joshua Tree National Park, and close to multiple national monuments and 1000s of acres of desert and mountain wilderness.

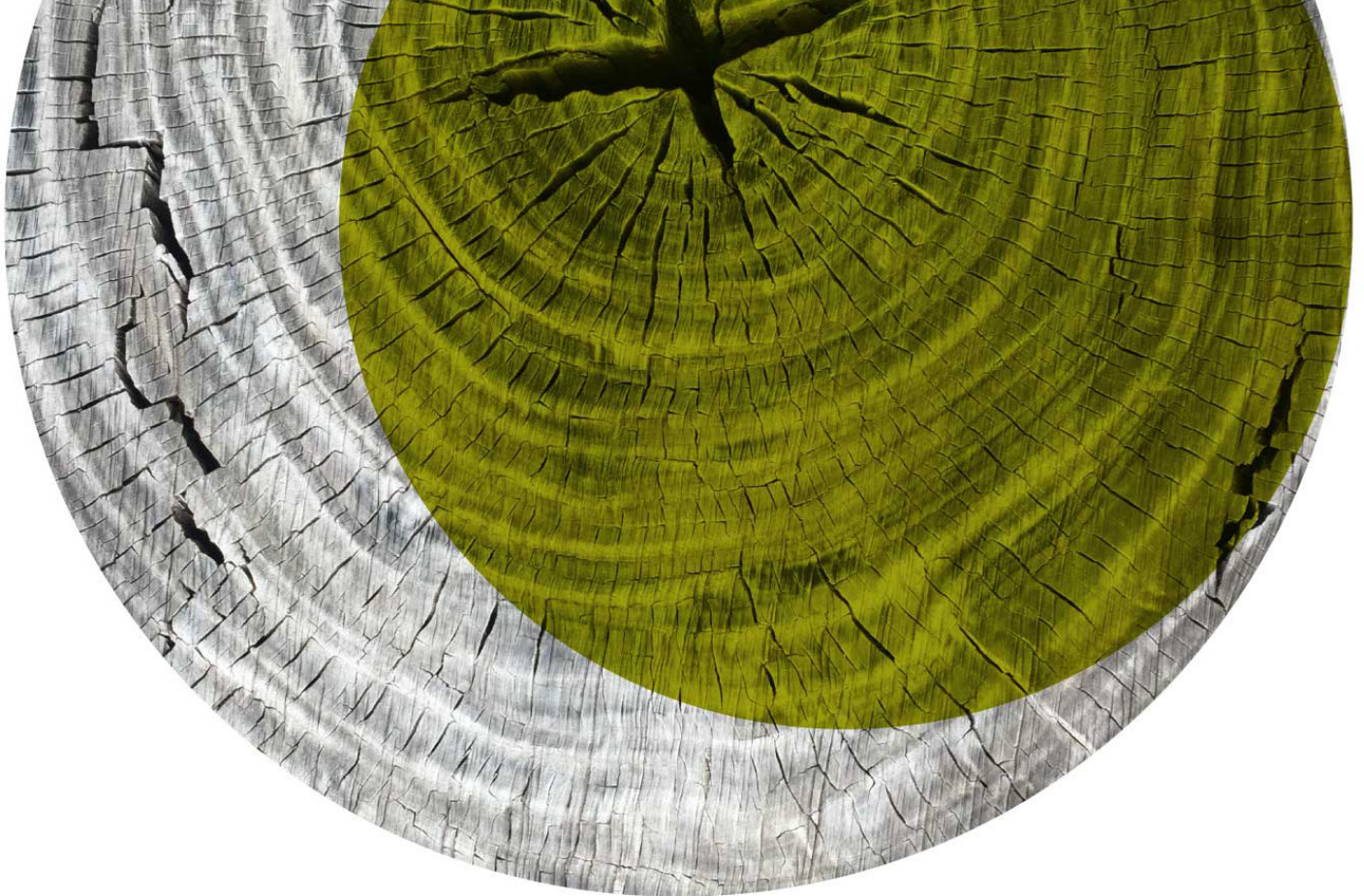
Situated in the Morongo Basin, the Joshua Tree area is an amazing place! Both a destination for national park and desert tourists and a thriving local community of artists, educators, activists, and regular folks. Thirty minutes from the Coachella Valley cities of Palm Springs and Palm Desert, the Morongo Basin is away from the hubbub but close enough to enjoy the cities when the mood strikes, or you need an airport. You are also about two hours from Los Angeles and 2.5 hours from San Diego.

Most MDLT employees live and shop in the 29 Palms, Yucca Valley, or Morongo Valley communities. Other basin locations like Pioneer Town, Landers, and Wonder Valley are slightly farther away but offer interesting options. A few people commute regularly from Redlands, California or similar locations.

More Information

The links below are from a variety of online sources and represent a variety of opinions. As with anything online, take them with a grain of salt. MDLT encourages you to explore, ask questions, and do your own research. We are sure you will come away realizing that location is a significant benefit of the CCO role.

- A community of artists, musicians, and unique local businesses, and shops: <https://www.joshuatree.guide/top-10-tips> and <https://www.joshuatree.guide/destinations>
- Ten Things to do in Morongo Valley: https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attractions-g32745-Activities-Morongo_Valley_California.html
- Morongo Unified School District: <https://www.morongousd.com/>
- Joshua Tree National Park: <https://www.nps.gov/jotr/index.htm>
- Moving to Palm Springs: <https://www.businessinsider.com/palm-springs-california-surprising-things-what-its-like-2023-12>
- 10 Things to Know Before Moving to Joshua Tree: <https://homeandmoney.com/blog/moving-to-joshua-tree-ca/>
- Incredible biodiversity of the Mojave Desert: <https://ucan.redu/blog/california-naturalist/article/joshua-trees-hub-ecosystem>
- An international dark sky area: <https://darksky.org/places/joshua-tree-national-park-dark-sky-park/>



Potrero Group is honored to coordinate this search on behalf of Mojave Desert Land Trust. We support innovative leaders and organizations making a difference in the world with strategic planning, facilitation, organizational development, and board and executive search services. We are committed to equitable and inclusive practices in all of our work.

To join our mailing list or for more information, please visit PotreroGroup.com