

## The Mountain Institute

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# The Mountain Institute

## A leading partner in conservation, community development, and cultural heritage

The Mountain Institute (TMI), established 3 December 1973, is the only international organization dedicated exclusively to environmental conservation and economic development in mountain communities throughout the world. TMI partners with local mountain organizations to support programs on 3 continents and a global network of mountain people and organizations called the Mountain Forum. TMI believes that the responsibility for a sustainable future of the world's mountains lies with its people. Accordingly, its mission is to strengthen mountain cultures, contribute to improving livelihoods, and preserve mountain environments.

## A mountain philosophy

TMI holds that mountains and mountain communities are a valuable and unique global resource. Urgent action is needed to prevent unsustainable development of fragile mountain ecosystems. Remote mountain regions are some of the last bastions of globally significant biodiversity and indigenous cultures. They are critical water towers for much of the Earth's fresh water supplies. Inappropriate extraction of resources, unregulated mining, clear-cutting of timber, and marginalization of environments and cultures are threatening mountain environments around the world.

## Goals

TMI's key goals are to

- Increase active conservation of high-priority mountain biodiversity and habitat.
- Improve the quality of life for mountain communities through sustainable livelihoods.
- Strengthen mountain cultures.
- Increase the capacities of local communities and partners.

- Expand awareness, education, and advocacy to promote the global mountain agenda (Chapter 13 of Agenda 21).

## Principal work of TMI

TMI's work encompasses all of the principal types of activities related to conservation and sustainable development, including activism, education, technical assistance, training, applied research, conservation, development, policy development, project implementation, and constituency building.

TMI implements programs in the oldest, longest, and highest of the world's mountain ranges—the Appalachians, Andes, and Himalaya—as well as global initiatives such as the Mountain Forum and Sacred Mountains. Our programs use community-based participatory approaches, building on indigenous knowledge and wisdom. We aim to strengthen capacities, to help local communities develop effective strategies, and then to share these models and successes across international boundaries to promote Chapter 13.

TMI was one of the first organizations to design and successfully implement community-based conservation models, whereby indigenous people are fully integrated in conservation planning and implementation. This approach has been expanded to include enterprise-linked conservation projects directly aimed at improving the economic well being of some of the world's poorest and most remote mountain communities. More recently, TMI has taken a lead in the development of a mountain-specific curriculum through our *Mountains: A Global Resource* initiative. Finally, TMI has been instrumental in policy work in the following areas:

- Organizing the first NGO Consultation on Chapter 13.
- Promoting the resulting priorities for action through the UN

Commission on Sustainable Development.

- Providing seminal contributions in conceptualizing, fostering, and sustaining the Mountain Forum over the years, including electronic conferences such as "Investing in Mountains," "Community-Based Mountain Tourism," "Mountain People, Forests, and Trees," and "Mountain Policies and Laws".
- Facilitating program development and policy action through collaboration with governments and other stakeholders.

## TMI works at all levels

TMI works at all levels of society, with the largest portion of our work being done at the local level, for example,

- Global: Examples of TMI's global programs include working to found the Mountain Forum and efforts to implement its Global Information Server Node, the Sacred Mountains initiative, the School for Mountain Studies, and the Sustainable Mountain Living Systems program.
- Regional: At the regional level, TMI implements large-scale transboundary conservation programs in the Himalaya and the Andes.
- National: TMI works with national governments in Nepal, China, India, Peru, Ecuador, and the USA. As one of many examples, TMI is coordinating a collaborative effort with Nepal's Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation, the World Conservation Union, the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation, the World Wildlife Fund, and the World Bank to create a Nepal Trust Fund for Biodiversity.
- Local: The largest portion of TMI's work is done at the local level in the Himalaya, Andes, and Appalachian mountain ranges. Examples include the Huascarán

National Park and Cordillera Huayhuash initiatives in Peru, the Blister Swamp conservation project, the Mountain Learning and Spruce Knob Mountain Center in West Virginia, the Makalu-Barun Conservation Project and Langtang Ecotourism Project in Nepal, the Qomolangma Conservation Program and Peak Enterprise Program in the Tibet Autonomous Region of China, and the Sikkim Conservation and Enterprise Project in India. In aggregate, these programs bring over 40,000 km<sup>2</sup> of priority ecosystems under active conservation, with participation of and benefits for local communities.

#### **TMI's four primary programs**

TMI currently works in four program areas. Three of these are based in mountain ranges, with offices in the Andes (Peru), Himalaya (Nepal), and Appalachia (USA). The fourth is the global program.

Global programs include the Mountain Forum, a global network of mountain people and professionals, of which TMI is a founding and active member. Membership in the Forum is open to all, free of charge. Global programs also include Sacred Mountains, a program that supports high altitude archaeology. This program also draws on people's diverse views of the cultural and spiritual significance of mountains to prepare educational and interpretive materials that enrich visitors' experience of national parks and give them sound reasons for conserving the environment. The third component of Global Programs is Sustainable Mountain Living Systems, which develops, tests, and applies appropriate technologies for environmentally friendly, energy-efficient construction in mountain communities.

In the Andes, TMI conserves globally significant and threatened ecosystems in Peru's Cordilleras Blanca and Huayhuash and in the

high grassland *paramos* of Ecuador and other Andean countries. TMI conducts participatory research on natural, social, and cultural resources to promote better understanding, management, and economic valuation of highland areas. TMI supports traditional cultures and promotes the Mountain Agenda through public education, high-altitude archaeological expeditions, and community heritage projects.

TMI's Appalachian programs promote conservation and sustainable management of resources through environmental and cultural education programs, scientific study, and demonstration projects. TMI's Spruce Knob Mountain Center is surrounded by nearly one million acres of National Forest, one of the most intact wilderness areas of the central Appalachian mountains. From this base, students of all ages explore highland forests, wetlands, historical sites, and communities.

Since the mid-1980s, TMI has been introducing innovative models of participatory protected area management and conservation-linked enterprise development in the Himalaya. With 6 of the world's highest peaks located within its project areas, TMI empowers local communities to conserve some of the richest cultural heritage and biodiversity in the world, including the snow leopard, Himalayan black bear, and hundreds of bird species.

#### **TMI's plans for the future**

TMI's vision is to contribute to a world where mountains and mountain people are valued and understood as integral and important to the entire world's ecosystems and where thriving mountain communities prosper in ecologically rich mountain environments. TMI's current strategic plan objectives to meet this goal include

- Increased conservation of mountain ecosystems—active management of current areas and expansion to new ranges and regions.

- Providing mountain communities with services that build stewardship and improve livelihoods linked to conservation—building on successful models for community-based conservation.
- Increased outreach to marginalized mountain stakeholders, especially the most disadvantaged such as women, the poorest of the poor, traditional cultures, and youth.
- Intermediary partnerships to increase local capacity to more effectively deliver services and leverage impact.
- A strong constituency and advocacy network that builds awareness and support for mountains as a global resource—using local and regional issues forums, electronic conferences, and outreach to policymakers, such as the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, to address issues at the interface of mountain conservation and development.
- Training, education, and curriculum development to increase awareness, knowledge, and understanding of mountain issues, especially among youth and women, particularly in preparation for and during the International Year of Mountains 2002.

TMI believes that mountains can serve as both a metaphor and a model, as a continual inspiration, conscience, and emblem for enriching and preserving lives, communities, ecosystems, and indeed, our entire planet.

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