

We hear a lot about the Clinton Foundation these days, but it's all about where the money comes from. That's outside the scope of this blog, but it made me curious about what they do with the money. In particular, I wondered what they did for the environment. Since the only thing I really knew about that is that they're not giving our Center any of the money, I thought I'd do some research. Based on what I could find from nonpartisan sources, the verdict seems quite positive.

The easiest source to find is the Foundation itself. But that's not exactly objective, so I dug a little deeper.

One thing I should note at the beginning is that the Foundation is technically a charity, not a foundation, because it relies on fundraising rather than an endowment and because it conducts many of its own programs rather than funding other organizations. In trying to assess the Foundation's work, one objective-seeming source I found is [InsidePhilanthropy](#). Here's the takeaway from their general remarks about the Clinton Foundation:

"In fact, the Clinton Foundation stands as one of the more successful efforts of recent years to mobilize new resources for philanthropy. Since its founding in 2001, it has raised nearly \$2 billion, according to an independent review by the Washington Post. . . . The other missing context here is this: Intermediaries like the Clinton Foundation and donor networks play a growing role in philanthropy, which is generally a good thing. . . . Meanwhile, another exciting trend in philanthropy—also embodied by the Clinton Foundation—is how funders are creating deeper partnerships with government and business in order to leverage money and have bigger impact."

In a similar vein, [Yahoo Finance](#) calls the Foundation "high-visibility charity that operates in Africa, Haiti and other downtrodden places and gets good marks for many of its programs."

What about the environment? *InsidePhilanthropy* singled out a couple of projects for discussion. The first is on "Urban Watershed Protection & Restoration in Development." The goal is to make development projects in the Seattle region zero-impact on the Puget Sound watershed. A second project is "Improving Disaster Resilience & Recovery in the US," which will train Americorps volunteers in the Toyoto production philosophy and will also provide rebuilding training to grantees engaged in disaster recovery.

One reason that you don't see more about the Foundation's activities is that they don't seem to reflect a sharply defined strategy. Instead, according to the [Washington Post](#), it "remains a foundation about everything, sprawling into disjointed fields whose only common bond is that they once caught a Clinton's eye — a recent example is a project to fight elephant

poaching in Africa, a passion of Chelsea and Hillary Clinton's." Similarly, the [NY Times](#) describes the Foundation as "more a nonprofit global consulting firm than a traditional philanthropy, with scattered interests that reflect the darting mind of its namesake, former President Bill Clinton." Taking a close look at the Foundation's work in Rwanda, the *Times* says "a review of the foundation's history shows that it has done vital, often pathbreaking work, particularly in health and rural development."

Environment seems to be an important part of the mix. The Foundation lists the following environmental areas as part of its Global Initiative: Metrics, Data, and Mapping Oceans, Supply Chains Systems, Thinking for Vulnerable Species Conservation, Valuing Ecosystem Services and Natural Capital, and Waste. There's a separate initiative on climate change, which is described as providing "real-world demonstrations of how we can cut emissions while compressing the timeframe for delivering real progress."

It wasn't easy to find stories about the Foundation's programs from reasonably nonpartisan sources. I did find from [CharityWatch](#) that the Foundation spends 88% of its funding on programs as opposed to overhead. That's about the same as the Red Cross, if that's an appropriate comparison. Another observer, from the [Chronicle of Philanthropy](#), agrees that the grant payout rate is reasonable, but does raise a question about a recent increase in payroll expenses. If you're interested in looking into this further, here are some websites that take strong positions:

[\*Supporting the Foundation\*](#)

[\*Attacking from the Far Right\*](#)

[\*Attacking from the Far Left\*](#)

You be the judge. All I can say, based on my first pass on the research, is that the Foundation seems to be doing good work with the money, regardless of the controversy over the way it raises funds.