

Wildfire Resilient Landscapes Institute

Institutional Resilience Policy Model
for Resource-Constrained Environmental Organizations

Deborah J. Hanson, MPA

Founder and Executive Director

March 2026

Published by

Wildfire Resilient Landscapes Institute (WRL Institute)

Los Angeles, California

© 2026 Wildfire Resilient Landscapes Institute. All rights reserved.

This working paper is part of the Wildfire Resilient Landscapes Institute Working Paper Series.

It is intended to support research, policy analysis, and applied systems development in environmental resilience and public sector strategy.

This manuscript may be revised as part of the ongoing development of the Institute’s research program. Reproduction, distribution, or commercial use without written permission is prohibited.

Suggested Citation

Hanson, D. J. (2026). *Institutional Resilience Policy Model for Resource-Constrained Environmental Organizations*. Wildfire Resilient Landscapes Institute Working Paper Series (No. 001). <https://wildfireresilientlandscapes.org>

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
1 Analytical Scope	4
2 The Core Theoretical Shift	5
3 Institutional Fragmentation and Policy Misalignment	8
4 Structural Components of Institutional Resilience	12
5 Policy Implications for Environmental Governance	18
6 Implementation Architecture	20
7 Discussion and Theoretical Contribution	22
8 Conclusion	24
9 References	28

Abstract

Environmental nonprofits operating in climate-affected regions face persistent structural pressures arising from ecological volatility, financial instability, and limited organizational infrastructure. Policy and sector practice often treat these pressures as separate management challenges, reinforcing an assumption that resilience is primarily an organizational responsibility. This paper introduces the Institutional Resilience Policy Model, which reframes nonprofit resilience as an institutional system outcome shaped by the stability of the support environment. Drawing on nonprofit finance and revenue portfolio research, resource dependence theory, organizational resilience scholarship, and climate adaptation and environmental governance literature, the analysis identifies five structural components necessary for long-term operational stability: financial architecture stability, governance capacity infrastructure, coordinated support networks, adaptive capacity funding, and mission integrity safeguards. The model argues that stabilizing mission-driven environmental organizations under chronic climate stress requires policy designs that align funding structures, coordination mechanisms, and risk buffering systems with ecological time horizons. The framework advances policy thinking by linking organizational sustainability to institutional design and offers a foundation for environmental governance reforms that strengthen continuity, accountability, and mission stability in resource-constrained contexts.

Keywords: institutional resilience, nonprofit policy, environmental governance, revenue diversification, climate adaptation, organizational stability, mission alignment

Section 1 Analytical Scope

Institutional Conditions Shaping Environmental Nonprofit Stability

Resource constrained environmental nonprofit organizations operate within a structural context defined by the simultaneous interaction of ecological, financial, and organizational pressures. These pressures are persistent system conditions that shape organizational behavior, strategic decision making, and long-term mission sustainability rather than temporary or isolated challenges (Yu & Chaturvedi, 2025).

First, environmental nonprofits function within conditions of ecological volatility. Climate driven disturbance regimes such as wildfire intensification, prolonged drought, and shifting temperature and hydrological patterns are increasing in frequency and severity, producing continuous environmental uncertainty (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2023). Organizations engaged in mitigation, restoration, or adaptation operate within landscapes undergoing accelerated ecological change, meaning operational demand is shaped by external environmental dynamics that are both unpredictable and intensifying (California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, 2023).

Second, these organizations operate within structurally unstable financial environments. Funding streams are frequently episodic, restricted, and program specific, limiting organizational flexibility and long-term planning capacity. Philanthropic and public funding mechanisms are typically structured around short grant cycles that do not align with ecological recovery time horizons or infrastructure maintenance needs (Grossi & Argento, 2022). Financial volatility therefore constrains adaptive planning and encourages reactive program delivery aligned with available funding rather than systemic environmental need (Hanson, unpublished MPA capstone).

Third, environmental nonprofits frequently function with limited organizational infrastructure. Many operate with small staff, constrained administrative capacity, and governance structures that must manage complex technical, financial, and ethical decisions under conditions of uncertainty. Limited institutional capacity directly affects strategic planning, revenue diversification, and mission protection, particularly when organizations must respond simultaneously to environmental shocks and funding instability (Huang et al., 2025).

These three pressures do not operate independently. Ecological volatility increases operational demand precisely when financial resources are least predictable (IPCC, 2023). Financial instability constrains the development of organizational capacity needed to respond effectively to environmental change (Grossi & Argento, 2022). Limited infrastructure, in turn, reduces the ability to diversify revenue, plan adaptively, or buffer external shocks (Huang et al., 2025). The interaction of these conditions produces a structural environment in which mission driven organizations must continuously balance survival, adaptation, and program delivery (Yu & Chaturvedi, 2025).

Prior research on environmental nonprofit management demonstrates that these interacting pressures directly influence governance behavior, revenue diversification strategies, and mission alignment decisions (Hanson, unpublished MPA capstone). However, policy responses addressing environmental risk, nonprofit financing, and organizational capacity are typically designed within separate institutional domains. Climate adaptation policy, philanthropic funding structures, and nonprofit regulation operate through distinct governance systems with limited coordination (Grossi & Argento, 2022). As a result, environmental nonprofit instability is commonly treated as an organizational management problem rather than as an institutional design issue.

This paper therefore reframes the central analytical question. Instead of asking how individual organizations can adapt to persistent instability, it examines the institutional conditions required to sustain mission driven environmental organizations operating under chronic resource constraint and climate stress.

The guiding question of the Institutional Resilience Policy Model is: What institutional arrangements enable environmental nonprofit organizations to remain operationally stable, mission aligned, and adaptive under conditions of sustained ecological volatility and structural resource limitation?

By shifting the level of analysis from organizational behavior to institutional design, the model positions nonprofit resilience as an outcome of policy architecture rather than solely a function of managerial capacity.

Section 2 The Core Theoretical Shift***From Organizational Resilience to Institutional Stability***

Conventional nonprofit policy frameworks typically treat resilience as an organizational responsibility. Stability is understood depending on internal management capacity, leadership effectiveness, revenue diversification, and adaptive strategy. When nonprofit organizations experience financial distress, operational disruption, or mission drift, these outcomes are commonly interpreted as indicators of organizational weakness or managerial limitation rather than as consequences of broader institutional conditions (Grossi & Argento, 2022).

This organization centered perspective reflects longstanding assumptions in nonprofit governance and public administration research that emphasize internal capacity building as the primary mechanism for improving performance and sustainability. Policy responses therefore tend to focus on strengthening individual organizations through technical assistance, training, program evaluation requirements, or competitive grant structures intended to reward efficient management (Huang et al., 2025). While these approaches address important elements of organizational function, they do not fully account for the structural environment within which nonprofit organizations operate.

The Institutional Resilience Policy Model advances a different analytical premise. Organizational stability is not solely the product of internal capacity but emerges from the interaction between organizations and the institutional systems that structure their operating conditions. Environmental nonprofits function within funding regimes, regulatory frameworks, and governance systems that shape resource availability, risk exposure, and coordination capacity. When these external systems are unstable, fragmented, or misaligned with ecological

and operational realities, even well managed organizations experience persistent instability (Yu & Chaturvedi, 2025).

This perspective is consistent with institutional theory, which demonstrates that organizational behavior and performance are strongly conditioned by the regulatory, normative, and financial environments in which organizations are embedded (Scott, 2014). Institutional design influences resource flows, decision incentives, and the distribution of risk across actors. Stability or instability at the institutional level therefore directly shapes the adaptive capacity of individual organizations.

Empirical research in resilience engineering similarly shows that system level stability depends on the structure of the environments that support operational actors rather than solely on the performance of those actors themselves. When support systems fail to provide consistent resources, coordination mechanisms, or recovery capacity, localized adaptation cannot prevent cumulative system degradation (Hollnagel, 2017; Huang et al., 2025). Applied to the nonprofit sector, this implies that organizational outcomes cannot be evaluated independently from the institutional conditions that govern funding continuity, regulatory coherence, and cross sector coordination.

Within environmental contexts, this relationship is particularly pronounced. Climate driven disturbance regimes operate at spatial and temporal scales that exceed the planning horizons and resource capacity of most nonprofit organizations. Ecological recovery unfolds across decades, while funding cycles frequently operate on annual or short-term intervals. Governance responsibilities for land management, public health, and infrastructure resilience are distributed across multiple agencies with limited coordination. These structural conditions

generate persistent misalignment between environmental need and institutional support capacity (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2023; Yu & Chaturvedi, 2025).

Under such conditions, organizational instability does not primarily reflect managerial failure. It reflects systemic exposure to unstable support environments. Organizations may experience funding volatility, coordination barriers, or unbuffered risk not because of internal weakness but because the institutional architecture that governs resource distribution and policy alignment does not provide structural stability (Grossi & Argento, 2022).

The central theoretical shift of the Institutional Resilience Policy Model is therefore a reframing of causal responsibility. Organizational failure is interpreted not as evidence of insufficient internal capacity but as an indicator of institutional instability. Resilience becomes a property of system design rather than an attribute of individual organizations.

This shift has direct implications for policy design. If organizational stability depends on institutional conditions, then resilience policy must focus on stabilizing the structural environment in which organizations operate. Institutional stability requires consistent and aligned support systems that enable long term adaptation under conditions of environmental uncertainty.

Four key domains of institutional stabilization are essential for policy design. Funding structures should ensure continuity across ecological timeframes, not just short-term program cycles, as financial stability underpins adaptive planning and lasting environmental management (Grossi & Argento, 2022).

Second, governance capacity must support coordinated decision making across policy domains that jointly influence environmental outcomes. Fragmented governance systems increase transaction costs, delay response, and reduce collective effectiveness in managing cross sector risks (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2025).

Third, coordination systems must enable information sharing, resource alignment, and joint planning across agencies and sectors. Resilience research consistently shows that system performance improves when operational actors are embedded within structured coordination networks rather than isolated administrative units (Holling, 1978; Folke et al., 2005).

Fourth, risk buffering mechanisms must distribute and absorb environmental and financial shocks that exceed the capacity of individual organizations. Buffering structures such as pooled funding, shared infrastructure, or contingency mechanisms reduce exposure to volatility and support long term system stability (Hollnagel, 2017; Huang et al., 2025).

Together, these domains define resilience as an institutional system outcome. Organizations do not operate independently of their support environments. Their capacity to remain mission aligned, financially viable, and operationally effective depends on the structural stability of the policy systems that surround them.

The Institutional Resilience Policy Model therefore shifts the focus of nonprofit resilience from organizational adaptation to institutional design. Stabilizing funding architecture, governance coordination, and risk buffering capacity becomes the primary policy mechanism through which long term environmental nonprofit stability can be achieved.

Section 3 Institutional Fragmentation and Policy Misalignment

Resource-constrained environmental nonprofits operate within a policy environment characterized by institutional fragmentation and structural misalignment between risk exposure and support mechanisms. Climate impacts, ecological disturbance, and environmental risk operate across spatial and temporal scales that require coordinated governance, yet funding systems, regulatory frameworks, and administrative responsibilities remain distributed across multiple agencies and policy domains. Environmental management, disaster response, public health adaptation, and nonprofit funding are typically administered through separate institutional channels with distinct performance metrics, reporting requirements, and investment time horizons. This structural separation produces gaps in coordination precisely where integrated response capacity is most necessary (IPCC, 2023; Sledge & Thomas, 2019).

Financial structures reflect this fragmentation. Many environmental nonprofits depend on short grant cycles, restricted program funding, and episodic emergency allocations that do not align with the long-term and uncertain nature of ecological change. Research consistently demonstrates that revenue concentration and restricted funding reduce organizational flexibility and increase vulnerability to external shocks (Chikoto & Neely, 2014; Mayer et al., 2014). Revenue diversification strategies are frequently encouraged as a corrective measure, yet empirical evidence shows that diversification alone does not eliminate volatility and may introduce additional administrative complexity when pursued without adequate capacity or strategic alignment (Hung & Hager, 2019; Choi, 2025). Financial instability is therefore not simply the result of organizational decision-making but reflects structural features of the funding environment itself.

Governance support structures exhibit similar misalignment. Policy frameworks often assume that nonprofit organizations possess sufficient internal capacity to manage strategic planning, risk assessment, and adaptation under changing environmental conditions. However, organizational capacity is unevenly distributed and strongly influenced by access to training, technical assistance, and collaborative networks (Nordin et al., 2024). Small and place-based environmental organizations frequently operate with limited administrative infrastructure while simultaneously managing complex ecological and social risks. Without coordinated support systems, these organizations function in relative isolation despite operating within interdependent environmental and community systems (Goldberg, 2018).

Fragmentation is also evident in disaster and climate response systems. Nongovernmental organizations play critical roles in recovery and long-term community stabilization, yet coordination mechanisms between government agencies and civil society organizations are often reactive rather than structurally embedded (Sledge & Thomas, 2019). As climate impacts intensify, environmental nonprofits are expected to respond to shifting ecological conditions while navigating funding cycles and administrative requirements that remain largely disconnected from the pace and scale of environmental change (EPA, 2023; IPCC, 2023).

The combined effect of these structural conditions is a policy environment in which organizations are expected to maintain operational stability despite unstable institutional support. Sector-wide assessments consistently report persistent financial stress, increasing competition for funding, and constrained organizational capacity across nonprofit systems (Nonprofit Finance Fund, 2022; Independent Sector, 2024). These conditions do not reflect isolated organizational weakness but rather systemic misalignment between environmental risk, governance structures, and financial architecture. Institutional fragmentation therefore functions as a primary driver of

organizational vulnerability and limits the effectiveness of existing policy responses to climate-related environmental challenges.

Section 4 Structural Components of Institutional Resilience

Addressing institutional fragmentation requires a shift from organization-centered resilience strategies toward policy frameworks that stabilize the support environment within which environmental nonprofits operate. Institutional resilience refers to the structural conditions that enable mission-driven organizations to remain operationally stable while responding to ecological volatility and financial uncertainty. Rather than treating resilience as an internal organizational attribute, this perspective conceptualizes stability as an outcome of coordinated financial, governance, and support systems that buffer risk and sustain adaptive capacity across time (Young, 2022, Searing et al., 2021).

A central component of institutional resilience is financial architecture that aligns funding structures with ecological time scales and organizational operating requirements. Research in nonprofit finance demonstrates that predictable, flexible, and diversified revenue systems improve organizational stability, particularly when environmental conditions create ongoing uncertainty and demand continuous adaptation (Irvin & Furneaux, 2022; Chikoto & Neely, 2014). Multi-year funding commitments, capacity investment, and adaptive financing mechanisms allow organizations to plan, monitor, and respond to changing environmental conditions rather than operate in cycles of reactive adjustment. Financial systems that support long-term operational continuity therefore function as structural risk buffering mechanisms rather than simple resource transfers.

Institutional resilience also depends on governance capacity infrastructure that supports strategic decision-making under uncertainty. Governance quality influences organizational ability to manage diversification, align mission with resource constraints, and coordinate responses to environmental change (Bryson & George, 2024). Empirical research on nonprofit capacity

demonstrates that leadership competence, planning systems, and organizational learning processes are strongly associated with long-term performance and stability (Nordin et al., 2024). Governance support structures such as training systems, planning tools, and decision frameworks therefore constitute public capacity infrastructure rather than purely internal management functions.

Coordinated support networks represent an additional structural component of institutional resilience. Environmental nonprofits frequently function as localized response units embedded within broader ecological and social systems. Effective operation under conditions of resource constraint requires access to shared administrative services, technical assistance, and collaborative planning platforms that reduce duplication and enable coordinated action (Goldberg, 2018). Intermediary organizations and regional coordination mechanisms provide connective infrastructure that allows multiple organizations to address system-level risks that exceed individual organizational capacity.

Adaptive capacity is sustained through funding and policy mechanisms that support learning, monitoring, and strategic adjustment in response to changing environmental conditions. Climate and ecological systems are characterized by dynamic and often nonlinear change, which requires organizations to engage in continuous assessment and planning rather than fixed program delivery (IPCC, 2023). Research on nonprofit resilience demonstrates that organizations with greater flexibility to reallocate resources, revise strategies, and invest in organizational learning are better able to maintain operational continuity during periods of external disruption (Searing et al., 2021).

Finally, institutional resilience requires safeguards that protect mission integrity under conditions of financial pressure and diversification. Revenue strategies developed in response to

funding instability can alter organizational priorities and decision processes, increasing the risk of mission drift or practice drift when financial survival becomes dominant (Bruder, 2025; Berrett & Holliday, 2018). Governance oversight and alignment mechanisms therefore function as stabilizing structures that preserve organizational purpose while allowing adaptive financial strategies.

Together, these structural components define institutional resilience as a property of the policy environment rather than solely an organizational characteristic. Stable financial architecture, supported governance capacity, coordinated support networks, adaptive funding mechanisms, and mission integrity safeguards collectively create conditions under which environmental nonprofits can respond effectively to ecological change while maintaining long-term operational stability. Institutional resilience thus represents a policy design objective that aligns public support systems with the structural realities of climate-affected environmental management.

Section 5 Policy Implications for Environmental Governance

Reframing nonprofit resilience as an institutional system outcome carries significant implications for environmental governance. Current policy approaches primarily support environmental nonprofits through project-based grants, short funding cycles, and emergency response mechanisms. These structures assume that organizations can maintain operational stability through episodic resource inflows. However, research across nonprofit finance and organizational resilience demonstrates that short-term and restricted funding structures increase financial volatility, constrain planning capacity, and reduce long-term program stability (Chikoto & Neely, 2014; Hung & Hager, 2019; Mayer et al., 2014). When ecological risk is continuous rather than episodic, governance systems that rely on intermittent support create structural misalignment between environmental conditions and institutional response capacity (IPCC, 2023 ; Searing et al., 2021).

Institutional resilience therefore becomes a public governance responsibility rather than an organizational management issue. Environmental nonprofits frequently function as localized response systems addressing wildfire recovery, ecosystem restoration, climate adaptation, and community health stabilization. These activities generate public value that extends beyond organizational boundaries, including risk reduction, environmental protection, and community recovery capacity (National Council of Nonprofits, 2023; Sledge & Thomas, 2019). When organizations performing these functions operate under structurally unstable funding and coordination environments, public systems inherit increased environmental and social risk.

Policy frameworks that prioritize program outputs without supporting organizational infrastructure also undermine long-term environmental performance. Governance capacity, financial reserves, coordination networks, and adaptive planning resources are consistently

identified as determinants of nonprofit stability and effectiveness (Bryson & George, 2024; Irvin & Furneaux, 2022; Nordin et al., 2024). Yet these capacities are rarely funded or regulated as components of environmental governance systems. As a result, institutional fragility persists even when program funding is substantial.

A systems-based policy approach would shift attention from organizational performance alone to the structure of the support environment in which organizations operate. Stabilizing funding architecture, strengthening governance infrastructure, supporting coordination networks, and financing adaptive capacity become environmental risk management strategies rather than administrative reforms. Such an approach aligns with resilience theory, which emphasizes that system stability depends on the structure of feedback, buffering, and adaptive capacity rather than on the strength of individual components (Young, 2022).

This perspective also has implications for environmental justice and regional resilience. Resource-constrained organizations often serve communities experiencing disproportionate environmental exposure and limited adaptive capacity (Sloan et al., 2025). Institutional instability in these organizations therefore amplifies geographic and social vulnerability. Policies that stabilize the institutional environment can reduce unequal exposure to environmental risk by strengthening the capacity of locally embedded response organizations.

Environmental governance systems designed around institutional resilience would therefore move beyond program funding toward structural support for the organizational infrastructure that enables sustained environmental management under chronic climate stress.

Section 6 Implementation Architecture

Translating institutional resilience from analytical model to operational policy requires governance mechanisms that align funding, coordination, and capacity development across multiple administrative levels. Implementation must occur within existing environmental governance systems while addressing structural instability in the support environment of resource-constrained organizations.

A central requirement is the development of financing mechanisms that reflect ecological time scales rather than annual or project-based cycles. Multi-year and flexible funding structures enable organizations to plan, maintain staff capacity, and invest in long-term ecosystem management (Choi, 2025; Searing & St. Clair, 2025). Reserve policies and adaptive funding instruments can provide buffering capacity during environmental or economic shocks, reducing the likelihood of organizational disruption during periods of heightened ecological demand (Irvin & Furneaux, 2022).

Governance capacity infrastructure must also be supported as a component of public environmental management. Strategic planning tools, board development programs, and decision-support systems improve organizational alignment and financial sustainability (Bryson & George, 2024). Evidence shows that governance capacity directly influences revenue diversification effectiveness, mission stability, and long-term organizational performance (Berrett & Holliday, 2018; Nordin et al., 2024).

Regional coordination platforms represent another critical implementation mechanism. Environmental risks such as wildfire, drought, and ecosystem degradation operate across jurisdictional boundaries. Collaborative networks enable organizations to share technical expertise, administrative resources, and strategic planning functions (Goldberg, 2018). Backbone

organizations and intermediary support structures can facilitate collective action and reduce duplication of effort across fragmented institutional environments.

Adaptive capacity financing must also be institutionalized. Environmental management under climate change requires continuous monitoring, learning, and strategic adjustment. Funding structures that support evaluation, planning, and organizational learning enhance long-term resilience and improve response to changing ecological conditions (EPA, 2023; IPCC, 2023).

Implementation must further include safeguards that protect mission alignment under conditions of financial pressure. Revenue diversification can improve financial stability but may also introduce incentives that shift organizational priorities (Bruder, 2025). Institutional oversight mechanisms and alignment review processes can reduce the risk of mission drift while preserving adaptive flexibility.

Operationalization of institutional resilience therefore requires coordinated policy instruments that stabilize financial architecture, strengthen governance infrastructure, support regional coordination, finance adaptive capacity, and maintain mission integrity. These components function collectively as a structural support system enabling environmental organizations to operate effectively under chronic ecological and financial stress.

Section 7 Discussion and Theoretical Contribution

This model contributes to nonprofit policy and environmental governance scholarship by reframing organizational resilience as an institutional system property rather than an internal organizational attribute. Traditional approaches emphasize managerial competence, strategic adaptation, and revenue diversification as primary determinants of nonprofit survival. While these factors influence performance, they operate within broader institutional environments that shape the resources, constraints, and risks organizations face (Young, 2022).

Empirical research consistently demonstrates that funding volatility, restricted revenue structures, and fragmented support systems influence nonprofit stability independent of managerial capacity (Chikoto & Neely, 2014; Hung & Hager, 2019; Searing et al., 2021). Organizations operating in unstable support environments experience greater revenue volatility, reduced planning capacity, and increased vulnerability to external shocks (Mayer et al., 2014; Walk et al., 2022). These findings suggest that resilience cannot be fully explained at the organizational level alone.

The Institutional Resilience Policy Model extends resource dependence and nonprofit resilience theory by locating primary causal mechanisms within the structure of the support environment. Organizational outcomes are shaped by funding architecture, governance infrastructure, coordination systems, and risk buffering mechanisms embedded in public policy and philanthropic systems. Stability or instability in these structures influences mission alignment, adaptive capacity, and long-term operational viability.

This framework also bridges nonprofit policy and climate adaptation research. Environmental nonprofits operate within increasingly volatile ecological systems characterized by uncertainty, disturbance, and nonlinear change (IPCC, 2023). When institutional support

structures remain static while ecological risk intensifies, structural misalignment emerges.

Institutional resilience therefore becomes a prerequisite for effective environmental governance under climate stress.

The model further contributes to scholarship on mission integrity by conceptualizing mission stability as a system-level outcome. Revenue diversification research identifies trade-offs between financial stability and mission alignment (Berrett & Holliday, 2018; Bruder, 2025). By locating these trade-offs within institutional funding environments, the model explains mission drift as a structural risk generated by unstable support systems rather than solely by organizational decision-making.

More broadly, the framework advances a systems perspective in nonprofit policy research. Environmental governance increasingly depends on distributed organizational networks rather than centralized administrative control (Sledge & Thomas, 2019). Stability in these networks depends on institutional design features that regulate resource flows, coordination capacity, and adaptive response. Institutional resilience therefore represents a foundational condition for sustained environmental management.

Future research may empirically evaluate how variations in funding structure, governance capacity support, and coordination infrastructure influence long-term environmental outcomes. Comparative analysis across regions or policy regimes could clarify which institutional configurations most effectively stabilize resource-constrained organizations under climate stress.

By repositioning resilience as an institutional design problem, this model provides a conceptual foundation for policy frameworks that support long-term environmental governance through stabilization of the organizational systems that deliver public environmental services.

Section 8 Conclusion

Policy Synthesis and Implications

Environmental governance increasingly depends on the operational stability of mission-driven organizations that implement restoration, climate adaptation, and community risk reduction at local and regional scales. Yet the institutional environments in which many environmental nonprofits operate remain characterized by fragmented funding structures, limited governance capacity support, and weak coordination infrastructure. These conditions create persistent instability that constrains long-term planning, reduces adaptive capacity, and increases vulnerability to ecological and financial shocks.

This paper argued that nonprofit resilience should not be treated solely as an organizational responsibility but as an institutional system outcome shaped by the structure of the support environment. Resource-constrained environmental organizations operate under simultaneous ecological volatility, financial instability, and limited organizational infrastructure. When these pressures are addressed through fragmented or short-term policy mechanisms, structural misalignment emerges between ecological time scales and institutional response capacity. Organizational instability then becomes a predictable feature of the governance system rather than an indicator of managerial weakness.

The Institutional Resilience Policy Model provides a framework for understanding how funding architecture, governance capacity infrastructure, coordination networks, adaptive capacity financing, and mission integrity safeguards collectively determine long-term organizational stability. These institutional components function as enabling conditions that support sustained environmental management under chronic climate stress. Stabilizing these

structures reduces volatility, supports long-term planning, and strengthens the capacity of environmental organizations to deliver public risk reduction and ecosystem recovery functions.

The policy implications are substantial. Environmental governance systems designed primarily around program funding and project delivery are insufficient for managing long-term ecological instability. Structural support for organizational infrastructure must be recognized as a component of environmental risk management. Multi-year financing, governance capacity development, regional coordination platforms, and adaptive planning resources represent mechanisms for stabilizing distributed environmental response networks.

Reframing institutional resilience as a policy objective also clarifies the relationship between environmental management and public risk reduction. When organizations responsible for restoration, mitigation, and community adaptation operate within unstable institutional environments, ecological risk and social vulnerability increase. Conversely, stabilizing the institutional support environment strengthens system-wide capacity for climate adaptation, disaster recovery, and long-term ecosystem stewardship.

Environmental governance under accelerating climate change therefore requires policy frameworks that stabilize the institutional conditions under which mission-driven organizations operate. Institutional resilience becomes not a secondary administrative concern but a foundational component of effective environmental management.

Limitations

This analysis is conceptual and theoretical in orientation and does not include original empirical testing of the Institutional Resilience Policy Model. The framework synthesizes existing research across nonprofit finance, organizational resilience, environmental governance, and climate adaptation but does not quantitatively evaluate causal relationships between

institutional design features and organizational outcomes. Empirical validation remains necessary to assess the magnitude and variability of the proposed mechanisms across different policy contexts.

The model is also derived primarily from research on environmental nonprofits operating in resource-constrained and climate-affected contexts. Institutional conditions and policy environments vary substantially across regions, governance systems, and organizational scales. The applicability of the framework to larger, well-capitalized organizations or to policy environments with highly centralized administrative systems may therefore differ.

In addition, the analysis focuses on structural features of the institutional support environment and does not fully examine internal organizational variation, leadership dynamics, or strategic decision-making processes that also influence resilience outcomes. While the framework emphasizes institutional determinants, organizational behavior remains an important mediating factor.

The policy implications discussed here are therefore analytical rather than prescriptive. Implementation feasibility, fiscal constraints, and political considerations are not evaluated in detail. The framework identifies structural conditions associated with institutional stability but does not specify optimal policy instruments or administrative pathways for achieving those conditions within governance systems.

Future Research Directions

Further research is needed to empirically evaluate the relationship between institutional support structures and nonprofit stability under conditions of environmental volatility. Quantitative studies examining how funding duration, revenue diversification structure,

governance capacity investment, and coordination network participation influence organizational survival and performance would provide important validation of the model.

Comparative policy analysis across regions or governance regimes could also clarify how institutional design influences environmental management outcomes. Differences in funding architecture, regulatory frameworks, and inter-organizational coordination systems may produce measurable variation in the stability and effectiveness of environmental response networks.

Longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable for examining how institutional resilience evolves over time. Environmental nonprofits operate within dynamic ecological and economic conditions. Tracking organizations across multiple disturbance cycles could reveal how institutional support structures influence adaptive capacity, recovery trajectories, and mission stability.

Future work may also explore the interaction between institutional resilience and environmental justice outcomes. Resource-constrained organizations often serve communities experiencing disproportionate exposure to environmental risk. Research examining whether institutional stabilization reduces geographic or demographic disparities in environmental protection would extend the model's policy relevance.

Finally, interdisciplinary research linking nonprofit policy, climate adaptation, and public sector governance could further develop theoretical understanding of how distributed organizational systems function as components of large-scale environmental management. As climate volatility increases, understanding how institutional design shapes collective response capacity will become increasingly central to environmental governance scholarship.

References

- Berrett, J. L., & Holliday, B. S. (2018). The effect of revenue diversification on output creation in nonprofit organizations: A resource dependence perspective. *Voluntas*, 29(6), 1190–1201. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-018-00049-5>
- Bruder, I. M. (2025). From mission drift to practice drift: Theorizing drift processes in social enterprises and beyond. *Organization Studies*, 46(3), 385–407. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01708406251314591>
- Bryson, J. M., & George, B. (2024). *Strategic planning for public and nonprofit organizations* (5th ed.). Wiley.
- California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. (2023). *California wildfire and forest resilience action plan*. <https://wildfiretaskforce.org/action-plan/>
- Chikoto, G. L., & Neely, D. G. (2014). Building nonprofit financial capacity: The impact of revenue concentration and overhead costs. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 43(3), 570–588. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764012474120>
- Choi, S. Y. (2025). How does nonprofit revenue diversification affect revenue volatility before, during, and after external economic crisis? *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08997640251316487>
- Environmental Protection Agency. (2023). *Climate change indicators in the United States*. <https://www.epa.gov/climate-indicators>
- Federal Emergency Management Agency. (2025). *National resilience strategy*. U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

- Folke, C., Hahn, T., Olsson, P., & Norberg, J. (2005). Adaptive governance of social ecological systems. *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, 30, 441–473.
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.energy.30.050504.144511>
- Goldberg, L. (2018). *Capacity building for collaboration: A case study on building and sustaining landscape-scale stewardship networks in the 21st century*. California Landscape Stewardship Network.
- Grossi, G., & Argento, D. (2022). The fate of accounting for public governance development. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, 35(9), 272–303.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/AAAJ-11-2020-5001>
- Hanson, D. J. (Unpublished). *Navigating revenue diversification: Balancing financial sustainability and mission alignment in small environmental nonprofits* (MPA capstone). California State University, Northridge.
- Holling, C. S. (1978). *Adaptive environmental assessment and management*. Wiley.
- Hollnagel, E. (2017). *Safety II in practice: Developing the resilience potentials*. Routledge.
- Huang, X., Li, Y., Zhang, Z., & Chen, J. (2025). Resilience engineering and long-term infrastructure system performance. *Reliability Engineering & System Safety*.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ress.2024.109620>
- Hung, C., & Hager, M. A. (2019). The impact of revenue diversification on nonprofit financial health: A meta-analysis. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 48(1), 5–27.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764018807080>
- Independent Sector. (2024). *Health of the U.S. nonprofit sector annual report*.
<https://independentsector.org>

- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. (2023). *AR6 synthesis report: Climate change 2023*. <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/>
- Irvin, R. A., & Furneaux, C. W. (2022). Surviving the black swan event: How much reserves should nonprofit organizations hold? *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 51(5), 943–966. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08997640211057405>
- Mayer, W. J., Wang, H., Egginton, J. F., & Flint, H. S. (2014). The impact of revenue diversification on expected revenue and volatility for nonprofit organizations. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 43(2), 374–392. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764012464696>
- National Council of Nonprofits. (2023). *Nonprofit impact matters: How America's charitable nonprofits strengthen communities and improve lives*. <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org>
- Nordin, N., Khatibi, A., & Azam, S. M. F. (2024). Nonprofit capacity and social performance: Mapping the field and future directions. *Management Review Quarterly*, 74(1), 171–225. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11301-022-00297-2>
- Nonprofit Finance Fund. (2022). *State of the nonprofit sector survey*. <https://nff.org>
- Scott, W. R. (2014). *Institutions and organizations: Ideas, interests, and identities* (4th ed.). SAGE.
- Searing, E. A. M., & St. Clair, T. (2025). Nonprofit revenue portfolios and exposure to business cycle risk. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08997640251317639>

- Searing, E. A. M., Wiley, K. K., & Young, S. L. (2021). Resiliency tactics during financial crisis: The nonprofit resiliency framework. *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*, 32(2), 179–196. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.21478>
- Sledge, D., & Thomas, H. F. (2019). From disaster response to community recovery: Nongovernmental entities, government, and public health. *American Journal of Public Health*, 109(3), 437–444. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2018.304895>
- Sloan, E., Hajjar, R., & Davis, E. J. (2025). Equity in resilience: A case study of community resilience to wildfire in southwestern Oregon, United States. *Ecology and Society*, 30(1), Article 20. <https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-15862-300120>
- Walk, M., Curley, C., & Levine Daniel, J. (2022). Competition is on the rise: To what extent does traditional fundraising performance research apply in competitive environments? *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*, 32(4), 651–667. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.21500>
- Young, D. R. (2022). *Resilience and the management of nonprofit organizations: A new paradigm*. Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800889736>
- Yu, J., & Chaturvedi, E. (2025). California’s wildfire crisis and the future of planetary resilience. In A. Cilento et al. (Eds.), *Planetary health: Laws, policies and science on the One Health approach* (pp. 81–109). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-90621-3_6