



## Season 2 Episode 6—Big Help for Big Projects: Government and Nonprofit Support

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### Jamie Mardis

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### Jamie Mardis

You're live with *On the Heir*, where the airwaves are buzzing with stories of land, legacy, and lineage. I'm your host, Jamie, and today we're diving into the world of government and nonprofit resources that can help heirs property owners take on big projects — whether that's building ponds, improving soil, or conserving forests.

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Now when it comes to managing heirs property, resources can make the difference between a dream project and a stalled plan.

From small-scale improvements to large conservation efforts, families often need technical guidance, financial assistance, or even legal advice.

Government programs like those offered through the USDA — think NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service) and FSA (Farm Service Agency) — can support efforts such as soil and water conservation, tree planting, and even cost-sharing for fencing or irrigation.

Nonprofits can provide education, grants, and local project coordination. For families with mixed or joint ownership, these programs are even more critical — because navigating applications and compliance can be tricky without a clear plan or a point person coordinating efforts.

### **Jamie Mardis**

So, let's prepare you for some support. Before families dive into applications or project planning, preparation is key.

Here's what to consider: Document Ownership: Gather deeds, wills, or any documentation showing who has legal interest. Even partial ownership details are helpful. Identify Goals: This is where you decide as a family what projects are a priority — ponds, fencing, forest management, or crop improvements.

Assess Capacity: Evaluate how many family members can contribute time or resources, and whether you need external help. And please- be honest with yourselves and your family members. This is a lot to take on, and I'm sure we'd all agree that it's okay if you feel like you can't necessarily take it on right now.

And finally, Coordinate Applications: Programs often require one family member to act as the primary contact. Make sure that role is clear. And to be clear here, the person that assumes that role is not someone that makes the final say in the family agreements or anything like that. This is just your spokesperson. This person's position is to clearly reiterate your family's wants and desires.

Now let's get into some types of support that are available.

Technical Assistance: Both government and nonprofit programs provide experts who can advise on soil health, water management, forest stewardship, and conservation planning. Make sure you have cost share programs; certain initiatives cover a percentage of project costs, which can make large-scale improvements feasible for families with limited funds

Training and Workshops: Extension offices and nonprofits often run sessions on sustainable land use, grant applications, and farm management strategies.

And finally, we have grants and loans. Some nonprofit or state initiatives offer financial support for projects like tree planting, pond construction, or erosion control.

By combining these resources strategically, heirs property owners can pursue projects that might otherwise feel out of reach.

And if you're still unsure where to start, contact your local Extension office. Their contact information can be found on the ACES website at [www.aces.edu](http://www.aces.edu) — that's a-c-e-s dot e-d-u. That's ACES a-c-e-s dot edu.

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Now, you know I'm not going to leave you without some tips to success when it comes to large projects on heirs property, preparation, communication, and strategy are everything. Let's walk through some practical tips that can make a big difference.

I cannot stress this enough. Start small. Then you can scale up. Trying to tackle a huge project all at once can be overwhelming, especially with multiple heirs involved. A small pilot project gives your family a chance to sort of test the waters, identify challenges, and even learn what works before committing significant time or resources to a much larger project. For example, instead of immediately building a large pond, start with a small water catchment or irrigation system. or if you're considering reforestation or tree planting. Start with a smaller, more manageable piece of land by starting small, your family gains confidence, refined your plan, and can demonstrate early successes to encourage everyone to stay invested.

Next, keep clear records of applications, agreements, and project results. Documentation is key not just for program compliance, but for maintaining family harmony. Keep copies of all grant applications, program agreements, and receipts. Track the progress with photos, notes, or spreadsheets.

These records will be invaluable if you apply for additional support. Need to report outcomes to a program administrator or if heirs want to review what has already been accomplished. Proper records also protect your family in the event of disputes or audits, ensuring everyone can see exactly what was done, who contributed it, and how resources are used.

Maintain open communication among heirs. Communication is the glue that holds any family project together. Schedule regular check-ins—whether in person, over the phone, or via video call to discuss progress, address concerns and adjust plans as needed.

Encourage each heir to share their ideas and concerns openly, and make sure everyone understands their roles and responsibilities. Misunderstandings often happen when assumptions are made or when someone feels left out of the decision-making process. Consistent communication prevents frustration and reduces conflict and ensures that everyone stays aligned with the project.

Next, you want leverage local Extension staff and community resources. We are here for you. You don't have to navigate programs and technical requirements alone. Your local Extension agents, conservation offices, and then traffic coordinators can provide guidance every step of the way. They can help with project design, applications, compliance, and connecting your family with additional resources.

For example, they might suggest a cost-share programs, recommend a trusted contractors for erosion control or help you access workshops on soil and water management by tapping into local expertise. Families can avoid common pitfalls. Save money and maximize the success of their projects.

Make sure you want to build a shared vision and assign responsibilities even before the first shovel hits the ground. Your family should agree on the overall vision and goals for the project. Break down the work into tasks and it's our responsibility so everyone knows what they're accountable for. Clear expectations reduce confusion and make it easier to measure progress. For instance, one error might handle program paperwork. Another could oversee labor and materials and a third might track financial contributions. Sharing responsibilities makes the work manageable and helps everyone feel invested in the outcome.

Next, you want to plan for maintenance and long-term sustainability. Completing the initial project is only a part of the story. Think ahead about ongoing maintenance and sustainability.

If you plant trees, who will water and care for them? If you build upon who will monitor water quality and upkeep the structure, planning for the long term ensures that your investment continues to benefit the family and the land for years to come. Rather than fading after the initial project begins.

And finally, Celebrate milestones together. Recognize small wins along the way.

Whether it's completing the first phase of a project, securing funding, or seeing the land improvements take shape. Celebrations help to build morale, reinforce collaboration, and keep everyone motivated to continue working together on your shared legacy. No milestone is too small, even if it's just getting great outdoors on the phone. That's something for your family to celebrate.

### **Jamie Mardis**

By following these tips and starting small, documenting everything, maintaining communication, leveraging experts, assigning responsibilities, planning for sustainability, and celebrating milestones — heirs property families can take on big projects confidently while protecting both their land and their legacy.

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Now let's wrap it up. Big projects on heirs property don't have to feel impossible.

With careful planning, clear communication, and support from government and nonprofit programs, your family can take meaningful steps to improve the land — while protecting it for generations to come.

Think about it this way: every step you take to organize your family, document agreements, and implement improvements — whether it's building infrastructure, adding utilities, starting a small conservation project, or creating a productive agricultural area.

It is a step towards strengthening your legacy.

The land is more than soil and trees; It's a tangible connection to your family's history, identity, and future. Preparation is key. Start by understanding your land, your ownership structure, and the resources available to you. Break down large projects into manageable pieces. Celebrate small milestones along the way, because every success, no matter how small, reinforces cooperation and builds confidence among heirs. And coordination is just as important. Make sure everyone knows their roles and responsibilities. Communicate regularly and be willing to make adjustments as the project progresses. Conflict often arises when assumptions are made, or information isn't shared. So, keeping everyone in the loop will save both time and stress.

And don't underestimate the value of outside support. Extension agents, local conservation offices, and nonprofit organizations can help guide you through technical requirements, grant applications, and program compliance. They can also connect you with tools, workshops, and experts that your family might not have had access to on your own. Leveraging this support can help reduce costs, improve efficiency, and increase the long-term success of your projects. Finally, remember it's not just about physical improvements you make — it's about preserving your family's legacy. Every effort you make to protect the land improves productivity and keep

your family aligned with a shared vision ensures that your land continues to provide value for generations to come.

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Whether your goal is conservation, income generation, or simply maintaining a connection to your family's history, the work you do now lays the foundation for the future.

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Thanks again for tuning in to *On the Heir*. Be sure to subscribe. Leave us a review and share your thoughts with us. Together we'll continue exploring the fascinating world of heirs property. One episode at a time. Until then, keep your legacy strong, your family connected, and your land thriving.