



# 2024 Policy Agenda

## America the Beautiful for All Coalition

Comprised of more than 250 nonprofits from across the nation and a variety of land, water, ocean, wildlife, sovereignty and environmental justice missions, the America the Beautiful for All Coalition is the largest and most diverse coalition working to ensure that the national goal to conserve 30% of U.S. lands, water and ocean by 2030 (30×30) centers communities on the frontlines of the climate and nature loss crisis. For too long, communities of color and low income communities have borne the brunt of environmental injustices like pollution, nature destruction, and unsafe or unwelcoming outdoor spaces and been denied their rightful place at environmental decision-making tables. We believe the largest American conservation goal of the century should be led by a coalition that looks and sounds like communities across America.

Each year, the America the Beautiful for All Coalition partners join together across missions, identities and cultures to identify opportunities to support communities facing nature deprivation, stem nature loss, and ensure that 30×30 is a tool for community justice. As water insecurity and extreme weather threaten vulnerable communities, species lose habitat and go extinct, and climate-related public health issues grow more severe, policy action remains urgent. We have no time to waste in stemming the nature loss crisis - for communities most vulnerable now and into the future. This coalition is daring enough to write a new narrative where the perspective and needs of those closest to environmental challenges must be the ones deciding what policy actions guide the largest conservation goal of the century.

### Our 2030 Goals:

#### **Conserve at least 30% of U.S. lands, waters, and oceans by 2030.**

Protect 30×30 to avoid massive species loss, secure equitable access to nature's benefits, and prevent and repair the impacts of the climate crisis for all communities.

#### **Apply a Justice40 metric to the America the Beautiful Initiative.**

Implement a Justice40 metric for the America the Beautiful Initiative to ensure at least 40% of investments are made in communities of color and frontline communities that have historically seen little to no investment in conservation and equitable access to nature.

## How this coalition plays a role:

### Collective Advocacy

We unite across missions, identities and cultures to stand in support of policies that will advance 30×30 through a justice lens. Together, we work to center the voices of communities across the country - especially those who have been least heard and are on the frontlines of the nature loss crisis.

### Capacity Building

We acknowledge the deep disparities in the environmental movement. We confront the differences in access to decision-makers, funders, and other assets by building opportunities to grow the movement equitably and resourcing justice-focused work and organizations.

### Storytelling

We believe in the power of representation. All identities deserve to be represented through affirmative stories. This creates increased sense of belonging and reduces barriers to a more representative conservation movement. Failure to uplift and amplify the stories of communities of color and other non-dominant identities in the U.S. has contributed to the environmental movement being out of sync with the communities who are most in need of access to environmental decision-making.

## We call on all decision-makers to act:

We urge elected decision-makers at every level as well as land, water and ocean managers across the nation to join together in pursuit of conserving 30% of U.S. land, waters and ocean by 2030. Achieving this goal is core to communities' ability to prosper in the face of the nature loss, extinction and climate crises — but only if the those on frontlines are leading the path forward.

Respecting tribal sovereignty and honoring indigenous knowledge are essential and imperative if we are to realize a just future that learns from the environmental movement's mistakes in the past and generates new opportunities based on our shared humanity — not the privileges of the few.

### **Our policy agenda outlines important opportunities to advance the America the Beautiful Initiative via:**

- Progress reports on our 2023 policy priorities
- Our new 2024 policy priorities



## Letter from the Co-Chairs

Together, working across hundreds of organizations, missions, cultures and identities, the America the Beautiful for All Coalition cultivates allyships from unlikely partners for a future where access to nature is equitable and conservation efforts are guided by justice. This coalition is leading the way to achieving the largest and most ambitious conservation goal in the century - conserving 30 percent of lands and waters by 2033 (30x30) while prioritizing investment in communities of color and frontline communities.

It is not enough to simply protect and conserve nature; we must do so in a way that ensures equitable access for all and addresses the historical injustices that have marginalized communities of color and communities on the frontlines of the climate crisis in the United States of America and our territories.

The threats of nature loss impact all of us. But systemic racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, and xenophobia has been wielded through policymaking to sacrifice public health and access to nature in marginalized communities. In 2024, we look back on 60 years of the Civil Rights Act and the Wilderness Act. These two historic pieces of legislation changed the course of this nation in dramatic ways but were never intentionally combined in virtue - a perilous flaw of the conservation movement in that era.

In 2024, we have an opportunity to urge leaders in Washington, DC to meet this moment 60 years later and advance just environmental policy and protections that recognize systemic oppressions tied to environmental injustice. This momentous opportunity requires coordinated efforts from government, nonprofits, and grassroots organizations to address the historical and ongoing injustices faced by marginalized communities. By incorporating Justice40 metrics and prioritizing investment in communities of color and frontline communities, we can ensure that conservation and environmental policies are not only effective but also equitable, inclusive and sustainable.

We understand that achieving a sustainable and inclusive America the Beautiful requires a national shift in our collective approach, prioritizing justice and equity in all conservation efforts. By centering basic environmental and health injustices many frontline and communities of color face, we can work towards a future where everyone has the opportunity to enjoy and benefit from nature's plentiful gifts.

This Coalition believes that on the path to conserving 30 percent of lands and waters by 2033, *who* benefits and *how* conservation priorities are decided by the federal government should be central to framing the decisions on *what* is counted towards 30 percent. For centuries advocates for protecting nature in support of public health and the right to experience and benefit from nature equitably have been marginalized from the decision-making table. We believe that due to our work—ensuring environmental justice leaders and advocates are at the forefront of policy decision-making—the largest conservation goal of this century will center those who have historically benefited least from conservation policy and protect their ecosystems.

The America the Beautiful For All Coalition strongly emphasizes public health and justice. We are passionately committed to shaping a future that embodies equality in access to nature and its benefits, justice-oriented conservation efforts, and a prioritization of the physical, mental health, and well-being of all individuals. As a climate mitigation strategy, the U.S. must work to guarantee increased and equitable access to natural spaces for everyone.

Join us in working towards an America the Beautiful where the benefits of Tribal, Indigenous, frontline and community of color-led conservation efforts contribute to the flourishing of all healthy communities and individuals for generations to come. The right to environmental protections and to access nature's benefits are civil rights so let us seize this moment to forge a more just, inclusive and sustainable future for all.

**Mark Magaña**

Founding President & CEO of GreenLatinos

**Nsedu Obot Witherspoon**

Executive Director of Children's Environmental Health Network

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## **On the Nature Loss Crisis, we cannot afford to fail.**

The climate crisis is here. We feel it in extreme weather events from hurricanes to droughts, and we discuss it over the proverbial water cooler when "weird weather" causes 40 degree swings from one day to the next.



Scientists agree that, to stem the threats of the climate and extinction crises, we must conserve 30% of the world's terrestrial, inland water, and coastal and marine areas by 2030. The social and economic costs of inaction on climate change will harm all of us — but some communities are more vulnerable than others.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), increases in average and extreme temperatures and heat waves are expected to lead to more heat illnesses and deaths among vulnerable groups, including certain socially vulnerable groups. These include low-income households, communities of color, those experiencing homelessness, and immigrant populations. If the impacts of climate and extinction crisis continue without rapid prioritization of a nature positive future across many jurisdictions, they will worsen and cost us all. The political will to act now and reach 30% of U.S. lands, freshwater and ocean conserved by 2030 is a goal we can't afford to miss.

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*\*In 2023, this was a priority of the Urban Parks and Greenspace workgroup. It has been shifted to a crosscutting focus for 2024.*



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# The Moral & Strategic Imperative for Achieving 30×30

Wild nature is our best defense against the climate crisis. If past trends in nature loss continue, the United States can expect to lose an additional 15.3 million acres over the next 10 years.<sup>1</sup> Failure to achieve 30×30 would hinder the movement's capacity to achieve ambitious yet existential environmental goals in the future, would leave frontline communities vulnerable, and would prolong insufficient political will, in the electorate and from decision-makers, on environmental issues.

## 1 Nature is disappearing when we need it most to fight climate change

The United States is emitting the equivalent of 15 percent of nature's sequestration potential every year—a whopping 140 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (MMT CO<sub>2</sub>e). Wildfires have been burning with more severity and across larger areas, adding carbon to the atmosphere and further decreasing the sequestration potential of forests and other lands.<sup>2</sup>

## 2 The nature gap harms communities of color most

Communities of color are three times more likely than white communities to live in nature deprived places. 74 percent of communities of color in the contiguous United States live in nature-deprived areas, compared with just 23 percent of white communities.<sup>3</sup>

## 3 U.S. Species and ecosystems are at risk of wide range collapse

34 percent of plants and 40 percent of animals are at risk of extinction, and 41 percent of ecosystems are at risk of range-wide collapse - with the most rapidly declining being the freshwater systems upon which we all rely. Because many protected areas prioritize geological features or landscapes of cultural significance instead of targeting threatened biodiversity, most at-risk species are insufficiently protected to prevent further decline.<sup>4</sup>

# 2023 Conservation and Community Victories and Losses

The path to 30×30 will require political courage from all levels of government - and will rely on the respectful sovereign-to-sovereign collaboration with Tribal governments - to ensure that we not only gain ground to fight the nature loss crisis but stem further loss. A nature positive future is at the heart of our fight to secure public health and correct environmental injustices harming communities on the frontlines of the climate, extinction, and nature deprivation crises. While progress and backsliding on the goals of the America the Beautiful Initiative are vast in communities and jurisdictions across the country, these are some highlights and lowlights relevant to this coalition's priorities from 2023.

## Examples of Progress toward 30×30 & Nature-based Justice40:

- ✓ America the Beautiful Challenge grants funded more than \$141 million in environmental stewardship projects in 2023 with 40% of funds going to Tribal Communities. The total project-based funding ask in 2023 was nearly \$885 million, showcasing tremendous opportunity for continued investment in boots-on-the-ground 30×30 work.
- ✓ President Biden used the Antiquities Act to tell more of the American story and protect ecologically and culturally important lands. In 2023, the President designated Castner Range, Emmett Till & Mamie Till Mobley National Monument, Avi Kwa Ame, and Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni – Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument.
- ✓ The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) - which is the nation's largest land manager and manages 245 million acres of public lands - advanced a Public Lands Rule. Slated to be finalized Spring 2024, this would better protect the more than 86 percent of BLM lands which currently lack durable protections from oil and gas leasing, mining, and other extractive industries.
- ✓ Tribal-led proposal for the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary in Northern California advances with a proposed designation. Offering additional progress for community-centric ocean conservation, the Biden-Harris Administration unveiled the first-ever **U.S. Ocean Justice Strategy** to advance environmental justice for communities that rely on the ocean and Great Lakes for economic, cultural, spiritual, recreational, and food security purposes.

# 2023 Conservation and Community Victories and Losses

Continued progress:

- ✔ After years of local defense from Northern Minnesotans, the Administration finalized a mineral withdrawal that will protect a sensitive part of the watershed that feeds the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. The withdrawal protects this pristine freshwater ecosystem from the proposed Twin Metals Mine, as well as other mining threats, which would have resulted in harm pollution and degradation that could last in perpetuity.
- ✔ Advocates win decades-long fight when EPA cited its authority under Section 404(c) of the Clean Water Act to protect Bristol Bay in Alaska from Pebble Mine that would have harmed the largest sockeye salmon population in the world and thereby destroyed 10,000+ year old subsistence traditions by indigenous people and with it the sport fishing and recreation industry.
- ✔ More than \$1 billion were directed to support frontline communities and under-resourced communities through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) Urban & Community Forestry Program. Competitive grants were awarded to plant and maintain trees, combat extreme heat and climate change, and improve access to nature in cities, towns, and suburbs where more than 84% of Americans live, work, and play. Communities in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and several U.S. Territories and Tribal Nations are receiving funding, covered by the Justice40 Initiative and made possible by President Biden's Inflation Reduction Act – the largest climate investment in history.
- ✔ In the 50th anniversary year of the Endangered Species Act, advocates supported President Biden to veto harmful riders that would have rolled back protections for the lesser prairie chicken and northern long-eared bat. The lesser prairie chicken is a critical indicator species for disappearing grasslands. The northern long-eared bat is severely endangered and a critical support for insect management and pollination - core functions of America's agricultural economy.
- ✔ Tongass National Forest protected after the Biden-Harris Administration rolls back harmful Trump 2020 Alaska Roadless Rule. This action restored longstanding roadless protections to 9.37 million acres of roadless areas that support the ecological, economic and cultural values of Southeastern Alaska.



# 2023 Conservation and Community Victories and Losses

## Continued progress:

- ✔ Blackfeet Nation secured protections for the sacred Badger Two Medicine outside of Glacier National Park in Montana after decades long fight. **A settlement** announced on September 1, 2023, permanently retired the last of oil and gas leases.
- ✔ Biden-Harris Administration canceled the last seven oil and gas leases in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and proposed stronger protections against development on vast swaths of the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska. The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is a 1.5-million-acre (600,000-hectare) coastal plain which lies along the Beaufort Sea on Alaska's northeastern edge where caribou migrate and come to give birth. The plain is marked by hills, rivers and small lakes and tundra and sacred to the Gwich'in people. Migratory birds and caribou pass through the plain, which provides habitat for wildlife including polar bears and wolves.
- ✔ The U.S. Navy and EPA moved forward in defueling the Red Hill Fuel Storage Facility in Hawaii after drinking water contamination crisis in Honolulu has poisoned communities for ten years. This was an important step but much work lies ahead to recover the aquifer.

## At Risk:

- ⚠ Modernizing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to better protect nature and communities. Republican extremist attacks on NEPA continue in pursuit of what they call "permitting reform" and the guise of supporting renewable energy. These are diversion tactics meant to weaken the environmental bill of rights for communities and would not even address the root cause of the delays that NEPA opponents claim they seek to solve.
- ⚠ For Rock Springs, WY, the BLM has released a draft Resource Management Plan that recommends a more conservation-focused approach for 3.6 million acres that will update the current plan to better prioritize wildlife habitat and movement and close some portions of the region to energy development. This signals an important shift to a more conservation-focused application of BLM resource management plans but political disagreements in Wyoming don't guarantee this outcome.

# 2023 Conservation and Community Victories and Losses

## Continued At Risk:

⚠️ **Ambler Road** - On October 13, 2023 — in order to rectify the insufficient environmental analysis from **2020** — the Biden administration **released** the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the Ambler Access Project, quantifying the proposed project's impact on wildlife and local communities. The Administration has an opportunity to protect the Brooks Range by choosing not to allow the mining industry to expand their grasp on U.S. public lands through this stretch of the Arctic.

⚠️ On its way out the door, the Trump Administration attempted to remove longstanding protections for 28 million acres of ecologically and culturally important lands in Alaska. Thankfully those actions were paused, and the Bureau of Land Management is receiving public comments through mid February 2024 on retaining or revoking existing mineral withdrawals. Restoring protections has the support of over half of Alaska's federally recognized tribes and tribal entities, as well as numerous NGO partners within and outside of Alaska.

⚠️ **Oak Flat Mining Threat** — Sacred to Western Apache and other Indigenous people, the beautiful lands of Oak Flat, Arizona are also home to species like ocelots and endangered Arizona hedgehog cacti. Multinational mining conglomerate Rio Tinto — with a long, proven record of ecological and cultural destruction in other parts of the world — intends to replace its rolling hills with a massive copper mine.

## Backsliding:

⊗ On March 13, the **Biden administration approved** the controversial **Willow Project in Alaska**. ConocoPhillips' Willow Project is a massive and decades long oil drilling venture on Alaska's North Slope in the National Petroleum Reserve, which is owned by the federal government. By the administration's own estimates, the project would generate enough oil to release 9.2 million metric tons of planet-warming carbon pollution a year – equivalent to adding 2 million gas-powered cars to the roads.

# 2023 Conservation and Community Victories and Losses

## Continued Backsliding:

⊗ Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge in East Texas approved for Border Wall expansion waiving critical environmental laws like the Endangered Species Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act and the Clean Air Act. Over 40+ years, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has been purchasing land on the Texas-Mexico border to protect one of the most biologically diverse regions in North America from developers and farmers. The four counties of the lower Rio Grande Valley are home to 1,200 plants, 300 butterflies and 700 vertebrates, 520 of which are birds, according to USFWS. Among the most common vertebrates are deer, bobcat, armadillos, javelina hogs, the Texas tortoise, and an endangered cat — the small, spotted ocelot. These hollow "fixes" to the immigration system have proven to be political stunts without the intended results and now millions of dollars of investments in this critical biodiversity hot spot will be wasted as a proposal from previous administrations moves forward from its xenophobic origins.

⊗ Mountain Valley Pipeline - The Fiscal Responsibility Act ratified all issued permits and mandated issuing another needed to complete the pipeline, allowing it to cut through the Jefferson National Forest on the border of West Virginia and Virginia. In doing so, the pipeline would irreversibly scar public lands, leave waterways full of sediment, and expose residents to threats from explosive leaks. To build its project across this public land, the pipeline company was required to obtain approvals from the United States Forest Service (USFS) and the BLM. The attempt by Congress and the Biden Administration to block these lawsuits violates important separation of powers principles and is unconstitutional.



The path of the embattled Mountain Valley Pipeline runs more than 300 miles from West Virginia into Virginia with a proposed extension into North Carolina, including this portion cutting through the Jefferson National Forest in Virginia. ©Mason Cummings

# Progress Report: 2023 Priorities

In 2023, our coalition called on Congress and the Biden-Harris Administration to act on the following policy priorities. Below, we outline actions taken to advance (or lack of action) on the coalition's 2023 priorities over the last year and next steps to ensure these critical policies are advanced and implemented thoroughly in 2024 and beyond.

## **Maximize the impact of existing federal funding to implement the goals of the America the Beautiful Initiative**

The passage of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), alongside annual appropriations and other mandatory funding streams, provides the Biden Administration with historic levels of funding that can be leveraged to benefit conservation, climate and communities. In 2023, the Biden administration made major progress deploying IRA, IIJA, and other funding in support of America the Beautiful goals and prioritization of historically underserved communities.

### **Forward progress included:**

- Department of the Interior (DOI) released a “restoration and resilience framework” to guide \$2 billion of restoration investments from IRA and IIJA, including naming regional “keystone initiatives;”
- 21 BLM “restoration landscapes” received \$161 million, and USDA also announced \$1 billion invested in 400 urban and community forest projects.

### **Areas where progress is needed:**

- Public reporting remains piecemeal and siloed by agency or program, making it difficult to assess cumulative progress. In particular, the Administration could more transparently report on progress towards achieving the Justice40 metric for land, water, and wildlife programs, or at minimum report on funding that has gone towards the programs agencies have already identified as “covered programs” under Justice40 (see here for [DOI’s list](#));
- The Administration could also improve federal agencies’ coordination and collaboration on investments in priority conservation initiatives such as DOI’s regional “keystone initiative” priorities, USDA’s regional “frameworks for conservation action,” and BLM’s priority “restoration landscapes;”
- Incorporating access to nature and greenspace as a priority criteria and/or eligible use for programs that fund transportation and transit, community development, and child care facilities and schools;
- Transparent progress reporting on equitable nature access initiatives, including the work of the [Nature in Communities Committee](#); and,
- Making clear how agencies are addressing barriers for underserved and historically marginalized communities to access funding.

# Progress Report: 2023 Priorities

## **Cont'd: Maximize the impact of existing federal funding to implement the goals of the America the Beautiful Initiative**

### **Areas where progress is needed (continued):**

- Assessing the total funding amount needed to achieve the 30x30 goal, particularly to jumpstart progress on private, state, and Tribal lands;
- Incorporating clear public health goals that align and support priority actions;
- Taking advantage of opportunities to grow the America the Beautiful Challenge by attracting more philanthropic dollars and generating broader participation across federal agencies;
- Improved interagency coordination between federal and local offices is also necessary to remove barriers to community access to existing funding sources;
- The inflow of funds to communities through a Justice40 framework requires substantial cooperation to ensure federal funds reach frontline communities including and not limited to Tribes. When local and state agencies have policy frameworks that synergize with federal initiatives, the likelihood of applying for grants and winning is drastically increased; and
- Agencies should adopt strategies to remove funding application and reporting barriers such as:
  - Utilize video applications and presentations in lieu of extensive grant reporting;
  - Eliminate local grant matching requirements; and
  - Open federal grant opportunities that have been restricted to states to Tribes and community based organizations.

### **Ask to the decision-makers:**

The America the Beautiful for All Coalition celebrates the substantial progress made in deploying federal funding to achieve America the Beautiful goals, especially where those actions have had targeted benefits for Tribes and historically underserved communities.

However, **we encourage the Administration to more transparently report the cumulative progress towards the Justice40 and 30x30 metrics.**

In 2024, we also call on the Administration to **focus on assessing and addressing barriers for under-resourced and historically marginalized communities to access federal funding, and to invest in community capacity building needed to maximize future investments under IRA, IIJA and other funding sources.**

With major investments from the IRA and the IIJA making its way into communities for addressing climate, nature-loss, extinction, and public health concerns, **this is an important year to identify optimization opportunities by listening directly to grantees and awardees.**

# Progress Report: 2023 Priorities

## **Support increased opportunities for co-management & co-stewardship of public lands & waters with Tribes, Native Hawaiians, Alaska Natives, and Territories**

As a collective of several hundred organizations representing different communities and missions across the nation that stand for conservation as a tool for justice, the America the Beautiful for All Coalition believes that we have a responsibility to stand behind and with those who have direct and significant relationships with any of our policy agenda priorities. This is especially true when it comes to respecting the sovereign authority of Tribes to steward and protect their traditional lands, waters and sacred sites.

In our 2023 policy agenda, the coalition included support for expanding Tribal co-management and co-stewardship. Since we released that agenda in January 2023, co-management and co-stewardship agreements between the U.S. and Tribes increased from about 20 in 2022 to nearly 200 in 2023.

In 2024, we choose to stand directly behind those with the greatest experience navigating Tribal co-management and co-stewardship, Tribal leaders themselves.

On February 2, 2024, ATB4All's priorities, projects and campaigns (PPC) workgroup co-lead, Greg Masten (National Congress of American Indians Foundation President), hosted a webinar on behalf of the coalition to listen to the following thoughtful speakers on opportunities to optimize co-management and co-stewardship in the U.S. after the historic progress made in 2023. We were joined by more than 200 participants from nonprofits, businesses and Tribes.

Our 2024 recommendations on co-management and co-stewardship policy below are a reflection of the guidance from these experts, Tribal leaders working nationally, in the southeast, and northwest of the modern day United States along with experienced practitioners who have supported co-management and co-stewardship models, and their organizations.

Experts:

- Larry Wright, Jr. - Ponca Tribe of Nebraska and Executive Director of the National Congress of American Indians
- Qwa'shi'lo'shia / Lisa Wilson (Lummi) - Vice Chair of the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission. Another position Lisa fills is the Co-Chair of the Natural Resources Committee of the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians
- Edward Ornstein - (Southeastern Mvskoke Nation) Special Counsel on Environmental Affairs for the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida



# Progress Report: 2023 Priorities

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- Pat Gonzales-Rogers - Yale School of the Environment and the Yale Divinity School, teaching a graduate-level class titled Tribal Natural Resources and Sovereignty as well as supervising a clinic that serves as consultant to the Yurok Tribe.

On the heels of historic strides in co-management and co-stewardship the following improvements can help guide optimization of this essential tool to support government-to-government obligations and increase opportunities for public lands and waters to be more accessible to their original stewards and improve management of what should be connected and resilient ecosystems.

**Asks for decision-makers** from the America the Beautiful for All Coalition in support of Tribal leaders:

- Expand opportunities for co-management and co-stewardship of public lands, waters and sacred sites. Comprehensive guidance can be found in the National Congress of American Indians Resolution [#PDX-20-003](#).
- Accordingly, and in solidarity with this resolution, we call on Congress to pass legislation and direct federal agencies to include tribal nations in land management decisions at every level of the government based on incorporation of tribal co-management principles and practices;
- In further support of the resolution, our coalition requests that Congress enhance legal authorities that support tribal co-management and directly fund tribal land management on tribal, state, and federal lands

The Administration should:

- Provide greater consistency across U.S. federal agencies to reduce barriers for Tribes to navigate co-management and co-stewardship processes and provide consistency in support of expanded opportunities and connected landscapes.
- Offer funding from the beginning of co-management and co-stewardship consultation to address the disparity in resourcing and staffing for Tribes to enter into negotiations with parity.



## Progress Report: 2023 Priorities

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- Federal agencies should enter into Memoranda of Understanding or Memoranda of Agreement with private philanthropy to support seed funding liquidity so that Tribes can equitably navigate the early processes with the federal government before their co-management or co-stewardship agreements are finalized.
- Educate agency staff and decision-makers on Treaty rights to ensure that Tribal sovereignty is upheld and consistently respected through shared decision-making.
- Provide set-aside funding for Tribes, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and Indigenous communities in Territories for restoration of ecologically and culturally important watersheds, landscapes, and critical ecosystems.
- Work in collaboration as sovereigns across multiple jurisdictions to restore management access to historic homelands to the Tribes who seek to steward their traditional lands and practices.
- Leverage lessons learned from successful models and continue to adapt based on the observations of Tribes about barriers to meaningful collaboration and consultation.
- For Tribes without Treaty rights, ensure legal instructions for Tribes to follow from the agency to ensure that Tribes are supported in developing plans of action, Memoranda of Understanding or Memoranda of Agreement. This provides more consistency from the federal government.

### **Pass a 2023 Farm Bill that invests deeply in the conservation of wetlands, grasslands, forests, soil, clean water and habitat in partnership with the nation's farmers, ranchers, forest owners, community organizations, and other conservation allies**

In 2023, Congress failed to negotiate and pass the Farm Bill - a typically bipartisan piece of legislation that is critical to funding conservation and justice programs throughout the U.S. In 2024, the America the Beautiful for All Coalition stands with many expert farm bill coalitions, such as the Native Farm Bill Coalition, the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, and many watershed health-focused coalitions in support of their Title 2 conservation priorities to conserve and restore health lands and waters and center justice by supporting historically under-resourced communities.



# Progress Report: 2023 Priorities

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## **Cont'd: Pass a 2023 Farm Bill that invests...**

Despite Congress' missed deadline for a 2023 Farm Bill, the alternative in which extremists sought to cut Inflation Reduction Act funding for Farm Bill conservation programs would have been disastrous. We thank Chairwoman Stabenow for drawing a clear line in defense of these critical programs and we hope other champions will demonstrate this courage in 2024.

The Farm Bill has offered the most consistent source of federal programs supporting the implementation of conservation practices on agricultural lands and nearby waters. In 2021, Farm Bill-funded conservation programs touched over 45 million acres, an area larger than the entire state of Oklahoma.<sup>1</sup> The benefits of on-farm conservation programs are widespread: they help farmers and ranchers keep drinking water clean for our urban and rural communities, build soil resilience, limit the impacts of severe drought and flooding, reverse natural habitat destruction for wildlife, mitigate agriculture's greenhouse gas emissions, and support farm operations that are productive and sustainable long-term.



In past years, the Farm Bill has seen efforts to include anti-environmental provisions that have attacked environmental safeguards including the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, and the Pesticide Registration Improvement Enhancement Act.

The 2024 Farm Bill should avoid anti-environmental and anti-public health provisions. The coalition's Farm Bill priorities span multiple issues from freshwater conservation, wildlife corridor and habitat connectivity, and increasing conservation program access for historically underserved populations. These priorities can be addressed through the Conservation, Forestry, Energy, Rural Development, and Research titles.

## Cont'd: Pass a Farm Bill that invests...

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### **Defend Inflation Reduction Act Funding for Conservation Programs**

Increase conservation funding within the 2024 Farm Bill to meet the demand of private landowners seeking to advance conservation best practices. The Conservation Title of the 2018 Farm Bill accounted for 7 percent of the total Farm Bill budget, with \$60 billion of the total \$867 billion legislation. Demand is high and has historically gone unmet at a time when these investments are needed most.

### **Protect water quality and water quantity by increasing river health funding**

Increase funding for the Water Source Protection Program - through this program the USFS can use matched partner funding to implement water source protection programs on their lands.

### **Increase funding for research on equitable and sustainable land and water stewardship**

Prioritize climate research, including farmer-led research and innovation, through programs like the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program. Ensure that research programs focus on and celebrate the contributions of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) farmers. Prioritize research to better understand the large-scale trends and challenges related to land and water conservation for beginning and BIPOC producers. Underserved producers, including many BIPOC farmers and ranchers, have experienced systemic and institutional racism that has further hindered their access to conservation programs.

### **Help landowners and producers prioritize practices that offer greatest climate benefits and wildlife habitat connectivity opportunities**

Develop science-based climate-smart agriculture definitions that prioritize practices that afford the greatest climate benefit, such as incorporating cover crops, perennial crops, managed grazing of perennial pasture, and other investments in soil health. Utilize existing programs to provide resources and incentives to private landowners to help increase habitat connectivity and allow for wildlife movement and resilience in key migration corridors.

### **Increase funding for conservation programs as a critical priority to serve Tribal lands and as necessary to keep up – not only with Tribal, but also national conservation needs.**

The America the Beautiful for All Coalition stands with the Native Farm Bill Coalition and its members who have called for continued opportunities to support Tribal-led conservation through Farm Bill programs and work with Tribes through sovereign government to government decision-making. Congress should add Tribes to the list of entities defining Priority Resource Concerns. We call on Congress and the Administration to work with Tribes, the Native Farm Bill Coalition, and our partners at the National Congress of American Indians to address inconsistencies and barriers to accessing critical conservation programs that results from the inappropriate application of local and state government standards to Indian Country.



## Farm Bill priorities for freshwater, wildlife and justice

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We call on leaders in Congress negotiating a 2024 Farm Bill to:

- Encourage the USDA to include wildlife corridors and connectivity as priorities when implementing any of the conservation practices within the Farm Bill.
- Support science-based forest management and natural solutions, such as restoring floodplains, wetlands, and streams, along with forest thinning and controlled burns.
- Promote sustainable grazing to keep grasslands intact and facilitate wildlife movement by removing or modifying fences, or adopting new practices like virtual fencing. This allows for cattle management without hindering wildlife. This should include establishing a new practice standard for virtual fencing and mandating USDA research on virtual fencing technology and its conservation effects.
- Expand on the model of the Wyoming Big Game Conservation Partnership, which supports big game migration route protection and voluntary participation by private ranch and farm owners, to extend this work to other states. This can also include increasing funding availability for conservation practices to address habitat connectivity under existing programs.
- Advocate for source water protection to minimize contamination risks to humans, the environment, and wildlife.
- Instruct NRCS to require states to prioritize soil health as a priority resource concern.
- Prioritize floodplain easements and other nature-based solutions for flood damage control that offer multiple benefits with annual funding, best practices, directed interagency collaboration to focus on areas with recurring flood issues, and including nature-based approaches in project alternative assessments.
- Enhance drought resilience by improving water infrastructure to help vulnerable communities including strengthening the Watershed Condition Framework and offering an 85 percent cost-share rate for high-level, climate-friendly, and drought-resilient conservation practices and ensuring EQIP funding and applications adopt water conserving and drought-resilience practices.

# Progress Report: 2023 Priorities

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## **Prioritize representation in staffing and interpretation within federal agencies to ensure inclusion of local and culturally-relevant perspectives.**

A 2023 Government Accountability Office report examining federal workforce trends over 10 years found representation at federal agencies of “historically disadvantaged racial groups” increased slightly with a 19% increase amongst Black Americans, a 6% increase amongst Asian Americans, with Latino employees increasing by less than 2%. While progress should be celebrated, it must continue at an accelerated and expanded pace.

In 2023, we called on agencies implementing the goals of the America the Beautiful Initiative to promote equitable access to the outdoors, enhance and expand opportunities for public participation at each step of the decision-making process, and hire and train a diverse workforce that is representative of local and most culturally relevant populations.

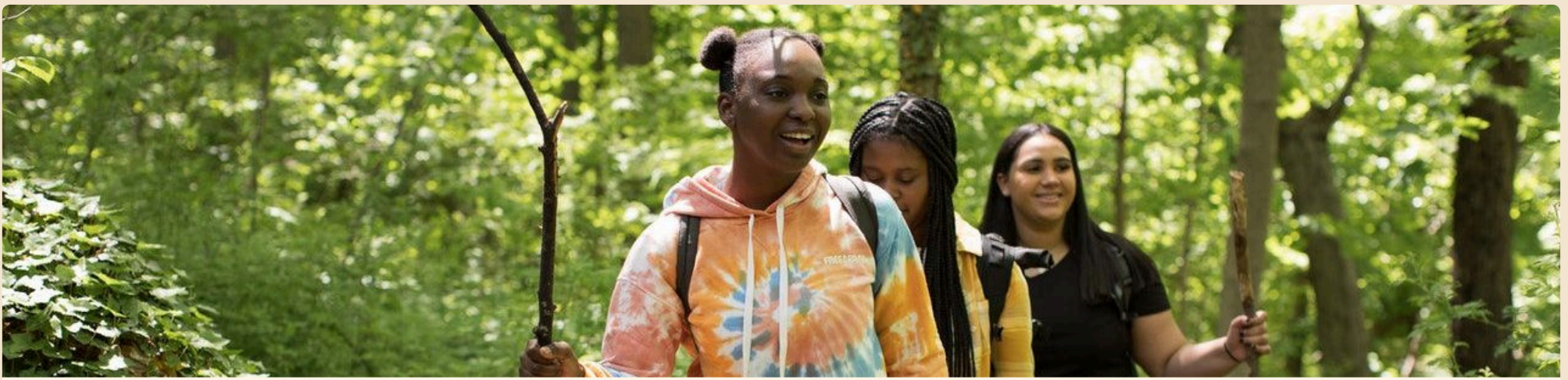
We are grateful to have heard of bright spots such as:

- The creation of the "my DOI career" website managed by the DOE, which is more accessible than USAJobs; the DOI Pathways Program that promotes employment opportunities to students and recent graduates from all backgrounds.
- USDA's progress to hire individuals that relate to and look like the people it serves, reporting out an 18-25% increase in hiring a diverse workforce.
- The Inflation Reduction Act set aside \$500 million to the DOI through Sept. 30, 2030, including funds for hiring National Park Service (NPS) employees. This is happening with efforts to boost recruitment in historically black colleges, military installations, trade schools, and universities with Native ties.
- NPS' commitment to hire, welcome, promote, and retain a workforce that represents communities across the country and ensure that all Americans can see themselves reflected in the stories that national parks tell under Director Chuck Sams' leadership.

Much of this progress is in reaction to decreases in workforce diversity over the last decade. **We call on this Administration and future administrations through 2030 to diagnose inequitable barriers to more people of color and individuals from frontline communities serving in leadership roles.**

**We call on all agencies managing the America the Beautiful Initiative to diagnose and address barriers to retention and promotion for people of color across all rungs of management, especially leadership.**

Through 2030, we call on all agencies managing progress on America the Beautiful Initiative goals to **be transparent with reporting how they are complying with the President's Executive Order 14035** on representative staffing in the federal government. These lands and waters are not welcoming to all Americans unless the perspectives of their own communities are involved in the management.



# 2024 Legislative Priorities

## Pass valuable conservation and equity legislation languishing in Congress:

While there have been bright spots for bipartisan cooperation on a few pieces of conservation legislation such as on the Recovering America's Wildlife Act, gridlock in Congress has stymied important conservation legislation that is essential to advancing 30×30 and Justice40. Anti-funding riders that would neutralize critical programs, partisan attempts to preemptively overturn rule-makings through the Congressional Review Act, and poison pill budget amendments, threaten solutions to the climate, extinction, and inequitable nature crises. The coalition recommends forward action and passage of the following bills along with dozens of lands bills that have been languishing in Congress, and supports continued political courage by conservation-minded lawmakers to drive solutions to the nature-loss crisis.

### 1 Environmental Justice for All Act

The most comprehensive environmental justice legislation in history. It prohibits disparate impacts on the basis of race, color, or national origin as discrimination. In addition, the bill directs agencies to follow certain requirements concerning environmental justice. Agencies must prepare community impact reports that assess the potential impacts of their actions on environmental justice communities under certain circumstances. Further, it creates a variety of advisory bodies and positions, such as the White House Environmental Justice Interagency Council. Among other things, the council must issue an environmental justice strategy.

### 2 National Outdoor Opportunity Act

Creates of a national equity fund that will ensure long-term investments in programs to serve all youth with opportunities to explore the great outdoors.

### 3 Recovering America's Wildlife Act

Provides financial and technical assistance to states, territories, and the District of Columbia for the purposes of (1) recovering species listed as a threatened or endangered species under the Endangered Species Act or under state law, or (2) avoiding the need to list species under such laws. For example, the bill establishes the Endangered Species Recovery and Habitat Conservation Legacy Fund. A portion of the fund must be used to establish an Endangered Species Recovery Grant Program. It also provides funding for (1) the conservation or restoration of wildlife and plant species of greatest conservation need; (2) the wildlife conservation strategies of states, territories, or the District of Columbia; and (3) wildlife conservation education and recreation projects. DOI must use a portion of the funding for a grant program. The grants must be used for innovative recovery efforts for species of greatest conservation need, species listed as endangered or threatened species, or the habitats of such species.

## Important legislation for Congress to act on in 2024

### Advancing Tribal Parity on Public Land Act (ATPPLA)

Establish a formal role in managing the federal lands for Tribal Nations, setting them on equal footing with states and local governments in acquiring land. This bill mandates federal public land managers consult with Tribal governments with historical connections to the land, land use plans must be consistent with Tribal plans wherever possible, and that existing public land advisory boards include at least one Tribal representative. ATPPLA would improve current law by adding cultural sites and treaty obligations to land acquisition criteria.

### Outdoors for All Act

Expand outdoor recreational opportunities in urban and low-income communities across the nation; invest in new parks and open spaces—and upgrade existing ones; this will increase shade, tree cover, and clean air in these communities that are critical to navigating the intensifying effects of the climate crisis.

### Clean Water Act of 2023

Would reverse the dangerous Sackett decision of the U.S. Supreme Court by reinstating the historic and bipartisan, federal-state partnership that has protected our rivers, streams, and wetlands for over 50 years; establishes a clear, level playing field for businesses and industries to thrive while protecting our critical natural resources; and ensure clean water for families and communities.

### Headwaters Protection Act of 2023

Would restore and maintain healthy watersheds on National Forest land, which supply drinking water for 1 in 5 Americans and provide key habitat; authorize increased funding for and improve equitable access to the USFS' Water Source Protection Program and Watershed Condition Framework, two programs that benefit freshwater resources. The bill would also require the USFS to ensure that future actions in National Forest like mining and timber harvesting will not have long-term negative impacts on watersheds.

### Public Lands Act;

Restores and expands over 1 million acres of federal public lands in California. Consists of three House bills including:

The Northwest California Wilderness, Recreation, and Working Forests Act, which is led in the House by Representative Jared Huffman (D-California-02), The Central Coast Heritage Protection Act, which is led in the House by Representative Salud Carbajal (D-California-24), and The San Gabriel Mountains Foothills and Rivers Protection Act, which is led in the House by Representative Judy Chu (D-California-28).

### Tribal Cultural Areas Protection Act

Establish a national system for protecting culturally significant and sacred ancestral sites on public lands. While existing laws allow for a national inventory of protected lands for parks, wilderness, and other purposes, no such system exists to protect Tribal cultural sites. This proposed legislation provides a new tool for Congress to permanently safeguard and preserve cultural resources on public lands that have been used by Indigenous peoples since ancient times. Moreover, the bill mandates all public land management agencies identify potential Tribal cultural areas in their respective jurisdictions and grants authority to Tribal nations to manage and undertake cultural practices on these sites.

# 2024 Congressional Action Priorities

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## **Shenandoah Mountain Act**

Designate more than 92,000 acres of the George Washington National Forest as the Shenandoah Mountain National Scenic Area.

## **Living School Yards Act**

Direct important federal resources towards upgrading school grounds into nature-based learning environments that help reduce the impacts of extreme weather while providing students access to shaded play, recreation, gardening and outdoor learning.

## **Transit to Trails Act**

Provide equitable access to parks, green spaces, and public lands and waters by establishing a grant program that will fund projects to make transportation to these spaces more accessible for underserved communities.

## **America's Red Rock Wilderness Act**

Designate more than 8 million acres of BLM land in Utah as wilderness, the highest form of protection for federal lands. designates specified lands in the following areas of Utah as components of the National Wilderness Preservation System: (1) Great Basin, (2) Grand Staircase-Escalante, (3) Moab-La Sal Canyons, (4) Henry Mountains, (5) Glen Canyon, (6) San Juan-Anasazi, (7) Canyonlands Basin, (8) San Rafael Swell, and (9) Book Cliffs and Uinta Basin.

## **Wild and Scenic River Bills:**

- Wild Olympics Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Act
- River Democracy Act
- Northwest California Wilderness, Recreation, and Working Forests Act
- Montana Headwaters Legacy Act
- M.H. Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic River Act
- Dolores River National Conservation Area and Special Management Area Act
- Deerfield River Wild and Scenic River Study Act
- Nulhegan River and Paul Stream Wild and Scenic River Study Act

**Water Data and Security Act:** Establish a national water data framework for sharing, integrating, and utilizing water data and supporting the development of innovative water data technologies and tools. Develop common standards and direct federal agencies that generate and use water data to work together and more.

**Rio Grande Water Security Act:** Bring vital coordination and resources to address water security needs across the Rio Grande. Develop an integrated water resources management plan for the Rio Grande Basin using the best available science, data, and local knowledge to improve water conservation, address community water needs, and restore this iconic river and its tributaries. Convene a Rio Grande Basin Working Group to provide recommendations to improve infrastructure, data, and monitoring, increase water conservation, and improve collaboration across the Basin for the next three decades. Reauthorize a critical program to invest in Pueblo irrigation infrastructure.

## **Great Bend of the Gila National Conservation Act**

Establish the Great Bend of the Gila National Conservation Area and the Palo Verde National Conservation Area in Arizona to conserve nearly 60,000 acres of culturally and ecologically significant lands in Maricopa County, AZ.

## **Twenty-First Century Dams Act**

Provide resources for programs related to state dam safety, the rehabilitation of high hazard potential dams, and the inspection of dams; Reauthorizes through FY2026 the National Dam Safety Program; Reauthorizes through FY2026 a program related to the rehabilitation of structural measures and a program related to water infrastructure; Directs the Department of the Army to establish a program to carry out dam removal projects.

## **Protect America's Children from Pesticides Act**

Would increase protections against exposure to toxic pesticides including a ban on the highly toxic pesticide paraquat, which is known to cause Parkinson's disease, as well as dangerous organophosphates and neonicotinoids. These dangerous pesticides, including many banned in other countries, are sickening America's farmworkers and children and harming ecosystems that sustain us.

# Progress Report: 2023 Priorities

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## **Reject projects that would exacerbate the climate crisis, harm communities and ecosystems as well as any changes to the permitting process that would greenlight such projects**

The Biden-Harris Administration has made notable progress protecting 26 million acres since taking office and taken significant strides toward 30% of U.S. ocean conservation. While the coalition has not agreed with all decisions as exemplified earlier in this report, it cannot be denied that they have demonstrated leadership for ecological and cultural resource conservation.



We should also celebrate the historic steps the Biden Administration took just a few weeks ago when President Biden announced that his Administration would pause pending decisions for exports of Liquid Natural Gas (LNG), while the Department of Energy reviews its process for analyzing these decisions. This action was one that listened to the voices of frontline communities and the concerns about the impacts to our climate and local communities impacted by these projects.

As the nation makes the necessary transition to renewable energy, the Administration must site projects and secure materials in a manner that protects culturally and ecologically significant lands and waters and honors the principles of the America the Beautiful Initiative. Backsliding on the nation's 30×30 commitment and allowing for the degradation of pristine ecosystems reduces our defenses against the climate and extinction crises and today's and tomorrow's children of their experience with healthy nature.

Regardless of political pressure that threatens the necessary courage to confront the climate crisis, we call on Members of Congress and the Biden-Harris Administration to reject projects that would endanger frontline communities by disturbing sacred sites, cultural resources, health ecosystems and wildlife habitat, and exacerbating the climate crisis. Oil and gas operations within an immediate radius of urban parks, wildlife refuges, and communities should be prioritized for early closure and decommissioning.

## **A strong National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) protects the rights of communities.**

We celebrate the Biden-Harris Administrations efforts to overturn the worst parts of Trump-era NEPA rollbacks and restore the common sense protections to the law's original intent. →



# Progress Report: 2023 Priorities

## **Cont'd - A strong NEPA:**

Codifying climate change and environmental justice considerations are critical for protecting communities from the climate and nature loss crises and preventing further or worsened environmental injustices for people on the frontlines of these crises. A key piece of this remedy was ensuring that all communities can access public input processes by addressing the onerous burdens put on public comment requirements by the Trump Administration. **The Biden Administration should go further by finalizing the Phase II NEPA Rule proposed by the White House Council on Environmental Quality to better ensure environmental justice principles and robust and meaningful public engagement is part of this process.**

## **Phase out new federal onshore and offshore drilling and support the just transition to renewable energy**

Onshore, the Administration moved forward with two important proposed regulatory changes via the proposed BLM Methane Waste Prevention Rule and the Onshore Oil and Gas Leasing Rule. While these two rules do not phase out leasing, they do provide essential reforms to reduce the unnecessary and wasteful venting and flaring of methane, one of the most potent greenhouse gasses, and provide important and long overdue reforms for oil and gas leasing to prevent speculative leasing, and protect communities from messes left behind by abandoned wells, and increases the rates the oil industry pays to operate on public lands. At the same time, the BLM has moved to prioritize the rapid deployment of responsibly sited renewable energy development, including by proposing a new Renewable Energy Rule to further incentivize clean energy on appropriate areas of public lands and initiated updates to the Western Solar Plan - with a draft plan released in January 2024.

Offshore, the Administration finalized the 2024–2029 National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program (Program) with the fewest oil and gas lease sales in history. The Administration will now decide whether, where, and how to offer the first of these potential sales in 2025, a decision that must account for and stem the ongoing harm to people and wildlife caused by the offshore oil industry. The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) has also proposed a financial assurances rule that takes steps to hold oil and gas companies responsible for decommissioning costs. The Administration has made important progress towards renewable energy goals offshore by approving the nation's first six commercial-scale offshore wind energy projects and holding four offshore wind lease auctions that have brought in almost \$5.5 billion.

The Biden-Harris Administration should continue to make progress in finalizing strong oil and gas reforms including a final BLM methane rule, oil and gas leasing rule, BOEM financial assurances rule, as well as strengthening and finalizing the proposed rule for the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska. To address the need for just transition, the Administration should establish a plan for aligning onshore and offshore oil and gas programs with the its climate goals and prepare additional regulatory steps that can be taken to bring these programs into alignment with climate goals.

# Progress Report: 2023 Priorities

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## **Reform outdated mining laws and regulations**

In our 2023 Policy Agenda, we observed that “prior mining has all too often left a legacy of pollution that has disproportionately impacted Tribes, indigenous communities, communities of color and other frontline communities. With estimates that the vast majority of cobalt, nickel, lithium and copper are located within 35 miles of Native American reservations, it is critically important that Congress and the Biden Administration significantly reform mining laws and regulations, and reduce the demand for new minerals by fostering a circular economy and other means, to avoid repeating the mistakes of our past.”

At that time, the Coalition highlighted two positive steps taken by the Biden-Harris Administration: the establishment of the Interagency Working Group on mining reform and efforts toward enhanced Tribal consultation regarding mining projects. The Coalition encouraged building on those steps.

Since then, progress on mining reform within the executive branch has been limited and slow, but not inconsequential. Progress on improving community and tribal engagement and on Justice40 implementation, on the other hand, appears to have stalled.

In 2023, the Administration took the following meaningful steps to address the threats of outdated mining laws and regulations:

- On May 16, 2023, the BLM issued a Solicitor’s Opinion in response to the District Court’s decision in Rosemont (re: Thacker Pass) “acknowledge[ing] recent judicial decisions affirming that the Mining Law and the relevant Bureau of Land Management regulations do not allow for approval of those facilities on federal lands where there is no evidence of mineral discovery.” BLM rescinded more expansive opinions allowing for large scale ancillary uses on improperly claimed lands.
- On September 12, 2023, the Interagency Working Group on Mining Laws, Regulations, and Permitting (IWG) (launched February 2022) released its long-awaited report. Among a host of other matters, the report highlighted the need to strengthen community and tribal consultation, to reform land leasing and enable royalties, and to shift the burden of clean-up to companies rather than taxpayers. These findings are generally consistent with the reforms identified in the Clean Energy Minerals Reform Act. Some reforms recommended by the Interagency Working Group can be achieved through federal regulation, and BLM and USFS must prioritize following those recommendations by updating their regulations.

Concerningly, the Administration has been remiss in strengthening community and tribal engagement and in establishing strong guidance and benchmarks for Justice40 implementation related to mining and ancillary projects. This includes millions of dollars of IRA and IIJA funded projects.

# Progress Report: 2023 Priorities

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## Cont'd: Reform outdated mining laws and regulations

Failure to modernize the 1872 Mining Law threatens the nation's 30×30 and Justice40 commitments:

- ❏ • Permitting federally funded projects to move forward with only pro forma commitments to 40 percent of benefits accruing to overburdened, low-income, or disadvantaged communities in proximity to mining projects;
- Risking irreparable harm to conservable land and sensitive ecosystems;
- Allowing the acceleration of domestic mining with inadequate environmental and community protections;
- Permitting federally funded projects to move forward without regard to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent.

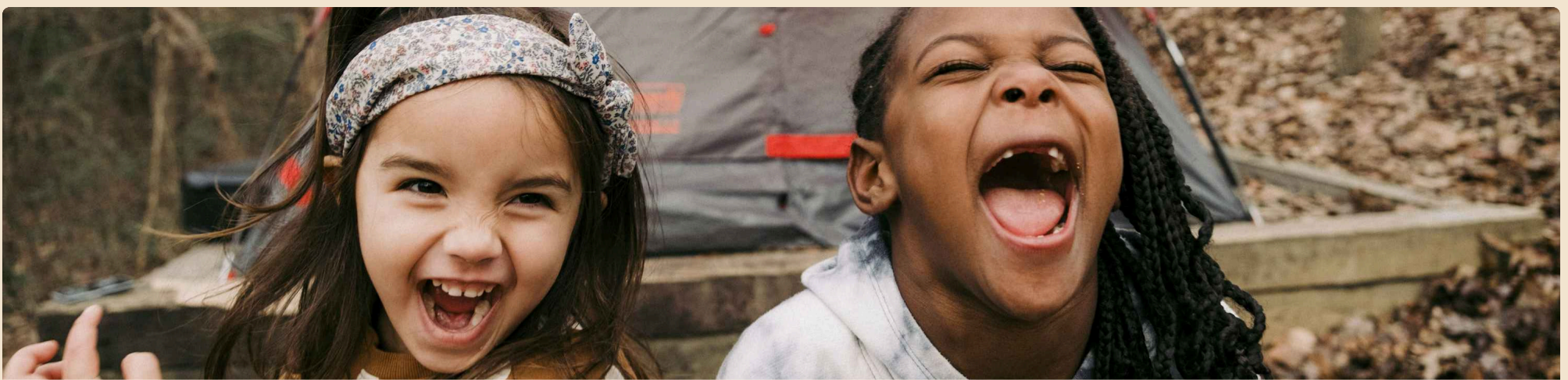
The lack of progress in these areas is particularly troubling in light of significantly stronger momentum in 2022 on these matters. The Administration should resume the development of sub-regulatory guidance in these areas, as it has done in other matters, such as clean energy development and climate finance.

Further efforts by the Administration should implement those recommendations in the IWG report that can be achieved through executive and regulatory action. Where recommendations require statutory change, the Administration should seek to pass the Clean Energy Minerals Reform Act or its components.

Additionally, mining reform should be bundled into permitting reform efforts to the extent that such reforms seek to balance environmental and public health protections with expediting clean energy permitting. Clear non-negotiables, such as the preservation of judicial review, should anchor the Administration's efforts.

The Administration has clearly identified that domestic mining is part of its economic policy, which centers around a clean energy transition. Accordingly, demand reduction through reclamation, recycling, and improved technologies should be prioritized over new mining projects.

ATB4All will continue its push for executive and agency action consistent with the Interagency Working Group on Mining's report, and for stronger guidance on tribal engagement, community engagement, and Justice40 implementation within the mining permitting process. **We call for federal funding related to critical minerals to be tied directly to meeting strong engagement and Justice40 requirements.**



# Progress Report: 2023 Priorities

## **Utilize integrated pest management and accelerate the transition from pesticides that are harmful to wildlife, ecosystems, and human health\***

Actions by states, Congress, and the EPA have been taken to accelerate the transition away from harmful pesticides to wildlife, ecosystems, and human health. Several states have implemented *integrated pest management laws* for schoolyard management, including CA, IL, MA, NJ, NY, OR, TX, LA, and more. The bicameral *Protect America's Children from Toxic Pesticides Act* has been reintroduced in the 118th Congress but has not advanced in committee. In 2023, EPA suspended the technical-grade product containing the herbicide dimethyl tetrachloroterephthalate (DCPA, also known as Dacthal), a suspected carcinogen. This action prohibits the sale, distribution, and use of DCPA.

The EPA has implemented a ban on chlorpyrifos pesticide use on crops which protected the foods we eat from this neurotoxin in 2021. In a shocking decision, an appeals court overturned that rule in late 2023 and remanded the rule back to the EPA to consider the full scientific record on chlorpyrifos and determine whether any food uses are safe for children and farmworkers and can be retained. **We encourage EPA to move forward with a new rule that disallows the use of chlorpyrifos** - known to harm developing brains of children - on all foods upon full review of the scientific record.

The Administration must take urgent action for a more comprehensive integration of non-toxic pest management systems. To do so, the **Administration should direct federal agencies to expand pilot projects of alternative pest management strategies, increase the scaling of successful programs, and revise standard protocols to address invasive species sustainably by utilizing integrated pest management strategies. The Administration should also propose a federal budget to fund integrated pest management and the transition from harmful pesticides.**

Congress should also pass the **Protect America's Children from Toxic Pesticides Act** which would:

- Ban dangerous pesticides including organophosphate insecticides, neonicotinoid insecticides and paraquat herbicides;
- Close loopholes that have allowed the EPA to issue emergency exemptions and conditional registrations to use pesticides even before they go through full health and safety reviews;

*Note: In 2023, this policy sat in the Urban Parks & Greenspace priorities and has been moved to a crosscutting policy to address its nationwide implications.*

# 2024 Cross-cutting policy priority additions

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## **Cont'd: Pesticide transition:**

- Create a petition process for the people which will allow citizens to request review of pesticides that would otherwise be approved for use indefinitely;
- Support local community protective actions from preemption of veto by state law;
- Protect farmworkers from harm by requiring EPA-reviewed injury reports, improved pesticide label instructions and requiring labels in languages in addition to English; and
- Broaden the knowledge base by requiring suspension and review of pesticides deemed unsafe by other nations.

## **Increase Access to Conservation Funding for Native Communities**

In the 2023 Policy Agenda, the America the Beautiful for All coalition noted especially the barriers faced by Tribes and Indigenous communities; inclusive of, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiian, and Indigenous people of all territories in seeking funding to support conservation, land acquisition and easements due to lack of direct eligibility, sufficient funding, and set asides.

Since then, the Biden Administration has taken positive steps and made progress addressing some of these issues. In the proposed FY2024 budget, the DOI proposed the creation of a \$12 million Tribal Land and Water Conservation Fund program. In the 2023 round of America the Beautiful challenge funding, forty percent of grants supported projects implemented by Indigenous Communities. Finally, NPS announced in July that they would be updating the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) State Assistance Program manual to provide more explicit policies and practices aimed to better consult with and incorporate the needs of Tribes and indigenous communities.

But, we can and should do more. The barriers to accessing conservation funding call on us to work together to make further progress. A recent report, "Tribal Access to the Land and Water Conservation Fund", examined barriers facing Tribes in accessing LWCF funding. The study found that of the number of LWCF State Assistance Program grants awarded over the past half century, only 0.2% of them went to Tribes and indigenous communities. That is significantly incongruent with the 2.3% of tribally held lands in the United States and the 2% of the U.S. population living in tribal areas. This fall, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) passed a resolution endorsing the Tribal Access to the Land and Water Conservation Fund Report and calling for a standalone program for tribes and indigenous communities to address these barriers to funding access.

The America the Beautiful for All Coalition supports a program built by and for Tribal Nations, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiian, and Indigenous people of the territories. We also recognize building that program will take an act of Congress and new funding, which will take time – potentially years.

# 2024 Cross-cutting policy priority additions

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## **Cont'd: Increase Access to Conservation Funding for Native Communities**

In the interim, the Biden Administration must continue to do more to build on the progress they've already begun to make. We encourage the Biden Administration to continue to propose and follow through on creative ideas to increase conservation funding opportunities for native communities, including last year's proposed creation of a Tribal Land and Water Conservation Fund.

We'd also note the Administration's success in setting a goal via the America the Beautiful Challenge program of an expectation that more than 10% of grants would benefit tribes and indigenous communities and then far exceeding that in each funding round. We encourage the Administration to consider the strategy of setting a numerical goal for overall conservation funding from LWCF and other conservation funding sources that benefits Tribes, and Indigenous communities; inclusive of, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiian, and Indigenous people of the territories and then working towards that goal with an emphasis on utilizing all existing authorities, technical assistance, and other tools to ensure that tribes and indigenous communities receive an equitable share of conservation funding. **We stand ready to collaborate with the Administration on ways to support these goals to build on the progress they have already made.**

## **Require Natural Capital Accounting and Ecosystem Services**

In August 2023, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued guidance on accounting for ecosystem services in benefit-cost analyses, and accepted public comments on the "Proposed Guidance for Assessing Changes in Environmental and Ecosystem Services in Benefit-Cost Analysis." Before this guidance, ecosystem services were not captured in benefit-cost analyses, which the U.S. government uses to check that regulations and investments are making a positive impact on Americans, however they have not been required to consider ecosystem services (e.g. clean air, stormwater/flood control,). According to OMB, "failing to fully account for nature's bounty has led to under-valuing and erosion of our nation's natural assets. When we account for our environment, we are able to harness opportunities to confront climate change, promote prosperous and resilient communities, and invest in strong infrastructure."

**The Office of Management and Budget should update *benefit-cost analysis* requirements for federal decision-making to include the value of nature and of ecosystem services, both from an economic perspective and beyond monetary value.** The OMB must issue a *requirement* rather than guidance to include the value of ecosystem services in benefit-cost analysis. This imperative will develop healthy ecosystems which protect communities and strengthen the economy. By accomplishing this, projects that would convert lands and waters from their natural state would have to stand against a benefit-cost analysis, thereby developing a higher environmental standard for projects to meet.

# Freshwater Conservation: Preserving our Lifeline

Our freshwater ecosystems are under threat. Widespread pollution, over-extraction, climate change impacts, and the destruction of habitats pose significant risks to the health and availability of freshwater resources. It is essential that we prioritize the conservation and restoration of freshwater ecosystems to ensure the long-term sustainability of this vital lifeline for humans and countless other species.



Freshwater dependent species are disappearing at a rate faster than others. Without immediate action, we risk losing valuable biodiversity and destabilizing entire ecosystems. Protecting and restoring freshwater habitat is also crucial for the provision of clean water to communities. It is imperative that we implement stronger regulations and conservation measures to safeguard these resources for generations to come.

The U.S. took an important step forward with its commitment to the Global Freshwater Challenge at COP28.

**We call for continued bold action to protect these disappearing life sources and for all levels of government to use the tools at their disposal to protect vulnerable yet vital wetlands.**

## **Spatial Scale Protections for Freshwater Ecosystems are Urgent for Vulnerable Communities and Species**

Historic droughts, floods, and failing infrastructure imperil water supplies, leaving communities without access to safe drinking water, while roads wash out, schools/businesses flood, and power outages increase due to extreme weather and climate-related disasters. We celebrate this administration's leadership including billions of dollars for projects across the country to build new water reuse, efficiency, storage, and conveyance facilities that secure and grow sustainable water supplies and avoid new dams. In addition, President Biden's National Climate Task Force has launched multiple interagency working groups to build resilience across the country — including the Drought Resilience Interagency Working Group. We call on this group to leverage the President's historic commitment to 30x30 and the Global Freshwater challenge to identify and invest in the restoration of the most climate-vulnerable communities. Too often, the health of freshwater ecosystems are not primary considerations for use of connected terrestrial protected areas.

# Freshwater policies

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**We call on the Administration to identify watersheds that are vulnerable** to pollution, flooding, water scarcity and drought, and offer critical habitat for aquatic species. **They must also invest in these areas to improve local communities' water health and security into the future.**

## 2023 Priority Status Checks

In the coalition's inaugural year, each workgroup identified priorities for the 20-point 2023 policy agenda. Below is an evaluation of progress or lack of progress on the workgroup's policy priorities from 2023.

### **Reform the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) to better serve frontline & disadvantaged communities**

Decades of Clean Water State Revolving Fund grants show that smaller communities and municipalities with larger populations of color are statistically less likely to receive CWSRF assistance, according to a recent Natural Resources Defense Council analysis. We called for important reforms to protect community health and increase equitable access to these funds. These included: reducing barriers to frontline communities accessing important green infrastructure funding, states prioritizing CWSRF-funded projects in underserved communities, EPA providing oversight and review of state funding decisions to ensure that historically disinvested communities are recognized, and transparently report on where funds go.

Work is still needed to improve opportunities for disadvantaged communities to access these programs, EPA initiated important actions in the first years of this administration including: new investments and guidance on the remediation of PFAS pollution in drinking water, guidance to states on redefining the term "disadvantaged communities" in accordance with the Justice40 Initiative, and changes to funding formulas to better support states in phasing out lead pipes through SRFs.

With the revival of earmarks after years of pause, one of the greatest threats to equity in this program now falls on Congress to address. In 2024, **Congress should reject earmarks that carve out access to funding that would otherwise be allocated through a competitive process through State Revolving Funds** (SRFs) in favor of more politically potent projects. Earmarks often provide grants (or so-called loans with principal forgiveness) to communities that are not disadvantaged. While true loans to wealthier communities must be repaid (revolving money back into the SRFs), earmarking grants to such communities means there's less funding available to revolve back into the funding stream.<sup>1</sup> Earmarks like these are ultimately subtracted from EPA appropriations, meaning those with earmarked funds miss out.<sup>2</sup>



## 2023 Freshwater Priority Status Checks

### Support increased funding, program reforms, and expansion of Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Building Resilient Infrastructure & Communities Program (BRIC)

FEMA's BRIC program aims to address the need for climate adaptation and hazard mitigation funding, especially in low-income communities, communities of color, and other vulnerable areas. In our 2023 policy agenda we called for supporting program reforms to increase incentives for nature-based and health-protective resilience projects, expanding FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program Endangered Species Act 7(a)(1) Conservation Action Program, revise floodplain management regulations for the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), and revising the National Flood Insurance Program Community Rating System.

Throughout the year, the Administration's following outcomes supported the coalition's policy priorities in favor of reforming and expanding FEMA's BRIC program:

- FEMA released the fourth Notice of Funding Opportunity for BRIC with \$1 billion available, making it possible for local jurisdictions, in partnership with states, territories, and tribal governments, to begin the grant application process.
- FEMA further expanded BRIC Direct Technical Assistance with a goal to add at least 80 more Direct Technical Assistance opportunities to help communities in need identify mitigation needs and develop tools. This will also help to design holistic, equitable climate adaptation solutions.
- FEMA conducted a stakeholder engagement effort to identify successes and opportunities for reducing barriers to access the BRIC program.

Looking forward, FEMA should consider the following reforms to improve the BRIC program for 30×30 and Justice40 progress in accordance with the President's America the Beautiful Initiative:

- Creation of a mandatory minimum 20 percent set-aside within BRIC for nature-based projects (NBS); to ensure that resources are perpetually available for critical projects, avoiding the need for NBS-focused applications to compete against applications in the general pool;
- Adjust the scoring system for applications for NBS. With minimal points currently attributed for projects that incorporate NBS, FEMA should get rid of the “all or nothing” approach to scoring and better evaluate natural capital accounting to reduce benefit-cost analysis barriers for NBS projects;
- Request that the BRIC Program cover an expanded set of hazards: drought, extreme heat, and others;
- Streamline the application process. Simplifying paperwork and reducing administrative and bureaucratic burdens on communities with smaller resources;

## Cont'd: FEMA Building Resilient Infrastructure & Communities Program

- Prioritize funding tied to programs using equity framework for under-resourced communities and those facing enhanced disaster risks in the face of climate change;
- Continue to involve communities in the reform process by seeking their input and including their perspectives in the decision-making process.

## 2024 Policy Priorities

### Remove Failing & Ecologically Harmful Dams and Restore Natural River Systems & Imperiled Aquatic Species

Restore Salmon and Steelhead Populations in the Columbia and Snake Rivers - including removing dams and restoring nature flow

In late 2023, President Biden ordered federal agencies to do everything in their power to restore wild salmon and steelhead populations in the Columbia and Snake rivers of the Pacific Northwest. Despite historic progress, Salmon in these native ecosystems remain on the brink of extinction and the removal of four breaching dams on the Salmon River - which flows into Idaho, Oregon and Washington on the path to the Columbia River and out to the Pacific Ocean - is urgent.

When the four Columbia River Basin Tribes signed treaties with the United States in 1855, they explicitly reserved the right to fish in perpetuity while ceding significant portions of their territory to the government. These treaties have been repeatedly broken. Nearly all the salmon in the Columbia basin are listed as endangered or threatened under the ESA, requiring the federal government to take actions to protect this important species. By failing to remove the dams, the government is violating its Treaty obligations.<sup>1</sup>

Now is the time to secure wins for threaten salmon and steelhead species. There is an urgent need for policymakers, the Biden Administration, Tribal Nations, and other stakeholders to develop comprehensive plans to restore the lower Snake River and replace the services provided by the dams.

- This spring, the Washington State Legislature confirmed that honoring Tribal treaty rights and saving Snake River salmon from extinction are top priorities. It released a 2023-25 State Transportation and Operating Budget with funding to recover salmon, restore the lower Snake River, and maintain clean energy and agriculture. Other states should follow suit and pursue nonpartisan solutions without delay;
- In 2021, Representative Simpson of Idaho released a Columbia Basin Initiative that proposed breaching the four lower Snake River dams and replacing their services in order to prevent salmon extinction;

## Cont'd: Remove Failing & Ecologically Harmful Dams and Restore Natural River Systems

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- In 2022, Governor Inslee and Senator Murray of Washington published a report and recommendations calling salmon extinction “categorically unacceptable” and urging immediate action to make breaching the lower Snake River dams possible; and
- In 2023, Representatives Blumenauer, Salinas, and Hoyle sent a letter to President Biden in support of his Presidential Memorandum on Columbia River Basin salmon recovery.

2023 marked one of the most encouraging signals of hope for the Basin with Tribal-led conservation advancing the victory - the removal of four dams on the Klamath River in Oregon and California. In 2024, the Biden Administration, Congress, and States should continue to follow tribal leadership and restore riverine ecosystems with the removal of dams to restore the natural flow and conditions of rivers across the country.

- Work to identify comprehensive solutions to restore river systems including the Snake River. Concepts such as the Columbia Basin Initiative, provide one such example of how Congress can advance efforts to recover salmon without leaving communities behind.
- Provide all funding and authorities requested by federal agencies to honor our Tribal treaty obligations and restore healthy and abundant salmon and steelhead in the Columbia River Basin.
- Reject legislation such as the Northwest Energy Security Act and any related riders which would lock in the illegal Trump-era plans which are driving salmon and steelhead to extinction and prevent the administration from studying how to replace the benefits of the dams and breach them.
- Work with the Columbia River Basin Treaty Tribes and States of Oregon and Washington to advance the full breadth of their Columbia Basin Restoration Initiative, including taking action to breach the lower Snake River dams within two fish generations.
- Ensure all federal agencies – including the Bonneville Power Administration – follow through on the directives in the September 27th Presidential Memorandum and USG Commitments to advance the President’s salmon recovery goals in the Northwest.

## Congress should strengthen, reintroduce and pass the Clean Water Act of 2023 and The Headwaters Protection Act of 2023

**Clean Water Act (CWA) of 2023** seeks to restore protections after the U.S. Supreme Court drastically reduced safeguards for many of our waters in the Sackett v. EPA case, leaving them open to pollution and destruction. Although states could take steps to fill the gap left by the Supreme Court, some state's have taken the opposite approach — limiting state authority to protect wetlands (the way the Supreme Court limited the federal government’s authority).

The North Carolina legislature, for example, has endangered North Carolina’s communities, water quality, and fisheries by gutting state wetlands protections.<sup>1</sup> Future versions of the bill should strengthen these federal agency processes to ensure they cannot be gamed by anti-environment administrations and courts.

The bill would maintain CWA permitting exemptions, including those for farming activities, and require federal agencies to use science-based evidence to ensure these exemptions do not harm water quality or disproportionately affect certain communities.

Wetlands and ephemeral waterway protections are amongst the most urgent needs on the path to conserving 30% of freshwater ecosystems by 2030. In May, the Supreme Court ruled that the CWA does not cover wetlands that lack a continuous surface connection to a larger body of water, which excludes many waters that connect underground. The court narrowed the law to exclude from protection “ephemeral” streams that flow only seasonally. More than half of our nation's valuable wetlands could lose federal protection, under the court's definition. The EPA in August 2023 issued a new rule revising its regulation “the waters of the United States” rule to meet the court’s limitations. These natural tools not only filter nutrient pollution, but play a crucial role in mitigating flooding and combating impacts of climate change.

📄 **Call for state-based action:** States with insufficient laws to protect waters previously protected by the Clean Water Act before the Supreme Court's Sackett decision should expand the wetlands and streams covered by state protections, and states with laws prohibiting better and more thorough protections than EPA’s regulations should remove those laws.

**Headwaters Protection Act of 2023** - America’s National Forests supply drinking water for nearly 1 in 5 Americans – making them the single most important source of water in the country. Many of our watersheds that begin in our forests are considered “impaired” or “at risk.” To ensure clean drinking water for communities, the USFS has two key authorities to manage our forests: the Water Source Protection Program (WSPP) and the Watershed Condition Framework (WCF). The WSPP invests in projects that prevent water pollution at the source by encouraging farmers and ranchers, water utilities, Tribes, local governments, and the Forest Service to work in partnership. The WCF establishes a process at the USFS to evaluate the health of our watersheds and ensure investments benefit downstream communities. The Headwaters Protection Act improves the WSPP by increasing its funding, expanding access to it, and directing the program to prioritize local, collaborative partnerships to protect forests and watersheds. Specifically it will:

- Reauthorize the WSPP and increase the authorization of appropriations from \$10 million per year to \$30 million per year;
- Broaden the range of water users, including historically disadvantaged communities, who can participate in and benefit from the WSPP;
- Reduce financial barriers for water users to participate in the WSPP;
- Prioritize WSPP projects that benefit drinking water quality and improve resilience to wildfire and climate change;
- Make a technical change to the WCF to ensure healthy watersheds do not become degraded; and
- Authorize \$30 million in new appropriations per year for the WCF.

# Ocean Justice for Coastal and Island Communities

## 2023 Priority Status Checks

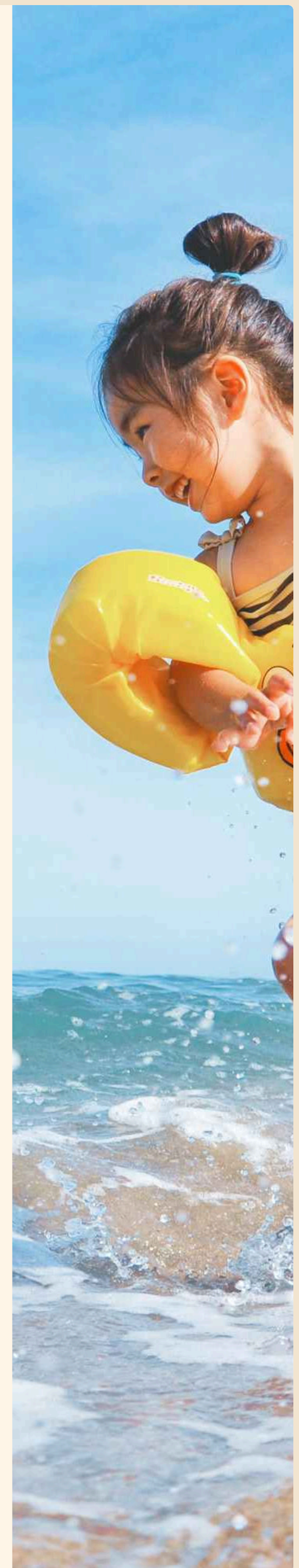
Important progress was made for the ocean in 2023. The administration developed the first ever Ocean Climate Action Plan, which sets three goals to (1) create a carbon neutral future, (2) accelerate solutions that tap natural coastal and ocean systems to absorb greenhouse gases, and (3) enhance community resilience to ocean change. The administration also launched the Ocean Justice Strategy, which integrates principles of equity and environmental justice into federal ocean activities.

America the Beautiful for All Coalition ocean advocates are keeping an eye on justice for our most vulnerable coastal communities. The national target to protect 30% of US ocean is not enough to address the multiple threats facing the ocean, such as climate change, pollution, overfishing, and habitat loss, so the United States should go "Beyond 30x30" and adopt a more holistic and equitable approach to ocean management, wherein access, equity, and quality are measured alongside quantity.

Different sectors have different definitions of what counts as ocean conservation, and the current accounting methods are not adequate to measure the quality, effectiveness, and diversity of marine protected areas (MPAs). There are various tools and frameworks, such as *The MPA Guide*, Marine Conservation Institute's Blue Parks, and the IUCN Green List that can help design and evaluate MPAs in a manner that delivers both ecological and social benefits.

## "Beyond 30x30" for a healthy and resilient ocean.

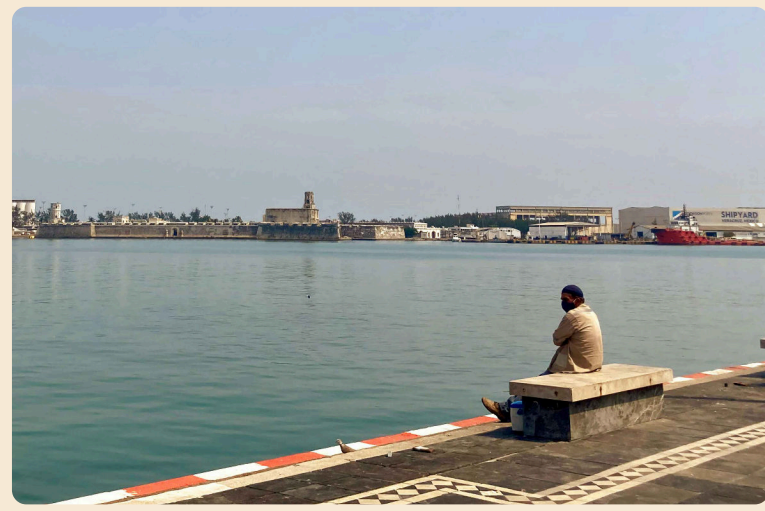
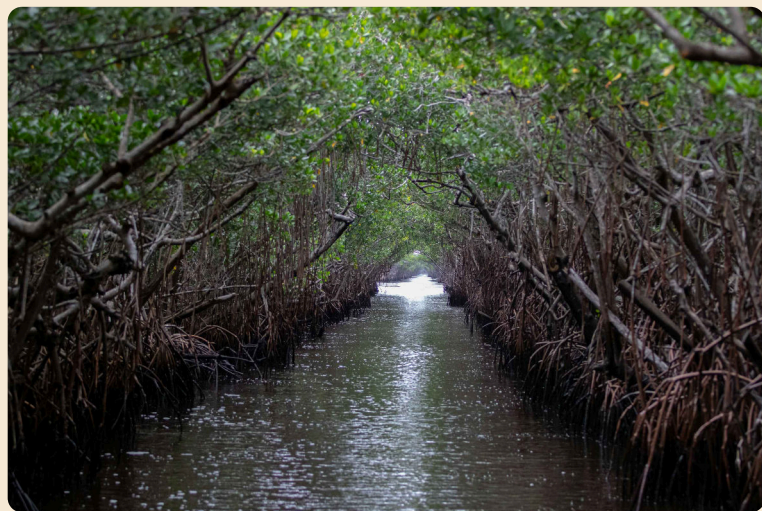
The America the Beautiful for All Coalition calls for a shift from focusing on numbers and percentages to focusing on outcomes and impacts. We urge the ocean conservation community to work together with local communities, Indigenous peoples, fishers, and other stakeholders to **create a network of geographically representative MPAs that are just, well-designed, and well-managed.**



# Championing justice and equity in ocean policy.

Our advocates and partners across the country are contributing to a rising tide of ocean justice and highlighting the need for more inclusive and diverse voices in ocean decision-making. The Ocean Climate Action Plan and the Ocean Justice Strategy lay out a framework for integrating access, equity, and quality into ocean policy. While the United States is on the cusp of achieving the numerical goals of 30% conservation on the ocean years ahead of the 2030 deadline, it is worth noting that most existing U.S. MPAs are located in remote offshore areas in the western Pacific, many of which lack final management plans, while the coastal habitats and species that are most important for people and biodiversity are underrepresented in conserved areas and under threat.

We shouldn't agonize over bringing sectors together for an agreed upon accounting of 30%, but rather **focus on the human dimensions and enabling conditions to ensure access, equity, and quality of conservation** along every coast. We propose the United States go "Beyond 30×30" on the ocean and adopt a more holistic and equitable approach to ocean management.



Critical habitats including salt marshes, seagrass, mangroves, and corals, and keystone species like oysters, kelp, and salmon, have supported communities of people for millennia before there even was a United States, and are all threatened by human use, development, pollution, and climate change. Protected areas around these coastal places – designed with sustainable uses in mind – are going to be much smaller than the huge marine monuments in the Pacific. But they are incredibly important to people and communities around the country.

Developing conservation solutions around these places will not deliver the huge quantitative targets for 30×30, but are critical for achieving the goals of America the Beautiful to create jobs and support healthy communities and supporting locally led and locally designed conservation efforts.

# Ocean policies

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## 2023 Policy Updates & 2024 Priorities

The America the Beautiful for All Coalition calls on the administration to advance the policy solutions below in support of ocean justice, Indigenous leadership, natural climate solutions, and to ensure the U.S. commitment on the ocean go "Beyond 30×30."

⚠️ In 2024, the Biden administration must deliver on the designation of six **new national marine sanctuaries** and **active management for three marine national monuments**.

### Support marine protected areas design, designation, and effectiveness

The designation and management of MPAs must be locally led by the nearby communities who call these places home, and consistent with the UN Declaration on Indigenous Rights and Free, Prior, and Informed Consent. In 2023, the Biden administration advanced the designation of six new national marine sanctuaries. This coalition submitted a comment letter in support of the final management plan for the proposed Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary and organized meetings between government officials and local leaders to advocate for the leadership of Indigenous peoples. The Biden administration must ensure that Native voices and local communities connected to each of the sanctuaries are able to fully participate in every step leading to the final designation of Chumash Heritage, Hudson Canyons, Lake Erie, Lake Ontario, Pacific Remote Islands, and Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Sanctuaries.

### Ensure marine protected area management and implementation

According to the Marine Conservation Institute, nearly 26 percent of U.S. oceans are in marine protected areas. But 97 percent of all MPAs are located in the remote offshore regions of the U.S. Pacific Islands and nearly half of the conserved ocean areas have no final management plan. Three monuments in particular — the Mariana Trench Marine National Monument, the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument, and the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument — have languished without final management plans for as many as 15 years. 2024 has the potential to be the year when all three management plans are finalized and published because of the work undertaken during the first three years of the Biden administration and by our coalition partners. Draft management plans for Mariana Trench and Northeast Canyons and Seamounts were made available for public review in 2021 and 2023, respectively. With the support of our coalition partners and local communities, these comment periods resulted in hundreds of comments from fishermen, scientists, NGOs, and communities. The Biden administration must deliver active management for all three monuments.

# Public Lands must represent more of America's story on the path to 30×30

The Antiquities Act and other tools to conserve public lands must be used to celebrate and acknowledge the rich tapestry of this nation's full history - good and bad. Representation through storytelling in our public lands helps us acknowledge our shared humanity, find a sense of belonging, and do justice to the contributions of all communities. We encourage public land managers across this nation and those who work to permanently protect culturally and ecologically rich landscapes, waters and sacred places to honor the rights and perspectives of the lands original stewards, connect, restore and respect these places so that more people can feel pride in this nation's lands, waters, and ocean.



Castner Range National Monument in El Paso, TX was a community-led victory in 2023 when President Biden designated this ecologically, culturally, and archaeologically rich sacred place that is important to Latino-American Heritage.



In 2023, the coalition working to protect sites critical to the story of Emmett Till and his mother, Mamie Till-Mobley, secured a national monument designation that included underrepresented and hard truths about the nation's history in public lands.

**The stories we tell through our public lands must represent communities and people across this nation. How we follow local leadership to protect those stories and designate protections for these places matters most.**

The America the Beautiful for All Coalition stands behind locally-led conservation campaigns that honor Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge, engage individuals and communities who understand and relate to local priorities, and can steward these special places into the future. The road to 30×30 must be grounded in justice not just through the stories we tell but the meaningful consultation and engagement processes that yield conservation outcomes. By listening to local leadership, we can collectively ensure accurately represented and preserved for future generations to learn from and enjoy. It is through these collective efforts that we can create a more inclusive and sustainable approach to conservation.

Our public lands should serve as a reflection of the diversity and richness of the American story and all those who have contributed to it. By actively involving local and culturally relevant voices, we can foster a sense of ownership and pride among local communities, ensuring that the protection and management of public lands align with their needs and aspirations.





# Public land policies

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## 2023 Public Land Priority Status Checks

Each workgroup identified policy priorities for the 20-point 2023 policy agenda. Below is an evaluation of progress or lack of progress on the workgroup's policy priorities in the coalition's inaugural year.

### **Use the Antiquities Act & other authorities to protect ecologically and culturally important areas**

Since taking office, the Biden-Harris Administration has conserved 26 million acres of land putting them on track to be one of the most productive Administration's slowing the nature loss crisis while also ensuring that essential and often under-celebrated parts of the nation's history are preserved for future generations.

In 2023, the Biden Administration made major progress on this policy proposal when the President signed proclamations to designate four community-derived national monument proposals under his Antiquities Act authority including:

- Avi Kwa Ame National Monument in Nevada;
- Castner Range National Monument in Texas;
- Emmett Till and Mamie Till-Mobley National Monument in Mississippi and Illinois; and
- Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni – Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument in Arizona.

### **Reverend Wheeler Parker, Jr., cousin of Emmett Till and last living witness of his abduction:**

*“It’s been my life’s work to tell the truth of what happened to Emmett. This national monument designation makes certain that Emmett Till’s life and legacy, along with his mother Mamie Till Mobley’s social action and impact, will live on and be used to inspire others to create a more just and equitable society. We thank President Biden for codifying the national monument and are heartened to know these places will foster empathy, understanding and healing for years to come.”<sup>1</sup>*

## **Cont'd: Use the Antiquities Act & other authorities to protect ecologically and culturally important areas**

The Biden Administration also demonstrated a continued interest in hearing from local communities about their goals for conserving the places that matter to them, with senior Biden Administration officials attending listening sessions on the proposed Berryessa Snow Mountain and San Gabriel Mountain National Monument expansion proposals.

The Biden Administration should continue to build on their already historic progress in conserving lands and waters by considering actions to designate the following community-led conservation proposals:

- Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument expansion
- San Gabriel Mountain National Monument expansion
- Dolores River Canyon Country National Monument
- Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary
- Chuckwalla National Monument
- Black Wall Street National Monument
- Owyhee National Monument
- César E. Chávez and the Farmworker Movement National Historical Park

As the Biden Administration has recognized with their recent designations that support indigenous-led conservation and those that tell stories of painful parts of U.S. history to ensure they are remembered and learned from, national monuments are an important tool that can be used to ensure a more equitable vision of conservation. But, progress should not stop at designation, agencies should work with community groups to develop resource management plans (RMPs) that meet ecological and cultural goals, and avoid architecture of erasure effects. National Monuments should be accessible, not just physically, but also through interpretation (what is being interpreted, who is doing interpretation). It is imperative for communities of color and frontline communities to see their communities reflected in the history and culture interpreted and represented on federal conservation lands through heavy involvement and consultation in the development of appropriate management plans.

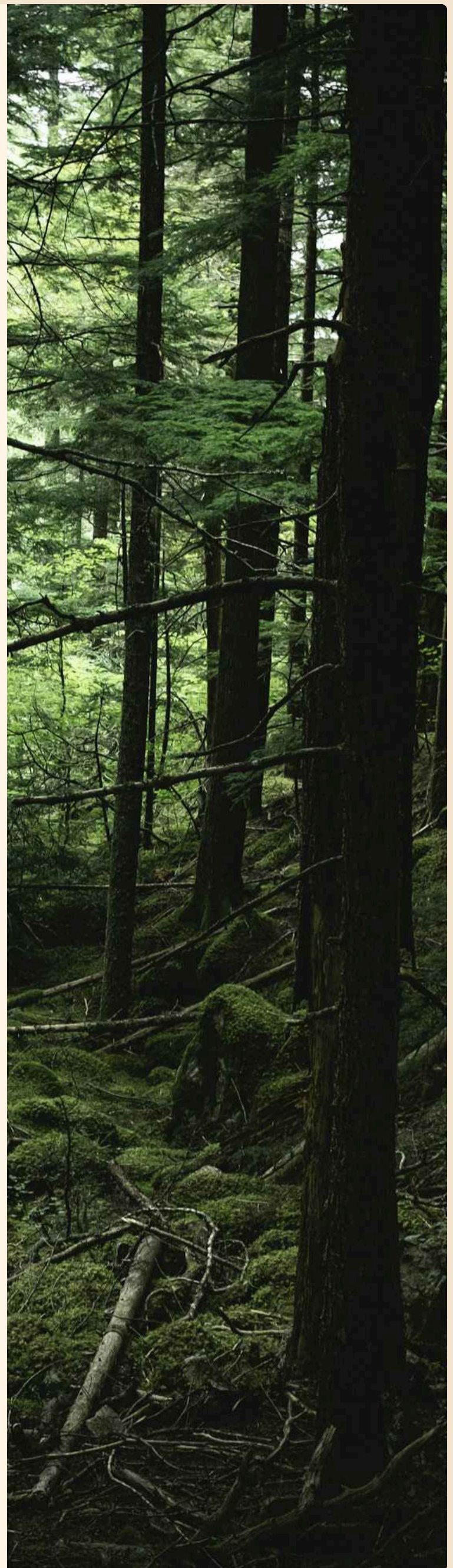
The BLM is receiving comments through mid-February 2024 on retaining or revoking existing mineral withdrawals for 28 million acres of BLM lands in Alaska (known as "D-1 lands"). The Trump administration attempted to remove protections for these ecologically and culturally important lands in January 2021. The Biden administration deferred those actions and initiated a NEPA process to fully evaluate impacts and solicit public input. Fully restoring protections has the support of more than half of Alaska's federally recognized Tribes and Tribal entities, as well as numerous NGO partners within and outside of Alaska.

## Enact a rulemaking to conserve old and mature forests

The USFS has proposed a first of its kind nationwide forest plan amendment to conserve old growth forests. This proposed amendment would amend all 128 forest plans across the country for the conservation of old growth stands and old growth conditions. Among other things, the proposed amendment would provide immediate protections for existing old growth forests through mandatory, enforceable standards to prohibit degradation of old-growth forest composition or structure, and allow vegetation management in old-growth forests *only* for proactive stewardship to promote the resilience and adaptability of old growth. It would also lay the groundwork for recruitment and conservation of existing and future old growth through the development of “place-based strategies for old-growth forest conservation and management, developed in partnership with Tribal communities and in collaboration with local stakeholders.”

While the USFS and BLM aren't currently proposing a rulemaking for old and mature forest conservation the historic proposal of a nationwide plan amendment for our national forests is a major step towards the vision outlined in the 2023 policy agenda. Additionally, a rulemaking could still follow the nationwide plan amendment to build on the progress already being envisioned under the nationwide plan amendment process with the benefit of providing additional durability.

The Biden Administration has heard the tremendous public interest in conserving old growth and mature forests. During the 2023 Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking comment period more than 528,000 comments were submitted that represented overwhelming support for protecting mature and old growth forest from logging, wildfire, and climate change; and for forest management informed by the best available science and Indigenous knowledge. More than 60 percent of forests on BLM and Forest Service lands are mature or old-growth, totaling 112.8 million acres.





## **Cont'd: Enact a rulemaking to conserve old and mature forests**

These historic stands are foundational to ecological integrity and climate resiliency across all forest-types on our federal public lands.

We urge the Administration to expediently move forward with a draft EIS and a final Nationwide Forest Plan amendment, before the end of the first term, that incorporates robust Tribal consultation and public input with strong measures for recruiting future old growth as well as strong protections for current old growth. Before finalizing the amendment, the Forest Service should improve it by tightening protections for old growth - especially against commercially motivated logging - and adding protections for future old growth. Following the final plan amendment, we look forward to seeing the Administration move forward with implementation in the form of strong place-based strategies for old-growth conservation and recruitment and further consideration of a rulemaking to build on and complement progress they will have made.

## **Enact a Bureau of Land Management Rulemaking to modernize 245 million acres of public lands management**

In 2023, the BLM proposed the **Public Lands Rule** which establishes a framework to ensure healthy landscapes, abundant wildlife habitat, clean water, and balanced decision-making on our nation's public lands. The proposal would uphold the BLM's multiple-use and sustained yield mission, ensuring the health, diversity, and productivity of public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. More than 20 million acres of unprotected BLM land is within 10 miles of the nation's most socially vulnerable and nature-deprived census tracts. These lands are concentrated in New Mexico, Nevada, Arizona, and Utah, suggesting particularly significant opportunities for BLM to address the nature gap. By **putting conservation on an equal footing with other uses**, the proposal would help guide responsible development while safeguarding important places for the millions of people who visit public lands every year to hike, hunt, camp, fish, gather medicine, conduct ceremony, and more. BLM received over 290K comments, of which almost 70K were unique and over 90 percent were in favor.

By the close of winter 2024 the BLM must enact a Public Lands Rule which directs land managers to identify landscapes for conservation and restoration, prioritizing places based on land and water health, partnership opportunities, proximity to underserved and nature-deprived communities, and benefits to local communities with opportunities for public input. **Congress must block any legislation that would undermine a BLM Public Lands rule including S. 1435/ H.R. 3397 "To require the Director of the Bureau of Land Management to withdraw a rule of the Bureau of Land Management relating to conservation and landscape health."**

# Urban Parks and Greenspace are vital for public health, equity, biodiversity & climate

People have always co-existed with nature even in built environments. More than **80 percent** of people in the U.S. live in urban areas. No community or ecosystem is disposable; reconciling communities' healthy relationship with nature is essential to the goals of the America the Beautiful and Justice40 initiatives.

## 2023 Priority Status Checks

Below is an evaluation of progress or lack of progress on the Urban Parks and Greenspace 2023 workgroup policy priorities. We celebrate the Administration's investments in urban tree planting and greening through the \$1 billion investment in the USDA Urban & Community Forestry Program, Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership, National Historic Landmark designations, and formation of the Nature in Communities Committee as initial down payments to ensure no community or ecosystem is left behind.



## Expand access to existing open space through community use agreements

Existing open spaces such as schoolyards and community gardens serve as critical natural areas and viable solutions for public health benefits, increasing food security, mitigating climate change, augmenting biodiversity, and developing climate change literacy.

✔ The EPA's Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Centers Program can reduce barriers for communities to establish cooperative community use agreements for schoolyards and other open spaces. Federal grants awarded by USDA and EPA, such as the Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem-Solving Cooperative Agreement program, allow communities to engage in community use agreements for public access to open space.

⚠ The *Living Schoolyards Act of 2023* has been introduced in the Senate but has not advanced from committee. The Act would allow school grounds to be augmented into nature-based learning environments that reduce the impacts of extreme weather and biodiversity loss, but has no provisions to ensure the general public benefits from living schoolyards outside of school hours.

# Urban Parks and Greenspace policies

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## **Cont'd: Expand access to open space through community use agreements**

**The Administration should direct the Department of Education to implement shared-use agreements for public use of outdoor schoolyards during non-school hours or formalize joint use of district and city recreation facilities such as community gardens.** It should support joint task force collaboration led by the CEQ Nature in Communities Committee to review plans for the building and infrastructure inputs required for healthy and sustainable child care facilities, schools, public housing, parks, and open spaces.

**Congress should pass legislation to authorize and fund grant programs to improve schoolyards for student recreation and learning outdoors**—including community use of schoolyards when not in session.

## **Improve accessibility of open space through increased investments and planning for public transit and active transport infrastructure**

Federal agencies should prioritize filling access gaps by working directly with local and regional public transportation authorities to enhance access to functional green spaces, open spaces, and public lands. This should be done while reviewing existing parking and fee policies and other transit system gaps that may create barriers for communities. Agencies should work with states to use programs like the Surface Transportation Block Grant and apply a Justice40 metric to assess funding. Including these criteria in forthcoming Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act programs, especially ReConnecting Communities, Transportation Alternatives, and RAISE will ensure a whole-of-government approach to improving accessibility. The U.S. Department of Transportation announced \$3.353 billion in grants for the Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP) Program and the Neighborhood Access and Equity (NAE) Program, which public transportation authorities can receive—the bicameral A. Donald McEachin's Environmental Justice For All Act and the bicameral Transit to Trails Act have been introduced in the 118th Congress, but neither has advanced out of committees. **Congress should increase public transit funding by passing the Transit to Trails Act and the Environmental Justice for All Act,** applying a Justice40 metric for funding authorization, awards, and increased community engagement.

## **Increase Equitable Access to the Outdoors**

Access to nature is a human right, yet nearly 75 percent of low-income communities of color live in places deprived of nature and its benefits. The disparities in nature access and outdoor spaces fall along socioeconomic, racial and geographic divides, which affect community's overall health and well-being. We must provide greater opportunities for people to access nature and reduce barriers for getting outside. This will create healthier, happier communities, foster a sense of belonging in nature, and create a generation of new environmental leaders who will diversify and strengthen a growing conservation movement at a time when people need to fight for the planet and future.

## Cont'd: Increase Equitable Access to the Outdoors

**Congress should pass the Outdoors for All Act** which will codify the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program and deliver Justice40 commitments to underserved communities by funding new park and open space creation, and existing park upgrades in cities.

**Congress should support legislation that will increase funding for outdoor education and recreation providers in communities across America.** Parks at all levels of jurisdiction demonstrate a need for augmented park funding levels for equitable access, general maintenance and supplementing biodiversity. The National Park Service estimates that there is \$23,263,000,000 in deferred maintenance and repair. There is a **maintenance backlog** of \$5.6 billion for state parks and \$60 billion for local parks. Los Angeles County has identified a \$12 billion parks and recreation maintenance backlog.

Federal funding for new and existing park programs should be scaled up to provide educational and recreational opportunities, including an adequate budget for necessary construction and long-term maintenance of infrastructure like bike racks, trails, sidewalks, shade structures, water fountains, native plant horticulture, and long-term stewardship. **Congress must reject efforts to undercut current parks funding levels in the FY 2024 and FY 2025 federal budgets and secure the expansion and long-term institutionalization of current funding initiatives through legislation.**

## 2024 Policy Priorities

### Advance restoration of degraded lands in rural and urban communities

Due to a **legacy of redlining** low-income communities and communities of color across urban and rural areas are disproportionately near degraded lands, vacant lots, and toxic lands. Where environmental burdens are concentrated, multiple benefits can be derived from restoration projects. Restored lands can address declining biodiversity and residual pollution, revitalize ecosystem services, and provide outdoor recreation opportunities for residents. Successfully restoring degraded lands will complement traditional conservation efforts to conserve existing healthy ecosystems by advancing equitable access to resilient open areas, and enhancing ecosystem function across diverse geographies.

**Federal agencies and Congress must increase the scale of programs that prioritize the equitable restoration of lands across various geographies and ecosystems in order to meaningfully advance America the Beautiful values in Justice40 communities.** Restoration of lands includes growing upon successful initiatives including but not limited to conversion of farmland, landfills, oil wells, vacant lots, rail yards, utility corridors, airports, and power plants into habitat. Specific programs to expand include the Federal Lands to Parks Program, Choice Neighborhood Grants, Conservation Reserve Program, Schoolyard Habitat Program, Conservation Planning Assistance Program, Urban Wildlife Conservation Program, Oil Well Remediation Program, Brownfield Program, Brownfield Job Training Program. Congress must also pass the Brownfields Reauthorization Act of 2023.

# Recommendations for Urban Greening & Wildlife Conservation

## Create and expand national wildlife refuges in biodiversity hotspots and urban areas within, or close to, frontline communities, communities of color, and Tribal nations

The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), with the support of other federal land management agencies, should prioritize the conservation of ecologically and culturally important areas through the designation of new National Wildlife Refuges and expansion of existing National Wildlife Refuges (NWR). Wildlife refuges are celebrated across the country, with 2023 additions in Tennessee and Wyoming, and an opportunity for bipartisan collaboration on the preservation of North American species, and expansion of access to nature.

The Biden Administration has proposed studies for refuge identification in Maryland as well as numerous community-led proposals for expansions or creations of wildlife refuges in both urban and rural settings including the expansion of Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge, the creation of a Santa Cruz River NWR in Tucson, expand the Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge in Albuquerque and many others.



We call on the Biden Administration to expand the refuge system to account for biodiversity hotspots, cultural significance, and escape routes for species facing climate change to advance the goals of 30x30 and Justice40. Every state has at least one wildlife refuge and most major U.S. cities are within an hour's drive of one. As such, Refuge System expansion provides opportunities to explicitly address the biodiversity crisis and improve equitable access to nature to communities.

### **Congress should increase funding for national wildlife refuge system maintenance and staffing as well as land acquisition.**

The USFWS is collecting comments through early March 2024 to revise their **Biological Integrity, Diversity and Environmental Health policy** and create a new rule to help guide management of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The new rule can provide for consistent, transparent, and science-based approach for evaluating both existing and new management practices at national wildlife refuges, in support of the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System. **We urge the Biden Administration to pass a strong rule for the management of the refuge system** that emphasizes ecosystem resilience, habitat connectivity, and wildlife protection. One which will stop commercial agricultural practices, use of genetically engineered crops, predator control, and the heavy use of pesticides.



# Wildlife policies to stem the North American extinction crisis.

## 2023 Priority Status Checks

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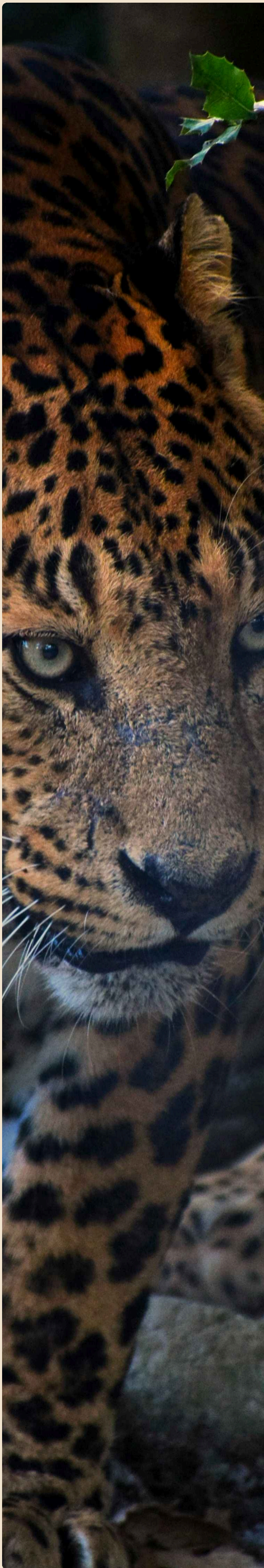
### Coordinate landscape-scale planning across federal agencies

In March 2023, the White House Council on Environmental Quality released guidance for federal agencies on Ecological Connectivity and Wildlife Corridors. The guidance emphasizes collaboration among Federal agencies, Tribes, States, territorial, and local governments, as well as stakeholders, to facilitate landscape, waterscape, and seascape-scale connectivity planning and management. Improved coordination and collaboration can lead to cost-effectiveness, improved outcomes, increased public support, and the sharing and leveraging of knowledge, funding, technical expertise, and other resources.

#### To implement and build on this decision-makers should:

- Coordinate planning across federal agencies to the maximum extent possible. This should include alignment in the selection of priority or focal landscapes identified by agencies from DOI to USDA.
- A shared database and associated mapping for identifying, conserving, and connecting habitat and migration corridors, sustaining natural areas essential to climate resilience, and community impacts across federal agencies.
- Ecosystem-scale planning including outlining opportunities in federal/cross-jurisdictional land and water management for a full range of ecosystem services in plans and actions for sustainable development. This should include scoping opportunities for pilot projects in focal ecosystems/biomes.
- Aligning multiple federal land management agency plans via coordinated revisions within an ecosystem and larger landscape.
- Coordinating funding investments for restoration and conservation on the ground identified by communities and partners within a focal landscape.

⊗ In 2023, U.S. scientists declared 21 species extinct, including birds, mussels, fish, and one mammal. The main factors contributing to these extinctions are habitat destruction, pollution, climate change, and invasive species. The current rate of extinction is "tens to hundreds of times higher" than extinctions that occurred over the past 10 million years, according to the UN.



# Wildlife policies

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## 2024 Policy Proposals

The coalition's wildlife workgroup calls for forward movement on the following policy additions. In the face of rapidly disappearing habitats, and climate change stressing America's native species, the environmental and public health consequences of inaction are vast. The disappearance of wildlife not only heightens the risk of community health issues like West Nile Virus but also amplifies the likelihood of future pandemics, while simultaneously affecting the integrity of our food and water systems.

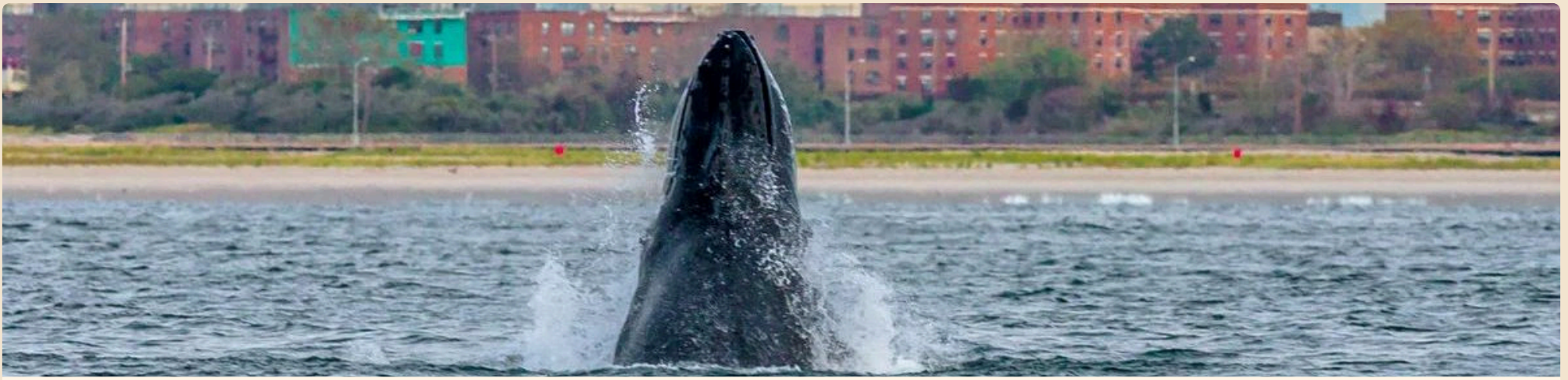
While there remains much to be accomplished, glimmers of hope, such as the recent sighting of a new jaguar in Southern Arizona near the U.S.-Mexico border, serve as a powerful reminder that nature possesses the capacity to rejuvenate itself when provided with the necessary policies and protections. It is imperative that local, state, and federal lawmakers and agencies utilize the resources at their disposal to establish and safeguard disappearing habitats, fostering connectivity, restoration, and preservation efforts.

### **Establish a National Biodiversity Strategy**

We call for the creation of a National Biodiversity Strategy (NBS) to tackle the intertwined issues of biodiversity loss and climate change in a unified and comprehensive manner, ultimately enhancing both environmental resilience and the welfare of the communities across the nation.

The urgency for a cohesive strategy to combat the biodiversity crisis cannot be overstated. Projections by scientists indicate that we stand to lose up to a million species in the coming decades. Within the United States, scientists predict 34% of plants and 40% of animals are at risk of extinction, and 41% of ecosystems are at risk of range-wide collapse.

The decline in biodiversity poses a direct and significant threat to the security, health, and overall well-being of communities in the U.S. It diminishes critical ecosystem services such as zoonotic disease buffering, water filtration, and pollination, which are essential for maintaining ecological balance and livelihoods. This loss of biodiversity disproportionately affects communities of color, low-income groups, tribal communities, and others who have historically been systematically and deliberately targeted for environmentally damaging activities and excluded from meaningful participation in conservation efforts.



## 2024 Policy Proposals

### Cont'd: Establish a National Biodiversity Strategy

As a result, they bear a disproportionate burden of the negative impacts of biodiversity loss, exacerbating existing social and environmental injustices.

**We urge Congress to support S. Res. 494/ H. Res. 195, a resolution calling on the federal government to create a National Biodiversity Strategy.** The United States and the Vatican are the only nations in the world without a Biodiversity Strategy. This strategy would create a stronger, more coordinated national response to the crisis and create a blueprint for tackling the challenge. It is a logical next step to President Biden's National Nature Assessment.

### Expand protected areas and create wildlife corridors to promote habitat connectivity

Protected areas and wildlife corridors are essential for preserving biodiversity and allowing species to move freely between habitats. Wildlife crossings help mitigate the impact of infrastructure development, such as roads and highways, on essential species by providing safe passages. This is vital for maintaining ecological connectivity and preserving biodiversity in ecologically vibrant states.

In addition, wildlife crossings reduce the risk of collisions between vehicles and wildlife, benefiting both humans and animals. By minimizing road mortality, these crossings contribute to the conservation goal of 30x30 while promoting coexistence between infrastructure and wildlife. We support programs like the wildlife crossings pilot program. This program will boost wildlife populations and biodiversity while improving habitat connectivity for terrestrial and aquatic species. We urge Tribes, states and local communities to take advantage of the program.

Wildlife Corridors are natural routes that enable animals to move between larger areas of intact habitat. They are critical for species to meet daily or seasonal needs like food, water, and mates. They are also critical for biodiversity. Larger intact landscapes aid in gene flow and genetic diversity of species, expand habitat range critical in a changing climate, and increase population size to help resiliency of species.

**We urge the Biden Administration to continue to prioritize the creation of wildlife corridors.** The Administration should use GIS mapping and other tools to identify biodiversity hotspots and prioritize protections for these areas while also considering areas that are culturally significant and would connect people with nature.

**We call on Congress to pass a National Wildlife Corridor Act** to help guide the process.

Photo credit: Humpback whale spy-hops off Rockaway Peninsula in New York City in 2013. Credit: [Artie Raslich/Getty Images](#)

# Endorsements & Advocacy

The full steering committee of the America the Beautiful for All Coalition stands behind the policy recommendations that have emerged from coalition workgroups and its members.

While every organization has a different mission and focus areas, the power of our collective voice on the path to 30×30 and Justice40 cannot be denied.

Steering committee:

Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments	Azul
Children’s Environmental Health Network (co-chair)	Continental Divide Trail Coalition
Earthjustice	GreenLatinos (co-chair)
International Union for the Conservation of Nature	Justice Outside
Kua‘āina Ulu ‘Auamo	Native American Rights Fund
NDN Collective	River Network
Sierra Club	The Wilderness Society
Yale University Center for Environmental Justice	

Join the America the Beautiful for All Coalition in advocating for change today. You can endorse the policy agenda at:

**[www.americathebeautifulforall.org/policy-agenda](http://www.americathebeautifulforall.org/policy-agenda)**

Contact us: [atb4all-backbone-team@googlegroups.com](mailto:atb4all-backbone-team@googlegroups.com)

