
DAVID WATKINS
STAFF DIRECTOR

VIVIAN MOEGLEIN
REPUBLICAN STAFF DIRECTOR

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

June 16, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President
United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave,
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden,

We write in support of your America the Beautiful Initiative and your administration's efforts to conserve and restore at least 30 percent of America's lands and waters by 2030 (30x30). At a time when the climate and nature are in crisis, and the coronavirus pandemic's zoonotic origins have demonstrated our deep interconnectedness with the natural world, your bold conservation vision is as ambitious as it is necessary. Given our work in Congress, in particular on the House Natural Resources Committee, we stand by to leverage our experience and offer our suggestions in support of the America the Beautiful Initiative.

In recent decades, Congress has worked to extend the American conservation ethic, in order to ensure that our most exceptional places and wildlife are protected for future generations. In the 116th Congress, the House of Representatives and the Senate worked to sign a major lands package into law, creating and expanding national parks sites and recreation areas, conserving wilderness, protecting wildlife, and supporting recreation and park access.¹ Congress then passed America's Conservation Enhancement Act to support the protection of fish, wildlife, and their habitats for the benefit of all Americans, and made a generational investment in conservation and our national parks through the Great American Outdoors Act.^{2,3} During a period of deep political polarization, the success of these efforts demonstrates the broad, bipartisan appeal of conservation. We hope that your administration will use the full scope of these new laws and authorities to carry out your conservation vision. Furthermore, there are several pieces of outstanding conservation legislation, which, if passed, would take major steps towards meeting the goals of the America the Beautiful Initiative. We look forward to working with your administration to see these pieces of legislation signed into law.

As we look to the future of American conservation, we were heartened that the America the Beautiful report, submitted to the National Climate Task Force by Secretaries Haaland, Vilsack, and Raimondo, and Chair Mallory, sets the ambitious goal of protecting 30 percent of American lands and waters by 2030

¹ John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act, Pub. L. No. 116-9, 133 Stat. 580 (2019).
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/47>

² America's Conservation Enhancement Act, Pub. L. No. 116-188, 134 Stat. 905 (2020).
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/3051/text>

³ Great American Outdoors Act, Pub. L. No. 116-152, 134 Stat. 682 (2020).
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/1957>

(30x30).⁴ This effort builds on what many in the scientific community, the conservation community, and Congress have long known: protecting the nature we already have is one of the most cost-effective ways to protect wildlife and the climate. Decades of federal investment in, and support for, conservation actions demonstrates the benefits conservation provides to communities and the environment. By protecting natural areas, we protect the resources and biodiversity on which we all depend, while supporting the health of the climate system that sustains us.

Overall, we believe that the America the Beautiful Report demonstrates robust engagement with a wide-variety of stakeholders and a meaningful effort to lift up the voices of communities while meeting your conservation vision.⁵ By laying out a set of core principles, the report provides a clear roadmap for a long-term American conservation effort.

Among the key takeaways, we particularly appreciated the report's focus on conservation outcomes, rather than on prescriptions. While the science clearly demonstrates a need to take significant steps to protect nature and the climate in the near term, we support your administration's efforts to ensure that conservation is an across the board, whole of government approach.^{6, 7} While no one bill could encapsulate the full scope of conservation and restoration need, the emphasis on using a variety of actions, from federal designations to voluntary conservation easements, is an important step to ensure that we are advancing conservation in every American community.

Furthermore, we appreciate the clear effort to support equity and justice through the America the Beautiful Initiative. From recognizing the central role tribal communities have long played in protecting the landscape and resources of this continent, to supporting expanded access to nature and the benefits it provides for urban and underrepresented communities, we applaud your administration's work to ground conservation efforts in justice. We believe that through continued support for, and input from, tribal and underrepresented communities, this effort can help create jobs and advance equity for all Americans.

We were also encouraged by your administration's outreach to the sporting and recreation communities. The outdoor recreation economy has demonstrated its role as an economic powerhouse, supporting more than 5 million direct jobs and nearly \$800 billion in consumer spending.⁸ These jobs can help put Americans to work while supporting a transition away from extraction dependent professions to the economy of the future.

Finally, we were pleased to see that your administration would convene an interagency group, led by USGS, to map the current boundaries of conservation in the United States. In order to meaningfully begin this effort, it will be important that we work from a public, clear, and calculable outline of existing conservation

⁴ U.S. Department of the Interior. (2021). Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful. Retrieved from <https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/report-conserving-and-restoring-america-the-beautiful-2021.pdf>

⁵ U.S. Department of the Interior. (2021). Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful. Retrieved from <https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/report-conserving-and-restoring-america-the-beautiful-2021.pdf>

⁶ Baillie, J. & Zhang, Y. (2018, September 14). Space for Nature. *Science*, 361(6407). Retrieved from https://science.sciencemag.org/content/361/6407/1051?ijkey=a76486dbedbae03b94b4ae7de8430f201d41fc6a&key_type=tf_ipsecsha

⁷ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. (2019, August 7). IPCC Special Report on Climate Change, Desertification, Land Degradation, Sustainable Land Management, Food Security, and Greenhouse gas fluxes in Terrestrial Ecosystems: Summary for Policy Makers. Retrieved from https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2019/08/4.-SPM_Approved_Microsite_FINAL.pdf

⁸ Outdoor Industry Association. (2018). Advocacy. Retrieved from <https://outdoorindustry.org/advocacy/>

that allows us to target future efforts in the areas and ecosystems with the greatest need. We urge your administration to expedite this process.

While we believe the report presents an important start towards setting out a long-term conservation agenda, we offer a short list of suggestions based on our years of experience working on conservation legislation as Members of Congress. Your administration's significant investment in conservation and restoration through the Presidential Budget presents a positive step in this work, and we encourage you to continue to work with Congress throughout the appropriations process and through further authorizations to meet these opportunities. We believe that through the incorporation of these suggestions, your administration will be able to maximize the full potential of the America the Beautiful Initiative.

- **Develop a clear, actionable, and measurable plan for achieving targeted conservation outcomes, and provide Congress with a roadmap of staffing and resource needs to achieve these goals.** The America the Beautiful report provided by your administration is a strong starting place from which to build an American conservation initiative. It includes principles around which a conservation ethic should be built and incorporates intended outcomes. Starting from this roadmap, you should work with stakeholders and Congress to develop a clear, long-term conservation plan, with actionable and measurable outcomes, to ensure we are providing the essential protections necessary to secure nature and the climate. Once this plan is in place, we would encourage your administration to provide Congress a clear indication of the resources and staffing necessary to achieve this plan.
- **Provide additional operational funding and increase staffing at the relevant land and resource management agencies.** Federal agencies are on the frontline of conservation, from management planning to community engagement; however, decades of declining funding, and aging and shrinking workforces pose a significant barrier to achieving conservation goals. America is past due for an investment in the land and resource management workforce, especially as your Civilian Climate Corps creates a pipeline for new land, ocean, and resource management employees.⁹ We have a responsibility to ensure that a skilled, diverse workforce with ample funding is available to support the full scope of programs necessary to make America the Beautiful into a reality.
- **Empower Federal agencies and ensure a vested role and direct responsibility to engage with stakeholders.** Our lands, oceans, and resources, those both public and private, are overseen and managed by a variety of agencies with different mandates and responsibilities. To achieve the goals of America the Beautiful, these agencies must each be empowered to act swiftly within their jurisdiction to support a whole of government conservation approach. This could include acting on a long backlog of proposed conservation projects. Agencies must also be held accountable to ensure that they are meeting with stakeholders who are impacted by decision-making within their jurisdiction.
- **Fund badly needed land and coastal restoration efforts on public and private lands across the country, with a focus on community climate resilience.** There is significant opportunity to put Americans back to work restoring degraded landscapes that might aid in the fight against the climate and nature crises. The administration should invest in these efforts, while ensuring that this funding is targeted to promote climate resilient communities and ecosystems.
- **Target Conservation Investments to climate-critical ecosystems.** It is essential that all future federal investments take significant consideration of the climate crisis. Your administration should

⁹ DeSantis, M. (2021, May 3). Biden Administration Proposes New Civilian Climate Corps [IN11654]. Retrieved from <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IN/IN11654>

develop a clear, measurable, and actionable plan to leverage America the Beautiful to protect critical ecosystems, including major carbon sinks, biodiversity hotspots, wildlife refugia, and those that protect limited resources, including water, on which American communities depend.

- **Support Funding for Environmental Justice communities.** Your administration has committed to ensuring that 40 percent of the benefits of federal climate programs go to disproportionately impacted and disadvantaged communities. We would encourage you to develop a plan to clearly demonstrate how the benefits of America the Beautiful are being shared with front-line and fence-line communities.
- **Protect key wildlife corridors and connectivity between protected areas.** Protected wildlife corridors are key to maintaining healthy populations. These linkages will only become more critical as a changing climate forces additional species migrations to find desirable conditions. Protecting these transit corridors, through federal action, easements, and voluntary protections, will be crucial to ensuring American the Beautiful protects some of our nation's most charismatic wildlife.
- **Provide additional funding for agency planning.** Agency planning is central to federal land, ocean, and resource management, whether conservation or otherwise; however, many management plans are years or decades out of date and fail to encapsulate updated scientific information on climate change and appropriate resource management. It is imperative that agencies receive additional funding to support long term conservation planning efforts that support nature and the climate.
- **Provide funding for National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) reviews, and ensure all communities are heard.** NEPA reviews allow communities to engage on major federal decisions, whether they are conservation actions or proposed development. Ensuring that these processes are fully funded, enabling them to be thorough and expedient will benefit all Americans. As a starting point, we encourage your administration to support the *Environmental Justice for All Act*, and to incorporate pieces of that legislation into your America the Beautiful strategy.¹⁰
- **Fund mapping efforts and improve the utilization of geospatial data in a manner that goes beyond a Conservation and Stewardship Atlas.** While the Conservation and Stewardship Atlas is important to set a baseline for America the Beautiful, federal agencies are missing opportunities through under-utilization of geospatial data. With additional funding for mapping, both at federal agencies and as a high-paying jobs creator in local communities, America the Beautiful could enhance our understanding of resources on the ground and ocean floor. Not only is this essential to publicizing the successes of American conservation and for targeting additional investment, this improved collection of geospatial data would aid agencies in everything from safe navigation for commerce to and from our shores, to search and rescue, and wildfire and disaster response.
- **Support a U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) led inventory and continual monitoring of land and resource conditions.** To set a meaningful baseline for the America the Beautiful Initiative, USGS could be charged with inventorying the current state of conservation in the United States. This inventory, performed with the help of the Civilian Climate Corps, could provide essential information to help resource managers perform conservation planning and to support conservation and climate benefits on our working lands. Furthermore, with the help of these trained volunteers, USGS could then support the monitoring of ecosystems for adaptive management to ensure that we are achieving the conservation outcomes intend under America the Beautiful.

We believe that these additional items would help improve the America the Beautiful Initiative, ensuring that it provides an enduring benefit to American conservation. Through a robust investment in conservation

¹⁰ U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources. (n.d.). Environmental Justice. Retrieved from <https://naturalresources.house.gov/environmental-justice>

agencies and their routine operations and functionalities, we can improve the pace and scale of conservation progress, while ensuring better service across the board for all stakeholders who interface with these agencies.

These additional actions would also improve the economic impact of this initiative, ensuring that it provides a meaningful investment in the economy of the future. Numerous Congressional Committees have held hearings on the job-creating benefits of investment in conservation, restoration, and renewable energy development.^{11, 12, 13, 14} Investment in natural areas supports the rapidly expanding outdoor recreation economy, which delivers outsize benefits to the economy as a whole.¹⁵ America the Beautiful could also serve as an opportunity to invest in the often-overlooked outdoor *restoration* economy, an area with significant jobs and impact potential.¹⁶ Conservation and restoration jobs remain in local communities and provide a skillset that will only become more valuable. Federal conservation investments are an opportunity to generate co-benefits between America the Beautiful and the Civilian Climate Corps, providing workers including scientists, engineers, architects, and laborers, with the skills they need to be competitive in the economy of the future. We appreciate that the America the Beautiful report notes the job creation benefits of conservation, and we encourage you to double down on these investments in conservation and restoration.

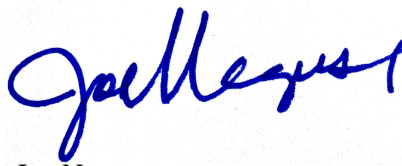
Thank you for your bold leadership in support of American conservation and climate protection. It is a welcome change and is a crucial step towards securing the future of our nation and the planet. We fully support the ambitious work you have laid out, and we look forward to working with you to protect America the beautiful.

If you have any questions or want any additional information regarding our proposed additions, please do not hesitate to reach out to us, our staff, or the House Natural Resources Committee.

Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva
Chair
House Committee on Natural Resources



Joe Neguse
Chair
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and
Public Lands

¹¹Building Back Better: Examining the Future of America's Public Lands, 117th Congress. (2021). Retrieved from <https://naturalresources.house.gov/hearings/building-back-better-examining-the-future-of-americas-public-lands>

¹² Reclaiming Orphaned Oil and Gas Wells – Creating Jobs and Protecting the Environment by Cleaning Up and Plugging Wells, 116th Congress. (2020). Retrieved from <https://naturalresources.house.gov/hearings/reclaiming-orphaned-oil-and-gas-wells-creating-jobs-and-protecting-the-environment-by-cleaning-up-and-plugging-wells%20>

¹³ The Clean Future Act: Industrial Climate Policies to Create Jobs and Support Working Communities, 117th Congress. (2021). Retrieved from <https://energycommerce.house.gov/committee-activity/hearings/hearing-on-the-clean-future-act-industrial-climate-policies-to-create>

¹⁴ Legislative Hearing on S. 283, National Climate Bank Act, 117th Congress. (2021). Retrieved from <https://www.epw.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2021/4/legislative-hearing-on-s-283-national-climate-bank-act>

¹⁵ U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. (2020, November 10). Outdoor Recreation. Retrieved from <https://www.bea.gov/data/special-topics/outdoor-recreation>

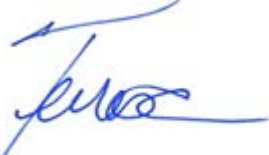
¹⁶ Peltier, H. (2020, May). Employment Impacts of Conservation Spending. *Boston University Pardee School of Global Studies*. Retrieved from https://www.bu.edu/pardee/files/2020/06/Employment_Impacts_of_Conservation_Spending-Peltier2020.pdf



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Chair
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations



Jared Huffman
Chair
Subcommittee on Waters, Oceans, and Wildlife



Teresa Leger Fernández
Chair
Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of the
United States



Julia Brownley
Member of Congress



Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress



Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan
Member of Congress



Diana DeGette
Member of Congress



Doris Matsui
Member of Congress



Lori Trahan
Member of Congress



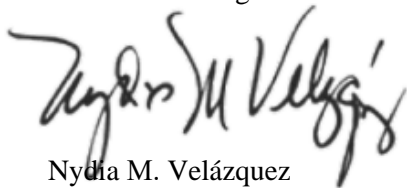
Mike Levin
Member of Congress



Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress



Darren Soto
Member of Congress



Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress



Ruben Gallego
Member of Congress



Betty McCollum
Member of Congress



Ed Case
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Regina McCarthy, Chair, National Climate Task Force
The Honorable Debra Haaland, Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior
The Honorable Thomas Vilsack, Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture
The Honorable Gina Raimondo, Secretary, U.S. Department of Commerce
The Honorable Brenda Mallory, Chair, Council on Environmental Quality