

PROTECTING AMERICA'S WILDERNESS & PUBLIC LANDS

February 2021

The *Protecting America's Wilderness and Public Lands Act* permanently safeguards irreplaceable landscapes in California, Colorado, Arizona, and Washington State, including an effort to secure the Grand Canyon against the threat of uranium mining. The bill designates approximately 1.5 million acres of wilderness and incorporates more than 1,200 river miles into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System (NWSRS). It is also one of many steps House Democrats are taking to protect the climate and the economy, prioritizing the long-term conservation of large landscapes in line with the President's 30x30 goal and supporting the expansion and designation of national monuments, recreation areas, and multiple-use trails, which are crucial for the growing outdoor recreation economy. Above all, the *Protecting America's Wilderness and Public Lands Act* respects the voices of local stakeholders and tribal communities while recognizing the importance of protecting public lands for the benefit of current and future generations.

ADDRESSING THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Our public lands are one of the best resources we have to respond to the climate crisis. Wilderness areas, wild and scenic rivers, and other protective designations help safeguard clean water and air, store carbon from the atmosphere, and buffer communities against climate impacts like drought, flooding, and wildfire. These protected areas also support critical habitat for threatened and endangered species and provide refuge for species in a changing environment.

The *Protecting America's Wilderness and Public Lands Act* includes the Northwest California Wilderness, Recreation, and Working Forests Act, originally introduced by Representative Jared Huffman (D-CA), which would increase wildfire resiliency in Northwest California. The impacts of climate change in the region have resulted in more frequent and severe wildfires, threatening communities, clean water, and human lives. This title would increase community and firefighter safety by requiring federal agencies to work with local residents to develop a new coordinated fire management plan that prioritizes reducing fuel loads near existing roads, infrastructure, and other developed areas.

FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS AND THE 30X30 GOAL

The *Protecting America's Wilderness and Public Lands Act* would safeguard incredible and unique landscapes for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future generations. Wilderness and wild and scenic river designations are permanent and lasting protections for the most pristine and remote federal lands and waters. These protections are crucial to meeting President Biden's goal to protect 30% of American lands and waters by 2030, a number scientists believe is necessary to buffer nature from the impacts of climate change and human development.

The *Protecting America's Wilderness and Public Lands Act* includes the Central Coast Heritage Protection Act, originally introduced by Representative Salud Carbajal (D-CA), which would preserve some of the few remaining grassland and alkali wetlands in California's Central Coast by protecting approximately 319,382 acres of public land and nearly 230 miles of free-flowing rivers. These designations would provide lasting protections for the region's abundant biodiversity, including several endangered and threatened species; clean drinking water; unparalleled outdoor recreation opportunities; and significant Native American cultural sites.

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ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

The *Protecting America's Wilderness and Public Lands Act* would dramatically improve recreational access for underserved communities while protecting vital sources of clean drinking water to ensure that environmental justice communities are able to reap the benefits of conservation.

Protecting America's Wilderness and Public Lands Act includes the San Gabriel Mountains Foothills and Rivers Protection Act, originally introduced by Representative Judy Chu (D-CA), which would enhance protections for the San Gabriel Mountains and Watershed and increase opportunities for public lands access in Los Angeles County. Although Los Angeles County is one of the most park-poor and polluted regions in the United States, over 15 million people live within a 90-minute drive of the San Gabriel Mountains, which provide Angelenos with 70-percent of their available open space and 30-percent of their drinking water. This title would ensure that residents of this dense urban area – particularly minority and low-income communities – have the opportunity to access the benefits of nearby public lands.

THE SAN
GABRIEL
MOUNTAINS
PROVIDE
30%
OF LOS ANGELES
COUNTY'S
DRINKING
WATER

THE RECREATION
ECONOMY
GENERATES
\$887
BILLION
IN CONSUMER
SPENDING EACH
YEAR

OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMY

Recreation on public lands and waters provide significant economic benefits for local communities. In fact, research has shown that rural communities with access to outdoor recreation assets fare better in terms of job creation, economic sustainability, and resident retention than communities without outdoor recreation assets. In particular, the outdoor recreation economy brings customers to local businesses and increases tax revenues to state and local governments.

The *Protecting America's Wilderness and Public Lands Act* includes the Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy (CORE) Act, originally introduced by Representative Joe Neguse (D-CO), which was carefully crafted to preserve key public lands in support of Colorado's world-class outdoor recreation opportunities. The bill would designate new recreation and special management areas, and designate a first of its kind National Historic Landscape at Camp Hale, a former military base and foundational landscape for American outdoor recreation. Nationally, the outdoor recreation economy generated 7.6 million direct jobs, \$887 billion in annual consumer spending, and \$59.2 billion in state and local tax revenue in 2017.

RESPECTING TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

PROTECTS TREATY RIGHTS AND TRIBAL ACCESS FOR TRADITIONAL USES

Since time immemorial, tribal communities have lived on and stewarded the lands we now call our public lands. Unfortunately, past policies often dispossessed tribal communities of their land and restricted access to sacred cultural sites. This bill protects ancestral homelands, preserves treaty rights, and ensures tribal access for traditional and cultural uses.

The *Protecting America's Wilderness and Public Lands Act* includes the Grand Canyon Protection Act, originally introduced by Representative Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ), which would protect the Grand Canyon region from uranium mining. By extending an existing moratorium in perpetuity, the bill would preserve a tribal homeland and protect the Colorado River watershed. Numerous tribes across the Southwest have cultural and historical connections to the Grand Canyon, and some tribes, including the Havasupai, rely on the Canyon's seeps and springs as their primary water source. Rep. Grijalva has worked closely with tribes across the region for more than a decade to protect this important landscape and the lifegiving water it provides.

COLLABORATIVE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

The *Protecting America's Wilderness and Public Lands Act* highlights the importance of stakeholder engagement and collaboration from start to finish. Each title of the bill reflects the ideas, input and ongoing engagement of diverse and locally driven coalitions that include sportsmen, recreation enthusiasts, conservationists, local businesses, federal agencies, and members of the public. As a result, this bill enjoys support from a broad coalition of stakeholders fighting to protect public lands, increase access for underserved communities, and ensure a clean environment for all.

The *Protecting America's Wilderness and Public Lands Act* includes the Wild Olympics Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, originally introduced by Representative Derek Kilmer (D-WA), which was developed through a multi-year stakeholder process with a focus on addressing local concerns. This process included more than 500 group and individual meetings with stakeholders across the State of Washington that helped refine the proposal to accommodate concerns from local stakeholders, including loggers, while ensuring lasting protections for critical salmon habitat, clean water resources, and recreational opportunities on the Olympic Peninsula.

REFLECTS ONGOING COLLABORATION WITH DIVERSE STAKEHOLDERS AND LOCAL VOICES