



## **Fact Sheet: Conserving Public Lands and Water**

From parks and rivers to farmlands and forests, America's great outdoors fuel our national spirit of adventure and independence and help power our economy. Our lands and waters also are where our families go to unwind, to fish, hike, and hunt, and to spend valuable time together.

Today, however, much of America's great outdoors is under intense pressure. Open lands, farmlands and woodlands are disappearing, waterways are polluted, and a changing climate is threatening natural systems. At the same time, many Americans – especially young people – are losing touch with the outdoor places and traditions our country has always treasured. President Obama believes that for America to be at its strongest, we need healthy and accessible lands and waters and healthy and active youth who are connected to them. That is why he established the America's Great Outdoors Initiative in April, 2010, to work with the American people develop a 21<sup>st</sup> century conservation and recreation agenda.

The America's Great Outdoors Initiative turns the old ways upside down. Instead of dictating policies from Washington, it calls for supporting local, community-driven conservation ideas. Instead of growing bureaucracy, it calls for reworking inefficient policies and making the Federal Government a better partner with states, tribes, and local communities.

During the summer of 2010, senior Administration officials held 51 public listening sessions across the country, 21 of them specifically with youth. Some 10,000 Americans participated in the live sessions and more than 105,000 provided comments. The outcome of this national conversation is a report to the President, *America's Great Outdoors: A Promise to Future Generations*. Prepared in consultation with the American people, the report reflects their ideas on how to reconnect with America's lands, waters, and natural and cultural treasures, and build on the conservation successes in communities across the nation.

### **Conserving Public Lands and Waters: What We Heard**

Three out of every 10 acres in the United States - more than 635 million acres— are public lands that belong to all Americans. Americans love these lands, and use them for everything from family vacations and motorized recreation to exploring our history and finding solitude. Our public lands provide water resources, recreation access and opportunities, wildlife habitat, educational value, and many other benefits to the American people.

Americans are concerned about the many threats these lands are facing, including from invasive species, unnaturally destructive fires, pests and disease, and climate change. To tackle these challenges, participants asked the federal agencies to coordinate and collaborate with each other – and with state, tribal, and local partners, to develop collaborative strategies to manage large landscapes, wildlife, and watersheds. Federal land managers should partner beyond their boundaries with landowners and other land managers to create landscape-level management strategies, such as by establishing of wildlife migration corridors. The government should also place greater emphasis on making public lands and open spaces accessible to all people by creating

or expanding urban parks and supporting the efforts of farmers, ranchers, and local communities to conserve open spaces, rivers, and working lands.

### **Conserving Public Lands and Waters: What We Are Doing**

Responding to the priorities of Americans, the Obama Administration will take action to:

#### **Provide Full Funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).**

- Focus a portion of federal LWCF funds on projects that promote large-scale land conservation, enhance urban parks and community green spaces, and improve river restoration and access.
- Consult with local and state governments, federal agencies, and stakeholders, to focus a portion of the LWCF stateside program on urban parks and community green spaces, landscape-scale conservation, blueways, and other recreational venues.

#### **Manage federal lands and waters to ensure access while protecting larger landscapes.**

- Integrate large, landscape-scale conservation into federal land management plans and actions.
- Strategically invest and align federal funds from the LWCF, Farm Bill, and other grant programs, as appropriate, to achieve landscape-scale conservation and restoration goals on public and private lands and to leverage other public and private funds.
- Manage federal lands and waters to increase their resilience to climate change by improving the science available to land managers and building adaptation and mitigation into federal land management plans.
- Collaborate with public and private stakeholders to create and protect critical wildlife corridors and maintain landscape connectivity.

#### **Advance national, regional, and community-supported work to protect and enhance unique landscapes and cultural areas while ensuring openness and transparency in all land designations.**

- Engage the public to identify and recommend potential sites on existing federal lands for protection.
- Implement a transparent and open approach to new national monument designations tailored to engaging local, state, and national interests.
- Identify natural and cultural places with strong local support for potential congressional designation.

#### **Protect America's historic and cultural resources.**

- Increase funding for the Historic Preservation Fund administered by the Department of the Interior.
- Provide financial and technical support for state and local communities, tribes, and private sector organizations for historic preservation and cultural resource protection.
- Elevate the importance of cultural resource protection in federal land management agencies.

#### **Catalyze large-scale land conservation partnerships through economic incentives and technical assistance.**

- Create an AGO Collaborative Landscape Conservation Initiative through coordinated competitive processes, using increases in LWCF and other federal grant programs.
- Support landscape partnerships by targeting existing federal dollars, policies, and other resources toward conservation of private and tribal working lands and coordinating expenditures across federal agencies, where appropriate,
- Significantly increase the pace of working farms, ranch, and forest land conservation by extending the enhanced tax deductions for conservation easements beyond 2011.

For more detailed information and to learn how you can take action in your community, visit:

[www.doi.gov/AmericasGreatOutdoors](http://www.doi.gov/AmericasGreatOutdoors).