



America's  
Great Outdoors:  
A Promise to Future Generations  
February 2011

*Executive Summary*



*This page intentionally left blank.*

# America's Great Outdoors: A Promise to Future Generations

---

## Executive Summary

From the snow-capped peaks of Washington's Cascade Mountains to the white sand beaches of Florida's Gulf Coast, and the vast expanses of forests, grasslands, rivers, lakes, farms, and rangeland that lie between, America boasts a stunning array of magnificent lands and waterways. Our appreciation for these special places is rooted in the natural environment as well as in the rich diversity of people, stories, and traditions that have become associated with them over the course of our history. Since our earliest beginnings, the lands, coasts, rivers, forests, and mountains and the resources they hold have helped to define who we are as a people and as a nation. They have also been a source of America's wealth, providing places to reflect, relax, recreate, and create lasting memories with friends and family.

However, Americans today have become increasingly disconnected from our great outdoors. We find ourselves cut off from the natural and cultural inheritance that has shaped our lives and history. Our natural resources remain central to our economic vitality, yet they are under intense pressure from development and fragmentation, unsustainable use, pollution, and impacts from a changing climate.

On April 16, 2010, President Obama launched the America's Great Outdoors (AGO) Initiative and charged the Secretaries of the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture, the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality to develop a 21<sup>st</sup>-century conservation and recreation agenda that addresses these challenges.<sup>1</sup> AGO takes as its premise that lasting conservation solutions should rise

---

<sup>1</sup> President Obama instructed the lead agencies to coordinate with the Departments of Defense, Commerce, Housing and Urban Development, Health and Human Services, Labor, Transportation, and Education; and the Office of Management and Budget to develop this report.



from the American people—that the protection of our natural heritage is a non-partisan objective shared by all Americans. Through listening sessions and outreach, AGO launched a robust public conversation about the future of conservation in America.

The result is a call for a grassroots approach to protecting our lands and waters and connecting all Americans to their natural and cultural heritage. AGO seeks to empower all Americans—citizens, young people, and representatives of community groups; the private sector; nonprofit organizations; and local, state, and tribal governments—to share in the responsibility to conserve, restore, and provide better access to our lands and waters in order to leave a healthy, vibrant outdoor legacy for generations yet to come.

### **A Conservation Legacy**

The AGO report builds on the legacy of Americans who have taken up the mantle of conservation to protect our unique natural heritage. Throughout our history, conservation actions have been grounded in the premise that our natural heritage belongs to the people and that access to it and its protection are basic American values. Communities have long been catalysts for and champions of action to protect the places they cherish, whether majestic national parks and forests, iconic working lands, or city green spaces.

America’s leaders have acted to secure the future of our natural heritage out of a keen awareness that it inspires us as a people and sustains us as a nation. During the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln protected the magnificent resources of California’s Yosemite Valley by setting aside lands that would eventually become part of our third national park. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, President Theodore Roosevelt furthered the concept of federal protection of public natural and cultural resources by protecting some 230 million acres as national forests, parks, wildlife refuges, and preserves and by establishing national monuments. In the



1930s and 1940s President Franklin Delano Roosevelt championed conservation and development of our natural resources to put Americans back to work during the Great Depression.

### **Conservation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

America's Great Outdoors builds on this nation's long history of actions taken to conserve our natural heritage. What has resulted is a nationwide system of public lands—both large and small and including parks, wildlife refuges, forests, wilderness areas, scenic seashores, hiking trails, protected waters, and recreation areas. America's homesteads, farms, and ranches have contributed to our heritage as well by preserving working landscapes, supplying food and fiber, protecting woods and watersheds, keeping air and water clean, and providing wildlife habitat. Historic and cultural sites have helped to educate us and to remind us of our roots. Together, our public, private, and tribal lands and waters embody one of our nation's founding principles: the right of all Americans to enjoy and benefit from America's natural treasures and the obligation to pass that heritage along to future generations.

Fulfilling that promise—and the shared obligation—to preserve and protect our natural and cultural heritage for present and future generations is one of the daunting challenges for 21<sup>st</sup>-century America. Busy lives and limited access to clean, safe, open spaces discourage many Americans from taking part in outdoor activities. The nearly 80 percent of Americans who live in or near cities find it particularly difficult to connect with the outdoors.<sup>2</sup> The outdoors has increasingly lost its relevance in the lives of our children, who now spend only half as much time outside as their parents did, but who spend an average of seven hours a day using electronic devices. Studies show that access to the outdoors can help reverse the obesity epidemic that has tripled among our children in the last generation. They show that time spent in nature can reduce stress and anxiety, promote learning and personal growth, and foster mental and physical health.

We have also grown from a nation of 92 million people 100 years ago to 308 million today, and the Census Bureau projects that our population will grow to nearly 400 million in the next 40 years. Land and natural resource development have fragmented our lands, disrupted natural systems, and imperiled productive farmland and woodlands. One out of three acres that has been developed in the United States was developed from 1982 to 2007.<sup>3</sup> Annually, we now lose about 1.6 million acres of our working farms, ranches, and forests to development and fragmentation.<sup>4</sup> Many of our rivers, lakes, coasts, and streams are polluted. Fish advisories and beach closures occur frequently. Our natural legacy faces new challenges, including new types of pollution and a changing climate, whose full consequences are yet to unfold.

---

<sup>2</sup> United Nations World Urbanization Prospects: The 2007 Revision.

<sup>3</sup> USDA Summary Report: 2007 National Resources Inventory.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



### **A National Conversation about Conservation and Stewardship**

Over the summer of 2010, AGO launched extensive public conversations about conservation. Senior administration officials held 51 public listening sessions all across the nation, 21 of them specifically with youth. More than 10,000 Americans participated in the live sessions and more than 105,000 comments were provided. Americans from across the country shared specific and creative ideas about conservation, recreation, and connecting people to the outdoors. They were farmers, ranchers, teachers, parents, young people, and representatives of land trusts, recreation and conservation organizations, historic preservation groups, faith communities, the private sector, as well as state, local, and tribal governments. All ethnic groups, political parties, and age groups joined the public listening sessions or submitted their ideas in letters, online, or through social media sites.

Through the AGO listening sessions and public input process, we learned that there is a powerful consensus across America that outdoor spaces—public and private, large and small, urban and rural—remain essential to our quality of life, our economy, and our national identity. Americans communicated clearly that they care deeply about our outdoor heritage, want to enjoy and protect it, and are willing to take collective responsibility to protect it for their children and grandchildren. In fact, they are already doing so. They are restoring rivers and streams, building and improving hiking trails and bike paths, ensuring the long-term conservation of their private lands, sponsoring beach and roadside cleanups, planting trees and gardens, and restoring migratory bird habitat and populations.

Tens of thousands of young people are participating in youth conservation organizations taking hold from coast to coast. State governments, tribes, and local communities are working together to establish parks, trails, and environmental education centers. Farmers and ranchers, conservation organizations, hunters and anglers, private businesses, public agencies,

## America's Great Outdoors Vision Statement

Americans envision a future in which:

*All children, regardless of where they live, have access to clean, safe outdoor places within a short walk of their homes or schools, where they can play, dream, discover, and recreate.*

*Americans participate in the shared responsibility to protect and care for our unique natural and cultural heritage for the use and enjoyment of future generations.*

*Rural lands—our working farms, ranches, and forests—are conserved and restored through incentives and local partnerships.*

*Our national parks, national wildlife refuges, national forests, and other public lands and waters are managed with a renewed commitment to sound stewardship and resilience.*

*Our natural areas and waterways, whether publicly or privately owned, are reconnected, healthy, and resilient and support both human needs and the wildlife that depend on them.*

*Communities work together to restore and protect healthy rivers and lakes to provide recreational opportunities and to contribute significantly to a vibrant economy.*

and others are forming innovative partnerships to conserve millions of acres that benefit communities, wildlife, recreation, and local economies. But we need to do more.

Americans today are calling for a 21<sup>st</sup>-century approach to conservation. That approach must help us to protect the places and the resources that we value. It must help us achieve greater health and well-being as individuals and as a nation. It must also recognize the economic challenges we face as a government and a nation. We must be wise in how we spend taxpayer dollars, and also recognize the significant economic benefits produced by protecting and restoring our natural and cultural heritage and by promoting outdoor recreation and land stewardship. Today, Americans recognize that pitting a healthy environment against a healthy economy is a false choice—we must and can have both. By investing in our natural wealth and heritage, we can create jobs associated with recreation and land stewardship, while passing on a vital natural legacy to our children and grandchildren.

Most profoundly, Americans have called for a new vision of conservation for the 21<sup>st</sup> century—one that builds on the traditions of the last century but also recognizes the challenges and changing circumstances of the new century.

This report to the President contains three chapters: Connecting Americans to the Great Outdoors; Conserving and Restoring America's Great Outdoors; and Working Together for America's Great Outdoors. It also includes a special section, *Youth and America's Great Outdoors: What We Heard from America's Young People*. Each chapter includes goals, recommendations, and actions that aim to deliver on this vision in real and tangible ways. Woven throughout is the basic tenet that the federal government must be a better partner and supporter of local conservation efforts. It must empower communities to realize their conservation goals through technical assistance, access to resources, and the science for sound decision-making. It must maximize conservation benefits from taxpayer dollars; catalyze private sector investment; and reconnect with and engage Americans about the importance of our outdoor resources.

### Continuing the Conversation, Fulfilling the Promise

The national conversation President Obama began in April will reinvigorate America's enjoyment, conservation, and stewardship of our outdoors. It will also join the ingenuity, passion, and grounding of the American people with the leadership responsibilities and resources of the federal government to achieve the shared vision. Working together, we will ensure that our children and their children have the opportunity to enjoy and benefit from America's irreplaceable natural legacy.

In the coming months and years, as we work together to implement the recommendations in this report, the conversation with Americans will continue and broaden. We will honor those who have come before us, and we will leave a lasting legacy for those who will come after us.

## Chapter 1: Connecting Americans to the Great Outdoors

### 1. Provide Quality Jobs, Career Pathways, and Service Opportunities

**What we heard:** The importance of job and service-based learning opportunities related to protecting and restoring the outdoors was a constant theme raised in AGO listening sessions, especially in the 21 sessions devoted to youth. Our citizens want to work on America's public lands and waters, but they expressed frustration with the hiring processes.

**GOAL A** **Develop quality conservation jobs and service opportunities that protect and restore America's natural and cultural resources.**

Jobs and service opportunities provide both meaningful ways to protect and restore the outdoors and to make conservation relevant, especially to young people. Conservation, restoration, and recreation offer quality job and service opportunities and also spur economic growth for local communities, regions, and the nation as a whole. President Obama has called on all Americans to participate in the nation's recovery and renewal through jobs and service. Americans can help ensure that our natural heritage is passed on to future generations.

**Recommendation 1.1:** Catalyze the establishment of a 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Conservation Service Corps to engage young Americans in public lands and water restoration.

**Recommendation 1.2:** Work with the Office of Personnel Management to improve career pathways and to review barriers to jobs in natural resource conservation and historic and cultural preservation.

**Recommendation 1.3:** Improve federal capacity for recruiting, training, and managing volunteers and volunteer programs to create a new generation of citizen stewards and mentors.

### 2. Enhance Recreational Access and Opportunities

**What we heard:** Federal agencies provide exceptional recreational opportunities and facilities on more than 635 million acres of land that receive over a billion visits each year.<sup>5</sup> State, county, and municipal entities also manage thousands of parks, natural areas, and historic

---

<sup>5</sup> USDA report on Major Uses of Land in the United States, 2002.



sites that are enjoyed daily by tens of millions of people nationwide. In addition, many private landowners provide access to their lands for recreation. Nevertheless, many public comments focused on barriers to recreation access and enjoyment on public lands.

**GOALA Increase and improve recreational access and opportunities.**

*“City transportation and general transportation is lacking. We need better public transportation to get around to different areas in the city, and we need shuttles that take people to outdoor spaces further away.”* (Listening Session Participant, Albuquerque, NM)

Despite the many opportunities for quality outdoor recreation on public lands and waters, better integration, alignment, coordination, and targeting of recreational resources and opportunities on public land is called for. At the same time, partnership and assistance must be provided to support local, state, and tribal efforts to enhance recreation and conservation through existing programs and through new venues, such as First Lady Michelle Obama’s *Let’s Move!* initiative aimed at combating childhood obesity.

**Recommendation 2.1:** Support outdoor recreation access and opportunities on public lands by establishing a Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation (FICOR).

**Recommendation 2.2:** Support community-based efforts to increase access to outdoor recreation.

### 3. Raise Awareness of the Value and Benefits of America’s Great Outdoors

**What we heard:** The outdoor experience has lost its currency for many Americans because of busy schedules, shifting cultural norms, financial barriers, and the lure of new technology. AGO listening session participants spoke about the need to make the outdoors desirable and relevant to America’s young people, and to redefine the “great outdoors” to include not just iconic places but neighborhood and city parks, community gardens, and school yards as well. Participants observed that their experiences in nature and at historic places inspired a lasting connection and, for some, lifelong careers and commitment to service in the outdoors.

**GOALA Cultivate stewardship and appreciation of America’s natural, cultural, and historic resources through innovative awareness-raising partnership initiatives and through education.**

Our citizens are increasingly disconnected from nature and the outdoors. Our children, in particular, are losing a primary point of early exposure to nature and natural systems that can spark a child’s imagination and drive to become a scientist, innovator, conservationist, poet, or community leader. This situation calls for an integrated and technologically innovative campaign to make the outdoors relevant and exciting to our citizens once again and to install a shared stewardship responsibility.

**Recommendation 3.1:** Launch a public awareness initiative to show that experiencing America’s great outdoors is fun, easy, and healthy.

**Recommendation 3.2:** Work with the Department of Education and other federal agencies to align and support programs that advance awareness and understanding of the benefits of nature.

**Recommendation 3.3:** Promote and support replicable programs that teach about and connect children and families with their natural and cultural heritage.

## 4. Engage Young People in Conservation and the Great Outdoors

**What we heard:** In 21 youth-specific AGO listening sessions, young people from all across the nation shared their passion, energy, and commitment—and their frustrations—about the condition of our great outdoors. The youth participation in AGO had a tremendous impact on the themes of this report and influenced its recommendations. To honor and capture the youth voice, a separate pullout report, “Youth and America’s Great Outdoors,” was prepared.

### **GOAL A** Build stewardship values and engage youth in conservation and recreation.

*“We need a philosophical change of what the great outdoors is. We don’t need to go out west or to some faraway place. It can be a little stream, out your door, even if it’s in the city. It exists where we exist.”* (Listening Session Participant, Hyde Park, NY)

As we look to protect America’s great outdoors for the enjoyment of current and future generations, it is imperative that we continue to specifically engage, empower, and learn from our young people. Many of our youth are already participating in the protection and enhancement of our natural resources and want to help address the challenges of connecting with the outdoors. We will capitalize on their willingness and enthusiasm.

**Recommendation 4.1:** Engage young people in the implementation of AGO.

## Chapter 2: Conserving and Restoring America's Great Outdoors

### 5. Strengthen the Land and Water Conservation Fund

**What we heard:** The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), the primary source of federal funding for states and federal agencies to protect and conserve America's national treasures and to promote outdoor recreation, is primarily generated from outer continental shelf oil and gas drilling activities. During the AGO listening sessions, many participants supported full funding of the LWCF and suggested that LWCF funding could be more effectively used if it was strategically focused on specific project types and/or locations.

#### **GOAL A** **Invigorate the LWCF to better meet conservation and recreation needs.**

*“As a grandmother, who with my late husband, enjoyed our great outdoors, I want the next generation to enjoy America's great outdoors too. As a former grant writer for a tri-state council of governments, I have been privileged to see the fruits of the LWCF in numerous small towns in our area.”* (Listening Session Participant, Missoula, MT)

Meeting the 21<sup>st</sup>-century conservation and recreation needs of our nation requires both an increase in funds and changes in the administration of the LWCF. Although LWCF revenue collection is authorized up to \$900 million, congressional appropriations have been provided at this level only twice during its more than 45-year history. The demand for LWCF funds for federal land acquisition and state grants programs far exceeds funding levels appropriated by Congress. The successful implementation of AGO will require both a more strategic investment of funds from both the state and federal sides of the LWCF and better coordination among other federal grant and aid programs linked to the AGO initiative.

**Recommendation 5.1:** Provide full funding for LWCF programs.

**Recommendation 5.2:** Focus a portion of federal LWCF funds on projects that achieve AGO goals related to large-scale land conservation, urban parks and community green spaces, and river restoration and access.

**Recommendation 5.3:** Broaden guidelines for Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans (SCORPs) to align with AGO priorities.

### 6. Establish Great Urban Parks and Community Green Spaces

**What we heard:** Urban parks and community green spaces today play an important role providing places for recreation, quiet, and restoration, but these benefits are not enjoyed equally by all our citizens. Barriers to use of these open spaces include fear of crime or violence, remote locations

and lack of transportation, pollution and deteriorating infrastructure, and cultural sensitivities. Americans want to partner with the federal government at the local level to create or enhance green spaces and outdoor recreation, and they want access to federal technical know-how, knowledge, and funding to support local community efforts.

**GOAL A** **Create and enhance a new generation of safe, clean, accessible great urban parks and community green spaces.**

*“Urban parks create jobs, spur growth, increase property value, prevent obesity, clear pollution, and build community. Yet they’re often dismissed as frivolous in hard times and remain severely underfunded. How can we change the perception that they are not just a “nice thing to have” but an essential part of our urban infrastructure.”*  
(Listening Session Participant, Washington, DC)

Urban parks and community green spaces contribute to the social, physical, and emotional health of America’s communities and are among the few public places where citizens can recreate close to home. Parks and green spaces also generate economic benefits for communities, from higher property values to increased recreation and tourism and a resulting improved business environment.

**Recommendation 6.1:** Establish the AGO Great Urban Parks and Community Green Spaces initiative by targeting increased funding for the NPS *LWCF stateside grant program* to leverage investment in new and enhanced urban parks and community green spaces.

**Recommendation 6.2:** Support and align federal agency programs and initiatives to promote the creation, expansion, and enhancement of urban parks and community green spaces.

**Recommendation 6.3:** Target technical assistance support to communities to create and enhance urban parks and community green spaces.

**Recommendation 6.4:** Connect people with urban parks and community green spaces.

## 7. Conserve Rural Working Farms, Ranches, and Forests Through Partnerships and Incentives

**What we heard:** A growing awareness exists that protecting our natural and cultural heritage requires an “all-lands” approach, i.e., working across all ownerships types across a landscape. Participants made it clear that farmers, ranchers, and forest owners are eager to help and are taking steps to protect our great outdoors, but they emphasized that conservation and stewardship must make economic sense. Participants want AGO to foster, catalyze, and partner in community-level efforts on working lands to conserve and strategically connect the nation’s landscapes and watersheds. Citizens suggested that the federal government should expand tools for landowners; conservation and historic preservation groups; and state, local, and tribal governments to conserve lands through voluntary, incentive-based approaches. One of the most frequent recommendations was to maintain the enhanced tax deduction for conservation easements.



**GOAL A Catalyze large-scale land conservation partnership projects through economic incentives and technical assistance.**

AGO will support and catalyze landscape-scale conservation on working lands efforts by using LWCF funds and existing revenue sources and grant programs, and by improving coordination and alignment in use of technical and financial resources among federal, state, tribal, and local governments and other partners. Emphasis will be placed on using science-based tools and technology to leverage resources to achieve the maximum benefit to landscapes and resources from dollars spent.

**Recommendation 7.1:** Support collaborative landscape conservation through competitive processes, including increases in LWCF funding and other programs.

**Recommendation 7.2:** Support landscape partnerships by targeting existing federal dollars, policies, and other resources toward conservation of private and tribal working lands and coordinating expenditures, where appropriate, across federal agencies.

**GOAL B Significantly increase the pace of working farms, ranches, and forest lands conservation.**

In signing the Tax Relief, Unemployment Insurance Reauthorization, and Job Creation Act of 2010, President Obama extended the enhanced tax incentive deduction for landowners who donate conservation easements through December 31, 2011. Extending the enhanced deduction beyond 2011 would further bolster land conservation and resource protection, especially on working lands.

**Recommendation 7.3:** Extend the enhanced deductions for conservation easement donations beyond 2011.

**GOAL C Increase financial incentives for land stewardship for farmers, ranchers, forest landowners, and tribes.**

Conservationists and landowners alike agree on the need to maintain traditional markets for food, fiber, and wood products from agriculture and forestry, and also to create new sources of revenue from working lands. Developing markets for environmental services and benefits provided by private lands will create new sources of income that reward landowners for stewardship and for keeping these working lands in agricultural and forestry uses.

**Recommendation 7.4:** Develop and expand new markets, including those for the environmental services provided by working lands, for local agricultural or sustainable forest products, sustainable energy, and others.

**Recommendation 7.5:** Support financial and other incentives to encourage access for hunting, fishing, hiking, recreation, and other outdoor activities on or across private working lands.

**Recommendation 7.6:** Promote tools such as safe harbor agreements that provide certainty to landowners who agree to carry out stewardship activities that benefit fish and wildlife and protect water resources.

## 8. Conserve and Restore our National Parks, Wildlife Refuges, Forests, and other Federal Lands and Waters

**What we heard:** Nearly 30 percent of lands in the United States are managed and protected by the federal government<sup>6</sup> and offer people opportunities to make personal connections to the outdoors. They provide essential ecosystem services, such as drinking water and reduction of greenhouse gases, sustaining people and some of our most iconic wildlife species. Federal public lands generate billions in economic activity and millions of jobs. Listening session participants noted that some federal lands contain exceptional natural, cultural, or historic features that require special protection. They acknowledged that the many natural and human-created threats facing our nation's federal lands and waters, from disease infestations to climate change, require proactive management.

### **GOAL A** **Conserve, restore, and manage federal lands and waters to ensure access and enjoyment for future generations while contributing to the protection of a larger natural and cultural landscape.**

*“Our vision... is for the federal government to act as the catalyst for federal, state, tribal, and local agencies and private interests to work together across America to protect a network of critical ecosystems, natural resource areas, and recreation lands from the inner city to wild lands.” (Written comment)*

Ensuring that our nation's forests, grasslands, and other ecosystems are resilient must increasingly guide federal land and water management. In all cases, federal lands management must be consistent with their designations and ensure their long-term health. Decisions must be developed through sound science and implemented with ongoing monitoring and adaptive management. In turn, management actions, such as controlling invasive species and planting native vegetation, can provide jobs for local individuals and businesses. Federal land managers should continue to work closely with neighboring public and private landowners, especially where doing so can provide mutual benefit and improve habitat connectivity, natural resilience, recreational access, and corridors for wildlife.

**Recommendation 8.1:** Manage federal lands and waters within a larger landscape context to conserve and restore ecosystems and watershed health.

**Recommendation 8.2:** Manage federal lands and waters to increase their resilience to climate change.

**Recommendation 8.3:** Manage federal lands and waters to create and protect critical wildlife corridors and maintain landscape connectivity in collaboration with other public and private stakeholders.

---

<sup>6</sup> USDA report on Major Uses of Land in the United States, 2002.

**GOAL B Advance national, regional, and community-supported efforts to preserve and enhance unique landscapes, natural areas, historic sites, and cultural areas while ensuring openness and transparency in any land designations.**

America is endowed with a vast array of natural and cultural features that reflect the character of our communities and our nation. Some federal lands contain iconic natural and cultural features that require unique protection. As economic pressures, development, effects of climate change, and other factors mount to threaten the sustainability of heritage resources, locally led partnership initiatives can guide broader decision-making efforts to preserve these unique places for future generations. The process for increased federal protection of existing federal lands should be accompanied by transparency in approach and public involvement.

**Recommendation 8.4:** Engage the public to identify and recommend potential sites on existing federal lands for protection under the 1906 Antiquities Act.

**Recommendation 8.5:** Identify potential areas for congressional designation that have strong local support.

**GOAL C Protect America’s historic and cultural resources.**

Historic preservation can have benefits beyond protecting resources. It can serve as a catalyst to reinvigorate communities and economies while instilling pride in local history and traditions. Historic preservation and cultural resources protection can support local businesses, increase job opportunities, and revitalize both urban and rural communities.

**Recommendation 8.6:** Provide financial and technical support to states and local communities, tribes, and private sector organizations for historic preservation and cultural resources protection.

**Recommendation 8.7:** Continue to protect and interpret historic sites and cultural landscapes on federal lands.

## 9. Protect and Renew Rivers and Other Waters

**What we heard:** During the AGO listening sessions, participants expressed a passion for our waterways, knowledge of their economic and ecological importance, and enthusiasm for their conservation. Americans encouraged the federal government to help community efforts to enhance recreational opportunities in their local waterways and adjacent green spaces; to help increase community access to rivers and lakes for recreation; to support community-based protection and enhancement of the nation’s waters; and to improve coordination among federal agencies.

**GOAL A Empower communities to connect with America’s great outdoors through their rivers and other waterways.**

Americans are working together to establish recreational opportunities on their rivers and other waterways and to access their local aquatic resources and adjacent green spaces. AGO will help empower local communities to restore and connect with their rich water-based natural resources.

**Recommendation 9.1:** Establish the AGO National Recreational Blueway Trails Initiative to increase access to recreation.

**Recommendation 9.2:** Facilitate recreational access to the nation’s waterways.

**GOAL B Support restoration and conservation of rivers, bays, coasts, lakes, and estuaries for recreation, healthy fisheries, and wildlife habitat.**

*“Water should be a pillar of AGO, project reconnect and restore [to] connect Americans to land and water resources through education and recreation.”* (Listening Session Participant, Washington, D.C.)

The federal government should integrate federal water resources projects with locally driven watershed protection efforts and expand support for community-based restoration and conservation of water resources. These locally supported restoration projects may result in enhanced fish passage, habitat restoration and connectivity, water-based recreation, flood control, traditional uses, and adjacent land-based recreation.

**Recommendation 9.3:** Enhance and restore local waterways and the surrounding land by partnering with state, local, and tribal government, and the private sector to support community efforts.

**Recommendation 9.4:** Coordinate and align federal water resource management programs and resources.



## Chapter 3: Working Together for the Great Outdoors

### 10. Make the Federal Government a More Effective Conservation Partner

**What we heard:** Public comments confirmed that effective partnerships will be critical to the success of the AGO Initiative. People across the nation called for better collaboration between the public and private sectors to help citizens realize the benefits of connecting to the outdoors. Americans expressed their desire for better communication and coordination among federal agencies and better delivery of services to the public to achieve these goals for enhanced conservation and outdoor recreation across our country. A common theme in nearly all of the listening sessions and public comments was that the federal government can be more efficient and effective even without additional resources.

#### **GOALA** Improve federal government performance as a conservation partner.

Now is the time for the federal government itself, with its many agencies and programs for conservation and recreation, to improve how it works with all stakeholders. What is called for is a more holistic, focused approach in the use of existing authorities, processes, and procedures across all agencies in order to be better at connecting people to the outdoors and conserving our natural heritage. The goals of the AGO Initiative can be better achieved by strategically aligning existing federal resources, authorities, and funding. An intergovernmental council of senior officials will continue the dialogue with the American people and report to the President.



NPS- M. DELKER PHOTO

*“Inconsistency across agencies, confusing bureaucratic processes and administrative hurdles, rules and regulations that often seem punitive, are poorly explained, and change with land ownership boundaries: these are all obstacles to many people who seek to visit the outdoors. Much of this could be addressed through better communication, both between agencies and from agencies to local communities and the public.”* (Listening Session Participant, Lander, WY)



NPS - SNYDER PHOTO

**Recommendation 10.1:** Establish the interagency AGO Council to achieve more cooperation and collaboration among federal agencies engaged in conservation and recreation.

**GOAL B Amplify the impact of the AGO Initiative by creating the Partnership for AGO.**

The President charged the leaders of the AGO Initiative to “Build upon State, local, private, and tribal priorities for conservation . . . and determine how the federal government can best advance those priorities through public-private partnerships . . .” Public-private partnerships can be nimble and innovative in distributing information and expertise, leveraging investment, inspiring children, broadcasting successful and replicable models, and building public awareness. The Partnership for AGO established through congressionally chartered foundations and composed of diverse leaders—representing philanthropy, the private sector, conservation, historic preservation, state and local governments, tribes, recreation, educational institutions, and community groups—will amplify the impact of AGO.

**Recommendation 10.2:** Launch the Partnership for AGO.

America's Great Outdoors: A Promise to Future Generations  
February 2011  
Executive Summary

Produced by:

Council on Environmental Quality  
Department of Agriculture  
Department of the Interior  
Environmental Protection Agency

In partnership with:

Department of Commerce  
Department of Defense  
Department of Education  
Department of Health and Human Services  
Department of Housing and Urban Development  
Department of Labor  
Department of Transportation  
Office of Management and Budget

The full report, *America's Great Outdoors: A Promise to Future Generations*, which includes a special youth report, summaries of federal government programs and effective partnerships and programs, and the Presidential Memorandum on America's Great Outdoors may be downloaded at [www.doi.gov/AmericasGreatOutdoors](http://www.doi.gov/AmericasGreatOutdoors).

Photos: (Cover) *WildLink Bridge Program*, Yosemite National Park, CA; (Page 2) Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, MN; (Page 4) AGO Listening Session, Rio de Los Angeles State Park, CA; (Page 15) Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site, MT (Page 16) Central Park, NY.