

Working Together for America's Great Outdoors

10. Make the Federal Government a More Effective Conservation Partner

“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)

Partnerships will be critical to the success of the America's Great Outdoors Initiative, a fact confirmed by many public comments. People across the nation called for better collaboration between the public and private sectors; state, local, and tribal governments; and between local communities and the federal government to help citizens realize the wide-ranging benefits of a revitalized connection to the outdoors.

No single entity, whether federal, state, local, or private, can provide the resources needed to achieve the breadth and depth of action proposed in this report. American citizens expressed their desire for better coordination among federal agencies and better delivery of services to the public to achieve these goals for enhanced conservation and outdoor recreation. They noted the frustrations that can occur as partners work with the federal government. Some even lose interest because of excessive and uncoordinated procedures and reviews for new proposals. Others want federal agencies to engage underserved communities, as partners with local governments and the private sector, to identify the financial, cultural, and safety barriers to these populations' accessing and enjoying the outdoors. People want strategies to overcome these obstacles.

Members of the public also said the federal government needs to align its existing resources, authorities, and funding to achieve the goals of AGO.

What has clearly emerged is that the federal government itself, with its many agencies and programs for conservation and recreation, must improve how it works with stakeholders. Americans are ready and willing to work with their government to reconnect to the great outdoors. They just want to be met half-way. The federal government can take the following steps to be a better conservation partner and foster the national conversation on the AGO Initiative.

GOAL A Improve federal government performance as a conservation partner.

Connecting people and places across the nation with conservation and recreation work requires commitment and resources from more than just one agency or organization. Partnerships must be created and supported to ensure the success of the AGO Initiative. Collaboration will be encouraged between the public and private sectors; state, local, and tribal governments and the private sector; between natural resource and cultural resource interests; and between local communities and the federal government. This will lead to innovative approaches and will support existing programs for conservation and connectivity in America.

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

A common theme of the listening sessions and public comments was that the federal government can be more efficient and effective even without more money or new legislation. We must improve coordination among federal agencies and focus existing authorities, processes, and procedures across all agencies. Lastly, agencies can create incentives to reward and encourage the good work by federal employees.

Action Item 10.1a: Establish the interagency AGO Council co-chaired by the Chair of CEQ and the Director of OMB with a steering committee of senior officials from CEQ, OMB, DOI, USDA and EPA. Other AGO council members shall include senior officials from: DOC, DOD (including USACE), HHS, HUD, DOL, DOT, EPA, CNCS, ACHP, and other agencies as appropriate.

The AGO Council will:

- Coordinate intergovernmental efforts to implement the AGO action plan.
- Report to the President annually on progress on AGO Initiative goals outlined in the action plan.
- Develop a one-stop access to federal agency rules, procedures, programs information, and resources for government officials, private sector, landowners, and individuals.
- Communicate with affected tribes consistent with Executive Order 13175 of November 6, 2009, on consultation and coordination with Indian tribal governments, as well as with other stakeholders.

“Paperwork that accompanies some of the federal programs is a deterrent.” (Listening Session Participant, Charleston, SC)

Action Item 10.1b: Within 180 days of being established, the AGO Council will publish a plan with assignments and timelines to improve agency coordination, align federal programs, and implement this report. (AGO Council)

Action Item 10.1c: Hold periodic listening sessions and maintain the AGO website and Facebook page to sustain public input and engagement. (AGO Council)

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...” Americans echoed his words. Fundamental to 21st-century conservation success must be innovative partnerships and broad-based commitment to conservation and recreation. Public-private partnerships can be nimble, distribute expertise, leverage investment, inspire children, share models, and promote awareness.

Recommendation 10.2 Launch the Partnership for AGO.

Engage leaders from philanthropy, the private sector, conservation, historic preservation, state and local government, tribes, recreation, education, and community groups to establish the Partnership for AGO to support the vision and goals of the AGO Initiative. Working through congressionally chartered foundations, including the National Park Foundation, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, National Forest Foundation, and the National Environmental Education Foundation, these leaders would report to the President through the AGO Council within six months to build a lasting Partnership for AGO to:

- Engage citizens to implement AGO recommendations;
- Focus philanthropy and other investment on AGO goals;
- Expand private sector engagement with and investment to coordinate in AGO goals;
- Broaden partnerships to coordinate nonprofit, private, and government sector focus on AGO goals;
- Explore alternative financing for operations and maintenance needs of federal agencies;



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE - PEACO PHOTO / YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK, IDAHO, MONTANA, WYOMING

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.

- Broadcast best practices for science and planning and innovation in conservation and recreation to reconnect people to the outdoors; and
- Develop ways to evaluate success.

Action Item 10.2a: Engage diverse leaders from philanthropy, the private sector, conservation, recreation, historic preservation, state and local government, tribes and community groups to establish the foundation for the Partnership for AGO as an entity charged with supporting the vision and goals of the AGO Initiative. (AGO Council)