



Fact Sheet: Conserving Private Lands

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 21st 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 Private Lands: What We Heard

About two-thirds of the landscape in the contiguous United States is owned and managed by farmers, ranchers, and forest and other landowners. A small portion of these private lands are under easement and other arrangements that ensure that they are protected over the long term; the majority are in active agriculture and forestry uses. These working lands provide abundant food, fuel and fiber. They are an essential piece of vibrant and diverse rural communities that are part of the fabric of our nation. What is increasingly clear is that well managed private lands also support healthy ecosystems that provide clean water, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities and other environmental services that benefit all of our communities.

AGO listening sessions revealed a growing awareness that protecting the nation's natural and cultural heritage requires working across land ownership boundaries. This approach recognizes that watersheds, wildlife, and ecosystems do not correspond to boundary lines. It also recognizes the value of leveraging the stewardship practiced on more than a billion acres of private land that are woven into in the patchwork of today's landscapes.

Conserving large landscapes requires collaboration among all stakeholders, including landowners, tribes, conservation groups, agriculture and forestry groups, and local, state, and federal governments. Such "locally grown" landscape partnerships are springing up in regions across the nation and are increasingly vital to 21st century conservation. AGO can help foster these vibrant, community-level efforts to conserve and connect the nation's landscapes and watersheds.

At listening sessions, Americans also emphasized the importance of incentive-based approaches to conservation. They noted that conservation must make economic sense to landowners. Citizens suggested that the federal government should expand tools for landowners, conservation groups, and state, local, and tribal governments to conserve lands through voluntary approaches. One of the most frequent recommendations was to maintain the enhanced tax deduction for conservation easements.

Conserving Private Lands: What We Are Doing

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

Use economic incentives and technical assistance to catalyze large-scale land conservation partnership projects.

- Increase funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund and other programs to support collaborative landscape conservation through competitive processes.
- Target existing federal dollars, policies, and other resources toward landscape partnerships that conserve private and tribal working lands; and coordinate conservation spending across federal agencies, where appropriate,

Significantly increase the pace of farm, ranch, and forest land conservation.

- Extend enhanced deductions for conservation easement donations beyond 2011.

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

- Develop and expand markets for environmental services provided by working lands, including agriculture, sustainable forest products, and sustainable energy.
- Support financial and other incentives that allow access for hunting, fishing, hiking, and recreation on or across private working lands.
- 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.

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

www.doi.gov/AmericasGreatOutdoors.