

**AMERICA'S GREAT OUTDOORS:
A PROMISE TO FUTURE GENERATIONS
FEBRUARY 2011**

Letter to the President

Dear Mr. President,

On April 16, 2010, you introduced America's Great Outdoors, an initiative aimed at reigniting our historic commitment to conserving and enjoying the magnificent natural heritage that has shaped our nation and its citizens. We are pleased to present you with the America's Great Outdoors report to begin implementation of this 21st-century conservation agenda. The report was created in consultation with the American people. It reflects their ideas on how to reconnect people with America's lands, waters, and natural and cultural treasures, and it builds on the conservation successes in communities across the nation.

To develop this plan, you asked us to travel outside of Washington, D.C., and to listen and learn from the American people. We embarked on what has become one of the most robust conversations about conservation in our history, convening 51 public listening sessions in cities and communities across the country, including 21 aimed at youth. More than 10,000 citizens participated in person and we received more than 105,000 comments. Citizens from across the country, including farmers, ranchers, hunters, anglers, outdoor recreation enthusiasts, parents, teachers, and young people, as well as representatives of conservation organizations, state, local, and tribal governments, historic preservation groups, faith communities, and businesses, shared specific and creative ideas. We heard from all ethnic and age groups, political parties, and thousands of young people.

The message was clear: Americans care deeply about our outdoor heritage and want to enjoy and protect it. They want to join us in taking responsibility for ensuring that this invaluable legacy is passed along to their children and grandchildren. Americans also understand the interdependence of a healthy environment and a strong economy. Many participants extolled the positive impacts that conservation has on our economy and jobs, including recreation, tourism, economic redevelopment, and public health.

This America's Great Outdoors agenda builds on the stewardship legacy championed by President Theodore Roosevelt more than 100 years ago. Now, as then, the basis for our proposed actions is the value that Americans place on conserving the extraordinary and diverse lands and waters that sustain, restore, nourish, and support us. This initiative is about the government empowering and partnering with people and communities to protect and restore the places they cherish. In formulating this plan, we reviewed the comments and ideas from the public, analyzed existing federal programs, and reviewed successful non-federal approaches to produce a set of recommendations that will support conservation partnerships and reconnect Americans to our natural landscapes and our history.

We stand ready to continue the national conversation you initiated and to work together with the American people to achieve the goals of America's Great Outdoors.

Sincerely,

Signed

Secretaries of the Interior and of Agriculture, the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality

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Introduction

America's Great Outdoors: A Promise to Future Generations

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 21st-century conservation and recreation agenda that addresses these challenges.¹ AGO takes as its premise that lasting conservation solutions should rise 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.

¹ 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.

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 20th 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. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt championed conservation and development of our natural resources in the 1930s and 1940s to put Americans back to work during the Great Depression.

Conservation in the 21st 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 21st - 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.² 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 2007.³ Annually, we now lose about 1.6 million acres of our working farms, ranches, and forests to development and fragmentation.⁴ 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.

² United Nations World Urbanization Prospects: The 2007 Revision.

³ USDA Summary Report: 2007 National Resources Inventory.

⁴ 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, 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 21st-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 21st century—one that builds on the traditions of the last century but also recognizes the challenges and changing circumstances of the new century. 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.

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.

This Report does not change or substitute for any law, regulation, or any other legally binding requirement and is not legally enforceable.

CONNECTING AMERICANS TO THE GREAT OUTDOORS

America's natural heritage has defined the nation and shaped American culture. Since our earliest beginnings, our relationship with the outdoors has influenced our national character. Both our strong sense of community and our rugged individualism are products of our interactions with nature. Today, even a walk in the woods, a family picnic in a city park, a jog along an urban waterfront, or a fishing trip with a grandchild can restore our connection to the outdoors and create lasting memories that contribute to who we are as a people. Each camping trip to a park or forest or visit to a historic battlefield can strengthen our sense of individual pride and shared responsibility for our lands and waters and the history they contain.

Listening session participants across the nation spoke of their desire for a deep connection with the outdoors. They described spiritual renewal, better mental and physical health, quality time spent with families and friends, and opportunities for employment and for public service as some of the tangible and intangible benefits of being outdoors. People shared inspirational stories of their grassroots efforts to improve their outdoor surroundings. One community converted an illegal dump into a community garden. Revitalizing their urban area provided community members with job training, outdoor learning experiences, green space, and locally grown food.

Participants also discussed youth stewardship programs for the next generation. They talked about programs that engage Americans with the outdoors through biking, hiking, hunting, canoeing, off-roading, skiing, and other recreational activities. They described initiatives that encourage parents to get their children outside. One listening session was devoted to the cutting-edge topic of the connections between outdoor experiences and improved mental and physical health. Other sessions focused on the special relationship that tribal communities have with nature, culture, and the outdoors.

At all of the listening sessions, people spoke about the realized and potential economic benefits provided by the outdoors, including recreation and tourism, rural and urban economic redevelopment, and lower health-care costs. Recreation and tourism and related businesses and enterprises have become powerful elements of rural and urban economic development. In 2006, recreationists spent \$122.3 billion on their activities, including equipment, licenses, user fees, and trip-related expenses. This is one percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).⁵ Spending by recreation visitors in areas around national forests is estimated to be nearly \$13 billion annually, sustaining more than 224,000 full and part-time jobs.⁶ Recreation-related visits to Department of the Interior (DOI) lands were estimated to support over 316,000 jobs and create nearly \$25 billion in economic value to surrounding communities.⁷ Despite the current economic downturn, the number of recreation visits to national parks increased from 205 million in 1979 to 286 million in 2009.⁸ Every year approximately seven million anglers, two million hunters, and many millions of birders visit national wildlife refuges.⁹ Visitors spend some \$18 billion annually on lakes and other facilities managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), leading to

⁵ 2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation.

⁶ USDA National Visitor Use Monitoring Results: 2005 - 2009.

⁷ Economic Impact of the Department of the Interior's Programs and Activities.

⁸ National Park Service visitation statistics. <http://www.nature.nps.gov/stats/park.cfm>.

⁹ Banking on Nature 2006: The Economic Benefits to Local Communities of National Wildlife Refuge Visitation.

350,000 jobs added to the nation's economy.¹⁰ Tourism and recreation are also highly significant outdoor activities in the coastal zone. Public lands along U.S. coastlines offer access to seashores, bays, and estuaries for fishing and birding, boating and surfing, and other coastal activities within aesthetic landscapes. Over 180 million people visit beaches and other coastal habitats every year, and coastal recreation and tourism generate \$8 billion to \$12 billion annually.¹¹

In his remarks at the April 2010 White House Conference that launched the America's Great Outdoors Initiative, President Obama cautioned that "[w]e are losing our connection to the parks, wild places, and open spaces we grew up with and cherish. Children, especially, are spending less time outside running and playing, fishing and hunting, and connecting to the outdoors just down the street or outside of town." For many Americans, particularly young people, the outdoors and open spaces are neither accessible nor inviting today. Many of our citizens worry about their safety while outdoors and while making their way to outdoor locations. Simply getting there is another obstacle for many of our citizens, especially our youth and our disadvantaged communities. Many cannot afford transportation to reach outdoor destinations and may not have parks or green spaces close to home. Environmental problems can further complicate the picture. Some communities cannot enjoy outdoor activities because of contamination on nearby land or unhealthy air quality. Swimmers and sunbathers encounter thousands of beach closures and health advisories each year.¹² In 2008, fish advisories were issued for 43 percent of the nation's total lake acreage and 39 percent of the nation's total river miles.¹³

This disconnection from nature and the outdoors is a serious threat facing America's great outdoors—and it is costing us. Americans' increasing disconnection from the outdoors is one factor in the skyrocketing obesity rates across the nation, which has tripled among our children over the past 30 years.¹⁴ Children today spend less than half as much time outside as their parents did, but instead are "plugged in" to electronic devices for more than seven hours a day.¹⁵ Studies show that access to the outdoors can help turn the tide on the obesity health epidemic.¹⁶ They show that play and relaxation in nature can reduce stress and anxiety, promote learning and personal growth, and provide overall mental and physical restoration. This disconnect also weakens the commitment to stewardship of our shared natural legacy.

When consulted during the AGO listening sessions, Americans across the nation made it clear that they want to reconnect—or connect for the first time—with the great outdoors. They expressed the desire to achieve this through jobs and service and through recreation and education, and they want their federal government to help.

¹⁰ US Army Corps of Engineers fact sheet. <http://corpsresults.us/recreation/receconomic.htm>.

¹¹ NOAA Fact Sheet. <http://www.habitat.noaa.gov/about/habitat/keyfacts.html>.

¹² EPA Beaches Introduction. <http://water.epa.gov/type/oceb/beaches/introduction.cfm>.

¹³ National Listing of Fish Advisories, Technical Fact Sheet: 2008 Biennial National Listing.

¹⁴ Ogden, C.L., K.M. Flegal, M.D. Carroll, C.L. Johnson. *Prevalence and trends in overweight among U.S. children and adolescents, 1999–2000*.

¹⁵ Juster, Thomas F., Hiromi Ono and Frank P. Stafford. *Changing Times of American Youth: 1981–2003*.

¹⁶ Kuo, Frances. 2010. Parks and Other Green Environments: Essential Components of a Healthy Human Habitat. [http://www.nrpa.org/uploadedFiles/Explore_Parks_and_Recreation/Research/Ming%20\(Kuo\)%20Reserach%20Paper-Final-150dpi.pdf](http://www.nrpa.org/uploadedFiles/Explore_Parks_and_Recreation/Research/Ming%20(Kuo)%20Reserach%20Paper-Final-150dpi.pdf).

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

The importance of job- and service-based learning opportunities related to protecting and restoring the outdoors was a constant theme raised in the listening sessions, especially in the 21 sessions devoted to youth. Americans are committed volunteers, and service is a powerful way to build skills and make a difference. According to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), in 2009, more than 63 million Americans contributed 8.1 billion hours of service, valued at nearly \$169 billion.¹⁷

During the youth listening sessions especially, people expressed a desire to work on America's public lands and waters. However, they expressed frustration with the application and hiring processes. In some cases, they admitted to giving up and seeking employment elsewhere. Participants recommended that federal agencies streamline their hiring systems and coordinate better with each other and with state, local, and tribal partners and the private sector.

Jobs related to natural and cultural resources help build awareness of and appreciation for the outdoors. In these economically challenging times, increasing opportunities for training and employment in America's Great Outdoors can put people back to work and produce lasting benefits. These opportunities can strengthen local and regional economies, improve individual health and welfare, and build a lasting stewardship ethic among the American people.

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

Listening session participants frequently mentioned that jobs and service opportunities provide meaningful ways both to maintain and restore our natural resources and to make conservation relevant, especially to young people. Participants noted that conservation, restoration, and recreation offer quality job opportunities and also spur economic growth for local communities, regions, and the nation as a whole. They also noted that building "green infrastructure" and restoring natural systems create win-wins for jobs, the economy, and for conservation. Increasing opportunities for jobs and training in the great outdoors can put Americans back to work now with benefits that last well into the future. Through increased opportunities for conservation-related jobs and service, Americans become citizen stewards who share the responsibility of ensuring that our natural heritage is passed on to future generations.

Recommendation 1.1: Catalyze the establishment of a 21st- Century Conservation Service Corps (21CSC) to engage young Americans in public lands and water restoration.

Many public comments recommended building on existing conservation service corps programs and promoted the idea for a 21st- Century Conservation Service Corps (21CSC) to provide job training and to maintain and preserve public lands. The 21CSC would provide the umbrella structure for the many existing federal, state, tribal, local, nonprofit, and private sector conservation corps programs and proposals. Its purpose would be to build on and leverage the experience and expertise of these programs and to encourage a new generation of outdoor

¹⁷ Corporation for National and Community Service. *Volunteering in America 2010: National, State, and City Information*. http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/10_0614_via_final_issue_brief.pdf

enthusiasts and natural and cultural resource professionals. The 21CSC program will focus on helping young people, including low-income and disadvantaged youth, to earn valuable training and work experience and to accomplish needed conservation work on public lands in the great outdoors.

Action Item 1.1a: Create an interagency working group within the AGO Council¹⁸ to develop the 21CSC framework and harmonize agency processes. The interagency working group will also seek ways to expand the opportunities for the conservation corps to work on projects related to the conservation, restoration, construction, or rehabilitation of natural, cultural, historic, archeological, recreational, or scenic resources on public lands. [Department of Agriculture (USDA), Department of Commerce (DOC), Department of Defense (DOD), Department of the Interior (DOI), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Department of Labor (DOL), Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP), and United States Office of Personnel Management (OPM)]

Action Item 1.1b: Form an advisory committee to advise the 21CSC interagency working group and facilitate alignment with and investment in the program. The advisory committee will be composed of diverse representatives from the private sector as well as state, local, and tribal government. The committee would comply with the Federal Advisory Committee Act. It will provide its report within one year of creation. (DOI as host, but in partnership with USDA, DOC, DOD, USACE, EPA, DOL, CNCS, ACHP, and OPM)

Recommendation 1.2: Work with OPM to improve career pathways and to review barriers to jobs in natural resource conservation and historic and cultural preservation.

Listening session comments raised concern over the importance and the difficulty of hiring qualified candidates because of the complexity of the federal hiring processes. This is of particular focus as an aging federal workforce readies for retirement.

Action Item 1.2a: Review hiring authorities for participants of existing public lands corps, youth conservation corps, and similar programs, and develop interagency guidance to clarify and expand hiring authority, including number of hours and type of work required for applicants to qualify for a different status. Participants must meet job prerequisites and complete their term of service. (DOI and OPM)

Action Item 1.2b: Create an easy-to-use job locator web portal that connects qualified applicants to natural and cultural resource job opportunities across the federal government. (DOI and OPM)

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.

President Obama has called on all Americans to participate in the nation's recovery and renewal through community service. Annually, tens of thousands of volunteers help federal, tribal, and state land management agencies and local governments perform work on the ground. Service

¹⁸ *The AGO Council is explained in recommendation 10.1.*

activities on public lands play an important role as these opportunities provide training for inexperienced resource managers, build a stewardship ethic in the volunteers, and help restore and enhance our public lands and waters. In 2009, the CNCS engaged more than five million Americans in service opportunities through its programs, including the Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America programs, and leads President Obama's national call-to-service initiative, United We Serve.¹⁹

Action Item 1.3a: Improve access to federal resources through an easy-to-use web portal that matches volunteers with opportunities, allows volunteers to create their own projects, and offers resources for training and technical assistance. Hundreds of thousands of volunteer opportunities are searchable on CNCS' www.serve.gov, an online resource for finding, creating, and listing volunteer projects. (DOI)

Action Item 1.3b: Expand capacity to build on and promote partnerships and programs on public lands that connect people to the outdoors through meaningful volunteer service opportunities relating to restoration and education. (DOI, USDA, DOD-USACE, DOL, and CNCS)

¹⁹ Corporation for National & Community Service Fact Sheet.
http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/factsheet_cncs.pdf.

2. Enhance Recreational Access and Opportunities

As highlighted in the AGO vision, recreation provides one of the easiest and most natural ways to connect with the outdoors. America's lands and waters offer a multitude of outdoor recreation activities that enhance health and wellness, encourage appreciation for natural and cultural resources, and present enjoyable opportunities to connect with family and friends.

Federal agencies provide exceptional recreational opportunities and facilities on more than 635 million acres of land that receive over a billion visits each year.²⁰ The federal lands include a diversity of natural and cultural landscapes and features such as the 16 million acres of Alaska's Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge; expansive fishing opportunities at Virginia's John H. Kerr Dam and Reservoir (Buggs Island Lake); the majestic peaks of Utah's Wasatch-Cache National Forest; and the cultural and historic heritage of Georgia's Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park. Our federal lands provide innumerable trails, roads, waters, and facilities that support and promote a broad range of recreation and tourism opportunities.

Federal agencies also promote recreation along multi-jurisdictional wild and scenic rivers and national trails and fund recreation projects through such programs. In addition, state, county, and municipal entities manage thousands of parks, natural areas, and historic sites that are enjoyed on a daily basis by tens of millions of people nationwide. In addition, many private landowners provide access to their lands for recreation. The contributions of these lands to the physical, mental, and spiritual health of Americans; the quality of life of communities; and the economic benefits at the local, regional, and national levels are significant.

Many public comments focused on limitations to recreation on local, state, tribal, and federal lands. Many people commented on the lack of physical access related to public transportation, roads, trailheads, and trails. Others noted that the lack of information or access to information about recreational opportunities on public lands and waters is a problem. This information gap ranges from poor signage and notifications of trail or park closures to outdated, complex government websites that are hard to navigate and understand. The lack of coordinated information and regulations adds other barriers to recreation access and enjoyment.

Increasing recreational access must be balanced with the preservation and stewardship responsibilities of the federal land management agencies. Each federal land management agency has specific preservation and stewardship responsibilities based on their mission and additional designations such as Wilderness or Wild and Scenic Rivers. Increased recreational access is an important goal of the AGO and a priority for the American people, but it must be developed in ways that are consistent with and appropriate for the specific authorities of each agency.

GOAL A: Increase and improve recreational access and opportunities.

Federal agencies support a broad range of outdoor recreation opportunities on federal lands and waters. These range from the USACE *Handshake Partnership Program* that provides incentives for partnerships to increase recreation on USACE lands to U.S. Forest Service (USFS) *Kids in the Woods program*; National Park Service (NPS) *Junior Ranger*; Bureau of Reclamation *CAST*

²⁰ USDA report on Major Uses of Land in The United States, 2002.

for Kids; Bureau of Land Management (BLM) *Take-it-Outside*; and First Lady Michelle Obama's *Let's Move!* initiative. All of these programs encourage children to be more active outdoors. Authorities and initiatives to support recreation across the federal government include the Department of Transportation (DOT) *Recreational Trails and National Scenic Byways Authority*, the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans supported through the Land and Water Conservation Fund and managed by the DOI, and EPA *Urban Waters Initiative* that is helping communities access, improve, and benefit from their urban waters and adjacent lands.

Listening session participants observed that information about “what recreational activities are permitted where” is often inaccessible or unclear. They said that permitting for recreational access is not consistent, and that if federal programs and resources were aligned and better targeted, the recreation benefits would be vastly improved. Furthermore, recreational users felt that recreation should be a higher priority for land and water management agencies. Many also observed that the First Lady's *Let's Move!* initiative offers powerful partnership and awareness-raising opportunities about the positive relationship between outdoor recreation and public health.

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

Despite the many opportunities for quality recreation, many participants in the AGO process observed that significant obstacles remain to outdoor recreation on public lands and waters. Participants called for better integration and coordination among the federal agencies whose missions include providing outdoor recreation and/or natural resources and environmental protection.

Action Item 2.1a: Improve coordination, effectiveness, and efficiency among federal agencies through the FICOR.

The FICOR should also work closely with existing FACA bodies that support recreational activities. These include the Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council, Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council, the First Lady's *Let's Move!* initiative, and the President's Council on Fitness, Sports and Nutrition. (USDA, DOI, DOC, and DOD-USACE)

Key tasks to accomplish in FICOR include:

- Coordinate recreation management, access, and policies across multiple agencies to improve public enjoyment and recreational use of federal lands and waters.
- Provide the public with reliable and up-to-date web-based information that is easily accessible with modern communication devices. Evolve and promote the federal interagency www.recreation.gov website to become a one-stop portal for information and resources about federal outdoor recreation opportunities, locations, access, routes, features, transportation options, and permit and reservation requirements.
- Streamline and align policies and procedures among federal, state, local, tribal, and other recreation providers.
- Improve the engagement of young people and their families in outdoor recreation through healthy, active lifestyles.

- Target underserved and disadvantaged communities for both access to and engagement in the benefits of and opportunities for outdoor recreation.
- Identify ways to improve access to our parks, refuges, and public lands for persons with disabilities.
- Identify partners outside the federal government who can promote outdoor recreation and provide additional resources and access.

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

Across the nation, people stressed the importance of creating recreation opportunities. This included providing spaces for recreation, establishing and maintaining recreational facilities such as trails and sidewalks, and eliminating physical barriers such as fences or roads between communities and places to recreate. People also recommended technical assistance and additional federal support for regional-scale recreation planning and for creating physical recreation connectors like trails. Many (particularly young people) observed that a primary limitation for using the great outdoors is safety.

Action Item 2.2a: Expand technical assistance and align programs that support local, state, and tribal efforts to enhance public recreation and conservation, including, but not limited to, the NPS *Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program* (RTCA) and the National Trails System; DOT enhancement and trails and scenic byways programs; state programs such as California’s Green Sticker Program; CNCS community-based efforts to increase access to outdoor recreation; and USDA *Voluntary Public Access Program (Open Fields)*. (DOI, USDA, DOT, and CNCS)

Action Item 2.2b: Partner with local and adjacent tribal school districts to support school kids on field trips to federal urban parks and other units. (DOI, USDA, DOD, USACE, , and DOT)

Action Item 2.2c: Support community-based programs that improve the safety of open spaces and access routes, similar to DOT *Safe Routes to Schools* and Department of Justice (DOJ) Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation. (DOI, DOT, USACE, and DOJ)

See also: Recommendation 5.1 (increase the number of community parks and green spaces); Section 6, Recommendation 7.5 (incentives to encourage hunting and fishing on private lands); Section 9, Recommendation 9.1 (establishment of national recreational trail blueway).

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

The outdoor experience has lost its currency for many Americans. Increasingly busy schedules, shifting cultural norms, financial barriers, and the lure of new technology often keep many people from venturing outdoors for recreation, play, work, or service. During the listening sessions, participants spoke about the need to make the outdoors desirable and relevant to America's young people. Many people articulated a need to redefine the "great outdoors" to include iconic national parks and forests, wildlife refuges, and cultural and historic sites, as well as neighborhood and city parks, community gardens, and school yards. One of the most frequent recommendations was to launch a national public awareness initiative. It would use 21st-century communications technology and techniques to show Americans that going outdoors is fun, safe, easy, and healthy.

Many listening session participants observed that their experiences in nature and at historic places occurred early in their lives through formal and informal education. These experiences inspired a lasting connection, and for some, lifelong careers and commitment to service in the outdoors. Cultivating a stewardship ethic through education will produce the next generation of scientists, conservationists, naturalists, farmers, ranchers, forest landowners, anglers, rangers, entrepreneurs, and community leaders who value nature and outdoor experiences. Education is also an important tool to raise awareness of the many benefits of our great outdoor resources. These benefits include food and fiber; physical, mental, and spiritual health; economic values of community enhancement, outdoor jobs, industry, and tourism; and the essential services that healthy and resilient natural systems provide as they clean our air, purify our water, prevent floods, provide habitat for wildlife, and absorb pollution.

Unfortunately, many schools have had to cut back on their environmental and outdoor education programs due to tight budgets. Many nonprofit, faith-based, and private sector programs are filling the need through after-school and weekend programs, but these still leave out many children. Supported by the AGO vision, there remains a need to promote environmental literacy and awareness through a variety of strategies and partnerships.

GOAL A: Cultivate stewardship and appreciation of America's natural, cultural, and historic resources through innovative awareness-raising partnership initiatives and through education.

There is a growing deficit of public awareness about the value that our natural heritage and resources provide to the nation and about our shared stewardship responsibility to protect them. Particularly in the youth listening sessions, participants argued that they are removed from nature and the great outdoors, both physically (because so many now live in cities), and emotionally, socially, and culturally. These young people called for an innovative campaign to make the outdoors relevant and exciting to them. Many comments noted that particularly in fiscally challenging times like today, programs that promote environmental education are pushed aside. Therefore, our children are losing a primary point of early exposure to nature and natural systems that can spark their imaginations and drive them to become a scientist, innovator, conservationist, poet, or community leader. Nongovernmental organizations, religious institutions, and others are stepping in to provide varied environmental education opportunities,

but, participants said, as wonderful and effective as some of these programs are, they cannot reach all the children who would benefit from them, as school programs would.

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

Listening session participants suggested that increasing access to, and expanding opportunities for healthy outdoor recreation is essential. The USDA and DOI are partnering with the First Lady’s *Let’s Move!* initiative through *Let’s Move Outside!*, which is focused on reducing childhood obesity through outdoor recreation. Together, AGO and *Let’s Move Outside!* initiatives would partner with public, nonprofit, and private groups to mount an innovative communications initiative aimed at young people and their parents. The joint initiative will work to expand opportunities for outdoor activity; educate the public about the health, community, and economic benefits of outdoor activity; and provide information on where and how to get moving outside.

Action Item 3.1a: Increase access to and expand opportunities for healthy outdoor recreation by integrating and advancing the shared goals of AGO and *Let’s Move Outside!* initiatives through a coordinated strategic plan. (AGO Council and *Let’s Move Outside!*)

The joint initiative will use well-known spokespeople, leverage private sector investment, and use social and other innovative technology to increase enthusiasm and information about the great outdoors. By leveraging existing media and technology, and by developing new, user-friendly tools, this joint initiative will help make the outdoors exciting and accessible for children and families of all backgrounds.

Action Item 3.1b: Build partnerships that demonstrate and promote the health benefits of parks and outdoor spaces. Also build support for restoring, protecting, and creating and accessing these places. (AGO Council and *Let’s Move Outside!*)

Action Item 3.1c: Coordinate a national strategy with the public health and medical communities that promotes the benefits of parks, outdoor spaces, and natural places to improve the health and well-being of Americans. (AGO Council)

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.

One of the most common concerns raised at listening sessions was the need to integrate learning about nature and the environment into school curriculums. The federal government has an important but limited role to play in supporting the nation’s states, districts, and schools to ensure that all children gain a basic level of environmental literacy and understand how environmental issues cut across different subject areas. The Department of Education’s *21st Century Community Learning Centers Program*, for example, provides support for activities that increase learning time, including after school, before school, and summer school programs. The administration’s *Blueprint to Reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act* proposes

to reform and strengthen this program by incorporating approaches that better integrate community involvement and comprehensively redesign and expand the school day. In addition to giving more time for academic work (which could include topics like biology), programs would also provide enrichment activities, which could include opportunities for experiential learning outdoors. Furthermore, the Effective Teaching and Learning for a Well-Rounded Education program would provide competitive grants to states, high-need districts, and private sector partners to strengthen teaching and learning across academic content areas. Other opportunities for federal agencies to become more coordinated and strategically invested through existing environmental and outdoor education programs include distance learning web activities, professional teacher development workshops, and formal education programs.

Action Item 3.2a: Report to the AGO Council on specific ways to integrate and support the outdoors, nature, cultural sites, and the environment into place-based, experiential, expanded-time programs; after-school and summer school programs; and service learning programs. (DOI and the Department of Education)

Action Item 3.2b: In partnership with local school districts, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations, expand connections to public schools and youth organizations through existing web-based programs, service learning, teacher training, field trips, and residential and other programs. These could include, but are not limited to, the NPS *Teacher-Ranger-Teacher*, *Electronic Classroom*, and *Citizen Science* programs; USFS *Pollinator Live* program; National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) *Bay-Watershed Education and Training Program (B-WET)* program; and USDA *Know Your Farmer Know Your Food* program. Special emphasis will be placed on engaging underserved communities. (DOI, USDA, DOC)

Action Item 3.2c: Work with the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) to develop curricula that incorporate traditional tribal practices, activities, and environmental literacy for both the classroom and outdoor activities. (DOI)

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

An appreciation and an understanding of America's great outdoors cannot be gained without an understanding of the nation's natural and cultural history. Education about America's great outdoors should include both formal education and informal opportunities outside the education system—outdoor learning, nature walks, orienteering, recreation, hunting, fishing, and many other activities. Many programs promote stewardship and appreciation of our natural and cultural heritage beyond the school day. They are led by diverse organizations, including faith-based and scouts organizations, hunting and fishing groups, outdoor recreation and conservation organizations, and groups working with future farmers. They are as diverse as America, yet they share the common goal of instilling a stewardship ethic in their communities. These remarkable programs are helping to launch the next generation of scientists, farmers, ranchers, conservationists, entrepreneurs, artists, teachers, and community leaders who care about the outdoors. The federal government should support, celebrate, and reward these initiatives.

Action Item 3.3a: Support and expand existing federal programs that emphasize place-based, experiential learning, including: The NPS *Parks as Classrooms* and *Junior Ranger* programs; CNCS *Learn and Serve America*'s expanding network of environmental and cultural resources service grantees; NOAA *B-WET*; USFS *Children's Forests*, *NatureWatch*, and *More Kids in the Woods*; and BLM *Take it Outside* and *Hands on the Land*. (DOI, USDA, DOC)

4. Engage Young People in Conservation and the Great Outdoors

Youth participation in AGO had a tremendous impact on the themes of this report and influenced its recommendations. At 21 youth-specific listening sessions across the nation, government officials met with hundreds of young people, each of whom had a personal perspective on—and experiences with—the outdoors. From a uniformed conservation corps in Missoula, to a room of high school kids in Orlando, to Native American youth in two BIE schools, these voices were diverse, passionate, and thoughtful. As we look to protect America’s great outdoors for current and future generations, it is imperative that we continue to engage, empower, and learn from our young people. They are our future farmers, ranchers, hunters, anglers, conservationists, scientists, teachers, business leaders, and elected officials who will inherit and carry on the stewardship of our nation’s outdoor legacy.

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

America’s young people are our nation’s future. We have an obligation to ensure that America’s great natural legacy is preserved for their enjoyment, welfare, and livelihoods. To honor and capture the youth voice, a separate pullout report, “Youth and America’s Great Outdoors,” was prepared by a team of young and committed federal employees.

Recommendation 4.1: Engage young People in the implementation of AGO.

Thousands of young people joined in the AGO process through the listening sessions, the AGO Facebook page, and the website. 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.

Action Item 4.1a: Disseminate and implement the “Youth and America’s Great Outdoors” report. (DOI working with the AGO Council)

Action Item 4.1b: Create an America’s Great Outdoors youth outreach strategy. (AGO Council)

Quotes received through the public input process:

“Speaking as a parent of two sons who played team sports, but were not interested in the outdoors. One went to a college that had a state-funded outdoor program that got him on a backpacking trip. It changed his life, and he majored in environmental science.” (Listening Session Participant, Concord, NH)

“Engage parents in the outdoors so they can pass it on to their kids and create future stewards. Volunteer based groups—citizens science, rehabilitation trail work to engage communities to experience the value of the lands first hand.” (Listening Session Participant, Missoula, MT)

“Through partnerships between existing Corps programs and federal agencies tasked with implementation of the America’s Great Outdoors, the 21st century CCC would: Engage, educate and employ more young people in service to the environment; Expand and replicate innovative

Corps programs and projects; Develop career pathways from Conservation Corps to federal employment in natural resource management; Facilitate connections between corps programs and other youth partner programs to expose more young people to the outdoors.” (Listening Session Participant, Missoula, MT)

“Hunting and fishing are ways of life. They are our passions. We share it with family and friends and it truly makes us whole and makes us who we are. We MUST protect our land and waters. We MUST ensure that they will be around for generations to come. President Obama, this is not a choice, this is an obligation.” (Listening Session Participant, Missoula, MT)

“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)

“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)

“I think there is a desire to go outdoors, but there is a lack of priority for it when people are so busy... We are all so busy that we don’t have the time to get out anymore.” (Listening Session Participant, Minneapolis, MN)

CONSERVING AND RESTORING AMERICA'S GREAT OUTDOORS

At the beginning of the 20th century, Americans realized the immense natural wealth of the United States was limited, as symbolized by the closing of the western frontier and the disappearance of the vast bison herds on the Great Plains. In response, President Theodore Roosevelt made natural resource conservation a primary goal of his administration. Roosevelt focused on the public estate, placing some 230 million acres under public protection. He created five national parks, signed the 1906 Antiquities Act, established 18 national monuments, established the U.S. Forest Service, placed 16 million acres in the new National Forest System, and set aside the first lands to become national wildlife refuges.

The America's Great Outdoors Initiative celebrates Roosevelt's legacy even as a new chapter in American conservation emerges. Some of the challenges we face today are similar to those faced at the dawn of the 20th century. Then as now, Americans viewed the existence of shared public spaces in cities and towns as essential. Then as now, Americans recognized the need to conserve our public lands for the benefit of all Americans. Then as now, Americans understood the importance of clean, abundant water for human consumption, agriculture, wildlife, and other uses.

We now have new challenges. Today, we recognize that to protect ecosystems, watersheds, and wildlife, conservation must take place across large landscapes. This requires collaboration among landowners, public land agencies, and local communities. Each year about 1.6 million acres of our working farms, ranches, and forests are lost to development and fragmentation.²¹ We also face the reality of a warming planet and need to manage our lands and waters to adapt to these changes. And there is even greater appreciation for the importance of recreation and of the role of public and private lands in providing places for Americans to experience the great outdoors. Over the last century, our appreciation for conserving historic and cultural sites has grown.

The chapters that follow focus on urban parks and community green spaces, conservation of our working lands, stewardship of our public lands, and protecting our rivers and water resources. One cornerstone for accomplishing the goals set forth in these chapters is immediate full funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).

There are several common themes throughout this section of the report. First, although Roosevelt advanced conservation with bold decisions from the White House, the recommendations that follow seek to catalyze and bolster local conservation efforts that emanate from outside Washington, D.C. Second, many recommendations recognize that federal agencies must partner with local stakeholders to conserve community parks and green spaces, large landscapes, watersheds, and rivers. Third, mitigating and adapting to climate change must inform how we manage our federal lands. Lastly, especially given the current budgetary environment, it is vital that federal agencies work more effectively to align, target, and better leverage their resources and work with a variety of partners to leverage additional, non-federal resources for conservation.

²¹ USDA Summary Report: 2007 National Resources Inventory.

5. Strengthen the Land and Water Conservation Fund

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) is a primary source of federal funding for states and federal agencies to protect and conserve America's national treasures and to promote outdoor recreation. LWCF revenue is primarily generated from outer continental shelf oil and gas drilling activities, and collection is authorized up to \$900 million, subject to Congressional appropriations. Its purpose is to fund federal land acquisition; conserve threatened and endangered species; and provide grants to state governments for recreation planning, development of recreation facilities, and acquisition of lands and waters. This fund program has enjoyed a broad base of popular support and oversight since it became law in 1964.

Although LWCF revenue collection is authorized up to \$900 million, appropriations have been provided at this level only twice during its more than 45-year history. Since the program's inception, the LWCF has funded the purchase of more than 4.5 million acres of land by the federal land management agencies of USDA (USFS) and DOI (NPS, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), BLM) at a cost of \$6.1 billion. The NPS LWCF *stateside program*, which requires that 50 percent of federal investment be matched by the grantee, has funded about 38,000 state and local projects. Funding recipients have acquired some 2.3 million acres and have developed about 27,000 recreation facilities. Acquisitions funded through LWCF stateside grants must remain in recreational use in perpetuity. In recent years, the LWCF has funded two additional state grant programs with purposes similar to the intent of the 1964 law. The USFS *Forest Legacy Program* has been funded through the LWCF since 2004, and has protected more than 2 million acres of important private forests. The FWS *Section 6 Endangered Species grant program* has been funded through the LWCF since 2003.

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

Meeting the 21st-century conservation and recreation needs of our nation and the American people will require both an increase in funds and changes in the administration of the LWCF.

The demand for LWCF funds for federal land acquisition and state grants programs exceeds the funding levels appropriated by Congress. Significant opportunities exist for federal land management agencies to acquire inholdings within national parks, forests, refuges, and other federal lands. Growing demand for local parks, open space, and outdoor recreation projects adds to the need for state and local government support from the LWCF.

The use of LWCF funds has changed little since 1964, although the requirements for carrying out successful conservation and recreation projects and programs have changed greatly. Successful implementation of the initiatives identified in this report will require more strategic investment of funds from both the state and federal sides of the LWCF and better coordination among agencies, states, and other federal grant and aid programs linked to the AGO initiative. And these strategic investments must be informed by sound science and access to good information.

Recommendation 5.1: Provide full funding for LWCF programs.

Full funding of LWCF was one of the most common comments shared during the AGO listening sessions, and it received broad support. Full funding would allow federal and state agencies and our partners in conservation and recreation to make lasting investments in the outdoors to provide outdoor recreation opportunities, reconnect people to the outdoors, and conserve open space, wildlife, and forests.

Action Item 5.1a: Provide full funding for LWCF programs. (AGO Council)

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.

During the listening sessions, many comments suggested that LWCF funding should be more strategically focused to address the nation's most urgent conservation challenges. There needs to be strong, ongoing investment in the traditional land conservation actions of federal land management agencies, but some portion of the federal LWCF funds could be invested to complement the goals in AGO. This is especially true of those related to large-scale land conservation, urban parks, and community green spaces, and to restoration of and increased access to rivers and other waters. People throughout the nation also supported using a small portion of LWCF funds for recreation access to federal lands.

Action Item 5.2a: Implement an interagency process to invest part of the federal LWCF funds in high-yield conservation projects that address shared ecological goals. Use commonly accepted criteria to select opportunities where federal investment would yield the most significant ecological outcomes and community benefits. Ensure that the process is transparent, incorporates input from appropriate government and external stakeholders, and is based on sound science and good information. (CEQ, OMB, USDA and DOI)

Action Item 5.2b: Invest a portion of LWCF funds to increase recreation access to federal lands. (DOI and USDA)

Action Item 5.2c: Coordinate and align investment of federal LWCF funds with federal grant programs to states for land acquisition, as appropriate and consistent with state partner priorities—including NPS *LWCF stateside program*, FWS North American Wetlands Conservation Act, and the USFS *Forest Legacy Program*—to achieve AGO priorities related to urban parks and community green spaces, landscape-scale conservation, and recreational blueways. (DOI, USDA, and DOC)

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

States are required to adopt SCORPs and update them every five years to be eligible for the NPS *LWCF stateside program*. This ensures that federal investments in outdoor recreation are consistent with state plans and help accomplish local and state priorities. From state to state these plans vary widely in their quality and utility and many do not address some of the kinds of programs and priorities envisioned in this report.

Action Item 5.3a: Consulting with local and state governments, federal agencies, and stakeholders, develop new guidelines and criteria for SCORPs that focus a portion of the LWCF stateside program on urban parks and community green spaces, landscape-scale conservation, and recreational blueways, in addition to outdoor recreation. (DOI, USDA)

Action Item 5.3b: Establish competitive grants funding for states to amend their SCORPs to meet the new guidelines. (DOI)

Quotes received through the public input process:

“Increased and consistent funding to support federal, state, and local conservation, including full funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). LWCF investments ensure continued protection of America’s public lands and enhance public access.” (Listening Session Participant, Poughkeepsie, NY)

“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)

6. Establish Great Urban Parks and Community Green Spaces

In an 1870 essay, Frederick Law Olmsted, the central architect of New York City's Central Park, extolled the virtues of outdoor space, especially for urban communities. He wrote, "We want a ground to which people may easily go after their day's work is done, and where they may stroll for an hour, seeing, hearing, and feeling nothing of the bustle and jar of the streets...."²²

Today, urban parks and community green spaces play an even more important role as special public places that promote health, provide economic benefits, and nurture democratic values by inviting casual interaction among citizens. Eighty percent of Americans now live in or near cities and lead even busier lives than previous generations could ever have imagined.²³ For many Americans, our nation's iconic parks and forests, such as Yellowstone National Park, Tongass National Forest in Alaska, and the Adirondack State Park in New York, are far away and difficult to access. As a result, urban parks and community green spaces are essential for providing places for people to recreate outdoors, to find quiet and solitude, and to generally improve their quality of life. Many such places are also significant and evocative cultural and historic landmarks. For many people, these local, open environments are a stepping stone into the great outdoors that can lead to a lifelong bond with nature and enjoyment of the benefits that come with it. As underscored in the AGO vision, urban parks and community green spaces contribute to the social, physical, and emotional health of America's communities, and neighborhood parks are among the few public places where communities can readily congregate close to home.

Parks and green spaces also generate economic benefits for communities, from higher property values to increased recreation and tourism. Communities have found that conservation of open space and access to recreation and parks improve the business environment. A study of small businesses in Colorado found that quality of life—and particularly access to parks, recreation and open space—was very important to where businesses chose to locate, relocate, or expand.²⁴ By providing places for people to play, exercise, and even grow vegetables, community green spaces can contribute to public health and, by extension, to reduced health-care costs. Parks and green spaces also provide important and cost-effective ecological services, filtering polluted water and air, managing storm runoff, and offering protective shade. Studies show that people exercise more when they have easy access to parks and open space.²⁵ To increase physical activity and combat the obesity epidemic, the Childhood Obesity Task Force recommends increasing the number of safe and accessible parks and playgrounds, particularly in underserved and low-

²² *A paper read before the American Social Science Association at the Lowell Institute, Boston, February 25, 1870.*

²³ United Nations World Urbanization Prospects: The 2007 Revision.

²⁴ Crompton, John L., Lisa L. Love, and Thomas A. More. *An Empirical Study of the Role of Recreation, Parks, and Open Space in Companies' (Re)Location Decisions*, *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* 15, no. 1.

²⁵ Kahn, Emily B., Leigh T. Ramsey, Ross C. Brownson, Gregory W. Heath, Elizabeth H. Howze, Kenneth E. Powell, Elaine J. Stone, Mummy W. Rajab, Phaedra Corso, and the Task Force on Community Preventive Services. (2002) *The Effectiveness of Interventions to Increase Physical Activity*. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 22, no. 4S.; Cohen, Deborah, J Scott Ashwood, Molly M Scott, Adrian Overton, Kelly R Evenson, Lisa K Staten, Dwayne Porter, Thomas L McKenzie, Diana Catellier, (1996), *Public Parks and Physical Activity Among Adolescent Girls*. *Pediatrics* 118: 1381-1389.; Cohen DA, McKenzie T, Sehgal A, Williamson S, Golinelli D. (2007) *How Do public parks contribute to physical activity?* *Am J Pub Health*. 97: 1-6.

income communities.²⁶ Many communities are developing green infrastructure plans for a network of open spaces that conserve ecosystem values and functions and provide associated benefits to human populations, including adapting to a changing climate.

Even so, as AGO listening session participants made clear, these benefits are not enjoyed equally by all. Some Americans stay away from parks out of fear of crime or violence, both within and on the way to these outdoor places. Others worry about aging infrastructure and the safety of outdoor facilities themselves. Others noted trash and pollution; physical barriers, such as roads and fences; and lack of safe, reliable, and affordable transportation as barriers to outdoor recreating and enjoyment. Different cultural proclivities also make the demographics of using the outdoors uneven. People noted that outdoor facilities in parks and recreational areas are heavily used but often have limited staff to meet the public's need. Others commented that many Americans do not have access to parks and green spaces close to home.

Across the nation the federal government heard overwhelming support for investing in parks, community gardens and forests, and other green spaces close to where Americans live, work, and go to school.

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

As America continues to become more urbanized, the need for green spaces close to home increases. Such spaces are good for our health, our ties to community, and our economy. They can be critical to building lasting personal connections with the great outdoors. Launching a new generation of Great Urban Parks and community green spaces will require federal leadership through investment of new funds, better alignment of programs and priorities, leveraging resources from outside government, and providing technical support for local communities.

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

A portion of any increases in NPS *LWCF stateside program* should be used to support creating or enhancing urban parks and community green spaces. These projects would be locally supported with substantial momentum and committed funding. They would benefit from leveraged federal funding to promote further collaboration and to target conservation efforts. In turn, funding for urban parks would enhance other community development and revitalization programs.

Priority areas for investment in urban areas are: (1) Waterfronts that connect urban communities with water and waterside parks and open spaces; (2) Signature parks, such as City Park in New Orleans or Grant Park in Chicago, that serve as community anchors; (3) Renewed green spaces and urban garden spaces that have suffered from urban blight; and (4) Natural areas within a city or community that reconnect people with the outdoors, like Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge in Brooklyn, New York.

²⁶ White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity Report to the President, 2010.

Action Item 6.1a: Increase the number of urban parks and community green spaces by making grants to state governments using increased funding within the NPS *LWCF stateside program*. (DOI)

Action Item 6.1b: Increase the number of urban parks and community green spaces by working with partners to develop criteria within NPS's *LWCF stateside program* for new urban parks and community green spaces. (DOI)

Project criteria should include, but not be limited to:

- demonstrated need for and benefits of the project;
- alignment within a strategic conservation plan, such as a green infrastructure plan;
- identified partnership, collaboration, leverage, and community support;
- demonstrated sustainability and stewardship of the project over time;
- demonstrated plan to provide for safe and accessible routes;
- maximized employment opportunities for young people that connect them to the outdoors;
- multiple identified benefits, such as wildlife corridors/ecosystem connectivity, flood control, economic revitalization, heritage tourism, and outdoor recreation; and
- identified opportunities for outdoor education, place-based learning.

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.

Although the need for parks, green space, and places for outdoor recreation in our cities is growing, other priorities often draw attention and resources away from these important community resources. At listening sessions, participants identified a range of federal programs that, if better coordinated and aligned, could make a difference for community investments in outdoor spaces. These investments would also catalyze investment by non-governmental partners and accomplish a whole greater than the sum of its parts.

Action Item 6.2a: Align and leverage federal investments and actions to expand or enhance urban parks and community green spaces through coordinated efforts. These should include, but not be limited to: the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), DOT, and EPA's *Sustainable Communities Partnership's* regional planning grants; EPA-led *Urban Waters Federal Partnership*; partnership between DPC, White House Office of Urban Affairs, HUD, ED, DOJ, Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and DOT *Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative*; USFS *Urban and Community Forestry Program*; NPS *RTCA*; DOT *Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grants*. (AGO Council)

Action Item 6.2b: Work with communities and tribes to establish community forests in both urban and rural communities through the USFS *Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program*. (USDA)

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

Listening session participants made clear that there is no shortage of community-level interest in leading efforts to create and enhance city and community parks. What is lacking is easily accessible technical know-how and seed funding. Programs like the NPS *RTCA* program were frequently cited as particularly effective at helping communities help themselves accomplish their conservation objectives. *RTCA* awards small technical assistance support for community-led natural resource conservation and outdoor recreation projects.

Action Item 6.3a: Support tribal, state, and local governments and private sector organizations in the planning and development of urban parks and community green spaces through programs such as the USFS *Urban and Community Forestry Program* and the NPS *RTCA*. (DOI, USDA and EPA)

Action Item 6.3b: Promote the EPA *Brownfields Program* as a tool to leverage funding for states, tribes, territories, private-sector initiatives, and communities to assess and clean up brownfield sites, redeveloping them for other uses, including as parks and green spaces, especially in underserved communities. Communities receiving EPA *Brownfields Program* funds also frequently benefit from complementary redevelopment funds provided through separate programs managed by the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) and by HUD. (EPA)

Action Item 6.3c: Strengthen federal partnership work on urban waters and support related agency-level programs, such as EPA-proposed *Urban Waters Initiative*. Through federal coordination and community partnerships, these programs revitalize urban waters and adjacent communities, transforming overlooked assets into treasured centerpieces and drivers of urban revival. (EPA, USDA, DOC, and DOI) (*See recommendation 9.3a*)

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

Participants emphasized that financial help to communities is essential, but not the only mechanism for creating and supporting urban parks and community green spaces. The federal government can support connecting people to community parks and green spaces in many ways. It can provide education and engagement, promote public-private partnerships, and eliminate or minimize governmental barriers to access. One example is the partnership approach to resource protection and public use and enjoyment offered through the NPS and state and private partners in the Santa Monica Mountains in Los Angeles.

Action Item 6.4a: Accelerate assistance provided to communities for urban parks and community green space planning through existing programs including, but not limited to, the NPS *RTCA* program, USFS *Urban and Community Forestry Program*, and DOT *Safe Pathways to Schools* to explore opportunities to support safe sidewalks and paths to neighborhood parks as well as schools. (DOI, USDA, EPA, and DOT)

Action Item 6.4b: Work with state, local and tribal governments, including parks and recreation departments, to connect federal parks and other units in urban areas with the public transportation system and pedestrian or bike paths. (DOI, USDA, and DOT)

Quotes received through the public input process:

“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)

“I have worked in urban schools (Houston, TX) for over 10 years. Many of the underprivileged students I have served have never experienced the great outdoors. Please, make urban parks more accessible for all!” (Listening Session Participant, Bozeman, MT)

“Urban parks are important, all the more so in large cities where they provide what I think of as breathing room. They also keep us in touch with change of seasons. They should be supplemented by plantings of trees and sometimes shrubs on some streets where possible.” (Listening Session Participant, Bozeman, MT)

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

Conservationist Aldo Leopold wrote that trying to accomplish conservation entirely on public land was like trying to keep dry with only half an umbrella.²⁷ Made more than 70 years ago, his observation resonates today. More than 70 percent of land in the contiguous United States is in private ownership—largely as farms, ranches, and forests, with more than 56 million acres held in trust by the United States for Indian tribes and other individuals.²⁸

These privately owned lands are vital to conserving our water resources, ecosystems, and wildlife, to provide recreation for hunters, anglers, and other outdoor enthusiasts, and to preserve our natural heritage for generations to come. Even in areas with large government ownership of land, privately owned lands often provide important wildlife habitat and migration corridors. Through their stewardship practices, farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners play a critical role in helping the nation address climate change and in making sure the air we breathe and the water we drink are clean and healthy.

Despite their importance for the environment and recreation it is becoming ever more challenging for landowners to keep private lands intact. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) reports that one out of three acres ever developed in the United States was developed from 1982 to 2007.²⁹ Each year some 1.6 million acres of privately owned farms, ranches, and forests are sold off, in whole or in part, for development.³⁰ The costs to clean air, wildlife, cultural heritage sites, and farm and forest economies are significant.

Beyond stepping up the pace of conservation on private lands, it is clear that more strategic approaches and incentives to protecting them are necessary. AGO listening sessions revealed a growing awareness that protecting the nation’s natural and cultural heritage requires working across public, private, and tribal lands at a landscape scale. This “all-lands” approach recognizes that watersheds, wildlife, and ecosystems do not recognize property lines. Conserving large landscapes requires collaboration among landowners; tribes; local, state, and federal governments; conservation groups; agriculture and forestry groups; and other stakeholders. 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 and catalyze these vibrant, community-level efforts to conserve and connect the nation’s landscapes and watersheds to benefit both present and future generations.

Because government resources for this task are limited, it is imperative that our strategies for these lands maximize the conservation benefits from each taxpayer dollar spent. Collaboration among the federal government, local governments, land trusts, landowners, tribes, and others already working to protect local watersheds and landscapes will be necessary to achieve the AGO vision for private lands. Federal agencies can provide technical assistance to local partners

²⁷ “Conservation Economics,” reprinted in *River of the Mother of God*.

²⁸ Department of Interior report on Context and Complexity of the Indian Trust, 2003.

²⁹ USDA Summary Report: 2007 National Resources Inventory.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

and, where appropriate, enter into cooperative agreements to provide both technical and financial assistance. At the same time, cooperation among public land agencies will also be necessary to improve the delivery of financial and technical assistance to landowners. Geographic information systems (GIS) and other science-based tools can help target important lands and resources for conservation and ensure that federal expenditures achieve the goal of increasing ecosystem and wildlife resiliency and function. Collaborative work among public and private entities should draw on existing plans and evaluation measures, such as state wildlife action plans and state forest resource assessments. Success will depend on leveraging resources from all stakeholders, public and private.

Listening session participants made it clear that farmers, ranchers, and forest owners are eager to help protect America's great outdoors. Many already actively contribute to maintaining and enhancing lands and waters. Nevertheless, although many private landowners have a strong conservation ethic, conservation and resource stewardship must make economic sense. Conservationists and landowners alike discussed the need to maintain traditional markets for food, fiber, and wood products from agriculture and forestry, and to create new sources of revenue from these lands. Developing markets for environmental services and benefits provided by private lands—wetlands, biodiversity, water quality, and mitigation of climate change impacts—will create new sources of income that reward landowners for stewardship and for keeping these lands in agricultural and forestry uses. More incentives can be found by expanding markets for agricultural products, biomass energy, and sustainably harvested wood products. In the foreseeable future, many farms, ranches, and forests will be multifaceted operations that provide a host of profitable environmental services.

Some listening session participants heralded the success of innovative government conservation initiatives such as the FWS *Safe Harbor* program. It provides landowners with regulatory assurances under the *Endangered Species Act* (ESA) in exchange for carrying out stewardship activities that benefit wildlife. These relatively inexpensive tools are powerful incentives to encourage conservation on private lands. In Montana and other western states, FWS and NRCS are working together with ranchers to encourage conservation of the sage grouse, a candidate for listing under the ESA. They provide landowners with regulatory assurances while also helping fund habitat restoration and other practices. Participants in AGO listening sessions suggested that federal agencies explore similar tools for other regulatory requirements that impact private lands and landowners.

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

Across the country, landowners, conservation groups, and state, tribal, and local governments and other partners are joining forces to address local and regional conservation concerns. The first AGO listening session, in Ovando, Montana, was attended by members of three partnerships working to protect the Blackfoot Valley, the Crown of the Continent region, and the Rocky Mountain Front. In Maine, New Hampshire, and South Carolina, participants talked about collaborative work to conserve private forests lands. In Nebraska, participants discussed using incentives to conserve farmland and wetlands. Participants encouraged the federal government to support such ground-level efforts.

Many people also expressed strong support for the long-term conservation benefits provided through existing Farm Bill conservation programs, including the NRCS *Environmental Quality Incentives Program* (EQIP), *Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program* (WHIP), *Wetlands Reserve Program* (WRP), *Conservation Reserve Program* (CRP), *Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program* (FRPP), and *Grassland Reserve Program* (GRP).

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

Listening session participants suggested creating a competitive fund to create incentives for landscape-scale conservation as well as focusing on more coordinate expenditures under existing conservation programs. A competitive fund would bolster existing efforts and encourage forming other local partnerships. They also argued that technical assistance for landowners and conservation partners is one of the most cost-effective ways to meet conservation goals.

Action Item 7.1a: Create the AGO Collaborative Landscape Conservation Initiative through coordinated competitive processes using increases in LWCF and other federal grant programs. (USDA, DOC, DOD, and DOI)

Funds would be targeted on land conservation activities, particularly voluntary purchase of conservation easements, sponsored by a state and diverse local partnerships. Selection of partnerships for funding would be based on criteria that:

- leverage other federal, local, and private resources;
- emphasize the protection of working lands;
- conserve water resources and wildlife;
- use science and mapping to target important lands;
- provide recreational opportunities;
- plan for potential climate impacts and the need for connectivity; and
- other criteria enumerated in law.

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.

Many listening session participants noted that existing programs could be better targeted to assist and promote landscape-scale conservation and that better coordination is needed across federal agencies and with states and local partners. Many existing federal programs within USDA, DOC, DOD, and DOI contribute significantly to the conservation of working lands within important landscapes. These programs should use the best available science to implement the most effective stewardship practices and conservation actions on the most significant lands. State wildlife action plans, state forest assessments, and other local and regional priority-setting processes should inform these efforts. Federal agencies should work together to coordinate capacity building and resource expenditures wherever appropriate.

Action Item 7.2a: Coordinate and align, as appropriate, federal programs that provide technical or financial assistance to public and private organizations that support and implement collaborative landscape-scale conservation initiatives. Program examples include the NPS *LWCF stateside program*, USDA conservation and forestry Farm Bill programs, and the USFS *Forest Stewardship Program*. (USDA, DOC, DOD, and DOI)

Action Item 7.2b: Maintain the USDA *CRP* at 32 million acres through the terms of the 2008 Farm Bill and focus part of the program on landscape conservation, including work that benefits wildlife, water quality and quantity, and other valuable resources. (USDA)

Action Item 7.2c: Continue targeting the DOD *Readiness and Environmental Protection Initiative* to conserve land with significant value for the military mission while protecting important conservation resources in partnership with governmental and non-governmental organizations. (DOD)

GOAL B: Significantly increase the pace of working farms, ranch, and forest land conservation.

Public input suggested that the federal government should expand tools available to landowners, conservation and historic preservation groups, and state, local, and tribal governments to conserve lands through voluntary, incentive-based approaches. Expenditure of federal funds for landscape partnerships also needs better coordination. One of the most frequent recommendations of the AGO public input process was to extend the enhanced tax deduction for conservation easements.

Many listening session participants and public comments called for changing the estate tax to reduce the tax burden on families who own farms, ranches, and forests. It was argued that when lands are passed down to the next generation, heirs—particularly those that are land-rich and cash-poor—can face the need to sell and subdivide their property to pay the inheritance tax. It is true that the estate tax affects a relatively small portion of landowners, but it affects a significant number of acres. The tax disproportionately affects landowners who own larger parcels that are worth more and, therefore, more likely subject to the tax. The estate tax is also increasingly important because the average age of these landowners is rising.³¹ One criticism of reducing the estate tax is that doing so disproportionately helps wealthy citizens. Structuring policies that conserve lands could provide public benefits associated with land and watershed conservation. Opportunities to amend the estate tax to conserve working lands should be explored.

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

Starting in 2007, an enhanced tax incentive allowed landowners a significant tax benefit for donating a conservation easement on their land to a qualified organization. Working landowners receive even greater financial benefit for such donations. This enhanced deduction expired in 2009, but was extended through December 31, 2011, by the Tax Relief, Unemployment Insurance Reauthorization, and Job Creation Act of 2010. When it was in effect in 2007 and

³¹ Butler, Brett and Earl Leatherberry. *America's Family Forest Owners*.

2008, a recent survey showed this incentive helped America's 1,700 local land trusts increase the pace of conservation by about 250,000 acres each year—a 36-percent increase over previous years.³² Extending the enhanced deduction beyond 2011 would further bolster land conservation and resource protection, especially on working lands.

Action Item 7.3a: Work with Congress to extend the existing conservation easement tax deduction provision beyond 2011. (AGO Council)

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

Loss of open space to development and fragmentation is far more likely to occur where development values outweigh returns from agriculture, ranching, and forestry. The government's role in maintaining traditional markets for agriculture and forestry products remains outside the scope of the AGO Initiative, but public input suggested that opportunities exist to encourage new markets from rural lands that could strengthen efforts to maintain rural landscapes.

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.

New markets for environmental services are developing, including climate mitigation, water quality and quantity, fish and wildlife habitat conservation, wetlands protection, sustainable energy production, and other services. These markets are in various stages of maturity. Many agencies have long supported such efforts and are exploring opportunities and innovations to expand their use. Expanding them will benefit land conservation, environmental stewardship, and landowners and allow for farms, ranches, and forests of the future to derive income from markets for environmental services. USDA and other agencies can provide landowners with technical assistance that increases agricultural and forest productivity while also enhancing land stewardship.

Action Item 7.4a: Support the development and expansion of environmental markets through the Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, programs and authorities of USDA, and other laws and foster better coordination across federal agencies to support the development of environmental markets. (USDA, DOC, DOD, USACE, DOI, and EPA)

Action Item 7.4b: Support efforts in the next Farm Bill to develop and expand environmental markets. (USDA)

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.

Although most recreational opportunities are on public land, private lands also can play an important role in providing recreation. There is a long tradition of hunting and fishing on private

³² Land Trust Alliance fact sheet on Renewing the Conservation Tax Incentive.

lands through open access, lease agreements, or other mechanisms. The USDA *Voluntary Public Access Program (Open Fields)* offers states financial assistance to encourage or provide incentives to landowners to provide access to hunters. Continuing this program and expanding it to new states and tribes will benefit landowners and sports enthusiasts alike. Private landowners in some locations support hiking and snowmobile trails across their property. Depending on the agreement, this might give a landowner additional income, which helps the landowner keep the property as well as maintain recreational resources and access.

Action Item 7.5a: Expand partnerships with private landowners that facilitate access to or across private lands for recreation through programs such as the USDA *Voluntary Public Access Program (Open Fields)*. (USDA and DOI)

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.

FWS, in partnership with states, tribes, conservation groups, and others, has successfully encouraged private landowners to protect and restore habitat for listed and candidate species under the Endangered Species Act. They accomplished this through safe harbor and candidate conservation agreements with assurances. FWS and NMFS should work with USDA to provide financial incentives through the Farm Bill to help support these efforts.

Action Item 7.6a: Promote the use of safe harbor and candidate conservation agreements and collaborate with FWS and NMFS to streamline permitting processes with agreements and memoranda of understanding that promote conservation objectives. Work with NRCS in combining Farm Bill conservation program dollars where appropriate. (DOI, DOC, and USDA)

Action Item 7.6b: Work in partnership with states to explore the use of safe harbor-like certainty agreements to achieve the goals of improved water quality and continued implementation of voluntary conservation practices, and look for opportunities to pilot such agreements. (EPA and USDA)

Quotes received through the public input process:

“One thing I see working is collaborative decision making – for natural resource protection, outdoor recreation planning, etc. – if you want to vie for competitive grants you have to show collaboration: don’t plan in a bubble – it’s not effective.” (Listening Session Participant, Asheville, NC)

“Multi-partner initiatives to advance conservation across all ownership types within large priority landscapes are a highly effective strategy for conservation delivery. This type of landscape conservation will be particularly important to achieve higher level conservation outcomes, such as watershed protection, climate mitigation, and climate adaptation, where isolated conservation actions will not be sufficient to achieve these larger goals.” (Listening Session Participant, Missoula, MT)

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

Nearly 30 percent of lands in the United States—more than 635 million acres—are managed and protected by the federal government.³³ These federal lands and their waters contain ecosystems as diverse as the coastal mountains of California’s King Range National Conservation Area, southern Appalachian ecosystems of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and the tropical rainforests of the Caribbean National Forest in Puerto Rico, as well as an inspiring array of natural, cultural, and historic resources. Some of these exceptional natural and cultural places have been designated as World Heritage Sites. Public lands offer American and international visitors wide-ranging opportunities to make a personal connection to the outdoors. They may do this through the solitude of wilderness or bird watching at dawn, the exhilaration of motorized trails, climbing, skiing, snowboarding, or river rafting, the pride of historic places, or the satisfaction of volunteer service. Our public lands provide water resources, wildlife habitat, recreation access and opportunities, educational value, and other benefits to the American people.

The nation’s mountains, prairies, forests, coasts, deserts, lakes, estuaries, and rivers also provide essential ecosystem services that benefit all Americans. Public lands contain important watersheds that supply drinking water to millions. These lands also sequester significant amounts of carbon annually, thereby reducing atmospheric greenhouse gases. Many of America’s most iconic wildlife species—bison, elk, and grizzly bears, among them—greatly depend on public lands for survival. Likewise, federal lands and waters sustain people, providing recreation, relaxation, and renewal. Be it a hike, bike, or horseback ride along a local trail, a family ski vacation, a visit to a historic or cultural site, or a weekend fishing or boating trip, access to the great outdoors through our public lands and waters improves our quality of life, while also bringing economic benefit to local communities.

There are many important reasons to invest in stewardship of our public lands—most compelling are economic growth and jobs. Outdoor recreation on our public lands generates significant economic activity. Tourism and related visits to public lands are important to the economic vitality of many rural communities. Spending by recreation visitors in areas surrounding national forests is estimated to be nearly \$13 billion annually.³⁴ Visitors who live more than 50 miles from the forest lands account for the majority of these contributions, which also sustain more than 224,000 full- and part-time jobs. Investments in our public lands yield jobs. On average, eight jobs are created for every \$1 million invested in wildlife protection; 30 jobs are created for each \$1 million invested in ecosystem restoration; 17 jobs are created by every \$1 million invested in infrastructure projects; six jobs for every \$1 million for contracting and planning; and 15–22 jobs are created for every \$1 million spent by visitors to DOI recreation facilities.³⁵

The impacts to the economy of these visits are enormous. The NPS alone annually contributes \$6.3 billion in labor income. DOI wildlife refuges provide an estimated \$1.7 billion in sales and

³³ USDA report on Major Uses of Land in The United States, 2002.

³⁴ USDA National Visitor Use Monitoring Results: 2005 - 2009.

³⁵ Economic Impact of the Department of the Interior’s Programs and Activities; Department of the Interior and USDA Forest Service analysis.

\$543 million in employment income.³⁶ Recreational visits to national forests contribute \$13 billion to gross domestic product.³⁷ USACE reports that visitors spend some \$18 billion annually on its lakes and other facilities, leading to 350,000 jobs added to the nation's economy.³⁸

In addition to recreation, many rural communities rely on the federal government's management of public lands for multiple purposes—including forestry, grazing, and renewable and nonrenewable energy—as sources of employment and economic growth. Balancing consumptive and non-consumptive uses of public lands has become increasingly important. Land restoration activities and the emerging area of renewable energy can provide both environmental benefits and jobs for local communities.

Some participants at listening sessions also discussed the importance of conserving inventoried roadless areas on our national forests. In 2001, the Clinton Administration adopted broad protections of roadless areas on national forests that this Administration is now defending in courts. Because the 2001 rule remains in legal limbo, the Administration has taken steps to ensure that any projects in roadless areas are thoroughly reviewed. If the courts do not uphold roadless protections, the Administration will take other steps to protect these areas. Although this report contains no recommendation with respect to roadless area conservation, protecting roadless areas remains a priority.

Although the federal government manages some of the nation's most extraordinary lands and waters—places such as Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area, the Monongahela National Forest, Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, and Eglin Air Force Base—federal lands often occur within a patchwork that includes other public and private properties. In some cases, federal forests and grasslands occur in a “checkerboard” pattern of mixed federal, state, tribal and private ownership. There is a growing awareness among federal agencies that protecting large landscapes, wildlife, and watersheds requires collaborative management across ownerships. Federal land managers must partner beyond their boundaries with many landowners and other land managers to achieve the benefits that come from managing land and water resources at a landscapes level, such as the creation of wildlife migration corridors. The need to help wildlife adapt to a rapidly changing climate, which is altering habitats, further highlights the importance of a landscape approach to conservation that emphasizes connectivity.

Federal lands and waters face diverse and increasing threats. Insect and disease infestations have weakened our forests. Examples are the mountain pine beetle on the Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests, a legacy of fire suppression; and invasive species, such as the tallowtree and the Asian gypsy moth. Grasslands and sagebrush ecosystems face similar stresses. Climate change exacerbates these stressors, and considerable impacts on federal lands from a rapidly changing climate are already apparent. To help natural and human communities that depend on public lands and waters in adapting to climate change, it is imperative that management of federal lands and waters be focused on restoration and building resilience in ecosystems and be informed by science. This will help ensure that federal lands continue to fulfill their basic role in

³⁶ Council of Economic Advisors. 2010. Strengthening the Rural Economy.

³⁷ USDA National Visitor Use Monitoring Results: 2005 - 2009.

³⁸ US Army Corps of Engineers fact sheet. <http://corpsresults.us/recreation/receconomic.htm>.

providing water resources, wildlife habitat, recreation access and opportunities, and educational and other benefits to the American people.

Many participants in listening sessions noted that some federal lands contain exceptional natural, cultural, or historic features that require special protection. Designation of wilderness and wild and scenic rivers will continue to be important mechanisms to protect outstanding resources for future generations. These designations require Congressional action and both the USDA and DOI will continue to work with Congress to support such designations where there is strong local, state, and national support. National monument designations, which do not require Congressional authorization, were also the subject of many comments at listening sessions. As discussed below, establishment of a national monument should receive careful consideration, carried out with transparency that ensures local, state, and national input.

As we look to the future of our public lands and waters, we also must celebrate how far we have come. Since first setting aside land that would become Yosemite National Park in 1864, our nation has protected many exceptional places as national parks, forests, refuges, wilderness, and national landscape conservation areas. This year is the 100th anniversary of the Weeks Act, which led to the establishment of new national forests in the eastern United States. In addition, landmark legislation in 1916 established the NPS, the first agency in the world charged solely with the protection and enjoyment of special places for future generations. 2016 marks the 100th anniversary of the NPS and serves as an opportunity to recommit to enhancing our parks and prepare the NPS for another hundred years of service to our country and the world. Based on input from listening sessions and by engaging a broad diversity of stakeholders, the NPS will mark its centennial with diverse new partnerships to ensure that the best examples of natural and cultural heritage are preserved for future generations.

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.

Participants in many listening sessions acknowledged the many natural and human-created threats facing our nation's federal lands and waters. Some discussed how invasive species, unnaturally destructive fires, pests and disease, and climate change require more proactive management. Ensuring that our nation's forests, grasslands, and other ecosystems are resilient to disturbances and to a changing climate must increasingly guide federal land and water management. In all cases, federal management decisions must be developed through sound science and implemented with ongoing monitoring and adaptive management. In turn, management actions, such as invasive species control, forest thinning, prescribed fire, and planting native trees and vegetation can provide jobs for local individuals and businesses.

Management of federal lands and waters must also consider neighboring lands. This "all-lands" approach recognizes that watersheds, wildlife, and other important resources do not adhere to property lines. Similarly, the threats facing our lands and waters are not limited to any one national park, national forest, wildlife refuge, or Indian reservation; these threats are felt over broad landscapes. As a result, federal land managers should seek opportunities to engage in partnerships and provide voluntary incentives to neighboring landowners. For instance, the FWS,

in cooperation with the NRCS, has worked with farmers, ranchers, and forest owners to conserve working landscapes across the country—a new conservation paradigm that places targeted public lands within a matrix of working private lands. Federal land managers should also continue work with neighboring landowners to look for opportunities to consolidate federal land ownership where federal lands are fragmented or in a “checkerboard” pattern, where doing so can help federal land managers, benefit neighboring owners, and improve recreational access.

The all-lands model of conservation requires a new generation of science, one that seeks to break down jurisdictional barriers and share data and conservation strategies with the larger land, water, and wildlife community. The DOI *initiation of a network of Landscape Conservation Cooperatives and Climate Science Centers* is designed around this premise and will provide a forum for coordinated planning and implementation of land management approaches. Likewise, the Forest Service is taking steps to integrate climate adaptation and mitigation into management of the national forests through its *National Roadmap for Responding to Climate Change*.

Finally, federal lands must be managed in a manner consistent with their unique designations and to ensure their long-term health. The recommendations that follow focus on conservation and restoration of federal lands, making those lands more resilient to climate change, and protecting wildlife corridors that cross federal lands. Although these are three separate recommendations, it is important that they be integrated into the land management policies and the plans that implement them—both within individual land management agencies as well as across all federal lands and waters. The goal is to have the broad diversity of land and water management agencies work together to achieve common ends, although individual agency actions will be highlighted.

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

To accomplish this recommendation, it will be necessary to provide support and direction to land managers to focus the diversity of funding sources on these challenges and opportunities and to expand authorities so that land managers have the flexibility to support landscape-scale conservation, and enhance the partnerships between federal, state, local and tribal governments; nonprofit organizations; and private landowners.

Action Item 8.1a: Integrate large, landscape-scale conservation into federal land management plans and actions. (USDA, DOD, USACE, and DOI)

Examples include:

- Continue to support the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Fund (\$40 million) to provide matched funding for proposals in high-priority landscapes that support collaborative landscape conservation. (USDA)
- Develop a Forest Service planning rule that emphasizes collaboration with other land management agencies and stakeholders, landscape-scale planning and conservation, adaptive management and sustainability. (USFS)
- Create budget structures to promote landscape-scale conservation and integration among resource programs. (USFS)

- Continue to protect and enhance water resources on federal lands by managing lands to protect and restore riparian areas and aquatic ecosystems, improve water quality, assess watershed condition, and invest resources in areas whose condition can be improved cost-effectively and are important to the public. (USDA, DOD, and DOI)
- Complete and institutionalize a national network of 21 Landscape Conservation Cooperatives to develop the science needed to understand landscape-scale threats and craft landscape-level strategies for managing and responding to those threats. (DOI)
- Incorporate landscape-scale conservation and restoration as a priority in BLM resource management plans and programs. (BLM)
- Expand programs to develop landscape-scale assessment, modeling, and mapping to support conservation planning on federal and private lands. (DOI-USGS)
- Integrate units of the National Park System, Fish and Wildlife Refuge System, and BLM *National Landscape Conservation System* into landscape conservation and restoration activities on public lands as anchors of preservation. (BLM , FWS, NPS)
- Develop or expand existing co-management agreements between tribal and federal land managers where shared management objectives on federal lands provide for landscape-scale conservation. (DOI-BIA)
- Through the USACE *environmental stewardship programs* at existing Corps facilities, plan and implement projects to restore and sustain critical watersheds, wetlands, and environmentally sensitive areas. (DOD-USACE)

Action Item 8.1b: 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. (USDA, DOD, and DOI) (*Complements Action Item 7.2a*)

Action Item 8.1c: Expand federal land management agency authorities, such as stewardship contracting, USFS integrated resource restoration, and the partnership authority between FWS, NPS, BLM and USFS *Service First*, to complement their ability to achieve large landscape conservation and restoration goals. (USDA and DOI)

Action Item 8.1d: Cultivate and support engaging local, state, and tribal governments, nonprofit organizations, and landowners in regions where federal agencies are conserving and restoring large landscapes through grants, planning, and capacity building. (USDA, DOD, USACE, and DOI)

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

Public comments noted the importance of managing federal lands and waters to anticipate and mitigate the impacts of climate change. Federal land managers should implement adaptation actions that foster resilience to climate change in land, water, and wildlife. Federal lands can also be managed to mitigate climate change by increasing carbon storage in ecosystems where doing so is consistent with sound conservation and watershed protection goals. On degraded lands where risks from destructive fires, pests, or other threats are heightened, land managers should act to improve resilience while promoting long-term carbon storage consistent with conserving

ecosystems and watersheds. In advancing this recommendation, the federal land management agencies will actively engage tribal, state, and local governments, private landowners and nonprofit organizations. This recommendation and associated action items will be informed and prioritized through the recommendations of the Interagency Climate Change Adaptation Task Force.

Action Item 8.2a: Develop science to support decisions related to climate change adaptation and resilience. Improve science available to public land managers through consortia that use information from NOAA *Climate Service*, DOI *Climate Science Centers*, and USFS, NRCS, and other agency work. (USDA, DOC, and DOI)

Action Item 8.2b: Build climate change adaptation and mitigation into federal land management plans and practices. (CEQ, USDA, DOC, DOD-USACE, and DOI)

Examples include:

- Integrate climate change adaptation and mitigation into national forests management through a revised Forest Planning Rule and through implementation of the USFS *Climate Change Scorecard*. (USDA-USFS)
- Use DOI's *Landscape Conservation Cooperatives* to inform management of public lands and resources. (DOI)
- Implement the NPS *Climate Response Strategy* to address the impacts of climate change in parks through science, adaptation, mitigation, and communication. (DOI-NPS)
- Develop science-based inventories and monitoring programs to assess the impacts of climate change on fish and wildlife habitat regardless of land ownership. (DOI, USDA, DOD-USACE)
- Incorporate into BLM *Resource Management Plans* provisions to support carbon sequestration and climate change adaptation. (DOI-BLM)

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.

Among the primary threats to the nation's fish and wildlife are habitat loss and fragmentation. Climate change will exacerbate these threats. Developing a comprehensive approach to maintaining and restoring wildlife corridors and habitat connectivity and to protecting fish and wildlife populations have become a conservation priority. Public comments noted the importance of protecting wildlife corridors that cross federal, state, tribal, and private lands. Today, many grassroots efforts to protect wildlife have evolved with collaboration among public and private agencies to expand the commitment to and investment in restoring and maintaining wildlife corridors, habitat, and connectivity for species across the American landscape.

Safeguarding wildlife resources requires sound science and mapping to prioritize management, conservation, and restoration efforts, whose effectiveness must be monitored. Public land management agencies must also partner with private land owners to support management of all lands to address the challenges of climate change.

Action Item 8.3a: Work with states and other partners to use and disseminate scientific data and other information concerning the locations of and threats to critical wildlife corridors to ensure effective investment in restoring and conserving of those corridors. (DOI and USDA)

Action Item 8.3b: Incorporate wildlife corridor conservation and restoration into federal agency plans, programs, and actions. (USDA, DOD, USACE, and DOI)

Examples include:

- Address wildlife and ecosystem connectivity through the USFS *Forest Planning Rule*, BLM *Resource Management Plans*, NPS *Park Management Plans*, and FWS *Refuge Plans*, including the placement of energy projects and transmission lines. (DOI and USDA)
- Update water project master plans and shoreline management plans to identify and sustain important wildlife and fisheries habitat and corridors at USACE and Bureau of Reclamation facilities, such as reservoirs, dams, locks, and river shorelines. (DOD-DOD-USACE, DOI)

Action Item 8.3c: Coordinate and leverage investment of federal funds to conserve and restore wildlife corridors with other public and private wildlife conservation entities. (DOI, USDA, DOD, and USACE)

GOAL B: Advance national, regional, and community-supported work 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 both community and national character. Some federal lands contain outstanding 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 to preserve these places for future generations. This process for increased federal protection of existing federal lands should be accompanied by transparency 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.

Historically, the Antiquities Act is one of the most important tools to achieve national conservation goals. The areas designated under the Antiquities Act by 14 presidents since 1906 include some of the most inspiring and unusual natural and historic features in America. Examples are Olympic National Park in Washington, Devils Tower in Wyoming, the Sonoran Desert in Arizona, the Statue of Liberty in New York City, and the USS *Arizona* Memorial in Hawaii.

During listening sessions, strong support was voiced for the designation of unique places as national monuments as an important way to preserve critical elements of the American landscape and cultural heritage. Some expressed concern that potential designations would circumvent the

public review process. All agreed on the importance of transparency in designations, with local input and recognition of local, state, national, and tribal interests, including agriculture, recreation, and access to sacred lands.

Action Item 8.4a: Implement a transparent and open approach to new national monument designations tailored to engaging local, state, and national interests. (DOI and USDA)

Any recommendations should focus on historic and natural features and cultural sites on federal lands that deserve protection under the 1906 Antiquities Act. In the process of making recommendations, the following should be considered:

- public input from local, state, and national interests;
- transparency in development and execution of the designation;
- valid existing rights on federal lands; and
- criteria enumerated in law.

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

New land designations are important for protecting outstanding lands and waters, cultural resources, historic sites, and recreation areas and for creating wildlife corridors and restoring intact landscapes. Such designations may only be accomplished by Congress, and involve input from federal agencies. In considering proposals for new wilderness areas, wild and scenic rivers, national parks, national forests, national wildlife refuges, and national conservation system lands, USDA and DOI should work with Congress to ensure that there is meaningful local, regional, and national input before any congressional designation.

Action Item 8.5a: Work with Congress to consider new congressional designations of or additions to wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, national parks, national wildlife refuges, and national conservation system lands. Priority for federal support should be given to sites where strong local, regional and national support exists. (DOI and USDA)

Action Item 8.5b: The NPS will identify key natural areas and cultural themes underrepresented in the National Park System to guide congressional designation of sites that may deserve such recognition and protection. Recommendations for protecting individual sites would still be made through existing procedures that take into account the criteria enumerated in law. (DOI-NPS)

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

On public lands and elsewhere in regions and communities, 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. It can add an important dimension to understanding and experiencing national parks and other special outdoor places. Historic preservation and cultural resources protection can attract visitors who support local businesses, increase job opportunities, revitalize urban or rural communities, and encourage reuse of historic buildings. To affirm and reinforce the connection between the American people

and America’s great outdoors in all its richness and diversity, build on the linkages between our natural and our cultural heritage.

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.

The federal government offers an extensive portfolio of community assistance programs to support tribal, state and local governments, and private-sector preservation efforts, from planning assistance and capital grants to wide ranging technical support. Participants in the public input process strongly encouraged the federal government to more actively support local state, tribal, and regional historic preservation work.

Action Item 8.6a: Increase funding for the Historic Preservation Fund. (DOI)

Action Item 8.6b: Expand support for state, tribal, and community historic preservation efforts for capital projects, planning, interpretation, community-based surveying, and technical assistance that support partnerships and community-based preservation activities. (DOI)

Action Item 8.6c: Establish through legislation clearly defined standards and processes to support a system of regional and community-based national heritage areas that promote locally supported preservation work, promote heritage tourism, and create jobs. (DOI)

Action Item 8.6d: Continue supporting battlefield preservation through partnerships with historic preservation land trusts to fund acquisition of historically significant, threatened battlefields emphasizing Civil War sites, as part of the Civil War Sesquicentennial from 2011 to 2015. (DOI)

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

Action Item 8.7a: Elevate the importance of cultural resources planning, protection, and interpretation in the federal land management agencies. (DOI, ACHP, USDA, DOD, and USACE,)

Quotes received through the public input process:

“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)

“In the United States, there are wildlife corridor efforts in all 50 states and every congressional district. These corridors are important for the sustainability of every major wildlife group from the monarch butterfly to the pronghorn antelope to the California grey whale—and are found in urban, rural and wild natural areas. Indeed, because corridors connect core natural areas they epitomize the need for landscape-scale conservation approaches that make our lands and waters

permeable for wildlife movement and climate change resiliency. Wildlife corridors are one of a handful of conservation issues that connect all Americans.” (Listening Session Participant, Missoula, MT)

“America’s Great Outdoors begins when you open your front door and step outside—whether it is onto an urban stoop, a suburban sidewalk or a rural front porch. Before we can reach the National Parks, Trails, or Wilderness Areas, we enter into our neighborhoods, downtowns, community gardens and parks. Appreciating the Great Outdoors means exploring the places where we live, work and play; the places that define the human environment. By first cultivating a sense of stewardship in our communities, we encourage stewardship of cultural and natural resources beyond our immediate surroundings.” (Written comment)

9. Protect and Renew Rivers and Other Waters

Water is life. The more than 3.6 million miles of rivers and streams that wind through our nation provide America's drinking water, fuel the economy, sustain critical ecosystems, and offer endless opportunities for recreation and enjoyment.³⁹ From the Columbia River to the upper Midwest prairie potholes to the Tennessee and Penobscot valleys, water has shaped the nation's social, cultural, and economic development and enabled its prosperity. Virtually all of our cities and towns are next to waterways, making these waters an outdoor opportunity close to home for all. Today, American life remains inextricably linked to the rivers and shores on which it was founded.

Federal projects are underway to restore and conserve large-scale, aquatic ecosystems in Florida's Everglades, Chesapeake Bay, Great Lakes, Gulf Coast, California Bay-Delta, Mississippi River Basin, Washington's Puget Sound, and many others. Federal, state, and local governments and private organizations and landowners have built effective partnerships to restore and protect these remarkable systems. Under this Administration, a number of these efforts have been given additional emphasis and resources. Because these projects are well underway, this report offers no specific recommendations for these ecosystems. However, these large restoration projects can serve as laboratories for—and have spurred—many smaller watershed-level projects, expanding water conservation whether in wetlands of California's Klamath Basin Nation Wildlife Refuge or in a city-scale project such as the Los Angeles River. This existing work can further benefit from many recommendations in this report.

In AGO listening sessions, participants expressed their passion for the rich natural and cultural history of our waterways, impressive knowledge of their economic and ecological importance, and enthusiasm for their conservation. Hundreds of people described steps they are taking to protect and connect with the rivers and waterways in their communities to promote conservation, recreation, and economic growth and community redevelopment. Interest in water-based recreation, such as kayaking and canoeing, is growing. In December 2006, Congress designated as a national historic trail the routes of John Smith's explorations of Chesapeake Bay and environs more than 400 years ago. This first national water trail effectively demonstrates both the historic and recreational values of these corridors. Americans across the country are working together at the local level to create navigable, accessible, community-scale water trails that connect communities to their water resources and natural environment close to home.

Unfortunately, not all communities can access their local waterways due to physical barriers, unsafe conditions, or because they are not aware that these resources are close at hand. Federal assistance can empower communities to become aware of, restore, and connect with these rich natural resources. Federal vision can help community water recreation trails connect as a national network for healthy recreation that supports ecological and economic revitalization. Congress has now designated two water trails because of their recreational and historic significance: the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail and the Star Spangled Banner National Historic Trail in Maryland.

³⁹ Environmental Protection Agency Report on National Water Quality, 1998.

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

Americans across the country shared stories of working together to create recreation within reach by reconnecting with their local rivers and other waterways. This work also connects their communities to nearby green space and other special places. Recently completed regional water trails in New England and the Pacific Northwest span hundreds of miles and link dozens of cities and towns to the great outdoors. In South Carolina, the new Congaree River Blue Trail links the capital city of Columbia to Congaree National Park with the state’s most expansive swath of wilderness and the largest intact old-growth bottomland hardwood forest in the southeastern United States.⁴⁰ Communities are creating a system of water and biking trails along the Anacostia River in the District of Columbia and Maryland. It will soon connect the National Park Service’s Kenilworth Park and Aquatic Garden to downtown museums and other parks and recreation in the Nation’s Capital.

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

In listening sessions people strongly encouraged the federal government to help communities enhance recreational opportunities in local waterways and adjacent green space, including by creating a national blueways initiative. A *blueway* is a designated community-scale portion of river recognized as a destination for fishing, boating, wildlife watching, and other recreation, which should get special attention for restoration and access.

Action Item 9.1a: Develop a transparent process to designate rivers and waterways as AGO National Recreation Trails Blueways, through existing authorities in the National Trails System Act, as amended. (USDA and DOI, working with DOD, USACE, EPA, and other agencies)

Nominations to the AGO National Recreation Blueway Trails Initiative will be locally driven and will include partnerships with federal, state, and local agencies, tribes, nonprofit organizations, the private sector, private landowners, and other entities.

Action Item 9.1b: Provide technical assistance and leverage investments that help public agencies and nonprofit organizations plan for designating and implementing an AGO National Recreation Blueway Trail, within existing programs and designation. (DOI, EPA, USDA, DOC, DOD, and USACE)

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

In many parts of the country, community access to rivers and lakes for recreation—fishing, boating, and swimming—is limited. Comments from the listening sessions call for the federal government to provide more incentives, expertise, and financial assistance to increase access to waterways.

⁴⁰ Congaree National Park fact sheet. www.nps.gov/cong/naturescience.

Action Item 9.2a: Increase access for water-based recreation, including along AGO National Recreation Blueway Trails, by updating existing programs' project selection criteria to consider projects that provide or improve access, including the NPS *LWCF stateside program*. (DOI, USDA, DOC, DOD, and USACE)

Action Item 9.2b: Facilitate information exchange and networking among communities working to improve access to and enjoyment of urban waters through an *Urban Waters Initiative* learning network. (EPA)

Action Item 9.2c: Align and improve efficiency among federal and local transportation and infrastructure agencies to promote community access to neighborhood waterways. (EPA, DOT, USDA, DOC, and DOI)

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

Growing awareness of the link between healthy communities and healthy watersheds has shifted the emphasis from large-scale, federally funded water supply, power generation, or flood control to a more comprehensive approach that considers economic, social, wildlife, and recreational benefits. The federal government should integrate federal water resources projects with locally driven watershed protection efforts. Federal agencies should expand support for community-based restoration and conservation of water resources.

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.

The public encouraged the federal government to expand support for community-based protection and improvement of the nation's waters. 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. The AGO Initiative will focus and align technical and financial support for community-based water restoration.

Action Item 9.3a: Strengthen federal partnership work on urban waters and support related agency-level programs, such as the proposed EPA *Urban Waters Initiative*. Through federal coordination and community partnerships, these programs revitalize urban waters and the nearby communities. They transform overlooked assets into treasured centerpieces and drivers of urban revival. (EPA, USDA, DOC, and DOI) (*See Recommendation 6.3c*)

Action Item 9.3b: Align federal programs that provide planning and technical assistance to communities and local governments or support increased community stewardship of urban waters, such as NOAA *Open Rivers Program*; the FWS *Fish Passage Initiative* and *National Fish Habitat Plan*; and EPA *Urban Waters Program*. (EPA, USDA, DOC, DOD, and DOI)

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

Many federal agencies have water management programs or provide financial and technical assistance for state and local water resources management. Improving coordination among agencies is essential to support existing resource uses and to achieve restoration, habitat, and recreation goals for the nation’s rivers, lakes, estuaries, and wetlands. Key opportunities identified in listening sessions include sharing of water data and models; recognizing and planning for emerging challenges, such as the impact of climate change on water resources; and coordinating diverse water projects within a watershed to improve the sustainability and resilience of water resources.

Action Item 9.4a: Reduce fish passage barriers in America’s streams and rivers on federal lands by targeting work to restore water quality and critically endangered aquatic species and to expand recreational fishing. (DOI, USDA, DOD, and USACE)

Action Item 9.4b: Identify existing mechanisms for—and ways to strengthen—coordination among water resources management agencies at federal, state, local, and tribal levels. (AGO Council)

Action Item 9.4c: Develop a pilot project with state and local partners to integrate land conservation with watershed-scale water management. (DOD-USACE, EPA, , USDA, and DOI)

Quotes from the public input process:

“I live in Michigan, a wonderful state that has seen its share of difficult economic times of late. What is a constant source of pride, however, is the natural beauty of the Great Lakes and the thousands of lakes streams and rivers that cover the entire state.” (Listening Session Participant, Missoula, MT)

“Water should be a pillar of AGO, project reconnect and restore 2 connect Americans to land and water resources through education and recreation.” (Listening Session Participant, Washington, DC)

“Waterways should be central to AGO themes. Not only waterways in urban areas but also from their source. The upper watersheds are in danger in many areas. Focus on multi-jurisdictional projects that protect the watershed and provide for recreation from the source down. Waterways would also appear as a ‘new’ emphasis and give a refreshed image.” (Listening Session Participant, Missoula, MT)

10. Make the Federal Government a More Effective Conservation Partner

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.

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;
- 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)

Quotes received through the public input process:

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

“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)