

# Conserving and Restoring America's Great Outdoors

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At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup> 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

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<sup>21</sup> USDA Summary Report: 2007 National Resources Inventory.

## America's Great Outdoors Vision Statement

Americans envision a future in which:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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.

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## 5. Strengthen the Land and Water Conservation Fund

*“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)

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 21<sup>st</sup>-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

*“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)

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)

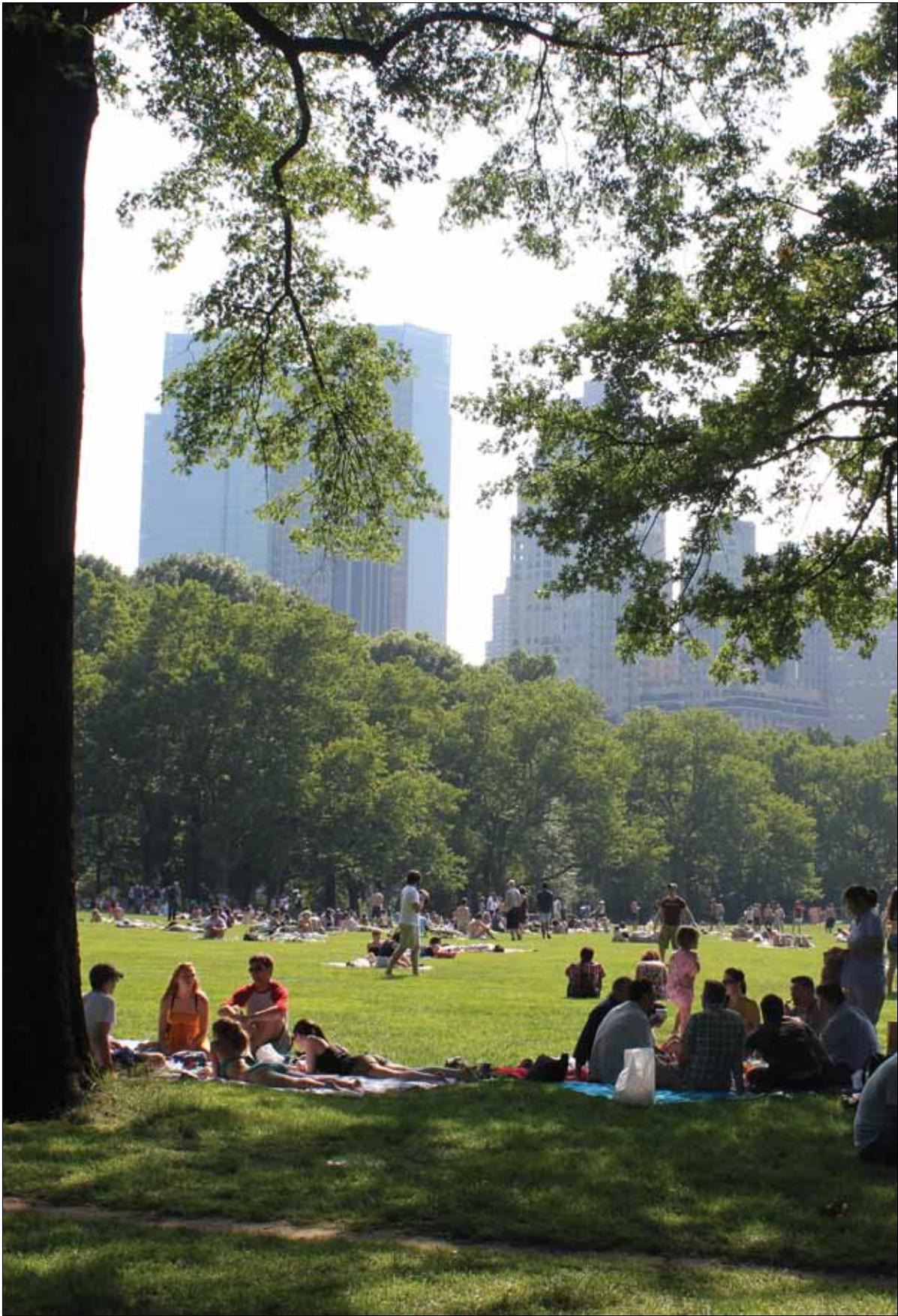
**Action Item 5.2c:** Coordinate and align investment of federal LWCF funds with federal grant programs to states for land acquisition, as appropriate and consistent with state partner priorities—including NPS *LWCF stateside program*, FWS *North American Wetlands Conservation Act*, and the USFS *Forest 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)



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

*“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)

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....”<sup>22</sup>

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.<sup>23</sup> 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.

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

<sup>23</sup> United Nations World Urbanization Prospects: The 2007 Revision.

*“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)

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.<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> 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-income communities.<sup>26</sup> 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.

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<sup>24</sup> 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.

<sup>25</sup> 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.

<sup>26</sup> White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity Report to the President, 2010.

**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.

**Action Item 6.1a:** Increase the number of urban parks and community green spaces through partnerships 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;



U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE - ZITSMAN PHOTO / WEST VIRGINIA

- 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



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE - DOVE PHOTO / RIO DE LOS ANGELES STATE PARK, CALIFORNIA

*“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)

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, 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)

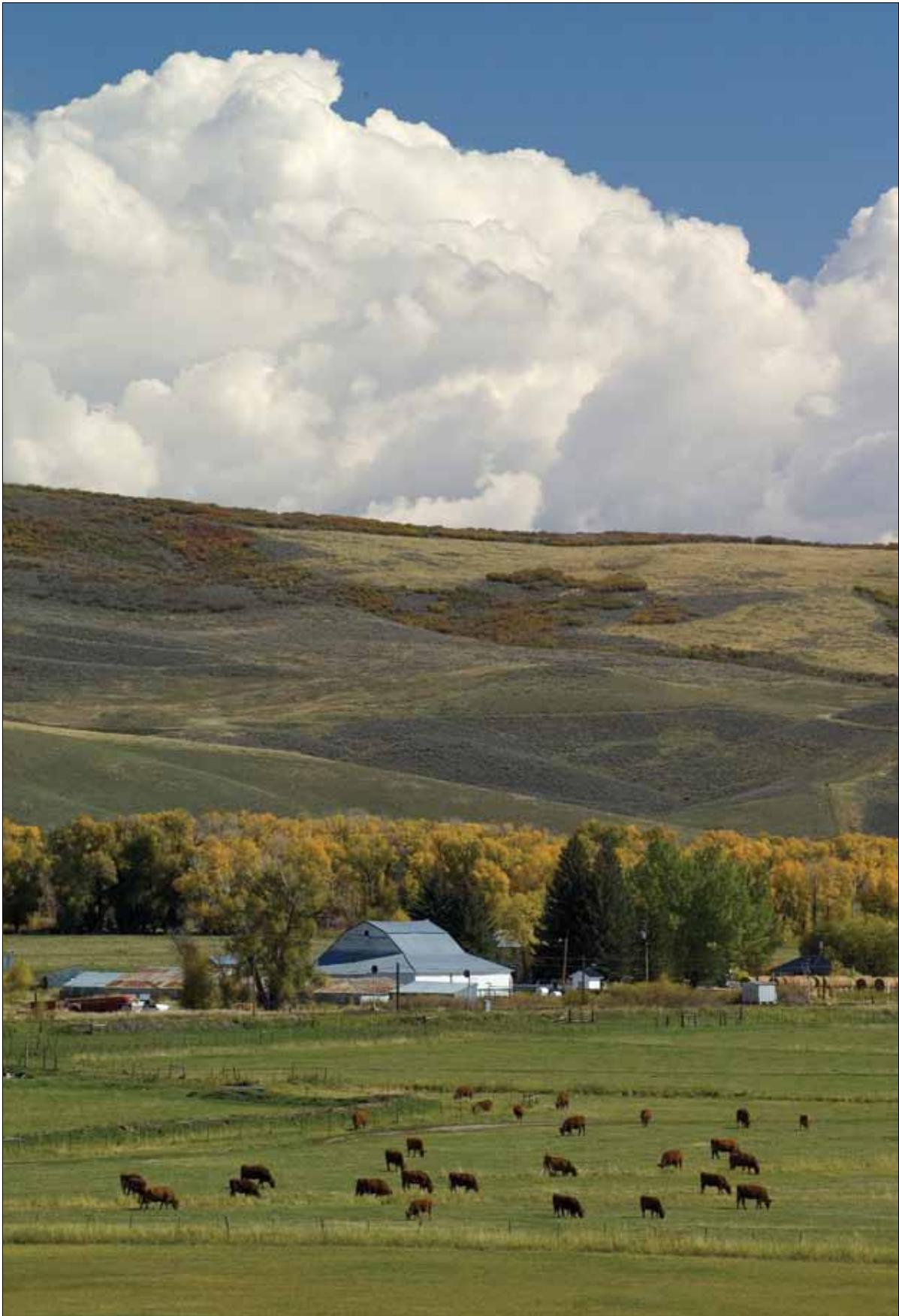
**Action Item 6.3c:** Strengthen federal partnership work on urban waters and support related agency-level programs, such as EPA-proposed *Urban Waters Initiative*. Through federal coordination and community partnerships, these programs revitalize urban waters and adjacent communities, transforming overlooked 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)



THE NATURE CONSERVANCY - © GODFREY PHOTO / CARPENTER RANCH, COLORADO

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## 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.<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup>

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.<sup>29</sup> Each year some 1.6 million acres of privately owned farms, ranches, and forests are sold off, in whole or in part, for development.<sup>30</sup> The costs to clean air, wildlife, cultural heritage sites, and farm and forest economies are significant.

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<sup>27</sup> “Conservation Economics,” reprinted in *River of the Mother of God*.

<sup>28</sup> Department of Interior report on Context and Complexity of the Indian Trust, 2003.

<sup>29</sup> USDA Summary Report: 2007 National Resources Inventory.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

*“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)

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 21<sup>st</sup>-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 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.



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE - WALDRON PHOTO / MANASSAS NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD PARK, VIRGINIA

*“One thing I see working is collaborative decision-making—or 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)

**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.<sup>31</sup> 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

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<sup>31</sup> Butler, Brett and Earl Leatherberry *America's Family Forest Owners*.

Relief, Unemployment Insurance Reauthorization, and Job Creation Act of 2010. When it was in effect in 2007 and 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.<sup>32</sup> 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.

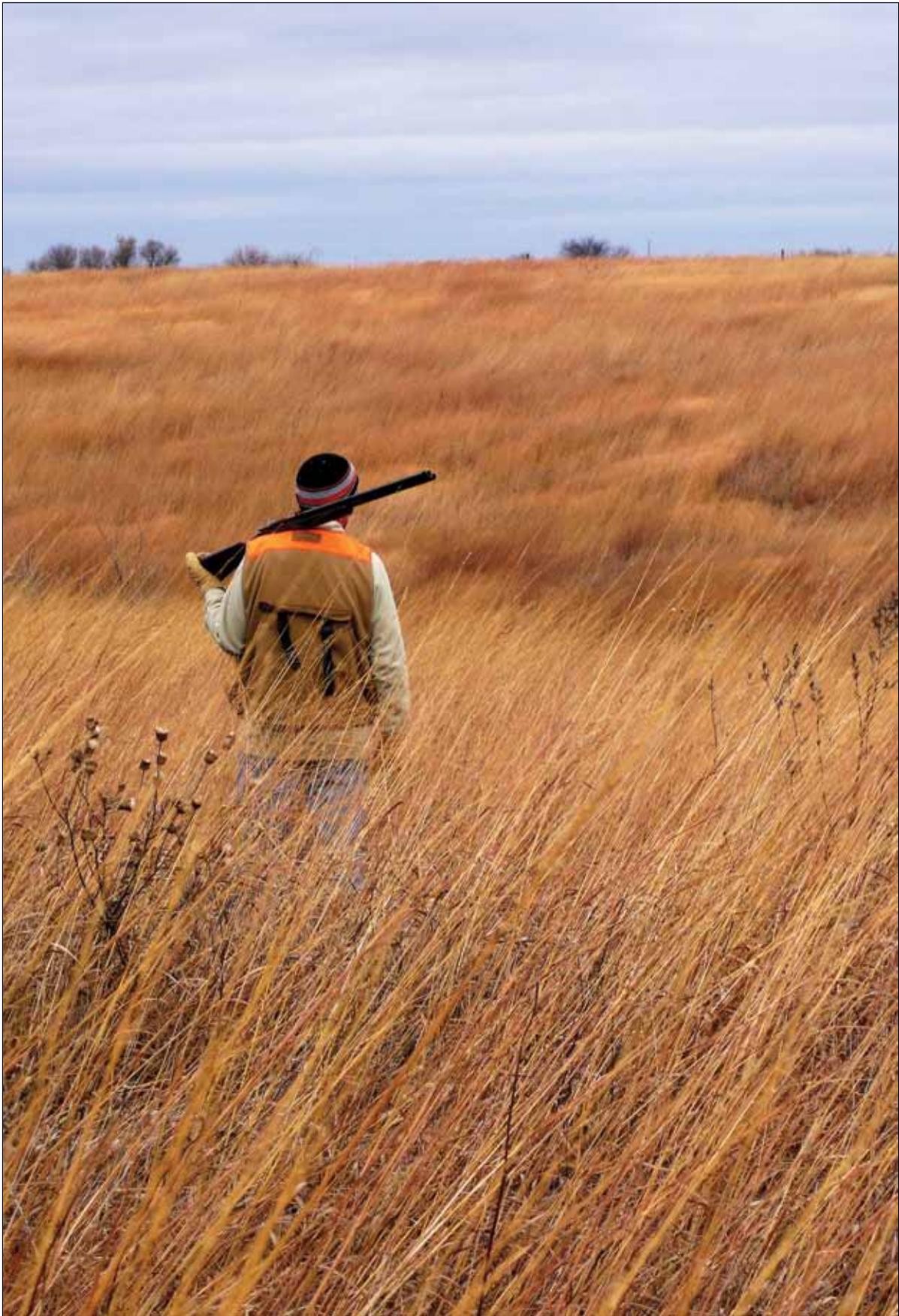
**Recommendation 7.4 Develop and expand new markets, including those for the environmental services provided by working lands, for local agricultural or sustainable forest products, sustainable energy, and others.**

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)

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<sup>32</sup> Land Trust Alliance fact sheet on Renewing the Conservation Tax Incentive.



THE NATURE CONSERVANCY · © HELZER PHOTO / RATZLAFF PRAIRIE, NEBRASKA

**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 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.

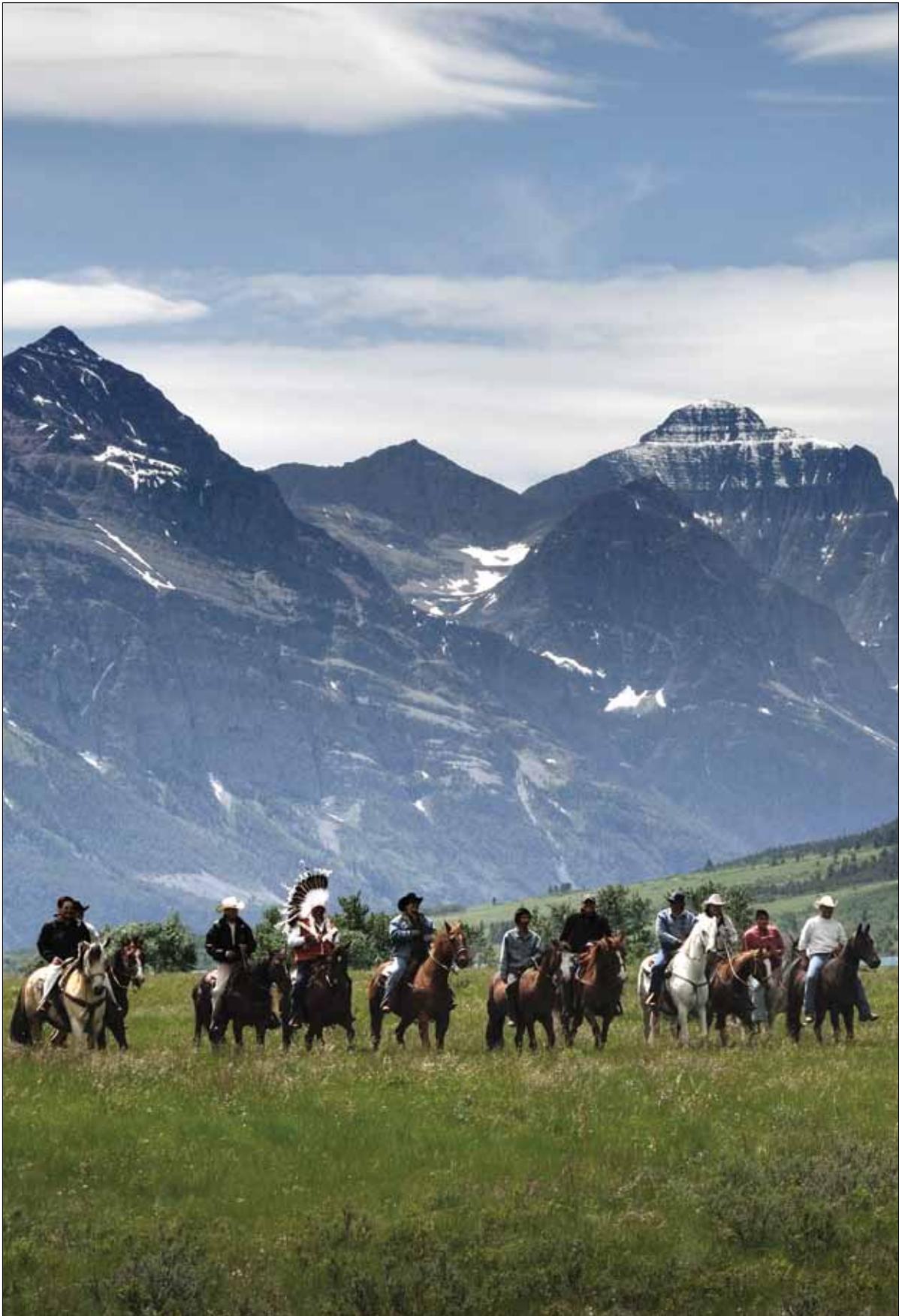
**Action Item 7.5a:** Expand partnerships with private landowners that facilitate access to or across private lands for recreation through programs such as the USDA *Voluntary Public Access Program (Open Fields)*. (USDA and DOI)

**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)



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE - MCMAINS PHOTO / GLACIER NATIONAL PARK, MONTANA

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## 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.<sup>33</sup> 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.

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<sup>33</sup> USDA report on Major Uses of Land in The United States, 2002.

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.<sup>34</sup> 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.<sup>35</sup>

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 \$543 million in employment income.<sup>36</sup> Recreational visits to national forests contribute \$13 billion to gross domestic product.<sup>37</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup>

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.

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<sup>34</sup> USDA National Visitor Use Monitoring Results: 2005 - 2009.

<sup>35</sup> Economic Impact of the Department of the Interior's Programs and Activities; Department of the Interior and USDA Forest Service analysis.

<sup>36</sup> Council of Economic Advisors. 2010. Strengthening the Rural Economy.

<sup>37</sup> USDA National Visitor Use Monitoring Results: 2005 - 2009.

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

*“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 [these corridors] 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)

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 tallotree 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 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 100<sup>th</sup> 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 100<sup>th</sup> 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.

**GOALA** **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

*“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)

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)



U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE - HILLEBRAND PHOTO / SANTA ANA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, TEXAS

*“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)

- 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-USACE, DOI)



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE - AUSTIN/JONES PHOTO / YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK, IDAHO, MONTANA, WYOMING

**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)

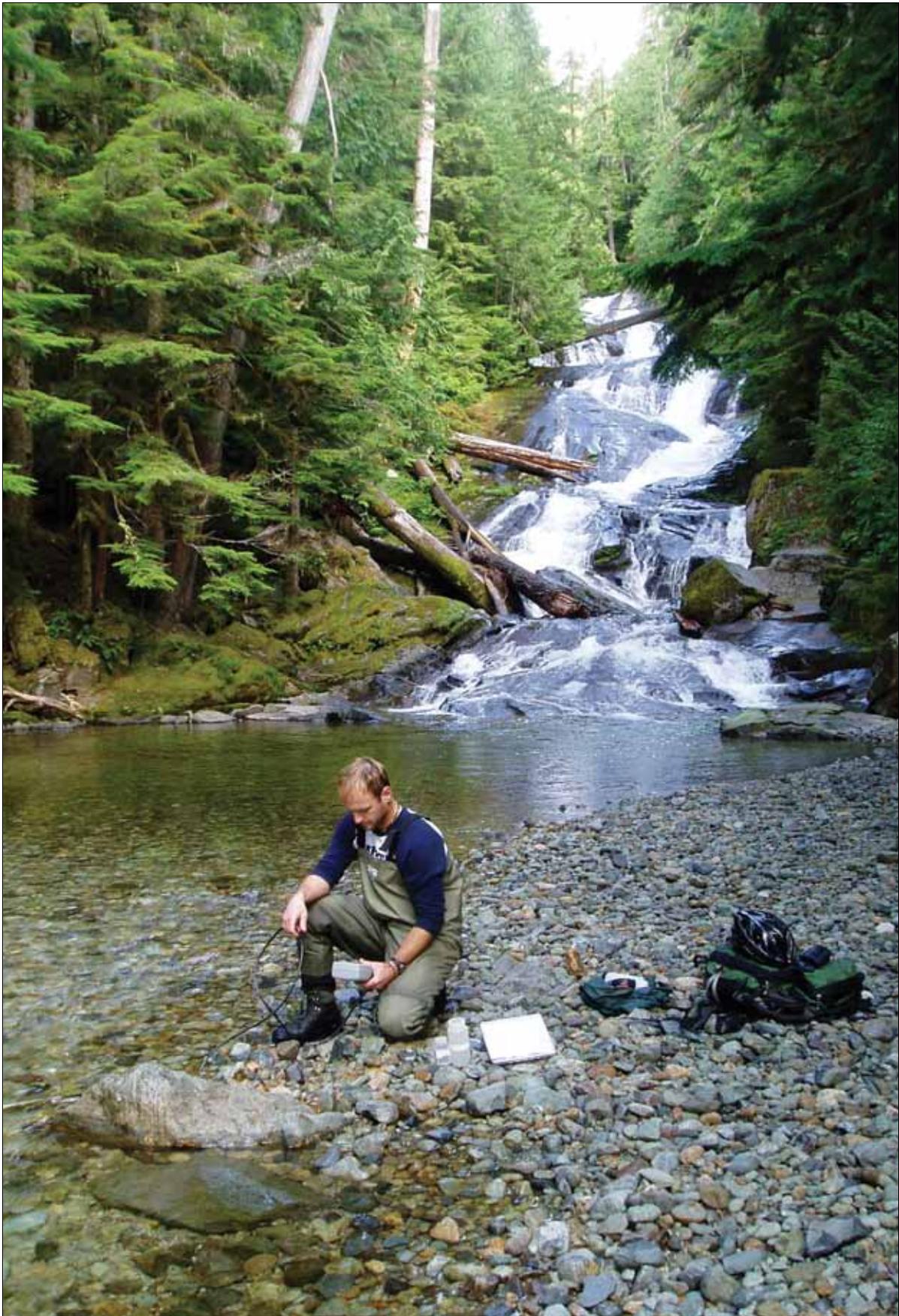
**Action Item 8.6b:** Expand support for state, tribal, and community historic preservation efforts for capital projects, planning, interpretation, community-based surveying, and technical assistance that support partnerships and community-based preservation activities. (DOI)

**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)



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE - LADD PHOTO / MOUNT RAINIER NATIONAL PARK, WASHINGTON

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*“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)

## 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.<sup>39</sup> 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.

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<sup>39</sup> Environmental Protection Agency Report on National Water Quality, 1998.

*“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)

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.

**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.<sup>40</sup> 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.

<sup>40</sup> Congaree National Park fact sheet. [www.nps.gov/cong/naturescience](http://www.nps.gov/cong/naturescience).

**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.

**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

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

the 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)



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