



# National Policy Agenda

**LEGISLATIVE & ADMINISTRATIVE PRIORITIES  
FOR THE 117TH CONGRESS**

**SPRING 2021  
NWF.ORG**



# National Policy Agenda

As America's largest and most trusted conservation organization, the National Wildlife Federation and our 53 state and territorial affiliates work every day to unite all Americans to ensure wildlife thrive in a rapidly changing world. For more than eight decades, the National Wildlife Federation has endeavored to find bipartisan, collaborative, and science-based solutions to conserve our wildlife and cherished lands, waters, and forests for future generations.

From this mission, the National Wildlife Federation created a Strategic Plan with these commitments:

- Protect, Restore, and Connect Wildlife Habitat
- Transform Wildlife Conservation
- Connect Americans with Wildlife

Using these guiding principles, the National Wildlife Federation developed the following 2021-2022 National Policy Agenda to lay out opportunities for the 117th Congress and the Administration to unite the nation around measures that put Americans back to work building a stronger, more resilient, and more equitable future for wildlife and people.

This work is more important than ever, as America confronts multiple ongoing and intersecting challenges—from the climate and biodiversity crises to the economic and public health issues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. We don't have a moment to waste.

Cover photo: Sean Crane

---

*“Restoring nature to its natural state is a cause beyond party and beyond factions. It has become a common cause of all the people of this country. It is a cause of particular concern to young Americans, because they more than we will reap the grim consequences of our failure to act on programs which are needed now if we are to prevent disaster later. Clean air, clean water, open spaces—these should once again be the birthright of every American. If we act now, they can be.”*—Former President Richard Nixon

---



National Wildlife Federation  
1200 G Street NW, Suite 900  
Washington, D.C. 20005  
[www.nwf.org](http://www.nwf.org)

# Rebuilding America's Infrastructure

Investment in our nation's infrastructure is long overdue, and we must ensure that investment benefits both people and wildlife. Aging roads, bridges, and railways pose safety risks. Inefficient buildings and industrial processes waste energy, while many rural areas still lack effective internet access, and the U.S. electric grid is largely ill-equipped to handle modern energy needs. These challenges require concerted policy attention.

## Support Climate-Smart Infrastructure

The transportation sector currently makes up roughly one-third of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, consuming 14 million barrels of oil per day, according to the Energy Information Administration. Supporting smart, forward-looking planning that promotes increased use of mass transit and electrification of cars, buses, and other transport will not only cut emissions and oil dependency, but will allow for more efficient movement of people and commerce. This requires investment in battery charging infrastructure, electric vehicle purchasing, and greater support for states and localities wishing to get people out of cars and into shared transportation. These priorities provide an opportunity for the United States to lead in clean energy technology and job creation.

In crafting surface transportation legislation, Congress should prioritize measures that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and other air pollution from ground transportation. These could include state incentives to reduce emissions, alternative and electric vehicle fueling infrastructure, mitigation at ports and in cities, new priorities for freight planning, and incentives and other support for carbon capture, use, and storage. Lawmakers should prioritize climate and other pollution reduction while fostering alternative modes of transportation and community-based solutions.

Congress should also account for climate risk in future transportation planning and funding decisions. Future transportation investments should be informed by the latest projections for future climate risk, and be designed to minimize vulnerability to those risks. This is especially critical as degraded natural resources such



*The transportation sector currently makes up roughly one-third of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, consuming 14 million barrels of oil per day.*



*Congress must continue to guard against any misguided and misdirected attempts to weaken environmental reviews or silence the public's voice.*



MARK MEYER/U.S. FOREST SERVICE

as protective wetlands, forests, and coastal dunes are leaving communities and local economies more vulnerable to the costs and damages caused by extreme weather and the effects of climate change.

## Invest in Natural Infrastructure

Now is the time for Congress and the Administration to invest in upgrades to our nation's energy, transportation, and natural infrastructure systems in order to increase community safety and resilience, protect and recover wildlife, boost local economies and family-sustaining jobs, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

By investing in natural infrastructure—such as forests, wetlands, rivers, floodplains, working lands, and other open spaces—Congress can protect and restore communities and increase nature's capacity to store carbon. Healthy and resilient natural systems help deliver cleaner water, jobs, increased outdoor recreation, and enhanced fish and wildlife habitat. Investing in a combination of natural infrastructure and built infrastructure will maximize job creation across the nation, bolstering local economies, and improving community resilience.

Natural infrastructure measures are cost-effective, and can make a valuable difference in minimizing or avoiding the risk of catastrophic storm and flooding damages in at-risk areas. During Hurricane Sandy, for example, natural infrastructure prevented \$625 million in flood damages in 12 coastal states and reduced damages by 20 to 30% in the four states with the greatest wetland coverage. Similarly, natural infrastructure reduced Hurricane Katrina's storm surge in some areas near New Orleans, and levees protected by wetland buffers had a much greater chance of surviving than levees without natural safeguards. Our natural systems are one of our most effective—and underutilized—tools as we confront and adapt to a changing climate.

As Congress negotiates an infrastructure package, natural infrastructure should be appropriately centered as a common-sense, cost-effective solution that protects federal roadways and built investments while providing myriad conservation benefits. Specifically, the National Wildlife Federation encourages Congress to incorporate a competitive resilience grant program that provides resources for states and communities to improve transportation resilience planning and to complete projects that reduce the vulnerability of critical transportation assets in the face of natural hazards. Any such program should explicitly recognize and encourage the use of natural infrastructure approaches to improve resilience, such as wetland restoration and greenways to absorb floodwaters and buffer impacts of erosion and weather.



Finally, building on the good work of Senate and House transportation committees to address the significant problem of wildlife-vehicle collisions, Congress should commit \$500 million to wildlife and fish overpasses, underpasses, culverts, and other tools that reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions and maintain wildlife movement. Congress should also carry forward other excellent provisions from last session, including eligibility for wildlife crossings in broader transportation programs, workforce training, and research.

## Safeguard Bedrock Environmental and Community Protections

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), a statute guided by the simple notion that we must look before we leap, is a fundamental environmental statute that requires the review of major federal activities' impacts on public health, public safety, wildlife, and the environment. NEPA also gives the public the critical opportunity to provide input—and is often the only forum for members of the public, outside experts, states, Tribes, and public interest organizations to have a voice—in federal decision-making that can profoundly impact their lives and livelihoods. Under the last Administration, the Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ) rewrote the implementing regulations for NEPA, drastically undermining scientific integrity, public input, and critical protections for people and wildlife. As CEQ works to review that rulemaking and restore the foundational requirements of this critical environmental statute, Congress must also continue to guard against any misguided and misdirected attempts to weaken environmental reviews or silence the public's voice. Instead, Congress should focus on supporting better implementation and enforcement of NEPA by increasing funding, training, and other resources for federal agencies' permitting offices, as well as supporting improved coordination among all federal agencies involved with NEPA processes.



BRUCE HALLMAN/USFWS



KURT TRISCORI/BLM



BOB WICK/BLM





AARON MAIZLISH

# Wildlife

## Ensure Wildlife Thrive in a Changing World

**A**merica has a long and deep history of wildlife conservation, but we can and must do more to ensure wildlife and their environments survive for future generations. This session of Congress comes at a pivotal time of systemic declines in wildlife populations due to evolving threats such as habitat loss, disease, and invasive species—all amplified by climate change. Despite many successful efforts to restore populations of American wildlife such as elk, gray wolves, striped bass, and eagles, as many as one-third of America's species remain vulnerable to extinction, with one in five at high risk of becoming endangered.

Congress should build off of recent conservation victories such as the **Great American Outdoors Act** and the **America's Conservation Enhancement Act** and work to pass strong, effective wildlife policies capable of responding to the magnitude of today's threats.

Funding for wildlife conservation should be one of Congress's top conservation priorities. Passing the **Recovering America's Wildlife Act** is essential to stemming the biodiversity crisis by ensuring state, territorial, and Tribal wildlife programs have the resources they need to conserve species of greatest conservation need and to prevent them from becoming endangered. These efforts will also help accelerate the recovery of species already listed as endangered or threatened.

In the same vein, Congress should significantly increase funding for federal wildlife programs, particularly endangered species recovery plans. Federal programs for endangered species recovery, wildlife management on public lands, and wildlife research are essential but woefully underfunded.

## Connect Wildlife Habitats

Wildlife travel both daily and seasonally to survive, and the habitats wildlife rely on continue to be fragmented by housing, roads, fences, energy facilities, and other human-made barriers. As a result, animals are often cut off from food, water, shelter, and breeding sites, making dangerous and costly wildlife collisions on America's roads far too common.

*Passing the Recovering America's Wildlife Act is essential to stemming the biodiversity crisis by ensuring state, territorial, and tribal wildlife programs have the resources they need to conserve species of greatest conservation need and to prevent them from becoming endangered.*



Maintaining wildlife corridors and habitat connections are among our most important wildlife conservation strategies. Expanding human development is cutting wildlife off from habitats they need to survive and reproduce. Climate change is exacerbating this by shifting species' ranges and degrading existing habitat.

Congress should pass the **Wildlife Corridors Conservation Act** and the **Tribal Wildlife Corridors Act** to create nationwide programs that will help identify and maintain wildlife and fish movements across federal, state, Tribal and private lands. These programs will be supported through increased coordination amongst agency and non-federal partners and through a wildlife movements grant program for on-the-ground projects.

**The Migratory Bird Treaty Act** protects over a thousand bird species from unnecessary harm. The Department of Interior and Congress should reinstate critical protections for migratory birds that were rolled back by the last administration to ensure migratory birds are protected against unintentional but significant harms. A permitting system to manage unavoidable harms to migratory birds should also be established, through administrative action or passage of the **Migratory Bird Protection Act**.

Congress should address systemic threats to wildlife such as wildlife diseases and invasive species. COVID-19, which likely transferred from wildlife to humans, highlights the need to strengthen our domestic wildlife disease response capacity and relevant international programs. The threat from wildlife diseases is greater than ever in an increasingly globalized world. Congress should increase the capacity of existing federal programs to respond to wildlife disease, by funding Fish and Wildlife Service disease response programs, the U.S. Geological Survey's National Wildlife Health Center, and USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's National Wildlife Disease Program. Additionally, Congress should pass the **Wildlife Disease Emergency Act** to help the federal, state, and Tribal agencies prepare for, identify, and respond to wildlife disease emergencies.

**Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)** presents an existential threat to deer, elk, and moose, and all of the communities, hunters, and conservation funding which depend on them. Congress took an important step last session by establishing a federal CWD task force. However, States and tribes are the front line against the spread of this disease, and Congress needs to pass the **Chronic Wasting Disease Management Act** to provide resources to help them combat it. Furthermore,



USFWS



DANIELLE BRIGIDA



*Maintaining wildlife corridors and habitat connections are among our most important wildlife conservation strategies.*

Congress should pass the **Invasive Fish and Wildlife Prevention Act** to provide the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service with authority and funding to once again regulate interstate transport of listed injurious species under the **Lacey Act**.

**Wild Salmon and Steelhead**—from the Pacific Coast to central Idaho—are integral to the Northwest’s Tribal Nations, fisherman, main street businesses, identity, and way of life. These fish, however, are running out of time, and barreling towards extinction. Since the completion of the lower Snake River dams in 1975, the populations of Snake River salmon and steelhead have declined by at least 90%. Species, including southern residents killer whales, that rely on abundant salmon also face unprecedented challenges, and their absence could upset the regional ecosystem. The decline of salmon has also left the federal government in violation of its treaty and trust obligations to Northwest Tribes. Over the past several decades local, state, and regional leaders have tried to solve this problem to no avail, and these failures have left the region in an endless loop of litigation, division, and failed half-measures. The time has come for Congress and the Biden Administration to put forward a comprehensive solution that invests in local communities and unites the region. With their leadership, we can achieve the largest river restoration in history, while securing a prosperous future for the Northwest by investing in reliable, affordable clean energy, local communities, and Native American Tribes.

**National Wildlife Refuges** are the nation’s only federal public lands devoted to the needs of wildlife, but unfortunately, they are severely underfunded and severely understaffed. Congress should increase funding for Refuge System Operations and Maintenance, starting by providing \$600 million in fiscal year 2022. Congress should also pass the

**Refuge Resource Protection Act**

authorizing the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to collect damages from parties that injure or destroy public resources on Service properties, and the **Protect Our Refuges Act** prohibiting the use of neonicotinoids, a type of agricultural insecticide, on National Wildlife Refuges.



TOM KOERNER/USFWS



BLM



BLM





# Climate

**C**limate change is an existential threat to communities, the U.S. economy, and the long-term survival of America's wildlife. It impacts countless aspects of our lives, from the foods we eat and where we live, to our health, our livelihoods, and the cherished conservation traditions Americans hold dear. The National Wildlife Federation has long called for bold efforts to combat climate change, and to help communities and ecosystems adapt to worsening impacts from climate-fueled megafires and hurricanes, algal outbreaks and extreme heat, habitat loss, the spread of diseases and invasive species.

The 116th Congress made some important climate progress, such as passing bipartisan clean energy innovation and tax credit legislation, and a phase-out of the super polluting hydrofluorocarbons.

But there is a great need, and a great opportunity, for more robust and ambitious climate action, to both tackle the climate crisis and create economic opportunity. We commit to working with policymakers to re-assert the government's leadership in combating the climate crisis while ensuring that no community is left behind in the transition to a zero-carbon economy.

## Build a Clean and Resilient Grid

Shifting the electric grid to clean generation, and using that to power everything from cars and buses to blast furnaces and chemical plants, will require a massive buildout of new generation sources, battery storage, transmission, greater energy efficiency upgrades, and a modern, resilient grid. The next 10 years could make or break the effort to reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by mid-century: a necessary step if we want to avoid the most catastrophic climate impacts on water security, food supply, human health, wildlife, and more. The United States cannot meet our net-zero goal without this energy transformation.

Congress should focus on long-term tax incentives for clean energy deployment to create good-paying jobs that can support families, and prioritize the most carbon-intensive regions. Congress should also consider a clean electricity standard to ensure we meet aggressive goals; vehicle electrification infrastructure and tax credits for zero-emission vehicles; and additional research, development, and deployment funding for carbon capture, use, and storage and direct air capture to remove carbon emissions and create new markets for captured carbon.

*The next 10 years could make or break the effort to reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by mid-century: a necessary step if we want to avoid the most catastrophic climate impacts on water security, food supply, human health, wildlife, and more.*



SARAH SWENTY/USFWS





BOB WICK/BLM

## Set Economy-Wide Climate Goals

Congress can meet climate goals by focusing on zero-carbon advances throughout the economy. The National Wildlife Federation continues to support an economy-wide carbon price, which – if implemented effectively and equitably – could reduce pollution in every neighborhood while generating revenue to fund clean technology deployment, worker training, economic diversification, and more. Complementary, industry- or sector-specific policies are also needed, and Congress should focus on research and incentives for clean manufacturing and industrial decarbonization, with prioritization of deindustrialized and fossil fuel-producing communities as well as a low-carbon fuel standard to speed transportation electrification and development of low- or zero-carbon liquid fuels for marine and air travel. Congress should also finance efficiency upgrades and retrofits for homes, businesses, schools, hospitals, and government buildings while fostering inclusion of natural infrastructure and carbon-sequestering green spaces in infrastructure projects.

## Leave No Community Behind

Many communities have endured decades of pollution and underinvestment, and others are highly dependent on the polluting industries that endanger their well-being. Climate change compounds the burdens that historically disenfranchised, rural, and fossil fuel-producing communities already face.

Congress must ensure that ambitious, equitable climate policy targets investment and incentives to blunt the impacts of economic transition, support workers, build climate resilience, and revive depressed local economies while including local voices in determining investments, planning, and outcomes, to ensure that pollution reductions occur most rapidly in overburdened communities. Congress also needs to better equip state and local policymakers in identifying and driving investment to pollution- and climate-affected areas through improved use of mapping tools like Environmental Protection Agency's EJScreen.



LIEUT. COMMANDER MARK MORAN, NOAA CORPS, NMA/AOC



## Harness Nature's Power

Natural ecosystems absorb and store carbon, and protecting and restoring forests, wetlands and other natural systems is one of the best ways to remove carbon from the atmosphere. Congress should pursue an aggressive agenda of direct investment, tax incentives, research, and other measures centered around natural resource restoration and resilience to sequester carbon naturally while generating additional benefits for local economies, recreation, clean air and water, and wildlife. Protecting existing carbon sinks in forests, grasslands, and coastal ecosystems is critical to prevent massive carbon emissions. Scaling up the use of climate-smart approaches to management and restoration of landscapes and habitat will play a vital role in locking in carbon above and below ground while boosting resilience in a changing climate.

To ensure that renewable energy sources contribute to climate change mitigation goals instead of inadvertently undermining them, Congress should reject the anti-science appropriations rider that erroneously forces federal agencies to consider all biogenic emissions from forest-derived bioenergy to be “carbon neutral.” The rider ignores the science that shows that different types of forest biomass and efficiencies of use result in different emissions profiles and time lags between emissions and re-absorption of carbon during forest regrowth. Congress should defer to the best available science and deliberation by independent experts to understand net emissions from bioenergy. Overall, Congress should seek to promote emissions reductions in the near term, when addressing the climate crisis is the most critical.

***Congress must ensure that ambitious, equitable climate policy targets investment and incentives to blunt the impacts of economic transition, support workers, build climate resilience, and revive depressed local economies.***



SCOTT FLAHERTY/USEWS



TIMOTHY POHLHAUS





# Environmental Justice

**L**ower wealth frontline communities have borne the brunt of pollution in this nation. Without proper attention and resources, we expect climate change will continue to decimate these already overburdened communities.

Congress should strengthen landmark legislation and increase investments into frontline communities that have experienced systemic socio-economic disparities, environmental racism, and other forms of injustice. Congress and the Administration have the opportunity to address historically racialized and discriminatory practices and policies that have produced the environmental injustices frontline communities face today to ensure shared and sustainable wins for people and wildlife.

Congress should pass the **Environmental Justice for All Act**, which includes a series of policies that have been co-developed through frontline community engagement. These policies include provisions to strengthen legislation including the **National Environmental Policy Act** to ensure meaningful community involvement and civic participation in federal permitting and **Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964** to permit private citizens, residents, and organizations to seek legal remedy when faced with discrimination. The bill also requires consideration of cumulative impacts, the accumulation of pollution from many different sources over time, a prominent issue that has resulted in continued air and water pollution among frontline communities in permitting decisions under the **Clean Water Act** and **Clean Air Act**. The bill also authorizes \$75 million annually for grants to support research, education, outreach, development, and implementation of projects to address environmental and public health issues in frontline communities.

To provide resources that will strengthen the ability for frontline communities to move from surviving to thriving, Congress should pass the **Environmental Justice Legacy Pollution Cleanup Act** to allow for necessary investments in providing supplemental appropriations for the cleanup of legacy pollution to states and Indigenous Tribes, including National Priority List sites in the Superfund program, abandoned coal mining sites, and formerly used defense sites. These investments would support a number of needed upgrades, including the replacement of lead drinking water service lines through forgivable loans to ensure water affordability, increased funding for the Diesel

*Congress and the Administration must address climate justice and ensure affected communities have a seat at the policymaking table.*



Emissions Reduction Assistance Program to reduce air pollution in transportation corridors, brownfield remediation, and several other existing programs that address pollution and affordability.

## Amplify Climate Justice

In addition to strengthening protections, addressing legacy pollution, and guiding impactful investments, Congress and the Administration must address climate justice. Similar to environmental justice, climate justice recognizes the adverse and inequitable impacts of a warming climate among people.

The National Wildlife Federation believes environmental and climate justice-related legislation is essential and urges Congress to pass the **Climate Equity Act**. As we tackle the climate crisis through policies and legislation, Congress must ensure affected communities have a seat at the policymaking table. This bill provides several provisions to hold Congress and the executive branch accountable to the adverse impacts of environmental and climate-related legislation on frontline communities through the use of equity scores and additional review processes to inform regulations and guide federal grant-making and investment programs. The bill would establish an independent Office of Climate and Environmental Justice Accountability to work with frontline communities on rulemaking and to monitor government compliance through cross-agency collaboration.

## Foster Accountability

To aid accountability, the National Wildlife Federation is working with several frontline leaders to create and implement Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping tools, which combine data and mapping to allow users to visualize patterns of environmental and climate hazards in order to inform policies and decision-making. Combined with ground-breaking legislation, such as the **Environmental Justice Mapping and Data Collection Act of 2021**, Congress can ensure that existing policies and targeted investments address frontline community needs.



CURRAN KELLEHER

BLM

JAY PEEPLES



# Water & Coasts

## Safeguard Clean Water

**T**he **Clean Water Act** is the most important federal law protecting water quality and reducing pollution, ensuring clean water for wildlife and communities alike. The previous Administration attempted the most severe weakening of clean water protections in history by removing Clean Water Act protections for at least half of America's wetlands and streams and undermining the careful balancing of state and federal responsibilities in administering the law. The EPA should immediately act to repeal these rollbacks, replacing them with rules that are more protective of wetlands and streams, provide clarity for all stakeholders, and are informed by the best available science and broad stakeholder input. At the same time, Congress should conduct strong oversight as federal agencies work to review regulations and restore longstanding safeguards. Additionally, Congress should reject any legislative efforts to weaken the **Clean Water Act** and instead support legislation that clarifies the EPA's longstanding obligation to protect our nation's waters, from the smallest headwaters and wetlands to the largest rivers and lakes.

## Ensure Clean Water for All

Every person in America should have access to clean drinking water. Congress should also reauthorize and increase funding levels for the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds (SRFs) and codify a 20% set aside for green infrastructure approaches. States use the SRFs to provide low-interest loans and grants to communities to finance projects that improve drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure. Increased funding—including additional assistance in the form of grants instead of loans—should prioritize resources for communities that need it most to ensure safe, reliable, affordable drinking water and resilient protections from flooding.

Congress must also invest in critical federal programs that equip communities with resources to address increasing water quality challenges on a local and watershed-wide scale. Congress should provide robust appropriations for programs that repair and upgrade water infrastructure, strengthen the resiliency of water systems, support enforcement and permitting requirements, and strengthen nutrient pollution and PFAS reduction efforts. This federal funding must be directed to frontline communities that need it most.



NOAA NMFS



## Fostering Resilient Waters, Coasts, and Communities

From the Great Lakes to the Everglades, **America's great watersheds help define us as a nation**, providing fishing and boating opportunities, drinking water, and incredible wildlife habitat—and they need more attention than ever in the face of a changing climate. Congress should provide robust federal funding—both through regular appropriations and any economic stimulus legislation—for critical EPA, Army Corps, and Department of the Interior ecosystem restoration and pollution reduction programs that support large-scale restoration efforts across the country, including in the Great Lakes, Mississippi River Delta, Chesapeake Bay, and Delaware River Basin. Additionally, the federal government should fund Everglades restoration efforts at \$725 million annually to accelerate the ecosystem benefits of restoration, taking advantage of state matching funds to get this project across the finish line.

New regional restoration efforts should be established and resourced in the 15-state Ohio River Basin, and along the mainstem of the Mississippi River through authorization of a **Mississippi River Restoration and Resilience Initiative**.

Along the Gulf coast, an unprecedented restoration effort continues to unfold with the funds from the BP oil spill settlement. These investments must be coordinated and leveraged with other federal spending, including on infrastructure or economic recovery, to create jobs and drive large-scale restoration and climate resilience. In the Mississippi River Delta, federal and state agencies must collaborate to ensure swift implementation of freshwater and sediment diversion projects—an indispensable tool for restoring Louisiana's nationally-significant wetlands.

Flooding is the most expensive type of natural disaster in the United States. After repeated short-term extensions of the program, Congress must act to fully reauthorize and reform the **National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP)**. Any reauthorization should require the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to increase the accuracy of flood maps using the most modern science and technology, thoroughly integrate future risks due to climate change, encourage pre-disaster mitigation prioritizing natural infrastructure to reduce risk, and support a continued glidepath toward premiums which reflect accurate levels of risk, with means-tested assistance for those who cannot afford actuarial rates. FEMA must reduce current barriers to funding natural infrastructure projects for hazard mitigation, such as the incomplete benefit valuation of ecosystem-services in FEMA's Benefit-Cost Analysis Toolkit. The agency should also



DAVE MENKE/USFWS

*From the Great Lakes to the Everglades, America's great watersheds help define us as a nation and must be restored and protected.*



SAM FARKAS, NOAA OAR PHOTO CONTEST 2014





ROBERT SCHWEMMER, CINMS, NOAA

work to provide increased capacity-building and technical assistance funding, and simplify the grant application process to provide equitable access to mitigation funding across all communities. Congress should continue to reduce incentives for risky development in floodplains and along our coastlines, including through improvements to the **Coastal Barrier Resources Act**.

To help wildlife and communities thrive in the face of more intense and frequent storms and droughts, Congress should also provide strong oversight of the Army Corps of Engineers' implementation of the **Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2020** provisions that advance the use of natural infrastructure for flood protection and improve Corps engagement with economically disadvantaged and Tribal communities. The next WRDA bill should build upon these positive provisions and leverage the protective value of natural infrastructure as we increase ecosystem and community resilience.

## Protect Our Coastal and Ocean Resources



BLM

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) also has a critical role to play in promoting climate resilience along our coastlines and supporting climate science. Robust appropriations for NOAA programs, including those within the National Ocean Service and National Marine Fisheries Service, is critical to protect our coasts and ocean environments. Congress must recognize the ocean as a critical part of the climate solution, and take action to preserve and restore blue carbon ecosystems, increase resources available for coastal community resilience, better protect forage fish—species that constitute the foundation of ocean food chains—through passage of the **Forage Fish Conservation Act**, promote responsible development of offshore wind, and address the plastic pollution crisis.

*Every person in America should have access to clean drinking water...Congress must invest in critical federal programs that equip communities with resources to address increasing water quality challenges.*



TOM KOERNER/USFWS



# Working Lands

## Establish Working Lands as a Solution to Climate Change

**W**ith over half of the land in the United States currently managed as cropland, rangeland, or private forest, working landscapes are critical for wildlife habitat, water quality, and carbon sequestration. Congress must ensure that working lands are a part of the solution to climate change. Farmers, ranchers and forest owners can play a leading role in preparing for and mitigating climate change while supporting wildlife and protecting clean water.

Farm Bill conservation programs are voluntary, incentive-based programs that enable farmers, ranchers, and forest owners to adopt conservation practices on working lands, and Congress should include equitable and comprehensive environmental provisions in the next Farm Bill. Congress and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) must ensure that the **2018 Farm Bill** is implemented in a way that maximizes the benefits to soil, water, and wildlife, including making sure that the Conservation Reserve Program enrollment gets back on track after dropping to a thirty-year low. In the lead up to the **2023 Farm Bill**, the National Wildlife Federation will be looking for Congress to establish ways to significantly increase conservation funding, promote climate-smart agriculture practices, conserve native grasslands and wetlands, and increase opportunities to enhance carbon sequestration on private forestlands.

## Grasslands

Grasslands continue to be one of the most threatened ecosystems in the world; over the last decade alone, millions of acres of grasslands in North America have been converted to cropland, leading to dramatic losses in the abundance and diversity of our grassland wildlife, particularly grassland birds. Conversion also strips the prairie's remarkable ability to store carbon. Congress must act quickly to conserve and restore North America's native grasslands in order to support working grasslands and ranchers, restore degraded grasslands, sequester carbon, and prevent further loss of grassland wildlife and the plant species and communities on which they depend. Congress should pass a new **North American Grasslands Conservation Act**, modeled after the popular and effective **North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA)**, in order to kickstart the protection and restoration of North America's grasslands and the livelihoods and wildlife that depend on them.



*Farmers, ranchers and forest owners can play a leading role in preparing for and mitigating climate change while supporting wildlife and protecting clean water.*



# Public Lands

**T**he American people own more than 640 million acres of land and water that are managed by the federal government to provide clean drinking water, habitat for fish and wildlife, natural resources and recreation opportunities for all. These lands provide solace, family time, and fill freezers for many with wild game. They are open to all, no matter the size of our checkbooks. To fully deliver on the promise for a healthy, sustainable environment for future generations, we should protect our most iconic landscapes by passing collaborative conservation efforts on the ground, such as the **Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act** in Montana and the **CORE Act** in Colorado. And we must invest in the restoration of our shared public lands from forests to grasslands and sagebrush steppe ecosystems. These are the kind of efforts that will help the nation realize the goal of conserving and restoring 30% of our land and water by 2030. As we do this work, we must ensure equitable access to nature and safety for frontline communities and individuals with varying abilities and income levels through targeted programs and policies.

## Clean Up Orphan Wells and Abandoned Mines

Approximately 57,000 documented orphan oil and gas wells sit on federal, state, Tribal and private lands, many of which leak methane into the atmosphere and contaminate groundwater. Congress should prioritize capping these wells and cleaning up drill sites in order to protect air and water, reduce the spread of invasive species, and reconnect wildlife habitat. Likewise, roughly 150,000 abandoned hard-rock mines across the United States plague our federal lands. More than half of these mines could cause human injury or death, or spew pollution that despoils streams and rivers and pose health risks to people and wildlife. Addressing these two critical cleanup needs would put hundreds of thousands of Americans back to work.



BLM



LISA PHILLIPS, BLM





TOM KOERNER/USFWS



BOB WICK/BLM

## Transparency and Good Government Practices on our Public Lands

New leadership at the Department of Interior means that the American people no longer have to fend off threats of oil and gas drilling on every conceivable acre of public land, but the need to reform the oil and gas leasing system remains. Multiple abuses and inefficiencies plague the current purchasing and leasing system on public lands at the expense of hunters, anglers, outdoor users, and taxpayers. Under a law over 100 years old, speculators are allowed to purchase leases over-the-counter after they receive no competitive bids. Noncompetitive leasing robs taxpayers of their fair share; puts vastly more land under lease than would be otherwise; and in effect, locks hunters, anglers, and other outdoor enthusiasts out of millions of acres of public land.

More transparency and public participation in the leasing process is needed as well. Congress should pass legislation to identify companies who nominate lands to drill or bid on leases, require that private property owners and the public are notified of lease sales, and stop the practice of locking up lands for development that have virtually no potential to produce oil or gas.



MATTHEW PAULSON

*To fully deliver on the promise for a healthy, sustainable environment for future generations, we should protect our most iconic landscapes by passing collaborative conservation efforts.*





## Forest Restoration

The U.S. Forest Service estimates 75-82 million acres of our national forests need restoration. A changing climate and decades of overly aggressive fire suppression has increased the size and intensity of wildfire, and experts predict these fire conditions to worsen. Meanwhile, tens of thousands of miles of failing or obsolete roads fragment wildlife habitat, compromise animal security, and choke fish-bearing streams with sediment. Investments to increase the pace and scale of climate-smart forest restoration are key to storing carbon, assuring abundant clean water, and revitalizing rural communities.

*Investments to increase the pace and scale of climate-smart forest restoration are key to storing carbon, assuring abundant clean water, and revitalizing rural communities.*

An additional 1.3 million acres of forest could be re-established by passing the **REPLANT Act**. In some cases, changes in climate have thwarted nature's ability to reseed and grow forests. Mitigating the size, severity, and effects of forest fires and repairing the decaying road system on our national forests are essential to ensure watershed health and function. The United States can and must better manage our forests to defend our communities, and to increase the capacity for our forests to store carbon and produce clean water. Congress can revitalize national forests with at least \$1 billion in new funding for proactive and climate-informed forest management and restoration. **The Outdoor Restoration Partnership Act** would help solve this problem.

## Conserve the Sagebrush Steppe

Congress and the new Administration should also fully implement the 2015 sage-grouse plans—and give them an opportunity to work as we have seen sage-grouse populations continue to decline due to habitat destruction. As outlined by the 2015 plans, the Bureau of Land Management requires increased funding to ensure protections are in place. This funding is necessary to undo years of damage caused by the elimination of these protections and by oil and gas leasing that was allowed in vital sage-grouse habitat. In addition, Congress and the Administration will need to tackle other threats to the sagebrush ecosystem, including fires fueled by invasive grasses. In one recent five-year period, 9 million acres of sage-grouse habitat were destroyed by fires. Programs need to be put in place to restore habitat and prevent fires and encroachment by invasive plants. Over 350 species of wildlife rely on this landscape—the iconic vistas of movies that define the West.



*Congress must invest in the restoration of our shared public lands from forests to grasslands and sagebrush steppe ecosystems.*



# Tribal Partnerships

**T**hrough our Tribal Partnerships Program, the National Wildlife Federation partners with sovereign Tribal nations to solve today's conservation challenges for future generations. We work nationwide with Tribes to protect wildlife, advance land stewardship, safeguard water resources, provide environmental education, and combat climate change.

The Tribal Partnerships Program is guided by the 30-year vision that *"Sovereign Tribal governments have the capacity and influence to achieve their natural resource goals and better address associated socio-economic and environmental justice issues."* Along with our Tribal partners, we work to address historical injustices through the advancement of new policy that leads to increased resources and capacity for Tribes to address wildlife and habitat conservation priorities while sustaining their cultural values.

In addition to the **Recovering America's Wildlife Act** and the Tribal Wildlife Corridors Act mentioned above, legislative priorities for the 117th Congress and the Administration include the **Indian Buffalo Management Act**, the **Save Oak Flat Act**, legislation to **provide universal Tribal access to clean water, inclusion of Tribes in Interior Secretarial Order 3362** (Big Game Habitat and Migration Corridors), and corresponding implementation and **advancement of Tribal priorities in the Department of the Interior's Bison Initiative.**

*Sovereign Tribal governments have the capacity and influence to achieve their natural resource goals and better address associated socio-economic and environmental justice issues.*



CINDY SOUDERS, USFWS



JON MYATT/USFWS



# Education

Congress has a responsibility to children, students, and future workforce participants to provide them opportunities that aid in the development of the knowledge and skills they will need for a more equitable, environmentally-just, and resilient future. The National Wildlife Federation works to ensure all children have access to licensed childcare and opportunities to spend quality time outdoors in a healthy manner and safe environment.

## Support Equitable Environmental Education

For the 117th Congress, legislative priorities should include passage of a new **Climate Change Education Act** that will provide \$200 million for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to make grants to schools, school districts, museums, aquariums and more to support K-12 and higher education climate literacy and skill development. In addition, we encourage passage of school greening and environmental justice legislation, a provision of the **Rebuild America's Schools Act** that will provide \$130 billion in infrastructure investments for the refurbishment of more than 30,000 K-12 schools in low income areas of the United States that have experienced systemic racial, economic, and environmental discrimination.

Congress should fully fund important climate education programs, including the EPA's Environmental Education program, established under the National Environmental Education Act of 1990; the NOAA Environmental Literacy grant program; and Title 4 of the **Every Student Succeeds Act**, which should include an increased focus on climate.

Now more than ever, the United States should increase its domestic and international capacity to ensure equitable, sustainable, and safe outdoor learning environments for children, primarily by building a strong climate education framework into commitments to the Paris Climate Agreement and by adopting the **Action for Climate Engagement Strategy**.

*Now more than ever, the United States should increase its domestic and international capacity to ensure equitable, sustainable, and safe outdoor learning environments for children.*



MARIA ELENA GARCIA/NWF



SARAH WARD/NWF





NOAA/PIFSC/HMSRP

*“Time and again, our leaders have shown that conservation can not only bridge the partisan divide, but also put Americans back to work and safeguard wildlife and our way of life for future generations.”*

- Collin O'Mara, President and CEO of the National Wildlife Federation





National Wildlife Federation  
1200 G Street NW, Suite 900  
Washington, D.C. 20005  
[www.nwf.org](http://www.nwf.org)

---

For more information,  
please contact Abby Tinsley,  
Associate Vice President,  
Policy and Government Affairs  
([TinsleyA@nwf.org](mailto:TinsleyA@nwf.org)) or Grace  
Howe, Legislative Coordinator  
([HoweG@nwf.org](mailto:HoweG@nwf.org))

