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CONGRESS



— NATIONAL  
POLICY AGENDA

## INTRODUCTION

For nearly nine decades, the National Wildlife Federation has been uniting Americans to ensure wildlife thrive. Along with our 52 state and territorial affiliates, we work in the halls of Congress to implement effective and innovative policies and programs that benefit wildlife, people, and our planet.

At this critical time when more than a third of our country's species are at heightened risk of extinction and landscapes and communities are imperiled by drought, floods, wildfires, and extreme weather events, we are determined to promote science-based solutions so that wildlife and people can adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing world.

The 119<sup>th</sup> Congress has the chance to meet these challenges head-on by enacting meaningful legislation to restore wildlife habitat, build climate resilience and reduce emissions, and expand equitable solutions for Tribes and impacted communities. The National Wildlife Federation encourages members to work collaboratively to pass durable, bipartisan solutions like the ***Recovering America's Wildlife Act*** to benefit people and wildlife alike for generations to come.



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## THE RECOVERING AMERICA'S WILDLIFE ACT

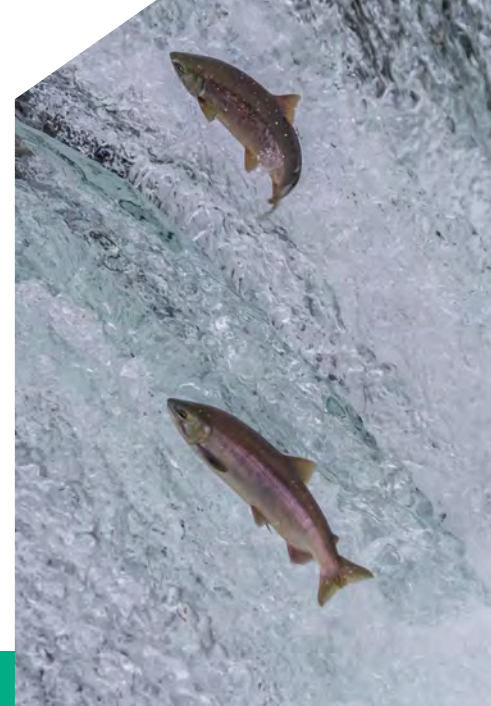
One-third of all U.S. wildlife species currently face an elevated risk of extinction because of threats like habitat loss, climate change, invasive species, and emerging diseases. More than 150 U.S. species have already gone extinct, and nearly 500 additional species have not been seen in decades and may be extinct. Two-thirds of bird species and as many as 40 percent of freshwater fish species are in need of urgent conservation action. Right now, we are in a race against time to avert a looming wildlife extinction crisis. Unless we change course, we risk losing our nation's treasured wildlife—from backyard birds to bighorn sheep. In addition to depriving future generations of the beautiful diversity of wildlife in this country, this loss would harm local and regional economies in innumerable ways.

The bipartisan [Recovering America's Wildlife Act](#) will allow states, territories, and Tribes to invest \$1.4 billion annually in proactive, on the ground, collaborative efforts to help at-risk species by restoring habitat, controlling invasive species, reconnecting migration routes, and addressing emerging diseases. This common-sense legislation will enable state wildlife agencies to implement their unique, congressionally-supported wildlife action plans. These detailed plans incorporate the best-available science and broad public input and have been approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Collectively, these plans identify more than 12,000 species of plants and animals in need of conservation attention. Currently, the federal government provides less than five percent of what would be needed to implement these plans in a meaningful way. The bill will also provide Tribes meaningful, reliable support for their wildlife programs for the first time.

Proactive measures taken earlier in a species' decline are cheaper and more effective than waiting until the species is in need of listing under the Endangered Species Act. We have no time to waste. We know that increasing funding for conservation efforts works. State, Tribal, and federal wildlife agencies have had great success in restoring other species that were once on the brink – like bald eagles, peregrine falcons, elk, striped bass, and more. Thanks to dedicated funding, these fish and wildlife now have healthy and thriving numbers.

When we save wildlife, we save ourselves. Healthy fish and wildlife populations and resilient habitats contribute to clean water and air, flood prevention, pollination, and carbon sequestration, and they represent the heart of our nation's outdoor heritage. The ***Recovering America's Wildlife Act*** will also result in more recreational opportunities for all Americans, which will create jobs as Americans spend \$140 billion every year on wildlife-focused recreation alone.

Getty/Sehob



### State Wildlife Action Plans

State Wildlife Action Plans offer a roadmap for state wildlife agencies to implement coordinated plans to conserve species in their state. These congressionally-supported plans are developed with local, state, federal, Tribal and non-profit stakeholders to establish a snapshot of the status of local wildlife, fish, and invertebrate populations. State Wildlife Action Plans identify Species of Greatest Conservation Need along with their habitats, key indicators of population health, and additional monitoring and research needs. State Wildlife Action Plans provide a guide to direct funding and efforts to conserve and restore important species before they become threatened or endangered. These plans are updated every ten years, with the last round of updates made in 2015 for most states. As state wildlife agencies make updates in 2025, Congress can support implementation of states' plans by passing the ***Recovering America's Wildlife Act*** and enacting innovative tax incentives.



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## NEW TAX CREDITS FOR CONSERVATION AND CLEAN ENERGY

With portions of the 2017 *Tax Cuts and Jobs Act* set to expire, the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress is expected to undertake significant tax reforms. NWF encourages Congress to enact new bipartisan, balanced provisions that reduce emissions and support clean energy technology, carbon management, and conservation action by states, municipalities, businesses, and private landowners. NWF staff members are eager to partner with Congress on proposals including:

## Energy Credits

- **Transmission Investment Tax Credit** – New transmission infrastructure is required to improve availability of clean power. A credit for transmission investments would help spur more projects and provide savings to customers.
- **“Clean, Firm” Bonus Credit** – A bonus credit for deployment of clean energy technology with steady production capacity can even the playing field for emerging technologies like next-generation geothermal to contribute to the U.S. power grid.
- **Clean Fuels Tax Credit** – Congress should extend the 45Z credit to promote sustainable aviation fuel and other clean fuel technologies, but with safeguards in place to protect wildlife habitat and water resources while ensuring effective emissions reduction over a fuels’ lifecycle.



## Carbon Management Credits

- **Carbon Capture Tax Credit** – Additional modifications are needed to optimize the 45Q tax credit’s value and impact, including indexing the credit to inflation and increasing the values for re-use of captured carbon and permanent underground carbon storage.
- **Tech-neutral Carbon Dioxide Removal (CDR) Credit** – While 45Q incentivizes direct air capture—one form of atmospheric carbon removal technology—a broader credit, with appropriate environmental safeguards, would support additional CDR pathways such as biomass carbon removal and storage, enhanced weathering, and more.

## Conservation on Private Land

- **Transferable Credits for Conservation of Declining Habitats** – Creating incentives for private landowners to place their holdings into conservation easements would expand the toolkit available to target conservation efforts specifically on declining habitats, such as North America’s grasslands. Making federal conservation credits transferable would improve their accessibility, increasing utilization by a wider range of landowners.
- **Crediting Administrative Costs** – Expanding easement credits to include administrative and transaction costs would further reduce costs to landowners interested in conservation.

## Credits for State Wildlife Action Plan Implementation

- As state agencies work to update their State Wildlife Action Plans in 2025, Congress could create a state-administered tax benefit allowing state agencies to transfer credits to private landowners in exchange for the implementation of portions of that state’s wildlife action plan, or other proactive conservation efforts. This would improve on a proposal in the *Endangered Species Recovery Act of 2009* by expanding the program’s scope from endangered species to actions that benefit species of greatest conservation need.





## A WILDLIFE-FRIENDLY FARM BILL

America's farms and ranches make up about 40 percent of our nation's land. With the right policies, programs, and incentives, these working lands can deliver our food, fiber, and fuel while supporting vital habitat for wildlife and mitigating impacts on water quality and our climate. The farm bill drives many day-to-day decisions on farms and ranches, but America's producers are currently operating under another one-year extension of the 2018 Farm Bill, without the certainty that a full farm bill would provide. A new farm bill should include important conservation programs that provide incentives for farmers, ranchers, and foresters to restore and protect wetlands and other wildlife habitat; expand voluntary public access for hunters, anglers, and wildlife enthusiasts; improve water quality and quantity; and rebuild healthy soils.

Congress should act quickly to pass a new wildlife-friendly farm bill that will:

- Protect and build on the additional climate-smart conservation dollars provided by Congress in 2022. This funding should be protected from cuts and moved into the conservation title baseline to boost long-term funding for farmers and ranchers to help them adopt practices that benefit soil, water, wildlife and climate.
- Increase the farm bill's focus on supporting wildlife corridors and connectivity through USDA conservation programs and encourage the Administration to expand wildlife corridor pilot programs and double down on secretarial orders that support wildlife corridors and connectivity.
- Stop subsidizing the conversion of native prairie to cropland and save millions of taxpayer dollars through a nationwide Sodsaver provision.
- Protect the Conservation Reserve Program and ensure it will continue to help producers meet soil conservation, water quality, and wildlife goals.
- Enhance USDA data collection, measurement, and analysis systems—including support for robust forest carbon measurement—to improve the outcomes of conservation programs.
- Improve access to technical advice and financial support to socially disadvantaged farmers and create more resilient communities.
- Fund forest stewardship and agroforestry that is ecologically appropriate, does not undermine grassland conservation, and includes a forest stewardship plan where needed.
- Enable USDA to support more diversified agricultural operations by providing new opportunities and breaking down barriers to promote more comprehensive approaches within USDA and between USDA and its partners.
- Protect pesticide registration laws and ensure the process better protects wildlife while meeting obligations under the Endangered Species Act. We will defend state and local authority to enact further conditions on pesticide use to meet local needs and allow for these requirements to be updated when needed.

Getty/Jason Doiy







## SUPPORTING WILDLIFE RECOVERY

Providing resources to recover the growing number of species in need is the greatest opportunity Congress and the Administration have to improve wildlife conservation outcomes across the nation. Beyond the ***Recovering America's Wildlife Act***, Congress also needs to provide the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service with the resources it needs to recover endangered and threatened species so the management of those species can be returned to states and Tribes. There will be important opportunities to advance or even secure the recovery of iconic and culturally-significant keystone species such as monarch butterflies and other pollinators.

## Preventing Conflicts with Wildlife

Wildlife conflict resolution programs help communities, private landowners, and public land ranchers live with and benefit financially from the wildlife on their landscape. They also expand the habitat available for wildlife, benefiting the people that hunt, watch, or appreciate those animals. The National Wildlife Federation urges Congress to provide the funding required to make these popular programs successful.

## Disease and Invasive Species

Wildlife diseases and invasive species pose serious risks to people, wildlife, and our economy. Congress should take additional legislative steps to help states, Tribes, and federal agencies better address these threats through improved coordination, surveillance, and rapid response. Numerous bills introduced in recent sessions would contribute to these improvements, including the ***Wildlife Disease Surveillance for Pandemic Prevention Act*** and the ***Invasive Species Response Act***.



## Indian Buffalo Management Act

Before the systematic destruction of the buffalo in the 1800s, there were over 30 million of these majestic animals roaming freely throughout much of the United States. They provided Tribal communities with everything from clothing to food, shelter, utensils, pouches, headdresses, containers, arrows, and much more. This legislation would create a permanent buffalo program at the Department of the Interior to help promote and develop Tribal capacity to manage buffalo and buffalo habitat on Tribal lands.



# Native seeds and native plants

Native plants form the foundation of the food webs that wildlife depend upon, and addressing the biodiversity crisis will require a sufficient supply of native seeds.

Native seeds are a vital part of returning native vegetation to areas impacted by wildfire, extreme weather, or mining. Native plants can restore ecosystem productivity and enhance resilience ensuring wildlife thrive. The National Wildlife Federation is committed to working in collaboration with the Plant Conservation Alliance, like-minded conservation groups, and seed growers to understand the needs for native plants and seeds in all parts of the U.S.

Getty/Alex Hamer

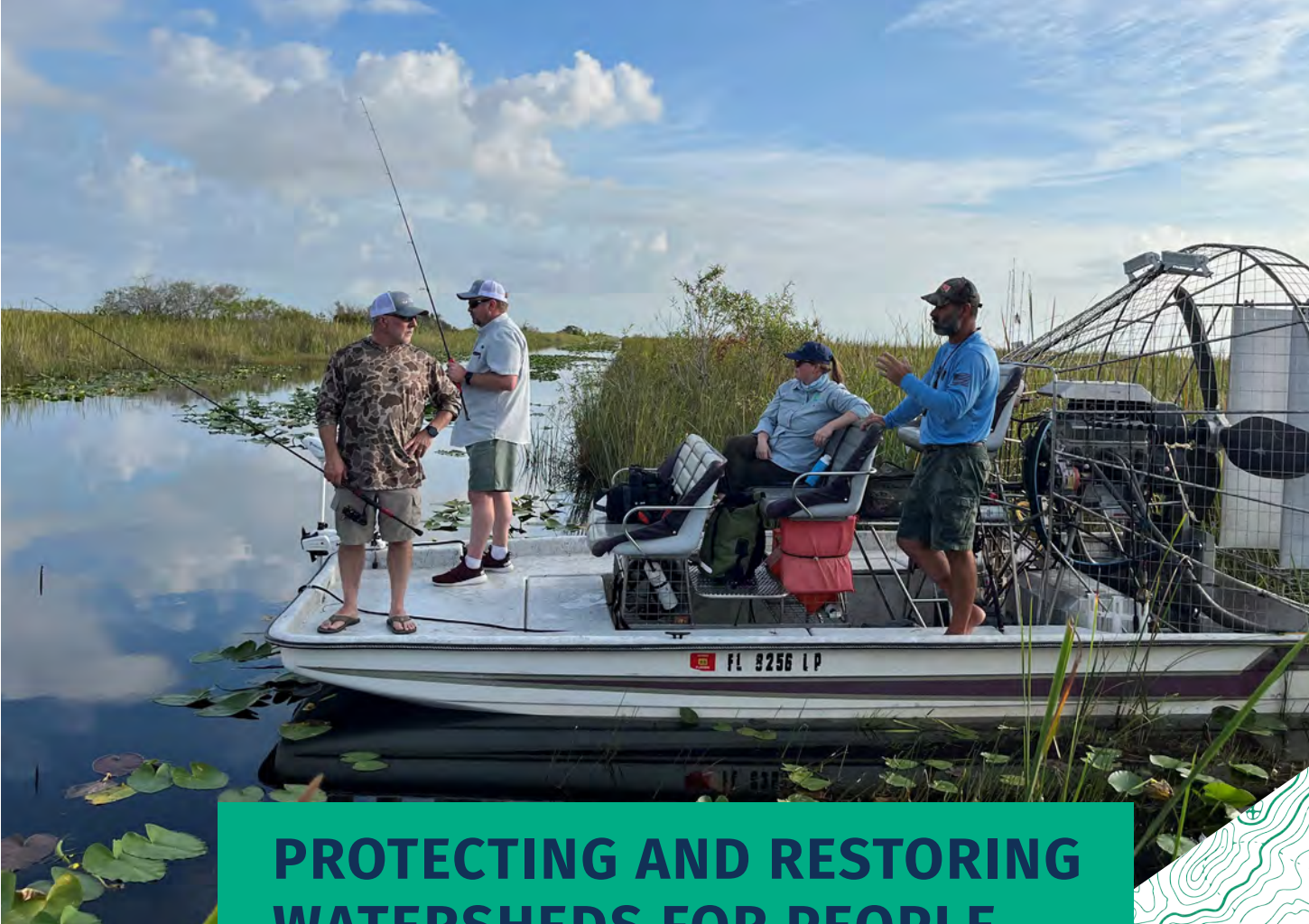


## Native American Seeds Act

Seed preservation is critical for cultural heritage, food security, and biodiversity. Seed traits are vital for the sustained flourishing of plant life for generations to come and for creating a path for future generations to carry on their heritage. The act would allow for the Department of the Interior and Indian Tribes to establish a program to protect traditional Native American seeds. Its goal is to assist Tribal initiatives in preserving traditional seeds and farming methods vital for their physical, cultural, and spiritual well-being.

The Department of the Interior’s National Seed Strategy Keystone Initiative is a crucial step toward addressing the national native seed supply through important coordination among federal agencies and collaboration with ecoregional and Tribal partners. Congress should build on the DOI’s work by promoting policies, resources, and infrastructure that:

- Ensure the long-term success of the Native Seed Strategy and increase awareness of the need for a larger seed supply for federal, state, and municipal agencies and consumers nationwide.
- Include native plants in the relevant legislation such as the Farm Bill, **Recovering America’s Wildlife Act**, the **North American Grasslands Conservation Act**, and support other standalone native plant legislation to minimize invasives and increase appropriate native plants in public and private land restoration, with a priority on federal, state and municipal properties.
- Implement best management practices for reduced pesticide use, increased seed collection, more nursery capacity, diversified seedling production, climate-resilient forest restoration, and urban forest management.
- Prevent and mitigate impacts from invasive pests, plants, and pathogens on native plant species and forests.



## PROTECTING AND RESTORING WATERSHEDS FOR PEOPLE AND WILDLIFE

Rivers, streams, and wetlands provide essential habitat for fish and wildlife and vital protections and benefits for communities. Multiple federal programs and laws—including the *Clean Water Act* and *National Environmental Policy Act*—have been established to protect and restore these valuable resources for people and wildlife alike. Congress must protect the integrity of these laws and continue providing federal agencies with the resources required to do the jobs they were established to do.





## Defend and Restore Clean Water Safeguards

Access to clean, safe water for drinking, fishing, and swimming is a fundamental human right. The *Clean Water Act* is the most important federal law protecting water quality, reducing pollution, and ensuring clean water for wildlife and communities alike. It also provides baseline federal protections for the wetlands across our nation that function as natural filters, buffer communities from floods and drought impacts, provide important habitat for fish and wildlife, and create new opportunities to hunt and fish. The Act is responsible for the fact that our waters are no longer catching fire or used as open sewers—conditions that led to the Act’s sweeping, bipartisan passage over fifty years ago. Despite the progress made, there remains a long way to go to achieve clean water for all. Between 2009 and 2019, the rate of wetland loss increased by more than 50 percent, following the loss of over half of U.S. wetlands over the preceding centuries. During the last decade alone, an area of vegetated wetlands greater than the size of Rhode Island disappeared from the landscape.

The latest [Wetlands Status and Trends report](#) makes clear that we need to improve our approach to wetlands conservation in the United States. However, the Supreme Court’s decision in [Sackett v. EPA](#) threatens the progress made to clean up our

ivers and restore our wetlands. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the **Sackett** decision has removed federal *Clean Water Act* protections from up to 63 percent of wetlands and up to 4.9 million of miles of streams.

Without a strong federal baseline that adequately protects these waters nationwide, the burden falls to states and localities to protect wetlands and streams. States and Tribes will need to fill the gaps created by **Sackett** and enact strong state and Tribal-level protections for vulnerable waters. However, history has proven that this state-by-state approach is not enough to ensure the protection of our waters for future generations. Recent polling shows strong, bipartisan support for clean water initiatives and it is critical that Congress addresses the harm done by the **Sackett** decision to ensure federal safeguards for all important waters.

For now, Congress should defend against additional rollbacks to clean water laws and ensure robust funding for the EPA water quality and enforcement programs. Congress should also support state and Tribal efforts to enact or strengthen protections for the waters we all rely on, including through securing strong funding for key federal wetland conservation programs, like the **North American Wetlands Conservation Act** and EPA’s Wetland Program Development Grants. Additionally, it is important that Congress and the Administration support key action on “forever chemicals” known as PFAS, water infrastructure investment, and the **Tribal Access to Clean Water Act**.



## Healthy and Resilient Coasts, Rivers, Wetlands, and Floodplains

Healthy rivers, coasts, wetlands, and floodplains—our nation’s natural infrastructure—provide important fish and wildlife habitat, flood protection, clean water, and extensive economic opportunities. The protection and restoration of natural infrastructure is a cost-effective way to help communities reduce the impacts of storms, floods, droughts, wildfire, rising sea levels, and any unintended consequences of existing infrastructure projects. It is critical that we defend the laws that protect these vital resources and harness the full potential of natural infrastructure to increase the ability of our communities and wildlife to adapt as we face a changing climate.

Water projects carried out by the Army Corps of Engineers have an outsized impact on the nation’s rivers, wetlands, wildlife, and communities. To help wildlife and communities thrive, Congress should ensure that the Army Corps implements requirements to increase the use of natural infrastructure in its flood risk reduction projects, account for community and ecosystem resilience in project design, effectively mitigate projects’ adverse impacts, and improve the agency’s engagement with economically disadvantaged communities and Tribal Nations. Congress should also ensure that the next **Water Resources Development Act** builds on these important directives. Importantly, the Army Corps should reject outdated projects that will destroy vital wetlands and embrace a modern project planning paradigm that prioritizes natural infrastructure and other resilient solutions and fully accounts for losses and gains in the services provided by healthy ecosystems.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) also plays a critical role in stewarding the nation’s water resources. The agency manages over 250,000 miles of streams and rivers, the source of drinking water to one in ten Americans in the West. **The BLM Aquatic Resources Program** carries out important work reconnecting Western streams to their floodplains in areas that face increasing threats from drought and is critical to providing reliable water supplies and conserving the economic benefits communities rely upon. Congress should support strong funding levels for this program, which increases drought resilience, reduces wildfire risk, provides forage for livestock, and reestablishes fish and wildlife habitat.

## Flood Prevention

Flooding is one of the most expensive types of natural disasters in the United States, costing taxpayers billions of dollars each year in property losses on top of untold suffering. After repeated short-term extensions of the National Flood Insurance Program, Congress should act to fully reauthorize and reform the program. Reauthorization should require the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to:

- Increase the pace and accuracy of flood map updates using the most modern science and technology.
- Thoroughly integrate future climate change risks.
- Encourage pre-disaster mitigation prioritizing natural infrastructure to reduce risk.





## Bolstering flood resilience and recovery in Appalachia

Climate change is increasing the risk and severity of flooding and other natural disasters. This risk is especially severe in Appalachia, due to the region's geography, economic capacity, and industrial legacy. Additional support is needed for nature-based hazard mitigation – including ecologically appropriate mine land reclamation such as the Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative – alongside support for Appalachian communities to proactively respond to and recover from flooding. The National Wildlife Federation and regional partners have outlined a more detailed flood policy platform [here](#).

- Support risk-based premiums, with means-tested assistance for those who cannot afford actuarial rates.
- Strengthen building standards and discourage development in high-risk areas.
- Work to remove barriers for ecosystem restoration projects that pose no adverse impact to people or property.

Congress should also pursue reforms under the **Stafford Act** to improve delivery of pre- and post-disaster support, including through additional capacity-building and technical assistance access and funding across all communities. Additionally, Congress should continue to support critical hazard mitigation assistance programs, including through the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities program.

## Supporting America's Great Watersheds

From the Chesapeake Bay to the Colorado River, America's great watersheds help define us as a nation providing hunting, fishing, and boating opportunities; drinking water; and incredible wildlife habitat—and they need more attention than ever in the face of increased flooding, drought, and wildfire risk. Congress should provide strong federal funding for critical EPA, Army Corps, Department of the Interior, and USDA ecosystem restoration and pollution reduction programs that support large-scale restoration efforts across the country, including in the Everglades, Great Lakes, Mississippi River Delta, Chesapeake Bay, Colorado River, Rio Grande, Columbia River, and the Delaware River Basin. The federal government should fund Everglades restoration efforts at \$725 million annually to accelerate the ecosystem benefits of restoration, building on recent historic federal and state investments to get projects across the finish line. The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and the Delaware River Basin Conservation Program will both need reauthorization during the 119th Congress. Additionally, new regional restoration and resilience efforts should be established and resourced along the mainstem of the Mississippi River, the 14-state Ohio River Basin, and in the Rio Grande Basin.

In the Colorado River Basin, the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) should meaningfully involve the 29 sovereign Tribal nations in the basin in the process of developing the management framework that will replace the 2007 Interim Guidelines. Congress should continue to provide support to BOR and other agencies to fund aquatic restoration efforts to build resilience to drought and other impacts of climate change in the Colorado River Basin and across the western United States.

## Ohio River Restoration Program Act

This bipartisan legislation would establish a non-regulatory restoration program for the waters of the 14-state Ohio River basin, seeking to make the Ohio River the cleanest working river in the country. The bill would replicate the success of other geographic restoration programs, directing federal resources to carry out an action plan focused on improving water quality and flood resilience, controlling invasive species, restoring fish and wildlife habitat, and promoting recreational access. This investment would fill a gap in support for one of the country's major waterways in a region that has suffered from repeated flooding and toxic pollution.





Bill Miller

## ENSURING HEALTHY AND RESILIENT COASTS AND MARINE ECOSYSTEMS

Healthy, intact, and productive coastal, nearshore, and ocean habitats are critical to the wellbeing of communities, and a wide variety of marine species of ecological, economic, recreational, and cultural significance. Yet, these resources are facing new stressors and unprecedented environmental change due to climate impacts, necessitating forward-looking resource management responses. Research shows that conserving existing natural coastal features like coastal wetlands, estuaries, and marshes is one of the most effective and cost-effective ways to protect essential habitat, store carbon, enhance coastal resilience, and contribute to a healthy marine environment. Congress should strive to protect taxpayers and the environment by reducing incentives for risky development in floodplains and along our coastlines and by advancing coastal blue carbon solutions, such as the **Coastal Restoration Act**.

Congress should also work to ensure a sustainable source of funding for coastal states to confront the unique stressors of rapidly rising sea levels and increased coastal storms, like recent Hurricanes Helene and Milton, through passage of the **Reinvesting In Shoreline Economies and Ecosystems (RISEE) Act**. This timely legislation would capture offshore energy revenues to support funding for ocean and coastal restoration and resilience of coastal communities around the nation.

It is also important that Congress preserves the integrity of bedrock laws and protections that pertain to proactive ocean and coastal conservation and management.

## Support Funding for Ocean and Coastal Programs

Strong funding for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) programs are critical to protect our coasts and ocean ecosystems. Congress should maintain or increase appropriations for NOAA's Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to support healthy fisheries, species diversity, sportfishing, and for restoration dollars to support critically-needed, on-the-ground habitat restoration opportunities, such as establishment of oyster reefs and living shorelines. Other areas where enhanced NOAA funding can make an impact include:

- Promoting climate-resilient coastlines and ocean climate science, including ocean-based carbon dioxide removal strategies.
- Strengthening the National Marine Sanctuary System's capacity, to help finish designations like Papahānaumokuākea and the Pacific Islands Heritage Marine National Monument, enhance protections for deep-sea coral on the Blake Plateau, and better manage new designations and sanctuary management plan updates.

## Promoting Healthy Fisheries and Protecting Marine Wildlife

Despite the success of the *Magnuson-Stevens Act*, there is a continued strong need to rebuild stocks, protect habitat, and safeguard fishing communities. Congress should also continue to support marine ecosystem health by improving protection of forage fish—species that constitute the foundation of ocean food webs—through passage of the **Forage Fish Conservation Act**.

There is also a need for Congressional support for enhanced opportunities for responsible access and recreational enjoyment of marine resources through legislation like the **Youth Coastal Fishing Act**.

Protecting highly imperiled marine life should continue to be a priority for Congress, including increased funding for sea turtle research and recovery grants supporting innovative fishing strategies and technologies that help both the declining population of the North Atlantic right whale and Rice's whale, address key threats such as vessel collisions and marine debris entanglement, and the needs of communities and fishermen impacted by efforts to restore the populations of these endangered species.

Sandy Scott







## CONSERVING AND RESTORING LANDS AND WILDLIFE HABITAT

**Maintaining wildlife migrations and movements** is key to addressing the biodiversity crisis. It is also a great opportunity for Congress to support the hunters, anglers, wildlife supporters, and communities that depend on wildlife.

Congress came together with strong bipartisan support in 2021 to establish the **Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program** in the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act*. This comprehensive program includes workforce training, research, and the first federal funding committed to wildlife overpasses, underpasses, and related infrastructure. It is helping states, Tribes, and partners get wildlife across roads safely, and reduce vehicle collisions with wildlife. The 119<sup>th</sup> Congress should reauthorize, make permanent, and increase funding for the wildlife crossings program to match the demand states, Tribal nations and local governments have demonstrated for these projects.

Congress should also support efforts to maintain and improve wildlife movements across public, private and Tribal lands by passing the bipartisan **Wildlife Movement Through Partnerships Act** and the **Native American Habitat Connectivity Act**. Both bills support essential migration research and provide funding for on-the-ground habitat management and partnerships with private landowners.

To promote aquatic migration, Congress should provide resources to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the Interagency Fish Passage Task Force to continue and build upon its work to collaboratively restore aquatic ecosystems by removing institutional and physical barriers and efficiently leverage resources to deploy funding as quickly as possible. The Task Force has become a model for collaborative and effective government efficiency, leveraging the resources and expertise of 13 member agencies to conserve and restore U.S. lands and waters while enhancing community resilience to natural disasters.

NWF also looks forward to working with Congress and the Administration to provide funding and support for agency efforts to connect wildlife habitats including the Department of the Interior's **Improving Habitat Quality in Western Big-Game Winter Range and Migration Corridors**, and USDA's **Migratory Big Game Initiative and Secretarial Memorandum to Conserve and Restore Wildlife Habitat Connectivity in the United States**.



Alan Nyiri

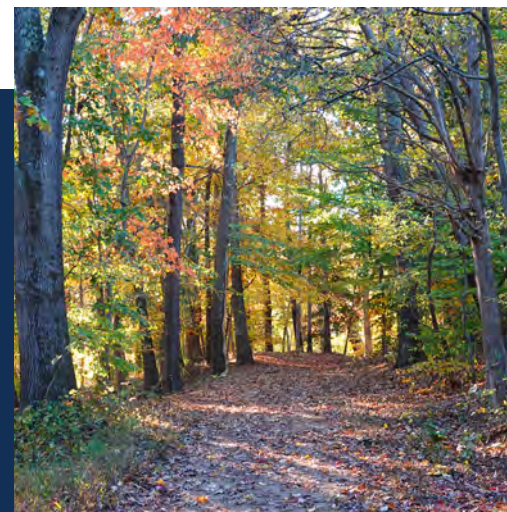
## Better Stewardship for America's Forests

Forests across the country provide benefits to Americans near and far, providing clean drinking water and wildlife habitat, locking away carbon, supporting livelihoods, and much more. A [2024 survey](#) found robust support for natural climate solutions—including forest conservation, restoration, and prescribed burning—across demographic groups and political parties: 94 percent of surveyed voters support these actions.

Today, forests face myriad threats. Climate-driven disturbances such as extreme wildfires, heatwaves, and drought—coupled with ongoing forest fragmentation and the introduction of invasive forest pests, pathogens, and plants—are already erasing forest carbon storage and interfering with forest regrowth.

In addition to voluntary, incentive-based conservation programs of the **Farm Bill**, Congress should act to:

- Support forest health and resilience in a rapidly changing climate, in both urban and rural forests, by funding and removing barriers to evidence-based and proactive management.
- Create an enabling environment for prescribed fire and cultural burning, which can reduce risks to communities and ecosystems and support Tribal and Indigenous ecocultural restoration.



Erin Huggins



Getty/Bollenbach



- Restore and protect water resources on U.S. Forest Service (USFS) land by expanding access to the Water Source Protection Program, improving long-term planning in the Watershed Condition Framework, and providing dedicated funding to both programs.
- Support aquatic restoration as a wildfire risk reduction and mitigation strategy.
- Promote research and development of innovative applications for wood waste residues of forest stewardship or invasive species removal that can deliver durable climate benefits and stimulate rural economies, rather than outmoded and harmful strategies such as biomass-to-electricity.
- Promote research and take decisive action to reduce the threats to forests posed by invasive species, from pests and pathogens to plants and animals, which have devastating impacts on economies, wildlife, and even human health.
- Continue to support Tribal co-stewardship of forests.

## New Hope for America's Grasslands

North America's iconic grasslands are being destroyed and degraded at an alarming rate. Each year millions of acres of grasslands are converted to cropland, paved

over by growing urban areas, or degraded by invasive species, overgrazing, or energy development. The prairies of the Great Plains, coastal grasslands, Florida upland prairie, eastern savannahs and hilltop prairies, sagebrush steppe, and more provide critical habitat for wildlife and store huge amounts of carbon in their soils, all while supporting livelihoods and rural communities.

Hundreds of species of wildlife rely on grasslands, and even at small scales grasslands can harbor as much plant diversity as tropical rainforests. Birds like sage grouse, prairie chickens, meadowlarks and burrowing owls need grasslands to thrive. Today, because of the loss and degradation of grasslands, populations of grassland birds have dropped by more than half just since 1970, the largest decline of any bird group. Monarchs and other butterflies depend on grasslands, as do mule deer, pronghorn, elk, Blanding's turtles, and horned lizards.

NWF is leading a broad coalition of agriculture, conservation, and hunting groups to advocate for Congress to pass the bipartisan **North American Grasslands Conservation Act**, built upon the proven, collaborative model of the **North American Wetlands Conservation Act**. **The Grasslands Act** would provide both a continent-wide roadmap and funding to support voluntary partnerships to help landowners conserve and restore America's grasslands.

## Conserving Public Lands

The federal government holds more than 640 million acres of land in trust for the benefit of everyone. These lands provide habitat for fish and wildlife, hold important cultural significance, supply fresh drinking water to millions of Americans, contain a variety of natural resources that are critical to our economic vitality, and offer nearly endless opportunities for hunting, fishing, and other outdoor recreation.

The federal government has an obligation to manage public lands in a sustainable and responsible way for this and future generations. To do so, Congress and the Administration should support the tools necessary to eradicate invasive species, reduce fire frequency and intensity, improve landscape and watershed health, facilitate animal movement, minimize impacts of industrial disturbance, and conserve landscapes that contain significant ecological, historic, or Indigenous sites. The government should do all of this and still provide for multiple uses. NWF will advocate for policies that seek to manage lands in ways that meet those qualifications, and defend against efforts that can undermine this mission, including weakening of the Antiquities Act and other land management statutes. Congress and the Administration should resist efforts to allow, encourage, or facilitate the large scale sale or transfer of federal public lands.

## National Wildlife Refuges

The National Wildlife Refuge System is our only national network of lands dedicated to fish and wildlife conservation. This network spans some of our country's most iconic ecosystems and connects communities – urban and rural – with the outdoors through recreation opportunities such as hunting, fishing, and birdwatching. Despite the Refuge System's enormous impact, decades of underfunding have resulted in the loss of more than 16 percent of its full-time staff. Refuges across seven states currently operate without a single wildlife officer. Thousands of volunteers have stepped up to support their local refuges after seeing the constraints first-hand, but even volunteer programs have been scaled back because of the lack of necessary infrastructure, or because the full-time professional staff are stretched too thin to support volunteer project planning. The status quo is truly unsustainable and falls short of the vision President Theodore Roosevelt had when he established this system in 1903. Congress should:

- Invest in the Wildlife Refuge System by significantly increasing annual appropriations for the Refuge System Operations and Maintenance.
- Increase the Wildlife Refuge System's share of maintenance backlog funding when reauthorizing the **Great American Outdoors Act**.

## Malheur Community Empowerment for the Owyhee Act

The Owyhee Canyonlands area in southeast Oregon is a vast undeveloped landscape seldom seen in the modern world. Home to desert bighorn sheep, elk, mule deer, and wild turkey, the Owyhee Canyonlands is considered a sporting paradise. But it is threatened by burgeoning development and unmanaged recreation. The bipartisan **Malheur Community Empowerment for the Owyhee Act** is the result of many years of consultation with local landowners, business owners, Tribes, hunters, and other conservationists and would ensure healthy fish and wildlife populations, and encourage better planning for recreation, grazing, drought, and wildfire.





Aaron Kindie



Kirk Rasmussen

## CLIMATE AND CLEAN ENERGY SOLUTIONS

The National Wildlife Federation is eager to work with the new Administration and the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress to make meaningful progress on confronting climate change while cementing the tremendous strides made in recent years. Technologies and strategies that have bipartisan backing – such as carbon management, next-generation geothermal power, and transmission infrastructure – offer good opportunities to continue moving the needle on emissions reductions. We will maintain a focus on natural climate solutions that benefit communities and wildlife, and we will work to ensure that workers and frontline communities are protected and are active participants in the transition to a clean economy.



The 119<sup>th</sup> Congress should support the development and deployment of next-gen geothermal through appropriations and legislation targeted at advancing research, development, and deployment of projects that help the industry achieve commercialization. Similarly, Congress should consider opportunities to update and expand clean energy, energy efficiency, carbon management, and grid modernization during reauthorization of the **Energy Act of 2020** to better meet the climate imperative, including robust support for distributed generation such as community and rooftop solar.

In addition to the tax and permitting measures recommended above, the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress can advance climate solutions by:

- Supporting funding for data and mapping tools to help project developers and agencies make siting decisions according to changing wildlife habitat and migration routes.
- Ensuring that the Department of Energy's Bioenergy Technology Office advances innovative research into next-generation fuel sources and that Congress recognizes the need to move beyond crop-based feedstocks.
- Supporting the build out of an ecologically and socially responsible domestic mining and supply chain for critical minerals, including heightened efforts to research, test, and develop methods for safe reuse and recycling of waste materials and products.
- Advancing well-rounded trade bills like the **Clean Competition Act**, **PROVE IT Act**, and others to reward lower carbon, cleaner domestic manufacturing and balance the scales on dirtier imports.
- Clarifying the jurisdictions of regulatory authorities for carbon dioxide transport and storage (on- and offshore) and supporting agencies to develop and enforce strong safety and monitoring regulations.

# Responsible Development of Clean Energy and Transmission

All energy sources present trade-offs. We know that the emissions from burning fossil fuels or solid biomass for electricity, for instance, contribute to climate change and endanger the health of communities. However, even clean, zero-emitting energy sources can have unintended impacts on wildlife and communities when ecosystem and social considerations are afterthoughts.

The National Wildlife Federation will continue to promote the integrity of bedrock environmental laws, like the *National Environmental Policy Act* (NEPA), that require consideration of environmental impacts for federally permitted infrastructure projects and create opportunities for public input. However, the urgency of the climate crisis demands that we bring clean energy sources to the grid quickly if we are to meet the country's climate goals by mid-century. The National Wildlife Federation will advocate for a resilient grid that supports clean energy production and minimizes negative impacts on communities and ecosystems, by:

- Supporting additional funding and staffing for agencies to conduct environmental reviews and process permit applications in a timely manner.
- Eliminating the Department of Energy's National Interest Electric Transmission Corridor (NIETC) process to expedite permitting for national interest transmission projects without losing important environmental reviews.
- Requiring that the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission promulgate a rule on interregional transmission planning that allocates costs between those who benefit, which would help end stalemates in planning between interstate and regional transmission organizations (RTO) and independent system operators (ISO).
- Requiring neighboring transmission regions to jointly craft plans, creating needed synergy among states and RTOs/ISOs, while prioritizing state authority.

- Establishing a minimum interregional transmission transfer capability with a capacity limit of at least a 30 percent peak demand between regions, using a technology-neutral approach.

# Continue momentum to develop responsible offshore wind energy

Congress and the new Administration should work with the Department of the Interior to successfully manage the 46 gigawatts of offshore wind energy currently in the pipeline and push for additional areas to be auctioned off in the future. Responsible development of offshore wind energy is important to improve monitoring and mitigation strategies to protect marine ecosystems during the construction and operation of offshore wind facilities.

# Natural Climate Solutions

Natural climate solutions are a key component of the National Wildlife Federation's vision for reducing the severity of climate change while learning to live with unavoidable consequences. In cities and rural areas, from the coasts to the mountains and everywhere in between, natural climate solutions can help address the climate crisis while providing co-benefits that no other solution offers.

Urban forests, for example, can yield economic benefits to cities, reduce the costs of heating and cooling buildings, support human health and well-being, and bolster biodiversity. The National Wildlife Federation will advocate for strong funding to plan and maintain urban forests and other green and blue infrastructure, especially in historically underserved communities, where the impacts of climate change are likely to land with the greatest harm. The Federation will also continue to advocate for proactive management of our country's natural resources in ways that both store carbon and reduce the risk of climate

change-fuelled disasters like wildfires and flooding. (See **NWF's Natural Climate Solutions Policy Platform** for additional recommendations.)

Conserving existing carbon-rich ecosystems in the U.S. and abroad is one of the most cost-effective, high-impact strategies to slow climate change. NWF and its affiliates strongly urge Congress to enact legislation to help reduce ecosystem loss such as the **FOREST Act**, with the goal of reducing tropical deforestation, promoting responsible agricultural practices and supply chains, and supporting the rule of law abroad.

**Push for integrity and accountability in voluntary carbon markets.** Public and private funds should be directed to high-impact applications that yield direct, durable, high-integrity emissions reductions. We encourage a precautionary approach to voluntary carbon markets. Entities should first avoid and minimize their emissions. They should seek to mitigate (i.e., offset) only their residual or unavoidable emissions as they transition to net-zero. We urge Congress to provide robust support for research, monitoring, reporting, and verification of emissions reductions from biological, technological, and hybrid strategies to reduce and sequester greenhouse gas emissions.

National Wildlife Federation







## RESPONDING TO 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY CHALLENGES: FUNDING KEY AGENCIES AND PROGRAMS

From climate change-driven extreme weather events to plastic pollution, from invasive species introductions to growing energy demand for novel technologies, the list of challenges we face seems to grow every day. Without the support of research initiatives to untangle these problems and to collaborate with partners at home and abroad on solutions, the U.S. risks falling behind – and seriously endangering lives, economies, and habitats. To ensure that the U.S. remains a leader in innovation and economic competitiveness, Congress should continue to provide adequate funding for priority research areas such as long-duration energy storage, ecosystem adaptation, and feedbacks between health and the environment.

### U.S. Global Change Research Program (USGCRP)

Coordinating research efforts across 15 agencies, the USGCRP plays an integral role in understanding and responding to global change, supporting decision makers as they navigate complex, interconnected challenges. Congress should continue to appropriate sufficient funds for research by its constituent agencies and should take steps to ensure that its leadership continues to be non-partisan and credible.



## SUPPORTING STUDENTS, EDUCATORS AND WORKERS

The 119<sup>th</sup> Congress should support children, students and professionals in ensuring equitable access to an education that provides them with a foundational knowledge of the natural world, the risk of extreme weather events, and climate resilience. This includes efforts to support energy worker transition. Congress should consider legislation to support energy sector workers transitioning to careers in the clean energy economy with assistance for families, wage replacement, and training and education opportunities.





The National Wildlife Federation supports access to licensed childcare and opportunities to enjoy the outdoors in a safe and healthy manner. Legislative priorities include the **No Child Left Inside Act**, which would provide further federal assistance to states to develop and implement environmental literacy plans. These plans integrate outdoor and natural sciences learning opportunities into core subject curricula at schools. Similarly, the **Living Schoolyards Act** would allow children to spend more quality time outside through hands-on outdoor learning opportunities that strengthen applied science learning skills.

School infrastructure provides an important learning environment for children. The **Rebuild America's Schools Act** would provide funding for more than 30,000 schools located in low-income areas that have faced systemic racial, economic, or environmental discrimination to receive much-needed infrastructure updates. The National Wildlife Federation also supports the expansion of the U.S. Department of Education's Green Ribbon Schools program, which rewards outstanding schools that have incorporated green infrastructure and environmental learning.

Today's young people will be tomorrow's conservation leaders. Investments in proper training and skills development that equitably prepares students – particularly those in frontline communities – is vital to ensuring a resilient future. The **Climate Change Education Act** would work to ensure students have a foundational knowledge of climate change through allocating funding to NOAA to provide grants to schools for climate literacy and skills development.



## ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND CUMULATIVE COMMUNITY IMPACTS

The National Wildlife Federation is committed to bringing people into the fold and ensuring they have the necessary tools for civic engagement. By engaging with people from all backgrounds and meeting them where they are, we hope to foster a broad coalition of conservation advocates. In this manner, we hope to advance holistic solutions that protect and restore wildlife, ecosystems and communities.



Frontline and fenceline communities have too often felt the cumulative effects of environmental, social, and health challenges. Without meaningful changes, these communities will likely continue to face the most severe effects of extreme weather and disaster, public health challenges, and socioeconomic stagnation. Lawmakers and administrative officials should consider the cumulative impact these overlapping challenges pose to vulnerable communities. NWF is committed to working to educate decision-makers of the dangers cumulative impacts pose and the necessity of multi-layered policy solutions.

## Clean Air

While access to clean air is considered a fundamental right, many frontline and fenceline communities bear the brunt of air pollution, especially in low-income communities and communities of color. Historically, these communities have been disproportionately located near industrial facilities, highways, and power plants that emit toxins and greatly increase the risk for residents to suffer respiratory illnesses, cardiovascular disease, and other major health impacts.

The National Wildlife Federation is committed to championing policies that reduce air pollution and its disproportionate impacts. That means supporting stringent air quality standards under the *Clean Air Act*, advocating for regulations on toxic pollutants such as particulate matter and ozone, and pushing for these policies to be codified into law to cut emissions.

NWF will also work to ensure that federal and state investments in clean air initiatives are prioritized to equitably serve the needs of communities most impacted by pollution. We will advocate for including cumulative impact assessments within the environmental permitting processes to better account for the disproportionate burdens faced by frontline and fenceline communities. We will also engage communities and our partners to support better enforcement mechanisms and hold polluters accountable to ensure that all people have access to clean, breathable air.

Through these efforts, NWF seeks to help create a healthier, more equitable environment for all while supporting the broader goals of tangible climate action and environmental justice.



## Donald A. McEachin Environmental Justice (EJ) for All Act

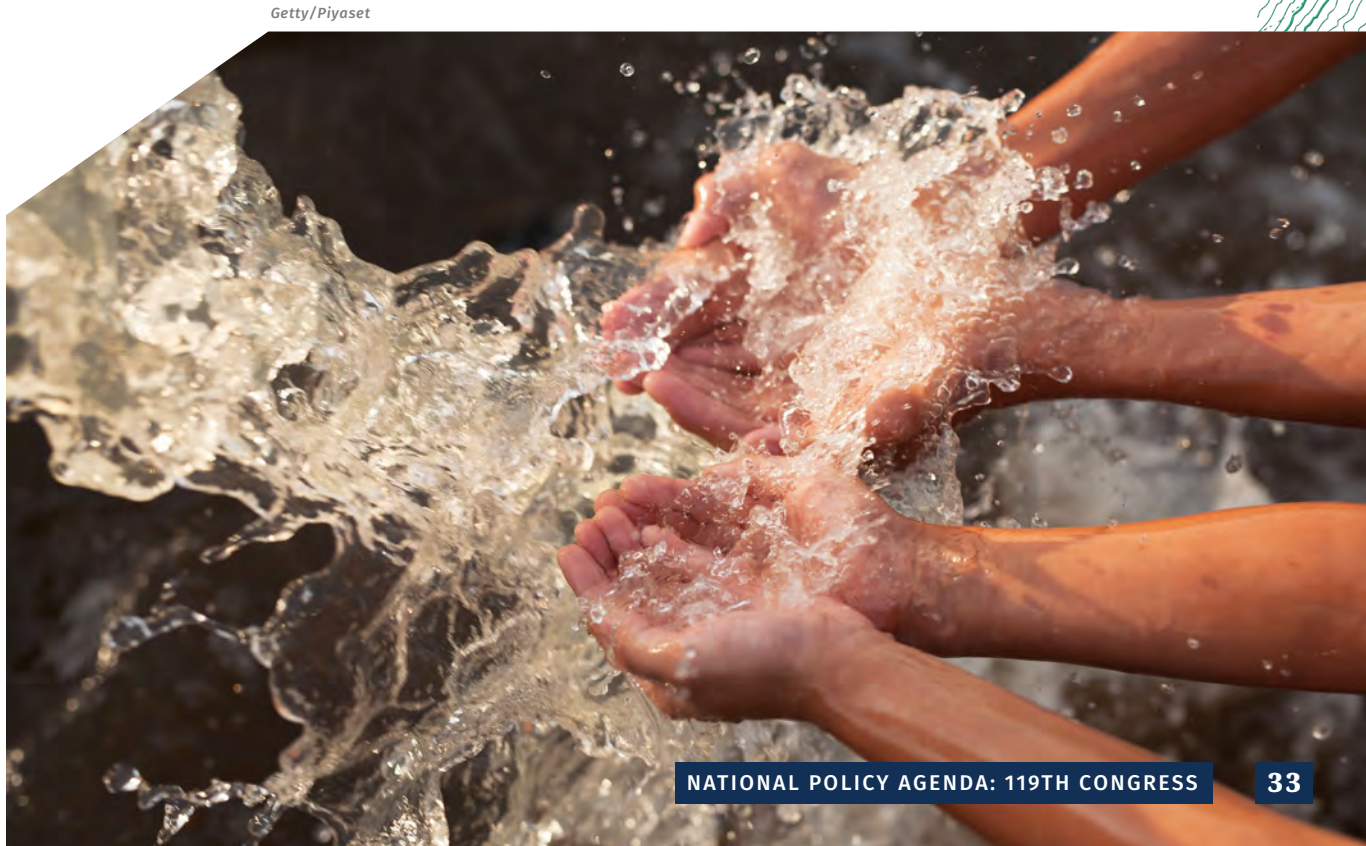
This priority legislation addresses environmental injustice in communities disproportionately impacted by pollution and environmental hazards. It was co-created to meet the needs of those most impacted by environmental degradation. Congress should learn from the example of the EJ for All Act to better serve the needs of frontline and fenceline communities. The EJ for All Act strengthens our foundational environmental laws and builds on them to ensure all voices have a seat at the federal decision-making table. America's bedrock environmental laws are an essential aspect of protections for wildlife, ecosystems, and communities. Rollbacks of these statutes would exacerbate harms related to public health for frontline and fenceline communities and threaten important protections for imperiled wildlife and their habitats.

## Reducing Exposure to PFAS

NWF supports efforts to reduce PFAS exposure in people, and to better understand these chemicals' impacts on wildlife. PFAS, a family of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, are found in many consumer products and packaging. These "forever chemicals" persist in people's bodies and the environment and are linked to cancers and immune disorders in people and reduced reproductive success in wildlife. PFAS exposure has disproportionately impacted low-income communities and communities of color.

Congress should protect people and wildlife alike by rejecting attempts to weaken federal safeguards to reduce PFAS exposure. Instead, Congress can build on federal drinking water standards, support efforts to use *Clean Water Act* tools to address PFAS in our waters, and advance efforts to reduce exposures on contaminated land and better understand these chemicals' impact on wildlife, especially in game species consumed by hunters, anglers, and their families. NWF supports the implementation of the EPA's PFAS Action Plan to support efforts to improve monitoring, detection, and coordination between state and federal agencies to clean up PFAS pollution from former military bases. Other legislative proposals in this area include:

- Support for the bipartisan **Relief for Farmers Hit with PFAS Act**, which would establish a USDA program to help farmers address PFAS contamination through testing, compensation for contaminated land, and researching and implementing remediation strategies for contaminated farmland.
- Including provisions in the **National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)** to accelerate identification, notification, and clean-up of PFAS located at Department of Defense or National Guard facilities, implement interim solutions to address impacts on neighboring water supplies, require the Secretary of Defense to procure products from the Safer Choice program and direct resources toward PFAS detection and remediation science, research and technologies.
- Support passage of the bipartisan **PFAS Action Act**, which would require EPA to set drinking water limits for two types of PFAS chemicals and address ongoing concerns related to PFAS contamination in air and water.



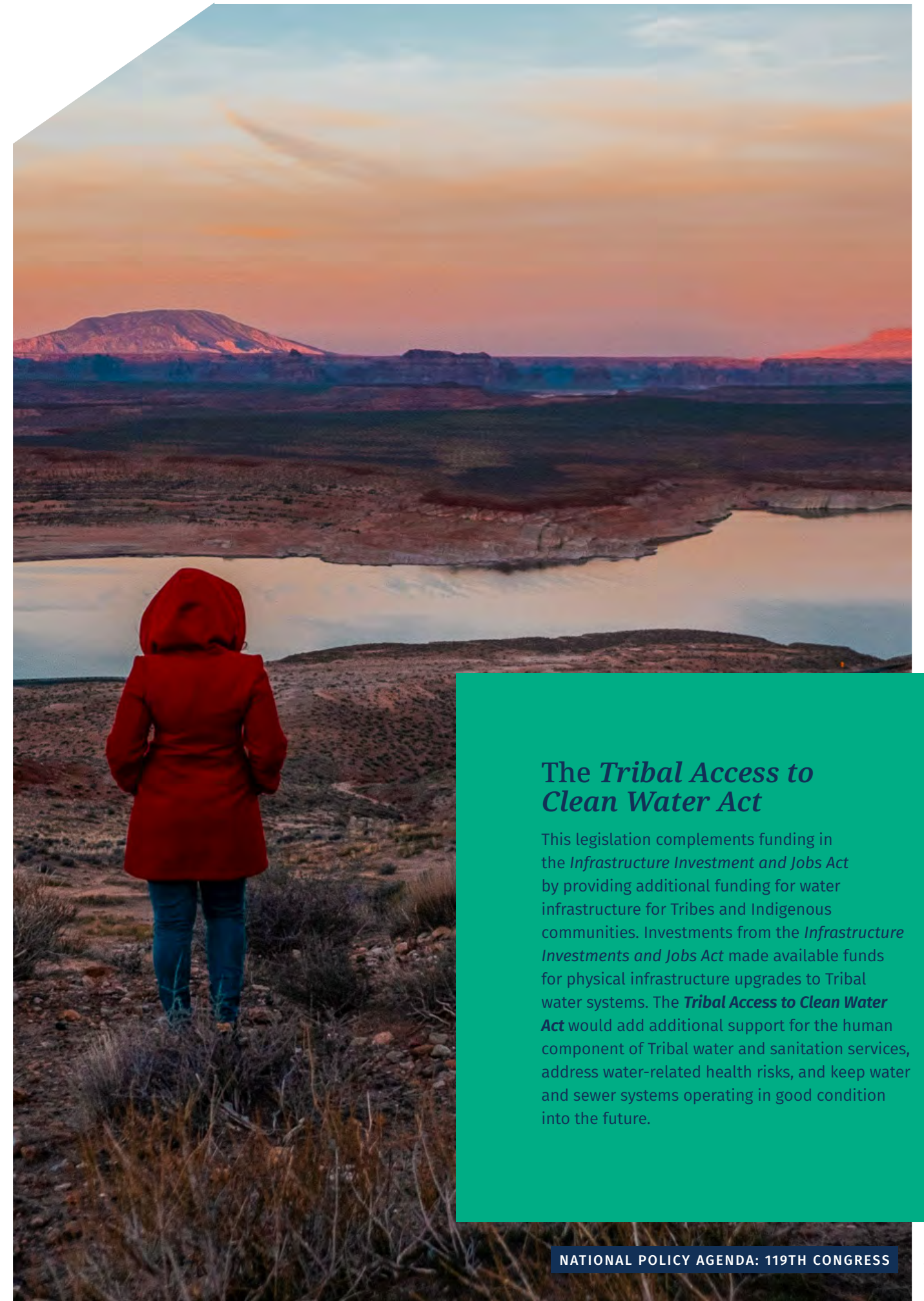




## Investing in Water Infrastructure

The EPA estimates that we need to invest over \$1.25 trillion in maintaining and repairing our wastewater and drinking water infrastructure over twenty years just to meet environmental and public health standards. Climate change exacerbates existing water infrastructure challenges, which are often disproportionately borne by low-income communities, rural communities, communities of color, and Indigenous Peoples. That's why Congress must increase annual funding levels for the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds (SRFs), including providing additional assistance in the form of grants, and prioritizing the use of green infrastructure approaches. Any funds appropriated for congressionally directed spending on water infrastructure projects should be provided in addition to, not in lieu of, this urgently needed funding. Congress must enhance access to water infrastructure for historically underserved communities, including through the passage of the **Tribal Access to Clean Water Act**.

Congress must also invest in other critical federal programs that equip communities with resources to address increasing water-related challenges on a local and watershed-wide scale, including programs that assist households struggling to afford water bills, strengthen the resiliency of water systems, support enforcement and permitting requirements, and strengthen nutrient pollution cleanup, remediation, and reduction efforts. This federal funding must be directed to frontline communities that need it most.



## The Tribal Access to Clean Water Act

This legislation complements funding in the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* by providing additional funding for water infrastructure for Tribes and Indigenous communities. Investments from the *Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act* made available funds for physical infrastructure upgrades to Tribal water systems. The **Tribal Access to Clean Water Act** would add additional support for the human component of Tribal water and sanitation services, address water-related health risks, and keep water and sewer systems operating in good condition into the future.





Roselyn Pierce



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