



RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the policy examples above, below are some concrete next steps federal officials and Congress can take to help communities achieve the America the Beautiful goal of conserving and restoring at least 30% of our lands and waters by 2030 through locally-led collaborative efforts.

Restore Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments

The President should also act swiftly under the Antiquities Act to restore protections for Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument and to expand Bears Ears National Monument to the boundaries [originally proposed by Tribes](#) in 2015. Restoring Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante national monuments to their original boundaries, or expanding them, and ensuring adequate funding for proper collaborative management with Tribes, will help achieve the America the Beautiful goal while ensuring the quality of life and economic vitality of the region.

Indigenous nations want Bears Ears National Monument protected and restored, and Tribal nations [depend on the land](#) within the region to sustain their traditional livelihoods and cultural practices, such as hunting, gathering, and ceremonies.

City of Moab, Utah Council Member Kalen Jones said, “Restoring protections for Bears Ears National Monument will preserve these lands, support Tribally-led conservation priorities, and hopefully lead to increased funding to support management and enjoyment of Bear Ears National Monument.”

Use the Antiquities Act to Protect More Lands

The Antiquities Act is responsible for protecting many of our most iconic and treasured public lands and waters. More protections under the Antiquities Act would be built on community-led solutions that would ensure more equitable access to nature, address the climate crisis, restore America’s biodiversity and wildlife, and begin to reckon with historic and present injustices.

These natural, cultural and historic sites, lands of great scientific value, and ocean waters are not only places, but also contribute to the ongoing and often-untold stories and true history of the United States. The Antiquities Act conserves places so the stories and experiences can be told and felt for generations to come.



Reform the Oil and Gas Leasing Program

Federal public land policy should be modernized to ensure that the companies extracting natural resources provide a fair return to federal and state taxpayers while also protecting wildlife and providing the opportunity for the development of sustainable economic non-extractive activity such as outdoor recreation.

Develop a plan to phase out the production of fossil fuels, which are a major contributor to climate change, in a way that also supports the workers, communities, and states that currently have fossil fuel-dependent economies.

Town of Frisco, Colorado Mayor and avalanche forecaster Hunter Mortensen said, "Oil and gas leasing on public lands across the West leads to an increase in dust. This unique combination of factors has caused a dangerous springtime phenomenon of dust on snow events in the mountains of Colorado. Dust blows in during springtime wind storms, settling on the snow. This causes snow to melt 1-4 weeks earlier which negatively impacts both summer and winter tourism, as well as harming agriculture and increasing the likelihood of wildfires."

Expand an Outdoors for All

Low-income communities and communities of color are [disproportionately impacted](#) by the dual climate and nature crises and continue to experience inequitable access to nature and its many benefits including clean air and water. In fact, 74 percent of communities of color and 70 percent of low-income communities in the contiguous United States live in [nature-deprived areas](#) and pollution caused by the burning of fossil fuels caused [8.7 million or one in five deaths](#) globally.

Fossil fuel drilling on our public lands results in [nearly 25%](#) of all climate emitting pollution in the U.S., and these impacts are disproportionately hurting Black, Brown, Indigenous, and working class people. These stressors put our communities in harm's way with increased public health impacts, more drought, drastic temperature changes, and wildfires. Climate impacts also affect our community economies by damaging agricultural jobs, and threatening tourism and outdoor recreation economies.

Improving access to outdoor spaces close-to-home, and restoring degraded lands and waters will provide physical, spiritual, and mental health benefits.

Increase Indigenous Collaborative Management and Collaboration with Tribal Nations and Governments

Globally, lands and waters overseen by Indigenous Peoples contain over [80 percent](#) of the world's remaining biodiversity. The America the Beautiful initiative must respect Tribal sovereignty, self-determination, and strengthen government-to-government consultation and relationships. America the Beautiful must address the injustices of the past by clearing a path for real change and opportunity for Tribal nations.



Increase Funding

Many local communities are feeling the brunt of increased recreation and demands on our federal lands over the past year. Many counties and municipalities have also had to supplement USDA Forest Service district budgets from their general funds to pay for additional ranger patrols because of inadequate federal funding to manage overrun areas.

Through greater investments from the [Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership](#), [Great American Outdoors Act](#), and [Land and Water Conservation Fund](#); the addition of a [Gateway Community Dividend Program](#) to the PILT program; and an increase in funding for fighting wildfires, the public will be able to recreate closer to home, which will help to close the [Nature Gap](#).

Streamline Processes

With more expedient approval of time-sensitive applications, like shovel-ready locally-funded community parks, through processes like the [Recreation and Public Purposes Act Patents and Leases](#), more people can get back to work while ensuring access to our amazing public lands.

One local elected official recommended that there might be a way to create a streamlined process with advocates who can be trained to help review and push applications through the pipeline.

Increase Federal Agency Staffing

Additional field staffing for federal agencies would also help local communities. For example, because the USDA Forest Service doesn't have the staffing or financial resources to properly manage campgrounds and recreation areas, many communities struggle to find the resources to deal with the increased needs. For example, one Western mountain community had to add more frequent and costly garbage collection services in response to an influx of visitors. Similarly, if a USDA Forest Service district office staff person is on vacation, no one else can process applications in a timely manner. It would be helpful to have additional staff who can help expedite urgent requests, as well as an increased staff presence at USDA Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management district offices.

City of Driggs, Idaho Mayor Hyrum Johnson said, "With tourism and development both at all-time highs, like in so many western communities, community staff and leaders are feeling significant pressure."



Increase Consultation with Local Elected Officials

The recent and significant increase in visitation to our public lands and other recreation areas reveals how important these areas are to the health and well being of the American people, and how fragile many of these landscapes are. Federal government recognition of this influx of recreators, of the cost of hosting them, and a sincere offer to work with local governments on solutions would go a long way towards helping expand efforts around the America the Beautiful initiative.

One way to do this might be by offering to match funds through grants to incentivize local leaders to raise funds or other resources so that they have a sense of ownership.

Quarterly or semi annual visitations by America The Beautiful managers to local commission or council meetings would be beneficial.

Incentivize Companies to Capture Methane

The [fugitive emissions](#) from abandoned coal mines and oil and gas flaring cause much of the carbon emissions in our county. Incentives for cleaning up fugitive methane should be an exciting element of the American Jobs Plan.

The Federal government should be incentivizing oil and gas companies across the nation to capture the escaping methane everywhere to redeploy jobs from the fossil fuel sector directly into greenhouse gas management.

Support a 21st Century Civilian Conservation Corps

The country needs an inclusive 21st-century [Civilian Conservation Corps](#), which would hire thousands of young people to mitigate the impacts of climate change, provide much-needed support in managing our public lands, and help to make the country more wildfire resilient.



CONCLUSION



The [America the Beautiful initiative](#) can be a broad, equitable, and more just solution to the climate and biodiversity crises we are facing. This framework can act as a way to protect, restore, and conserve more public lands, water, wildlife, and nature; help with the influx of new residents and visitors and overcrowding; and grow the number of people who can experience our public lands and the outdoors.

Studies [have shown](#) the benefits of proximity to public lands, finding that counties in the West with more federal lands perform better in four key economic factors. The rural, non-metro counties with the highest percentage of federal public lands have experienced faster growth in population, employment, personal income, and per capita income -- highlighting the importance of federal public lands in the West.

Yet, as more people move to mountain communities, the nature gap continues, and the West burns due to increased fossil fuel emissions. Western mountain communities are directly affected as they grapple with increased infrastructure costs and needs and dire, long-term, and costly [health](#) and [climate impacts](#) like the release of harmful methane gas; heat, drought, floods, and wildfire; and dust on snow.

It is our responsibility to take and support prudent and pragmatic steps to increase land restoration and protection while reversing and mitigating climate change's devastating impacts by reducing the amount of greenhouse gases and other forms of pollution that contribute to climate change.

As communities move forward with conserving more nature and as we begin to address issues of inequity and injustice, it is important that we prioritize working with Indigenous nations and people, private landowners, and approach the America the Beautiful effort in an inclusive, collaborative, and locally-led way bringing in more people to make equitable access to nature paramount in our planning and decision-making.