

CONSERVING & RESTORING AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL: NOW IS THE TIME

WESTERN MOUNTAIN COMMUNITIES WORKING
TO ACHIEVE THE 30X30 GOAL



The Mountain Pact

July 2021

Founded in 2014, The Mountain Pact mobilizes local elected officials in over 80 Western mountain communities with outdoor recreation based economies to speak with a collective voice on federal climate, public lands, and outdoor recreation policy.

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INTRODUCTION

In this report, [The Mountain Pact](#) provides some background on the America the Beautiful initiative and why it is important to Western mountain communities. We also highlight examples from local elected officials in the Mountain Pact Network of how Western mountain communities have and are helping to achieve the goal of conserving and restoring 30% of our lands and waters by 2030 through locally-led collaborative projects. These examples include the adoption of resolutions, on-the-ground conservation work, and policy recommendations.

We also recommend new strategies and projects to help achieve the America the Beautiful goals and next steps.

Founded in 2014, [The Mountain Pact](#) educates, empowers, and mobilizes local elected officials in over 80 Western mountain communities with outdoor recreation based economies to speak with a collective voice on federal climate, public lands, and outdoor recreation policy.

The Mountain Pact Executive Director Anna Peterson said, “The America the Beautiful goal to expand conservation and protect even more of America’s lands and waters is an ambitious and critical step to conserve nature and buffer the United States’ Western mountain communities from the worst impacts of climate change. We celebrate that this remarkable vision also works towards a more inclusive and equitable vision of nature conservation that better reflects our country’s values and expands access to the outdoors for all. By uniting local governments, private landowners, and Tribal communities and individuals, this plan will bring us all together towards a shared vision of a better America.”



BACKGROUND

The United States is facing a conservation and climate crisis as nature declines and greenhouse gas emissions [continue to increase](#). Science tells us that worldwide [biodiversity is deteriorating](#) at a faster rate than at any time in human history. From [2001 to 2017](#), more than 24 million acres of land were lost to human development in the lower 48 United States, which equals the loss of one football field-sized patch of land every 30 seconds.

In fact, many [scientists](#) continue to warn that we must conserve and restore [at least 30 percent](#) of lands and waters by 2030 if we want to preserve biodiversity and ecosystems, support an increasing global population, and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Through an [executive order](#) in January 2021, President Biden announced his administration's goal to conserve 30% of U.S. lands and water by 2030 (commonly referred to as 30x30). Then in May 2021, the administration followed up on the executive order by issuing a report, [Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful](#), which recommends "a ten-year locally-led campaign to restore the lands and waters upon which we all depend, and that binds us together as Americans."

America the Beautiful is a bold, science-based initiative that includes the [30x30 goal](#), the first-ever national conservation goal to address the twin threats of climate change and the rapid loss of biodiversity and safeguard America's lands, water, and wildlife. It supports the conservation efforts of people across the country in rural and coastal communities, Tribal Nations, private landowners, and many others on the frontlines of conserving, stewarding, restoring, using, and enjoying nature.

The America the Beautiful report recommends that conservation efforts adhere to the following eight key principles:

1. Pursue a collaborative and inclusive approach to conservation.
2. Conserve America's lands and waters for the benefit of all people.
3. Support locally led and locally designed conservation efforts.
4. Honor Tribal sovereignty and support the priorities of Tribal nations.
5. Pursue conservation and restoration approaches that create jobs and support healthy communities.
6. Honor private property rights and support the voluntary stewardship efforts of private landowners and fishers.
7. Use science as a guide.
8. Build on existing tools and strategies with an emphasis on flexibility and adaptive approaches.

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), working with the Departments of the Interior, Agriculture, and Commerce, including the National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration, has formed an interagency working group that will create the [American Conservation and Stewardship Atlas](#), which will compile baseline information about how much land and water are currently conserved and restored in the U.S. This process will determine how to best measure the country's progress toward the America the Beautiful goal and properly account for the many innovative and effective ways communities conserve their lands and waters for current and future generations.

Recent polling found that [77 percent](#) of voters in the Rocky Mountain West support this initiative. Many local governing bodies across the West [have passed](#) resolutions supporting the America the Beautiful initiative and the 30x30 goal.

Reaching the America the Beautiful goal does not involve a one-size fits all approach. To the contrary, different communities around the country will develop conservation strategies that reflect their unique needs and interests. Efforts to reach the America the Beautiful goal will rely on varied and flexible approaches.

WHY IS THE AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL INITIATIVE SO IMPORTANT?

PUBLIC HEALTH BENEFITS

Scientists say that the loss of biodiversity, the increasing number of extreme weather events, and human encroachment upon wildlife habitat may [increase the risk](#) of the transmission of infectious diseases such as COVID-19 and SARS.

Our natural places help provide food security, clean air to breathe, and clean water to drink while offering us a wide range of health benefits; and every person, regardless of race, background, or economic status, should have access to close-to-home opportunities to get outside in nature.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Wilderness, wildlife refuges, national conservation lands, monuments, and other protected areas drive our local economies and provide access for hunting, fishing, hiking, biking, camping, and other outdoor recreation pursuits.

Economic research shows that employment and personal income [grew significantly faster](#) in rural counties with conserved, restored, and protected public lands than rural counties with fewer protected and conserved areas. Conserved public lands are the backbone of the rapidly growing outdoor recreation economy, [generating](#) \$788 billion in consumer spending nationally and supporting 5.2 million jobs. One hundred economists and scientists [have found](#) that the global economy would benefit from the creation of far more protected areas on land and at sea than we have today.

Conserved private lands, including working forests, farms, and ranches, protect open spaces, preserve threatened wildlife, and help maintain the way of life in many Western mountain communities.

Science has shown that conserving nature can provide [over one-third](#) of the cost-effective climate mitigation needed through 2030 to hold warming below 2°C.



WESTERN MOUNTAIN COMMUNITIES HELPING TO ACHIEVE THE AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL GOAL

This report presents a small sample of land preservation and climate action projects that Western mountain communities have completed or are currently working on and ideas for not only future projects, but also policy prescriptions that can help achieve the America the Beautiful goal.

The projects described in this report range from local conservation efforts to federal conservation designations, but in no way do they represent the full spectrum of ideas for how the country can achieve the America the Beautiful goal. We hope that these examples will help spark new thinking in communities across the country about the diversity of projects and policies that can fall under the 30x30 umbrella.





ARIZONA

City of Flagstaff

Creation of Picture Canyon Natural and Cultural Preserve

After many years of tirelessly advocating that this exceptional area be preserved, in 2012, the City of Flagstaff [purchased](#) 478-acres of land just east of the city commonly known as Picture Canyon from the Arizona State Land Department for \$4.8 million with funding from the 2004 city voter-approved open space bond and a Growing Smarter Grant from Arizona State Parks.

This area has been home to Hopi, Zuni, and Ancestral Puebloan people since time immemorial and contains hundreds of petroglyphs depicting archers, geometric shapes, and local animals like birds and turtles.

After acquiring the land, the city renamed the area the [Picture Canyon Natural and Cultural Preserve](#) because it provides a natural place for members of the Flagstaff community to learn about ecology, geology, and archaeology while recreating outdoors. As a neighbor to the preserve, the [City of Flagstaff Wildcat Hill Wastewater Treatment Plant](#) ensures a year-long water source, providing critical riparian habitat for wildlife and songbirds.

City of Flagstaff, Arizona Former Vice-Mayor said, "I think that the America the Beautiful initiative is a great response to the climate and biodiversity challenges our country is facing. The City of Flagstaff's Greater Buffalo Park and Picture Canyon Natural and Cultural Preserve are two fantastic examples of locally-led and broadly supported conservation projects that can count toward the 30x30 goal."

Passage of The Greater Buffalo Park Citizen Initiative

In 2014, a group of dedicated and determined Flagstaff conservationists formed the [Greater Buffalo Park campaign](#) (Proposition 413) to place a [question](#) on the ballot for voters in the City of Flagstaff to preserve, as passive open space, 300-acres of centrally located spectacular city-owned land that was vulnerable to development.

After collecting thousands of signatures, the campaign committee placed the question on the November 2016 ballot. The local newspaper [endorsed](#) the measure, which the voters [approved by 87%](#).





CALIFORNIA

Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program (California and Nevada)

The [Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program](#), which has invested over \$2.5 billion in the region, is a partnership of federal, state, and local agencies, private interests, and the Washoe Tribe. It was created to protect and improve the extraordinary natural and recreational resources of the Lake Tahoe Basin. Program partners implement projects that include everything from new bike trails to creek restorations to programs that protect Lake Tahoe from aquatic invasive species and catastrophic wildfire. The program can serve as a good example of how conserving lands and waters can support communities by creating a resilient landscape.

Northwest California Wilderness, Recreation, and Working Forests Act

The [Northwest California Wilderness, Recreation, and Working Forests Act](#), if passed, will protect communities by increasing fire resilience, restore forests and fish habitat, strengthen local economies, enhance recreational opportunities, and protect important wild places on federal lands.

City of South Lake Tahoe, Mayor Pro Tem Devin Middlebrook said, “The America the Beautiful initiative lays out exactly the right approach to restoring biodiversity and combating climate change. Local governments can help achieve the 30x30 goal by enacting smart comprehensive land use and growth management plans.”





Town of Truckee

Truckee River Legacy Trail and Measure R Trail Funding

In Truckee, trails are both popular destinations for year-round recreation as well as important components of the Town's transportation infrastructure. The Town of Truckee has constructed over 21 miles of paved multiuse trails, including the Truckee River Legacy Trail. This trail network connects three of Truckee's major neighborhoods to Downtown Truckee, providing multiple ways for the residents and visitors to commute, access the Truckee River, or enjoy shops and restaurants. Reflecting the importance of trails to the Truckee community, in 2014 voters passed Measure R, a ¼ percent local sales tax to support Town of Truckee trails. These funds support building and maintaining trails in accordance with the long-term vision laid out in the [Truckee Trails and Bikeways Master Plan](#).

Truckee Springs

In June 2021, Truckee Donner Land Trust, in collaboration with the Town of Truckee, completed the acquisition of Truckee Springs, 26 acres of open space along the Truckee River in downtown Truckee. This land provides important riparian and upland habitat and will help protect water quality, and will provide important connections to existing soft surface trails. To provide enhanced public access and connectivity, the Town of Truckee will extend the multiuse Truckee River Legacy Trail westward across the Hilltop development and Truckee Springs, connecting to Highway 89 and Donner Lake. Construction on a new pedestrian bridge crossing the river to West River Street will connect Truckee's historic downtown to Truckee Springs.

Council Member, David Polivy from the Town of Truckee said, "Conservation, greenhouse gas reductions, healthy communities, and economic vitality all go hand in hand in Truckee. With our community's focus on outdoor recreation and getting people out of their vehicles, our success expanding our cross town trail network along with critical river side open space is testament to our Town's commitment to address the issues of today and those for tomorrow. We look forward to pursuing the national goals of President Biden's America the Beautiful Initiative and are aligned in our commitment to support healthy lands and waters in and around our built communities."





COLORADO


Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy (CORE) Act

The CORE Act will protect 400,000 acres of Colorado public land and designate nearly 80,000 acres as new recreation and conservation management areas that preserve existing outdoor uses such as hiking and mountain biking. It is the most significant and broadly supported effort to conserve Colorado’s most cherished lands, waters, and forests in a generation. The measure also includes a first-of-its-kind National Historic Landscape at Camp Hale to honor Colorado’s military legacy and the history of Colorado’s 10th Mountain Division, a unique and powerful tribute to those who have served our country.

For decades, local communities have been calling for the protection of historic sites, recreation areas, unspoiled wilderness lands, as well as waterways and wildlife habitat through individual pieces of legislation that have been united and refined in the CORE Act. This important legislation is the result of collaboration with diverse stakeholders, including ranchers, sportsmen, small business owners, veterans, local elected officials, outdoor recreation organizations, as well as water, and energy groups.

Eagle County, Colorado Commissioner Kathy Chandler-Henry said, “Eagle County is excited to see the expanded vision for conservation in the America the Beautiful plan. Including our private landowners, Tribes, individuals and public entities in the ambitious and necessary protection of our lands and waters is the first step toward creating a future for our children and grandchildren that values natural resources. We’ve seen the healing powers of nature during this last difficult year. Ensuring that we have an America the Beautiful for all is within our reach.”





Town of Ridgway, Colorado Mayor John Clark said, “From boosting our outdoor economy to protecting our critical water resources and wildlife habitat to conserving some of our wildest public lands, the Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy (CORE) Act is a collaborative effort that brings some of the best ideas and input from across the state into one piece of legislation. The need for this legislation is critical, in order to fight climate change while putting us on a path to conserving 30% of our land and water by 2030.”

San Miguel County

Protection of the Gunnison sage-grouse habitat

San Miguel County is [working with partners](#) including landowners, Colorado Parks & Wildlife, US Fish & Wildlife, U.S. Forest Service, and the Bureau of Land Management to bring the threatened Gunnison sage-grouse back from the brink of extinction by improving and protecting its habitat in the San Miguel Basin.

Payment for Ecosystem Services Program

San Miguel County is piloting a [Payment for Ecosystem Services Program](#) which includes the development of a protocol to help farmers and ranchers improve their soil and increase its capacity to hold water, which may help ease the effects of drought. To help the county achieve its climate mitigation goals, the program is also looking at how much carbon can be sequestered within local soils. Using Natural Resource Conservation Service funding, the program could become a way to pay farmers and ranchers for ecosystem services centered on soil health and improve the productivity and resiliency of the land for current and future agricultural producers.

Tribal Reconciliation Program

San Miguel County has developed a reconciliation program with the three Ute Tribes to [repair the county's relationship](#) with the Tribes and restore more equitable access to traditional Tribal lands. The program is an important way for the county to gain a better understanding of traditional knowledge that can inform collaborative land management with the Tribes moving forward, and to ensure that Tribal members have access to lands.

The County has worked with policymakers on the Colorado Recreation and Economy Act and any potential legislative language for the Dolores River area to ensure that language is included in these policies that will allow Tribal access to gather traditional resources from designated areas.

Pitkin County

Pitkin County has several initiatives for conserving land and riparian areas, and for restoring wetlands and river courses. These projects rely on local volunteers and staff and collaboration with non-profits, government entities, and private citizens.

Agricultural Leasing Program

Pitkin County has developed an [agricultural leasing program](#) that offers leases for county land to ranchers and farmers so they can continue the county's agricultural heritage and support and nurture strong local food systems. The program is very popular with many enthusiastic farmers vying for land each year.



Healthy Rivers and Stream Fund

In 2008, the voters of Pitkin County approved a .10¢ sales tax to fund the [Healthy Rivers and Streams Fund Program](#) to support the efforts to protect, defend, and enhance rivers and streams through collaboration on watershed wide opportunities, solutions, and education on water issues. Recently, the county acquired another half-mile stretch of prime gold medal fishing in the Roaring Fork River to ensure public access. Currently, the county is completing some projects to make irrigation more efficient, remove dangerous hazards for river runners and fishermen, and add a Recreational In-Channel Diversion to preserve water flows in the river.

Open Space and Trails Program

Founded in 1990, the [Pitkin County Open Space and Trails Program](#) acquires, preserves, maintains, and manages open space for multiple purposes, including, but not limited to, recreation, wildlife habitat, and local agriculture. The program also acquires, preserves, develops, and manages trails. Funding for the program comes from a property tax, and since its inception, more than 20,000 acres have been conserved either as open space or through conservation easements, and some 84 miles of trails and 60 miles of Nordic trails are being maintained.

Conservation Easements

Pitkin County is currently negotiating conservation easements on ranch and rural properties which are rapidly appreciating in value and quickly becoming out of reach for agricultural operators. Conservation easements allow farmers and ranchers the financial wherewithal to stay on the land while ensuring they are not developed to the detriment of agriculture. These efforts to keep agricultural lands in production are a good way to achieve the America the Beautiful goals.

Aquatic Nuisance Species Program

The Aquatic Nuisance Species Program, which is administered by the Ruedi Water and Power Authority on Ruedi Reservoir is made up of local elected officials from several jurisdictions. They identify and remove invasive species and the program has, thus far, been successful at keeping invasive zebra and quagga mussels out of Ruedi Reservoir.

Looking ahead, some high elevation recreation and scenic areas in the county deserve greater protection and former hard rock and coal mine sites should be restored.





Town of Frisco

Wetland Conservation Easements

In 2020, the Town of Frisco worked with Colorado Open Lands to place a permanent conservation easement on [10.88 acres in the Meadow Creek wetlands](#) and restored .41 acres of wetlands. This conservation effort grew out of the need to restore and preserve a new wetlands area because wetlands were lost when the Frisco Bay Marina was expanded in 2019. This conservation easement recognizes that intact wetlands can help to reduce the impacts of climate change by storing water to reduce drought and the risk of wildlife and stormwater infiltration. The project also ensures that the public can enjoy them for recreation and rejuvenation well into the future.

Looking forward, it's essential that the town continue to protect wetlands, which could include the purchase of wetlands that are privately owned, and to purchase mining claims and other inholdings to reduce the potential for development in backcountry areas. If funding were to become available to help with forest fuels mitigation and sustainable trail development, the town has a list of projects ready to go.

Summit County

Open Spaces and Trails Department

Working with multiple partners including private landowners and the USDA Forest Service, the Summit County [Open Spaces and Trails Department](#) identifies, protects, and manages open spaces, trails, and trailheads. Working with over 200 landowners, the department has protected almost 17,500 acres as open space through over 347 acquisitions and dedications.

The Swan River Restoration Project

A special project of the Open Spaces and Trails Department, [The Swan River Restoration](#), aims to reestablish and naturalize more than two miles of the Swan River and valley near Breckenridge. Three main forks of the Swan River watershed converge in the Upper Swan River Valley, where over 100 years ago it was habitat for native species, like beaver and cutthroat trout that freely migrated between the three tributaries. Due to a legacy of dredge boat mining from the area's gold mining era, the river and valley were obliterated by the mining process. Hydrological surveys showed that the Swan River was running subsurface, buried under miles of dredge rock debris while the valley was largely bereft of ecological functions.

After more than a decade of planning, in 2016 and 2017 over a half mile of valley floor was restored with a mile-long stream channel and 25 acres of floodplain.

A strong collaborative effort, partners in the project include the USDA Forest Service, the Town of Breckenridge, Trout Unlimited, Summit County, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Colorado Water Conservation Board, Colorado Division of Reclamation, Mining and Safety, Friends of the Dillon Ranger District, Friends of the Dillon Ranger District, the Blue River Watershed Council, and others.

Looking ahead, Summit County is planning to continue working on additional reaches of the Swan River Restoration Project, with some of the areas located on private land. Full funding has not yet been secured for the remainder of the project.



Divestment from Fossil Fuels

In December 2020, in accordance with Summit County's recently-adopted Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) policy for investment, the Treasurer's Office sold the county's last holdings of fossil fuel stocks in the county's managed portfolio of investments.

100% Renewable Electricity Commitment

In February 2018, Summit County adopted a [resolution](#) committing to 100% renewable electricity by 2035. In 2021, 18 County facilities are 100% solar-powered, including the County Commons, Justice Center, Frisco Transit Center, North Branch Library, Breckenridge Facilities Shop, and many public works buildings. Overall, many Summit County facilities are powered by renewable energy sources by partnering with Xcel Energy on their Renewable Connect program.

EV Readiness, Inclusion, and Equity

The Summit County Board of County Commissioners has adopted an Electric Vehicle (EV) Readiness Plan. Twelve stakeholders, including towns, ski areas, businesses, advocacy organizations, and residents helped draft the plan, which contains strategies that are designed to reduce barriers to EV adoption, making it more affordable, convenient, and functional for people to drive an electric vehicle or ride an electric bicycle.

Blue River Integrated Water Management Plan

The [Blue River Watershed Group](#) has partnered with Trout Unlimited to produce a basin-wide Integrated Water Management Plan (IWMP) for the Blue River basin. The long-term goal of the IWMP is to enable consumptive and non-consumptive water users to understand and quantify current and future uses and integrate them for the maximum benefit of all users while protecting the existing water resource.

Eagle County

Eagle County Open Space Program

Funded by property tax dollars, Eagle County's Open Space Program has protected 13,450 acres of land in Eagle County since its inception in 2003. These lands include working ranches, critical wildlife habitat and riparian corridors, river recreation access points, trails and scenic view corridors.

Climate Action Collaborative

Since 2016, Eagle County has worked closely with Walking Mountains Science Center to engage the community in the county's Climate Action Plan implementation. By working as a core member of a [Climate Action Collaborative](#), the county works alongside other local governments, businesses, and non-profit partners to reduce climate pollution from the county's energy supply, buildings, transportation, and waste diversion.

Holy Cross Energy, the county's local electrical utility cooperative, is taking significant actions to increase the portion of renewable energy powering the community, and electricity has emerged as the county's clean fuel of choice. To date, the county's most impactful Greenhouse Gas (GHG) reduction strategy or "big move," as determined through GHG modeling, has been the electrification or "fuel switching" from fossil fuels to electricity for county buildings and transportation systems.





IDAHO

City of Driggs, Idaho Mayor Hyrum Johnson said, “Farmers, anglers, ranchers, and private landowners are some of America’s most effective conservationists. This is especially true in Driggs and Teton Valley, Idaho. We are grateful that President Biden’s ambitious plan supports our private landowners committed to protecting their property by providing the tools, financial resources, and incentives for landowners and the private sector to restore degraded natural areas and manage their resources sustainably. Locally-led conservation efforts can provide a sustainable economic base for rural communities while preserving important traditions and safeguarding nature.”



Blaine County, Idaho Board of Commissioners Chair Dick Fosbury said, “Blaine County’s pristine public lands and waters contribute to healthy lifestyles and an exceptional quality of life for residents and visitors alike. Our comprehensive plan helps to protect natural resources by prioritizing conservation and growth management. And yet, a changing climate is increasing the frequency and severity of wildfire and flood events which threaten our way of life and damage public lands and water. The America the Beautiful initiative will strengthen our efforts to restore heavily damaged public lands and build resilience within our community.”



MONTANA

Montana Headwaters Legacy Act

The [Montana Headwaters Legacy Act](#), which was re-introduced in June of 2021, will protect 377 miles of river in Southwest Montana by designating stretches of the Gallatin, Madison, and Smith Rivers as “wild and scenic,” the highest level of federal protection. Adding these important Montana rivers to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System will ensure that they remain clean and free-flowing in perpetuity.

City of Bozeman, Montana Mayor Cyndy Andrus said, “I am very pleased to see that the Montana Headwaters Legacy Act includes the public lands portions of the Gallatin River, Taylor Fork and Hyalite Creek, which is the primary source of Bozeman’s drinking water. Protecting these important headwaters streams will also protect every downstream water user, including farmers and ranchers, municipalities, industrial users, and river-based recreationists that contribute to Montana’s \$7.1 billion outdoor recreation economy.”

Badger-Two Medicine Protection Act

[Blackfeet leaders](#), non-Tribal neighbors, hunters, anglers, conservationists, ranchers, local landowners, and many others have drafted the [Badger-Two Medicine Protection Act](#), which would designate 127,000 acres in the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest as the Badger-Two Medicine Cultural Area.

Building on existing protections, the legislation would prohibit commercial timber harvest, exclude vegetation management; make permanent the existing road construction ban; ban the use of motorized vehicles and mountain bikes; and prohibit new structures including water facilities, pipelines, or buildings of any kind. Maintenance of existing structures, grazing allotments, and current activities would still be permitted. The bill also requires the Forest Service to consider new management proposals put forward by the Tribe, to consult with the Tribe on management twice a year, and gives the Tribe two 30-day veto windows on proposed new uses at the beginning and end of the environmental review process.

City of Missoula

Missoula Conservation & Climate Action Plan

To achieve carbon neutrality by 2025, Missoula’s Conservation & Climate Action Plan (CCAP) identifies strategies and practices that enable City operations to optimize efficiency, work wisely and responsibly, and utilize technology and innovation to consume less, reduce costs, and build resiliency for the future. The city does this through updates to fleet and facilities; internal policies and practices; and renewable energy and offsets. The city works with community partners like Climate Smart Missoula to achieve these goals.

100% Clean Electricity

On June 22, 2020, the City of Missoula, Missoula County, and NorthWestern Energy entered into a Memorandum of Understanding jointly stating their intention to cooperate in support of the City and County’s goal of 100% clean electricity by 2030. The MOU committed the three parties to develop an Implementation Plan that identifies specific projects and programs to be pursued along with timelines for each.



Community Wildlife Habitat

In 2018 the City of Missoula became the first certified Community Wildlife Habitat in the state of Montana. The city did this by certifying homes, schools, and common areas as spaces that provide food, water, cover, and places to raise young wildlife while using sustainable gardening practices. As of January 2019, Missoula is home to 145 certified homes, 14 schools, and 33 common areas. This process took three years of hard work and dedication from non-profit partners, community partners, volunteers, and the City of Missoula.

Zero Waste

In 2016 the Missoula City Council adopted the 2016 Missoula Zero Waste Resolution to develop a community-wide Zero Waste plan to reduce waste by 90 percent by 2050 and become Montana's first Zero Waste community. The city, led by a ZERO by FIFTY Leadership Team, is collaborating with partners, advising and supporting residents and businesses with their own Zero Waste initiatives, and gathering resources for widespread plan implementation. The Leadership Team is advised by the Zero Waste Advisory Committee (ZWAC) made up of volunteer stakeholders from a variety of sectors, organizations, and the community. Our Missoula Growth Policy

Our Missoula Growth Policy

The 'Our Missoula' City Growth Policy is the fundamental policy document that guides growth and development in Missoula. The vision for Missoula in 2035, with supporting land use concepts, goals, objectives, and actions is one of managed growth while meeting the needs of the community's residents. Conservation of the qualities and characteristics that Missoulians value are fundamental to reaching a shared vision of a sustainable, livable community with a diversified economy, improved infrastructure and environmental quality, and affordable housing options for all. Citizen input and engagement in the policy and next steps has been critical to empower community members with prioritized strategies and actions to reach a shared vision for the future.

Going forward, the City will continue to expand these and other programs through an updated inventory of city and community systems while working to better highlight the efforts of internal departments from parks and recreation to the wastewater treatment facilities.





NEVADA

Clark County, Nevada Commissioner Justin Jones said, “For too long, the costs and impacts of nature loss have fallen disproportionately on low-income communities and communities of color in the U.S. 74 percent of communities of color and 70 percent of low-income communities in the contiguous United States live in [nature-deprived areas](#). This critically needed proposal focuses on improving access to outdoor spaces close-to-home and restoring degraded lands, coastlines, and waters across this country.”

In May 2021, the Clark County Commission unanimously adopted a [resolution](#) calling for the protection of 30% of the lands and waters of the U.S. by 2030. The county unanimously adopted a [Sustainability and Climate Action Plan](#), which recognizes the devastating effects of climate change around the world and in the county especially because Las Vegas is one of the [fastest-warming](#) cities in the country.

In 2020, Clark County launched [Transform Clark County](#) to develop a cohesive vision for its future and an actionable strategy to achieve it. Transform Clark County includes a rewrite of the Master Plan and Development Code, which are Clark County’s key policy and regulatory documents. This project will significantly expand conservation efforts by incorporating complete streets principles, climate change, and water conservation measures into the County’s planning decisions.

Clark County, Nevada Commissioner Justin Jones said, “Clark County looks forward to working in tandem with Secretary Haaland and other administration officials to achieve the shared goals of the America the Beautiful initiative to preserve our public lands, address climate change, and support the priorities of the Moapa Band of Paiutes and other Tribes here in Southern Nevada.”





NEW MEXICO

Santa Fe County

Designate Additional National Heritage Areas (NHAs)

Currently, 591 counties across the country are home to 55 National Heritage Areas (NHAs), which Congress authorizes and the National Park Service manages. If authorization of a new heritage area occurs, counties are provided with funding that supports the local economy, quality of life, and tax base through locally controlled public-private partnerships.

Because NHAs foster investment in historic preservation and natural resource conservation, they can help achieve the America the Beautiful goal. The Northern Rio Grande National Heritage Area is in Santa Fe, Rio Arriba, and Taos counties where there are additional land and water conservation and restoration opportunities. Local communities can apply for federal grants to help them conserve their heritage and culture. Looking ahead, new NHAs would help achieve the America the Beautiful goal.

Reverse the 2020 Navigable Water Protection Rule

The 1972 amendments to the Clean Water Act established federal jurisdiction over “navigable waters,” defined in the Act as the “waters of the United States.” Many Clean Water Act programs [apply only to](#) “waters of the United States.” The Clean Water Act gives discretion to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Army Corps of Engineers (ACE) to define “waters of the United States” in regulations.

In 2020, the EPA modified the [definition](#) of “navigable waters,” significantly reducing the range of protected wetlands and allowing greater latitude for where pollutants could be discharged. This change removed protections for [more than 90%](#) of New Mexico’s waters, jeopardizing the health and safety of New Mexicans. Looking ahead, it’s encouraging that the EPA [has announced](#) its intention to reverse the 2020 rule and revise the definition of “waters of the United States” to better protect our nation’s vital water resources that support public health, environmental protection, agriculture, and economic vitality.





City of Las Cruces

Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument

Local conservationists came together to successfully advocate for the designation of the 500,000-acre [Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument](#), which includes the Organ Mountains, Desert Peaks, Potrillo Mountains, and Doña Ana Mountains. The monument preserves the area's cultural and historic legacy and maintains its diverse array of natural and scientific resources.

[Trackways National Monument](#) was established in 2009 to conserve, protect, and enhance the unique and nationally significant paleontological, scientific, educational, scenic, and recreational resources and values of the Robledo Mountains in southern New Mexico. This area preserves not only habitat but world-class fossils found nowhere else.

Otero Mesa

Looking ahead, the preservation of the 1.2 million-acre Otero Mesa could help achieve the America the Beautiful goal. While the mesa is considered North America's largest and most pristine Chihuahuan Desert grasslands, [one of the most endangered ecosystems](#) in North America, the oil and gas industry has long eyed its potential gas reserves. The area provides habitat for a broad variety of plant and animal species, including those that are threatened, endangered, or in decline. It is home to New Mexico's healthiest herd of pronghorn antelope and serves as a wintering ground for migratory songbirds, owls, and falcons. The groundwater there could supply drinking water for 800,000 people.

City of Las Cruces, New Mexico Council Member Gill Sorg said, "To me, it's a no brainer. We need to keep our biodiversity and habitat from being destroyed. Las Cruces continues to pursue locally-led efforts to preserve the many arroyos and open space in and near the city. We continue to add more park acreage as we grow as these provide unique habitat for a wide variety of birds. We also support the preservation of many Wilderness Study Areas and conservation lands across Southern New Mexico like our Sky Islands, for example."





OREGON

Two separate pieces of legislation in the U.S. Senate could help protect and restore numerous river corridors in the Rogue watershed and protect various at-risk landscapes in Oregon's Southwest Siskiyou region.

The River Democracy Act

This piece of legislation would designate more than 4,000 miles of Oregon's waterways as Wild & Scenic. Several hundred individuals and businesses nominated some of their favorite watersheds for inclusion in the bill from the Oregon Coast to the Oregon High Desert. In SW Oregon alone, more than 750 miles of waterways are included for protection, incorporating tributaries to the Rogue, Chetco, Applegate, and Winchuck River watersheds.

The Oregon Recreation Enhancement Act

This piece of legislation would encompass protections for several watersheds in Southwest Oregon. The Oregon Recreation Enhancement Act would:

- Create the 90,000 acre Rogue Canyon National Recreation Area;
- Expand the Wild Rogue Wilderness by 55,000 acres;
- Establish the Molalla Canyon National Recreation Area);
- And permanently "withdraw" 100,000 acres of public lands in the Hunter, Baldface, and Rough & Ready Creek watersheds, located in Josephine and Curry Counties.

City of Ashland, Oregon Councilor Tonya Graham said, "We know that conserving 30% of our lands and waters is a threshold we need to accomplish for our overall ecological health. We appreciate President Biden giving us guidance on what this can mean for local communities and how private entities, local, state, and federal governments can work to preserve our lands and waters collectively."





UTAH

Bears Ears National Monument

[Bears Ears National Monument](#) was created in 2016 by President Barack Obama after many years consulting with regional Tribes as well as conservationists, hunters, ranchers, and Utah lawmakers. On December 4, 2017, President Trump announced that he had cut Bears Ears National Monument by 85% and Grand Staircase-

Escalante National Monument by half--the largest reduction of public land protections in history. This move has been fought in the courts by Tribes, businesses, and conservation organizations. Utah residents [overwhelmingly](#) support the original Bears Ears designation, as do Tribes in the area and across the nation.

City of Moab

Decarbonization Resolution

Like many Utah cities, Moab has passed a [resolution](#) in support of decarbonization by shifting to 100% renewable energy by 2030. Yet ongoing oil and gas leasing undermines the city's efforts by keeping underpriced fossil fuels coming to market, as well as chipping away at currently natural public lands. Increased fossil fuel development increases the impacts of climate change such as drought, unpredictable snowfall and snowmelt, and increases in catastrophic wildfires.

Millcreek Parkway

Millcreek Parkway is a protected riparian area that runs through the city, providing a non-motorized transportation, recreation, and wildlife corridor. In 2020 the city created a mountain bike skills park to primarily serve youth and families for whom the equipment and transportation to traditional public lands trails was difficult.

The Management of Sand Flats Recreation Area

The Bureau of Land Management and Grand County cooperatively manage the 9,000 acre Sands Flats Recreation Area, which is located in the heart of the Colorado Plateau and provides camping, mountain biking, hiking, and motorized trails. Adjacent to the City of Moab, user fees support increased management and volunteer engagement.

Scott and Norma Matheson Wetlands Preserve

The [Scott and Norma Matheson Wetlands Preserve](#) is the largest intact wetlands system on the Colorado River in Utah, and hosts more than 200 species of birds, amphibians and mammals. This wetland has become drier during the last twenty years, as Colorado River flood levels decrease in height and frequency, and more importantly, the groundwater feeding the wetlands becomes fully utilized.

The Preserve recently modified some of the connectivity between wetland and river to create a breeding area for endangered fish. In the future, Moab's waste water treatment plant effluent could be used to restore much of the ecological functionality of this wetland, but would require additional treatment to be discharged there. Funding for both the treatment, and the planning work would help make this a reality.



WASHINGTON

Leavenworth

The City of Leavenworth is actively engaged in trying to be better stewards with a renewed emphasis on recycling and a pilot program for composting. The city continues to work with the county, state, and U.S. Forest Service partners to address the new realities of climate change, including water issues, increased fire danger, and resiliency. The city recently adopted the Wildland Urban Interface Building Code and is in the process of putting together a pilot program to help owners of low-income older homes upgrade to be more fire-resistant. The city has also recently upgraded all water meters to smart meters which will allow them to track usage, conserve more water, and also the city to update their pricing to reflect peak and off peak times once their rate study is done.

Looking forward, the city is working towards implementing a sustainable tourism model.



WYOMING

Teton County

Looking ahead, the Bridger-Teton National Forest and the Jackson Hole Land Trust [will continue](#) to apply to the Land and Water Conservation Fund to acquire school trust land inholdings in the forest for preservation, which could help achieve the America the Beautiful goal.





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.