

Promising Gains and the Challenges that Remain

Tongass National Forest, Alaska
Colin Arisman

Thanks to you, our country has made key advances in conservation this year, but there is so much urgent work left to be done.

Four years of standing strong together against ferocious attacks on public lands deepened our relationships with local communities and many partners, as we all joined together in the fight to protect the shared lands people love and rely upon.

Now, we have a president who shares our highest priorities. His early executive orders tackling the intertwined climate, extinction and inequity crises charted a new course for our nation:

- Adopting a national goal to protect 30 percent of U.S. lands and waters by 2030;
- Suspending all activity to explore the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for oil and gas;

- Reviewing scores of destructive policy decisions by the previous administration; and
- Ordering a long-overdue review of the climate-destroying federal oil and gas leasing program.

Our hopes rose for the sort of sweeping conservation gains called for in this time of ecological crisis. But with the lack of a decisive pro-conservation majority, Congress has struggled to act in concert with the president at the speed and scale necessary to confront the climate, extinction and inequity crises.

Promising Gains

We've been working tirelessly for months with Indigenous leaders, community groups and conservation organizations to restore protections to the Tongass National Forest in southeastern Alaska, of which 9.4 million acres were opened to roadbuilding and logging by the Trump administration in 2020.

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Dear Conservation Champion,

Thanks to you, we have developed conservation solutions to tackle the great challenges of our day. By becoming better stewards of public lands, our nation can address climate change and species loss, while, at the same time, ensuring that the benefits of healthy ecosystems and wild nature are shared more equitably among all people.

If President Biden and the slender pro-conservation majority in Congress stick together and stand firm on the bold positions they have staked out on climate and conservation, transformational change is within our grasp.

But success is by no means certain.

That is why we must redouble our efforts to bring the unique expertise and strength of The Wilderness Society to help local communities build the solutions that this administration and Congress can embrace.

Together, we can mobilize a groundswell of public support that will signal the power of the pro-conservation majority. We will impress upon President Biden, his team and their allies the need to follow through on our highest shared aspirations.

Let's roll up our sleeves and get the job done!

Jamie Williams
President



Uncompahgre National Forest, Colorado
Mason Cummings

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The Wilderness Society recognizes Native Americans and Indigenous peoples as the longest serving stewards of the land.

**To learn more visit:
wilderness.org/landacknowledgment**



America's Wilderness is published three times a year by The Wilderness Society.

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National Monuments Restored!

President Biden restored protections to Bears Ears, Grand Staircase-Escalante, and Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monuments on October 8. The news came nearly four years after the previous administration unlawfully attacked these special places, triggering fierce opposition by Tribal leaders, scientists and local businesses.

And you were right there every step of the way, helping us fight alongside them. Your support allowed us to lead the national coalition pushing for restoration of these national monuments since 2017—and to defend the Antiquities Act, which empowers the president to designate national monuments.

You submitted tens of thousands of comments to elected officials; made donations to help

fund our legal battles; and pressured the Biden administration to stick to its promise. And you powered our work with many allies—especially in support of the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition—to keep the pressure on the Biden administration to follow through on their commitments to restore these protections.

Conserving the lands and waters that sustain the health of our communities and fight the climate crisis will continue to require bold action like restoring these monuments. We are working hard to support local communities and the president in protecting other irreplaceable landscapes.

Your commitment and the unflagging efforts of our staff and partners across the country has righted a great wrong. Take a bow!

In July, this work was rewarded when an executive order announced that protection would be restored—and then went even further. The order banned all industrial-scale logging of old growth trees throughout the entire 16.7-million-acre forest, citing the out-sized capacity of giant, ancient trees to absorb and store climate-changing carbon. Moreover, the order invested \$25 million in the local economy to support projects that improve forest health and ecosystem restoration.

We are working to ensure that the new policy protecting old growth trees is extended to all the national forests. When we succeed, we will add another chapter to the long history of forest conservation leadership that you have made possible.

We were also encouraged by the Biden administration's plan to dramatically increase the protected and connected lands and waters in the U.S. in order to allow nature to heal and thrive. The plan adopts the methods we have used to achieve our greatest impact: inclusive, community led conservation planning that listens to the people most affected by how public lands are used, relies on sound science and the knowledge of Indigenous peoples, and protects nature.

The Challenges That Remain

The fossil fuel, mining and industrial-scale timber companies are fighting hard to hang on to their access

to public lands at below-market prices. These industries have many allies in Congress who turn a blind eye to the growing devastation stemming from climate change and who value near-term profits over the health of people and the planet.

We have been working diligently with our many partners and the Biden administration to find creative solutions to restore protections to dozens of places and bedrock environmental laws that were attacked by the Trump administration. And we're going the extra mile, to make sure the solutions we embrace will endure. But progress has been slow.

For example, we supported our Tribal allies as they spent months pressuring President Biden to restore almost two million acres of the Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments—which he did on October 8. While this gives us much to celebrate, we expected faster action in view of candidate Biden's campaign promises and Interior Secretary Deb Haaland's strong recommendation in June 2021 that both national monuments be restored to their original boundaries.

Your support helped us secure this important victory and remains critical as we urge the president to keep up this momentum by protecting other significant landscapes in the weeks, months and years ahead.

Many of our highest priority campaigns are led by Indigenous people: the Gwich'in Steering Committee for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition for Bears Ears National Monument, and representatives of the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian tribes for the Tongass National Forest. These leaders and the communities they represent are the original

stewards of the land and bring unparalleled knowledge to these campaigns.

Thanks to you, The Wilderness Society has added your voice, and those of our million-plus supporters, in support of their efforts to protect the lands and waters that in turn safeguard their livelihoods, ways of life, and cultural and spiritual heritage.



Karlin Itchoak, Alaska State Director
Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska
Mason Cummings

Where We Go From Here

It is still too early to tell whether the Biden administration and Congress will be able to deliver significant, enduring gains on climate, protecting nature and environmental justice.

What is very clear, however, is that the pro-conservation majority must step up our efforts to demand action and lift up the voices of those who have not historically had a seat at the table but are disproportionately impacted by these challenges. Also clear is that The Wilderness Society will play a key role in the effort to leverage the full potential of these lands to help solve the great challenges of our day.

Over and over again, we have shown that broad-based, community led conservation, informed by our deep knowledge of public lands policy and law, can generate innovative ideas. And, further, that those ideas can be leveraged to achieve sweeping national policy through

trusted relationships we have forged with elected leaders. We are the successors of the revolutionary thinkers who got The Wilderness Act written and signed into law in 1964, so that today it protects 111 million acres of wildlands. We played a central role in developing the Roadless Rule and getting it adopted in 2001, so that it now protects 58.5 million acres in national forests across the country. And we led legislative strategy for the huge coalition that got the Land and Water Conservation Fund permanently reauthorized and fully funded on a bipartisan basis in Congress in 2020.

It's up to all of us, the champions of America's public lands, to lead once again.

We can, we must and we will help our nation unlock the potential of public lands to combat climate change, restore and connect healthy ecosystems and habitat to stem the extinction crisis, and ensure that the benefits of public lands are enjoyed by all people.



Communities across the country are coming together to create sound and equitable climate resiliency plans. Many of those near public lands want a partner who can help them navigate complex processes for pushing federal land managers to prioritize conservation and climate resiliency.

Because of you, The Wilderness Society can be that partner! But it will take a big investment to increase our skilled, dedicated staff on the ground in these communities.

Alpine Lakes Wilderness, Washington
Andy Porter



“I think of (my giving) as paying the earth first, and myself second.”

Forrest and Kelsey Wells take to the outdoors whenever they can. Kelsey, who teaches in a bilingual English-Spanish elementary school, recalls that “By the time we met in high school, we were both avid outdoors enthusiasts.” Forrest, an emergency medicine physician at a busy urban hospital, adds, “experiences in the outdoors center me and fill my cup for the challenges I face on a daily basis.”

Living in Utah, the couple are surrounded by public lands and spend most of their free time backcountry skiing, climbing and biking in the mountains. For vacations, they enjoy visiting magnificent public lands further from home.

But this love of the outdoors is not why Kelsey and Forrest support The Wilderness Society. “We’re both very committed to the ideals of ‘effective altruism,’ wherein the focus is to make maximum impact by investing in highly effective organizations that produce outsized results working on the most important issues,” explains Kelsey.

Addressing climate change is the couple’s highest priority, so they needed to choose among the many groups doing important work on climate. “The Wilderness Society’s emphasis on science-based, continental-scale landscape conservation and connectivity caught our attention,” says Forrest, “because establishing big networks of wildlands is essential to build resilience to climate change for ecosystems.”

“The other piece of it,” adds Kelsey, “is that The Wilderness Society is effective at the local level, bringing people together to figure out conservation solutions, and also at the national level, gathering all those community voices to gain big leaps forward in national policy.”

“We’re glad that one benefit of The Wilderness Society’s approach will be more access for more people to enjoy public lands the way we do,” Forrest says. “But more important is recognizing that climate change is here, and we have to act now to improve the chances for ourselves, and all the life with which we share this world, to thrive.”

Kelsey and Forrest also took steps to heighten the impact of their giving and to make it easy to fulfill their commitment to make a difference. They contribute 10 percent of each paycheck to a savings account that they use to make quarterly donations to a few highly vetted organizations. “I think of it as paying the Earth first, and myself second,” remarks Forrest.

“Effective altruism encourages us to be mindful of our giving in an ongoing way,” Kelsey explains. “Ten percent of the time I spend working comes out to about two days a month,” she adds, “so I mark two days every month on my calendar as the days I am working to fight climate change. It reminds me to be grateful for what I have and the chance to make a difference.”

Your Support in Action

So many reasons to love wild places...

So many ways to protect them!

Think about all the ways wild places touch your life. Imagine living without fields and forests, mountains and rivers, silence and stars, wilderness and wildlife.

Then, think about what you can do today to create a lasting future for the people and wild places you love.

Zion National Park, Utah
Mark Adamus

Become an Advocate for Wilderness.

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Denali National Park, Alaska
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