



Beyond Willow: A Climate Plan for Public Lands

Western Arctic, Alaska
Lisa Hupp/USFWS

This spring, despite the fierce protests of millions of people, the Biden administration approved the Willow project, ConocoPhillips' plan for huge oil fields in the Western Arctic region of Alaska.

With three massive drill sites supporting more than 200 wells and hundreds of miles of roads and pipelines, the Willow project's industrial development will seriously harm Indigenous villages and wildlife in this fragile landscape. In addition, the greenhouse gas emissions stemming from the production and burning of upwards of 300 million barrels of oil over 30 years will exacerbate climate change. And, of course, approval of the project contradicts President Biden's campaign promises in support of our nation's climate goals.

Immediately following the project's approval, The Wilderness Society and five partners filed a lawsuit to block the project, taking our fight to the courts.

How Did This Happen?

The Willow decision cannot be reconciled with the Biden administration's climate goals and record. It has done more than any other administration in history to tackle the climate crisis. And yet, approving Willow lit the fuse on a massive climate bomb that will hurt local communities and lock us all into decades of additional greenhouse gas pollution. Clearly, the decision was not centered on the project's impact on the climate.

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Dear Conservation Champion,

Protecting public lands for all has never been more urgent or important—and thanks to you, we are making exciting progress.

The designations of two new national monuments—which together span more than half-a-million acres—honor decades of community-led efforts to preserve significant cultural sites and access to nature, and safeguard important wildlife habitat and migration corridors. We also applaud a transformative new plan by the Bureau of Land Management to place land conservation on equal footing with other uses.

While these are promising steps forward, we are keenly aware that our nation cannot reach its necessary and stated climate goals without significantly reducing greenhouse gas emissions. And the place to begin is on our public lands. By protecting them, we protect our future.

So, let's make the most of the conservation opportunities before us—using all the grit and determination we've got—to secure public lands for the benefit of people, wildlife and the climate. Your unwavering commitment means we will succeed.

Thank you!

Jamie Williams
President



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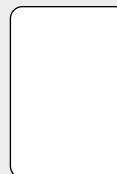
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wilderness.org/landacknowledgment



Since 1935, The Wilderness Society has led the effort to permanently protect nearly 112 million acres of wilderness in 44 states. We have been at the forefront of nearly every major public lands victory.

Our Mission: Uniting people to protect America's wild places.



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Questions or comments? Please send an email to newsletter@tw.s.org

The project's approval also signals that the Biden administration is making decisions about the highest and best use of public lands on a case-by-case basis, with an ever-shifting array of interests and pressures at play in each decision.

This must change. The Wilderness Society is calling for the Biden administration to manage our shared public lands in the public interest—to safeguard biodiversity, support frontline communities and protect the climate.

A Climate Plan for Public Lands

Our climate cannot afford another Willow. That is why we and our partners are aligned behind a simple and powerful idea—that this nation needs a comprehensive climate plan for public lands. We must ensure that consequential developments like Willow are no longer made in a vacuum, without the benefit of the considerations and direction that a comprehensive plan would provide.



A national climate plan for public lands will:

1. Phase out fossil fuel development, while addressing the impact on local economies.
2. Responsibly ramp up renewable energy infrastructure.
3. Protect the richest carbon storing lands, like old-growth and mature forests.
4. Center community input and climate considerations when evaluating development projects.



James River Park Trail, Virginia
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To learn more please visit wanderproject.org

A New Conservation Imperative at the BLM

Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail, California
Bob Wick/BLM

Climate disruptions are rapidly changing our world. And we are running out of time to conserve the natural, healthy ecosystems that sustain life on earth.

This anxiety is acutely felt in western states, as increasingly severe drought, devastating flooding and uncharacteristic wildfire threaten wildlife, communities and livelihoods.

Yet hope lies in U.S. public lands, which offer some of the best solutions to address climate impacts and nature loss: wetlands that protect our towns from flooding; forests that absorb carbon and produce clean air and drinking water; and wild lands and green spaces that provide critical relief from heat waves in cities and towns. But only a fraction of our public lands system is protected in a way that can sustain these incredible benefits.

The Heart of the West

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands are the heart of the West. Spanning more than 245 million acres across 12 western states, from the Arctic Coastal Plain to the border with Mexico, they include iconic landscapes that drive vibrant, sustainable local economies. And they are home to innumerable stories of human experiences on the land, told and retold over thousands of years—including up to the present day.

Many of these lands remain in their natural state, providing critical habitat for wildlife. They also lie between many larger wilderness areas, national parks and wildlife refuges, as well as smaller parcels of protected private, state and county lands. If conserved in corridors that match the migration routes of wildlife, BLM lands can form vital links to knit together already protected lands, forming a network of resilient landscapes spanning much of the West.



Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming
Jacob W. Frank/NPS



Ah-Shi-Sle-Pah, Wilderness Study Area, New Mexico
Mason Cummings

However, while the BLM’s mission includes conservation, for nearly 40 years the agency has largely focused on resource extraction and development. Today, roughly 90% of BLM lands are open to oil and gas leasing, and, in many regions, unmanaged motorized use has fragmented wildlife habitat while putting extreme pressure on already-tapped water supplies in an era of climate change.

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Seizing the Chance to Transform the BLM

Under the Biden administration, the senior leadership of the BLM is the most conservation-minded in history. Seizing this opportunity for transformative change, The Wilderness Society and our partners have been working closely with the agency for more than two years to reshape its priorities.

These efforts were rewarded in late March when the BLM’s “Public Lands Rule” was unveiled. The rule provides communities and land managers across the West with tools to protect critical wildlife habitat, new direction to prioritize and protect cultural resources, and a new mandate to prioritize climate resiliency across all lands managed by the agency.

When fully deployed, the rule will enable BLM state and field staff, working closely with local communities, to protect tens of millions of acres—a transformative impact comparable to that of the Wilderness Act or the Roadless Rule.

With our deep roots in key western landscapes that benefit from public lands, The Wilderness Society is uniquely positioned to ensure that the communities most affected by the new Public Lands Rule have a prominent role in making those decisions.

Elevating climate resiliency, sustaining biodiversity, and protecting cultural and historic sites as priorities for BLM lands will support local communities, clean water and thriving wildlife populations—and buffer against the destructive impacts of climate change. These factors make our community fabric, and our local economies, stronger. That’s why we are working closely with many partners to ensure that this transformative new policy is implemented to the fullest extent possible.

Ask a Conservationist

Tykee James, a Wilderness Society Senior Government Relations Representative and President of DC Audubon's board of directors, answers a question submitted by one of our members.



Ben Israel/Nature Forward

How do you go about building relationships with Congressional staff and why are they so important to your work?

Congressional staff are my first point of contact when I advocate for laws to increase access to the benefits of nature. They are incredibly busy people. They draft legislation, outline the implications of proposed legislation, and do a zillion other things. To persuade a Member of Congress, you must first persuade key staff.

I work to convince them to remove barriers that prevent communities from being in nature, whether it's by supporting funding for public transit to public lands, prioritizing park funding in communities with the least access to nature, or other means.

But words! People get sick of words! All the talking, the emails and conference calls. That outreach is essential, but I also try to give people the experience that we want everyone to have—to be in nature. So, once a month, in the early morning, I lead a bird walk for Congressional staff in a small, lush park by the Capitol.

The group is different every time. But one thing is always the same. Folks slow down, and they begin to notice the incredible diversity of life all around them. They feel something, like wonder, and they remember their favorite bird story—often from childhood.

When I ask for their help to make that experience of nature available to everyone, they care a little more, respond a little faster, and work a little harder to find solutions.



Indigo Bunting in Rock Creek Park, DC
Kathryn Wilson

Have a question for the experts?

Submit it to newsletter@tws.org and the answer could be featured in an upcoming issue of *America's Wilderness*.

National Treasures Are Now National Monuments!

In March, President Biden designated two new national monuments: Avi Kwa Ame National Monument in southern Nevada and Castner Range National Monument in west Texas. In so doing, he protected cultural lands in Nevada that are significant to 12 Tribes, expanded outdoor access for Latinx communities in Texas, and preserved irreplaceable stretches of the Mojave and Chihuahuan Deserts.

As always, people have been the key to these conservation victories. Both monument designations follow decades of effort from local communities—the Fort Mojave Indian Council, other Nations and local Indigenous groups have called for formal protection of Avi Kwa Ame for years, while the El Paso Latinx community has advocated protecting Castner Range over the past half century. Following their lead, The Wilderness Society supported their advocacy and amplified calls for permanent protection.

You, too, are among the key people responsible for this victory. It is your generous and sustained support that allows us to be a faithful and trusted partner to communities seeking protection for the lands they love and depend upon. As an indication of the

significance of our role, the White House invited a delegation of five representatives from The Wilderness Society to the designation ceremony.

Avi Kwa Ame

Known as the “center of creation” by Yuman-speaking Tribes, Avi Kwa Ame translates to Spirit Mountain in the Mojave language. This ecologically diverse region is home to a sacred cultural landscape with petroglyphs, provides vital habitat and migration routes for wildlife such as the desert tortoise and desert bighorn sheep, and contains one of the oldest Joshua tree forests in the country. The new national monument spans more than 500,000 acres.

Castner Range

Castner Range is a former weapons-testing range on the eastern slope of the Franklin Mountain in West Texas. Latinx communities in and around El Paso and Ciudad Juarez have long cherished these nearly 7,000 acres of green space where colorful Mexican gold poppies bloom. It serves as an important migration corridor for wildlife in the Chihuahuan Desert and plays host to more than 25 endangered or threatened species.



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Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, Oregon
Matt Payne