

Conservation Game Changers

This spring, the Biden administration issued a series of game-changing directives that together will transform how we manage and steward public lands in the face of a changing climate and ongoing nature loss. For too long, extractive industries have profited from public lands at the expense of other important priorities like conservation, wildlife habitat and preserving important cultural resources.

Building on decades of advocacy by The Wilderness Society and the support of our dedicated donors—public lands are now well on their way to becoming a potent, practical solution to climate change and nature loss.



**Read
our new
climate
report**

Taken together, these new directives and other federal actions over the past year could result in a 40% reduction in emissions attributable to coal, oil and gas extracted from public lands, according to a new report from The Wilderness Society.

Here's a breakdown of these significant new policies:

Public Lands Rule

This new directive will transform the way 245 million acres of public lands across the West are managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM)—putting conservation, restoration, protection of drinking water and stewardship of tribal cultural lands on equal footing with other uses.

Just 13.6% of BLM lands currently enjoy permanent protection from development like mining and drilling, yet these lands are some of the most critical remaining lands left in the lower 48 states for communities to adapt to a changing climate. This new policy facilitates Tribal Nation co-stewardship for cultural lands and enables states and local governments to restore vital watersheds.

The BLM now has regulatory direction to ensure these lands—vital connective tissue for wildlife moving between large parks and other protected areas—get the stewardship they need and deserve.

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Dear Conservation Champion,

We've just come through one of the most victorious periods for public lands and climate policy in recent history.

Exciting new agency directives and other federal actions mean the country is finally making headway on reducing our fossil fuel footprint and stemming the loss of biodiversity in North America.

Beginning in April with a 20-year mineral withdrawal in Colorado's Thompson Divide, the administration released an array of new directives this spring designed to strengthen conservation, facilitate renewable energy development and rein in unfair policies for polluting oil and gas industries across 245 million acres of public lands. We also celebrated the expansion of two national monuments honoring Indigenous stewardship and creating greater public access to the wonders of nature in California.

This generation-defining progress gives you a greater voice in how we manage and protect public lands, for people and for the diversity of life they contain. Although our work is never done, we should take a moment to celebrate these incredible milestones.

Thank you for being beside us as we build the healthier world we want and deserve!

Jamie Williams
President



Jefferson National Forest, Virginia
Mason Cummings


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

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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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PRESIDENT:
Jamie Williams

DESIGN:
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“The Public Lands Rule amounts to a generation-defining shift in how we manage our shared natural resources. It’s time we get to work implementing it, working closely with tribes and local communities to tackle crises like climate change, biodiversity loss and lack of access to the outdoors.”

— Jamie Williams, President

Oil and Gas Rule

With this rule, the administration is finally reining in the oil and gas industry on public lands by modernizing the woefully outdated federal leasing program. This critical action sets stricter standards for oil and gas companies trying to develop on public lands by focusing development away from sensitive places and making companies cover the costs to clean up the messes they leave behind. It would also make companies pay a fairer share to access public lands in the first place. The Wilderness Society has been pushing for these much-needed reforms for nearly two decades.

Renewable Energy Rule

This rule will help the U.S. achieve the Biden administration’s nationwide goal of 100% clean electricity by 2035. It makes wind and solar development on public lands even more competitive with the oil and gas industry by reducing rents and fees. Together, this rule and the Western Solar Plan—which the BLM is updating now—will support responsible renewable energy development on public lands while minimizing harm to sensitive habitat and cultural areas.

Western Arctic Rule

Recognizing the importance of one of the largest undisturbed places in Alaska to Indigenous communities, biodiversity and the future of our global climate, this rule will strengthen protections for 13 million acres of designated Special Areas in the Western Arctic. These lands include Teshekpuk Lake, Colville River, Utokok Uplands, Peard Bay

and Kaseguluk Lagoon, all of which hold immense significance for Indigenous communities and are important habitats for wildlife and fish. Protecting the Arctic is critical because it is warming at four times the rate of other regions—we can’t afford another climate bomb like ConocoPhillips’ Willow project.

With these and other actions, the country is now moving steadily toward U.S. goals to protect 30% of our lands and waters by 2030 (30x30) and significantly reduce our fossil fuel footprint. But we’re already seeing pushback on these rules from fossil fuel industries and their allies on Capitol Hill. We’ll be counting on your generous support as we rigorously defend these courageous policies from attacks in Congress and in the courts.



Teshekpuk Lake, Alaska
Ashley Sabatino/BLM



Antiquities Act Under Assault

For over a century, the Antiquities Act has played a pivotal role in the protection of more than 100 million acres on land and hundreds of millions of acres at sea. As a bipartisan conservation tool used by presidents since 1906, it is one of the reasons why an extraordinary record of America’s scientific and cultural history exists in a preserved state for the public’s benefit.

It seems backwards, then, to witness continued attacks on the Antiquities Act by anti-conservation lawmakers who want to undermine this long-standing conservation statute, which enables presidents to protect historic and cultural landmarks or “objects of historic or scientific interest” on federal public lands as national monuments. This spring, the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands held a hearing to consider legislation that would require Congress to approve the establishment of a national monument through the Act. If not approved within six months, the president would then be prohibited from designating a monument to conserve those lands for 25 years. We are deeply concerned by this legislation and other attacks on the Antiquities Act.

Congress already has its own authority to create, modify or revoke national monuments and has exercised this authority numerous times. In fact, Congress has often ratified national monuments established by presidents, expanding them and converting many into the national parks we know and love today (see sidebar).

Originally established by President Teddy Roosevelt, the Act was created to enable presidents to swiftly protect irreplaceable resources that were at risk of being damaged or destroyed. Under the Act, presidents have been able to bypass partisan gridlock and quickly employ their authority to protect threatened places. All told, 18 presidents—nine Republicans and nine Democrats—have used this authority almost 300 times to create more than 160 national monuments and to expand the boundaries of dozens of others.

Legal expertise to protect our existing national monuments has come into sharp focus recently as well. For example, with Tribal Nations and other partners, we have continued to vigorously defend previous monument gains, such as Bears Ears, Grand Staircase-Escalante and Cascade-Siskiyou National Monuments.

In both cases, and thanks to your help, we have been successfully defending those monuments in court to make sure they remain available for all generations to enjoy, learn from and study.

New challenges have emerged, including a lawsuit filed in February by Arizona state legislators and others attempting to invalidate the new Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni—Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument (designated in August 2023). The Arizona monument reflects the voices of 13 Tribal Nations, for whom this land is sacred, as well as countless communities and individuals across the state that benefit from the tourism and recreation it offers.

As supporters of The Wilderness Society, you've stood by us as we've fought time and again against attempts to erode the Antiquities Act. And because of you, we will do everything it takes to uphold our progress and this invaluable conservation tool—because we are far from done.

Right now, our teams of legal, policy and regional conservation experts are working in concert with tribes and local communities to protect additional wild and sacred spaces and lay the groundwork for these protections to endure long into the future.

Together, we will make sure this 118-year-old bedrock conservation law endures so that public lands reflect our past, enhance our present-day lives and preserve a healthy future!

Did you know?

Many of the national parks we cherish today got their start as national monuments under the Antiquities Act, including:



Acadia National Park
in Maine



Badlands National Park
in South Dakota



Death Valley National Park
in California/Nevada



Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve in Alaska



Grand Canyon National Park
in Arizona



Great Sand Dunes National Park in Colorado



Olympic National Park
in Washington



Zion National Park
in Utah



Los Padres National Forest, California
Mason Cummings

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Victory in CA for Tribes and Access

This spring, nearly one million people across the country called on President Biden to protect more national monuments. Because of these voices, he expanded two monuments in California in May, honoring Indigenous and community stewardship and building on the U.S. conservation goals of 30X30.

Molok Luyuk at Berryessa Snow Mountain

The Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation, in collaboration with congressional leaders and community advocates, has permanently protected 13,696 acres at Molok Luyuk—meaning Condor Ridge in Patwin—an area that includes sacred grounds and historic trade routes along the central coast of California. The proclamation supports co-stewardship with federally recognized tribes and marks a return to an Indigenous name for these lands. Sitting 90 miles northwest of Sacramento at the eastern edge of the existing Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument, this critical wildlife corridor for tule elk, mountain lions and black bears offers safe passage for species escaping the stressors of climate change and human development.

San Gabriel Mountains

Community leaders, residents and elected officials in the Los Angeles region are celebrating the expansion of the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument, which adds 109,000 acres of public lands to the existing monument boundary. This 20-year, locally driven effort protects a stunning urban sanctuary for over 18 million people, many of whom have severely limited access to any tranquil green space, and conserves more of the Angeles National Forest, which provides one-third of Los Angeles County's fresh drinking water. Importantly, the proclamation itself honors the cultural and historical significance of the original stewards of these lands—the Fernandeño Tataviam Band of Mission Indians and Gabrieleño (also known as Kizh, Gabrielino, Tongva) Peoples—all of whom are part of this sacred landscape today.

Your generous support means The Wilderness Society can advocate for creating monuments, expanding their boundaries and defending the Antiquities Act—even when facing congressional gridlock. In an era of climate change, conservation cannot wait.



Berryessa-Snow Mountain National Monument, California
Bob Wick/BLM



San Gabriel Mountains National Monument, California
Mason Cummings

Meet Our Science Team!

We'd like you to get to know the staff teams that help make our achievements for public lands possible.

From its conception 90 years ago, The Wilderness Society has kept science as a core tenet of its work—guiding conservation decisions, partnerships and public lands advocacy for which we are renowned. With staff in Alaska, Colorado, Maine, Minnesota, Montana and Washington, our science team supports our priorities by:



Conducting innovative research



Summarizing and sharing our results and insights



Building relationships with external scientists, agencies and partners

The team's groundbreaking science is key to understanding complicated environmental issues and ultimately making better conservation decisions for public lands and their surrounding communities. For example, led by Landscape Ecologist Kevin Barnett, the team recently completed a first-ever mapping of old-growth forests across the country, contributing to the U.S. Forest Service's goal to better protect old-growth that helps fight climate change. In addition, solid data analysis and mapping by Director of Science



Science team members at Avi Kwa Ame National Monument, Nevada.
Tim Fullman

Applications Matt Dietz and GIS Mapping Specialist Phil Hartger has shown that BLM public lands are some of the most ecologically intact and healthiest lands left in the United States—critical for how wildlife—and we—navigate a changing climate. The data will be valuable information for communities working to implement the new “Public Lands Rule” (see cover story).

These experts also map energy leases on public lands; research bird migrations in the Appalachians; chart migration corridors and biodiversity hotspots throughout North America; study fish habitat and behavior; track Arctic caribou; and investigate the role and restoration of fire in western forests.

Science is in their blood, but these colleagues love to have fun, too! You can often catch them playing the banjo, restoring sail boats, getting dirty in their gardens, surfing, building with Legos, shivering while ice fishing, shredding the guitar and, on occasion, foraging for food right out their back doors.



Lead Fisheries Biologist Jason Leppi measures a broad whitefish from the Colville River in Alaska.
Jason Leppi



Mapping members of the science team: Mackenzie Boshier, Marty Schnure and Phil Hartger.
Michael Russo



Director of Research Mariah Meek collects brook trout in the Adirondacks.
Will Wetzel



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