

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION AGENDA

For the Next Administration

2017–2021





DEFENDERS OF WILDLIFE

Defenders of Wildlife is a national, nonprofit membership organization dedicated to the protection of all native wild animals and plants in their natural communities.

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Cover photo: grizzly bears, Katmai National Park, Alaska © Christine Haines

A CALL TO ACTION

Defenders of Wildlife believes we all share a common interest in the protection of America's spectacular wildlife and our great systems of public lands that offer endless opportunities for hiking, fishing, wildlife watching and other pursuits Americans value.

We will seek to work with the new administration to:

- 1. Protect and restore our endangered and threatened plants and wildlife.**
- 2. Defend and responsibly manage our federal public lands.**
- 3. Invest in responsible renewable energy development that minimizes impacts to wildlife.**
- 4. Protect wildlife from the impacts of climate change.**
- 5. Encourage initiatives by private landowners, states and tribes to conserve imperiled species and habitats.**
- 6. Strengthen our role as an international leader in imperiled species conservation.**
- 7. Help our youth and diverse and changing communities connect with our federal public lands and wildlife conservation heritage.**
- 8. Maintain our commitment to conservation based on sound science.**

These eight priorities are the core of the conservation agenda we propose to the next administration. Working together, we can prevent species extinction, safeguard and restore our wildlife and public lands and proudly uphold our conservation legacy for future generations.



Introduction

The next president will face daunting challenges—and excellent opportunities—in many areas that affect the lives of every American, including the conservation, protection and sound management of our unparalleled wealth of wildlife and other natural resources and our unique systems of public lands. This vital natural heritage lies at the heart of our quality of life and sense of national identity, and it is beset by threats that are in many ways more insidious than ever before:

- Our planet is in the midst of a man-made mass extinction of plants and animals comparable to the catastrophe that killed the dinosaurs and much of the life on Earth millions of years ago.¹ Some scientists estimate we are now losing species at 100 to 1,000 times the natural rate of extinction.² Species decline, particularly the loss of large carnivores, like sharks, wolves and bears, is having significant ecological effects.³ The broad-scale disappearance of pollinators will have disastrous consequences for ecosystem function as well as human agriculture.⁴ Amphibians are also vanishing at an alarming and rapid rate.⁵
- Climate change poses profound and increasingly palpable challenges to human and natural communities already seriously threatened by habitat loss, overexploitation and pollution.⁶
- Natural areas are disappearing at an unprecedented rate—especially in the West, which is losing an average of one football-field-size area every 2.5 minutes to roads, energy infrastructure, agricultural and timber operations, urban sprawl and residential development.⁷
- Second only to habitat loss, invasive species are a major threat to native flora and fauna and to entire ecosystems.⁸ Almost half of imperiled native species in the United States are threatened by invasive species predation and competition.⁹
- The very existence of thousands of species worldwide, from African elephants and rhinos to the diminutive vaquita

porpoise, is threatened by an unprecedented spike in illegal wildlife trade. International criminal networks and poachers annually collect, capture or kill hundreds of millions of plants and animals, trafficking in live specimens and parts around the world for hundreds of millions of dollars.¹⁰

- The environmental laws and federal land systems that protect and sustain our wildlife and its habitat are under siege. Congress has launched hundreds of legislative attacks on the Endangered Species Act (ESA), our bedrock law for protecting imperiled wildlife and plants and their habitat. Capping decades of ideological assaults on federal ownership of lands in the West, armed anti-government protestors recently seized a national wildlife refuge and occupied it for more than a month. Some right-wing ideologues and state and federal legislators are even calling for selling off or giving away parts of the federal lands set aside to protect wildlife and habitat.

A legacy to draw on and uphold

Fortunately, our nation has a long and distinguished history of committed conservationism on which our new president can build to meet the challenges ahead.

More than a century ago, confronted with the mounting toll of heedless development, the United States took bold steps to protect our spectacular scenic vistas and rich diversity of wildlife by establishing our national park, forest and wildlife refuge systems. Conservation-minded presidents—Republican and Democratic—worked to fulfill and strengthen our national commitment to protecting our environment.

With presidential leadership and the efforts of many others, conservation became an American tradition. We created strong environmental laws and systems of land protection, placed national treasures under federal stewardship and saved imperiled creatures like the bald eagle, California condor, Florida manatee, gray wolf and grizzly bear from extinction. This deep conservation legacy and the continuing commitment of millions of Americans to preserving the natural environment provide a solid foundation for addressing today's threats.

Recent gains to maintain

Our new president should also build on the leadership shown by President Obama and his administration in responding to pressing conservation challenges. Among its accomplishments, the Obama administration placed more federal public land and water under protection as national monuments than any other president in history, preserving exceptional and irreplaceable wildlands, marine resources and cultural and historic sites for generations to come.

President Obama made climate change a central issue in his administration's agenda, focusing on the critical need to reduce the nation's greenhouse-gas emissions and the equally urgent need to plan for and address the impacts of climate change on our wildlife, lands and resources. The Department of the Interior established Climate Science Centers in regions across the country and created Landscape Conservation Cooperatives to foster coordination among federal and state land managers. The Council on Environmental Quality issued new guidance on planning for climate change under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), directing federal agencies on how and when to consider greenhouse-gas emissions in planning and, just as important, how to account for the cumulative effects of climate change and management alternatives on wildlife, water and other natural resources.

To lead the transformation of the nation's energy systems needed to achieve its climate goals, the Obama administration provided visionary leadership for the development of renewable energy on federal lands, setting new "smart-from-the-start" policies that promote siting wind and solar projects in areas where they have the least impact on wildlife and mitigating for unavoidable impacts.

The Obama administration advanced wildlife conservation on federal and nonfederal lands in other important ways. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) took strong steps to protect imperiled species. The Forest Service adopted a new planning rule requiring the agency to provide for biological diversity and connectivity in national forest planning and management. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) developed new scientific tools, adopted policies and implemented new plans to better manage public lands

and resources at a landscape scale. And President Obama focused the full efforts of the federal government on the urgent need to fight international wildlife trafficking, issuing an Executive Order directing all agencies to work within their authorities to combat this illegal trade, establishing a Presidential Task Force on Wildlife Trafficking, and imposing a nearly complete ban on domestic trade in ivory in 2016.

Mistakes to learn from, work to finish

In addition to advances, there have been missteps and missed opportunities during the last eight years. FWS made hasty and ill-considered efforts to delist the gray wolf, for example, and has faltered badly in its efforts to restore the red wolf and the Mexican gray wolf to their proper places in the Southeast and Southwest respectively. The Obama administration's embrace of an "all of the above" energy policy encouraged renewable energy but continued the extraction of the fossil fuels that cannot be part of our energy future as we confront climate change. The president remained a strong and effective opponent of the concerted congressional effort to undermine wildlife laws and programs, but he did accept—as part of larger federal funding bills—damaging anti-wildlife policy riders concerning wolf delisting and sage-grouse listing that emboldened legislative opponents of the ESA.

Many of the initiatives begun by the Obama administration will need strong and continued efforts to come to fruition. The success of the landscape-scale effort to conserve greater sage-grouse and its sagebrush habitat, for example, will hinge on how BLM and the states implement (and improve) land management plans and fulfill promises to protect this disappearing western bird. It will take a conservation-minded president and administration to see these initiatives through.

A conservation agenda for the next four years

There is no question that the threats to America's wildlife, the landscapes it inhabits and the federal laws and land management systems that protect it are daunting. To help the new administration meet the challenges and opportunities ahead, Defenders of Wildlife proposes the conservation agenda—eight priorities and the actions needed to address them—presented on the following pages.

1 Imperiled Species

Protect and restore our endangered and threatened plants and wildlife.

More than 40 years ago, the United States enacted the ESA, putting in place the world's most farsighted and important program for the conservation of imperiled wildlife and its habitat. The ESA is the cornerstone of our commitment to preserving life on Earth. The protection it affords our rarest and most threatened species also benefits humans, because these plants and animals play crucial roles in the ecosystems that help sustain all life on Earth.

Despite the long-standing failure of Congress to provide adequate funding, the ESA has rescued hundreds of species from the brink of extinction and set many more on the path to recovery. It is because of the ESA that we now have wolves again in the Northern Rockies, expanded manatee and sea turtle populations in Florida, American alligators throughout the South and sea otters in California. We can marvel at the sight of bald eagles, whooping cranes, grizzly bears and California condors largely because of the ESA. Nevertheless, anti-environmental politicians and special economic interests have been unrelenting in their efforts to undermine it and other federal laws, policies and agencies that protect our wildlife, public lands and other natural resources.

Charged with conserving and restoring our nation's wildlife and wildlands, our next president must first overcome these relentless and cynical attacks, many of which are attempts by Congress to weaken the ESA. The next president must not only defend the ESA, but improve administration of the law to save critically endangered species from extinction and to increase the rate of recovery for listed plants and animals. Endangered species conservation also needs more resources, and FWS and NMFS must develop policies and practices that use those resources more effectively to implement and enforce ESA programs.

ACTIONS NEEDED

Strongly oppose all proposed legislation that would undermine the integrity and effectiveness of the ESA.

Congress has advanced hundreds of bills and riders in recent years to weaken ESA protections for endangered species and to interfere with scientific determinations made by the

federal agencies charged with administering the act. The new administration should quickly signal its strong support for the ESA and firm opposition to all legislative proposals that would weaken and undermine it, including ones that would transfer federal endangered species authority to the states.

FWS and NMFS receive less than 30 percent of the funding they need to effectively implement the ESA. Considerably more funding is needed to fully recover many of the species currently listed. FWS and NMFS should continue to identify ways to use existing resources more efficiently to protect the species at greatest risk and to speed recovery of listed species. The two agencies should also develop a more deliberate and strategic system for allocating conservation funding to maximize the number of different species conserved under the ESA and ensure timely protection for species at greatest risk of extinction.

Make imperiled species recovery, not just staving off extinction, the focus of endangered species permitting and mitigation.

Most ESA incidental take authorizations and permits are not designed to further species recovery, and many even impede and undermine it. FWS and NMFS should set higher conservation standards for authorizing the incidental take of imperiled species and impose conditions designed to fully mitigate harmful impacts to those species. Moreover, given the likely need to list hundreds of additional species in coming years, FWS and NMFS should identify innovative ways to streamline the process of preparing recovery plans without reducing the effectiveness of these documents. Adopting online or web-based recovery planning is one example of an innovative reform that would enhance the recovery planning process.

Use emerging technologies, such as satellite imaging and data analytics, to overcome financial and staffing barriers to monitoring the status of listed species and their habitats and verifying compliance with ESA permits.

Inadequate monitoring and compliance oversight under the ESA is a long-standing problem for FWS and NMFS.



CALIFORNIA SEA OTTERS © MICHAEL PETERS

In recent years, satellite imaging and other affordable technologies that help overcome these challenges have become available. Other federal agencies, such as the Environmental Protection Agency, have already embraced these technologies to solve compliance and monitoring problems. FWS and NMFS must follow their lead and incorporate cutting-edge technology into their imperiled species enforcement and conservation programs.

Promote transparency by posting online key public documents relating to the issuance of ESA permits, biological opinions and incidental take authorizations.

FWS and NMFS will likely never have all the resources and staff they need to monitor all the imperiled species they oversee and the broad range of incidental take authorizations and permits they issue. By posting all biological opinions, incidental take authorizations, permitting documents and required monitoring reports online, the agencies can crowd-source ESA compliance monitoring through public volunteers, ensuring that mandated authorization conditions and reporting procedures are actually followed.

Ensure that the impacts of climate change are fully addressed in key ESA decisions.

Climate change is already causing substantial disruption to habitat and wildlife behavior. FWS and NMFS must ensure that listing decisions, recovery plans, biological opinions and incidental take permits incorporate the impacts of climate change on imperiled species, or their conservation outcomes may be short lived.

Ensure that federal agency decisions do not harm critical habitat in ways that undermine species recovery.

Federal agencies have often been allowed to degrade critical habitat in ways that impede imperiled species recovery. That must change if we are to succeed in recovering more species. Therefore, FWS and NMFS should not only adopt but also enforce stronger and more protective standards on the modification and destruction of critical habitat.

2 Public Lands

Defend and responsibly manage our federal public lands.

Our public lands are a treasure of immeasurable value. Established as an antidote to the reckless exploitation of the nation's natural resources in the 19th century, these uniquely American spaces cover almost one quarter of our country. They include national parks with iconic landscapes such as Yosemite and the Everglades; national wildlife refuges that host huge herds of caribou and millions of migratory birds; national forests and grasslands with old-growth forests and open prairies; and deserts and other vast western lands managed by BLM.

These public lands are vitally important to wildlife conservation, providing some of the last remaining contiguous blocks of habitat and harboring intact populations of many rare and endangered species. Federal lands are also of immeasurable economic value to the public, attracting tourists, hunters, anglers and other outdoor recreationists by the millions and providing ecosystem services to local communities.

Visitors to national wildlife refuges, for example, generate more than \$2.4 billion for local economies annually.¹¹ The

estimated value of the environmental benefits that wildlife refuges provide by filtering our air and water and sustaining abundant wildlife is even greater: more than \$32 billion.¹² National forests provide approximately 20 percent of our national water supply¹³—up to 50 percent or more in 11 western states.¹⁴ Some 180 million people in more than 68,000 communities rely on these forested lands to capture and purify their drinking water.¹⁵

Despite the overwhelming support of the American public for public lands, conservative ideologues and special interests are mounting growing attacks on particular federal land systems and the very concept of federal land ownership. These anti-government extremists want to carve up our public lands and give them away to state and local governments that are incapable of responsibly managing them and would inevitably accelerate mining, oil and gas development and other resource exploitation at the expense of wildlife and public enjoyment of these lands. The new administration must oppose all efforts to diminish or dismantle federal land management systems and commit to protect and sustainably manage these lands.



ACTIONS NEEDED

Maintain the integrity of the laws, policies and agencies that protect wildlife and its habitat within the National Wildlife Refuge System, the National Forest System, the National Park System and the National System of Public Lands administered by BLM, and maintain the right of all Americans to benefit from these public lands and resources by vigorously opposing efforts to dispose of the federal estate.

The frequency and audacity of congressional efforts to undermine federal management—and even cede federal ownership—of public lands are increasing, impelled by the spurious claims of a vocal minority that states and private interests can better manage federal land and resources.

The constitution vests authority over federal lands in the federal government. The Department of the Interior and Department of Agriculture bear the vital public trust of balancing sustainable use of natural resources with conservation of public lands and wildlife for the use and enjoyment of all Americans. The next administration must uphold our public lands heritage and defend federal lands and land managers from lawlessness, threats of violence and stop efforts to dismantle and turn portions of federal land conservation systems over to state or local governments.

Enhance wildlife habitat connectivity by establishing a comprehensive landscape-scale program managed by the responsible federal agencies—in collaboration with states, tribes and private landowners—to identify and protect wildlife corridors and to coordinate wildlife management across jurisdictional boundaries.

Human development, including roads, agriculture, mineral extraction and expansion of urban areas, is increasingly dividing and fragmenting the habitat that wildlife need to thrive and survive. Effective wildlife management is also impeded by the multiple jurisdictions—federal, state, tribal and local governments and private owners—that have authority over wide-ranging species. The new administration

should direct federal land management agencies to initiate a comprehensive program, in collaboration with states, tribes and landowners, to enhance connectivity for wildlife by identifying and protecting wildlife corridors and coordinating wildlife management across jurisdictions.

Manage and defend national wildlife refuges from damaging activities and unauthorized incursions, while continuing the strategic growth of the National Wildlife Refuge System to conserve vital wildlife resources nationwide.

The National Wildlife Refuge System is the only network of federal lands dedicated solely to wildlife conservation—and the largest such network in the world. The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act enacted by Congress 20 years ago has unified and strengthened the stewardship of our refuges. However, congressional attacks and other threats to both the system and this organic act are mounting, and their integrity must be vigorously defended. The new administration should strengthen protection for the system by implementing new regulations governing nonfederal oil and gas development on refuges and supporting legislation authorizing FWS to seek compensation from parties that negligently damage or destroy refuge resources. FWS should also continue expanding the National Wildlife Refuge System to strategically secure land and water for plants and animals threatened by habitat loss, climate change and other factors.

Implement comprehensive landscape-scale management and mitigation strategies to conserve imperiled species and their habitats on public lands.

The Forest Service and BLM are charged with the challenge of managing multiple uses across some of the largest and most important landscapes for conservation in the country. Recent initiatives at the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture have helped advance landscape planning concepts on these public lands. New regulations for land management planning and a host of new mitigation policies are intended to direct development and land use to low-conflict areas, while conserving wildlife and other natural resources. The Forest Service and BLM must continue this



KING RANGE NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA, CALIFORNIA/BOB WICK/BLM

progression in landscape-scale conservation and planning by fully funding and implementing current initiatives, and by coordinating conservation planning on large landscapes where the agencies share management responsibilities. Both agencies should also ensure that landscape mitigation measures for development activities are durable and produce a “net benefit” for affected lands and wildlife resources.

Emphasize the importance of conservation and climate resiliency in public lands planning and management.

The Forest Service and BLM must recognize the enormous conservation value of public lands and continue efforts to protect, connect and restore priority lands for imperiled wildlife and climate resiliency. Regional multi-agency conservation plans, such as the Northwest Forest Plan, provide conservation values, ecosystem services and predictability to local and regional communities and economies and must not be dismantled. The Forest Service and BLM should also continue emphasizing habitat restoration within degraded ecosystems and watersheds, including invasive species control, restoration of natural fire cycles, reconnection of fragmented habitats and the improvement of infrastructure that poses a threat to wildlife and climate resiliency.

Identify and protect habitat strongholds on public lands to conserve and recover threatened and endangered species.

Federal land management agencies have a critical role to play in conserving and recovering species listed under the ESA, and managing habitat to avoid new species listings. Adopting a strategic planning framework for species recovery on public lands will make the agencies more effective in that role. The latest research indicates that conservation investments yield the highest return when they identify and manage essential habitats and areas of biological richness in a connected system of “strongholds” to support species persistence in the face of climate change, invasive species, unnatural fire and other threats.

The next administration has a unique opportunity to apply this concept across ecosystems and jurisdictions in federal land management planning. This strategic approach will not only ensure that agencies effectively contribute to the recovery of imperiled species and avoid new listings, but assist in the conservation and restoration of ecological integrity, climate resiliency and connectivity of these important lands. The strategy would also transform implementation of the ESA, shifting some of the burden of threatened and endangered species protection from FWS to other agencies and programs that have a legal responsibility and opportunity to contribute to the recovery of listed species and their habitat.

3 Renewable Energy

Invest in responsible renewable energy development that minimizes impacts to wildlife.

Wind and solar energy play an indispensable and rapidly growing role in America's energy future. To meet the nation's climate goals, we must transition quickly from dependence on fossil fuels, with their heavy carbon emissions, to clean renewable energy. Our public lands can be an important part of this transition from oil, gas and coal production to well-sited solar and wind power projects. But even renewable energy, like other forms of development, can have serious impacts on wildlife, habitat and other natural values, making careful planning essential to avoid conflicts and to mitigate for adverse effects—to make renewable energy development “smart from the start.”

While BLM has made substantial progress in reducing adverse environmental effects from renewable energy expansion on its lands, the agency continues to struggle to assess impacts and develop robust mitigation strategies that effectively offset unavoidable impacts from development. Adequate resources are needed to support the creation and expansion of efficient methodologies and geospatial tools to ensure designation of low-conflict areas and the adoption of effective and durable mitigation measures consistent with BLM's land management responsibilities.

More broadly, the concepts of smart from the start—integrating wildlife considerations and other values into advance planning to guide development away from high-conflict areas and ensure appropriate mitigation for impacts on wildlife—should be expanded to planning for other forms of infrastructure, including transportation, transmission lines, pipelines and oil, gas and coal leasing. Together with the application of key federal policies and directives on landscape-level planning, development and mitigation, smart-from-the start concepts can significantly improve federal infrastructure decisions.

ACTIONS NEEDED

Adopt and implement a smart-from-the-start approach to the siting of renewable energy projects on public lands that directs development to low-conflict areas and already degraded lands.

While BLM has made significant progress toward implementing a smart-from-the-start approach for siting solar

development through the Solar Energy Program, it has yet to implement the approach for wind development on public lands. The effective implementation of BLM's Solar and Wind Leasing Rule is critical for codifying the Solar Energy Program and establishing a framework for smart-from-the-start wind energy development on public lands.

Conduct a five-year review of BLM's Solar Energy Program beginning in 2017 to reassess predicted future demand for solar development on public lands and the need for new solar energy zone designations.

A five-year review is an important step for BLM to take to evaluate the implementation of the Solar Energy Program, a directed development approach for solar energy development on public lands. The administration should devote adequate resources to this effort, as a thorough review will help inform and improve the implementation of directed development approaches for a variety of renewable energy and transmission development projects on public lands.

Fund important research and development efforts to better understand and address the impacts of renewable energy development on wildlife.

Significant gaps still exist in the data on the impacts of renewable energy development on wildlife. While the Department of Energy allocated funding in the FY 2015 and FY 2016 budgets to support the development of eagle and bat impact minimization technologies for wind turbines, additional funds are needed from the Department of the Interior and Department of Energy to further this work and better understand and address other impacts to species from solar and wind energy development, including the impacts of solar development on birds.

Facilitate responsible transmission planning and development that embrace the smart-from-the-start approach to renewable energy.

As described in the Department of Energy's *Wind Vision Report*, lack of transmission planning and development is one of the largest barriers to responsible renewable energy development. Many low-conflict sites will fail to attract

sufficient development interest unless and until there is adequate transmission capacity to load centers. Coordinated agency/stakeholder transmission planning efforts such as the current effort underway to develop west-wide energy corridors on public lands are imperative for the future of responsible transmission development.

Implement efficient and effective wildlife permitting programs that promote wildlife conservation and facilitate responsible renewable energy development.

FWS has struggled to develop and implement workable regulations and incidental take permitting programs for eagles and other migratory birds pursuant to the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The implementation of effective permitting programs under both statutes should be prioritized to ensure that sensitive species are conserved as renewable energy development proceeds.

Apply smart-from-the start concepts and applicable policies and initiatives to planning for federal infrastructure projects.

The administration should direct federal departments and agencies responsible for planning, constructing, improving and expanding our nation's infrastructure to employ smart-from-the-start principles and make full use of existing policies to avoid damaging and fragmenting wildlife habitat. Smart-from-the-start planning includes directing development activities to low-conflict areas and mitigating for unavoidable impacts to land, air, water, wildlife and ecosystem services. Such direction should apply to the Department of the Interior, Department of Agriculture, Department of Transportation, Department of Commerce and Department of Defense. The administration should also publicly state its commitment to smart-from-the-start principles in any new infrastructure Congress advances.



IVANPAH SOLAR PROJECT, MOJAVE DESERT/USFWS PACIFIC SOUTHWEST REGION

4 Climate Change

Protect wildlife from the impacts of climate change.

The success of our nation's efforts to conserve and recover wildlife and other natural resources will depend on how well we respond to the challenge of climate change. New federal initiatives and the historic international climate agreement signed in Paris are critical steps toward ameliorating this looming threat. The latest report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and *National Climate Assessment* from the U.S. Global Exchange Research Program confirm that climate change is already causing serious damage and disruption to wildlife and ecosystems. Documented impacts include the loss of important habitat in polar and high mountain ecosystems, rising sea levels, ocean acidification, increased incidence of both drought and severe storms, warming of rivers and other waters, escalated threats from invasive species, and more frequent catastrophic fires. These impacts threaten the natural systems that support wildlife and provide communities with drinking water, flood protection, food, medicine, timber, recreational opportunities, scenic beauty, jobs and numerous other services.

ACTIONS NEEDED

Maintain global leadership in emissions reductions by fully supporting the Paris Climate Agreement, moving forward with targeted emissions reductions, and committing to policies that will enable our country to set a more ambitious emissions target by 2020.

The *President's Climate Action Plan* introduced by the White House in 2013 set our nation on a course to substantially lower our greenhouse-gas emissions from power generation, transportation and other sources. The next administration should advance and defend the various specific plans released under the president's action plan, including the Clean Power Plan. The strength of these commitments helped pave the way for the international climate agreement signed in Paris in December 2015. Under this agreement, 197 nations have pledged to limit the increase in global temperature to 2.0 degrees Celsius and make efforts to keep it even lower. Given the potentially devastating consequences of climate change for coastal communities, food production, public health and

wildlife, the world is counting on the United States to meet, and build on, our commitments to reduce carbon emissions.

Rapidly phase down the leasing of federal fossil fuels and account for and minimize greenhouse-gas emissions from all sources on federal lands and waters.

To meet the nation's climate goals, the United States must rapidly transition away from extraction and combustion of fossil fuels and toward clean, renewable sources of energy, like solar and wind power. Much of the fossil fuel deposits under federal management must be left in place, since we cannot achieve the carbon emission reductions we need if we continue to extract and burn fossil fuels. The new administration should direct the Forest Service, BLM and the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management to conduct comprehensive assessments of their leasing programs for oil, gas and coal and evaluate strategies for promptly phasing out new federal leasing for these dirty fuels. The administration should also direct federal agencies to minimize greenhouse-gas emissions from all sources on federal lands and to account fully for the societal costs, including adverse effects on public health and climate, in all decision-making on fossil fuels.

Advance national climate adaptation policy by implementing the *National Fish, Wildlife and Plants Climate Adaptation Strategy* and other federal adaptation strategies and ensuring that adequate funding is available to support these efforts.

Federal agencies have made great strides recently in developing greenhouse-gas reduction measures and accounting for the effects of climate change in their policies and procedures. In particular, the *National Fish, Wildlife and Plants Climate Adaptation Strategy* represents a unique joint effort by federal, state and tribal agencies to inspire innovative solutions that secure the protection of our natural resources in our changing climate. The new administration should direct federal land management agencies and other relevant agencies to implement the national strategy fully and incorporate it into planning and decision-making.

Ensure that federal agencies incorporate climate adaptation into decision-making, including on endangered species conservation and natural resources management, by implementing the Council on Environmental Quality's NEPA guidance.

NEPA, one of our nation's most important environmental laws, requires all federal agencies to consider the impacts of their activities on the human environment. The Council on Environmental Quality's final *NEPA Guidance on Climate Change*, issued in 2016, provides direction on how agencies should consider climate change, including how to account for greenhouse gas emissions and how to assess the effects that climate change will have on a proposed project and the affected environment. Ensuring that federal agencies comply with this guidance is critical for responsible federal decision-making in our changing world.

Increase the scientific capacity of federal agencies to understand and plan for the impacts of climate change by fully supporting federal cooperative and interagency climate science programs and initiatives.

The myriad challenges of a changing climate will require continued cross-sectoral and interagency efforts to understand and respond to impacts and to increase resilience to lessen those impacts. Federal agencies have begun to build this critical infrastructure for the development and delivery of the multisector and multiscale science necessary to answer these challenges. Continued investment and support for programs and initiatives like the Department of the Interior's Climate Change Science Centers and Landscape Conservation Cooperatives, the Department of Agriculture's Climate Hubs and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Regional Integrated Sciences and Assessments program are critically important to future climate change management.



POLAR BEARS © JOAN CAMBRAY

5 Collaborative Conservation

Encourage initiatives by private landowners, states and tribes to conserve imperiled species and habitats.

For wild species, human-drawn boundary lines are meaningless. The grizzly bears that find important protected habitat inside Glacier and Yellowstone national parks and other federal lands do not halt at the edges of these areas. To find food and mates they must keep going, traversing state, tribal and private lands along the way.

Our federal lands are one of our most treasured natural assets, but they alone cannot provide the geographic range and connectivity necessary to conserve wildlife.

According to a comprehensive scientific review, approximately 30 percent of the land in any given area or ecoregion must be conserved to maintain native flora and fauna in functioning ecosystems.¹⁶ The existing network of protected lands in the United States is simply too small, too fragmented and too inconsistently managed to, by itself, sustain wildlife populations in the long term. It is essential that we work to create a national network of conservation lands to meet the needs of wildlife and our needs as a society.

Achieving this goal will require a strategic and coordinated effort across agencies, tribes and private entities, with particular emphasis on conserving private lands. Nearly two-thirds of our nation's 2.3 billion acres are privately owned. In some states, such as Illinois and Texas, private land accounts for more than 90 percent of the total land area, with protected areas scattered inconsistently throughout. Private lands support two-thirds of the species listed under the ESA, and 10 percent of listed species occur only on private lands.¹⁷ These lands also disproportionately support the last remnants of imperiled ecosystems, such as tallgrass and shortgrass prairies and longleaf pine and bottomland hardwood forests. The burgeoning threat of climate changes will make private lands even more important as buffers and connectors for natural communities and wildlife populations forced to migrate or otherwise adjust to climate change.

Effective strategies to conserve wildlife thus require creative and flexible solutions that leverage federal and state resources to incentivize private landowners in their efforts to simultaneously conserve their land and maintain their livelihoods. Because conservation funding is limited, investments must be made in a coordinated, strategic manner that ensures that the most critical landscapes are given priority. By adopting this national approach to conservation and working

cooperatively with state, tribal and private landowners, the new administration has the opportunity to stem the current loss of biodiversity and usher in a new era of environmental leadership for the United States.

ACTIONS NEEDED

Secure appropriations to fully fund voluntary U.S. Department of Agriculture wildlife and forestry conservation programs on private lands authorized through the Farm Bill and further expand those programs to benefit imperiled species and carnivores.

Existing programs administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture under the Farm Bill, such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) managed by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) have made great strides in conserving imperiled wildlife on private lands through initiatives such as Working Lands for Wildlife and regional partnerships. The Forest Service provides additional assistance through the Forest Stewardship Program. All of these programs should be expanded.

Unfortunately, funding for Department of Agriculture Farm Bill conservation programs has been cut in recent years. The new administration should press for increased funding for these vital programs that benefit producers and wildlife. Moreover, the new administration should look to expand these programs to additional geographic areas, landscapes and species, particularly carnivores through projects that encourage coexistence. Finally, the administration should direct the Department of Agriculture to monitor, assess and report on the effectiveness of the Farm Bill conservation programs in sustaining and restoring imperiled species and their habitat.

Incentivize conservation of at-risk species by offering regulatory predictability and assurances for credible and transparent science-based initiatives by state, tribal and private landowners.

FWS and NMFS need to increase the use of existing tools that provide regulatory incentives for proactive voluntary conservation initiatives, such as Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances and Safe Harbor Agreements,



and look for opportunities to develop innovative conservation crediting systems that encourage early efforts and net benefit scenarios. To qualify for these incentives, these proactive initiatives must be science-based, fully transparent and verifiable.

Promote strategic private lands conservation programs by linking incentive funding through the Farm Bill and other programs to the goals and objectives of state, regional and national conservation initiatives, including the State Wildlife Action Plans.

Conservation efforts at both the federal and nonfederal levels should be focused to the maximum extent possible at the landscape level and on actions that are most likely to achieve improvement in conservation status for imperiled wildlife. There are many regional and national partnership efforts underway that bring diverse stakeholders together to develop science-based conservation plans. For example, State Wildlife Action Plans identify Species of Greatest Conservation Need and their habitats and the actions needed to conserve them. Federal agencies such as the Forest Service, NRCS and FWS should modify their program requirements to give priority to projects that are consistent with, or help implement, larger established landscape-level conservation plans. NRCS's conservation initiatives and regional partnerships are good examples of these types of programs.

Support increased funding for the State Wildlife Grant Program and programs under the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund.

State fish and wildlife agencies have a vital role to play in the conservation of imperiled species. They have jurisdiction over candidate and other at-risk species and work closely with FWS on the recovery of species listed under the ESA. However, these agencies are almost exclusively funded by

hunting and fishing licenses and other revenues generated by consumptive uses of game species. This means that very little state funding is dedicated to conserving declining and listed nongame species. The State Wildlife Grants Program provides federal grant funds for developing and implementing programs that are beneficial to wildlife, including species not hunted or fished, and habitat. Priority is placed on projects that benefit species of greatest conservation need and use the funds to address conservation needs identified within a state's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plan/Strategy. These needs include research, surveys, species and habitat management, and monitoring. The Cooperative Endangered Species Fund established under the ESA also provides grants to states and territories that need increased funding to participate in a variety of voluntary conservation projects for candidate and proposed species.

To the maximum extent possible and consistent with federal laws, support the coordination of federal land management activities with parallel conservation initiatives on state, tribal and private lands with the goal of creating a national network of conservation lands.

Landscape-level planning, which is essential for wildlife conservation, requires coordination of federal, state, tribal and private efforts focused on science-based species and habitat needs. Landscape Conservation Cooperatives are a valuable opportunity for cross-agency coordination and should be fully funded and supported. Federal land management agencies should ensure that states, tribes and landowners are included in their land management planning processes, consistent with federal land management responsibilities and goals, particularly those related to facilitating wildlife adaptation to climate change.

6 International Wildlife Conservation

Strengthen our role as an international leader in imperiled species conservation.

The United States has long been a world leader in international wildlife conservation, dating back to 1900 and the passage of the Lacey Act, which made it a federal crime to import, possess or sell any species acquired in violation of foreign laws or treaties. In the early years of the 20th century, the United States entered into groundbreaking treaties with Canada, Russia, Japan and Mexico to conserve migratory birds and led the negotiation for the 1940 Convention of Nature Conservation and Wild Life Preservation of the Western Hemisphere. The leadership of the United States in the negotiation of the Convention on International Trade in Wild Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES) was so significant that for years it was known as the Washington Convention.

More recently, the Obama administration took a global leadership role in fighting international wildlife trafficking. Executive Order 1386 on Combatting Wildlife Trafficking, issued by President Obama in 2013, established the Presidential Task Force on Wildlife Trafficking to lead an “all of government” effort to halt poaching and illegal trade in wildlife. In fulfillment of a key priority established by the task force in its national strategy, FWS promulgated new regulations in 2016 that ban virtually all import or trade in elephant ivory. The administration obtained a similar commitment from China, the world’s largest market for illegal ivory. The new administration must continue to provide this sort of bold international leadership as countries across the globe have and will continue to follow our lead in the conservation of imperiled species.

ACTIONS NEEDED

Accelerate steps to reduce the demand for illegal wildlife and wildlife products and end wildlife trafficking in the United States.

Given that the United States is one of the largest markets in the world for wildlife—legal and illegal—combating wildlife trafficking and shutting down domestic consumption of illicit wildlife and wildlife products must be a high priority for the new administration. The government should strengthen enforcement of laws addressing wildlife trafficking and raise public awareness of the devastating

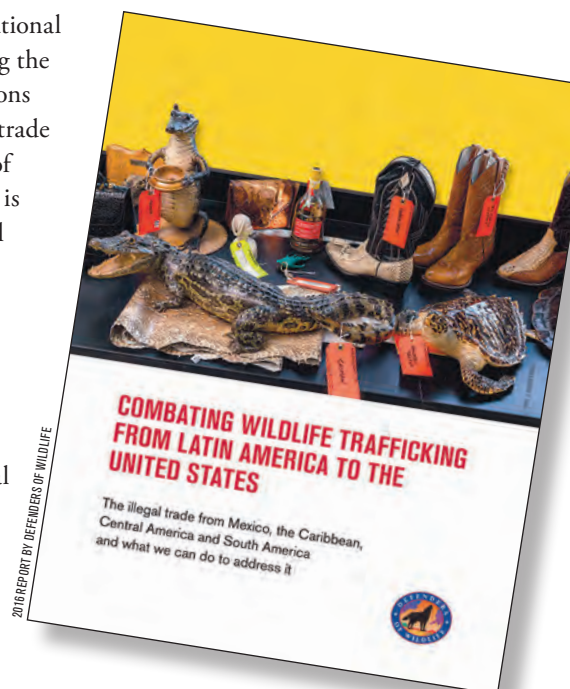
impact that the purchase of illegal wildlife and wildlife products is having on imperiled species in the wild. The growing movement toward the adoption of additional state and federal restrictions on wildlife products must keep pace with measures taken by other countries.

Promote and adopt measures in multilateral environmental and trade agreements to reduce and end wildlife trafficking throughout the world.

Effectively combating wildlife trafficking requires coordinated action at the international level between the source countries (range states) and the consuming countries. The new administration should ensure that the federal government reaches out to other countries and international bodies to engage law enforcement agencies, the scientific community, communications and education experts and diplomats at the highest levels of government.

Maintain America’s historical role as the dominant voice for conservation under CITES.

Since the adoption of CITES in the mid-1970s, the United States has been the most dominant and influential voice within the international community in opposing unsustainable international trade in imperiled species. We must continue in this role by supporting the inclusion under CITES of species threatened by international trade and by opposing the relaxation of restrictions and authorization of trade in parts or products of these species. CITES is the only international wildlife convention with an enforcement mechanism to ensure its effectiveness and continued strong U.S. support for the convention is essential to its future success.



7 Youth and Minority Engagement

Help our youth and diverse and changing communities connect with our federal public lands and wildlife conservation heritage.

Young Americans, citizens of an increasingly diverse nation, are the future protectors of our nation's environmental legacy. But their willingness to carry the torch will depend on how much they care. We cannot underestimate the importance of ensuring that our public lands and environmental priorities are relevant, inspiring and inclusive of more diverse audiences.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, most American children under the age of one belong to minority groups. Within the next few decades the country will be "majority minority." Despite this unmistakable demographic trend, a 2012 report from the Outdoor Foundation found that 78 percent of participants in outdoor recreation are white. Visitors to our public lands are also markedly older and white.¹⁷

The next administration must ensure that our public lands are welcoming to the rich diversity of our people and representative of the varied experiences of America. It must find ways to connect younger and more diverse groups to our public lands and environmental priorities.

Part of that outreach effort should include educating young people about the outdoors and our deep conservation legacy, expanding opportunities for all Americans to connect with nature and our public lands, striving for greater diversity in staffing, and better reflecting the full range of American experiences in the places we seek to protect.

Finally, beyond increasing representation of diversity in public land management, use and enjoyment, the next administration must ensure that the voices of diversity continue to be heard in government, including participation in federal decision-making.

ACTIONS NEEDED

Step up efforts to engage young Americans and diverse communities in nature and encourage them to visit, enjoy and build memories and traditions on our public lands.

If the youth of today never experience the forests, rivers, canyons and other wonders of the outdoors or the thrill of seeing wildlife in its natural habitat, how will they learn to cherish and protect these treasures? For too many young

Americans, the national wildlife refuges, national parks and other federal lands where they can have these meaningful experiences are missing from their lives.

To address this absence, the next administration should prioritize connecting young people and diverse communities to our public lands. The administration should fight for adequate funding to support outdoor education and public use and interpretative efforts like the Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership, a visionary program that encourages urban constituencies to discover, appreciate and care for wildlife and nature in their communities. With 80 percent of Americans living in cities, this collaborative initiative between FWS and local partners helps connect urban residents to national wildlife refuges and other wild places.

The next administration should continue to support initiatives that create opportunities and incentives for all Americans to get out and enjoy our public lands—and let nature do the teaching.

Diversify the agency staffs that manage and protect our wildlife, public lands and environment.

If our public lands are going to be welcoming to all, the staffs of our federal agencies must better reflect the population they serve. The "inclusive workplace strategy" currently in place at the Department of the Interior is a good start. It includes diversity training and a youth office to engage young people from minority communities and sectors with historically lower participation rates, including young women and girls.

But more must be done to see the public face of our land agencies truly reflect the public. The next administration should also build on the progress in recent executive direction and initiatives to promote diversity and inclusion in the workforce. For example, the administration should follow up on the Department of the Interior's analysis of barriers to entry for minorities, the disabled and other under-represented groups, which is due for completion in FY 2017. The new administration should also build on efforts to not just limit discrimination, but to appreciate the advantages of diversity and reward managers for finding ways to recruit, retain and capitalize on diversity in the workplace.

Recent monument designations have marked the extraordinary achievements and contributions to the United States made by the Latino leader César Chávez, the African American heroine and anti-slavery crusader Harriet Tubman, the woman's suffrage and equality movement, and the fight for LGBT rights. But more must be done.

Future generations will only fight to protect our public lands if they can connect with the value and see the relevance of these places to their own lives and experiences. The new administration should actively seek opportunities to designate monuments and protect places of special meaning to diverse groups.

Defend government transparency and public access laws.

We must also protect the laws that give voice to the concerns of diverse communities, including NEPA, the Equal Access to Justice Act (EAJA) and citizen suit provisions in our environmental laws. These laws often provide the vehicle and the resources for minority groups and local communities to engage on major federal actions or to challenge government decisions that could affect their health and well-being, as well as damage our public lands and wildlife resources.

Unfortunately, these important laws are frequently attacked by anti-transparency forces in Congress that want to push development forward without vigorous disclosure to the public or opportunity for judicial review. The administration should highlight the importance of these laws and defend them.



FWS STAFF TEACHES KIDS ABOUT ENDANGERED CALIFORNIA CONDORS / MIKE CLEIN / USFWS

8 Science-based Conservation

Maintain our commitment to conservation based on sound science.

The Obama administration avoided the widespread abuse of science that plagued the Bush administration, but at times struggled with how to use science in wildlife and resource management decisions. The ESA mandate to use the best available science, for example, has not always been followed. Such violations are rarely deliberate or malicious. More often than not they are the result of weak institutional frameworks for taking full advantage of science in decision-making. For example, federal agencies regularly collect monitoring reports, but are unable to effectively compile or efficiently extract the relevant data to inform future decisions and conservation strategies. And agencies often lack adequate funding to conduct basic scientific research.

Fortunately, opportunities abound to overcome these challenges. The next administration can immediately improve federal science-based decision-making by requiring greater cooperation between federal departments and agencies in developing and applying science in conservation planning and management. Technology and other innovations have also vastly reduced the costs of gathering, organizing and analyzing scientific data. The private sector, academia and many nongovernmental organizations have already deployed these innovations to improve decisions in healthcare, education, law and dozens of other fields. The next administration should take full advantage of these opportunities to operationalize its commitment to science.

ACTIONS NEEDED

Develop information on species and habitat condition to support natural resource assessment and planning at appropriate scales.

Conservation planning, species recovery and land management must be grounded in accurate, current information on species distribution, habitat types and conditions, threats and trends. This is a sizeable challenge, particularly in light of rapid changes in land-use patterns and development, ownership, climate and ecological conditions such as the spread of invasive species. Fortunately, more powerful tools are available than ever before, including mapping and remote-sensing capabilities, citizen science initiatives, modeling and scenario

development, and computing systems capable of managing large data sets. Landscape-scale initiatives such as the BLM Rapid Ecoregional Assessments have demonstrated both the challenges and promises of large-scale multivariate landscape condition analyses, and tools like the data.gov portal allow more people than ever to access important data. The next administration should continue this commitment to the collection, development and dissemination of landscape-scale ecological data.

Require federal departments and agencies to cooperatively develop and apply shared scientific information to species conservation and resource planning and management, especially on lands and waters administered under shared or multiple jurisdictions.

Protecting and restoring species and biodiversity requires a large-scale (landscape or seascape) approach to natural resource conservation and management. This can include creating and applying broad science-based strategies that transcend land management unit boundaries. To be effective, such strategies must be developed using the best available science information relevant to the resources within a landscape. Moreover, conservation and management entities within the landscape should cooperate in the development of science capacity and information relevant to shared resource management. Federal agencies, such as the Forest Service and BLM should be provided with the direction and tools to cooperatively develop scientific resources to support interagency land management planning and conservation.

Encourage the use of independent science reviews to support the quality and credibility of federal conservation and management decisions.

High-integrity, defensible and durable conservation decisions are based on the responsible and transparent interpretation of the best available scientific information. Independent peer review is a hallmark of the science process and the federal land management agencies have policies in place to ensure that conservation decisions are supported by science, but agencies do not usually submit or compare the science used in decision-making for independent review. The next

administration should provide the necessary leadership and capacity to support reviews of information used in conservation decision-making, especially in cases involving high degrees of conservation risk and scientific uncertainty. As one example, the administration should continue the development of peer-reviewed science to establish the foundation for land management planning within the area covered by the Northwest Forest Plan.

Employ technological innovations to improve scientific data collection, analysis and communication.

The federal government collects reams of scientific and administrative data that can inform wildlife and habitat conservation decisions. Unfortunately, this information is often not used by decision-makers, conservation partners, academics and regulated communities, because it is not readily available for analysis.

Collected data are often stored only on CD-ROMs, paper documents and other formats too time-consuming to analyze. This can be directly addressed by requiring federal wildlife agencies to make unprotected data openly available in machine-readable formats. When the data are available, agencies and the public can undertake the critical analyses that can improve conservation decisions. The federal government already recognizes this potential, including through current executive direction, but federal wildlife agencies have been very slow to implement the requirements of the order. Now is the time for federal wildlife and natural resource agencies to embrace open data.

More clearly distinguish policy decisions from science decisions.

Federal wildlife agencies often fail to clearly distinguish science judgments from policy judgments. For example, controversial policy judgments in ESA listing decisions have sometimes improperly been framed as science judgments. While agencies are more likely to get judicial deference using this approach, it is a double-edged sword, because it undermines scientific integrity and the legitimacy of decisions. The next administration should develop decision-making tools that distinguish between science and policy judgments.

IN SUMMARY

Defenders of Wildlife will seek to work with the new administration on the priorities and actions proposed in this conservation agenda. Together we can meet the challenges ahead, create opportunities and ensure that America's extraordinary conservation legacy endures.



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