



Californians Applaud New Public Lands Rule that Will Launch Process to Protect Local Lands and Waters

Rule will rebalance BLM's focus on conservation, restoration, recreation, and climate impacts

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March 30, 2023 (Oakland, CA) – Californians welcomed today's [announcement](#) of a plan that shifts the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) focus towards updating and modernizing the agency's tools and strategies for managing lands. With mounting impacts on the nation's public lands, and the growing importance of public lands for recreation and conservation, the proposed rule would help ensure that the nation's BLM public lands continue to provide abundant and well-connected wildlife habitat, supply clean drinking water, and power local economies. As the nation's largest land manager (245 million acres) the BLM plays a critical role in California, [managing over 15 million](#) acres of wildlands across the state, areas vitally important to the state's conservation of water, wildlife, and our growing demand for access to the outdoors.

Known as the "Public Lands Rule," the plan highlights the need for the agency to work with local communities to focus on the conservation of land, water, and wildlife to ensure communities can combat the growing impacts of climate change. It also encourages local BLM managers to work more closely with tribal nations to ensure cultural resource protection in California and across the West.

"Today's announcement of BLM's new Public Lands Rule is a huge step in the right direction for wildlands across California and the West," said Dan Smuts, Senior Regional Director for The Wilderness Society. "California lawmakers and the Biden administration have set significant conservation goals to ensure we stave off the worst impacts of the climate and nature crisis. We can't reach those goals without the largest land manager in the U.S. playing a significant role in the effort. This new Public Lands Rule directs the BLM to do just that – make conservation a priority now and into the future."

California's elected officials – seeing the important role the BLM must play in the state and across the West – have focused on BLM conservation issues since the beginning of the Biden administration. In [multiple letters](#) over the past year, Senators Alex Padilla and Dianne Feinstein have pushed the administration to prioritize conservation on BLM-managed lands. On the House side, Representative Jared Huffman recently organized and sent [a letter signed by 40 members](#) of the House, including 13 members of the California delegation, calling on Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland to direct the BLM to help western states meet the challenges of the climate crisis by administratively protecting more public land.

"Bureau of Land Management lands have important stories to tell in California – of indigenous stewardship, family and cultural traditions that span generations. Strengthening and expanding its designations of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern is a vital tool for protection of tribal cultural sites in California," said T. Robert Przeklasa, Executive Director, Native American Land Conservancy.

Early last year Senator Padilla and Rep. Huffman sent the BLM a [letter](#) urging the agency to do more to protect key lands and waters, particularly in northern California as part of the forthcoming Northwestern California Integrated Planning (NCIP) process.

The NCIP process covers 386,000 acres (over 596 square-miles) of BLM holdings in Butte, Del Norte, Glenn, Humboldt, Mendocino, Shasta, Siskiyou, Tehama, and Trinity counties. Surrounding communities hope that the BLM will use the NCIP process to establish wilderness study areas (WSA), particularly on BLM lands in Rep. Huffman's district like the Trinity Alps Wilderness additions, English Ridge, and the South Fork Eel River Wilderness additions that are proposed for wilderness designation in his and Sen. Alex Padilla's [Northwestern California Wilderness, Recreation, and Working Forests Act](#).

"Building off of the priorities laid out in the Public Lands Rule, the BLM has a once-in-a-generation opportunity to enact a new management plan that protects lands across Northern California," said **Ryan Henson, Policy Director of California Wilderness Coalition**. "By making conservation a priority, the BLM will become a leader in the on-going effort to protect places like English Ridge and the South Fork of the Eel River here in California. Both are areas that our congressional leaders have proposed for protection and local communities have championed for decades."

In addition to the state's congressional leaders, California's Natural Resources Secretary Wade Crowfoot recognized the opportunity shifting the BLM's focus presents and has also [written to Sec. Haaland calling for more conservation protections](#). Of the 15 million acres managed by BLM in the state, Californians believe that almost 4 million acres should be considered for administrative and/or legislative protections.

Similarly, in 2022, [businesses](#) that serve communities that depend on BLM lands sent a [letter calling for greater protections](#) and [over 120 Western local elected officials](#) have likewise called for greater BLM conservation.

Town of Truckee, California Vice Mayor David Polivy said, "Our nation's protected public lands are tremendous assets to our Western communities. They play a critical role in our way of life and support our outdoor recreation and tourism economies, health, and well-being. They help make the communities where we live what they are while contributing to a healthier and better tomorrow for future generations. We must protect and restore more of these Bureau of Land Management lands and hope this rule-making process will be an opportunity for western voices to be heard."

Anna Peterson, Executive Director of The Mountain Pact said, "[Over 120 local elected officials from western states](#) have called on the Biden administration to protect more Bureau of Land Management lands as part of the administration's America the Beautiful initiative. We look forward to the BLM using this rulemaking process to conserve and protect our nation's important public lands, [wildlife](#) and waters in tandem with locally-led efforts to advance conservation across the west."