



CONSERVATION
LANDS
FOUNDATION

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Saving the Planet Requires Bold Administrative Action by the Bureau of Land Management

Western communities are experiencing many challenges that come with the ever-increasing popularity of our public lands and growing infrastructure needs on top of devastating and expensive climate impacts from wildfires, floods, mudslides, drought, and heatwaves. All of these climate impacts negatively impact western [tourist](#), [outdoor](#), and [agricultural](#) economies; as well as the west's [health](#), [land](#), [water](#), and [air quality](#).

[Scientific research](#) warns that if we are going to stave off the worst impacts of the climate and biodiversity crisis we have to [take bold action by 2030](#). The Biden administration's America the Beautiful initiative can help accomplish the goal of protecting, restoring, and conserving 30 percent of our lands and waters by 2030, but the administration must aggressively use the tools they have already at their disposal to durably protect federal public lands if they are going to succeed.

The Success of Biden's America the Beautiful Initiative Hinges on BLM Action

President Biden's [America the Beautiful initiative](#) outlines eight principles for how our country can "[work together to conserve, connect, and restore 30 percent of our lands and waters by 2030 for the sake of our economy, our health, and our well-being](#)." One way the administration can accomplish these goals will be through federal land management agencies better protecting, conserving, and restoring more of our nation's lands and waters through administrative actions by the Bureau of Land Management (examples on how are listed below). Accomplishing the initiative is essential to providing continued opportunities for outdoor recreation, equitable access to nature, and ultimately ensuring a thriving and livable planet.

As the [largest land manager in the nation](#), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has a critical role to play in implementing the America the Beautiful initiative if the administration is going to reach its ambitious conservation goals of protecting more of our nation's lands and waters. The BLM manages [245 million acres of land largely spread across 12 western states](#). Protecting these lands in their natural, undeveloped condition is crucial to combating the effects of climate change. Across the West, these lands provide real, [quantifiable carbon sequestration and climate adaptation benefits](#) and also serve to conserve scarce water resources. They serve as critical climate refugia for wildlife species and play a vital role in ensuring habitat connectivity across the West. They are in short the heart of the America the Beautiful initiative and their protection should be prioritized by the administration.

BLM Lands Are Vitaly Important - Here's Why

Our nation's public lands are tremendous assets to the American people and in particular to Western communities and economies. The 245 million acres of lands managed by the BLM are also the connective tissue between our forests, rivers, parks, and communities. BLM lands make up [10.5 percent](#) of all lands in the country and many of these remain in their natural state, ensuring wildlife habitat connectivity; clean air and water for communities; as well as providing outstanding opportunities for outdoor recreation. These lands include traditional homelands of Indigenous populations and safeguard thousands of cultural and historic sites.

[BLM lands are critical for wildlife connectivity across the West.](#) [Researchers](#) have concluded that our existing national parks and other protected areas are not big enough to sustain native wildlife. It is critical that core protected areas be connected by corridors – natural areas that connect vital habitats – to allow animals and plants to move freely across the landscape. Across the West, these vital habitat corridors are found predominantly on lands managed by the BLM - this includes lands identified as “Lands with Wilderness Characteristics” (LWC) and “Areas of Critical Environmental Concern” (ACECs).

It's no secret that the West is suffering from a climate change driven drought that has made water resources a critical issue for everyone. Here again, lands managed by the BLM have a critical role to play in ensuring water across the west. Millions of Americans depend on waters that flow through lands managed by the BLM and the agency acknowledges that ensuring water quality for these populations is critical and [adopted](#) a “Water Program Strategy” in 2015 that was designed to make it a leader in “protecting water resources.” The only clear way for the BLM to meet this commitment is by protecting the watersheds - and that means protecting more lands to prevent vegetation loss and soil disturbances, thus ensuring water quality.

In addition to the conservation value of these lands, they also provide critical economic certainty for rural and gateway communities, so long-term investments can be made to develop local economies and infrastructure. Outdoor recreation is a significant economic driver in the United States each year generating [\\$689 billion in consumer spending and supporting 4.3 million jobs.](#)

Conservation Requires Action - The BLM Has The Tools, They Need To Use Them

The BLM has existing tools and authorities that it must begin using more widely across the West to accelerate the scope and pace of conservation. Guided by the [Federal Land Policy and Management Act \(FLPMA\)](#), these policies and regulations enable the agency to better restore, conserve, and protect national public lands. Two of the most important tools managed by the BLM under FLPMA are Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) and ACECs and it's time for the BLM to live up to the letter of the law and use these tools to help address the climate and biodiversity crisis.

WSAs are BLM's most durable and important administrative designation. The designation ensures wilderness character is maintained on identified public lands, protecting the agency's wildest places, irreplaceable cultural resources, native species, and world class recreation. There are more than [29 million acres](#) of BLM-identified [LWCs](#) in the lower 48 states that are eligible for WSA designation and millions more acres of community-identified LWCs that should be considered for designation. To truly address the climate and biodiversity crisis and protect our water resources, the BLM must embrace and use this tool to protect more public lands.

[ACECs](#) are perhaps the most versatile tool the BLM has at its disposal. FLPMA directs the BLM to give priority to the designation and protection of ACECs. These are places where special management attention is required to protect and prevent irreparable damage to important historic, cultural, or scenic values, fish and wildlife resources, or other natural systems or processes. For decades, this designation has gone largely unrealized, with inconsistent identification, designation, and management. To this day there are no national standards or regulations that define what protection means for individual ACECs leading to poor management that in many instances renders the designation meaningless. BLM should address this problem immediately and implement clear regulations that ensure ACECs are truly protected. There are currently over [1,000 ACECs comprising over 20 million acres in the United States.](#) FLPMA requires the BLM to prioritize the protection and designation of ACECs as part of their planning processes and if the administration is going to reach its conservation goals, they have to direct the BLM to meet this requirement.

In addition to WSAs and ACECs, BLM's toolbox is full of other useful management tools that should also be more frequently used to meet the conservation goals set by the Biden administration. Other key conservation tools the administration could use through the administrative process include:

- [Backcountry Conservation Areas \(BCAs\)](#) can be managed to conserve intact wildlife habitats and support high quality wildlife-dependent recreation.
- [Wildlife Migration Corridors](#) can be established through coordination with states to enhance and improve the quality of big-game winter range and migration corridor habitat on Federal lands under the management jurisdiction in a way that recognizes state authority to conserve and manage big-game species and respects private property rights.
- [Wild and Scenic Rivers](#) can be identified by the BLM as eligible and suitable for further protection through the Resource Management Planning (RMP) process.

The BLM must aggressively use these tools if they are going to help the Biden Administration and Western states achieve their conservation goals. Please review our western state opportunities document.