

# AMERICA'S GREAT OUTDOORS: A Vision for Conserving the Nation's Wildlife in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION 2010



NWF



AMERICA'S GREAT OUTDOORS

# Report

*“Americans are blessed with a vast and varied natural heritage. From mountains to deserts and from sea to shining sea, America’s great outdoors have shaped the rugged independence and sense of community that define the American spirit. Our working landscapes, cultural sites, parks, coasts, wild lands, rivers, and streams are gifts that we have inherited from previous generations.”*

Presidential Memorandum on  
America’s Great Outdoors

**America’s Great Outdoors is at the heart of everything National Wildlife Federation and our four million members and supporters work for. Whether we are helping retire federal grazing permits so bison and elk can roam their home ranges freely or holding the oil industry accountable for dolphins and pelicans dying from an oil spill, we are protecting the lands, waters and wildlife that make America’s outdoors great.**

**Integral to this protection is ensuring Americans, in particular children, are outside, reconnecting to nature. From getting kids to explore the bugs and the birds in their own backyard during America’s Great Backyard Camp-out to forty years of Ranger Rick’s outdoors wisdom, National Wildlife Federation knows that it takes people connecting with nature to maintain the American conservation ethic.**



Donald M. Jones

# Success



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*“Everything that we do within our lives in the pueblo has to do with realizing that we don’t have much water. We should accept the fact that we are part of Mother Earth and that we don’t own it. . . . In the past, everything was shared by the people,*

*the animals, the birds, the insects, the plants, all of that. If you try to assist nature, you can make things happen.”*

**Peter Pino**  
former Zia Pueblo governor, NM

From time spent with friends in neighborhood parks and backyards as a child to teaching a grandchild how to fish, Americans connect with each other by connecting with the outdoors. These inter-personal connections and connections with land are the root of the American conservation ethic. As the administration considers the future of American conservation, enacting policies that protect the outdoors and reconnect people to nature must be a



Frank Kovalchek

top priority. The America’s Great Outdoors initiative should translate Americans love for the outdoors to policies that will sustain and improve the outdoors for future generations.

These policies must build upon a century of conservation science and management. As has been shown time and again, successful conservation combines a fundamental understanding of the resource and the threats it faces with a plan and implementation process that allows for input from all stakeholders. Landscapes, water and wildlife do not end at political boundaries — and neither should conservation policies. Public-private partnerships, local-state-federal agency coordination, and

tribal-state cooperation are just some of the partnerships needed to ensure America’s Great Outdoors is not a patchwork of conservation but seamless protection of important areas.

Conservation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will inevitably differ from the conservation successes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. New threats, from climate change to the lure of video games and the internet on a child’s playtime, could not have been dreamt of one hundred years ago. But ultimately, the same driving force behind conservation will be the same as it always has been — people’s connection to that special place where they go to hunt, hike or simply get away from it all.



The Obama Administration's America's Great Outdoors Initiative should build on the passion for the outdoors, demonstrated by the following stories, to set an ambitious, but essential, conservation policy agenda. Here are some of the critical policies that need to be enacted to make sure Americans at the start of the next century can continue to enjoy our great outdoors.

*“It is OUR duty, for those of us already OUT THERE, to drag others with us to remember or discover the magic, and to feel our place in the cosmos!”*

Jeff Hoagland, Hopewell, NJ

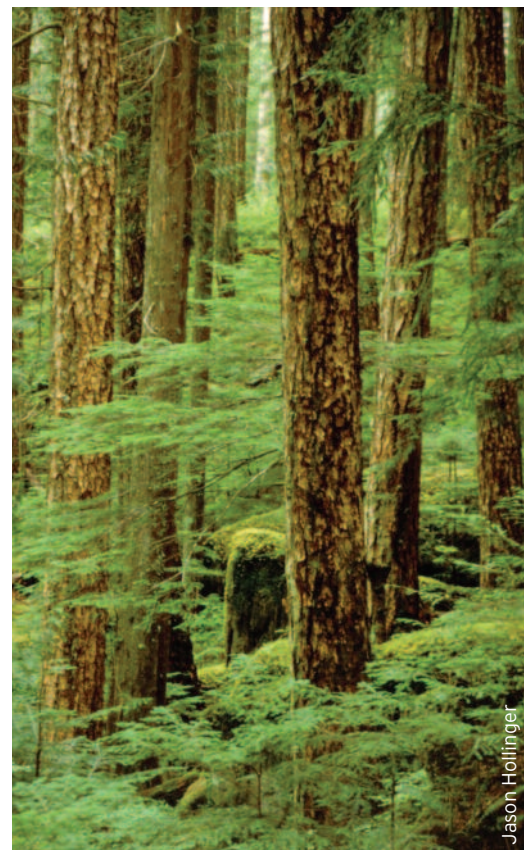
## Funding the Land and Water Conservation Fund

Over the last forty-five years the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) has provided resources to expand and add new federal public lands as well as provide states with funds to build parks, playgrounds and outdoor recreation areas. From the Redwoods National Park in California to Liberty State Park in New Jersey and in every state in between, in rural and urban neighborhoods, these areas provide a place for recreation and provide critical habitat for wildlife.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund is the federal government's primary tool for land acquisition to expand our national parks, wildlife refuges, national forests, state parks, scenic rivers and trails, and local recreation facilities. The fund is split into two programs: “Federal Side” and

“State Side”. The federal side focuses on purchasing land to expand our national treasures. The stateside portion of LWCF provides grants to state and local communities in a matching format that doubles the federal investment.

Unfortunately, despite LWCF's strong record of success, the program remains woefully underfunded: the program has reached its full funding levels only once in its forty-five year existence. The stateside portion of LWCF saw its funding nearly disappear in the late 1990s. Maintaining and creating critical habitat for wildlife and provided outdoor recreation for everyone is a vital investment for our outdoor future.



## Connecting

“Probably one of the best memories I have is going trout fishing with my dad in the Sturgeon River near Wolverine, Michigan. I would wear his hip boots and he

would have his waders on and he would instruct me on casting, letting the worm bounce along the gravel on the bottom of the stream. He would guide me around the deep holes and show me how to get the bait right in the darkest part of the hole without snagging a tree root, because that was where the best trout were waiting. I loved the swirling water around my hip boots and the sound it made. And, I loved the quiet and solitude because it was just me and my dad, the stream and the birds and the breeze rustling the leaves on the trees.”

Betsy Kish, Port Austin, MI



### NWF'S AMERICA'S GREAT OUTDOORS POLICY ASKS:

- 1) Congress must pass legislation for full and dedicated funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund.
- 2) Congressional appropriators must invest in providing new public lands, parks, playgrounds and outdoor recreation areas to match the growing and shifting human and wildlife population.

“The highlight of this trip was our 83 year old cousin Virginia’s ride on rapids of 4-5 degrees. . . it was the ride of her life and I will never forget her enthusiasm and joy of having done it!”

Janet B. Deering, Port St. Lucie, FL



# Safeguarding Natural Resources from Climate Change

*“...walking up the trails in the Adirondack Mountains... you could only imagine a place like that would be on the way to Heaven...”*

Gwenn Meltzer, Woodlyn, PA

Declining snowpack and rising temperatures due to climate change are driving the loss of prairie potholes across Minnesota, the Dakotas and Montana. With over 50% of North American waterfowl breeding in the prairie pothole region, including most canvasbacks, duck hunters will be impacted in the region and around the country. To strengthen the resilience of the prairie pothole region to withstand ongoing climate impacts, a national climate adaptation strategy, together with state and regional plans needs to be implemented and funded. Climate change will impact natural resources across the country from sea level rise on coasts to increased wildfires and droughts in the interior.

Safeguarding natural resources from climate change and strengthening an ecosystem's resilience to climate change can take many forms depending on the system. Local and regional climate impacts modeling are needed to determine future climate. Vulnerability assessments are needed to determine species and systems most threatened. And, the full tool box of conservation actions — from connecting fragmented habitat to watershed restoration to assisted migration — are needed to save threatened species and ecosystems.

The administration's proposal to establish regional landscape conservation centers (LCCs) that will aid conservation at regional levels and incorporate climate science in to state and regional planning is a step in the right direction. But, ultimately Congress must pass comprehensive clean energy and climate legislation that reduces carbon pollution and provides a dedicated fund for natural resource adaptation.

## **NWF'S AMERICA'S GREAT OUTDOORS POLICY ASKS:**

- 1) Congress must pass legislation that caps carbon pollution emissions and provides long term dedicated funding for natural resource adaptation.**
- 2) The administration must develop and implement a national adaptation strategy that clearly delineates how federal natural resource agencies should practice climate smart conservation.**



Flickr: flythebirdpath~> (in yosemite) teddy

## Connecting

“ On my first attempt ever at catching Florida lobster along a shallow reef and rock outcrop in southern Biscayne Bay, I snorkeled over both a loggerhead and green sea turtle lying on the bottom so close I could have almost touched them. I surfaced and told my friend, Biff Lampton, what I had seen. He had already caught 3 legal lobsters and said, ‘Fuller we ain’t here to look at turtles, but to catch crawfish.’ I took a breath and proceeded to locate the elusive quarry, which, detecting my approach, scooted far back in a rock crevice beyond the reach of the tickle stick. I surfaced, and by then my experienced bug hunter pal had already caught another legal bug and released several shorts. I had a lot to learn but had had a great day in those beautiful waters.”

Manley Fuller, Tallahassee, FL



David Vogel/USFWS



Donna J. Vorreyer

“There isn’t anything like being sung to sleep by the ocean. That is the sweetest lullaby I have ever heard. I will cherish the memories the rest of my life.”

Brandi Plummer, Baytown, TX

# Connecting Children, Youth and Families with the Great Outdoors



*“I think that unstructured play in the outdoors is the greatest gift I can give to my kids.”*

Holly Loff, Gypsum, CO

Today’s children have less contact with nature than any generation in human history, spending on average 53 hours each week in front of a screen watching television, surfing the internet, and playing video games, the equivalent of more than a full-time work week. They are spending half as much time outdoors as children did just 20 years ago.

This is a troubling trend for the future of American conservation, our economy, the health of our children and the well-being of our

communities. Over the last 20 years, childhood obesity has doubled, adolescent obesity has tripled, and instances of ADHD have increased. The childhood obesity epidemic’s impact on our health care system, declining sales of hunting and fishing licenses and waning visitation to public lands will have an increasingly negative impact on our nation’s economy.

Connecting children, youth and families to nature will require a multi-faceted approach. State and federal agencies will need to work with community partners across the fields of public health, parks, recreation, transportation, city planning, and education. Because the issue spans multiple disciplines, comprehensive state strategies are needed to coordinate and effectively implement all of the policy tools and partnerships available to federal and state governments.

## **NWF'S AMERICA'S GREAT OUTDOORS POLICY ASKS:**

- 1) Congress must pass legislation to provide incentive funding to states to promote the development and implementation of comprehensive state strategies to connect children, youth and families with the great outdoors.**
- 2) The administration must develop and implement a comprehensive, national, coordinated strategy to reconnect children, youth and families with the great outdoors through policy solutions and federal funding.**



Larry Jernigan/USFWS

*“I remember playing in the river all day long. Life was an adventure.”*

Marco Arevalo, Houston, TX

## Connecting



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*“I’ve often heard that ‘there’s no place like home,’ but for me the outdoors is my home. However, being outside can be rare because I live in an urban area that is not close to a lot of parks or forest areas. The *Earth Tomorrow* program in Atlanta has given me many experiences to enjoy the outdoors including some of the little known green ‘jewels’ in and around the city that I live in and parks and recreation areas in Georgia.*

*One of my favorite places is a park that a friend took me to once, a local but well-hidden park in the back of a neighborhood that doesn’t receive much public use unless you drive there yourself, or like me, take a bus and walk to get there. I enjoyed walking off the made path and over a small stream of water. I walked up a hill that made for great exercise, and I found that my small journey was just a mere beginning — there was much more for me to see. When I am there I call it my ‘sanctuary’ because I can take a moment to listen to my surroundings, and I can sit and meditate on my future.”*

Lyndon Habersham Jr., Atlanta, GA (Age 19)

# Preserving Public Lands

America has 700 million acres of public lands, including some of the most spectacular and recognizable landscapes in the world. Mount Rushmore, Yosemite National Park, and the Cape Cod National Seashore are America's playgrounds and cathedrals. Public lands provide refuge to people and wildlife alike. They contribute to the economy through recreation, tourism, and natural resource extraction, all while providing the US trillions of dollars in ecosystem services, such as natural water filtration, clean air, and storm protection.

However, some of the most ecologically sensitive public lands, including Colorado's Roan Plateau, New Mexico's Otero Mesa, and Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, are at direct risk from oil and gas development. Western waters are contaminated from active and abandoned mines on public lands, threatening wildlife and human health. Underfunded and understaffed land management agencies are leaving visitor centers in disrepair, landscape and wildlife management lacking and restoration projects forever on the back burner.

Providing adequate funding to the National Wildlife Refuge System, the National Landscape Conservation System and other public lands is one of the most basic ways to protect America's Great Outdoors. But preserving public lands will also mean having responsible, science-based energy development that supports renewable energy while making sure all energy production takes into account recreational and wildlife impacts. Abandoned mines need to be reclaimed, and leasing fees and royalties from mines and energy development need to help the resource through habitat restoration or expanded land protection.

## **NWF'S AMERICA'S GREAT OUTDOORS POLICY ASKS:**

- 1) Energy policies and mining reform policies must ensure that energy and mineral development on public land includes monitoring of and mitigation of impacts to fish, wildlife and water resources, while requiring disturbed lands to be reclaimed.**
- 2) Congress must expand protections for special lands and waters through new designations of wilderness, national monuments, parks, refuges and more.**
- 3) Land management agencies must be provided adequate funding to properly manage our valuable natural resources and wildlife.**



## Connecting

“ There’s a seat on the porch at my favorite cabin in Yosemite National Park that’s calling my name. I’ve spent more time on that porch than I care to guess. It’s *the* spot I long for when life in Los Angeles starts to feel a little crazy, a little too fast-paced. A place where I can slow down and take in nature’s many lessons. It is here that my children now play and discover nature in ways I did when I was a kid. They run free in the meadow, explore trees, fish in the creek, climb rocks, swim in the river, take nature hikes and see their favorite deer visitors year in and year out. This place is a gift my parents gave me and one I now pass on to my boys. Someday I hope they’ll long for quiet moments on the porch as much as I do.”

Debi Huang, Los Angeles, CA



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Larry Moats/USFWS

“ I was hiking with a friend in the Laguna Mountains east of San Diego, CA, and ahead of us we saw a mountain lion crossing the trail. It stopped and turned its head to look at us. We stopped and marveled (and maybe trembled a bit!). Then [it] continued on its way... Incredible gift!”

Mollie Martinek,  
San Diego, CA

# Restoring America's Great Waters



*“Nights spent camping out under the stars on the banks of the Nanticoke are one of my greatest memories and reminds me of the connectivity of nature. What happens in the Nanticoke can impact the mainstem of the Chesapeake Bay and beyond.”*

Ryan Ewing, Annapolis, MD

From the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico, from the Puget Sound to the Chesapeake Bay, America's Great Waters are the lifeblood of our nation and contribute trillions of dollars to our economy. We depend on these waterbodies for food and drinking water, for transportation, for energy, for recreation, and for our sense of regional and national identity. Tourism, commercial and recreational fishing, and other commercial activities thrive on the wealth of natural resources that these ecosystems supply.

Yet, despite the importance of these large aquatic ecosystems, we have not adequately protected them. Nutrient and toxics pollution, invasive species, altered water flows, climate change, and loss of habitat have each



Nina Hale

taken their toll and degraded water quality. These problems seriously threaten the viability of our nation's Great Waters and the invaluable economic and ecosystem benefits they provide.

Protecting our nation's Great Waters goes hand-in-hand with efforts to protect our nation's lands, but restoration efforts are severely hampered by a lack of sufficient funding. Year after year, carefully designed regional restoration plans are underfunded. Without sufficient, sustained, dedicated funding and a concerted effort to protect all of our nation's waters, we may degrade waterways and lose benefits they provide to terrestrial ecosystems and their inhabitants.

## **NWF'S AMERICA'S GREAT OUTDOORS POLICY ASKS:**

- 1) Ensure sufficient, sustained, dedicated funding for restoration and protection all of America's Great Waters.**
- 2) Protection of our nation's wetlands, marshlands and ecosystems that filter polluted runoff and protect coastal areas from flooding, storm surges and hurricane damage.**

## *Connecting*

“ My favorite spot along Lake Michigan is Point Betsie Lighthouse in Frankfort, MI. Ever since I was little this spot has given me the opportunity to view the most amazing sunsets. Each year my family goes up north for at least a week and we travel to Point Betsie to view a sunset that keeps us going until the next year when we can return. I also like walking the lakeshore and looking for Petoskey stones with the Lake Michigan waves crashing in the background. ”

**Katie Morris, Ann Arbor, MI**



Flickr: dabijnsi

# Supporting Private Lands Conservation Efforts

No effort to protect America's great outdoors would be complete without private lands conservation.

Approximately 262 million acres of forests are in the hands of families and individuals. Nearly 907 million Acres — or 50% of the US — is currently managed as cropland, pastureland, or rangeland. These private lands are critical for hundreds of species of wildlife, from grassland game birds, like quail and grouse, to

frogs, salamanders and snakes. But private land habitat is particularly threatened. Less than one percent of America's native grasslands remain on the landscape; much of it is on private lands and in danger of conversion to cropping to meet increasing demand for corn ethanol. Similarly, America's private forests and wetlands are under increasing pressure for development and other uses. Continued loss of these systems not only means the loss

of important habitats, but also the release of large amounts of carbon stored in these systems — contributing to global warming.

Many private landowners across the nation are eager to enhance, restore and protect natural habitats, as well as soil and water resources on their land. While there are a number of enormously popular and successful federal lands conservation programs to help them accomplish their goals, these programs are woefully underfunded.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has several popular private lands conservation programs, among them the *Partners for Fish and Wildlife Conservation* program and the *Grasslands and Wetlands Easement Programs* for the Northern Great Plains Region. The Farm Service Agency runs the largest of the private lands conservation programs, the *Conservation Reserve Program* (CRP). The CRP has been widely credited with reducing cropland soil loss by hundreds of millions of tons and producing more than 13 million pheasants and more than 2.2 million ducks each year. Unfortunately, the program was reduced in size by seven million acres in the last Farm Bill, meaning many critically important wildlife habitats are now being forced out of the program and are being



Todd Harless/USFWS

*“My daughter and I took my niece to the beach and went across the street to the wetlands to watch the birds. While there we talked about the ocean and the different kinds of animals that live in the ocean. I also took pictures I was able to share with my pre-school class.”*

Angela St. George, Rancho Cucamonga, CA



Picasa: Jack Maurer

returned to cropping. The Natural Resources Conservation Service also has a number of successful land conservation programs that help private landowners enhance, restore and protect wildlife habitats on their property, like the *Wetlands and Grasslands Reserve Programs*. The U.S. Forest Service administers several programs to assist private forest owners in protecting and managing their land, including the popular *Forest Legacy Program*.

## **NWF'S AMERICA'S GREAT OUTDOORS POLICY ASKS:**

- 1) Congress must make funding of private lands conservation programs a priority in the annual appropriations process.**
- 2) The next Farm Bill must authorize increased funding for conservation programs.**

“ Montana, the ‘Last Best Place’ to hunt and fish. There are many streams, meadows, and peaks in this great state that hold a special place in my heart. Each has influenced me, even defined who I am. I can’t think of my life without them. One place in particular, The Teller Wildlife Refuge, has had a profound impact on my life. Located in the heart of the Bitterroot Valley, the TWR is a private refuge encompassing 1,300 acres of fields, river bottom, warm water sloughs and creeks in the shadow of the Bitterroot Mountains. My first memories of TWR are as a child. Early morning duck hunts with my father, I being too young to carry a gun. My ears remember the whistle of wings and early morning duck chatter. My eyes remember

**the droves of birds descending upon us out of the fog, the wonderful dog work, and my father breaking ice. My nose remembers the smell of gun powder and wetland mud. I can almost taste it. This is where my conservation ethic was born.**

**My father helped establish this gem of private land with the help of Otto Teller. Through the acquisition and consolidation of local farms under conservation easements, the TWR continues to provide a respite for wildlife in one of the fastest developing counties in the state. Each year I make the pilgrimage to the refuge with friends for our own early morning duck hunt. After each hunt we go to a big granite rock next to Gird Creek. Ritualistically, we place the day’s quarry on top of the rock. My father’s ashes lie under the rock and this is our way of letting him know that his conservation legacy is safe and lies deep within us. My greatest anticipation is the day I bring my daughter for her first hunt, carrying on the tradition to the next generation.”**

**Land Tawney, Missoula, MT**



*“Even in times of crisis, we’re called to take the long view to preserve our national heritage — because in doing so we fulfill one of the responsibilities that falls to all of us as Americans, and as inhabitants of this same small planet.”*

President Barack Obama,  
April 16, 2010

What is your connection  
to the outdoors?

Share your story and tell  
NWF what outdoors policies  
you support. Go to:

[www.nwf.org/greatoutdoors](http://www.nwf.org/greatoutdoors)

INSPIRING AMERICANS TO PROTECT WILDLIFE FOR OUR CHILDREN'S FUTURE.

