

Stewardship with Vision



October 2020

PUBLIC ACCESS POLICY STATEMENT

The mission of the Western Landowners Alliance (WLA) is to sustain working lands, connected landscapes and native species. As landowners and managers, we take seriously the privilege and responsibility of stewarding the wildlife and natural resource values in our care on private lands and permitted and leased federal or state grazing allotments.

WLA strongly supports keeping public lands under federal management, and increasing federal investment in the care of public lands. At the same time, we also recognize the critical importance to the public of private lands and private stewardship. According to the USFWS, two-thirds of imperiled wildlife species [rely on private land for habitat](#). These same private lands supply food and fiber, clean water, open space, energy and recreational opportunities. They are the cornerstones of both human communities and ecosystems and they depend on the investment and stewardship of private landowners.

In the West, public and private lands are often intermingled, and this can create challenges in terms of both management and public access. In addition, water and wildlife are public resources which often cross private lands. The potential for conflict arises whenever public and private rights intersect on the same piece of land. Conflicts can also arise when access to public lands is constrained by surrounding private lands.

While the public has the right of ownership over public lands and resources, the landowner also has the right of ownership over private lands and resources. Private stewardship entails substantial financial investment, often made possible only through land-based enterprises such as farming, livestock grazing and commercial recreation. Negotiated access with willing landowners can be mutually beneficial, enabling public

access while supporting the investments and economic activities that keep these lands intact and available to people and wildlife. Efforts to force public access, on the other hand, undermine property rights, private investment, economic viability of working lands and the management of natural resources.

It is also essential to recognize that unlimited public recreational access, whether to public or private land, can often have detrimental impacts on wildlife and the landscape. While outdoor recreation is important for many reasons, mutually agreed-upon limits and careful management are needed to ensure the conservation of wildlife and other natural resource values. Private lands provide refugia critical to the survival of many wildlife species. In fact, many imperiled species today [exist only on private lands](#) where they have found shelter from human pressure.

WLA supports voluntary negotiated public access agreements on private lands for responsible recreationalists; access that takes the conservation of natural resource values into consideration, and sets limits to keep those resources undiminished. We advocate for the tools and funding to support such agreements. It is also important to recognize that landowners across the West already provide public access in many forms, from permission to hunt and fish to guided outfitting to programs designed specifically for veterans, disabled individuals and youth.

Just like public and private lands are intermingled and interdependent, so too are public and private interests. Successful solutions will start with mutual respect, a desire to achieve win-win outcomes and the recognition that the conservation of land, wildlife and natural resources must be the first priority.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: WESTERNLANDOWNERS.ORG