

REDEFINING CONSERVATION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

A 1000-DAY ROADMAP TO A CONSERVATION MODEL THAT WORKS FOR RURAL AMERICA, WORKING LANDS AND WILDLIFE

Conservation-as-usual isn't working. We are literally losing ground and natural resources every day. We can't afford to waste any more time with top-down solutions that don't work. It's time for an entirely new approach to conservation.

The Biden administration wants to address climate change, biodiversity loss, economic recovery and to reunite America. There are ways to achieve these goals together. But success will hinge on the engagement and support of working land stewards and rural communities.

WLA is working with the administration and partners to ensure that working landscapes play a pivotal role in policy initiatives to conserve biodiversity, build back our economy and infrastructure, combat climate change and create a more equitable future. This policy roadmap to the first 1,000 days of the Biden administration includes both actions the executive branch can take immediately to address the crises straining the nation and policy and administrative changes that will codify a new approach to conservation that starts from the ground up.





AT THE PACE OF PARTNERSHIP

From the pandemic response and economic recovery to climate change, the Biden administration faces the challenge of crafting a policy agenda that is bold enough to meet the moment and recognizes that working lands and rural communities are essential partners in addressing these challenges. The first 100 days of the Biden administration will be critical to tackling urgent, pressing issues.

But real progress in reshaping conservation must move at the pace of partnership. That is why in the first 1,000 days in office, the administration should pursue a new approach to conservation – one that is more successful because it recognizes and supports the people on the ground who are actually stewarding America's land and natural resources.

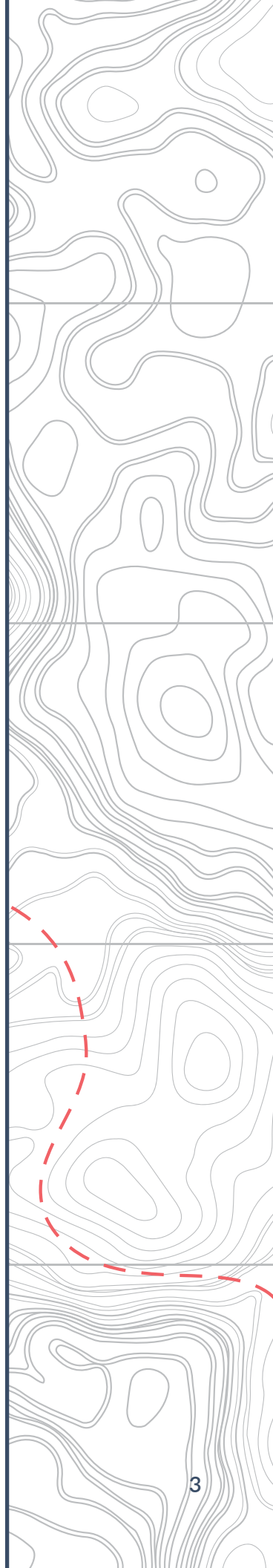
Our first 1,000 day policy agenda for the Biden administration contemplates both immediate action to address the crises straining the nation along with a long-term commitment to reimagining conservation.



ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND RURAL REVITALIZATION

Well-managed private lands, including family farms, ranches and timberlands, are the cornerstones of both human communities and functioning ecosystems. Thin profit margins, volatile commodity markets exacerbated by the pandemic and other man-made and natural forces like climate change are driving these lands into development. We're fighting to ensure the economics of working lands support stewardship. A 21st century model of conservation rewards stewards for producing and protecting all the values working lands provide.

- **Infrastructure Investments:** The Biden-Harris Plan to Build Back Better in Rural America includes proposals to “Rebuild our crumbling infrastructure, from roads and bridges to water systems to electricity grids.” Beyond roads and bridges, the administration should ensure that administrative and legislative infrastructure proposals invest in natural infrastructure that sustains ecosystems and communities including forests, water resources and intact, working landscapes.
- **Support Competitive Markets and Beginning Farmers:** The Biden administration should make a firm commitment to ensuring competitive markets for agricultural producers, create access to regional food systems and address other economic and societal barriers facing young and marginalized groups entering agriculture.
- **Create Economic Drivers for Stewardship:** The Biden administration should promote a win-win approach to conservation that recognizes and supports working lands stewardship. This means creating meaningful economic drivers, like [habitat leases](#), regulatory assurances and administrative support for stewardship and implementing policy on human-wildlife conflict reduction that incorporates the [four C's](#) – conflict prevention, control, compensation and collaboration.





CLIMATE CHANGE, BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION AND LAND MANAGEMENT AND RESTORATION

Working lands form a critical pillar of the solution to the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss. They must be included in both technological and natural solutions. In particular, we are urging the administration to support provision of natural carbon sequestration and native habitat on working lands, alongside opportunities for renewable energy development and green infrastructure.

- **Prevent Fragmentation and Conversion of Native Range:** In the West, healthy native grasslands and rangelands are already sequestering carbon, as well as supporting biodiversity and agricultural livelihoods. Public policies should prioritize the research, funding and technical support needed to restore, steward and conserve these essential lands. Keeping these lands intact through habitat leases and stewardship contracts, conservation easements, tax credits and other strategies should be an immediate priority for the administration. Along with policy options to avoid land conversion and development, funding for research and science should be prioritized to identify additional strategies to increase soil health, sequester carbon, improve soil water retention and increase biodiversity.
- **Support Landowners in Restoring Biodiversity on Private Lands:** The majority of threatened and endangered species depend on private lands for survival. The Biden administration should partner with private landowners to encourage and support proactive, voluntary conservation actions to recover wildlife and restore biodiversity. Landowners should not be penalized for taking action to restore endangered species. Specifically, the administration and Congress should:
 - » Create dedicated funding and staff capacity within the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) for proactive and collaborative at-risk

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species conservation initiatives, including increasing enrollment in agreements under the ESA such as Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances; and

- » Provide funding and support to state wildlife agencies to engage proactively with landowners and support voluntary conservation efforts for at-risk and listed species.

- **Improve Farm Bill and other Conservation programs:** Federal conservation programs and funding opportunities generally garner broad political support, including those available through the conservation title of the Farm Bill and various federal agencies. These programs are vitally important but need improvement for better utilization and better outcomes. Many of these programs are overly complex, underfunded, difficult to access, not adequately promoted, and can conflict with economic diversification opportunities such as ecosystem service markets. To improve delivery of these vital programs to the landowners and landscapes who want and need them, the administration should create interagency “resource coordinator” positions that serve as regional information sources on available programs, partners and conservation opportunities across state and federal agencies. Resource coordinators can also convey input from landowners to federal agencies to help continue to improve and better coordinate these programs for greater impact and efficiency.
- **Provide Funding for Long-Term Conservation:** Caring for land and wildlife is an ongoing process that requires committed investment. The Biden administration should champion the development of funding mechanisms that support long-term stewardship in the public interest. This could include things like federal and state wildlife and natural resource trust funds or endowments that could support multi-year stewardship contracts, habitat leasing, conservation agreements and watershed restoration initiatives. These investments in stewardship will help to secure biodiversity and improve climate health while also supporting rural livelihoods and economic recovery.
- **Encourage Flexible Land Management:** Durable conservation requires that land management strategies are informed and supported by those closest to the ground. Land stewards who work under constantly changing conditions and with continually evolving science understand the importance of flexibility and adaptive management. Forest and range management policy should be tiered to outcomes rather than tied to rulesets, providing [flexibility for livestock producers](#)⁷ to manage for stewardship and operational efficiencies on public grazing allotments. In addition, the administration should couple outcomes-based management strategies with a policy to inform a consistent approach to restoring Bureau of Land Management-administered lands. The Biden plan on clean energy and infrastructure promotes creating 250,000 jobs cleaning up abandoned extractive infrastructure on public lands. An accompanying restoration policy will ensure that the BLM remains a good neighbor to the rural West for generations to come.



PLACE-BASED CONSERVATION

For conservation initiatives to succeed, the Biden administration must meaningfully include local voices and land stewards in decision-making. Local community conservation collaboratives not only reflect the best of American civic engagement, they capitalize on local knowledge and partnerships to create win-win-wins for the economy, community and conservation.

- **Build Collaborative Capacity of Federal Agencies:** In many cases, federal agency culture and institutional frameworks have grown rigid and internally focused over time. The Biden administration has an opportunity to redefine and democratize conservation by strengthening community-based collaborative conservation. To fully support this collaborative approach, the administration should invest in the human capacity needed within the federal workforce and the communities they serve to bring impacted stakeholders together, leverage resources and deliver technical assistance. Along with investing in the human power of the federal government, the administration should seek to improve institutional frameworks, funding and staffing to promote interagency cooperation, communication, coordination from the field up to DC.
- **Actively Seek and Prioritize Guidance of Impacted Communities:** Many producers and land stewards primary interface with the federal government is through local officials working within their community. However, these officials move on or are relocated often, making it harder to build the trust and relationships necessary to sustain community-supported collaborative conservation. The Biden administration should explore pathways to reward and promote staff who are effective collaborators, and ensure that meaningful pathways exist for community and thought leaders to connect directly with decision-makers.

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- **Re-imagine the Role of the Federal Government in Facilitating Landscape-Scale Conservation:** Any nation-wide conservation objective must stand on the shoulders of the cumulative contributions of place-based organizations and collaboratives. As a central goal in considering landscape-scale conservation strategies, The Biden administration should learn from what is already working, consider what place-based collaboratives need to succeed and develop ground-up structures that meaningfully integrate these structures into regional or national conservation strategies.

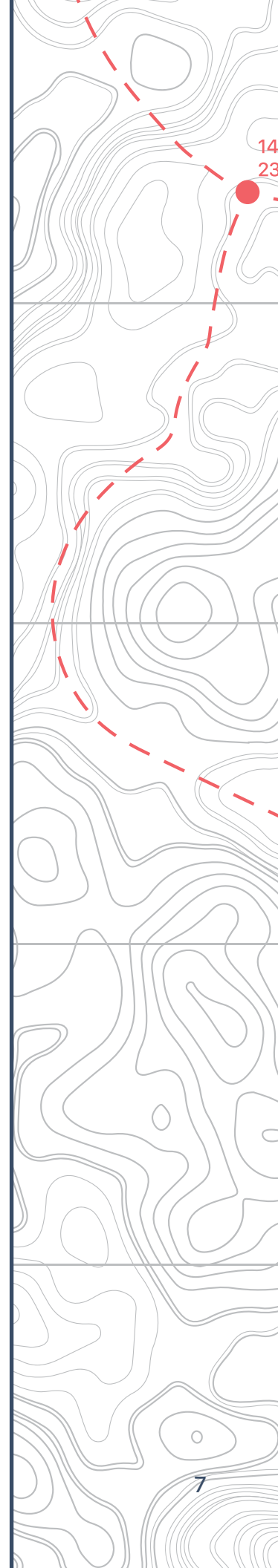


RAISING THE VOICE OF STEWARDSHIP

We need a new approach to conservation that starts today. Working lands are cornerstones of our ecosystems and our human communities. The way we steward these lands will shape our collective future. Working lands are where people and nature come together. It is where we must learn to be in right relationship to the land and to one another.

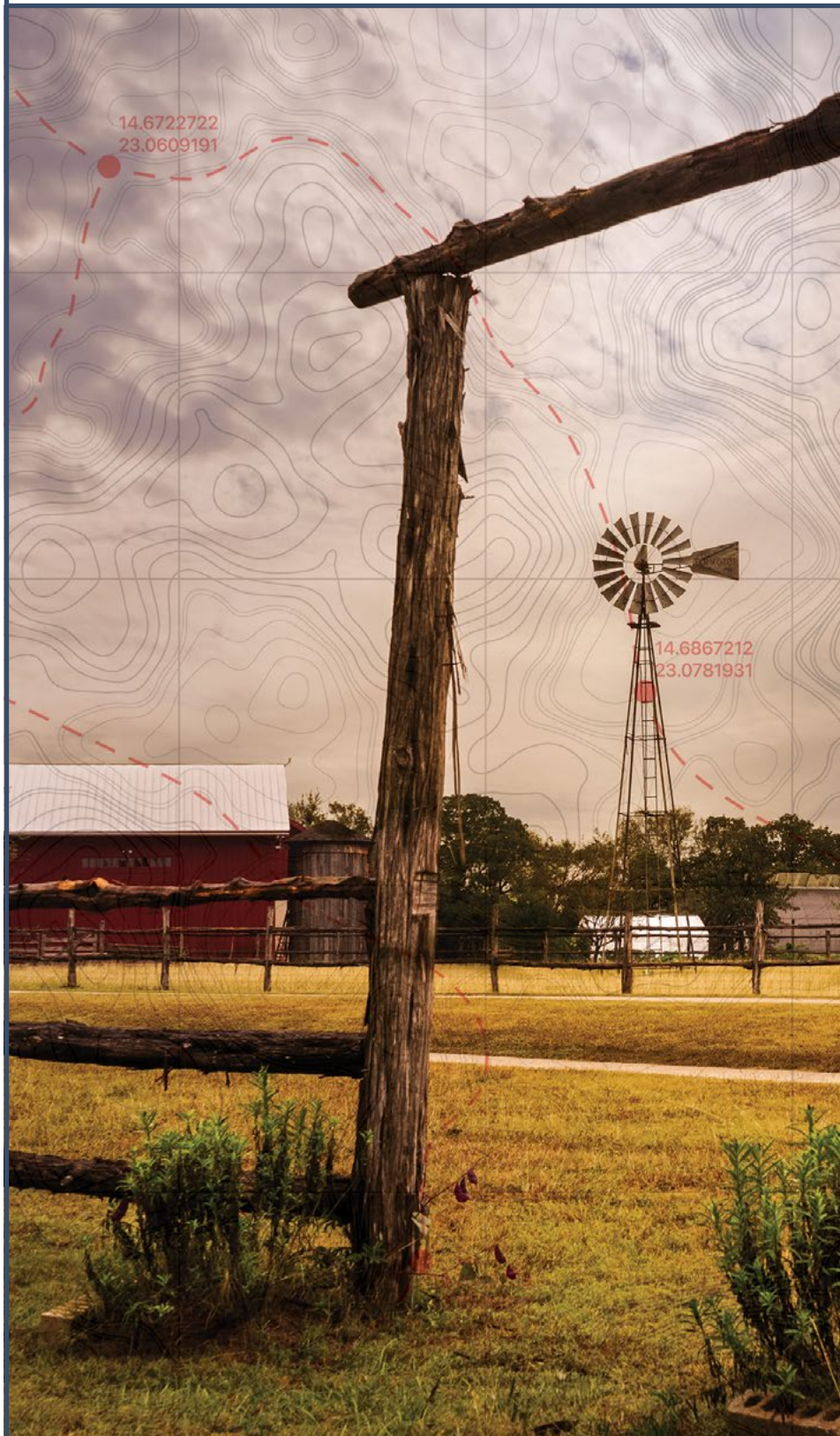
Conservation policy in the coming decades needs to center on the stewardship of working lands, informed by experienced land managers and supported by local communities. Conservation policies should prioritize the development of economic drivers that support ecological stewardship, enabling those who produce our food and steward our land and natural resources to earn a reasonable livelihood doing so. Successful conservation will bring people together, not drive us apart. It will be measured not in acres under legal protection but in the well-being of land, wildlife and human communities as a result of stewardship.

Given the magnitude of the challenges at hand, the Administration's approach must represent more than just a swing of the political pendulum, but a meticulous march toward durable solutions. If the administration is to succeed, there are no shortcuts.





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LANDOWNERS
ALLIANCE**
STEWARDSHIP WITH VISION



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westernlandowners.org/policy

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