



April 9, 2021

The Honorable Joe Neguse  
Chair  
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands  
Committee on Natural Resources  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Neguse:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify at the Subcommittee's oversight hearing on March 23, 2021 on "Building Back Better: Examining the Future of America's Public Lands." I provide the following responses to Questions for the Record as requested.

1. *Your testimony mentioned that 30x30 isn't a one-size-fits all approach. Can you explain what you mean by this?*

Scientists are consistently saying that we must save more nature to save ourselves. We are destroying the natural systems upon which all life depends. According to scientific experts, we need to protect 30 percent of the earth's lands and waters by 2030, with ultimate goal of keeping 50 percent of the planet in a natural condition.

The job is big. In the United States, only about 12 percent of land is currently protected. We need new protected areas – like those identified in H.R. 803. But we also need policies that will provide incentives for private conservation. These policies include tax incentives and direct financial assistance.

The 30x30 agenda is not about locking people out, but instead bringing people in. Groups like the Natural Resources Defense Council are working to help cities and counties, states and private landowners see their role (and the economic benefits) in conserving nature.

2. *What sort of flexibilities would be built into this approach?*

Local governments need financial support to provide more open space to their communities. Federal funds can help support these efforts. Through grants to states, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) can assist towns and counties in preserving and restoring natural areas. Congress can do more by passing the Parks, Jobs & Equity Act.



Farm bill programs – such as the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQUIP); the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP); the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program-Agricultural Land Easements (ACEP-ALE,); Wetland Reserve Easements (ACEP-WRE); the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP); the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP); and the Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP) - can also provide this assistance. The American Farmland Trust recently released a report describing some of these programs and opportunities to improve them. See, American Farmland Trust, *Agriculture's Role in 30x30: Partnering with Farmers and Ranchers to Protect, Land, Biodiversity and Climate* (April 5, 2021). Available at <https://s30428.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/AFT - Agriculture's Role in 30x30 - 4-5-2021.pdf>.

Innovative use of state funds can also support this effort. Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) provides an excellent example. As you are probably aware, GOCO invests a portion of Colorado Lottery proceeds to help preserve and enhance the state's parks, trails, wildlife, rivers and open spaces. To date GOCO has helped partners across Colorado protect 1.2 million acres of open space.

3. *What are the benefits of having multiple, land use designations in the federal inventory?*

Wilderness areas are an important piece of the 30x30 solution, but not the only one piece. Other land use designations such as the Bureau of Land Management's protection of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern provide significant conservation benefits even though these lands do not meet the definition of wilderness.

The 30x30 agenda provides a pathway to ramping up the conservation we need to preserve biodiversity and prevent catastrophic climate change. The key to the agenda's success will be to use available science to measure conservation outcomes and incorporate this science into public, as well as private conservation.

4. *How can Congress support land management agencies in their outreach so that they can utilize these flexibilities for better place-based decision-making?*

Land management agencies need resources – both staff and funding – to conduct meaningful outreach and collaboration.



5. *Should Congress place more emphasis on fully funding our land management agencies like the BLM and Forest Service, so they have the resources to properly protect land units under their jurisdiction? And how does underfunding of our land management agencies hurt our ability to manage federal public lands?*

Absolutely. America's public lands and waters are priceless assets. But we cannot take them for granted. It takes dedicated staff and funding to inventory the public's resources, to make informed decisions about their management and to monitor the results of such decisions.

Investing in the staff we trust to steward our public lands and waters is a smart money move. If we do not make these investments in agencies like the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service now, the costs will be much higher in the future than what it would take to invest wisely now. This is what Building Back Better is about. Just as we would with our own personal money, Congress needs to invest in a way today that delivers the returns we seek in the future.

Passing the Civilian Climate Corps Act can also help. It will put civilians to work in helping communities respond to the impacts of climate change. The Act can help train future experts and leaders for land management agencies by providing relevant job opportunities and experience to the nation's youth.

Sincerely,

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