

# Protecting 30% of America's lands and ocean by 2030

## WE NEED NATURE.

### NOW, NATURE NEEDS US, TOO.

*We depend on nature for the water we drink, the air we breathe, and the food we eat. Nature keeps us healthy, powers our economy, grounds us during times of crisis, and connects us as a nation.*

Nature in America, however, is in steep decline. With a growing number of animals and plants facing extinction, natural places rapidly disappearing to development, and climate change further imperiling the health of our ocean and lands, scientists are urging bold action to protect nature.

To protect wildlife—and ourselves—we must protect and restore at least 30% of U.S. lands and 30% of its ocean by 2030 (30x30). Protection for lands should include a substantial increase in protections for rivers, lakes, wetlands, and other inland waters.

## Nature, like the climate, is at a tipping point...

Scientists are documenting a growing nature crisis in America that threatens the health and prosperity of every community.

- **A football field's** worth of natural lands disappears to development in the United States every 30 seconds. These losses are concentrated near communities of color, low-income communities, and communities with high numbers of families with children.
- **2.9 billion birds** in the United States and Canada have been lost since 1970.
- **At least one-third of American wildlife**, more than 12,000 species, are at increased risk of extinction. Worldwide, one million species are at risk of extinction, many within decades.
- **Half of all freshwater and saltwater wetlands** in the contiguous 48 states have disappeared.
- Human activity has severely altered **three-fourths** of the planet's lands and significantly altered **two-thirds** of the ocean.

Only 12 percent of lands and 23 percent of the ocean are protected in the United States, with ocean protections almost exclusively in the western Pacific and Hawaii.

**Photo:** Bob Wick, Bureau of Land Management  
(Sacramento Recreational River, California)

# ...but we can solve this problem...

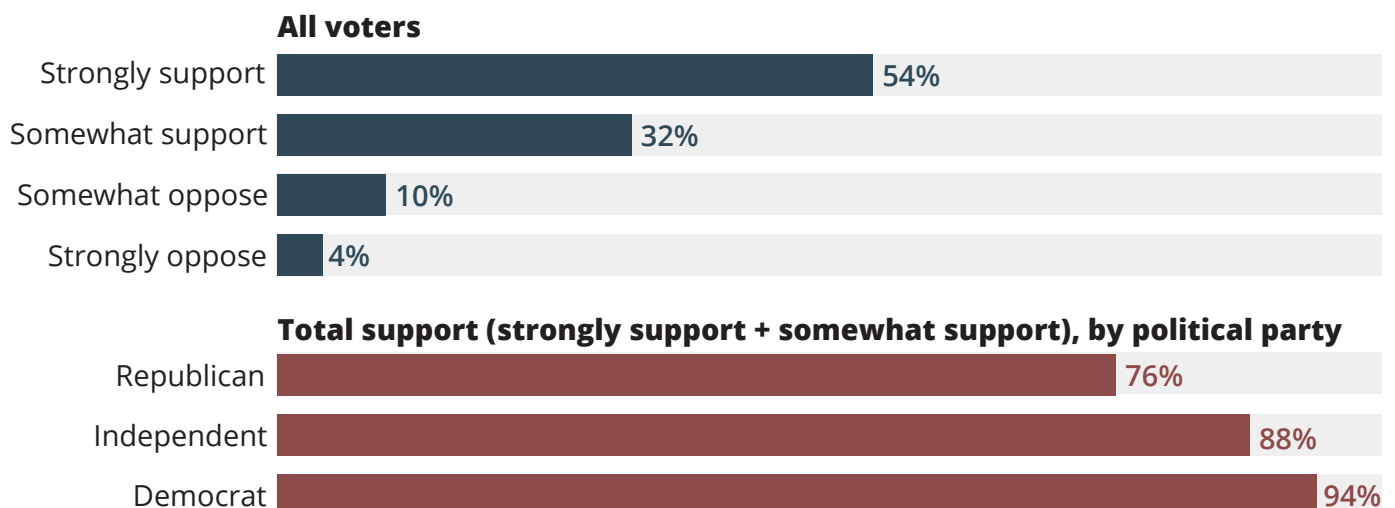
According to world-renowned scientist Edward O. Wilson and others, roughly half of all lands and waters should be conserved in a natural condition to prevent most wildlife and plant species from going extinct. We must provide safe havens where the natural world can thrive if future generations are to have clean water, clean air, healthy communities, and secure food supplies.

The U.S. needs to accelerate land, freshwater and ocean protection and restoration efforts at all levels of government and across the country. By setting a national goal of protecting at least 30 percent of all lands and waters by 2030—a commitment that is widely supported by Americans—the U.S. can be a leader in the global effort to conserve nature.

Protecting at least 30 percent of the world's terrestrial and aquatic habitats and 30 percent of the world's ocean habitats would reduce extinctions and safeguard the natural resources we rely on for food, jobs, and recreation. It also would help prevent global temperatures from rising more than 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, a threshold beyond which scientists say the costs and effects of climate change worsen significantly. Conserving more lands and waters in a natural state would also help protect U.S. communities from floods, fires, storms, and other impacts of climate change.

## PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR AN AMBITIOUS NATIONAL CONSERVATION TARGET IS HIGH AND BIPARTISAN

Percentage of voters who support or oppose the following statement: *'We should set a national goal of protecting 30% of America's lands and ocean areas by 2030.'*



**Source:** Survey of 1,203 registered voters, conducted by Hart Research Associates for the Center for American Progress, February 20–26, 2019, data on file with authors.



## ...and we can solve it in a way that protects human communities and the natural world.

The path to conserving 30% of America's lands and waters must reflect our nation's values and the needs of all communities and peoples across the country. **In particular, a national 30x30 effort should seek to uphold these five principles:**

### 1. Support locally-led conservation

The U.S. can only reach a 30x30 goal by doing more—far more—to help communities protect the places that matter most to them, in a manner that meets local, state, tribal, and regional needs.

### 2. Work toward a more equitable and inclusive vision for nature conservation

For too long, the costs and impacts of natural resource extraction and pollution have fallen disproportionately on low income communities and communities of color in the U.S. For example—as a result of discrimination, economic segregation, dispossession of lands, and other factors—communities of color in the U.S. are three times more likely than white communities to live in nature deprived places. The pursuit of a 30x30 goal must address these disparities and yield a more equitable distribution of nature's benefits to all people.

### 3. Honor the sovereignty of tribal nations and Indigenous communities

Many of the most important and best-conserved natural, cultural, and historic resources in the U.S. are under the ownership and care of American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian communities. The pursuit of a 30x30 goal must uphold the sovereignty of tribal nations, reflect meaningful consultation with tribal leaders, account for the expertise and experiences of Indigenous communities, and help Indigenous communities fulfill their visions and priorities for the stewardship of natural, cultural, and historic resources.

### 4. Support private land conservation

Farmers, ranchers, and private forest and landowners have long been some of America's most effective conservationists. Policymakers should respect private property rights and support the voluntary land practice and conservation efforts of private landowners, working waterfronts, and the private sector to achieve a 30x30 goal.

### 5. Be guided by science

To successfully conserve nature for future generations and to harness the power of nature to fight climate change, science must guide the U.S. pursuit of a 30x30 goal. Scientists have developed a deep and growing body of knowledge to help communities and leaders make informed choices about how to protect and restore our ocean, lands, rivers, lakes and wetlands in a way that reflects the diversity of the country's geography, peoples, and wildlife.

# It's not too late. We can create a better future.

Recent global crises emphasize how connected we all are with each other and with nature. As we enter an era in which we will rely more than ever on the integrity and stability of the natural world, we must confront and reverse the rapid decline of its natural systems. Our economic prosperity, the health of our communities, and our ability to weather the effects of a changing climate all depend on the services nature provides.

America has a remarkable track record of solving environmental problems. To protect at least 30 percent of U.S. lands, inland waters and ocean by 2030, the country will need to act in all domains, in all geographies, and in the interest of all communities. By advancing locally led conservation initiatives, building a more inclusive, equitable, and just approach to stewardship, and responding to an ambitious national call to action, the United States can fulfill its promise as a conservation leader and serve as an example for the world to follow.



**Photo:** Hazel Rodriguez, United States Fish and Wildlife Service

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