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America the Beautiful 2022 Annual Report

*An update on progress made to support locally led
conservation and restoration efforts*

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Letter to America

Dear Reader:

In this second annual report on President Biden's America the Beautiful initiative, you will find updates on the steps Federal agencies are taking to support locally led efforts to conserve and restore our nation's lands, waters, and wildlife.

In particular, this report describes the impacts of unprecedented investments in conservation and restoration that we are making from coast to coast, thanks to the President's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act. You will also read about the successes of communities who, after years and years of work, secured protections for irreplaceable natural, historic, and cultural treasures, from the Tongass National Forest and Camp Hale and Camp Amache in Colorado. And you will find updates on our efforts to support and advance the conservation priorities and needs of Tribal Nations, to incorporate Indigenous Knowledge into the Federal Government's decision-making, and to ensure that all communities have access to nature and its many benefits.

Though the milestones and accomplishments described in this report are important and inspiring, so too is the way in which communities, stakeholders, and governments at all levels are advancing land, water, and wildlife stewardship. True to the principles of the America the Beautiful initiative, we are pursuing the President's national conservation goal in a way that is collaborative and inclusive, honors Tribal sovereignty and supports the priorities of Tribal Nations, supports voluntary stewardship efforts of private landowners and honors private property rights, fosters job creation and healthy communities, uses science as a guide, and conserves our nation's lands and waters for the benefit of all people.

My colleagues and I in the Biden-Harris administration are proud of the progress reflected in this second annual report, and excited about the work that remains ahead.

Sincerely,



Brenda Mallory
Chair, Council on Environmental Quality

I. Introduction

In 2022, the Federal family continued to support and advance locally led conservation and restoration efforts across the nation as part of the America the Beautiful initiative. This call to action, born out of Executive Order 14008 on *Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad* that President Biden signed during his first month in office, charged the Secretaries of the Departments of the Interior, Agriculture, and Commerce along with the Chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) with the goal of conserving at least 30 percent of our lands and waters by 2030.

As part of the America the Beautiful initiative, the Biden-Harris administration committed to produce annual, publicly available reports. This report—the second on America the Beautiful—provides an overview of activities that occurred in 2022 consistent with the goals and principles of the initiative.



Figure 1: President Biden speaking at the 2022 Tribal Nations Summit. *Photo by DOI.*

Background on the America the Beautiful Initiative

For years, scientists have sounded the alarm about the extinction crisis that threatens the health of the natural systems that supply our food, water, fiber, fuel, and other resources. This nature crisis exacerbates—and is exacerbated by—the impacts of climate change that are rapidly altering our terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems. Nature-deprived communities across the nation bear the brunt of nature loss and climate change, resulting in disproportionate impacts to their health and well-being.

The America the Beautiful initiative is designed to strengthen the nation's economy by addressing the interconnected climate and biodiversity crises and improving equitable access to nature. The initiative builds on America's long tradition of collaborative stewardship to build a future where every person in the country can experience the opportunities provided by our nation's cherished lands and waters. Locally led and partnership-driven, America the Beautiful supports conservation and restoration efforts across the country.

Following the President's Executive Order in January 2021, the Federal Government conducted listening sessions to inform the America the Beautiful initiative. A wide range of

stakeholders provided input that supported the development of the America the Beautiful initiative. As reflected in the initial report from May 2021, the input reflected significant agreement and shared values across many stakeholders, leaders, geographies, and political perspectives on the value of natural places and healthy ecosystems in the fight against climate change, in protecting clean drinking water and clean air, and in safeguarding an abundance and diversity of wildlife. The feedback also emphasized the belief that the country can and should be doing more to support and accelerate locally led conservation efforts of all kinds across the country as well as the need to expand access to the outdoors and nature for all communities.

The input also illuminated strong agreement on a set of principles adopted as the foundation of the initiative. These eight principles guide the work that the Biden-Harris administration has done and will continue to do to advance conservation and restoration:

- Pursue a collaborative and inclusive approach to conservation;
- Conserve America’s lands and waters for the benefit of all people;
- Support locally led and locally designed conservation efforts;
- Honor Tribal sovereignty and support the priorities of Tribal Nations;
- Pursue conservation and restoration approaches that create jobs and support healthy communities;
- Honor private property rights and support the voluntary stewardship efforts of private landowners and fishers;
- Use science as a guide; and
- Build on existing tools and strategies with an emphasis on flexibility and adaptive approaches.

Additionally, stakeholders helped identify six areas ripe for successful collaboration through the initiative: creating more parks in underserved communities; supporting Tribally led conservation and restoration priorities; expanding collaborative conservation of fish and wildlife habitats and corridors; increasing access for outdoor recreation; rewarding voluntary conservation efforts of fishers, ranchers, farmers, and forest owners; and creating jobs by investing in restoration and resilience.

Within the Biden-Harris administration, the America the Beautiful Interagency Working Group is co-chaired by CEQ Chair Brenda Mallory, Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, and Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo. Together, they help coordinate and advance conservation and restoration work across the government—with many additional agencies playing significant roles.

In year one, the Department of Agriculture (USDA) made big investments to support conservation outcomes on private lands, enrolling more acres in Farm Bill Conservation Programs, such as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), and making its programs easier to use and more responsive to the needs of farmers, ranchers, and other landowners.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) designated the Wisconsin Shipwreck Coast National Marine Sanctuary in Lake Michigan, initiated the designation process for the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary off the coast of California, expanded Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary, and proposed new national estuarine research reserves in Connecticut, Wisconsin, and Louisiana. Additionally, the Department of the Interior (DOI) led action to facilitate Tribal co-stewardship on public lands, such as taking action to protect Chaco Canyon, made big investments in new parks and outdoor spaces through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and laid the groundwork with States and Tribes to conserve wildlife corridors. The first year, too, marked restorations of national monuments, including Bears Ears, in which President Biden reaffirmed the principle that once a place is protected, it is to be protected forever.

Overview: Year Two of America the Beautiful

In 2022, the Biden-Harris administration continued to advance locally led conservation and restoration efforts while engaging a broad array of stakeholders. Through historic investments, new policies, and place-based efforts, the administration worked to strengthen conservation of lands and waters across the country. The President's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act made the largest investments in the restoration and resilience of natural systems in U.S. history, and States, Tribes, and local governments advanced visionary and creative conservation goals across the country.

President Biden also signed into law other legislation that bolstered conservation and restoration work, including with the Bipartisan Year-End Omnibus and the National Defense Authorization Act. These two legislative accomplishments supported the goals and principles of America the Beautiful nationwide, designating new wilderness in Nevada, establishing a new national historic site in Illinois, designating more than 70 new miles of wild and scenic river segments and national heritage areas across the country, extending authorizations for myriad programs, and more.

In total during his first two years in office, President Biden took more conservation actions and protected more lands than any other 21st century President by channeling more than \$10 billion to local land conservation. His efforts have conserved millions of acres of lands and waters through designations of national monuments, wildlife refuges, wilderness areas, farm bill conservation programs, and more. The President has demonstrated his commitment as a modern conservationist to aggressively pursuing the challenge of conserving at least 30 percent of American lands and waters by 2030.

Additionally, late in 2022, the administration was pleased to see the international community follow America's lead in these efforts when, at the United Nations Biodiversity Conference, governments across the globe reached a historic agreement to collectively commit to conserving at least 30 percent of lands and waters by 2030, among other goals.

Historic Investments

The Inflation Reduction Act, which President Biden signed into law in August 2022, reflects the most ambitious action taken on combatting the climate crisis in the nation's history and has already begun to support American workers and create good-paying jobs across the country. It is providing historic investments to reduce emissions, secure environmental justice, and develop a robust and sustainable clean energy economy. Many of these investments also advance restoration of America's lands and waters, and will enable communities to improve access to outdoor spaces.

For example, the Inflation Reduction Act included \$4.6 billion to address the worsening drought crisis in the West; \$500 million for land resilience, conservation, and habitat restoration within the Interior Department; approximately \$20 billion for USDA's Farm Bill conservation programs to support producers in climate change mitigation and resilience; \$700 million in additional funding for the Forest Legacy program to permanently conserve private forestlands; \$1.8 billion for hazardous reduction projects to mitigate the risk of wildfire to communities, critical infrastructure, water sources, and at-risk species habitat; \$1.5 billion for Urban and Community Forestry activities including those in underserved communities and that mitigate extreme heat; \$2.6 billion for NOAA to build the nation's resilience to climate change, including by enabling more targeted research, conservation, restoration, and protection measures for coastal and marine habitats, fisheries, and marine mammals; \$3 billion for Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) grants for projects related to climate change and air pollution, extreme heat risk mitigation, resiliency and adaptation, and community engagement; and \$3 billion for Department of Transportation grants to reduce air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, manage stormwater run-off, address urban heat islands, and gaps in tree canopy coverage.

These investments build on the once-in-a-generation investments in our nation's infrastructure and natural capital through President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Great American Outdoors Act. In the first year of implementing the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the Biden-Harris administration announced more than \$185 billion in funding and more than 6,900 specific projects, reaching more than 4,000 communities across all 50 States, D.C., and the territories that, in many cases, support conservation and restoration nationwide. The Great American Outdoors Act also continued to support the nation's lands and waters through full and permanent funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and through critical investments in infrastructure on our national parks, forests, wildlife refuges, recreation areas, and more.

Aligned with the goals and principles of the America the Beautiful initiative, the Biden-Harris administration has worked to ensure that these historic investments directly support and empower local communities to advance their conservation and restoration priorities. For example, the Biden-Harris administration and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation launched the America the Beautiful Challenge, a "one stop shop" competitive

grant program for conservation and restoration projects that implement conservation plans across the nation.

In 2022, the America the Beautiful Challenge granted \$91 million to 55 conservation projects in 42 States, three U.S. territories and for 14 Tribal Nations. The fund leveraged more than \$50 million in matching contributions to generate a total conservation impact of more than \$141 million. About one-third of the funding supported projects proposed by Tribes, and the Native Americans in Philanthropy organization is covering the match requirements for Tribes through its Tribal Nations Conservation Collaborative Fund. The request for proposals received an unprecedented response, with applicants submitting 527 proposals representing all 50 States, Puerto Rico, and three U.S. Territories requesting a total of \$1.1 billion, illustrating how much impactful conservation work is ready and waiting for investments like these.

Furthermore, USDA enrolled more than 3.1 million acres in the Grassland Conservation Reserve Program, which is the largest signup in the program to date. This voluntary program protects grasslands and promotes biodiversity while allowing producers and landowners to continue grazing and haying practices on their land.

New Policies and Initiatives

In 2022, the Biden-Harris administration outlined new strategies and goals that strengthen collaborative, science-based conservation of public lands and waters. In Executive Order 14072 on *Strengthening the Nation's Forests, Communities, and Local Economies*, President Biden provided directives to safeguard mature and old-growth forests on Federal lands, strengthen reforestation partnerships across the country, combat global deforestation, and enlist nature to address the climate crisis and improve the resilience of our lands, waters, wildlife, and communities.

The administration's Nature-Based Solutions Roadmap, for example, responded to President Biden's directive in the Order for the Federal Government to identify key opportunities for greater deployment of nature-based solutions across the Federal Government. The Roadmap, released in November, outlined new actions and recommendations to make nature-based solutions a go-to option for fighting climate change, and boosting progress toward America's climate goals. Additionally, the Order established the directive for the U.S. Global Change Research Program to conduct the first National Nature Assessment for the country to increase our knowledge of nature in the United States, its relevance to our lives and the economy, and its links to global change. In complementary actions, the Office of Management and the Budget, the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), and the Department of Commerce produced a draft plan for a national strategy to put America's natural assets on its economic balance sheet, to help reflect the importance of nature in the lives of Americans and in the economy.

At the 2022 Tribal Nations Summit, CEQ and OSTP announced first-of-its-kind government-wide guidance for Federal agencies to recognize and include Indigenous Knowledge in Federal research, policy, and decision-making. Initiated at the 2021 White House Tribal Nations Summit, the new guidance was developed in consultation with Tribes and engagement with Indigenous Peoples to elevate Indigenous observations, oral and written knowledge, practices, and beliefs that promote environmental sustainability and the responsible stewardship of natural and cultural resources in Federal policymaking.

Additionally, the administration has established two forums for interagency coordination on the America the Beautiful initiative. First, the Biden-Harris administration renewed the Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation (FICOR), which focuses on providing the public with improved and more affordable experiences on America’s public lands and waters. Second, the Biden-Harris administration launched the Nature in Communities Committee, which focuses on strengthening investments in communities that have historically been denied the many benefits that nature provides.

New National Parks, Wildlife Refuges, and Other Conservation Actions

In 2022, President Biden had the honor to lift up a number of nationally significant sites that, together, help tell a more complete story of America.

In March, he signed the Amache National Historic Site Act, designating the former incarceration site for Japanese Americans during World War II in Granada, Colorado as part of the National Park System. In May, the President signed the Brown v. Board of Education National Historical Park Expansion and Redesignation Act, providing for inclusion of additional related sites in the National Park System to reflect a more complete story of the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision outlawing segregation in public schools in 1954. In October, President Biden designated Blackwell School National Historic Site in Texas to help tell the history of Texas school districts that established separate elementary schools for Mexican American children through the practice of de facto segregation.

Also in October, as part of his administration's commitment to protect, conserve, and restore our country's iconic outdoor



Figure 2: President Biden at the first new national monument of his presidency: the Camp Hale – Continental Divide National Monument. *Photo by White House.*

spaces and historical sites for the benefit of future generations, President Biden used his authorities under the Antiquities Act to designate the Camp Hale – Continental Divide National Monument in Colorado. This new monument honors the nation’s veterans and Indigenous People and their legacy by protecting this Colorado landscape, while supporting jobs and America’s outdoor recreation economy.

In November, at the White House Tribal Nations Summit, President Biden committed to continuing to use his authorities to protect sacred Tribal lands, including Avi Kwa Ame or Spirit Mountain, an area in southern Nevada central to the creation story of many Tribes. The Departments of the Interior and Agriculture also completed more than 20 co-stewardship agreements to continue advancing and supporting Tribally led conservation and restoration priorities.

And, in December, the omnibus bill included the designation of New Philadelphia National Historic Site in Illinois, which commemorates the history of early 19th century Black pioneers; established seven new National Heritage Areas including Alabama Black Belt, Bronzeville-Black Metropolis in Illinois, Downeast Maine, Northern Neck in Virginia, St Croix, Southern Campaign of the Revolution in North Carolina and South Carolina, and Southern Maryland; expanded the protection of important historical and natural resources by expanding the boundaries of several existing parks; and added two new rivers to the Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Additionally, the Red River National Wildlife Refuge Boundary Modification Act, which became law in December, upgraded the acquisition boundary of the refuge in Louisiana by thousands of acres.

In addition to President Biden’s actions, multiple Federal departments and agencies made conservation progress. For example, DOI announced the establishment of the Lost Trail Conservation Area in northwest Montana as the 568th and newest unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System. This expansion—the first unit for the System under the Biden-Harris administration—is the culmination of a 20-year locally-led effort to conserve important big game corridors and recreational areas in the region. The new conservation area provides an important wildlife habitat corridor between National Forest lands, the Flathead Indian Reservation, and other wildlife refuges while allowing for sustainable timber harvest and continued outdoor recreation opportunities.

Additionally, in January 2022, NOAA designated the Connecticut National Estuarine Research Reserve in Long Island Sound. As the 30th site in the reserve system, the new reserve encompasses 52,160 acres. In June 2022, NOAA initiated the designation process for the proposed Hudson Canyon National Marine Sanctuary, for an area near the largest submarine canyon along the United States Atlantic coast.

Broad Public Engagement

The Biden-Harris administration is committed to continuing to engage the public to inform conservation and restoration priorities. In 2022, for example, the Departments of the

Interior and Agriculture stood up the Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Council to provide recommendations on policies that benefit wildlife and habitat conservation, safe recreational shooting sports, and wildlife-associated recreation opportunities. NOAA also announced the establishment of a new Marine and Coastal Area-based Management Advisory Committee, which will advise NOAA on science-based approaches to area-based protection, conservation, restoration, and management in marine and coastal areas, including the Great Lakes.

In addition, the America the Beautiful Interagency Working Group, co-chaired by Secretaries Haaland, Vilsack, Raimondo, and Chair Mallory, gathered input from the public about how to best track, reflect, and advance progress within the initiative and illustrate where additional investments can make the most difference for climate, biodiversity, and equity.

During the 60-day formal public comment period on the development of the American Conservation and Stewardship Atlas (Atlas), more than 34,500 comments were received. Some of these comments were signed by individual organizations or members of the public; others had ten to thousands of individuals sign on in agreement. Comments came from a wide, diverse range of constituents. Some examples include:

- Elected officials, including Governors and county commissioners
- Farm bureaus and other national, State, regional, and local agricultural organizations
- Regional Fishery Management Councils, including New England, North Pacific, and the Council Coordination Committee
- Conservation-focused nonprofits
- Researchers and scientists from universities, private companies, and more
- Indigenous scientists, Indigenous Knowledge holders, and Tribal organizations
- Engaged citizens

The open-ended nature of the Federal Register questions generated myriad perspectives, and the full version of each comment can be individually reviewed on the [Regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov) docket. However, general themes emerged from each of the questions posted in the Federal Register Notice that have been useful to inform interagency conversations. The summary in Appendix A offers a snapshot of consistent themes and feedback heard.

II. Progress in Six Focus Areas

In addition to the key investments, policies, designations, and public engagement highlighted above for 2022, this section provides additional detail on efforts to advance the six areas of early focus of the America the Beautiful initiative. These summaries do not capture all the efforts underway; nor do they fully reflect the important partnerships with local, State, and Tribal governments, and non-governmental organizations to advance locally led conservation and restoration. Appropriately, many of the items highlighted have been decades in the making and build on existing programs that have been embraced by local, State, and Tribal governments as well as previous administrations. Like the 2021 annual report, this compilation is both a celebration of accomplishments to date and a call to action to continue future conservation and restoration work in the years to come.

Creating More Parks and Safe Outdoor Opportunities in Nature-Deprived Communities

The Biden-Harris administration has continued to create more parks and safe outdoor opportunities in nature-deprived communities, many of which are communities of color or low-income communities, to improve equitable access to nature and its benefits. Examples from 2022 include:

- Interagency Memorandum of Understanding on Promoting Equitable Access to Nature in Nature-Deprived Communities.** The Biden-Harris administration celebrated the signing of this agreement by 10 Federal departments and agencies to support local leaders' efforts to improve access to nature and create, expand, steward, and conserve natural spaces for all Americans. The CEQ has convened the newly formed interagency group, named the Nature in Communities Committee, with representatives from the Environmental Protection Agency, AmeriCorps, and the Departments of the Interior, Agriculture, Commerce, Army Civil Works, Housing and Urban Development, Transportation, and Homeland Security.



Figure 3: Second Gentleman Emhoff planting trees with local leaders in celebration of the signing of the memorandum to expand equitable access to nature.
Photo by White House.

- **Mapping Nature-Deprived Communities.** The Biden-Harris administration included, for the first time, a layer in the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool to reflect a lack of equitable access to parks and open space. This inclusion acknowledges disparity—and the impact of parks and open spaces on human health and community wellbeing—and drives important resources to disadvantaged communities.
- **Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership:** Through the Land and Water Conservation Fund’s Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership program, the National Park Service (NPS) announced that communities in 26 cities across the United States would receive up to \$61.1 million in grant funding to create new parks and trails, or substantial renovations to existing parks. In addition, NPS announced that \$192 million will be distributed to urban communities to create new outdoor recreation spaces, reinvigorate existing parks, and form connections between people and the outdoors in economically underserved areas. In order to increase the program’s flexibility, the Department announced programmatic changes to the program to support bigger ideas and more communities in their pursuit of creating more parks and places.
- **Urban Forests, Gardens, and Agriculture:** The USDA has continued to invest in its programs focused on urban forests, gardens, and agricultural opportunities.
 - **Urban and Community Forestry:** In addition to regular appropriations at a historic high of \$40 million, the Forest Service (FS) Urban and Community Forestry Program also received \$1.5 billion in 2022 in Inflation Reduction Act funding to engage directly with historically underrepresented and disadvantaged communities and restore and sustain the health of urban and community forests.
 - **Gardens:** The People's Garden Initiative based in the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) distributed more than \$1 million to support gardens in nature-deprived communities in 17 cities with an additional \$2.5 million slated for distribution.
 - **Agriculture:** The Farm Service Agency (FSA) established six additional Urban and Suburban County Committees in 2022 to partner with local organizations to identify urban spaces in nature-deprived communities that could be transformed into agricultural spaces for urban and suburban producers.
- **Urban Waters Federal Partnership:** Led by the EPA, this existing partnership among 15 Federal agencies continued its work throughout 2022 to help reconnect communities with their waterways by improving coordination and collaboration with community-led revitalization efforts and promoting their economic, environmental, and social benefits. Currently in 20 communities, the partnership announced nearly \$4 million to benefit 22 urban waters projects that are critical for citizen health and safety, recreation, and economic development across 15 cities.

- **Bureau of Indian Education Community Schoolyards:** At the 2022 White House Tribal Nations Summit, DOI announced a new partnership between the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) and Trust for Public Land to create culturally informed education spaces. This innovative partnership will help fund nine new schoolyards in Tribal communities that combine nature, physical activity, education, Native languages, and cultural heritage.
- **Urban Bird Treaty Program:** In 2022, the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Urban Bird Treaty Program contributed \$135,000 to support projects in five cities, representing more than \$460,000 from FWS and its partners that engage communities in habitat restoration and bird monitoring, education, and recreation and improve access to nature for diverse and underserved communities.
- **Land Use Innovation Grants:** The NPS, EPA, and Groundwork USA, a national nonprofit serving a network of local groundwork trust organizations committed to improving the natural and built environments of low-resource communities, launched a new grant initiative to help communities transform brownfields into parks, trails, and greenspace. The inaugural round of awards totaled nearly \$230,000 and supported six projects in Connecticut, New York, Massachusetts, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin.
- **Fisheries Equity and Environmental Justice Strategy:** NOAA developed a new Fisheries Equity and Environmental Justice Strategy to increase coordination, communication, and engagement with underserved and underrepresented groups. Based on public comments and feedback received, NOAA is revising and finalizing its strategy for public release.
- **Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program:** Through this program in 2022, experienced NPS staff provided free, on-location help to 260 communities and public land managers who are working to create and restore parks, conservation areas, and brownfields. Completed projects helped restore rivers, wildlife habitats, and impaired resources; improve outdoor recreation; develop climate resiliency strategies; and support natural disaster recovery.
- **Community Development Block Grants:** In fiscal year 2022, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provided \$146.4 million in funding directed by States, cities, and counties to develop and improve parks and recreational facilities and to plant trees.

Next Steps: The America the Beautiful initiative will continue to build and integrate with the Biden-Harris administration's work on the Justice40 Initiative to deliver 40 percent of the overall benefits from Federal investments in climate and clean energy to disadvantaged communities. Leadership from the newly established interagency Nature in Communities Committee, which CEQ convenes, will provide information and coordination for nature-related efforts across the Federal family. Additionally, Federal departments and agencies will continue to look for effective ways to invest the historic funding available from the

Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act to advance the goals of America the Beautiful in an equitable manner.

Support Tribally Led Conservation and Restoration Priorities

The Biden-Harris administration remains committed to honoring Tribal sovereignty and supporting the priorities of Tribal Nations as part of the America the Beautiful initiative. Examples from 2022 include:

- **Advancing Tribal Co-Stewardship Policies:** Since Secretary Haaland and Secretary Vilsack signed Joint Secretarial Order 3403 in 2021 committing to co-stewardship of Federal lands, waters and wildlife, the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture have celebrated several significant co-stewardship



Figure 4: Vice President Harris speaking at the 2022 Tribal Nations Summit. *Photo by DOI.*

arrangements providing Tribes a greater role in the management of Federal lands and waters that have cultural and natural resources of significance and value to their respective communities. At the 2022 Tribal Nations Summit, the Department of Commerce joined the Order, furthering the administration's co-stewardship goals in the management of waters, fisheries, and other resources of significance and value to Tribes. Additionally, for the first time, the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture released reports on land, water, and wildlife treaty responsibilities and legal authorities that can support Tribal co-stewardship.

- **Co-Stewardship Agreements:** In 2022, DOI and FS completed more than 20 landmark co-stewardship agreements with Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations and consortiums, with more under development. A representative sample of the agreements include:
 - **Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes Bison Range:** In December 2020, the Montana Water Rights Protection Act restored the National Bison Range land to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and created a two-year period for transitioning management of the bison range from FWS to the Tribes. In June 2021, DOI transferred all lands comprising the bison range, approximately 18,800 acres, to the Bureau of Indian Affairs to be held in trust for the Tribes. In January 2022, ahead of schedule, the Tribes

assumed full management of the bison range and, in fiscal year 2022, FWS also transferred \$5.4 million to repair deficient infrastructure.

- **Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge:** The Rappahannock Tribe reacquired from a private landowner 465 acres at Fones Cliffs, a sacred site to the Tribe and part of their ancestral homelands. Fones Cliffs, a globally significant area for bald eagles, is located on the eastern side of the Rappahannock River in Virginia and within the authorized boundary of the Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge. The land is now owned by the Tribe, is publicly accessible, and is held with a permanent conservation easement that was conveyed to FWS.



Figure 5: Secretary Haaland speaks at the celebration of the Rappahannock Tribe’s reacquisition of Fones Cliff.
Photo by DOI.

- **Redwood National Park:** In May 2022, Redwood National Park and the Yurok Tribe successfully reintroduced condors at the park in California. This marks the first time in 130 years that the endangered species returned to the ancestral homelands of the Yurok people. In July 2022, Redwood National Park and the Yurok Tribe executed a funding agreement for the Tribe to continue their groundbreaking condor reintroduction work, as well as for trail repair and maintenance, and air quality monitoring.
- **Bears Ears National Monument:** In June 2022, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), FS, and the five Tribes of the Bears Ears Commission—the Hopi Tribe, Navajo Nation, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation, and the Pueblo of Zuni—formalized and celebrated their partnership for co-management of Bears Ears National Monument in Utah. To implement the collaborative stewardship, BLM, FS, and the five Tribes executed a first-of-its-kind cooperative agreement to guide the shared stewardship of the 1.36 million acres of the monument.
- **Kawerak, Inc. Co-Stewardship Funding Agreement:** In 2022, BLM signed a multiyear, self-governance funding agreement to transfer a portion of BLM’s

cultural resource activities and functions to Kawerak, Inc., a Tribal non-profit consortium representing 20 Tribal governments in the Bering Strait region of Alaska. This groundbreaking self-governance agreement regarding cultural resources is the first of-its-kind between BLM and Tribes in Alaska.

- **Effigy Mounds National Monument Sister Park Agreement:** In November 2022, NPS celebrated the first sister park agreement between a Tribe and NPS. The Tribal Sister Park Agreement between Effigy Mounds National Monument in Iowa and the Ioway Tribal National Park (Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska) will promote cooperation and support for the mutual benefit of both parties and enrich the experience and capacity of the personnel at both parks.
- **Joshua Tree National Park:** In November 2022, Joshua Tree National Park celebrated an agreement with the Twenty-Nine Palms Band of Mission Indians that enables the park and Tribe to collaborate on interpretive and educational services, natural and cultural history training, mutual aid for search and rescue and wildland fire operations, joint protection of the Chemehuevi Cemetery, and other opportunities in California.
- **Tongass National Forest:** The Tongass National Forest has worked closely with Tribes and Tribal partners in Alaska—the Hoonah Indian Association, the Organized Village of Kake, and the Organized Village of Kasaan—to execute multiple agreements. The agreements include thinning work that contributes to the long-standing Hoonah Native Forest Partnership, youth stewardship projects that protect burial sites while providing training and leadership development in Kake, and a framework to sustain culturally critical resources and forest products in Kasaan. These co-stewardship agreements also include sharing Indigenous Knowledge, enabling workforce development, and protecting culturally significant places.
- **Nez-Perce Tribe:** The Nez Perce Tribe and the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests in Idaho continued their long-standing collaboration in 2022 with a Master Participating Agreement for stream and floodplain restoration, and continuation of historic and prehistoric interpretation. The Nez Perce Tribe is leading this stream habitat restoration in the Crooked River Valley to protect steelhead and Chinook salmon.
- **Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians:** The Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests in North Carolina and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians entered into a historic Tribal Forest Protection Act agreement, the first ever to be signed within the Southern Region of the FS. The Southern Region spans from Texas to North Carolina and includes the southeast United States. Coupled with a Good Neighbor Agreement, this work integrates cultural and Indigenous Knowledge with silviculture and fire management to inform best management practices for basket-quality white oak trees and other culturally important forest products while reducing fire risk, restoring oak forests,

improving wildlife habitat, creating early successional habitat, promoting cultural tourism and recreation, and reducing risk to Tribal trust lands.

- **Regional Collaboration:** A wide variety of partnerships across the Federal family continued to grow in 2022. A few examples are as follows:
 - **Espanola, Rio Grande, and Tributaries Project:** In 2022, the Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) finalized a design agreement with the Santa Clara Pueblo and Ohkay Owingeh for the Espanola, Rio Grande, and Tributaries Project, which is a major Civil Works project that will restore and protect approximately 1,000 acres of aquatic and riparian habitat in the Rio Grande and its tributaries and protect cultural resources on Tribal lands. These habitats are an integral part of maintaining the social identity and the transmission and retention of Indigenous Knowledge for both Santa Clara and Ohkay Owingeh.
 - **Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area:** In 2022, the Office of Science and Technology Policy, as Chair of the Arctic Executive Steering Committee, worked closely with Federal and Tribal partners to implement provisions of Executive Order 13990 that re-established the Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area, a co-management, co-stewardship arrangement between a Federal Task Force led by DOI, NOAA, and the U.S. Coast Guard with the Bering Intergovernmental Tribal Advisory Council.
 - **Northern Great Plains Tribal Communities:** The Smithsonian Institution is collaborating with Tribal communities in the Northern Great Plains region to advance buffalo restoration programs, establish educational and professional pathways for natural resources students, and develop long-term research to inform resource management in the face of climate change.
- **Advisory Council on Historic Preservation Tribal Climate Plan:** The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation issued a plan to assist Tribes and Native Hawaiian Organizations (NHOs) in addressing the impacts of climate change and emergency response on sacred sites, cultural landscapes, and other historic properties. Developed based on listening sessions and extensive consultation, the plan supports the incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge in addressing these impacts since natural landscapes are cultural landscapes and identifying ways to avoid and mitigate climate impacts on historic properties of religious and cultural significance to Tribes and NHOs remains critical.
- **Replacement of Derogatory Names:** The Interior Department that the Board of Geographic Names voted on the final replacement names for nearly 650 geographic features including the word sq___. The final vote completed the last step in the historic efforts to remove a term from Federal use that has historically been used as an offensive ethnic, racial, and sexist slur, particularly for Indigenous women. In addition, the Advisory Committee on Reconciliation in Place Names held its inaugural meeting in December to initiate its task of identifying Federal land unit

names and geographic feature names that may be considered derogatory and creating recommendations for potential replacement names.

- **Climate Resilience and Relocation Planning:** The Biden-Harris administration made historic investments to support Tribes and Tribal organizations in enhancing their preparedness, planning, resilience, and relocation efforts, bolstered by new funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act. Through the Tribal Climate Resilience program, DOI announced 124 awards totaling \$45 million, to support 76 Tribes and 8 Tribal organizations. At the 2022 Tribal Nations Summit, the administration also announced a new Voluntary Community-Driven Relocation program and a \$135 million commitment from DOI and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to assist Tribal communities severely impacted by climate-related environmental threats.
- **Native American Lands Environmental Mitigation Program:** In fiscal year 2022, the Department of Defense (DoD) entered into Cooperative Agreements with 13 Tribes through this program, which works to address environmental impacts to Tribal lands from past military activities. Additionally, DoD appropriated \$20 million to the program to continue advancing these efforts, which is the largest amount to date.
- **International Workshop on Indigenous Perspectives:** In September 2022, NOAA and NPS, with additional funding support from the Department of State, convened approximately 55 Indigenous and government representatives from the U.S., Chile, Canada, and Mexico in Port Angeles, WA. The workshop facilitated a dialogue among Indigenous representatives and government agencies that are involved with protected lands and waters. The participants, most of whom represented Indigenous communities, organizations, and Tribal governments, shared their unique experiences, raised concerns, and collectively identified actions to advance collaborative management between Indigenous communities and government agencies, including in our domestic approaches.
- **Pollution Management Grants for Tribal Governments:** The EPA awarded grants to 186 federally recognized tribes to support Tribally led efforts to protect and restore waters from nonpoint source pollution under the Clean Water Act section 319 program.
- **Tribal Transportation Funding:** The Department of Transportation supported efforts to improve transportation and access for Tribes across the country. For example, with more than \$575 million in this program available in fiscal year 2022, the funds help support Tribal priorities to improve community access to parks, natural areas, and other outdoor opportunities including areas of traditional or cultural importance.

Next Steps: With clear direction from President Biden to continue advancing Tribally led conservation and restoration priorities, the initiative will implement guidance established in 2022, build on the momentum to empower co-stewardship efforts, and look for

meaningful ways to support Tribally led conservation and restoration priorities. The historic funding available from laws including the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act as well as new programs such as the America the Beautiful Challenge, will enable the Federal Government to grow the foundation of progress that has been set in the early years of the America the Beautiful initiative.

Expand Collaborative Conservation of Fish and Wildlife Habitats and Corridors

The Biden-Harris administration has continued its work to enhance fish and wildlife habitat nationwide, improve migratory corridors, and support the full diversity of wildlife in America through improved Federal interagency coordination as well as close collaboration with States, Tribes, local communities, and willing private landowners. Examples from 2022 include:

- **Enhancements of Public Lands and Waters:** The Federal family celebrated the expansion and addition of public lands and waters through funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and other grant programs that improve and connect habitats and corridors as well as increase access to nature and outdoor recreation. Some highlights of expansions supported by the LWCF include:
 - **San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge:** This FWS refuge, which is home to some of the only forested wetlands adjacent to the Gulf of Mexico in Texas, gained more than 4,600 acres of Columbia Bottomlands habitat for the benefit of resident and migratory wildlife.
 - **Bayou Sauvage Urban National Wildlife Refuge:** This FWS refuge, which is one of the last remaining marsh areas in New Orleans area, gained the 2,500-acre Little Pine Island Tract, consisting mostly of tidal marshes and hardwood forests.



Figure 6: Secretary Haaland celebrates the expansion of Bayou Sauvage Urban National Wildlife Refuge. *Photo by DOI.*

- **Great Sand Dunes National Park:** The NPS celebrated the transfer of 9,362 acres of land containing springs and wetlands vital to supporting the park's rich diversity of life. The land also contains sand sheets and salt flats, key contributing factors to the formation and maintenance of the dune system, and the acquisition allows the Park to manage the land more holistically as a large, connected landscape.
- **Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park:** The NPS acquired 16,451 acres of land, which includes critical habitat for endangered species, such as Hawaiian hawksbill turtles and Hawaiian monk seals, as well as many well-preserved and significant Hawaiian cultural sites.
- **Ninemile Prairie:** The BLM acquired 4,600 acres in the Blackfoot River Watershed in Montana, which provides important habitat for a variety of wildlife including grizzly bears, Canada lynx, bull trout, and Westslope cutthroat trout and ensures access to high-quality hunting and hiking.
- **Escalante Creek:** The BLM acquired a 160-acre parcel that is home to three sensitive fish species and a popular whitewater kayaking destination in Colorado in the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area.
- **Elk Creek:** The FS acquired 1,015 acres within the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest in Northeast Oregon, providing access to campgrounds and more than 15 public trails with a popular overlook. The area is well-known for its high-quality elk, deer, and bear hunting opportunities.
- **Etowah River:** The FS acquired 272 acres within the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests in Georgia, which contains numerous threatened and endangered species within the Etowah River. The acquisition provides enhanced access to trout fishing, deer and turkey hunting, and kayaking.
- **Connectivity Guidance:** The BLM released a new policy in 2022 designed to support connections between habitats for fish, wildlife, and native plants, preserving the ability of wildlife to migrate between and across seasonal habitat. The policy will continue to strengthen BLM's ongoing partnerships with States, Tribes, and diverse stakeholders. Additionally, in 2022, the FS released a memo asking National Forest System units and Regions to consider the impacts of FS actions on ecological connectivity and wildlife corridors and to seek out opportunities to enhance and integrate connectivity and corridors into national forest system management and collaborations.
- **Federal Partnerships:**
 - **Interagency Coordination on Fish Passage:** Across the Federal family, interagency coordination is underway to deliver on the more than \$2 billion allocated to fish passage through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. In 2022, the FS and its partners upgraded or removed 126 road-stream crossings, reconnecting nearly 200 miles of upstream aquatic habitat. Leveraging both annual funds and additional investments from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, FWS advanced collaborative efforts with partners to remove or bypass

211 barriers to fish passage that will reopen more than 6,800 miles of stream and river habitat, improve infrastructure and community resilience to climate change, and provide direct benefits to Tribal and underserved communities. In December 2022, NOAA announced nearly \$105 million in recommended funding for 36 new fish passage projects under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, including significant funding to implement fish passage projects that meet Tribal priorities and build Tribal organizational capacity to support their role as stewards of Tribal resources. Fifteen of the projects—encompassing more than \$26.3 million in funding—will be led by Tribal applicants for fish passage.

- **National Seed Strategy for Rehabilitation and Restoration:** In partnership with the Plant Conservation Alliance, BLM advanced its extensive public-private collaboration with more than 400 partners including 17 Federal agencies and more than 20 Tribal Nations across 52 States and territories to protect native plants and develop native seed for restoration. This year, the partnership published its annual report, continued to assess native seed needs and capacities, and advanced large-scale research of native production to meet increasing demand. Additionally, BLM awarded nine new national agreements for plant conservation and restoration work with partners, such as the Navajo Nation, Society for Ecological Restoration, Oregon State University, University of Nevada-Reno, and Institute for Applied Ecology. The BLM also continued in 2022 to grow Seeds of Success, the national wildland native seed collecting program, and managed 36 Seeds of Success seed collecting teams and brought its national collection total to more than 27,000 native seed collections.
- **Recovery and Sustainment Partnership:** This DoD initiative, which manages habitats across the country in collaboration with DOI, continued to support efforts to better address the dynamic between protected species and mission activities. In 2022, the partnership continued to focus on improving the conservation status of more than 40 species.
- **The National Fish Habitat Partnership:** This program supported by the FWS, NOAA, EPA, FS, USACE, and U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), continued collaboration with State and Tribal governments and non-governmental and research organizations to achieve nationwide gains for fish habitat, aquatic communities, and recreational anglers. In 2022, FWS facilitated the distribution of more than \$5 million to 90 projects through the broad network of Fish Habitat Partnerships across the country, and NOAA funded \$150,000 for three specific coastal partnership projects in Hawaii, South Carolina, and Alaska. Additionally, in 2022, USACE and the Reservoir Fisheries Habitat Partnership funded \$800,000 at two Civil Works projects in

- Pennsylvania and New Mexico to improve shoreline stabilization, increase fish habitat, and reduce invasive species.
- **Forest Management for Habitat Health:** In 2022, in collaboration with partners, the FS leveraged \$127 million of agency funds with \$32 million from partners to restore and improve more than 2.3 million acres of wildlife habitat benefiting game and non-game species alike. The program worked hand-in-hand with the Forest Management and Fuels programs to achieve habitat benefits while also reducing fuels and producing commercial timber products on 129,000 acres.
 - **Understanding Networks and Habitats:** The Smithsonian Institute, in concert with National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the support of many partners, is leading efforts to track imperiled birds of the Northern Great Plains across their full annual cycle using the Motus animal tracking network, which will dramatically enhance knowledge of grassland bird movement ecology and inform integrated population models for these imperiled species. Additionally, Smithsonian staff, along with a multi-organization research team, continue advancing an initiative to create a dynamic online system for projecting wildlife habitat and connectivity across the West by using wildlife relocation data provided by wildlife agencies, universities, and non-profit organizations.
 - **Environmental Stewardship:** The USACE funded \$35.21 million in fiscal year 2022 to manage approximately 954,863 acres for invasive species, forestry management, wildlife habitat, and fisheries management.
 - **National Environmental Research Parks:** The approximately 200,000-acre Savannah River Site, the first of seven National Environmental Research Parks designated by the Department of Energy (DOE), continued its efforts to support conservation in South Carolina. In 2022, the Savannah River Ecology Laboratory, a University of Georgia research unit, partnered with USDA and FWS to advance habitat efforts around the Carolina bays.
 - **Sustainable Sites Initiative:** The DOE's Sustainable Climate-Ready Sites Initiative recognizes participating sites for excellence in natural resource and habitat conservation, improvements in adaptation and resilience to climate change, and other environmental benefits. The voluntary program covers approximately 2.4 million acres of DOE-managed land and, in fiscal year 2022, completed a six-month pilot with eight sites to test and refine the program. Twelve sites signed on to the initiative for fiscal year 2023, representing all DOE program offices with operations on DOE-managed land.
 - **Hawaiian Forest Bird Extinction Prevention Strategy:** The DOI announced in 2022 a multi-agency strategy that invests \$14 million in funding to prevent imminent extinction of Hawaiian forest birds imperiled by mosquito-borne avian malaria, which causes widespread mortality in part because of rising temperatures caused by climate change. Ecologically and culturally integral to the Hawaiian

Islands, the forest birds reflect the health of the forest and remain a cultural connection between the Native Hawaiian Community and the Hawaiian Islands, and this coordinated strategy incorporates Indigenous Knowledge and respects Hawai'i's unique ecosystems and the islands' heritage.

- **Watersheds, Rivers, and Oceans:**
 - **National Marine Sanctuaries:** The NOAA received strong support for the proposed Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary off the coast of California during public scoping and has since worked to prepare a draft management plan, environmental impact statement, and proposed rule, as well as an Indigenous Collaborative Management Framework to continue active and inclusive engagement with all interested Tribes. In addition, NOAA initiated the designation process for a proposed sanctuary for Hudson Canyon, the largest submarine canyon along the United States Atlantic coast that provides habitat for a range of protected and sensitive species including sperm whales, sea turtles, and deep-sea corals, and whose biodiversity supports the economies in New York, New Jersey, and beyond, with commercial and recreational fisheries, recreational diving, and wildlife viewing. The NOAA also announced a new pre-designation Hudson Canyon Sanctuary Advisory Council.
 - **Management Federal Advisory Committee:** The NOAA announced the establishment of a new Marine and Coastal Area-based Management Advisory Committee, which will advise NOAA on science-based approaches to area-based protection, conservation, restoration, and management in marine and coastal areas, including the Great Lakes. The committee will provide a forum for discussion and advice on area-based management, including opportunities to enhance conservation of biodiversity, climate resilience, and access to nature for underserved communities.
 - **Estuary and Wetlands Conservation and Restoration:**
 - **National Estuary Program Grants:** The National Estuary Program (NEP) led by the EPA and partners conserved and restored more than 150,000 acres across 28 nationally designated watershed-based estuarine systems in 2022. Additionally, the program created a new NEP Watershed Grant program for up to \$18 million for projects to address habitat loss, coastal flooding and erosion, and nutrient over enrichment.
 - **Connecticut National Estuarine Research Reserve:** The NOAA and the State of Connecticut designated a reserve in Long Island Sound in Connecticut in 2022 that encompasses 52,160 acres and includes unique habitat types as well as diverse lands and seascapes for many species, including threatened or endangered species. The reserve also contains a historically important shelter and burial pit by First Nation Peoples that placed them in this area more than 4,700 years ago.

- **Chesapeake Bay:** The USACE awarded a contract for \$43 million to begin construction on the Eastern Shore, Mid-Chesapeake Bay Island Ecosystem Restoration Project. This project will use dredged material to provide hundreds of acres of wetland and terrestrial habitat for fish, shellfish, reptiles, amphibians, birds, and mammals in the Bay.
- **Steigerwald Lake National Refuge:** The DOE Bonneville Power Administration investment of \$24 million into the Steigerwald Lake National Wildlife Refuge Reconnection Project made the project the largest agency-funded estuary restoration project to date and culminated in the reconnection of 965 acres of Columbia River floodplain for the first time in more than 50 years. Through coordination with the FWS and local partners, the project removed more than two miles of levee to connect the river to its historic floodplain; expanded the refuge by 160 acres; restored salmon-bearing Gibbons Creek to its natural channel with unobstructed access for salmon and lamprey; created more than 100 acres of wetland; reforested 250 acres of riparian habitat; and added more than a mile to the existing recreational trails.
- **Wetland Restoration:** The DOI provided more than \$142 million in funding for wetland conservation projects and national wildlife refuges. More than \$112 million in grants approved by the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission support the conservation or restoration of more than 488,000 acres of wetland and associated upland habitats for waterfowl, shorebirds and other birds in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.
- **River Conservation:**
 - **Sustainable Rivers Program:** The Sustainable Rivers Program through the USACE focused on improving the health and life of rivers by changing infrastructure operations. In 2021 and 2022, the program engaged 20 new river systems through collaboration with Tribes and other stakeholders and now includes more than 12,000 river miles in 44 river systems.
 - **Wild and Scenic Rivers:** The National Wild and Scenic Rivers System grew its collection of exceptional rivers protecting free-flowing conditions, water quality, and outstanding natural, cultural, and recreational values with the designation in December 2022 of more than 70 miles of river segments across two new rivers: the York River in Maine and the Housatonic River in Connecticut. An approximately four-mile segment of the Musconetcong River in New Jersey was also added to the system in June 2022.
- **Coastal Restoration:** The Coastal Program within the FWS, through cooperative conservation partnerships in priority coastal ecosystems and

communities, completed 185 projects in fiscal year 2022 that protected 23,871 upland acres, 7,426 wetland acres, and 17 river miles. Additionally, the Program restored and enhanced 11,357 upland acres, 2,379 wetland acres, and more than 5 river miles. Every Coastal Program project dollar was leveraged by approximately 14 non-program dollars to maximize the benefit to America's wildlife and people.

- **Coral Reefs:** The DOI announced \$2.7 million in fiscal year 2023 funding under the Office of Insular Affairs Coral Reef Initiative and Natural Resources program to help protect corals and fight invasive species in the U.S. territories and the freely associated states. The NOAA also continued to advance its efforts in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary in fiscal year 2022 by, for example, investing \$1.1 million in grants for ten capacity building projects to nine partners and outplanting more than 20,000 corals. Additionally, NOAA continued its efforts to help reverse the long-term ecosystem decline of the Florida Reef Tract by engaging partners to restore seven ecologically and culturally significant coral reef sites in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.
- **Everglades Restoration:** The United States provided the largest-ever single investment in the Everglades in 2022 of \$1.1 billion dollars. This landscape provides drinking water for more than 8 million Americans and supports Florida's \$90 billion dollar tourism economy.
- **Healthy Watersheds:** In 2022, the EPA Healthy Watersheds Program helped grantees and their partners protect an estimated 1.1 million acres of intact watershed lands and more than 5,000 perennial stream miles through direct land acquisition, conservation easements and other non-regulatory voluntary tools working with state and local government partners as well as private landowners.

Next Steps: Given the strong catalyst that recent Federal funding investments have given for such a wide range of locally led, partnership-driven efforts to expand collaborative conservation of fish and wildlife habitats and corridors, the America the Beautiful initiative will continue sowing the seeds for more regional partnerships and place-based priorities. For example, USDA will continue to look for opportunities to expand the approach used with its big game corridor collaboration with the State of Wyoming and the voluntary contributions of private landowners.

Increase Access for Outdoor Recreation

Hiking, hunting, fishing, boating, biking, and other activities benefit communities, economies, and wildlife, and the Biden-Harris administration remains committed to enhancing and building the outdoor recreation economy. In 2022, new data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) confirmed that outdoor recreation is a major economic powerhouse, generating more than \$862 billion in economic output and supporting more than 4.5 million jobs across the nation. Further, NOAA and BEA released the latest update

to the Marine Economy Satellite Account, a report on the contributions to the U.S. economy from the nation's oceans, seaports, Great Lakes, and other major water bodies; the update valued coastal and offshore tourism and recreation at \$190.9 billion. Examples of Federal action to support access to outdoor recreation and the growing outdoor industry from 2022 include:

- **Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation:** The Biden-Harris administration launched an interagency effort, called the Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation (FICOR), that will work to create more safe, affordable, and equitable opportunities for Americans to get outdoors. The FICOR—which includes leaders from the Departments of the Interior, Agriculture, Commerce, and Defense—will focus on improving access to nature, expanding outdoor recreation opportunities, and providing the public with improved and more affordable experiences on America's public lands and waters.
- **Interagency Task Force on Outdoor Recreation for Veterans:** This task force, established by the COMPACT Act of 2020 and co-chaired by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and DOI, worked in 2022 to formalize coordination between the VA and public land agencies, identify barriers to access for outdoor recreation for veterans, and develop recommendations by the end of 2024 to better facilitate the use of public lands for wellness and therapy for veterans.
- **New Lifetime Pass for Military Veterans and Gold Star Families:** The Biden-Harris administration announced that veterans of the U.S. Armed Services and Gold Star Families can obtain a free lifetime pass to more than 2,000 Federal recreation sites spread out across more than 400 million acres of public lands, including national parks, wildlife refuges, and forests.
- **Hunting and Wildlife Conservation Council:** The DOI and USDA announced 18 members of the council, which is a Federal advisory committee of subject matter experts that will provide recommendations to the Federal Government regarding policies that benefit wildlife and habitat conservation; expand fair-chase hunting, safe recreational shooting sports, and wildlife-associated recreation opportunities; and policies that benefit national and local economies. The newly established Council was chartered and held its first meeting in 2022.
- **Hunting and Fishing Access and Opportunities:** In 2022, FWS opened or expanded 109 hunting or sport fishing opportunities on approximately 38,000 acres across 18 refuges. Additionally, in fiscal year 2022, the NPS granted \$2 million in recreation fishing funds to engage underrepresented groups, providing new fishing equipment and instruction for student and family groups.
- **Trails Programs:**
 - **National Trails System:** The DOI announced the designation of nine new national recreation trails in seven States, adding nearly 600 miles to the National Trails System. With the new additions of land and water trails, the network now includes more than 1,300 trails, and more than 30,400

miles, with at least one in every State, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

- **Recreational Trails Program:** The DOT continued to advance the work of its Recreational Trails Program, which will provide up to \$84 million dollars per year through fiscal year 2026 to support States in developing, maintaining, and improving access to park and recreation facilities for both nonmotorized and motorized recreational trail users.
- **Rails-to-Trails and Rails-with-Trails:** These facilities help communities safely develop and expand their bicycle and pedestrian and trail networks along abandoned or near active railway corridors. The DOT issued an updated Rails-with-Trails Report in 2021 that identified effective design practices for project development and is continuing to research best practices to support the work ahead.
- **Travel, Tourism, and Outdoor Recreation Program:** The Economic Development Administration supports travel, tourism, and outdoor recreation with this program that includes \$510 million in non-competitive awards directly allocated to every U.S. State and territory and a \$240 million competitive grant program. Each State or territory is utilizing its allocated funds to engage in activities that best support their travel, tourism, and outdoor recreation sectors. Of the total provided in 2022, for example, a significant portion of the \$145.4 million was directed to build and improve attractions like hiking trails and to increase access in communities across the country. More than 50 percent of competitive awards are intended to directly benefit historically underserved communities and populations, including \$21.2 million supporting Indigenous communities.



Figure 7: Under Secretary and Administrator Spinrad visits the Anchor River State Recreation Area in Alaska.
Photo by NOAA.

- **Recreation Infrastructure:** Across the Federal family, many Departments and agencies invested in recreation infrastructure to help improve access to the outdoors. Some examples include:
 - **FS:** The FS announced more than \$37 million in investments in 2022 to improve vital recreation infrastructure located on national forests and grasslands, with funding made possible by the Bipartisan Infrastructure law, and these investments include \$19 million for recreation sites.
 - **USACE:** The USACE invested more than \$73 million, including \$25 million this year in roads and parking, to support outdoor recreation opportunities through funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act.
 - **Land and Water Conservation Fund State-side Projects:** The DOI announced the distribution of \$279 million from the Land and Water Conservation Fund to all 50 States, U.S. territories, and the District of Columbia for State-identified outdoor recreation and conservation projects.
- **Thompson Divide:** In addition to the new designations established by President Biden in 2022 that support outdoor recreation, including the Camp Hale – Continental Divide National Monument, the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior announced a proposed 20-year withdrawal to protect the Thompson Divide in western Colorado, one of the State’s most cherished landscapes. In response to broad concerns about protecting the Thompson Divide’s important wildlife habitat, recreation opportunities, grazing lands, and clean air and water, the proposal would withdraw the area from operation of the public land laws, mining laws, and mineral and geothermal leasing laws, subject to valid existing rights.

Next Steps: As interest in outdoor recreation continues to grow across the country, the America the Beautiful initiative will continue to celebrate, sustain, and responsibly support this trend. The newly launched FICOR, which is currently chaired by the NPS, will provide strategic leadership to help coordinate policies, facilitate partnerships, and improve implementation on issues such as investing in resilient recreation infrastructure; bolstering education and career opportunities; cooperating with State, Tribal, territorial, and local governments; and improving equitable access to Federal lands and waters.

Incentivize and Reward the Voluntary Conservation Efforts of Fishers, Ranchers, Farmers, and Forest Owners

The Biden-Harris administration celebrates conservation as a continuum, recognizing the varied and important contributions of voluntary conservation efforts from fishers, farmers, forest owners, ranchers, and other landowners. The America the Beautiful initiative has remained faithful to the commitment to support healthy rural economies, advance climate-smart, sustainable agriculture practices, and keep working lands and waterfronts productive. Examples from 2022 include:

- Big Game Conservation:** The USDA and State of Wyoming formalized a partnership to support the voluntary conservation of private working lands and migratory big game populations in Wyoming. As part of this partnership, USDA will leverage its tools and authorities across NRCS, FSA, FS and the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. For fiscal year 2023, USDA also committed additional funding in key conservation programs including \$6 million in additional assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, \$10 million through the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, and piloting a Habitat Lease building on the Grassland Conservation Reserve Program.
- Conservation Reserve Program:** In 2022, USDA enrolled more than 2 million acres into the CRP and more than 3.1 million acres in the Grassland Conservation Reserve Program (Grassland CRP), the largest Grassland CRP signup to date. USDA also announced partnerships with three Tribal Nations in the Great Plains to help conserve, maintain and improve grassland productivity, reduce soil erosion, and enhance wildlife habitat through the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). These are the first-ever CREP agreements in partnership with Tribal Nations. This program advances conservation goals and creates new streams of income for farmers, ranchers, producers, and private foresters.



Figure 8: Secretary Vilsack meets with producers and partners in Arkansas. *Photo by USDA.*

- Regional Conservation Partnership Program:** The USDA announced \$197 million in new investments through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program’s Alternative Funding Arrangements. Funded projects include collaborative efforts to sequester carbon, mitigate the effects of climate change, and improve the efficiency of agricultural irrigation systems. Through this program, NRCS works with partners to implement projects that demonstrate innovative solutions to advance conservation priorities on the ground.

- **Forest Legacy Program:** In 2022, USDA invested \$90 million of Forest Legacy funds to promote voluntary conservation of lands through permanent conservation easements contributed by private landowners and land acquisitions by State natural resource agencies. These projects leveraged approximately \$66 million in non-Federal contributions from States, private landowners, non-profit partners, and private donors. Once fully implemented, these projects will permanently conserve ~178,000 acres of forestlands to maintain a multitude of environmental, social, and economic public benefits.
- **Chesapeake Bay Initiative:** The USDA announced the new Chesapeake Bay States' Partnership and an additional \$22.5 million in conservation assistance in fiscal year 2022 to help farmers boost water quality improvements and conservation in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. The new initiative will support Bay-area farmers, building on a \$1.1 billion investment made by NRCS more than the past decade. The USDA and EPA also announced and are moving forward with a new task joint force to better quantify the voluntary conservation efforts of farmers in the Bay watershed.
- **Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative:** Through its Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative, NRCS invested \$12 million in partnerships that expand access to conservation technical assistance for livestock producers to increase the use of conservation practices on grazing lands.
- **Sentinel Landscapes Partnership:** The partnership, founded in 2013 by DoD and implemented through coordination between DoD, USDA, and DOI empowers private landowners around military installations to advance sustainable management practices on their farms, ranches, and forests around DoD installations and ranges. In 2022, the partnership designated three new sentinel landscapes in Texas, Florida, and Indiana, bringing the total number of sentinel landscapes to ten. To date, the program and associated contributions have permanently conserved more than 609,000 acres of land and enrolled 3 million acres of land in technical assistance programs.
- **Partners for Fish and Wildlife:** The FWS supported landowners in their voluntary efforts to conserve wildlife habitat, offering financial and technical assistance to interested landowners and helping to keep working lands in working hands. In fiscal year 2022, the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program completed 1,877 projects, restoring and enhancing 233,890 upland acres, 17,453 wetland acres, 280 river miles, and 60 fish passage structures. Every Partners for Fish and Wildlife project dollar leveraged approximately four non-program dollars to maximize return on investment.
- **Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances:** The FWS continued to support these collaborative agreements that provide non-Federal landowners with additional incentives for engaging in voluntary conservation to support non-listed species. For example, a programmatic agreement for aquatic species in Kansas, finalized in 2021 and expanded in 2022 focuses on conserving 10 species—

including the alligator snapping turtle, 4 species of fish, and 5 mussel species—with up to 883,200 acres eligible for enrollment. In total, the program’s 62 active agreements involve 49 States and more than 670 landowners, cover more than 27 million acres and 93 stream miles, and support 97 species.

- **Safe Harbor Agreements:** This year, FWS finalized two new safe harbor agreements, which support the voluntary efforts of non-Federal landowners whose actions specifically contribute to the recovery of species listed as endangered or threatened. The two recent additions bring the current total to 116 active agreements with 737 landowners, covering more than 5.8 million acres and 84 linear miles of stream and providing conservation benefits to 130 species.
- **Tidal Channel Restoration:** In Puerto Rico, the USACE entered into a Project Partnership Agreement in July 2022 to provide \$163 million for restoration of Cano Martin Peña tidal channel, Puerto Rico. The restoration project supports the revitalization of eight impoverished communities settled along the tidal channel and will significantly improve human health and safety by reducing residents’ contact with polluted floodwaters.
- **Marine Species Conservation:**
 - **Species in the Spotlight:** Through its “Species in the Spotlight” initiative, NOAA has continued taking targeted actions to halt the decline of the nine species most at-risk of extinction in the near future. In 2022, NOAA continued implementing action plans through voluntary measures and public-private partnerships to, for example, rehabilitate Hawaiian monk seal pups.
 - **Species Recovery Grants:** These grants from NOAA support States, Tribes, and territories in implementing high priority recovery actions, including management, research, monitoring, and/or outreach activities, that have direct conservation benefits for species listed as threatened or endangered. In fiscal year 2022, NOAA awarded about \$6.2 million across 25 multi-year awards.
 - **Marine Mammal Rescue Grant Program:** This NOAA grant program provides funding for communities to develop or continue conservation efforts such as marine mammal stranding response, rehabilitation, and scientific research regarding marine mammal health. In 2022, NOAA awarded \$3.7 million across 49 grants to recipients in 20 States and one Tribe.

Next Steps: America the Beautiful will continue to honor private property rights and support the voluntary stewardship efforts of private landowners and fishers, a guiding principle of the initiative. The Federal Government will continue to use the historic funds available from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law as well as the Inflation Reduction Act to ensure that programs focused on ranchers, farmers, forest owners, fishers and others have

the resources necessary to continue meaningful conservation and restoration already underway.

Create Jobs by Investing in Restoration and Resilience

The Biden-Harris administration has continued to invest in restoration, reforestation, reclamation, and other activities to benefit America's natural systems and strengthen the nation's resilience to sea level rise, flooding, extreme wildfires, droughts, storms, and other climate-related impacts. These efforts to restore the nation's lands and waters have created, and will continue to create good-paying jobs and deliver economic benefits to communities nationwide. Examples from 2022 include:

- **Great American Outdoors Act:** The Act continues to provide historic opportunities to create jobs while addressing maintenance needs and supporting critical projects on public lands and at BIE schools. Legacy Restoration Fund (LRF) projects funded in fiscal year 2022 at both DOI and FS are expected to contribute approximately 20,000 jobs and \$2.2 billion in Gross Domestic Product. By the end of 2022, more than \$1.6 billion of LRF funds were awarded to support more than 180 Great American Outdoors Act deferred maintenance and repair projects nationwide. The following are examples of major project accomplishments funded by the LRF:
 - **NPS:** In fiscal year 2022, the NPS selected 34 projects across 22 States for the LRF. In partnership with DOT's Federal Highway Administration, numerous projects have initiated design or construction, including improvements to the cave trails at Mammoth Cave National Park in Kentucky and stabilization of the riverbank at high priority areas along the Towpath Trail and Valley Railway at Cuyahoga Valley National Park in Ohio.
 - **BLM:** Building on the previous year, the BLM awarded more than 50 construction contracts to improve facilities and infrastructure on public lands in the Western States. Additionally, the BLM completed 12 projects with noticeable public benefits: for example, in Montana, the BLM replaced the outlet works at the Grub Dam Rehabilitation project to improve safe operation since the dam provides recreational and natural resources benefits in addition to a consistent water source for wildland fire control.
 - **FWS:** In 2022, the FWS continued work on LRF projects at more than 30 refuges across the country. Additional public access project components were completed at locations, such as at the Dale Bumpers National Wildlife Refuge in Arkansas where more than 40 miles of public-use roadways and campgrounds were rehabilitated, providing public access to more than 10,000 permit holders annually. Other LRF-funded projects have been implemented to address water management at drought-impacted refuges.
 - **FS:** In 2022, the FS completed 80 deferred maintenance projects across 45 national forests in 21 states with 884 additional projects underway. Once completed, these LRF-funded projects will address more than \$600 million in backlog maintenance spanning 120 national forests and 5 FS research

stations across 42 States and Puerto Rico. This work involves 372 active partnerships and leverages more than \$200 million in partner contributions. Projects address numerous priorities by supporting for small businesses and rural economies—97 percent of contracts are with small businesses and 45 percent are disadvantaged small businesses—as well as investing in infrastructure to help communities adapt to and manage impacts of climate change and to help protect communities with the highest wildfire risk.

- **Wildfire Mitigation:** The USDA announced \$131 million in wildfire mitigation to begin work on the FS 10-year wildfire strategy. The initial investment in 10 landscapes in Washington, Oregon, California, Idaho, Montana, Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona will lead to about 208,000 acres of wildfire risk reduction treatments. Additionally, DOI invested \$180 million in total in wildfire mitigation funding for fiscal year 2022, including \$103 million to support nearly 2 million acres of fuels management work, as part of the Department’s Five-year Monitoring, Maintenance and Treatment Plan; the USDA also announced \$228 million in funding for fiscal year 2023, the first of four allocations.
- **Tackling Legacy Pollution:** The Biden-Harris administration advanced efforts to address orphan wells, abandoned mine lands, and remediation sites:
 - **Brownfields Cleanup:** The EPA Brownfields Program helps revitalize communities by cleaning up and repurposing contaminated sites. In fiscal year 2022, the program exceeded many of its targets by assessing 1,638 sites, cleaning up 173 properties, supporting 14,170 jobs and making 6,900 acres available for reuse, often including parks or other open space.
 - **Orphan Well Clean Up:** As part of the historic \$4.7 billion investment authorized through President Biden’s Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to clean up orphaned oil and gas wells, the DOI announced \$33 million to clean up 277 well sites on Federal lands, distributed \$560 million in initial grants to States to begin plugging and remediating well sites on State and private land, and released guidance, informed by Tribal consultations and listening sessions, making the first \$50 million in funding available to Tribes to address orphan wells on Tribal lands.
 - **Reclamation of Abandoned Mine Lands:** Due to new investments from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the Interior Department began distributing \$725 million in additional grants for abandoned mine land remediation for States and Tribes. These funds will support local investment opportunities that create good-paying union jobs and provide for the sustainable long-term rehabilitation of abandoned mine lands.
 - **Environmental Remediation:** The Interior Department announced just more than \$68 million to invest in ecosystem restoration efforts over the next five years, to build on proven projects, programs and partnerships that conserve wildlife and natural resources, including nearly \$10 million focused on environmental remediation and legacy pollution clean-up.

- **Coastal Resilience Funding:** In December 2022, NOAA in partnership with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation announced \$136 million to fund 88 projects under the 2022 National Coastal Resilience Fund. The projects will restore, increase, and strengthen natural infrastructure to ultimately protect coastal communities and enhance fish and wildlife habitat. The total investment, including grants announced earlier in 2022, as well as non-Federal match, is \$241 million.
- **Regional Restoration:** Several examples from 2022 of significant regional efforts include:
 - **Gulf States:** The DOI announced more than \$252 million to Gulf States to support coastal restoration and conservation, including onshore infrastructure projects and activities to implement marine and coastal resilience management plans.
 - **Delaware River Watershed:** The DOI announced a nearly \$15.8 million investment in the watershed to improve wildlife habitat, enhance resilience to climate change, and engage underserved communities in conservation.
 - **Sagebrush Ecosystems:** The DOI announced a nearly \$20 million investment in fiscal year 2022 and 2023 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funds to support more than 90 projects in western States to restore and conserve strategic areas within the sagebrush ecosystem.
 - **Klamath Basin:** The DOI announced nearly \$26 million from President Biden’s Bipartisan Infrastructure Law for Klamath Basin restoration projects, including nearly \$16 million for ecosystem restoration projects in the Basin and \$10 million to expand the Klamath Falls National Fish Hatchery. This funding builds on months of close collaboration and engagement with Klamath Basin stakeholders, Tribes, and Federal, State and local leaders.
 - **Great Lakes:** The FWS announced more than \$2.8 million in fiscal year 2022 funding through the Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Restoration Act, and the twelve selected projects address key conservation and restoration needs in the basin across seven States.
- **Addressing Natural Disaster Risks:** The FEMA within the Department of Homeland Security announced \$2.3 billion in funding for its Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities program for Fiscal Year 2022—the largest program investment in history, boosted by the President’s Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. This funding will help communities increase resilience to heat waves, drought, wildfires, flood, hurricanes, and other hazards by preparing before disaster strikes.
- **Fisheries Habitat Restoration:** Through the Damage Assessment, Remediation, and Restoration Program, NOAA works with co-trustees from Federal and State agencies and federally recognized tribes to protect and restore natural resources and fisheries injured by oil spills, hazardous waste sites, and vessel groundings. In fiscal year 2022, six pollution settlements were finalized, yielding a total of \$113.6 million for restoration in Louisiana, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Texas.

- **Youth Opportunities**

- **AmeriCorps Projects:** In 2022, nearly 13,000 AmeriCorps members carried out environmental stewardship activities, exposing them to careers in restoration and resilience. Across the fiscal year, AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers served in national parks and worked on a variety of projects that benefited parks, including interpretation, facility, climate change, natural and cultural resources, and other projects.
- **Indian Youth Service Corps Program:** In 2022, the Biden-Harris administration launched the Indian Youth Service Corps, a new partnership-based program to engage Indigenous youth in public service and workforce development while deepening connections to the nation's natural and cultural resources.
- **Urban Wildlife Conservation Program:** In 2022, the FWS Urban Wildlife Conservation Program bolstered the efforts of 27 urban national wildlife refuges by providing training, coaching, mentoring and youth internships to engage in co-designing conservation with systematically excluded communities. These efforts are part of the \$17 million the FWS invested in fiscal year 2022 in internships or fellowships with more than 870 young adults to support restoration projects and conservation activities across public and partner lands.
- **NOAA Ocean Guardian Youth Ambassador Program:** The NOAA Ocean Guardian Youth Ambassador program provides a new level of engagement for youth aged 12-18 committed to ocean conservation and stewardship of our blue planet. These enthusiastic youth will share their ideas and unique perspectives about America's underwater treasures, as well as share their passion with others. The pilot youth ambassador application period started in November 2022 and concluded with an application deadline of January 6, 2023. To date, more than 250 youth have applied to be included in the NOAA Ocean Guardian Youth Ambassador Program.



Figure 9: An all-veterans California Conservations Corps crew advances a trail project. *Photo by DOI.*

Next Steps: The commitment to supporting restoration priorities as a means of strengthening local economies, creating jobs, and fostering resilience will remain a key focus for the America the Beautiful initiative. The Federal Government will continue to make effective use of funding afforded through President Biden’s Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act to continue maximizing benefits and leveraging existing programs with demonstrated results.

III. Conclusion

The historic goal that President Biden set in Executive Order 14008 and the America the Beautiful initiative continue to inspire action and stewardship across the country and the world, as evidenced by the global target committed to at the 2022 United Nations Biodiversity Conference to conserve at least 30 percent of lands and waters by 2030. During the first year, the Biden-Harris administration developed the foundational, inclusive vision and created strong momentum with unprecedented funding. In the second year of the America the Beautiful initiative, the administration continued to celebrate and support meaningful, diverse, locally led and partnership-driven efforts across the country. By investing unparalleled resources and engaging with States, Tribes, local communities, and other key stakeholders, the Federal family will continue to advance our nation’s shared commitment to building a better America for generations to come.

Appendix: Summary of Public Comment Period on the Development of the American Conservation and Stewardship Atlas

Science and Data

The first question in the Federal Register Notice focused on science and data and asked what data sources, standards, and technical approaches should be applied to data included in the Atlas to ensure that it is an authoritative and useful tool for the public. Many comments here emphasized the importance of prioritizing scientific integrity with requests for the interagency team to use a transparent, repeatable methodology; use credible data standards; and make data public, free, and easily accessible.

Other comments focused on the importance of ensuring user-friendly outputs. These comments raised the importance of continually updating data for timely use; meeting 508 and related requirements for accessibility; and complementing the Atlas with useful guidance and educational tools.

Some comments emphasized the importance of respecting privacy considerations, and some urged that the data used demonstrate characteristics central to the America the Beautiful initiative. Here, comments discussed the value of reflecting lands, freshwater, and marine data consistently; reflecting the initiative's goals on biodiversity, climate change, and equity; integrating Indigenous Knowledge; and showing lands and waters that are vulnerable to conservation-related threats.

Comments also addressed the critical importance of collaborating with State and local governments as well as a wide variety of other partners to ensure alignment between ongoing efforts. Other comments similarly spoke to the significance of acknowledging and building on existing tools to avoid redundancy and learn from past tools: comments here urged the interagency team to carefully examine options related to using existing Federal databases, such as the Protected Areas Database (PAD-US), and building potential layers out of the existing resources.

Conservation as a Continuum

The second question in the Federal Register Notice focused on how the Atlas can best represent conservation as a continuum. Specifically, this question had three subsections about what types of stewardship actions should be considered to reflect a more holistic view of conservation and restoration, specific attributes that should be considered in determining what counts as conservation, and strategies for ensuring that the Atlas is comprehensive and inclusive given the many concurrent efforts of State, local, and Tribal governments.

The sub-question about stewardship actions to be considered generated a wide variety of perspectives. Comments urged the interagency team to carefully consider how it handles the question of permanence and how different types of resource uses—including grazing,

forest management, mining, working seascapes, and clean energy development—may have different implications. The comments also emphasized the value of reflecting a diversity of specific stewardship efforts; carefully evaluating Federal designations; prioritizing co-management actions and the application of Indigenous Knowledge; and looking for overlaps with existing international standards.

The sub-question about attributes of lands and waters that should be included similarly generated a wide variety of feedback. Many comments discussed the value of focusing on outcomes and benefits; committing to regional diversity; including a range of specific characteristics—including everything from the history of past conservation efforts to the conservation objectives of the area; and considering a variety of guiding ideas and approaches, such as a Hippocratic Oath for nature.

Likewise, the sub-question about strategies for the Atlas to best reflect contributions of State, local, Tribal, territorial, and private lands generated meaningful ideas. Many comments spoke to the benefit of continuous engagement with the aforementioned parties; others emphasized the value of incentivizing and potentially compensating participation, the significance of continually updating the inventory to account for new additions, incorporating Indigenous Knowledge meaningfully, and celebrating concrete examples to illustrate and inspire action.

Outcomes

The third question in the Federal Register Notice requested feedback about how the Atlas can reflect land and water contributions to biodiversity, climate change mitigation and resilience, and equitable access to nature and its benefits. Key themes from the comments here spoke to the importance of establishing and reflecting clear definitions of conservation and restoration; using the clear definitions to explore how stewardship affects outcomes; developing and maintaining updated baselines with appropriate datasets; focusing on and evaluating goals individually; ensuring that outcomes are considered inclusively and accessibly; and using the Atlas to highlight particularly effective, at-risk, or promising areas for attention.

The Process

Significant feedback also emerged through the public comment period about the process by which feedback is gathered. These comments focused on the importance of continuing future and ongoing engagement, allowing a forum for future comments to consider and respond to clear definitions, and extending the amount of time oral comments could be offered.