

Fostering an Inclusive Approach to Public Lands for the Next 100 Years

Recommended Policies & Priorities

Introduction

In 2016, we celebrate the Centennial of the National Park Service. This is an opportunity to reflect on our nation's conservation legacy – and coalesce around a new vision for the next century.

Conservation of America's public lands and waters, including our national parks, forests, monuments, wildlife refuges, National Conservation Lands, and recreational areas should be driven over the next 100 years by three guiding principles: 1) every child will have the opportunity to discover his or her *own* history and heritage; 2) federal land agencies will demonstrate engagement that is respectful and inclusive of different cultures via outreach, stewardship and interpretation; and 3) a responsibility to actively engage *all* people.

In this policy brief, we have identified five areas of focus, and actions under each, which we encourage federal land management agencies to adopt to ensure a more inclusive approach to the conservation of our shared natural and cultural heritage:

- Access to public lands
- Historical, spiritual, sacred and cultural preservation
- Landscape-scale conservation
- Stakeholder engagement
- Workforce diversity

To achieve this new vision for conservation, and spark the necessary cultural and operating changes within the agencies responsible for protecting our public lands and waters, **we ask President Obama to issue a Presidential Memorandum on the Centennial of the National Park Service (August 25, 2016).**

This Executive Order should emphasize the need for the Department of the Interior and the U.S. Department of Agriculture to adopt guiding priorities for a more inclusive approach to conservation of our public lands including a full reflection of the faces of our country; a respect for different cultures, histories & approaches; and a responsibility to actively engage all people. In this directive, **the President should also call for the appointment of an Action Committee/Ombudsperson across the land management agencies**, which would oversee incorporation of these principles -- and accountability to the public in the management of America's system of public lands and waters.

Access to Public Lands

There are many issues that inhibit people from visiting and using our public lands and waters today, including geographic proximity, economic challenges, and cultural barriers. On the cultural front, African-Americans have felt unwelcome and even fearful in federal parklands during our nation's history because of the horrors of lynching, Jim Crow laws, and other forms of racial segregation.

Americans of Asian descent have been disenfranchised. Japanese Americans were incarcerated in concentration camps, many of which were on public lands managed by the Bureau of Reclamation.

Hispanics have also experienced segregation and their 500-year connection to rivers and lands within the United States is not widely recognized. In addition, the recent anti-immigrant sentiment has negatively impacted Latino's access to public lands.

Many of our national parks and other public lands are within the ancestral homelands of Indian tribes, and tribal members continue to value the natural resources and sacred places within these places as important for their cultural identity. This applies to tribes that were forced to leave their homelands as well as to those who now inhabit reservations in a portion of their ancestral territory close to parks.

We need to acknowledge and atone for this history – and together, move forward.

Additionally, our land management agencies are struggling to effectively communicate the value of our public lands and waters to today's increasingly digitally-dependent youth. We need to acknowledge this disconnect and find ways to make our public lands relevant to young people, and a next generation of stewards.

Our vision for a more inclusive approach to public lands conservation over the next 100 years includes a commitment to engaging *all* the segments of our country's population so they become active users and vital advocates in protecting our public lands and waters for the future.

To demonstrate this commitment, we ask the President most immediately to:

- Order a review of federal programs designed to reach culturally-diverse communities with a goal of identifying and outlining the steps necessary to increase participation from those communities and to improve access to public lands and waters for those constituencies.
- Create a senior-level position at the White House Council on Environmental Quality with responsibility for overseeing multi-agency engagement/education initiatives with a mandate of increasing awareness, outreach, and partnerships with culturally-diverse communities across our system of public lands and waters.

Additional opportunities for action include:

- Create Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) between relevant land management agencies and private partners to implement the findings from the aforementioned review. Identify and develop appropriate strategies to address concerns, and create communication channels to support those efforts.

- Leverage the National Park Foundation, National Forest Foundation, and other private partners to advertise the range of experiences already available in America’s national parks and public lands — everything from rugged backcountry activities to vacations with concierge services. Seek innovative ways to connect with culturally diverse communities and demonstrate how these places relate to their personal experiences and varied travel interests.
- Establish new outreach, interpretation and education positions inside land management agencies at all federal hiring grade levels, with diverse backgrounds, to start developing and implementing park interpretation and education innovations.
- Review permitting system to ensure youth and community groups can more easily access public lands, including backcountry experiences.
- Encourage land management agencies to establish partnerships with small businesses, local outdoor clubs, and the recreation industry to sponsor gear and provide local support needed for families to cost-effectively access and enjoy public lands.
- Provide free annual federal recreation passes to all members of federally recognized tribes.
- Assess the cultural implications of existing agency uniforms, offices, signage, and other facilities. For example, the Park Service law-enforcement vehicles look like those used by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, and uniforms have law enforcement connotations, both of which present a significant impediment to engaging all Americans.
- Identify public or private partners who can train land management agency representatives to be aware of their interactions with those veterans who suffer from war-related trauma, as well as youth and newcomers to parks, to ensure public actions and events do not intentionally and negatively affect them.
- Identify strategies to partner with faith groups and local organizations to facilitate events and outreach efforts that leverage parks and other public lands as a forum for critical conversations and atonement – allowing for community restoration and reconnection in a meaningful way.
- Ensure appropriate access to public lands facilities and experiences are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act and welcoming to people of all abilities.

Historical, Cultural, Sacred, and Spiritual Heritage

Our vision for a more inclusive approach to public lands over the next 100 years includes a commitment to honoring the many cultures reflected in America today. We ask the Administration to take steps to connect diverse communities, especially young people, more directly to the preservation and interpretation of their unique heritage and stories.

To demonstrate this commitment, we ask the President most immediately to:

- Support permanent and full federal funding for the Historic Preservation Fund to enable federal land management agencies to work with partners and local communities to assess our existing system of national parks and other public lands and waters for missing or incomplete storytelling. Efforts should focus on identifying aspects of the American story that are absent or are inadequately or inaccurately addressed so that the system reflects the broader, more complex stories of our collective heritage as a nation of many cultures and experiences.

- Direct the Park Service to issue a final rule on “Gathering of Certain Plants or Plant Parts by Federally Recognized Indian Tribes for Traditional Purposes,” – recognizing the significance of many national parks as places for traditional gathering of plants by Native Americans and authorizing tribes to resume these traditions.
- Direct the Park Service to complete the update of National Register Bulletin 38, “Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Traditional Cultural Properties,” a guidance document that incorporates the cultural values of Indian tribes and other traditional communities into the federal National Historic Preservation program.

Additional opportunities for action include:

- Support federal funding for National Heritage Areas at levels sufficient to achieve community engagement and preservation goals. National Heritage Areas provide critical opportunities to connect communities to their local history, preserve landscapes, attract new economic activity, and tell compelling stories that reflect our culturally diverse nation.
- Authorize direct federal Historic Preservation Fund matching grants for survey, planning, restoration, and rehabilitation of significant historic places in National Heritage Areas.
- Launch a Master Interpretive Plans pilot project, working with other public and private partners to demonstrate how outreach and educational messaging around a single theme can be coordinated across different agencies, sites and public lands.
- Develop experiential and educational programs and identify strategies for inviting diverse cultural community groups, including relevant Indian tribes, to help protect, and interpret for the public, culturally and historically significant resources on public lands.
- Identify and proactively assist local communities in efforts to conserve their natural and historic community assets and landscapes through the use of the National Historic Preservation program, engagement of State Historic Preservation Officers and Tribal Historic Preservation Officers, tax credits, River, Trail, and Conservation assistance programs, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and national landmarks, trails, and heritage areas.
- Explore innovative uses of preservation easements, or leasing of historic structures, that may offer communities more flexible management opportunities than more traditional models.
- Audit preservation programs and existing resources across land management agencies to determine opportunities to leverage joint funding & partnerships.
- Because the process of making nominations to the National Register of Historic Places can be challenging to the uninitiated, provide cross-culturally trained coordinators to educate and assist communities in protecting and preserving locally-significant places. Formalize ways to educate communities about how they can meaningfully engage in the national register process.
- Review names of sites throughout system for cultural bias. Some sites may require comprehensive name changes to reflect a broader and more inclusive history.

In particular, to honor American Indian Tribal, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian heritage (in addition to the items listed above):

- Draw upon “Traditional Ecological Knowledge” – Indian knowledge, traditions, values, and attitudes toward the Earth – as guidance for how federal land managers might interpret natural and cultural resources on public lands for the public.

- Enlist tribes in the interpretation or protection of key tribal resources in national parks and other public lands, and use Native stories and languages in interpretation where appropriate. Ensure consultation on all appropriate activities.
- Cooperate with and provide assistance to tribes in developing and operating tribal park systems and tribal programs to preserve natural and cultural resources and in other endeavors that are part of the National Park Idea.
- Launch new initiatives to recruit and hire tribal youth in public lands agencies, especially for positions that leverage cultural understanding.
- Establish a Branch of Tribal and Native Peoples Relations within the Department of the Interior Solicitor's Division of Conservation and Wildlife with the goal of removing unnecessary barriers in tribal relations.

Landscape-Scale Conservation

Our vision for a more inclusive approach to national parks and other public lands and waters over the next 100 years includes a commitment from agencies to identify and designate new park sites and conserve our public lands and waters in a manner that reflects and respects a variety of cultures and histories, as well as ways of caring for the land. Protecting cultural and natural landscapes that tell America's complex history will help us learn from our past, honor our ancestors, and educate future generations.

To demonstrate this commitment, we ask the President most immediately to:

- Direct the Secretary of the Interior to review the DOI strategy on landscape-scale conservation, in consultation with tribes, to more fully encompass cultural landscapes and to acknowledge the need to design conservation and climate change mitigation programs that protect habitats, ecosystems, and natural processes that also recognize peoples' histories, livelihoods, and beliefs.
- Build on President Obama's legacy of protecting critical natural and cultural landscapes by using the Antiquities Act to protect vulnerable landscapes that are important to all Americans by January 2017, including Bears Ears; Gold Butte; Stonewall; Castner Range; and the Greater Grand Canyon Heritage area.
- Leverage Master Leasing Plans (MLPs) and other cooperative planning opportunities to protect landscapes with cultural, spiritual, and historical significance. Specifically, finalize the Moab MLP and use that opportunity to set the stage for additional planning efforts to address oil and gas conflicts around national parks, protect critical landscapes and allow local communities to be an active part of the process. Commit to doing MLPs for the important cultural landscapes surrounding Mesa Verde National Park, Colorado, and Chaco Cultural National Historical Park, New Mexico.

Additional opportunities for action include:

- Work with the U.S. Congress and culturally-diverse communities to identify the next generation of places worthy of protection to reflect and protect a broader range of America's stories. This may include the Birmingham Civil Rights National Historical Park, Freedom Riders Historical Park, and the Cesar Chavez National Historic Park Act.

- Identify and study potential public lands or waterways that might be suitable for conservation as part of cooperative recreational programs such as the National Wild and Scenic Rivers and the National Scenic and Historic Trails system. Specifically, identify opportunities to recognize the history of Asian Pacific Islanders, women, and LGBT Americans as well as additional Hispanic, Native American, and African-American heritage under both programs.
- Secure the strongest possible protection for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, ensuring we will not lose its unparalleled cultural, spiritual, wildlife, and ecological values. This may be done by encouraging Congress to act on the Administration’s wilderness recommendation for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.
- Identify and evaluate alternative administrative arrangements, including new lines of authority and new terms of office for the directorate or senior executive service, to encourage interagency coordination, as well as working with local and state land agency partners to better connect urban areas to public lands.
- Conduct studies of the natural and cultural importance of existing public lands. For example, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) can partner with tribes to launch a study of culturally-significant resources on public lands that may be important for consideration in future energy development, recreation and conservation decisions.
- Leverage federal resources and programs to restore urban landscapes and bring the outdoor experience to America’s population centers. This could include USDA and DOI cooperation with the Environmental Protection Agency on brownfield restorations. After restoration, areas could be managed by a state, local, or tribal government agency, or by private partners to benefit urban communities.
- Engage new and existing partners to enlist young people in the process of conducting natural and cultural research on public lands. A reinvigorated Student Conservation Corps for instance, might conduct social science, biology, and archeological research, going back more than 100 years, in coordination with local universities or land management agencies.
- Work with partners to engage in the “Citizen Science” movement (also known as crowd-sourced science): a network of volunteer monitoring and scientific research conducted by amateur scientists. Engaging youth and adult volunteers in “science aspects” will enhance their outdoor experiences, provide opportunities to learn from agency scientists, and benefit conservation efforts by providing long-term monitoring.

Stakeholder Engagement

Our parks and other public lands and waters play a unique role in capturing the many different historical and cultural stories that have shaped this country; in celebrating acts of bravery and sacrifice; and in providing opportunities for atonement and healing. Moving forward, land management agencies must be committed to actively and authentically engaging culturally diverse communities in new and meaningful ways to shape the direction of conservation and public land policies for the future.

To demonstrate this commitment, we ask the President immediately to:

- Launch a new initiative with a partner independent of the federal government (such as with a university) to identify and recommend strategies and programs that engage the needs of an

increasingly diverse American population. Specifically, to build and sustain public support for the public lands system, it is important for our federal land management agencies and personnel to understand how culturally diverse communities now use and relate to national parks and other public lands.

Additional opportunities for action include:

- Recruit people from culturally diverse communities to be appointed to, and participate in, BLM Resource Advisory Councils and other similar land management committees and public processes. Develop relationships with local elected officials, faith leaders, and other community leaders to assist with this effort.
- Streamline the process for establishing cooperative agreements and create an easier, consistent, accessible, and transparent process for engaging formal partners including small community and grassroots organizations.
- Support federal funding for, and establish in every local land management office, a “Navigator” (similar to that mandated under the Affordable Care Act) or “community liaison” role within land management agencies to establish and strengthen connections with culturally diverse communities and get out into neighborhoods to connect the lands/sites to the communities. This person in a “navigator” role can empower community groups to successfully navigate public input and land planning processes.
- Provide grant funding to support participation from local and grassroots organizations to assist federal land management agencies with engaging culturally diverse communities.
- Engage local schools – a natural place where communities convene – to bridge the gap between local community and federal agencies. Many schools are also community centers and provide an environment that is accessible and inclusive.
- Develop relationships with local community organizations, NGO’s, non-profits and foundations to support education, outreach, hiring, and other initiatives.
- Look beyond traditional youth and conservation groups when engaging stakeholders. Consider the tech community; educators, the public health industry, and others.
- When moving land managers to new appointments, look for aptitude in cultural sensitivity and people who can affect diversity hires and create inroads to developing authentic relationships with culturally-diverse communities.
- Require agencies to hire/do business contracting with local, minority-owned businesses and culturally diverse communities; require locally-sourced products be used by agency staff to help staff build relationships with diverse businesses and stakeholders in their communities.
- Offer free annual federal recreation passes for volunteers to help build a network of local supporters.
- Replicate public-private partnership programs such as My Brother’s Keeper across the federal government and seek to identify best practices.

Workforce Diversity

Our vision for a more inclusive approach to our parks, public lands and waters over the next 100 years includes a commitment to making these lands relevant to all of our citizens by ensuring that they reflect the demographic and ethnic diversity of our nation — including among the people who work in these agencies.

To demonstrate this commitment, we ask the President to immediately:

- Charge the White House Office of Personnel Management to examine land management agency efforts to recruit and hire staff with more diverse backgrounds, develop an action plan to identify and create opportunities for a new generation of leaders that are inclusive and targeted at recruiting from non-traditional communities, establish a supportive environment and career pathways for those employees, and create internal incentives for building a more diverse workforce and multicultural workplace. We would request a formal, annual report on progress be generated for public accountability.
- Host a meeting of thought leaders and key public and private partners along the lines of what the Administration has done to spur veteran hiring in the private sector to identify and launch effective new multicultural hiring initiatives within land management agencies.
- Support increased annual operating funds for land management agencies and dedicate the necessary funding within DOI and USDA to the recruitment and hiring of diverse candidates in the federal work force and training of land managers.

Additional opportunities for action include:

- Engage national and local partners such as the NAACP, National Council of La Raza, Japanese American Citizens League, National Congress of American Indians, National Council of Asian Pacific Americans, League of United Latin American Citizens and others to enhance DOI and USDA internal and external diversity outreach and hiring initiatives. Convene and attend stakeholder meetings and conferences, as appropriate for recruitment purposes.
- Work with the National Park Foundation, National Forest Foundation, and other partners to establish a public-private partnership fund to help underwrite diversity recruitment and workforce development issues.
- Ensure Human Resources staff has the training to create a supportive work environment for new hires in land management agencies.
- Expand the existing Park Service intake program to identify and train the next generation of leaders to identify diverse candidates for that program and identifying similar management-level training programs in other land management agencies.
- Some land management agencies are positively using the Direct Hire Authority-Resource Assistant Internship while other agencies within the same department are not. This successful program attracts diversity candidates and should be implemented across the agencies.

Finally, we also request that the **federal land management agencies commit to identifying and recruiting the next generation of stewards, and ensuring that the candidate pool is inclusive.**

Create a continuum of service and work programs from high school through college that includes volunteerism, national service, paid internships, and conservation work. These programs should be undertaken with the goal of building a life-long connection between young people and their national parks and other public lands, preparing them for employment while supporting needed improvement to park facilities, assets, and resources. These programs will be particularly impactful to young people with limited employment opportunities that may provide an introduction to the parks. This can include:

- Build upon, and expand to include other communities of color, successful programs like the Latino Heritage Internship Program (created through partnership with Hispanic Access

Foundation and the Park Service). Bolster partnerships with historically black colleges and universities, and tribal colleges and universities, and identify ways to connect youth with paid internships, mentors, and ultimately full-time careers. Expand into other land agencies at DOI and USDA, and include a Direct Hire Mandate.

- Create mentorship programs with partner organizations, such as is done at the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.
- Launch a Step Up Program to get high school students engaged with land management agencies in internships, but also in showing the path to long-term careers.
- Empower leaders from communities of color already serving in federal land management agencies through employee organizations, formal mentorships, recruitment, and retention initiatives to provide leadership and guidance in engaging culturally diverse communities.