



Policy Memo: Conservation of Land & Water Should be a Local Issue, Not Driven by Federal Mandates

President Biden has committed to the “30 by 30” resolution, which is a proposal by the Natural Resources Defense Council to use “science-based decision-making to protect 30 percent of U.S. lands and waters by the year 2030.”ⁱ *Scientific American* states that most commonly used statistics suggest that roughly 12 percent of U.S. land and 26 percent of waters are protected. Kate Kelly, public lands director at the Center for American Progress, explains why the resolution is so important to the Biden Administration:

30 by 30 is a recognition that we have a nature crisis on our hands, and it’s a commitment to pursue ambitious and inclusive conservation policies – because we have a problem, all is not well on planet Earth.ⁱⁱ

“Slowing extinction rates, conserving our lands and waters, and protecting biodiversity can be achieved while avoiding overzealous and expensive environmental actions that are more harmful than helpful.”

The Biden Administration has not released many specifics on what areas will be protected, or how the protections would be enacted. Citizens have yet to see the science behind the “science-based” plan. South Carolina, Hawaii, and California have already introduced bills at the state level.ⁱⁱⁱ These bills, like the resolution, are largely focused on the priority of the goal and offer little concrete action. While the details remain to be presented, experts believe the resolution will include national wildlife refuges, national monuments, state-level protected areas, conservation easements on private land, and co-management with tribal leadership.^{iv}

Conservation efforts to protect U.S. land and water are laudable and often met with broad bipartisan support. However, the methods in which those efforts are carried out need to be examined carefully and both environmental and economic interests should be considered. The Biden Administration has already pledged to ban new oil and gas permits on public lands and waters^v, and it isn’t difficult to see further executive measures taken to negatively impact the energy sector in the name of “conservation”. For example, the *New York Times* reports that “the quickest path for the United States to reach its 30 percent land goal would rely on Mr. Biden’s executive powers to increase the protection of federal lands by designating new national monuments and banning drilling, mining, and timber harvesting.”^{vi} The *Times*, in a moment of clarity, realizes that top-down federal mandates are troublesome and local input is necessary:

Americans generally support land conservation, but differ over how it should be carried out. A survey published this year by Duke University suggests that while rural Americans care deeply about conservation, they do not trust big environmental groups like those that have pushed 30 by 30. Instead, they prefer policies overseen by state and local governments that foster collaboration with communities. A failure to engage rural Americans is the fastest way to ensure collapse of 30 by 30.^{vii}

Key Point: Slowing extinction rates, conserving our lands and waters, and protecting biodiversity can be achieved while avoiding overzealous and expensive environmental actions that are more harmful than helpful. The Biden Administration should approach conservation proposals from this perspective.

The Texas Energy Project is a project of the Texas Conservative Coalition Research Institute (TCCRI), a public policy research organization based in Austin, Texas. See txenergyproject.org and txccri.org for more information.

Endnotes

i “Plan for Climate Change and Environmental Justice: Joe Biden” Joe Biden for President, October 2020 <https://joebiden.com/climate-plan/>

ii “An Ambitious Strategy to Preserve Biodiversity” Scientific American, October 2020 <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/an-ambitious-strategy-to-preserve-biodiversity/>

iii *Ibid.*

iv *Ibid.*

v “Plan for Climate Change and Environmental Justice: Joe Biden” Joe Biden for President, October 2020 <https://joebiden.com/climate-plan/>

vi “More Than Twice the Size of Texas” New York Times, December 2020 <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/21/opinion/biden-climate-change-conservation.html>

vii *Ibid.*