

Increase Active Management of Federal Lands and Reduce Litigation through Collaboration

The U.S. has the most extensive network of federal lands in the world. Sportsmen and women are committed to making this federal land estate work to sustain fish and wildlife populations, provide access for hunting and other recreation, retain ecosystem services for our citizens, and allow careful, science-informed development that helps sustain the country's economy.

Controversies over how lands should be used and managed have hamstrung agencies responsible for caring for the lands. Conflicting direction in organic acts and policy changes in Congress and the White House, declining federal funding, and routine litigation have paralyzed federal land management and reduced agencies' effectiveness. Federal land management agencies need to work collaboratively to manage federal lands actively to improve their value for wildlife, recreation, and other uses.

Increase Collaboration, Reduce Litigation

- Authorize collaboration in federal land decisions and protect collaboratively based decisions from litigation. Congress; Agriculture/FS; Interior/FWS, BLM; Defense/COE
- Authorize alternative remedies to litigation, including arbitration, and limit fee reimbursement to cases of direct and personal interest as defined in the *Equal Access to Justice Act*. Congress; Agriculture/FWS, BLM; Defense/COE; DOJ

Collaboration is the voluntary work of citizens with each other and federal agencies to develop plans and projects. These locally driven solutions achieve buy-in from diverse stakeholders. New policy must place collaborative agreements on par with lawsuits in determining the

direction of federal land conservation. Arbitration between litigants and collaborative groups can avoid costly and disruptive litigation on projects where stakeholders have already agreed upon the best approach.

Invasive Species

- Increase funding and capacity for education, management, and prevention to combat the invasive species epidemic across all lands and waters. Interior/all bureaus; Agriculture/FS, NRCS; Defense/all bureaus; EPA; Transportation/FHA; Commerce/NOAA; Homeland/CG

Invasive species are a serious threat to America's fish and wildlife as well as federal lands and waters. Invasive species are a leading cause for habitat loss, a key contributing factor to threatened and endangered species listing, and they exacerbate risks of wildfire across the landscape.

Each year, public agencies and utilities spend \$140 billion to manage and mitigate impacts of invasive species. State and federal agencies lack the capacity to manage and implement adequate prevention programs, and thus rely on restrictive measures on recreational uses of public lands and waters to mitigate invasive species spread. Unfortunately, the nation is losing the battle, and the

cost of managing invasive species grows exponentially once they are established.

Outdoor recreation is one way invasive species and pathogens are transported and spread. Consequently, hunters, anglers, and boaters are also poised to be the best line of defense in preventing their spread. Local, state, and federal agencies should increase their focus on public education and collaborate closely with the sportsmen's and women's conservation community to ensure stakeholder and public user concerns are considered prior to management decisions. Federal agency budgets to manage invasive species should reflect the growing seriousness of the threat.

Include State Wildlife Managers in Federal Land Management

- Amend federal land planning policy to integrate state wildlife management objectives. Congress; Agriculture/FS; Interior/BLM; Defense/all bureaus
- Align federal land hunting access with state regulations on seasons, means, and methods. Congress; Agriculture/FS; Interior/all bureaus; Defense/COE
- Provide clear direction in Wilderness Area designations for federal land management agencies to honor existing agreements and provide access for management of wildlife and habitat, water developments, hunting, and other infrastructure. Agriculture/FS, Interior/all bureaus

Federal land agencies are managing the habitat for wildlife populations that are managed by state wildlife agencies (or FWS). Habitat and population management must be better coordinated in several ways. Federal land managers should be required to integrate state wildlife management goals in plans and projects. Federal rules for hunting

access should match those established by states. Access to federal lands, particularly to Wilderness Areas, should be provided for state wildlife management activities. Several recent Department of the Interior Secretarial Orders direct cooperation and deference to states; however, other policy conflicts with this direction.

Implementing the USDA Shared Stewardship Vision

- Increase the USFS budget subaccounts supporting active management programs sufficiently to address the 80 million acres of national forest in need of restoration. Congress; Agriculture/FS
- Authorize and fund the USFS to rebuild staff capacity that has been lost over years of “fire borrowing” practices. Congress; Agriculture/FS
- Formalize Shared Stewardship as policy to increase effectiveness, efficiency, and scale of landscape conservation to improve active management of federal lands. Expand Shared Stewardship to other federal land management agencies. Agriculture/FS; Interior/all bureaus; Defense/COE
- Fund Shared Stewardship agreements to leverage non-federal funding, capacity, and expertise. Congress; Agriculture/FS; Interior/all bureaus

The USDA adopted the Shared Stewardship vision in 2018 to address the challenges of catastrophic wildfires, more public demand, degraded watersheds, and epidemics of forest insects and disease. More than 80 million acres of national forest land are in critical need of attention to restore environmental function, provide quality habitat, and protect human infrastructure. Across 11 western states, there are more than 6.3 billion standing dead trees.

These conditions have contributed to the increase in catastrophic wildfires that is furthering the damage and consuming billions of dollars diverted from other

intended purposes to cover fire costs. This so-called “fire borrowing” was stemmed recently by Congress, but the lost funding has not been restored. This deficit is a major obstacle in implementing Shared Stewardship and proceeding with restoration.

The U.S. Forest Service must begin an unprecedented scale and pace of restoration projects. The Shared Stewardship approach brings together the necessary partners, but Congress and the Administration must fund these efforts. Non-federal funding, capacity, and expertise is available to help.