

POLICY FOCUS

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The Future of Environmentalism: True Conservation

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HIGHLIGHT

Undoubtedly, the most American form of environmentalism is conservation. Conservation is regarded as wise-use management (or stewardship) of natural resources. It welcomes human involvement to bolster nature and a flourishing economy. It's typically defined by public-private partnerships, deregulation, and market solutions to environmental problems.

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. is a global leader in environmental stewardship. Our nation has curbed emissions; innovated energy technology; conserved, recovered, and delisted threatened and endangered species; and taken steps to adhere to clean water and air standards.

Guided by a true conservationist ethos, which calls for wise use of natural resources, our nation has advanced policies that equally bolster

nature and people. As a result, the world looks to us for guidance on balancing economic development with environmental protection.

In the course of over 40 years, true conservation efforts—including free-market environmentalism—have become more doctrinaire and accepted by the wider public. However, preservationist environmentalism, which calls for “no use” of natural resources and greater government involvement, threatens the progress we’ve achieved on this front.

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Unfortunately, the federal government, including the Biden White House, is pursuing preservationist environmental policies that make us wholly dependent on foreign nations with poor environmental and human rights track records for energy and rare earth minerals. Even more troubling, preservationists are distorting conservation and increasingly relying on public policy to implement top-down solutions to today’s pressing environmental problems. This could have dire consequences for human flourishing.

For lasting environmental progress to be achieved, the federal government should encourage partnerships with non-government actors to take an active role in conserving our natural resources and lands. Businesses and private individuals are already leading the charge to conserve wild spaces, critical habitat, and species on a voluntary basis and a top-down government approach will complicate problems further.

Through adherence to true conservation, however, America can push back

preservationist policies and lead on environmental stewardship again.

THE U.S. IS A PIONEER IN TRUE CONSERVATION

Since the early 20th century, our country has advanced true conservation thanks to policy advancements, market innovations, and individuals.

Cooperation between public-private entities, nonprofit organizations, activists, and

concerned citizens has led the nation to advanced high standards for water, land, and air. As a result, the U.S. has emerged a global leader in environmentalism, not only in the public sector, but also through free-market environmentalism. This **philosophy** calls for “voluntary, unregulated trade” that results in good environmental action.

Despite ongoing threats posed by preservationist environmentalism, true conservation efforts remain the gold standard and are pursued at both the public and private levels. While preservationist environmentalists want to move the U.S. away from effective measures, here are several advancements that bolster nature without reimagining the economy.

FOREST MANAGEMENT

True conservation practices are already succeeding in several areas concerning land management and can be modeled by several approaches and focuses. Proactive forest management is instrumental for maintaining healthy forests and making

them less susceptible to destruction by high-intensity fires.

The majority of recent forest fires in the American West are the result of poor management practices in place. By embracing a preservationist “no touch” approach, these states—especially California—have allowed their forests to become vulnerable to fires and have put their residents and communities at risk. But the southeastern U.S., however, has revolutionized prescribed burns and should have their blueprint exported nationally and out West.

The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) is capable of managing **193 million acres** of forest lands, but is currently plagued by a **backlog** of 80 million acres of forest lands **requiring** restoration to “reduce the risk of wildfire, insect epidemics, and forest diseases.” In its 2021 budget

derived from natural smoke that results from high-intensity fires versus prescribed burn smoke. Ironically, a 2017 Advancing Earth and Space Science **report** determined wildfire smoke pollutes three times as much as smoke emanating from prescribed burns, yet the Clean Air Act doesn’t account for this. As a result, prescribed burn smoke is **regulated** as a pollutant—making it difficult to implement this practice on a wide scale.

Despite the aforementioned setbacks, forest management is succeeding in one corner of the country: the Southeast. Florida stands out as a state where wildfire prevention has largely succeeded. **Seventy percent** of all controlled burning is concentrated in the region because much of the land is privately managed, and **landowners are keen** on maintaining the practice.

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justification, USFS **determined** that 63 million acres are at “high to very high risk” from what they call uncharacteristic wildfire.

Despite **claims** to the contrary, the primary cause of high-intensity wildfires is excess fuel load **accumulated** by plant material—not climate change. According to a recent Institute of Physics Science (IOPS) **study**, key drivers like live fuel contribute the most to fires (53 percent), followed by weather (23 percent). Climate (14 percent) and topography (10 percent) are lesser contributors.

Part of the issue is that current stipulations of the Clean Air Act fail to account for pollution

Due to Florida’s success with controlled burns, its state legislature passed landmark legislation, **The Florida Prescribed Burning Act of 1990**, into law. In addition to **shielding** responsible prescribed burners from civil liabilities, the measure also **prevented** major biodiversity loss in the Sunshine State. The law also established a one-of-a-kind burn manager certification program for “burn bosses”—one that has been replicated across 11 states.

Florida has been so successful that even embattled preservationist states like California are **seeking guidance** from the state on how to tackle raging wildfires befalling their state.

MAINTAINING MULTIPLE-USE MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC LANDS

Public lands must be kept in the American public's hands, not reimagined to be at the mercy of special interest groups eager to exclude participants. The Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) mission statement **enumerates** that public lands should be maximized for "commercial, recreational, and conservation" opportunities. These include energy development, livestock grazing, hunting, fishing, and timber harvesting.

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Preservationists, however, insist on the "modernization" of public land management to move from "multiple use" to "**public use**"—which would shut out traditional stakeholders such as livestock grazers and ranches who depend on natural resource development to sustain their livelihoods. Additionally, the public-use model could be deployed to limit hunters and anglers, the largest funders of conservation, from access. In this sense, "public use" is really a misnomer because it would reclassify public lands in a way that would limit many important uses of the land that benefit both the land and the public.

Even the Biden administration **signaled** it will maintain its multiple use mission in order to serve all stakeholders and constituencies. But this is a mixed signal: Efforts like 30x30 or the **America the Beautiful Report** to "conserve" 30 percent of public waters and public lands by 2030 (laid out in the Biden administration's January 27th **Executive Order** "Executive Order on Tackling the

Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad") would undermine conservation efforts.

Not only would the 30x30 approach work against conservation efforts, it is redundant. Per the U.S. Geological Survey, our nation already protects well over **40 percent** of public lands from consumptive activities. Instead, solutions like the 30x30 alternative, billed as "**Western Conservation Principles**," should be a guiding template. The plan, jointly released by the Senate and Congressional Western Caucus, calls for

focusing efforts on issues like "invasive species; overgrown, diseased, and infested forests; and post-wildfire restoration." The **plan** doesn't call for more government funding or interference, but rather "thoughtful, deliberate improvements to existing programs, systems, and processes, removing regulatory burdens blocking responsible management, and leveraging the expertise, resources, and collaboration of private and public partners."

SPECIES MANAGEMENT

The United States succeeds in species and wildlife conservation efforts. Keystone species like the Greater Yellowstone grizzly bear and Lower-48 gray wolf have made tremendous comebacks thanks to wildlife conservation efforts.

The seminal law guiding species conservation is the Endangered Species Act of 1973. It has worked to prevent endangered or threatened species from going extinct

since enacted into law by Congress and has a remarkable 100-percent success rate. That, in itself, should be celebrated. However, the law isn't being properly **utilized**. Only **3 percent** of listed species have been delisted following their successful recovery.

Section 4 of the law **encourages** delisting and downlisting of recovered species, suggesting the former as “the ultimate goal of implementing the Endangered Species Act (ESA).” But there's a pervasive misperception and misguided fear that if a recovered species is delisted and management returns to the states, as in the case of gray wolves and grizzly bears, that the

EMPOWERING INDIVIDUALS, NOT GOVERNMENT, TO LEAD CONSERVATION EFFORTS

Top-down governmental policies can be a hindrance to achieving environmental progress in the U.S. Instances like the **2015 King Gold Mine spill** and **Flint water crisis** confirm the federal government can perpetuate, rather than mitigate, crises.

That's why private individuals, who are voluntarily incentivized to conserve their surroundings, should lead conservation efforts going forward. In many instances, private efforts can mitigate environmental

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species will be decimated again if hunting is embraced as a management tool. Therefore, keeping a species listed on the ESA in perpetuity satisfies radical environmental organizations because they can fundraise off of it. In turn, keeping species listed with permanent protections in perpetuity undermines wildlife science by adversely affecting predator-prey relationships, stalling management efforts, and diverting attention and funding to species that are actually endangered or threatened.

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If resources are allocated to recovered species but not imperiled ones that warrant more attention, the science isn't being followed here.

problems by engaging with stakeholders like land owners. Given governmental shortcomings through heavy-handed involvement and red tape, private solutions can adequately fix problems and resolve conflict. Some individuals and groups are already working to conserve our national resources. Consider these examples:

Blue Forest Conservation: Forest Resiliency Bonds

With the federal government's **reluctance** to modernize the National Environmental Policy Act with respect to forest management, private solutions are emerging in the private sector.

Forest Resilience Bonds (FRB), pioneered by the nonprofit Blue Forest Conservation, utilize private capital in public land management. They are working to bridge the gap between \$3.1 billion in undeployed funds earmarked for sustainable investments and support for forest management projects.

The bond has **four** clear aims: to deliver financial and technical resources to restore forests; to create a financing model dedicated to forest resiliency and export it nationally; to restore watershed and forest health; and to mitigate wildlife risk to fragile ecosystems and nearby communities.

Elk Occupancy Agreement

The Property and Environment Center (PERC) and Greater Yellowstone Coalition recently **entered** into an inaugural Elk Occupancy Agreement with a private ranch in Montana's Paradise Valley to conserve 500 acres of prime elk habitat.

The agreement will compel the landowner to conduct "habitat management and enhancement activities including invasive

solutions. One company taking the issue head-on is 4ocean, a Florida-based for-profit entity.

4ocean specializes in proactive waste clean-up and selling items, namely bracelets, to draw awareness to the problem. For every purchase, it pledges to collect a pound of trash from oceans, rivers, and coastlines through their One Pound Promise.

4ocean **aspires** to be a "business for good" with a lasting impact that doesn't partake in virtue signaling. Their mission statement is predicated on the belief that "business can be a force for good and that the single actions of individual people, collectively, have the power to change the world."

Since 2017, they've **recovered** over 19 million pounds of plastic waste.

While preservationists often paint good environmental stewardship and human flourishing as mutually exclusive goals, this is not the case. Conservation-driven solutions can combat the burning environmental problems of today and ensure a future where nature and people can peacefully coexist.

conifer tree removal, cheatgrass spraying, controlled burning, and further noxious weed treatment when needed in the elk winter range to maintain and enhance range conditions."

The **agreement** intends to reduce cattle-elk conflicts in the hopes of reducing brucellosis, a bacterial infection spread by infected animals. Ultimately, an EOA will benefit the general public when the landowner sets aside land for elk and other wildlife.

4ocean—Using Private Solutions to Address Ocean Plastic Pollution

Plastic waste in oceans is an **oft-ignored issue** that has the potential to be solved by private

CONCLUSION

While the federal government is impeding environmental progress, conservation is succeeding at the state and local levels due to public-private partnerships and market solutions.

Preservationists often paint good environmental stewardship and human flourishing as mutually exclusive goals but this is not the case. Conservation-driven solutions can combat the burning environmental problems of today and ensure a future where nature and people can peacefully coexist.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Get Informed

Learn more about true conservation. Visit:

- [Western Conservation Principles](#)
- [Property and Environmental Research Center](#)
- [U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service](#)

Talk to Your Friends

Help your friends and family understand these important issues. Tell them about what's going on and encourage them to join you in getting involved.

Become a Leader in the Community

Get a group together each month to talk about a political/policy issue (it will be fun!). Write a letter to the editor. Show up at local government meetings and make your opinions known. Go to rallies. Better yet, organize rallies! A few motivated people can change the world.

Remain Engaged Politically

Too many good citizens see election time as the only time they need to pay attention to politics. We need everyone to pay attention and hold elected officials accountable. Let your Representatives know your opinions. After all, they are supposed to work for you!

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Independent Women's Forum (IWF) is dedicated to building support for free markets, limited government, and individual responsibility. IWF, a non-partisan, 501(c)(3) research and educational institution, seeks to combat the too-common presumption that women want and benefit from big government, and build awareness of the ways that women are better served by greater economic freedom. By aggressively seeking earned media, providing easy-to-read, timely publications and commentary, and reaching out to the public, we seek to cultivate support for these important principles and encourage women to join us in working to return the country to limited, Constitutional government.