

May 10, 2021

An Open Letter to Colorado Lawmakers:

We write to you today in support of a commitment by the state of Colorado to conserve 30 percent of the lands and waters in our state by 2030 (“30x30”). Setting our state on a path to reaching this goal, by significantly increasing the pace of conservation, will prevent the worst impacts of climate change, protect our economy, safeguard the natural systems we depend on, and improve community vitality.

In January, President Biden issued an executive order instructing federal agencies to identify pathways and strategies to achieve a goal of conserving at least 30 percent of the country’s lands, waters, and ocean by 2030. On May 6th, the White House, in coordination with federal land management agencies, released a report calling for extensive collaboration with state and local governments. Colorado’s delegation in Washington D.C. has also called upon the administration to work with states and local governments on 30x30 conservation efforts. In a bicameral letter to President Biden, Senator Michael Bennet, Senator John Hickenlooper, Representative Diana DeGette, Representative Joe Neguse, and Representative Jason Crow affirmed support for the national 30x30 effort, stating: “Success will require a whole-of-government approach, coordination across Federal, Tribal, State, and local agencies, a commitment to collaboration, a willingness to compromise, and good-faith conversations.”

The national 30x30 effort will require state-level action. State agency collaboration and engagement with communities and local governments across the state, that have an intimate knowledge of land stewardship and conservation, will also be a critical undertaking in this effort. Colorado’s history of conservation leadership makes the state well-positioned to be a major contributor to this national and international effort, and there is strong support for 30x30 in the state. According to the 2021 Colorado College *Conservation in the West* poll, 81 percent of Coloradans support a 30x30 goal.

Our state, like the country as a whole, is experiencing a significant loss of natural lands. Colorado’s elected officials, along with state agencies, must develop and implement concrete policy and funding tools to conserve additional lands in the state and meet the climate, nature, and wildlife crisis currently at hand. Successful 30x30 state efforts will support locally-led and community-driven conservation efforts, respect private property and water rights, honor tribal sovereignty, create a more equitable and inclusive conservation vision, and be guided by science. State agencies should work cooperatively with federal agencies to advance conservation and restoration efforts on federally-managed public lands; create additional state parks, wildlife areas, and conservation leases on trust lands; expand voluntary restoration and easement programs for private landowners; and assist community efforts to conserve natural areas and open spaces. Colorado agencies must partner with U.S. land managers as they begin conducting extensive outreach to tribal nations, local governments, farmers, ranchers, hunters, anglers, recreationists, and communities that depend on our natural resources.

Protecting, conserving, and restoring public and private lands and waters, and managing those resources primarily for nature, alongside compatible uses, will provide resilience into the future. Increasing land and water conservation must also play a central role in helping Colorado reach its long-term climate goals. Conservation and restoration can increase natural carbon sequestration and offer one of the most

cost-effective solutions to combating climate change. These nature-based climate solutions further support forest and watershed health, working lands, and habitat for wildlife.

Conserving 30 percent of our state presents a unique opportunity to create a more inclusive vision of nature and the outdoors. Communities of color in Colorado are 20 percent more likely to experience nature deprivation than white communities, contributing to Colorado’s “nature gap.” Implementing a 30x30 goal will help the state close the “nature gap” by expanding access to outdoor spaces, creating additional close-to-home opportunities in communities of color, and developing the next generation of nature stewards. Protected lands and waters are also drivers of our outdoor recreation economy, contributing \$62 billion to our state and creating more than half a million jobs. Increased investments in restoration and conservation will also deliver jobs to rural communities and are shown to have a significant return in economic value.

Thank you for your continued efforts on behalf of our climate, lands, and communities. The undersigned state and national organizations strongly support the Biden administration’s 30x30 objectives and call upon Colorado’s elected leaders to take action and commit to a statewide 30x30 goal. We look forward to collaborating with the administration, legislators, state agencies, and stakeholders across Colorado to accelerate conservation efforts in our state.

American Whitewater

Audubon Rockies

Colorado Sierra Club

Conservation Colorado

Colorado Wildlands Project

Colorado Wildlife Federation

Continental Divide Trail Coalition

Great Old Broads for Wilderness

High Country Conservation Advocates

National Parks Conservation Association

Rocky Mountain Wild

San Juan Citizens Alliance

The Wilderness Society

Trout Unlimited

Western Resource Advocates

Western Slope Conservation Center

Wild Connections

Wilderness Workshop