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President Obama Announces Plan for Community-Based Conservation through the America's Great Outdoors Initiative

WASHINGTON, D.C. – President Barack Obama today announced the Administration's action plan, under the America's Great Outdoors initiative, to achieve lasting conservation of the outdoor spaces that power our nation's economy, shape our culture, and build our outdoor traditions. By making the Federal Government a better partner with American communities, this initiative seeks to reinvigorate our approach to conservation and reconnect Americans, especially young people, with the lands and waters that are used for farming and ranching, hunting and fishing, and for families to spend quality time together. Recognizing that many of these places and resources are disappearing and under intense pressure, the President established the America's Great Outdoors Initiative last April to work with the American people in developing a conservation and recreation agenda that makes sense for the 21st century.

Recognizing that the best ideas come from outside Washington, the report released today outlines ways in which the Federal Government will help empower local communities to accomplish their conservation and recreation priorities. Last summer, senior Administration officials held 51 listening sessions across the country to gather input from Americans about the outdoor places and activities that they value most. These sessions drew more than 10,000 participants and more than 105,000 written comments, shaping an action plan that, based on local initiatives and support, when implemented will result in:

- Accessible parks or green spaces for our children.
- A new generation of great urban parks and community green spaces.
- Newly-restored river restorations and recreational "blueways" that power economic revitalization in communities.
- Stronger support for farmers, ranchers, and private landowners that help protect rural landscapes and provide access for recreation.
- The reinvestment of revenues from oil and gas extraction into the permanent protection of parks, open spaces, wildlife habitat, and access for recreational activities.
- A 21st century conservation ethic that builds on local ideas and solutions for environmental stewardship and connecting to our historic, cultural, and natural heritage.

“With children spending half as much time outside as their parents did, and with many Americans living in urban areas without safe access to green space, connecting to the outdoors is more important than ever for the economic and physical health of our communities,” said Nancy Sutley, Chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality. “Through the America’s Great Outdoors Initiative, this Administration will work together with communities to ensure clean and accessible lands and waters, thriving outdoor cultures and economies, and healthy and active youth.”

“The America’s Great Outdoors Initiative is born out of a conversation with the American people about what matters most to them about the places where they live, work, and play,” Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar said. “It’s about practical, common-sense ideas from the American people on how our natural, cultural, and historic resources can help us be a more competitive, stronger, and healthier nation. Together, we are adapting our conservation strategies to meet the challenges of today and empowering communities to protect and preserve our working lands and natural landscapes for generations to come.”

“America’s farmlands and woodlands help fuel our economy and create jobs across the rural areas of our country,” said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. “This plan seeks to work in partnership with landowners, conservation groups, states and others to conserve our working lands and our public lands and to reconnect Americans – especially our nation’s youth – with opportunities to stay active. This blueprint was developed with input from the over 100,000 Americans in all corners of our country who joined our national listening sessions and who contributed their ideas online.”

“This initiative is an effort to reconnect Americans with the valuable resources all around them and shape a 21st century plan for protecting our great outdoors,” said EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson. “It is important that our waters, lands and greenspaces are brought back into our daily lives. President Obama’s initiative will help make these critical resources a national focus once again, and involve people of every background in conservation of the places that we hold dear.”

Specific recommendations and actions in the report include:

- Calling for full funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which directs Federal revenue from oil and gas extraction for national, state and local conservation and recreation projects.
- Establishing a 21st century Conservation Service Corps to engage young Americans in public lands and water restoration.
- Extending the deduction for conservation easement donations on private lands beyond 2011.
- Establishing an America’s Great Outdoors National Recreational Blueways Trails initiative to designate community-scale portions of rivers as recreational destinations that receive special attention for restoration and access.
- Supporting collaborative efforts to conserve large landscapes across working lands by targeting resources from incentive-based programs.
- Increasing outdoor recreational opportunities and access.

- Establishing an interagency America's Great Outdoors Council to ensure Federal agencies collaborate efficiently on conservation and recreation strategies.
- Launching the Partnership for America's Great Outdoors, a non-governmental body that will focus on forming strategic conservation partnerships across communities, businesses and governments.
- Partnering with communities throughout the country to establish and expand urban parks and green spaces and to build on large landscape conservation projects.

The full report and additional information is available at: www.doi.gov/AmericasGreatOutdoors.

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