

# CONSERVING THE GREAT AMERICAN OUTDOORS

## SUMMARY

The Great American Outdoors Act is the largest federal conservation program created in the past 50 years.

The new law takes \$1.9 billion in royalties annually from energy development on non-park, non-wilderness public lands and puts it into national parks, wildlife refuges, and other public lands across the country for conservation and repairing visitor centers, trails, campgrounds, and other facilities.

The program is funded almost exclusively from revenues generated by federal oil and natural gas production.

The law also permanently funds \$900 million annually for the popular Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). LWCF funds come exclusively from offshore oil and natural gas production.

**Wind and solar energy provide next to nothing in federal conservation funding.**

American treasures funded by American oil and natural gas.

## PUBLIC LANDS FUNDING AT RISK



President Biden is threatening this conservation and infrastructure funding by limiting oil and natural gas leasing and overregulation. There is no other energy source that can replace the royalties from oil and natural gas, which provide 94% of the funding for conservation.

Consequently, thousands of lingering projects that need attention as result of years of overcrowding and overuse by millions of visitors are at risk.



## RESTORING PUBLIC LANDS

The National Park Service started in 1916, 44 years after Yellowstone became the first national park. Today the agency maintains 423 sites that span 84 million acres across the United States and its territories.

Along with the expansion of the parks system, the popularity of national parks continues to skyrocket. The trend has accelerated in recent years as visitation exploded during pandemic lockdowns and is spurred by greater social media exposure and over-marketing from outdoor recreation brands such as REI, Patagonia, and North Face.

Consequently, overcrowding combined with historic underfunding by Congress has plagued our national parks, resulting in aging infrastructure and billions in deferred maintenance. In 2020, the agency faced a \$13 billion backlog for outstanding maintenance projects. In 2022, that figure ballooned to \$21.8 billion. Likewise the backlog on public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management and other federal agencies totals another \$7 billion.

## LARGEST INVESTMENT IN U.S. HISTORY

Signed into law in August 2020, the Great American Outdoors Act built on a 50-year tradition of balancing responsible oil and natural gas development with protecting our most treasured landscapes. The bill passed with strong bipartisan support from conservatives and progressives.

The Great American Outdoors Act combined two public lands conservation programs:

### The National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund

The new fund provides up to \$1.9 billion annually for national park and public lands restoration from onshore energy revenues. The vast majority of revenue comes from federal onshore oil and natural gas royalties from leases on non-park, non-wilderness public lands.

Conservation revenues are distributed as follows:

- 70% to the National Park Service to reduce deferred maintenance in national parks
- 15% to the U.S. Forest Service
- 5% to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- 5% to the Bureau of Land Management
- 5% to Bureau of Indian Education schools.

### Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)

Signed into law in 1965, the LWCF provides funding for national parks, wetlands, forests, and wildlife refuges and matching grants for state and local parks.

For the first time the popular conservation program is now fully funded at \$900 million annually, without the need for action by Congress.

National Park Service's maintenance backlog in 2022:

**\$21.8 billion**

## OVERCROWDED & UNDER PRESSURE

### Yosemite's Washburn Fire



The 2022 Washburn Fire started from human activity near Yosemite's Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias. It started along a road used by tourist shuttle buses.

### Trashed Trails and Campgrounds



Overcrowded campgrounds and trails are often littered with waste, forcing public land managers to close several areas off from human activity.

### Over Marketing by Outdoor Retailers



Aggressive marketing like REI's ads motivate people to buy gear and seek the solitude on public lands that's portrayed. In reality, public lands are often overcrowded, but outdoor brands do not contribute to fix the damage they help create.

## CONSERVATION COURTESY OF THE OILFIELD

Western Energy Alliance is proud that the new Legacy Restoration Fund is funded almost exclusively by federal oil and natural gas production, to the tune of up to \$1.9 billion annually.

Of the 700 million acres of oil and natural gas managed by the Bureau of Land Management, only 0.06% has oil and natural gas activity on the surface. Yet the return is enormous. The energy owned by the public goes a long way to meeting the growing needs of national parks.

According to data from the Department of the Interior's Office of Natural Resources Revenue, \$4.4 billion in onshore energy revenue was available in 2021 for the program:

- **Oil and natural gas \$4 billion, 91.3%**
- Coal \$364 million, 8.2%
- Geothermal \$18 million 0.4%
- Wind \$5 million, 0.1%.

In addition, **\$3.7 billion** was available in offshore oil and natural gas revenue in 2021, more than enough to fund the \$900 million for projects under the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

If renewable energy sources were the only ones available because of banning of fossil fuels, as some in the Biden Administration advocate, only \$11.5 million would have been available for conservation funding.



The Great American Outdoors Act strikes an appropriate balance between responsible energy development on working landscapes and preservation of our nation's treasured public spaces.

## FUNDED PROJECTS

Thanks to royalties from oil and natural gas production, the following national parks projects were funded in 2021 and 2022 through the Great American Outdoors Act.



### YELLOWSTONE \$204 MILLION

Spanning Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho, projects funded in the first and most beloved national park include repairs to historic buildings, roads leading up to the iconic Old Faithful geyser, and other infrastructure. Flooding in 2022 added to maintenance needs in the park and underscores the need for steady funding.

### YOSEMITE \$145 MILLION

One of the most photographed national parks, Yosemite is located in east-central California. Projects funded include repairs to campgrounds, water systems, parking, and erosion control. Forest fires in 2022 caused major damage, similarly underscoring the need for steady funding.



### BLUE RIDGE \$219 MILLION

Located in western Virginia and North Carolina, the Blue Ridge Parkway was the most visited national park in 2021, with 16 million visitors. Projects funded included bridge replacement; repairs to roadways, overlooks and parking; and erosion control.





## MISMANAGEMENT BY FEDERAL AGENCIES

Unfortunately, federal conservation programs have been mismanaged under President Biden. Recently the National Parks Service announced the maintenance backlog ballooned from \$13 billion to \$21.8 billion.

The root of the problem lies in growing inefficiencies at federal agencies. A February 2022 congressional oversight hearing revealed numerous problems within the Department of the Interior and the Parks Service, including the growing costs to administer the program, conduct environmental reviews, and complete projects. Agency officials revealed funds that should be spent in the field are being squandered in Washington, D.C. on paperwork and bureaucracy.

## FUNDING AT RISK

Public lands face a double whammy. The future of Great American Outdoors funding is threatened by President Biden's executive order on climate change signed in January 2021, which halted new federal oil and natural leasing.

The president's action lays the foundation to transition away from production on public lands entirely, putting at risk \$2.8 billion annually for conservation and park infrastructure.

Officials at Interior repeatedly fail to acknowledge the fundamental fact that conservation dollars are tied to federal oil and natural gas production. They avoid admitting that the money is available only because of the \$9 billion the oil and natural gas industry generates annually.

If the policies President Biden has embarked on lead to the ultimate goal of "no oil on federal lands," revenues for Great American Outdoors Act projects will disappear. It won't happen suddenly, but in the coming years as the existing inventory of leases run out, production will slow and eventually be eliminated. Royalties will then decline, creating a gap in available funds for conservation.

One wonders if President Biden is aware that his policies could wipe out conservation and funding for national parks?

It seems to be a blind spot. Conspicuously, nobody in the administration has acknowledged the conflict between his policies to limit leasing and public lands conservation.

## WHAT THEY'RE SAYING

*"The Great American Outdoors Act was successful because it took the revenue generated from public lands and waters from oil and gas development and reinvested back into conserving and restoring these same public lands."*

Sen. Steve Daines (R-MT)

*"This bill is truly a historic conservation victory and will ensure that America's treasured public lands are preserved for generations to come."*

Sen. Joe Manchin (D-WV)

*"[The Great American Outdoors Act] is the single largest investment in public lands in U.S. history."*

U.S. Department of the Interior

## About

### Western Energy Alliance

Western Energy Alliance represents 200 member companies engaged in all aspects of environmentally responsible exploration and production of oil and natural gas in the West. The Alliance represents independent oil and gas producers, the majority of which are small businesses with an average of fourteen employees.

Learn more at [www.WesternEnergyAlliance.org](http://www.WesternEnergyAlliance.org)

