

# CAPITOL COMMENTS



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## America's Great Outdoors Opportunity

On April 16, 2010, President Obama announced the "America's Great Outdoor Initiative" (the initiative). The presidential memorandum directed the secretaries of the departments of Interior and Agriculture, the

administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, and the chair of the Council on Environmental Quality to lead efforts to develop a 21st century strategy for America's great outdoors. Prompted by the nation's growing disconnect with nature and the outdoors, natural resource fragmentation and deterioration, and the lack of family and youth participation in outdoor activities, this initiative is intended to engage partners and involve community-driven efforts. The efforts will be focused on conserving land, water, wildlife, historic sites, cultural resources and enhancing the public's understanding and enjoyment of these outdoor resources.

The goals of the initiative are threefold. First, it will strive to reconnect Americans, especially children, to the nation's landscapes, waterways, ranches, farms, forests, and coasts. Second, the initiative will build upon current public and private priorities to conserve outdoor resources and establish corridors and connectivity across outdoor resources. Third, it will use science-based management to restore and protect land and water resources of the nation for the benefit of future generations.

The presidential memorandum calls for listening sessions around the country. Borrowing from the memorandum ([www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/presidential-memorandum-americas-great-outdoors](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/presidential-memorandum-americas-great-outdoors)), these sessions are intended to include outdoor recreationists, farmers, ranchers, sportsmen, tribal leaders, community leaders, youth groups, business people, and conservation groups. Listening sessions will place a special emphasis on youth. The initiative intends to

engage the departments of Defense, Commerce, Housing and Urban Development, Health and Human Services, Labor, Transportation, Education and the Office of Management and Budget. The listening sessions and national assessments of current efforts will form the basis of a series of reports to the Office of the President. The first such report is due on November 15, 2010. This report will include a review of existing non-federal conservation approaches, analysis of federal resources that complement these non-federal efforts, proposed strategies to achieve the goals of the initiative, and an action plan

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to meet the goals laid out in the memorandum. The report will also identify federal budget constraints, opportunities, and recommendations for private and public programs. Follow-up reports are due in September of 2011 and 2012.

This initiative holds promise for all of us concerned about future generations and the future quality of our natural resources. How the effort will dovetail with the extensive work conducted by the American Wildlife Conservation Partners and other groups, which led to the 2008 White House Conference on North American Wildlife Policy, is unknown. What is known is that incoming administrations, regardless of their political party affiliation, tend to put their own signature and priorities on programs regardless of the effort expended prior to their arrival in Washington. During discussions with the

administration's transition team, the documents associated with the 2008 wildlife policy conference were a major topic of interest. I am hopeful that they and the work of the Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council will shape the future direction of the Initiative.

This initiative is clearly more encompassing than wildlife policy. It includes urban, suburban, local community and state government issues. The announcement of this initiative referenced the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009. This act designated new national park units, wilderness units, national wild and scenic river systems, and national trails systems. In addition, the act authorized the National Landscape Conservation System administered by the Bureau of Land Management. The reference to the 2009 act and the information provided at the briefing and in material handed out after the announcement does not include a direct connection to the issues identified and discussed at the 2008 White House wildlife conference.

As a community, we have invested substantial time and effort for the future of fish and wildlife resources and the people who enjoy those resources. Sportsmen must participate in the listening sessions and engage in conversation to assure that wildlife policy and hunting and fishing are part of the solution to

enhance the nation's delivery of conservation and outdoor recreation programs. Hunting, fishing, and active management of wildlife habitat often takes a political back seat to preservation and protection. The ebb and flow of political parties' interest in sportsmen and women's issues never seems to reach heights where substantive gains are achieved for our interests. Clearly the current administration intends to make this initiative its signature conservation program and lasting legacy. Let us demand that this time around, a rising tide floats all boats including those that contain hunters, anglers, and fish and wildlife habitat. Through the years, it has been those very individuals who have faithfully weathered the storms and steered conservation. ■