

Hunt Fish 30x30

THE CONSERVATION FOUNDATION FOR 30X30

The new administration has joined in a call to conserve 30% of lands and waters by 2030; the hunting and fishing community's century of conservation should provide a roadmap

It doesn't take a long road trip to see that the landscapes around us are changing. City suburbs—and increasingly even smaller towns—are growing like an amoeba, consuming farms and ranches along their edges. Even in sparsely populated areas like the Great Plains, the relatively few remaining parcels of native grass are being converted to row crops or development. Natural forces are also affecting our wildlife habitats. Sagebrush rangelands are ravaged by fire only to be replaced by invasions of cheatgrass or medusahead. Forests are dying due to insect infestations or disease, making them more prone to catastrophic wildfire; and with increasing frequency, droughts and extreme weather are affecting habitats across the country. These changes are working against the mainstay of our nation's conservation strategy: securing habitat for native fish and wildlife.

As hunters, we spend significant time in the natural world and often see these changes more closely; we have also been part of a force for conservation since the late 1800s that has driven

conservation of wildlife and wild places. Once again, the leadership of hunters and anglers will be essential to ensure we have natural systems that can sustain a diversity of species, as well as our way of life for generations to come.

There is growing discussion around the globe for an increased commitment to protecting natural areas and biodiversity. A concept branded “30 by 30” aims to conserve at least 30% each of U.S. lands and waters by 2030, with similar targets being considered around the globe. The goal is intended to support a diverse array of fish and wildlife but is also being promoted as a way to address the impacts of a changing climate.

This concept fits within the Boone and Crockett Club's updated climate change policy that was released last fall. Like the 30 by 30 concept, the policy includes a specific focus on promoting climate solutions that conserve natural habitats to help sequester carbon within landscapes such as forests and grasslands as well as on sustainably managed farms and ranches. Not only do these areas help achieve climate goals in a cost-effective manner, they also provide important

habitat values to a wide range of fish and wildlife species.

However, while the broad vision of 30 by 30 is laudable, so far there are no specifics of implementation. The Biden Administration endorsed this goal in Executive Order 14008 (January 27, 2021) and is now devising a way to implement it. The hunting-conservation community must engage in the process to ensure that the sustainable conservation vision and collaboration developed by visionaries like Theodore Roosevelt, Gifford Pinchot, Aldo Leopold, and other conservation giants steers the direction.

So, what is the 30 by 30 initiative, and what are the opportunities to use our nation's conservation successes as the foundation to make this initiative viable and beneficial to the wildlife we value?

A BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION TARGET

The concept of 30 by 30 largely took root over the last five years as a way to slow the effects of a changing climate. Some scientists suggest that rapid land conversion is exacerbating the problem and that maintaining or restoring at least 50% of the Earth's land area as intact natural

ecosystems could prevent predicted temperature increases as well as protect important habitat for native species. In response, the United Nations (UN) Convention on Biological Diversity crafted a framework with an ambitious plan for action to stop the loss of biodiversity by 2030 and then allow for the recovery of natural ecosystems over the following 20 years. The UN vision is that: “By 2050, biodiversity is valued, conserved, restored and wisely used, maintaining ecosystem services, sustaining a healthy planet and delivering benefits essential for all people.” One specific action, among many, is, “By 2030, protect and conserve a well-connected and effective system of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures at least 30 per cent of the planet with the focus on areas particularly important for biodiversity.”

This international vision has been picked up by the current administration. Within the first week of taking office, President Joe Biden signed Executive Order 14008 that focuses on taking a government-wide approach to climate change. Elements

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of that order focused on doubling renewable energy development while pausing new oil and gas leases on public lands and offshore waters. The order also called for a Civilian Climate Corps to “conserve and restore public lands and waters, bolster community resilience, increase reforestation, increase carbon sequestration in the agricultural sector, protect biodiversity, improve access to recreation, and address the changing climate.” In addition to these ideals, the order includes the goal of conserving at least 30% each of our lands and waters by 2030.

Supporting information from the Department of the Interior notes that: “The decline of nature threatens wildlife; across the globe, approximately one million animal and plant species are at risk of extinction in the coming decades, including one-third of U.S. wildlife. The U.S. Geological Survey reports that only 12% of lands are permanently protected.” Because 28% of the country is federal land, we know that not all of those lands count under that definition.

But with only 12% of landscapes currently “protected,” it begs the question

of how to bridge the gap by the end of the decade, and at what cost. Certainly, existing local, state, and federal public lands can help, but there is no way to achieve that goal without considering private lands for both total acreage as well as connectivity of conserved landscapes. At the same time, most of the landscapes that have potential to sustain biodiversity are in rural areas where people live, work, and recreate.

With these estimates in mind, there’s a significant amount of work to be done but few details on how to do that. Notably, a vision of “protection” versus “conservation” is worth watching carefully.

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If implemented well, the 30 by 30 concept has very positive potential. However, this nation’s original conservationists—hunters and anglers—are working to ensure that the vision does not lose focus on the tremendous successes and lessons learned over more than a century. In February, the Club joined with a growing list of organizations on the Hunt Fish 30 x30 coalition led by our longtime partners, the Congressional Sportsmen’s

Foundation. Hunt Fish 30x30 outlines general support for the ambitious 30 by 30 principles while also working to ensure that the hunting/fishing conservation community is part of the solution. In the preamble to the statement, the groups note:

“While levels of anthropogenic activity in various land and water management strategies can vary greatly, only those strategies that target conservation needs with measurable outcomes will be effective. We support 30 by 30 policies that are not merely aspirational, but that recognize existing management levels/actions that currently afford protections and work to identify additional conservation needs and actions through an objective, science-driven, stakeholder-engaged process to determine the appropriate level of management actions necessary to meet biodiversity conservation goals.”

The Hunt Fish 30x30 coalition notes that the International Union for the Conservation of Nature’s World Commission on Protected Areas defines “protected area” as a “clearly defined

geographical space, recognized, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values.” Protected areas can take many forms that meet this definition—for example, a conservation easement on private land. But if the definition truly means only a “hands-off” approach that strictly limits human visitation and use, not all worthy conservation areas will “count.”

Proposals to achieve the 30 by 30 goals must clearly define what “protection” means and use a variety of actions to achieve that goal. Ideally, “protection” will be replaced with “conservation” as the guiding principle. Sustainable management of privately owned farms, ranches, and forest lands through voluntary collaboration must be an integral component of plans. In addition, existing public lands provide many of the recreational opportunities for hunters and protected areas shouldn’t substantially restrict access to public lands or waters. How 30 by 30 is implemented can make or break the success of the



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initiative—and ensuring continued broad public support for landscape and biodiversity conservation is essential.

CONSERVATION VS. PRESERVATION

In a policy statement approved in late 2017, the Boone and Crockett Club outlined its vision for conservation based on its more than 130 years in the conservation arena and the success of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. According to the statement, the Club maintains that conservation, rather than preservation, has the greatest chance of producing the goods and services that people need as well as retaining long-term ecological integrity. Though often presented as competing concepts, the Club has never viewed conservation and preservation as opposing schools of thought. Conservation is the overarching concept, with preservation being one of many management options within a broad conservation approach. The Club believes preservation is useful in limited situations where appropriate conservation practices can still be taken to ensure sensitive ecosystems remain resilient in the face of ecological change (national parks and wilderness areas are examples).

Modern conservation also acknowledges the ecological reality that with or without human influence, lightning-caused fires, insects, disease, drought, floods, high winds, climate change, and other natural forces will continue to change ecosystems. There is no state of “natural balance” for ecosystems to return to, which is why conservation requires a very sophisticated scientific approach implemented by highly trained professionals.

The Club's climate change policy notes that sustainable, active management of forests, both public and private, would be a significant benefit to the climate, and to restoring millions of acres of

wildlife habitat. Sustainable grazing practices, likewise, can conserve critically important biodiversity in grasslands while sequestering carbon. These activities can also maintain the way of life for those that live in the places where most of our natural areas are found.

So long as people exist, there will continue to be a demand for food, protection from the elements, clean water, and energy. These needs must be addressed, at least in part, by using the natural resources that exist in North America. The Boone and Crockett Club maintains that the appropriate response to the challenges and conditions we face today is not a retreat to inaction or relying primarily on preservation, but instituting new, active approaches to ecosystem management that produce sustainable results and can be broadly supported by the public.

THE ROAD AHEAD

The federal government and organizations are developing a plan to identify specifically how to accomplish the 30 by 30 goal. President Biden's executive order called for a task force led by his administration, “working with state, local, tribal, and territorial governments, agricultural and forest landowners,

fishermen, and other key stakeholders,” to recommend steps to accomplishing the goal. Having this level of engagement is laudable—and necessary to ensure that the approach is achievable. Ensuring that the hunting and fishing community that played a key role in the foundation of this nation's conservation movement is at the table is essential.

We are seeing rapid changes to the landscapes around us and 30 by 30 could help stem that tide. Implemented effectively, the improvements to habitat and connectivity will help to sustain a diverse array of wildlife species, as well as our hunting opportunities. However, an aspirational goal focused on land preservation that reduces recreational access or threatens collaborative conservation and management efforts on public and private lands is doomed to fail.

The Boone and Crockett Club and its partners in the Hunt Fish 30x30 coalition are meeting with Biden administration officials to ensure that the details of this plan lead to attainable, landscape conservation that benefits species and the people that live and work in the areas where the vast amount of biodiversity in this country still remains. ■



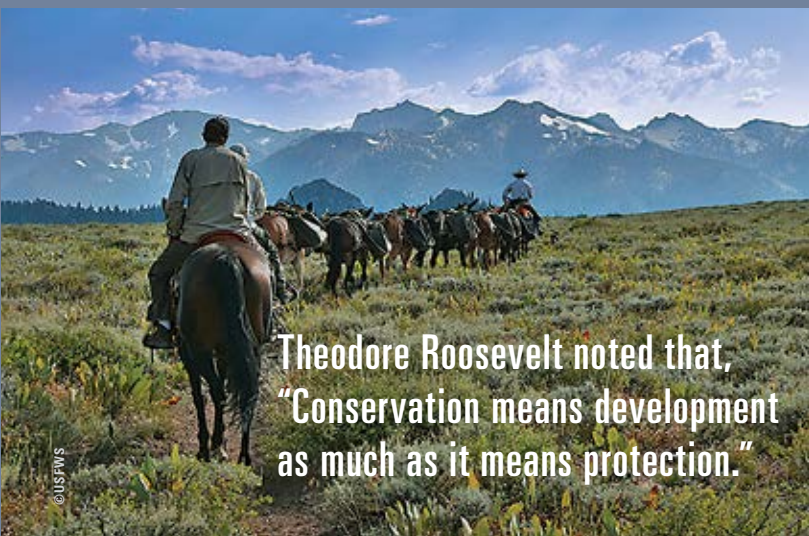
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COLLABORATIVE CONSERVATION AS PART OF 30 BY 30



Theodore Roosevelt noted that, “Conservation means development as much as it means protection,” and embracing a balance of both approaches through collaboration and partner engagement will be critical to meeting 30 by 30 goals. Collaborative conservation efforts are already being embraced by local communities while making a difference for biodiversity and land conservation—here are a few examples of policies the Boone and Crockett Club has been engaged on that should be considered as 30 by 30 plans are developed:

- The Natural Resources Conservation Service has helped landowners through the Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) program that targets Farm Bill funding toward species conservation on working lands. These collaborative efforts have supported conservation across the country, including in the Southeast—one of the most biologically diverse regions in the world—where the WLFW’s Gopher Tortoise Initiative has conserved more than 278,000 acres of critical longleaf pine habitat. Pairing NRCS’s investments of more than \$46 Million across that time with contributions by other stakeholders, the success of this program has served to not only benefit gopher tortoises, red-cockaded woodpeckers, and indigo snakes—but also bobwhite quail and other species that rely on the longleaf pine ecosystem.
- Over the last three years, the U.S. Department of the Interior has initiated partnerships for targeted conservation actions to improve big game migration corridors and winter range in the western U.S. Through a federal grant program, approximately \$10.5 million was used to kickstart 47 different habitat restoration projects on public and private lands. Perhaps more notable is that \$54.4 million in matching funds were brought to the table for projects ranging from conservation easements to sagebrush and forest restoration projects to transportation infrastructure projects that reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions. An additional \$4.4 million was directed specifically to 59 private land conservation projects through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. Through effective administration, this program is showing how critical collaboration is for conservation that works across jurisdictions and land ownership boundaries.
- Since 1989, the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) has directed over \$1.8 billion in federal investments that have been matched by non-federal investments of \$3.75 billion resulting in the conservation of more than 30 million acres of wetland habitat. Notably, while scientists have reported a loss of 3 billion individual birds in North America, wetland bird species including waterfowl have increased by an estimated 51% thanks to NAWCA and Farm Bill wetland conservation programs.
- State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAPs) that identify “species of greatest conservation need” serve as the roadmap for habitat and species conservation efforts. Through the State Wildlife Grant program, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service directs about \$60 million in federal funding each year that supports state fish and wildlife agency conservation efforts guided by these plans, however this is only the start of what is necessary to address the 12,000 species in greatest need. The Recovering America’s Wildlife Act would dedicate \$1.4 billion annually for state and tribal conservation efforts and would significantly move the needle on the nation’s biodiversity conservation goals as part of any 30 by 30 policy.
- Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) and shared stewardship efforts promoted by the Club allow federal, state, and local partners to share in cooperative forest management and restoration projects that can help protect our communities, municipal water supplies, and fish and wildlife habitat. Active forest management such as harvesting trees, thinning dead and dying trees, creating fuel breaks, prescribed and managed burns, and creating defensible spaces are all effective tools to reduce wildfire threats while also improving habitat and helping to sequester carbon. In addition, the lumber produced by these forest management efforts will lock up carbon in long-lasting wood products while creating better growing conditions for the next stand of trees, which will sequester even more carbon. Over 36 states have GNA agreements with the U.S. Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management completing more than 250 projects and restoring tens of thousands of acres of forest habitat, streams, and other wildlife habitat.



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