RECOMMENDATION
NINE
CLIMATE CHANGE

Focus Climate Policy on Habitat Conservation and Restoration

America's sportsmen and women are experiencing firsthand the consequences of increasing temperatures, prolonged droughts, record forest fires, more powerful hurricanes, inland flooding, spread of invasive species and wildlife diseases, and algal outbreaks. These cascading problems degrade habitat, threaten fish and wildlife, and reduce hunting and fishing opportunities. As a result, communities and the recreation economy are put at risk.

Habitat conservation and restoration are a key part of the solution. Habitat sequesters greenhouse gases, which is a major factor in mitigating emissions. Restoring natural resources and improving practices on working lands can achieve more than 30 percent of the emission offsets necessary to achieve net-zero emissions nationally before 2050. Land conservation also boosts the resilience of habitat to changing conditions, which accelerates recovery of imperiled wildlife, expands hunting and fishing opportunities, and revitalizes local economies.

Sequestering Carbon in Forests, Wetlands, Grasslands, and Other Habitats

- Accelerate the pace of forest conservation in the U.S. Forest Service budget and with tax incentives for reforestation of private lands and marketing of wood products. **Congress; Agriculture/FS**
- Enact a comprehensive National Grasslands Initiative modeled on the successful *North American Wetlands Conservation Act* to achieve a goal of "net gain" of grasslands and prairie habitats. **Congress; Agriculture/FS, FSA, NRCS; Interior/BLM, FWS**
- Establish federal tax incentives that reward additional tons of long-term carbon sequestration in agriculture, rangeland, and forest management in a manner similar to existing incentives for carbon capture, utilization, and storage technologies. **Congress; Agriculture/all bureaus; Interior/all bureaus; Energy; EPA; Treasury/IRS**
- Increase funding of Farm Bill conservation programs and better target them to address natural sequestration opportunities, soil health, and methane emissions reductions. **Congress; Agriculture/all bureaus; Interior/all bureaus; Energy; EPA; Treasury/IRS**
- Require federal agency investment in buildings to measure embodied carbon baselines in buildings and set achievable reductions over 5 and 10 years. **EPA; GSA; HUD; Agriculture/FS**

Habitat sequestration should receive the same level of policy support as technologies that reduce emissions. Many existing programs accomplish this objective, but the one ecosystem in the U.S. with significant potential to sequester carbon that does not yet have a concerted conservation policy is grasslands. A National Grasslands Initiative to protect remaining native grasslands and shrublands from conversion, and to restore native grasses across their historic range, would expand the portfolio of habitat solutions to sequester carbon.

In addition, ecologically-appropriate forest restoration and reforestation on federal, state, and private lands will optimize sequestration by reducing risks of catastrophic fires. Wood products from sustainable forests move sequestered carbon into buildings and products. Supporting these markets can increase the use of wood as a preferred building material. The added benefits include restored watersheds, fisheries, habitat values, and reduced costs for disaster response and indemnity payments.

Minimizing Habitat Impacts from the Transition to Clean Energy

- Identify public areas for siting clean energy projects away from priority habitats, migration corridors, or flyways. **Energy; Interior/BLM, BOEM; Agriculture/FS; Commerce/NOAA**
- Encourage siting of clean energy projects on former industrial sites, rooftops, parking lots, landfills, abandoned mines, and brownfields. **Congress; EPA; HUD; Energy; Interior/all bureaus; Agriculture/FS**
- Prevent the continued conversion of native habitats for cultivation of biofuel feedstocks and promote the research and adoption of more sustainable, next-generation feedstocks. **Congress; Agriculture/all bureaus; Interior/all bureaus**

In restoring ecosystems to reduce emissions and bolster resilience, we must also ensure these ecosystems are not unwittingly degraded as we develop cleaner sources of energy.

Just as there are habitat impacts from conventional energy development, there are wildlife risks that should be minimized when developing wind, solar, geothermal, advanced nuclear, and carbon capture, utilization, and storage. It is essential to consider and curtail impacts to wildlife as the nation deploys additional sources of clean energy.

Investing Carbon Revenues in Natural Solutions

- Dedicate at least 25 percent of all proceeds derived from or dedicated to climate policies toward restoring forests, wetlands, grasslands; improving the sequestration capacity and resilience of working lands; and reclaiming abandoned mines, degraded waterways, Superfund sites, and brownfields. **Congress**
- Prioritize early investments in remediating degraded natural resources and expanding the outdoor economy in regions and frontline communities, such as in Appalachia, that are disproportionately impacted by the transition to a low-carbon future. **Congress; Agriculture/FS; Interior/all bureaus; EPA; Energy**

Should Congress enact a carbon pricing policy or fund climate programs, a significant portion of the money should be dedicated to investments in natural solutions, which can provide 30 percent of the necessary emission reductions and increase resilience. We acknowledge there are several options for pricing carbon and support a productive debate on this idea.

Bolster Resilience through Natural Defenses

- Incorporate natural defenses and climate-smart conservation practices into all land management practices, facility management plans, and infrastructure investments, such as a highway bill. **Congress; Transportation/FHA; GSA; Interior/all bureaus; Agriculture/all bureaus; Defense/all bureaus**
- Encourage restoration of natural defenses by increasing support for the *North American Wetlands Conservation Act*, the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, Community Development Block Grants, and the hazard mitigation and flood abatement programs of the Army Corps, Department of Transportation, and Federal Emergency Management Agency. **Congress; EPA; Interior/FWS; HUD; Homeland/FEMA; Defense/all bureaus; Transportation/FHA**

Natural defenses like wetlands, forests, and grasslands have the capacity to help communities withstand extreme weather events such as flooding and hurricanes. In recent years, regions with healthier natural resources have suffered less damage, because natural systems can blunt and absorb the brunt of the impacts. These solutions are often more effective than engineered solutions and provide additional benefits through enhanced habitat, water quality, and carbon sequestration.

iStock.com/EJ-J