

# CONSERVING THE GREAT AMERICAN OUTDOORS



## SUMMARY

The Great American Outdoors Act is the largest federal conservation program created in the past 50 years. It strikes an appropriate balance between responsible energy development on working landscapes and conservation of our nation's treasured public spaces.

The law directs \$2.8 billion in revenues annually from energy development on non-park, non-wilderness public lands and waters into national parks, wildlife refuges, and other public lands to fund conservation and repairs for visitor centers, trails, campgrounds, and other facilities.

Funding comes almost exclusively from revenues generated by federal oil and natural gas production.



WESTERN ENERGY ALLIANCE

## RESTORING PUBLIC LANDS

Our nation's beloved national parks systems includes 429 sites that span 84-million acres across the United States and its territories. The popularity of national parks continues to skyrocket, especially in recent years.

Consequently, overcrowding combined with historic underfunding by Congress have plagued our national parks, resulting in aging infrastructure and billions in deferred maintenance. In 2020, the National Park Service (NPS) faced a \$13 billion backlog for outstanding maintenance projects. In 2023, that figure ballooned to \$23.3 billion. Likewise, the backlog on public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management and other federal agencies totals another \$14.5 billion.

Luckily, the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA), signed into law in August 2020, builds 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.

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

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

The fund dedicates 50% of the energy development revenues from oil, gas, coal, alternative or renewable energy on federal lands and waters, up to \$1.9 billion annually, for national park and public lands restoration. The vast majority of revenues come from federal oil and natural gas development.

Conservation revenues are distributed as follows:

- 70% to the National Park Service
- 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 the Bureau of Indian Education schools.

### Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)

Signed into law in 1964, the LWCF provides funding for national parks, wetlands, forests, and wildlife refuges and matching grants for state and local parks. After years of underfunding, under GAOA the popular conservation program is fully funded at \$900 million annually.

## PUBLIC LANDS UNDER PRESSURE

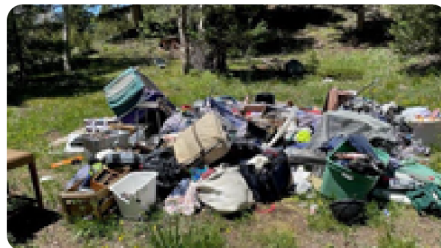
Paradoxically, people are visiting public lands in record numbers as they seek nature and recreational opportunities, but their growing numbers are damaging valued landscapes.

### Vandalism and Graffiti



Rather than 'leave no trace,' an increasing number of visitors are vandalizing national parks, leaving stickers, carvings, and graffiti.

### Trashed Trails and Campgrounds



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

### Outdoor Industry's Harmful Ads



Aggressive marketing motivates people to seek the solitude on public lands that's portrayed. Yet outdoor brands do not contribute to fixing the damage from overcrowding they help create.





## CONSERVATION COURTESY OF THE OILFIELD

Western Energy Alliance is proud that the conservation made possible by the Great American Outdoors Act is funded predominantly by federal oil and natural gas production.

Of the 700 million acres of oil and natural gas managed by the Bureau of Land Management, only about 0.06% has oil and natural gas activity on the surface. Yet the return is enormous for meeting the growing needs of national parks and other public lands.

According to data from the Office of Natural Resources Revenue, \$16.5 billion in energy revenue was available in 2023 for conservation:

- **Oil and natural gas \$15.4 billion, 93.3%**

- Wind \$595.4 million, 3.6%.
- Coal \$491 million, 3%
- Geothermal \$18 million, 0.4%

The \$15.4 billion from oil and natural gas producers alone would cover the full \$2.8 billion that GAOA enables. Yet the Biden Administration is pursuing policies that would ultimately stop federal oil and natural gas, meaning conservation funding would fall short.

If renewable energy sources were the only ones available, as President Biden wants, only about \$307 million would have been available for conservation in 2023 and our national parks would have suffered.

## FUNDED PROJECTS

Thanks to revenues from oil and natural gas production, the following are examples of national parks projects funded in 2024, among many others.

### GRAND CANYON \$180 MILLION

One of the Seven Natural Wonders, the Grand Canyon became a national park in 1919. GAOA funding will replace utility systems on the North Rim that provide electricity, water, and communications for 300,000 visitors each year.

### DEATH VALLEY \$62 MILLION

Death Valley is the hottest, driest, and lowest national park. GAOA funding will rehabilitate water systems that enable 1.7-million visitors annually to survive the scorching desert heat.

### YOSEMITE \$180 MILLION

One of the most photographed national parks, Yosemite is located in east-central California. GAOA funding will rehabilitate a 45-year-old water facility that treats up to one-million gallons per day for park visitors and adjacent communities.

### BRYCE CANYON \$15 MILLION

Bryce Canyon National Park is home to the world's largest collection of spire formations, known as hoodoos. GAOA funding will replace the water distribution system to provide water for visitors and improved fire protection.



## MISMANAGEMENT BY FEDERAL AGENCIES

Unfortunately, the federal government has mismanaged public lands for decades. For example, the National Park Service recently announced the maintenance backlog ballooned from \$13 billion to \$23.3 billion.

The root of the problem lies in inefficiencies at federal agencies. A January 2024 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report documented numerous problems within the Department of the Interior, including the growing costs to administer programs, conduct environmental reviews, and complete projects. Years of poor management, tracking, and accounting by public land managers have resulted in ballooning costs.

## FUNDING AT RISK

Public lands face a double whammy. The future of Great American Outdoors Act funding is threatened by over 200 actions from the Biden Administration to stop American energy production, including on federal lands.

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

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

If Biden Administration policies lead to the ultimate goal of "no oil on federal lands," revenues for projects would dry up. It wouldn't happen suddenly, but in the coming years as the president's policies squeeze out oil and natural gas production, revenues would decline and funds for conservation would slow to a trickle.

**"[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

Working with a vibrant membership base of independent oil and natural gas companies for over 50 years, Western Energy Alliance stands as a credible leader, advocate, and champion of industry in the West. Our expert staff, active committees, and committed board members form a collaborative and welcoming community of professionals dedicated to abundant, affordable energy and a high quality of life for all.

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