

Before the Special Committee on the 30 x 30 Federal Initiative  
Presented by Zack Pistora, Kansas Sierra Club  
Oral Testimony  
December 9th, 2021



Chairman Rahjes and Honorable Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the federal policy initiative “30 by 30”, otherwise known as *Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful*. As the directive’s name alludes to, “30 by 30” represents the President’s goal of conserving at least 30 percent of our American lands and waters by 2030. This ten-year directive spawned from Section 216 of President Biden’s Executive Order 14008, *Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad*, that tasked federal agencies – the U.S. Departments of Interior, Agriculture, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Commerce, and Council on Environmental Quality – to engage a wide range of stakeholders on ‘how to develop an ambitious and inclusive national conservation effort that honors America’s conservation traditions.’

As one of the largest volunteer-based, nonpartisan, nonprofit grassroots environmental organizations in the country and here in Kansas, the Sierra Club is glad to see this demonstration of leadership toward conservation and land stewardship, especially in its approach of interacting with state, local, and nongovernmental stakeholders and encouraging broad participation in achieving the goal.

**To start, let us all agree how essential conservation is. Not only do all Kansas families and communities depend upon healthy natural ecosystems for their fundamental living needs and prosperity, but all life does. Therefore, environmental stewardship is paramount and should be central within our ethics as individuals and the responsibility of our government. With this notion as a grounding point for us, we can work toward this goal by utilizing means and strategies that make sense for Kansas.**

We all need clean air to breathe, clean water to drink, and uncontaminated soil to grow our food and fiber. Our health and well-being are inextricably tied to the health of our ecosystems. We gain inspiration and comfort from our natural sanctuaries. Our economy – whether it’s the natural resources rely upon for agriculture, energy, recreation, and more – is dependent upon nature. *Therefore, the protection of nature is not a question of why, but how.* Fortunately, the 30 by 30 initiative asks ‘how’ to a diverse, variety of stakeholders who have many answers, many of which can be synchronized and custom-tailored based upon community.

**The 30 by 30 initiative spells out an overarching goal and strategies based upon eight (seemingly noncontroversial) principles. The plan for implementing and achieving the national goal is up to state and local entities.**

While there are many details and decisions are needed from public officials and stakeholders to help define conservation and standards for land and water stewardship, *Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful* offers eight principles for achieving broad participation in achieving the goal of 30 percent protection of lands and waters. These principles, taken from the initiative’s report, are outlined on the next page.

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A common theme throughout the document is that it leans on state and local actors to design the conservation efforts. The directive empowers those state and local actors to utilize public and/or private conservation strategies and supports the voluntary stewardship methods that honor private property rights. Furthermore, the federal report on 30 by 30 specifically encourages public officials to recognize and build upon the “oversized contributions that farmers, ranchers, forest owners, fishers, hunters, rural communities, and Tribal Nations already make in safeguarding wildlife and open spaces for the benefit of the rest of the country.”

**The 30 by 30 plan should not be viewed as a covert government strategy to grow its authority over landowners and/or be considered a land grab. In fact, the report states its wishes to do the opposite:**

“While the U.S. has a remarkable record of success in safeguarding iconic lands, species-rich waters, and at-risk wildlife, the Federal Government has also caused pain along the way: dispossessing Tribal Nations and Indigenous people of their lands and infringing upon their subsistence rights; evicting private landowners to create national parks; imposing segregationist policies on public lands and beaches; ignoring the contributions of communities of color and underrepresented communities in the preservation of national resources; and more. A renewed national commitment to land and water conservation can and must strive to honor the needs and priorities of all communities in America, help address the climate crisis, and help to strengthen the foundation of the nation’s economy.”

**30 by 30 presents an opportunity for Kansas to amplify its leadership in conservation and reinvigorate its commitment to preserve its natural heritage. To that end, the Kansas Sierra Club empowers you to embrace this federal directive as a means for further social and economic progress for Kansas. In this ‘have it your way’ conservation program, our hope is that Kansas will have more conservation, and thus more prosperity, not less.**

Sincerely,

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*The Sierra Club is the largest grassroots environmental organization dedicated to enjoying, exploring, and protecting our great outdoors. The Kansas Chapter represents our state’s strongest grassroots voice on environmental matters for over forty years.*