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Biden admin, greens launch defense of conservation plans

By Jennifer Yachnin, E&E News reporter

GREENWIRE | The White House and environmental allies this week sought to push back against conservative activists and lawmakers who have characterized President Biden's goal to protect more natural spaces as the beginning of a "land grab" by the federal government.

Council on Environmental Quality chief of staff Matt Lee-Ashley on Tuesday said he believes that public perception of the Biden administration's "America the Beautiful" plan is much more positive: "This is like mom and apple pie kind of stuff."

"This is an area where people from both parties can get together and get things done," Lee-Ashley said during a panel sponsored by the Outdoor Industry Association.

That message was broadcast loudly this week by proponents of the Biden administration's rebranded "30x30" effort — which calls for conserving 30% of the nation's lands and waters by 2030 to protect biodiversity and address climate change — in an apparent retort to brewing opposition to the effort.

Both Council on Environmental Quality Chair Brenda Mallory and Lee-Ashley, along with environmental groups, highlighted local and state support for safeguarding the nation's lands and waters in a series of events this week.

"My ask of you is to stay engaged, continue to push solutions in your community, continue to offer feedback and guidance as we implement the president's vision," Mallory said at an event yesterday sponsored by the League of Conservation Voters. "When people see what these national efforts look like in local communities and the differences they make in people's lives, that will make the changes durable."

During her remarks to the group, Mallory also stressed the Biden administration's focus on locally led conservation in achieving its conservation goals.

"One of the reasons that we did not, in finalizing the plan, identify specific areas or specific things that we thought were necessary as the projects in any one place was a recognition that across the country there are different factors, different circumstances that drive what is a value to a community, and will be impactful to that community and therefore be more enduring in that community," Mallory said.

Her appearance coincided with the release of an LCV [report](#) detailing state and local measures in support of the 30x30 goals.

That survey tallied states with executive or legislative action backing the conservation effort, and touted the 10 local governments in Colorado, New Mexico and Nevada that have passed resolutions endorsing the initiative.

"States and communities all across the country are stepping up to protect the places that they know best, invest in the next generation of conservation and then take some really innovative approaches that center equity," LCV Conservation Program Director Alex Taurel said yesterday.

A separate [report](#) released Wednesday by the Mountain Pact, an umbrella group representing elected officials in 80 communities across the West, likewise seeks to highlight support for the conservation goals by touting local resolutions.

Although unmentioned in either the Mountain Pact or LCV reports, the documents contrast efforts led by the American Stewards of Liberty, a group that has sought to organize local opposition to Biden's conservation efforts ([Greenwire](#), July 12).

According to the Texas-based group, more than 70 local governments across 12 states have passed a version of its resolution opposing the 30x30 effort. Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts (R) also denounced the conservation goal in an executive order.

Congressional Republicans have likewise indicated their resistance to new protections on public or private lands ([E&E Daily](#), March 16).

But Lee-Ashley asserted Tuesday that the Biden administration has had "good conversation with Republican elected officials at the federal and state level," although he did not identify individuals.

"Frankly, I think you'd be hard-pressed to find an elected official, a governor or a member of Congress who doesn't have some passion for the outdoors and wants to do right by the resources in their state or district," Lee-Ashley said, and later added: "We're going to have success."