

## America's Great Outdoors Initiative Factsheet

- from Bernie McHugh, Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition - June 27, 2010

### Background

On Friday, April 16, President Obama officially launched the America's Great Outdoors Initiative, a national dialogue about conservation in America. It is tasked with looking at voluntary conservation in cooperation with non-federal partners, including non-profit land trusts and state governments.

The President singled out land trusts in protecting and preserving the nation's parks, working lands and natural resources. He said *"Rising to meet these challenges is a task and an obligation, but it's one that government cannot and should not meet alone. There are roughly 1,600 privately run land trusts in this country that have protected over 10 million acres through voluntary efforts."*

### Listening Sessions

The AGO calls for listening sessions to be held across the country. Sessions have been held in, or are planned for, Maryland, South Carolina, Washington, California, North Carolina, Minnesota, New York, Utah, and Montana. **There are no listening sessions planned for New England!** This in spite of the fact that N.E. has over 400 of the country's 1,600 land trusts, and that Massachusetts is where the land trust movement started, where the first public lands were protected, and has one of the oldest and best state park systems in the nation. **Montana gets three listening sessions and N.E. gets zero!**

This is especially galling in view of the fact that the New England Governors Conference established a blue-ribbon Commission on Land Conservation that issued a ground-breaking report calling for regional cooperation on protection of land for parks, forests, farms, fish & wildlife, and coastal resources. Gov. Baldacci of Maine convened the Commission when he was Chair of the Conference. Gov. Patrick of Mass. is the current Chair.

**Ask for a Massachusetts listening session!** Send an email to [ago@ios.doi.gov](mailto:ago@ios.doi.gov) (with a copy to Mass. Secretary of Energy & Environment Ian Bowles at [ian.bowles@state.ma.us](mailto:ian.bowles@state.ma.us)). Point out how the people of Massachusetts have supported land conservation for over one hundred years and how your and trust or parks friends group has worked to better our quality of life by protecting forests, farms, wildlife, parks and open space. You might also mention that Massachusetts does this with very limited Federal help - New England gets MUCH less for land, water and wildlife conservation than Western states.

### Send Your Ideas

Post your idea about ways Americans can reconnect with our great outdoors and how we can better conserve our public and private lands. Comments on these topics will be incorporated into the Report.

- *Challenges - What obstacles exist to achieve your goals for conservation, recreation, or reconnecting people to the outdoors?*
- *What Works - Please share your thoughts and ideas on effective strategies for conservation, recreation and reconnecting people to the outdoors.*
- *Federal Government Role - How can the federal government be a more effective partner in helping to achieve conservation, recreation or reconnecting people to the outdoors?*
- *Tools - What additional tools and resources would help your efforts be even more successful?*

To submit your ideas and comments, go to: <http://ideas.usda.gov/ago/ideas.nsf/>

### Resources & More Information

See below for a summary of the President's memorandum. The President's remarks can be found at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-americas-great-outdoors-conference>

More information is available from the Land Trust Alliance at <http://www.landtrustalliance.org/policy/conservation-funding/greatoutdoors>

Download the recommendations of the New England Governors Blue Ribbon Commission on Land Conservation: <http://massland.org/files/NEGCALastingLegacy2009.pdf>

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Summary of Presidential Memorandum

April 16, 2010 - Presidential Memorandum -- America's Great Outdoors

To Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture, Administrator of EPA and Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality

SUBJECT: A 21st Century Strategy for America's Great Outdoors

Across America, communities are uniting to protect the places they love, and developing new approaches to saving and enjoying the outdoors. They are bringing together farmers and ranchers, land trusts, recreation and conservation groups, sportsmen, community park groups, governments and industry, and people from all over the country to develop new partnerships and innovative programs to protect and restore our outdoors legacy. However, these efforts are often scattered and sometimes insufficient.

The Federal Government, the Nation's largest land manager, has a responsibility to engage with these partners to help develop a conservation agenda worthy of the 21st Century. We must look to the private sector and nonprofit organizations, as well as towns, cities, and States, and the people who live and work in them, to identify the places that mean the most to Americans, and leverage the support of the Federal Government to help these community-driven efforts to succeed. Through these partnerships, we will work to connect these outdoor spaces to each other, and to reconnect Americans to them.

For these reasons, it is hereby ordered as follows:

Section 1. Establishment.

(a) There is established the America's Great Outdoors Initiative (Initiative), to be led by the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture, the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and implemented in coordination with the agencies listed in section 2(b) of this memorandum. The Initiative may include the heads of other executive branch departments, agencies, and offices (agencies) as the President may, from time to time, designate.

(b) The goals of the Initiative shall be to:

(i) Reconnect Americans, especially children, to America's rivers and waterways, landscapes of national significance, ranches, farms and forests, great parks, and coasts and beaches by exploring a variety of efforts, including:

(A) promoting community-based recreation and conservation, including local parks, greenways, beaches, and waterways;

(B) advancing job and volunteer opportunities related to conservation and outdoor recreation; and

(C) supporting existing programs and projects that educate and engage Americans in our history, culture, and natural bounty.

(ii) Build upon State, local, private, and tribal priorities for the conservation of land, water, wildlife, historic, and cultural resources, creating corridors and connectivity across these outdoor spaces, and for enhancing neighborhood parks; and determine how the Federal Government can best advance those priorities through public private partnerships and locally supported conservation strategies.

(iii) Use science-based management practices to restore and protect our lands and waters for future generations.

Sec. 2. Functions. The functions of the Initiative shall include:

(a) Outreach. The Initiative shall conduct listening and learning sessions around the country where land and waters are being conserved and community parks are being established in innovative ways. These sessions should engage the full range of interested groups, including tribal leaders, farmers and ranchers, sportsmen, community park groups, foresters, youth groups, businesspeople, educators, State and local governments, and recreation and conservation groups. Special attention should be given to bringing young Americans into the conversation. These listening sessions will inform the reports required in subsection (c) of this section.

(b) Interagency Coordination. The following agencies shall work with the Initiative to identify existing resources and align policies and programs to achieve its goals: Departments of Defense, Commerce, Housing and Urban Development, Health and Human Services, Labor, Transportation, Education and Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

(c) Reports. The Initiative shall submit to the President, through the Chair of the CEQ by November 15, 2010, a "Report on America's Great Outdoors that includes the following:

(A) a review of successful and promising nonfederal conservation approaches;

(B) an analysis of existing Federal resources and programs that could be used to complement those approaches;

(C) proposed strategies and activities to achieve the goals of the Initiative; and

(D) an action plan to meet the goals of the Initiative.

The report should reflect the constraints in resources available in, and be consistent with, the Federal budget. It should recommend efficient and effective use of existing resources, as well as opportunities to leverage nonfederal public and private resources and nontraditional conservation programs.