

November 8, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Deb Haaland, Secretary of the Interior
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Tom Vilsack, Secretary of Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear President Biden, Secretary Vilsack, and Secretary Haaland:

On January 27, 2021 President Biden signed Executive Order 14008, an order entitled “*Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad*”. With that order, President Biden committed his administration to a conservation goal of protecting 30 percent of land and 30 percent of ocean waters by 2030. To meet that goal, the administration launched the “America the Beautiful” campaign, where according to the Department of Interior website, they state the purpose as a:

“decade-long challenge to pursue a locally led and voluntary, nationwide effort to conserve, connect, and restore the lands, waters, and wildlife upon which we all depend.”

This Presidential Action refers to the need and importance of protecting biodiversity. Several times within the Executive Order (EO), the administration asserts that protected lands increase resilience to the impacts of climate change and better conserve the biodiversity of our lands.

The language in section 201 appears to have been used as a template for a recurring theme throughout the EO in four other sections. This language apparently signifies the overall importance this administration places on obtaining a better world via fighting climate change.

PART II—TAKING A GOVERNMENT-WIDE APPROACH TO THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Sec. 201.

It is the policy of my Administration to organize and deploy the full capacity of its agencies to combat the climate crisis to implement a Governmentwide approach that reduces climate pollution in every sector of the economy; increases resilience to the impacts of climate change; protects public health; conserves our lands, waters, and biodiversity; delivers environmental justice; and spurs well-paying union jobs and economic growth, especially through innovation, commercialization, and deployment of clean energy technologies

and infrastructure.

On behalf of grassroots conservation groups in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE), we are preparing this letter to reflect our shared concern that the policies of the previous Administration be changed. Wildlife and wilderness in the GYE are instrumental and critical to achieving the goals of 30 x 30. We were pleased at the news of this Administration's willingness to acknowledge climate change and to apply science to resolve the issues. Application of best science requires we take a decisive role in protecting our land and water resources. We had high hopes there would be a change in our national policies when it came to implementing the best available science in our natural and physical world.

We expect and need strong leadership at the national level. We appreciate the recent decisions over the expansion of Bears Ears, Grand Staircase Escalante and Seamounts National Monument as well as furthering the protections of Tongass National Forest. But we need to encourage your administration to do more. The GYE is facing an onslaught of threats from multiple special interests within the region. Recent decisions by the political leadership of Montana and Idaho, Governors Gianforte and Little respectively, have allowed the politicization of wildlife and have already worsened the mismanagement of our natural heritage by the states.

- Wolves are facing extermination due to state management.
- Bison (our National Mammal) need to be on public lands.
- Grizzlies require connected habitat.
- Timber projects and road construction fragment wildlife habitat. They are given urgency because of wildfire threats, but underlying drought and increasing temperature are driving wildfire not fuel loads. Logging roads fragment habitat for all species.

In Montana and Idaho, new extreme state laws have put wolves squarely in the crosshairs for near extermination across the region, badly undermining the goal of protecting biodiversity. The Department of Interior's failure to instate emergency protection for wolves under the ESA could lead to a major setback in wolf recovery across the region, with impacts rippling out to other species such as elk and deer (threatened by Chronic Wasting Disease, which wolves help control) and major segments of the tourism and hunting economy. We need to reinstate wolf protections under the Endangered Species Act.

Slaughtering wolves and failing to reestablish public bison herds on public land does nothing to foster environmental justice. Over 150 tribes wrote to Secretary Haaland September 14 asking for emergency relisting the gray wolf under the ESA due to spiritual connections with these animals. Wyoming meanwhile seeks to delist grizzly bears once again, seeking to open hunting of these magnificent creatures which hold spiritual significance for Native Americans. Bison also belong on public lands and yet are severely restricted in their range in Montana due to meddling and intolerance by the Montana Department of Livestock.

The actions of US Senators and Representatives run counter to Executive Order 14008. Montana Senators Daines and Tester and Representative Rosendale seek the dissolution of federal Wilderness Study Areas on national forest and BLM lands across Montana, instead of seeking to further protect them. This runs completely counter to the goals of 30 x 30.

The Custer Gallatin National Forest is undercutting protection of the Hyalite Porcupine Buffalo Horn WSA in its forthcoming final forest plan. The Custer Gallatin is also preparing major timber projects like the South Plateau which include road building and clearcutting in critical grizzly bear habitat next to Yellowstone National Park. They are currently clearcutting in the Bridger Range and preparing to take down large old trees in the Gallatin Range, exacerbating climate change by releasing much of the carbon stored in old Douglas fir and lodgepole pine, destroying what are essentially carbon removal machines (trees).

We see these policies being contrary to the goals, purpose and intent of Executive Order 14008. Not only do they create confusion and conflict with the original purpose, intent and mission of the Executive Order, but they provide confusion and conflict with several Federal agencies and programs, all of which have been long designated to protect and conserve our land, water and biodiversity. Just as these policies are considered contrary to the goals set aside in the America the Beautiful campaign, we also understand that there are similar actions proposed in the Infrastructure Bills in Washington D.C. Monies set aside for logging and forest thinning, especially those planned in old growth communities, undermine one of the fundamental protective measures of ecological biodiversity.

Federal, state, tribal and private interests need to work together in an effort to protect the planet from and mitigate the negative effects of climate change. The same could be said for the protection of this planet's biological diversity. Yet, the politicization of local and regional politics is threatening to hamper the national goals of this administration. We strongly feel that the protection of the GYE is fundamental in the administration's goals. The U.S. Forest Service stated in their draft 2020 Forest Service Plan the following:

The Custer Gallatin National Forest encompasses over 3 million acres in southern Montana and the northwest corner of South Dakota. Stretching over 400 miles from its westernmost to its easternmost boundaries, the Custer Gallatin is among the most ecologically, socially, economically, and culturally diverse national forests in the Forest Service's Northern Region.

The GYE is believed to be the only intact temperate zone ecosystem in the lower United States. This hallowed resource should be and could be key in the importance of fighting climate change, but this fragile ecosystem is becoming increasingly isolated by growing human populations and development. The influx of human activity further isolates the habitats of plants and animals to the north and northwest. The isolation is particularly threatening to populations of large mammals, as it will result in a gradual deterioration of population genetics and population resilience in the GYE. The Gallatin Range must remain in wilderness condition to provide a northward connection with other mountain ecosystems in the northern Rocky Mountains.

Not only would maintaining the GYE in the most complete wilderness condition as much as possible be positive for the region's biodiversity, it would also mitigate the negative impacts of climate change by preserving mature and old-growth forests, allowing the Northern Rockies to be part of the natural carbon sinks around the globe. We urge the Biden Administration to use the GYE as a tool for mitigating climate change and preserving the region's biodiversity by taking actions to preserve wilderness, protect wildlife connectivity including that for grizzlies, provide ESA protections for wolves, allow bison on public lands and protect mature and old growth forests.

There is much work to do and the undersigned nonprofits are officially requesting the Biden Administration to help us help you in our shared desire to mitigate climate change and preserve the biodiversity of this planet. Preserving the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem can be a huge part of that effort. To summarize, we ask this administration protect all predators from unsound and unscientific laws and practices, keep old-growth forests intact, allow bison on public lands and to designate all wildlands as wilderness as defined and characterized in the Wilderness Act of 1964. We look forward in working together among our non-government organizations, governmental agencies, private citizens in this effort. This step alone matches and is in agreement with goals of the "America the Beautiful" campaign that we established at the beginning of this letter.

"decade-long challenge to pursue a locally led and voluntary, nationwide effort to conserve, connect, and restore the lands, waters, and wildlife upon which we all depend."

Thank you and with sincere regards, the undersigned:

Gallatin Wildlife Association
Clinton Nagel, President

Gallatin Yellowstone Wilderness Alliance
Joseph Scalia III, President

Conservation Congress
Denise Boggs, Executive Director

Wyoming Wildlife Advocates
Kristin Combs, Executive Director

Yellowstone Bison Foundation
Pat Simmons

Footloose Montana
Stephen Capra, Executive Director

John Muir Project
Rachel Fazio, Associate Director

Sequoia ForestKeeper
Mr. Ara Marderosian, Executive Director

Friends of the Clearwater
Jeff Juel, Montana Policy Director

Cottonwood Environmental Law Center
John Meyer, Executive Director