

PUBLIC LANDS TOOLKIT

EMPOWERING LATINO
COMMUNITIES
TO LEAD AND PROTECT

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Hispanic
Access
Foundation



MAITE ARCE
PRESIDENT & CEO

LETTER TO THE READER

Querida comunidad,

At Hispanic Access Foundation, we believe public lands are not just spaces of beauty or recreation; they are sacred, life-giving places that hold our histories, cultures, and futures. For Latino communities across the country, these lands represent more than a weekend getaway. They are places of healing, tradition, family connection, and hope.

Yet, we know that too often, Latino communities are excluded from the decision-making processes that determine how these lands are managed, who has access, and whose stories are told. This toolkit was created to change that. It is designed to equip you—leaders, organizers, advocates, and community members—with the knowledge, tools, and inspiration to take action for our public lands.

Whether you're navigating complex policies, mobilizing your community, or advocating for monument designations, this resource is for you. It reflects our collective commitment to conservation that is equitable, community-centered, and rooted in our shared values. As we face unprecedented threats to the future of our public lands, from policy rollbacks to climate change, your voice is more important than ever. Together, we can ensure that our lands remain public, protected, and reflective of the people who call this country home.

Thank you for being part of this movement. We hope this toolkit fuels your efforts and affirms your role as a steward, advocate, and protector of the places that sustain us all.

Con esperanza y compromiso,

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for Latino leaders and the
people they serve.

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INTRODUCTION

Across the world, the land holds the stories of our ancestors and forms part of the intricate ecosystem that sustains our existence on this planet. As stewards of the environment, we share a collective responsibility to protect the lands that give us life. Not only is this protection important for the conservation of our natural resources, but it's essential to honoring the history and culture of the lands we call home, ensuring they are preserved and uplifted for future generations.

Protecting public lands ensures people, from all backgrounds but especially those who have faced historic barriers to accessing green spaces, have equitable access to natural spaces close to home. Public lands offer physical, mental, spiritual, and economic benefits, yet those benefits are not equally distributed. Advocacy for public land protection is also advocacy for health, equity, and belonging.

This toolkit was created to help demystify the complex United States public lands system and serve as a resource for the Latino community to deepen understanding, strengthen advocacy skills, and take action. It provides a foundational overview of how public lands are managed, key legislation and policy structures, and how communities can influence decisions through civic engagement.

You will also find real-life examples of successful community-led campaigns and guidance on pursuing land designations. As changes to federal agencies and policy landscapes unfold, the stakes for public lands are higher than ever, making it critical for communities to be informed and involved.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

WHO IS THIS TOOLKIT FOR, AND WHY WAS IT CREATED?

This toolkit was developed by Hispanic Access Foundation to support Latino communities, advocates, and policymakers in understanding and championing equitable public land management and conservation efforts. It uplifts Latino voices and priorities, often overlooked in mainstream environmental narratives, and provides practical tools to engage in public land advocacy, education, and leadership.

Many Latino communities bring diverse cultural heritage, deep-rooted connections to the land, and powerful leadership to the movement for equitable access and representation. This toolkit is designed to support individuals and organizations in building on that strength to ensure Latino voices, stories, and stewardship are reflected in our public lands. Whether you're a grassroots leader, policy advocate, community educator, or engaged resident, this toolkit is for you.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

The toolkit is organized into thematic sections covering the history of public lands, current threats and opportunities, pathways to engagement, and tools to build advocacy capacity. This resource is designed for a variety of uses, including:

- **Advocacy:** Use facts, language, and community-centered recommendations to inform public comments, legislative testimony, sign-on letters, and op-eds.
- **Education:** Share this toolkit in workshops, classrooms, community events, or leadership programs to build understanding of public lands history, policy, and engagement opportunities.
- **Organizing:** Mobilize Latino communities using data, narratives, and tools that reflect lived experiences and cultural connections to the land.
- **Strategic Planning:** Organizations and coalitions can use this toolkit to inform campaign design, policy priorities, or institutional inclusion initiatives.

OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

All content and recommendations in this toolkit are grounded in the following values:

- **Equity:** Centering communities most impacted by exclusion from public lands and policy decisions.
- **Access and Representation:** Promoting inclusion of Latino history, language, and leadership across public land management.
- **Conservation with Community:** Supporting policies that protect land and water while benefiting local economies and cultures.
- **Intergenerational Legacy:** Honoring the importance of access to nature, heritage, and healing for future generations.

LET'S BUILD TOGETHER

We invite you to adapt this resource for your work and share your experiences with us. With the strength of our communities and shared commitment to justice, we can shape a future where public lands are truly for all.

SECTION 1

OUR PUBLIC LANDS: A SHARED LEGACY, A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Public lands are more than policies and acreages; they are places where families gather, communities connect to culture, and future generations find inspiration. In the U.S., public lands belong to us all. From local parks to national forests, these lands support clean water, wildlife, recreation, and cultural heritage. But with this shared inheritance comes shared responsibility. How these lands are managed, and who gets a say, impacts everything from our environment to our economy to our quality of life.

Across the country, public lands are managed by various government agencies. Their job is to balance different uses—recreation, conservation, cultural protection, and economic development—while ensuring these lands are preserved for future generations. As community members, our role is to stay informed, engaged, and ready to speak up for the places that matter to us.

State lands include state parks and wildlife areas. Additionally, upon attaining statehood, many states were granted national lands to administer as state trust lands, to generate revenue to fund public education and other needs. As such, each state has various agencies managing its state lands. Municipalities and counties also manage local public lands as parks and open space areas.



640 MILLION ACRES.
4 FEDERAL AGENCIES.

ONE YOU

Your voice protects our lands.

LEARN. ENGAGE. ACT.

America's national public lands cover 640 million acres, about 28 percent of our nation's total area. The vast majority (95 percent) are managed by four federal agencies:

- The U.S. Bureau of Land Management,
- National Park Service,
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and
- U.S. Forest Service.

The first three of these agencies are part of the U.S. Department of the Interior, while the last is part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. These agencies often collaborate, as well as with state and local agencies and stakeholders, to manage land holistically and share expertise and resources, recognizing that ecosystems extend beyond agency boundaries.

While each agency has a slightly different mission, all are responsible for balancing how land is used and the decisions affecting our access, culture, and environment. In addition, the agencies each have established planning processes to set long-term goals for land use and sustainability. During plan development, the agencies provide opportunities for public input and engagement during which land users and stakeholders, including the general public, advocate for their interests and values.

YOUR VOICE MATTERS!

While long-term sustainability is inherent in every agency's mission, the reality is that their balancing of conservation and resource use is often challenging. Many factors influence how well that balance is achieved, including the President's agenda, directives from Congress, and the influence of industry lobbyists and other special interests.

That's why your voice for our public lands – and for clean water, wildlife and plants, cultural sites, and access to the places we love – matters and is needed, especially now. Don't underestimate the power we can collectively have. Our efforts to engage with decision-makers, participate in agency planning efforts, attend hearings, and mobilize communities have an impact. Our efforts help ensure that agency decisions reflect the interests of the public, rather than just powerful corporations and organizations.

SECTION 2

HOW PUBLIC LANDS ARE MANAGED

FEDERAL LAND MANAGEMENT AGENCIES EXPLAINED

U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

The BLM's mission is "to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations."¹ The BLM manages 245 million acres of public lands under a multiple-use, sustained-yield mandate.^{2a} This means the BLM must balance land management for multiple uses and outputs of renewable resources while also conserving natural, historical, and cultural resources, including those significant to Tribal Nations, along with scenic and watershed values. Economic uses include energy development (oil, gas, solar, wind, coal, and geothermal), livestock grazing, mining, and timber harvesting. The BLM also manages diverse outdoor recreation activities—camping, hiking, hunting, rafting, and off-roading.

But multiple use doesn't mean every use on every acre. To exemplify this point, the BLM manages a system of **National Conservation Lands**—38 million acres of national monuments, wilderness areas, wild and scenic rivers, and national scenic and historic trails set aside for conservation.² These public lands have special conservation designations that limit or restrict development. Such areas include National Monuments, National Conservation Areas, Wilderness Areas, Wilderness Study Areas, Historic Trails, and Wild and Scenic Rivers.

The **Federal Land Policy and Management Act** (FLPMA) of 1976³ is often referred to as the BLM's organic act, since it formalized and modernized the agency's authorities and responsibilities in far-reaching ways. Through FLPMA, our nation declared that public lands would largely remain in public ownership. It set forth the BLM's multiple-use and sustained-yield mission while also requiring the integrity of national and cultural resources be protected. Additionally, FLPMA directed the BLM to recommend lands for designation as Wilderness Areas and classify these areas as Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) until Congress acts to either formally designate them as wilderness or release them from WSA status.

To heighten the BLM's focus on land and resource sustainability, in 2024 the agency adopted its **Conservation and Landscape Health Rule** (also known as the **Public Lands Rule**).⁴ The Public Lands Rule puts conservation on equal footing with diverse land uses, enabling the BLM to achieve a management balance that better sustains the land and addresses the long-term needs of future generations. The rule updated planning and management tools to help the BLM achieve this outcome.

U.S. Forest Service (USFS)

The USFS manages the **National Forest System**,⁵ which consists of 154 national forests and 20 national grasslands covering 193 million acres. Its mission is "to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations."⁶ Similar to the BLM, the USFS operates under a multiple-use, sustained-yield mandate, including managing lands with specific conservation designations such as National Monuments and Wilderness Areas. Lastly, USFS expends considerable resources to fight wildfires.

The **National Forest Management Act** (NFMA) of 1976⁷ is the primary law governing how the agency manages our national forests and grasslands. NFMA requires the Secretary of Agriculture to assess our nation's national forests and grasslands and develop and implement a resource management plan for each of them. Among the resources addressed in these plans are timber, range, mining, recreation, water, wildlife, and socio-economic effects on local communities.

ADVOCACY ALERT

The Western Economic Security Today (WEST) Act (H.R. 1206) proposed in Congress in early 2025 would roll back the Public Lands Rule despite overwhelming public support for its adoption.

In addition, **Roadless Area Conservation Rule** (Roadless Rule),⁸ adopted by the USFS in 2001, restricts road construction and reconstruction and timber harvesting on over 58 million acres of National Forest System roadless areas, benefiting water quality, biodiversity, and recreation.

ADVOCACY ALERT

A new Executive Order calling for the expansion of logging on the National Forest System could open millions of acres set aside under the Roadless Rule to timber harvesting, directly threatening old growth forests and other roadless areas.

National Park Service (NPS)

The NPS mission is “to preserve unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the **National Park System** for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations.”^{8a} This mission prioritizes preservation, unlike the multiple-use mandates of BLM and USFS. A key management priority for NPS is accommodating an ever-growing number of visitors while ensuring that park resources are preserved and not ruined by an adoring public. There are currently 433 units in the National Park System covering over 85 million acres. NPS uses different naming designations for the areas it manages, including parks, monuments, preserves, memorials, historic sites, historic parks, battlefields, military parks, rivers, and recreation areas.

The NPS was established through the National Park Service Organic Act of 1916,^{8b} which also directs the Secretary of the Interior to make and publish rules to guide NPS management of the public lands under its jurisdiction.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

The mission of the USFWS is to “conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.”⁹ USFWS manages over 95 million acres of public lands and 760 million acres of marine areas.

This includes over 570 units of the **National Wildlife Refuge System** and five marine national monuments. USFWS is also charged with enforcing U.S. conservation laws such as the Endangered Species Act and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

The **National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966**¹⁰ and the **National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997**¹¹ are the cornerstone laws guiding USFWS’s management of national wildlife refuges. These laws provide the framework for conservation, management, and restoration of fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats within the refuge system, and also identify wildlife-dependent recreational activities as priority uses as long as they are compatible with refuge conservation goals.

ADVOCACY ALERT

New Executive Orders aim to open up marine reserves managed by the USFWS in both the Pacific and Atlantic oceans to commercial fishing, which threatens endangered species and lead to declines in fish populations.

PUBLIC LANDS AGENCIES SNAPSHOT



U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages 245 million acres of public lands under a multiple-use mandate, trying to balance economic uses such as energy development, livestock grazing, and timber harvesting with recreation and conservation of natural, historical, and cultural resources.



U.S. Forest Service (USFS) manages 154 national forests and 20 national grasslands covering 193 million acres. Similar to the BLM, the USFS operates under a multiple-use mandate, trying to balance economic uses, recreation, and resource conservation.



National Park Service (NPS) manages the National Park System’s 433 units covering over 85 million acres. NPS’s mission prioritizes preservation, with a key challenge being how to manage hundreds of millions of visitors while also ensuring that park resources remain unimpaired.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) manages over 570 units of the National Wildlife Refuge System and five marine national monuments, spanning 95 million acres of public lands and 760 million acres of marine areas. USFWS conserves, protects, and enhances fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats, while also managing wildlife-dependent recreation.

KEY ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS AFFECTING PUBLIC LANDS MANAGEMENT

Major laws that pertain to nearly all federal agencies regarding the protection of natural and cultural resources are described below.



The **National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)**¹² enacted in 1970, is a cornerstone of our nation's environmental protection. It mandates federal agencies provide a clear statement of a project's purpose and need, identify a range of project alternatives, and evaluate the environmental, social, and economic impacts of these options before making decisions. Agencies must prepare Environmental Impact Statements (EISs) or Environmental Assessments (EAs) and allow public review and input. The NEPA process helps to avoid or reduce environmental impacts.

ADVOCACY ALERT

Major steps have been taken to weaken NEPA, including repealing regulations and fast-tracking reviews, which can reduce assessment thoroughness and limit public input. This could accelerate development and increase environmental impacts.

Canyon, Glacier Bay, Mount Lassen, White Sands, and Death Valley, as well as cultural areas such as Chaco Canyon, the Statue of Liberty, and the site where César Chávez and others founded the United Farm Workers union. Most monuments are managed by the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, and U.S. Forest Service.



The **Endangered Species Act (ESA)**¹⁵ was enacted in 1973. It provides a mechanism for species of plants, birds, fish, wildlife, and insects that are at risk of extinction to be classified as threatened or endangered and be given protections to avoid their extinction. ESA also provides for the designation of critical habitat and prohibits the destruction of that habitat. In addition, the ESA prohibits importing, exporting, taking, possessing, selling, and transporting endangered and threatened species (with certain exceptions).

ADVOCACY ALERT

The USFWS has proposed to re-interpret the ESA by changing the definition of "harm" to a species to exclude habitat destruction, contrary to legal precedent.

The **Wilderness Act (1964)**¹⁶ created the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) and emphasizes that Wilderness Areas should be managed to preserve their natural conditions. It also gives guidance on how to manage established Wilderness Areas, including what activities are permitted and prohibited. The Wilderness Act also immediately established 54 Wilderness Areas, covering 9.1 million acres in 13 states, and empowered Congress to add new Wilderness Areas to the NWPS.

The **National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)** (1966)¹⁷ is a landmark law in the preservation of the nation's historic and archaeological sites. NHPA established the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). It also requires federal agencies to assess the impact of their projects on historic properties, ensuring that preservation is considered in federally funded or permitted activities. NHPA also created a framework for state, tribal, and local governments to play an active role in identifying, protecting, and being consulted on projects potentially impacting historic resources.

The **Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA)** (1979)¹⁸ safeguards archaeological sites on public and Tribal Nation lands. It defines archaeological resources and establishes a permitting system for archaeological projects on public lands. ARPA also identifies illegal activities and penalties related to unauthorized excavation or removal of archaeological resources and restricts their unlawful trafficking. It also mandates that resource information (such as the nature and location of cultural resources) be kept confidential and directs federal land managers to create public education programs about protecting these resources.



ADVOCACY ALERT

Despite skepticism about the legality of such actions, there is a growing effort to reduce the size of several national monuments in the western United States and also opening them up to energy development, including Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante in Utah, Chuckwalla in California, and Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks in New Mexico.

KEY POLICIES TO KNOW



NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT

Requires environmental reviews and public input before major federal actions.



ANTIQUITIES ACT

Allows presidents to protect historic, cultural, and scientific sites as national monuments.



ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

Protects species, and their habitats, to prevent extinction.



WILDERNESS ACT

Preserves wild lands in their natural state, largely untouched by human development.



NATIONAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION ACT

Protects historic and archaeological resources.



ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES PROTECTION ACT

Safeguards archaeological sites on public and Tribal lands.

TRIBAL LANDS AND TRIBAL STEWARDSHIP

Tribal Nations stewarded the lands now referred to as 'public' since time immemorial. There are 574 federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native Tribes and villages in the United States.¹⁹ The U.S. government holds approximately 56 million acres of reservation lands in trust for Tribal Nations. These lands have been reserved for a Tribe or Tribes under treaty or through a federal statute or administrative action.

These lands are not "public" in the same way, they are sovereign spaces where Tribes govern and manage resources based on community needs, values, and cultural traditions. Visitors may enter reservation lands according to specific tribal restrictions. Tribal Nations have the power to promulgate and enforce laws, administer justice, and otherwise exercise tribal rights on these lands. Tribal Nations manage reservation lands based on many factors, including community needs, cultural ties, economic resources, legal status, workforce skills, geography, and natural features.

Tribal Nations have maintained a continuous presence on these lands since long before recorded history. Their connections to our public lands are deep and varied, disrupted by a complex and violent history of colonization and displacement by the federal government and European settlers.

Between 2021 and 2025, the Biden administration worked to strengthen the connection between Tribal Nations and their ancestral lands, now within the public domain.²⁰ This historic change acknowledged Tribal Nations as equal partners in public lands stewardship, leading to the signing of over 400 tribal co-stewardship agreements²¹ that define collaborations between federal agencies and Tribal Nations to manage specific public lands, waters, and wildlife. These agreements give Tribal Nations a more active role in decision-making processes, enabling Indigenous knowledge and cultural practices to play a role in public land management in ways that align with tribal values and traditions.

WHY ADVOCACY MATTERS NOW

Despite our nation having far-reaching environmental and cultural resource protection laws, our public lands face many threats including climate change, habitat loss and fragmentation, unsustainable resource extraction, increasingly severe wildfires, species extinction, impacts from recreation, illegal dumping, looting of cultural sites, and insufficient resources for the level of stewardship needed.



SECTION 3

PUBLIC LANDS FUEL OUR COMMUNITIES – ECONOMICALLY & BEYOND

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Public lands are not just spaces of beauty, culture, and belonging, they are powerful engines for economic opportunity, health equity, cultural preservation, and climate resilience. They support local businesses, bring tourism and recreation dollars into communities, and attract entrepreneurs and workers who value clean air, natural beauty, and a healthy environment.

But the value of public lands goes far beyond numbers. These lands sustain cultural traditions, provide space for healing and play, offer entry points to careers in stewardship and science, and help address disparities in access to the outdoors.

For Latino communities and other historically excluded groups, public lands offer more than outdoor recreation. They open doors to opportunity, whether through small business growth, stewardship careers, or healthier neighborhoods that attract new investment. When communities have access to public lands and a voice in how they are managed, the benefits ripple outward across generations.

ECONOMIC IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

Public lands contribute billions to the U.S. economy every year:

- The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) calculated that the diverse activities on public lands they manage **generated \$201 billion in economic output nationally in 2021, supporting nearly 783,000 jobs**. This includes \$11.4 billion and 76,000 jobs in outdoor recreation. For comparison, the BLM's 2021 total budget was \$1.6 billion.
- In 2023, spending by visitors to National Parks **drove \$55.6 billion in economic output supporting 415,400 jobs**. The National Park Service's budget in 2023 of \$3.5 billion was a small fraction of this output.
- Spending by visitors to National Forests and Grasslands between 2018-2022 **contributed \$13.7 billion annually and sustained 161,000 jobs**.
- In 2017, visitors to National Wildlife Refuges had an economic **impact of \$3.2 billion on local communities and supported more than 41,000 jobs**.

These economic benefits are orders of magnitude larger than the federal investment in our public lands management agencies. Of course, these agencies' missions are much broader than supporting economic activities, and their management leads to many other benefits that are harder to quantify but essential for a healthy society. Such benefits include:

- Clean water and air from healthy ecosystems
- Carbon storage to fight climate change
- Cultural preservation of sacred and historic sites
- Habitat protection for wildlife, pollinators, and biodiversity
- Public safety through wildfire management and emergency access
- Mental and physical health benefits from time outdoors
- Spiritual and familial connection rooted in cultural traditions

****ADVOCACY ALERT****

Public lands need your voice! Take action by contacting elected officials, signing advocacy letters, submitting public comments, attending hearings, or mobilizing your community to protect these vital spaces.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND CAREER PATHWAYS

Public lands also serve as entry points into meaningful careers. They provide opportunities in conservation science, wildfire prevention, outdoor education, archaeology, and cultural interpretation. Youth corps programs, internships, and fellowships with federal land management agencies offer essential pathways for young people, particularly those from Latino and historically underrepresented communities, to become tomorrow's stewards.

Expanding access to these programs and investing in a more diverse federal workforce ensures that public lands are protected by and for all communities.

CLIMATE RESILIENCE AND NATURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

In the face of a changing climate, public lands are increasingly recognized as critical natural infrastructure. Forests, wetlands, deserts, and grasslands serve as buffers against flooding, wildfire, and extreme heat. These landscapes also store carbon, filter water, and provide habitat corridors that support biodiversity.

To fulfill this role, public lands need strong and sustained investment. As climate impacts intensify, it is essential to advocate for the resources and policies that enable land management agencies to protect ecosystems, restore degraded landscapes, and build climate resilience in partnership with communities.

CIVIC AND EDUCATIONAL IMPACT

Public lands are also living classrooms. They support place-based learning, environmental education, and civic engagement. When programming is bilingual, culturally relevant, and locally accessible, it becomes a powerful tool for building community awareness and leadership.

From ranger-led programs to school field trips, public lands foster environmental literacy and civic participation, especially when young people see their cultures, histories, and voices reflected in these spaces.

HEALTH AND HEALING IN THE OUTDOORS

A growing body of research affirms what many communities have long known: nature heals. Spending time outdoors improves mental and physical health, reduces stress, and promotes well-being. This is especially true in communities facing chronic health disparities.

In fact, many healthcare providers are now prescribing time in nature, known as “green prescriptions,” as a preventative health strategy. Public lands offer accessible and affordable opportunities for communities to experience these benefits, especially when barriers like transportation, fees, and culturally relevant programming are addressed.

BRIDGING THE NATURE GAP

Our national public lands also play a crucial role in bridging the Nature Gap – the disparity in access to parks, trails, and green spaces that disproportionately affects communities of color and low-income neighborhoods – by offering outdoor spaces where people from all backgrounds can experience the benefits of the outdoors. However, much work is needed to address the barriers to access these communities face, such as transportation challenges, entrance fees, or a lack of culturally relevant programming.

By improving access and ensuring public lands reflect and serve the full diversity of the U.S. population, we create healthier, more equitable communities.

A COMMUNITY ASSET, A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Communities near public lands benefit in many ways. These places attract entrepreneurs, remote workers, retirees, small business owners, and outdoor enthusiasts who contribute to local economies. A study shows western rural counties with the highest share of national public lands on average experienced higher population, employment, and personal income growth when compared to peer counties with the lowest share of such lands.

But sustaining these benefits requires intentional investment, inclusive planning, and strong community partnerships. When Latino communities and other groups have a seat at the table, public lands can truly reflect the richness of our nations and serve as spaces of prosperity, healing, and belonging for all.



SECTION 4

CURRENT THREATS TO PUBLIC LANDS

SHIFTS IN PUBLIC LANDS POLICY AND MANAGEMENT: WHY ENGAGEMENT MATTERS NOW

In 2025, new federal policy directives have signaled a renewed focus on increasing domestic energy production on public lands. This includes a declared National Energy Emergency,²² which allows for the expedited approval of certain energy and infrastructure projects by temporarily bypassing standard environmental review procedures. While supporters argue these efforts boost energy independence and economic growth, concerns have been raised by conservation organizations, Tribal Nations, and public lands advocates about potential long-term consequences.

Proposed policy changes and executive actions aim to increase timber harvests,²³ expand mining access,²⁴ and accelerate oil and gas development²⁵ on lands managed by federal agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). Currently, more than 80 percent of BLM-managed lands are already available for oil and gas leasing.²⁶ Critics of the new policies have expressed concern that further expansion of energy projects could contribute to habitat loss, decreased public access, increased pollution, and reduced recognition of Tribal Nations' stewardship rights.



IN THE LINE OF FIRE: RISK GROWS FOR PUBLIC LANDS



Reduced
access for
communities



Fast-tracked
oil, gas, timber,
and mining



Weakened
environmental
safeguards
(NEPA, ESA)



Understaffed
land
management
agencies



Proposals for
land transfers to
states or private
entities

Several iconic landscapes have been identified as potentially vulnerable to reduced protections under these policy shifts. These include areas such as the Tongass National Forest²⁷ and Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska,²⁸ the Boundary Waters²⁹ in Minnesota, the Ruby Mountains³⁰ in Nevada, and the Pecos River Watershed³¹ in New Mexico. Some agency-level proposals have also reviewed or revised key conservation frameworks, including the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and the BLM's Public Lands Rule.



PUBLIC LANDS WORKFORCE CHALLENGES AND AGENCY CAPACITY

In parallel with regulatory shifts, federal workforce reductions within land management agencies have raised concerns about the long-term capacity to manage, monitor, and protect public lands. Thousands of positions were cut or left vacant across the NPS, BLM, USFS, and the USFWS in early 2025. While some of these decisions are being reviewed in court, staffing reductions have led to operational gaps in wildfire prevention, visitor services, maintenance, and conservation enforcement.

Strong and adequately resourced federal land agencies are vital to the stewardship of public lands. From ensuring safe recreational access to preserving natural and cultural heritage, federal employees are essential to sustaining the public benefits these lands provide. Reduced staffing not only impacts day-to-day operations, but it also increases the risk of delayed responses to climate-related events, limited enforcement of environmental protections, and diminished engagement with local communities and Tribal partners.

CONCERNS ABOUT PUBLIC LANDS TRANSFERS

Recent proposals and legislative actions have reignited long-standing debates about transferring federally managed public lands to state or private control. While some advocates argue this would provide more local control, others have raised concerns about the capacity of state agencies to manage large-scale public lands and the potential risk of privatization.

Several states have pursued legal efforts or introduced legislation to take control of federal lands within their borders. In some cases, federal land sales have been authorized to generate revenue, raising alarms among conservation and Tribal leaders about the future of public access, habitat integrity, and treaty rights.

WHY YOUR VOICE MATTERS

These ongoing shifts underscore the importance of community engagement in public lands decision-making. Whether it's submitting public comments, attending agency planning meetings, or advocating for inclusive policies, communities have the power to influence how our shared lands are managed. By staying informed and involved, we can ensure that public lands continue to reflect the values of access, stewardship, equity, and intergenerational responsibility.

SECTION 5

PUBLIC LANDS ADVOCACY OPPORTUNITIES

Public lands belong to all of us, but only if we stay engaged. From monument designations to local park planning, every voice matters in shaping how these lands are protected, accessed, and stewarded for future generations.

Today, our collective advocacy is more important than ever. In early 2025, Congress introduced bills that, if passed, could reshape long-standing protections and reduce public influence and roll back decades of progress in sustaining our public lands. These opportunities underscore the need for ongoing community involvement and civic engagement.

One example is the Ending Presidential Overreach on Public Lands Act (H.R. 521),³² introduced by U.S. Representatives Celeste Maloy (UT-02) and Mark Amodei (NV-02). This bill would require Congressional approval of any national monuments established or enlarged by the President under the Antiquities Act of 1906, a tool used by Presidents of both parties for over a century to protect cultural and natural sites of national significance.

Another bill, the Western Economic Security Today (WEST) Act (H.R. 1206),³³ introduced by Rep. Maloy, along with Rep. Russ Fulcher (ID-01) in February 2025 seeks to repeal the BLM's Conservation and Landscape Health Act (also known as The Public Lands Rule). This rule was created to elevate conservation as a priority alongside other land uses. During the public comment period, the Bureau received over 150,000 comment letters, of which more than 90 percent supported adopting or strengthening the rule.

At the time of this writing, Congress is also considering a proposal in its budget reconciliation process to sell over 500,000 acres of national public lands. While the outcome remains uncertain, efforts to transfer or sell off public lands are not new, and advocates on all sides of the issue continue to organize..

In contrast, the Public Lands in Public Hands Act (H.R. 718),³⁴ a bipartisan effort co-sponsored by Ryan Zinke (MT) and Gabe Vasquez (NM-02), seeks to reinforce the importance of keeping public lands in federal stewardship for the benefit of all Americans.



Meanwhile, changes to bedrock environmental laws, such as the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), are often made through rulemaking processes that require public comment periods, giving community members the opportunity to voice their concerns. These moments provide meaningful opportunities for community members to shape the direction of policies that impact ecosystems, access, and cultural protections.

These bills and rollbacks of environmental protections threaten the landscapes we love, but they also provide communities—including Latino, Tribal, and frontline communities—with opportunities to lead in advocacy and conservation.

Now is the time to act. We'll dive deeper into how to engage in advocacy later in the toolkit (The Hispanic Access Way), but at a glance, here's how you can make a difference:

- **Speak up** during public comment periods on proposed land use plans, environmental rules, or development projects.
- **Engage** in agency planning processes that shape the management of local forests, deserts, and monuments.
- **Mobilize your community** to attend town halls, write to elected officials, and share personal stories about the importance of public lands.
- **Defend cornerstone tools** like the Antiquities Act and the Public Lands Rule by making your voice heard when these policies are debated.

Together, we can ensure that public lands remain public, protected, and accessible, for us and for generations to come.

ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES TO WATCH AND ENGAGE



APPROPRIATIONS/BUDGET ADVOCACY:

As Congress debates agency funding, we must advocate for robust staffing, outreach capacity, and program resources for BLM, NPS, USFS, and USFWS.



PROACTIVE PROPOSALS TO PROTECT PUBLIC LANDS:

Coalitions working over longer time frames to secure new designations, expansions, or cultural landscape protections can provide opportunities for you to engage and provide input.



SUPPORT CO-STEWARDSHIP AGREEMENTS:

Help raise awareness and public support for partnerships between Tribal Nations and federal agencies.



AMPLIFY LOCAL ACCESS CAMPAIGNS:

Transportation, programming, and fee reduction efforts are growing, especially in communities facing the Nature Gap.



BUILD SUSTAINABLE PARTNERSHIPS AND RELATIONSHIPS:

Support organizations working across all levels to protect public lands and hold decision-makers accountable.

SECTION 6

THE HISPANIC ACCESS ADVOCACY WAY- HOW WE ENGAGE

BRIDGING VALUES WITH ACTION IN PUBLIC LANDS ADVOCACY

At Hispanic Access Foundation, advocacy is grounded in the belief that public lands must benefit all people and future generations. These spaces offer not only recreation and environmental benefits, but are also essential for health, cultural identity, and spiritual connection. Latino communities and other historically underrepresented groups bring valuable knowledge, cultural connections, and leadership to the stewardship of public lands—contributions that are essential to shaping a more inclusive and sustainable future. Our approach to advocacy is holistic, relational, and deeply community-rooted. It weaves together cultural relevance, policy engagement, capacity building, and public storytelling. We don't simply advocate for land, we advocate for the people connected to it.

CORE ADVOCACY PRINCIPLES ALIGNED WITH OUR PUBLIC LANDS PLATFORM



Community and Faith-Rooted Engagement

We ground our advocacy in the trusted networks and cultural values that define Latino life, including faith institutions, community groups, and local leaders. Our work starts with listening and relationship-building. Faith and community are not just outreach channels—for many they are sources of power, purpose, and deep stewardship values. Many landscapes hold sacred, cultural, and communal meaning. By organizing through trusted spaces and leaders, we ensure public lands advocacy is not only inclusive but rooted in shared values of belonging, justice, and care for creation.



Nonpartisan Civic Education

We equip communities with the tools to participate in democratic processes without partisan agendas. This supports our platform's call for Community Engagement and Transparent, Inclusive Decision-Making, ensuring policies are shaped by diverse, informed voices.



Community-Driven Priorities

Our work is shaped by listening first. From monument designations to trail access, our policy work reflects our commitment to Equity and Access by centering community-defined needs and experiences, especially from Latino communities.



Partnerships Over Parachuting In

We don't show up for a campaign, we stay for the long haul. Like our platform's emphasis on Investing in Communities and Balanced Land Uses, our advocacy is built on trust, mutual accountability, and the recognition that sustainable impact comes from within.



Intergenerational and Bilingual Strategies

We intentionally design our tools to engage youth, elders, and everyone in between. This reinforces our commitment to Inclusive Access—from creating safe trails for seniors to facilitating Spanish-language public comment campaigns for working parents.

TOOLS THAT BRING OUR VALUES TO LIFE

We operationalize our principles and public lands platform through accessible, culturally relevant advocacy tools that foster agency and connection:

- **Listening Sessions:** These bilingual gatherings allow us to root campaigns in lived experience, advancing Community Engagement and Equity & Access.
- **Latino Conservation Week:** We hold a national celebration and mobilization moment that raises awareness, builds pride, and advocates for policy aligned with Environmental Quality for All and Public Lands Stewardship.
- **Storytelling:** We help Latinos connect personal narratives to national policy discussions, reinforcing our commitment to Cultural Protection and Community Voice.
- **Legislative Meetings:** We facilitate direct community-to-leader engagement, strengthening Transparency, Civic Participation, and Government Accountability.
- **Public Comment Campaigns:** We provide support to elevate Latino perspectives in rulemaking tied to Environmental Justice, Ecosystem Health, and Land Resilience.

This approach isn't just about building campaigns, it's about building **capacity, confidence, and community leadership** in defense of public lands that sustain us all.

BUILDING COMMUNITY AWARENESS

INFORMED COMMUNITIES ARE EMPOWERED COMMUNITIES

At Hispanic Access Foundation, we believe that effective advocacy begins with awareness—awareness of the issues, of one's rights, and of the deep connection between public lands and community well-being. Building community awareness is about making information not only available but accessible, relatable, and actionable. It's about meeting people where they are, in their language, through trusted messengers, and with culturally relevant tools.

TACTICS FOR RAISING AWARENESS

Host Bilingual Town Halls and Listening Circles

Create welcoming, inclusive spaces, virtually or in-person, where community members can learn about public lands, share their experiences, and raise local concerns. Listening circles also help identify community priorities that should inform policy advocacy and program design.

Use Culturally Relevant Environmental Education Campaigns

Connect conservation messages to cultural values like stewardship, legacy, and family well-being. Use stories, sayings, and imagery that reflect the lived experiences of Latino, immigrant, and Indigenous communities.



Leverage Trusted Messengers

Engage elders, promotores de salud (health promoters), educators, faith leaders, and local youth as ambassadors of public lands information. These trusted voices help bridge the gap between national policy and local realities, translating complex issues into community-relevant conversations.

Create Bilingual Infographics and Video Explainers

Develop visual, language-accessible materials that explain key issues like monument designations, access to local parks, or how to submit public comments. Videos featuring community voices or animation can be especially effective on social media and WhatsApp. Engagement Tools That Work

WhatsApp and SMS Campaigns

Use these high-engagement platforms to share event reminders, educational messages, or quick calls to action. Short, bilingual texts with links to videos or sign-up forms are effective for mobilization of Latino communities.

Radio PSAs and Local News Segments

Partner with Spanish-language radio stations and trusted local news outlets to air short public service announcements (PSAs), interviews with community advocates, and awareness segments that reach people where they already tune in.

Community Mural Projects

Facilitate youth-led or intergenerational mural projects that celebrate local landscapes and cultural ties to nature. These murals serve as permanent awareness tools in public spaces, sparking conversations about identity, land, and community.

Faith and Community Events

Integrate public lands messaging into community gatherings such as faith-based gatherings, health fairs, school meetings, and neighborhood celebrations. These events offer natural opportunities to connect conservation with values like health, family, and stewardship, especially when co-hosted with trusted local leaders.

FORMING PARTNERSHIPS

COLLABORATING FOR COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Advocating for public lands is stronger when it's done with others, not for them. At Hispanic Access Foundation, we believe that partnerships are essential to expanding reach, building credibility, and achieving sustainable change. For partnerships to be effective, they must be grounded in trust, mutual benefit, and shared leadership.

Whether working with health organizations, education coalitions, faith communities, or environmental allies, our goal is to co-create opportunities for Latino communities to thrive—while protecting the natural and cultural heritage that connects us all.

PARTNERSHIP GUIDANCE

Identify Overlapping Missions Across Sectors

Look beyond the conservation field. Public lands intersect with health equity, education access, climate resilience, spiritual practice, economic opportunity, and youth development. Building cross-sector alliances widens the tent and strengthens the case for inclusive, community-rooted advocacy.

Offer Co-Branded Opportunities

Invite partners to collaborate on events, campaigns, or storytelling initiatives where shared values shine. Latino Conservation Week, for example, is a powerful platform to elevate multiple missions: environmental, cultural, health, and civic. Consider joint messaging, dual logos, or shared speakers to build collective visibility.

Share Leadership and Credit

Avoid transactional relationships. Instead, engage partners as co-designers and co-leaders. This includes planning together, uplifting their voices publicly, and ensuring community-facing benefits. Authentic partnership recognizes each organization's contributions—equally and transparently.



PARTNERSHIP CHECKLIST

Use the checklist below to ensure new collaborations are equitable, purposeful, and mutually beneficial:

MOU Templates

Establish clear roles and expectations from the beginning using Memorandums of Understanding. MOUs can outline decision-making, communication, event logistics, and evaluation processes.

Shared Impact Goals

Align on what success looks like for all parties. Whether it's increased civic participation, bilingual resources, or expanded youth engagement, shared goals help keep the partnership accountable and outcome-driven.



RESOURCE:
MOU TEMPLATE

Community Benefit Language

Center the impact on the community in all joint planning. Make sure promotional materials and project plans explicitly describe how the partnership serves local residents, especially those historically excluded from public lands advocacy.

Tip: Great partnerships are built at the speed of trust. Take the time to build relationships before asking for deliverables. Show up for others' events, celebrate their wins, and offer support with no strings attached.

TRIBAL PARTNERSHIPS

HONORING INDIGENOUS SOVEREIGNTY IN PUBLIC LANDS ADVOCACY

Public lands advocacy must begin with the recognition that many of these landscapes are the ancestral homelands of Indigenous peoples. For generations, Tribal Nations have served as stewards of the land, long before federal designations existed. Any effort to protect or advocate for these lands must acknowledge this truth and uphold the sovereignty, leadership, and rights of Tribal communities.

Hispanic Access Foundation is committed to building partnerships with Tribal Nations based on trust, humility, and mutual respect. We





CASE EXAMPLE:

MONUMENT DESIGNATION COLLABORATION

In the campaign to designate Castner Range as a national monument in West Texas, Hispanic Access joined a diverse coalition including local Tribes, veterans, conservationists, and community leaders advocating for permanent landscape protection. Tribal voices were central, as the land holds deep cultural and historical significance for Native peoples in the region.

Hispanic Access supported outreach that elevated Indigenous perspectives, organized listening sessions, and ensured advocacy materials reflected cultural and spiritual ties to the land. While we did not lead Tribal engagement, we supported the inclusion of Native voices and followed Tribal partners' lead in messaging and policy recommendations.

This campaign underscored the importance of stepping back, listening deeply, and making space for Indigenous leadership in public lands protection.

do not speak for Native communities, we listen, learn, and follow their lead. Our work is strongest when rooted in collaboration that affirms the cultural, spiritual, and legal significance of land to Indigenous peoples.

BEST PRACTICES FOR TRIBAL PARTNERSHIP

Acknowledge Indigenous Sovereignty and Stewardship

Recognize that Tribal Nations are sovereign governments with their own systems of governance, law, and environmental management. Public lands advocacy must honor treaties, traditional knowledge, and the historical context of land dispossession.

Begin with Relationship-Building, Not Project Pitches

Trust takes time. Start by attending community events, listening without agenda, and showing up consistently. Partnership begins with presence, not proposals.

Include Native Partners in Co-Design and Leadership Roles

Move beyond consultation to collaboration. Invite Tribal partners into early planning, agenda setting, and decision-making. This reflects a commitment to shared power and long-term impact.

ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR ENGAGEMENT

- **Consent:** Always seek explicit permission before sharing Indigenous stories, knowledge, or affiliations.
- **Credit:** Acknowledge contributions publicly and prominently in materials, press releases, and events.
- **Reciprocity:** Ask what support Tribal partners need, not just what support you hope they can provide. Compensation, visibility, and long-term investment are essential.

Tip: Relationship-building with Tribal Nations is not a box to check, it's a responsibility to uphold. Approach it with humility, patience, and a commitment to long-term solidarity.



GOVERNMENT

ENGAGING DECISION-MAKERS TO ADVANCE PUBLIC LANDS POLICIES

Government engagement is a critical pillar of public lands advocacy. From local parks departments to members of Congress, decision-makers shape the future of access, stewardship, and protection of public lands. Hispanic Access Foundation works to ensure that Latino communities have a seat at the table and that their voices are heard in policy processes that affect their health, culture, and environment.

We approach government engagement through education, not confrontation, building nonpartisan relationships with elected officials, agency staff, and public servants to inform, connect, and advocate.

ENGAGEMENT TACTICS

Host Nonpartisan Legislative Briefings and Site Visits

Invite policymakers to briefings or guided tours in the communities they represent. Latino Advocacy Week and Latino Conservation Week, in particular, are powerful platforms to demonstrate public support for land protection and equitable access. These visits allow decision-makers to see the personal and cultural significance of public lands and to hear directly from constituents.

Partner with City/County Agencies on Local Planning

Many land-use decisions, especially those related to parks, trails, and access infrastructure, are made at the local level. Collaborate with municipal and regional agencies on comprehensive plans, master park strategies, and resilience efforts to ensure Latino voices are included from the start.

Submit Bilingual Public Comment Campaigns

Help communities participate in rulemaking by launching accessible public comment drives on key proposals—from national monument designations to land management plans. Providing comment templates in Spanish and English removes barriers and increases participation in environmental governance.

SAMPLE TOOLS FOR GOVERNMENT ENGAGEMENT

Meeting Request Script

Dear [Representative/Commissioner Name],

My name is [Name], and I represent [Organization/Community Name]. I am writing to request a meeting to discuss the importance of public lands and equitable access for Latino communities in [City/State]. We would welcome the opportunity to share local stories and highlight policy solutions that benefit both the environment and our community's well-being. Please let us know your availability for a 30-minute conversation.

Sincerely,

[Your Name, Title, Contact Info]

Sample Resolution of Support

Encourage local governments to pass resolutions that affirm support for public lands protection, Latino access, and inclusive conservation. Resolutions can be used to support new designations, funding requests, or participation in events like Latino Conservation Week.

"WHEREAS Latino communities contribute to the cultural, economic, and environmental vibrancy of [City/County Name]; AND WHEREAS equitable access to public lands supports community health, education, and cultural connection; NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that [City/County Name] affirms its commitment to inclusive conservation and supports efforts to expand access and protection of public lands for all communities."

One-Pager Template: Economic and Cultural Benefits of Public Lands

Create concise, visually engaging one-pagers to demonstrate the impact of public lands in your region. Include:

- Local economic data (e.g., outdoor recreation jobs)
- Cultural and historical significance
- Quotes or stories from community members
- Clear policy asks or support statements



RESOURCE:
ONE-PAGER TEMPLATE

Tip: Don't wait for an issue to arise—build relationships with government partners before you need their support. Send thank-you notes, invite them to events, and share regular updates on your community's conservation successes.

BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

PARTNERING WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR FOR PEOPLE AND PUBLIC LANDS

Businesses play a critical role in advancing public lands protection, equitable access, and community well-being. Many companies, especially those with local footprints or sustainability goals, are seeking meaningful ways to support environmental justice, employee engagement, and cultural connection.

We recommend you work with businesses not just as sponsors, but as partners in creating long-term impact for Latino communities and the lands they cherish.

ENGAGEMENT APPROACHES

Align with Employee Wellness and Sustainability Goals

Frame public lands engagement as part of a company's ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance), employee health, or corporate social responsibility strategies. Highlight how time in nature supports mental health, team-building, and climate resilience, all core to both business and community priorities.

Collaborate on Trail Cleanups or Branded Events

Co-host bilingual, family-friendly volunteer days in partnership with a local business. These events provide visibility, create shared value, and offer employees a hands-on opportunity to give back to communities. Latino Conservation Week is a prime opportunity for this kind of collaboration.

Offer Speaking Roles at Advocacy Events

Invite business leaders who are aligned with equity and conservation values to speak on panels, monument designation briefings, or legislative roundtables. This elevates their role in public-facing advocacy while modeling corporate commitment to community-centered conservation.

Business Partnership Spotlight

Partner Feature: [Business Name] + Latino Conservation Week

During Latino Conservation Week 2024, [Business Name] partnered with Hispanic Access Foundation to host a volunteer restoration day at [Location] and sponsored bilingual educational materials on the importance of [Monument Name or Conservation Area]. Employees expressed a sense of pride and connection to the community, while the company saw strengthened local relationships and positive media coverage.

"Partnering with Hispanic Access helped us live our values. This was more than just a volunteer event—it was a day of connection, purpose, and impact."

— [Business Leader Name, Title]

Sample Sponsorship Menu with Impact Metrics

SPONSORSHIP TIER	INVESTMENT	BENEFITS	IMPACT
Trail Champion	\$5,000	Logo on event signage, social media recognition, speaking role at event	1,000+ digital impressions, 100 local participants
Community Advocate	\$10,000	All above + featured story in post-event report, co-branded materials	10,000+ reach across national comms, high visibility
Equity Leader	\$25,000+	All above + year-round visibility at Latino Conservation Week & legislative briefings	National exposure, long-term policy impact

Tip: Focus on shared values, not just visibility. Businesses are more likely to partner when they see alignment with their mission, workforce, and long-term community investment goals.

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

LEVERAGING MISSION ALIGNMENT FOR GREATER IMPACT

Nonprofit organizations are natural allies in the movement to protect public lands, especially when our missions intersect across health, equity, education, climate justice, and cultural preservation. Rather than working in silos, Hispanic Access Foundation seeks to build coalitions that amplify shared goals and create opportunities for deeper, broader impact. Strong nonprofit partnerships are grounded in mutual respect, co-leadership, and a commitment to centering the communities we collectively serve.

PARTNERSHIP STRATEGIES

Map Issue Overlap

Look for points of connection between public lands and other issue areas, like mental health, food justice, youth leadership, or faith-based outreach. For example, a partner working on mental health may benefit from framing access to nature as a healing tool.

Offer Shared Platforms for Storytelling and Policy Advocacy

Host joint webinars, co-author op-eds, or facilitate panel discussions where diverse voices can speak on shared issues. Let partners lead with their unique perspective while connecting it to conservation and access.

Cross-Promote Campaigns and Funding Opportunities

Support each other's initiatives on social media, in newsletters, or through joint grant proposals. Collaboration builds visibility, credibility, and trust with funders and policymakers alike.

TOOLKIT RESOURCES

Partner Outreach Email Template

Subject: Partnership Opportunity – Let's Amplify Latino Voices in Public Lands

Hi [Name],

I hope this message finds you well. I'm reaching out on behalf of Hispanic Access Foundation to explore a potential collaboration around [campaign/event name]. We see clear alignment between our missions and would love to co-host an event or join forces on outreach, particularly around equitable access to public lands and Latino representation.

Would you be open to a 20-minute call to explore ideas? Looking forward to connecting.

*Warmly,
[Your Name, Title]*

Shared Webinar or Event Pitch Example

"From Green Space to Healing Space: How Public Lands Support Mental Health in Latino Communities"

Partner with a health-focused nonprofit for a bilingual webinar or in-person event exploring the link between land access and well-being—featuring personal stories, data, and policy solutions.

COMMUNITY GROUPS

BUILDING TRUST FROM THE GROUND UP

True advocacy starts with the grassroots. Local community groups, whether they're informal neighborhood collectives, mutual aid circles, or civic clubs, hold deep knowledge, social capital, and trust.

We don't expect communities to come to us, we go to them. We show up, listen, and invest in long-term relationships that support both their priorities and public lands protection.

COMMUNITY-CENTERED APPROACH

Attend Their Meetings Before Inviting Them to Yours

Respect local leadership by showing up first. Observe, listen, and build trust before asking for collaboration. Demonstrate genuine interest in their work, not just your agenda.

Support Their Priorities While Aligning Public Lands Into the Mix

Rather than introducing new issues, find ways to connect your work to theirs. If a group is advocating for youth safety, emphasize how access to parks reduces violence and supports youth development.

Provide Honoraria, Food, and Child Care at Events

Compensate people for their time and remove participation barriers. These simple steps communicate that you value community knowledge and leadership.

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT EXAMPLES

Promotor Leadership

“Maria, a community promotora in East LA, first attended a public lands training during Latino Conservation Week. Today, she’s leading hikes for local moms and testifying at county commission meetings about the need for park access in her neighborhood.”

Dream Map / Visioning Session

Host a community mapping activity where residents envision their ideal public space. Use paper maps or large visuals for participants to draw or write what they would like to see in local parks, trails, or protected areas. These visuals can inform planning, advocacy, and funding efforts.

Tip: Community partnerships thrive on consistency and care. Keep showing up—even when there’s no campaign—and let communities lead the way.



PASTOR MOSES: HOW FAITH LED TO ADVOCACY FOR CASTNER RANGE

A STORY OF SACRED LAND, COMMUNITY VOICE, AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

WATCH PASTOR MOSES
SHARE HIS JOURNEY



In the heart of El Paso, nestled against the Franklin Mountains, lies Castner Range—a stretch of land sacred to Indigenous communities, beloved by local families, and defended by those who believe open space should be protected for all.

For Pastor Moses Borjas, Castner Range is more than a landscape. It's a testimony—a place where his calling to faith and commitment to justice converged.

"Castner Range is a spiritual place. It connects us to something greater than ourselves—creation, history, healing. I saw in it an opportunity for our community to come together and fight for something that mattered deeply."

As leader of a growing congregation, Pastor Moses knew the struggles of working-class and immigrant families—many without safe, accessible green spaces. Castner Range was close, beautiful, and worth protecting.

When Hispanic Access supported the monument designation, Pastor Moses became a powerful voice. He led prayer gatherings,

spoke at events, and used his pulpit to uplift the biblical call to stewardship.

"Our faith teaches us to care for the land because it is a gift from God. But faith also calls us to act—to protect what's sacred and ensure that every family, no matter their ZIP code, has a place to breathe, reflect, and belong."

His advocacy helped connect policymakers to community stories, reminding them that protecting Castner Range meant honoring veterans, respecting Indigenous heritage, and investing in future generations.

When President Biden designated Castner Range a national monument in 2023, Pastor Moses stood with veterans, youth, and Tribal leaders to celebrate years of community-led advocacy.

Takeaway: Pastor Moses reminds us that public lands are spiritual, cultural, and justice spaces—and that faith, rooted in community, can help protect them for all.

SECTION 7

SUCCESS STORIES

COMMUNITY VOICES, LASTING IMPACT

Across the country, Latino communities are stepping up as powerful stewards of the land—leading efforts to protect the places that hold deep cultural, spiritual, ecological, and historical significance. The following case studies highlight how community-driven advocacy, rooted in relationships and shared values, can shape national policy and preserve public lands for future generations.

At the heart of each campaign is a consistent approach: listen first, uplift local leadership, and build lasting partnerships. Whether in the deserts of Southern California or the borderlands of West Texas, Hispanic Access Foundation has worked alongside communities to ensure their voices are heard—and reflected—in national monument designations.

Across all four campaigns, several core strategies emerged:

- Faith-rooted organizing to connect advocacy with spiritual purpose and moral conviction
- Bilingual outreach and education to ensure all community members can engage
- Youth and community leadership development to build intergenerational power
- Public comment mobilization to elevate lived experiences in the decision-making process
- Partnership with Tribal Nations and veterans to honor land stewardship and lived history

These case studies are more than policy wins—they're testaments to community resilience, equity in action, and the belief that public lands must reflect the people they serve.

5 WAYS TO SUPPORT THESE LANDS TODAY

- Share your personal story about these lands
- Participate in public comment opportunities
- Attend local planning or BLM meetings
- Invite others to explore and learn about the monuments
- Support policies that fund land protection and stewardship jobs

These stories exemplify the power of community-led advocacy. By centering local voices and fostering partnerships across faith, culture, and identity, lasting conservation outcomes become not only possible—but inevitable.



SAN GABRIEL MOUNTAINS NATIONAL MONUMENT

FAITH AND COMMUNITY UNITE FOR MONUMENT EXPANSION IN CALIFORNIA

In May 2024, President Biden expanded the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument by 109,000 acres, a victory for Latino communities in Los Angeles who have long advocated for greater access to green spaces. Hispanic Access Foundation mobilized faith leaders, health advocates, and local residents to highlight the importance of the San Gabriels for recreation, spiritual connection, and community health.

“The San Gabriel Mountains make up 70% of Los Angeles County’s open space and are the backyard for many Latino and culturally diverse communities... The designation expansion ensures permanent protection of the San Gabriels, which are critical for the health and well-being of millions of people and future generations.”

— Maite Arce, President and CEO, Hispanic Access Foundation

PATH TO PROTECTION



CASTNER RANGE NATIONAL MONUMENT

A LEGACY OF ADVOCACY IN EL PASO

After over 50 years of community advocacy, Castner Range in El Paso was designated a national monument in March 2023. Hispanic Access Foundation played a pivotal role by engaging Latino military families, veterans, and faith leaders to emphasize the area's cultural and ecological significance. The designation protects nearly 7,000 acres of land, ensuring future generations can access and enjoy this cherished landscape.

"After 52 years, and so many letters of support – a lot of work has been put into all this – from community members to staff volunteers."

— Pastor Moses Borjas, Por La Creación Faith-Based Alliance

PATH TO PROTECTION

Local advocacy begins
to prevent development
of Castner Range

1971

2017

Hispanic Access joins
regional coalition

Faith and veteran
leaders testify at
public events

2021

President Biden
designates Castner
Range as a national
monument

2022

Over 10,000
public comments
submitted in
support

2023

CALIFORNIA DESERT NATIONAL MONUMENTS

COALITION BUILDING FOR DESERT PROTECTION

In 2016, the Mojave Trails, Sand to Snow, and Castle Mountains were designated as national monuments, thanks to a diverse coalition of conservationists, youth, faith leaders, and community groups. Hispanic Access Foundation engaged Latino communities through educational events, hikes, and advocacy campaigns, emphasizing the importance of these deserts for cultural heritage and environmental conservation.

“Latinos make up nearly 50 percent of the population in the California desert - we have an important voice in the protection of our public lands, and a critical role to play in encouraging stewardship of our outdoor and cultural heritage.”

— Maite Arce, President and CEO, Hispanic Access Foundation

PATH TO PROTECTION

Hispanic Access
mobilizes Latino
community support and
educational outreach

2013 - 2015

2016

President Obama
designates the
monuments

Continued engagement to
defend protections and
promote youth leadership

2017 - PRESENT

CHUCKWALLA NATIONAL MONUMENT

A CALIFORNIA MONUMENT TO CULTURE, CONSERVATION, AND COLLABORATION

In April 2024, President Biden designated Chuckwalla National Monument, a landmark achievement that protects over 600,000 acres of culturally, ecologically, and spiritually significant desert land in Southern California. Hispanic Access Foundation supported this community-driven campaign by elevating Latino voices, fostering cross-sector partnerships, and advocating for the inclusion of underrepresented communities in land conservation efforts.

The Chuckwalla region holds deep meaning for Latino, Black, and Indigenous communities. It is home to sacred sites, endangered wildlife, and landscapes shaped by generations of stewardship. Hispanic Access worked closely with partners across the Inland Empire and Coachella Valley to ensure this designation reflected the values and needs of the region's diverse population.

"The Chuckwalla designation is a monumental step in ensuring that public lands reflect the stories, histories, and cultures of all people. It's not just about protecting land—it's about protecting identity, community, and connection."

— Maite Arce, President and CEO, Hispanic Access Foundation

PATH TO PROTECTION

Community-based campaign launches,
highlighting cultural significance and
responsible land management

2022

2023 - 2024

President Biden
designates Chuckwalla as
a national monument

2025

Hispanic Access Foundation supports public
engagement and coalition-building

CONCLUSION

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TOGETHER FOR OUR LANDS, OUR STORIES, OUR FUTURE

PUBLIC LANDS ARE A SHARED INHERITANCE AND A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY.

They are more than open space; they are places of healing, identity, opportunity, and connection. When we protect public lands, we are investing in our health, dignity, and the legacy we leave behind.

LATINO LEADERSHIP IS NOT JUST IMPORTANT—IT'S VITAL.

Our communities carry generations of knowledge, resilience, and a profound connection to the land. We are caretakers, advocates, and changemakers. And our voices must help shape the decisions that define our future.

The challenges to our lands are growing—but so is our power. Now is the time to rise together—to speak up, to act boldly, and to protect what we love.

STAND WITH US. USE YOUR VOICE. SHARE YOUR ROOTS. BE A PART OF THIS MOVEMENT.

GLOSSARY

TERMS:

- **ACTS** - Laws created by a federal or state legislature
- **AGENCIES** - Units of government created by statute.
- **AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL ACT/LEY AMERICA LA BELLA** - it is a 10-year, locally led campaign to conserve and restore the lands and waters upon which we all depend. Conserving at least 30% of U.S. lands and waters by 2030.
- **ANTIQUITIES ACT OF 1906/ LEY DE ANTIGÜEDADES DE 1906** - The Antiquities Act of 1906 was established as the first national policy giving the president the power to preserve cultural and natural resources in the United States. The act also requires federal agencies to protect historic and archaeological sites on public lands.
- **BILLS** - Legislative proposals that have not yet been voted on by the legislature
- **BIODIVERSITY** - The variety of life in a habitat or ecosystem
- **BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT (BLM)/ OFICINA DE ADMINISTRACIÓN DE TIERRAS**
- **CLIMATE CHANGE** - Changes in global climate patterns, specifically those occurring since the late twentieth century, that are attributable largely to increased levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide produced by the use of fossil fuels.
- **CONSERVATION** - The protection of the natural environment or species.
- **DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR (DOI)/DEPARTAMENTO DEL INTERIOR** - a federal agency that manages and protects the United States; natural resources and cultural heritage
- **ECOSYSTEMS** - Geographic areas where living entities (plants, animals, and other organisms) and non living entities (water, air and oil) interact in mutually interdependent ways.
- **ENVIRONMENT** - The surroundings or condition in which humans, plants, and animals function.
- **ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (EA)** - is a document that evaluates the potential impacts of a proposed project on the environment. EAs are required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).
- **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EIA)** - is a process used to systematically evaluate the potential significance effects a proposed project or development might have on the environment, aiming to identify, predict, and mitigate any negative impacts before a decision is made to proceed with the project.
- **ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT/LEY DE ESPECIES EN PELIGRO EXTINCIÓN** - a law that protects endangered and threatened species and their habitats in the United States and abroad. It was passed in 1973.
- **HABITAT** - The home of an animal, plant, or other organisms
- **INDIAN** - The term used in the U.S. Constitution to refer to North American indigenous peoples.
- **NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (NEPA)/ LEY NACIONAL DE POLÍTICA AMBIENTAL** - is a federal law that mandates federal agencies to assess the potential environmental impacts of major proposed actions before making decision, essentially required them to integrate environmental considerations into their planning and decision-making processes, thereby informing the public about potential environmental effects of government projects.
- **NATIONAL PARK SERVICE/ SERVICIO NACIONAL DE PARQUES** - is a federal agency that manages the United States national parks, monuments, and other areas.
- **ORGANIC ACT** - is an act of the United States Congress that establishes an administrative agency or local government
- **SUSTAINABILITY** - The use of natural resources in a way that is economically, socially, and environmentally viable in the long term.
- **TRIBAL CO-MANAGEMENT** - collaboration between tribes and the federal government, as well as the management of tribal resources.
- **TRIBAL CO-STEWARDSHIP** - is a collaborative agreement between tribes and federal agencies incorporating shared decision-making and Indigenous knowledge to manage and protect federal lands and waters.
- **U.S. FOREST SERVICE/ SERVICIO FORESTAL DE LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS** - is a federal agency that manages the country's national forests and grasslands.
- **U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE/ SERVICIO DE PESCA Y VIDA SILVESTRE DE LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS** - the federal agency that manages and conserves fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats.
- **WILDERNESS** - An area of land that exhibits minimal human impact; in the United States, such lands are protected under the National Wilderness Preservation System.
- **WILDLIFE** - Undomesticated animals that live in their natural habitats.

ABBREVIATIONS

- **ARPA** - Archaeological Resources Protection Act
- **BLM** - U.S. Bureau of Land Management
- **EA** - Environmental Assessments
- **EIS** - Environmental Impact Statement
- **ESA** - Endangered Species Act
- **FLPMA** - Federal Land Policy and Management Act
- **NEPA** - National Environmental Policy Act
- **NFMA** - National Forest Management Act
- **NHPA** - National Historic Preservation Act
- **NPS** - National Park Service
- **NWPS** - National Wilderness Preservation System
- **USFS** - U.S. Forest Service
- **USFWS** - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

ENDNOTES

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33. Western Economic Security Today (WEST) Act (H.R. 1206) - <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/1206>
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Together, we honor the cultural, ecological, and historical significance of our shared lands, and work to ensure they remain protected and accessible for generations to come.

ABOUT HISPANIC ACCESS FOUNDATION

Hispanic Access Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that connects Latinos with partners and opportunities improving lives and creating an equitable society. Our vision is that all Hispanics throughout the U.S. enjoy good physical health, a healthy natural environment, a quality education, economic success and civic engagement in their communities with the sum improving the future of America. For more information, visit www.hispanicaccess.org.

Hispanic Access Foundation was actively involved in elevating the Latino community's voice around the Browns Canyon, San Gabriel Mountains, Boulder-White Clouds, Sand to Snow, Mojave Trails, and Castle Mountains National Monument efforts. Additionally, Hispanic Access Foundation has launched the initiatives Por la Creación Faith-based Alliance, which unites Latino faith leaders around the protection of God's creation and creating tomorrow's environmental stewards, and Latino Conservation Week, which includes more than 150 conservation and outdoor-related events across the country.



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