



## NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA DESIGNATIONS

### *The Proposed Big Sky Country National Heritage Area*

#### ISSUE

The proposed Big Sky Country National Heritage Area which includes all of Cascade County and parts of Chouteau County.

#### BACKGROUND

National Heritage Areas (NHAs) are designated by Congress as places where natural, cultural, and historic resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally important landscape. Through their resources, NHAs tell nationally important stories that celebrate our nation's diverse heritage. NHAs are lived-in landscapes. Consequently, NHA entities collaborate with communities to determine how to make heritage relevant to local interests and needs.

NHAs are a grassroots, community-driven approach to heritage conservation and economic development. Through public-private partnerships, NHA entities support historic preservation, natural resource conservation, recreation, heritage tourism, and educational projects. Leveraging funds and long-term support for projects, NHA partnerships foster pride of place and an enduring stewardship ethic.

NHAs further the mission of the National Park Service (NPS) by fostering community stewardship of our nation's heritage. The NHA program, which currently includes 49 heritage areas, is administered by NPS coordinators in Washington DC and six regional offices - Anchorage, San Francisco, Denver, Omaha, Philadelphia and Atlanta - as well as park unit staff.

NHAs are not national park units. Rather, NPS partners with, provides technical assistance, and distributes matching federal funds from Congress to NHA entities. NPS does not assume ownership of land inside heritage areas or impose land use controls.

#### NHA FACTS

- Fifty-five NHAs have been designated by Congress since 1984. Each NHA is created through individual federal law. There are no current National Heritage Areas in Montana.
- NHA designation recognizes the national importance of a region's sites and history.
- Through annual Congressional appropriations, NPS passes funds to NHA entities. Although most entities are authorized to receive up to \$1 million annually over a set period of time, actual annual appropriations range from \$150,000 – \$750,000.
- The financial assistance component of the program is secured with legal agreements, accountability measures, and performance requirements for NHA entities.





## MSGA'S POSITION

MSGA stands firm on the protection of private property rights. In November 2020, MSGA membership adopted a policy opposing the proposed Big Sky Country National Heritage Area designation.

MSGA advocates from the protection of private property rights and the protection of private property right owners for undue harm as a result of a national heritage area. In most cases, National Heritage Areas are primarily composed of private land. However, private property owners within the proposed footprint have no ability to remove their property from this designation. Additionally, the concern that once a designation is put in place, an annual allocation of up-to \$1 million dollars can be made. This money will be managed by a self-appointed, private, unelected, unaccountable entity.

## MSGA'S ACTION

During the 2021 Legislative session, MSGA worked with Representative Josh Kassmeier to introduce legislation to require state legislative approval for designations of national heritage areas or national historic trail designations allowing for an additional layer of a "check and balance" put in place to the citizens of Montana.

House Bill 554 stated that "any designation by the United States national park service of a national heritage area or national historic trail that extends beyond federal land requires the approval of the legislature prior to a congressional act."

This legislation was signed into law in May 2021.





## CONSERVING AND RESTORING AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL *30 x 30 Initiative*

### ISSUE

The Biden administration's preliminary report on their "[Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful](#)" plan to conserve 30 percent of lands and waters in the United States by the year 2030.

### BACKGROUND

In one of his [first executive orders](#), President Biden instructed the U.S. Departments of Agriculture (USDA) and Interior (DOI) to conduct stakeholder outreach and develop a plan to conserve 30 percent of lands and waters by the year 2030. The executive order required DOI to submit a report with recommendations within 90 days. On May 6, the Biden Administration made public its report regarding the 30x30 initiative, renamed the effort "Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful." The report outlines first steps in the administration's effort to conserve 30 percent of lands and waters by the year 2030.

The "Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful" initiative calls for development of a 10-year conservation strategy that focuses on:

- Pursuing a collaborative and inclusive approach to conservation – building on cooperative conservation models
- Conserving America's lands and waters for the benefit of all people – urban and rural focus
- Supporting locally-led and locally designed conservation efforts collaborative conservation of fish and wildlife habitats and corridors.
- Honoring Tribal sovereignty and supporting the priorities of Tribal nations
- Pursuing conservation and restoration that creates jobs and supports healthy communities
- Honoring private property rights and supporting voluntary stewardship of private landowners
- Using science as a guide
- Building on existing tools and strategies with an emphasis on flexibility and adaptive approaches

Additional report recommendations include:

- Create more parks and outdoor spaces for nature-deprived communities
- Support Tribally-led conservation and restoration
- Expand collaborative conservation of fish and wildlife habitats and corridors
- Increase access for outdoor recreation
- Incentivize and reward voluntary conservation of farmers, ranchers, and forest owners
- Create jobs by investing in restoration and resilience





The report also calls for the creation of an interagency working group.

On January 4, 2022, the [Administration released a draft conservation "Atlas"](#), which is intended to guide the way the Administration will catalog and quantify national conservation efforts. The debut of the draft Atlas follows publication of the America the Beautiful Interagency Working Group's [first annual report](#), released at the end of 2021.

## MSGA'S POSITION

MSGA stands firm on the protection of private property rights.

Initial meetings with Montana's congressional offices, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), US Forest Service (USFS), US Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS) have taken place to discuss the proposal and MSGA's initial thoughts and concerns. In this ambitious proposal, and in order for the Administration to achieve success, they must have farmers and ranchers at the table. Cattle, and cattle producers, must be part of the solution as existing leaders in the American conservation model. MSGA continues to work through its national affiliates to have ongoing dialogue with USDA and DOI. We also continue to advocate that the interagency working group should include representation from private property owners and public land lessees.

We believe the Administration must recognize a baseline where good practices have already resulted in meaningful conservation: this proposal must not start from "zero". In defining "conservation", there must be an accounting for what is already done: conservation easements, utilization of federal conservation practices, adoption of the innovative approaches that support healthy ecosystems, and more. The administration should also take a broad view of conservation so that good practices are rewarded (by being counted) and are encouraged in the future – as part of this proposal, or during the normal course of daily activities.

There are a wide variety of state and federal programs that target conservation initiatives that should also be accounted for and encouraged: wildlife habitat recovery, fuels treatments to improve forest and rangeland health, cooperative agreements that take a landscape-level view.

Finally, there should be recognition that some conservation activities may have very little federal





## MSGA'S POSITION CONT..

interaction. Cattle producers make incredible investments on both private and public lands that are already considered conservation activities. These investments include one-time actions (easements, installation of water features, riparian support, invasive species treatments) but also ongoing practices that support biodiversity and landscape resilience (grazing management, prescribed fire, and more). These activities should be recognized and encouraged.

MSGA recommends the Administration not use this proposal as a way to substantially expand the land and water that the federal government owns. The government already owns a significant portion of landscapes across the West, and further expansion would disincentivize involvement for many communities. With respect to private lands, the government should refrain from any infringement of property rights or ownership. Voluntary conservation should be encouraged. Grazing should be used as a tool to improve existing federal lands, rather than further federal acquisition.

