

PUBLIC LANDS

Republicans on 30x30: 'Catchy tagline' on an empty package

Jennifer Yachnin, E&E News reporter • Published: Wednesday, May 5, 2021



House Natural Resources Committee ranking member Bruce Westerman (R-Ark.) on Capitol Hill in March. Francis Chung/E&E News

While the White House continues to mull the details of its ambitious conservation plans, House Republican lawmakers already skeptical of President Biden's "30x30" pledge yesterday volleyed a new round of criticisms at the program.

Arkansas Rep. Bruce Westerman, the top Republican on the House Natural Resources Committee, led a virtual [panel](#) discussion yesterday on the administration's 30x30 pledge, which aims to conserve 30% of the nation's lands and waters by 2030.

"At this point the administration has failed to develop its policy beyond a catchy tagline," Westerman asserted. "They have not defined a baseline of current conservation practices, established metrics for measuring progress, or even provided a clear understanding of how they define the word 'conservation.'"

Biden committed to the policy — which aims to address climate change and protect biodiversity — in an executive order signed in late January and directed the Interior Department to propose guidelines on determining how to tally land and waters.

The agency issued that report last week to the National Climate Task Force led by White House climate adviser Gina McCarthy, but the White House has yet to release it to the public ([Greenwire](#), April 27)

During a nearly two-hour session, Republican lawmakers reiterated their concerns that the 30x30 pledge is a "haphazard goal" that will "lock up millions of acres of land and water."

"True conservation is about managing our lands and waters for their environmental quality, not quantity," Westerman said.

Montana Rep. Matt Rosendale (R), who criticized federal land management in his state as subpar compared to state and private efforts, likewise slammed the 30x30 program as an "arbitrary top-down government mandate."

Rosendale added: "Locking up millions of acres of land with unclear goals in mind would result in countless negative impacts on both our economy and our environment."

Westerman pointed to a massive public lands package approved by House lawmakers earlier this year as an example of what GOP lawmakers fear. Democrats touted the bill, in part, because it would help to achieve the 30x30 goals.

[H.R. 803](#), the "Protecting America's Wilderness and Public Lands Act," would set aside more than 1.2 million acres of federally managed lands from new oil and gas or mining claims.

The measure passed largely along party lines, 227-200. Eight GOP lawmakers supported the bill ([E&E News PM](#), Feb. 26)

"It seems like it really is this model of preservation and trying to lock things up into wilderness areas," Westerman said.

But Brian Yablonski, who serves as CEO of the Montana-based Property and Environment Research Center, a free-market environmental think tank, told lawmakers that private conservation and multiple-use lands would be key to the meeting the 30x30 objective.

"Private land stewardship is the next frontier of conservation," Yablonski said, touting features like abundant wildlife, clean water and vast open space. "Conserving envisions multiple and sustainable use of our resources: like hunting and ranching."

In response to questions posed during her confirmation hearing in March, Interior Secretary Deb Haaland wrote to Senate lawmakers that the 30x30 program would need to rely on a variety of lands to achieve its goals, including "state and local parks, Indigenous-led conservation, voluntary private conservation, and working lands cared for by generations of farmers and ranchers" ([E&E News PM](#), March 4).

Deputy Interior secretary nominee Tommy Beaudreau echoed those remarks at his own confirmation hearing last week.

In an exchange with Wyoming Sen. John Barrasso, the panel's ranking Republican, Beaudreau said: "I think Secretary Haaland has said it best: Conservation in order to meet the 30x30 goals is about partnerships, it's about inclusivity it's about working with folks on the ground."

Kansas Sen. Roger Marshall (R) likewise lamented the lack of details about the conservation program to date: "I wish you could tell me what 30x30 means."

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