



DEFENDERS OF WILDLIFE 2019-2028 Strategic Plan





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Protecting and Reclaiming America's Wildlife Heritage

North America has some of the most abundant and diverse wildlife and wild places on Earth.

From the lush wetlands of Florida to the frozen tundras of Alaska and Canada, from the arid deserts of Mexico and the Southwest to the verdant forests of the Pacific Northwest, our continent is home to an unparalleled richness of species—more than 200,000 in the United States alone—species as varied as the habitats they depend on for survival. Our wildlife and spectacular landscapes are a source of great pride for America, a remarkable inheritance admired around the world.

With this legacy of natural riches comes a deep and enduring sense of shared responsibility to protect them. The United States has a storied conservation history. We were the first country in the world to create national parks and a national system of wildlife refuges. To protect our native plants and animals and their habitats, we pioneered environmental laws, such as the Endangered Species Act, that now serve as models for other nations. For generations, we have recognized our moral duty to conserve and protect the wildlife and wild lands that make our country unique. This ethic is part of what makes us proud to be Americans and determined to share these great treasures with future generations.

But our natural legacy is in danger.

Our wild plants and animals are facing an extinction crisis of epic proportions. Scientists estimate that we are losing species at a rate at least 100 times greater than the expected natural

rate. Habitat loss and fragmentation, population growth, resource extraction, invasive species and disease are contributing to this rapid loss. And climate change continues to accelerate, with dire and irreversible impacts on wildlife and the lands and waters it needs to thrive.

Meanwhile, our natural heritage has become the target of unrelenting political assault. An anti-environmental Congress and administration have hobbled agencies and programs at all levels with budget cuts; diluted and dismantled environmental laws, policies and regulations; ignored imperiled species in need of protection; and opened protected lands to drilling and mining at an unprecedented rate. Scientists have been shut out of key policy discussions, and industry insiders have been put in charge of environmental agencies, undercutting the very institutions entrusted with protecting America's natural resources. The odds against our treasured wildlife have worsened significantly.

With more than 70 years of experience on the frontlines of wildlife conservation, Defenders of Wildlife is well positioned to fight these attacks and reclaim our wildlife heritage. Our team of policy experts and lawyers challenge destructive policies and work to establish lasting protections for wildlife and habitat. With leadership from our staff research specialists, science informs all our work—from projects on the ground to policy analyses and initiatives. To bolster our effectiveness, we partner with wildlife agencies and federal land managers to help them address complex challenges, and with states, tribes, landowners and communities to find practical and effective ways to coexist

with wildlife. Our outreach is working to mobilize a broad and powerful constituency for wildlife conservation—a voice for America’s wildlife that will not be silenced.

But we need even more voices, we need an army of wildlife guardians. Surveys show that the environment consistently ranks high among public concerns. The key is translating this concern into action. The conservation movement has an impressive record of developing and mobilizing activists, but to ensure lasting success we need to join forces with diverse communities already committed to environmental issues and inspire people who may not necessarily think of themselves as conservationists or activists to get involved. Defenders envisions a conservation movement that is larger and more diverse, one that unites people from every corner of the nation and all classes and cultures with a common and urgent purpose.

Without a broad, inclusive and engaged public that feels invested in nature, America is at risk of losing its wildlife heritage forever. Our children and all who follow must not be denied this legacy. They deserve to see our magnificent and diverse wildlife and wild places firsthand—not just in picture books and films showing what once was—and to make the real connections that lead to actions that carry the legacy forward.

Now, more than ever,
America’s wildlife
needs defenders.

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Why Defenders?

Defenders of Wildlife's unwavering focus is on our treasured wildlife and the lands and waters on which it depends.

We are the premier U.S.-based national conservation organization dedicated to the protection and restoration of imperiled species and their habitats in North America.

Defenders' approach is direct and straightforward: We protect and restore imperiled species throughout North America by transforming policies and institutions and by promoting innovative solutions. We speak with one voice informed by scientific, legal and policy expertise, hands-on wildlife management experience and effective advocacy. This enables us to “punch above our weight” and puts Defenders at the forefront of developing long-term solutions to wildlife conservation challenges. Aligned around an integrated and focused strategy, we believe that we can make a lasting difference for wildlife and its habitat during these uniquely challenging times.

Our team has the experience and knowledge to engage in any arena to protect wildlife—Congress, the courts, federal and state agencies, academia and public debate—and does so tirelessly and effectively. Our field offices give us a grounding in the ecosystems and communities where we work, allowing us to engage the public, build support for conservation and develop practical solutions that will stand the test of time. Fueled by the commitment of our members, partners and supporters, we are building a powerful, enduring voice for wildlife conservation.



Finding Common Ground

Defenders works with a wide range of stakeholders, from government agencies and tribes to other environmental groups and individual property owners, to find the common ground that helps us devise lasting conservation solutions. No other organization engages so broadly and effectively with partners across the entire spectrum of the conservation community.

Photos, from top: Installing fladry on an Idaho ranch; speaking at Fort Peck Indian Reservation in Montana; releasing prairie dogs with conservation partners in Wyoming.





Our Mission

Defenders of Wildlife is a national, nonprofit membership organization dedicated to the protection of all native animals and plants in their natural communities.

We focus our programs on what scientists consider the two most serious environmental threats to our planet: the accelerating rate of species extinction and associated loss of biological diversity and the alteration and destruction of habitat.



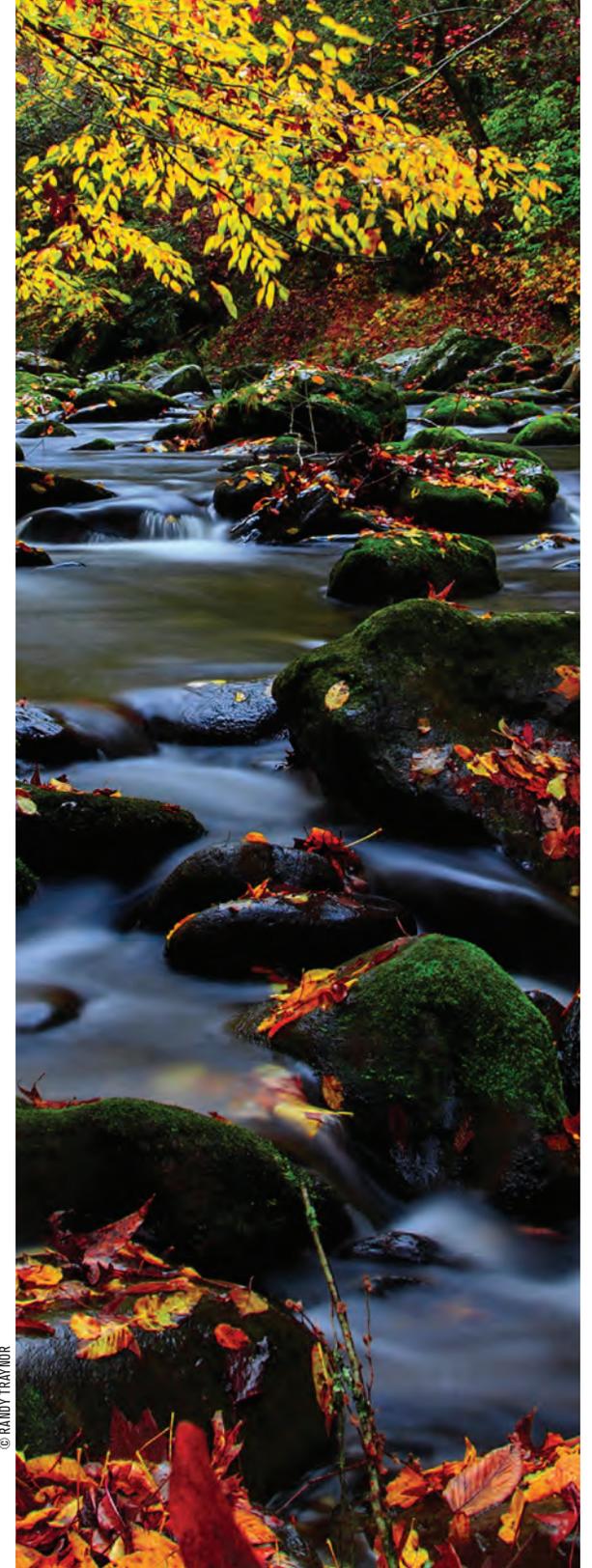
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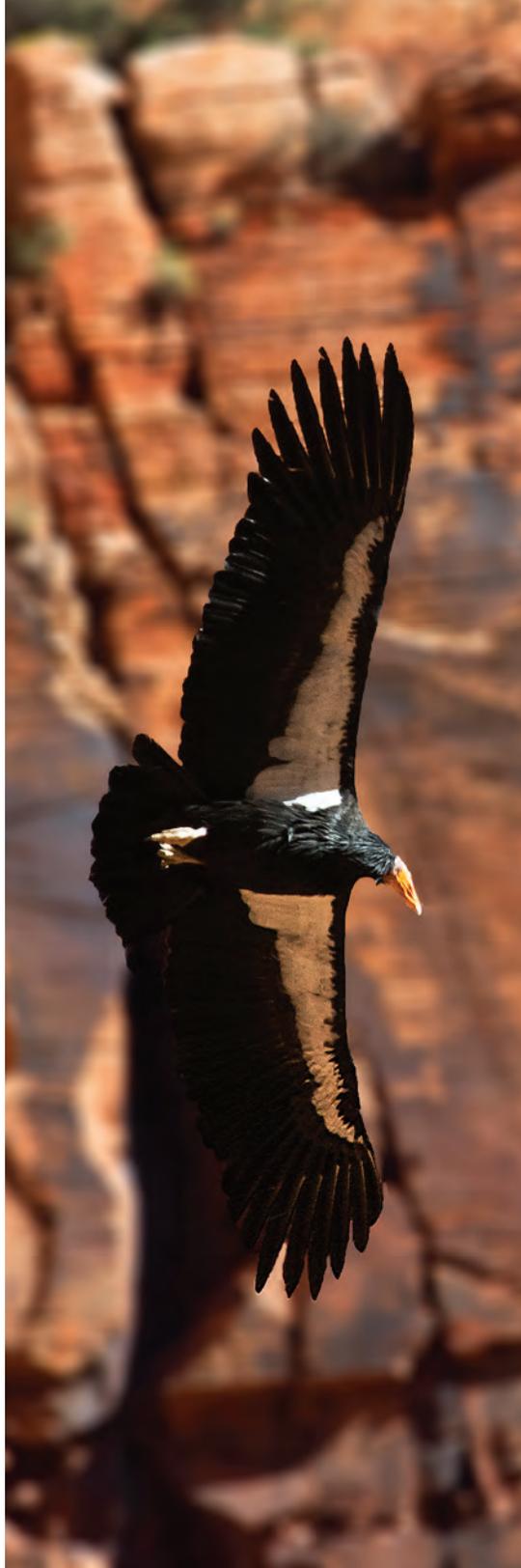
Our Conservation Vision

Defenders of Wildlife envisions a future where diverse wildlife populations in North America are secure and thriving, sustained by a network of healthy lands and waters.

- **Diverse wildlife populations.** Our conservation efforts are targeted at the full range of vulnerable North American biodiversity, from plants to pollinators to predators. While we do not set geographic boundaries on our work, we primarily focus on species of North America, including migratory and transboundary species that move freely across the borders or through the waters of the United States, Mexico and Canada. We recognize that we cannot protect any species without simultaneously protecting the habitats and other species on which it relies.
- **Secure and thriving.** We are working for the day when vulnerable North American species rebound to the point that they are secure—no longer threatened with rapid decline or extinction—and thriving in robust, well-distributed populations.
- **Network of healthy lands and waters.** Wildlife has the greatest chance of being secure and thriving if it is supported by a transnational network of public and private lands, rivers and coastal waters, core natural areas and working landscapes.

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Our Values: Who We Are and How We Operate

Defenders of Wildlife believes in the inherent value of wildlife and the natural world.

We value all species and habitats whether or not they are recognized as having utilitarian or aesthetic value to humankind. We believe that we will better achieve our mission to conserve all native plants and animals in North America in their natural communities if we live by convictions that guide all aspects of our work. Our values statement sets expectations for how we interact with each other, guides relationships with partners and supporters, and shapes our interactions with those who hold differing opinions and beliefs.

We are “One Defenders,” committed to working together under the highest standards of honesty and integrity to achieve transformative goals for our members, supporters and the plants and animals we seek to conserve. We strive to:

- Recognize and act on our belief that the conservation of biological diversity is best advanced by the contributions of people of diverse backgrounds, experiences, beliefs and cultures.
- Collaborate with all who share our commitment to wildlife conservation and challenge those who act against the interests of wildlife and biodiversity conservation.
- Honor the contributions of our members and supporters.
- Balance idealism with pragmatism.
- Be fair, honest, open-minded, collaborative, respectful and accurate in all our interactions and communications.

- Always use the best available science and technology to inform and guide our decisions, but recognize that these critical tools may not always be the sole driver of our actions.
- Measure our performance by the achievement of lasting solutions consistent with our mission, vision, goals and priorities.
- Use our resources wisely, thinking big and maximizing the impact and effectiveness of our advocacy work.
- Embrace innovation and be willing to take responsible risks to advance wildlife conservation.
- Routinely assess our successes and our disappointments, learning from them and adapting our strategies and tactics as necessary.
- Minimize our impact on wildlife and the environment by conserving resources in our daily work.

Defenders of Wildlife embraces the values of fairness and equity in society—including our workplace and our movement. We are committed to providing a professional, fair and safe workplace free of harassment and discrimination. Our greatest strength is our skilled, talented and dedicated employees; we care about their welfare and professional growth—and will always listen to their suggestions for improving our decision-making processes and operations. We foster empowerment at all levels of our organization through clarity of authority and accountability. We value the unique perspectives and backgrounds of our colleagues and work to expand the diversity of our workforce, board of directors and coalitions. More than co-workers, we are teammates and partners in our mutual goal of respecting our planet and all who live on it.





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Our Focus and Goals

Strategic Focus

With so much wildlife at risk and limited resources, Defenders of Wildlife strategically focuses on species and groups of species whose protection has maximum benefits for wildlife, habitat and people:

- Predators like **wolves, grizzly bears, jaguars and black-footed ferrets** that are vital to the restoration of natural ecosystems where they have been missing or suppressed for generations.
- Keystone species that create or maintain habitat for other wildlife—like **beavers**, whose dams establish and maintain wetlands; **prairie dogs**, whose burrows shelter many other species; and **sea otters**, whose appetite for kelp-grazing invertebrates keeps our highly productive undersea kelp forests functioning.
- Species that require large, connected expanses of habitat like **greater sage-grouse** on our western grasslands and **desert tortoises** in

the arid Southwest, because protecting them creates conservation “umbrellas” that benefit other species that share their habitat.

- Environmentally sensitive species that are indicators of habitat health and water quality critical to wildlife and human communities, species like **migratory shorebirds** and **amphibians** that rely on a variety of habitats throughout their life cycles and **mussels** and **freshwater fishes** that need clean water to survive.
- Groups of species like **bees, butterflies and bats** that serve functions essential to ecological integrity—and our own well-being—such as pollination and control of harmful insects.
- Marine species like **orcas, right whales, sharks and rays** that are crucial to the stability of our ocean food webs and ecosystems.

We also fight to protect **all species listed or proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act** against wrong-headed decisions and management actions that undermine the integrity of the act.

Focal Landscapes

We apply the same strategic focus to habitat by concentrating on focal landscapes (see map). Focal landscapes are areas that offer important opportunities to:

- Maintain/restore ecological integrity.
- Stabilize or improve the status of imperiled species.
- Address Defenders' conservation program priorities.
- Test conservation approaches and management techniques.
- Maximize our impact by collaborating with federal and state resource agencies, local organizations and landowners.

Our focal landscapes include areas where we currently have field capacity and expertise and priority areas for expansion.



MAP DATA SOURCES: NATURAL EARTH, ESRI



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GOAL 1: Conserve and restore imperiled biodiversity in North America

Defenders of Wildlife protects native plants and animals in their natural communities, focusing on the conservation of imperiled species and species that help restore the integrity and health of ecosystems.

To realize our conservation vision, Defenders of Wildlife deploys a wide range of tools and tactics, from policy analyses and advocacy, to litigation, innovative science and technology programs and field conservation. Every Defenders program aligns with or contributes to at least one of three broad imperatives:

- **Prevent** species and their habitats from becoming imperiled.
- **Protect** endangered and threatened species and their habitats.
- **Restore** the health of vulnerable species and their habitats.

Priority Strategies for Success

1. Defend and restore wildlife conservation protections and policies.

To maintain, strengthen and expand our nation's legacy of wildlife conservation and protection of imperiled species and ecosystems, we will fiercely defend wildlife and land conservation laws and policies and work to restore their protections whenever they are undermined or lost. We hold

agencies and other stakeholders accountable for complying with the Endangered Species Act and other legal mandates for conserving wildlife and public lands.

- Defeat legislative proposals and oppose administrative regulations and policies that would undermine the Endangered Species Act and other bedrock laws that protect wildlife and its habitat, including the National Environmental Policy Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the Marine Mammal Protection Act and federal land management statutes.
- Thwart legislative proposals and oppose administrative policies and actions that threaten the National Wildlife Refuge System, National Forest System and other federal lands.
- Restore weakened bedrock environmental laws and vital protections for wildlife and federal lands through legislative, administrative or judicial action.
- Hold members of Congress and government officials accountable for their positions and actions on critical wildlife and public lands issues.
- Prevent the devolution of federal land ownership or management authority to the states or private parties.
- Litigate to protect imperiled species and ecologically important habitats and ecosystems and to block actions that undermine laws and regulations that protect our wildlife, land, water and climate.
- Work to eliminate international trafficking in imperiled species.





2. Secure new wildlife conservation initiatives, policies and laws.

Defenders will promote innovative ideas and lasting solutions for safeguarding wildlife and habitat by working with federal, state, tribal and local governments and with conservationists, private landowners and other stakeholders. We will focus on conserving imperiled species and our focal landscapes and other priority habitats and act strategically to reshape laws, policies and programs for wildlife.

- Enhance implementation of the Endangered Species Act and other conservation laws on federal public lands to ensure that federal programs and actions contribute more effectively to the recovery of imperiled species.
- Develop and advocate for national policies to protect and restore habitat on public and private lands, including providing for wildlife habitat connectivity.
- Identify strongholds for imperiled species on public lands in order to secure durable habitat protections for wildlife and plants.
- Expand initiatives and policies for monitoring the status of species, habitats and threats.
- Pursue state legislative and regulatory actions to complement federal wildlife and land conservation laws and policies.
- Transform state wildlife agencies and commissions to prioritize conservation and recovery of imperiled species.
- Promote incentives-based policies and programs at all levels of government that protect and restore imperiled wildlife and habitats.
- Develop collaborative opportunities for wildlife conservation on private lands and on lands administered by the Department of Defense and other federal agencies.

3. Ensure adoption of effective climate change policies and practices to conserve wildlife.

Defenders will secure the timely adoption of forward-looking policies to address the enormous threat climate change poses to wildlife. We will work closely with and advise federal, state, tribal and local governments and private landowners on wildlife adaptation, responsible renewable energy development and climate change policy that will result in more resilient ecosystems.

- Call on federal agencies to address climate change impacts and adaptation in public land management and natural resources and similar conservation planning processes.
- Ensure that the threat of climate change is weighed appropriately in listing, management and recovery planning for endangered and threatened species.
- Identify the best available scientific information on climate change and wildlife adaptation and urge federal, state, tribal and local governments to use that information in addressing climate change impacts and implementing adaptation strategies.
- Advocate for the adoption of policies and technologies that address climate change by reducing emissions and promoting adaptation.
- Support robust development of low-impact onshore and offshore renewable energy sources to mitigate climate change.
- Pursue federal and state policies that promote carbon sequestration and reduced greenhouse gas emissions by protecting and restoring wildlife habitats.

4. Mobilize science and technology to advance wildlife conservation.

Science and technology offer innovative and effective approaches for informing and engaging the public and improving wildlife conservation outcomes. Defenders will develop and promote science and technologies that expand the conservation community's ability to track the status of wildlife populations and habitat. We will lead the development and application of cutting-edge tools to conserve wildlife.

- Identify emerging scientific research and technologies and develop and advocate for those with the potential to improve wildlife conservation outcomes.
- Lead and collaborate on science that informs how we implement conservation programs at multiple scales.
- Develop and apply new science to spatially prioritize conservation actions across the landscape.
- Develop internet-based tools that allow policymakers and the public to access critical data for better wildlife conservation decision-making.
- Create tools that leverage emerging technologies to enable or improve monitoring and evaluation of on-the-ground conservation.
- Make recommendations on how scientific and technological developments and investments at all levels of government can improve wildlife conservation policies and procedures.
- Promote data-driven wildlife conservation decisions at the federal, state, tribal and local levels of government.

5. Lead wildlife conservation on the ground.

As a national conservation organization with a strong field presence and working relationships with communities, activists and private landowners across the country, we will promote sound wildlife conservation policies at all levels of government and develop and implement new strategies for conserving wildlife and habitats on the ground.

- Engage in and expand restoration efforts on public, tribal and private lands to recover imperiled wildlife and protect habitat.
- Increase and expand wildlife habitat connectivity across lands and jurisdictions.
- Build partnerships with public and private landowners and tribes to improve and expand human-wildlife coexistence and other wildlife conservation projects.
- Implement targeted coexistence initiatives to increase social acceptance for predators and other wildlife.
- Promote pilot projects to test innovative conservation strategies for priority species and habitats.
- Ensure mitigation measures for development projects fully mitigate impacts on imperiled species and, where possible, result in a net benefit for such species.
- Advocate for implementation of management practices by federal, state and tribal wildlife and public land managers that support protection and recovery of native wildlife and its habitats.
- Promote incentives, policies and actions to restore and maintain ecological integrity on private lands.

6. Ensure adequate public and private funding for wildlife conservation.

Defenders will secure public and private funding for wildlife conservation and the protection of imperiled species and their habitats.

- Secure increased funding for the implementation of the Endangered Species Act and other critical wildlife laws and programs.
- Champion funding for the National Wildlife Refuge System and for wildlife programs for other federal public land systems.
- Secure increased funding and improve implementation of Farm Bill and other federal wildlife conservation programs for nonfederal lands.
- Promote incentives for increased private funding for wildlife conservation programs.
- Secure federal and state funding to support human-wildlife coexistence programs.
- Advocate for increased funding and improved processes for states and tribes to conserve imperiled species.
- Use available data—and advocate for additional monitoring and assessment—to inform wildlife conservation funding needs.



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GOAL 2: Mobilize a broader constituency for wildlife conservation

Defenders of Wildlife recognizes the vital role people play in protecting our wildlife and wild places.

We implement place-based conservation programs that are rooted in the communities in which we work and in strategic areas where we can have a positive impact on wildlife and landscapes. At the same time, we are driven by our responsibility to mobilize and grow a movement for conservation that will endure for generations to come.

To advance our conservation goals, Defenders will strengthen and expand our current membership, networks and partnerships and engage new constituencies, particularly those historically left out of the conservation movement.



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Priority Strategies for Success

1. Mobilize members and supporters.

Defenders' members and supporters are essential to the future of America's wildlife and wild places. We will engage our constituents in conservation actions and activities and provide them with the tools and resources they need to serve as effective advocates and ambassadors for wildlife and habitats.

- Diversify our membership base.
- Develop public engagement campaigns that attract a diverse audience and provide a voice for wildlife.
- Recruit members and supporters to take action in Defenders' campaigns to protect wildlife and habitats.
- Activate members and supporters to advance regional and local conservation priorities.
- Galvanize members and supporters nationally and in legislatively important areas to advance pro-conservation priorities and hold policymakers accountable for their positions on critical wildlife and land management issues.
- Use emerging technologies to engage members more deeply in conservation programs.

2. Engage new audiences.

Partnering with the wider conservation movement, Defenders will proactively expand the conservation community—beyond traditional constituencies—transcending the historical barriers of exclusion in conservation. We will work together through broad collaboration on issues of shared interests on behalf of our nation's wildlife and wild places.

- Enlist nontraditional constituencies to advance critical wildlife and land conservation policy priorities at the federal, state and local levels.
- Emphasize the connection between wildlife conservation and human health and well-being and expand collective work on issues of mutual concern.
- Empower the next generation of conservationists to lead in the protection of wildlife and habitats.
- Lead community science programs, including efforts that engage youth and student scientists in wildlife conservation campaigns.
- Implement human-wildlife coexistence programs to reduce conflicts between wildlife and people and increase social tolerance for wildlife, especially predators, on landscapes with high biological diversity.
- Use evolving social platforms to engage new audiences in our program work.



Photos, from left: Creating a raingarden at an elementary school in Tacoma, Wash.; participating in the People's Climate March in D.C.; encouraging wildlife activism at the March for Science; preparing to march at Defenders' headquarters; transporting a Pacific fisher for release in a national forest.

3. Expand partnerships.

Defenders will build on our long history of working with partners to develop, lead and participate in new alliances and coalitions to expand our base of support and work together to advance the conservation of wildlife and wild places.

- Develop partnerships with organizations that represent the interests of diverse communities to work on issues of common interest.
- Identify and engage new partners across sectors and issue areas of common concern.
- Expand outreach to and engagement with Native American tribes and other indigenous peoples.
- Develop partnerships with technology companies that can deliver our tools to new audiences.

4. Diversify our workforce and foster a culture of inclusivity.

Defenders' staff is our most valued asset. We are committed to growing a mission-driven team that represents the diversity of society and nurturing an equitable and inclusive workforce that embraces different backgrounds and perspectives.

- Foster a culture that seeks out, attracts and retains diverse talent by creating programs and systems that promote diversity and equity.
- Enhance Defenders' inclusion efforts through comprehensive goal-setting, leadership and management training, open communications and mentorship programs.
- Collaborate with underrepresented communities in our efforts to achieve our conservation mission and equip our staff with the capacity and capabilities to serve as genuine partners.
- Create a broad and diverse applicant pool of future talent through partnerships with community groups and foundations and a robust internship and fellowship program.





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Defenders of Wildlife is a national, nonprofit membership organization dedicated to the protection of all native wild animals and plants in their natural communities.

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NOAA NMFS

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