

30 by 30: A Two-Year Status Update on E.O. 14008

February 24, 2023

30 by 30 is a [global initiative](#) to conserve 30% of the Earth’s lands and waters by 2030, which [the concept’s founding researchers propose](#) would reduce threats to biodiversity, “avoid catastrophic climate change and ... secure essential ecosystem services.” Global efforts toward 30 by 30 at various jurisdictional levels have been ongoing since 2019. At the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity in December 2022, over 190 countries committed to 30 by 30 (among other commitments) by joining the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#). Some [U.S. states and localities](#)—but [not all](#)—also have resolved to support 30 by 30, as have some [tribal leaders](#).

The Biden Administration formalized a 30 by 30 policy for the United States at the federal level through Section 216 of [E.O. 14008](#), “Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad.” The section specified that the Secretary of the Interior, in consultation with other relevant Secretaries and agencies, must issue a report recommending steps that the United States should take to achieve the goal of conserving at least 30% of U.S. lands and waters by 2030. The E.O. specified that the report must propose guidelines for determining what lands and waters “qualify for conservation” and must establish mechanisms to measure progress toward reaching the goal.

Implementation of Federal 30 by 30

The Biden Administration launched its federal 30 by 30 framework, [America the Beautiful](#), and issued the report required by E.O. 14008, [Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful](#), in 2021. The report specified principles for the Administration’s efforts in pursuit of 30 by 30, such as ensuring conservation benefits all Americans and honoring private property rights and tribal sovereignty, among others. The report recommended that the federal government publish annual progress reports and create an [American Conservation and Stewardship Atlas](#) to collect information on areas being managed for conservation purposes. However, the report did not explicitly specify what lands and waters qualify for conservation, nor did it establish mechanisms to measure progress. The Administration issued a [one-year progress report](#) on America the Beautiful in December 2021, which highlighted projects and programs that the Administration considered to be furthering the initiative but did not include cumulative conservation statistics. The Administration also invited the public to participate in development of the atlas in January 2022. The atlas has not yet been launched.

Congressional Research Service

<https://crsreports.congress.gov>

IN12116

Questions Remain about Federal 30 by 30

The Administration has not yet defined what lands and waters are considered to be *conserved* for the purposes of E.O. 14008. In the absence of such a definition, a baseline of *conservation* under the policy cannot be established and progress cannot be definitively measured. Therefore, stakeholders might question what U.S. lands and waters are already conserved, how progress toward 30 by 30 is to be measured, and what specific actions may support or oppose the policy. For example, it is unclear whether progress requires protection of currently unprotected land—such as through new conservation easements, federal land designations, or [federal land acquisition](#)—or whether it also includes restoration of currently protected areas. It is also unclear whether areas with certain characteristics “count” under E.O. 14008—such as those where extractive activities are allowed, such as fishing or timber harvesting—and therefore how to approach management policies for such areas for the purposes of the E.O. Some have estimated that about 12% of U.S. [lands](#) and 23% of U.S. [oceans](#) are protected in some way. However, it is unclear if these statistics align with the definition of *conserved* for the purposes of E.O. 14008 or with other ways progress could be measured (for example, whether progress in conserving lands and waters should be measured separately).

This uncertainty contributes to a lack of clarity regarding the impacts of the Administration’s 30 by 30 policy—particularly, whether it has generated an increase in *conservation* or has primarily served as an organizing principle for ongoing activities. Federal and nonfederal activities have purported to support America the Beautiful, such as the [America the Beautiful Challenge grant program](#) administered by the [National Fish and Wildlife Foundation](#) and existing programs through various federal agencies, including the [Fish and Wildlife Service](#) and the [Natural Resource Conservation Service](#). However, these activities appear to reflect redeployments of existing federal resources (e.g., the America the Beautiful Challenge grants “streamline federal grant opportunities”). It is unclear whether any regular FY2023 appropriations were intended for 30 by 30 or E.O. 14008, and Congress did not allocate specific funds in [FY2023 appropriations](#) (see p. S8651) in response to the Administration’s requested [\\$25.5 million to fund the U.S. Geological Survey’s development of the American Conservation and Stewardship Atlas](#). The Administration has identified the America the Beautiful initiative with [\\$7.1 billion in funding](#) provided through the [Inflation Reduction Act](#) for various objectives. However, it is difficult to directly attribute this funding to congressional support of 30 by 30.

The federal 30 by 30 policy has been controversial. Those who oppose the policy have asserted that it could lead to [increased federal land acquisition](#) and [protective designations](#), or [federal conservation easements on private land](#), infringing on private property rights, curtailing [state and local government revenue](#), or [reducing economic opportunity](#). Those who support the policy, in contrast, assert that working toward 30 by 30 may [reduce climate risk](#), [protect biodiversity](#), or support [resource-related economic development](#). Congress might wish to evaluate how the Administration balances these concerns in implementing America the Beautiful, particularly if the Administration further clarifies the initiative’s terms and methods. Congress also might want to take its own actions to advance or oppose 30 by 30—such as by supporting or opposing certain federal land and water designations, expanding or shrinking the federal estate, or managing certain uses of federal lands. In the absence of formalized definitions for America the Beautiful, such actions may be independent of the Administration’s vision for 30 by 30 but could support Congress’ conception of it. Congress also may seek clarification about the Administration’s definitions of conservation or progress under the E.O. before taking further actions.

Author Information

Anne A. Riddle
Analyst in Natural Resources Policy

Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.