



Parks Now Principles and Recommendations for Equitable Implementation of 30x30 Initiative

Parks Now is a coalition of California-based organizations and leaders committed to public health and social and environmental justice. We believe that access to parks, the coast, and public land is fundamental to healthy, vibrant communities. Our mission is to encourage meaningful action towards investing and improving parks and access to the outdoors, especially for California's increasingly diverse, urban, and young population. We know that doing these things are essential to the success of any 30x30 strategy and long-term sustainability.

The world's biodiversity is decreasing at an alarming rate. In the last century, thousands of species have been lost to human activity destroying habitat and fueling the climate crisis that threatens all living things on earth. Addressing a disaster of this magnitude necessitates a holistic strategy that includes everyone. It requires scientists to inform us, policy makers to guide us, and most importantly, a broad base of individuals that care about the environment to become tomorrow's scientists, policy makers, and advocates representing their own communities' unique voices.

With Indigenous communities continuing to lose access to their land, and more people moving into urbanized areas, our relationship to nature—an important driver of what keeps us invested in protecting it—has never been more tenuous. To cultivate the next generation of environmental stewards, we need to reimagine our conservation practices and rebuild them in a way that instills principles of environmental protection that are accessible and culturally relevant for all.

And yet access to safe, welcoming parks and other outdoor natural spaces, so fundamental to public health and social wellbeing, remains deeply inequitable for Black and Indigenous people, and other people of color (BIPOC) and low-income neighborhoods. They face myriad physical and emotional barriers such as a lack of walkable access to parks, spotty public transportation, lack of affordable accommodations, signage and programs that are in English only, and the presence of often hostile law enforcement, among others.

Executive Order N-82-20, that Governor Newsom issued in late 2020 directing California state agencies to protect 30 percent of state land and coastal waters by 2030, is an important opportunity to correct these inequities. Making conservation relevant and accessible to those who will become our planet's future stewards fulfills this moral imperative, while also ensuring the enduring success of the 30x30 effort.

As the state develops a strategy to achieve 30x30, we urge officials to apply the following principles and recommendations to ensure a holistic and equitable approach.

PRINCIPLES:

1. People in every community caring for nature is the best guarantee for sustainable biodiversity.
2. Access to nature is fundamental to people's health and is a right that must be guaranteed for all.
3. Equitable access to nature means more than removing physical barriers; it is also about creating spaces that are safe and welcoming to all.
4. Local communities--including Tribal governments and other BIPOC communities-- hold important lived experiences and knowledge critical to caring for nature and identifying priority areas for conservation and restoration.
5. Protection of nature and outdoor recreation can take many different forms, depending on regions, cultural traditions, and other factors.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The following recommendations are guided by these principles and intended to serve as a framework to ensure that equitable access is advanced in tandem with biodiversity protection in 30x30 implementation.

1. Invest in building a culture of stewardship.

Ensure that building a culture of environmental stewardship is part of the 30x30 strategy in order to secure long-term biodiversity protection, and significantly invest in measures that reduce barriers to outdoor access.

Potential Actions:

- Strengthen people's relationship to nature by ensuring everyone lives within a 10-minute walk to a park and expanding public access to suitable state lands that are not currently accessible.
- Fund outdoor access programming activities that engage people who face barriers to accessing nature.
- Design and make culturally relevant nature-based interpretation for multiple audiences available in outdoor spaces to maximize access and inclusivity.
- Invest in environmental education in the classroom and in the field, including outdoor activity programming with an environmental education component.
- Develop career pathways and workforce development opportunities in natural resources jobs and ensure they are accessible to everyone.
- Inspire and empower future stewards by diversifying boards, commissions, executive and field staff to demonstrate that everyone belongs and can be an environmental leader.

2. Advance nature and biodiversity protection that is meaningful to today's population.

Rethink how nature and biodiversity are defined and creatively reimagine how to protect them in various natural and built environments. Explore and optimize opportunities to enhance nature and biodiversity in settings where it's desired and/or needed but does not already exist and can be substantially increased, while considering unique ways to facilitate protection outside of simply conserving lands.

Potential Actions:

- Engage community members who are not part of the traditional conservation community to identify what nature and biodiversity means to them.
- Build greenspaces in urban and suburban environments to ensure nature exists in every community.
- Restore disturbed lands that are close to urban populations and ensure access to those lands is prioritized.
- Include communities in conservation and environmental protection activities, through volunteerism and paid opportunities.

3. Develop a strategy to advance biodiversity protection and equitable public access together, and leverage investments to promote multiple benefits.

Take a holistic approach that promotes biodiversity protection through a lens of public access. Seize opportunities to protect biodiversity and support activities that allow people to access these areas and prioritize conserving lands that advance multiple benefits.

Potential Action:

- Integrate accessibility into the evaluation and prioritization of lands for protection in a way that accounts for public access benefits to urban and rural communities.
- Prioritize restoration and protection in areas with existing public access benefits or that produce public access benefits, such as in urban river parkways, utility corridors, and regional parks.
- Prioritize parklands acquisitions in areas that have less surrounding open space than others and ensure accessibility to serve high-need communities.
- Promote activities that advance integration of urban and natural spaces, such as enhancing wilderness-urban interfaces in accessible ways, to ensure urban areas are not isolated from natural areas.

4. Ensure the feedback and recommendations you receive from communities that have not traditionally been included in these conversations meaningfully informs decisions.

Listen carefully to the broad universe of stakeholders you have engaged (and evaluate who needs to be at the table but isn't), keep them updated, and ensure strategies are responsive to feedback, particularly from those that have not traditionally been part of the conversation.

Potential Actions:

- Conduct outreach and engagement activities in ways that are truly accessible to the community. Think about the choices in venues, schedules, language assistance, childcare, refreshments, and other factors, and prioritize those that are convenient and familiar to those you want to engage.
- Develop meaningful and ongoing partnerships with Tribes, community-based organizations, nonprofits, educators, and researchers to advance 30x30 goals.
- Ensure the knowledge held by Tribal and other BIPOC leaders and communities informs decisions while protecting Tribal sovereignty
- Ensure meaningful community engagement carries through from start to finish. Check in and consult often, making sure feedback is reflected at each step of the way.