

LETTER: Protecting public lands is a climate and justice imperative

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In her March 27 webinar, GreenLatinos Public Lands Director Olivia Juarez emphasized the need not only to protect public lands, but also to empower everyday people to take an active role in shaping sound climate policy.



Not only are our public lands and waters at risk, but so is access to them. Juarez envisions a future where everyone has safe, welcoming entry to public parks, beaches, and national monuments.

The loss of nature in our country is severe. We have lost 50% of our coral reefs and 85% of our wetlands, and we continue to lose a football field-sized area of land to development every second.

While all people are likely to be affected by the extreme weather driven by climate change, communities of color bear a disproportionate environmental burden. Poor communities are more likely to experience excessive pollution and contaminated water, and less likely to have access to joyful experiences in nature—a phenomenon Juarez calls “nature deprivation.” Outdoor workers, too, will need better protection as weather becomes more severe.

Juarez highlighted recent Executive Orders from the Trump administration that redefined the primary purposes of national forest management as logging and fossil fuel extraction. These orders also sought to weaken the Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act.

Rather than preserving public lands for clean water, wildlife habitat, recreation, cultural history, and carbon absorption, the current administration has prioritized selling these lands for resource extraction to benefit wealthy industrialists. In doing so, the Trump administration essentially advocates borrowing — or stealing — from future generations.

Even access to public lands is currently under threat, particularly for low-income individuals. Massive staffing cuts at the National Park Service have undermined visitor services. Meanwhile, a shift to “cashless” park entry policies effectively denies access to those without credit cards — the “unbanked.”

GreenLatinos urges support for the “30x30” initiative: conserving at least 30% of U.S. land and water by 2030 to enhance biodiversity, mitigate the climate crisis, and ensure equitable access for all.

To view the Friends of White’s Woods webinar, visit <https://www.friendsofwhiteswoods.org/events>.

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