

Remarks at the White House Conservation in Action Summit

March 21, 2023

The President. Please, please have a seat. Thank you very, very much.

Chairman Williams, thanks for that introduction and for your leadership of Fort Mojave Indian Tribe. You know, it was great to meet you last week in Nevada.

And thank you, Secretary Haaland, for hosting this White House Conservation Summit here. You know, and I want to thank you for—all your fellow Cabinet members and the Federal employees across agencies to carry out this historic conservation plan across our Nation, because it is a big deal.

We're grateful to have incredible partners, including Members of the Congress, Tribal leaders, conservation advocates all here today.

And, folks, my first week in office, I issued an Executive order establishing the country's first-ever National Conservation Goal. And we called it the —"America the Beautiful." And it's a nationwide campaign to protect and conserve by 2030 at least 30 percent of the lands and waters that support and sustain our Nation.

And last year, on Earth Day, I signed an Executive order to protect America's forests and to harness the power of nature in the fight against climate change. I'm here today to talk about the incredible progress that we've made.

You know, in my first year in office, we protected more lands and waters than any American President since John Kennedy. And—[*applause*].

And with—the help of Members of Congress here today, I signed the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the—Inflation Reduction Act, the largest investment in climate and environmental justice and conservation ever anywhere in the world.

Through the past 2 years, these investments have helped protect our iconic outdoor spaces, preserve our historic sites, and make our Nation more resilient to the devastating impacts of climate change.

We also relied on important partners to help us meet the—meet these goals.

Farmers and ranchers have implemented critical conservation and stewardship practices across 50 million acres in private land in areas the size of the State of South Dakota.

In Alaska, we protected the Tongass National Forest and the salmon Bristol Bay—of Bristol Bay.

And we—restored the protections and status that the previous administration rolled back in Bears Ears National Monument; the Grand Staircase Escalante; and North—the North East Canyons and—Seamounts of—the marine monument.

Last year, I had the honor of visiting Camp Hale Continental Divide in Colorado—[*applause*]—and adding that to the list of national monuments for the first time to be added in my administration.

It matters. This matters, because when we conserve our country's natural gifts, we're not just protecting the livelihoods of people who depend on them—like the family farms, outdoor recreation businesses, rural communities welcoming visitors across—from all across the country

and around the world that matter. We're protecting the heart and the soul of our national pride. We're protecting pieces of history, our—telling our story that will be told for generations upon generations to come.

You know, our natural wonders are literally the envy of the world. They've always been and they always will be as central to our heritage as a people and essential to our identity as a Nation.

That's why the budget I released earlier this month includes new funding to increase access to our natural areas for Americans from all backgrounds. And we're going to continue to take aggressive steps toward conservation with the big actions I'm announcing—about to announce today.

First, I'm proud to use my authority under the Antiquities Act to establish the—and I— want you to know it's a big deal—the—[laughter]—*Havina Kwa' May* [*Avi Kwa' Ame*; White House correction]—I—I'm having trouble—

Audience member. Kwa' Ame!

The President. Thank you.

Audience member. [Inaudible]

The President. I got it. [Laughter] I just know it as "Spirit Mountain" in Nevada.

It's one of our most beautiful landscapes that ties together one of the largest contiguous wildlife corridors in the United States: 500,000 acres. It's breathtaking. Breathtaking deserts, valleys, mountain ranges. Rich in biodiversity. Sacred lands that are central to the creation story of so many Tribes who have been here since time immemorial.

Look, you know, it's a place of reverence. It's a place of spirituality. And it's a place of healing. And now it'll be recognized for the significance it holds and be preserved forever. Forever.

And I look forward to visiting myself.

I want to thank my friends in Congress who fought so hard for this day to become possible: Senators Jacky Rosen. Catherine Cortez Masto. Representatives Susie Lee, Dina Titus.

And a special thanks to you, Mr. Chairman, for your partnership.

Look, second thing we're doing is we're protecting the Castner Range in Texas as a national monument.

Thank you, Veronica Escobar, Representative, for your leadership in this. Now, I hope you'll still have reason to call me, because you called me a lot on this one. I—[laughter].

This is managed by the United States Army at Fort Bliss, and it tells the story of the Tribal Nations who lived there and the members of our Armed Forces who trained on those lands.

It's also a place of incredible beauty. And right now—right now, as winter gives way to spring, Mexican gold poppies are bursting into bloom. You see—I wish—what I wanted to do was have all this in a video behind me here because—[laughter]—because when you see it, it's just breathtaking. Transforming desert plains and hills into a sea of vibrant yellow and oranges, framed with the rugged mountains and the blue sky.

The people of El Paso have fought to protect this for 50 years. Their work has finally paid off. And now we'll clear the area of old munitions, create access to the outdoors for communities and parks, and we're going to—green spaces that—they're harder and harder to find. And importantly, Castner Range will be preserved for future generations.

Folks, the third thing we're doing today—I'm—issuing a Presidential memorandum directing the Secretary of Commerce to immediately consider designating 777,000 square miles of the Pacific Ocean southwest of Hawaii as a new—national marine sanctuary.

You know, that's an area larger than Alaska and Colorado put together and three times the size of Texas. That's no small amount of land. [*Laughter*] [*Inaudible*]

It would make it the largest ocean area on the planet with the highest level of protection. And it will help us meet our goal of conserving—the goal I set when I got elected—of protecting and conserving 30 percent of our oceans.

It's a network of islands and reefs where waters are filled with the—most of the diverse—the most diverse marine on the planet—marine life on the planet: sharks, rays, marlins, tunas, turtles, whales, ancient coral forests—many that are threatened and endangered right now but won't be.

And I want to thank Brian—Senator Brian Schatz and Mazie—Mazie, where are you?

Senator Mazie Hirono. Here.

The President. There you are. There—I want to say—[*applause*]*—Mazie—*

Representative—and Representatives Ed Case and Jill Kotuda [Tokuda; White House correction] and many—Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander leaders—you know, look—who have worked tirelessly to protect our oceans. I want to thank you.

I mean, I genuinely mean it. Thank you. It wouldn't have happened without you.

And that's not all we're doing today. Earlier, you heard Secretary Haaland announce that she's taking steps to modernize the management of America's public lands to put conservation on an equal footing with development, to safeguard more places for people to hike, hunt, camp, and fish.

And we're going to be moving—ahead today with a strategy to conserve—to conserve the wildlife corridors across agencies and across our entire landscape.

Whether it's the National Park Service or the Bureau of Land Management or the Forest Service or private landowners, we need to be coordinated to make sure that habitats we're conserving along migration routes, no matter where or who's in charge of that land.

And today, we're releasing the first-ever United States Ocean Climate Action Plan to harness the tremendous power of the ocean to help in our fight against climate—the climate crisis.

We know and you well know we can reduce emissions by building offshore wind farms, better protect our coastal and fishing communities from worsening storms, changing fish—changing fisheries, and other impacts on climate change.

And—I'm also committed to working with the Tribal leaders here—as well as Senator Patty Murray, Maria Cantwell, and Representative Mike Simpson—to bring healthy and abundant salmon runs back to the Colorado [Columbia; White House correction] River system.

Let me close with this. Our country's natural treasures define our identity as a nation. They're a birthright—they're a birthright we have to pass down to generation after generation. They unite us.

That's why our conservation work is so important. It provides a bridge to our past and to our future—not just for today, but for all ages.

Rachel Carson, an environmentalist and—author, wrote, quote, "Those who contemplate the beauty of the Earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts."

I share with all of you here today the enduring reverence for the power and the promise of the country's extraordinary natural wonders. And they are extraordinary.

When I was Vice President, I went to most of the national parks, and I brought my family because I wanted them to see them. Going down the Colorado River, the Snake River. Just incredible, incredible, incredible places.

But we got to keep it going. We got to keep the faith. We got to remember who we are. We're the United States of America. And we owe to our children, our grandchildren, our great-great-grandchildren, and all to come what we have and what we can preserve. There is nothing beyond our capacity if we work together.

So, God bless you all. And may God protect our troops. Thank you so much.

Audience member. Thank you, Joe!

The President. Thank you! It's a good day. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:40 p.m. at the Department of the Interior. In his remarks, he referred to Timothy Williams, chairman, Shan Lewis, vice chairman, Johnny Hemmers, Cellina Reyes, and Michael Jackson, members, Fort Mojave Indian Tribal Council; Rafael Gomez Jr., member, Ysleta del Sur Pueblo Tribal Council; and Secretary of Commerce Gina M. Raimondo.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : White House Conservation in Action Summit.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Cantwell, Maria E.; Case, Edward E.; Cortez Masto, Catherine; Escobar, Veronica ; Garcia, Colleen; Gomez, Rafael; Haaland, Debra A.; Hemmers, Johnny; Hirono, Mazie K.; Jackson, Michael; Lee, Suzanne K.; Lewis, Shan; Murray, Patricia L.; Raimondo, Gina M.; Reyes, Cellina; Rosen, Jacklyn S.; Schatz, Brian; Simpson, Michael K.; Titus, A. Constandina; Tokuda, Jill N.; Williams, Timothy.

Subjects: Biodiversity preservation efforts; Carbon emissions, reduction efforts; Climate change; Conservation, fishery stocks, management efforts; Conservation, promotion efforts; Environment, quality, improvement efforts; Farmland, pastures, and forests, carbon-mitigation role; Federal programs, improvement efforts; Fiscal year 2024 budget proposal; Land conservation efforts; Public and Tribal lands, conservation and management; Secretary of Commerce; Secretary of the Interior; Solar and wind energy, promotion efforts; White House Conservation Action Summit.

DCPD Number: DCPD202300213.