

SHARED GROUND

Aligning Affordable Housing and Public Lands Priorities

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Shared Ground: Aligning Affordable Housing and Public Lands Priorities

Communities across the United States are confronting intensifying challenges including a housing affordability crisis and increasing political pressure to develop our nation's public lands. These challenges are often presented as competing priorities. However, efforts to build affordable housing and efforts to steward federal public lands are grounded in shared objectives—supporting healthy and livable communities, advancing equitable access to opportunity, and ensuring responsible land use and long-term conservation.

This document articulates a shared policy framework between the affordable housing and public lands communities, outlining practical approaches to advance the goals of both sets of stakeholders simultaneously. It affirms that protecting public lands and addressing housing affordability are not mutually exclusive, but complementary priorities that, when aligned, allow us to strengthen communities and achieve durable, equitable outcomes.

Access to Affordable and Fair Housing

Housing costs continue to rise faster than wages in every community, leaving many middle to low income families and individuals unable to afford stable housing. Local governments face growing pressure to safely house their residents amid shortages of affordable units; poor conditions in existing affordable housing; and insufficient public investment in rental assistance, preservation, and new development. At the same time, the private sector often favors speculation over long-term affordability, while tenants and first-time homebuyers lack meaningful power to negotiate in the market.

Proven solutions for increasing housing affordability without sacrificing our public lands include the preservation of existing affordable housing, reuse of already-developed public and federal properties, equitable zoning reforms that pair increased density with affordability, infill development, tenant protections, and stronger financing tools. The housing crisis is fundamentally a policy and investment challenge—not the result of a simple shortage of land.

Public Lands at a Crossroads

America's federally-managed public lands are facing renewed threats from federal lawmakers and regulators who portray a large-scale public lands sell-off as a solution to housing affordability challenges. Many of the proposals lack enforceable requirements to ensure that disposed lands would be used for affordable housing and instead risk enabling low-density sprawl and expensive residential development in places without the infrastructure to support growth.

Quick fix solutions like this don't recognize or address the fact that housing shortages differ across states, communities, and income brackets. Nor do they recognize that people need to live near communities in which they work, have support, and access necessities like transportation, grocery stores, and health care. Proposals that fail to take these types of nuance into account will have little impact on local affordability issues, while enriching

private developers and destroying wildlife habitat. Finally, once sold, public lands are removed from public ownership permanently, resulting in the loss of recreational access, ecological functions, cultural resources, and the long-term economic stability and benefits to public health these lands provide to surrounding communities.

Shared Principles

The principles below establish a shared framework for aligning housing affordability efforts with responsible public lands stewardship. They set clear expectations to ensure that any housing-related use of public lands advances genuine community benefit, long-term affordability, and protection of irreplaceable natural and cultural resources.

1. Demonstrated Public Interest and Community Benefit: Any proposal for the use or disposal of public lands for housing must carry binding, legally enforceable requirements that the land primarily serves affordable housing rather than market-rate and never fuels speculative development. Benefits must flow primarily to local, existing communities—not private developers—and projects should be limited to parcels near existing infrastructure and services.

2. Careful Inventory and Prioritization: Any such proposal must also require careful inventory of the public lands under consideration for use or disposal and prioritize already-developed sites over undeveloped land. Proposals must also be reconciled with existing land use plans and community development plans to ensure alignment and local community engagement in decision making.

3. Conservation, Cultural, Recreational, and Tribal Safeguards: Public Lands with significant conservation, wildlife, cultural, historic, Tribal, or recreational value must be excluded from any conveyance or development proposal. All proposals must include early, meaningful consultation with Tribal Nations, and transparent engagement with local communities, with clear public accountability throughout the process.

4. Shared Commitment to Community Solutions: Affordable housing and public lands leaders agree that protecting public lands and addressing housing costs are complementary—not competing—priorities. When aligned, these goals create stronger, more resilient, and more equitable communities. We oppose efforts that justify large-scale public land sell-offs in the name of affordable housing. Instead, we support genuine housing solutions that meet demonstrated local needs while safeguarding the public lands and natural resources that belong to everyone.

The housing affordability crisis requires comprehensive, community-based solutions. How we use our public lands is neither the cause of the crisis nor a panacea. Treating them as such risks undermining both affordable housing and conservation goals.

By working from shared values—livability, sustainability, equity, and fairness—housing advocates and public lands stewards can reject false choices and advance solutions that invest in housing where it belongs while protecting the public lands that make communities worth living in.

National Low Income Housing Coalition	The Wilderness Society
National Housing Law Project	Conservation Lands Foundation
National HIV/AIDS Housing Coalition	League of Conservation Voters
Private Equity Stakeholder Project	Vet Voice Foundation
Poverty & Race Research Action Council	Sierra Club
National Coalition for the Homeless	Natural Resources Defence Council
Grounded Solutions Network	Southern Environmental Law Center
National Alliance to End Homelessness	Nevada Wildlife Federation
National Fair Housing Alliance	Olympic Climate Action
Minnesota Housing Partnership	Californians for Western Wilderness
Public Advocates	WildEarth Guardians
Nevada Environmental Justice Coalition	CalWild
Nevada Housing Justice Alliance	New Mexico Wild
Church of the Messiah Housing Corporation	Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance
Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey	Idaho Conservation League
St. James Housing and Redevelopment Authority	Conservation Colorado
ECHO Housing & Community Development	Wyoming Wilderness Association
San Francisco Tenants Union	Friends of the Inyo
Community Care Alliance	The Ocean Project
Christian Church Homes	Central Oregon LandWatch
American Friends Service Committee	Public Advocates
Lowenstein Development, LLC	Wyoming Outdoor Council
Peer Voices United	Wild Montana
Philadelphia Housing Development Corporation	GreenLatinos
So Ohio HART (Homeless Advocacy Response Team)	Friends of Nevada Wilderness
Sisters of St. Joseph Healthcare Foundation	Washington Wild
Lived Experience Advisors	Bozeman Birders
	Great Old Broads for Wilderness, Cascade Volcanoes Chapter
	Californians for Western Wilderness

East Bay Housing Organizations

Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership

Seattle/King County Coalition on
Homelessness

Prince George's County, MD Peace Action

Alianza Coachella Valley