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Indigenous-Led Conservation: A Pathway Towards 30x30

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Introduction

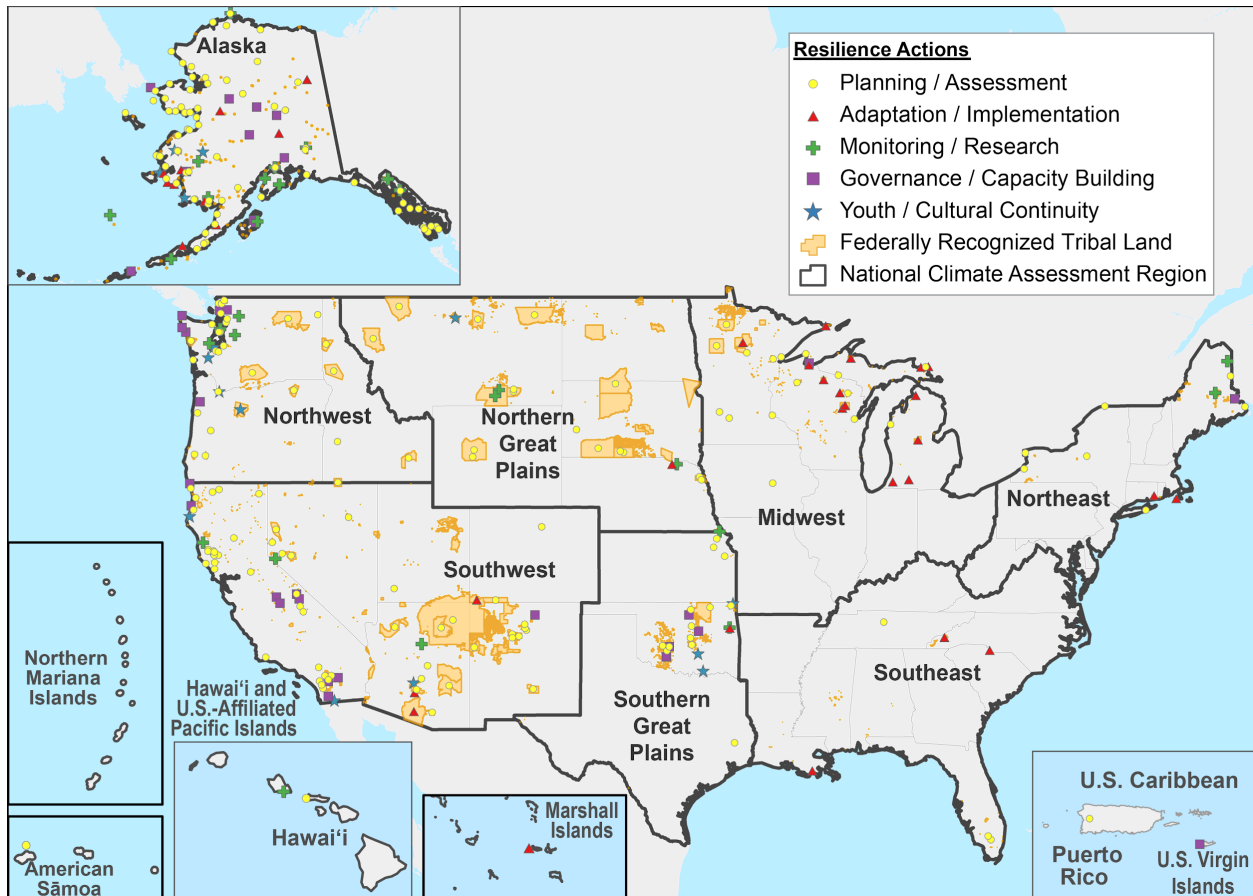
Indigenous communities have inhabited the Earth for millennia — their wisdom and culture is as deeply ingrained within the land as the structures they have established there. And yet, for centuries, violent settlers have repeatedly tried to force them from their own lands, or eliminate them entirely. With Westernization and globalization, it has become common practice for remnants of once-abundant Indigenous communities to be discovered beneath schools, shopping malls, and other built environments. Communities who once lived in tandem with nature were forced out and stripped of their identities while their land was plundered and commercialized. Mainstream progressive movements are recognizing the importance of reuniting Indigenous communities with their land. An Indigenous-rights movement is taking shape across the globe and empowering Indigenous communities to provide guidance on effective stewardship of land. Indeed, Indigenous leaders are poised to help the U.S. overcome some of the most pressing climate challenges of the 21st century. By prioritizing Indigenous-Led Conservation (ILC) practices in future climate mitigation efforts, we can ensure we're fully operationalizing all available resources to meet climate goals attainable in an equitable and sustainable way.

What is ILC? ILC refers to conservation practices that are designed and executed under the management of Indigenous leaders. At present, there are 574¹ federally recognized Native American Indian tribes and Alaska Native entities in the U.S. The majority of these tribes live on federal Indian reservations², occupying approximately 56.2 million acres of land held in trust by the U.S. government on behalf of Indigenous communities. This land management structure, in which the U.S. government holds jurisdiction over these areas that Indigenous communities are inhabiting, can lead to disagreements over how to best steward these lands. Indigenous communities must consult the government prior to making land management decisions on the reservations, which can reinforce colonialistic power dynamics that have been burdening these communities for years on end.

ILC enables Indigenous people to serve as decision-makers, advisors, and direct stewards of the land. It seeks to restore land tenure rights, improve biodiversity, and acknowledge that Indigenous people are not only stakeholders at the forefront of the climate crisis but also knowledge-holders, possessing centuries-worth of knowledge on best practices for preserving our natural lands.

There are numerous conservation benefits associated with ILC. Lands under the management of Indigenous peoples account for approximately 80 percent of the world's biodiversity, despite Indigenous communities only making up about 5 percent of the global population. According to the UN's World Conservation Monitoring Center, Indigenous and local communities (entities whose cultures and livelihoods are inextricably linked to their inhabited lands) manage roughly 32 percent of global lands, most of which is in "good ecological condition." With a growing number of plant and animal species at risk of extinction, including one-third of wildlife in the U.S., it is critical that we bolster the ability of Indigenous communities to do what they do best: serve as sovereign managers of the land.

The Fourth National Climate Assessment catalogued more than 800 indigenous efforts to combat climate change over the past decade (see more about each project [here](#)).



President Biden has demonstrated a commitment towards centering ILC in his plans for reestablishing the U.S. as a leader in the fight against climate change. He appointed Deb Haaland, a member of the Laguna Pueblo of New Mexico, as the U.S.'s first Indigenous Secretary of the Interior, representing a path forward for elevating the long-silenced voices of our nation's Indigenous communities.

Frontline communities, including those living on Indigenous lands, often bear the brunt of pollution and climate change as mining, logging, and pipeline construction — and consequent oil spills — directly threaten their access to clean air and water, as well as their peace of mind. Despite energy production sometimes occurring on Indigenous lands, many Indigenous communities face severe energy insecurity. These communities have also been subject to long-spanning conflicts over their land, which has led to displacement, dissolution of culture, and costly legal battles. Secretary Haaland is well-positioned to begin the process of healing the strained relationship between the Department of the Interior (DOI) and our nation's Indigenous population. She has a long-standing history of Indigenous rights activism, including standing alongside the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe to protest the Dakota Access Pipeline — the largest Indigenous protest in U.S. history. Her presence in President Biden's cabinet represents a step towards ILC and, more broadly, an augmentation of the rights Indigenous people in the U.S.

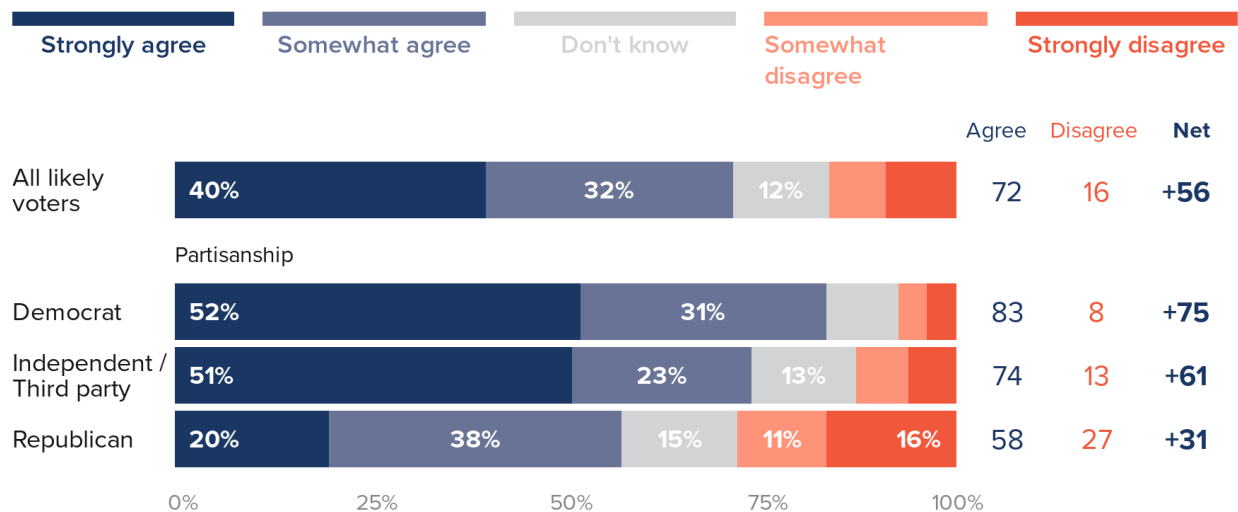
President Biden has signaled his desire to include ILC as a policy priority as part of his Build Back Better agenda through the 30x30 initiative. This is an effort to conserve 30 percent of our nation’s lands and waters by 2030 while supporting locally-led and locally-designed conservation efforts, which Haaland will lead as head of the Interior. 30x30 is a pivotal path towards protecting high conservation value wildlife habitat, preserving biodiversity, and maintaining greenhouse gas (GHG) sinks like forests and wetlands that serve to mitigate the effects of climate change in the years to come. Indeed, forests, vegetation, and soils account for approximately 11 percent of the U.S.’s annual GHG emissions. The health of our public lands and waters are directly linked to that of the climate. It is critical that federal agencies honor the sovereignty of Tribal Nations and pursue ILC as a central pathway towards conserving 30 percent of our nation’s lands and waters by 2030. Biden’s 30x30 executive order calls for the publication of an annual “America the Beautiful” report — an effective way to hold the administration accountable for maintaining their promises to prioritize ILC.

Not only are there countless ecological reasons for why the Biden administration should uphold ILC — the political case is compelling too. Data for Progress polling has found that roughly three-quarters of all likely voters (72 percent) — including nearly all Democrats (83 percent) and a majority of Independents (74 percent) — agree that federal agencies should prioritize ILC as a means for achieving America’s conservation goals. Notably, Republicans also support federal prioritization of ILC by a 31-point margin (58 percent support, 27 percent oppose).

Voters Agree Federal Agencies Should Prioritize Indigenous-led Conservation

Several federal agencies including the Department of Interior, Department of Agriculture, and Department of Commerce recently issued a report on how the government can reach President Biden's goal of conserving 30% of America's lands and waters by 2030. In this report, the agencies identified honoring the sovereignty of Tribal Nations and Indigenous-led conservation efforts as key principles to achieve this conservation goal.

Do you agree or disagree that any government efforts to conserve and restore America's lands and waters should involve regular, meaningful, and robust consultation with Tribal Nations?



November 11–16, 2021 survey of 1,298 likely voters

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What’s more, President Biden has recently restored the Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments, sacred sites for numerous Indigenous communities in Utah. These monuments were previously scaled back 85 percent and 50 percent respectively by former Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke to allow for drilling and other fossil fuel projects — the biggest reversal of land monument protections in U.S. history. Recent Data for Progress polling illustrates that nearly two-thirds of voters support restoring Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments. What’s more, voters support Biden restoring these national monuments by a +39-point margin, including Independents by a +49-point margin. Republicans are almost evenly split. Numerous Indigenous communities have praised Biden for this decision, including the Navajo, Hopi, Zuni and Ute tribes.

Not only is ILC an effective path forward for meeting our critical conservation needs, but it is also extremely popular amongst voters, and can pave the way for a new normal for many Indigenous communities. ILC offers the opportunity to rebuild, restore, and breakthrough old systems of thinking — all while protecting the Earth from the effects of climate change and biodiversity loss.

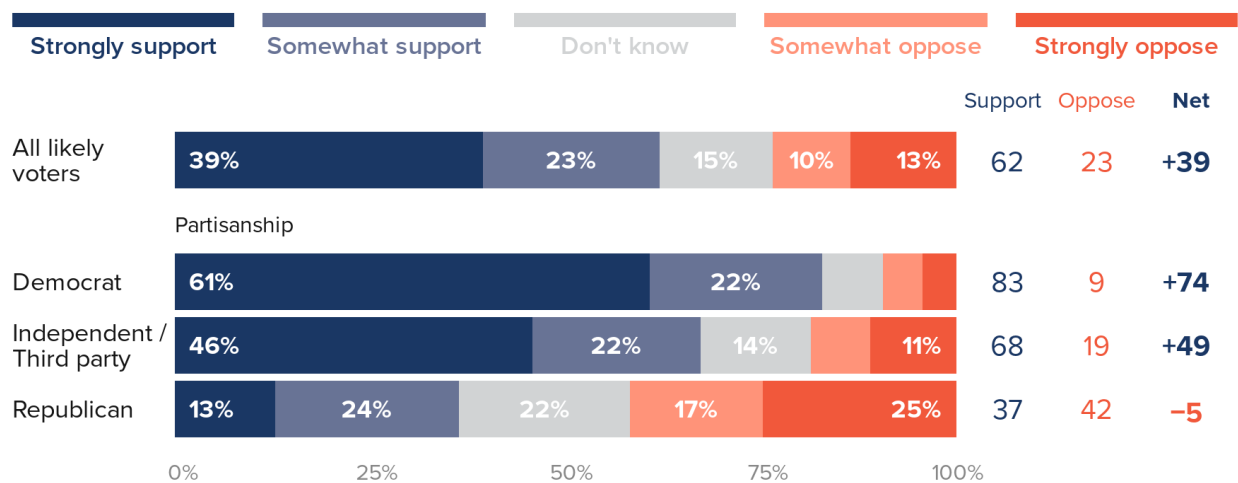
We will investigate 4 case studies that illustrate the effectiveness of ILC, both domestically and abroad.

A Majority of Voters Support President Biden's Decision to Restore the Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante Monuments

Former President Trump issued executive orders to reduce the size of Bears Ears National Monument by 85 percent and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument by 50 percent. Both monuments include land that is considered sacred to several Tribal Nations.

Recently, President Joe Biden announced that he would be restoring the Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante monuments to their full sizes.

Do you support or oppose this decision?



November 11–16, 2021 survey of 1,298 likely voters

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Domestic ILC Case Studies

SOGOREA TE LAND TRUST

Indigenous communities are no stranger to land rights conflicts. Some have found land trusts to be a viable avenue for reclaiming their native lands. Land trusts allow entities like Indigenous tribes to take ownership of a given area of land — effectively stewarding the land on behalf of the land owner. Land trusts have typically been used under the purview of maintaining private lands, but have more recently become a tool for Indigenous communities to regain sovereignty over their sacred lands. The Sogorea Te Land Trust³, an urban, intertribal, women-led Indigenous land trust that facilitates the rematriation (the feminine counter to “repatriation”, returning ancestral lands back to Indigenous people) of Indigenous land in the San Francisco Bay area, is one such example. This land trust was founded in 2012 to reclaim and restore Ohlone (a Northern California tribe) lands and promote cultural revitalization.

The Sogorea Te Land Trust operates 3 main projects, which each have unique impacts on the climate and community: the Lisjan traditional village, Rammay community garden, and Gill Tract community farm.

LISJAN TRADITIONAL VILLAGE

Lisjan⁴, the first site incorporated into Sogorea Te, is a traditional village site in East Oakland. The village is home to a number of plant species that have traditional and medicinal significance for the Ohlone people, such as sage, tobacco, mugwort, soap root, as well as fruit and vegetable species. The village is sustained via a rainwater catchment system, which stores over 5,500 gallons of potable water that is recycled and reused throughout the village and can help prevent flooding, erosion and rainwater runoff that could otherwise have damaging effects to the land, homes, and other infrastructure, as well as wildlife habitat. With climate change projections illustrating an increased threat of rising sea levels to coastal communities like Oakland, Lisjan offers a formidable example for mitigation efforts that Indigenous communities can lead. In addition to the aforementioned ecosystem services and disaster mitigation benefits, rainwater catchment can offer sustainable access to clean water for the land trust as sea level rise not only brings about direct damage to the land, but can also lead to water contamination issues. Lack of access to clean water is an issue plaguing numerous communities throughout the U.S., including tribal populations. Lisjan offers one such solution for communities whose water infrastructure is insufficient, and an opportunity for the land trust to recycle a valuable resource to carry out everyday activities including cooking, cleaning, and gardening.

RAMMAY COMMUNITY GARDEN

The Sogorea Te land trust also operates the Rammay Community Garden⁵. Similarly to Lisjan, the Rammay Community Garden grows produce that is of cultural significance to the Ohlone people, including corn, squash, and beans. The garden, located in West Oakland, is home to 14 fruit trees, 10 raised beds, and a vertical garden, and utilizes solar energy to power its garden shed. The garden is shared with multiple partners in the community, including the American Indian Child Resource Center, which provides Indigenous youth in Oakland with the opportunity to learn native cultivation techniques and land management practices. The Rammay Community center also hosts plant identification workshops and community harvests to share traditional knowledge with Indigenous youths and the broader community.

In addition to the benefits of increased food security for the land trust and community, urban agriculture — specifically community gardens — can have the added benefits of improving soil fertility, providing habitat to critical pollinators, and improving air quality. Rammay Community Garden's use of solar power also helps reduce energy inputs associated with food production, which can prove to be a significant portion of food-related emissions.

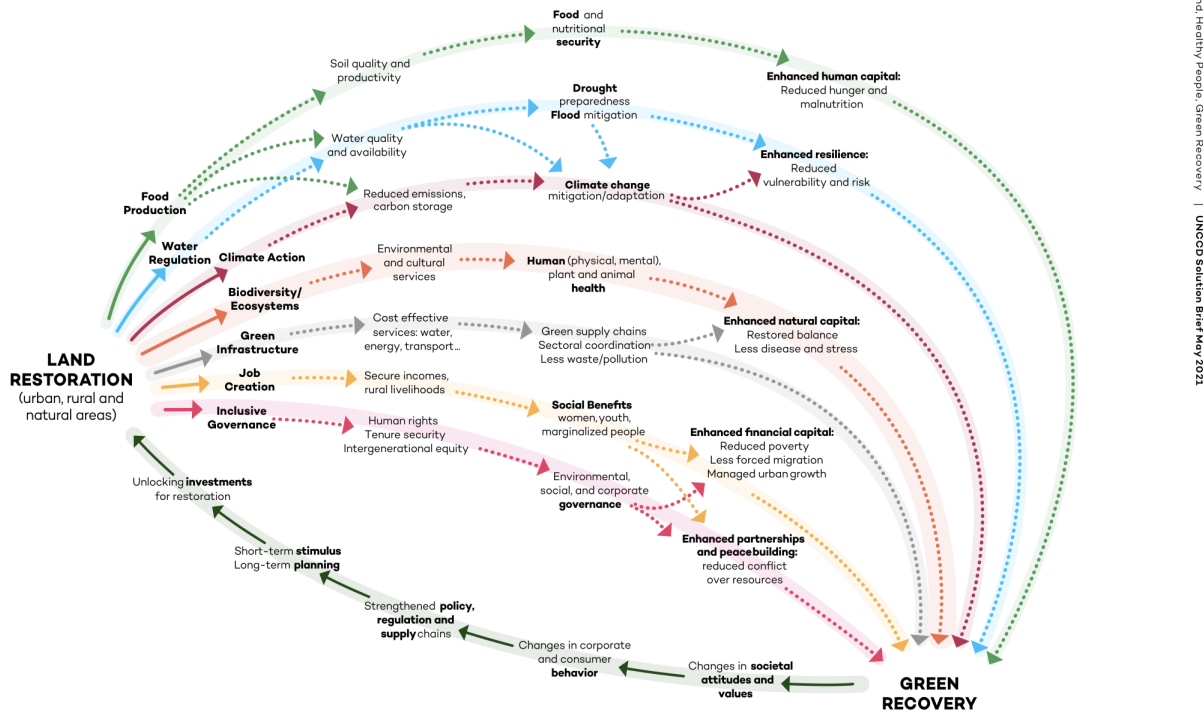
Community gardens can also help offset the urban heat island effect, a phenomenon in which temperatures in urban regions are higher than surrounding rural areas due to heat-trapping materials used in roads, buildings, and other built infrastructure. Trees and other vegetation provide shade and other cooling mechanisms, which is critical as global climate conditions are trending warmer, posing a significant health risk to human, animal, and food systems.

GILL TRACT COMMUNITY FARM

The Gill Tract Community Farm⁶ is a collaborative effort between the Sogorea Te Land Trust and the University of California, Berkeley, to drive forward research and education on food inequity, community resilience, and environmental health. The urban farm, located in Albany, CA, provides volunteers who donate their time to help to maintain the farm with organic food in exchange for their labor. The farm also hosts events centered around conservation initiatives such as monarch butterfly habitat restoration, creek clean-ups, and planting native trees, herbs, and flowers. What's more, local and sustainable sourcing of food can drive down GHG emissions and costs associated with food transportation.

These projects, both individually and in tandem, provide the conservation benefits of: improved biodiversity, passing on traditional land management and harvesting practices, and water management. They also can help improve community health and resilience by teaching local communities Indigenous youth how to effectively steward the land and providing access to healthy and affordable food.

The UN Convention to Combat Desertification details the numerous environmental and community benefits of land restoration. Read more [here](#).



Land, Healthy People, Green Recovery | UNODS Solution Brief May 2021

The Sogorea Te Land Trust also operates the Shuumi Land Tax: a means for sending tax-deductible donations to the trust. Shuumi means gift in Chochenyo, one of the Ohlone native languages, and the land tax offers an opportunity to fund initiatives of the land trust, including building urban gardens, community centers, and ceremonial spaces. Donations have helped the trust to reclaim the lands that have a rich history for the Ohlone tribe. Indeed, the Sogorea Te trust acquired its first plot of land from Planting Justice, an Oakland-based food justice NGO, in 2018 when the NGO donated a quarter-acre of urban farm land (which was later developed into the aforementioned Lisjan site) to the tribe. The land trust now partners with Planting Justice to carry out a number of conservation and justice-related projects, and are working on establishing an easement that will facilitate the permanent transfer of the land title to the trust.

Although land trusts can be a vital stepping stone towards land ownership for Indigenous communities and an opportunity for these communities to steward the land for conservation purposes, it does not come without its own unique challenges. Power imbalances can result as the entities who own the land (often the federal government) are able to delineate how the trustees (i.e. Indigenous groups) are allowed to use the land and its resources. Given the historic social tension between tribal nations and the federal government, this can lead to a culture of distrust and conflict when the federal government and tribes disagree on how a given area of land should be managed. Legal and regulatory hurdles can lead

to additional challenges related to land fragmentation as trustees may only have claim over piecemeal areas of land in a given area, thus creating a unique set of issues when these communities feel entitled to and connected with their traditional lands.

The land trust model is one prospective opportunity for Indigenous communities to gain sovereignty over their land while advancing conservation and climate justice. This model can be used beyond the Bay area as a framework for reclaiming and protecting Indigenous territories and sacred sites.

YUOK TRIBE CARBON-OFFSET PROJECT

ILC can go beyond traditional land restoration and reclamation practices. Northern California's Yurok tribe's carbon-offset project, one of the first of its kind in the U.S., follows California state emissions trading guidelines and illustrates how Indigenous communities can be effective pioneers for burgeoning climate mitigation efforts. The Yurok tribe was allotted five thousand acres of land upon becoming federally recognized in 1986, and has since been in pursuit of buying back its ancestral lands after years of costly legal battles for reclaiming their traditional areas. The tribe was able to acquire lands in Northern California watersheds through a loan from California's Clean Water State Revolving Fund in 2011. These once-sacred Yurok lands were previously owned by a timber company whose business model the Yurok tribe hoped to emulate, but the loans proved costly and thus logging was not a timely or cost-effective option for the tribe. Thus began the Yurok tribe's foray into carbon cap-and-trade. Rather than logging, the tribe focused its efforts on land reclamation and improved forest management, with the Yurok Fire Department helping to manage prescribed burns.

In 2013, when the nascent California cap-and-trade program was officially established, the Yurok became the first institution in the state to register a forest offset project after negotiating the right for tribal lands to be included in the program rather than just lands that fell under state jurisdiction as originally planned. Under California law, for each metric ton of carbon that is sequestered (in the Yurok's case through its forest management practices), the California Air Resources board provides the tribe with one carbon offset credit, which the tribe can then sell to industries. Although there are questions about the effectiveness of cap-and-trade programs, including whether the ability to trade credits enables certain polluters to prolong inaction, the objective is to require polluting industries to reduce their emissions over time or else purchase carbon credits in order to remain compliant with the state's declining emissions cap. As a result, the tribe receives money from selling their carbon offsets.

In 2018, the Yurok's successful carbon-offset project had become the tribe's main source of discretionary income, allowing them to increase their land buy-back efforts twelvefold. The tribe went on to increase their land ownership from the original five thousand acres to sixty thousand acres. Furthermore, the Yurok tribe's leadership in this space has paved the way for 13 other tribes and Alaska Native corporations from across the U.S. to participate in California's cap-and-trade program since its inception.

The Yurok tribe's work has been well-recognized and serves as an example for how conservation efforts can be synergistic with community revitalization, particularly as it pertains to Indigenous communities. In 2019, the tribe became the first Indigenous community to be awarded the United Nations Development Programme's Equator Prize, which rewards outstanding efforts surrounding nature-based

solutions towards mitigating climate change and its resultant environmental justice issues. The tribe received a \$10,000 award and the opportunity to attend the 74th UN General Assembly, providing a platform for the Yurok tribe to share their land stewardship techniques and serve as an inspiration for similar initiatives to take shape.

International ILC Case Studies

CANADA: INDIGENOUS GUARDIANS PROGRAM

ILC is a burgeoning practice internationally as well. The Canadian government, in alliance with Nature United and other Indigenous partners, developed the Indigenous Guardians program — a pilot program that allows for Indigenous people to monitor, manage, and steward their lands and waters in Indigenous communities across Canada. The Indigenous Guardians program began as a pilot program in 2017 with a federal budget of \$25 million to be invested over 4 years to fund Indigenous stewardship projects.

Some of the key activities⁷ that the Guardians engage in include monitoring and researching issues pertinent to wildlife, climate, contamination, and integrating traditional and Indigenous conservation practices to maintain their traditional lands and waters across Canada. The Watchmen serve a role similar to that of a park ranger, carrying out efforts to protect and maintain Indigenous lands and engage the public, with the addition of incorporating Indigenous knowledge into their stewardship work.

In addition to advancing conservation efforts, the program touts the benefits of job creation, lower crime rates, and stronger public health outcomes, all with a keen focus on youth engagement. The program facilitates youth leadership training and mentorship activities like harvesting and language and culture training. Youth are encouraged to become acquainted with the inherited and traditional knowledge shared from their elders in an effort to preserve their deep-rooted culture and wisdom.

The Canadian government also created an Indigenous Guardians toolkit⁸ — a resource that helps support engagement and knowledge-sharing for Indigenous Guardian programs by providing guidance on starting and operating a Watchmen program, hiring staff, engaging the community, and more. Currently, there are over 45 communities across Canada with Guardian Watchmen, and each Watchmen program is invited to share resources and success stories through the toolkit to help inspire similar efforts.

The Nuxalk⁹ Guardian Watchmen program, established in 2010, is an example of the efficacy of combining modern conservation practices with traditional methodologies. The Nuxalk Guardian Watchmen mainly focus their efforts on coastal conservation — preserving and restoring habitat for salmon and other fish species and monitoring the effects of fishing, logging, tourism and other human activities on marine and terrestrial ecosystems. They also broadly steward lands that are of ecological and cultural significance to the Nuxalk nation. The data they collect is analyzed using a combination of modern science, analytics and traditional Indigenous practices. A recent study completed by the Watchmen improved local knowledge on bear behavior and contributed to the community's understanding of bear populations in the region.

The Nuxalk often serve as the only protector of the lands in which they inhabit as these lands are often understaffed by federal conservation officers, a common issue in remote areas around the world. Programs such as the Guardian Watchmen are useful for supplementing conservation efforts in commonly neglected regions. The Watchmen are also able to provide guidance to visitors to their lands, including fishers, hunters, loggers, and recreators.

AUSTRALIA: NORTHERN TERRITORY ABORIGINAL RANGER GRANT PROGRAM

Australia has also taken a leadership role in empowering Indigenous communities to manage critical conservation areas throughout the western regions of the continent. In 2017, the Australian government started the Northern Territory Aboriginal Ranger Grant Program¹⁰ in order to train Aboriginal people as rangers to steward lands and waters. The rangers are responsible for coordinating conservation and social practices such as fire management, biodiversity research, preservation of cultural sites, cultural immersion experiences for site visitors, weed management, and animal control.

Since its inception, the program has distributed approximately \$11.4 million to support the conservation efforts of roughly 1,000 rangers on Aboriginal lands. This funding has been allocated to fund wildlife management, fire mitigation, skills development training, and the purchase of equipment and vehicles. Funding for resources, like all-terrain vehicles, is critical for successfully carrying out conservation projects, particularly in remote areas that are difficult to map and monitor.

According to a recent review by the Australian government, the program has excelled at allocating resources to facilitate rangers successfully carrying out activities pertinent to environmental protection and restoration. The review calls for increased information sharing about the success of the ranger program grants both within the program itself and among different groups receiving funding. This kind of sharing will help build on the successes of projects and spread awareness about the program.

Policy Recommendations

These case studies bring to life the numerous benefits of integrating traditional and local knowledge into modern conservation practices, reestablishing tenure of Indigenous traditional lands, training the next generation of conservation champions via youth engagement, and upholding cultural preservation. These emergent themes help illuminate the kinds of policies we need to deploy. The policy recommendations that follow aim to employ ILC as a viable tool in the fight against the climate and biodiversity crises and restore Indigenous sovereignty.

FEDERAL TASK FORCE FOR INDIGENOUS-LED CONSERVATION

In order to carry out the ambitions laid out by the 30x30 initiative, the federal government should establish a Task Force for Indigenous-Led Conservation to advise the DOI on how to involve Indigenous people as decision-makers, advisors, and direct stewards of U.S. lands.

This task force will be responsible for the following:

- ▶ Aligning traditional Indigenous practices with U.S. conservation goals;
- ▶ Assessing current relationships and agreements, particularly land tenure agreements, between U.S. tribal nations and the federal government;
- ▶ Delineating sacred native lands for conservation and cultural purposes;
- ▶ Serving as a connector between the DOI and Indigenous communities throughout the U.S to improve community buy-in and decision-making power;
- ▶ Enhancing community and tribal benefits of key conservation efforts carried out by the Biden administration and;
- ▶ Restore trust with Indigenous communities following the passage of harmful legislation like the Indian Relocation Act of 1956, and should seek to establish guiding principles outlining the relationship between tribes and the U.S. government.

Canada's Anti-Racism Action Program¹¹, which allocates \$20.4 million to support 92 projects across the country to mitigate barriers to justice-related issues for marginalized groups, including Indigenous communities, can serve as a framework for similar initiatives throughout the U.S.

The projects funded by the anti-racism program are expected to help: local organizations confront racism and religious intolerance, promote multinational discussions on diversity and equity issues and religious discrimination, and build research and evidence to address the unique challenges experienced by Indigenous communities, religious minorities, and other marginalized groups.

One such project is the First Light St. John's Friendship Centre, which will receive \$253,940 to foster intercultural dialogue and understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups, and increase the participation of Indigenous people in policy making at the provincial level.

WORKFORCE TRAINING

Tribal communities face significant barriers to entry to the U.S. workforce compared to other identity groups throughout the U.S. Indigenous individuals seeking employment are often afflicted by a lack of access to education, employment, and job training opportunities, which in turn can result in low wage careers or even fewer career opportunities as a whole. A 2019 report¹² by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics found that between 2016-2018, American Indians and Alaska Natives had a higher unemployment rate — 6.6 percent, notably higher than the national rate of 3.9 percent — and a lower labor force participation rate than the U.S. population overall. Even more concerning, the unemployment rate was higher for Indigenous individuals living on tribal lands, including federal or state American Indian reservations or off-reservation trust lands — than for those living elsewhere. Workforce training programs, particularly those that are conservation focused and engage in targeted outreach to Indigenous communities, offer the opportunity for Indigenous individuals to learn valuable skills that prepare them for the labor force and help protect and restore American tribal and public lands.

Establishing a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) is a top priority for the climate movement and one such avenue for intersecting conservation and workforce training efforts. If the CCC were to come to fruition, it promises to be a much more diverse, inclusive, and productive workforce training program than its New Deal Era predecessor that works to implement critical conservation practices in the U.S. and create a new generation of skilled conservation champions.

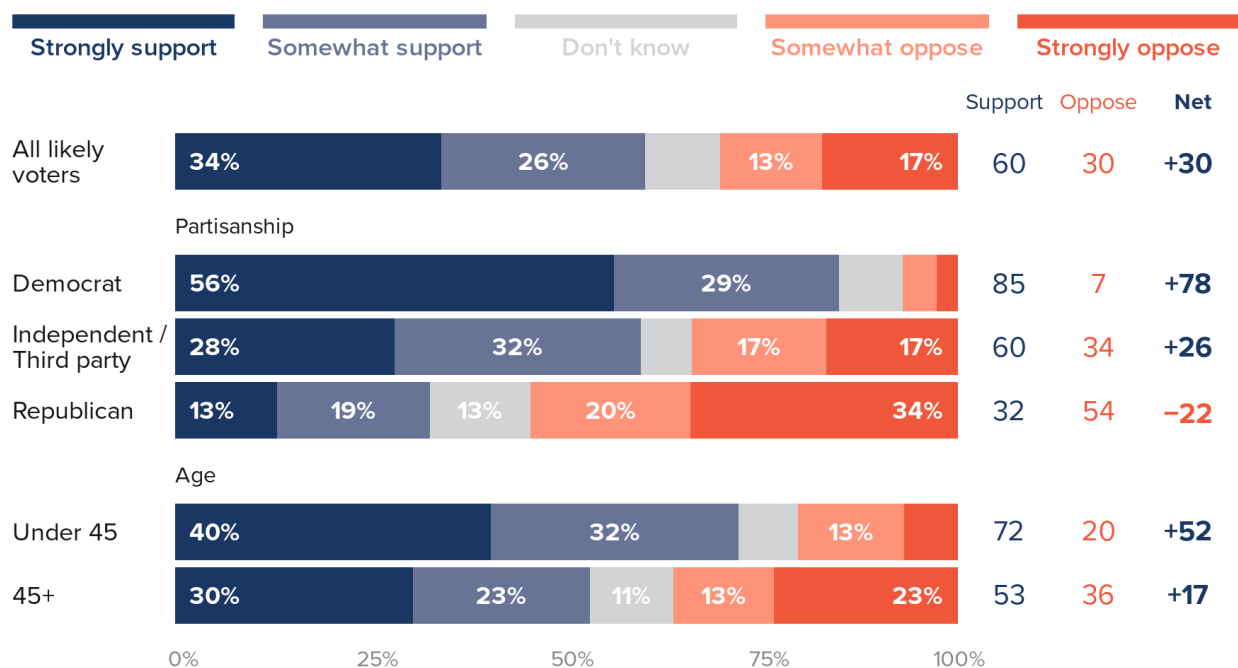
Data for Progress polling illustrates the popularity of a modernized CCC¹³, with over half of likely voters (57 percent) support creating a Civilian Climate Corps.

DfP polling finds that a majority of voters support establishing a Civilian Conservation Corps.

A Majority of Voters Support Establishing a Civilian Climate Corps

Lawmakers in Congress are proposing a new national service organization called the Civilian Climate Corps. The Civilian Climate Corps will create tens of thousands of new jobs in federally-funded projects to help communities respond to climate change and transition to a clean energy economy. Civilian Climate Corps workers will be compensated at least \$15 an hour and have full healthcare benefits. Workers will also have access to educational and vocational training opportunities to build skills for future good-paying, union jobs.

Do you support or oppose the Civilian Climate Corps?



October 8–12, 2021 survey of 1,226 likely voters

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A modernized CCC or parallel workforce development program should:

- ▶ Contain robust labor standards that include prevailing wages and project labor agreements;
- ▶ Prioritize youth workforce training with targeted outreach to Indigenous youth;
- ▶ Partner with and invest in Tribal Colleges and Universities throughout the U.S.

Additionally, Indigenous communities have repeatedly expressed the significance of youths maintaining their culture and native language(s). Workforce training programs like a modernized CCC should offer cultural heritage components that allow Indigenous groups to learn how to effectively steward the land in a way that aligns traditional practices with the ones currently established. This may include establishing a scholarship fund for Indigenous youths pursuing educational subjects pertaining to ILC practices.

ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING LAND TENURE RIGHTS FOR INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

One significant barrier that many Indigenous communities face while trying to reclaim their traditional lands is cost. Legal battles to reclaim lands for tribal purposes are costly, as are loans, which can take years for Indigenous groups to repay. Thus, we recommend that the DOI seek to:

- ▶ Bolster the existing Land Buy-Back Program for Tribal Nations¹⁴ and renew and increase funding for Trust Land Consolidation Fund when it ends in November 2022, with advising from the ILC Task Force on how to allocate funds;
- ▶ Replace costly loans with land allocations that ultimately lead to land ownership for Indigenous communities carrying out conservation projects and;
- ▶ Translate lessons learned from National Commission on Indian Trust Reform to amend existing \$4 billion Indigenous land trust structures¹⁵ to mitigate inequities and facilitate repatriation of Indigenous lands.

In addition to FPIC, Indigenous communities must be able to say no to proposed projects occurring on their lands after receiving a full risk assessment for proposed future work. Additionally, to truly honor tribal sovereignty and informal agreements between tribes and the federal government, treaties and memorandums of understanding must be created for projects carried out on Indigenous lands.

CONSERVING CRITICAL HABITATS AND PRESERVING SACRED INDIGENOUS LANDS

Many Indigenous communities feel a deep cultural and ancestral tie to their lands but have not had the resources or opportunities to access, manage, or live peacefully on these lands.

Thus, we recommend that the DOI, in alliance with the ILC Task Force:

- ▶ Protect sacred places, creating a lands mapping protocol with direct input from ILC Task Force to determine which areas should be designated as protected/sacred lands, which are off limits to mining and oil and gas leasing;
- ▶ Restore lands and monuments that were subject to rollbacks/deprioritization by the Trump administration i.e. Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments;
- ▶ Amplifying the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) by increasing tribal involvement and cooperation;
- ▶ Designating new federal conservation lands in partnership with tribes and White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ); and
- ▶ Implement a pilot program based on lessons learned from the Guardian Watchmen, Aboriginal Ranger, and other similar initiatives to prioritize ILC projects for forest restoration, wildlife conservation, and fire management.

Conclusion

The time is ripe for a newer, more modernized and inclusive model for conservation — one that centers the expertise and needs of Indigenous communities. Conservation policies should build on the practices and inherited knowledge of Indigenous communities who have lived in tandem with the Earth for centuries and have a proven track record of effectively maintaining the land on which they live. Allowing Indigenous people to have a seat at the table is simply not enough. We must build, set, and dine at the table *together*, developing and implementing a comprehensive set of policy solutions for tackling the climate crisis, and iterate on these practices as new information becomes available. Research shows that voters overwhelmingly support Indigenous-Led Conservation and that we must deploy all of our most valuable assets in the fight against climate change. By breaking through old conservation systems that have proven ineffective or insufficient and embracing tried, true, and traditional Indigenous practices, we can build towards a cleaner and safer environment for all.

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