

Pathways to 30x30

By John Benson

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1. Introduction

We're doing it! Together we are conserving more land and coastal waters than ever before in California thanks to countless dedicated leaders and groups across our state. Thousands of Californians first came together to establish our Pathways to 30x30 Strategy, then built our 30x30 Partnership to implement this strategy, and are now actively expanding conservation across millions of acres of land and sea. Our movement toward 30x30 is open to all and we look forward to building our collaboration together in years to come.¹

2. Executive Summary

California's firm commitment and steady progress to protect and conserve 30% of its land and coastal waters by 2030 has positioned our state as a global leader in the 30x30 movement. Each year, we demonstrate how bold action to conserve our environment helps people and nature thrive together. 30x30 actions safeguard our biodiversity, protect our natural resources, expand outdoor access, bolster local economies, and safeguard public health and safety amidst worsening climate change. Our collaboration across governments, conservation organizations, and local communities is building durable, equitable, and resilient conservation that benefits all Californians and our shared future.

As of June 2026, 27.1% of California's lands and 21.9% of its coastal waters are conserved and under long-term management. This includes 1,023,000 acres of land added over the past year, adding up to more than 3.5 million acres of conserved lands and coastal waters since our Pathways to 30x30 Strategy was released in 2022. The cumulative acreage added since 2022 is larger than the states of Rhode Island and Delaware combined. This year's increase marks a new milestone, propelling California past the halfway point of the acreage of land that we need to conserve since setting our 30x30 commitment.

Historic investments continue to drive this work. Over the past four years, the Newsom Administration and California Legislature have together invested nearly \$1.3 billion in nature-based solutions. Additionally, California voters have approved a \$10 billion Climate Bond (Proposition 4, 2024) that is funding a range of conservation efforts. These investments have enabled California to accelerate conservation, restoration, and climate resilience projects at an unprecedented scale. Upcoming funding from the Climate Bond will continue to deliver lasting conservation outcomes across the state.

¹ Governor Gavin Newsom, "Pathways to 30x30, September 2026 Annual Report," https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/2026_30x30_Pathways_Progress_Report.pdf

California also deepened its commitments to tribal leadership and stewardship this year. The state's first-ever Tribal Stewardship Policy, accompanied by a comprehensive Tribal Stewardship Toolkit,² has established a clear and actionable framework to expand tribal stewardship across at least 7.5 million acres of lands and coastal waters. This policy and toolkit build upon historic ancestral land return that continues to be prioritized within our 30x30 movement. Together, these improvements will guide continued 30x30 progress, help to align decision-making with tribal priorities, strengthen government-to-government relationships, and ensure that environmental conservation in California honors the original stewards of these lands.

Several other major milestones that strengthen durable conservation and climate resilience have been reached this past year, including:

- Governor Newsom and California State Parks launched State Parks Forward,³ which will add three new state parks in the Central Valley and enable existing state parks to expand by 30,000 acres by 2030, thanks to partnerships with land trusts and conservation organizations.*
- The Salton Sea Conservancy was established, marking a transformational step to restore one of the state's most ecologically significant but challenged landscapes. The Conservancy will ensure the long-term benefits of projects that protect local communities and restore habitat around California's largest inland water body.*
- A new Cutting Green Tape Directive was issued by state agency leaders to accelerate ecologically beneficial projects and strengthen coordination across agencies. A second Interagency Summit on Advancing Restoration followed to empower state agency staff to improve restoration permitting and achieve environmental review efficiencies*
- \$10 million was invested to advance 30x30 in coastal waters, including projects that identify biodiversity hotspots, restore kelp forests, eelgrass meadows, and dune ecosystems, and support tribally-led stewardship and restoration of vulnerable coastal and marine ecosystems. Evaluation Criteria for 30x30 Conservation Areas in Coastal Waters were established to complement this investment.*

As California accelerates toward achieving 30x30, we must also ensure that conserved lands and coastal waters receive the long-term care needed to remain healthy, resilient, and accessible. Implementing AB 900 (2025, Papan) will help the state assess stewardship needs and identify the sustained investments required to support 30x30's ongoing success. Building stewardship capacity through strong partnerships with tribes, conservation organizations, and local communities, along with targeted investments in restoration, monitoring, and workforce development, will be essential to sustaining the benefits of today's conservation progress for generations to come.

² <https://cwc.ca.gov/CNRAHome/Initiatives/Tribalaffairs/TribalStewardshipPolicyAndToolkit/Explore-the-Toolkit/Building-the-Tribal-Workforce-for-Tribal-Stewardship>

³ https://www.parks.ca.gov/pages/712/files/StateParksForward_FactSheet_General_042126_FINAL.pdf

California's progress would not be possible without the visionary leadership of Governor Newsom and the enduring partnership of the California Legislature. The Governor's initial commitment to 30x30 through Executive Order N-82-20 in October 2020 set an ambitious course for the state, while the Legislature has played a critical role by codifying 30x30 into state law and championing investments that have transformed the vision into lasting action. Together, they have partnered with government agencies. The Governor's initial commitment to 30x30 through Executive Order N-82-20 in October 2020 set an ambitious course for the state, while the Legislature has played a critical role by codifying 30x30 into state law and championing investments that have transformed the vision into lasting action.

Achieving 30x30 will require conserving almost three million more acres of land and 283,000 more acres of coastal waters, but this is well within reach. California's progress to date has demonstrated that our state is capable of sustaining the pace and scale needed to achieve the 30x30 goal. With fewer than four years remaining, success depends upon sustained collaboration, innovation, and investment. But 30x30 is about more than reaching a milestone. Together, through this commitment, we are building a future in which people and nature thrive together, ensuring that generations to come inherit a healthy, resilient, and abundant natural world.

3. Global Partners Driving 30x30

3.1. Overview

The 30x30 initiative is a worldwide effort for governments to designate 30% of Earth's terrestrial, freshwater, and marine areas as protected by 2030, forming part of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework adopted in 2022

It is considered the most ambitious conservation target ever agreed, often referred to as "nature's moonshot," aiming to reverse biodiversity loss, stabilize ecosystems, and support human wellbeing

Representatives from nine governments from around the world that are committed to achieve 30x30 gathered in San Diego at the 30x30 Partnership 2025 Summit.⁴ They exchanged ideas, shared lessons learned, and strengthened collaboration to advance the global 30x30 goal. The summit showcased how governments at every level are delivering on-the-ground conservation outcomes by highlighting innovative approaches, addressing shared challenges, and elevating the vital role subnational leadership plays as a driving force in achieving biodiversity commitments worldwide.

⁴ The 30x30 Partnership 2025 Summit took place on Thursday, August 14, 2025, at the San Diego Natural History Museum in Balboa Park, San Diego, California. The event brought together representatives from nine governments worldwide alongside conservation leaders, policymakers, scientists, and community partners to advance the global 30x30 goal — protecting 30% of land and sea by 2030. See: <https://www.californianature.ca.gov/pages/2025-partnership-summit> for more information.

3.2. Goals and Significance

Biodiversity Protection: Safeguarding critical habitats and species to prevent further extinctions and ecosystem collapse.

Climate Mitigation: Conserved areas help capture carbon, regulate water cycles, and provide natural flood protection.

Human Benefits: Protected areas support food security, pollination, recreation, and overall health.

Scientific Threshold: Protecting 30% of ecosystems is considered the minimum Global Adoption and Implementation.

Over 190 countries have committed to the 30x30 target, including the G7 nations and the European Union.

Implementation involves not only designating areas on paper but ensuring effective management, ecological restoration, and connectivity between habitats.

For example, the UK is developing strategies to ensure that protected land and marine areas are genuinely thriving with wildlife and restored habitats.

3.3. Challenges and Considerations

Effectiveness: Simply designating areas is insufficient; management and monitoring are crucial to ensure biodiversity recovery.

Indigenous Rights: Some controversies have arisen regarding land rights and equitable participation in conservation planning

Global Coordination: Achieving 30x30 requires collaboration across governments, businesses, and local communities to balance conservation with sustainable development.

4. Final Author's Comment:

California has an amazing state park system. For many years I traveled up and down our state camping at these parks in my yellow Toyota Sunraider mini-SUV. For more information on the California State Parks, go through the link immediately below.

We also have a huge number of National Parks and similar facilities. Go through the second link below to see these.

<https://www.parks.ca.gov/>

<https://www.nps.gov/state/ca/index.htm>