



U.S. Department of the Interior

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## Secretary Haaland Delivers Remarks on the Interior Department's Progress on Environmental Justice

In advance of the one-year anniversary of the Biden-Harris administration, Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland delivered remarks today at the GreenLatinos Winter National Summit, where she highlighted the progress the Interior Department has made on advancing environmental justice and tackling the climate crisis. During her remarks, Secretary Haaland emphasized how investments from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will help clean up legacy pollution in historically marginalized communities, and how the Department's conservation efforts are centering equity, justice, and inclusion.

A full recording of Secretary Haaland's remarks is available on [Interior's YouTube page](#).

### ***Remarks as prepared for delivery are below:***

Good afternoon — buenas tardes, everyone! I'm honored to join GreenLatinos' Winter National Summit from the Ancestral homelands of the Anacostan and Piscataway people right here in Washington D.C.

I want to start my remarks by first saying, "thank you" – thank you to GreenLatinos for the work you've done over the years to promote environmental justice and ring the alarm about climate change.

Tomorrow marks one year since the Biden-Harris administration came in facing the interlocking challenges of this public health emergency, the climate crisis, economic uncertainty, and a history of racial injustice.

We knew these challenges would not be solved overnight. In fact, we knew these challenges would not be solved in a year. But that didn't stop us from taking bold steps to address the stark challenges that families across our country face.

I know that I don't have to tell anyone at this summit that climate change impacts communities of color and poor communities disproportionately. You also know that those disparities didn't just happen overnight. It has been a long history of environmental injustice — lack of access to clean water, pollution in the air, and basic infrastructure failures that fed into those disparities.

We are at a critical moment in our efforts to address the climate crisis.

You know what I'm talking about. The bright orange skies and wildfire flames across the West, destructive storms hitting our coasts, and devastating tornadoes in the Midwest. Each of these catastrophic events impacts families, elders, and neighbors not only directly by the disaster, but also by the smoke, poor air quality, power outages, and coastal erosion that result.

Climate change and the disasters that come from them have no boundaries. Every community faces the pain and heartache that those events bring. However, not every community has the resources to rebuild, or even relocate when a climate event happens in their backyard. That's why the Biden-Harris administration is building equity and inclusion into our all-of-government approach to the climate crisis.

The Department of the Interior is playing a critical role in implementing the President's ambitious climate change goals. We're rooting our work in equity as we address the barriers to access to the outdoors and how we can close those gaps, create a clean energy economy, and address the legacy of environmental injustice.

I truly believe that our nation's public lands belong to all of us. However, many communities — particularly in urban areas, communities of color and poor communities — don't have access to the outdoors. On top of that, climate change is threatening many of the natural places we all love.

It makes me so sad to hear about young kids who have never been to a vast outdoor space or families who don't have the means to make memories at our parks.

My love for the outdoors came from my dad. He was an active-duty Marine during my childhood and though we moved around a lot when I was young, he always took me and my siblings outside no matter where we lived. I remember as a child, walking for hours on beaches, climbing mountains, lacing up my sneakers and walking in cold rivers, and just enjoying the outdoors.

I saw this same joy during a visit to the San Diego Wildlife Refuge last year. I met with a group of kids who were learning about wildlife and ecosystems in the place they call home. They could feel the dirt in their hands, smell the desert plants and see water soak into the earth. As they grow up and live their lives, they will remember that experience and it will help them to always care about that place.

Those kids will be more likely to be responsible stewards of the land because they had the opportunity to experience it. Maybe we'll see them become park rangers or land managers or wildlife scientists at Interior one day!

It is our job to make sure all kids have that opportunity.

On top of that, it's well documented that access to the outdoors is good for our health and I would even go farther to say... that nature is also good for the soul. Every community deserves access to those benefits.

That's why equity is a huge part of President Biden's bold conservation initiative, called *America the Beautiful*. It's a ten-year, locally led effort to conserve and restore the lands and waters that bind us together as Americans.

Through it, the President set the first-ever national goal to restore and conserve 30 percent of U.S. lands and ocean by 2030 — a goal that I know GreenLatinos embraced when the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change announced the recommendation.

*America the Beautiful*, at its core, is a call to action for all of us to do more for the planet, for the economy, and for future generations.

It's a vision that recognizes that nature offers some of the most cost-effective ways to address the climate crisis; that we need to do more to stem the steep loss of nature and wildlife; and that we need to address the inequitable access to the outdoors for communities of color.

This initiative is inclusive and collaborative. It's about supporting locally led and voluntary efforts with ranchers and farmers and private landowners. It's about honoring Tribal sovereignty. It's about access to the outdoors for all communities, no matter their income, background, or where they live. And it's about using science and traditional knowledge to guide how we conserve, connect and restore the lands, waters, and wildlife upon which we all depend.

It's exciting!

The inclusive table that GreenLatinos creates with partners and networks is a model of the collaborative conservation that *America the Beautiful* seeks to embrace. Thank you for being that model, and for your continued support and collaboration as we work to bring this effort to communities across our nation.

To match our efforts in conservation, Interior is making strides to create a clean energy economy to prevent further damage to our earth. We also know that a clean energy transition will have important benefits for historically marginalized communities and advance our environmental justice and economic empowerment goals.

Just last week we announced the upcoming offshore wind energy lease sale for the New York Bight. Offshore wind development within the New York Bight could generate enough clean energy to power 2 million homes. We expect this sale could yield tens of thousands of good-paying jobs in the region. But this isn't just an exciting clean energy announcement. It's also an opportunity to advance several of our other goals.

To that end, we are advancing several innovative lease stipulations and programs that will help to be a model moving forward. We are requiring that lessees make every reasonable effort to enter project labor agreements to help ensure future projects in the Bight are built by union labor. We are also requiring lessees to identify Tribes, underserved communities and other ocean users who could be affected by offshore wind development. And we will hold companies accountable for improving their engagement, communication and transparency with these communities.

As we look to the future, we know that we cannot ignore the pains of the past.

The Biden-Harris administration understands that the disproportionate impacts from the pandemic and climate change stem from a long history of legacy pollution and marginalization.

I come from a community in New Mexico that is still coping with the legacy of mining and the impact that those mines had on our water and our air. I've seen the health impacts that families deal with after years of neglect.

Right now, millions of Americans live within a mile of tens of thousands of abandoned mines and orphaned oil and gas wells. These discarded remains of extractive industries spew poison into the air and nearby waters and contribute to climate change.

I recently traveled to see some of these orphaned wells and more importantly what is being done in communities to restore these areas. I met with a young activist who pointed out an

idle site right outside the gates of a children's ballpark in a Spanish-speaking community. She told me how children go to school with tissues tucked in their noses because of the bleeds they so often get from the toxicity in the air, and that it's not a question of if she gets sick, but when.

It's heartbreaking, but here is the good news:

The new Bipartisan Infrastructure Law includes \$4.7 billion for orphaned well site plugging, remediation, and restoration activities that will address longstanding risks of water contamination, seeping toxic chemicals, and destructive gas emissions that harm public health and wildlife. It's an important investment that we are working to get out into communities as quickly as possible. Because our children deserve better.

This is something that GreenLatinos has always had an eye toward and something that Latino, Latina, Latinx and Indigenous communities share -- a moral responsibility to take care of the earth, not just for ourselves but for future generations and for every living thing on this planet.

It's clear in the way we respect the land. It's engrained in the foods we eat, the traditions we keep, and the reverence we have for our Earth. I want to thank all of you for bringing that history and that experience to the conversation and grounding this movement in equity.

President Biden and the entire administration looks to be partners as we build a future that we can all embrace. Thank you.

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## About the U.S. Department of the Interior

The Department of the Interior (DOI) conserves and manages the Nation's natural resources and cultural heritage for the benefit and enjoyment of the American people, provides scientific and other information about natural resources and natural hazards to address societal challenges and create opportunities for the American people, and honors the Nation's trust responsibilities or special commitments to American Indians, Alaska Natives, and affiliated island communities to help them prosper.



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