Dear Friends,

The Conservation Lands Foundation is the only national organization whose sole mission is to protect, restore, and expand the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) National Conservation Lands through advocacy, education, and partnerships. We are proud to do this work alongside the more than 90 local organizations that make up our Friends Grassroots Network.

While roughly 85 percent of the public lands under BLM jurisdiction are open to extraction and other industrial development, the National Conservation Lands are our nation's latest collection of valuable and vulnerable public lands and waters under the jurisdiction of the BLM. These public lands and waters, found primarily throughout the West and Alaska, currently encompass 38 million acres of National Monuments, National Conservation Areas, Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, and 2,700 miles of Wild and Scenic Rivers and National Scenic and Historic Trails. They protect some of America's most remarkable cultural and ecological treasures and are open for all to enjoy. These lands form the backbone of our natural and cultural identity, while powering local economies and the $1.2 trillion outdoor recreation economy.

In 2025, we celebrated the 25th anniversary of the National Conservation Lands by bringing together the System's original visionaries, longstanding champions, and emerging leaders to craft an ambitious vision for 2050.

The resulting vision: a permanently protected, ecologically healthy, and biologically-diverse system of public lands and waters managed for the American people by the BLM, where cultural values, thriving wildlife habitat, and resilient landscapes are prioritized, where decision-making is guided by Tribal co-management and Indigenous Knowledge, and where the public has greater access to, connection with, and feels a greater responsibility for, continuing this inheritance.

Achieving this vision rests on five core pillars:

- Community engagement and a national network of local advocates and stewards
- Permanent protections
- Tribal collaboration
- A broad conservation constituency
- A strong public lands agency

To turn this vision into concrete progress, we identified actionable, near-term policy priorities for each of the pillars over the next two to six years. Each pillar is anchored by a set of guiding principles to help candidates, policymakers, members of Congress, and agency leaders understand what is at stake, and their responsibility to adhere to longstanding law and adopt best practices for managing these public lands.

These recommendations and principles offer a critical roadmap for leaders in Washington, DC and across the West to make meaningful, lasting commitments and achieve progress for our public lands. We look forward to partnering with you to make this vision a reality.

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Community Engagement & a National Network of Local Advocates and Stewards

Introduction:

The work of protecting and expanding the National Conservation Lands has always happened in partnership with community members, local governments, Tribal nations and partners, including the Friends Grassroots Network. In 2008, the Conservation Lands Foundation established the Friends Grassroots Network, based on the belief that the country's public lands, including our National Conservation Lands, are best protected when there is a national network of local advocates working to advance a shared conservation vision. The Network has grown from four groups at its inception to a robust and active set of 92 groups today.

This model has proven that strengthening relationships between communities and BLM staff, and providing opportunities for public engagement in stewardship and planning, is critical to the health and success of the National Conservation Lands system.

Policy Priorities:

- **Strengthen partnerships between BLM and nonprofit partners,** affirming them as essential restoration and public engagement implementation partners.
    - **Reinstate memoranda of understanding (MOUs) and assistance agreements** at the field office level across the National Conservation Lands.
    - Create and identify **new grant mechanisms outside of the BLM budget, and strengthen existing grants** to Friends Network and other local grassroots organizations.
- Improve the **quality and rates of public engagement provided for by the BLM** in land use planning processes through robust and accessible comment periods (including translators and other accommodations), multiple forms of outreach, fact sheets and other presentations, and conducting both virtual and in person public meetings.

Guiding Principles:

- Partnerships between federal agencies and local grassroots organizations play an invaluable role in land management: local organizations often hold institutional knowledge; provide hundreds of volunteer hours to support and steward these lands every year; and often provide funding for projects. MOUs help formalize these partnerships.

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Tribal Collaboration

Introduction:

For centuries before the establishment of federal public lands, Tribal nations lived in and managed these landscapes with knowledge gained and refined over millennia. While early federal land management forcibly displaced Indigenous peoples, recent history marked a vital shift toward agreements that support Tribal co-management (shared legal decision-making responsibilities) and co-stewardship (a broader framework to share responsibilities) of our public lands.

These concepts, in different forms, have been recognized twice in legislation, first for the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument and again for Alabama Hills National Scenic Area. But similar, locally specific, approaches can also be implemented through agreements. Examples of collaboration with Tribes on land management responsibilities include the Bears Ears Commission, where the federal government agreed to share management responsibilities for the Bears Ears National Monument with the five Tribes of the Commission; and the Fallon Paiute Shoshone Inter-Governmental Co-Stewardship Agreement with BLM, signed in 2024 for management of several Wilderness and National Conservation Lands units.

Today, the American public increasingly recognizes that honoring Tribal sovereignty and integrating Indigenous Knowledge are essential to effective conservation, climate resilience, and rectifying historical injustices, and is pushing federal land management agencies to recognize the same.

This collaborative approach has been especially powerful within the National Conservation Lands—a system specifically designated to preserve cultural, historical, and ecological values. By partnering directly with Tribes as equal decision-makers, federal agencies uphold their trust and treaty obligations and tap into thousands of years of stewardship expertise, ensuring these irreplaceable landscapes are protected for generations to come.

Policy Priorities:

- Through statute or policy, support the **presumption that all Tribes hold treaty and aboriginal rights** unless a law explicitly limits them, and are thus owed unique government-to-government engagement on public land decisions.
- Create locally-relevant **permanent co-stewardship,** continue to enter into **agreements with Tribes to manage public lands,** and **provide funding** to support these agreements.
- Support **permanent contracting and compacting authority with Tribes that authorizes BLM to pay 100% of direct and indirect "contract support costs"** for any Tribal agreement**.**
- Provide explicit authority for **funding for Tribes to actively participate in** land management.

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Guiding Principles:

- Tribal sovereignty means that Tribal Nations retain the right to self-government, legally recognized by the federal government.
- Tribal sovereignty–the inherent authority of Indigenous Tribes to govern themselves, their people, and their lands–is undisputed.
- Collaborative management of public lands can have direct, tangible, meaningful outcomes for Tribal communities.
- Co-management and co-stewardship are essential components of successful land conservation, not an afterthought.

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Permanent Protections

Introduction:

The National Conservation Lands are among the most remarkable places owned in common by the American public, and also among the most vulnerable. Congress permanently established the System in 2009, and protective measures also reside in land use plans, secretarial orders, and agency regulations, none of which, unfortunately, provide for permanent protection.

Without further action, incredibly unique and valuable landscapes are vulnerable to politically-driven swings in management direction. This instability has real consequences. Ranchers, Tribes, outfitters, sportsmen, local elected officials, and other community members invest years in collaborative planning processes, only to watch their hard won outcomes reversed on the whims of an administration or Congress.

The uncertainty on the ground inhibits local businesses from planning long-term investments, and agency staff burn scarce capacity relitigating settled questions instead of providing needed on-the-ground resource improvements and enhanced public access.

Ultimately, permanent protections aren't an abstraction or a partisan preference, but rather a promise kept to all of us on behalf of our shared public lands. Our goal is straightforward: ensure stability and predictability to communities and users, and protect critical landscapes with designations that persist.

Policy Priorities:

- Require **use of best available science and monitoring** on a regular basis to ensure that public lands and waters are managed **to meet science-based standards for durable, sustainable ecological health**.
- Affirm that the **Congressional Review Act (CRA) can only be applied to a notice and comment rulemaking.**
- **Work with Tribes and local communities** to **identify priority landscapes** for statutory and administrative protections.
- Dedicate sufficient appropriations to **craft and continue to implement management plans** for units of the National Conservation Lands and other BLM-managed lands in a timely manner.

Guiding Principles

- Federal policy makers have a responsibility to ensure that the conservation of cherished public lands that belong to all Americans are consistently cared for and managed beyond election cycles.
- Meaningful, respected, and valued public and community participation in BLM's land use planning process–particularly in rural landscapes–results in better and long-lasting decisions.

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- Protection is more than lines on a map. It requires increased staff, monitoring, maintenance, and a management plan co-created with the community to achieve conservation outcomes for the landscape.
- Certainty is a business requirement. Outfitters, ranchers, and gateway-town businesses must be able to confidently rely on the certainty of updated land management plans to make significant long-term investments.

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A Broad Conservation Constituency

Introduction:

The long-term protection and expansion of National Conservation Lands depends on a base of support that reflects the rich cultural tapestry of the nation. Yet public lands conservation and decisions, like other policy areas, suffer from a false sense of political division and a failure to capture the full scope of human connection to these cherished natural and cultural landscapes.

Legislative and administrative policy has a clear role to play in expanding this tent. By intentionally cultivating broad interest in and access to public lands—elevating Indigenous leadership, engaging youth, and integrating local, diverse community and economic interests—National Conservation Lands will gain greater political durability, fresh perspectives, and foster a deep-seated sense of stewardship among the public. Broadening awareness and participation empowers every American to advocate and steward their National Conservation Lands.

Policy Priorities:

- Provide **robust funding for stewardship initiatives that** expand outdoor access and economies, and connect younger generations to BLM landscapes.
- Ensure **units of the National Conservation Lands have federally acknowledged advisory boards, and that those boards better reflect the full range of constituencies** connected to these lands.
- Dedicate resources **to enhance awareness of the National Conservation Lands** and help embed their value into the cultural and social experience of the country.
- **Strengthen recreation and volunteer opportunities** so that multigenerational community members and those with diverse physical abilities can engage with BLM landscapes.

Guiding Principles:

- National Conservation Lands and other BLM lands are essential for public health, clean air and water, thriving wildlife, and a better quality of life–giving everyone a stake in their protection. Public land conservation is climate action.
- Protecting public lands is bipartisan, nonpartisan, popular, and patriotic – transcending politics - and an inheritance we have a responsibility to care for and pass on to future generations.
- Public lands are for everyone and all users, and federal policy makers have a responsibility to remove barriers that limit access.
- Public land conservation supports the country's hunting, fishing, and nature-based ways of life, and sustainable recreation requires strong stewardship of our public lands.

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A Strong Public Lands Agency

Introduction:

Since the establishment of National Conservation Lands, the Bureau of Land Management has faced significant roadblocks to achieving its multiple-use mission: consequential staff reductions, inconsistent management direction, annual budget vulnerabilities, and a disconnect between public use/expectations and political will.

Congress and a future presidential administration must focus on reshaping the BLM by expediting the hiring of the talent needed to responsibly manage public lands, aligning the agency's priorities with the public's desire to protect more public land and waters, and structuring operations to ensure that conservation is on par with other uses, as required under the multiple-use management mandate.

Policy Priorities:

- Provide **significant appropriations** to strengthen BLM's capacity to improve the health, biodiversity, public's access, and Tribal co-stewardship of public lands.
- **Rebuild the BLM** with a deliberate plan focused on actual and consistent implementation of multiple use, technology investment, and hiring flexibility.
- Invest in **base staffing levels for units of the National Conservation Lands** and align land management priorities to ensure conservation is on equal footing with extractive and other land uses, including appropriate delineation of National Conservation Lands responsibilities and identifying national leadership roles in the overall agency organization chart.
- **Prioritize nonprofit and private partnerships** to enhance the agency's reach.

Guiding Principles:

- BLM has the leadership and operational capacity to better implement the Federal Land Management and Policy Act (FLPMA), as well as the laws and actions creating individual units.
- BLM adheres to its conservation mandate and legal responsibility to manage the National Conservation Lands for their conservation values and ecological health.
- BLM, with the support of Tribes and local communities, co-creates and implements a cohesive vision of land management that includes resource management as a part of basic staff education and responsibilities.

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