

Global Conservation: A Reflection Of America's Values And A Foundation For Its Prosperity And Future



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Beyond a moral duty, re-engaging in global conservation is a vital strategic investment that safeguards America's economic prosperity, national security, and public health.

A majority of Americans regard conservation as a sacred duty

Conservation of nature is a core American value [shared by many faiths](#) and fundamentally intertwined with the nation's identity, values, and pioneering spirit. In fact, [the United States created the first national park in the world](#) when President Ulysses S. Grant signed the Yellowstone National Park Protection Act into law in 1872. Since then, generations of Americans have reaffirmed their commitment to conservation by creating national and state parks in all 50 states and establishing the National Park Service in 1916, among many other legislative and policy actions to preserve nature. Americans continue to prioritize protecting nature, as illustrated by voters approving over [\\$16 billion in funding](#) for parks and conservation in both [Democratic and Republican leaning areas](#) in the 2024 elections.

The Reimagining Global Conservation Issue Series

This brief is part of a series produced by Reimagining Global Conservation to support a bipartisan Playbook for reimagining the U.S. role in global conservation. The series will inform a future U.S. re-engagement after the 2025 disruption of U.S. foreign assistance. Each paper frames a decision the rebuilt system must make, lays out trade-offs, and poses questions for discussion and debate.

Global conservation supports America's prosperity

In our increasingly interconnected world, America's prosperity, security, and future wellbeing are not just dependent on conserving nature within our borders. While global conservation is often framed as a way to save iconic species like elephants, tigers, and rhinos in far off lands, the reality is that preserving nature globally provides innumerable goods and services that bolster American businesses, advance national security, foster healthy communities, feed families, and support outdoor recreational activities. In keeping with America's commitment to nature, the United States invested over \$500 million per year in global conservation, making it the largest government donor to these efforts until the funding cuts that took place in early 2025. Since the early 1980s, America has invested billions of dollars in effective approaches ranging from strengthening protected area management to incorporating Indigenous and local knowledge and practices, promoting conservation enterprises, and combating wildlife trafficking in diverse settings including Kenya's savannas, the Amazon's rainforests, and the Mekong River Delta.

Why it is crucial for America to reengage in global conservation

Before the 2025 funding cuts, America's investments in global conservation yielded measurable benefits for both people and nature. For instance, U.S. government funding was critical in [Namibia's creation of a network of locally-run community conservancies](#) in the early 1990s that sustainably manage wildlife and are now a hotspot for international ecotourism and responsible big game hunting. With the authority and credibility that only America brings to the international stage, the U.S. government was able to apply innovative tools and approaches to support global conservation including [public private partnerships](#), [diplomatic engagement](#), and [cutting-edge science](#). Reengaging in global conservation is critical to America's economy, health, and security for the reasons highlighted below:

- ❖ **Global conservation provides natural resources that fuel American businesses:** Industries ranging from [big pharma](#) to [multinational food and beverage companies](#) and the [personal care sector](#) rely on nature to provide the raw materials that underpin production of their goods. Recognizing this dependence, the World Economic Forum is [urging industries to help reverse biodiversity loss](#) through practices like improving water management, using sustainably sourced raw materials, and switching to renewable energy in manufacturing.
- ❖ **Global conservation bolsters American safety and security:** U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement estimates that [wildlife trafficking is the fourth largest funding source](#) for transnational criminal organizations, generating an [estimated \\$7 to \\$23 billion annually](#). Chairman Paul Gosar of the U.S. House Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations noted in a January 2026 [press release](#), “International conservation is a national security issue, as cartels, terrorist organizations, and hostile foreign actors exploit wildlife trafficking and environmental crime to fund violence, drugs, and war.” Prior to the funding cuts in 2025, combating wildlife trafficking was a [cornerstone](#) of America’s global conservation efforts.
- ❖ **Global conservation secures America’s food supply:** Americans have come to expect a wide variety of foods at the grocery store, many of which are imported. For instance, the [USDA estimates](#) that over half of fresh fruits and a third of fresh vegetables sold in U.S. supermarkets are imported. Additionally, virtually all of the [coffee](#) and [80% of seafood consumed in the U.S](#)¹ is imported. Food production is [highly reliant on nature](#), which provides essential services like water regulation, pollination, soil cycling, and crop biodiversity. Global conservation secures America’s food supply by ensuring that natural habitats like forests, fisheries, and grasslands that underpin agricultural productivity are protected from threats such as deforestation and [illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing](#) and by increasing sustainable practices in agriculture.
- ❖ **Global conservation keeps Americans healthier:** Nature supports [Americans' health](#) in myriad ways from providing nutrient-rich foods to helping prevent pandemics and serving as a source of new therapies that treat common conditions like cancer. For instance, [forest conservation](#) can be an effective strategy to prevent spillover events (where a pathogen jumps from animals to people) that may lead to disease outbreaks
- ❖ **Global conservation stabilizes America’s weather:** The physical impacts of wildfires, extreme weather events, and sea level rise [pose significant risks to American businesses](#) and [communities](#). Conserving forests, mangroves, savannas, and other natural habitats can sequester carbon and help [stabilize American weather patterns](#).
- ❖ **Global conservation provides opportunities for outdoor recreation:** The ease and affordability of international travel in recent years means that more and more Americans are traveling overseas for nature-based, “bucket list” experiences like wildlife safaris and responsible big-game hunting. The global ecotourism sector is [projected to almost double in growth](#) in the coming decade, posing significant risks to the integrity of natural habitats. Global conservation efforts are critical to ensuring that national parks and conservancies are well managed for the benefit of people and nature.

¹ Based on NOAA statistics for 2023.

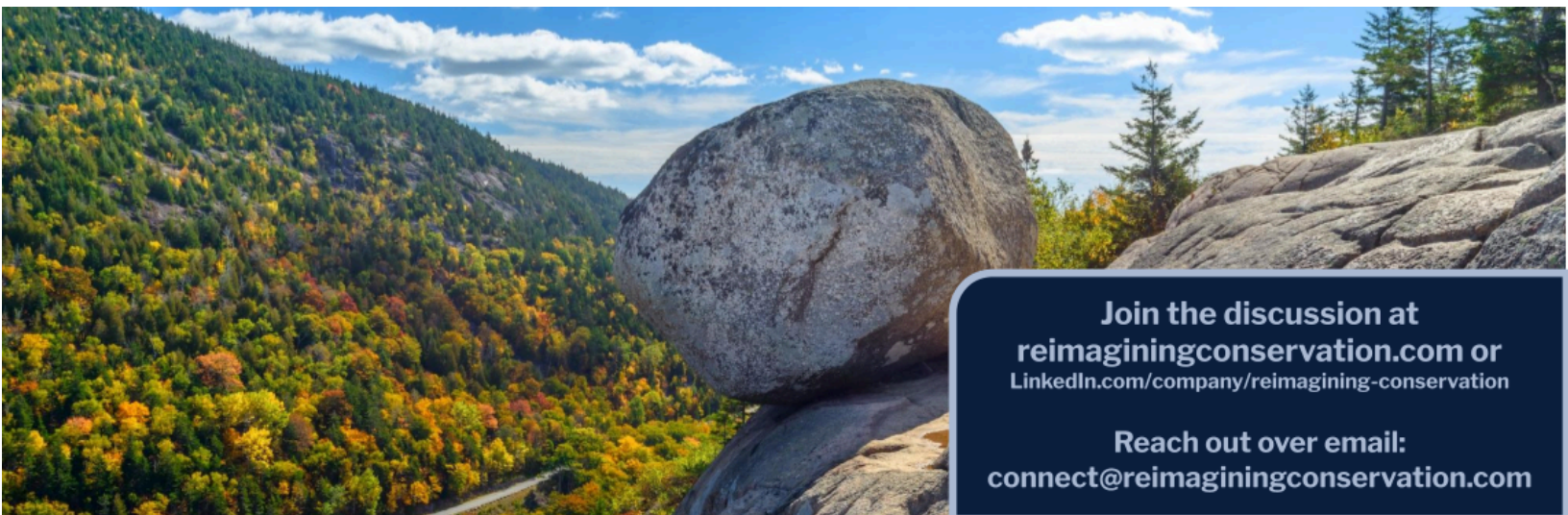
Conclusion

Reengaging in global conservation is a moral duty for Americans given our deep belief, leadership, and success in preserving nature and crucial to strategically advancing national interests. Conservation is tightly linked to the security and stability of global food production and critical minerals supply chains, the prevention of wildlife trafficking and transnational crime, and efforts to reduce the risk of future pandemics, among many other benefits. As our engagement recedes, other countries will continue to [chart paths that serve their own interests](#) and capitalize on the gradual loss of American influence in shaping decisions that directly impact our prosperity and safety. Thus, reengagement is vital to strengthening our ability to influence global conservation outcomes that intersect with America's security, health, and economic competitiveness.

Help us Build the Playbook

What do you think about the values that underlie the US role in global conservation? Comment on this post or add to the discussion on [LinkedIn](#) with these questions in mind:

- What values are most important to you?
- Are there any values that were missed?
- How do these values connect or divide us as a coalition for the future US role in global conservation?
- How should we measure success of future global conservation investments?



Join the discussion at
reimaginingconservation.com or
[LinkedIn.com/company/reimagining-conservation](https://www.linkedin.com/company/reimagining-conservation)

Reach out over email:
connect@reimaginingconservation.com

Learn More

Additional resources relevant to this topic. Please feel free to suggest more for us to add to the list.

The History and Values of American Conservation

- **The Resource:** [Yellowstone: Establishment of the First National Park](#) (National Park Service) and [How Religion Intersects with Americans' Views on the Environment](#) (Pew Research Center).
- **Description:** These resources document the legal origins of the world's first national park in 1872 and provide contemporary data on how environmental stewardship is viewed as a moral and religious duty by a majority of Americans.

- **Relevance to Global Conservation:** This establishes the "Sacred Duty" and historical leadership of the United States, providing the moral and cultural foundation for why America engages in conservation both at home and abroad.

Conservation as a National Security Imperative

- **The Resource:** [International Conservation is a National Security Issue](#) (House Committee on Natural Resources) and [Wildlife Trafficking Investigation](#) (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement).
- **Description:** Official statements and investigative summaries detailing how wildlife trafficking serves as the fourth-largest funding source for transnational criminal organizations and cartels.
- **Relevance to Global Conservation:** This directly addresses the **Safety and Security** dimension. It explains how underfunding global conservation creates "security voids" that are exploited by hostile actors, linking environmental protection to the disruption of global criminal networks.

The Economic ROI of Biodiversity

- **The Resource:** [The Return on Investment of Global Conservation](#) (Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences) and [How Nature-Positive Industry Can Help Reverse Biodiversity Loss](#) (World Economic Forum).
- **Description:** Peer-reviewed research and economic frameworks analyzing the financial benefits of preserving natural habitats and the reliance of major industries (pharma, food, personal care) on raw natural materials.
- **Relevance to Global Conservation:** These resources provide the evidence base for the **Economic Prosperity** argument. They illustrate that conservation is not a "sunk cost" but a high-yield strategic investment that stabilizes supply chains for American multinational corporations.

Global Food Security and Nature-Based Services

- **The Resource:** [Food Production is Highly Reliant on Nature](#) (Science) and [Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Imports Continue to Rise](#) (USDA ERS).
- **Description:** An analysis of the ecological services (pollination, water regulation, soil health) required for food production, paired with data showing that over 50% of fresh fruit and 80% of seafood in the U.S. is imported.
- **Relevance to Global Conservation:** This highlights the **Supply Chain Vulnerability** of the American grocery store. It shows that if natural habitats in exporting nations collapse, America's domestic food security and prices are directly impacted.

Preventing Pathogen Spillover through Forest Conservation

- **The Resource:** [Forest Conservation Can Prevent Next Pandemic](#) (Nature) and [5 Reasons Why Biodiversity Matters for Human Health](#) (World Economic Forum).
- **Description:** Scientific reporting on how maintaining intact forests prevents "spillover events" where diseases jump from wildlife to humans, alongside a broader look at nature's role in pharmaceutical discovery.
- **Relevance to Global Conservation:** This addresses the **Public Health** dimension. It frames global conservation as a "preventative medicine" strategy, arguing that protecting ecosystems abroad is significantly cheaper than managing the global economic and health costs of a pandemic.