



**UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT
INTERAGENCY
MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
ON PROMOTING EQUITABLE ACCESS TO NATURE
IN NATURE-DEPRIVED COMMUNITIES**

1. PURPOSE

In furtherance of Executive Order 14008, *Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad*, this Interagency Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) seeks to strengthen and sustain the ability of the signatory Federal agencies to support locally led conservation and park projects in nature-deprived communities.¹ Nature-deprived communities are disadvantaged communities that disproportionately lack access to the climate mitigation and human health benefits of natural areas such as, but not limited to, parks, urban forests, conservation areas, open space and water-based recreation, public gardens, tree canopy cover, beaches, waterways, and other locally accessible green and blue spaces (hereinafter referred to as “parks and green and blue spaces”).² As envisioned by Executive Order 14008, improved access to nature can help build healthy, thriving communities that are better able to withstand the effects of climate change. This MOU is entered into by the White House Council on Environmental Quality, United States Department of Agriculture, United States Department of Commerce, United States Department of the Army (Corps of Engineers Civil Works), United States Environmental Protection Agency, United States Department of

¹ Executive Order No. 14008, 86 Fed Reg. 7,619 (Jan. 27, 2021), available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/executive-order-on-tackling-the-climate-crisis-at-home-and-abroad/>.

² Section 219 of Executive Order 14008 uses the term “disadvantaged communities,” which it describes as “historically marginalized and overburdened” communities, and directs agencies to “make achieving environmental justice part of their missions by developing programs, policies, and activities to address the disproportionately high and adverse human health, environmental, climate-related and other cumulative impacts on disadvantaged communities.” Some community members and advocates prefer a term other than “disadvantaged communities.” Until subsequent guidance can address the question of the most appropriate terminology, this MOU relies on the language used in Executive Order 14008.

Housing and Urban Development, United States Department of the Interior, United States Department of Transportation, United States Department of Homeland Security, and the Corporation for National and Community Service (collectively, the Parties). This MOU sets forth the Parties' commitments to the goals and responsibilities iterated below.

2. BACKGROUND

Pursuant to Section 216(a) of Executive Order 14008, the Secretaries of the Interior, Agriculture, and Commerce and the Chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) submitted a report, *Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful*, which recommends a ten-year initiative in support of locally led efforts to conserve and restore America's lands and waters. One of the six early focus areas of the initiative is to "[c]reate more parks and safe outdoor opportunities in nature-deprived communities" and specifically to "support locally led conservation and park projects in communities that disproportionately lack access to nature and its benefits."³

A diverse body of scientific literature has identified public access to parks and green and blue spaces as a critical nature-based solution to address people's mental and physical health challenges and an important tool for mitigating the impacts of climate change, such as extreme heat and flooding.⁴ The burdens associated with a lack of access to nature do not fall evenly on all Americans. For example, an estimated 100 million Americans do not have an accessible park within a ten-minute walk of their home.⁵

Federal investment in the creation of and improved access to parks and green and blue spaces in nature-deprived communities also furthers the *Justice40 Initiative*, established in Section 223 of Executive Order 14008. The activities outlined in this MOU can help address the burdens of legacy pollution and climate change impacts disproportionately borne by disadvantaged communities and contribute to the delivery of 40 percent of the overall benefits of climate, clean energy, and other Federal investments. It is important, however, that the investments be guided by the priorities, perspectives, and needs of local communities and avoid potential harms, such as displacing residents, or making local housing less affordable.

This MOU establishes a framework from which the Parties can collaborate, learn from each other, and engage more effectively in supporting local leaders' efforts to improve access to and create, expand, steward, and conserve parks and green and blue spaces for current residents of nature-deprived communities.

3. GOALS

The Parties agree to pursue the following goals to promote locally led conservation and park and green and blue space projects in nature-deprived communities, guided by science, evidence and, as appropriate, Indigenous Knowledge.⁶

³ DOI, *et al.*, "Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful," May 2021, available at <https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/report-conserving-and-restoring-america-the-beautiful-2021.pdf>.

⁴ USDA Forest Service, "Urban Nature for Human Health and Well-Being," Feb. 2018, available at https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/fs_media/fs_document/urbannatureforhumanhealthandwellbeing_508_01_30_18.pdf.

⁵"10-Minute Walk," May 2020, research results available at <https://10minutewalk.org/#Our-research>.

⁶ As explained by the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), "Indigenous Knowledge is a body of observations, oral and written knowledge, practices, and beliefs that promote environmental sustainability and the responsible stewardship of natural resources through relationships between humans and environmental systems. It is applied to phenomena across biological, physical, cultural and spiritual systems. Indigenous Knowledge has evolved over millennia, continues to

- a. **Identify Nature-Deprived Communities** – Explore and select a set of publicly-available datasets and methods for identifying nature-deprived communities and tracking outcomes using available tools.
- b. **Increase Access to Nature and Its Benefits** – Identify, leverage, and manage Federal programs, plans, and technical assistance to drive greater investment in and equitable access to nature and its benefits.
- c. **Enhance Collaboration** – Facilitate coordination among the Parties and with State, Tribal, Territorial, and local governments, the private sector, and nongovernmental partners to reduce barriers to project implementation and provide increased access to Federal resources that benefit current residents.
- d. **Improve Public Health and Safety** – Support strategic planning, co-led research, and other activities promoting improved social, economic, climate resilience, and human health and safety outcomes through investments in parks and green and blue spaces in nature-deprived communities.
- e. **Develop Community Leaders and Capacity** – Develop the capacity of community leaders to collaboratively establish and implement community park and green and blue space plans and visions, including support for neighborhood project developers, managers, and community organizers who are critical to addressing local concerns.
- f. **Build Trust** – Support community-led engagement that promotes local parks and green and blue spaces and results in greater awareness of and technical support for accessing the resources and tools provided by the Federal Government.
- g. **Ensure Long-Term Continuity** – Increase support of existing programs and the establishment of new organizational structures and processes at the Federal level that can deliver improved and equitable access to parks and green and blue spaces for current residents of nature-deprived communities.

4. CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE PARTIES

To implement this MOU, each of the Parties agrees to:

- a. Identify contributing programs and projects and prioritize relevant resources, as allowed by law, in support of State, Tribal, Territorial, and local efforts to create and improve current resident access to the climate mitigation and human health benefits of parks and green and blue spaces in nature-deprived communities.

Contributing programs include those with authority to do one or more of the following:

- i. Help build capacity in nature-deprived communities to drive their own planning, acquisition, development, operations, and maintenance of parks and green and blue spaces, including support for neighborhood project developers, coordinators, and community organizers, workforce training, and park and green and blue space programming that benefits current residents.
- ii. Expand equitable access to and improve the quality of parks and green and blue spaces, including through land or water conservation and restoration projects, tree planting and maintenance, urban agriculture initiatives, the addition of new beach and river access points,

evolve, and includes insights based on evidence acquired through direct contact with the environment and long-term experiences, as well as extensive observations, lessons, and skills passed from generation to generation.” OSTP, “Indigenous Knowledge,” available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/ostp/ostps-teams/climate-and-environment/indigenous-knowledge/>.

trail development, safety lighting, accessibility for the disabled, and outdoor equipment for current residents.

- iii. Improve accessibility to parks and green and blue spaces, especially in congested areas in proximity to schoolyards, places of worship, and community centers, with a focus on safe routes to natural areas, including sidewalks, transit stops, and multi-modal access points.
 - iv. Promote community-driven vacant lot and site remediation projects, strategic tree planting, public garden and urban agriculture availability, ecological restoration activities, climate resilience investments, and cultural interpretation programs to foster greater commitment to and co-stewardship of parks and green and blue spaces.
 - v. Engage with nature-deprived communities with the goal of providing opportunities for residents to experience the benefits of local parks and green and blue spaces through, as appropriate, youth and conservation corps, outdoor education programs, Tribal co-stewardship initiatives, Indigenous Knowledge sharing, sustainable recreation activities, community science programs, community-based conservation and urban agriculture projects, and other activities that support shared learning and collaborative planning.
 - vi. Expand educational programs, community science, and co-led research projects that promote awareness, understanding, and appreciation of the social, economic, and health benefits of improving current resident access to parks and green and blue spaces.
- b. Collaborate to leverage resources and achieve shared goals grounded in science, evidence and, where appropriate, Indigenous Knowledge that result in greater current resident access to parks and green and blue spaces and their benefits in nature-deprived communities. The Parties, in furtherance of the goals of this MOU, will establish an interagency committee in which each Party agrees to regular participation led by its designated representatives or their alternates. Designated representatives and alternates shall be points of contact with authority to make programmatic decisions and to align and leverage available resources in support of the goals in this MOU. A Party may update its designated representatives and alternates via written notice to all Parties. CEQ will initially convene the designated representatives or alternates. A schedule of meetings (with a minimum of four meetings per fiscal year) and annual rotation of the convening role will be instituted for purposes of collaboration, problem-solving, and providing interagency progress on implementation of this MOU.

The Parties agree to take other steps needed to implement this MOU and leverage each other's relevant commitments, authorities, and resources in support of community-led actions for improving access to parks and green and blue spaces in nature-deprived communities. These steps include but are not limited to:

- i. Establishing and adopting metrics that support mapping and tracking accomplishments in identified nature-deprived communities, consistent with the America the Beautiful initiative and Executive Order 14008.
- ii. Facilitating introductions and partnerships among Federal departments, agencies, and relevant program staff at the headquarters, regional, state, and field office level, State, Tribal, Territorial, and local governments, the private sector, and nongovernmental organizations to promote effective, collaborative engagement and delivery of assistance to nature-deprived communities.

- iii. Directing Federal program leadership to identify and leverage opportunities to collaborate with interagency partners in support of nature-deprived communities, including as appropriate, entering into interagency funding agreements between or among the Parties to allow them to efficiently leverage funds.
 - iv. Hosting informational outreach and engagement events for nature-deprived community residents, stakeholders, and relevant interagency partners.
- c. Participate in and support interagency annual reporting of accomplishments toward the goals established in Section 3 of this MOU, which can be combined with other reporting requirements under Executive Order 14008, if feasible. Reporting may include such information as relevant grants, research projects, geographic locations, funding amounts, and examples of assistance that have advanced access to and quality of parks and green and blue spaces and their benefits to current residents in nature-deprived communities. As part of its rotational responsibility, the convening Party will be responsible for leading the reporting and compiling of information that will be made available to the public annually.

5. MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS

- a. Each Party will handle its own activities and utilize its own resources, including the expenditure of its own funds, in pursuing the objectives of this MOU. Each Party intends to carry out its separate activities in a coordinated and mutually beneficial manner.
- b. The Parties, through designated representatives and alternates, agree to coordinate all public statements regarding this MOU.
- c. The Parties may enter into appropriate agreements as necessary to pursue and implement the goals set forth in this MOU, including agreements on a project- and program-specific basis. Any such agreements should be consistent with this MOU, Executive Order 14008, and applicable Federal law.
- d. This MOU is an expression of intent. Nothing contained in this MOU is intended or should be construed to limit or affect the authority or legal responsibilities of the Parties or bind them to perform any actions.
- e. Nothing in this MOU will be construed to impair or otherwise adversely affect:
 - i. The authority granted by law to an executive department or agency or the head thereof; or
 - ii. The functions of the Parties relating to budgetary, administrative, or legislative proposals.
- f. This MOU will be implemented consistent with applicable law and subject to the availability of appropriations.
- g. Nothing in this MOU requires any Party to obligate or transfer funds. Specific activities that involve the transfer of money, services, or property between or among the Parties will require execution of separate agreements. Such agreements must be independently authorized by appropriate statutory authority. This MOU does not provide that authority. Negotiation, execution, and administration of each such agreement must comply with all applicable statutes and regulations.
- h. Nothing in this MOU is intended to or should be construed to restrict the Parties from participating in similar activities or arrangements with other public or private entities, organizations, or individuals.

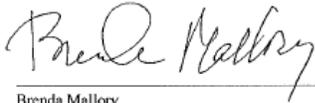
- i. Each of the Parties will implement this MOU to the extent practicable, consistent with its status as an independent department or agency, applicable statutory and regulatory requirements, and applicable procedures.
- j. This MOU is not intended to and does not create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or in equity, by any party against the United States; its departments, agencies, entities, officers, employees, or agents; or any other person.
- k. Pursuant to 41 U.S.C. § 22, no member of or delegate to Congress may benefit from this MOU, either directly or indirectly.
- l. This MOU may be amended, extended, or terminated by written consent of all the Parties.
- m. A Party may terminate its participation in this MOU by providing 60-day written advance notice to all Parties.
- n. Additional Federal agencies may become parties to this MOU by signing an amendment to this MOU.
- o. This MOU is effective on the date it is signed by all the Parties.
- p. This MOU will terminate on December 31, 2030.

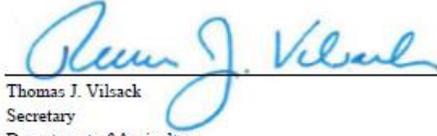
6. SIGNATURES

See the attached signatory pages.

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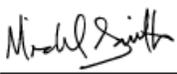
Counterpart Signatory Page

	August 28, 2022		AUG 22 2022
Brenda Mallory Chair White House Council on Environmental Quality	Date	Deb Haaland Secretary Department of the Interior	Date

	August 26, 2022		August 16, 2022
Thomas J. Vilsack Secretary Department of Agriculture	Date	Pete Buttigieg Secretary Department of Transportation	Date

	SEP 01 2022		August 26, 2022
Michael S. Regan Administrator U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	Date	Gina M. Raimondo Secretary Department of Commerce	Date

	8/16/2022		August 30, 2022
Marcia L. Fudge Secretary Department of Housing and Urban Development	Date	Michael L. Connor Assistant Secretary Department of the Army, Civil Works	Date

	August 19, 2022	RANDOLPH D ALLES	Digitally signed by RANDOLPH D ALLES Date: 2022.08.29 13:51:48 -04'00'
Michael D. Smith Chief Executive Officer Corporation for National and Community Service, operating as AmeriCorps	Date	R.D. Alles Acting Under Secretary for Management Department of Homeland Security	Date