



APPALACHIA KEYSTONE INITIATIVE

Enhancing Biodiversity, Improving Outdoor Recreation and Addressing Legacy Pollution

The Appalachian Mountains, serving as a home to a wide array of plant and animal species, boast a rich tapestry of biodiversity and contributes to the region's ecological significance and natural beauty. Most of the great rivers of the East Coast have their headwaters in the peaks, ridges and foothills of the Appalachians. This unique geography forms a "superhighway" of species migration, with wide expanses of resilient forests and vulnerable pinch points where the migration of species northward in their ranges is under serious threat due to climate change.

To address this threat and improve both human and environmental health in Appalachia, as part of the Department of the Interior's Restoration and Resilience Framework funded by President Biden's Investing in America agenda, the Department's new Appalachia Keystone Initiative is bringing together bureaus and offices to address the critical intersection of climate change with ecological, social and economic needs of the region.

Given the overwhelming interest in durable and impactful conservation solutions, there is clear need for the Interior Department to have a unified vision across all its bureaus with equities in the region, as well as with outside groups and stakeholders. Through the Appalachian Keystone Initiative, the Department will engage partners and federal staff to create a single vision for the region.

The effects of legacy pollution are felt especially strongly throughout Appalachia, where the Appalachian Mountains and the surrounding ecosystems are experiencing the detrimental impacts associated with energy development, urban expansion and transformation of agricultural lands. Across this unique region, stretching from New York to Mississippi, Americans live in close proximity of abandoned coal mines and orphaned oil and gas wells. These legacy pollution sites are environmental hazards and jeopardize public health and safety by contaminating ground and surface water; emitting noxious gases like methane; creating subsidence; leaving altered landscapes with large waste piles, impoundments, and dilapidated structures and equipment; contributing to flooding; and harming vegetation and wildlife.

Through local partnerships, the Appalachia Keystone Initiative will help advance biodiversity and build resilience to climate change while helping working families across the area address the environmental impacts from legacy energy developments. This Initiative will work to rehabilitate ecosystems that have been adversely affected and empower communities to fortify the connections between cultural heritage, economic prosperity, and environmental well-being.

Resources made available through the Investing in America agenda will help communities after years of struggling with hazardous pollution, toxic water levels and altered landscapes, all while proactively engaging in Tribal co-stewardship, creating good-paying jobs and improving outdoor recreation experiences.

THE APPALACHIA KEYSTONE INITIATIVE INVESTS IN:



Habitat Restoration and Biodiversity Resilience

The Appalachia Keystone Initiative includes more than \$15 million for ecosystem restoration projects for federal lands, including projects like efforts to restore 500 acres of mine lands at New River Gorge in West Virginia; reforestation efforts on agricultural land in the southern Appalachian range of the eastern hellbender salamander through *America the Beautiful* Challenge grant funding; and the Potomac Headwaters Fish Passage Restoration Project, which is reconnecting over 195 miles of habitat for brook trout, American eel, and other aquatic species across Maryland, Virginia and West Virginia.



Restoring and Reclaiming Legacy Pollution Sites

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law allocated a total of \$16 billion to address legacy pollution, including \$11.3 billion in AML funding over 15 years, as well as \$4.7 billion for orphaned well site plugging, remediation and restoration activities, and resources for states to create jobs and build the foundation for a clean energy economy. Appalachian states are eligible for significant funding through both the AML and orphaned well programs.



Inspiring Large-Landscape, Partnership-Driven Coordination

Working with groups such as the Appalachian Trail Landscape Partnership and the Doris Duke Foundation, agency staff across the Department are developing a unified federal vision to amplify future investments. These efforts draw from regional planning efforts that have strong federal participation, such as Southeast Conservation Adaptation Strategy and the Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture. This integrated approach will leverage significant private investments in the landscape that have become available with the goal of economic empowerment and landscape conservation.

