

TRANSITION TO GREEN

*Leading the way to a healthy environment, a green economy
and a sustainable future*

**ENVIRONMENTAL TRANSITION RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION**

NOVEMBER 2008

INTRODUCTION

This report highlights priority environmental recommendations for the Obama administration transition team endorsed by a coalition of national environmental and conservation organizations listed below¹. Many organizations assisted in the creation of this report and we recognize their contributions. The report describes how the administration can resume Federal leadership on critical energy and environmental challenges affecting our economy, health and well-being in order to put our nation on a sustainable path now and for future generations.

Over the past several months, a coalition of national environmental and conservation organizations has completed an internal process to develop a set of suggestions for the new administration. Sub-committees including representatives from throughout the environmental community have considered the full breadth of environmental issues we expect will be considered by the administration and developed the detailed recommendations included in this report. It contains key consensus recommendations and is meant to compliment, and not replace, other environmental transition reports developed by individual organizations with recommendations of their own.

Each set of agency recommendations highlights three major issues for the agency, followed by key administrative, legislative and budgetary policy actions and critical actions to take in the first 100 days. We urge the agency transition teams to use this document in the first crucial days of the Obama administration and look forward to working with the administration to develop policies that will both revitalize our economy and protect the planet.

AMERICAN RIVERS - CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL LAW
CLEAN WATER ACTION- DEFENDERS OF WILDLIFE - EARTHJUSTICE -
ENVIRONMENT AMERICA - ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENSE FUND - FRIENDS OF THE EARTH
GREENPEACE - IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE - LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS
NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY - NATIONAL PARKS CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION
NATIONAL TRIBAL ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL - NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION
NATIVE AMERICAN RIGHTS FUND - NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL - OCEANA
OCEAN CONSERVANCY - PEW ENVIRONMENT GROUP
PHYSICIANS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY - POPULATION CONNECTION
POPULATION ACTION INTERNATIONAL
RAILS-TO-TRAILS CONSERVANCY - SIERRA CLUB - THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY
THE TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND - UNION OF CONCERNED SCIENTISTS
WORLD WILDLIFE FUND

¹ The organizations listed here and on the back cover do not necessarily endorse or have expertise on every recommendation in this report. Please refer to the list of transition project co-chairs in the appendix for more information on a particular agency or department recommendation. This endorsement list is current as of November 24, 2008.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview of Presidential Actions

America is undergoing historic changes. In his victory speech, President-elect Barack Obama captured the paradox facing our nation: we are confronted with a long list of grave challenges, but out of them can also arise opportunity. We can meet these difficult times with boldness instead of timidity; with innovation instead of more-of-the-same.

We can ignite this transformation by repowering America with clean energy and placing our nation at the forefront of environmental leadership. Generating green collar jobs, making our offices and homes more efficient, rebuilding our water infrastructure, reducing our dependence on oil, reviving our ailing landscapes—these are the solutions that can lead directly to economic prosperity, greater social equity, and even enhanced national security.

The entire federal government has a critical role to play in unleashing these innovative solutions, but it is the president who will set the tone. President-elect Obama has an opportunity to galvanize the nation—to announce bold measures that will channel America’s ingenuity into solving the entwined economic, climate, and environmental crises.

The steps outlined here offer a road map. These recommendations, respectfully submitted to the transition team for its consideration, were compiled by a broad coalition of the leading national environmental and conservation groups in the nation. It covers a wide range of issues that merit prompt presidential attention, but it underscores the urgent need to build a green energy economy to tackle global warming. Most importantly, the document reflects a fundamental consensus that serious action is needed right now in order to usher in a healthier, cleaner, more prosperous and more sustainable era for America.

Guiding Principles

Economic Vitality, Clean Energy, and Climate Solutions Go Hand-in-Hand

Many Americans are struggling to make ends meet, but we can lift ourselves out of this economic crisis through investing in clean energy solutions that solve global warming. Done right, this approach will revitalize our economy by generating millions of well-paying jobs that use the skills workers already have to manufacture and install clean energy and green infrastructure right here in the United States—such as wind farms, solar panels, hybrid cars, mass transit and efficient buildings connected to a smart electricity grid.

Social Justice Requires Environmental Justice

Too often the worst impacts of ecological degradation hit the poor and people of color “first and worst.” Their neighborhoods rise to the top of siting lists for waste dumps, dirty power plants and transportation hubs. Meanwhile, these same communities benefit “last and least” from available solutions such as hybrid cars, solar panels, and organic food. We believe that an economic plan built around green-collar job training and strengthened environmental safeguards will not only alleviate the pollution afflicting these communities, but also provide a path out of poverty and a more just society.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Science Should Have a Primary Role in Safeguarding Our Environment

At the base of the best environmental regulations rests not politics but science. Yet science has been under siege at federal agencies for the last eight years. For example, agency review boards have been stacked with industry-funded scientists, while cozy relationships between regulators and the companies they regulate have more influence over decisions than unbiased science. This situation needs to be reformed across federal agencies now. Public-servant scientists should be seen as the nation's brain-trust and their independence and influence must be reestablished.

Integrity Must Be Returned to Environmental Governance

President-elect Obama and his administration have an opportunity to restore the fundamental American tradition of fairness: the principle that no one, not even the government, is above the law. When equity prevails, polluters and agencies alike follow the rules, and the government embraces its responsibility to enforce environmental statutes. To fully hold itself accountable, government must become more transparent and citizens must be invited back into decisions about their own air, water, and lands. Above all, agencies must be allowed to use their regulatory tools to advance the public interest, not serve special interests. With the right kind of leadership, the Obama administration can return a sense of decency and purpose to the role of government.

Top Areas for Priority Action

This report specifies numerous recommendations across a wide range of federal agencies. Contained herein are many opportunities between Inauguration Day and the first Earth Day address of the next administration for President Obama to begin to make progress on energy and the environment by setting an agenda and taking action. However, we believe there are four broad areas that deserve special attention during this period.

Clean Energy and Climate Change

The top priority of the environmental community remains addressing climate change and creating the new clean energy economy, key to America's economic revitalization. A document detailing the principal actions deserving the immediate attention of the new administration has previously been transmitted to the transition team and has been incorporated into this report. Successfully tackling this issue will require: (a) using existing executive authority; (b) working with Congress to pass legislation; (c) and showing real leadership internationally on the issue. In addition, government agencies must incorporate climate science, impacts, and adaptation strategies into their operational plans and ongoing work.

The Federal Budget and Stimulus Legislation

This is now a critical time for the nation to reinvest in the budgets of federal agencies with responsibilities for clean energy, human health, and environmental protection while redirecting those resources to the best possible use. The federal budget provides the means for achieving some of the nation's most important goals, whether it is ensuring there is clean water to drink, mass transit to ride, national parks to visit, or a new generation of clean technology being developed. Yet the resources available for these purposes have been shrinking, putting the public's needs at risk. Stimulus legislation is an especially time sensitive

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

opportunity, where carefully directed investments in green infrastructure and clean energy can quickly create jobs and produce economic activity.

The White House as a Leader on Clean Energy and the Environment

The job of restoring environmental protection in the federal government needs to start at the top in the White House. This includes having the President's advisors focus on energy and climate as a top priority. The Council on Environmental Quality needs to have its resources rebuilt so that it can take a lead role on environmental policy, including energy and climate. Science must play a central role in all policy making, with the Office of Science and Technology Policy leading the charge. Furthermore the broken regulatory process should be fixed, with the Office of Management and Budget's role properly defined so that the mission of the federal government becomes again protecting the public's health, safety and environmental assets.

Putting the Right People in the Right Jobs

One of the most important decisions in government is who should be put into the key decision making positions. In this document we have tried to identify some of the most important government policy posts. Filling these positions with individuals who have integrity, are highly qualified, and have an appreciation of the value of environmental protection is essential to the success of these agencies.

