

## New Executive Order from Governor Newsom Biodiversity, Climate and Working Lands: A Step in Right Direction

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On Wednesday Governor Gavin Newsom issued a new [Executive Order N-82-20](#) that is another step forward in combating climate change. The order establishes the goal of protecting 30% of California's lands and waters by 2030 while also outlining some initial actions required to get there. The governor's bold leadership is urgently needed as climate change worsens more rapidly than expected globally, and as almost every Californian has been impacted by the 4+ million acres of wildfires and smothering toxic smoke since August.

Along with the Governor's recent Zero Emissions Vehicle [Executive Order N-79-20](#) that bans the sale of new gas-powered cars and trucks by 2035, this week's order provides guidance on another key component of the comprehensive policy approach needed to reverse the climate crisis: protecting biodiversity, wildlands, state waters, and working lands.

State agencies are now required to come up with a plan in the next year to "accelerate natural removal of carbon" and store more carbon in the state's soils. Per the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, in addition to cutting greenhouse gas emissions at least in half over the next decade, we must also begin drawing down the enormous amounts of warming compounds we've already dumped into the atmosphere from burning fossil fuels, cutting down forests, and disturbing soils.

A key pillar of The Climate Center's [Climate-Safe California](#) platform, enhanced sequestration practices on working and natural lands are urgently needed on a much larger scale. To reach net negative carbon emissions by 2030 and in keeping with the latest science, we must remove an additional ~100 million metric tons (MMT) of carbon dioxide equivalents from the atmosphere annually by then.

While the governor's order does not include a specific target, it does task the California *Air Resources Board* with updating sequestration goals for natural and working lands to achieve the state's current— and now unfortunately too conservative— policy of carbon neutrality by 2045. We look forward to working with state agencies to establish an appropriate science-based target on the shorter time frame needed to avoid the worst of climate impacts. We will also work with partners to ensure there are adequate funding streams to scale up these efforts.

Importantl the order includes California Native American tribes in the group of stakeholders responsible for the planning processes to guide habitat and soil management changes. Also directs state agencies to “build climate resilience in our forests, wetlands, urban greenspaces” particularly for lower-income communities. It is crucial that we address the disproportionate impact on frontline communities of heatwaves, air pollution, and drought. Major investments in urban forestry, riparian habitat restoration, and soil sequestration practices can provide increased resilience to climate extremes and benefit community health. It will also be critical to promote [equitable infill development](#) protecting natural and working lands.

We will join with partner NGOs, state agencies, the legislature, and others to codify policy details that will ensure this order becomes reality. We will also continue advocating for [additional Executive Orders](#), legislation, and regulations that build on Climate-Safe California and recognize the rapidly worsening climate reality. It's time to enact the full range of accelerated science-based targets and comprehensive policies required for a vibrant, equitable, and climate-safe future.

In California, 47% of the state is owned by the federal government, mostly in national forests, national parks and desert lands owned by the federal Bureau of Land Management. The vast majority of that land is undeveloped. So in some ways the goal of 30% protection is already achieved. However, if state agencies eventually define “protected” as not allowing commercial uses, like mining, or logging or cattle grazing on public lands, the percentage is lower — 22% of the land area and 16% of the state's territorial waters out to three miles offshore, according to a [detailed mapping study](#) by Defenders of Wildlife that was published in May. But the state has no control over federal lands.

Newsom said he hopes to work with private landowners and interest groups, not just on public land....

