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Introduction to the "National Landscape Agenda":

When you read the National Landscape Agenda below just published by the American Society of Landscape Architects, consider it to be a partnership with the Big Park 8 volume National Park expansion plan published by the National Parks and Conservation Association.

The plans together paint a target on your back.

When either plan talks about new parks and conservation areas, they are always talking about the removal of existing families, ranchers, businesses and the historic peoples of the area.

That means land acquisition. Land acquisition is government forced acquisition of private property using Kelo type condemnation otherwise called eminent domain.

If they don't use condemnation, it means the landowners are forced to sell "willingly" under threat of condemnation. Condemnation is always used by the Park Service as a threat to get you to sell "willingly."

When the National Park Service condemns a landowner and they go to court to fight over price, if the landowner settles before a judge rules, the sale is always listed by the Park Service as a "willing seller" situation when the NPS reports to Congress.

You can look at the maps below and get an idea of whether you or your neighbors, friends or local community are targets and are in danger.

You need to begin to fight the National Landscape Agenda now and urge your friends and others to do the same thing.

Look at Big Park. That is the 8 volume plan by the National Parks and Conservation Association first written in 1988. It is still fresh today. Especially with the author of the Big Park 8 Volume NPCA Plan being Destry Jarvis, the brother of Jon Jarvis, the new director of the National Park Service.

Chuck Cushman
Executive Director

PLANNING



A NEW NATIONAL LANDSCAPE AGENDA

The Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 is just a beginning.

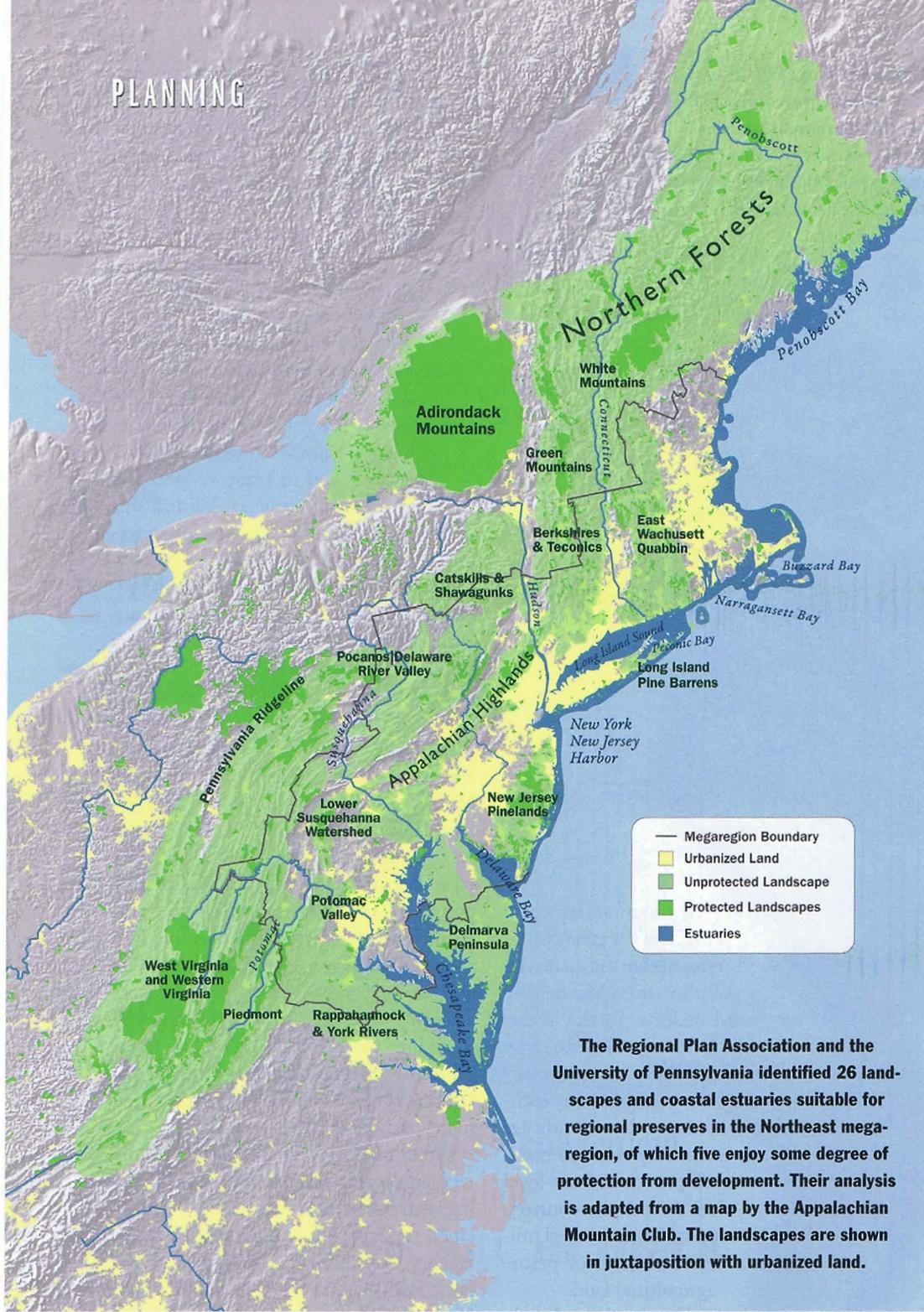
By Frederick R. Steiner, FASLA, and Robert D. Yaro

IN MARCH, THE HOUSE AND SENATE passed the sweeping Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009, which was signed into law on March 30 by President Barack Obama. Its 1,218 pages provide deferred maintenance for eight years of not-so-benign neglect by the George W. Bush administration and even codify an important initiative established

during the Clinton administration in the 1990s. The act includes more than 150 measures that create more than two million acres of new wilderness areas, along with national parks, wild and scenic rivers, historic sites, scenic trails, and other protected public lands.

Although a welcome—and overdue—action, the new law does not go far enough

to create a nationwide system of protected landscapes. Some states and regions benefit from new protected areas; many others do not. While the new act makes the National Landscape Conservation System, created through an executive order by the Clinton administration, a permanent entity, the sys-



The Regional Plan Association and the University of Pennsylvania identified 26 landscapes and coastal estuaries suitable for regional preserves in the Northeast megaregion, of which five enjoy some degree of protection from development. Their analysis is adapted from a map by the Appalachian Mountain Club. The landscapes are shown in juxtaposition with urbanized land.

The environmental challenges now faced by the nation create an urgency to restart the promising initiatives from our recent past. The renewed attention to the environment by the Obama administration offers hope.

Establish Nationwide Priorities for Preservation

The next step is to assess what we have that merits protection. Also beginning in the 1970s, the late Ian McHarg advocated a national ecological inventory to identify the best lands for both development and conservation. The Environmental Protection Agency produced its EMAP system and, soon afterward, Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt, Honorary ASLA, proposed a national biological survey modeled on the U.S. Geological Survey.

Due to intense opposition from the Congress in the late 1990s, the national biological survey did not occur, but the U.S. Department of the Interior did initiate its GAP Analysis Program, a means for “assessing to what extent native animal and plant species are being protected.” It identifies the “gaps” between what is being protected and what should be. GAP analyses can be state, local, regional, or national but are primarily conducted at the state level and are coordinated by the United States Geological Survey’s Biological Resources Division. This assessment program helped set the stage for passage of the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program and State Wildlife Grants Program in 2000. Under this program, each state wildlife agency has developed a

parks. It is ironic that no such effort has ever been undertaken to classify and protect similar resources and lands in the “Lower 48.”

Sadly, after this high-water mark of the land conservation movement, the federal government virtually abandoned its leadership role in landscape planning and land conservation when Ronald Reagan became president in 1981. This retrenchment con-

tinued under the presidencies of both George H. W. and George W. Bush. During the Clinton administration, important isolated conservation efforts were begun, such as for the Florida Everglades, and habitat conservation planning advanced as a means to implement the Endangered Species Act, but comprehensive, nationwide efforts were put on hold.

“comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy” to guide conservation action and prioritize federal funding.

The GAP model suggests a framework for a more comprehensive assessment of potential conservation areas. Such an assessment should have four components:

- Geological, Hydrological, and Ecological Protection Areas

- Cultural Protection Areas
- Resource Production Protection Areas
- Natural Hazard Protection Areas

The first two of these should be obvious to landscape architects. Let's look at the latter two.

Resource Production Protection Areas. These areas include regionally or nationally significant farmlands, ranches, forests, mines, and water resources. Significant resources include essential products such as timber, minerals like sand and gravel, or the elements necessary for production such as prime-quality soil and water supplies. These resources can be renewable or nonrenewable.

The United States possesses some of the richest farmland in the world, yet the American Farmland Trust estimates that we are losing three acres of farmland an hour to development. An existing mapping tool that could be used in the survey is the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) system. LESA uses several well-established USDA systems, such as the soil survey, to identify the best agricultural lands.

Drinking water protection is another important issue. Sprawl poses significant threats to the supply and quality of our drinking water across the country, in places as diverse as upstate New York and central Texas. At risk are both surface and groundwater supplies. A 30 percent impervious surface cover degrades the available supply; hence, maintaining a supply of clean drinking water is a powerful reason to protect the lands surrounding watersheds.

Natural Hazard Protection Areas. Areas prone to fire, geological hazards, floods, hurricanes, and avalanches may result in the loss of life and property if developed. An example of an effort to protect such areas is the National Consortium to Map Gulf Coast Ecological Constraints (see "Rebuilding the Gulf Coast," *Landscape Architecture*, April 2006). It was convened following the devastation to the Gulf Coast caused by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The consortium used existing data from federal, state, local, and private sources to map areas of societal, flood, high wind, and storm surge risk. Historical hurricane patterns, economic impacts, and sea rise vulnerability were overlaid with social vulnerability factors to determine cumulative



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risk at the Gulf Coast regional scales.

In the 1970s, the Coastal Zone Management Act made noteworthy initial efforts to protect the nation's coastlines. In light of potential sea-level rise and continued frenzied development along the coasts, a renewed initiative is necessary. A first step would be to continue the reforms needed for the national flood insurance and disaster recovery programs to remove incentives for development in flood-prone areas and use FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) funds to buy out storm-damaged properties, particularly in those areas that are subject to repeated storm surges or are critical for wetlands retreat. The areas of the greatest risk could be set aside as preserves, having the dual benefits of protecting human health, safety, and welfare as well as providing wildlife habitat and coastal regeneration.

These four assessments should be combined in a National Landscape Survey.

While an abundance of data exists about our national landscapes, a coordinated effort to analyze and synthesize this data is lacking.

While geographic information systems and remote sensing imagery have advanced to a point where an abundance of data exists about our national landscapes, a coordinated effort to analyze and synthesize this data is lacking. This should be a goal of the National Landscape Survey. The effort should be coordinated by the federal government, enlisting state agencies and universities, and should result in a map of the most significant land and resources that merit protection. In addition, the survey should identify new and poten-

tial opportunities for large-scale interregional connectivity, such as the Appalachian Highlands, the Yellowstone–Yukon Initiative, the Colorado Conservation Partnership, or the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail.

The National Landscape Survey would provide a spatial representation and ranking of important landscapes requiring preservation and management nationwide. Intuitively, the result would be the identification of the large landscapes worthy of protection. Conservation of these areas must involve a partnership that combines technical expertise, financial resources, regulatory powers, and political engagement from all levels of government and the private sector. The strategies for realizing a national network would also need to vary among regions to take into account differences in public land management and water law. The National Landscape Survey would thus provide the basis for expanding the National Landscape Conservation System beyond BLM lands in the West and Alaska.

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Regional Preservation Strategies

Federal and state public lands are distributed differently across the nation. Many states in the West are composed of high percentages of public land, encompassing the vast majority of the nation's 634 million acres—or nearly 1 million square miles—of public land. By contrast, Texas and much of the Northeastern United States have very little public land. Water law also differs in the East and West. The coastlines and megaregions present special opportunities for this national landscape conservation strategy.

In the West, a crucial first step would be to revitalize national treasures in decline. Existing national parks need to be restored, their management systems improved, and funding increased. Chronic underfunding of the National Park Service's operating and capital budgets for many years has left the system with a multibillion-dollar backlog simply to maintain existing parks. This has resulted in much deferred maintenance and shrinking staffs. Department of the Interior Secretary Ken Salazar's announcement on

New national parks and monuments should be created through redesignation of lands now controlled by the BLM or other federal agencies.

April 23 that the National Park Service will invest \$750 million in the nation's parks is an important step in reversing the neglect under the Bush administration. Nearly 800 park projects will receive funds that will be used for construction, deferred maintenance, energy-efficient equipment replacement, trails, abandoned mine lands, and road maintenance.

A huge next step would be to create new national parks and monuments through redesignation of lands now controlled by the BLM or other federal agencies. National

parks generally receive a higher level of protection than other federal lands. A map prepared by Glenn Eugster and his National Park Service colleagues in 1987 (see pages 70 and 71) presents a good picture of where those new parks could occur. Eugster and his team identified such areas as California's Owens Valley, Arizona's Verde Valley, Louisiana's Atchafalaya Basin, and Adams County in Ohio.

Areas adjacent to existing National Parks—many of them subject to vacation home, resort, and tourism development—are especially vulnerable and need stronger protection. Efforts could also be expanded to engage so-called gateway communities in joint efforts to meet park visitors' needs for lodging, food, and services while preserving the integrity of landscapes and the visitors' experiences. For instance, Williams, Arizona, which is the gateway to the Grand Canyon, is an overpriced eyesore and tourist trap. Plans to improve the quality of this trinket town's built environment and even create alternative gateways have been thwarted by politically influential local



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businesses. Stronger leadership from the National Park Service would help improve the character of places like Williams.

Wilderness and roadless areas in national forests and on BLM lands need to be restored and expanded. This would reduce the trend established during the George W. Bush administration, which eroded protection of roadless areas.

Based on the National Landscape Survey, new national forests and wildlife refuges should be created. New national scenic corridors and preserves should be established around existing protected areas such as wild and scenic river corridors. The coordinated efforts of the federal government, two states, and several local governments to protect the Columbia Gorge provide one example of such an undertaking. The Rio Grande and St. Lawrence River valleys present similar opportunities at the international level.

The national survey will result in the identification of important prairie preserve opportunities across the Great Plains where irrigated crop cultivation is no longer viable. In 1987, Deborah and Frank Popper put forth their initially controversial "Buffalo Commons" proposal to return much of the Great Plains to native flora and fauna. From initial skepticism from within the region, the concept has received wider acceptance. The Great Plains Restoration Council identifies the Buffalo Commons as "a cultural and social movement for positive, restorative social and ecological change on the Great Plains."

As a model and a metaphor, the concept is now mature enough to investigate as a network of many "buffalo commons." Such a network would include restored prairie ecosystems integrated into a comprehensive economic development program of business, solar, biomass, and wind power production, creating the potential for the plains to become a new Saudi Arabia of alternative energy. Two examples of places meriting preservation are the Flint Hills of Kansas and the Sand Hills of Nebraska. Both are landscapes of considerable rugged beauty and resilience.

In the East, biodiversity, watersheds, and scenic and historic areas can be protected

through new national parks, new heritage areas, and new state and regional parks and preserves. In addition, the federal government needs to provide financial and technical expertise, while states impart management and regulatory powers and incentives for local cooperation.

A first step to protecting biodiversity, watersheds, and scenic and historic areas would be to revive the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Forest Legacy Program. These funding sources provide matching funds to the states and local government to undertake land conservation in keeping with federal priorities and guidance.

Based on the National Landscape Sur-

11 Emerging Megaregions:
Arizona Sun Corridor,
Cascadia, Front Range,
Gulf Coast, Great Lakes,
Northeast, Northern
California, Piedmont
Atlantic, Southern
California, Southern Florida,
Texas Triangle

vey, a new generation of national parks, forests, or other national designation could be coupled with state-level land-use regulatory commissions to protect large natural and scenic landscapes in the East. One model for this is in the Highlands region in New Jersey, where a Forest Service-led assessment process, the federal Highlands Conservation Act, and New Jersey's Highlands Water Protection Act are combining to protect more than 400,000 acres in a densely developed area. Another precedent is in the Long Island Sound, where assessments and plans created under the auspices of the federal Long Island Sound Study and funding from the Long Island Sound Stewardship Act are helping protect a system of more than 33 sites.

Concurrently, a new generation of federal and state urban heritage parks is needed. Examples include the Rio Salado in Phoenix

and Tempe, Arizona, the Trinity corridor in Fort Worth and Dallas, Atlanta's BeltLine, and Cleveland's Cuyahoga River Valley. This would be consistent with the leadership roles many cities are taking to regreen urban areas such as Houston's Buffalo Bayou and New York's Fresh Kills Park and Jamaica Bay. Outside the cities, agricultural preserves should be created for highly productive agricultural lands threatened by suburban development.

The Megaregions: A Network of Regional Reserves

Megaregions are networks of more than one metropolitan area, connected by economic, transportation, and environmental links. The Regional Plan Association projects that by 2050, more than 70 percent of population and economic growth will occur in 11 megaregions across the United States. Because of rapid growth in these megaregions, the protection of open space and important resource lands is especially crucial. As a result, the national strategy should promote networks of protected "regional reserves" in and adjoining the nation's 11 emerging megaregions.

Based on the National Landscape Survey, regional reserves would protect large (100,000 acres or more) ecological, scenic, historic, recreational, agricultural, and water supply systems through state-initiated, regional land-use regulatory programs. Drawing from the National Landscape Survey, landscape architects and planners will be able to identify suitable candidate landscapes for preservation at the megaregion scale. For example, the Texas Triangle is formed by San Antonio and Houston at its base with Dallas-Fort Worth at the apex. It is most likely that any national survey, such as the one proposed here, will identify the Edwards Plateau and Hill Country on the west of the triangle and the Blackland Prairie and Coastal Plain on the east as significant landscapes. The Edwards Plateau and Hill Country area contains one of the richest aquifers in the nation and is a scenic landscape. The Blackland Prairie and Coastal Plain area includes the richest farmland in the state. The Coastal Plain also includes shorelines important for recreation and vulnerable to hurricanes.

In the Northeast megaregion, the University of Pennsylvania and the Regional

Plan Association have already identified 26 candidate landscapes and coastal estuaries that would appear suitable as regional preserves. Of these, only five (Adirondack Park, New Jersey Pinelands, Long Island Pine Barrens, New Jersey Highlands, and Cape Cod) are protected through existing systems.

Protecting our lands and natural resources must become a national priority. We must conserve and protect our most

Wilderness and roadless areas in national forests and on BLM lands need to be restored and expanded.

precious lands: first, through a National Landscape Survey, and second, through expanding the National Landscape Conservation System to ensure America's future. These landscapes hold a significant place in American history; if we want future generations to enjoy their scenic beauty and safeguard resources, there must be federal action, coupled with state, regional, and local efforts.

LAW

Frederick R. Steiner, FASLA, is dean of the school of architecture at the University of Texas at Austin. Robert D. Yaro is president of the Regional Plan Association and professor of practice at the University of Pennsylvania.

Resources

- America 2050, www.America2050.org
- *Cities in the Wilderness: A New Vision of Land Use in America*, by Bruce Babbitt, Honorary ASLA; Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2005
- Envision Central Texas, www.envisioncentraltexas.org
- Envision Utah, www.envisionutah.org
- Greenbelt Alliance, www.greenbelt.org
- Open Lands Project, www.openlands.org
- Land Trust Alliance, www.landtrustalliance.org
- Regional Plan Association, www.rpa.org
- *A Region at Risk*, by Robert D. Yaro and Tony Hiss; Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1996



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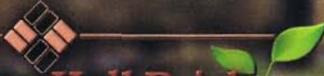






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