

Washington Interfaith Staff Community Energy & Ecology Working Group

Recommendations for a Faithful Environmental Agenda

As a coalition of diverse faith traditions, we are united across theological lines by our commitment to care for all of Creation and our call to serve vulnerable communities. It is the moral responsibility of our nation, and our sacred task as people of faith, to protect our ecosystems, work for environmental justice, and address climate change. People of faith and conscience view the climate crisis as one of the defining moral issues of our time. A [recent poll](#) found that almost three-quarters (73%) of voters said they are worried about climate change, including 87% of Black Protestants, 82% of nonwhite Catholics, 77% of white Catholics, 76% of Jews, and 57% of white evangelical Protestants. We believe that the United States can and must play a leadership role in addressing these environmental challenges which threaten our planet, our security, the health of our families, and the fate of communities throughout the world.

We urge you to support policies that will safeguard Creation, address the impacts of climate change on our most vulnerable brothers and sisters, and fulfill our moral obligation to leave a habitable world for future generations. Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities (BIPOC) have been hit the hardest by the triple health, economic, and environmental crises we face. The needs of these communities must be the center of any policy.

Our congregations, religious orders and organizations are also helping to serve families and communities impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic on a daily basis. As our country responds to both the short term relief and longer term recovery, we need solutions that are sustainable for people and for the climate. We urge you to prioritize policies that meet basic needs, and save lives and create a more environmentally sustainable and resilient economy for all.

Shared FAITH Principles

- **FRONTLINE, vulnerable, and BIPOC communities must be supported first;**
- **ACCELERATE the transition to a clean energy economy and commit to net-zero climate pollution in electricity by 2035 and economy-wide by 2050;**
- **INVEST in climate resiliency and sustainable infrastructure;**
- **TRANSITION our workforce to clean energy jobs with support and job training for workers;**
- **HONOR Creation by promoting protection and conservation of public lands and ocean.**

This call for a Faithful Environmental Agenda represents various faith communities that encompass a broad sweep of society from all sides of the political spectrum. In a climate lacking in civil discourse and an ability to find common ground, there is a need to remember the values that make us who we are as a nation. Our diverse faiths bring us together, modeling the need to partner with each other in order to advance environmental protection. The above Preamble and FAITH Principles represents the consensus view of the endorsing organizations. Endorsement of and common cause with the Preamble and Principles does not imply endorsement of or support for all of the following legislative and administrative recommendations described in this document's specific sections.

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS

American Baptist Churches USA
Baptist Creation Care Initiative
Christian Reformed Church, Office of Social Justice
Church World Service
Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach
Creation Justice Ministries
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Franciscan Action Network
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Global Alliance Interfaith Networks
Green Chalice, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Green The Church
Interfaith Power & Light
Jesuit Conference Office of Justice and Ecology
Leadership Conference of Women Religious
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office
Ministry of Environmental Justice for the United Church of Christ
National Baptist Convention USA, Inc
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Office of Public Witness
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Justice Team
The Episcopal Church
The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC)
Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice
WED African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church
Young Evangelicals for Climate Action

Top Legislative Recommendations:

1. Prioritize environmental justice investments and legislation.
 - Provide increased funding and resources to communities historically and currently harmed by pollution and other forms of environmental degradation. Such assistance should include increased funding and expanding the size and focus of the EPA's Environmental Justice Small Grants program, as well as increased funding for energy efficiency programs including the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and the Weatherization Assistance Program.

- Pass legislation such as the Environmental Justice for All Act (H.R. 5986/S. 4401), the Environmental Justice Act (H.R. 3923/ S. 2236), and the Environmental Justice Legacy Pollution Cleanup Act (H.R. 8271/ S.4617) that seek to address adverse human health and environmental impacts on BIPOC and low-income communities.
- Ensure a just transition for communities dependent on fossil fuel jobs and communities overburdened by fossil fuel pollution by passing legislation like the RECLAIM Act (H.R. 2156/ S. 1232).

2. Achieve net-zero climate pollution economy-wide by 2050. Accelerate the deployment of clean renewable energy, with the goal of net-zero climate pollution from the electricity sector by 2035.

- Prioritize extending and modernizing tax incentives for energy storage, electric vehicles, onshore and offshore wind energy, energy efficiency, and solar energy.
- Implement a goal and a process for achieving net-zero climate pollution by 2050 with legislation like the 100% Clean Economy Act (H.R.5221). Like with H.R.5221, this process should be guided by BIPOC communities affected by environmental injustice and other vulnerable communities.

3. Investment in sustainable infrastructure in all communities, particularly in BIPOC and low-income communities.

- Include investments in infrastructure that provide for clean air and water, broadband, and public transportation, particularly for low-income communities and remote, rural areas.
- Increase funding for the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund and the Clean Water State Revolving Fund which are essential to providing safe and affordable drinking water to communities, building climate resilience, and expanding economic opportunities for low-income communities and BIPOC communities.
- Empower farmers to implement climate solutions in agriculture. Enact legislation like the Agriculture Resilience Act (H.R.5861) to ensure agricultural innovations that reduce climate pollution and produce clean energy are economically profitable.

4. Demonstrate global leadership by fully funding international climate finance accounts.

- Fulfill the United States' initial pledge of \$3 billion to the Green Climate Fund by providing the remaining \$2 billion. Approve the funding request by the Biden Administration in FY22 and going forward. Ensure multilateral climate finance is funded in its own right and does not come at the expense of bilateral development assistance.
- In addition to increasing bilateral climate assistance, prioritize mainstreaming climate mitigation and adaptation through all international development aid as appropriate, including by developing and implementing a climate change strategy at USAID.

5. Promote resilience and conservation of our public lands and oceans.

- Pass a resolution modeled on S.Res.372 to declare a national goal of preserving 30% of our land and oceans as public space by 2030.
- Pass legislation to stop future leasing of public lands for fossil fuel extraction, while also providing necessary funding for communities and local governments currently dependent on fossil fuel revenues.
- Support robust ocean-climate action, including measures such as increased conservation of marine protected areas, solutions to plastic pollution, ramping down offshore drilling, increasing offshore renewable energy, and investing in natural carbon sinks such as seagrass meadows and salt marshes. Many of these priorities are featured in The Ocean-Based Climate Solutions Act (H.R. 8632).

Top Administrative Recommendations

1. Re-enter the Paris climate agreement immediately and submit a Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) that reflects increased ambition on climate targets, including an increased climate finance target.

- Lead by example and continue to increase ambition by advocating for stronger NDCs. Continue to seek bilateral agreements to strengthen the exchange of knowledge about clean technologies and climate resilience. Work towards a mid-century emissions reduction strategy that will galvanize the international community to keep global temperatures from rising more than 1.5 C°.

2. Advance environmental justice administration-wide and ensure communities harmed by environmental degradation, especially BIPOC communities, have power in decision making.

- Make environmental justice a central mission of the federal government and direct all federal agencies to advance environmental justice through their work.
- Prioritize improvements to the National Environmental Policy Act regulations by directing the Council on Environmental Quality to initiate a new rulemaking process to restore key provisions of the NEPA regulation. CEQ should also use this opportunity to update the NEPA regulations in a manner consistent with the statute, rather than merely reverting to the previous regulation.
- Ensure meaningful participation of communities where clean energy infrastructure (eg., hydro-electric dams, geothermal, solar and wind farms) is proposed to maintain the integrity of local ecosystems and the health, safety and livelihoods of local populations.
- Create an Environmental and Climate Justice Division of the Department of Justice focused on enforcement of anti-pollution laws and remediation of harms from legacy pollution.

3. Return to a regulatory path that is in line with principles of stewardship, sustainability, and justice by reinstating regulations that reduce pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

- Direct the EPA to repeal and replace regulations for methane emissions from new oil and gas facilities and initiate rulemaking to develop emissions guidelines for existing oil and gas facilities.
- Direct the EPA to reinstate the previous Mercury and Air Toxics Standards (MATS). In particular, co-benefits or ancillary benefits must be included in the rule's cost-benefit analysis.
- Direct the EPA to repeal the Affordable Clean Energy (ACE) Rule and replace it with a new rule regulating greenhouse gas emissions from existing power plants that will achieve net-zero climate pollution from electricity by 2035.
- Rescind the Safer Affordable Fuel Efficient (SAFE) auto emissions standards and implement regulations to achieve 100% zero emissions for new vehicles by 2035.

4. Protect public and sacred lands.

- Pause new leasing of public lands and waters for fossil fuel extraction, while using convening power to form partnerships for sustainable economic transition away from fossil fuel dependence. Work with Congress to provide necessary funding for communities and local governments currently dependent on fossil fuel revenues.
- Commit to developing strong conservation protections for at least 30% of US lands and waters by 2030.
- Protect federal public lands and tribal lands by immediately ceasing border wall construction in public and tribal lands and begin to address the deep harm to wildlife and sacred sites by removing the most harmful sections and engaging in meaningful consultation with public lands managers and indigenous communities.
- Immediately rescind all legal waivers issued for border wall construction and work with Congress to remove the authority of the Homeland Security Secretary to waive laws for border wall construction. Recently waived laws include NEPA, the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act and numerous other laws that protect human health, wildlife and sacred lands.
- Protect federal public lands by keeping them publicly-owned, preserving biodiversity, and helping ecosystems adapt to climate change. Engage the diverse peoples of our nation in our National Parks and monuments. Protect and provide legal protection for Native American sacred sites on public lands.
- Manage public lands and waters to meet our climate and conservation goals, including by accelerating the development of responsibly-sited clean and renewable energy that creates jobs and cuts pollution.
- Withdraw any leases for exploratory oil and gas drilling offered in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

For Additional Information:

- WISC-EEWG [Just Transition Principles](#): Shift to Carbon-Neutral Communities Without Leaving Anyone Behind