



THE GARDEN CLUB of AMERICA

THE GARDEN CLUB OF AMERICA POSITION PAPER

The Garden Club of America supports independent, academic, peer-reviewed scientific research as the basis for formulation of responsible public policy and legislation, as well as appropriate funding to ensure quality results.

CLEAN AIR

Clean air is essential for healthy plants, animals and people. The Garden Club of America supported the Clean Air Act of 1970 and has continued to support clean-air initiatives. Air pollution remains a problem nationwide, and some power plants, refineries and manufacturing facilities continue to violate federal emission standards. In order to improve air quality and to reduce the risks of climate change, The Garden Club of America supports federal, state, and local legislation and policy that addresses the following:

POLLUTION REDUCTION

- Reducing of three key pollutants – sulfur dioxide (SO₂), nitrogen oxide (NO_x), and mercury (Hg) – that impair air quality and adversely affect the habitat of all living things: plants, animals, and humans.
- Lowering the amount of carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), and other greenhouse gases released to the atmosphere, as the changing climate may pose the greatest risk to biodiversity in the coming century.
- Reducing of these pollutants through an integrated strategy of regulated emission caps, improved energy efficiency, and greater use of renewable energy sources.
- Limiting greenhouse gas emissions from new and existing power plants and from other stationary sources, and improving fuel efficiency from mobile sources throughout the transportation sector.
- Enforcing the New Source Review, a key provision of the 1977 Amendment to the Clean Air Act, that requires old power plants to modernize their pollution controls whenever they make major repairs or renovations.
- Replacing hydrofluorocarbons (chemicals used in air conditioners and other applications) with alternatives that are safer for the ozone layer.
- Implementation of new engine standards for diesel-powered cars, trucks, and heavy equipment.
- Support of MACT (Maximum Achievable Control Technology) standard for emissions.

SAFETY

- Safeguarding human health from toxics, including hazardous air pollutants, whether they occur as chemical hazards (e.g., carcinogens, reproductive hazards, or agents that affect the lungs or blood) or physical hazards (e.g., those toxics that are flammable, combustible, explosive, or reactive).
- Regulation of Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs), especially known carcinogens benzene and formaldehyde and likely carcinogens perchloroethylene, tetrachloroethylene, and styrene.
- Reliance on peer-reviewed science, which currently advocates a reduction of both particulate matter (known as soot) and smog in order to protect human health.

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CLEAN WATER

The Garden Club of America recognizes that all life is dependent upon clean, uncontaminated water. We support the original objective of the 1972 Clean Water Act to “restore and maintain the chemical, physical and biological integrity of the nation’s waters.” We recognize that a watershed-based approach is an important way to achieve this goal.

Despite outstanding progress since 1972, more than one third of the waters in the United States still do not meet minimum standards. Contamination from industry, agriculture, resource extractions, water providers, and households is growing faster than our institutional ability to set and enforce standards. The proliferation of excess nutrients and toxic substances pollutes our rivers, lakes, and coastal waters. Critical wetlands loss and urban and agricultural run-off have increased the pollution and sediment load in our waters. Water quantity is also a problem, exacerbated by climate change. In many parts of the country, water supply is endangered by droughts, overdrafting of groundwater supplies, and diversions of scarce surface water for agricultural use and for continuing commercial and residential development.

The protection of freshwater resources is necessary to ensure the availability of an adequate supply of freshwater both now and in the future. In order to protect our water resources, promote water conservation and reuse, and prevent pollution, The Garden Club of America supports federal, state, and local legislation and policy that addresses the following:

WATER POLLUTION REDUCTION:

- Ensuring a vital Clean Water Act including broad jurisdictional coverage.
- Reducing point-source pollution from industry and sewage treatment plants.
- Reducing nonpoint-source pollution from urban and agricultural runoff.
- Reducing airborne pollutants that degrade water quality.
- Enforcing strict water quality standards and pollution permits.
- Improving funding for clean water programs.

ECOSYSTEM PROTECTION:

- Restoring and preserving the nation's surface water.
- Protecting groundwater.
- Preserving and protecting wetlands, including strict standards for any method of wetland alteration.
- Providing incentives for the creation and preservation of riparian buffer areas.
- Developing national and global policies to protect coastal waters and the world's oceans.
- Ensuring sufficient instream flows and natural flow patterns to sustain the integrity of river systems.

SAFEGUARDING OF HUMAN HEALTH:

- Protecting America’s drinking water and educating the public regarding its contents.
- Supporting infrastructure improvements that give all citizens access to safe drinking water.

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CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION

The Garden Club of America recognizes that global climate change is affecting the natural world, our economies, national security, and human health. Rapid loss of biodiversity, species extinction, ocean acidification, sea level rise, droughts, floods, storms, along with threats to clean air, to clean water, and to the health of our national parks are all risks we face if we do not address the human activities that create global warming. Because individual and collective action can modify the course of climate change, The Garden Club of America is committed to educating members and communities about its causes and about constructive responses to them. The Garden Club of America is particularly concerned about the influence of climate change on biodiversity. Native vegetation is the matrix that sustains plant biodiversity and supports wildlife and ecosystem services. Therefore, The Garden Club of America supports federal, state, and local legislation and policy to address the following:

FUNDING

- Strategies to protect biodiversity, especially at-risk species, to safeguard habitat, and to preserve options for future restoration
- Research to address the increased incidence of disease and invasive species and the disruptions of co-involved relationships (such as those between plants and pollinators)

LEGISLATION, REGULATION, AND PRIVATE INITIATIVES

- International, federal, state and local greenhouse gas reduction legislation and regulations that reflect the social cost of carbon and have their basis in peer-reviewed science
- Individual, corporate, and community initiatives to develop green infrastructure
- Initiatives to support sustainable forest and wilderness areas (including National Parks), as these open lands sequester carbon, help ensure clean air, and protect watersheds
- Accelerated promotion of renewable energy and advanced battery storage, as well as promotion of energy efficiency measures in the building and transportation sectors
- Initiatives to protect, conserve, and maintain water quality and quantity, to prevent stormwater runoff, and to safeguard oceans
- Promotion of carbon footprint reduction techniques such as carbon offsetting
- Support the use of alternative energy systems such as wind, solar and geothermal and the conservation of energy through efficiency and green construction that minimize the use of fossil fuels which account for the majority of greenhouse gases
- Support the reduction of methane gas from the oil, natural gas and farming industries as it is the second highest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions

ADAPTION

- Adaptation strategies for human, animal, and plant communities
- Re-vegetation and re-forestation of disturbed areas, including green buffers near waterways
- Development of sufficient supplies of native plant materials to meet this need
- Water management initiatives to conserve water and maintain water quality in response to the expected challenges of climate change to riparian systems and in-stream flow
- Promotion of more localized systems of food production and consumption

EDUCATION

- Public education about climate change, including the changing conditions for gardens, sustainable landscape design and gardening practices, and the reduction of energy-intensive products and maintenance practices
- Recognition of implications of changed hardiness zones for agriculture and horticulture, including changes in phenology (date flowers emerge), migratory patterns, productivity, and crop yield
- Awareness of individual energy use in day-to-day activities, as well as exploration of social, economic and environmental opportunities that become available through research and development of new technologies.

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NATIONAL PARKS

The Garden Club of America believes that our country's national parks are irreplaceable treasures whose value is incalculable. As important and meaningful symbols of our American heritage and culture, our parks must by law be managed by the federal government under a mandate of conservation stewardship. The National Park Service is directed by the Organic Act of 1916 and the Redwoods Act of 1978 to ensure that our natural and cultural park resources and values will continue to exist in a condition that allows the American people the opportunity to enjoy them forever.

The National Park System is directed "to conserve the scenery and natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such a manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for future generations." Therefore, our National Parks deserve the highest possible level of protection. While recreation and inspiration are important components of a national park experience, the NPS Management Policy Manual makes the conservation of resources its first priority. The Garden Club of America appreciates the intention of Congress in establishing the National Park System and respectfully reminds Congress of its responsibility for fully funding the operations of the entire park system. Therefore, The Garden Club of America supports federal, state, and local legislation and policy that addresses the following:

CONSERVATION AND BIODIVERSITY

- Placing a priority on conservation, education, and preservation.
- Fostering biodiversity and the protection of native plant communities and whole ecosystems within and around the parks.
- Including adequate funding for botanists to inventory plant communities.
- Protecting national parks from exploitation, pollution, and the effects of climate change.
- Enhancing new units that protect natural resources, including native plants and wildlife, and promote natural and cultural resource protection within urban communities.
- Encouraging ecologically compatible use of lands surrounding parks and collaboration with neighboring communities.
- Establishing corridors to enable migration of wildlife adapting to climate change.
- Ensuring the President's authority under the Antiquities Act is preserved in order to swiftly protect lands and waterways as well as historic and cultural sites.

MAINTENANCE AND MANAGEMENT

- Meeting annual funding needs as well as make up for previous funding deficiencies and cumulative shortages.
- Providing sufficient federal personnel for NPS programs by assuring adequate funding of federal staff.
- Protecting visibility and view sheds in all parts of our national park system.
- Provide full, permanent funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund of 1965 and use the federal portion of the funds for its intended purpose: the purchase of public lands.
- Preventing, controlling, and eradicating invasive plants.
- Planning for the future by encouraging managers and superintendents to engage the public in general management and other activity-level planning efforts.
- Making available the tools and training needed to maximize the effectiveness of park managers.
- Encouraging professionalism in educators and public awareness of the need for resource protection.
- Controlling animal populations where necessary to restore balance to the park ecosystem.

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NATIONAL PUBLIC LANDS

America believes that public lands are held in trust for American citizens under a mandate of conservation stewardship, with the goal of preserving them for future generations. More than twenty percent of the land in the United States is under federal supervision.¹ Agencies charged with caring for these lands must set an example by using the best management practices available.

There is ever-increasing pressure for multiple uses of federal lands. The Garden Club of America urges the responsible agencies to make resource protection and preservation their first priority when establishing public land policy. The future sustainability of these public lands should be carefully considered prior to any natural resource development. Federal lands are a water source for more than 90 million US citizens.² Preservation of our vital water resources must be a priority of public land agencies.

Therefore, The Garden Club of America supports federal, state, and local legislation and policy that addresses the following:

BIODIVERSITY

- Connecting public lands and conservancies to create wildlife corridors for migration of plants and animals threatened by climate change.
- Placing a priority on conservation and preservation practices that help mitigate the effects of climate change, foster biodiversity, and protect native plant communities and endangered species.
- Preventing, controlling, and eradicating invasive species.
- Providing adequate financial support for botanists to inventory, assess, and participate in the management of public lands.
- Protecting public lands from extractive processes.
- Increasing public land preservation to harness its ecological resources (such as water filtration, carbon sequestration, and wildlife habitat) and to provide recreational space.

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LAND CONSERVATION

- Encouraging collaborative efforts between government managers and private landowners to provide incentives for landowners to follow good conservation practices.
- Provide full, permanent funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund of 1965 and use the federal portion of the funds for its intended purpose: the purchase of public lands.
- Requiring federal agencies to uphold the same environmental laws that apply to private landowners.
- Adequately funding the National Landscape Conservation System, the National Wildlife Refuge System, the National Marine Sanctuary System, the National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, the National Arboretum, and government agencies charged with protection of public lands.
- Basing the evaluation of public lands management on the condition of the land.
- Including the right of citizens to comment in a timely fashion in an open forum on public lands issues.

¹ The two major agencies responsible for public lands are the Department of the Interior (National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management) and the Department of Agriculture (Forest Service).

² <http://www.DOI.gov/facts.html> (Website of the Department of the Interior)

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NATIVE PLANTS

In North America, a native plant is defined as an indigenous grass, shrub, vine, tree or herbaceous flora species present in a habitat or ecosystem prior to the arrival of European settlers on the continent.

All life depends on the plant kingdom. The Garden Club of America is committed to preserving our worldwide system of richly varied habitats and protecting native plant biodiversity, the ecosystems that support them, and our own quality of life. Native plants are an inseparable part of the natural beauty we need to preserve in the American landscape. Their extensive root systems control erosion, moderate floods, filter water to improve water quality, decrease the amount of water needed for landscape maintenance, and sequester carbon to combat climate change. Native plants also provide food and habitat for pollinators and wildlife. In addition, they supply an important genetic record for future food, agriculture, and plant-derived products.

It has been estimated that of the 20,000 known native species in North America, nearly 25 to 30 percent are at risk of extinction as a result of such factors as habitat loss, invasive species, climate change, and pesticide use.

It is vital that existing laws and regulations protecting native plant species be strengthened and administered using the best scientific knowledge available. New concepts of stewardship need to be encouraged to prevent critical loss of plant diversity in the United States and around the world. We view the 1973 Endangered Species Act as one of America's landmark pieces of conservation legislation. We encourage amendments to that act or reauthorization initiatives that both strengthen measures to protect the nation's rare, threatened, and endangered species and create workable science-based recovery programs.

Therefore, The Garden Club of America supports federal, state, and local legislation and policy that addresses the following:

- Protection of our native plants, with emphasis on those that are at risk.
- Positive incentives (including funding) that would encourage private landowners to protect native plants.
- Cooperation with state and federal agencies, as in the GCA Partners for Plants program, which works to monitor and conserve rare plants, restore native habitats and remove invasive weeds on federal, state and local public lands.
- Measures in the Voluntary Codes of Conduct for the Plant Industry, adopted from the St. Louis Declaration on Invasive Plant Species, to prevent and control ecosystem damage by exotic invasive plants.
- Seed banks to preserve the genetic record of native plants.
- Conservation practices outlined in the PlantWise initiative of the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center.
- Public-land planting policies that use native plants, control invasive plants, and preserve or restore healthy ecosystems.
- Increased funding for plant protection and restoration on public lands, including adequate funding for more botanists.
- Implementation of federal field research projects to ensure sustainability of wild-collected medicinal plants.
- Encouragement of domestic trade in local nursery-propagated native plants, thus reducing damaging traffic in wild-collected flora.
- Educational programs to increase awareness of the need to protect native plants and to promote their use by landscapers and in home gardens.
- Public and private support of botanical research and education for a well-trained future workforce through such vehicles as the GCA Scholarship program and the proposed 'Botanical Sciences and Native Plant Materials Research, Restoration and Promotion Act.'

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OCEANS

The Garden Club of America recognizes that oceans are the largest ecosystem, covering nearly three-quarters of Earth. Healthy oceans are the life support system for our planet. They hold 97% of our water and they are home to more than one million species of plants and animals. The United States coastline territory covers 3.4 million square nautical miles, as defined by the 200-mile limit, larger than the 50 states combined. Our coasts provide great beauty and critical wildlife habitats, protect communities from damaging storm surges, ensure national security and generate billions of dollars through tourism, fisheries and other economic revenue.

The Garden Club of America believes we should protect our coastal areas and oceans from all types of pollution and environmental degradation using best management practices.

Therefore, The Garden Club of America supports private and public action to:

Pollution Reduction

- Promote initiatives that protect, conserve and maintain water quality and quantity and prevent stormwater runoff, especially from combined sewer overflows.
- Encourage measures that support responsible waste management practices to reduce the growing ocean garbage patches.
- Through education and legislation, limit single-use plastics, which pollute our coasts and harm sea life, and encourage the use of compostable plastics in packaging and consumer goods.
- Lower the amount of carbon dioxide (CO₂), and other greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere to reduce ocean warming and acidification which poses an increasingly greater risk to sea life.

Funding

- Advocate for adequate funding of ocean and coastal programs, including the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) ocean programs, and those of other government agencies charged with the protection of oceans and coasts.
- Support strategies to protect ocean and coastal biodiversity, especially for at-risk species, thereby safeguarding habitat and preserving options for future restoration.
- Encourage and support research efforts to address the effects of ocean acidification and climate change.

Sustainable Resource Use

- Participate in the development of initiatives to protect coastal waters and the world's oceans.
- Support a transition to the use of clean energy systems while shifting from the use of fossil fuels which account for the majority of greenhouse gases.
- Support core conservation components and science-based fisheries management outlined in the Magnuson Stevens Act, in order to ensure that U.S. fisheries continue to provide a sustainable, healthy and secure share of the U.S. food system.

Ecosystem Protection, Conservation and Biodiversity

- Place a priority on conservation, education and the sustainable preservation of National Marine Sanctuaries and other marine protected areas as these places sequester carbon, support ocean biodiversity, and provide refuge for species facing changing ocean conditions.
- Advocate for the preservation of the Antiquities Act in order to protect historic and cultural sites on coastal land and in the oceans.
- Work to protect the oceans, coastal areas and marine life from damaging practices, pollution and the effects of climate change.

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SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE, SEED DIVERSITY, AND FOOD SECURITY

Federal agricultural policy affects the safety and security of our nation's food supply both now and far into the future. As more than 40 percent of land in the U.S is farmed, agricultural policy has a significant impact on many issues of concern to The Garden Club of America: climate change, water quality, air quality, native plants, invasive species, and energy use.

The Garden Club of America supports federal, state, and local legislation and policy that addresses the following:

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

- Restoring degraded soil and conservation of healthy soil on farms and ranches by encouraging placing conservation easements on marginal lands, practicing no tillage, planting cover crops or perennial forage, rotating crops and employing intensive rotational grazing, reducing use of fertilizer and pesticides that kill soil microorganisms, helping to mitigate climate change, and reducing runoff because of soil's sponge-like capacity to absorb water and to sequester carbon.
- Ensuring a strong and well-funded conservation title in the Farm Bill, which represents the largest source of federal funding for conservation on private lands in our country.

SEED DIVERSITY, HEALTHY FOOD, FOOD SAFETY, AND FOOD SECURITY

- Protecting worldwide seed diversity and further study of genetically modified organisms (GMO) crops to determine safety.
- Supporting programs for increased production of healthy foods, such as fruits and vegetables (referred to as "specialty crops" in the farm bill), and continued advocacy for organically and locally grown food and farm-to-school initiatives.
- Recognizing the importance of pollinators and encouraging them by increasing and preserving natural habitat and supporting efforts to work with pesticide manufacturers, agricultural interests, and beekeepers to determine best management practices for pollinator health.
- Discouraging the overuse of hormones and antibiotics in livestock.
- Supporting the regulatory authority of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Agriculture to achieve these ends.

LARGER ENVIRONMENTAL GOALS THAT PROMOTE FOOD SAFETY AND SEED DIVERSITY

- Protecting clean water by using riparian areas to prevent nitrate runoff and loss of topsoil, and encourage efficient irrigation practices.
- Preserving clean air and water by minimizing use of fossil fuels for cultivation, harvesting and transportation.
- Supporting policies that aid climate change adaptation, including establishment of seed banks, and wildlife corridors.
- Protecting native plant species with programs to prevent the introduction of invasive species and to eradicate existing ones.
- Encouraging protection of wildlife habitat and native ecosystems, including wetlands, grasslands, hedgerows, forests, and riparian systems. Support conservation easements, and tax incentives for this purpose.

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TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The Garden Club of America strongly supports an environmentally sustainable approach to improving the nation's transportation systems and infrastructure. They should support clean air and clean water, utilizing buffers to reduce runoff and water pollution, living shorelines to minimize storm damage, and native plants to improve resiliency and cost efficiency, as well as to prevent erosion and improve pollinator habitats. The GCA also supports billboard-free highways and roads to address visual pollution and enhance the scenic character of communities.

The Garden Club of America supports, on a case by case basis, federal, state, and local legislation and policies that address the following:

TRANSPORTATION RELATED AIR AND WATER QUALITY MEASURES

- Maintaining the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) review of all major transportation and infrastructure projects to ensure a healthy environment in our communities. NEPA was designed to “promote the general welfare, to create and maintain conditions under which man and nature can exist in productive harmony, and fulfill the social, economic, and other requirements of present and future generations of Americans.”
- Supporting the Clean Air Act, especially in promoting increased fuel economy and reductions in auto and truck emissions.
- Supporting the expansion of energy efficient transportation.
- Addressing a major source of water degradation - runoff from roads, urban areas, and agriculture - by utilizing natural features to provide buffer areas and filter pollution, while providing habitat and scenic beauty.
- Using innovative surfaces and lighting designs and materials, including native plantings, to reduce heat island effects, sequester carbon, and capture stormwater runoff.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

- Continuing federal support to state and local governments for transportation projects and programs that reduce emissions and congestion, and meet the requirements of the Clean Air Act.
- Promoting private investment in effective public transportation to further support the Clean Air Act.
- Encouraging alternatives to automotive transportation, including walkways, bike lanes, and trails.

ROADSIDE PLANTINGS AND BILLBOARD BLIGHT

- Encouraging the cooperation of federal, state, and local highway departments to promote biodiversity and improve air and water quality through roadside plantings, using native and pollinator-friendly plants, and eradicating invasive species.
- Encouraging additional designations for scenic byways while maintaining support and funding for the current program.
- Addressing the visual, safety, and environmental hazards of electronic billboards, including the digital light-emitting diode (LED) billboard.

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WASTE MANAGEMENT

The Garden Club of America recognizes that effective waste management is vital to our health and well-being. The United States produces more waste than any other country in the world, using over 380 billion plastic bags and wraps yearly, requiring 12 million barrels of oil to create.¹ According to the EPA, Americans generate about 251 million tons of solid waste a year; 53.8% of waste in the USA is buried in landfills, 34.5% is recycled and 11.7% is combusted.² Landfills produce methane and other toxic gases, their seepage causes water and air pollution. Incineration reduces the volume of solid waste by 20 to 30 percent, but also contributes to pollution.

The Garden Club of America encourages reusing, recycling and composting. Further, the GCA supports federal, state and local legislation and policy to address the following:

Responsible Waste Management

- Encourage measures at the state and federal level that support responsible waste management practices
- Teach personal waste reduction practices, including wise consumer choices, recognition of excess and unrecyclable packaging, and disposal options for toxic substances
- Reduce solid and liquid waste pollution by the reduction and proper disposal of toxic and hazardous waste
- Encourage responsible design for manufacture, resource extraction and proper disposal of electronic and other waste
- Promote non-toxic alternatives to herbicides, insecticides, pesticides, and toxic household chemicals and avoid the use of systemic insecticides
- Support responsible food purchase, use and food waste reduction in our communities
- Promote the proper disposal of pharmaceuticals
- Promote the reuse of materials, appliances, furniture and building materials
- Support community waste reduction, re-use, recycling and composting initiatives
- Promote legislation requiring manufacturers to identify and properly dispose of the chemicals used in their products
- Limit one-use plastics and single use disposable bags through community education and legislation
- Support innovative solid waste management systems
- Safeguard our oceans against the inundation of plastic waste
- Research reduced water use options of sewage for commercial and residential facilities
- Protect America's drinking water by insuring that landfills are properly lined and do not leak into groundwater
- Ensure that water treatment services are operating safely and meeting community health and ecological guidelines
- Support rehabilitation of aging water treatment systems
- Change building regulations to encourage use of greywater
- Encourage water efficiency in residential, commercial, leisure and agricultural applications

¹ <https://blog.epa.gov/blog/tag/plastic-bags/>

² https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-09/documents/2012_msw_fs.pdf

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