



## A POLICY LEGACY

The vast majority of Americans believe we have an obligation to leave a livable, sustainable world to future generations. Across party lines and ideologies, nothing is more certain than that we need to put our children and grandchildren first.

Yet our actions do not match our rhetoric. When it comes to the policies that govern how we share and tend our world, too often we sacrifice tomorrow for today.

There is, however, a compelling body of law demonstrating that all of us alive today have an obligation to make sure that our posterity inherits ecological options, quality, and access to their environmental world. The Climate Legacy Initiative advocates numerous recommendations for how our laws can truly protect our future generations. They include:

- **Implementing constitutional rights to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment and pass state laws to implement them.** State constitutions should be amended to state explicitly the inalienable right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment for present and future generations – and the responsibility of the state to hold natural resources in trust for its constituents.
- **Passing state laws establishing how governments should make environmental decisions.** Just as the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires federal agencies to consider environmental consequences, each state should pass a law establishing a process for making sound decisions.
- **Enacting a federal law that defines and enacts the legacy we want to leave our children and grandchildren.** A National Environmental Legacy Act (NELA) would define our legacy in concrete terms, making explicit the concrete goals we want to achieve in protecting public natural resources for our heirs. It also would provide a mechanism to ensure that we preserve that legacy.
- **Instituting “Cap and Trade” rules and mechanisms, and use revenues to make direct investments in efficiency.** While cap and trade can be effective in “supply-side” global warming pollution reduction, reducing demand at the same time is an enormously cost-effective addition. Commitments of 3-5% of electric utility revenues to energy efficiency programs have slowed and even stabilized electricity uses for years.
- **Creating “Environmental Stakeholder Trusts” to safeguard our common legacy.** National and state legislation should establish “sky trusts,” making clear the shared ownership of our environmental commons.
- **Establishing “Legal Guardians” for Future Generations.** Our yet-to-be-born grandchildren and great-grandchildren aren’t around to argue for their own interests – so they need a stand-in. The President, governors, and other governmental executives should issue orders establishing an Office of Legal Guardian for Future Generations.
- **Making trade rules meet the environmental needs of future generations.** Right now, international trade agreements are not structured to include minimum standards for climate protection.
- **Adopting proposed UN General Assembly declarations to help safeguard our global environment.** These declarations should define the rights and responsibilities of present and future generations to a clean, healthy, ecologically healthy and sustainable environment – as well as the formal establishment of the atmosphere as a “global commons” that we all own together.

The threat of the climate crisis provides an opportunity – indeed, an obligation – to at last address our long-ignored obligations to future generations.