

Contacts:

Christopher Lancette, The Wilderness Society (202) 429-2692; Kelly Trout, Friends of the Earth, (202) 222-0722; Shannon Andrea, National Parks Conservation Association, (202) 454-3371; Jessica Brand, Defenders of Wildlife, (202) 772-0239; Suzanne Struglinski, Natural Resources Defense Council, (202) 289-2387

Congress should end tax breaks for polluters, invest in green economy

Conservationists, public interest groups call on Congress to cut \$20 billion in wasteful spending

WASHINGTON (Jan. 28, 2010) – As President Obama calls for fiscal restraint in domestic spending, a coalition of conservation and wildlife organizations echoed the call and released a “Green Budget” report today outlining what Congress can do to create jobs while strengthening key environmental programs -- including cutting wasteful spending by nearly \$20 billion per year.

“We heard President Obama and we recognize the need for the federal government to tighten its belt, which is why we’re calling on Congress and the administration to eliminate wasteful spending.” said William H. Meadows, president of The Wilderness Society – one of 34 organizations that sent 2011 spending recommendations to Congress in the form of its “Green Budget”. “The president and Congress have some tough decisions to make but we believe sound economic and environmental policy go hand-in-hand. So while frugality is key, we must continue to invest in the kind of environmental initiatives that create jobs and protect our natural resources.”

The wide-ranging spending cuts identified would save billions of dollars per year by ending tax breaks and other giveaways to the oil and gas industry and other big polluters that are enjoying record-breaking profits. For example, closing the loophole that lets big corporations write off oil and gas production would save \$13.3 billion over nine years. Cutting taxpayer subsidies for dangerous and expensive new nuclear technologies would save more than \$220 million in 2011 alone. Congress could also save billions in subsidies to corporate agribusinesses that destroy land and pollute our water and instead invest in cost-effective programs like conservation, nutrition and deficit reduction. The savings outlined in the Green Budget are just a sampling of the ways our tax dollars subsidize pollution and could instead be invested in environmental protection and clean, renewable energy.

“Last September, President Obama pledged to end subsidies to fossil fuels,” said Friends of the Earth President Erich Pica. “The Green Budget provides him a way to start delivering on that promise. There’s no reason billions of our taxpayer dollars should be going to ExxonMobil and other polluting corporations. Eliminating these giveaways will unleash resources we can use to build clean energy jobs and a stable, healthy future for our country.”

The organizations producing the Green Budget believe the money saved by eliminating wasteful spending can be used to invest in creating a green economy – one that creates

jobs and protects natural resources. Their plan details what federal agency funding is needed to sustain clean air and water, protect lands, oceans and wildlife, and solve energy and transportation problems. They're also quick to remind Congress and the administration of the vital economic role public lands play in the economy: The Outdoor Industry Foundation estimates that outdoor recreation -- hunting, fishing, hiking, skiing, and similar activities -- contribute \$730 billion annually to the U.S. economy and supports 6.5 million jobs across the country. A study by the National Parks and Conservation Association, meanwhile, found that \$13 billion flows annually into gateway towns, creating 250,000 private sector jobs.

Key recommendations from the Green Budget:

Lands and Wildlife: After years of budget cuts, more funds are needed to aid the National Wildlife Refuge System, National Park System, National Forests and land managed by the Bureau of Land Management. All are faced with critical backlogs on projects needed to preserve and maintain existing sites and stop environmental damage they're experiencing.

"We look to Congress and the Administration to provide funding for our national parks and public lands that the American people deserve," said National Parks Conservation Association President Tom Kiernan, whose organization estimates that every federal dollar invested in national parks generates at least four dollars economic value to the public. "By investing in our national parks and public lands, we can improve the experiences of visitors, benefit local economies, and protect our national heritage for our children and grandchildren."

Defenders of Wildlife President Rodger Schlickeisen shared that sentiment.

"Wildlife refuges provide around \$1.7 billion in revenue annually, thanks to the 40 million people who visit these spots each year" he said. "Protecting these treasures is not only vital to our natural heritage, it is a sound economic investment that creates jobs and stimulates local economies."

Oceans: Congress should invest in our oceans including supporting programs that protect our coasts, responsibly manage fisheries, conserve marine wildlife, sustain coastal economies and observe and predict climate change. Additionally, Congress should support the Ocean Policy Task Force President Obama formed in June 2009 to develop a national ocean policy and coastal and marine spatial planning framework. That plan will develop recommendations for better managing U.S. oceans, which are now under the domain of 140 laws and implemented by 20 federal agencies.

Health, Air & Water: Congress should strengthen the Environmental Protection Agency's ability to reduce toxins in our air and water. Regulatory programs should be enhanced, and investments in the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Fund should be increased.

Education: Congress should support greater environmental education efforts. “As America moves toward a clean energy economy, Congress must make significant investments in environmental and sustainability education,” said Patrick Fitzgerald, director of education advocacy at the National Wildlife Federation. “By better educating our citizens and workforce, we will create the human capital America needs to strengthen our economy, achieve energy independence, and secure a clean energy future.”

Energy: Congress should invest in programs that can increase the amount of energy generated by wind and solar technologies. It should also continue to prioritize the Building Technologies Program that yields great energy savings from a variety of energy efficient building techniques. Congress should also expand the scope of the Energy Efficient and Conservation Block Grant Program, which encourages states and large communities to invest in initiatives such as retrofitting existing buildings and facilities with energy efficient technologies.

“We need to put our fiscal house in order to remain the world's leading economy,” said Frances Beinecke, president of the Natural Resources Defense Council. “We also need to lead, not lag, in developing the clean energy and conservation technologies that will strengthen our economy at home, make us more competitive abroad and position American workers for success in the fast-growing global market for wind, solar and other renewable power sources. The Green Budget supports these vital goals by increasing investment in environmental priorities while marking wasteful programs that should be cut or eliminated to save taxpayers money. It strikes the right balance. It deserves our support.”

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