

# TAKING LIBERTY

*How private property in America is being abolished.*

*By Michael S. Coffman, Ph.D.*

*All maps (except for Wildlands Project map, below) created by Environmental Perspectives, Inc., produced and funded by American Land Foundation and Stewards of the Range.*

One hour before the U.S. Senate was to adopt the United Nations Treaty on Biodiversity, Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchinson (R-TX) went to the floor with a 300-plus-page draft copy of Chapter 10 of the United Nations Global Biodiversity Assessment and a 4'x6' poster.

The poster showed the lower 48 states overlaid with hundreds of red islands representing wilderness areas interconnected by thousands of red ribbons called corridors, all surrounded by yellow buffer zones. Small green patches were "human occupation zones." The agenda was so outrageous it would have been discounted, except that Sen.

Hutchinson had the proof in her hands. The date was Sept. 29, 1994, and the agenda was called the Wildlands Project.

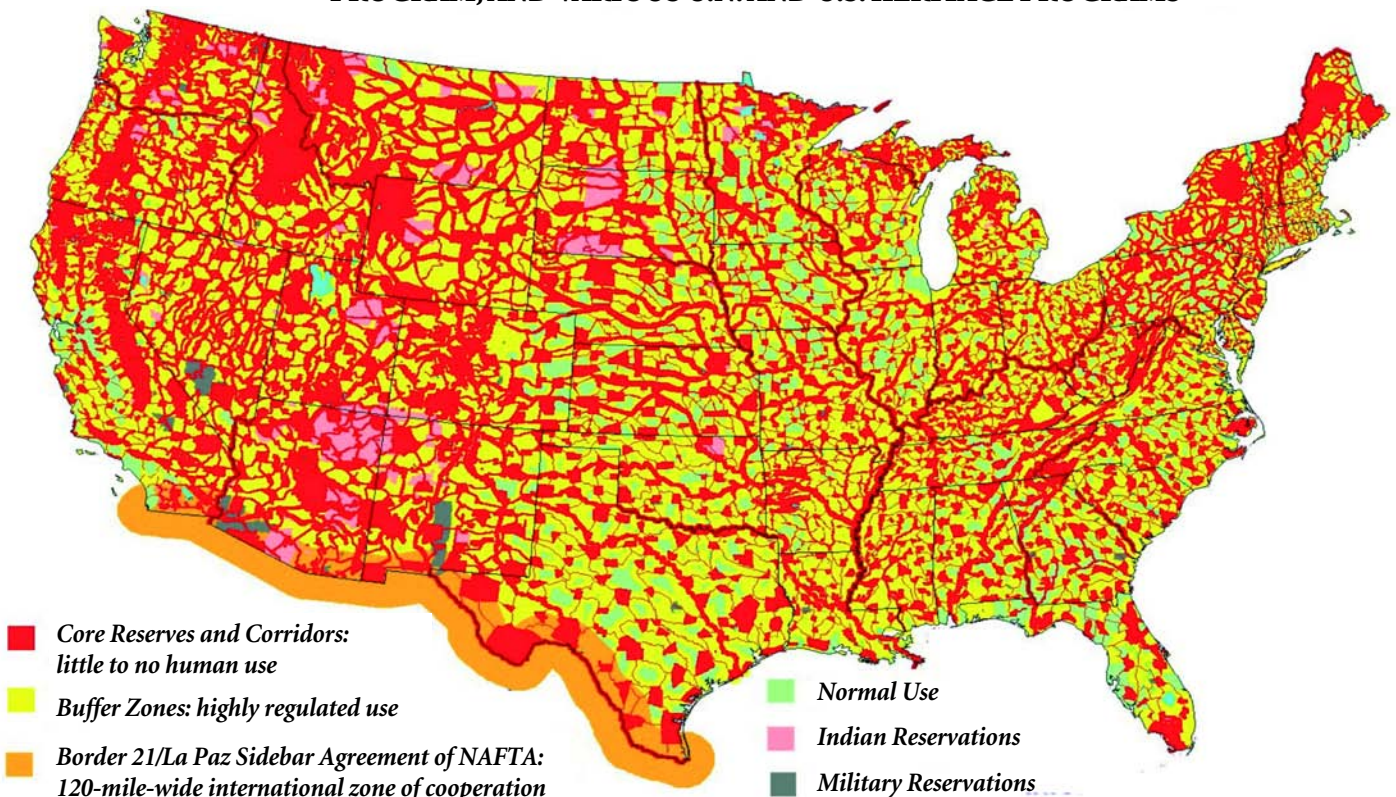
Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-ME), along with several other senators, withdrew the scheduled cloture vote on the treaty and a vote was never taken. That should have been the end of it, but in reali-

ty it was only the beginning.

## **Follow the Money**

While environmental concerns may be legitimate in some cases, many of the accusations made by environmental nongovernment organizations (NGOs) today are nothing more than perceptions created to indoctrinate the public and cause unfounded fear that

### **SIMULATED RESERVE AND CORRIDOR SYSTEM TO PROTECT BIODIVERSITY AS MANDATED BY THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY, THE WILDLANDS PROJECT, UNITED NATIONS AND U.S. MAN AND THE BIOSPHERE PROGRAM, AND VARIOUS U.N. AND U.S. HERITAGE PROGRAMS**



*Taken from: The United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, Article 8a-e; United Nations Global Biodiversity Assessment, Section 13.3.2.2.3; US Man and the Biosphere Strategic Plan, UN/US Heritage Corridor Program, "The Wildlands Project," WildEarth, 1992.*

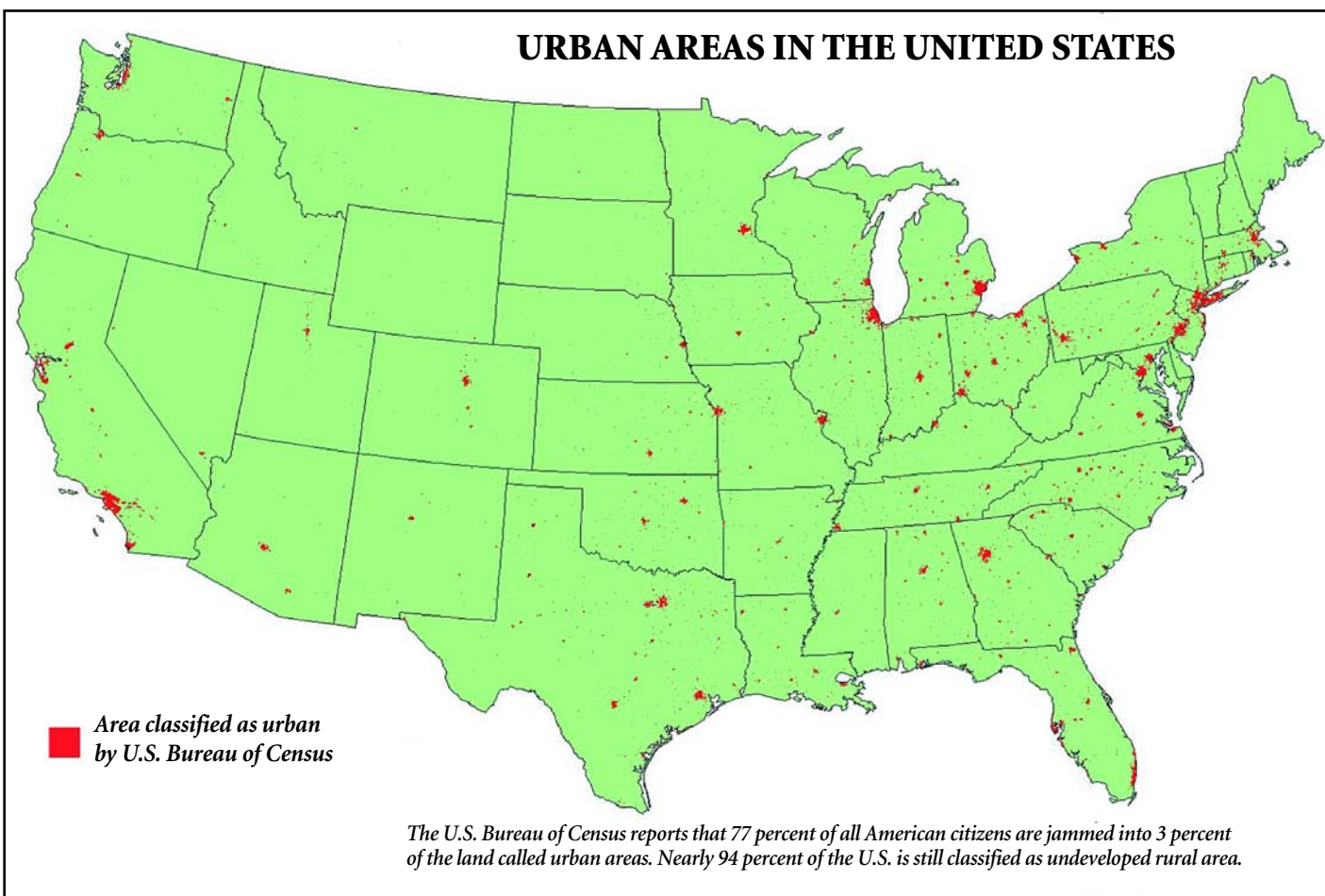
generates income for the NGO. Environmental fear has become a multibillion-dollar business that preys on unknowing urbanites.

Seventy-seven percent of all Americans live in about three percent of America's land area classed as urban by the U.S. Bureau of Census. The number only climbs to a little over six percent when all developed areas are included. Activist NGOs have found it easy to leverage legitimate environmental concerns into profitable campaigns that have marginal

property. James Madison and others even claimed that the entire purpose of government is to protect private property. They knew that private property is the foundation to liberty and wealth creation.

Hernando de Soto, a Peruvian citizen, completed a massive study for the World Bank in the early 2000s, the findings of which were published in "The Mystery of Capital." De Soto's team studied many nations for several years to determine why capitalism tri-

found that it takes 10 to 20 years and many payoffs to register property ownership in these countries. Hence, impoverished citizens do not register their ownership so their property rights are not legally established. De Soto calls this real but unregistered property "dead capital" because its equity is not available for investment. No equity means no capital to build wealth. Since citizens cannot build wealth, neither can the nation, condemned to perpetual poverty no



or negative environmental benefits.

### **Why Property Rights Matter**

Because urbanites out-vote rural residents by a 3-to-1 margin, they can pass laws that harm rural residents in the belief we need more government land and open space. Yet, most environmental laws strip rural citizens of their ability to use proven management practices to provide goods and services to urbanites. As a result, groceries, appliances, lumber and other commodities cost more.

The higher cost of goods and services is not the most dangerous threat to America. Our founding fathers recognized the critical nature of private property rights as they were firsthand witnesses to the abuse of power that occurs when government controls private

umphs in the West and fails in Third World nations. He found that strong property rights are the basis of liberty and wealth creation—just as was claimed by America's founding fathers.

For instance, equity loans on personal homes provide the funding for 70 percent of all small business starts in the United States. Small businesses are the economic backbone of America. This would not be possible without strong property rights. In turn, unencumbered legal property rights allow banks the security needed to make the loan in a few days or weeks.

This is not the case in Third World nations. Because of arbitrary regulations and corresponding corruption, de Soto

matter how many socialist income-redistribution plans are imposed by the United Nations.

### **Manipulating Property Value**

Loss of liberty to faceless bureaucrats who use a corrupt and arbitrary regulatory system to their own advantage is happening to more and more rural citizens in the United States.

Rural citizens are not alone. A growing number of communities are faced with arbitrary regulations under the umbrella of "smart growth" and "urban-growth boundaries." Depending on who draws the arbitrary boundary, low-value agricultural land can instantly be worth millions. Immediately across the urban-growth boundary, these arbitrary regulations prohibit development

and the value of the land remains low. Within 100 yards, one landowner reaps millions and another gets nothing. Arbitrary regulation—no matter how noble the intent—always breeds corruption.

Studies conducted by the Harvard Institute of Economic Research clearly show this enormous economic impact. Quarter-acre lots in cities with minimum smart-growth regulations average \$10,000 to \$40,000 per lot, while similar lots in cities imposing heavy smart-growth regulations average \$200,000 to \$600,000 per lot. There is a strong correlation between the time it takes to get a permit and the cost of the land, just as de Soto found in Third World nations.

Harvard economists Edward L. Glaeser and Joseph Gyourko, in their paper “The

where people can live where they choose and travel freely, to a Wildlands-dominated landscape where people live in designated population centers with limited travel allowed through highly restricted corridors. The Wildlands Project is the master plan for both the United Nations’ Agenda 21 and Biodiversity Treaty. In classic socialist utopian idealism, Agenda 21 defines how every human being must live in order to save mother earth. The Wildlands Project represents a grandiose design to transform at least half the land area of the continental United States into an immense “eco-park” cleansed of modern industry and private property.

Wildlands Project coauthor Reed Noss explains their intent: “The collective needs of nonhuman species must take precedence over

defining where gaps exist between already protected areas and those that require protection. These gaps are huge in Midwestern and Eastern states where very little government land exists. Federal, state or local governments already own over 40 percent of the land area in the United States; however, most of this federally owned land is in the West.

The only way to close these gaps is by taking private property through condemnation, conservation easements or uncompensated regulations. In most cases, access to this land represents a rural family’s livelihood and GAP represents a direct threat to their way of life.

The second federal program implemented at the end of the Clinton administration is the U.S. Forest Service Roadless Area Conservation Rule (RA). RA established blanket, nationwide prohibitions generally limiting timber harvest, road construction and reconstruction within 58.5 million acres of inventoried roadless areas on national forests and grasslands. The lives of thousands of people depend on these historically available resources for their living in forestry, livestock production and mining for critically needed minerals. This was one of the first major efforts to convert already restricted government lands into Wildlands status, and accelerated the process of extinguishing the use of private lands within these areas.

On July 14, 2003, the U.S. District Court for the District of Wyoming issued a permanent injunction and set aside the roadless rule. However, the U.S. Forest Service issued a new rule on May 5, 2005, that allows the roadless rule to be imposed with the permission of the governor of each state.

Already existing laws such as the ESA have made it easier for environmentalists to push their Wildlands agenda. By threatening landowners with species listings or habitat designations, they can force private property owners into signing conservation easements, or into giving away a large portion of their property to the government or to a land trust as mitigation in order to use just a small portion of their land.

### **Taking Liberty in Northwest**

The government owns 60 percent of Oregon and 42 percent of Washington, so the immediate focus in the Pacific Northwest has been to complete the conversion of these lands into Wildlands and target the private lands within these areas. The ESA has so far been the biggest tool for accomplishing this goal. The designation of the spotted owl gave the environmentalists the surrogate they needed. The spotted owl’s “habitat” occupies everything

## **FOR ANYONE WHO DOUBTS THAT ENVIRONMENTALISTS ARE SERIOUS ABOUT DESTROYING PRIVATE PROPERTY IN AMERICA, REDISTRIBUTING THE WEALTH, AND REDUCING THE USE OF OUR NATURAL RESOURCES, THOSE DOUBTS SHOULD BE PUT TO REST. THEY ARE MORE THAN HALFWAY THERE.**

Impact of Zoning on Housing Affordability” (March 2002), emphasized that the entire increase was due to smart-growth regulations. These “feel-good” regulations represent a huge drag on future urban economy.

Little did I know when I prepared the map Sen. Hutchinson used on the Senate floor, that environmental operatives were already in key positions of our government, ready to implement the antiproperty rights directives of the United Nations Treaty on Biodiversity. Although the treaty did not pass the Senate, they were able to shift gears, developing the authority necessary to implement the Wildlands agenda under an administrative cloak that didn’t require congressional approval. It has been just over 10 years since they actively began transforming America into a Wildlands. What is most frightening is how much they have accomplished in that short period.

For anyone who doubts that environmentalists are serious about destroying private property in America, redistributing the wealth, and reducing the use of our natural resources, those doubts should be put to rest. They are more than halfway there.

### **The Wildlands Project**

Under the Wildlands Project, the United States would be transformed from a land

the needs and desires of humans.”

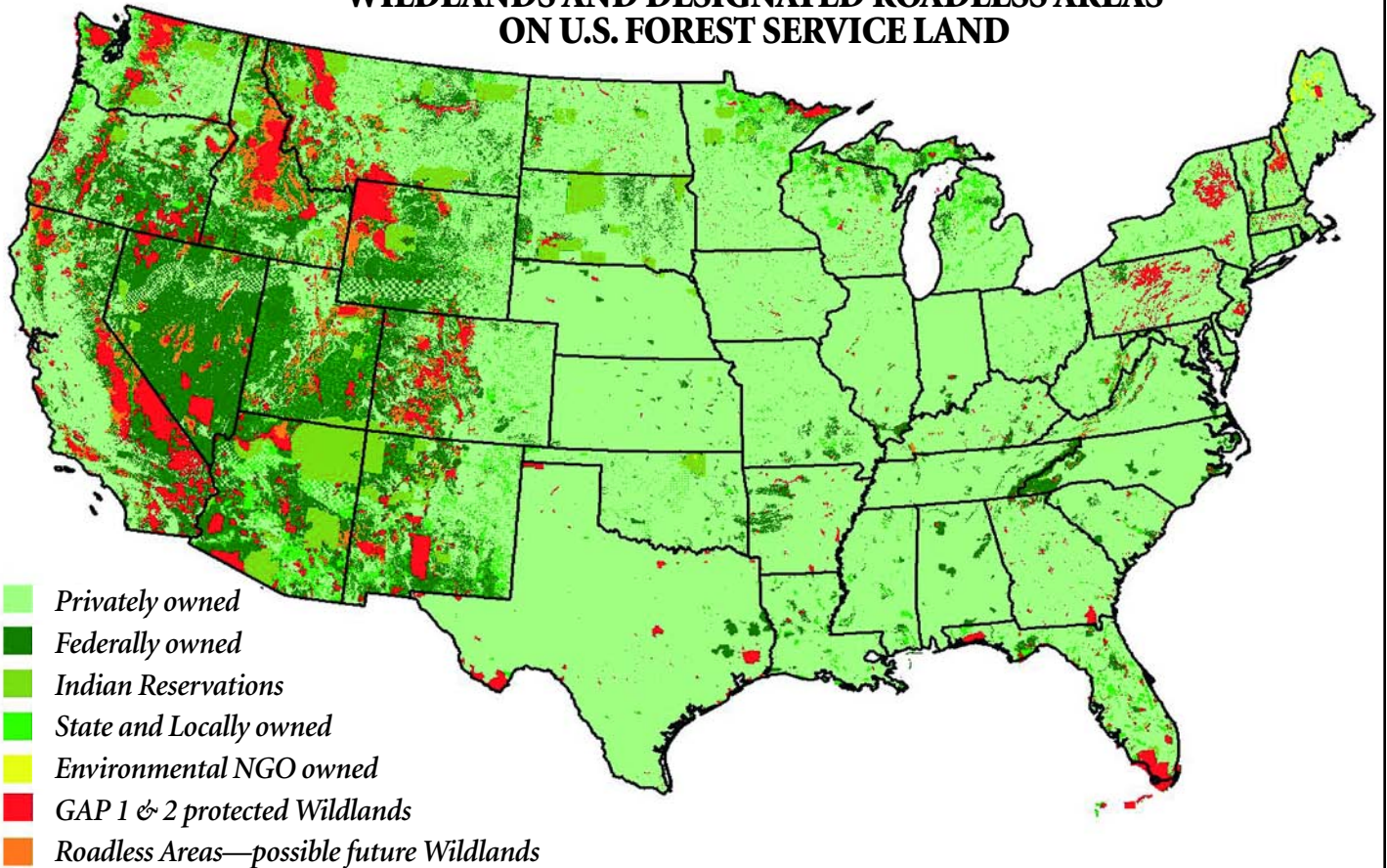
### **Federal Programs**

While many key laws like the Endangered Species Act (ESA), Clean Water Act and dozens of others that would facilitate implementation of the Wildlands agenda were already in place, environmentalists needed to identify areas that had no protection in order to begin converting land to conform to their agenda. The Clinton administration undertook two major programs with no congressional oversight during the 1990s to identify and begin targeting these areas. They were the Gap Analysis Program (GAP) and the Roadless Area Rule.

The GAP process starts by analyzing existing protected government land, then overlays geographical data of vegetation habitat, animal distribution and property ownership. Land ownership is further divided into stewardship classes: (1) is “fully protected” (such as wilderness areas); (2) is “mostly protected” (national parks and many wildlife refuges); (3) is “partially protected” (national landmarks and multiple use areas like U.S. Forest Service lands); and (4) is “no known land protection” (usually private land). Classes 1 and 2 are often combined.

Although GAP sounds innocent, even noble, it is designed for the sole purpose of

## AREAS IDENTIFIED AS GAP CLASSES 1 & 2 PROTECTED WILDLANDS AND DESIGNATED ROADLESS AREAS ON U.S. FOREST SERVICE LAND



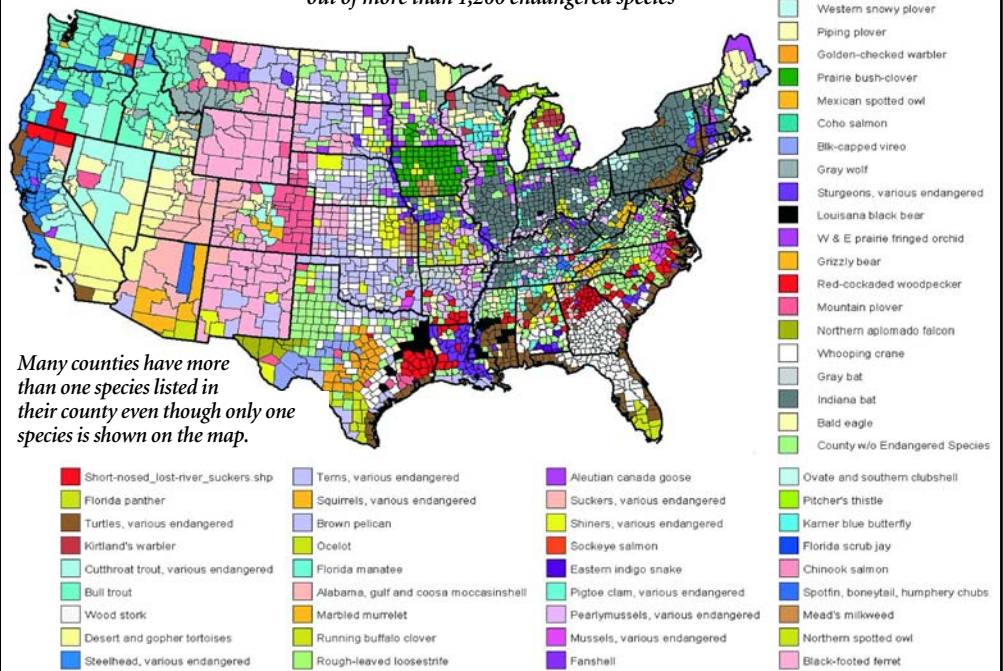
west of the Cascade mountain range's centerline, which includes large tracts of private property. The intention was never to save the bird, but to make ghost towns out of entire communities.

The federal government, State of Oregon and environmental NGOs collaborated to completely shut down agriculture in the Klamath Basin of south-central Oregon in 2001. Federal agents misrepresented the amount of water needed for endangered suckerfish in Klamath Lake, resulting in the loss of all irrigation water to farmers in the basin and turning farmland into dustbowls. The environmental NGOs fulfilled their mission.

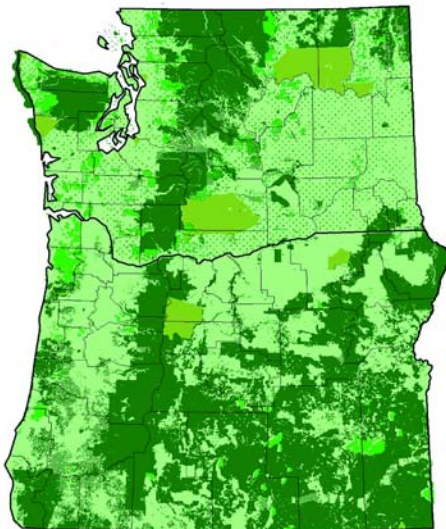
Even though their land essentially became worthless, the State of Oregon did nothing to help the farmers. Thousands of Klamath residents lost their jobs, and businesses that supported farming faced financial ruin. Later that summer, the National Academy of Sciences reviewed the data supporting the court decision and found "no clear evidence" that high lake levels benefited the fish or "convincing scientific justification" for not allowing the farmers to continue to use the

## ENDANGERED SPECIES BY COUNTY

*56 species or species groups  
out of more than 1,200 endangered species*



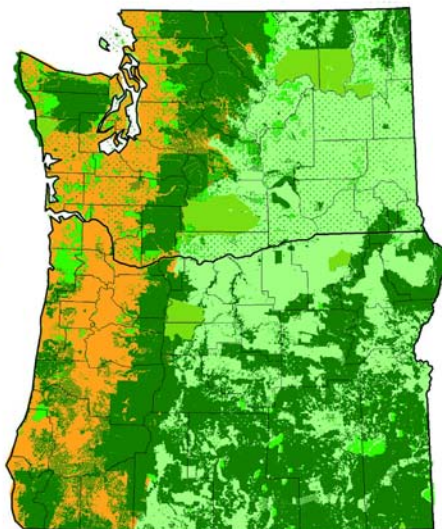
## LAND OWNERSHIP IN OREGON/WASHINGTON



Most people are unaware that 60 percent of Oregon and 42 percent of Washington are owned by the federal, state or local government.



## LAND CONTROL IN SPOTTED OWL HABITAT



The endangered spotted owl was used by environmental NGOs and wildlife biologists to shut down much of the logging in western Oregon and Washington even though it was later determined that the owl thrived in second-growth forests.

water for irrigation. In fact, evidence showed that the suckerfish seemed to do better when the farmers used the lake water for irrigation. In reality, an arbitrary ESA decision based on highly questionable science brought economic devastation to an entire region.

On the eastern side of the Cascade Mountain Range, the federal GAP analysis showed that large tracts of land were already protected or nearly protected, but there were still many ranchers, miners and foresters who used these lands and held legitimate property rights. A concerted effort was made through the Clinton administration to begin the transformation of this region through the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project in 1993.

The project attempted to develop cooperative management strategies between federal, state and local governments to control land use over the 64-million-acre Columbia Basin Ecosystem east of the Cascade mountains into Idaho, western Montana and northwest Wyoming. Citizens strongly opposed it and in 2003, after a 10-year study, only federal agencies and NGOs continued the program.

Individuals living within populated areas of the Northwest are also beginning to feel the effects of the Wildlands agenda to move urban growth into designated "human occupation zones." For example, in 1979 planners

drew an Urban Growth Boundary line around Portland, Ore., to control urban sprawl. Land values within the smart-growth boundary skyrocketed. Land values outside plummeted.

Smart growth causes severe economic hardship. In 1990, two out of three families could afford a home in the Portland area. That figure dove to one out of three by 2000. The problem became so bad that in 2004 the citizens of Oregon overwhelmingly passed Measure 37, requiring just compensation for landowners suffering from smart-growth regulations and other land-control restrictions.

### Taking Liberty in Southeast

Except for parts of Florida and the southern Appalachians, the Southeast generally has very little federal, state and local government land that activists can use to lobby for creating Wildlands. So, to speed the process up and help identify private land for Wildlands protection, Region 4 of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the University of Florida's GeoPlan Center conducted a GAP analysis called the Southeastern Ecological Framework Project in 1999-2000.

The project prioritized ecological areas in the Southeast that need protection. Because GAP gives such a high priority to ecosystems over people, more than 60 percent of the

Southeast—nearly all rural areas and private land—was identified as having a high protection priority.

Florida has already undertaken a number of statewide initiatives to implement the Wildlands Project under a variety of names, of which the Greenways Planning Project and Save Our Rivers Program are the largest.

During the 1990s these programs were under the umbrella of the Preservation 2000 Act, changed by the Florida Legislature in 2000 to Florida Forever. The goal was to place as much as 80 percent of Florida into Wildlands reserves and corridors, which they call hubs and linkages.

By 1999, Florida had purchased 1.3 million acres through the Save Our Rivers Program. After 2000, the same program targeted new lands for acquisition by "green-lining" a huge area of land. Green-lining typically locks the land value at rock-bottom prices, denying the landowner any chance for receiving highest and best value for his land, thereby skimming the landowner's equity for the government.

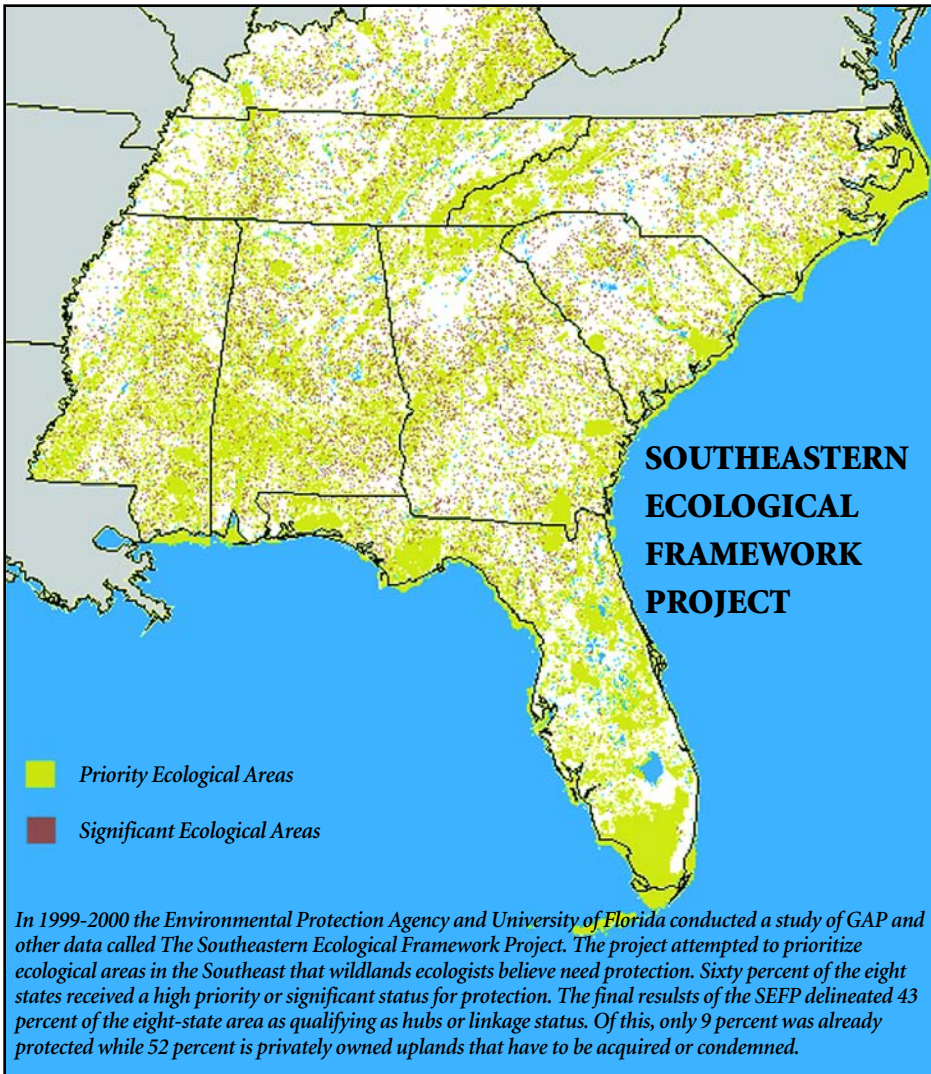
By 2005, Florida had purchased another 800,000 acres throughout the state increasing state ownership from 29 to 37 percent.

The state used conservation easements to acquire development rights on an additional 315,000 acres at about one-third the cost of

## WILDLANDS PROPOSALS BY NGOS



During the Clinton administration all land east of the Cascade Mountain Range of Oregon and Washington was classified as the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Program (ICBEMP) ostensibly to develop ecosystem management strategies that would protect the core values of nature. However, other places where this approach has been used, such as the Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area or the Adirondack State Park in upstate New York, reveal that all property rights come under the control of government bureaucracies. The Defenders of Wildlife have proposed additional areas to be included as GAP 1&2 Wildlands in Oregon.



what the state would have had to pay to buy the land outright. The landowners often sell the easement for quick cash, figuring the land will never have much future value. Or the landowner sells the easement because regulations have made it increasingly difficult to make a living on or to otherwise use the land.

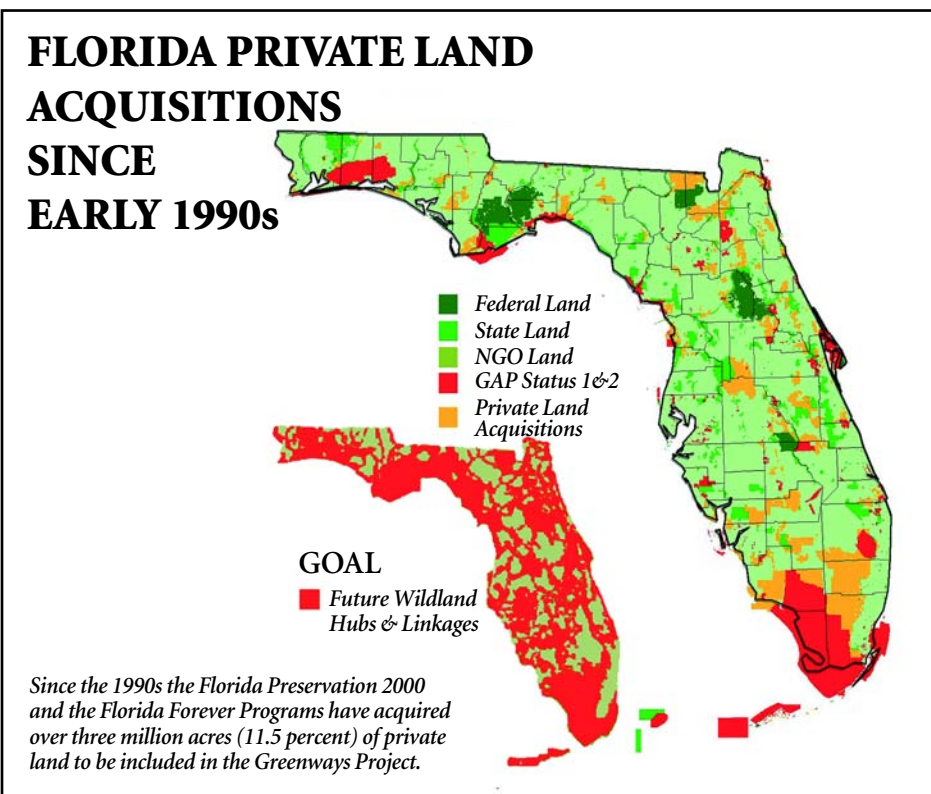
Florida is cannibalizing its private land in the name of protecting nature. It is not the only state in the East that is doing so. Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Rhode Island and New York are also following closely in Florida's footsteps. These states are also identifying greenway hubs and linkages for the Wildlands Project.

### Taking Liberty

Local communities will always need regulations that focus on true harm, nuisance and public health. A healthy economy is required to protect the environment. If the local, state or U.S. economy declines because arbitrary regulations limit or remove private property from production, it is highly probable that the very efforts to protect the environment will eventually cause its decline.

The end result will not be the eco-utopia the greens envision. It will be a land owned by government and elite land trusts. In truth, the Wildlands agenda is not about whether America's land and resources will be used for human benefit; it is about who will own them. Private property rights are as important to the environment as they are to people. ■

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### Taking Liberty on the Web!

"Taking Liberty" is a sophisticated Web-based animated program with narrations and stunning visuals showing the progress environmentalists have made and what programs they are using in their efforts to implement the radical Wildlands agenda. It is funded and produced by the American Land Foundation in Taylor, Texas, and Stewards of the Range in Meridian, Idaho. The program can be viewed at <[www.takingliberty.us](http://www.takingliberty.us)>. CDs of the program can also be purchased on the Web site or by calling 1-800-452-6389. They are \$15 each; 4-9 for \$12 each; and 10 or more for \$10 each. The maps shown in this article (a few of many) and in the program are also available for purchase.