DIGITAL SERVICE FOR THE PLANET

To successfully pursue the Biden Administration's ambitious environmental agenda, the federal government needs to significantly rethink how to build, manage, and partner with the technology that supports environmental conservation. The Administration should create a "Digital Service for the Planet," modelled on the U.S. Digital Service. The Digital Service for the Planet could be established and funded as an expansion of the U.S. Digital Service, or a stand alone organization. We recommend that this organization and structure would be within the White House, with deeper digital infrastructure and technology management expertise than exists today in a mission-focused area of any environment department. This is an important step for the federal government to be a better buyer, partner, and consumer of the data technology and innovations that are necessary to support the country's conservation, water and stewardship priorities.

The blueprint for a conservation technology agenda is already taking shape through the [Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crises at Home and Abroad,](#) the [Memorandum on Restoring Trust in Government Through Scientific Integrity and Evidence-Based Policymaking,](#) [Justice40,](#) and *[America the Beautiful](#)* [(30x30)](#).

However, a critical capacity gap persists for environmental agencies: across the governmental agencies that work on conservation, climate, wildlife and water, the primary technology focus is in core administrative work like human resources and financial accounting, and not on program delivery. Environmental agencies' programmatic staffing is fragmented and lacks seniority in agency hierarchies. This lack of programmatically tailored technology staffing means that the Administration and agency staff often rely on out-of-date information, operate in unnecessary silos, or suffer from an inability to collaborate due to an absence of common digital infrastructure. These are challenges that technology companies are continuously innovating around, but so are governmental organizations like the U.S. Digital Service. This also poses a unique opportunity as many programs across differing agencies have overlapping sets of data and technology infrastructure needs, but operate largely without being able to act upon it. The adoption of such tools could be instrumental in bringing natural resource planning and stewardship to the 21st century, but our government bureaucracies haven't built the staffing bench and culture to make full use of it.

The key question we ask is: How will this Administration ensure that environmental agencies can leverage the necessary technology to fulfill existing programs and new initiatives consistently and effectively?

The Obama administration made enormous progress on this challenge for social agencies by creating the U.S. Digital Service. The Biden administration has seen the potential of the U.S. Digital Service to work on environmental justice issues through the Justice40 initiative, and we believe the time is right to build on this momentum and holistically replicate this model for environmental agencies through a Digital Service for the Planet.

We call on the administration to consider three recommendations:

- **Create a Digital Service for the Planet.** The composition of the team required to deliver on technology issues critical to the environment is specialized. The Digital Service for the Planet could be established and funded as a distinct part of the U.S. Digital Service, or as a stand-alone office within the Executive Office of the President.

- **Move Chief Technology / Information Officers into mission-focused roles within agencies.** Evaluate the organization chart and placement of CTOs/CIOs and geospatial staffing and reconsider placing these offices in program- or mission-aligned hierarchies as opposed to administrative ones. This shift in CTO/CIO placement will ensure agencies have leadership and expertise to adopt and integrate technology to support their programs when necessary, and can more easily foster collaboration given common digital infrastructure needs.

- **Expand funding for digital infrastructure improvements and technology acquisition.** Task the Office of Management and Budget (or the newly created Digital Service for the Planet) with evaluating conservation technology investments across US Department of Agriculture, Department of Interior, Environmental Protection Agency, the Army Corps of Engineers, and National Marine Fisheries Service to develop coordinated recommendations for budget, software as a service, technology partnerships and staffing for technology in the FY23 budget.

More than forty environmentally-focused businesses and NGOs have signed this open letter to President Biden supporting the creation of a Digital Service for the Planet.