

Senator Elizabeth Warren has become famous for her policy plan documents as she runs for President. A few months ago, she released [a new one](#) focusing on public lands. The key points in her plan include:

- A moratorium on all new fossil fuel leasing on federal public lands
- Providing 10% of US renewable energy from projects on public lands
- Restoring the National Monuments that the Trump Administration is trying to shrink
- A commitment that funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (a federal trust fund that is supposed to be used for protecting natural resources) is used for its intended purposes, and not diverted to other uses
- Additional funding to address backlogs in funding for infrastructure on our public lands, including support for additional AmeriCorps volunteers
- Make access to all National Parks free

There are some things to really like about this proposal – positive action on renewable energy on public lands, and ending new fossil fuels leases on public lands are important steps to undo some of the errors of the current Administration. But it misses some key issues, could be even more ambitious, and also has some internal tensions that may end up being hard to resolve.

First, the proposal entirely overlooks the question of how to address the impacts of climate change on our public lands. Climate change is a key contributor to the California drought [that has killed over 100 million trees](#) on federal, state and private lands; it is a [contributor to increasing fire risk](#) (along with decades of fire suppression and increasing urban development in forest lands); it will cause changes to ecosystems and species, threatening many. Climate change raises real challenges for public land managers – do they intervene to offset the negative impacts of climate change (for example, with aggressive forest management to reduce fire risk) or stay hands-off because of the risk that additional human intervention may make things even worse? The questions have become even more pressing with the dramatic fire events in the Western US over the past few years. The Trump Administration has been using fire risks as a justification for significantly increasing active management, [including logging](#), on National Forests. But Warren's plan is silent on these questions.

Second, Warren's plan could be even more ambitious. While a moratorium on future fossil-fuel leasing is a great starting point, existing leases for fossil fuel development on federal public lands have committed the US to a substantial amount of additional carbon emissions. It might well be possible for a future US President to unilaterally terminate those existing leases, and pay out compensation to the lease holders. That might be expensive up front, but

well worth it from the perspective of a long-term investment in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Third, there is a serious tension between Warren's promise to make National Park access free, and getting additional funding to address the infrastructure backlog on our public lands. Much of the existing park fees are retained by the park to pay for infrastructure and visitor services. Eliminating those fees will require getting even more money out of Congress to pay for the backlog - and more importantly, requires confidence that Congress will continue to appropriate that money in the future, since we would no longer have the built-in revenue that park fees provide. That's quite a gamble to take.

Still, Senator Warren should be praised for taking public lands seriously, and thinking hard about what to do in the policy space. I hope the other candidates follow suit.