

Sierra Club on the Extinction Crisis



Clockwise from lower left: Jason Mark, Chris Hill and Bonnie Rice listen to Ben Jealous field a question from a forum participant.

On Dec. 14, the Sierra Club executive director and senior campaign managers held an online forum on the extinction crisis and our work to protect wildlife.

Several hundred members and supporters tuned in to hear Sierra Club Executive Director Ben Jealous, Wildlife Campaign Manager Bonnie Rice, and Chief Conservation and Outdoors Officer Chris Hill review the year’s achievements, discuss the work of the Biden Administration, and ongoing Sierra Club campaigns. Sierra magazine editor Jason Mark moderated the discussion.

Panelists noted that earlier that day, the Biden Administration had announced support for the removal of four dams on the Snake River in Idaho. Biden has supported the crucial “roadless rule” in Alaska’s Tongass National Forest, established five new national monuments on 1.5 million acres across the country, canceled all remaining oil and gas leases on federal lands in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge – the culmination of decades of work by Sierra Club and native activists – and announced the protection of 30 million acres in the western Arctic.

Chris Hill gave an overview of the 30x30 campaign to preserve 30% of our lands and waters by 2030. “We must not only move away from fossil fuels and toward clean energy, but also save

more nature,” she said. “For 2024, we want to designate more national monuments, especially the Black Wall Street National Monument.”

Rice discussed the role of Sierra Club’s campaign managers, who are responsible for executing campaigns from the national to the local level and assuring that local campaigns both support and receive support from the Club’s national level.

All noted the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the passage of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). “The ESA is our most effective law at preventing extinctions, with a 99% success rate,” said Rice. “We are working to highlight the urgency of the extinction crisis at all levels and pushing for full funding of the ESA.” She noted that 41% of U.S. ecosystems are on the verge of system collapse. “For 2024, we are making sure the momentum of the 50th anniversary of the ESA continues, lifting up the urgency of the extinction crisis. We need the same energy from the Biden administration that it is devoting to the climate crisis.”

There was a lot of interest and concern on the call about the intersection of renewable energy and wildlife. “Clean energy is one piece of the puzzle; saving more nature is the other piece,” said Hill.

Jason Mark noted that “All politics is local. When you pick up the phone and make a call to your state and congressional reps, they do hear you.”

Saying “We need more parks,” Ben Jealous announced the Club’s newest campaign, “2x the Parks”, creating more parks at the city, county and national level because it’s both “good for people and good for the world. Mother Earth is agnostic about why the park was created.”

“We must protect the interconnected systems that humanity and all life depend on,” he said. “We have to grow and expand the environmental movement in this country like never before.”