



S.1881 Safeguarding America's Future and Environment Act (SAFE Act)

On November 16, 2011, Senators Sheldon Whitehouse (RI) and Max Baucus (MT) introduced the SAFE Act, S. 1881, which is designed to protect American communities, wildlife and natural habitat from the increasingly destructive effects of climate change. The non-regulatory bill, the Securing America's Future and Environment (SAFE) Act, outlines the countless benefits that healthy natural resources provide to our country's safety, economy and well being, underscores the urgent need to help them adapt to a more hostile climate and provides a road map to do so. Following is a summary of the SAFE Act and how it will address the impacts of climate change on our natural resources.

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE

This Act may be cited as the 'Safeguarding America's Future and Environment Act' or the 'SAFE Act'.

SECTION. 2. FINDINGS, PURPOSES, AND POLICY

The Congress finds that natural resources provide significant benefits to the people and the economy of the United States including but not limited: to abundant clean water supplies; flood and coastal storm protection; clean air; a source for food, fiber, medicines; for pollination of the crops and other plants; scientific research and education; hunting and fishing opportunities and support of subsistence communities; outdoor recreation and world-class tourism destinations which provide jobs and support local economies.

Numerous United States agencies have observed that the natural resources of the United States are facing increasing impacts from climate variability and change.

The purpose of this Act is to establish an integrated Federal program to respond to ongoing and expected impacts of climate variability and change by protecting, restoring, and conserving the natural resources of the United States; and to maximize government efficiency and reduce costs, in cooperation with State, local, and tribal governments and other entities.

It is the policy of the Federal Government, in cooperation with State and local governments, Indian tribes, and other interested stakeholders, to use all practicable means to protect, restore, and conserve natural resources so that natural resources become more resilient, adapt to, and withstand the ongoing and expected impacts of climate variability and change; and can continue safeguarding the communities in, and sustaining the economy of, the United States.

SECTION. 3 DEFINITIONS

This section defines terms including: corridors, ecological processes, habitat, natural resource, natural resources adaptation and resilience.

SECTION. 4. NATURAL RESOURCES CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION PANEL.

This section directs the President to establish a Natural Resources Climate Change Adaptation Panel composed of the heads of Federal agencies or departments with jurisdiction over the natural resources of the United States. The Panel shall serve as a forum for interagency consultation on, and the coordination of, the development and implementation of a natural resources adaptation strategy.

SECTION. 5. NATURAL RESOURCES ADAPTATION STRATEGY.

This section directs the Panel to develop a natural resources adaptation strategy (“Strategy”) to protect, restore, and conserve natural resources so that natural resources become more resilient, adapt to, and withstand the ongoing and expected impacts of climate variability and change. Contents of the Strategy shall include: vulnerability assessments of natural resources to climate change; a summary of monitoring activities; identification of research needs; identification of resources in greatest need of protection and restoration and identification of mechanisms for ensuring coordination and communication between agencies and with states, tribes and private landowners and organizations. In developing the Strategy, the Panel will use the best available science, provide public notice and take comments. Review and revision of the Strategy by the Panel is required no later than every five years to incorporate new information regarding the ongoing and expected impacts of climate change on natural resources and new advances in adaptation strategies. Agencies implementing the Strategy are required to issue annual public reports documenting their actions.

SECTION. 6. NATURAL RESOURCES ADAPTATION SCIENCE AND INFORMATION.

This section codifies the U.S. Geological Survey’s existing National Climate Change and Wildlife Science Center. The Center will assess and develop scientific information, tools, strategies, and techniques to be used in addressing the impacts of climate variability and change on natural resources.

The Secretary of Commerce and the Secretary of the Interior will establish and appoint the members of a Science Advisory Board who have expertise in biology, ecology, climate change and other relevant scientific disciplines. This Board, that represents a balanced membership, will advise the Panel on the current state of science regarding the ongoing and expected impacts of climate variability and change on natural resources; and scientific strategies and mechanisms for natural resources adaptation. In addition the Board will identify and recommend priorities for ongoing research needs and review and comment on the Strategy.

SECTION. 7. FEDERAL NATURAL RESOURCE AGENCY ADAPTATION PLANS.

Each agency on the Panel will complete a natural resources adaptation plan for that Federal agency that is consistent with the Strategy. The plan will detail the ongoing and continuing proposed actions of the agency and will include the opportunity for public comment and will then be submitted to the President for approval.

These adaptation plans will identify and prioritize specific conservation strategies and actions that address the ongoing and expected impacts of climate variability and change on natural resources under the jurisdiction of the department or agency preparing the plan. This section enumerates aspects that should be included in the plan including but not limited to:

- Protection, restoration, and conservation of natural resources, protection of habitats and ecosystems, the diversity of native fish, wildlife, and plant populations, and wildlife corridors;
- Integration of the strategies and conservation activities into plans, programs, activities, and actions of the agency relating to the conservation and management of natural resources;
- Establishment of methods to assess effectiveness of strategies and conservation actions the agency takes to protect, restore, and conserve natural resources;
- Inclusion of written guidance to resource managers;
- Identification and assessment of data and information gaps necessary to develop natural resources adaptation plans and strategies.

Upon approval by the President, each Federal agency with representation on the Panel will implement the adaptation plan through existing and new plans, policies, programs, activities, and actions.

Under this section, agencies are required to review and revise their adaptation plans no later than every five years to incorporate the best available science, and other information, regarding the ongoing and expected impacts of climate change on natural resources.

SECTION 8: STATE NATURAL RESOURCE ADAPTATION PLANS

Federal funds appropriated to states pursuant to this Act must be used to carry out natural resources adaptation activities in accordance with adaptation plans approved under this section. Federal funds shall be distributed to states through three existing programs: the State and Tribal Wildlife Grant Program, the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972 and the Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program. Not later than one year following the date of development of the Strategy, each state shall prepare and submit to the Secretary of the Interior and, as applicable, the Secretary of Commerce, a state natural resources adaptation plan detailing current and future efforts of the state to address the ongoing and expected impacts of climate change on natural resources and coastal areas within the state's jurisdiction.. The Secretary of the Interior and, as applicable, the Secretary of Commerce shall review each state adaptation plan and approve the plan if it meets the requirements of this section and is consistent with the Strategy. All state plans must consider input from the public and independent scientists, must coordinate with other plans where appropriate and be updated every five years.

SECTION. 9. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.

There are authorized to be appropriated to carry out this Act such sums as are necessary.