

Environmental Justice Policy Priorities for 2021

*The Jesuit Conference Office of Justice and Ecology
and the Ignatian Solidarity Network*

“In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.” — Psalm 95: 4-5

The United States must play a leading role in safeguarding our planet against environmental threats. We urge the new Congress and Administration to support policies that will steward God’s creation, care for the most vulnerable, address the impacts of environmental degradation and climate change and pass down a habitable climate to our children and grandchildren.

The School of Environmental Sustainability

The [School of Environmental Sustainability \(SES\)](#) at Loyola University Chicago is a leader in environmental sustainability and is committed to addressing the causes and impacts of global climate change. The SES is dedicated to environmental sustainability across Jesuit institutions in the United States. The model of combining academics and research with sustainable agriculture and community living attracts purpose-driven students and future environmental leaders. SES, previously the Institute of Environmental Sustainability (IES), has an annual [Climate Change Conference](#) and established a student-run greenhouse, farmer’s market and a biodiesel lab that transforms waste into renewable energy. SES also aims to reduce Loyola’s carbon footprint by 50% and become a carbon-neutral campus by 2025.



The Ecodome, a 3,100-square-foot greenhouse, is used in sustainable food systems research and urban agriculture production. (Loyola University Chicago)

We ask our federal leaders to:

- **Accelerate the transition to clean energy to mitigate climate change.** To limit global warming to 1.5°C and avoid the worst impacts of climate change, [net CO₂ emissions need to be reduced to zero by 2050](#). This will require substantial new investments in [low-carbon technologies and energy efficiency](#). Through these investments and tax incentives to support renewable energy adoption, the electricity sector can eliminate carbon emissions by 2035, [leading to significant public health and job benefits](#). At the same time, the U.S. should offer transitional support for communities dependent on fossil fuel jobs and communities overburdened by fossil fuel pollution through legislation such as [the RECLAIM Act](#).
- **Re-enter the Paris climate agreement.** The U.S. must re-enter the Paris climate agreement and surpass its original goal of reducing [national emission levels by 28%](#) with the ambitious cuts now needed to keep global warming below 1.5°C. These efforts must be complemented by support for international climate finance, such as fulfilling the United States’ initial pledge of [\\$3 billion to the Green Climate Fund](#). This fund helps poor communities adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change.
- **Reinstate regulations to reduce harmful pollution and protect human health.** According to [a recent report by the House Energy and Commerce Committee](#), nearly 100 critical environmental protections have been rolled



Beekeepers harvest honey at St. Leo's Parish in Tacoma, WA.

back over the past four years, “threatening the health of our communities, families and natural environment.” These protections are even more critical now, as studies have shown [a direct link between air pollution and a higher death rate due to COVID-19](#). Among the most vulnerable to the deterioration of our air and water are [Environmental Justice communities](#), children and the elderly. To reduce harmful pollution and protect human health, [we urge the EPA to:](#)

- Reinstatement [previous methane regulations](#) and develop emissions guidelines for existing oil and gas facilities.
- Reinstatement the previous [Mercury and Air Toxics Standards \(MATS\)](#). Reduction of these pollutants [will protect human health](#).
- Repeal the euphemistically-named [Affordable Clean Energy \(ACE\) rule](#) and replace it with a new rule regulating greenhouse gas emissions from existing power plants that will achieve net-zero climate pollution from electricity by 2035.
- Rescind the so-called [Safer Affordable Fuel Efficient \(SAFE\) auto emissions standards](#) and implement regulations to achieve zero emissions for 100% of new light- and medium-duty vehicles by 2035.

- **Invest in sustainable infrastructure.** To improve our quality of life, preserve our environment and create stable jobs, we need significant investments in sustainable infrastructure. These investments are vital in places that have historically been underserved and are more vulnerable to natural disaster. Many rural communities in the Gulf South, for example, [lack basic septic infrastructure, causing water contamination and disease](#). These sanitation issues are compounded by longer and more destructive hurricane seasons. To build climate resilience and expand economic opportunity in these regions, the U.S. should:
 - Invest in clean air, water, energy, broadband and public transportation infrastructure. These measures [will create new jobs, contribute to achieving net-zero climate pollution and boost the economy nationwide](#).
 - Increase funding for the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund and the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, which provide safe and affordable drinking water to communities.
- **Prioritize communities most impacted by environmental injustice.** Legislative measures, funding and programs should prioritize Environmental Justice communities, which are most affected by environmental harm and often have the least resources to respond. We must create and support structures which allow communities of color, low-income communities and Tribal and Indigenous communities to participate meaningfully in government decision-making as our nation builds its climate resilience.
 - Restore key provisions of the [National Environmental Policy Act \(NEPA\)](#) to ensure the government conducts proper environmental reviews — with meaningful participation of local communities — before infrastructure projects like pipelines are approved.
 - Strengthen the EPA’s [Environmental Justice Small Grants program](#), the [Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program \(LIHEAP\)](#) and the [Weatherization Assistance Program](#) — which promote energy-efficiency and support communities on the frontlines of climate change.
 - Pass legislation such as the [Environmental Justice for All Act](#) to address the disproportionate adverse human health and environmental effects of federal laws on Environmental Justice communities.



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