

## Jonathan Hayden Senior Policy Advisor, Western Lands



Jonathan Hayden is a senior policy advisor at Western Resource Advocates (WRA). His primary focus, since joining WRA in 2021, is on protecting landscapes in New Mexico by developing and advocating for policies, model legislation, executive action, and other mechanisms that advance conservation goals.

Day-to-day, Hayden's work portfolio is vast. He works directly with the New Mexico State Land Office to encourage the conservation of the more than nine million surface acres that the office manages. As the largest state landowner after the federal government, this provides tremendous opportunity to influence land use practices and protections. He also works with coalition partners on conservation finance mechanisms

to secure dedicated funding for conservation, and is an expert on land use planning issues — particularly related to development in the wildland urban interface.

Growing up in Wisconsin – in some of the same areas the likes of renowned environmentalists, Aldo Leopold and John Muir – Hayden has always been interested in the outdoors. This early sense of connection with nature was galvanized into a career in conservation after the BP oil spill in 2010. Seeing the images of oil gushing from the sea floor, he was spurred into action and volunteered as an AmeriCorps VISTA for the Mississippi Center for Justice for over a year. Much of this work was helping underprivileged victims of the oil spill seek monetary relief from BP, but also included reviewing, commenting on, and developing coastal restoration plans. This experience, and working around so many dedicated attorneys and land managers, fueled Hayden's desire to return to school.

Hayden completed a dual degree program in law with a focus on environmental and land use issues and also a master's degree in urban and regional planning at the University of Colorado. He had previously received his undergraduate degree in journalism from the University of Wisconsin.

Hayden spent five years with the Santa Fe National Forest as a land management planner, as well as held a number of local government positions in Colorado, prior to his role at WRA. While with the Forest Service, Hayden played a pivotal role in expanding opportunities for traditionally underserved communities to influence forest management, including more robust outreach to tribes, land grants, and safety associations. He also spearheaded the biggest land acquisition – 2,100 acres – the Santa Fe National Forest had undertaken in 50 years by securing a purchase agreement and funding. In Colorado, Hayden worked with the cities of Aspen and Boulder in land use planning with mountain communities, which involved innovative thinking on how the built and natural environments can live together harmoniously.

Hayden credits his legal training for his successful navigation of the policy and legislative landscape, and his ability to anticipate pitfalls and potential issues. It also allows him to approach his job with creativity to help pioneer and advance policies that bridge land use planning and traditional environmental and conservation causes.

Outside of his work with WRA, Hayden sits on the board for the Friends of the Santa Fe National Forest, which helps to support and coordinate volunteer efforts and educational opportunities for residents and visitors. He also enjoys back country skiing, mountain biking, hiking, and foraging for mushrooms. And during the pandemic, he found a new interest in the restoration of a nearly 40-year-old Toyota RV.

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