

Forest Conservation Easement Program

Statement of Support

The undersigned organizations support the creation of a Forest Conservation Easement Program (FCEP) in the Farm Bill. The purpose of FCEP is to keep forests as forests through the use of conservation easements that purchase development rights from willing private landowners to prevent conversion to non-forest uses. Private forests in a conservation easement can remain privately owned and working.

FCEP is designed to:

- Significantly improve and enhance the ability of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to effectively conserve working forests at scale through conservation easements;
- Prioritize keeping forests as forests continuing to provide a multitude of environmental, economic, and societal benefits;
- Help landowners restore, enhance, and protect habitat for at-risk species while increasing carbon sequestration; and
- Provide landowners with two proven options for placing voluntary conservation easements on their land, with one held by the federal government and one held by eligible entities and land trusts.

It accomplishes this via two program components: **Forest Land Easements** (modeled after Agricultural Land Easements under NRCS's Agricultural Conservation Easement Program) and **Forest Reserve Easements** (as the successor to NRCS's Healthy Forests Reserve Program).

Under **Forest Land Easements (FLE)**, eligible entities such as land trusts, state agencies, and other similar entities, purchase working forest conservation easements from private landowners. Landowners may continue to manage their land as a working forest. NRCS will provide up to 50 percent of the fair market value for the purchase of the easement, with the remaining share coming from any combination of cash resources from the entity, landowner donation/bargain sale, and costs associated with the acquisition of the easement. In the case of forests of special environmental significance or land owned by historically underserved landowners, NRCS will provide up to 75 percent of the fair market value. Under the proposal, 10 percent of total FCEP funding in each fiscal year would be directed towards enrolling land owned by historically underserved landowners.

Under **Forest Reserve Easements (FRE)**, NRCS helps landowners restore, enhance, and protect forest resources by purchasing easements on private lands, while allowing landowners to continue working forest production and related uses. Enrolled land will be subject to a forest reserve easement plan that describes the practices and measures necessary to restore, maintain, and enhance habitat for at-risk species. Landowners will also have the option to enter into safe harbor agreements or similar assurances to avoid future regulatory restrictions on the use of that land under the Endangered Species Act. NRCS will purchase permanent easements from the landowner for fair market value of the easement and will provide financial assistance up to 100 percent of the eligible costs of practices and measures identified in the forest reserve easement plan. Financial assistance for 30-year easements and contracts will be 75 percent of that which would be paid for a permanent easement. Under the proposal, 10 percent of total FCEP funding in each fiscal year would be directed towards enrolling land owned by historically underserved landowners.

Signed,

Adirondack Land Trust, NY
Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley, VA
American Forests, National
American Forest Foundation, National
Appalachian Mountain Club, East Coast
Appalachian Trail Conservancy, East Coast
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, National
Backcountry Hunters & Anglers, National
Bayou Land Conservancy, TX
BLAC Land Trust, Southeast
Blue Ridge Land Conservancy, VA
Boone and Crockett Club, National
Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust, ME
Capital Region Land Conservancy, Mid-Atlantic
Carbon180, National
Catch-A-Dream Foundation, MS
Center for Large Landscape Conservation, MT
Central Virginia Land Conservancy, VA
Chesapeake Conservancy, Mid-Atlantic
Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts, OR
Coastal Rivers Conservation Trust, ME
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, National
Colorado Open Lands, CO
Columbia Land Trust, OR/WA
Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports, National
Delta Waterfowl, National
Ducks Unlimited, National
Eagle Valley Land Trust, CO
Estes Valley Land Trust, CO

Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina, NC
Forest Society of Maine, ME
Friends of Wilson Pond Area, Inc, ME
Gathering Waters: Wisconsin's Alliance of Land Trusts, WI
Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy, MI
Heart of the Lakes, MI
Houston Safari Club, TX
Izaak Walton League of America, National
Jefferson Land Trust, WA
Kaniksu Land Trust, ID
Kennebec Land Trust, ME
Kennebunkport Conservation Trust, ME
KKAC Organization, AR
Land Trust Alliance, National
Land Clinic, CA
Leelanau Conservancy, MI
Legacy Land Conservancy, MI
Lyme Timber Company, National
Mahoosuc Land Trust, Inc., ME
Maine Appalachian Trail Land Trust, ME
Maine Coast Heritage Trust, ME
Minority Outdoor Alliance, National
Mississippi Land Trust, MS
Mississippi River Trust, MS/LA
Mule Deer Foundation, National
National Alliance of Forest Owners, National
National Association of State Foresters, National
National Bobwhite & Grassland Initiative, National
National Deer Association, National

**Signatories as of 5/1/2023*

National Wild Turkey Federation, National
New River Land Trust, VA
North American Grouse Partnership, National
Northeast Carbon Alliance, Northeast
Northern Virginia Conservation Trust, VA
Northern Neck Land Conservancy, VA
Northwest Arkansas Land Trust, AR
Orion: The Hunters Institute, MT
Outdoor Alliance, National
Palmer Land Conservancy, CO
Pheasants Forever, Quail Forever, National
Pines and Prairies Land Trust, MN
Pingree Associates, ME
Pope & Young Club, National
Potomac Conservancy, MD/VA/WV/DC
Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust, ME
Resource Management Service, LLC, National
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, West
Scenic Hudson, NY
Sebasticoak Regional Land Trust, ME
Society for the Protection of NH Forests, NH
Somerset Woods Trustees, ME
Southern Virginia Land Conservancy, VA
Tall Timbers, FL
Texas Land Trust Council, TX
The Carbon Fund, National
The Conservation Fund, National
The Frontera Land Alliance, TX/NM
The Nature Conservancy, National
The Vital Ground Foundation, MT
The Westervelt Company, National
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership,
National

Trust for Public Land, National
Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust, NY
Unique Places to Save, National
Upper Saco Valley Land Trust, NH
Upstate Forever, SC
Valley Conservation Council, VA
Vinalhaven Land Trust Inc., ME
Western Foothills Land Trust, ME
Western New York Land Conservancy, NY
Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, PA
White Oak Initiative, Eastern U.S.
Whitetails Unlimited, National
Wild Sheep Foundation, Western U.S.
Wildlife Forever, National
Wildlife Management Institute, National
Wildlife Mississippi, MS