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
American Forests
American Forest Foundation
Appalachian Mountain Club
Appalachian Trail Conservancy
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Backcountry Hunters & Anglers
Bayou Land Conservancy
BLAC Land Trust
Boone and Crockett Club
Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust
Carbon180
Catch-A-Dream Foundation
Center for Large Landscape Conservation
Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts
Coastal Rivers Conservation Trust
Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation
Colorado Open Lands
Columbia Land Trust
Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports
Delta Waterfowl
Ducks Unlimited
Eagle Valley Land Trust
Estes Valley Land Trust
Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina
Forest Society of Maine
Friends of Wilson Pond Area, Inc
Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy
Heart of the Lakes
Houston Safari Club

Izaak Walton League of America
Jefferson Land Trust
Kaniksu Land Trust
Kennebec Land Trust
Kennebunkport Conservation Trust
KKAC Organization
Land Trust Alliance
Land Clinic
Legacy Land Conservancy
Lyme Timber Company
Mahoosuc Land Trust, Inc.
Maine Appalachian Trail Land Trust
Maine Coast Heritage Trust
Minority Outdoor Alliance
Mississippi River Trust
Mule Deer Foundation
National Alliance of Forest Owners
National Association of State Foresters
National Bobwhite & Grassland Initiative
National Deer Association
National Wild Turkey Federation
North American Grouse Partnership
Northeast Carbon Alliance
Northwest Arkansas Land Trust
Orion: The Hunters Institute
Palmer Land Conservancy
Pheasants Forever, Quail Forever
Pines and Prairies Land Trust
Pingree Associates
Pope & Young Club
Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust

*Signatories as of 4/13/2023*
Resource Management Service, LLC
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Scenic Hudson
Sebasticook Regional Land Trust
Society for the Protection of NH Forests
Somerset Woods Trustees
Tall Timbers
The Carbon Fund
The Conservation Fund
The Frontera Land Alliance
The Nature Conservancy
The Vital Ground Foundation
The Westervelt Company
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Trust for Public Land
Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust
Unique Places to Save
Upper Saco Valley Land Trust
Upstate Forever
Vinalhaven Land Trust Inc.
Western Foothills Land Trust
Western New York Land Conservancy
Western Pennsylvania Conservancy
White Oak Initiative
Whitetails Unlimited
Wild Sheep Foundation
Wildlife Forever
Wildlife Management Institute
Wildlife Mississippi

*Signatories as of 4/13/2023*