

# DRAFT-NOT-FOR-DISTRIBUTION

## Statement of Support

### Forest Conservation Easement Program

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

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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.

Sincerely,

The Conservation Fund  
Land Trust Alliance  
National Alliance of Forest Owners  
Wildlife Mississippi

Adirondack Land Trust  
Appalachian Mountain Club  
Appalachian Trail Conservancy  
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies  
Backcountry Hunters & Anglers  
Bayou Land Conservancy  
Boone and Crockett Club  
Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust  
Camp Fire Club of America  
Carbon180  
Catch-A-Dream Foundation  
Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts  
Coastal Rivers Conservation Trust  
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation  
Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports  
Delta Waterfowl  
Ducks Unlimited  
Forest Society of Maine  
Friends of Wilson Pond Area, Inc  
Frontera Land Alliance  
Houston Safari Club  
Kennebec Land Trust  
Izaak Walton League of America  
Kennebunkport Conservation Trust  
Mahoosuc Land Trust, Inc  
Maine Appalachian Trail Land Trust  
Maine Coast Heritage Trust  
Mule Deer Foundation.  
National Bobwhite & Grassland Initiative  
National Deer Association  
National Wild Turkey Federation

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North American Grouse Partnership  
Orion: The Hunter's Institute  
Pheasants Forever  
Pope & Young Club  
Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust  
Resource Management Service, LLC  
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation  
Quail Forever  
Sebasticook Regional Land Trust  
Somerset Woods Trustees  
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership  
Unique Places to Save  
Upper Saco Valley Land Trust  
Vinalhaven Land Trust Inc.  
Western Foothills Land Trust  
White Oak Initiative  
Whitetails Unlimited  
Wildlife Forever  
Wildlife Management Institute  
Wild Sheep Foundation