

# 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

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

Carbon180

Catch-A-Dream Foundation

Center for Large Landscape Conservation

Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts

Coastal Rivers Conservation Trust

Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation

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

Houston Safari Club

Izaak Walton League of America

Jefferson Land Trust

Kaniksu Land Trust

Kennebec Land Trust

Kennebunkport Conservation Trust

Land Trust Alliance

Land Clinic

Lyme Timber Company

Mahoosuc Land Trust, Inc.

Maine Appalachian Trail Land Trust

Maine Coast Heritage Trust

Minority Outdoor Alliance

Mule Deer Foundation

National Alliance of Forest Owners

National Bobwhite & Grassland Initiative

National Deer Association

National Wild Turkey Federation

North American Grouse Partnership

Northeast Carbon Alliance

Orion: The Hunters Institute

Palmer Land Conservancy

Pheasants Forever, Quail Forever

Pines and Prairies Land Trust

Pope & Young Club

Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust

Resource Management Service, LLC

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation

Scenic Hudson

Sebasticook Regional Land Trust

Society for the Protection of NH Forests

Somerset Woods Trustees

The Conservation Fund

The Frontera Land Alliance

The Nature Conservancy

The Vital Ground Foundation

The Westervelt Company

*\*Signatories as of 1/17/2023*

Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

Unique Places to Save

Upper Saco Valley Land Trust

Vinalhaven Land Trust Inc.

Western Foothills Land Trust

White Oak Initiative

White Tails Unlimited

Wild Sheep Foundation

Wildlife Forever

Wildlife Management Institute

Wildlife Mississippi