

June 15, 2023

Dear Member of Congress,

The undersigned organizations respectfully request that you **cosponsor the Forest Conservation Easement Program (FCEP) Act of 2023 (H.R. 3424)**, which was introduced by U.S. Representative Trent Kelly (R-MS-1) and U.S. Representative Annie Kuster (D-NH-2). We also urge you to support the inclusion of the FCEP Act in the conservation title of the Farm Bill with mandatory funding. The purpose of FCEP is to keep forests as forests through the use of conservation easements that purchase development rights from willing private and tribal 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 and local agencies, and tribes, purchase working forest conservation easements from private and tribal 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 and tribal 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.

To cosponsor the FCEP Act of 2023 (H.R. 3424), please contact Semaj Martin-Redd (semaj.redd@mail.house.gov) in Congressman Kelly’s office or Elizabeth Silvia-Chandley (Elizabeth.Silvia-Chandley@mail.house.gov) in Congresswoman Kuster’s office.

Signed,

Adirondack Land Trust, NY	Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, National	Ice Age Trail Alliance, Inc., WI
Agricultural Stewardship Association, NY	Conservation Florida, FL	Idaho Forest Owners Association, Inc., ID
Alachua Conservation Trust, FL	Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast, FL	Indiana Forestry & Woodland Owners Association, IN
Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley, VA	Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports, National	Izaak Walton League of America, National
American Bird Conservancy, National	Defenders of Wildlife, National	Jamestown, Eastern U.S.
American Chestnut Land Trust, MD	Delta Waterfowl, National	Jefferson Land Trust, WA
American Forest Foundation, National	Ducks Unlimited, National	Kaniksu Land Trust, ID/MT
American Forest Management, National	Dutchess Land Conservancy, Inc., NY	Kennebec Land Trust, ME
American Forests, National	Eagle Valley Land Trust, CO	Kennebunkport Conservation Trust, ME
Appalachian Mountain Club, Eastern U.S.	Environmental Real Estate Solutions, NY	KKAC Organization, AR
Appalachian Trail Conservancy, East Coast	Estes Valley Land Trust, CO	L&C Carbon, OR
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, National	Florida Conservation Group, FL	Land Clinic, CA
Backcountry Hunters & Anglers, National	Florida Forestry Association, FL	Land Trust Alliance, National
Bayou Land Conservancy, TX	Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina, NC	Leavitt Lake Ranches, CA
BLAC Land Trust, Southeast	Forest Society of Maine, ME	Leelanau Conservancy, MI
Blue Ridge Land Conservancy, VA	Forever Maryland, MD	Legacy Land Conservancy, MI
Boone and Crockett Club, National	Forterra NW, WA	Lowcountry Land Trust, SC
Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust, ME	French & Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust, PA	Lyme Timber Company, National
Capital Region Land Conservancy, Mid-Atlantic	Friends of the Mississippi River, MN	Mahoosuc Land Trust, Inc., ME
Carbon180, National	Friends of Wilson Pond Area, Inc, ME	Maine Appalachian Trail Land Trust, ME
Catch-A-Dream Foundation, MS	Galveston Bay Foundation, TX	Maine Coast Heritage Trust, ME
Center for Large Landscape Conservation, MT	Gathering Waters: Wisconsin’s Alliance of Land Trusts, WI	Manulife Investment Management Timberland and Agriculture, National
Central Virginia Land Conservancy, VA	Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy, MI	Minority Outdoor Alliance, GA
Chesapeake Conservancy, Mid-Atlantic	Green Diamond Resource Company, National	Mississippi Land Trust, MS/AR
Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts, OR	Groundswell Conservancy, WI	Mississippi River Trust, AR/MS/LA
Coastal Rivers Conservation Trust, ME	HeadWaters Land Conservancy, MI	Montana Association of Land Trusts, MT
Colorado Open Lands, CO	Heart of the Lakes, MI	Mother Lode Land Trust, CA
Columbia Land Trust, OR/WA	Houston Safari Club, TX	Mule Deer Foundation, National
	Hudson Highlands Land Trust, Inc., NY	National Alliance of Forest Owners, National
		National Association of State Foresters, National

National Bobwhite & Grassland Initiative Foundation, National	Potomac Conservancy, MD/VA/WV/DC	The Climate Trust, National
National Deer Association, National	Putnam Land Conservancy, FL	The Conservation Fund, National
National Wild Turkey Federation, National	Quail Forever, National	The Frontera Land Alliance, TX/NM
National Woodland Owners Association, National	Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust, ME	The Nature Conservancy, National
Natural Land Institute, IL	Resource Management Service, LLC, National	The Vital Ground Foundation, MT
Natural Lands, PA/NJ	Rhode Island Land Trust Council, RI	The Watershed Association, TX
New Jersey Conservation Foundation, NJ	Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, West	The Westervelt Company, National
New River Land Trust, VA	Santa Fe Conservation Trust, NM	The Wildlife Society, National
North American Grouse Partnership, National	Scenic Hudson, NY	Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, National
Northeast Carbon Alliance, Northeast	Scenic Rivers Land Trust, MD	Trust for Public Land, National
Northern Neck Land Conservancy, VA	Sebasticook Regional Land Trust, ME	Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust, NY
Northern Prairies Land Trust, SD	Society for the Protection of NH Forests, NH	Unique Places to Save, National
Northern Virginia Conservation Trust, VA	Society of American Foresters, National	Upper Saco Valley Land Trust, NH
Northwest Arkansas Land Trust, AR	Somerset Woods Trustees, ME	Upstate Forever, SC
Open Space Institute, Eastern U.S.	Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy, TN/NC	Valley Conservation Council, VA
Openlands, IL	Southern Virginia Land Conservancy, VA	Vinalhaven Land Trust Inc., ME
Orion: The Hunters Institute, MT	Summit Land Conservancy, UT	WeConservePA, PA
Outdoor Alliance, National	Sustainable Forestry Initiative, National	Western Foothills Land Trust, ME
Palmer Land Conservancy, CO	Tall Timbers, FL	Western New York Land Conservancy, NY
Pheasants Forever, National	Texas Conservation Alliance, TX	Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, PA
Pines and Prairies Land Trust, MN	Texas Land Trust Council, TX	White Oak Initiative, Eastern U.S.
Pingree Associates, ME	The Carbon Fund, National	Whitetails Unlimited, National
Pope & Young Club, National		Wild Sheep Foundation, National
PotlatchDeltic, National		Wildlife Forever, National
		Wildlife Management Institute, National
		Wildlife Mississippi, MS