

Forest Conservation Easement Program Act of 2023

Statement of Support

The undersigned organizations support the inclusion of the Forest Conservation Easement Program (FCEP) Act of 2023 (H.R. 3424/S. 2631) 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.

Signed,

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

Mother Lode Land Trust, CA
Mule Deer Foundation, National
National Alliance of Forest
Owners, National
National Association of State
Foresters, National
National Bobwhite & Grassland
Initiative Foundation, National
National Deer Association,
National
National Wild Turkey Federation,
National
National Woodland Owners
Association, National
Natural Land Institute, IL
Natural Lands, PA/NJ
New Jersey Conservation
Foundation, NJ
New River Land Trust, VA
North American Grouse
Partnership, National
Northeast Carbon Alliance,
Northeast
Northern Neck Land Conservancy,
VA
Northern Prairies Land Trust, SD
Northern Virginia Conservation
Trust, VA
Northwest Arkansas Land Trust,
AR
Open Space Institute, Eastern U.S.
Openlands, IL
Orion: The Hunters Institute, MT
Outdoor Alliance, National
Palmer Land Conservancy, CO
Pheasants Forever, National
Pines and Prairies Land Trust, TX
Pingree Associates, ME
Pope & Young Club, National

PotlatchDeltic, National
Potomac Conservancy,
MD/VA/WV/DC
Prairie State Conservation
Coalition, IL
Putnam Land Conservancy, FL
Quail Forever, National
Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust,
ME
Rensselaer Plateau Alliance, NY
Resource Management Service,
LLC, National
Rhode Island Land Trust Council,
RI
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation,
West
Salisbury Association Land Trust,
CT
Santa Fe Conservation Trust, NM
Scenic Hudson, NY
Scenic Rivers Land Trust, MD
Sebasticook Regional Land Trust,
ME
Shasta Land Trust, CA
Sierra Cascade Land Trust Council,
CA
Society for the Protection of NH
Forests, NH
Society of American Foresters,
National
Somerset Woods Trustees, ME
Southern Appalachian Highlands
Conservancy, TN/NC
Southern Virginia Land
Conservancy, VA
Summit Land Conservancy, UT
Sustainable Forestry Initiative,
National
Tall Timbers, FL
Texas Conservation Alliance, TX

Texas Land Trust Council, TX
The Carbon Fund, National
The Climate Trust, National
The Conservation Fund, National
The Frontera Land Alliance,
TX/NM
The Nature Conservancy, National
The Vital Ground Foundation, MT
The Watershed Association, TX
The Westervelt Company, National
The Wildlife Society, 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
Washington Association of Land
Trusts, WA
WeConservePA, PA
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, National
Wildlife Forever, National
Wildlife Management Institute,
National
Wildlife Mississippi, MS
Winston County Self Help
Cooperative, MS