

August 7, 2023

Dear Senator,

The undersigned organizations respectfully request that you **cosponsor the Forest Conservation Easement Program (FCEP) Act of 2023 (S. 2631)**, which was introduced by U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and U.S. Senator Roger Wicker (R-MS). 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 (S. 2631), please contact Claire Descamps (claire\_descamps@gillibrand.senate.gov) in Senator Gillibrand's office or Mikhail Love (mikhail\_love@wicker.senate.gov) in Senator Wicker's office. For more information about FCEP, visit [www.foresteasement.org](http://www.foresteasement.org).

Signed,

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