

RVCC FARM BILL PRIORITIES

The Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition (RVCC) strongly supports investments in federal agencies and programs that sustain the economic, social and ecological needs of rural America. Specifically, the Farm Bill plays a vital role in sustaining America's rural communities and enhancing its natural landscapes. From programs that incentivize working lands conservation, to grants and loans that help start and grow businesses that accomplish public lands restoration, the Farm Bill is critical to revitalizing rural America and conserving the health of our land and water. RVCC asks that Congress and our federal agency partners consider the following priorities during the reauthorization process.

BOX: RVCC Recommendations

1. Maintain full mandatory funding for key programs that strengthen rural economies and restore landscapes
2. Invest in community-based, local and regional organizations as strategic partners to help prioritize and implement programs
3. Provide flexibility in programs, allowing landowners to work directly with technical assistance providers to design conservation plans that work for them

Priorities

Working Lands Conservation: Nearly half of the land in the continental US is privately owned. These working lands are vital to effective fish and wildlife management, from salmon to sage grouse. Private land stewardship contributes to the economic and social wellbeing of rural communities. RVCC strongly believes that working lands, human communities, and wild places are all important and interdependent. Their health must be protected and advanced together.

The Farm Bill Conservation Title includes important programs that advance working lands conservation. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program helps farmers, ranchers, and foresters adopt modern and innovative land management techniques to preserve the long term health and productivity of the land. The Conservation Stewardship Program, Regional Conservation Partnership Program, Healthy Forest Reserve Program, and Agricultural Conservation Easement Program take conservation efforts further by advancing habitat conservation on working lands. Voluntary, market and incentive-based programs like these are key tools for landowners to participate in conservation, diversify their operations, and help keep landscapes intact.

Rural Development: The Farm Bill plays a critical role in sustaining and growing economic opportunities in rural areas, including businesses that implement restoration and conservation

work on public land. RVCC believes that ecosystem productivity, social equity, and economic well-being go hand in hand. Good public policy builds on and reinforces these linkages.

A major barrier to completing public land restoration is a lack of local businesses and contractors to implement projects¹. USDA Rural Business Development programs provide the necessary funding to help rural stewardship businesses start and expand to meet restoration needs. Creating new markets for restoration by-products is also essential to implement projects. The Community Wood Energy Program and Biomass Research and Development Program both serve to develop new markets for low-value wood products while creating efficient, environmentally responsible power generation in rural communities. Finally, the Farm Bill helps incentivize the next generation of land stewards with the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program. Investing in these programs should be a top priority.

Shared Stewardship: RVCC holds that hope for rural America lies in collaboration, common sense, and non-partisan solutions. Collaboration at the local level has helped move conservation past gridlock and into an era of practical solutions that meet the needs of diverse stakeholders. Community-based organizations are leaders in these conversations, cutting through contentious political disagreements and finding durable solutions. RVCC urges federal agencies to continue to work in partnership with community-based organizations that help improve planning and bring local landowners and the community to the table.

Congress can support community-based, collaborative efforts by maintaining funding for “boots on the ground” agency staff to directly engage in collaborative efforts and advise landowners. RVCC also encourages prioritizing programs that include collaboration and capacity-building criteria and outcomes. The Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program is an excellent example of targeting strategic funding to collaboratively supported projects and should be supported and expanded. Rural Development programs, NRCS working lands conservation programs, and federal land management agencies should align to strategically direct limited resources to cross-boundary projects where they are most needed, while investing in local businesses to accomplish work on the ground.

The Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition stands willing and ready to work in partnership with the Administration, Congress and federal agencies to achieve strong and lasting program outcomes.

¹ Schultz, C., McIntyre, K., Cyphers, L., Ellison, A., Kooistra, C., Moseley, C. (2017). Strategies for Success Under Forest Service Restoration Initiatives. *Ecosystem Workforce Program Working Paper Number 81*.

USDA NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE	FY 2018 Actual	FY 2019 President's Proposal	RVCC FY 2019 Requests*
Regional Conservation Partnership Program (1)	\$354 (FMF)	\$188 (2)	\$368 (FMF)
Environmental Quality Incentives Program	\$1,766	\$1,766 (FMF)	\$1,766 (FMF)
Conservation Stewardship Program	Add 10 million acres annually (FMF)	-	Add 10 million acres annually (FMF)
Agricultural Conservation Easement Program	\$250 (FMF)	\$250 (FMF)	\$250 (FMF)
Healthy Forests Reserve Program	-	-	\$12 (FMF)
Community Wood Energy Program	-	-	\$50 (FMF)
Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program	-	-	\$20 (FMF)
USDA RURAL DEVELOPMENT			
Rural Business Development Program	\$34	-	\$65
Rural Energy for America Program	\$50	-	\$70

*Dollar amounts in millions

(1) full mandatory funding (FMF) is based on a percentage of EQIP and CSP
(2) reduction based on proposed cut to CSP

FY 2019 Appropriation Priorities

Rural Development through Land Stewardship

In America's rural West, economic, environmental, and community health go hand in hand. Rural communities have the local knowledge needed to restore the nation's forests, rivers, and rangelands, but they cannot do it alone. Federal programs must support communities that want to start and grow local businesses, develop capacity to act as shared stewards of the land, and implement working lands conservation. Congress must sufficiently invest in federal agencies so they can support both vibrant rural communities and healthy landscapes.

Communities play a critical role in sustaining the health of America's land and water. To help rural America meet the rising challenges of longer fire seasons and increasing risk of drought, RVCC recommends the following funding priorities in FY2019.

Rural Jobs for Forest and Range Stewards

RVCC supports fully funding existing grant and loan programs through **USDA Rural Development** that help support and grow rural stewardship economies, including the **Rural Business Development Program** and **Renewable Energy Assistance Program**. These programs help rural communities start and grow businesses that make public land stewardship possible. Federal agencies can plan projects, but local businesses are necessary to complete work on the ground.

Shared Stewardship

Investing in partners and community-based organizations to plan and implement projects allows rural community groups to act as full partners in the restoration of America's land and waters. The **Natural Resource Conservation Service** provides essential "boots on the ground" assistance to communities to help implement working lands conservation programs. On federally managed land, the **Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program** is a critical example of a program that utilizes local collaboration to successfully implement landscape scale restoration.

Cross-boundary Restoration

Restoration of natural systems is not effective if it ends at an artificial political boundary. Private working lands play an important role in restoring landscape health. Programs like the **Regional Conservation Partnership Program**, **Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund**, **Conservation Stewardship Program** and the **Environmental Quality Incentives Program** ensure that entire landscapes are being restored, from the publicly owned headwaters to the stream reaches that run through working farms, forests, and ranches.

Responsible Agency Budgets

Federal land managers need sufficient baseline budgets to meet their obligations to the land and to rural communities. RVCC supports sufficient and stable funding for the **USDA Forest Service**, **Bureau of Land Management**, **US Fish and Wildlife Service**, and other federal

conservation partners. The mission of these agencies does not end at day-to-day planning and project implementation; agency programs such as the **Joint Fire Science Program** also play an important role in funding practical, management-driven research to help expand our knowledge and prioritize restoration efforts.

The Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition looks forward to working with Congress and the Administration to fulfill commitments and promises to the rural communities they serve, and upon which the natural well-being of our nation depends.

	FY 2018 Actual	FY 2019 President's Proposal	RVCC FY 2019 Request*
USDA FOREST SERVICE			
National Forest System			
Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration	\$40	-	\$60
Land Management Planning ¹	183	-	\$183
Hazardous Fuels ²	\$390	\$390	\$500
Wildland Fire Management			
Suppression and Preparedness	\$2,379	\$2,505	\$2,505
National Fire Capacity ³	\$78	\$66	\$78
State and Private Forestry			
Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program	\$4	-	\$4
Working Forest Lands Program ⁴	\$20	\$20	\$20
Forest Legacy Program	\$67	-	\$67
Forest and Rangeland Research			
Joint Fire Science Program	-	-	\$7
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR			
USFWS: Partners for Fish and Wildlife	\$52	\$36	\$52
NOAA: Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund	\$65	-	\$66
BLM: Wildlife Management	\$103	-	\$103
Joint Fire Science Program	-	-	\$6
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE			
NOAA: National Marine Fisheries Service	\$883	\$837	\$883
USDA RURAL DEVELOPMENT			

¹ combines Land Mgmt and I&M

² moved from S&PF to NSF in 2018

³ formerly State Fire Assistance; shifted from WFM to S&PF

⁴ formerly the Forest Stewardship Program

Rural Business Development Program	\$34	-	\$65
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* *Dollar amount in millions*