

# FORESTRY AND THE FARM BILL

*Working Together to Conserve and Restore Healthy and Resilient Forests*



Aspen Woodlands showing fall color in the Coniferous Forest Zone of the Santa Fe National Forest in New Mexico. © Alan W. Eckert

**T**he Nature Conservancy partners with federal agencies to conserve and restore healthy and resilient forests on both private and public lands.

Its interests span the conservation of public forests and include ensuring continued improvement in stewardship of private non-industrial forests, restoring forests for climate adaptation and resilience, and addressing challenges like insects and diseases, drought, and catastrophic wildfires.

## **TNC'S FOREST POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FARM BILL**

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### **Forest Legacy Program (FLP)**

By providing economic incentives to landowners, the FLP is encouraging sustainable forest management and supporting strong markets for forest products.

- Provide maximum flexibility on the program's non-federal cost share to enable more conservation outcomes and increasingly equitable access to utilize the program.

### **Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP)**

In its first 10 years, CFLRP projects generated nearly \$2 billion in local labor income, supported an average of 5,440 jobs annually, and engaged over 400 organizations in local collaboratives.

- Enable long-term reauthorization of CFLRP with a higher level of funding.
- Include climate resilience as one of the eligible activities.
- Increase the number of projects in every administrative region, particularly in meeting the greatest needs for wildlife resilience in the West.

## **ENGAGING ON THE FARM BILL**

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) has a long history of working with producers, landowners, and other stakeholders across America to create opportunities that conserve natural areas and build more resilient working lands and communities. As owners, operators, and managers of agriculture and forest lands, TNC engages with and advocates for Farm Bill policies and priorities from an on-the-ground, in-field perspective.

## Investing in Wildfire Resilience

Many areas adapted to and shaped by fire are becoming more populous and developed, emphasizing the need to address the interconnected crises of climate change and damaging wildfire.

- Advance wildfire resilience through specific actions, including emphasizing controlled and cultural burning and increasing investments, as recommended in TNC's reports, *Roadmap for Wildfire Resilience: Solutions for a Paradigm Shift* and *Wildfire Resilience Funding – Building Blocks for a Paradigm Shift*.

## Reforestation

Prioritize reforestation and reforestation-friendly outcomes and support investment in the reforestation supply chain.

- Support funding for the Tree Assistance Program and invest more in monitoring and research assistance.
- Reduce the barriers for rural landowners to participate in voluntary markets for forest carbon such as those proposed in provisions of the Rural Forest Markets Act.
- Create additional state and private forestry and Tribal Nation funding for post-fire reforestation and revegetation project implementation and monitoring programs
- Support and increase capacity for seed collection and storage, tree nursery expansion, workforce development, and improvements in pre- and post-planting practices among state, private, Tribal Nation, and land grant university partners through (1) a new competitive grants program, (2) incentives/low-interest or forgivable loans and long-term contracts to expand nursery expansion.

## Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR)

This program supports projects that align with many U.S. Forest Service (USFS) priorities.

- Increase the authorization for climate mitigation practices and support for landowners entering voluntary forest carbon markets.
- Expand the annual investment, particularly to urban environments.
- Allow maximum flexibility for the program's non-federal cost share to enable more conservation outcomes.

## Urban and Community Forestry Program

Urbanization impacts forest lands, and urban residents benefit from forests.

- Elevate urban and community forests and drive more equitable and just outcomes in the wildland urban interface. This includes permanent authorization of the National Urban Community Forestry Advisory Council and reframing the LSR program to be both a rural and urban program.

## Forest Health

Address the lack of directed research on the functional loss of tree species to invasives.

- Incorporate the Invasive Species Prevention and Forest Restoration Act in the Farm Bill.
- Expand the Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership program to include (a) an enhanced focus on invasive species control and (b) eligible activities to allow treatments for erosion control materials and resource concerns related to native wildlife species.

## Safeguard Public Processes and Environmental Protections

A mixture of incentives and investments are needed to safeguard public processes and environmental protections.

- Ensure every USFS region has access to two National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) strike teams, and adequate resources to comply with processes enshrined in bedrock environmental laws such as the Endangered Species Act and NEPA.

## Address Global Forest Loss and Degradation

A major driver of global deforestation is forest clearing to produce agricultural commodities like beef, soy, and palm oil.

- Prohibit agricultural commodities produced on illegally deforested land from entering the U.S. market.
- Require companies to carry out and report on risk-based due diligence, including supply chain traceability, on imports of commodities linked to deforestation.
- Increase engagement with and support for countries taking meaningful steps to improve governance and reduce deforestation.

## U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)

### Conservation Programs

Congress should provide additional incentives for small acreage forest owners to advance climate resilience.

- Strategically integrate climate resilience incentives and reforestation-friendly outcomes in USDA land protection and restoration programs.
- Enhance Regional Conservation Partnership Program to advance more forest restoration efforts.
- Improve Natural Resources Conservation Service's Landscape Conservation Initiatives to address and account for climate resilience.
- Authorize a new forest conservation easement program, while protecting longstanding conservation easement programs, to keep forests as forests by purchasing development rights from willing private landowners to prevent conversion to non-forest uses.