

**Statement of Christopher Topik, Ph.D.
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“Collaborative Forestry Improvements for the 2018 Farm Bill that enhance the benefits of America’s forests”

**Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry hearing on:
Conservation and Forestry: Perspectives on the Past and Future Direction for the 2018
Farm Bill.**

Chairman Roberts, Ranking Member Stabenow and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to participate in this important hearing about the past and future Farm Bill direction on conservation and forestry. My name is Christopher Topik and for the past 6 years I have been the Director of the Nature Conservancy’s *Restoring America’s Forests* Program. The Nature Conservancy is an international, non-profit conservation organization working around the world to protect ecologically important lands and waters for people and nature. Our mission is to conserve the lands and waters upon which all life depends. Prior to this job I worked as a forest ecologist at the USDA Forest Service for 16 years (10 years in support of forest management in the Washington and Oregon Cascades) and then 15 years as majority professional staff for both parties on the House Interior and Environment Appropriations subcommittee, responsible for the budgets and oversight of important natural resource and science agencies, such as the USDA Forest Service.

The Nature Conservancy

We at The Nature Conservancy (TNC) are proud to be part of the conversation today since the Farm Bill is the nation’s largest single investment supporting voluntary and successful conservation, restoration and management of America’s private lands. We have a long history of working directly with farmers, ranchers and private forest landowners, as well as states, Tribes and federal agencies, to improve the condition of America’s lands and waters, and improve economies for citizens and communities. We strongly believe that the best conservation outcomes arrive when communities are directly involved and directly benefit from the wealth that nature blesses us through agriculture, forestry and land management. In the past, and

hopefully the future, the Farm Bill provides farmers, ranchers and forest landowners with the tools necessary to protect and conserve not only the land, but also the rural way of life.

The Nature Conservancy is a large and decentralized organization with over 3700 employees, including over 500 scientists, working in all 50 states, territories and the District of Columbia, as well as 70 nations. Guided by science, we collaborate with local landowners, communities and businesses to implement practical conservation solutions that benefit people and nature. We are supported by almost a million members and by boards of trustees made up of local leaders in each of the states and countries where we work. We are nonpartisan, and our trustees, members, and staff come from across the political spectrum. Our recommendations are drawn from the hands-on experience of over 60 years working with people from all walks of life, with businesses and industries, and with governments from the local to the national level. We seek opportunities to advance solutions that work for people and nature, and we stand ready to defend our core values and bedrock environmental laws. We own and operate a lot of land, including over 2 million acres directly and easements on another 3 million; our preserve management includes many active forestry, farming and ranching operations so we know what it is like to be a producer. We are also very active in communities in many ways, for instance, last year we conducted controlled burns to conserve landscapes on 154,577 acres and assisted on another 306,000 acres.

I. Forests

Today my testimony will focus on just one aspect of our interest and experience on the Farm Bill: forestry. I attach a short summary of our overall Farm Bill priorities at the end of this statement. We will provide additional detailed recommendations and experiences on other Farm Bill agriculture and conservation issues in other forums.

Our country's forests are a vital natural resource, and a strong Farm Bill ensures our national and private forests remain healthy and productive. Our forest lands—whether federal, state, tribal or private—are huge economic drivers in many communities. We all benefit from healthy forests and the clean air and water, habitat, recreation, timber and other forest products they provide. The Conservancy's work across North America is guided by an ambitious vision that involves developing nature-based solutions to some of humanity's most pressing global challenges. Among our primary North American priorities is our *Restoring America's Forests* program, through which we aim to foster a dramatic increase in the proactive, science-based restoration of our nation's federal forests, thereby reducing the tremendous human and environmental costs associated with unnaturally large and damaging megafires.

A specific example of the way we use science and timber harvest for conservation is our 23,800 acre Two-Hearted River Forest Reserve in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Like many

hardwood forests in the Lake States, this reserve has been managed for a century to maximize the production of a few commercially valuable tree species. The result is a forest that is 80% hard maple of about the same age. If our next forest pest or disease attacks hard maple, the economic and environmental impacts will devastate millions of acres of forests and the communities that depend on those forests. TNC is actively harvesting in the Two-Hearted River Reserve to develop and demonstrate management regimes that increase age and species diversity to reduce pest and disease risk while maintaining economic returns to landowners, timber supply to forest dependent communities and clean water and recreational opportunities for all of us. (<https://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/michigan/explore/forest-to-floor.xml>).

Our Farm Bill views are based on detailed internal assessments that have involved all of our state chapters, and are informed by science and interactions with a host of forest landowners, industries and entities that benefit from healthy and productive forests. We are also active in several relevant coalitions working on Farm Bill matters, such as the Forests in the Farm Bill coalition and the Agriculture and Wildlife Working Group. Some of our suggestions today will be consistent with coalition positions that are still being developed.

Forests are vital to America for many reasons so forest health is important to landowners, industries and over half of Americans that get their water from forested water sources. Forest threats are real, including climate related stresses of drought and fire, and also land use conversion to non-forest uses. America's forests are 56% privately owned, so the work of the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee is especially vital to support technical assistance and provide economic assistance for meritorious practices that improve production and enhance environmental quality, allowing nature's benefits to continue to flow to society. We believe these core functions of the Farm Bill need to be our primary focus on this legislation. We realize that the Farm Bill legislation is also a chance to affect other related matters, such as specific federal forest management issues, so we will comment on some of those past Farm Bill items and suggest some for the next Farm Bill. Yet, the core conservation and forestry assistance and research functions are so important in the long run that we hope other side-bar issues do not distract too much from the need to continue commendable past Farm Bill programs and activities.

II. Forestry- Comments on the past Farm Bill

We believe that the 2014 Agricultural Act had many outstanding aspects that enhanced private landowner's abilities to manage forests and to do so in a way that helped their work roll-up with others and with public forests to have large scale, lasting impacts, while benefitting the landowners and supporting rural jobs. You will see below that it is essential to maintain key conservation funding that was provided in the 2014 Farm Bill. We also commend and support

the inclusion of forestry practices in a variety of Farm Bill programs since the production of wood and fiber are vital to the nation and to the forest landowners who facilitate the production. These practices are also essential to maintain or enhance water supply and flow, water that we can't live without and water that is absolutely essential to cities as well as to American agriculture.

The last Farm Bill also should be commended for allowing and encouraging strategic application of technical and funding assistance to large landscape efforts that really add up. Specifically, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) has provided the authority to bring many projects together that increase the impact of federal funding by partnering with a whole host of landowners, industries, and NGOs to bring more money and talent to bear on vital forestry and watershed projects. The NRCS landscape conservation initiative has been successful at forging benefits to water, wildlife and to forest landowners. TNC staff in many states are directly involved with science, collaboration and technical assistance in these landscape projects.

The Farm Bill funding and authorities, such as EQIP and RCPP, also aided the Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership to create a whole new cross boundary conservation effort in which private forests, through the NRCS, and the National Forests can work together to improve conditions on both public and private forests, and in the process, create many jobs, increase forest product harvest, and secure wildlife and water benefits. TNC has been involved in at least twenty of these projects. We see this as an important way to increase the buying power of federal money by partnering with many groups and private landowners to get larger projects done, faster.

The 2014 Farm Bill included essential support for science, research and forestry universities. We also believe the Farm Bill easement programs are important to both conservation and to private landowners who need assistance to make the most of their properties.

The 2014 Farm Bill also included some provisions that aid better management of federal forests. I want to call out in particular the Good Neighbor Authority and the Stewardship Contracting Authority. The Good Neighbor Authority provides for greater state participation in federal forest stewardship and has improved work in a number of places. This authority gets larger projects done that can cross boundary lines and therefore be more efficient and have greater benefit to neighboring communities.

We remain pleased that stewardship contracting was given permanent authorization in the last bill. Stewardship contracting has now been in force since the fiscal year 1999 Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, and is having many positive results. This administrative tool is used to achieve key land-management goals on Federal land that improve, maintain or restore forest or rangeland health through a trade of goods (timber value) and services

(stewardship activities). Simply stated, more work gets done on the ground, more jobs are provided locally to improve communities and local tax revenues, and the funds and projects stay local.

We attach in an appendix short example case studies showing how TNC staff and partners are using the stewardship contracting and agreement authority to improve forest health and local community resilience. TNC is just one of a great number of institutions and forest product companies using these authorities. Please see appendix for more on these projects that demonstrate the importance of stewardship contracting and agreements:

- Florida and Longleaf Pine on the Osceola National Forest:
- Michigan and Ottawa National Forest
- Oregon, Ashland Forest Resiliency Stewardship Project (Southern Oregon fire risk reduction)
- Arizona Four Forest Restoration Initiative (4FRI)
- Oregon, Klamath Tribal and Forest Service Partnership effort with a Master Stewardship Agreement since 2011

The Insect and Disease Infestation provision in the last Farm bill (Section 8204) was a good attempt to provide for better interaction between counties, states and the federal management of national forests. We remain hopeful that its implementation will go faster and accelerate accomplishments of the desired treatments. TNC recommends that such proposals are selectively utilized, and recommend emphasizing collaborative, science-based restoration to address large forest landscapes challenges.

III. Forestry- Comments on the next Farm Bill

As we stated above, we see the Farm Bill as a vital tool for America, providing needed assistance and authority to improve the vast agricultural, range and forest lands of our nation, and provide the food, fiber and nature we all depend on. First, we are very concerned that funds are already being cut disproportionately for our critical working lands. The Farm Bill must provide adequate resources for conservation so our farmers, ranchers and forest landowners can ensure our food security and economic stability, and bolster rural economies in the process. Voluntary conservation works: The Farm Bill is essential to keep our people and our nature healthy. The Forestry community should focus on these important needs and public services and not get sidetracked with contentious efforts to alter US Forest Service public land decisions by eliminating environmental reviews.

Principles to consider with respect to Forestry

Bolster Conservation Rewards and Incentives.

The bill needs to continue to encourage best practices as well as provide funds for investments that improve stewardship practices, technical assistance and cost-share programs on working private forest lands.

Prioritize Key Resource Issues.

The bill should be strategic and direct higher percentage of resources to conservation issues of special significance using the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) and through the continuation of National NRCS Landscape Initiatives such as Longleaf Pine to achieve local and landscape-scale environmental benefits.

Forest Service land management- Environmental Safeguards

The Congress should resist the temptation to use the Farm Bill as a way of preventing public participation and review of federal forestry projects by short cutting the National Environmental Policy Act procedures that allow transparency and local participation in decision making. We firmly believe that better forestry decisions are made when public discourse, collaboration and participation are encouraged through the NEPA process. The NEPA process ensures that local citizens, counties and others, as well as the best available science, are used to inform decisions that can have lasting impact on our forests.

Forest Service land management - Negotiated Agreements

Similarly, if legislation is considered that encourages the use of arbitration to determine US Forest Service forestry decisions, the process must allow the deciding officers to engage the participants in negotiations to come up with new and better decisions than those that may have been previously offered by proponents or the agency. Negotiation, especially when built on collaboration, can allow for better decisions, and these decisions may be able to span much larger forest areas to increase efficiency.

Encourage Conservation of Significant and Sensitive Habitat.

Maintain conservation compliance to prevent conversion of significant and sensitive habitats.

Improve Water Quality and Supply.

Encourage forest practices that reduce the amount of pollutants entering our waterways and promote sustainable water management for people and nature, especially in drought-prone areas.

Promote Climate Action.

Forests are vital for so many purposes, and that includes the natural carbon sequestration and water filtering that are vital to mitigate climate stresses. Maintaining productive and profitable forests helps our Nation keep forests as forests, so they are not converted to other purposes that lose these properties. Such investments provide many benefits to landowners, to water and

wildlife users, and are cheaper than other forms of climate mitigation.

Improve Conservation Outcomes.

Strengthen conservation outcomes of Farm Bill programs by refining implementation of those programs based on monitoring results and science-based assessment methods.

Maintain Healthy and Resilient Forests.

Increase the long-term protection of forest resources and their benefits from threats such as catastrophic wildfire, insects, and diseases, and promote the use of fire as an important forest management tool with the goal of maintaining healthy and resilient forests.

Support Research and Science

The Farm Bill provides some essential forest science support, and it also has programs and practices that rely on good science to foster efficient and useful forestry. Science support is a vital federal function.

Private Forests -- Specific Recommendations:

1. Create incentives for increasing prescribed burning and other forest management on state and private forests and grasslands by formally addressing challenges to using prescribed burning. Prioritize projects that use prescribed burning and other forest management activities funded through Conservation Title programs, including EQIP, HFRP, CRP, among others.
2. Enhance water sources by enhancing forest health and resilience:
 - There are many federal departments and agencies, as well as other governmental levels, many industrial sectors, and more, that all have a role to play in improving water sources. Provision of water quality and quantity are two critical benefits provided by well-managed forests, and are thus a key justification to keeping forests on the landscape. There is need for dedicated programs and policy to be built around combining federal and bringing non-federal financial resources to bear in assisting those who manage forested water resources that impact the public at large. The overarching goal would be to incentivize maintenance of forest cover on the landscape, including implementation of silvicultural best management practices, while reducing potential impacts to water resources through fire and disease risk reduction. We believe that the Farm Bill should require the Secretary of Agriculture to establish a federal government-wide technical and policy working group, with key science, economics, industry and citizen participation, to produce a plan within 18 months that identifies existing, and recommends additional, federal and private sector funding and cost share efforts that provide forest land owners resources to implement management actions that protect downstream water quality and enhance regulated flows of flood waters. The report will evaluate costs and benefits of forest treatments, and evaluate potential impacts on water users, including agricultural producers and municipal consumers.

- Amend Farm Bill authorities to allow aggregation of landowners or municipal water organizations to participate in forestry that enhances water sources. We recommend amending conservation program authority, including RCPP, to allow NRCS to pilot test concept of aggregating financial assistance payments in priority landscapes to a landowner cooperative or similar non-governmental entity, where the aggregation allows leveraging of non-governmental organization and/or water utility funds for practices that enhance or maintain water quality and quantity from forested landscapes
 - Investigate ways to enhance Rural Development authorities to include improvements to forest practices and stimulate forest related business that are a major part of many rural economies. Practices that improve water quality and delivery, *and* increase rural jobs, should be encouraged.
 - Develop a Forest and Water Fund (modeled off RCPP) to support forest watershed restoration and conservation projects with the objective of protecting drinking water and mitigating the risks of water extremes (flooding/drought) for downstream users. Funding can be made available with support from the Conservation, Forestry, Rural Development, and Research Titles and leveraged from non-federal funding sources. This fund could additionally support outreach, education and enrollment of targeted landowners, and for community planning to identify high-priority watersheds for investment.
3. Reauthorize HFRP and amend the program to 1) dedicate mandatory annual funding, 2) allow third party easements, 3) allow donated easements to serve as matches, 4) expand to include threatened and endangered species, and 5) identify water protection as a specific objective for HFRP funding.
 4. Develop a 5-year dedicated National Reforestation Initiative to incentivize reforestation within priority areas experiencing forest loss
 5. Include an LWCF provision allowing third parties to receive Forest Legacy grants to purchase, hold and manage conservation easements within federally-designated project areas. This new approach will create efficiencies in collaborating with third parties, by reducing costs for easement management and monitoring, and enhance states' role in federal conservation efforts, among many other benefits.
 6. Fully consider commercially viable forest land within the NRCS Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) and the Healthy Forest Reserve Program. Forest products are an important use that should be encouraged, so we support removal of the 2/3 forested acreage limitation that currently exists for the ACEP program, which has limited forest enrollment.

National Forests -- Specific Recommendations:

While the intent of the Farm Bill is to primarily focus on non-federal land policies, the bill also can be used to advance national forest policy. The Conservancy supports the following

1. Create an Accelerated Landscape Scale Restoration authority through a pilot program that would accelerate the pace of forest and watershed restoration, improve the resiliency of forest ecosystems, and better manage the threat of large fires in fire-prone western forests and address other forest challenges.
2. Extend and expand the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration (CFLR) program. There are 23 signature CFLR restoration projects in 14 states covering over 17 million acres. The Conservancy would like to see this program extended to 2024 and expanded to allow up to 5% of funds for planning, encourage private investments, encourage coordination with opportunities for cross-boundary impact (possibly by leveraging the Good Neighbor Authority or other cross-boundary authorities) where appropriate, and increase the authorized funding level to \$80 million.
3. Improve the U.S. Forest Service Good Neighbor Authority, by allowing road access, and Stewardship Contracting authority, by allowing at least 5% of retained receipts for planning and NEPA for future stewardship projects within the same region/forest, with an appropriate tracking mechanism.
4. Any fire funding solution in a Farm Bill package must be comprehensive by including the following three criteria: 1) address the continued erosion of agency budgets that results from the increasing ten-year average, and stabilize the level of funding for suppression within the agencies; 2) access disaster funding for extraordinarily costly fires, including those that may be calculated as part of the ten-year average; and 3) significantly reduce the need to transfer from non-suppression accounts and programs.

TNC additionally supports a legislative remedy to disconnected and isolated parcels of land in Georgia's Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest, by including the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest Land Adjustment Act (S. 571, H.R. 1434) to establish a "modified land exchange," whereby the USFS can sell these isolated parcels (30 totaling 3,841 acres; as identified in the legislation). Proceeds from the sale of these parcels will go into a federal account that the agency may use only to buy critical inholdings from willing sellers. The funds could only be spent inside the existing USFS proclamation boundary in Georgia – they could not be used to "grow" the forest beyond that boundary.

IV. Conclusion

We greatly appreciate the opportunity to participate in this hearing and in the open, thoughtful legislative process the Committee has provided. We know that investments in conservation provide the Nation with many benefits. Nature's solutions are important for nature, but they are also fundamental to our agricultural, ranching and forest industries and cultures.

Summary of TNC main points regarding Forestry:

1. Maintain funding for conservation and related programs that help forests and forest landowners, as well enhance the lasting benefits that forests provide, including rural jobs, quality water, fish and wildlife habitat, and open space that helps mitigate climate change.
2. Allow forest landowners continued and enhanced participation in Farm Bill programs like other producers.
3. Support strategic programs that can provide large landscape scale benefits through focused activity, especially the Regional Conservation Partnership Program and related landscape efforts, including the Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership.
4. Maintain and enhance vital forestry research and science capacity and their roles in sound management of America's lands and waters.
5. Support legislative provisions that enhance collaborative forestry, maintain NEPA and other bedrock environmental legal procedures, and provide for continued and enhanced participation of the public, industries, and local governments.
6. Pass a comprehensive federal fire suppression funding fix that includes 3 critical properties:
 - (a) addresses the continued erosion of agency budgets that results from the increasing ten-year average;
 - (b) accesses disaster funding for extraordinarily costly fires;
 - (c) end the need to transfer funds from non-fire suppression accounts and programs.

Appendix

Stewardship Contracting and Agreements

Case Study Examples TNC use of Stewardship Contracting and Agreements;

We attach short example case studies showing how TNC staff and partners are using the stewardship contracting and agreement authority to improve forest health and local community resilience. TNC is just one of a great number of organizations and institutions using these authorities.

Florida and Longleaf Pine:

In a landscape where industry attitudes have considered federal lands as inaccessible and merely “in the way” of their route to private lands with a stable wood supply, contractors and loggers are beginning to have a different view in Florida. The Nature Conservancy’s Stewardship agreements on the Osceola National Forest have resulted in multiple active logging crews working simultaneously throughout each of the past four years. Use of stewardship has allowed the forest to reach its annual board feet targets, while at the same time concentrate on areas most vulnerable to wildfire on the forest. Stewardship agreements have been a tool that have assisted wildfire mitigation programs such as the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration (CFLR) program, with the most highly vulnerable areas being prioritized for stewardship and wildfire mitigation activities.

In summary, stewardship has:

- Allowed for increased harvest and thus access for the private forestry sector to federal timberlands
- Increased employment for loggers, timber contractors, road construction, and other contractors that are performing vegetation management and other services that are part of the stewardship agreement.
- Allowed for accelerated restoration of longleaf pine as well as fish habitat enhancement and erosion control activities.
- Supported the development of a job training program that recruits underserved youth to implement management activities on the Osceola.
- Expanded the footprint of prescribed fire and supporting mechanical vegetative activities
- Increased habitat for targeted endangered and species of conservation concern such as red-cockaded woodpecker and gopher tortoise

These activities have been possible due to the approval of a forest-wide NEPA and without the need for additional federal appropriations due to use of revenue from stewardship sales

Michigan and Ottawa National Forest

The Nature Conservancy’s Michigan Chapter entered into its first Stewardship Agreement with Ottawa National Forest in July 2016. The largest project is aimed at larger scale restoration and planting of 1200 acres of degraded riparian areas along cold and cold transitional streams to

protect cold water refugia for cold water species like brook trout, this project that TNC plans to complete in three years would take the Forest Service 20 years to complete in house. Other projects include natural regeneration of a Jack Pine stand, maintenance and rehabilitation of 7.5 miles of wilderness area trails, and the replacement of a foot bridge stream crossing along the North Country Trail.

Ashland, OR Forest Resiliency Stewardship Project (Southern Oregon fire risk reduction)

Use of the Stewardship Authority on the Ashland Forest Resiliency project, through the Rogue River – Siskiyou National Forest has fostered a high functioning partnership with the City of Ashland, Lomakatsi Restoration Project, and TNC. Early collaborative implementation successes helped attract an additional \$7.5 million in Forest Service investments, along with a designation as a Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership which leveraged \$4 million in funding from the Natural Resources Conservation Service to create a public-private partnership working cross boundary. More recently, the partners secured an award of \$6 million from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, taking the all-lands project to nearly 14,000 acres of treatment to reduce forest land community risks across the 54,000-acre planning area. The City of Ashland has also delivered an ongoing annual commitment of \$175,000 in City restoration funds from a new water service surcharge spent on the USFS lands. The project has treated 6600 acres to date, delivered 14 MMBF of timber to mills, generating \$5.9 million in wood value, while sustaining ~17 FTE jobs, and as many as 100 FTE annually considering indirect and induced work supporting restoration and milling.

Arizona Four Forest Restoration Initiative (4FRI)

The stewardship contracting authority is being used to implement the largest restoration effort in Forest Service history – The Four Forest Restoration Initiative, a project funded under the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program. Over 500,000 acres of ponderosa pine forest have been cleared for thinning in Arizona through the NEPA process, and another 1.2 million acres will be cleared within two years. The project enjoys considerable public support with more than 40 stakeholder groups collaboratively developing recommendations to the Forest Service.

Continued losses of forest from large, catastrophic fires will have real economic and ecological impacts on water supplies and jobs. There is an urgent need to increase the pace and scale of restoration. The stewardship contracting authority provides the certainty and flexibility needed to attract private investment, which is critical for rebuilding industry, creating jobs, and accelerating restoration.

Under a 20,000-acre stewardship agreement signed in March of 2017, The Nature Conservancy, Forest Service, and industry are working to catalyze fundamental change. We are bringing

together strategic partnerships, advanced technology, and new business practices to attract new investment, sustain existing investments in wood products, and create a more reliable flow of wood at a reasonable cost and at a scale large enough to make a difference. We are working to develop technological innovations that increase agency capacity; remove agency disincentives to innovation that reduce costs and streamline processes; and are working with industry to reduce costs so that small-diameter wood can be removed economically. There is an urgent need to modernize the agency model for managing our forests. Tools such as CFLR and Stewardship Contracting authority provide unique and valuable vehicles for collaborative innovation and developing a new model of forest management that leverages strategic partnerships to increase the pace and scale of forest restoration.

Klamath, OR Tribal and Forest Service Partnership effort with a Master Stewardship Agreement

Through established strategic partnerships with The Klamath Tribal, and Lomakatsi Restoration Project (Lomakatsi) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC), have initiative a strategic collaboration to restore forested ecosystems in south-Central Oregon, is building additional capacity within the Tribes Natural Resources Department, creating sustainable job opportunities with a focus on tribal members, and engaging in ecological forestry and ecosystem restoration on the Klamath Reservation Forest and ancestral lands. The Master Stewardship Agreement, executed in September of 2011, put into place a ten-year framework for landscape restoration activities through the planning and development of Supplemental Project Agreements. The area of focus is the approximate 1.7 million acres of the Fremont-Winema National Forest which includes the 1.1 million acres of former reservation land and ancestral lands.

Since the spring of 2011 through the spring of 2017, 29 Klamath tribal workers have been involved in a variety of ecological restoration training and employment opportunities working across private and federal lands. Over the past five years, tribal workers have engaged in peer and mentor training, learning the skills to conduct a variety of ecological restoration prescriptions – forest thinning, prescribed fire application, native grass seeding, tree and shrub planting, riparian restoration, cultural monitoring, and project layout, marking and design. The partnership has leveraged over 2.2 million dollars to support this training and employment program across private, municipal and federal lands.

Conservation in the Farm Bill

WORKING TOGETHER TO PROTECT LAND AND IMPROVE WATER AND HABITAT

The Farm Bill is the nation's largest investment supporting the voluntary and successful conservation, restoration and management of America's private lands. These activities are critical to a strong economy, healthy and productive rural lands, and thriving communities.

Seventy percent of the land in the lower 48 states is privately owned. Nearly 900 million acres (roughly half of the land in the contiguous United States) are cropland, rangeland or pastureland and eligible for Farm Bill programs.

The Farm Bill is the most important legislation for conserving private lands in America. It provides farmers, ranchers and forest landowners with the tools necessary to protect and conserve not only the land, but also their way of life. These practices result in cleaner water, healthy soils, enhanced wildlife habitat, outdoor recreation opportunities and increased flood control.

Our country's forests are a vital natural resource, and a strong Farm Bill ensures our national and private forests remain healthy and productive. Our forest lands—whether federal, state, or private—are huge economic drivers in many communities. We all benefit from healthy forests and the clean air and water, habitat, recreation, timber and forest products they provide.

The Nature Conservancy has a long history of working directly with farmers, ranchers and private forest landowners. We partner together across America to create conservation opportunities to build safer local communities and stronger rural economies.

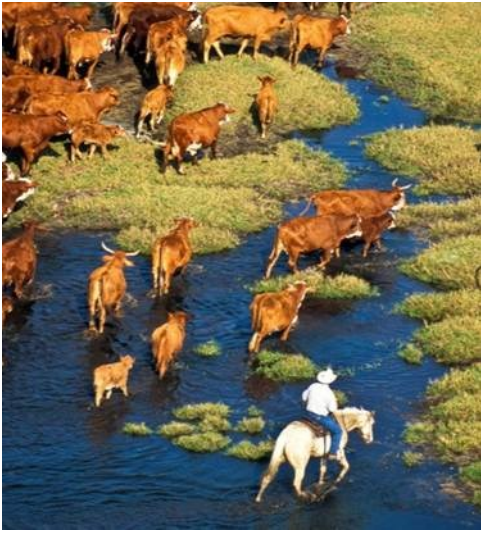
Farm Bill Funding

Funding for America's critical working lands has already been disproportionately cut. The next Farm Bill should increase funding so that the Conservation Title can continue meeting the needs of our farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners to ensure our country's food security and economic stability.

It is critically important that we restore the baseline funding for easement programs—the Agricultural Lands Easement (ALE) program and Wetlands Reserve Easement program (WRE)—to at least \$500 million a year.

Farm Bill conservation programs account for just 6 percent of Farm Bill funding. Congress should create and pass a Farm Bill that increases funding to the Conservation Title and avoids further cuts to the Forestry and Research Titles.

With more than \$6 billion already cut from conservation programs compared to authorized funding, conservation has already answered the call with more than its fair share for meaningful deficit reduction. Further cuts would gravely compromise the ability of conservation programs to accomplish their objectives and deliver multiple economic, conservation, and quality of life benefits to every region of America. Voluntary conservation works, and the results speak for themselves as the Conservation Title helps landowners maintain their legacy as stewards of America's working lands.



The Nature Conservancy's Top Farm Bill Priorities

Bolster Conservation Rewards and Incentives. Encourage farmers to conserve wetlands, grasslands and private forests. Congress can further incentivize these practices by increasing funding for the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), Healthy Forest Reserve Program (HFRP) and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP), and by maximizing investments in those programs through more efficient program delivery. Congress should also increase the acreage cap for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), and improve stewardship practices, technical assistance and cost-share programs on working agricultural and private forest lands.



Prioritize Key Resource Issues. Direct a higher percentage of Farm Bill resources to conservation issues of special significance via the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP) Program and the National NRCS Initiatives such as the Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI) and the Mississippi River Basin Initiative (MRBI) to achieve local and landscape-scale environmental benefits.



Encourage Conservation of Significant and Sensitive Habitat. Maintain conservation compliance to prevent conversion of significant and sensitive habitats, with a special emphasis placed on removing incentives to convert native prairie or grasslands to cropland.

Improve Water Quality and Supply. Reduce the amount of pollutants entering our waterways and promote sustainable water management for people and nature, especially in drought-prone areas.

Promote Soil Health. Create incentives for producers to adopt soil health practices that mutually benefit farmers, resource production and the ecosystems on which such productivity depends.



Improve Conservation Outcomes. Strengthen conservation outcomes of Farm Bill programs by refining implementation of those programs based on monitoring results and science-based assessment methods.

Maintain Healthy and Resilient Forests. Increase the long-term protection of forest resources and their benefits from threats such as catastrophic wildfire, insects and diseases, and promote the use of fire as an important forest management tool.

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