



Expanding Forest Conservation Easements

Recommendations for the upcoming Farm Bill

TITLE II: CONSERVATION

Keeping forests as forests can remove and store carbon from the atmosphere, benefit communities, and enrich the economy long-term.

Voluntary conservation easements are a critical tool to support sustainable forest management in the face of increasing land-use pressure and wildfire risk. Over half of all US forestland is privately owned, and landowners require improved easement options to keep forests intact, manage for resilience, and support ecosystem health while protecting forest revenue.

FOREST CONSERVATION CHALLENGES

- Increasing land-use pressure and wildfire risk make it challenging to preserve and manage forests.
- Existing conservation easements have narrow and onerous restrictions, limiting their reach.
- Current incentives for forest conservation easements are not attractive enough for landowners.

THE FARM BILL OPPORTUNITY

- Provide the financial incentives needed to keep forests as forests through improved conservation easements.
- Expand available options for forest conservation easements, similar to those available for agricultural land.
- Ensure that incentive structures can protect working forests long-term.

Absorb the Healthy Forest Reserve Program (HFRP) into a new Forest Conservation Easement Program (FCEP) to alleviate pressure to convert forests to non-forest land uses.¹

Voluntary conservation easements can ensure that private working forests remain intact long-term using sustainable management practices to sequester carbon, build resilience, and support

ecosystem health. Existing programs already support these goals, but face a series of programmatic restrictions limiting their impact on US forestlands.



- **Authorize \$100 million per year in additional mandatory funds** to prevent conversion of forests under FCEP, modeled after the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP).
- **Absorb HFRP into the new FCEP subprogram, Forest Reserve Easements (FRE), modeled after the ACEP Wetlands Reserve Easements.** FCEP-FRE should maintain HFRP language prioritizing carbon sequestration and supporting government-held easements with an emphasis on endangered species habitat and biodiversity.
- **Establish a second FCEP subprogram, Forest Land Easements (FLE), modeled after the ACEP Agricultural Land Easements.** FCEP-FLE should allow eligible entities like land trusts, state agencies, and other trusted actors to purchase easement titles from landowners with financial support from the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Working forestlands should be eligible for these entity-held easements.
- **Provide federal cost-share splits over 60%** for socially disadvantaged farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners under both subprograms.

¹ [Land Trust Alliance 2023 Farm Bill Recommendations](#)