

RVCC 2023 FARM BILL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNITY-BASED AND COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY

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Over the past two years, Congress has made historic investments in key RVCC priorities like wildfire mitigation, rural infrastructure, and climate resilience. As those resources become available, the reauthorization of the Farm Bill will play a critical role in ensuring agencies and partners have the tools they need to turn federal investments into meaningful outcomes for rural communities and landscapes.

To this end, RVCC's platform addresses what is a crucial yet unmet need for effective implementation of federal funding and programs at the local level: the capacity of community-based entities and partnerships. These local partners develop plans and projects, coordinate people and resources, and connect landowners and producers with funding opportunities – all activities that are instrumental in enabling rural communities to successfully access and utilize federal resources. The following recommendations outline a variety of strategies for Farm Bill programs and authorities to build the community-based capacities needed to maximize the local benefits of this important legislation.

1 Provide Dedicated Funding for Community-based and Collaborative Capacity: We propose developing a standalone program that funds community-based entities working on activities that increase capacity for collaborative conservation. We also propose providing the Forest Service - and the National Forest System in particular - with permanent authority to financially support the needs of collaboratives working on forest and grassland issues. Lastly, we support the modification of current programs and authorities to more deliberately incorporate or allow for funding of collaboration and baseline community capacity.

2 Reauthorize the Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership: The Farm Bill should reauthorize the Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership for five years and include the provision that 20% of the program's funding must be reserved for technical assistance, project development, and/or local capacity building.

- 3 Reauthorize the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP):** We propose the reauthorization of CFLRP through 2032 with a requirement that the Forest Service develop a staffing plan that provides support to the associated collaboratives. The Farm Bill should also include language encouraging the allocation of CFLRP funding towards non-Forest Service partners for the provision of crucial CFLRP collaborative support functions. Furthermore, Congress should consider piloting a new version of CFLRP that would allow successful CFLRP projects to develop CFLRP Management Plans that would serve as the applicable land and resource management plan for all CFLRP activities.
- 4 Improve Accessibility of the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP):** We propose several solutions that will increase RCPP's accessibility for smaller, community-based partners. This includes: 1) allowing for a percentage of RCPP funds to be utilized for partner administrative costs, 2) increasing flexibility in partner contribution requirements and eliminating the minimum partner contribution ratio, 3) increasing the program's Technical Assistance (TA) cap, 4) expanding the range of activities covered by TA funding to include capacity-building activities, 5) offering NRCS planning grants for prospective RCPP applicants, and 6) creating a pool of RCPP funding dedicated to small community-based partners and partners that work with historically underserved groups.
- 5 Make Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) More Inclusive:** We support expanding GNA's revenue retention authority to Tribal nations and counties, extending the sunset date for state revenue retention beyond 2023, and enabling GNA agreements and revenues to be used for workforce training and development that has direct benefits to restoration implementation.
- 6 Increase the Utility of Tribal Co-Management Authorities:** We support making the Tribal Forest Protection Act (TFPA) and "638" self determination contract authorities permanent, along with providing dedicated funding to TFPA 638 contracts. Additionally, it should be made explicit that funding other than appropriated dollars (such as stewardship retained receipts and K-V funds) can be used to fund 638 contracts. Lastly, we encourage modifications to the TFPA and 638 contracting authorities to make them more accessible to Alaska Native Tribes.
- 7 Expand Match Flexibility and Advance, Up-Front Funding Models:** We propose expanding match flexibility and reducing match and cost-share requirements for under-resourced communities and landowners, and partners that serve those entities, referring to language in the Inflation Reduction Act or the Forest Service's Interim Policy Direction as models. We also urge the consideration of opportunities to provide full advance payments (instead of reimbursement payments) for underserved producers/landowners or partners working with those producers/landowners.
- 8 Support Workforce Development through Locally-Driven Strategies:** We support several actions to drive the growth of the stewardship workforce, including: 1) revival of the [Forest Service's Economic Action Program](#), 2) support and funding for local businesses and community-based organizations to hire and train local restoration workforces, 3) alignment of existing authorities and funding for more comprehensive multi-year community economic development, 4) creation of a 21st Century Conservation Corps, 5) establishment of a State Prescribed Fire Assistance Program and budget line item to provide financial assistance for workforce, training, and planning, and 6) support for existing models of prescribed fire training.
- 9 Expand the Work of Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes (SWERIs) across the West:** The Agriculture and Interior Secretaries should be instructed to explore the creation of additional Ecological Restoration Institutes across the West. This exploration could consider creation of institutes in Idaho, Nevada, and Utah, as identified in PL 108-317, as well as the creation of institutes in Western states that are not identified in this legislation but have similar wildfire risk reduction and forest restoration needs. The establishment of new institutes should not come at the expense of funding for the three existing SWERIs.

2023 Farm Bill Funding Recommendations

Program	FY23 Enacted	FY24 Request	RVCC Farm Bill Request
New, Standalone Funding Program for Community-Based, Collaborative Capacity	N/A	N/A	\$10 million per program
Community Forest and Open Space Conservation	\$6 million	\$7 million	\$20 million
Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership	N/A	N/A	\$90 million
Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program	\$32 million	\$80 million	\$100 million
Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes	\$6.6 million	N/A	\$15 million
Landscape Scale Restoration	\$17 million	\$14 million	\$20 million
Regional Conservation Partnership Program	\$283 million	\$283 million	\$300 million
Environmental Quality Incentives Program	\$1.91 million	\$1.91 billion	\$2.025 billion
Conservation Stewardship Program	\$943 million	\$943 million	\$1 billion
Agricultural Conservation Easement Program	\$424 million	\$424 million	\$450 million
Healthy Forests Reserve Program (or equivalent program)	\$7 million	\$20 million	\$100 million
Community Wood Energy & Wood Innovation Program (Community Wood)	\$15 million	\$15 million	\$15 million
Wood Innovation Program	\$20 million	\$20 million	\$20 million
Implementation via Tribal authorities	N/A	N/A	\$11 million