

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.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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- 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.**

# WORKING LANDS CONSERVATION

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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 well-being 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

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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 projects <sup>1</sup>. 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. A revised and expanded **Community Wood Energy Program** and **Rural Energy for America Program** 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

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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 shared stewardship 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 continued 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.



US DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE	FY18 ACTUAL	FY19 PRESIDENT'S BUDGET	FY19 RVCC REQUEST
Regional Conservation Partnership Program <sup>2</sup>	\$354 (FMF)	\$188 <sup>3</sup>	\$368 (FMF)
Environmental Quality Incentives Program	\$1,766	\$1,766	\$1,766 (FMF)
Conservation Stewardship Program	Add 10 million acres annually (FMF)	Add 10 million acres annually (FMF)	Add 10 million acres annually (FMF)
Agricultural Conservation Easement Program	\$250 (FMF)	\$250 (FMF)	\$250 (FMF)
Healthy Forest Reserve Program	--	--	\$12 (FMF)
Community Wood Energy Program	--	--	\$50 (FMF)
Beginning Farmer & Rancher Development Program	--	--	\$20 (FMF)
Rural Business Development Program	\$34	--	\$65
Rural Energy for America Program	\$50	--	\$70

\*Dollar amounts in millions

Left cover photo by Bob Christensen

Right cover photo and page 3 photo by Emily Jane Davis

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.

2) Full mandatory funding (FMF) is based on a percentage of EQIP and CSP

3) Reduction based on proposed cut to CSP

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# COALITION PARTNERS

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## Alaska

Sitka Conservation Society  
Southeast Alaska Wilderness Exploration,  
Analysis, and Discovery  
Sustainable Southeast Partnership\*

## California

California Center for Rural Policy  
ForEverGreen Forestry  
Ore-Cal Resource Conservation and  
Development Area Council  
Sierra Institute for Community and Environment  
Skunk Ranch LLC  
Watershed Research and Training Center\*

## Colorado

Chooze Outdoors  
Coalition for the Upper South Platte  
Dolores Watershed Resilient Forest Collaborative  
FireWise of Southwest Colorado  
Grand County Wildfire Council  
Panadero Property Owners Association  
Public Lands Partnership  
San Miguel County Commissioner  
Southern Rockies Fire Science Network  
West Region Wildfire Council

## Idaho

Central Idaho Rangelands Network  
Framing Our Community  
Salmon Valley Stewardship\*

## Montana

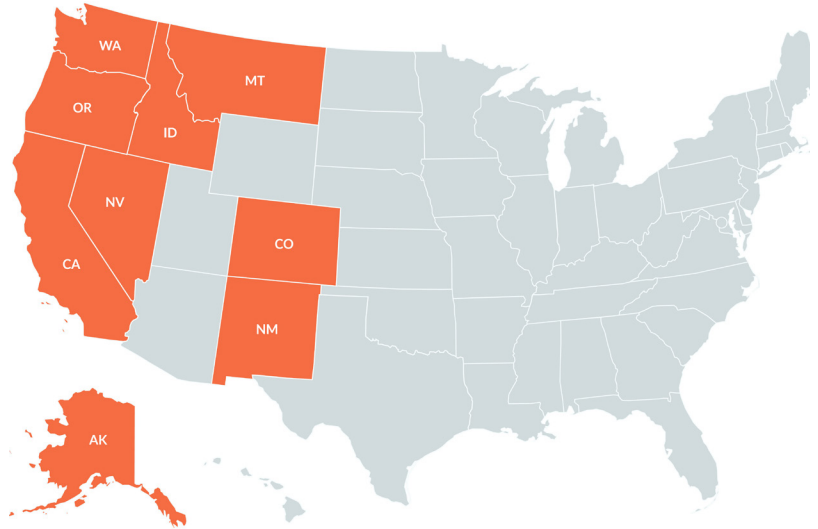
Flathead Economic Policy Center  
Heart of the Rockies Initiative\*

## Nevada

Boies Ranch

## New Mexico

Forest Stewards Guild\*  
Rocky Mountain Youth Corps  
Western Landowners Alliance



## Oregon

Applegate Partnership & Watershed Council  
Blue Mountain Forest Partners  
Ecosystem Workforce Program\*  
Lake County Resources Initiative  
Lomakatsi Restoration Project  
Pinchot Institute for Conservation  
Southern Oregon Forest Restoration Collaborative  
Southern Willamette Forest Collaborative  
Sustainable Northwest\*  
Wallowa Resources\*  
Western Environmental Law Center  
Wildland Fire Technologies, Inc.  
Suislaw Institute, Inc.\*

## Washington

Conservation Northwest  
Darrington Area Resources Advocates  
Darrington Strong  
Mount Adams Resource Stewards\*

\*Denotes RVCC Leadership Team member

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