

Dear Senator,

August 11, 2023

The undersigned organizations respectfully request that you **cosponsor the Forest Conservation Easement Program (FCEP) Act of 2023 (S. 2631)**, which was introduced by U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and U.S. Senator Roger Wicker (R-MS). We also urge you to support the inclusion of the FCEP Act in the conservation title of the Farm Bill with mandatory funding. The purpose of FCEP is to keep forests as forests through the use of conservation easements that purchase development rights from willing private and tribal landowners to prevent conversion to non-forest uses. Private forests in a conservation easement can remain privately owned and working.

FCEP is designed to:

- Significantly improve and enhance the ability of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to effectively conserve working forests at scale through conservation easements;
- Prioritize keeping forests as forests continuing to provide a multitude of environmental, economic, and societal benefits;
- Help landowners restore, enhance, and protect habitat for at-risk species while increasing carbon sequestration; and
- Provide landowners with two proven options for placing voluntary conservation easements on their land, with one held by the federal government and one held by eligible entities and land trusts.

It accomplishes this via two program components: **Forest Land Easements** (modeled after Agricultural Land Easements under NRCS's Agricultural Conservation Easement Program) and **Forest Reserve Easements** (as the successor to NRCS's Healthy Forests Reserve Program).

Under **Forest Land Easements (FLE)**, eligible entities such as land trusts, state and local agencies, and tribes, purchase working forest conservation easements from private and tribal landowners. Landowners may continue to manage their land as a working forest. NRCS will provide up to 50 percent of the fair market value for the purchase of the easement, with the remaining share coming from any combination of cash resources from the entity, landowner donation/bargain sale, and costs associated with the acquisition of the easement. In the case of forests of special environmental significance or land owned by historically underserved landowners, NRCS will provide up to 75 percent of the fair market value. Under the proposal, 10 percent of total FCEP funding in each fiscal year would be directed towards enrolling land owned by historically underserved landowners.

Under **Forest Reserve Easements (FRE)**, NRCS helps landowners restore, enhance, and protect forest resources by purchasing easements on private and tribal lands, while allowing landowners to continue working forest production and related uses. Enrolled land will be subject to a forest

reserve easement plan that describes the practices and measures necessary to restore, maintain, and enhance habitat for at-risk species. Landowners will also have the option to enter into safe harbor agreements or similar assurances to avoid future regulatory restrictions on the use of that land under the Endangered Species Act. NRCS will purchase permanent easements from the landowner for fair market value of the easement and will provide financial assistance up to 100 percent of the eligible costs of practices and measures identified in the forest reserve easement plan. Financial assistance for 30-year easements and contracts will be 75 percent of that which would be paid for a permanent easement. Under the proposal, 10 percent of total FCEP funding in each fiscal year would be directed towards enrolling land owned by historically underserved landowners.

To cosponsor the FCEP Act of 2023 (S. 2631), please contact Claire Descamps (claire\_descamps@gillibrand.senate.gov) in Senator Gillibrand's office or Mikhail Love (mikhail\_love@wicker.senate.gov) in Senator Wicker's office. For more information about FCEP, visit [www.foresteasement.org](http://www.foresteasement.org).

Signed,

Adirondack Land Trust, NY

Agricultural Stewardship Association, NY

Alachua Conservation Trust, FL Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley, VA  
American Bird Conservancy, National

American Chestnut Land Trust, MD American Forest Foundation, National  
American Forest Management, National

American Forests, National Appalachian Mountain Club, Eastern U.S.  
Appalachian Trail Conservancy, National  
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, National  
Backcountry Hunters & Anglers, National  
Bayou Land Conservancy, TX  
Bitter Root Land Trust, MT  
BLAC Land Trust, Southeast  
Blue Ridge Land Conservancy, VA

Boone and Crockett Club, National

Brunswick-Topsham Land Trust, ME

Caddo Lake Institute, TX/LA

Capital Region Land Conservancy, Mid-Atlantic

Carbon180, National

Catoctin Land Trust, MD

Catch-A-Dream Foundation, MS

Center for Large Landscape

Conservation, MT

Central Virginia Land Conservancy, VA

Chesapeake Conservancy, Mid- Atlantic  
Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts, OR

Coastal Rivers Conservation Trust,

ME

Colorado Open Lands, CO

Columbia Land Trust, OR/WA

Congressional Sportsmen's

Foundation, National

Conservation Florida, FL

Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast, FL

Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports, National Defenders of Wildlife, National Delta Waterfowl,  
National

Ducks Unlimited, National

Dutchess Land Conservancy, Inc., NY

Eagle Valley Land Trust, CO Environmental Real Estate Solutions, NY

Estes Valley Land Trust, CO

Florida Conservation Group, FL Florida Forestry Association, FL Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina, NC

Forest Society of Maine, ME Forever Maryland, MD

Forterra NW, WA

French & Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust, PA

Friends of the Mississippi River, MN Friends of Wilson Pond Area, Inc, ME

Galveston Bay Foundation, TX Gathering Waters: Wisconsin's Alliance of Land Trusts, WI

Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy, MI

Green Diamond Resource Company, National

Greenbelt Land Trust, OR

Groundswell Conservancy, WI HeadWaters Land Conservancy, MI Heart of the Lakes, MI

Houston Safari Club, TX

Hudson Highlands Land Trust, Inc., NY

Ice Age Trail Alliance, Inc., WI Idaho Forest Owners Association, Inc., ID  
Indiana Forestry & Woodland Owners Association, IN

Izaak Walton League of America, National  
Jamestown, Eastern U.S.  
Jefferson Land Trust, WA  
Kaniksu Land Trust, ID/MT Kennebec Land Trust, ME Kennebunkport Conservation Trust, ME

KKAC Organization, AR  
KWOA Kentucky Woodland Owners Association

L&C Carbon, OR  
Land Clinic, CA  
Land Trust Alliance, National Leavitt Lake Ranches, CA  
Leelanau Conservancy, MI  
Legacy Land Conservancy, MI  
Loon Echo Land Trust, ME Lowcountry Land Trust, SC  
Lyme Timber Company, National Mahoosuc Land Trust, Inc., ME Maine Appalachian Trail Land Trust, ME

Maine Coast Heritage Trust, ME

Manulife Investment Management Timberland and Agriculture, National  
Minority Outdoor Alliance, GA Mississippi Land Trust, MS/AR Mississippi River Trust, AR/MS/LA Mohonk  
Preserve, NY

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Montana Association of Land Trusts, MT

Mother Lode Land Trust, CA Mule Deer Foundation, National

National Alliance of Forest Owners, National

National Association of State

Foresters, National

National Bobwhite & Grassland Initiative Foundation, National

National Deer Association, National National Wild Turkey Federation, National  
National Woodland Owners Association, National

Natural Land Institute, IL Natural Lands, PA/NJ

New Jersey Conservation

Foundation, NJ

New River Land Trust, VA

North American Grouse Partnership, National

Northeast Carbon Alliance, Northeast Northern Neck Land Conservancy, VA  
Northern Prairies Land Trust, SD Northern Virginia Conservation Trust, VA

Northwest Arkansas Land Trust, AR Open Space Institute, Eastern U.S. Openlands, IL  
Orion: The Hunters Institute, MT Outdoor Alliance, National

Palmer Land Conservancy, CO Pheasants Forever, National  
Pines and Prairies Land Trust, MN

Pingree Associates, ME

Pope & Young Club, National

PotlatchDeltic, National

Potomac Conservancy,

MD/VA/WV/DC

Prairie State Conservation Coalition, IL

Putnam Land Conservancy, FL

Quail Forever, National

Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust, ME

Rensselaer Plateau Alliance, NY

Resource Management Service, LLC, National

Rhode Island Land Trust Council, RI Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, West  
Salisbury Association Land Trust, CT

Santa Fe Conservation Trust, NM Scenic Hudson, NY  
Scenic Rivers Land Trust, MD Seabcoo Regional Land Trust, ME

Sierra Cascade Land Trust Council, CA

Society for the Protection of NH

Forests, NH

Society of American Foresters, National

Somerset Woods Trustees, ME Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy, TN/NC  
Southern Virginia Land Conservancy, VA

Summit Land Conservancy, UT

Sustainable Forestry Initiative, National

Tall Timbers, FL

Texas Conservation Alliance, TX

Texas Land Trust Council, TX

The Carbon Fund, National

The Climate Trust, National

The Conservation Fund, National

The Frontera Land Alliance, TX/NM

The Nature Conservancy, National

The Vital Ground Foundation, MT

The Watershed Association, TX

The Westervelt Company, National

The Wildlife Society, National

Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, National

Trust for Public Land, National

Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust, NY

Unique Places to Save, National

Upper Saco Valley Land Trust, NH

Upstate Forever, SC

Valley Conservation Council, VA

Vinalhaven Land Trust Inc., ME

Washington Association of Land Trusts, WA

WeConservePA, PA

Western Foothills Land Trust, ME

Western New York Land Conservancy, NY

Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, PA

White Oak Initiative, Eastern U.S. Whitetails Unlimited, National

Wild Sheep Foundation, National Wildlife Forever, National

Wildlife Management Institute, National

Wildlife Mississippi, MS