



American  
Forest  
Foundation

## Priorities for the 2023 Farm Bill Reauthorization

### OVERVIEW

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The mission of the American Forest Foundation (AFF) is to deliver meaningful conservation impact through the empowerment of family forest owners. Working together, we strive to cultivate the many conservation benefits family-owned forests provide—and demonstrate their value to American communities, companies and landowners alike.

The following priorities reflect AFF's commitment to advocating for improved access and participation of family forest owners in the fight against climate change. Unlocking the climate potential of these landowners and their forests means providing technical and financial assistance that supports sustainable forest management and market development. Our commitment extends to advancing forest management practices and carbon markets through research, workforce capacity, and support for emerging forest products and environmental markets, particularly the voluntary carbon market.

### AFF PRIORITIES

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**Unlock private capital for family forest owners**

**Support the Inflation Reduction Act's Landscape Scale Restoration provisions**

**Empower small and underserved landowners**

**Ensure integrity in voluntary carbon markets**

**Expand the Wood Innovation Grant Program**

**Support wildfire mitigation on private lands**

**Reauthorize and streamline the Regional Conservation Partnership Program**

**Increase consulting and service forester capacity**

**Support reforestation and nursery capacity**

**Improve the Forest Inventory and Analysis Program**

**Reauthorize EQIP, CSP, CRP, Conservation Innovation Grants and the Renewable Resources Extension Act**

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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### Unlock private capital for family forest owners

A key priority for AFF is supporting active forest management and providing tools to help keep family-owned forests healthy and keep trees on the land. The next Farm Bill should reflect the opportunity for family forest owners to add value to their timber investments through the generation and sale of carbon offsets. To this end, AFF supports unlocking private capital by de-risking investments for private investors through traditional loans, bond and loan guarantees, and other innovative financing instruments. The incorporation of such provisions in the Farm Bill — like the Rural Forest Markets Act — is essential to enabling the use of private capital to fund the significant upfront costs of forestry actions that in some cases take decades to produce carbon that can be sold.

### Support the Inflation Reduction Act's Landscape Scale Restoration provisions

The Landscape Scale Restoration provisions of the Inflation Reduction Act are critical to increasing access to environmental service markets for family forest owners. In particular, voluntary carbon markets provide a clear pathway for forest owners to benefit financially while playing a critical role in climate mitigation. As we continue conversations with the U.S. Forest Service, AFF supports opportunities through the Farm Bill to improve deployment of these funds.

### Empower small and underserved landowners

The Inflation Reduction Act also provides additional funding for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program — two cost share programs small forest landowners rely on to provide critical funding for forest management and to improve habitat on their lands. AFF supports provisions in the Farm Bill to increase program allocations for socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers and ensure family forests continue to be represented.

### Ensure integrity in voluntary carbon markets

In order to protect family forest owners participating in carbon markets, AFF supports Farm Bill provisions that promote standards for high-quality offsets, instill market certainty, and legitimize scientifically rigorous registries and verification bodies.

### Expand the Wood Innovation Grant Program

AFF supports language in the Farm Bill that enhances the Wood Innovation Grant Program to further recognize embodied carbon in wood products, increase the current investment cap and reduce current match requirements.

### Support wildfire mitigation on private lands

Family-owned lands in the western United States make up a sizeable proportion of high-risk forested acres, making treatment of these forests a priority to address the full scope of wildfire risk mitigation. AFF supports the development of consensus policy recommendations in the Farm Bill that direct cross-boundary mitigation resources to family forest owners.

## Reauthorize and streamline the Regional Conservation Partnership Program

Current administrative processes have hindered the potential of RCPP to create a pathway for innovative public-private partnerships across regional landscapes. AFF supports new Farm Bill provisions that better assist family forest owners by providing the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) the authority to implement administrative flexibility around certain percentages required to be spent on financial assistance, technical assistance, and other categories as well as for recipients to use authorities beyond those available in existing NRCS conservation programs (e.g., EQIP). Authorization for flexible reimbursement from NRCS is also necessary to allow partners to more efficiently scale and recruit project participants across a region, providing technical and financial assistance to participants that ultimately meet eligibility criteria as opposed to determining each landowner's eligibility prior to their participation.

Lawmakers should also prioritize streamlining administrative processes around the RCPP Alternative Funding Arrangements (AFA) to be more aligned with other Title II programs. AFF supports accompanying report language in the Farm Bill that will:

### ***Reduce long paperwork processes***

RCPP agreements are tied up due to confusion about terms, authorities, and compliance requirements. While state NRCS leads are the main point of contact for RCPP AFA recipients, national NRCS staff need to provide final guidance and programmatic clarity. Waiting for information to be relayed between state and national NRCS staff has driven delays in project implementation.

### ***Remove administrative requirements***

Several administrative requirements are also unintentionally delaying the ability of recipients to scale targeted conservation impacts and develop innovative financing opportunities. Key examples include a one-to-one match requirement, archaeology and biology surveys needed for every treated property, treatments needing to meet existing NRCS practice standards at the interpretation of local NRCS staff, and funding needing to be distributed on first come, first serve basis instead of allowing for strategic treatment distribution based on modeling.

### ***Address NEPA compliance issues***

Congress should allow targeted relief from National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance on RCPP activities. Whether conservation activities are covered as approved NRCS practices is up to interpretation and the discretion of local NRCS leads, which can be problematic for a project spanning multiple states and leads.

## Increase consulting and service forester capacity

A common issue across forestry and conservation organizations is a lack of foresters to provide forest management expertise and services to landowners. With the heightened demand due to wildfires, domestic wood product needs, and landowners seeking forest management plans, the industry has reached a critical shortage of foresters that needs to be addressed. AFF supports the development of consensus policy recommendations in the Forests in the Farm Bill Coalition that address increased forester capacity.

## Support reforestation and nursery capacity

Millions of acres of forest land are lost annually to wildfire or other natural disasters and the current rate of loss is outpacing the nation's public and private nursery capacity and seedling supply. AFF supports the advancement of provisions to prioritize reforestation and support more investment and direct assistance to public and private nurseries.

## Improve the Forest Inventory and Analysis Program

AFF supports the full funding of FIA at \$103 million, bringing the program in line with historical levels. However, we recognize that executing this funding priority may not be within the scope of a Farm Bill. Therefore, the upcoming Farm Bill, AFF supports mandating FIA to develop a new strategic plan – to be drafted in concert with external stakeholders that addresses the following improvements:

### ***Increase FIA's workforce capacity***

A lack of staff and resources has prevented the program from meeting its 5-year plot remeasurement cycle, standing up a dedicated forest carbon monitoring program, and supporting more responsive data-sharing with the private sector.

### ***Empower more efficient data-sharing***

The ad-hoc nature of FIA fulfilling complex data requests from the public has led to some outside groups having greater access to critical datasets than others. AFF also supports generating consensus in the forest policy space around Farm Bill language to create an externally facing office within FIA tasked with meeting direct data requests from individual, outside organizations.

### ***Leverage public and private data collection***

Establishing protocols for combining FIA data with new sources of satellite, LiDAR, and other remote sensing technologies will amplify the benefits and utility of FIA data and allow for great strides in expanded coverage, analysis, and small area estimation.

### ***Enhance accuracy of data through improved measurement cycles***

To sustain and improve its dataset, more aggressive forest remeasurement cycles should be adopted by FIA that recognize geographies and landscapes that experience more rapid changes from development, climate change, and other forces.

## Reauthorize EQIP, CSP, CRP, Conservation Innovation Grants and the Renewable Resources Extension Act

AFF supports the development of consensus policy recommendations through the Forests in the Farm Bill Coalition that address these program improvements and reauthorizations.

## QUESTIONS?

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