

August 15, 2018

The Honorable Pat Roberts, Chairman
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and
Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building,
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow, Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and
Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building,
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Michael Conaway, Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Collin Peterson, Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Roberts and Conaway and Ranking Members Stabenow and Peterson,

The undersigned organizations representing millions of forest owners, conservationists, hunters, anglers, forest products manufacturers, and natural resource professionals participating in the Forests in the Farm Bill coalition (FIFB), wish to thank you for incorporating a number of the coalition's private forest policy recommendations in each chamber's proposal for the 2018 Farm Bill.

As the conference committee meets to consider a path toward merging these two bills, the FIFB coalition wanted to highlight some key provisions and funding levels that are imperative to the completed 2018 Farm Bill. To assist the committee in its work assembling a conference report, the coalition has once again attached our recommendations, and would like to highlight a few policy issues we find the committee would be well served by considering.

Conservation Programs

With the differing approaches taken by the two chambers on conservation funding in Title II, the FIFB coalition wanted to reiterate the need for supporting forest conservation with adequate funding in these programs. The coalition recommendation is to at least maintain the baseline funding presently available in the conservation title to advance conservation efforts nationwide.

The coalition was pleased to see that both bills increased total enrollment acreage in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The coalition supports a middle ground for a level of acreage increase for CRP that can be accomplished without lowering program participation. The coalition also cautions that provisions limiting CRP re-enrollment by forest type sets a challenging precedent that could cause perverse reactions to the program's conservation intent. We believe that the same treatment should be given to hardwood and softwood trees.

We would also like to applaud both Committees for recognizing importance of the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP) and ensuring that Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)s continue to receive funding at their current levels.

The coalition finds both bills could be further strengthened to better support forests in conservation programs, including: providing \$12M in mandatory funding for the Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP); providing \$12M in mandatory funding for the BioBased Markets Program; and providing \$3M in mandatory funding for the Biomass Research and Development Program. Additionally, the coalition applauds the House for its language that funds the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) at \$500M and provides additional flexibility to the program.

Markets and Jobs

Both the Senate and the House clearly placed effort into supporting markets for wood products. The coalition is appreciative of efforts to ensure check-off program authority is maintained and wood products are not disadvantaged in federal procurement. With respect to Timber Innovation Act (H.R. 1380/S. 538.) provisions, we would recommend the conference report adopt the Senate's language which includes both the Research and Wood Innovation Grant provisions of the legislation. The coalition applauds the House for including language to expand program authorities and increase the authorization for the Community Wood Energy Program (CWEP) to assist in lowering the cost of forest management for all landowners, private, corporate, and government, and helping to build resilient forests across all ownerships in the nation. We respectfully request that the Committee accept the House language on CWEP as an effective tool in improving forest health as well as promoting economic development in rural areas.

Keeping Forests as Forests

The coalition requests the Committee include the House's language supporting a National Reforestation Initiative. We would further suggest the Conference Report adopt language commissioning a government-wide technical and policy working group to produce a report outlining resources available to private landowners, from both the government and private sectors, that could assist in implementing management actions that regulate flood waters and protect water supplies.

Fire and Forest Health

In concert with the comprehensive wildfire funding fix that Congress approved earlier this year, both Committees have worked to further address challenges to forest health by building fire resiliency. The coalition thanks the Committees for their work to increase funding for landscape scale restoration and cross-boundary hazardous fuels projects. The coalition strongly urges the Committee to adopt the House bill's provision with respect to codification of the Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR) program, with language that mirrors the Empowering State Forestry to Improve Forest Health Act (H.R. 4976 / S. 962). The House language would ensure program investments are targeted at the highest landscape priorities within collaboratively-developed State Forest Action Plans

While both bills have answered our call to permit \$20M of the funding made available to the Forest Service for hazardous fuels abatement to be used across property lines, the House language goes a bit further to ensure that 20 percent of funding over \$300M in this account would be authorized for this purpose. We support the House's work to allow for cross-boundary use of 20 percent of the amount over \$300M or \$20M, whichever is greater, by states, private landowners, and non-governmental organizations. This approach will ensure that future funding increases can be prioritized to valuable cross-boundary work should it be the most effective way to address fire challenges.

Support Forest Research, Education, and Information Needs

We commend both the House and Senate in adopting language to encourage the Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) Program's use of remote sensing equipment, where appropriate. We would further encourage the Conference Report to include the House's report language prioritizing meeting FIA's 20 percent target plot re-measurement requirement, continuing the National Woodland Owner Survey, and implementing a nationwide, sample-based assessment with annual results reporting in the Timber Products Output program. Support for both McIntire-Stennis and Renewable Resources Extension Act (RREA) authorities was present in both bills, however the coalition would like to highlight the benefits of allowing tribal college eligibility in these programs.

Further, we would encourage the Conference Report to adopt language requiring decennial updates to State Forest Action Plans, with financial support through a funding authorization to assist agencies and partners with these plan updates.

Improve and Streamline Forest and Conservation Programs

Lastly, the coalition has considered the on-the-ground experiences of forest owners, conservationists, hunters, anglers, forest products manufacturers, and natural resource professionals when advocating for improvements to conservation program implementation—seeking to eliminate pain points for participants and maximize the effectiveness and efficiencies of these programs. As such, the coalition would like to highlight easy policy improvements to these programs to increase their efficacy.

The coalition believes continued funding for forest owner assistance in obtaining a clear land title, as well as estate planning that encourages long-term retention of forest land is critical to ensuring forests remain forests to provide their myriad public benefits. Conservation title programs would benefit from increasing payment limitations, which often bar or reduce program participation. The House bill made these changes, and we would encourage the Committee to ensure the Conference Report adopts this language. The Conference Report should allow the Secretary to waive adjusted gross income limitations (AGI) for conservation title programs where necessary to fulfill program objectives and address high priority, high impact conservation goals.

For landowners already enrolled in Conservation title programs, streamlining management plan requirements, which differ between the U.S. Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), would go a long way toward maximizing the effectiveness of these programs. Additionally, allowing NRCS to conduct a pilot test of a program to aggregate financial assistance payments in priority landscapes to a landowner cooperative or similar non-governmental entity that is contributing external funds to the project would encourage on-the-ground conservation by liberating individual landowners of the onerous requirements involved in enrolling in these programs. The House bill has incorporated both recommendations, and the coalition encourages their inclusion in the Conference Report.

We, once again, sincerely thank the Agriculture committee members and staff from both chambers who worked to include many of the coalition's provisions in their respective drafts.

Thank you again for your dedication to the 2018 Farm Bill. The Forests in the Farm Bill coalition is ready to assist you to ensure that the nation's private forest owners and the forest-dependent communities and industries they empower, have assurance that the tools that help keep private forests healthy and sustainable, will continue into the future.

Sincerely,

Aldo Leopold Foundation

American Forest Foundation

American Wood Council

Arkansas Forestry Association

Biomass Thermal Energy Council

Center for Invasive Species Prevention

American Chestnut Foundation

American Forests

Appalachian Mountain Club

Binational Softwood Lumber Council

CarbonVerde, LLC

Connecticut Forest & Park Association

Conservation Resources
Florida Forestry Association
Forestry Association of South Carolina
Hardwood Federation
Innovative Natural Resource Solutions LLC
Lignetics, Inc.
National Alliance of Forest Owners
National Association of Forest Service Retirees
National Association of University Forest Resources Programs
National Wild Turkey Federation
New Hampshire Sustainable Energy Association
Northern Forest Center
Oregon Small Woodlands Association
Resource Management Service, LLC
Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests
Southeastern Lumber Manufacturers Association
Texas Forestry Association
The Longleaf Alliance
The Nature Conservancy
The Trust for Public Land
Treated Wood Council
US Industrial Pellet Association
Virginia Forestry Association
Washington Farm Forestry Association
Western Pennsylvania Conservancy
Empire State Forest Products Association
Forest Resources Association
Hancock Natural Resource Group
Indiana Forestry & Woodland Owners Association
Kentucky Forest Industries Association
Louisiana Forestry Association
National Association of Conservation Districts
National Association of State Foresters
National Audubon Society
National Wooden Pallet & Container Association
New Hampshire Timberland Owners Association
Ohio Forestry Association, Inc.
Rayonier, Inc.
Sazerac Company
Society of American Foresters
Sustainable Northwest
The Forest Stewards Guild
The Lyme Timber Company
The Siuslaw Institute
The Westervelt Company, Inc.
Trees Forever
Vermont Woodlands Association
Walnut Council
Western Landowners Alliance
Wildlife Mississippi