



Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition FY 2014 Appropriations Priorities

The Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition (RVCC) strongly supports responsible federal investment in public programs that integrate ecological, economic, social and cultural values. At a time when the rising deficit is forcing cuts in government spending, law makers should allocate funding to programs that create the highest returns in both the short- and long-term. An investment in the people and landscapes of rural America will create robust returns and achieve economic and ecological resilience both locally and nationally through conservation and management of our Nation's forests, rangelands, watersheds, waterways, farms, and ranches.

Strengths of the President's FY2014 Budget Proposal

President Obama's FY2014 budget advances many priorities of the RVCC and demonstrates the Administration's dedication to strengthening our communities, creating sustainable economic growth and protecting our natural resources. The Administration recognizes the significant role that communities play in the management of our national forests and rangelands. This perspective is clear in the USDA Forest Service FY 2014 budget, which states "Community-based forestry is embedded in Forest Service culture...We are a community-based organization that collaborates with local communities and national partners to get our work done. Our FY 2014 budget request emphasizes the role that communities play in sustaining the forests and grasslands around them and the benefits they provide." The RVCC strongly supports the Administration and its desire to increasingly engage communities to restore our forests and rangelands and provide jobs and business opportunities in rural America.

Further, the Administration has taken important steps towards connecting the activities and goals of multiple budget line items to create a meaningful restoration-based agenda. By integrating budget line items relevant to

The RVCC believes that federal funds should be used to achieve environmental, social, and economic outcomes through:

- Restoration and stewardship of ecological integrity through collaborative, community-based management of forest and range landscapes;
- Promotion of local business ownership, contracting, training, and employment opportunities;
- Prioritization of programs and activities that support community-based organizations that integrate ecological restoration, stewardship and rural economic development;
- Integrated utilization of woody biomass for value-added products, including energy production;
- Protection of communities from catastrophic wildland fire through improved management techniques; and,
- Adaptation to and management of the impacts of climate change on public lands and rural communities.

landscape restoration, the Administration addresses the challenges of line-item budgeting and gives land managers more effective budget tools to achieve landscape scale restoration and stewardship objectives on the ground.

Budget proposal accomplishments include shifting emphasis within the Forest Service to restoration and stewardship and allowing the agency to focus resources in those areas by: (i) requesting funding for the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Fund; (ii) expanding the Integrated Resource Restoration budget line item pilot to implement efficiencies nationwide; and (iii) creating a Land Management

Working together to find policy solutions to the ecological and economic challenges of the rural West

RVCC is comprised of rural western, regional, and national organizations that have joined together to promote balanced conservation-based approaches to the ecological and economic problems facing the West. We are committed to finding and promoting solutions through collaborative, place-based work that recognizes the inextricable link between the long-term health of the land and well-being of rural communities. We come from Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon and Washington.



Planning, Assessment and Monitoring budget line item. By funding these integrated restoration activities, appropriators can support the Forest Service's comprehensive and dynamic approach to restoration resulting in the added benefits of ecosystem health, watershed protection and job creation.

Areas for Improvement in the President's FY2014 Budget Proposal

Although the RVCC is impressed by the significant restoration priorities within the President's budget, we believe there are also considerable absences that must be addressed. For example, the Presidential budget lacks strong socio-economic performance measures, such as tracking methods for adaptive capacity, economic impacts, social equity, and provision of ecosystem services. By measuring these categories, the Forest Service and BLM will be able to better document the federal government's role in fostering socio-economic resilience through land management.¹

We are also concerned that there continues to be a lack of funding in the President's budget to support community-based organization capacity building. Community-based organizations play a critical role in achieving conservation and economic development objectives by providing collaborative capacity needed to achieve management objectives on public and private lands, such as linking the stewardship objectives of government programs with private landowners.² We recommend that funding preferences should be given to collaboratively developed plans, proposals, and projects and those that recognize and support capacity building needs. Performance measures must be adopted to evaluate and incentivize collaborative land management efforts and their ecological, social and economic outcomes.

Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee

Our nation's public and private lands support vital natural systems that provide innumerable benefits, including clean air and water, renewable energy, timber resources and food supply. To protect and ensure these benefits over the long term, the primary focus of land management agencies should be the restoration and steward-

Key Recommendations for FY 2014

Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee

1. Fully fund the Forest Service Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration (CFLR) program (\$40.0 million).
2. Reauthorize the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (\$278.0 million in 2014, \$996.0 million over 5 years).
3. Expand and fund the Forest Service Integrated Resource Restoration (IRR) line item (\$756.8 million).
4. Fully fund the Forest Service Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program (\$4.0 million).
5. Fully fund the Forest Service's Woody Biomass Utilization Grant Program (\$6.0 million).
6. Require the Forest Service to award all contract and agreements related to IRR on a best value basis.

Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee

1. Reauthorize Stewardship End-result Contracting authority.
2. Reauthorize and fully fund essential private landowner conservation programs contained in the in the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 (Farm Bill).
3. Increase funding for NRCS Conservation Technical Assistance to ensure effective program implementation.
4. Enact and fully fund the NRCS Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative and dedicate a percentage of funding to capacity building and technical assistance provision.
5. Reauthorize and sufficiently fund the Forest Service Community Wood Energy Program (\$50.0 million).
- 6 . Designate collaboration and capacity building outcomes as priority preference criteria for allocation of grants, loans, and cost share for partnership programs in the Conservation Title of the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008.

ship of our nation's public lands and the provision of support for restoration and stewardship on private lands. Following are specific budget recommendations to support landscape scale restoration and stewardship by the land management agencies:

1. Fully fund the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration (CFLR) program (\$40.0 million).

Created in 2009, the CFLR program has fostered collaborative restoration on 23 forest landscapes across the country, providing nearly 8,000 jobs; improved 537,000 acres of wildlife habitat; and reduced hazardous fuels on 383,000 acres near communities.³ This program supports large-scale forest restoration by providing matching funds for projects proposed through multi-stakeholder planning at the local level. The CFLR program has demonstrated its ability to improve forest health and provide jobs and essential services to rural communities. We strongly recommend that Congress build on this early success and fund the CFLR program at \$40.0 million in FY 2014.

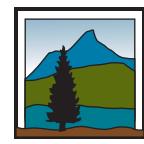
2. Reauthorize the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 (SRS Act), P.L. 106-393 (\$278.0 million in 2014, \$996.0 million over 5 years).

Since 2000, the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act has provided much-needed support to rural counties whose economies are historically dependent on timber harvest revenue from public lands. By reauthorizing this Act for 5 years starting in FY 2013, the federal government will directly support education, infrastructure needs and job creation in economically depressed regions across the country. We support an FY 2014 payment of \$278 million.

3. Expand and fund the Forest Service Integrated Resource Restoration (IRR) line item (\$756.8 million).

The RVCC supports the nationwide expansion of the 3-year IRR pilot study approved in the FY2012 Consolidated Appropriations Act. At the conclusion of the first year, the IRR pilot performed very well, meeting or exceeding allocated targets⁴ in all areas, except for timber volume sold, which was 82 percent of the target volume.⁵ Further, we commend the Forest Service on its continued effort to enhance its communication around the IRR pilot by hosting public webinars. As information is gathered from the

IRR pilots, we recommend that the agency apply lessons learned and opportunities for improvement to the national IRR program. We support full funding of the nationwide IRR within the Forest Service budget at \$756.8 million.



4. Fund the Forest Service Land Management Planning, Assessment and Monitoring line item (\$184.8 million).

The Land Management Planning, Assessment, and Monitoring BLI is intended to support the Forest Service's integrated approach to landscape management. This BLI will encourage greater collaboration and community engagement in identifying, prioritizing, and implementing programs and projects to address ecological diversity, social and economic stability, watershed health and the impacts of climate change on our public lands and adjacent communities. It will also increase the Forest Service's ability to achieve the efficiency requirements of the 2013 Planning Rule.

5. Authorize and fund the Forest Service Restoration Partnerships program (\$10.0 million).

The Restoration Partnerships program will utilize public-private partnerships to improve municipal and beneficial-use watersheds, reduce risks from wildfire to public utilities and infrastructure, and reduce biomass to sustain landscape fuel reduction and watershed investments. This program emphasizes and leverages non-Federal resources to generate broad and long-term restoration delivered using the agency's Watershed Condition Framework (WCF).

6. Fully fund the Forest Service Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program (\$4.0 million).

The Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program (CFP) provides grants to state and local government and qualified nonprofit organizations to establish community forests. By supporting community land acquisitions, the CFP will help communities protect their natural resources, including forests and watersheds, and support local timber-based economies, thereby stimulating financial and community benefits from sustainable management.



7. Fully fund the Forest Service's Woody Biomass Utilization Grant Program (\$6.0 million).

Funded under the Hazardous Fuels budget line item, the Woody Biomass Utilization Grant program provides funding to support pre-construction design and permitting for biomass utilization facilities. Awarded to small businesses and community groups, these grants support energy generation from woody materials harvested for fuels reduction and restoration. The RVCC supports full funding for this program at \$6.0 million.

8. Fund the Forest Service Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and increase its emphasis on working land easements. Expand use of LWCF to support community capacity for landscape scale conservation (\$600.0 million).

The President's Budget includes funding for LWCF at \$600 million, resulting in \$24.8 million in mandatory funding for Forest Legacy, bringing total Forest Legacy Program funding to \$84.8 million. LWCF is an important source of funding for protection of private working lands and community owned properties that provide an array of environmental services and products.

Although the use of LWCF for land acquisition is a key tool for the achievement of conservation objectives, it should also be used to support restoration, stewardship, and strengthening of community capacity required to achieve effective landscape-scale conservation. We recommend that increased emphasis within LWCF should be directed to the development of working lands easements that address not only ecological concerns, but also provide economic support and protection for continued working land stewardship on farms, forests and ranches. A portion of LWCF funds should also be used to strengthen the community capacity needed to achieve effective landscape scale conservation and acquisition.

9. Fully fund Forest Service Research and Development for Forest Disturbances and increase focus on the impacts of climate change (\$28.4 million).

By strategically directing funds to research how climate change impacts drought, prevalence of fire, water quality, air quality, and fish and wildlife habitat, Congress will

ensure that our nation can undertake critical research and identify high-quality solutions to address these land management and socioeconomic pressures created by climate change.

10. Sufficiently fund Wildland Fire Management Suppression in the Forest Service budget.

RVCC supports Suppression funding that is sufficient to ensure the protection of communities and forestlands from severe wildfire at a time when risk of damaging wildfire is growing in many rural areas. Suppression should be funded adequately to prevent transfer of funds during busy fire seasons.

11. Fully fund the Forest Service Federal Land Assistance Management and Enhancement Fund (FLAME) Reserve Fund (\$315.0 million).

The FLAME is critical to ensuring that wildfire suppression costs do not burden other agency programs. RVCC recommends it be fully funded at \$315.0 million.

12. Sufficiently fund the Forest Service Grazing Management program.

The Forest Service Grazing Management program includes funding for the administration of livestock grazing on National Forest System lands and completion of NEPA analysis for grazing allotments on these lands. Ensuring proper grazing techniques are used to increase the health of our forests and rangelands is essential to protecting water, soil, and fish and wildlife habitat. NEPA analysis and decisions must be made in a timely manner to accommodate needed changes to grazing permits to better adapt grazing practices to changing weather and climate conditions, while incorporating new science and monitoring data.

13. Provide direction to increase effective budget management and improve performance.

Effective budget management relies on accountability through transparency and identification of performance measures. Accountability includes planning and performance measures that address ecological, social and cultural priorities. The following steps should be taken to increase effective budget management and improve performance:

- a. Require the Forest Service and BLM to design and report on measures to determine adaptive capacity, economic impacts, social equity, and provision of ecosystem services resulting from land management programs.
- b. Require the Forest Service to award all contracts and agreements related to the Integrated Resource Restoration budget line item on a best value basis and include evaluative criteria that will increase the competitiveness of local contractors, creation of local markets for material removed and protection of workers.
- c. Encourage the practice of dedicating 10% of project costs to support multi-party project monitoring for all landscape-scale and watershed-scale projects. Project monitoring is essential to project success and is not funded by any previously listed budget line item.
- d. Increase federal accountability for collaborative work and focus on capacity building. Performance measures should evaluate and incentivize collaborative land management efforts and their ecological, social and economic outcomes.

Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee

The following recommendations address program and funding included in the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008, and/or in farm bill legislation proposed by the Senate and House Agriculture Committees of the 113th Congress:

1. Reauthorize Stewardship End-result Contracting authority.

Stewardship end-result contracting is an innovative tool for the USDA Forest Service and USDOI Bureau of Land Management to collaboratively restore public lands and create economic benefit for rural communities. It has been successful and critical for fostering restoration of our nation's forests and watersheds while creating community benefit. Between fiscal years 1999 and 2010, the Forest Service awarded 874 contracts and agreements for restoration treatments on over 588,020 acres nationwide. The best value provisions in stewardship contracting allow the consideration of factors other than price, creating a mechanism for the agencies to foster local benefit and

hire quality workers. The current stewardship contracting authority expires at the end of federal fiscal year 2013. The reauthorization and expansion of stewardship contracting should be aggressively pursued.



2. Reauthorize and fully fund essential private landowner conservation programs contained in the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 (Farm Bill).

NRCS conservation programs previously authorized in the 2008 Farm Bill provide opportunities for private landowners to improve management and reduce degradation of their lands by implementing restoration and conservation plans. Some – but not all – of these programs have been extended through FY 2013. It is urgent that Congress enact a 2013 farm bill to provide certainty to the farmers and private forest land owners that depend on these programs. We also strongly urge Congress to ensure that the Conservation Title programs are not reduced disproportionately to other farm bill programs.

3. Fully fund the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI) and dedicate a percentage of funding to capacity building and technical assistance provision.

The Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI) is an innovative program that draws a percentage of funds from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program and the Conservation Stewardship Program and allows groups of producers and partner organizations to implement conservation practices that affect multiple landowners in ways that meet local needs and opportunities. CCPI recognizes the value of community-based organizations in effectively delivering conservation programs, but currently does not provide funding to support the work of these partner organizations. We support full funding for this partnership-based approach to delivery of farm bill conservation programs, and we strongly urge Congress to permit CCPI funding to be used to support the capacity needs of partnering organizations – including training, networking and outreach expenses.

4. Increase funding for Conservation Technical Assistance to ensure effective implementation of conservation programs.

Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) funding is necessary for effective outreach, delivery and implementation of



conservation programs. CTA funding supports NRCS line staff and the ability of the agency to partner with community-based organizations through cooperative, contributive, and technical service provider agreements and contracts. The use of partnerships through these agreements can build delivery capacity, assist the strained federal workforce with a backlog of conservation work, create local benefit, and leverage private resources for greater impact. We recommend additional CTA funding to support existing conservation programs. If additional funds are unavailable, increase the percentage of total conservation program allocations that go to TA. These measures will increase the effectiveness and application of Financial Assistance cost-share dollars.

5. Designate collaboration and capacity building outcomes as priority preference criteria for allocation of grants, loans, and cost share for partnership programs in the Conservation Title of the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008.

Collaboration and partnerships create a strong new model for doing business in rural America. To support this model, we strongly recommend that Congress prioritize funding for projects and activities that strengthen community capacity by supporting strong community-based, locally-led and regional organizations and networks and the array of entities that support Farm Bill conservation program delivery. This can be accomplished by improving criteria to reward and support projects that can show evidence of collaboration and partnerships and that focus on capacity building.

6. Reauthorize and sufficiently fund the Forest Service Community Wood Energy Program (\$50.0 million).

The Community Wood Energy Program has the potential to produce important economic benefits and jobs in small communities by providing grants to state or local governments to plan and install wood energy systems to provide power or heat for facilities such as schools or hospitals.⁶ Congress must ensure reauthorization of this important program in the 2013 farm bill, and appropriate sufficient funding.

7. Enact and fully fund the USDA Rural Development Rural Business and Cooperative Grant Program (\$55.0 million).

The Rural Business and Cooperative Grant Program is a consolidated grant program that will increase efficiencies in the USDA Rural Development Agency's current grant allocation and evaluation process. This program will support small and emerging private business and cooperative in rural areas, and can provide funding for business incubators and adult education programs. This program will promote sustainable economic development in rural communities. We support full funding for this critical grant program.

8. Fully fund the USDA Rural Development Business and Industry Guaranteed Loan Program (\$741.0 million).

The Business and Industry (B&I) guaranteed loan program provides protection against loan losses so that lenders are willing to extend credit to establish, expand or modernize rural businesses to generate employment and provide lasting community benefit. The program also seeks to improve the economic and environmental climate in rural communities, and is especially important to encourage and support renewable energy development.

¹ Moseley, Cassandra and Emily Jane Davis. "Developing socioeconomic performance measures for the Watershed Condition Framework." Ecosystem Workforce Program Working Paper Number 36 (2012).

² RVCC. "Capacity for Conservation and Rural Job Creation." (2011) (<http://www.sustainablenorthwest.org/blog/category/policy-papers>).

³ CFLRP Steering Committee and USDA Forest Service. "People Restoring America's Forests: 2012 Report on the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program." (December 2012).

⁴ IRR performance measures include: number of watersheds moved to an improved condition class; miles of road decommissioned; volume of timber sold; miles of stream habitat restored or enhanced; and acres treated annually to sustain or restore watershed function and resilience.

⁵ USDA Forest Service. "Integrated Resource Restoration FY 2012 Report." (April 2013).

⁶ RVCC. "Sustainable Biomass Energy: The Need for a Comprehensive Energy Policy that Includes Thermal Energy." (2011) (<http://www.sustainablenorthwest.org/blog/category/policy-papers>).



Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations (dollars in millions)

Budget Area	Expanded Budget Line Item	FY 12 Enacted	FY 13 Annualized CR	FY 14 President's Budget	FY 14 RVCC REQUEST
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE – FOREST SERVICE					
National Forest System	Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program	\$39.9	\$40.2	\$39.9	\$40.0 (+\$0.1)
	Integrated Resource Restoration (nationwide)	-	-	\$756.8	\$756.8 (=)
	Land Management Planning, Assessment and Monitoring	-	-	\$184.8	\$184.8 (=)
	Restoration Partnerships	-	-	\$10.0	\$10.0 (=)
Secure Rural Schools and Self-Determination Act 5-year Reauthorization		\$291.4	\$311.0	\$278.00	\$278.00 (=)
State and Private Forestry (Cooperative Forestry)	Forest Legacy	\$53.3	\$50.1	\$60.0	\$60.0 (=)
	Community Forest and Open Space	\$2.0	\$2.0	\$4.0	\$4.0 (=)
Wildland Fire Management	Woody Biomass Utilization Grant Program	\$3.0	\$5.0	\$6.0	\$6.0 (=)
	FLAME	\$315.8	\$301.4	\$315.0	\$315.0 (=)
Forest and Rangeland Research	Forest and Rangeland Research <i>Forest Disturbances</i>	\$295.3	\$297.1	\$310.2	\$310.2 (=) \$28.4 (=)

Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies Appropriations (dollars in millions)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE – NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE					
2008 Farm Bill	Environmental Quality Incentives Program	\$1,373.0	\$1,400.0	\$1,350.0	\$1,350.0 (=)
	Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program	\$47.0	\$50.0	\$50.0	\$50.0 (=)
	Conservation Stewardship Program	\$742.0	\$768.0	\$989.0	\$989.0 (=)
	Community Wood Energy Program	-	-	-	\$50.0 (+\$50.0)
Discretionary	Conservation Technical Assistance	\$729.0	\$734.0	\$713.0	\$713.0 (=)
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE – RURAL DEVELOPMENT					
Discretionary	Rural Business and Cooperative Grant Program	-	-	\$55.0	\$55.0 (=)
Discretionary	Business and Industry Guaranteed Loan Program	\$811.0	\$776.0	\$741.0	\$741.0 (=)

Coalition Partners

Alaska

Sitka Conservation Society

California

Mid Klamath Watershed Council
Northwest Forest Worker Center
Watershed Research & Training Center

Idaho

Framing Our Community
Salmon Valley Stewardship

Montana

Criley Consulting
Future West
Northwest Connections
Swan Ecosystem Center
Vander Meers Wildland Conservation Services

New Mexico

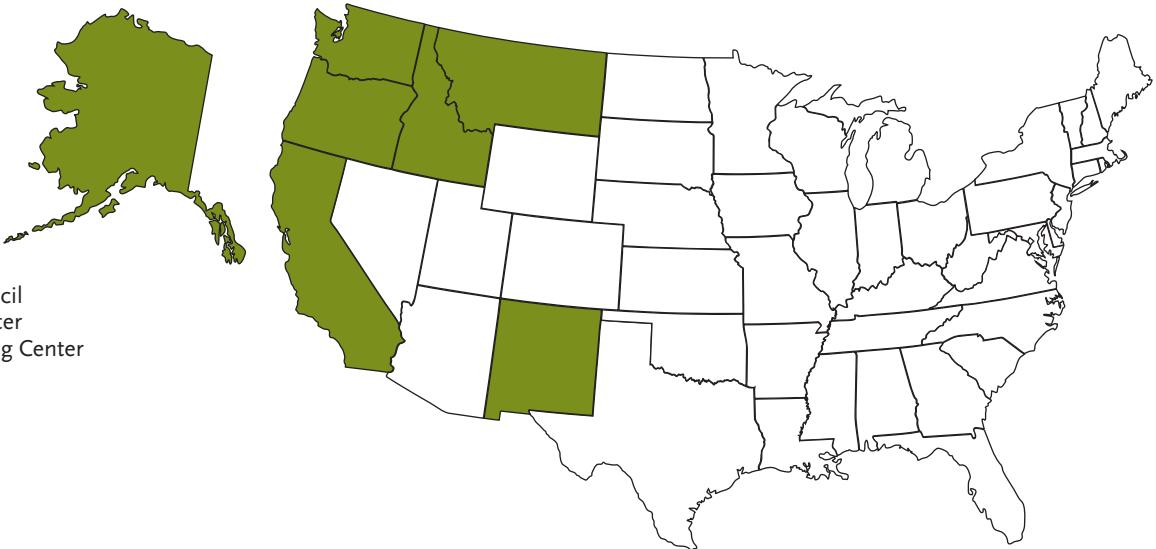
Forest Guild
Gila Wood Products
Gila WoodNet
Restoration Technologies

Oregon

Applegate Partnership and Watershed Council
Ecosystem Workforce Program
Institute for Culture and Ecology
Jebel Ronde Ranch
Lake County Resources Initiative
Siuslaw Institute
Southern Oregon Forest Restoration Collaborative
Sustainable Northwest
Wallowa Resources

Washington

Conservation Northwest
Skamania County



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Watershed Research and Training Center

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Learn more about RVCC in the Our Programs section of www.SustainableNorthwest.org

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