



May 15, 2023

The Honorable Mike Simpson
Chairman
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

The Honorable Chellie Pingree
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

Dear Chairman Simpson and Ranking Member Pingree:

The Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition is a network of community leaders, land management practitioners and conservation partners across the West that work to align land stewardship with rural community benefit.

Following passage of two historic sources of funding through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act, our coalition partners would like to underscore the crucial need to build rural community-based capacity in order to reduce barriers to accessing these resources and advance equity for rural stakeholders within important federal programs.

At RVCC, we are committed to the following funding priorities:

1. Adequate funding for federal programs and resources that support collaborative capacity and community-based investments.
2. Sustained investment in programs that support both land stewardship and rural economic benefit across land ownerships.
3. Research that informs public lands management, particularly the impacts on rural communities and economies.

We ask that the subcommittee support the following programs and initiatives as you draft the FY24 spending bill.

- **Include dedicated funding for collaborative and community-based capacity.** Effective use and implementation of many USFS and DOI programs and authorities requires established partnerships and relationships; stakeholder engagement and support; well-developed plans and proposals; and coordination, administration, and implementation capacity. However, there is little to no funding to support the community-based, collaborative efforts required to create these enabling conditions for implementation. Dedicated support is needed for this work, which is why we advocate for both standalone collaborative and community-based grant programs as well as the deliberate incorporation of capacity support into existing implementation-focused programs. Potential avenues include:
 - Create a new Congressional appropriation, or direct agencies, to pool funding sources to support a dedicated fund that supports baseline coordination and operations capacity

for conservation-focused partnerships working across jurisdictions. This concept is captured in the Network for Landscape Conservation’s “National Landscape Partnerships Fund” [proposal](#).

- Support dedicated grants for community-based capacity, such as those found in the following legislative proposals:
 - The National Community Capacity and Land Stewardship Program proposed in the [National Wildfire Emergency Act](#).
 - The Restoration and Resilience Grant Program proposed in the 2023 [Protect the West Act](#).
- **Maintain funding for the National Forest System.** This includes maintaining funding levels for the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, Hazardous Fuels, and Vegetation and Watershed Management, as well as continuing support for the Joint Chiefs’ Landscape Restoration Partnership.
- **Rural development through land stewardship.** Programs such as the Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program, Forest Legacy Program, and Landscape Scale Restoration give autonomy to stakeholders to figure out how best to manage local forests.
- **Science that supports rural communities.** The Forest Service’s Forest and Rangeland Research and the Joint Fire Science Program play vital roles in shaping and improving economic, social, and environmental outcomes on the ground. Research focused on responding to the rising threat of uncharacteristically severe wildfire is important, as are efforts focused on innovative wood products, recreation, rural economics, and the social impacts of public lands management. Information on changing rural social conditions and economies, such as those found in the Northwest Forest Plan socioeconomic monitoring efforts, can inform public lands management decisions and improve understanding of the economic impacts of public lands on rural communities.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to working together to ensure rural voices are considered throughout the appropriations process.

Sincerely,



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