

Private Forests & 2007 Farm Bill Issue Paper

The 2007 Farm Bill provides an opportunity to make changes in federal policy to address critical issues related to private forest conservation and the social, economic, and environmental well-being of rural communities.

The Farm Bill should include provisions that respond to the emerging threat of development on private forestlands by incorporating ways for communities to engage in the long-term protection and management of private forests. The conservation of private forests, like public forests, cannot be achieved without investments in and capacity for long-term stewardship. This requires the willing involvement of landowners, technical and financial assistance, and an in-place workforce and business infrastructure. Although many private forest landowners have been enthusiastic about existing programs, federal funding has been insufficient and has lacked the consistency needed to build their broad participation.

In private lands settings, the RVCC believes the following priorities must be integrated into national policies and programs to effectively realize our goal of achieving balanced conservation-based approaches to the ecological and economic problems facing the rural West.

PRIORITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2007 Farm Bill can better integrate private forest conservation and rural community development through the following recommendations.

1. *Create and provide innovative investment programs for acquisition and long-term stewardship to protect working forests from development pressures.*

Across the country, millions of acres of private forestlands are being put up for sale by forest products companies, other timberland investors, and non-industrial private forestland owners. Between 1995 and 2004, for example, half of

RECOMMENDATION HIGHLIGHTS

1. Create and provide innovative investment programs for acquisition and long-term stewardship to protect working forests from development pressures.
2. Provide technical and financial assistance to forest landowners to enhance forest restoration and sustainable forest management activities on private lands.
3. Permanently authorize the Wyden Amendment to enable federal land management agencies to provide assistance across ownerships to achieve cooperative and collaborative management.
4. Create incentives, measures, and monitoring criteria to stimulate the development of markets for ecosystem services.
5. Provide technical and financial assistance to small businesses and other agents of economic development in rural communities to develop and maintain the business infrastructure to sustain private forest management and local community benefits.
6. Establish and fund an integrated woody biomass grant and technical assistance program to stimulate cross-boundary cooperation to achieve the goals of ecologically-based forest restoration and rural economic development.

the nearly 70 million acres of privately owned industrial forests in the U.S. changed ownership. If, as often occurs, purchasers divide and convert the forests for residential or other development uses, nearby communities face losing the critical economic, environmental, recreational, cultural, and aesthetic values and benefits those forests have traditionally provided. One option being pursued by communities is to

WHO WE ARE

The Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition is comprised of western rural and local, 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 California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, New Mexico, Montana, Arizona and Colorado.

acquire the lands and manage them as community forests, now and for the future. Community-owned forests can be found around the world and are not a new concept. Some New England “town forests,” for instance, were established over three centuries ago. A recent resurgence of interest in community-owned forests has local groups in parts of the U.S. exploring innovative approaches to community-managed land tenure systems.¹

The RVCC supports conservation easements and specifically the Forest Legacy Program, as a tool for helping keep working forests as working forests and preserving environmental values. This program has been instrumental in addressing development pressures on family-owned forests. Congress should:

- Explore and further develop the ideas presented in the Suburban and Community Forestry and Open Space Program Act (S.1131) introduced by Senator Susan Collins on April 17, 2007. This legislation seeks to amend the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978 to establish a program to provide assistance to States and nonprofit organizations to preserve suburban forest land and open space, contain suburban sprawl, and limit conversion to non-forest land uses.
- Authorize a study as part of the Farm Bill to examine conservation and environmental issues related to the sale, fragmentation, and conversion of private forestlands, particularly industrial forestlands, in the U.S. and present options for addressing these issues.

2. *Provide technical and financial assistance to forest landowners to enhance forest restoration and sustainable forest management activities on private lands.*

Non-industrial private forest (NIPF) landowners need technical assistance if they are to meet the restoration and stewardship goals for their forestlands. The Forest Service’s Forest Stewardship Program is the primary federal source of technical and educational assistance for NIPF landowners.

- The Farm Bill should incorporate sufficient funding for the Forest Stewardship Program to enable the Forest Service to be an effective partner with state and local forestry agencies, private-sector businesses (e.g., consulting foresters), and non-profit organizations in providing these services to NIPF landowners.
- Congress should provide guidance through report language specifically instructing the land management agencies to emphasize peer-to-peer mentoring and training opportunities.

Non-industrial private forest landowners also need federal financial assistance to carry out restoration and stewardship activities on their lands. The RVCC has been supportive of federal programs, such as the Forest Incentive Program (FIP), the Stewardship Incentive Program (SIP), and the Forest Land Enhancement Program (FLEP), which are intended to provide cost-share assistance to non-industrial private forest landowners. As funding for these programs has diminished, however, landowners who have engaged in these programs have been frustrated—often having gained little federal support for their own investment in time and resources. Since these practices provide substantial public benefit, a federal investment is warranted. Congress should:

- Authorize increased funding in the Farm Bill for federal financial assistance to non-industrial private forestland owners to carry out restoration and stewardship activities and provide greater direction and clarity on how the funds are allocated. This could be accomplished by developing a process for prioritizing the allocation of cost-share funds based on criteria and needs agreed to by a diverse and collaborative group, such as the State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committees.
- Develop multi-year, tiered incentives for non-industrial forest landowners, wherein the more they do to restore and sustainably manage their lands, the more resources they may receive to assist them in their efforts. This may be accomplished by enhancing the Conservation Security Program to include forest landscapes and forest landowners.
- Remove barriers to the development and maintenance of a local restoration workforce. NIPF landowners need to have a workforce to accomplish the work on their lands if they are to be able to become and remain good stewards of the landscape.

¹ In response to this renewed interest, a three-day national conference was held in Missoula, Montana, in June, 2005 to bring together practitioners from around the country to explore issues, options, and experiences in community forest establishment, governance, management, and use. The Communities Committee has since created a website devoted to further exploring and sharing information about Community-owned and managed forests that can be found at: www.communitiescommittee.org.

3. ***Permanently authorize the Wyden Amendment to enable federal land management agencies to provide assistance across ownerships to achieve cooperative and collaborative management.***

Legislation has been introduced over the course of several Congressional sessions to permanently extend the Wyden Amendment. The Wyden Amendment allows the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service to spend federal dollars on private lands adjacent to public lands for watershed and forest restoration purposes. It has been an important authority for coordination and collaboration on projects that cross federal, state, and private land boundaries.

4. ***Create incentives, measures, and monitoring criteria to stimulate the development of markets for ecosystem services.***

Private forestlands provide a range of ecosystem services that benefit the public, such as clean water, carbon sequestration, and wildlife habitat. The federal government needs to recognize these public benefits supplied by private landowners and invest in the restoration of private lands. Moreover, to realize the full range of benefits and services that come from forests, it is critical to address restoration needs at a landscape level. To effectively do this, incentives that encourage landowners to cooperate with one another and with the public agencies are needed. The federal government has an important role in helping to create the policy framework that will allow private-sector market-based approaches to develop and function fairly and appropriately. A key part of that framework should be a monitoring and reporting program ensuring that the quality and quantity of environmental services being traded in the emerging markets are consistent and meet other environmental requirements under federal laws. The Administration's Farm Bill proposal has included a new subtitle in the Conservation Title on 'market-based approaches to conservation' which focuses on facilitating the development of such approaches for environmental goods and services from both agricultural and forest lands.

The RVCC supports the development of a new program focused on encouraging market-based approaches for environmental services. As Congress considers such a program, we urge provisions for:

- Non-industrial private forest landowners and rural communities to be involved in the process of designing and implementing the program.
- A pilot program that would provide grants to non-industrial private forest landowners, small businesses, and non-profit groups in rural communities interested in developing projects to advance market-based approaches to ecosystem services.

5. ***Provide technical and financial assistance to small businesses and other agents of economic development in rural communities to develop and maintain the business infrastructure to sustain private forest management and local community benefits.***

The RVCC is concerned that in the past several years, programs related to sustainable rural development have been eliminated and that provision of technical assistance and small, flexible grants, such as those provided through the Forest Service's Economic Action Programs, have received diminishing support. The Economic Action Programs have accomplished much by supporting projects that integrate the development of "soft" locally-owned infrastructure and the implementation of restoration activities on the ground.

- Congress should provide permanent authorization to the Forest Service to use appropriated funds to provide technical assistance and grants to rural communities. In annual appropriations bills since 1993, Congress has authorized the Forest Service to use appropriated funds to provide technical assistance to rural communities. The language suggested below would accomplish that goal (the language is taken from PL 106-291, Title II). We have added "Hereafter" and "and grants" to reflect the critical needs for 1) permanent authority for all branches of the Forest Service to provide technical assistance and grants and 2) added authorization for the National Forest System to cooperate with forest-dependant communities and non-governmental entities through grants.

"Hereafter, funds appropriated to the Forest Service shall be available for interaction with and provision of technical assistance and grants to rural communities for sustainable rural development purposes."

6. ***Establish and fund a new competitive grants program to build capacity and provide technical assistance to communities for the development of a woody biomass utilization infrastructure.***

The RVCC has developed a vision and strategy to support the development of a community-scaled and integrated woody biomass utilization infrastructure.² The following is an excerpt from the RVCC Woody Biomass Issue Paper:

Many communities and businesses are strategically situated in terms of forest resources, transmitting capacity, and potential business locations, but are lacking in social and institutional capacity to implement utilization projects. Existing fledgling rural manufacturing infrastructure must also be maintained and enhanced to overcome cost barriers associated with lost industry capacity.

Previously, programs like the Economic Action Program (EAP) administered through USFS State and Private Forestry (S&P) provided the assistance needed to help rural communities and entrepreneurs develop and maintain their capacity and access necessary technical resources. Current grant programs, such as the annually appropriated \$5 million Woody Biomass Utilization Grants program, also administered through S&P, only provide direct grants for infrastructure development. The absence of a program like EAP leaves the federal agencies with no other direct funding source, such as a budget line item (BLI) to provide technical assistance or capacity building support.

Congress should establish and fund a new competitive grants program and Budget Line Item (BLI), which

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provides capacity building and technical assistance services comparable to those offered through the U.S. Forest Service Economic Action Program (EAP). The federal land management agencies should also designate additional biomass coordinators at the Forest and/or Region level who are funded to work with communities and businesses to provide these critical services.

COALITION PARTNERS

California

Alliance of Forest Workers and Harvesters
The Watershed Research and Training Center

Idaho

Framing Our Community, Inc.
Salmon Valley Stewardship

Montana

Flathead Economic Policy Center
Northwest Connections
Swan Ecosystem Center

New Mexico

The Forest Guild
Gila WoodNet
Restoration Technologies
Santa Clara Woodworks
SBS Wood Shavings
The Village of Ruidoso, New Mexico, Forestry Department

Oregon

Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council
Institute for Culture and Ecology
Lake County Resources Initiative
Lomakatsi Restoration Project
Oregon Department of Forestry
Oregon Trout
Resource Innovations
Siuslaw Institute, Inc.
Sustainable Northwest
Wallowa Resources

Washington

Gifford Pinchot Task Force
Okanogan Communities Development Council
Methow Forest Owners' Cooperative
Mt. Adams Resource Stewards
Northwest Natural Resource Group

Washington, D.C.

American Forests

² The RVCC has a briefing paper on Woody Biomass that provides a more complete discussion of its perspectives and policy priorities.