

Policy Recommendations for the 2023 Farm Bill

Defenders of Wildlife



Wildlife depends on the Farm Bill. Imperiled species benefit from Farm Bill programs that support producers and the Forest Service in conserving their land. Reauthorizing the Farm Bill every five years provides an opportunity to revisit its policies, programs, and funding levels to ensure that they are serving congressional intent and the public good. Defenders of Wildlife, representing nearly 2.2 million members and supporters, provides the recommendations below to address four critical areas: the interconnected biodiversity loss and climate change crises, conflict prevention, equity, and accountability. In addition to our policy recommendations, Defenders supports increasing funding for specific conservation programs while maintaining resource levels for other programs and opposes any provisions that would circumvent, undermine, or weaken bedrock federal conservation laws.

Biodiversity Loss and Climate Change Crises

- Mandate that Farm Bill conservation programs implemented for climate-smart purposes address the threats of both climate change and biodiversity loss.
 - Develop a national-level ranking question under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) that increases the score for projects that have been identified by NRCS as having co-benefits for climate and wildlife.
 - Increase the cost share rate to 90 percent for practices and enhancements that have co-benefits for climate and wildlife.
 - Adopt a definition of “climate resilience” that incorporates the role of biodiversity.
- Increase the cost-share rate to 90 percent for conservation practices and enhancements under EQIP and CSP that conserve landscape and climate corridors, hydrologic connectivity, and climate refugia.
- Provide national-level funding for all Working Lands for Wildlife initiatives.
- Allow the Legacy Roads and Trails Remediation Program to more effectively remove unnecessary infrastructure in National Forests.
- Direct the Forest Service to report on Research Natural Areas.
- Restore mandatory funding for the Healthy Forest Reserve Program.

Conflict Prevention

- Compensate losses caused by threatened or endangered species at 100 percent of fair market value under the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP).

Equity

- Expand eligibility for LIP to tribal entities, such as livestock associations, by exempting them from LIP’s adjusted gross income limit on eligibility.
- Increase EQIP and CSP set asides for beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers from 5 to 10 percent.
- Convert the Heirs’ Property Relending Program into a grant program.

Accountability

- Require that conservation practices address a habitat resource concern to count toward the 10 percent set-aside for wildlife under EQIP.
- Allocate one percent of total annual funding available for new enrollments from all major Title II conservation programs for measurement, evaluation, and reporting of program outcomes.
- Direct NRCS to report on the impact of the Swampbuster provision on preventing the conversion of wetlands to cropland and other agricultural uses.