RVCC Fiscal Year 2020 Appropriations Priorities

Possible pull-out quotes:

Stewarding healthy landscapes and creating vibrant rural communities

The West’s open spaces, forests, rangelands, watersheds and agricultural soils – and the benefits they provide to all Americans – have never been more important or more threatened

Content

In America’s rural West, economic, environmental, and community health should go hand in hand. Federal land management agencies and rural communities and businesses have the opportunity to work together reduce the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire, improve ecosystem health, strengthen rural economies, and support the rural communities that help steward our public and private lands. With adequate and stable funding for public and private lands conservation programs, federal land management agencies, and rural development programs, we can address the growing backlog of needed restoration in the American West.

The Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition encourages Congress to support programs that contribute to collaborative restoration and stewardship economies on both public and private lands, including the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, Farm Bill working lands conservation programs, and the State & Private Forestry Landscape Scale Restoration program. Rural development programs that support the creation of rural businesses, including the Rural Development Business Program and Rural Energy for America Program, are also necessary to grow and maintain the workforce that supports stewardship and conservation works.

To be strong partners to local communities, federal land management agencies must receive adequate funding to accomplish their missions, including hazardous fuels reduction, management of threatened and endangered species, and fire suppression. In light of recently enacted changes to how fire suppression is funded, RVCC encourages funding programs that address the problem of uncharacteristic wildfire and that have been impacted by budget reductions from increasing fire suppression costs. Furthermore, agencies need to use the best available science to guide decision-making and implementation: full funding of the Joint Fire Science Program and Forest Service Research and Development is vital to the health of America’s landscapes.

Funding is critical, yet budget structures are equally important. The Forest Service’s newly proposed budget structure combines a number of existing budget line items into a single, unified pool, an approach that could have profound impacts, including reducing accountability for important programs of work. Increased flexibility may provide some benefits, yet RVCC is concerned that the proposal takes the wrong lesson from the Integrated Resource Restoration pilot - that integration of budgets might result in funds being used to meet only “hard targets” at the expense of other vital restoration goals. RVCC encourages Congress to carefully examine potential impacts of the proposed change on vital commitments such as working in partnership with communities, habitat restoration, planning and research, before adopting changes to the Forest Service’s budget structure.

RVCC looks forward to working with Congress and the Administration to fulfill commitments and promises to the rural communities they serve, and upon which the well-being of our nation depends.