



2018 Farm Bill: TU priorities for supporting working lands and partnerships to conserve and restore streams

Wallace Center Pasture Project, Wisconsin

Restore Farm Bill Funding for the Conservation Title. Trout Unlimited (TU) has worked with producers for over 50 years. In these partnerships, the goals are two-fold: improve agricultural operations while also restoring streams, water quality, and improving fisheries on ranch and farm lands. The Farm Bill's Conservation Title provides a key investment in these working-lands partnerships.

The 2014 Farm Bill cut the Conservation Title by approximately \$4 billion over ten years directly, and the cuts rose to \$6.1 billion to conservation compared to authorized funding under mandatory sequestration. It is imperative that the 2018 Farm Bill maintain and restore funding to the Conservation Title to support voluntary, non-regulatory conservation practices by America's ranchers and farmers, so they can lead as stewards of their lands. TU has **matched over \$16.5 million in Farm Bill dollars** with state and private dollars in just the five partnerships described below:

Driftless Area: More than 600 coldwater, limestone spring-fed creeks support a world-class trout fishery in the Driftless region of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois and Iowa. Post settlement sediment has filled valleys accelerating stream bank erosion and flood damage. Conservation practices are reversing that trend: restoring streams' connections with their floodplains and riparian areas helps prevent erosion and reduces the impacts of flooding. TU continues to work with producers on EQIP practices i.e. Seeding, Stream Crossing, Bank Stabilization, Upland Habitat and In-stream Habitat. Wisconsin Driftless farmers working with TU from 2007 to 2012 signed 562 EQIP contracts, totaling \$6.9 million to restore over 61 miles of streams, eliminating what would amount to more than 2500 dump truck loads of sediment annually to the streams. In 2017, in the first year of a RCPP project, TU partnered with Driftless Wisconsin farmers to carry out 48 stream restoration projects totaling \$1,230,263.





High-Desert Ranching: A \$1.3 million investment through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP), matched through 21 partners, is working with ranchers who have experienced severe drought for the majority of years in the last 30-year cycle. This project is reducing drought impacts to wildlife and livestock across the 15-million-acre project area in the Owyhee, Malheur and Salmon Falls watersheds of Oregon, Idaho and Nevada, within communities which have been historically underserved. Project partners are working together to develop on-the-ground projects that keep water in streams longer for both livestock and wildlife. Funding is being delivered to producers through EQIP contracts, the WRE Program, and matching dollars from partner organizations.



West Virginia: TU has worked on 300 farms in West Virginia, to maximize agricultural productivity through improved grazing management and providing off-stream water sources. TU has installed 1.5 million feet of agricultural exclusion fence, stabilized eroding stream banks, and restored instream habitat—to the benefit of over 75 miles of stream and 300 acres of riparian habitat. In just 2017, TU put \$1,357,900 in Farm Bill funds to the ground through both CREP and EQIP programs. These projects benefit fish, farmers, and our downstream neighbors in the Chesapeake Bay. As a result, water quality and in-stream habitat has improved, creating higher numbers and sizes of native brook trout—the West Virginia state fish.



Klamath Basin: A \$7.6 million RCP investment matched through five partners is working to address drought and external nutrient loading into Upper Klamath Lake, problems that persist downstream through the mainstem Klamath River. TU is working with a number of ranchers on projects that include piping to improve water delivery and pasture condition, while also reducing out-of-stream diversions from designated critical habitat for ESA-listed bull trout and Klamath redband trout. The program is improving riparian conditions with fencing and off-stream stock-watering systems, all delivered to producers through the EQIP program. This investment is addressing water quality degradation through the restoration of lake-fringe wetlands through WRP easements.



Washington: TU has been working with irrigators for over a decade, improving delivery of irrigation water to vital apple and hay crops while simultaneously improving stream flows. In eastern Washington's Methow and Yakima basins, TU has leveraged over \$5 million, matching EQIP dollars to ensure irrigators have updated water delivery systems to help especially during low flow water years. These projects include new diversions, surface to well conversions, irrigation efficiency and piping projects. These projects enhance the bottom line of the irrigator while simultaneously improving flows for ESA listed steelhead and chinook fish populations in important tributaries to the Methow and Yakima Rivers.



Trout Unlimited's Top Policy Improvements for 2018 Farm Bill

Pat Clayton, Rainbow Trout, www.fisheyeegyphotography.com

CONSERVATION TITLE

- Maintain and restore funding to the Conservation Title.
- Provide for an AGI waiver at the discretion of the Secretary.

REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM (RCPP)

- **Replace the difficult “AFA” contracting option with a more flexible tool with a proven track record.** Replace the “alternative funding arrangement” (AFA) option within RCPP, which has been difficult and time consuming to administer for the agency and applicants, with a grants program with eligible partners to deliver conservation benefits. This is adapted from the Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) program that has proven flexible to administer and has delivered tangible results. The grants program would only be a portion of the RCPP funding, with prioritization of RCPP applications involving multi-producer water delivery infrastructure, and other projects similarly raising complex contracting issues. (See proposed amendments to 16 USC § 3871c (2)).
- **Eliminate the unnecessary administrative burden and complexity of fund tracking.** Significant difficulty in administering the RCPP stems from Section 1271D(c)(2) which requires the agency to track unspent RCPP funds back to their covered program source. This tracking requirement also makes the application process overly burdensome as sponsors must specify exactly how much they will spend on each individual covered program, even early in the process. The proposed change will allow the agency to administer as RCPP funds the contributions from covered programs once they are designated for RCPP. (See proposed amendments to 16 USC § 3871d (c)(1)-(2)).
- **Streamline RCPP Applications.** The statute unnecessarily dictates a high level of detail required of RCPP applications. With the agency’s experience in implementing successful RCPP over the last four years, such statutory specificity applicable to all RCPP applications creates unnecessary administrative burdens. (See proposed amendments to 16 USC § 3871b).

NRCS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- NRCS delivery of voluntary, conservation technical assistance has been dramatically reduced by the demands imposed by delivering statutorily-mandated programs. Congress should ensure that an adequate and durable funding source is available for this critical conservation activity through NRCS field offices.

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