

July 13, 2023

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow  
Chairwoman  
Senate Committee on Agriculture,  
Nutrition, & Forestry

The Honorable John Boozman  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Agriculture,  
Nutrition, & Forestry

The Honorable Michael Bennet  
Chair  
Subcommittee on Conservation,  
Climate, Forestry, and Natural  
Resources

The Honorable Roger Marshall  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Conservation,  
Climate, Forestry, and Natural  
Resources

The Honorable Glenn Thompson  
Chairman  
House Committee on Agriculture

The Honorable David Scott  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Agriculture

The Honorable Jim Baird  
Chairman  
House Committee on Agriculture  
Subcommittee on Conservation,  
Research, and Biotechnology

The Honorable Abigail Spanberger  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Agriculture  
Subcommittee on Conservation,  
Research, and Biotechnology

**Re: Inclusion of Floodplain Restoration Provisions in Farm Bill**

Dear Chair Stabenow, Ranking Member Boozman, Chair Bennet, Ranking Member Marshall, Chair Thompson, Ranking Member Scott, Chair Baird, and Ranking Member Spanberger:

On behalf of our more than 75 partners, allies, and coalition networks, American Rivers submits this letter in support of reforming the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Emergency Watershed Protection Program-Floodplain Easement Program (EWPP-FPE) in the upcoming Farm Bill. As you prepare to work towards a bipartisan, comprehensive, and robust legislative package, we are committed to working with you to enhance and reinforce our nation's legacy of locally-led, incentive-based, and voluntary conservation programs.

Over the last decade, we've seen increased flooding which leaves many farmers, landowners, and ag producers at risk. The economic impact of severe storms and flood disasters can be quite expensive. As a result, farmers experience crop loss, contamination, soil erosion, equipment and property loss, livestock loss, and debris deposition. To protect farmers from the headaches, hardships, and heartbreak of the financial and emotional setback, we support a set of recommendations to improve USDA's Emergency Watershed Program-Floodplain Easement Program. The goal of this legislation is to move this program into the Farm Bill permanently, so farmers can

receive increased support from NRCS for financial and technical assistance. This will create certainty and ensure farmers can reliably and confidently count on a flood reduction and natural disaster assistance program that is rooted in rapid response, less red tape, and conservation with a purpose.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Emergency Watershed Protection Program-Floodplain Easement Program (EWPP-FPE) compensates farmers, landowners, and ag producers for permanently conserving flood-prone lands. However, this program needs to be expanded and reformed to incentivize farmers to participate on a much broader scale. Reforming the Floodplain Easement Program involves establishing a permanent voluntary and open-enrollment program, increasing funding for the program, creating a system of tracking, and reporting for floodplain easements, and drawing on expertise to quantify the economic benefits of functional floodplains.

**Recommendations:** The USDA Floodplain Easement Program needs to be reformed to enroll easement acres annually and make more substantial investments in flood damage reduction. To do this, Congress needs to include the following reforms in the 2023 Farm Bill.

1. **Fund flood damage reduction and floodplain easement programs** annually through USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service.
2. **Establish a tracking and reporting system** for floodplain easements within the **Conservation Effects Assessment Project**.
3. **Require USDA to collaborate with economic experts** to better understand and quantify the ecosystem services provided by functional floodplains.
4. Ensure floodplain easements are **not subject to land-tenure requirements**.
5. Require USDA to **collaborate with the US Army Corps of Engineers and the Federal Emergency Management Agency** to prioritize investments in areas subject to recurring flood damages.
6. Require USDA to **develop Best Management Practices to reduce flood damage** in the agricultural sector.
7. Require USDA to **improve guidance on floodplain restoration** to meet multiple natural resource challenges.

**We urge your committees to champion these policy recommendations as part of the Farm Bill that would expand the flexibility, accessibility, and the availability of the program to compensate farmers, landowners, and ag producers who set aside lands for floodplain easements.** The proposal will further mitigate flood damages, and this is supported by a variety groups from across the country including farmers, food and ag think tanks, businesses, river groups, land trusts, water and state utility associations, faith groups, foundations, aquariums, enviros, and more.

The need for this legislation is obvious according to the numbers. In the last decade, [have seen nearly 10,000 agricultural-related disasters which amounted to over \\$29 billion in crop damages](#). Nationally, farmers are being denied entry to the program despite the valuable assistance of the program. The current practice in place

disincentivizes farmers from opting for floodplain easements that would conserve lands to the benefit of communities and surrounding ecosystems. We must do more to fix it now in the upcoming Farm Bill.

Flooding is a natural process, and the rivers provide critical infrastructure services to facilitate it strategically. Farmers today need flood reductions strategies that secure their futures in farming and protect their lands. Now more than ever, we need to reform the EWPP-FPE program to put these strategies into action. Expanding floodplain easements would improve water quality, enhance water storage and increase drought resilience, create new opportunities for restoration; opportunities to reduce crop damage, protect livestock and private property, enhance ecological function of watersheds, support recreation and compatible agricultural uses, and increase safety and security for the millions of people.

We urge Congress to enact policy measures that builds on our floodplain policy proposal to meet the demand of farmers across the country and supports healthy rivers, and the communities who depend on them.

Sincerely,

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|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. ACRES Land Trust             | 19. Contra Costa Resource          |
| 2. Alabama Rivers Alliance      | Conservation District              |
| 3. Alliance for the Great Lakes | 20. Creation Justice Ministries    |
| 4. American Rivers              | 21. Empower our Future             |
| 5. American Sustainable         | 22. Endangered Habitats League     |
| Business Network                | 23. Environmental Working Group    |
| 6. Association of State         | 24. Family Farm Defenders          |
| Floodplain Managers             | 25. Farm Aid                       |
| 7. Belmar Farm                  | 26. Farmers Solidarity for         |
| 8. Bozeman Birders              | Agricultural and Social            |
| 9. Californians for Western     | Development (SOPADAS)              |
| Wilderness                      | 27. Friends of the Big Sioux River |
| 10. Chesapeake Conservancy      | 28. Friends of the Chemung River   |
| 11. Chicago Sierra Club         | Watershed                          |
| 12. Civilized Humanity          | 29. Friends of the Mississippi     |
| 13. Clean Energy Action         | River                              |
| 14. Climate Reality Chicago     | 30. Healthy Ocean Coalition        |
| Metro                           | 31. Hispanic Federation            |
| 15. Climate Reality Project     | 32. Hoosier Environmental          |
| Regenerative Agriculture        | Council                            |
| Coalition                       | 33. Inland Ocean Coalition         |
| 16. Climate Systems Solutions   | 34. Institute for Agriculture and  |
| 17. CO - Energy & Environment   | Trade Policy                       |
| Initiative                      | 35. Iowa Citizens for Community    |
| 18. Cojujo Farm                 | Improvement                        |
|                                 | 36. Iowa Environmental Council     |

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| 37. | Iowa Prairie Network                                | 57. | River Network                                      |
| 38. | Kansas City Zoo                                     | 58. | River Partners                                     |
| 39. | Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance                          | 59. | Sana Global  |
| 40. | Micah Six Eight Mission                             | 60. | Shedd Aquarium                                     |
| 41. | Missouri Confluence<br>Waterkeeper                  | 61. | Sierra Club  |
| 42. | National Association of<br>Counties                 | 62. | SoCal 350 Climate Action                           |
| 43. | National Mississippi River<br>Museum & Aquarium     | 63. | The Barn Group                                     |
| 44. | Natural Heritage Institute                          | 64. | The Ocean Project                                  |
| 45. | New Mexico Wild                                     | 65. | The Wei LLC  |
| 46. | New Mexico Wildlife<br>Federation                   | 66. | Vets United  |
| 47. | Northern Prairies Land Trust                        | 67. | Water Environment<br>Federation                    |
| 48. | NTS Group   | 68. | Waterkeepers Chesapeake -<br>Fair Farms Initiative |
| 49. | Ohio River Foundation                               | 69. | Web of Life Products                               |
| 50. | Pasa Sustainable Agriculture                        | 70. | Wellsave / Food System<br>CARE                     |
| 51. | Pink Panthers                                       | 71. | Western Nebraska Resources<br>Council              |
| 52. | Project Eleven Hundred                              | 72. | Western Slope Conservation<br>Center               |
| 53. | Protect Our Commonwealth                            | 73. | Whatcom Ag Water Board                             |
| 54. | Responsible Alpha                                   | 74. | Wild Farm Alliance                                 |
| 55. | Rio Grande Headwaters Land<br>Trust - del Norte, CO | 75. | Winyah Rivers Alliance                             |
| 56. | Rio Grande International<br>Study Center            | 76. | Women, Food and Agriculture<br>Network (WFAN)      |