October 27, 2011

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow  
Chairwoman  
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Pat Roberts  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Roberts,

The undersigned include participants in the Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition (RVCC), as well as unaffiliated organizations, businesses and landowners. We share core interests in the long-term environmental health and economic productivity of America’s ranches, farms and forestlands, and the well-being of our rural communities.

We represent the interests of the people and landscape of rural America in both policy and practice. **We seek secure funding for the conservation title, including adequate funding for technical assistance and “boots on the ground.”** Farm bill conservation funds are not just about natural resource stewardship, but about securing economic viability for the farms, forests and ranches that are so often the backbone of rural economies. Furthermore, the farm bill provides essential resources to boost rural economic activity through rural development programs that strengthen small business, as well as incentives for community-scaled renewable energy production.

As we have requested in past communications through RVCC\(^1\) or other channels, **we respectfully ask that the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry affirm the value of our nation’s working lands by ensuring that the upcoming farm bill does not disproportionately reduce funding for conservation programs.** Short term cuts to the farm bill conservation title will have long-term effects on the viability of working forest, farm, and ranch businesses, thereby negatively impacting struggling rural economies nationwide for decades to come.

**We urge you to protect and maintain farm bill conservation funding to keep rural communities working.** Farm bill conservation programs directly contribute to rural job creation and economic development by supporting responsible natural resource use and innovative stewardship. They are not subsidies, but investments that pay economic dividends long after initial funding. These programs give private landowners the support they need to improve stewardship and continue to keep their lands working – providing food, fiber, energy and ecosystem values that generate short and long-term wealth. At the same time, farm bill conservation programs protect open space and support functioning ecosystems - including habitat for fish and wildlife. They enable landowners

\(^1\) 2011 RVCC Issue Papers. Available at http://www.sustainablenorthwest.org/resources/rvcc-issue-papers
to make voluntary stewardship investments that fit with their business plans and provide long-term benefits to society, such as clean water and healthy soil. Finally, this conservation activity is a significant economic driver in many rural communities, employing skilled working lands restoration professionals.

The farm bill conservation budget has already faced deep cuts due to Congressional deficit reduction actions. Since passage of the 2008 farm bill, over $2 billion in mandatory conservation spending has been cut in the appropriations process. Additional deep or disproportionate cuts to the conservation title will have negative economic ramifications beyond the direct and immediate loss of conservation program funding. Private forests, farms and ranches will be less prepared to meet the conservation, innovation, climate change and energy challenges of this century in a way that keeps them producing to meet local and national economic needs.

**We strongly recommend full funding for technical assistance, including partnership building, landowner outreach and education, conservation planning and direct technical services – recognizing the role of intermediary organizations.** The economic and environmental benefits of the conservation programs are achieved through landowner and community engagement. At a time when there are more landowners applying for conservation programs than are able to be helped, we need more “boots on the ground” – whether federal or private, according to local circumstances – to help landowners and communities access and use these conservation programs. We ask that your Committee prioritize full funding for technical assistance, for federal or non-federal staffing, and that resources be broadly available to carry out these key activities: building voluntary partnerships that leverage resources, conducting landowner outreach and education, carrying out on-property and watershed-scale planning, and supporting technical project design and implementation.

We note that while federal partners must be adequately staffed, intermediary, non-federal organizations – especially community-based organizations (CBOs) - are often carrying out the above-listed activities in effective partnership with their federal counterparts (NRCS, Rural Development, etc.). Technical assistance must be designed so as to flexibly recognize both roles.

While we realize that we face an unprecedented and difficult political and financial climate, we urge you and your Committee to protect conservation programs, as well as programs that support small businesses and community-scaled energy production. These are investments that will strengthen our rural communities while yielding decades of returns from resilient forest, farm and ranch-based businesses and from public values such as clean air, clean water, thriving ecosystems and abundant fish and wildlife.

Sincerely,
Alabama
Andrew Williams, CEO
The United Christian Community Association (TUCCA)
Safford, AL

Jerry Lacey
President
LRLEAN
Fayette, AL

Arizona
Rob Davis
President
Forest Energy Corporation
Show Low, AZ

Arkansas
Billy Altom
Executive Director
Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living
North Little Rock, AR

California
Mark and Dina Moore
Lone Star Ranch
Kneeland, CA

Nick Goulette
Executive Director
Watershed Research & Training Center
Hayfork, CA

Richard Mackey and Karen Shimamoto
President (Richard)
Canyon Creek Ranch
Alturas, CA

Will Harling
Executive Director
Mid Klamath Watershed Council
Orleans, CA

Florida
Tirso Moreno
General Coordinator
Farmworker Association of Florida
Apopka, FL

Idaho
Joyce Dearstyne
Executive Director
Framing Our Community, Inc.
Elk City, ID

Kristin Troy
Executive Director
Lemhi Regional Land Trust
Salmon, ID

Nancy Gilliam, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Model Forest Policy Program
Sagle, ID

Kentucky
Dee Davis
President
Center for Rural Strategies
Whitesburg, KY

Mimi Pickering
Appalshop
Whitesburg, KY

Tanya Bernice Turner
Community Organizer
Kentuckians for the Commonwealth
Ermine, KY (Letcher Co.)

Maine
Ronald L. Phillips
Coastal Enterprises, Inc.
Wiscasset, ME

Massachusetts
Kim Phinney
Director of Rural and Tribal Development
YouthBuild USA
Somerville, MA

Minnesota
Jake Fischer
Clean Energy Program Manager
The Minnesota Project
St. Paul, MN
Missouri
Bob Bush
Retired, Northwest Missouri State University
Northwest Missouri Enterprise Facilitation, Inc.
Maryville, MO

Montana
Anne Dahl
President
Swan Ecosystem Center
Condon, MT

Carol Daly
President
Flathead Economic Policy Center
Columbia Falls, MT

Gerald J. Walsh and Sheila Schraudner
Walsh Land & Livestock
Rancher Stewardship Alliance
Dodson, MT

Jim Hagenbarth
Vice Chairman
Big Hole Watershed Committee
Divide, MT

Jim Stone
Rolling Stone Ranch
Ovando, MT

Katie Meiklejohn
Large Landscape Research Specialist
Sonoran Institute
Bozeman, MT

Mark Vander Meer
Owner
Vander Meer's Wildland Conservation Services
Swan Valley, MT

Marnie Criley
Owner
Criley Consulting
Missoula, MT

Zachary Jones
Family Owner and General Manager
Twodot Land and Livestock Co.
Established 1908
Six Generations of family stewardship
Harlowton, MT

Nebraska
Milan Wall
Co-Director
Heartland Center for Leadership Development
Lincoln, NE

New Hampshire
Bruce Mallory and Curt Grimm
Interim Director and Deputy Director
The Carsey Institute at the
University of Durham, NH

Joe Short
Program & Policy Director
Northern Forest Center
Concord, NH

New Mexico
Dana Bates
Gila Wood Products
Santa Clara, NM

Gordon West
Gila Woodnet
Silver City, NM

Michael DeBonis
Executive Director
Forest Guild
Santa Fe, NM

Zeecha Brooks
Restoration Technologies
Silver City, NM

New York
Rock Termini
Sect/Treas
Seneca Trail RC&D Council, Inc.
Serving Chautauqua, Cattaraugus, Allegany,
Livingston & Wyoming Counties, and the Seneca
Nation of New York

Ohio
Colin M. Donohue
Executive Director
National Network of Forest Practitioners
Athens, OH
Ted Bernard
Farmer and land owner
Guysville, OH

**Oregon**

Andrea Malmberg
Looking Glass Ranch
Union, OR

Betty Riley
Executive Director
South Central Oregon EDD
Klamath Falls, OR

Bob Parker
Extension Forester
Oregon State University Extension Service
Baker City, OR

Cassandra Moseley
Director
Ecosystem Workforce Program,
University of Oregon*
Eugene, OR

Chrysten Lambert
Ranching landowner, Fort Klamath
Klamath Falls, OR

Damion Ciotti
Local landowner
Klamath Falls, OR

Dani Watson
Ranch and Range Consulting
Klamath Falls, OR

George McKinley
Director
Southern Oregon Small Diameter Collaborative
Ashland, OR

James Root
Rancher
Upper Klamath Basin (off-project)
Fort Klamath, Oregon

James Walls
Executive Director
Lake County Resources Initiative
Lakeview, OR

James B. Henson, DVM, PhD
Chair, Board of Directors
Wallowa Resources
Enterprise, OR

Johnny Sundstrom
Siuslaw Institute
Deadwood, OR

Kurt Thomas
Rancher
Upper Klamath Basin (off-project)
Fort Klamath, Oregon

Maia Enzer
Policy Program Director
Sustainable Northwest
Portland, OR

Matt and Kathy Walter
W3 Ranch
Sprague River, OR

Nils Christoffersen
Executive Director
Wallowa Resources
Enterprise, OR

Shannon Peterson
Executive Director
Klamath Basin Rangeland Trust
Klamath Falls, OR

Tony Malmberg
The Savory Institute
Union, OR

William R. Renwick II
Chair
Harney County Watershed Council
Burns, OR

**South Carolina**

Sandra D. Jones
Landowner
Sumter, SC

**Tennessee**

James W. Ford
Outreach Coordinator
National Network of Forest Practitioners
Hermitage, TN
Washington

Dave Werntz
Science and Conservation Director
Conservation Northwest
Bellingham, WA

Jay McLaughlin
Mt. Adams Resource Stewards
Glenwood, WA

Washington, DC

Brian A. Kittler
Pinchot Institute for Conservation
Washington, DC

Rebecca R. Turner, Esq.
Director of Public Policy
American Forests
Washington, DC

West Virginia

Lonnie Ward
White Sulphur Springs,WV

National Organizations

Rebecca Salminen Witt
Chairman of the Board
The Communities Committee of the Seventh
American Forests Congress