



Memo

To: NACD Officers, Executive Board, Board Members, Presidents and Executive Directors of State/Territory Associations, Members

From: Jeremy Peters, NACD CEO

Date: April 14, 2026

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jeremy Peters".

Re: **NACD Update on Recent Congressional and Executive Actions**

All NACD updates are accessible on the [members only page](#) of the NACD website.

Headlines and Deadlines

- White House Releases FY27 President's Budget
- US Forest Service Reorganization
- USDA Announces Creation of National Proving Grounds Network
- USDA and the Department of Interior (DOI) sign MOU to further Grazing Action Plan
- USDA NEPA Reforms Finalized
- DOI Offering Renewed Deferred Resignation Program
- The Endangered Species Committee meets for the Fourth Time in nearly 50 years
- Legislation
 - ESA Amendments Act of 2025
 - Emergency Conservation Program Improvement Act

Action Items:

- Contact your members of Congress and encourage them to fund CTA and other programs
- Farm Bill feedback request

Current Events

President's Budget

The White House released the [President's Budget](#) April 3, 2026. Similar to last year's proposed presidential budget, it calls for cuts to many programs used by districts across the country to get conservation on the ground including NRCS Conservation Technical Assistance, USFS State, Private, and Tribal Forestry, and EPA's 319 grant program.



USDA

NOTE: Secretary Rollins is scheduled to appear before the House Appropriations subcommittee for Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration on April 16, 2026 at 10:30 am. You can watch the hearing [here](#).

Natural Resource Conservation Service

Program	FY25 Actual Spending	FY26 President’s Budget	FY26 Appropriations	FY27 President’s Budget
Conservation Operations ¹	\$896 million	\$112 million	\$850 million	\$111.5 million
Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations ²	\$15 million	\$0	\$50 million ³	\$0
Watershed Rehabilitation Program	\$1 million	\$0	\$3 million	\$0

Conservation Technical Assistance:

Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) is the foundational delivery system for NRCS work with America’s farmers, ranchers, forest stewards. It is the mechanism through which NRCS field staff and partners provide free, one-on-one, science-based guidance to producers helping them conserve, maintain and restore the natural resources on their lands and improve the health of their soils, water, and operations for the future.

CTA within the Conservation Operations account is critical because not every producer who needs technical assistance is seeking or is eligible for financial assistance through a Farm Bill program. CTA allows NRCS and its partners to serve any farmer, rancher, or forest steward who walks through the door, regardless of whether they enroll in a Farm Bill program. It also serves as an entry point for producers who may eventually pursue financial assistance.

The FY2026 President’s Budget also proposed eliminating CTA, but Congress recognized its importance and appropriated \$850 million and \$50 million, respectively. We anticipate that Congress will once again authorize funding. NACD is leading a letter to Congress requesting

¹ The proposed budget zeros out discretionary funding except for soil and snow surveys, water supply forecasting, and Plant Material Centers.

² Sec. 10601 of the OBBBA authorizes \$150 million/year mandatory spending for NRCS to provide technical and financial assistance Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations.

³ Continued funding for Water Bank, REHAB programs, PL-566.



\$1.05 billion in funding for Conservation Operations. Find NACD appropriations requests and concerns [here](#).

*Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Operations Program:*⁴

Provides technical and financial assistance to states, local governments, and tribes to plan and implement locally led watershed projects that reduce flooding, improve water quality, protect local ecosystems, and enhance resilience.

NACD supports the National Watershed Coalition’s FY2027 appropriations request for \$200 million for WFPO.

Watershed Rehabilitation Program

Helps rural communities strengthen and rehabilitate aging infrastructure, including dams and water storage facilities. The program generates around \$2 billion worth of water quality and erosion control benefits each year while improving wildlife habitat, recreation, water quality and supply for an estimated 47 million people.

NACD supports the National Watershed Coalition’s FY2027 appropriations request for \$75 million for the Watershed Rehabilitation Program.

Forest Service

Program	FY25 Actual Spending	FY26 President’s Budget	FY26 Appropriations	FY27 President’s Budget
State, Private, and Tribal Forestry (SPTF)	\$284 million	\$0	\$311 million	\$0 ⁵
Forest and Rangeland Research	\$300 million	\$0	\$309 million	\$0
Wildland Fire Management	~\$2.4 billion	\$0	~\$2.4 billion	\$0 ⁶

SPTF is the only federal mechanism supporting technical, financial, and educational assistance to non-federal forest owners. These programs are essential for healthy forests and habitats, wildfire mitigation, watershed protection, invasive species mitigation, and supporting the \$300+ billion U.S. forest products industry. Most programs deliver 2:1 or higher match rates, making

⁴ Combined with funding cuts to State Revolving Funds and Sec. 319; State, Private, and Tribal Forestry

⁵ No new funding for State, Private, and Tribal Forestry, using carryover balances to wind down operations.

⁶ Part of efforts to consolidate all wildland fire programs at Dept. of Interior. FY26 appropriations directed DOI to do a feasibility study before any reorganization. These funds are requested by DOI for the Wildland Fire Service.



them cost-effective tools for land stewardship. Eliminating them would reduce disaster readiness, increase wildfire and storm vulnerability, and leave forest owners and communities without support.

The budget calls for the reassignment of 19,000 positions due to the proposed transfer of firefighting duties to from USDA to the Department of Interior, as well as the loss of employees from forest management and research offices.

NACD supports the continued funding State, Private and Tribal Forestry at \$350 million.

Environmental Protection Agency⁷

Program (in millions)	FY25 Actual Spending	FY26 President’s Budget	FY26 Appropriations	FY27 President’s Budget
Overall	\$10.48 billion	\$4.16 billion	\$8.82 billion	\$4.2 billion
CWA sec. 319 Grants	\$142.2 million	\$0	\$172.2 million	\$0
State Revolving Funds ⁸				
<i>Clean Water</i>	<i>\$1.87 billion</i>	<i>\$155 million</i>	<i>\$746.1 million</i>	<i>\$155 million</i>
<i>Drinking Water</i>	<i>\$1.01 billion</i>	<i>\$150 million</i>	<i>\$410.7 million</i>	<i>\$150 million</i>
State and Tribal Assistance Grants	\$4.7 billion	\$750 million	\$4.4 billion	\$748 million
Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA)	\$18.6 million	\$8 million	\$72.3 million	\$7.8 million ⁹
Good Samaritan Mine Remediation Fund	\$0	N/A	\$0	\$1.7 million

EPA’s budget is reduced by approximately 52% with significant cuts to State Revolving Funds and WIFIA, and the elimination of the sec. 319 grant program and Congressionally Directed

⁷ “The Agency notes that FY26 levels are estimates and subject to refinement based on Administration priorities.” EPA Explanatory Statement

⁸ The proposed budget removes all discretionary funding, including congressionally directed spending for specific projects. Intended to shift responsibility to state programs.

⁹ Would receive no new federal funding and rely solely on applicant fees.



Spending. These programs provide for critical infrastructure improvements to water systems and nonpoint source pollution across the nation. The Clean Water State Revolving Fund provides below-market loans for a wide range of water quality infrastructure projects from stormwater management to estuary management projects. Section 319 grants are utilized by conservation districts and communities across the country to develop and implement watershed plans to fix impaired waters¹⁰. Loss of these funds will make it more difficult to employ nature-based solutions for community resilience, water quality, and disaster recovery.

NACD supports continued funding for Sec. 319 at \$200 million.

Department of Interior

Program (in millions)	FY25 Actual Spending	FY26 President’s Budget	FY26 Appropriations	FY27 President’s Budget
Overall	\$16.9 billion	\$14.4 billion	\$16.3 billion	\$16 billion
US Fish and Wildlife Service	\$1.67 billion	\$1.1 billion	\$1.65 billion	\$1.3 billion
Bureau of Land Management	\$1.46 billion	\$827 million	\$1.4 billion	\$936 million
US Wildland Fire Service	\$0	\$6.55 billion ¹¹	\$0	\$3.9 billion ¹²
US Bureau of Reclamation	\$1.88 billion	\$1.2 billion	\$1.6 billion	\$1.28 billion

Interior appears to grow by 4,500 employees, but that includes the 13,000 who would transfer from USFS. It would actually lose nearly 14% of its workforce outside of those transfers.

The Department of Interior is the steward of 20% of the land in the country via National Parks, BLM lands, National Wildlife Refuges, etc. This budget request reflects the administration’s prioritization of multi-use access to public lands and energy development.

In March, NACD signed a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) with the Bureau of Land Management to encourage local coordination for management and conservation implementation on and around public lands.

¹⁰ As identified by EPA and States.

¹¹ Proposed expansion of US Wildland Fire Service (WFS) to consolidate wildland fire programs from USFWS, BLM, BIA, NPS and USFS. DOI moved forward with the creation of the WFS, consolidating DOI programs under a single service to be based in Boise, ID.

¹² Incorporates Forest Service Wildland Fire funds which are zeroed out in the USFS budget.



In accordance with [NACD's MOU with USFWS](#), region reps from both NACD and USFWS are discussing and developing regional work plans to better engage in regional and local education and outreach opportunities.

Other News:

US Forest Service Reorganization

The U.S. Forest Service has announced plans for reorganization of the agency, intended to reduce administrative overhead, improve operational efficiency, and move leadership and decision-making closer to the field. Agency leadership indicated that this effort has been under development since early 2024, building on longer-standing internal discussions regarding budget constraints, staffing imbalances, and organizational complexity and would include relocation of Forest Service headquarters from Washington, D.C. to Salt Lake City, Utah.

Salt Lake City was selected due to its proximity to a large share of National Forest System lands and ongoing operational activity in the West. While some personnel will remain in Washington DC to support engagement with Congress, USDA, and the White House, the agency's primary leadership presence, including the Chief, is expected to head west.

The reorganization also includes a restructuring of the current regional forester structure and a transition to a more state-based organizational model, particularly in the West. Agency officials indicated that this model will flatten the organization, reduce layers of management, and improve coordination with governors, state foresters, and other state-level partners. It is also intended to integrate National Forest System operations, State and Private Forestry, research, and business operations more directly at the state level.

Leadership further acknowledged that approximately 5,000 employees associated with the headquarters and regional offices may be affected over time, though implementation will occur in phases. The idea is to shift more personnel and resources toward direct support for forests and ranger districts, including through reassignment to field units, service centers, and other operational functions. Agency officials emphasize that the transition will be carried out gradually and with attention to workforce impacts.

The Forest Service also announced changes to its Research and Development branch, including consolidation of leadership in Fort Collins, Colorado. While scientific staff are expected to remain geographically distributed, the agency indicated that it intends to reduce duplicative administrative structures and manage research through a more centralized program model.

With respect to wildland fire operations, agency leadership stated that the reorganization is not expected to alter operational fire response in the near term. Officials emphasized that firefighting capacity on forests and districts will remain unchanged, that Geographic Area Coordination



Centers will continue to operate as they currently do, and that there are no planned changes to NIFC coordination. Leadership characterized the approach for the upcoming fire season as operations continuing as normal, with broader organizational changes being phased to avoid disruption during peak fire activity.

Agency officials have framed the reorganization as a long-term effort to address persistent fiscal pressures, simplify internal processes, and rebuild field capacity. In particular, they cite longstanding concerns about slow hiring, burdensome approval processes, and insufficient staffing at the forest and district levels. The agency described this announcement as the first step in a multi-year process intended to create a leaner and more field-oriented organization.

This reorganization represents a substantial structural shift for the Forest Service. While near-term operational changes are expected to be limited, particularly for wildfire response, the longer-term transition to a state-based model and redistribution of staff may affect how partners interact with the agency at the regional, state, and local levels.

USDA Announces creation of National Proving Grounds Network

On April 7, 2026 USDA announced the launch of a nationwide initiative designed to evaluate agricultural technologies under real world conditions. The initiative has been designed to thoroughly test and validate both existing and emerging tools under real-world production conditions, ultimately providing farmers and ranchers with trusted, practical insights that they can rely upon when making technology-investment decisions.

USDA and Department of the Interior sign MOU

Building on the [Grazing Action Plan](#) (see *GA Updates from 10/27/2025 for details*) designed to fortify the American Beef industry through regulatory changes and improved coordination, USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins and DOI Secretary Doug Burgum signed an MOU to strengthen coordination, streamline access, and deliver meaningful, tangible support for farmers and ranchers who rely on public lands.

USDA NEPA reforms finalized

USDA adopted the interim final rule published on July 3, 2025, with minor changes, as the final rule. The changes were made in compliance of the Supreme Court decision in *Seven County Infrastructure Coalition v. Eagle County, CO* (2025) which emphasized judicial deference and timely agency decision-making and the Council on Environmental Quality's rescission of its NEPA regulations. These changes are generally related to deadlines and page limits for environmental assessments and environmental impact statements, incorporating Congress' definition of "major Federal action"¹³ and Congress' procedure for determining the appropriate

¹³ An action an agency determines is subject to substantial federal control and responsibility.



level of review and direction with respect to the establishment, adoption, and application of categorical exclusions. See NACD comments [here](#).

DOI offering renewed Deferred Resignation Program

DOI is the first agency in 2026 to bring back calls for deferred resignation (DRP) which will allow all full-time employees a chance to remain on paid leave through September before exiting federal service. DOI lost around 13,000 staff through multiple rounds of DRP in 2025. During appropriations negotiations, Congress placed a pause on reductions in force (RIFs) and some agencies are slowly starting to rebuild staff numbers after the RIFs and DRP, with many looking to begin in the next fiscal year. Based on the proposed budget and proposed RIF numbers from October 2025, it seems DOI is looking to let go of nearly a quarter of employees each from US Geological Survey, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and National Park Service.

The Endangered Species Committee aka the “God Squad” met for the fourth time in 50 years

The Endangered Species Committee, often referred to as the God Squad due to their ability to determine the fate of a species, convened on March 31 to discuss, and eventually grant, an exemption for oil and gas exploration and drilling offshore from the gulf states. The Trump administration cited national security concerns and the need for domestic oil production as the reasons for the exemption. The gulf is the only home to the critically endangered Rice’s whale. The petition was brought on the assumption that ESA provisions for the endangered whale were hindering oil and gas exploration though no there is no evidence to suggest that.

The Endangered Species Committee was established in 1978 in response to the Tennessee Valley River Authority and its conflict with the mighty snail darter. The committee is a high-level group of cabinet members plus an individual designated by the president who convene to discuss applications for a major exemption to the Endangered Species Act. Secretary Pete Hegseth attended at the invitation of the president. The committee has only met three other times since 1978.

Legislation

ESA Amendments Act of 2025

Anticipated to be heard on the House floor the week of April 20, 2026. Brought by Rep. Bruce Westerman (AR-4), this Act makes [targeted reforms](#) to incentivize species recovery, streamline processes, and provide consistent Congressional direction to agencies on how ESA should be implemented.

Emergency Conservation Program Improvement Act

Anticipated to be heard on the House floor this week. Brought by Rep. Julia Letlow (LA) to expand eligibility for payments to agricultural producers and owners of forest land impacted by natural disasters, including producers impacted by human-caused wildfires, and provides



additional time to disburse funds from the Emergency Conservation Program and Emergency Forest Restoration Program. H.R.1101 is coming up under suspension of the rules which is a way to fast track measures with broad bipartisan support. There will be limited debate, no floor amendments allowed and must pass with 2/3 majority. This bill has already passed the Senate.

ACTION ITEMS:

Appropriations:

Please contact your senators and representatives and encourage them to fund:

- Conservation Operations (\$1.05 billion)
- Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Operations Program (\$200 million)
- Watershed Rehabilitation Program (\$75 million)
- Clean Water Act Sec. 319 for Nonpoint Source Management (\$200 million)
- State and Private Forestry Programs (\$300 million)
- Forest Stewardship Program (\$30 million)

You can find issue papers outlining NACD appropriations requests [here](#).

Farm Bill:

For those who were able to join us in Washington DC for the Fly-In or who have recently been in contact with your representatives, the House Committee on Agriculture has requested stakeholder feedback you may have received during conversations with House members about the Farm Bill.

- ***Stakeholder Feedback Form:*** We expect the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026 to be headed to the House floor soon! To help with that effort we are asking stakeholders to pass along feedback that they have gotten from Member offices regarding the Farm Bill. Stakeholders can use [THIS](#) form to do so. Please fill this out as soon as possible for meetings that have already occurred or as soon as possible after meeting with offices over the coming weeks.
- ***Farm Bill Landing Page:*** All one pagers and summary documents can be found on our website [HERE](#). Reminder that you can find out how the agriculture title of H.R. 1 affects each state [HERE](#).