

Land Trust Alliance
Public Policy Update
12/9/2025

Federal government

The Federal Government reopened in mid-November which funds most of the government until January 30, 2026. The package included a “minibus” appropriations bill that funding the U.S. Department of Agriculture through fiscal year 2026. It also extended the 2018 Farm Bill for another year – until September 30, 2026.

We are monitoring the appropriations process, but it is unlikely congress will pass additional appropriations bills this calendar year, but it will have to act by January 30, 2026, to prevent another shutdown. Congress could pass additional appropriations bills, another continuing resolution or a combination of both.

Congress

In addition to funding the federal government for the remainder of fiscal year 2026, there are several things on the Congressional horizon:

- Great American Outdoors Act: The provisions in the GAOA to fund deferred maintenance at National Parks and Wildlife Refuges expired on September 30, 2025. There is bipartisan support for continuing to fund this work so Congress will need to pass an extension – which will likely happen sometime next year.
- There are bipartisan efforts underway in the House and Senate to streamline the siting of infrastructure including the Streamlining Procurement for Effective Execution and Delivery (SPEED) Act, which would shorten timelines for the National Environmental Policy Act and limit judicial review. Another bill under consideration is the Promoting Efficient Review for Modern Infrastructure Today (PERMIT) Act that would expedite federal permitting processes including the Clean Water Act and limit state authority to review federal permits and to impose additional restrictions. Both of these bills are expected to go to the House floor before the end of the year and potential action in the Senate next year.
- There is talk of a second reconciliation bill, but no details have been released, and it will not happen this calendar year. The Alliance will monitor closely for

harmful provisions that were excluded from the final version of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act including the proposal to allow the buy back of Department of the Interior conservation easements.

Farm Bill

The reconciliation bill addressed key parts of the Farm Bill including securing the remaining Inflation Reduction Act funds for the conservation title; however, our community continues to advocate for policy changes to streamline the implementation the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program – Agricultural Land Easement component and Regional Conservation Partnership Program easements. So, we need the next Farm Bill.

The Chair of the House Agriculture Committee, G.T. Thompson from Pennsylvania plans to mark up a modified version of the bill that passed out of the committee in May 2024 early next year. As a reminder, the bill that passed out of committee included the vast majority of the Alliance Farm Bill recommendations including the Forest Conservation Easement Program mandatory funding. We are seeking some clarifications to the language that passed, which have been well received.

In the Senate, Chair John Boozman from Arkansas, will likely mark up a bill sometime next year and language released in 2024 also reflects the vast majority of our Farm Bill recommendations.

So, we are in a good position should a Farm Bill move next year, but we will need to advocate for our priorities.

Executive Actions

Over the last few weeks, the administration has issued memorandums to federal agency heads directing additional review of senior-level staff positions for potential reassignment. It is very likely we will see another shuffle of senior staff and likely additional people leaving the federal workforce.

Changes at NRCS

Last month the NRCS announced it is changing the Office of Regional Conservationists to the Office of Assistant Chiefs, which are now led by political appointees.

They have not yet announced the new Assistant Chief for the North Region, but it is forthcoming. Astor Boozer, who currently serves as Northeast Regional Conservationist, will assume the role of Deputy Assistant Chief – North Region.

In addition, Colton Buckley who was the Chief of Staff to NRCS Chief Aubrey Bettencourt is now the Associate Chief. Other changes include:

- Chief of Staff: Cody Cornell
- Sr. Deputy Associate Chief for Natural Resources: Karen Woodrich
- Deputy Chief for Programs: Astrid Martinez
- Senior Advisor for Field Operations: Kelli Evans

ALEC proposed model legislation

This week the American Legislative Exchange Council once again rejected a harmful proposed model legislation that would have limited non-government easements to not more than 20 years. Thanks to everyone who responded to our call to action and reached out to relevant state legislators.

Call to Action: These attacks are not going away, and our community needs to be much more proactive about educating decision makers at all levels of government about the importance of the work that you do and how it helps landowners and families – and your communities. It's also important to educate them about the programs that you utilize to advance this work and how they are a good investment of public funding and about conservation easements. If our community is not framing the discussion, it creates the opportunity for misinformation to catch hold.