



Restoring America's Watersheds Act

U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich is sponsoring the *Restoring America's Watersheds Act* to improve the health of watersheds on national forest lands. The legislation would:

- ▶ Direct greater resources toward fire-impacted watersheds.
- ▶ Encourage partnerships with non-federal stakeholders to invest in forests that provide important water resources.
- ▶ Minimize runoff and sedimentation from old roads into forest streams.
- ▶ Encourage local collaboration in restoring our forests' health.

Water Source Protection Program

The bill would establish the Water Source Protection Program within the Forest Service. New Mexico's national forests are critical to our state's water supplies. Healthy forests mean clean water for residents, farmers and ranchers, and businesses, because more than half of our state's surface water originates in forests. When large, catastrophic fires damage forest watersheds, our communities are faced with the costs of cleaning ash, sediment, and debris out of streams and reservoirs, and may face reduced water supplies for years to come.

The Water Source Protection Program would build on partnerships between cities, businesses, water utilities, farmers and ranchers, and the Forest Service to provide matching funds for forest health projects on lands that provide water resources for downstream users.

In addition to reducing the risk of catastrophic fire to our water supplies, projects under the program would provide much-needed jobs in the forest products industry in rural communities. In New Mexico, the Santa Fe Water Fund and Rio Grande Water Fund are successful examples of these partnerships. The bill would clarify and enhance the Forest Service's ability to partner with communities to protect forest watersheds and provide reliable jobs for forest workers.

Legacy Roads and Trails Program

Unmaintained roads are one of the biggest contributors to sediment and other pollutants in national forest streams and rivers. This sediment travels downstream and degrades fish habitat, clogs irrigation infrastructure, and raises water treatment costs for cities.

The Legacy Roads and Trails program provides funds to carry out critical maintenance and urgent repairs on Forest Service roads and trails. Nationwide, the program has maintained or storm-proofed 13,000 miles of roads, upgraded or fixed 3,600 miles of trails, and supported 840 to 1,180 jobs annually. In its first three years in New Mexico, the program maintained or improved 346 miles of roads and trails, improving water quality for communities across the state.

The Legacy Roads and Trails program has received funding since 2008, but has never been authorized by Congress.

Watershed Condition Framework

The Forest Service developed the Watershed Condition Framework (WCF) in 2011, but it has never been authorized by Congress. The WCF is a system to evaluate the health of watersheds on national forest lands, identify priority watershed for restoration, develop restoration action plans, implement those plans, and monitor the effectiveness of the restoration projects.

The bill requires the Forest Service to coordinate with states, private landowners, and the public throughout the process. It also allows an emergency designation of priority watersheds that are newly damaged by catastrophic wildfire without waiting for the regular evaluation cycle.

Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program

The Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) was established in 2009 to select high-priority forest restoration projects as designed and proposed by local community collaborative groups.

Over the last five years, CFLRP projects have demonstrated that large, landscape-scale restoration projects can improve forest and watershed health while bringing economic development to rural communities. CFLRP has reached its authorized funding cap, so no new projects can be added. The bill would double the allowed spending cap and extend the program authorization for five more years so that new projects can be selected.