

THE RURAL REPORT | AUG 18 2026

Updates on Federal Action and Funding Opportunities
Supporting Development in Rural Communities

USDA Prepares Rulemaking to Rescind 2001 Roadless Rule

USDA announced today that the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Forest Service's proposed rescission of the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule will be published in the coming days. The Administration says rescission would return greater decision-making authority to local forest managers and allow roadless-area decisions to be addressed through existing forest planning processes, with consideration of state, tribal, and community input.

The Forest Service will accept public comments on the proposed rule through September 21. More than 95% of inventoried roadless areas are located in 10 Western states, though the proposal does not apply to Colorado or Idaho, which have separate state-specific roadless regulations. The Administration is framing the rescission primarily as a wildfire-risk reduction and forest-health measure, noting that more than 40% of inventoried roadless areas have high or very high wildfire hazard potential and that only 5% have received hazardous-fuels treatments since 2014.

Concerns Grow Over EQIP Funding and NRCS Staffing

Stakeholders are raising concerns that the Senate farm bill's proposed \$1.92 billion reduction to Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funding from FY2027–FY2031 could undermine conservation efforts and create uncertainty for producers. EQIP provides farmers and ranchers with technical and financial assistance to implement conservation practices, and more than 56,000 approved applications could go unfunded if the proposed cuts move forward. Advocates argue that maintaining funding is particularly important given the time and resources producers have already invested in developing detailed conservation plans and applying for assistance.

Concerns also extend to staffing at USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), with reports that staffing reductions are creating longer wait times, delayed payments, and fewer personnel available to help producers develop and implement conservation plans. Stakeholders argue that funding increases for conservation programs will have limited impact if NRCS lacks the staff needed to deliver them. The ongoing farm bill and USDA reorganization decisions will therefore be important for determining the administration's ability to support conservation and regenerative agriculture efforts on the ground.

Funding Opportunities

[Electric Infrastructure Loan & Loan Guarantee Program](#)

U.S. Department of Agriculture

USDA Rural Development provides insured loans and loan guarantees to nonprofit and cooperative associations, public bodies, and other utilities. Insured loans primarily finance the construction of electric distribution facilities in rural areas. ***Application deadline: Open***

[Water & Waste Disposal Loan & Grant Program](#)

U.S. Department of Agriculture

USDA Rural Development provides funding for clean and reliable drinking water systems, sanitary sewage and solid waste disposal, and stormwater drainage to households and businesses in eligible rural areas. ***Application deadline: Open***

[Community Facilities Direct Loan Program](#)

U.S. Department of Agriculture

USDA Rural Development provides affordable funding to develop essential community facilities in rural areas. Projects include fire and rescue stations, town halls, health care clinics, and hospitals.

Application deadline: Open

[Community Facilities Guaranteed Loan Program](#)

U.S. Department of Agriculture

USDA Rural Development provides loan guarantees to eligible lenders to develop essential community facilities (CF) in rural areas. Examples of community facilities include health care facilities, buildings like town halls, and public safety facilities such as fire departments. ***Application deadline: Open***

[Timber Production and Expansion Guaranteed Loan Program \(TPEP\)](#)

U.S. Department of Agriculture

USDA Rural Development provides financial support to qualified lenders whose loan applicants want to establish, reopen, expand, or improve a sawmill or other wood processing facility that processes ecosystem restoration byproducts from USDA Forest Service National Forest System lands.

Application deadline: Accepted until funds are expended.

[Targeted Technical Assistance for Rural Hospitals Program](#)

Health Resources & Services Administration

A federally funded initiative that offers comprehensive technical assistance to rural hospitals to address financial and operational challenges and maintain essential health services for their communities. ***Application Deadline: Rolling Basis***