



Tuesday, May 19th, 2026

The Honorable Sam Graves
Chairman
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rick Larsen
Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Support for Section 7107 — National Culvert Removal, Replacement, and Restoration Grant Program

Dear Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Larsen:

On behalf of American Rivers Action Fund, we write to express our appreciation for the inclusion of Section 7107, the National Culvert Removal, Replacement, and Restoration Grant Program, in the Build America 250 Act. This provision reflects an important recognition that modern transportation infrastructure can and should advance public safety, infrastructure resilience, river restoration, and economic opportunity simultaneously.

Across the country, outdated and undersized culverts contribute to roadway washouts, flooding risks, infrastructure failures, and aquatic habitat fragmentation. Investments in modern stream crossings improve transportation reliability while restoring fish passage, reducing long-term maintenance costs, strengthening resilience, and supporting outdoor recreation economies.

We are particularly encouraged by the Committee's continued support for a dedicated federal program focused on culvert replacement and restoration. The program has already demonstrated strong demand and measurable benefits through prior grant rounds, helping communities advance projects that improve transportation infrastructure while reconnecting rivers and streams critical to fish and wildlife.

As the Committee continues to refine the legislation, we respectfully encourage consideration of several opportunities to strengthen Section 7107 and maximize the program's long-term effectiveness:

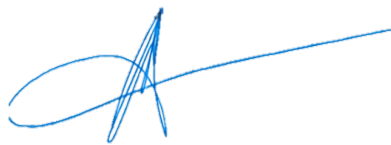
- **Permanent Authorization and Sustained Funding:** Establishing durable, long-term authorization and predictable funding levels would provide certainty for states, tribes, local governments, and partners planning large-scale restoration and infrastructure modernization projects.

- **Streamlined Delivery and Technical Assistance:** Rural and tribal communities often face capacity constraints that limit participation in federal grant opportunities. Additional technical assistance, simplified application processes, and streamlined permitting coordination would help accelerate project delivery while maintaining accountability.
- **Interagency Coordination Support:** Dedicated staffing and coordination resources among agencies such as the Federal Highway Administration, NOAA Fisheries, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service could improve technical reviews, reduce delays, and ensure projects incorporate resilient design standards.
- **Expanded Eligible Activities:** We encourage the Committee to explicitly include activities such as culvert inventories, barrier identification protocols, hydrological modeling, engineering assessments, and utility relocation costs as eligible expenses under the program. These activities are often essential prerequisites for successful project implementation.
- **Long-Term Resilience Standards:** Encouraging durable design life standards and streamflow adaptability would help ensure projects remain effective under changing precipitation patterns and future flood conditions, reducing costly reinvestment over time.
- **Transparency and Public Accountability:** Establishing a national, public-facing dashboard for awarded projects could improve transparency, track implementation progress, showcase project benefits, and support the Committee's broader goals related to efficient project delivery and stewardship of federal resources.

We also strongly support continued investment in the PROTECT Program and encourage the Committee to preserve both formula and competitive grant funding in the final legislation. The program has already demonstrated significant value in helping communities strengthen transportation infrastructure against flooding, wildfire, drought, and other natural hazards. As the bill advances, we encourage greater integration of Resilience Improvement Plans into long-range planning processes, expanded support for rural and tribal capacity building, and increased flexibility for higher federal cost shares in vulnerable and underserved communities. These improvements would help ensure transportation investments are more durable, cost-effective, and resilient for the long term.

We appreciate the Committee's leadership in advancing this important investment and look forward to continued collaboration as the surface transportation reauthorization process moves forward. Thank you for your consideration and your continued commitment to building safer, more resilient transportation infrastructure nationwide.

Sincerely,



Jaime D. Sigaran
Legislative Director
American Rivers Action Fund

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY



RESILIENT AMERICAN RIVERS AND RURAL ECONOMIES ACT

The RARE Act modernizes the National Culvert Program to ensure projects are delivered faster, more efficiently, and with greater access for the communities that need it most. It provides flexible funding for rural and Tribal communities, reduces match requirements for high-need areas, establishes clear design and fish passage standards, and improves transparency through a public-facing dashboard. The legislation also strengthens permitting and project delivery.

Across the country, aging and undersized culverts are increasing flood risks, damaging infrastructure, blocking fish passage, and disrupting transportation and emergency response. While federal investments are already underway, projects are often slowed by complex permitting and inconsistent standards. The RARE Act removes these barriers to ensure investments deliver results.

PRIORITY NEEDS

The Resilient American Rivers and Rural Economies (RARE) Act would address these challenges by modernizing and strengthening the National Culvert Program.

Specifically, RARE would:

- Provide flexible funding options for rural and Tribal communities
- Reduce or waive match requirements for high-need communities
- Establish minimum design and fish passage standards
- Create a public-facing dashboard to improve transparency and accountability
- Build a dedicated interagency support network to streamline permitting and project delivery

The RARE Act would reduce barriers to project delivery and give states, Tribes, and local communities the tools they need to upgrade infrastructure.

HOW CONGRESS CAN HELP

Introduce the Resilient American Rivers Act to:

- **Protect and strengthen funding for culvert and resilience programs**
- **Conduct oversight to ensure efficient project delivery**
- **Support policies that reduce barriers for rural and Tribal communities**

NATIONAL INVESTMENTS & IMPACT

North Carolina

Culvert failures have contributed to flooding and roadway disruptions during major storms. Projects upgrading deteriorating crossings improve storm resilience and public safety. *Total investment: \$472,000*

Idaho

Multiple projects are replacing culverts with bridges or improved structures. These upgrades restore miles of fish habitat and improve watershed connectivity. Partnerships with Tribes and federal agencies highlight the need for efficient delivery systems. *Total investment: \$7,000,000*

Alaska

Significant federal investments are replacing outdated culverts. Projects are restoring tens of miles of habitat and improving flood resilience, critical for remote and Tribal communities dependent on fisheries. *Total investment: \$47,000,000*

Massachusetts

Culvert replacement and stream restoration on Town Brook in Plymouth. Project replaces failing and undersized culverts, restoring fish passage for river herring and alewife while improving flood resilience and infrastructure reliability. *Total investment: \$2,000,000*

Oregon

Culvert upgrades are restoring critical salmon and steelhead habitat. Projects improve flood resilience and reconnect river systems. Local and Tribal partnerships underscore the need for accessible funding and streamlined processes. *Total investment: \$20,000,000*

California

Projects are replacing aging culverts with longer-lasting, resilient structures. Improvements enhance public safety and endangered species recovery. Investments demonstrate the importance of consistent design standards. *Total investment: \$28,000,000*

Washington

Numerous culvert projects are restoring access to miles of upstream habitat. Projects also reduce flooding and improve transportation infrastructure. Continued progress depends on faster permitting and coordination. *Total investment: \$80,000,000*

Maine

Culvert replacement projects are restoring dozens of miles of aquatic habitat. Benefits include improved fisheries, water quality, and ecosystem health. Streamlined delivery is essential to scale these efforts. *Total investment: \$35,000,000*



**AMERICAN
RIVERS**
ACTION FUND

American Rivers and its affiliated American Rivers Action Fund are national organizations working to make every river clean and healthy for people and wildlife. We combine on-the-ground projects with enduring partnerships to protect and restore the 4.4 million miles of rivers and streams that are essential to our nation's clean drinking water, extraordinary wildlife, and the strength of our communities. For more than 50 years, our staff, supporters, and partners have been driven by a common belief: Life Depends on Rivers.
AmericanRiversActionFund.org

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Resilient American Rivers and Rural Economies Act of 2026” or the “RARE Act of 2026.”

SEC. 2. NATIONAL CULVERT REMOVAL, REPLACEMENT, AND RESTORATION GRANT PROGRAM.

(a) In General.

Section 6703 of title 49, United States Code, is amended as follows:

(1) Definition of Small Community, Rural, and Tribal Applicants.

In subsection (a), add:

“(6) SMALL COMMUNITY, RURAL, AND TRIBAL APPLICANTS.— The term means an applicant— (A) from a unit of local government, special purpose district, or public authority serving fewer than 200,000 people; (B) located in a rural area, as defined by the Secretary, including any area that is not an urbanized area with a population over 50,000; (C) from an Indian Tribe (as defined in 25 U.S.C. 5304), a Tribal government, or a consortium of such Tribes; or (D) from a consortium of the entities described above.”

(2) Conforming Amendment.

In subsection (d), strike “subject to subsection (e)” and insert “subject to subsections (e) and (f).”

(3) Redesignation.

Redesignate subsections (f) through (i) as subsections (j) through (m).

(4) New Subsections (f)–(i).

(f) Minimum Design Standards.

The Secretary shall award grants only to projects that:

1. incorporate: (A) stream simulation design or other scientifically recognized methods ensuring unrestricted fish passage; and (B) hydraulic design methods that account for projected extreme weather-related hydrological changes; and
2. are designed with a minimum structural lifespan that reflects future hydrological conditions.

(g) Utility Relocation Costs.

Utility relocation costs necessary for project completion shall be considered eligible project costs and must be listed as a separate line item in all project budgets.

(h) Capacity Building Eligibility.

1. Grant recipients may use awarded funds through private contractors, nonprofit organizations, or other implementation partners.

2. The Secretary shall ensure pass-through agreements maintain fiscal accountability while enabling capacity-constrained entities to use specialized expertise.

(i) Process and Funding Arrangements for Small, Rural, and Tribal Communities.

1. Simplified Requirements. The Secretary, in coordination with the Undersecretary and Director, shall simplify application and reporting requirements to reduce administrative burden.
2. Alternative Funding Arrangements. (A) The Secretary shall establish arrangements allowing upfront funding instead of reimbursement. (B) Funding options shall include: (i) advance payments for eligible costs; (ii) direct grant mechanisms enabling project commencement without financial burden; and (iii) flexible drawdown structures allowing incremental disbursement as milestones are met.

(5) Federal Share.

In subsection (j) (as redesignated), insert:

“and up to 100 percent for a project carried out with a grant to a small community, rural, or Tribal applicant under the program” after “80 percent.”

(6) Authorization of Appropriations.

Strike subsection (m) and insert:

“(m) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.— (1) \$300,000,000 is authorized for each of fiscal years 2027–2031. (2) At least \$100,000,000 each year shall be used to carry out subsection (e).”

(b) Reporting and Oversight.

(1) Annual Report.

The Secretary of Transportation shall submit an annual report to the relevant congressional committees detailing:

- number and type of projects funded;
- percentage of funding allocated to small community, rural, and Tribal applicants;
- progress implementing alternative funding arrangements and their impact on project completion;
- updates on the effectiveness of minimum design standards in improving fish passage and infrastructure resilience.

(2) Consultation with Tribal and Local Governments.

The Secretary shall convene an annual consultation forum with Tribes, local governments, nonprofits, and scientific experts to review program effectiveness and recommend improvements.

(3) Interagency Coordination.

(A) The Secretary shall coordinate with USFWS, NOAA, and FHWA to expedite permitting, environmental review, and technical consultations. (B) The Secretary shall coordinate with USFWS,

NOAA, and the Army Corps to establish best practices for extreme-weather-adaptive culvert and weir design.

(4) Technical Standards Development.

The Secretary, in consultation with Tribal representatives and ecological scientists, shall develop updated technical guidelines ensuring:

- resilience to extreme weather;
- alignment with regional watershed restoration goals;
- integration of Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge.

(5) Improving Inventory and Data Sharing.

(A) The Secretary shall collaborate with the North American Aquatic Connectivity Collaborative to enhance data sharing and field reconnaissance. (B) Federal and State agencies receiving funding shall coordinate to maintain a comprehensive, up-to-date inventory of culverts and aquatic barriers.

(6) Interactive Online Dashboard.

The Secretary shall develop and maintain a public dashboard with real-time tracking of:

- project selections and awards (including pre-enactment awards);
- developer and applicant information;
- award status;
- project name and location;
- project summary and impact analysis.

(7) Implementation Timeline.

(A) Interim guidance must be issued within 90 days of enactment. (B) All changes must be implemented within 180 days of enactment.

Submitted via: www.regulations.gov
RE: DOT-OST-2025-0468
Comment on Surface Transportation Reauthorization RFI

The Honorable Sean Duffy
Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

Ms. Gloria M. Shepherd, Executive Director
Federal Highway Administration
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

RE: Priorities for the Surface Transportation Reauthorization

Dear Secretary Duffy and Executive Director Shepherd:

On behalf of millions of our members and supporters, we write today to provide input in response to the Department's Request for Information on the next surface transportation reauthorization. We deeply appreciate DOT's focus on safety, delivery, economic growth, and strong federal–state partnerships. In alignment with this vision, we urge the Department to build on recent momentum by strengthening two programs already delivering exemplary results: the National Culvert Removal, Replacement, and Restoration Grant Program, and the PROTECT Program (Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation).

Across the United States, aging or poorly designed culverts and stream crossings can have adverse effects on healthy rivers and anadromous fish such as salmon, steelhead, and river herring. Damaged culverts can create steep drop-offs, high water velocities, or dry channels that prevent fish from reaching their spawning grounds. While DOT's primary mission is advancing transportation infrastructure, its work can have lasting impacts on river health and recreational access. DOT must continue to strike the right balance between preserving the long-term health of streams and supporting the growing needs of the sportfishing industry – including ensuring anglers can safely access the places they fish. Today, recreational fishing remains a significant driver of economic growth¹, particularly in rural and coastal regions, with one in six Americans participating in fishing activities each year.

Recent polling² also demonstrates that the public, across political affiliations and geographic regions, strongly supports integrating habitat connectivity, wildlife migration route protection, and ecosystem restoration into transportation planning. These approaches not only strengthen natural systems but also mitigate risks from disasters like flooding and wildfires, enhance public safety, and create well-paying jobs – making them win-win investments with measurable conservation, and economic benefits. Below are our recommendations.

National Culvert Removal, Replacement, and Restoration Grant Program

The culvert program has emerged as a model of infrastructure investment that supports public safety, ecological restoration, aquatic connectivity, and economic development. Earlier this year, DOT awarded \$33 million in May 2025 to support eight culvert projects, following FY 2022's \$196 million investment across 169 active culvert replacements.³ To build on this success, we respectfully request:

- Permanent reauthorization and sustained funding to meet national demand.

¹ American Sportfishing Association. (2025, March 12). *New report highlights sportfishing industry's expanding economic impact*. <https://asafishing.org/industry/sportfishing-economic-impact/>

² Nature4Climate. (2024, March). *2023 Impact Report*. <https://nature4climate.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/N4C-2023-Impact-Report-FINAL.pdf>

³ U.S. Department of Transportation. (2025, May 14). *U.S. Transportation Secretary Sean P. Duffy approves another 76 grants to Get America Building Again* <https://www.transportation.gov/briefing-room/us-transportation-secretary-sean-p-duffy-approves-another-76-grants-get-america>

- Streamlined access, permitting timelines, and enhanced technical assistance for rural and tribal applicants to accelerate project delivery.
- Dedicated interagency staff funding (e.g., NOAA, USFWS, FHWA) to expedite technical reviews and integrate smart design.
- Ensure durable project design life and streamflow adaptability, supporting long-term infrastructure and ecosystem function.
- Explicit inclusion of inventories and barrier identification protocols, hydrological modeling, and utility relocation as eligible project costs.
- A national, public-facing dashboard for culvert projects, increasing transparency and public accountability while advancing DOT’s delivery goals.

PROTECT Program

The PROTECT program supports communities in hardening transportation infrastructure against adverse like flooding, drought, and wildfire. In April 2024, the Department awarded nearly \$830 million to 80 resilience projects across 39 states and territories – demonstrating strong cross-sector and bipartisan momentum behind these solutions.⁴ To amplify this impact in the next authorization:

- Preserve both formula and competitive/discretionary grants, ensuring reliability for planning and flexibility for innovation.
- Require integration of Resilience Improvement Plans into long-range and metropolitan planning to prioritize high-impact investments.
- Increase head-room for federal cost share on projects within approved resilience plans—particularly in underserved and vulnerable communities.
- Support coordination and capacity building, especially in rural or tribal areas, through outreach, technical support, and expert partnerships.

Building a Transportation System that is Safer, more Resilient, and Sustainable

Rivers, creeks, and streams serve as superhighways for anadromous fish, yet existing barriers often block these vital passageways. To build a safer, more resilient, and sustainable economy, we can—and must—do better. From culverts to road improvements and pedestrian safety, the next authorization provides an unparalleled opportunity to lead with innovation, job creation, and economic growth while balancing conservation needs.

Recent executive actions by President Trump further underscore the urgency and opportunity for modernizing infrastructure and conservation stewardship. The April 2025 memorandum on Updating Permitting Technology for the 21st Century directs federal agencies to streamline technical reviews through digitization⁵, interagency coordination, and data-driven decision-making – principles that align closely with DOT’s goals for delivery and transparency.

Similarly, the July 2025 Executive Order on Making America Beautiful Again⁶ establishes a federal commission to expand access to public lands, restore aquatic ecosystems, and reduce bureaucratic delays in

⁴ Strupp, J. (2024, April 12). DOT releases \$830 M for resilience projects. Construction Dive. <https://www.constructiondive.com/news/transportation-infrastructure-resilience-830-million/713114/>

⁵ Trump, D. J. (2025, April 15). *Presidential Memorandum: Updating Permitting Technology for the 21st Century*. The White House. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/04/updating-permitting-technology-for-the-21st-century/>

⁶ Trump, D. J. (2025, July 3). *Executive Order: Establishing the President’s Make America Beautiful Again Commission*. The White House. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/07/establishing-the-presidents-make-america-beautiful-again-commission/>

conservation efforts. Together, these initiatives reinforce the importance of durable infrastructure and provide a compelling federal framework for advancing programs like PROTECT and the Culvert Grant Program. We encourage DOT to leverage these directives to make permitting more effective and efficient, enhance interagency collaboration, and ensure that resilience investments reflect the full scope of federal priorities.

Thank you for considering these recommendations. We welcome further dialogue in refining these approaches that improve public safety, reduce costs associated with natural disasters, and create good paying jobs.

Sincerely,

350.org

A2/Anthropocene Alliance

American Fisheries Society

American Rivers Action Fund

Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy

Anacostia Riverkeeper

Angler Action Foundation

Appalachian Mountain Club

Appalachian Trail Conservancy

Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

Association of Northwest Steelheaders

Association to Preserve Cape Cod

Berkshire Environmental Action Team
(BEAT)

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Black Hills Preservation Project

California Environmental Voters

Californians for Western Wilderness

Calm and Mindful LLC

Capital Region Planning Commission

Catawba Riverkeeper

Center for Biological Diversity

Center for Heirs' Property

Center for Large Landscape Conservation

Center for the Blue Economy

Change the Chamber

Charles River Conservancy

Charles River Watershed Association

Clark Fork Coalition

Clean Streams LLC

Clinton River Watershed Council

Connecticut River Conservancy

ConservAmerica Action

Conservation Fisheries, Inc.

Conservatives for Responsible Stewardship

Cumberland River Compact

Dolores River Boating Advocates

Earth Ethics, Inc.

Elders Climate Action

Endangered Habitats League

Endangered Species Coalition

Environmental Protection Information
Center - EPIC

Farmington River Watershed Association

Fish Camp

Fishpond Inc.

FreshWater Accountability Project

Friends of the Big Sioux River

Friends of the Mississippi River

Friends of the Moshassuck

Georgia Conservancy

Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy

Great Egg Harbor Watershed Association

Great Salt Lake Audubon

GreenLatinos

Gulf of Maine Research Institute

Hacklebarney Chapter Trout Unlimited

Harpeth Conservancy

Hip Hop Caucus

Hoopla Valley Tribe

Housatonic Valley Association

Howling For Wolves

Idaho Rivers United

Indiana Wildlife Federation

Inland Ocean Coalition

Ipswich River Watershed Association

Izaak Walton League of America

Izaak Walton League Rapid City, South
Dakota Chapter
Jones River Watershed Association
Just Strategy
Kentucky Waterways Alliance
Kettle Range Conservation Group
Kingston Conservation Department
Klamath Forest Alliance
Kua'aina Ulu 'Auamo (KUA)
Levees.org
Los Angeles Audubon Society
Los Padres ForestWatch
Maine Audubon
Maine Council of Trout Unlimited
Maine Rivers
Mass Audubon
Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition
Massachusetts Rivers Alliance
MountainTrue
Move Past Plastic (MPP)
Mystic River Watershed Association
Nashua River Watershed Association
Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers
Wild & Scenic Stewardship Council
Natural Areas Association
Neponset River Watershed Association
New Hampshire Audubon
Next 100 Coalition
North American Climate, Conservation and
Environment(NACCE)
North and South Rivers Watershed
Association
North Clackamas Watersheds Council
Ohio River Foundation
onWater Fish
Partnership for the National Trails System
Pomperaug River Watershed Coalition
Predator Defense
Resource Renewal Institute
Responsible Alpha
River Collective Co.
Rivers Without Borders
Rockbridge Conservation
Save Our wild Salmon Coalition

Shining Horizons Land Management, LLC
Simetra Sanctuary
Sitka Conservation Society
Society for Conservation Biology North
America (SCBNA)
South Carolina Wildlife Federation
Southern Environmental Law Center
Species Unite
Steep Rock Association
Susitna River Coalition
Sustainable Conservation
Sustainable Southbury
The Nature Conservancy
The Ocean Project
The Piedmont Environmental Council
The Urban Wildlands Group
The Wei LLC
The Xerces Society
Upper Black River Council
Urban & Environmental Policy Institute,
Occidental College
Vermont Land Trust
Virginia Council Trout Unlimited
Voices of the Land
Ward 8 Woods Conservancy
West Virginia Rivers Coalition
Western Pennsylvania Conservancy
Western Watersheds Project
Wetlands Watch
Wild Virginia
Wildlands Network
Wildlife for All
Wildlife Forever
Wisconsin Wildlife Federation
Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council
Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW)
Yaak Valley Forest Council