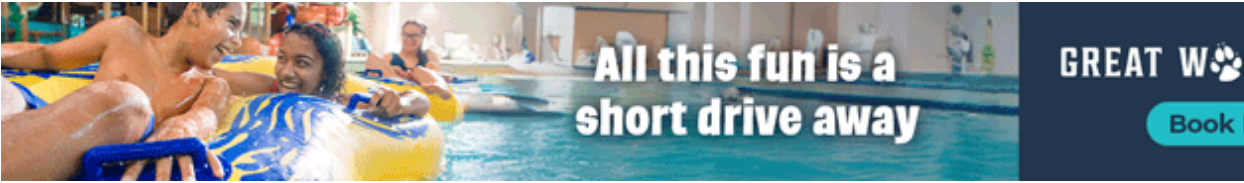




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# Trump freeze may strike \$25M to preserve Michigan forest and farmland

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An aerial view of Mike and Diana Arnold's farm in Norvell Township on Friday, June 15, 2024. It is an example of land preserved under a conservation easement in Jackson County. Jacob Hamilton | MLive.com



By **[Sheri McWhirter | smcwhirter@mlive.com](#)**

ANN ARBOR, MI – Nonprofit managers worry that a large federal grant to help Michigan farm and forest owners preserve their lands may fall victim to a vast Trump administration funding freeze that's being litigated in federal court.

Susan LaCroix, land protection director for the nonprofit Legacy Land Conservancy in Ann Arbor, said the future is uncertain for a [\\$24.6 million](#) land protection effort across Jackson, Lenawee, Livingston, Washtenaw, and Wayne counties.

A coalition of land conservancy groups received the money from the Inflation Reduction Act through the Farm Bill. The award was announced in October.

LaCroix said the coalition submitted its contract to the U.S. Department of Agriculture in early January in hopes it would be finalized before the federal administration changeover. The grant was specifically to come through the federal agency's Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

"We've been instructed that we're not really sure if we will be able to get a contract signed," LaCroix said. "It's kind of suspended indefinitely."

LaCroix said they were told the contract "has to be reviewed to make sure it aligns with the goals of the new administration."

Among the effort's goals is to offer conservation easements to landowners traditionally underserved by these types of programs, such as military veterans, Indigenous and other people of color, low-income, and even beginning or new farmers.



A spring-fed pond on Mike and Diana Arnold's farm in Norvell Township on Friday, June 15, 2024. It is an example of land preserved under a conservation easement in Jackson County. Jacob Hamilton | MLive.com

That intention to reach diverse property owners has organizers discouraged that the grant won't survive the administration's effort to weed out so-called "woke" spending.

“We were kind of holding out that because ours is a Farm Bill-specific (grant), it would be OK. But my understanding is that essentially, the administration says they’re not engaging in anything DEI,” said LaCroix.

The conservancy is serving as the program’s lead agency.

LaCroix said it doesn’t help that additional stated goals of the program are to preserve the natural features of the farmland and maintain the carbon-storage capacity of the forests through natural photosynthesis. The Trump administration is also actively targeting funding for climate-related projects.

There is also concern that land conservation efforts may be construed as an “undue burden on the energy sector,” which Trump targeted in a January “energy emergency” declaration that is meant to boost domestic fossil fuel production.

“When we do conservation easements it does restrict oil and gas production, and it doesn’t allow new pipeline easements to go through these conserved lands,” LaCroix said.

LaCroix noted the irony of the program’s potential defunding despite Trump receiving substantial support from the agricultural community. Farmers stand to be directly impacted by this cut, she said. About 20 landowners were already lined up.

The program’s uncertain future reflects broader reports among climate, environmental justice, and other grant recipients who’ve been unable to access congressionally-approved money allocated by the Biden administration.

The White House said last month it was pausing federal grants and loans as the Republican administration began an across-the-board ideological review.

The freeze could affect trillions of dollars and cause widespread disruption in health care research, education programs and other initiatives. Even grants awarded but not spent are supposed to be halted.

“The use of federal resources to advance Marxist equity, transgenderism, and green new deal social engineering policies is a waste of taxpayer dollars that does not improve the day-to-day lives of those we serve,” said a memo from Matthew Vaeth, the acting director of the Office of Management and Budget.

Democrats and independent organizations argue the move is illegal because Congress already authorized the funding.

Federal judges ordered Trump administration officials to release the money and issued temporary restraining orders against the funding freeze. Judges ruled the administration is defying judicial mandates to release funding.

Last week a federal appeals court rejected a Trump administration push to reinstate the freeze. Since then, White House officials said the funding review is part of a broader effort to cut what is says is wasteful spending.

Meanwhile, the Trump administration this week said it's giving America's schools and universities two weeks to eliminate diversity initiatives or risk losing federal money, raising the stakes in the president's fight against "wokeness."

*The Associated Press contributed to this article.*

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