



# THE ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION INDUSTRY: ACCELERATE INVESTMENT IN RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE, SPUR JOB GROWTH, AND PROTECT WATER RESOURCES

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Ecological restoration can help solve three of America's most pressing challenges: the current economic downturn, aging water infrastructure, and escalating natural disasters. The ecological restoration industry includes private sector businesses and NGOs that employ thousands while restoring our country's ecosystems and building resilient and sustainable infrastructure projects. A 2015 study found that the industry supports nearly \$25 Billion in annual economic output and 225,000 jobs. Army Corps data reveals that engagement of these firms for Clean Water Act permitting results in 50% faster permitting timelines, positioning the industry as key to efficient and responsibly built infrastructure.

Importantly, the industry has the skills and private capital to restore landscapes and ecological functions to scale in advance of resource impacts from development or climate change. Research confirms that every \$1 spent on disaster mitigation, including natural design approaches, saves \$6 in disaster costs. And the ecological restoration industry is making those cost-saving investments: recent interviews with a handful of industry firms revealed that the firms invested over \$1 billion during the past five years in wetland and stream restoration. These same projects also expand communities' floodplains and protect against storm surge capacities.

The new norm of unprecedented extreme weather events underscores the urgent need to invest in natural defenses against climate change. Our President must prioritize policy decisions and executive actions during their first 100 days that will accelerate investment in America's natural defenses and infrastructure. Such a policy commitment would not only represent leadership on climate change and fiscal responsibility, it would also spur skilled job growth in rural regions and boost the country's economic recovery.

The Ecological Restoration Business Association (ERBA) recommends the following actions to benefit our country's economic and environmental future:

- Adopt a Natural Disaster Mitigation policy that directs all agency heads to analyze their current disaster programs and identify where funding and program authorizations could better incentivize restoration of ecosystems functions for pre-disaster and flood mitigation. Agencies should update their relevant guidance and regulations to i) clearly allow for and acknowledge the value of ecosystem services to meet disaster program goals, and ii) promote creative procurement and financing models for disaster/flood mitigation restoration, including

engagement of third party providers through Request for Proposals (RFPs). These measures will incentivize private investment in ecological restoration projects with pre-disaster mitigation benefits, and thus reduce the unsustainable burden on government funding for disasters.

- Issue an Executive Order (EO) on the value of ecological restoration and mitigation to achieve the country's statutory and programmatic environmental goals. The EO should task the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) with coordination of mitigation policies across federal agencies to better incentivize multi-benefit restoration projects. The EO should also direct the Department of Interior (DOI), the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and other relevant DOI agencies to adopt formal mitigation policies that establish regulatory certainty and predictability for mitigation providers and permittees.
- Launch a Cutting Green Tape (CGT) Initiative to establish a legal and regulatory distinction between projects negatively impacting the environment and those restoring and uplifting ecological function. The CGT Initiative would produce durable policies that modify agencies' oversight and approval processes for restoration and mitigation permitting. This effort may include: development of a separate, expedited federal permitting track for restoration projects; relatedly, development of an exception or expedited FEMA review and Letter of Map Revision process for restoration projects with natural disaster mitigation benefits located within a FEMA designated floodplain; utilization of Army Corps Nationwide Permit 27 to clearly authorize a broad range of high priority restoration and mitigation projects; and, expansion of certain Categorical Exclusions to expedite NEPA reviews of those projects.
- Direct CEQ or other appropriate entity to develop a public facing dashboard to track permitting and approvals for designated high priority restoration and disaster mitigation projects across the country.
- Advance a Legislative Agenda and President's Budget that reflects a commitment to ecological restoration and efficient permitting for natural infrastructure. The President's Budget should increase funding for the Army Corps Regulatory program to train and fully staff District project managers and program leads. Staffing constraints and limited resource capacity currently result in significant and unnecessary regulatory delays across the country. The President's Budget and Legislative Agenda should request that Congress: i) fully fund the backlog of Army Corps' ecosystem restoration and mitigation projects and ii) direct the Corps to contract with third party providers for delivery of these projects, such as through proven procurement mechanisms like pay-for-performance contracting and similar RFP processes.

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