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Growing Conservation in the Farm Bill

Embargoed until
Wednesday, February 21
1:00PM Eastern

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE
AGRICULTURE AND WILDLIFE
WORKING GROUP



Without a Farm Bill Conservation Title, we would have:

-  **13.5 million fewer pheasants**
-  **450 million additional tons of topsoil disappearing every year**
-  **2.2 million fewer ducks**
-  **An additional 170,000 miles of unprotected streams**
-  **40 million fewer acres of wildlife habitat**



Conservation means development as much as it does protection. I recognize the right and duty of this generation to develop and use the natural resources of our land; but I do not recognize the right to waste them, or to rob, by wasteful use, the generations that come after us. I ask nothing of the nation except that it so behave as each farmer here behaves with reference to his own children. That farmer is a poor creature who skins the land and leaves it worthless to his children. The farmer is a good farmer who, having enabled the land to support himself and to provide for the education of his children, leaves it to them a little better than he found it himself. I believe the same thing of a nation.

Theodore Roosevelt

*Ossawatimie, Kansas
August 31, 1910*

If you ask most folks to list the country's important laws for fish and wildlife, they probably would not mention the Farm Bill. Similarly, they might not immediately think of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), which administers Farm Bill programs, as a powerhouse of conservation.

The past three Farm Bills, however, have shaped more conservation programs for a longer period of time – and put more funding behind those programs – than any other suite of legislation. The more than \$5 billion the USDA spends on conservation each year is two-and-a-half times larger than the entire U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service budget. And the USDA is proving every day that it can balance the goals of maintaining a stable food and fiber supply while sustaining fish and wildlife populations.

With a Farm Bill reauthorization being forged by Congress, our leaders can:

- successfully and economically ensure food and fiber production,
- effectively create new alternative energy sources,
- dramatically improve the health of our lands and waters, and the fish and wildlife they support, and
- continually build a positive agricultural trade balance.

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Executive Summary

Since the mid-1980s, when funding for fish and wildlife habitat protection first found its way into the federal Farm Bill, America's farmers, ranchers, and forest owners have been reaping a harvest that is valued far beyond the production of traditional crops. More than 1.5 million participate in Farm Bill conservation programs. By growing conservation, these Americans, who operate nearly 2.1 million farms, have helped populations of fish and wildlife for future generations. They are working to leave things, as T.R. once implored them to do, better than they found them.

Thankfully, through the years, the conservation ethic of farmers, ranchers, and forest owners has continued to grow, along with the federal funding devoted to fish and wildlife habitat. This funding is a crucial component of any national conservation strategy, because incentive-based conservation and land-stewardship programs are successful only if private landowners have the economic means to place them on their property. And this funding has helped amass a record of success that provides us with a crystal-clear rationale for expanding the Conservation Title in the next Farm Bill.

These programs provide an exceptional return on the investment provided by the American public. For example, America's most successful conservation program, the Conservation Reserve Program, is credited with saving 450 million tons of topsoil every year and protecting more than 170,000 miles of streams. It also is credited with generating some 13.5 million

*... modest increases
in our national conservation
investment can yield the
greatest returns.*

pheasants each year, according to new research commissioned by Pheasants Forever. Other Farm Bill conservation programs have led to similar increases in populations of species like salmon and turkeys. Collectively, Farm Bill conservation programs can work in unison to protect not only our future – but the future of generations to come – one acre at a time.

It must be noted that conservation funding does not simply boost fish and wildlife populations. It also triggers a host of additional socioeconomic benefits, including expanded opportunities to reinvest our dwindling sporting heritage. This, in turn, fuels robust state and local economies, which benefit from the \$70 billion annual economic

contribution of hunters and anglers, which, if weighed against the companies on the Fortune 500 list, would rank #11. Hunting and angling also support more than a million American jobs, far more than Wal-Mart, the country's largest employer.

The Farm Bill conservation programs profiled in this report all deserve to be reauthorized and expanded. Examined together, it becomes clear that these programs are woefully underfunded — in Fiscal Year 2004, for example, 3 out of every 4 applications to participate in Farm Bill conservation programs administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), a branch of the USDA, were rejected due to lack of funds. Put differently, more than 8 of every 10 dollars requested were denied because of funding shortfalls.

This said, each program in this report could benefit from increases in effectiveness. None of the improvements suggested within represent whole-scale changes. Rather, many of the recommendations pinpoint the places where modest increases in our national conservation investment can yield the greatest returns.

Introduction

Many of the country's foremost hunting, fishing, and conservation organizations care about improving Farm Bill programs designed to enhance the quality of our lands and waters.

The groups whose logos you see on the back cover met for the last two years within the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership's Agriculture and Wildlife Working Group (AWWG) to analyze these programs and identify ways to improve their efficacy.

Never before have so many organizations come together with such a goal. It is through the foresight and generosity of the Joyce Foundation, the McKnight Foundation, and the Max McGraw Wildlife Foundation, which provided not only financial support but the use of its headquarters to host working group meetings, that this collaboration was possible.

The following pages contain a detailed outline of the Agriculture and Wildlife Working Group's priorities and recommendations, each of which were shaped with an eye toward the needs of those who own and work the land. The outline encapsulates the findings of more than 20 white papers authored by leading policy



AWWG members met several times over two years at the Max McGraw Wildlife Foundation headquarters in Illinois to craft the recommendations included in this report. The AWWG extends its deepest thanks to the foundation for helping make this work possible.

experts, each of which dissected aspects of U.S. agricultural policies and sought ways to increase their benefits to fish and wildlife – and their utility to working farmers, ranchers, and forest owners.

Conservation must become a new priority commodity.

Of paramount concern to the AWWG is that the needs of working farmers, ranchers, and forest owners be met, especially because they now face a never-before-seen host of challenges.

- Ongoing international negotiations and pending lawsuits may result in Farm Bill Commodity Title modifications that reduce direct cash payments to agricultural commodity sectors.
- Increasing demand for ethanol and resulting higher commodity prices are skewing historical corn and other commodity crop bushels and acreages required to balance food, feed, fuel, and export needs.
- National press coverage that targeted certain Commodity Title program payments as "abuses" and "unnecessary" may result in scaled-back cash subsidies.
- Since 2005, dramatic cost increases for fuel, fertilizer, and chemicals are reducing agriculture's profitability.

- The federal budget climate has become more contentious as the multi-billion-dollar surplus present during the debate on the 2002 Farm Bill has turned into a deficit as this Farm Bill debate accelerates.

On a positive note, the AWWG recognizes that conservation is ascending rapidly to a new level of prominence and is now widely seen as a strong influence in sustaining a healthy rural America.

- Providing economic assistance to agricultural producers and forest owners through land stewardship and conservation incentives is much more likely to comply with international trade agreements.
- Conservation payments recently have been distributed more evenly across the agricultural and forest landscape to smaller and mid-size farming operations than have been Commodity Title payments.
- Sound conservation program enrollment options provide farmers, ranchers, and forest owners with viable alternatives to placing expensive inputs on marginal and fragile lands to boost crop production.
- Taxpayers perceive greater personal benefits, such as cleaner water and an improved environment, from their tax dollars invested in conservation programs.

These realities combine to give rise to a fresh one:

Conservation must become a new priority commodity.

Forces Shaping the 2007 Farm Bill



Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

No policy is formed in a vacuum, and the next Farm Bill will be no exception. The following issues will influence the formulation of any broad-scale legislation.

WAR

The international war on terror affects all supplemental spending in the domestic budget.

GLOBALIZATION

As international trade quickens and national borders blur, U.S. agricultural policy needs to shift rapidly to keep pace. In lieu of the long tradition of authorizing cash commodity crop payments, lawmakers and trade experts are examining incentives for land, fish, and wildlife stewardship that are compliant with international trade agreements. Effective incentive-based conservation practices can provide economic gains that simultaneously advance agricultural economies, protect our soil and water, and benefit fish, wildlife, and habitat.

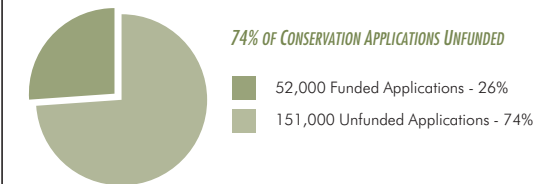
ENERGY SECURITY

Recognizing our reliance on foreign sources to meet many of our domestic energy demands – and the increasing instability of many of those sources – the U.S. faces an unprecedented need to develop domestic energy resources. The opportunity inherent in this circumstance is that America's farmers, ranchers and forest owners can help meet these demands. An increased national investment in biofuels, biomass production, and alternative energy sources works toward the goals of a secure homeland — and Heartland. But we need to be extremely careful to not erase the

significant wildlife and habitat gains made during the past two decades by shortchanging or misusing conservation programs along the way.

BUDGET DEMANDS

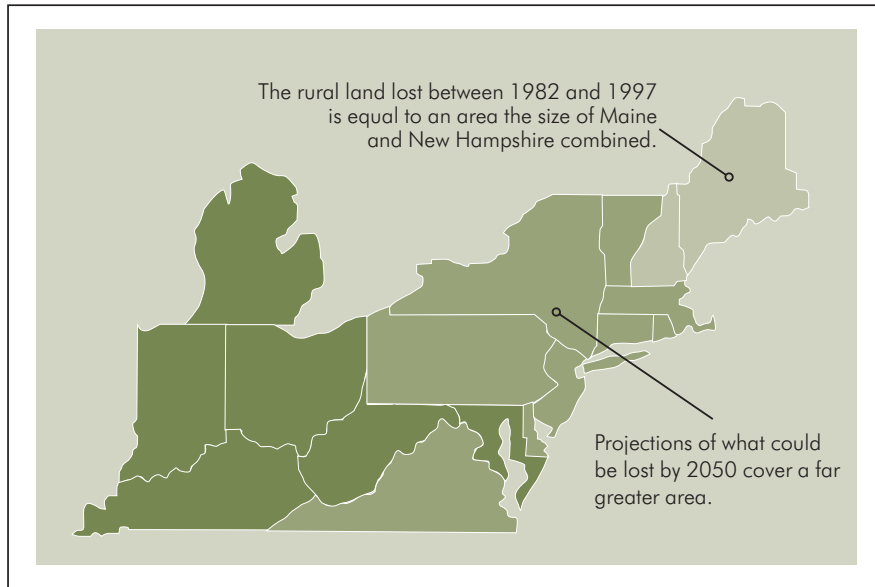
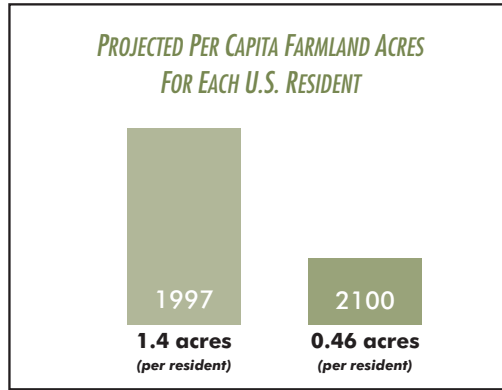
Those who decide national budgets always are pulled in many different directions when determining the country's priorities. Unfortunately, popular and effective Farm Bill conservation programs have been inequitably targeted for budget reductions. For example, in 2004, only one in every four applications for conservation programs was funded (see below).



Source: NRCS' 2004 Total Applications for EQIP, FRPP, GRP, WHIP, and WRP program

America's Changing Landscape

Since 1970, the United States has been losing rural land at the rate of two acres per minute. This brings our annual total loss to 1 million acres per year, meaning that while in 1997 there were 1.4 acres available to grow grains and other crops for each U.S. resident, in 2100 there may be less than one-half-acre to feed and clothe each of us. We also are annually losing approximately 1 million acres of forest. An estimated total 44.2 million acres of forestland is expected to feel substantial increases in housing density by 2030. This trend greatly increases the pressures we place upon our dwindling agricultural lands – and the farmers, ranchers, and forest owners who tend them.



The Farm Bill Conservation Title

The 2002 Farm Bill included more than \$17 billion in funding for programs designed to promote environmental quality and fish and wildlife habitat. This funding helped improve the integrity of more than 45 million acres of the American landscape.

While recognizing the ongoing contributions and tremendous potential of all the programs included in the Farm Bill Conservation Title, the AWWG has focused its analysis on the following voluntary initiatives. The results of this analysis are found in the following pages.

CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM (CRP)

CRP encourages farmers to plant ground covers to improve soil, water, and wildlife resources. Because of its incredible contributions to habitats for waterfowl, upland birds, wild turkeys, and many other wildlife species, CRP has become a favorite of many in the sportsmen's community. Filter strips and riparian buffers installed under CRP also protect water quality by reducing sedimentation and chemical runoff.

An important component of the CRP is the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

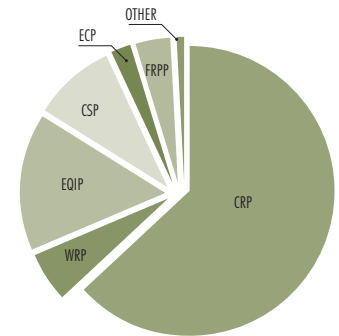
(CREP), which forges partnerships that allow participants to receive incentives for installing conservation practices identified by individual states.

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM (EQIP)

EQIP shares costs with farmers and ranchers for installing a host of conservation measures, including those to improve animal waste and irrigation water management, emissions reductions, fish and wildlife habitat, and soil erosion and sediment controls.

ESTIMATED OVERALL PAYMENTS BY CONSERVATION PROGRAM, CALENDAR YEAR 2005

CRP	Conservation Reserve Program	\$1,822,680,000
WRP	Wetlands Reserve Program	\$160,686,000
EQIP	Environmental Quality Incentives Program	\$443,929,000
CSP	Conservation Security Program	\$206,053,000
ECP	Emergency Conservation Program	\$65,478,000
FRPP	Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program	\$112,442,000
OTHER	Other Conservation Payments	\$21,711,000



The Farm Bill Conservation Title (continued)

2005 USDA Budget (\$ Millions)

Less than 5% of all 2005 USDA spending is to help farmers, ranchers, and forest owners with their conservation needs.

Cons.	Conservation Spending	\$5,178
FSA	Farm Service Agency	34,529
RM	Risk Management	3,014
FAS	Foreign Agricultural Service	5,375
RD	Rural Development	14,278
FNS	Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services	51,036
FSIS	Food Safety and Inspection Service	928
FS	Forest Service	5,538
APHIS	Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service	1,128
AMS	Agriculture Marketing Service	79
Sec. 32	Section 32 Funds	471
GIPSA	Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration	74
ARS	Agriculture Research Service	1,309
CSREES	Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service	1,184
ERS	Economic Research Service	74
NASS	National Agriculture Statistics Service	128
Other	USDA - Other Activities, including Office of Civil Rights, Office of Inspector General	555
Total		\$124,878

WILDLIFE HABITAT INCENTIVES PROGRAM (WHIP)

WHIP helps farmers plant high-quality fish and wildlife habitats that support healthy wildlife populations. While most Farm Bill programs are directed exclusively toward agricultural operations, WHIP can be used by landowners whose primary interest is fish and wildlife management.

WETLANDS RESERVE PROGRAM (WRP)

WRP offers landowners payments for protecting, restoring, and enhancing wetlands on their properties. Mindful that wetlands and surrounding grasslands provide quality habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife, protect grasslands, help recharge ground water, and reduce flood damages, the program's goals are to achieve the greatest wetlands functions and values, along with optimum wildlife habitat.

GRASSLAND RESERVE PROGRAM (GRP)

GRP helps farmers protect and restore grasslands while maintaining the areas as grazing lands. The program focuses on promoting biodiversity in areas facing possible conversion to cropping, urban development, and other threats.



Land enrolled in GRP.

CONSERVATION SECURITY PROGRAM (CSP)

CSP rewards farmers, ranchers, and forest owners who meet established standards of conservation and environmental management on working cropland. It seeks to reward the best and motivate the rest by providing incentives to those who maintain and enhance natural resources.

FARM AND RANCH LANDS PROTECTION PROGRAM (FRPP)

FRPP helps farmers and ranchers keep their land in agriculture. The program provides matching funds to assist the purchase of conservation easements.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

CRP dates to 1985 when President Reagan signed the Food Security Act, a new type of law intended to reverse the declining economic – and natural – environment on the American farm.

CRP offers annual cost-share assistance and rental and incentive payments to establish approved cover crops on eligible cropland.

The Commodity Credit Corporation makes assistance available for up to half of the participants' costs in establishing approved covers. Contracts last 10 or 15 years.

CRP BY THE NUMBERS:

- As of November 2006, more than 36.7 million acres are in CRP
- In FY 2006, the Farm Service Agency (FSA) issued \$1.8 billion in CRP annual rental payments nationally.
- CRP has reduced the annual cropland soil loss by about 450 million tons – enough to fill about 37.5 million dump trucks.
- As of November 2006, more than 767,000 CRP and CREP contracts covered land on 435,000 farms.

CRP provides the following annual dollar value:

- Soil productivity benefits – \$162 million
- Hunting migratory waterfowl – \$122 million
- Reducing runoff from fields – \$392 million
- Wildlife viewing – \$629 million

Through CRP, farmers and ranchers partnering with the federal government and others have protected and enhanced the environment by helping:

- Restore 2 million acres of wetlands and adjacent buffers;
- Protect 170 thousand miles of streams;

- Sequester 48 million tons of carbon dioxide;
- Produce 13.5 million pheasants each year;
- Safeguard water supplies for New York City; Columbus, Ohio; Raleigh, North Carolina; and more than 40 rural towns in Missouri through CREP; and
- Support 2.2 million ducks per year in the Prairie Pothole Region, about which you will read more in the pages to come.



Photo courtesy of Mark Godfrey/The Nature Conservancy

AGRICULTURE AND WILDLIFE WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CRP:

1. Reauthorize CRP at an acreage cap of 45 million acres, as was originally authorized.
2. Ensure continued enrollment opportunities, including regularly scheduled general CRP signups, Continuous CRP signups, and additional signups for the CREP. In recent years, general CRP signups have not been conducted consistently. For forests, expand existing continuous enrollment and enhance incentives to include longer contracts for bottomland hardwood forests, longleaf pine, and other priority forest types.
3. Use the State Wildlife Action Plans as a tool (see sidebar on page 16) for linking CRP for priority species.
4. Link the CRP enrollment process with other major national wildlife initiatives, including the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative, Sage Grouse and Prairie Grouse Conservation Plans, National Fish Habitat Action Plan, and Partners in Flight, to ensure that CRP acres will be enrolled where they have the most value.
5. Continue to support existing priority areas.
6. Increase the emphasis of Continuous CRP, a sub-program of the CRP, on fish and wildlife. This is particularly important in regions containing rare and declining habitats that are characterized by high land values or substantial irrigated cropland, since general CRP enrollments rarely function well in these areas. Continuous CRP is designed to focus on environmentally sensitive areas and is better suited to address their needs.
7. Authorize an annual CRP rental rate review and timely adjustment to ensure CRP rental rates are competitive and accurately reflect local rates.
8. Use mid-contract management, including site visits from USDA personnel, to ensure that wildlife benefits continue throughout the life of CRP contracts. How and often mid-contract management is used should be tailored to each state and based on wildlife needs.

Conservation Reserve Program (continued)

9. Cropland eligibility criteria for enrollment in CRP and CREP should include the requirement that the cropland was planted or considered planted to an agricultural commodity during four of the six years in 1996 through 2001.
10. On land enrolled in CRP, only permit managed haying and grazing using methodology that preserves the soil, water, and wildlife values of the land. Specifically, haying and grazing should be done outside the nesting and brood-rearing seasons for ground nesting birds found in the area and at intervals compatible with wildlife needs.

11. For forests, enhance cost-share assistance under CRP for mid-contract management activities, such as prescribed fire and competition/invasives control, and for restoration of native understory vegetation, where appropriate.
12. The CRP, and its existing priorities to conserve and improve the soil, water, and wildlife resources of enrolled land, shall not be compromised under the 2007 Farm Bill for any reason, including biofuels production.

The healing powers of CRP are seen in these before-and-after pictures of a stretch of prairie recently enrolled in the program.



Photos courtesy USFWS

CUTTING CRP WOULD PROVE COSTLY

In September 2006, the results of a study, "Analysis of the Economic Impacts on the Agricultural Sector of the Elimination of the Conservation Reserve Program," were released by the Agricultural Policy Analysis Center (APAC) at The University of Tennessee.

APAC estimated that if CRP contracts are eliminated as they expire, 37 percent, or more than 12.7 million acres, will return to crop production by 2015.

APAC estimates that returning land enrolled in CRP to crop production will result in:

- Three major crops (wheat, corn, soybeans) losing at least \$6.9 billion in net market returns in 2015;
- Federal payments for the eight major program crops rising nearly 34 percent, or \$3.8 billion, over USDA's estimate for farm program spending and;

Commodity prices increased significantly after this report was published, meaning that if these higher prices continue, farm program spending under the Commodity Title will decrease. A substantial reduction of acres enrolled in the CRP or elimination of the program, however, would dramatically reduce commodity prices owing to increased commodity crop production on the CRP acres.

- An additional cost to the government of \$32.6 billion by 2015.

APAC predicts that increasing the CRP will have significant positive effects on net farm income:

- Reaching the 39.2-million acre enrollment cap (authorized in 2002 Farm Bill) by 2015 raises net farm income by \$600 million;
- Results in a net savings in farm program spending to the treasury for the period 2007-2015 of \$6.3 billion;
- CRP enrollment of 45 million acres (AWWG recommendation for the 2007 Farm Bill) by 2015 raises net farm income by \$1.7 billion, and;
- Results in a net savings in farm program spending to the treasury for the period 2007-2015 of \$12.7 billion.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

EQIP originally was authorized in the 1996 Farm Bill and was reauthorized in the 2002 Farm Bill. It is the USDA's primary cost-share program for assisting farmers and ranchers seeking to meet conservation needs for soil, water, wetlands, and wildlife on working croplands and rangelands. It covers up to 75 percent of the costs of certain conservation practices for up to three years to encourage producers to manage lands better than they may have done without the incentive. And some producers with limited resources and beginning farmers may qualify for cost-shares of up to 90 percent.

EQIP'S NATIONAL PRIORITIES INCLUDE REDUCING:

- Non-point source pollution, such as nutrients, sediment, pesticides, or salinity in impaired watersheds;
- Groundwater contamination and point-source pollution, such as effluent from confined animal feeding operations;
- Particulate matter, nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds, and ozone precursors and depleters that contribute to air quality impairment violations of National Ambient Air Quality Standards;
- Sedimentation and erosion; and
- Threats to at-risk species.

EQIP BY THE NUMBERS:

In 2005, EQIP assistance totaled \$991.9 million, for practices including:

- Fish pond management – 34 sites
- Declining habitat restoration and management – 107 acres
- Shallow water management for wildlife – 1,381 acres

In 2004, farmers and ranchers filing more than \$2.2 billion in applications did not receive assistance.



Photo courtesy of Ducks Unlimited

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (continued)

- Stream habitat improvement and management – 2,320 acres
- Upland wildlife habitat management – 1,345,495 acres
- Wetland restoration – 9,582 acres
- Wetland wildlife habitat management – 26,097 acres
- Wildlife watering facilities – 35 sites

While highly effective, EQIP is dramatically under-funded.

In 2004, farmers and ranchers filing more than \$2.2 billion in applications did not receive assistance.

AGRICULTURE AND WILDLIFE WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EQIP:

1. Reauthorize EQIP at no less than current levels.
2. Require that a percentage of EQIP funds are spent on restoration and protection of at-risk fish and wildlife species.
3. Expand cost-share opportunities for forest landowners.
4. To ensure that cost-share and rental rates are fair and equitable, require a bi-annual review and revision of County Average Costs and County Average Rental rates.
This will ensure that EQIP remains affordable in the face of ever-fluctuating expenses for things like fuel and construction.
5. Require that any water saved through conservation practices remain instream or contribute to increased groundwater flow (for more information, see sidebar at right).

6. Add “lands adjacent to streams and rivers” to the definition of eligible lands in EQIP.
7. Increase EQIP cost-share payments from 75 to 90 percent for projects that result in increased in-stream flows or for projects that improve habitats for threatened or endangered species.
8. EQIP funding should be allowed only for eligible practices that do not adversely impact wetlands, riparian zones, streams, native grasslands, and other environmentally sensitive areas.



MAKE EVERY DROP COUNT

First, amend the Ground and Surface Water Conservation Program's (GSWC) net savings clause to state:

Net Savings – The Secretary may provide assistance to a producer under this section only if the Secretary determines that the assistance will facilitate a conservation measure that results in both: 1) a net savings in groundwater or surface water resources in the agricultural operation of the

producer and; 2) consistent with state law, increased groundwater or surface flows.

Second, we must apply this new net savings clause to any water conservation or irrigation efficiency practices funded through EQIP.

Third, we must increase EQIP and GSWC cost-share payments from 75 percent to 90 percent for projects that result in increased stream flows.



Image courtesy of John M. Williams Jr.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

WHIP was authorized in the 1996 Farm Bill and first received funding from Congress in 1998. The program is administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Through WHIP, the NRCS helps landowners promote healthy wildlife populations by developing upland, wetland, riparian, and aquatic habitat on their property. WHIP promotes key habitats, including rare, threatened, and endangered species, and those of national and state significance.

The program also promotes practices beneficial to fish and wildlife that may not be funded otherwise, in large part because many WHIP projects are fueled by the power of partnership. The NRCS cooperates with a number of other federal agencies, state and local partners, and the private sector.

WHIP is very popular and generates more applications than it can fund. In recent years, applications have outnumbered funding by a 2-to-1 ratio.

WHIP BY THE NUMBERS:

- Since its inception, WHIP has helped install projects on 2.8 million acres under 18,000 different contracts.

WHIP 2004 PRACTICES:

- Restoration and management of declining habitats – 1,517 acres
- Upland wildlife habitat management – 177,667 acres
- Wetland wildlife habitat management – 8,553 acres
- Field border buffer – 129,198 feet

- Windbreak/shelterbelt establishment – 374,085 feet
- Stream habitat improvement and management – 4,855 acres
- Streambank and shoreline protection – 25,686 feet
- Wetland restoration – 3,208 acres

AGRICULTURE AND WILDLIFE WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WHIP:

1. Reauthorize WHIP at \$100 million for 2008, with incremental increases each year during the course of the 2007 Farm Bill to \$300 million.
Target a significant portion of new funds for aquatic restoration activities, including instream habitat improvement projects. This funding level will better address unfunded applications and provide a more stable foundation for much-needed aquatic habitat restoration.
2. Make instream aquatic habitat restoration a national WHIP priority and allow states to continue to address priority habitats and at-risk species.
3. Conservation partnerships and program benefits should be enhanced by incorporating the assistance of states, municipalities, and non-government organizations to deliver and manage WHIP.

4. The contracting portion of WHIP should be streamlined. The NRCS, with its shrinking workforce, lacks adequate resources to administer WHIP efficiently. The NRCS should contract WHIP delivery to the applicable state fish and wildlife agencies that have the technical expertise to operate WHIP.
USDA currently enables states to operate a federal conservation program, the Forest Land Enhancement Program, and at least one state wildlife agency already delivers the WHIP program. If WHIP funds were likewise distributed to state fish and wildlife agencies or non-government organizations, arrangements could be made to deliver technical assistance through these entities. This would diversify the administrative process and ease the administrative burden for NRCS. This arrangement may lower technical assistance costs. Additionally, appropriate non-government organizations could secure this type of arrangement, positioning them to attract funding toward similar goals, which could improve the cost-share situation.

5. A monitoring mechanism should be provided for WHIP to determine whether completed projects are benefiting species in serious decline. A program focus on priority areas associated with declining species will make it much easier to monitor and measure success.
6. Suggested National Conservation Priorities for WHIP:
 - salmonid habitat in the Northeast and Northwest;
 - bobwhite quail habitat in the Southeast;
 - species of concern identified in State Wildlife Action Plans and the National Fish Habitat Action Plan;
 - native prairie vegetation around prairie grouse leks; and
 - rare and declining habitats throughout the country.



STATE WILDLIFE ACTION PLANS

Every state in the U.S. recently crafted strategies to keep fish and wildlife resources from dwindling past the point of no return. These strategies, called the State Wildlife Action Plans, are the first-ever coordinated effort to keep species from becoming threatened or endangered. They identify priority species and habitats and ensure that funding goes toward their conservation.

The potential for success in achieving the goals of the State Wildlife Action Plans is in large part determined each year by our elected federal officials, who set funding levels for the State Wildlife Grants Program. This program breathes life into the action plans by helping fund state fish and wildlife management departments.

The Teaming with Wildlife coalition keeps close watch on the State Wildlife Grants program. It is headed by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies; several organizations represented on the Agriculture and Wildlife Working Group are part of the team; and the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership is proud to serve on its steering committee. For more information, please visit www.teaming.com.



Photo courtesy of Georgia WRD

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

In conjunction with the grasslands that surround them, wetlands provide quality habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife, protect water quality, recharge ground water, and reduce flooding.

The U.S. has lost more than half of its naturally occurring wetlands and continues to lose more than 80,000 acres of these valuable resources each year.

The WRP originally was authorized in the 1990 Farm Bill and has provided a clear avenue for farmers and ranchers to remove marginal cropland from production in the interest of wetlands conservation. It is administered by the NRCS, which provides technical and financial support to help landowners with wetlands restoration efforts.

There are three ways landowners can participate in the WRP:

- 10-year cost-share agreements,
- 30-year easements, and
- permanent easements.

Permanent easements account for 80 percent of the acres enrolled in the WRP.

The WRP has proven its value in restoring several different types of ecosystems, including Southeastern bottomland hardwood forests, herbaceous prairie marshes, floodplain wetlands, and coastal tidal salt marshes.

One 4,000-acre wetland complex in Minnesota funded by the WRP has triggered the return of migratory and resident waterfowl, sandhill cranes, greater prairie chickens, numerous songbirds, and the western fringed prairie orchid, a federally listed threatened species.

WRP BY THE NUMBERS:

- More than 1.7 million acres have been enrolled in the WRP as of January 2006.
- Almost 8,400 separate sites have been improved by the WRP
- The 2002 Farm Bill expanded the WRP total enrollment cap to 2,275,000 acres.
- Producer demand for the WRP outstrips available funding by a 3 to 1 margin.
- WRP popularity is very high in the Lower Mississippi Valley states of Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Missouri, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Illinois, where 42 percent of the program acreage exists.
- As of 2005, there was a backlog of 461,704 acres waiting to be enrolled in the WRP.

AGRICULTURE AND WILDLIFE WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE WRP:

1. Reauthorize the WRP and raise its funding level from 250,000 to 300,000 acres per year.
2. Increase the ratio of adjacent grasslands to wetlands that can be enrolled in the program to 6 to 1 from its current level of 4 to 1.
3. Create a National Conservation Priority Area for the Playa Lakes region (see next page).



Photo courtesy of Ducks Unlimited

OF SUPREME IMPORTANCE

A 2006 Supreme Court decision in the combined cases of *Rapanos v. United States* and *Carabell v. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers* made already murky protections for isolated wetlands even less clear. In the decision, the Court said that lower courts must reconsider the Clean Water Act's definition of navigable waters and whether Congress has authority over wetlands that are adjacent to or separated by man-made berms from their tributaries. The decision was so complex that Chief Justice John Roberts was compelled to comment, "It is unfortunate that no opinion commands a majority of the Court on precisely how to read Congress' limits on the reach of the Clean Water Act. Lower courts and regulated entities will now have to feel their way on a case-by-case basis."

Most experts agree that this decision will speed our rate of national wetlands loss. With comprehensive wetlands protection legislation unlikely to emerge from Congress in the near future, established wetlands protection programs like the WRP take on even more importance. With the status of protection for so many of our nation's valuable wetlands in question, the need to strengthen established wetlands programs like the WRP grows greatly.



Photo courtesy of Layne Kennedy/The Nature Conservancy



Photo courtesy Brian Slobe

PLAYA LAKES REGION

Playas are the most numerous wetland type in the Southern High Plains, totaling more than 60,000 acres in Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas.

Playas are shallow, depressional, recharge wetlands that are generally round and small, averaging 17 acres in size. They have clay-lined basins and naturally fill with water periodically from rainfall and its associated runoff. Playas are the lowest points in large watersheds and focus recharge to the High Plains/Ogallala Aquifer.

Precipitation is inconsistent in the region and drought is a common occurrence, resulting in a wet-dry playa cycle. This cycle facilitates recharge and produces a highly diverse plant community that generates large quantities of nutritious seeds, essential for millions of waterfowl and other birds that migrate and winter in the region.

- Playas support 37 mammal species, more than 200 bird species, 13 amphibian species, 124 aquatic invertebrate taxa and some 340 species of plants.
- More than 99 percent of playas are privately owned.

By linking the region to the WRP, it will help both the playas and the program flourish.



Image courtesy of John M. Williams, Jr.

“The CRP simplifies my management of the property and may help make it possible for it to remain in the family for generations to come.”

– Hazel Moulton
Early County, Georgia



“It gives us great satisfaction to know that, even though our time of stewardship will end here someday, this marsh will be forever protected.”

– Ed and Sue Moxley
Erie County, Ohio



“Being part of this program has made the difference between us keeping or losing our farm.”

– Doug and Deb Breinig,
Furnas County, Nebraska, on CRP



“Seeing and enjoying the wildlife, wildflowers, and native grasses here is one of the most satisfying aspects of managing our farm the way we do.”

– Eric and Janine Wahl
Delaware County, Iowa



Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)

Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), first authorized in 2002, restores and protects grasslands while it maintains them as grazing lands. The program attempts to enhance plant and animal biodiversity, especially on grasslands containing shrubs and forbs facing conversion to cropping, urban development, and other threats.

Under the GRP, producers apply for easements or rental agreements with the NRCS or the FSA. Participants voluntarily limit future development and cropping of the land, but retain the right to:

- conduct common grazing;
- produce hay, mow, or harvest for seed production, subject to restrictions for the nesting and brood-rearing seasons of birds that receive federal or state protections or are in significant decline;
- carry out fire rehabilitation; and
- build firebreaks and fences;

GRP contracts and easements prohibit the production of crops other than hay, fruit trees, and vineyards that require breaking the soil surface. It also makes any other activity that would permanently disturb the surface of the land off-limits, except for appropriate land management activities included in a grassland conservation plan. Farmers and ranchers can enroll their lands in the GRP using rental or restoration agreements. They also can use permanent or 30-year easements.

GRP BY THE NUMBERS:

- More than 900,000 acres currently are enrolled in GRP.
- The potential for the GRP is huge: Grasslands make up the largest land cover on America's private lands, covering more than 525 million acres of the U.S.
- In the nine Great Plains states, more than 8.4 million acres of native grassland (non-cropland) were converted to cropland from 1982 to 1997.
- More than 300 migratory bird species rely on the prairies, 170 species for breeding and nesting habitat and another 130 for feeding and resting during spring and autumn migrations. Many other wildlife species depend on the prairies, including at least 25 mammals, eight reptiles, four amphibians, and more than 55 species of butterflies.
- In 2003, \$49.9 million was made available to fund GRP contracts and 812 contracts were awarded to protect 240,968 acres of critical grassland habitat.
- In 2004, more than 9,000 applications for 6.2 million acres in GRP applications were unfunded.

AGRICULTURE AND WILDLIFE WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GRP:

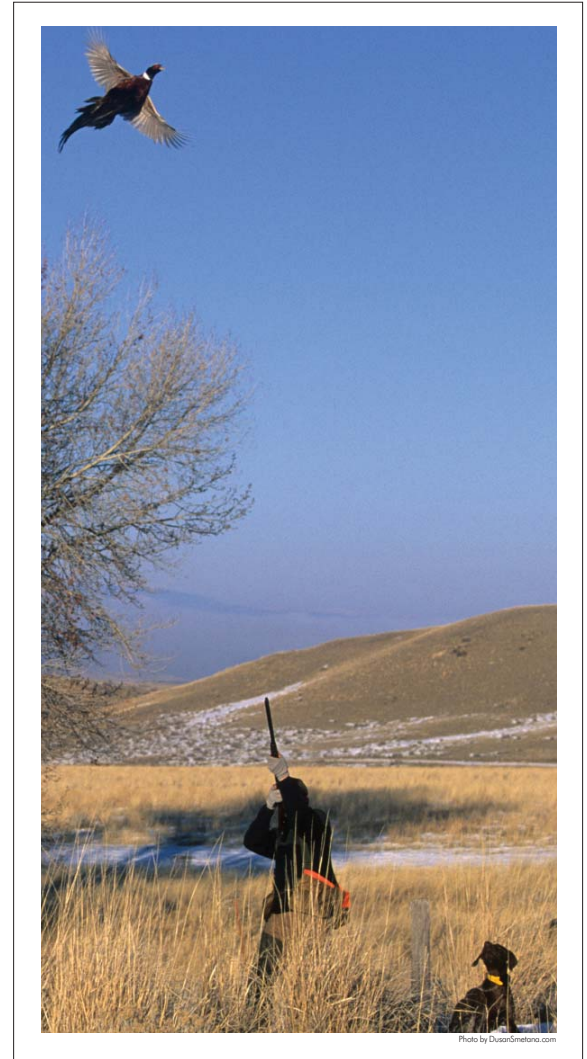
1. Reauthorize the GRP at 2 million acres per year.
2. Require that a minimum of 60 percent of the agreements are long-term easements of 30 years or more.
3. Provide incentives for large-tract and non-cropland native grasslands.
4. Focus the program on lands that support and provide necessary habitat for at-risk fish and wildlife species identified in State Wildlife Action Plans and the National Fish Habitat Action Plan.
5. Both rental and easement rates should provide maximum payments only for native plant communities, with reduced payments for acreage either converted to or invaded by exotic plant species, such as tall fescue, Old World bluestems, Bermuda grass, smooth brome,

weeping lovegrass, and bahiagrass.

6. Increase funding to create a new subprogram, the Grassland Reserve Enhancement Program (GREP).

The GREP will be a unique state and federal partnership that functions within the limitations of the GRP. The program will be established on a state-by-state basis, identifying priority threatened native prairies and rangelands that have urgent and specific needs for protection.

7. The formula used to calculate easement payments should be revised to make easements the most economical alternative for the applicant.
8. The minimum acreage cap should not apply to native prairie remnants in counties suffering more than 90 percent loss of native grasslands.
9. GRP-enrolled acres should not be subject to the county cap applied to other conservation programs, primarily the Conservation Reserve Program and the Wetlands Reserve Program, that limit enrollment to no more than 25 percent of the counties' cropland acres. GRP's focus is on protecting agricultural grasslands, so program enrollment should not be limited by, or applied to, limits based on the amount of cropland acres enrolled in conservation programs in a county.



Conservation Security Program (CSP)

CSP was authorized in the 2002 Farm Bill. Its incentives to producers who are supposed to meet the highest standards of conservation performance are offered in priority watersheds across the nation, regardless of the size of their operations or crops they produce. Both new and existing conservation practices are eligible for payments, making CSP the first federal conservation program that rewards farmers for the good stewardship they have already been practicing.

It also provides powerful incentives to achieve even higher levels of resource protection.

The program is designed to allow farmers to choose one of three levels of participation, entering into 5- or 10-year contracts that address resources of concern established by the NRCS through its state conservationists, along with local and state committees.

CSP producers also are eligible to earn additional financial incentives through payments for participation in watershed-wide CSP enrollment and on-farm research and monitoring.

CSP BY THE NUMBERS:

- In FY 2004, 18 watersheds in 22 states were selected by NRCS for CSP projects.
- 2,200 CSP contracts were signed.
- 1.9 million acres are in CSP.
- In FY 2005, 202 watersheds in 50 states were eligible for CSP.

If adequate funding is made available, the USDA intends for approximately one-eighth of the nation's 2,119 watersheds to be eligible for CSP each year.

AGRICULTURE AND WILDLIFE WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CSP:

1. Reauthorize CSP and ensure it provides increased, measurable, and consistent benefits for fish and wildlife conservation.
2. Include continuous signup as part of the CSP.
3. Require the NRCS to engage federal and state fish and wildlife agencies and non-government organizations when developing wildlife and habitat assessments. These same agencies and organizations also should be included in the development of fish and wildlife enhancement

practice descriptions. If state NRCS personnel decide not to follow the recommendations of their partners, they should be required to justify their decisions in writing. This will increase their accountability and improve partner relations.

4. Streamline the program's paperwork through a review of each appraisal form by NRCS national-level biologists.
5. A CSP model also should be adopted for private forest landowners.
6. Add "enhancement of instream flows" to the list of conservation practices that may be implemented by a producer under a contract.
7. Require fish and wildlife habitat improvements as program qualification requirements.
8. Allow federal and state lands that are integral parts of private farming and ranching operations to qualify.
9. Require annual compliance checks on a minimum of 15 percent of the farms participating in the CSP.



Photo courtesy of Steve Spaw, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)

The Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP), first authorized in 1996, provides matching funds to state, tribal, and local governments and non-governmental organizations to promote the purchase of conservation easements. Farmers and ranchers agree not to convert their land to nonagricultural uses and to develop and implement a conservation plan for any highly erodible land.

TO QUALIFY FOR FRPP, THE LAND OFFERED MUST:

- Contain prime, unique, or other productive soil or historical or archaeological resources;
- be included in a pending offer from a state, tribal, or local government or nongovernmental organization's farmland protection program;
- be privately owned;
- have any highly erodible land covered by a conservation plan;
- be large enough to sustain agricultural production;
- be accessible to markets for what the land produces; and
- be surrounded by parcels of land that can support long-term agricultural production.

FRPP BY THE NUMBERS:

- Through 2005, more than 500,000 acres in 42 states have been protected by FRPP.
- More than \$130 million in FRPP applications were unfunded in 2006.



Photo courtesy of Mark Godfrey/The Nature Conservancy

AGRICULTURE AND WILDLIFE WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FRPP:

1. Reauthorize FRPP at an annual funding cap of \$300 million.
2. Allow landowners the right to prohibit non-cropland conversion on land subject to easement under FRPP.
3. Authorize program funding for the establishment and protection of fish and wildlife habitat, and assign higher points for such practices.
4. Place priority on lands that support and provide habitat for at-risk fish and wildlife species identified in State Wildlife Action Plans.
5. Eliminate restrictions on forest land participation. Certain forestlands that should be protected have no protection under any other existing program.
6. Allow for temporary transfers of water rights (also referred to as leasing) or non-compensated permanent donation of water rights for instream flow purposes. Lands often can be irrigated while also protecting instream flow. Temporary water transfers can serve as an additional tool for a producer to ensure the economic viability of operations, thereby meeting the overarching goal of FRPP.

Forest Conservation and Management

Privately owned forests rise on approximately 30 percent of the rural landscape, covering about 430 million acres, or two-thirds of our nation's total forested lands. The vast majority of these private forests are in the hands of families and individuals. These forests provide a wide range of benefits to the public, including benefits that define our values, our way of life, and our connection to the land. These cornerstone values include the American tradition of earning a living from the land and its forest products and outdoor recreation traditions such as hunting, wildlife viewing, hiking, and fishing. Forests also protect the drinking water for hundreds of millions of Americans, help filter the air we breathe, and stabilize our climate.

FORESTRY BY THE NUMBERS:

- One million acres of intact forests are converted every year to more-intensive development.
- Only 3 percent of family forest owners have a written management plan.
- Only 22 percent of family forest owners sought professional advice prior to harvesting timber.
- Hundreds of acres of private forests are at high risk of wildfire, insect, disease and, invasive species.
- Two-thirds of the nation's water comes from forests.

Previous Farm Bills have begun to address these conservation issues, but more can be done to recognize forests' roles in the rural ecosystems and to better incorporate forests into conservation strategies in the 2007 Farm Bill.

AGRICULTURE AND WILDLIFE WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FOREST CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT:

1. Take a multiple resource management approach to all forestry programs, fully integrating fish and wildlife conservation measures to promote the overall health of forested ecosystems.
 2. Reauthorize the Healthy Forests Reserve Program and amend it to make funding mandatory through the CCC, including permanent easements as an option for landowners and increased annual funding.
 3. Support strong technical, educational, and outreach assistance for private forest owners through existing programs, such as the Forest Stewardship Program, and new programs, such as the Sustainable Forestry Outreach Initiative.
 4. Continue and improve the forestry aspects of existing conservation programs that promote restoration of healthy ecosystems. Special emphasis should be placed on at-risk forest types, like longleaf pine, Pine Barrens, and bottomland hardwoods.
5. Improve management on forest lands in ways that help achieve the conservation of at-risk fish and wildlife species.
 6. Increase capacity for prescribed burning on private lands to improve forest health and enhance wildlife habitat.
 7. Authorize funding for practices that allow landowners to comply with federal and state best management practices for aquatic resources protection.
 8. Improve the current flexibility of forestry programs to address the issues of individual states and regions by allowing state stewardship committees to set local planting densities and mid-contract management guidelines that fall within broad, national guidelines.

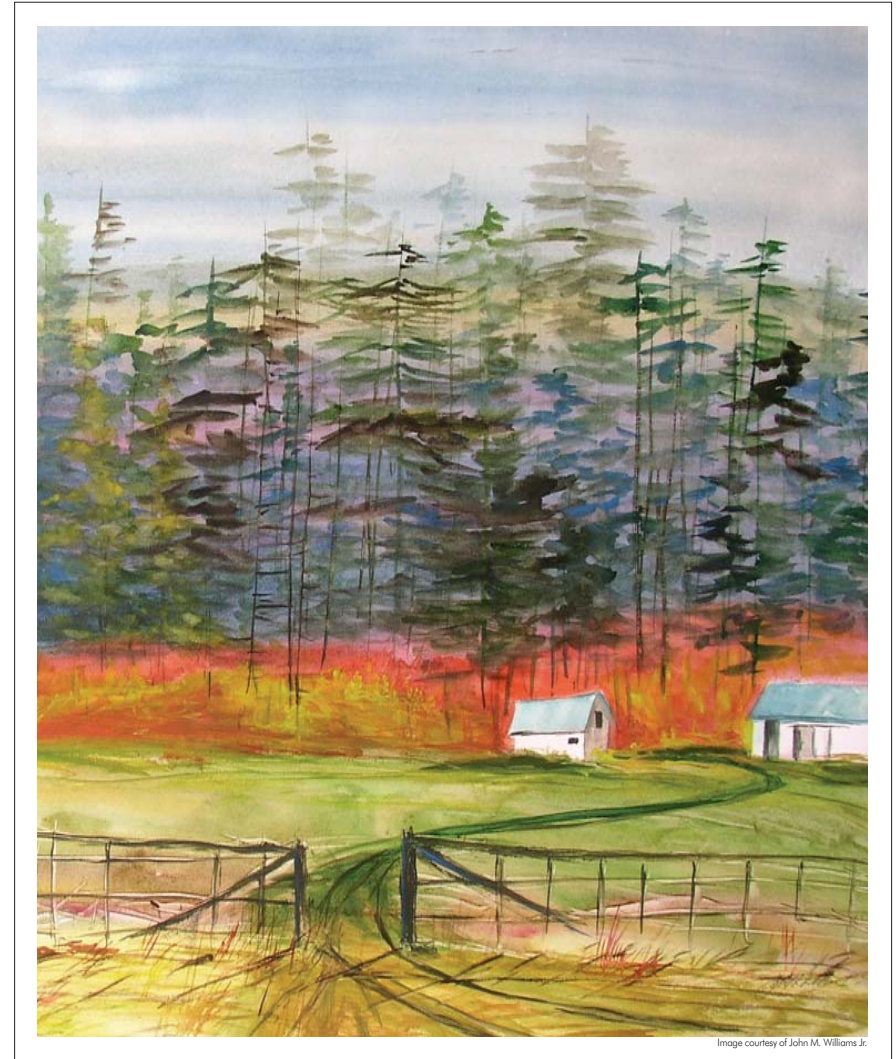


Image courtesy of John M. Williams Jr.

Additional Farm Bill Conservation Priorities



Photo by Tim Zink

Many AWWG recommendations fall beyond or encompass all of the programs that are covered in the preceding pages.

MEASURE GAINS

Beginning with the 1985 Farm Bill, funding for conservation programs has increased steadily. These conservation expenditures have resulted in significant accomplishments, but articulating them sometimes proves challenging. With more emphasis in the public debate being placed on shifting agricultural economic support from direct cash subsidies to incentive-based land stewardship programs, accurate measurement of quantified conservation gains takes on even more critical importance. Accordingly, the AWWG recommends that universal conservation performance measures be developed and that specific mechanisms be identified for tracking conservation successes.

CHANGE "WILDLIFE" TO "FISH AND WILDLIFE"

There are a number of divergent views as to whether the term "wildlife" includes fish. In order to eliminate confusion and specifically acknowledge aquatics as an important component of conservation, the term "wildlife" should be changed to "fish and wildlife" everywhere such term appears in all applicable titles of the Farm Bill.

...accurate measurement of quantified conservation gains is critically important.

ADDRESS NATIVE PRAIRIE LOSS

Technological advances and the unintended consequences of federal agricultural policies caused a new wave of native prairie destruction in the last decade, especially across the Prairie Pothole Region, triggering significant ecological and sociological effects. This region, 300,000 square miles of Iowa, Minnesota, the Dakotas, northern Montana, and the Canadian provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, once contained 25 million wetlands, a density unmatched on the continent. Today, well more than half of those wetlands are gone, succumbed to agricultural and commercial development. Yet the Prairie Pothole Region still supports more than half of North America's migratory waterfowl – including an estimated 2.2 million ducks.

Pockmarked by retreating glaciers, the Prairie Pothole region is characterized by freshwater marshes that form in concentric circles and primarily are recharged by snowmelt and spring rains. These marshes host a diversity of plants that provide water filtration and other environmental benefits. By focusing Farm Bill funding on conserving this region, we can help guarantee that a rich abundance of wildlife persists into the future.

Along with its wetlands density, the Prairie Pothole Region was once part of the largest grassland ecosystem in the world. The region has changed dramatically, however, since the days of Lewis and Clark. After settlement, native grasslands in the most productive portions of the region were converted to cropland to feed a growing world population. Today, grassland-dominated landscapes largely are confined to areas with poor soils, steep topography, and/or climatic conditions unsuitable for crop production.

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

The current Farm Bill provides substantial price support and risk protection to crop producers. The combination of loan-deficiency and disaster payments – coupled with crop insurance – makes crop production economically viable even if high yields are never achieved. The reduction in economic risk, combined with advances in herbicides, genetically engineered crops, and large farm equipment, provides

the incentive to break new ground. Government support is negligible for the cattle ranching industry – the current land-use for most native grasslands. Subsidized crop producers therefore have a significant economic advantage when competing to rent and buy native grassland.

SODSAVER

Loss of native grassland also is an economically costly policy, as it brings additional disaster-prone farmland into cultivation and creates taxpayer liability for the many subsidies associated with crop production on marginal land. Temperate grasslands, like those in the Prairie Pothole Region, are at highest risk of conversion to cropland. Yet they have some of the lowest rates of protection of any major ecological biome on earth. Along with being the heart of the breeding range for many North American ducks and shorebirds, the region

...if Swampbuster protection was lost for these vulnerable wetland types in the Prairie Pothole Region, the breeding waterfowl population would be reduced by 38 percent – more than 1.5 million birds.

also hosts numerous grassland-dependent songbirds, species that are experiencing a steeper population decline than any other bird group in North America. An ecological train wreck could occur in the region if the current pace of grassland loss continues.

The native grasslands of the Prairie Pothole Region are fundamentally important for livestock producers and their ranching lifestyle. Ranching, recreational hunting, and nature-based tourism associated with the native prairie provide economic diversity. This brings greater stability to rural economies.

Lastly, conversion of native grasslands also has important impacts on critical, associated habitats, such as wetlands.

Cattle producers consider wetlands valuable assets when they occur in pastureland, because they provide livestock water and quality hay during drought conditions. If producers convert grasslands to cropland, wetlands become liabilities because they are obstacles for farm equipment. This puts them at greater risk of being destroyed or degraded by sedimentation and contamination from pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers.

Additional Farm Bill Conservation Priorities (continued)

SWAMPBUSTER PROVISIONS

Swampbuster dates to 1985 and is designed to discourage producers from draining wetlands by seeking to withhold farm program benefits from any who plant an agricultural commodity crop on a wetland. Swampbuster can be a vital tool in slowing the loss of wetlands, and therefore needs to be retained in future Farm Bills.

History tells us that the wetlands most vulnerable to drainage are the small, shallow ones in heavily cropped landscapes.

An analysis conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service found that if Swampbuster protection was lost for these vulnerable wetlands in the Prairie Pothole Region, the breeding waterfowl population would be reduced by 38 percent – some 1.5 million birds.

To correct deficiencies revealed by a Government Accountability Office (GAO) investigation, Swampbuster enforcement also needs to be enhanced.

The GAO reports that the USDA should ensure that noncompliance waivers for identified violations are supported with adequate justification. The report also found that in response to farmers' appeals, waivers were issued 61 percent of the time that they were requested. The GAO showed that all too often, the waiver decisions were not adequately justified. And without enforcement support, field staff has less incentive to find farmers out of compliance when such a finding is warranted.

GRASSLANDS CONVERSION BY THE NUMBERS:

- Prairie Pothole wetlands total 5.3 million acres in 2.7 million basins.
- Each acre of small wetland provides \$29.23 worth of flood damage protection to agricultural land per year.
- 13.8 million acres of native prairie remains in the eastern Dakotas.
- 298,000 acres were converted to cropland during 2002-05.
- At current rates, half of the remaining native grassland in the Prairie Pothole Region will be lost in 34 years.
- In the Prairie Pothole Region of North and South Dakota, 60 percent of the remaining 5.9 million acres of unprotected wetlands occur in native pasture and hayland.
- USDA estimates that between 1982 and 1997, more than 1.4 million acres of rangeland was converted in the Great Plains.
- Estimates place savings that would result from eliminating subsidies on non-cropland conversion at \$1.4 billion over 10 years.



AGRICULTURE AND WILDLIFE WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REDUCING GRASSLAND CONVERSION TO CROPLAND:

1. Our national farm policy must dramatically reduce native grassland and wetlands losses and reduce damage to marginal and fragile land.
2. Any land that does not meet the definition of cropland, as determined by FSA, that is converted from non-cropland status to cropland should be made ineligible for any federal benefit, including but not limited to price and income support payments, crop insurance, disaster payments, conservation program enrollment, and FSA farm loan benefits.
3. To preserve its identity and to ensure no federal assistance is received, non-cropland converted to cropland shall be reconstituted as a separate farm by FSA, beginning no later than in the year the conversion occurs.

4. Landowners may choose to break native prairie or noncropland if they so desire. But they must do so with the full understanding that the profitability of crops grown on this acreage will depend on free-market economics, not agricultural subsidies, crop insurance, and disaster payments.

AGRICULTURE AND WILDLIFE WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS ON CONSERVATION COMPLIANCE

Sodbuster/swampbuster compliance should be linked to all federal farm programs benefits, including crop insurance and disaster program eligibility. A farm shall be ineligible to receive federal benefits for the year noncompliance is discovered. Following year eligibility may be approved if noncompliance is rectified and restoration certified within six months of discovery.

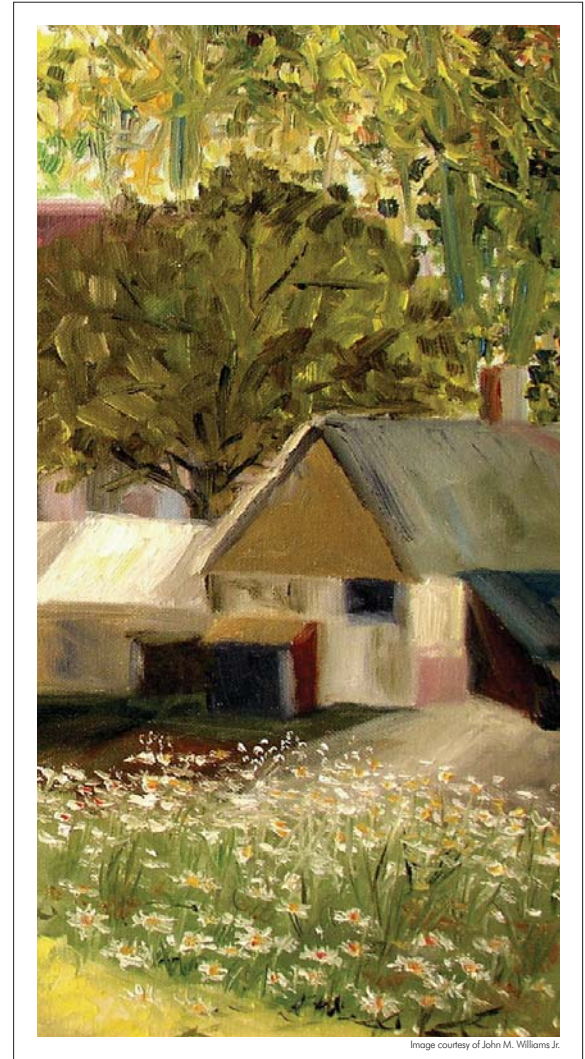


Image courtesy of John M. Williams Jr.

Biofuels, Biomass and Other Energy Sources

In a landmark event, President Theodore Roosevelt in August 1902 became the first U.S. president to ride in a motor car. Now, more than 100 years later, America's energy needs account for 20 million barrels of oil per day – a quarter of the world's daily consumption.

Lifestyles in the industrialized world revolve around fossil fuels—including oil, coal, and natural gas. These fuels, a finite resource, supply 86 percent of America's energy. Renewable fuels provide 6 percent. There is a growing international consensus that human-induced emissions of carbon dioxide and other gases like methane and nitrous oxide are a major factor causing climate change. These emissions come from, among other sources, burning ever greater quantities of fossil fuels.

The importance of developing fuel efficient equipment and vehicles, and consumers practicing conservation measures, unarguably is a critical first step in the search for U.S. energy security. Coupled with energy efficiency and conservation, development and use of cleaner energy in homes and businesses is vital to achieving energy independence. Renewable sources include wind power, solar energy, and biomass, among others.

Most renewable energy sources emit little, if any, greenhouse gases or other pollutants. The drawbacks for using renewable energy are that the costs of needed technologies are still relatively high. Renewable energy

sources generally are not as easily stored or moved as fossil fuels.

The most well-known and commonly used biofuel in the United States is corn-based ethanol, blended in various mixtures to power gasoline burning vehicles. Ethanol demand and production recently have skyrocketed, owing to high gasoline prices and the Energy Policy Act of 2005 requirement that 4 billion gallons of renewable fuels be blended into the national gasoline supply by 2006. The same act requires that 7.5 billion gallons of ethanol be blended into the gasoline supply by 2012.

Corn is the primary feedstock for ethanol production. About 20 percent of the nation's corn crop was utilized for ethanol production in 2006. Ethanol also can be made from other grains, such as sorghum, and from "biomass" sources, such as corn cobs, cornstalks, wheat straw, rice straw, switchgrass, and vegetable and forestry waste.

GROWING ENERGY

America's farm, forest, and ranch lands, appreciated and recognized primarily for food and fiber production, have begun producing a new trilogy of sustenance—food, fiber, and energy.

An exciting era is dawning for American agriculture, premised on the realization that farmland and forestland has a yet untapped potential for "growing" energy.

Unless careful consideration and caution are exercised in the development of a domestic bioenergy policy, however, negative effects could result with unintended damages to:

- Soil and water resources,
- Fish and wildlife,
- U.S. and world food fiber supplies, and
- Livestock and poultry industries.

CONSERVATION PROGRAMS AND BIOMASS PRODUCTION

As technology is perfected to economically produce and convert biomass products into cellulosic ethanol and other forms of fuel, the more than 40 million acres enrolled in conservation programs—especially the Conservation Reserve Program—are viewed by some as a source of land for biomass production.

As illustrated elsewhere in this report, Farm Bill conservation programs have made significant strides in saving soil by curbing wind and water erosion, purifying water, creating wildlife habitat, and contributing to dramatic increases in certain game and non-game wildlife species.

Cellulosic ethanol production and other renewables presents an exciting future and economic growth potential for agricultural producers, forest owners, and rural economies. But domestically growing biomass for biofuels production and other uses, including co-firing, direct combustion, and gasification, is in essence "mining the land" above ground level. Adequate research must be conducted to determine

the most efficient and sustainable biomass production methods. As we determine where biomass will be produced, the integrity and statutory priorities of existing conservation programs must remain intact.

BIOFUELS, BIOMASS, AND OTHER ENERGY SOURCES BY THE NUMBERS:

- U.S. motorists annually use more than 140 billion gallons of gasoline.
- Cellulosic ethanol reduces greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 85 percent over reformulated gasoline.
- One billion tons of dry biomass would displace 30 percent of U.S. petroleum consumption.
- Sugar-fermented ethanol reduces GHG emissions by 18 to 29 percent over gasoline.
- The percentage of the U.S. corn crop devoted to ethanol has risen to 20 percent from 3 percent in just 5 years.
- A modern dry-mill ethanol refinery produces approximately 2.8 gallons of ethanol and 17 pounds of highly valuable feed co-products, called distillers' grains, from one bushel of corn.
- According to the International Energy Agency, 13.4 percent of the world's total primary energy supply in 2002 was produced from renewable energy sources.
- About 40 percent of U.S. total energy consumption is dedicated to transportation and requires liquid fuels such as gasoline, diesel fuel, or kerosene.

- Cellulose is present in every plant: straw, grass, wood. Most of these biomass products currently are discarded. Transforming them into ethanol might provide as much as 30 percent of the current fuel consumption in the United States—and could provide similar benefits in other oil-importing regions like China or Europe.
- In July 2006, according to the *Boston Globe*, the production cost of cellulosic ethanol was approximately \$2.25 per gallon. At that price, it is not competitive when distribution costs are added. The Department of Energy holds an optimistic outlook toward future costs, however, and has requested a doubling of research funding.
- Switchgrass and other native perennial warm-season grasses may yield 5 to 7 tons per acre and potentially produce 80 to 90 gallons per ton of ethanol.

AGRICULTURE AND WILDLIFE WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BIOFUELS/BIOMASS PRODUCTION:

1. The Energy Title of the 2007 Farm Bill should be used to promote the next generation of biofuels and renewable energy. Research and development funding should promote the next generation of biofuels technology based on sustainable polycultures that are consistent with fish, wildlife, soil, nutrient management, and water conservation goals.
2. Land enrolled in Farm Bill conservation programs should not be used for biomass production unless credible research results provide documentable and verifiable evidence that producing and harvesting biomass on this land can be accomplished without compromising existing statutory priorities to conserve and improve the soil, water, and fish and wildlife resources.
3. USDA biomass production policies (especially stubble height, harvest frequency, and vegetative composition) should be developed in collaboration with federal and state fish and wildlife specialists and habitat and technical experts.
4. An incentive-based biomass program should not displace existing conservation programs, and incentive payments should be offset when economic gain is realized from biomass, feedstock, seed, or other production.
5. Because of the large acreages needed and logistical limits for cost-effective biomass transportation, the environmental benefit index should not be used to determine eligibility.
6. Opportunities for renewable energy and other renewable products from forests should be developed by expanding research and authorizing pilot projects to test technology and equipment, providing incentives to initiate markets for renewable products, and improving incorporation of forest products into existing and new renewable energy incentives.

Open Fields



Photo by Dušan Šmetana.com

When the first Farm Bill was passed in 1933, one in four Americans lived on a farm; today the figure is less than one in 50. This statistic reveals the stark reality that many rural communities are struggling to maintain their vitality. The next Farm Bill must practically address rural development needs in order to preserve the quickly disappearing heritage and core values that define America's character.

America's great hunting and fishing traditions, to a large extent, are contingent upon the health and wellbeing of its privately owned farm, ranch, and forest lands. Hunters, anglers, and many others who also enjoy the outdoors add scores of billions of dollars and millions of jobs to the nation's economy.

More than 20 states have capitalized on this economic opportunity for their rural communities by implementing voluntary access or walk-in

programs. Under these state-supervised programs, landowners are paid a nominal fee to allow hunters, anglers, and other outdoor recreationists the privilege of enjoying their land. Currently more than 22 million acres are enrolled in access programs in 20 states at a cost of only \$23 million – slightly more than \$1 per acre.

OPEN FIELDS BY THE NUMBERS

According to a recent TRCP cost-benefit analysis that used 2001 U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service data, 16 states with access programs realized a gain of more than \$512 million, thanks to the positive difference in hunter numbers generated by access programs, when compared to states without. Using trend lines established for states with access programs, if each state without an access program had implemented a successful one, more than \$2.7 billion in additional revenue could have been realized nationwide.

Legislation commonly called the Open Fields Bill would provide \$20 million per year in CCC-issued grants to states to enhance existing access programs or to develop new programs in states without access programs.

AGRICULTURE AND WILDLIFE WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS ON OPEN FIELDS AND ACCESS:

1. Include Open Fields language in the 2007 Farm Bill.
2. Program funds should be used for improved wildlife management and recreational opportunities on voluntarily land enrolled in Farm Bill conservation programs.
3. Landowner assurances that reduce liability and risk can be provided through the voluntary state-managed access programs.
4. A higher enrollment priority should be granted to conservation program applications that include a public access component.

Conclusion

Aldo Leopold once said, "We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us."

Leopold's words still ring true.

We must abandon this course of action as swiftly as is possible. And it is possible, because the sheer size of the omnibus Farm Bill carries with it the magnitude for massive change.

By enacting the consensus policy recommendations contained in this report, our nation can move in a better direction for the sake of future generations, and for the land itself.

The TRCP Agriculture and Wildlife Working Group, led by its many partner organizations, will continue to represent the concerns of healthy fish and wildlife populations as federal agricultural policy advances.



There can be no greater issue than that of conservation in this country.