



ASSOCIATION *of*
FISH & WILDLIFE
AGENCIES

POLICY PRIORITIES FOR THE 2018 FARM BILL

The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' priorities for the 2018 Farm Bill were adopted on March 10, 2017 and are based on current program purposes, implementation challenges, and resource needs. For more information, contact Andrew Schmidt at 202-838-3472 or aschmidt@fishwildlife.org.

AFWA is committed to working with Congress and the Administration to pass a 2018 Farm Bill that:

- Encourages state-led and partnership-driven proactive, voluntary, incentive-based conservation;
- Maximizes every dollar spent throughout Farm Bill conservation programs, delivering multiple resource benefits to the landowner and taxpayer with every project;
- Increases Conservation and Forestry Title funding to meet the increasing needs of fish and wildlife habitat and other natural resource concerns while supporting rural communities and agricultural producers;
- Promotes synergy among Farm Bill programs and title, avoiding unintended consequences resulting from practices and programs working at cross-purposes;
- Focuses on Priority Fish and Wildlife Species and Habitats at the local and landscape scales, including those identified in State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAPs); and
- Increases capacity and enhances partnerships to effectively implement and deliver Farm Bill programs.

Program Recommendations

Conservation Reserve Program

- Reauthorize CRP with an acreage cap of 36-40 million acres.
- Create a structure to transition acres out of the program and into long-term working grasslands, providing the necessary infrastructure to support grass-based agricultural production.
- Expand opportunities for grazing when determined to be ecologically-appropriate, reducing the cost of these contracts while also benefiting wildlife and pollinator habitat.
- Incorporate state and regional input for eligible mid-contract management activities.
- Continue funding incentives for the management of existing pine, including thinning and prescribed burning, at \$10 million, and require management of pine tree stands to meet wildlife habitat objectives identified in SWAPs prior to reenrollment for all contracts.
- When done as part of mid-contract management and included in the conservation plan at the start of the contract, exempt grazing from the 25 percent reduction in annual rental payment.
- Continue to offer General, Continuous, and CREP enrollment options in CRP.

Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP)

- Reauthorize and fund VPA-HIP at \$150 million over 5 years.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

- Require at least 10 percent of EQIP funds to be used for wildlife conservation practices annually, and incorporate state input to target EQIP wildlife funds towards priority fish and wildlife species, including those identified in SWAPs.
- Increase the availability of and emphasis on long-term incentive payments and contracts to encourage sustained management for wildlife and increase long-term benefits.
- Ensure that landowners have access to the appropriate expertise to achieve their stated land management objectives, including the ability to follow a wildlife management plan when managing specifically for wildlife habitat.
- Continue to support agency authority and flexibility to implement initiatives that address important and emerging natural resource concerns.

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

- Restore funding to a minimum of \$500 million per year.
- Allow program funding to be used for restoration and management activities to maintain the value of taxpayer investment.
- Provide greater flexibility with match requirements within ACEP-Agricultural Land Easements and grasslands of special significance.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP)

- Reauthorize and maintain funding for RCP, and provide USDA with the necessary technical assistance and administrative funds to implement the program. This amount should be a fixed percentage of RCP funding and not be negotiated after grants are awarded to projects.

Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP)

- Reauthorize HFRP with mandatory annual funding at \$12 million.

Sodsaver and Conservation Compliance

- Maintain and fully implement existing conservation compliance and Sodsaver provisions to maintain agricultural productivity and economic security while improving and protecting water quality, wildlife habitat, and other natural resource benefits.

Other Recommendations

- Modify the Adjusted Gross Income limitation and expand current payment caps for conservation programs as these programs provide multiple resource benefits to society.
- Fully utilize prescribed burning as an effective management tool and increase financial and technical capacity for prescribed burning on private lands to improve and enhance wildlife habitat.
- Prioritize the use of ecologically-appropriate and diverse stands of native plants in USDA conservation programs and practices, wherever possible.
- Increase emphasis on monitoring and reporting of the benefits of USDA conservation efforts to address natural resource concerns associated with federally threatened, endangered, or candidate species.
- Continue the Livestock Indemnity Program, and simplify and streamline the process for filing a claim.
- Support authorization of funds necessary to reduce threats posed by feral swine to agriculture and wildlife.
- Authorize and increase funding for monitoring and surveillance of chronic wasting disease in free-ranging cervid populations and captive cervid facilities.