

WHY WILDLIFE & AMERICA STILL NEED A FARM BILL IN 2025



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The Farm Bill's conservation programs assist farmers, ranchers, and landowners in achieving their operational objectives, increasing profitability, diversifying income streams, providing wildlife habitat, and improving environmental outcomes through a voluntary, incentive-based approach. However, many of the statutes behind these programs have not been updated since 2018, and America and its wildlife need a renewed conservation title. Passing a new Farm Bill with a strong conservation backing is necessary to continue the progress Farm Bill conservation programs have made in preserving America's farmland and rangeland, wildlife, and rural economies.

REVITALIZE THE CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is a valuable tool assisting working farms and ranches with the management of environmentally sensitive lands by putting perennial grass on the landscape, building soil health, improving water and air quality, reducing soil erosion, and enhancing wildlife habitat. The program's statutory authority expires on September 30th, 2025, and congressional action is needed to extend CRP enrollment authority.

To safeguard CRP in the next Farm Bill, Congress should:

- Ensure rental rates fairly compensate farmers and ranchers for the land and conservation practices they are providing.
- Alter emergency haying allowances to benefit soil, water, and wildlife by permitting emergency use on no more than 50% of an eligible contract.
- Enhance SAFE and CREP by ensuring both are referenced in statute and both offer enrollment on a continuous basis.
- Increase the total acreage enrollment cap and establish a cap for CRP Grasslands at 40% of total program acreage.
- Ensure any rental rate restrictions on CRP re-enrollment do not impact high priority soil, water and wildlife practices enrolled through the continuous enrollment option.
- Exempt grassland CRP with base (crop history) and all ACEP-WRE acres from the 25 percent county acreage cap and restore broad County Cropland Limitation waiver authority for all CRP signup types to exceed 25 percent of county cropland acreage.
- The **Conservation Reserve Program Improvement and Flexibility Act ([S.2608](#))** achieves several of these priorities. AFWA supports the Act's inclusion into a broader Farm Bill.

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STREAMLINE THE REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

A well-functioning Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) allows the USDA to successfully collaborate with state & local governments and private organizations to meet the dynamic conservation challenges facing today's farmers and ranchers. State fish & wildlife agencies can be made more effective partners on RCPP projects by:

- Allowing advanced payments to lead partners on Alternative Funding Arrangement RCPP projects. The costly initial outlays associated with these projects can preclude state agencies and other organizations from participating in the program.
- Repealing the statutory prohibition on partners from recovering indirect/administrative costs.

ENHANCE OUTDOOR RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

Public access is one of the biggest barriers to outdoor recreation. The Volunteer Public Access & Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) is the only federal program that supports public access to private lands for wildlife-dependent recreation.

- An [economic impact analysis](#) found VPA-HIP returned \$8 for every dollar USDA invested, with economic benefits accruing among farmers, ranchers and rural communities.
- Funding has not been increased since the program's inception in 2008. The **Voluntary Public Access Improvement Act of 2025** ([S.704](#) & [H.R.1565](#)) would provide a much-needed funding increase, allowing for greater access opportunities across the country.



EXPAND FOREST CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

The Forest Conservation Easement Program Act of 2025 ([S.1050](#) & [H.R.3476](#)) would enhance the ability of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to effectively conserve working forests at scale through conservation easements, in addition to expanding easement-holding opportunities to state fish & wildlife agencies and land trusts.

- AFWA supports the expansion of working forest easement opportunities and advocates for the inclusion of the Act into a broader Farm Bill.

PROTECT AMERICA'S GRASSLANDS WITH NATIONWIDE SODSAVER

The U.S. loses approximately 2 million acres of grasslands per year through conversion to cropland, urban development, and woody plant encroachment. As a result, grassland-nesting bird populations have declined by 53% since 1970.

- The **American Prairie Conservation Act** ([S.1209](#)) addresses this troubling trend by expanding the grasslands-saving "sod saver" provision of the Farm Bill nationwide. AFWA supports the Act's inclusion into a broader Farm Bill.

