

May 3, 2023



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SPORTSMEN'S CAUCUSES
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The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chair
Senate Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
Committee

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
Senate Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
Committee

The Honorable Glenn "GT" Thompson
Chair
House Agriculture Committee

The Honorable David Scott
Ranking Member
House Agriculture Committee

Dear Chair Stabenow, Ranking Member Boozman, Chair Thompson, and Ranking Member Scott:

As Members of the National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucus (NASC) Executive Council, we are writing to express our support for robust Conservation and Forestry Titles as the Senate and House Agriculture Committees continue to draft the 2023 Farm Bill. On behalf of the nearly 2,000 state legislators from all 50 states who are members of the bipartisan, bicameral Legislative Sportsmen's Caucuses that make up the NASC network, we appreciate both the Senate and House Agriculture Committees' dedication to drafting a strong Farm Bill designed to meet the needs of our nation's producers, as well as our nation's sportsmen and sportswomen. Further, we encourage each Committee to maintain existing investments through the Farm Bill's Forestry and Conservation Titles while exploring opportunities to strengthen the Conservation Title's critical voluntary and incentive-based conservation programs.

Opportunities to strengthen existing conservation investments most logically begin with the Title's oldest and, arguably, most well-known program, the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). For sportsmen and women, CRP is often synonymous with quality habitat and hunting opportunities. With this in mind, we join the sporting-conservation community in supporting the maintenance of fish and wildlife habitat as a core component of CRP alongside soil health and water quality objectives. Further, we support opportunities designed to maximize enrollment and landowner benefits afforded through the program while maintaining CRP's place as a complement, rather than competitor, to production agriculture within the overall US agricultural system.

Elsewhere, we again affirm our support for opportunities for farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners to implement meaningful conservation practices made available through the Conservation Title's suite of options. These include practice-specific opportunities supported through the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). This also includes the invaluable conservation easement opportunities offered through the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) that offer opportunities to ensure land remains in use for agricultural purposes (Agricultural Land Easements – ALE) or support the restoration of economically and ecologically critical wetlands (Wetland Reserve Easements – WRE). Each of these programs provide clear, on-site benefits while supporting landscape, regional, and nationwide conservation efforts that support fish and wildlife habitat well beyond the boundaries of individual farms, ranches, and forests.



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Similarly, and in recognition of the benefits offered through the Farm Bill in support for both public and private working forests, we join many within the sporting-conservation community in supporting the creation of a Forest Conservation Easement Program (FCEP) within the Conservation Title as a successor to the Healthy Forest Reserve Program (HFRP). Likewise, we further support the reauthorization of the Forestry Title's Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) and Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CLFRP) to ensure that the U.S. Forest Service retains the opportunity to work with engaged partners to ensure that our nation's public and private forest resources continue to receive necessary management actions.

Finally, and arguably most importantly for sportsmen and women, we support robust investments in the Conservation Title's Voluntary Public Access – Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP). With a lack of access to quality hunting and fishing opportunities widely cited as a primary reason for lapsed participation, providing quality areas for outdoor recreation has been, and continues to be, a top priority for state fish and wildlife agencies across the country. As the basis for many state agency programs designed to incentivize public access opportunities on private lands, the NASC Executive Council applauds investments made through VPA-HIP and joins partners within the sporting-conservation community in supporting substantial increases in the program's funding within the 2023 Farm Bill.

Again, the NASC Executive Council appreciates the Senate and House Agriculture Committees' ongoing support for fish and wildlife conservation through the Farm Bill. Recognizing both the on-site wildlife habitat benefits, as well as the off-the-farm benefits that many of these programs provide for both fish and wildlife populations, we look forward to supporting robust Conservation and Forestry Titles in 2023 as we continue our work on behalf of the National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucuses and our nation's sportsmen and women.

Sincerely,

Representative Jeff Goley
NASC Executive Council President