

# Fish, Wildlife and the Farm Bill

The reauthorization of the 2007 Farm Bill will be the most important piece of conservation legislation this year. Not only does it benefit multiple conservation objectives, but it works to sustain America's rural economy and improves our quality of life through clean water, clean air and healthy places to live.

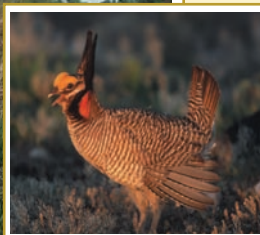
More than 40 hunting, fishing and conservation organizations, representing millions of outdoor enthusiasts, agree that the conservation programs of the Farm Bill represent a tremendous opportunity to deliver fish and wildlife conservation. For the 2007 reauthorization, the challenge is to ensure a higher level of integration of fish and wildlife benefits into all conservation programs that continue to benefit our natural resources and provide societal benefits that improve quality of life for Americans.

The following conservation focus areas describe successes achieved through Farm Bill conservation programs across our nation's diverse rural landscapes and offer ways the enclosed "Conservation Priorities" can be applied to improve fish and wildlife and facilitate rural economic gains for future generations.

## Conserving Wildlife

What's good for wildlife is also good for our citizens. By restoring degraded lands and waters, cleaning the air and conserving quality wildlife habitat we're also creating opportunities to enjoy the great outdoors. Here are a few Farm Bill success stories:

- Five billion dollars a year for improved soil, water and wildlife resources on 2.1 million farms.
- Conserved more than 40 million acres of important habitat for quail, pheasant, prairie grouse and waterfowl, which in turn, enhance our rural economies.
- Restored hundreds of thousands of wetlands and upland habitats that serve as natural filters to improve water quality and abate flood waters.



- Improved habitat for many declining grassland-dependent wildlife; helping reduce threats identified in state wildlife action plans that may preclude the need for federal threatened or endangered species listings.
- Restored and improved habitat for wildlife of all sizes from farmer-friendly pollinators, bog turtles and bats to black-tailed prairie dog, river otter and Sonoran pronghorn.
- Seventy-nine million hunters and wildlife viewers contribute \$77.5 billion annually to the U.S. economy.

**Challenge:** *The 2007 Farm Bill must continue its successful voluntary, incentive-based approach and provide the needed authorized funding levels to all qualified farmers, ranchers and forest owners that wish to participate in these successful conservation programs.*

## Sustaining Forests

Private forest owners, many of whom are also farmers and ranchers, are faced with increasing challenges as land prices and development pressures rise; markets for their products go overseas; and insects, disease, and wildfires threaten their livelihood. The Farm Bill, with its focus on helping rural landowners stay on the land, produces benefits for all citizens, and provides tools to overcome these challenges. Here are a few

Farm Bill success stories:

- Improved fish and wildlife habitat through forest stewardship, planting ecologically important tree species, manag-

ing understory vegetation, and promoting stand regeneration through burning and thinning.

- Replaced old culverts on logging roads making forests more accessible for management and outdoor recreation while improving water quality and fish habitat.
- Reduced risks of wildfire and disease while improving timber quality and profitability to protect forest owner investments and



vital wildlife habitat.

- Restored tens of thousands of acres of longleaf pine ecosystem and 34,000 acres of endangered bottomland hardwood ecosystem promoting healthy forests.
- Managed forests provide two-thirds of the nation's drinking water and \$230 billion in annual sales from U.S. paper and wood manufacturing.

**Challenge:** *The 2007 Farm Bill must recognize private forests and their fish and wildlife resources as part of the rural landscape, improve the effectiveness of programs for private forest management and thereby promote sustainable private forest conservation.*

## Improving Fish Habitat

The Farm Bill works to improve water quality and quantity in our nation's waterways. This is not only important for fish, aquatic wildlife and their habitats, but for people as well. The biological diversity of American's aquatic habitats is astonishing, while the ecological importance of water supply and flood control are incalculable. Here are a few Farm Bill success stories:

- Restored 2 million acres of wetlands and adjacent buffers, cleaning our drinking water, creating fish habitat, and protecting our fragile estuaries.
- Conserved 170,000 miles of streams, reducing nutrient run-off, preventing 450 tons of topsoil erosion and stabilizing stream-banks.
- Restored historical fish migrations and populations of salmon and native trout by removing dams, providing fish passage, and restoring streams that support actions identified in the National

Fish Habitat Action Plan.

- Restored native seagrasses, coastal marshes and riparian buffers improving marine ecosystem health and our quality of life.
- More than 44 million anglers in America generate in excess of 1 million jobs and contribute \$116 billion annually to the US economy.

**Challenge:** *The 2007 Farm Bill must continue to recognize the benefits that conservation programs accrue toward our nations' goal of clean water and healthy fish habitat and provide incentives to landowners to protect and improve wetlands, streams and riparian habitats.*

## Controlling Invasive Species

The 2007 Farm Bill presents an opportunity to steer more funding to the conservation of native species on agricultural lands by controlling harmful invasive species. Here are a few Farm Bill success stories:

- Controlled invasive species that out-compete native plants and animals, causing heavy losses in terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems.
- Improved rangelands by removing invasive plants increasing agricultural grazing values and habitat quality.
- Managed invasive plants, diseases and pests found in forests reducing infestations while improving timber quality and ecosystem health.
- In the U.S. invasive species cost Americans more than \$120 billion annually. The Asian longhorned beetle alone threatens to devastate 48 million acres of forests from New England to the Great Lakes and beyond.

**Challenge:** *The 2007 Farm Bill must recognize that invasive species are a primary threat to our agricultural, fish and wildlife resources and greater attention is needed to control and manage these increasing threats.*



# Conservation Priorities for the 2007 Farm Bill

The more than 40 national hunting, fishing and conservation organizations support and offer the following recommendations as top priorities for the conservation title of the 2007 Farm Bill.

## **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)**

Reauthorize USDA's most successful conservation program and ensure the competitive viability of the program. Overall CRP acreage should expand to 45 million acres.

## **Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)**

Increase America's number one wetlands restoration program to 300,000 acres per year to improve wetlands conservation, mitigate wetlands loss, provide migratory bird and fisheries habitat and improve water quality.

## **Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP)**

Increase GRP to 2 million acres per year. Require that a minimum of 60 percent of the agreements are long term easements of 30 years or more. Provide incentives for large tract non cropland native grasslands.

## **Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)**

Gradually increase the WHIP funding from \$100 million to \$300 million over the course of the 2007 Farm Bill with a significant portion of new funds targeted for aquatic restoration activities, including instream habitat improvement projects. Enhance conservation partnerships and program benefits by incorporating the assistance of states, municipalities and non-government organizations to deliver and manage WHIP.

## **Access**

Include a provision based upon "Open Fields" legislation, S.548/H.R. 1351 in 109th Congress, to provide \$20 million per year in grants to fund state-managed voluntary access programs. Program funds shall be used to enhance wildlife management and improve recreational opportunities on land enrolled in farm bill conservation programs.

## **Forestry**

Increase technical, education, and outreach to forest landowners through existing programs such as the Forest Stewardship Program and others that provide much needed funding for cost-sharing of forest management practices on private lands. This will enhance management for fish and wildlife habitat, air and water quality, recreation and timber production. Increase funding for the Healthy Forests Reserve Program and modify HFRP to include options for permanent easements.

## **Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP)**

Reauthorize at \$300 million per year. Allow transfer of water rights on enrolled land consistent with state law. Allow landowners the right to prohibit non cropland conversion on land subject to the easement.

## **"Sodsaver" or Non-cropland Conversion**

Any land that does not meet the definition of cropland, as determined by the USDA/Farm Service Agency, 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. To preserve its identity, non cropland converted to cropland shall be reconstituted as a separate farm by FSA.

## **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)**

Reauthorize EQIP, increase allocation percentages for fish and wildlife practices, and increase opportunities for private forestland owners. Require that any water saved through conservation practices remain instream or contribute to increased groundwater flow.

## **Biofuels and Renewable Energy**

Research and development funding should promote the next generation of biofuels and renewable energy technology based on sustainable polycultures that are consistent with fish, wildlife, soil, nutrient management and water conservation goals. Taxpayer investment in conservation and wildlife gains accomplished during the past 20 years under farm bill conservation programs should not be sacrificed or diminished.

## **Conservation Security Program (CSP)**

Reauthorize CSP and ensure it provides increased measurable and consistent benefits for fish and wildlife conservation. CSP should require fish and wildlife habitat improvement components for all program tiers and require that NRCS engage federal and state fish and wildlife agencies and non-government conservation organizations when developing fish and wildlife and habitat criteria and assessments. CSP should enhance other USDA conservation programs and not replace or reduce their funding.

## **Conservation Compliance**

Sodbuster/swampbuster compliance should be linked to all federal farm program 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 6 months of discovery.

## **Conservation Performance Measures**

Identify and authorize specific mechanisms for tracking the success of conservation measures.