



National Wildlife Federation®

Northern Rockies Natural Resource Center

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MONTANA WILDLIFE FEDERATION

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PRESS RELEASE

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BOZEMAN - Spokesmen for the Montana and National Wildlife Federations today told Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Chuck Conner to protect and expand federal Farm Bill conservation programs when the legislation is reauthorized in 2007. The comments came at a Farm Bill listening session sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture at the Museum of the Rockies.

“Farm Bill conservation programs have been incredibly important for Montana farmers and for hunters and anglers,” said Craig Sharpe, Executive Director of the Montana Wildlife Federation. There are 3.5 million acres of land enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in Montana, and these acres are not only reducing soil erosion and protecting water quality, but also providing habitat for many important wildlife species. Waterfowl numbers across the country have increased because of CRP and every Montana pheasant hunter knows how important CRP is for pheasant habitat. ”

Under CRP, farmers voluntarily enter into 10-year contracts to take land out of production and plant it to grassland cover. Annual rental payments made to farmers in Montana through the program total over \$117 million dollars.

“CRP is the biggest and most important farm program in Montana,” said Land Tawney, Regional Representative for the National Wildlife Federation. “But other programs like the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) also need to be funded and expanded to benefit wildlife. Through EQIP, the Natural Resource Conservation Service and other partners have been able to provide water for grayling in the Big Hole River, preserve and enhance sage grouse habitat, and undertake many other creative conservation initiatives.”

“Farm Bill conservation programs are under pressure from two different directions. Overall federal budget problems have led Congress to propose deep cuts even to extremely popular programs like CRP and EQIP, in addition to deep cuts already made by the appropriators to the Wetlands Reserve Program and Wildlife Habitat Incentives programs,” said Sharpe. “There is also tension in the Farm Bill itself between the Commodity Program, which guarantees support for certain crops and Conservation Programs. The Commodity Program has strong support among those who grow the relatively few crops that receive benefits, even though the Farm Bill’s conservation programs reach many more farmers.”

“USDA and Congress need to recognize the critical role Conservation programs play in supporting a wide variety of agricultural producers while benefiting soil, water and wildlife. Any cuts or streamlining to farm programs must be balanced and fairly made,” said Tawney. A strong conservation title in the Farm Bill is essential for America’s fish and wildlife.

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