



# THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

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## Draft Position Statement

In accordance with TWS policy, The Wildlife Society Council seeks member review and comment on the following draft position statement, **Recommendations for the 2007 Farm Bill**, prior to revising and finalizing it. Comments must be received by 15 January to be considered in a final position statement. Please send comments to: **Laura Bies, Assoc. Director of Government Affairs, The Wildlife Society, 5410 Grosvenor Lane, Suite 200, Bethesda, MD 20814-2144, or via email to [laura@wildlife.org](mailto:laura@wildlife.org).**

### Recommendations for the 2007 Farm Bill

The Farm Bill has been a major source of funding for conservation programs and practices related to farming and ranching activities in the U.S. These conservation programs and practices improve water quality, protect and enhance habitat for fish and wildlife, and preserve open space, all while allowing farmers and ranchers to remain on their land. A number of benefits to fish and wildlife resources produced by the conservation programs of the Farm Bill have been documented since 1985. Specifically, the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP), Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) all have produced documented benefits to fish and wildlife. The fish and wildlife benefits of some of these programs, such as CRP, have been well documented, while little data exist on the effects of other newer programs such as the Conservation Security Program (CSP). In light of this, an important component of the new Farm Bill will be monitoring to continually assess the fish and wildlife benefits of various conservation programs and practices.

Farm Bill conservation programs offer an unparalleled opportunity for landowners and wildlife professionals to work together to benefit fish and wildlife on public land. While Farm Bill conservation programs have had measurable effects on fish and wildlife, there are a number of ways that these benefits to fish and wildlife can be increased, improved upon, or made more efficient in a new Farm Bill.

The policy of The Wildlife Society in regard to the Farm Bill is that:

1. The Farm Bill conservation programs should be maintained or expanded. Funding levels should be maintained and expanded for those programs that have been shown to produce measurable benefits for fish and wildlife.
2. A systematic monitoring program for conservation benefits is needed, focused on actual conservation benefits, not on acres treated or dollars spent. Each program and/or practice administered within a state should include monitoring of expected benefits of its conservation provisions, through monitoring agreements established with State wildlife

agencies, U.S. Geological Survey, Agricultural Experiment Stations, or similar. Such a monitoring program should be funded through the Farm Bill itself.

3. The Conservation Effects Assessment Program (CEAP) program should be continued and expanded to specifically address fish and wildlife benefits.
4. A process for applying an adaptive management framework for programs and practices should be included in the Farm Bill. The adaptive management framework should be an important component of the monitoring program, recommended above, where replicated active-adaptive management designs can be incorporated into Farm Bill programs. Collaborative projects using pooled agreements may be a way of including enough sites to apply an adaptive management design. .
5. Sod busting provisions should be strengthened. For example, provisions that make lands that have been initially tilled in the past 10 years ineligible for inclusion in CRP might be a way of addressing some conversion of native grasslands and preventing lands from being tilled and then enrolled in CRP.
6. More rigorous scientific standards are needed in determining the benefits of various practices to fish and wildlife. Broad mandates that assume a particular practice has a benefit should be avoided. Instead, monitoring should be used to make informed statements about the fish and wildlife benefits of Farm Bill practices.
7. CRP should be expanded to include opportunities for permanent retirement of highly erodible lands. These lands should be seeded to native grasses and forbs for each of the specific ecological sites of the area.
8. Rangeland planting practices should have higher payment rates associated with establishing plant communities that represent specific historical states for each specific Ecological Site Descriptor in a county. Providing for longer-term practices necessary to maintain the desired conditions following initial practices such as planting should be encouraged through appropriate funding mechanisms.
9. Restoration of native plant communities and use of native species should be emphasized in Farm Bill programs. Current costs of many native plant species are a disincentive that could be countered with higher levels of funding for use of natives and establishment of native plant communities. Programs that are primarily of a conservation nature should only employ native species or at a minimum provide incentives for choosing native species.
10. GRP should be continued and expanded to provide for maintaining native grassland communities, especially in the Great Plains.
11. WHIP should be maintained and expanded to provide for fish and wildlife benefits, particularly for landowners who are not in agricultural production.

12. In agricultural production areas, a third of EQIP allocations should be targeted specifically for fish and wildlife as primary benefits for the program, in recognition of the fact that WHIP is not sufficient to address all fish and wildlife needs.
13. Additional programs such as CREP should be developed to augment WRP, WHIP, EQIP, and other programs, in the same manner as CREP augments CRP. Such programs could provide for considerations and benefits at the watershed or landscape scale that have been identified as important components of Farm Bill objectives.
14. Collaborative conservation efforts should be recognized. Farm Bill support of such efforts should provide for higher percentages of payments for collaborative conservation efforts. Pooled agreements should be encouraged, particularly when these are linked to landscape assessments or broader conservation planning.
15. NRCS should be encouraged to engage in multi-agency landscape assessments and planning to identify conservation needs at landscape scales, and to provide higher rates of payment for those sites on private lands that make greater contributions to conservation objectives identified as being important to the landscape.
16. State Conservationists should convene an annual meeting of all appropriate agencies and organizations to establish a vision of conservation goals with specific objectives identified for each year in each conservation area (soil, water, wildlife, etc.).
17. State Wildlife Action Plans should be considered in assigning priorities to programs or practices within a state.