



THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

Leaders in Wildlife Science, Management and Conservation

23 March 2015

Submitted to: House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies

Re: FY 2016 Appropriations for APHIS, NIFA, NRCS, and FSA

The Wildlife Society appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony concerning the FY 2016 budgets for the **Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, National Institute of Food and Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Farm Service Agency**. The Wildlife Society was founded in 1937 and is a non-profit scientific and educational association representing nearly 9,000 professional wildlife biologists and managers dedicated to excellence in wildlife stewardship through science and education. Our mission is to inspire, empower, and enable wildlife professionals to sustain wildlife populations and habitats through science-based management and conservation.

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

Wildlife Services, a unit of APHIS, is responsible for controlling wildlife damage to agriculture, aquaculture, forest, range, and other natural resources; monitoring wildlife-borne diseases; and managing wildlife at airports. Its activities are based on the principles of wildlife management and integrated damage management, and are carried out cooperatively with state fish and wildlife agencies. In FY 2016, the budget proposal includes a decrease of nearly \$10 million in funding for **Wildlife Services**. **We are very concerned about this proposed decrease and encourage Congress to provide funding at \$109 million, the FY 2015 level**

The proposed FY 2016 budget for **Wildlife Damage Management** would be decreased to \$80 million, from \$90 million in FY 2015. This funding does include \$20 million to continue a national feral swine control program, working cooperatively with the states currently experiencing issues with feral swine, and we support this funding. In recognition of the important work that Wildlife Services performs regarding methods development and wildlife damage management, **we strongly recommend that Congress fund Wildlife Services at the FY 2015 level of \$90 million in FY 2016**.

A key budget line in Wildlife Service's operations is **Methods Development**, which funds the National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC). Much of the newest research critical to state wildlife agencies is being performed at NWRC. In order for state wildlife management programs to be the most up-to-date, the work of the NWRC must continue. **We recommend funding Methods Development at \$19 million in FY 2016**.

National Institute of Food and Agriculture

The Renewable Resources Extension Act (RREA) provides an expanded, comprehensive extension program for forest and rangeland renewable resources. RREA funds, which are apportioned to State Extension Services, effectively leverage cooperative partnerships at an average of four to one, with a focus on private landowners. The need for RREA educational

programs is greater than ever because of continuing fragmentation of land ownership, urbanization, diversity of landowners needing assistance, increasing societal concerns about land use, and increasing human impacts on natural resources. **The Wildlife Society recommends that the Renewable Resources Extension Act be funded at \$10 million.**

The McIntire-Stennis Cooperative Forestry Program is essential to the future of resource management on non-industrial private forestlands while conserving natural resources, including fish and wildlife. As the demand for forest products grows, privately held forests will be increasingly needed to supplement resources obtained from national forest lands. However, commercial trees take many decades to produce. In the absence of long-term research, such as that provided through McIntire-Stennis, the nation might not be able to meet future forest-product needs as resources are harvested. **We appreciate the \$34 million in FY 2015 and urge that amount to be continued in FY 2016, per the President's request.**

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Farm Bill conservation programs are more important than ever, given the huge backlog of qualified applicants, increased pressure on farmland from biofuels development, urban sprawl, and the concurrent declines in wildlife habitat and water quality. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), which administers many Farm Bill conservation programs, is one of the primary federal agencies ensuring our public and private lands are made resilient to climate change. NRCS does this through a variety of programs that are aimed at conserving land, protecting water resources, and mitigating effects of climate change. NRCS also targets conservation actions towards species and ecosystems in need through in landscape-level initiatives, such as the Sage Grouse Initiative; such efforts are making great strides on the ground and involving an array of partners, leveraging federal funding, and improving wildlife habitat.

The FY 2016 budget would retitle the existing "Conservation Operations" account as the "Private Lands Conservation Operations" account, which would consolidate the discretionary and mandatory Technical Assistance (TA) funding needed for conservation delivery. The President would provide \$1.6 billion for PLCO, which would include \$831 million of discretionary funding, \$733 million of this for conservation technical assistance. For mandatory Technical Assistance to support Farm Bill conservation program implementation, \$775 million would be provided. Conservation Technical Assistance provides funding for NRCS to support implementation of the various Farm Bill programs. The FY 2016 budget proposal recommends \$733 million in funding for TA, a slight decrease from FY 2015. The Wildlife Society believes strong support for TA delivery is needed. Implementing the changes in the 2014 Farm Bill will require significant conservation planning and producer education effort. In the 2014 Farm Bill, Congress showed strong support for the use of mandatory funds for TA, though these funds can only be used in association with a specific farm bill program. Appropriated funds for Conservation Technical Assistance are still essential for NRCS to provide good customer service and strong conservation results. **The Wildlife Society encourages you to provide \$733 million for discretionary TA and \$775 million for mandatory TA in FY 2016.**

The Wildlife Society also supports the continuation of funding for the Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP) and supports the proposed \$5 million increase for the CEAP

National Reassessment. Information gathered from this effort will greatly assist in monitoring accomplishments and identifying ways to further enhance effectiveness of NRCS programs.

The Wildlife Society recommends Farm Bill conservation programs be funded at levels mandated in the 2014 Farm Bill. Demand for these programs continues to grow during this difficult economic climate at a time when greater assistance is needed to address natural resource challenges and conservation goals, including climate change, soil quality deficiencies, declining pollinator health, disease and invasive species, water quality and quantity issues, and degraded, fragmented and lost habitat for fish and wildlife.

Farm Service Agency

The Administration's request would provide funding for the **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)** at \$1.84 billion in FY 2016. Lands enrolled in CRP are important for the conservation of soil on some of the Nation's most erodible cropland. These lands also contribute to water quantity and quality, provide habitat for wildlife that reside on agricultural landscapes, sequester carbon, and provide a strategic forage reserve that can be tapped as a periodic compatible use in times when other livestock forage is limited due to drought or other natural disasters. **We strongly encourage Congress to fund CRP at a level that fully utilizes program enrollment authority through CRP general sign-up.**

Thank you for considering the views of wildlife professionals. We look forward to working with you and your staff to ensure adequate funding for wildlife conservation. Please feel free to contact Laura Bies, Director of Government Affairs, at laura@wildlife.org or at (301) 897-9770 x 308 if you need further information or have any questions.