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The Honorable House or Senate Member
Address House or Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman or Senator Last Name,

The Central Mountains and Plains Section (CMPS) of The Wildlife Society is a subunit of the parent organization comprised of states including Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming. The Wildlife Society is a professional organization that strives to ensure that wildlife and habitats are conserved through management actions that take into careful consideration relevant scientific information. We are advocates for effective wildlife policy, law, and programs that benefit wildlife and stewardship of our natural resources. The USDA Farm Bill has demonstrated its importance to wildlife and habitats across the United States.

CMPS would like to bring your attention to two important issues facing wildlife, soil, and water resources. Nationally, the number of lost Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres ballooned to 9.7 million, with the total acres nationwide falling to its lowest point in over 20 years. In the last 5 years, the 7 CMPS states have lost approximately 2.6 million acres of CRP, 26% of the acres lost nationwide. That's roughly an area the size of Yellowstone National Park or the area of the states of Delaware and Rhode Island combined.

CRP provides critical habitat for many species in the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains that have lost native grassland habitats to agricultural, industrial and urban development. For example, Lesser Prairie-Chicken (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*), Columbia Sharp-tailed Grouse (*Tympanuchus phasianellus columbianus*), and Plains Sharp-tailed Grouse (*T. p. jamesi*) have found a last bastion for survival in CRP fields, preventing these species from being listed under the Endangered Species Act. Millions of waterfowl and grassland birds use CRP fields as crucial nesting and feeding habitat as well. CRP also boosts rural economies. Outdoor recreation related to the pursuit and take of pheasants contributed approximately \$226 million to the South Dakota economy in 2011 alone with many of these birds being pursued on CRP fields.

Every American should be alarmed at the loss of program acres because CRP provides benefits to them as well. By curbing erosive forces, CRP maintains topsoil on highly erodible lands and prevents an estimated 450 million tons of irreplaceable topsoil from entering our rivers and streams. In addition to maintaining the fertility of some of the best farmlands the world has ever known, preventing topsoil erosion ensures that millions of people have clean drinking water. CRP also sequesters 50 million metric tons of carbon dioxide annually in soils and vegetation. The benefits are too numerous to list, but the importance of CRP lands to all U.S. citizens is well documented.

CMPS members live and work in states rooted in the soil. We understand the value of a dollar and that asking our government to continue spending more than it earns will lead to an impoverished future for our children and wildlife. In the environment where you work, special interests ask daily for protection for this program or that we hope that our voice for conservation of our national soil, water and wildlife resources and the local communities that depend on them can be heard. As you consider Farm Bill revisions we ask for your support in keeping the CRP cap at or above the 25 million acres outlined in the Senate Agricultural Committee bill.

Members of CMPS of The Wildlife Society would also like to show our support for conservation compliance. The draft Farm Bill produced by the Agricultural Committee and sent to the Senate floor encourages good stewardship by relinking conservation compliance to crop insurance premium subsidies in a workable manner. Access to crop insurance is maintained for all eligible farmers provided they follow basic conservation for fragile soils and wetlands. Protections such as grace periods to come into compliance and good faith exemptions are included to ensure farmers do not lose benefits prematurely. Conservation compliance helps farmers return environmental benefits to the public in exchange for taxpayer support of the farm safety net, making it truly a win-win policy. We also ask that you support this linkage during the ongoing debate on the Farm Bill.

As wildlife professionals actively invested in the health, wellbeing, and biodiversity of our working lands, we look forward to working with you and your colleagues through the passage of the 2013 Farm Bill and beyond. If you have any questions about these two critical issues or need additional perspective from the wildlife profession in CMPS, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

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