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

Re: FY 2015 Appropriations for APHIS, NIFA, NRCS, and FSA

The Wildlife Society appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony concerning the FY 2015 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 10,000 professional wildlife biologists and managers dedicated to excellence in wildlife stewardship through science and education. Our mission is to represent and serve the professional community of scientists, managers, educators, technicians, planners, and others who work actively to study, manage, and conserve wildlife and habitats worldwide. The Wildlife Society is committed to strengthening all federal programs that benefit wildlife and their habitats on agricultural and other private land.

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 2015, the budget proposal includes funding to continue a national feral swine control program, working cooperatively with the States currently experiencing issues with feral swine. In recognition of the important work that Wildlife Services performs regarding methods development and wildlife damage management, **we request that Congress support the President's request of $106 million to Wildlife Services in FY 2015.**

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 2015.**

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, and 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 2014 and urge that amount to be continued in FY 2015, 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.

One key program within the overall NRCS discretionary budget is **Conservation Operations**. The FY 2015 request for Conservation Operations is $815 million. **We urge you to provide $843.4 million for Conservation Operations**, which includes Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA). Due to the General Services Administration's recent decentralization of responsibility for making building rental payments, the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) will for the first time have to make rental payments out of the Conservation Operations budget. NRCS expects to pay $28.6 million in rent in FY 2015. When this change is taken into account, the Administration's request of $814.8 million for Conservation Operations would actually reduce the amount of funding available for conservation operations by $26.6 million relative to FY 2014.

Conservation Operation's Technical Assistance (TA) sub-activity provides funding for NRCS to support implementation of the various Farm Bill programs. The FY 2015 budget proposal recommends $717 million in funding for TA, a slight increase from FY 2014. **The Wildlife Society encourages you to support funding for TA at $717 million.**

Overall, 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 also supports the continuation of funding for the Conservation Effects Assessment Project. Information gathered from this effort will greatly assist in monitoring accomplishments and identifying ways to further enhance effectiveness of NRCS programs.

After several years of negotiations, Congress recently passed the Agriculture Act of 2014 with broad bipartisan support. This recently passed Farm Bill renewed a suite of extremely popular and effective conservation programs, but reduced mandatory funding by $4 billion. It is critical that Congress ensure that all of direct spending on conservation programs, as provided by the authorizing committees in the Farm Bill, can be spent as Congress intended in FY 2015. **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, 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.

We do have some concerns about the absorption of the **Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP)**, a voluntary program for landowners who want to improve wildlife habitat on their land, into the Environmental Quality Habitat Incentives Program, as mandated by the 2014 Farm Bill. EQIP was funded at $1.374 billion in FY 13 and the President's FY 2015 request is $1.35 billion. While at least 5% of EQIP funds must go towards wildlife conservation, we remain concerned that this $88 million decrease in overall funding coupled with the additional program responsibilities due to the absorption of WHIP could translate into lesser emphasis on critical wildlife conservation efforts.

Farm Service Agency

The Administration's request would slightly reduce funding for the **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)** to $1.957 billion in FY 2015. 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.