



THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

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The Wildlife Society appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony concerning the FY 2013 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 represents over 11,000 professional wildlife biologists and managers dedicated to sound wildlife stewardship through science and education. 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. The President's request is a \$7 million decrease from FY 2012 and a \$10 million decrease from FY 2011. In recognition of the important work that Wildlife Services performs regarding methods development and wildlife damage management, **we request that Congress appropriate \$94 million to Wildlife Services in FY 2013.**

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 \$18 million in FY 2013.**

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 supplies 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 \$33 million in funding allocated in the FY 2012 appropriations process and urge that amount to be continued in FY 2013.**

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 total FY 2013 request for Conservation Operations is \$828 million, level with FY 2012 but down from \$871 million in FY 2011. Conservation Operation's Technical Assistance (TA) sub-activity provides funding for NRCS to support implementation of the various Farm Bill programs. The FY 2013 budget recommends level funding for TA, which is a decrease of \$26 million from the FY 2011 level of \$755 million. **The Wildlife Society encourages you to return funding for TA to the FY 2011 level of \$755 million.**

Overall, The Wildlife Society believes more attention to TA delivery is needed. Changes in the 2008 Farm Bill greatly increased the number of conservation programs NRCS was required to support through delivery of TA. In addition, Congress expanded TA eligible activities in the 2008 Farm Bill to include conservation planning, education and outreach, assistance with design and implementation of conservation practices, and related TA services that accelerate conservation program delivery. TA will require funding levels from OMB that are more than what was historically allocated if NRCS is to fulfill Congressional intent as expressed in the

2008 Farm Bill. Recently, Congress allowed the use of mandatory funds for TA and, under current economic conditions, The Wildlife Society believes that such funds must continue to be utilized for effective delivery to occur. **The Wildlife Society urges Congress to authorize up to 30% of each mandatory program's funding for Technical Service Provider provisions as mandated by the 2008 Farm Bill and additional technical assistance to provide resources necessary to help meet NRCS TA shortfalls.** Similarly, we strongly encourage Congress to explore new ways of funding technical assistance in FY 2013 and beyond.

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.

The Wildlife Society recommends Farm Bill conservation programs be funded at levels mandated in the 2008 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.

We would like to specifically highlight the **Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP)**, a voluntary program for landowners who want to improve wildlife habitat on agricultural, non-industrial, and Indian land. WHIP plays an important role in protecting and restoring America's environment, and is doubly important because it actively engages public participation in conservation. **We appreciate the proposed increase in WHIP funding, to \$73 million in FY 2013 from \$50 million in FY 2012, but would urge Congress to fully fund WHIP at \$85 million.**

The Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentives Program was first authorized in the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill) for \$50 million for FY 2008-2012, and was administered by the Farm Service Agency. This funding has expired, and the FY 2013 budget includes \$5 million for the program within the NRCS budget. **The Wildlife Society commends the Administration for continuing to fund this program in FY 2013.** These funds will assist State and Tribal governments with needed resources to provide the public with additional outdoor opportunities. In addition, increased public access opportunities will help create jobs and stimulate rural economies. Continuity of program funding is critical to these programs that rely on landowner interest across multiple years.

Farm Service Administration

The Administration's request would increase funding for the **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)** to \$2.2 billion in FY 2013, up from \$2.07 billion in FY 2012. This increase assumes a CRP enrollment of 6 million acres in 2012. The Wildlife Society applauds FSA efforts to have a 6 million acre general sign-up in 2012, and to more fully utilize CRP enrollment authority to address conservation needs. 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. **We are pleased with and support the general sign-up and target enrollment of 6 million acres FSA included in the FY 2012 budget. However, we are concerned about the proposed reduction in the acreage cap from 32 million to 30 million.**

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.