

December 28, 2010

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar:

We are writing to express our strong support for the recent proposal by the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to accelerate the conservation of wetland and grassland habitat within the Prairie Pothole Region of South Dakota, North Dakota and Montana through the purchase of conservation easements from willing landowners. The Dakota Grassland Conservation Area project will serve as the cornerstone for balanced management of our vanishing prairie for wildlife, local ranchers and other landowners in addition to the general public.

The Prairie Pothole Region of the United States contains the last great intersection of wetlands and grasslands in North America and has been documented as an internationally valuable resource area for migratory waterfowl and other wetland associated wildlife. More than 800,000 of our nations' sportsmen and sportswomen participate in waterfowl and upland game bird hunting in this region annually, supporting local rural economies with expenditures valued at \$473 million.

A number of factors are driving substantial landscape level changes to this grassland and wetland resource area that will lead to a massive loss of habitat within the coming decade if not slowed through the implementation of additional conservation initiatives. In fact, at current loss rates, 50% of the remaining native prairie will be lost in just three decades unless the nation can increase its investment in the conservation of these lands.

Conservation easements are popular among many landowners, particularly ranchers, in the Prairie Pothole Region. Since its inception, landowners have enrolled 1.8 million acres in the easement program. Today, there are more than 800 landowners representing roughly 350,000 acres of habitat that have asked to have their land placed under easement. By implementing the new Dakota Grassland Conservation Area proposal to conserve 240,000 acres of wetlands and 1.7 million acres of grasslands, we can both meet the wishes of the landowners and ensure that this area provide critically important habitat for so many species of upland birds, waterfowl, and other wildlife in perpetuity.

In conclusion, this new Dakota Grassland Conservation Area proposal by the FWS for the Prairie Pothole Region is timely and welcome. We encourage you to implement it as soon as possible so that we can provide economic relief to affected landowners while addressing this imminent conservation need.

Sincerely,

Archery Trade Association
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Bear Trust International
Boone & Crockett Club
Bowhunting Preservation Alliance
Campfire Club of America
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Conservation Force
Dallas Safari Club
Delta Waterfowl
Ducks Unlimited
International Hunter Education Association
Izaak Walton League of America
Masters of Foxhounds Association
Mule Deer Foundation
National Shooting Sports Foundation
National Trappers Association
National Wild Turkey Federation
North American Bear Foundation
North American Grouse Partnership
Orion-the Hunters' Institute
Pheasants Forever
Quail Forever
Quality Deer Management Association
Sand County Foundation
Texas Wildlife Association
The Wildlife Society
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Tread Lightly
Whitetails Unlimited
Wild Sheep Foundation
Wildlife Forever
Wildlife Management Institute