



THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

Leaders in Wildlife Science, Management and Conservation

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

Submitted by: Byron Ken Williams, PhD, CWB®
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Re: FY 2017 Appropriations for APHIS, NIFA, NRCS, and FSA

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The Wildlife Society appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony concerning the FY 2017 budgets for the **Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)**, **National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)**, **Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)**, and **Farm Service Agency (FSA)**. The Wildlife Society was founded in 1937 and is an international non-profit scientific and educational association representing nearly 10,000 professional wildlife biologists and managers. Our mission is to inspire, empower, and enable wildlife professionals to sustain wildlife populations and habitats through science-based management and conservation. We respectfully request the following programmatic funding in FY 2017 to ensure that the federal budget supports the important work of managing and conserving our nation's wildlife resources. Thank you in advance for considering the views of wildlife professionals.

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

Wildlife Services, a unit of APHIS, resolves human/wildlife conflicts and protects agriculture, human health and safety, personal property, and natural resources from wildlife damage and wildlife-borne diseases in the United States. The Wildlife Society recognizes wildlife damage management as an important part of modern wildlife management.

In FY 2017, the President has proposed a decrease in funding for **Wildlife Damage Management** by approximately \$15 million. While we acknowledge this decrease partially reflects the removal of a one-time capital investment of \$5.8 million in aircraft equipment from FY 2016, we are highly concerned by the additional extent of this proposed decrease and the effect it might have on the continued success of programs managed by Wildlife Services, like the National Rabies Management Program. **Therefore, we encourage Congress to fund Wildlife Damage Management at or beyond the FY 2015 funding levels of \$90 million for FY 2017.**

Before wildlife damage management programs are undertaken, careful assessment should be made of the problem, including the impact to individuals, the community, and other wildlife species. 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. **The Wildlife Society recommends the continued funding of Methods Development at \$19 million in FY 2017.**

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. Authorized at \$30 million, RREA has been appropriated at roughly \$4 million per year since FY 2008. **To meet the growing need for sustainable outreach initiatives, The Wildlife Society recommends that Congress increase the funding for RREA to at least \$10 million for FY 2017.**

The McIntire-Stennis Cooperative Forestry Program is essential to the production, utilization, and protection of forestry resources, including fish and wildlife, on non-industrial, private forestlands. As the demand for forest products grows, the nation will increasingly rely on privately held forests 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 may have difficulty meeting future forest-product needs in a sustainable manner. **We appreciate the \$34 million provided for McIntire-Stennis in FY 2016 and urge Congress to continue this funding in FY 2017.**

Natural Resources Conservation Service

The **Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)** is the primary federal agency that works with private landowners to help them conserve, maintain, and improve their natural resources, thereby making them more resilient and valuable to society. NRCS emphasizes science-based conservation, and through a variety of voluntary, incentive-based programs, offers technical assistance and cooperative problem solving at the community level. Demand for NRCS programs and the backlog of qualified applicants has far outnumbered the agency's present capacity under current funding. With increased pressure on farmlands from biofuel development, urban sprawl, and the concurrent declines in wildlife habitat and water quality, the need for NRCS conservation programs continues to grow.

For FY 2017, the President has requested \$1.9 billion for **Private Lands Conservation Operations (PLCO)**, including \$1.0 billion of mandatory funding and \$860 million of discretionary funding; which includes the **Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA)** program. CTA provides discretionary funding for NRCS to support implementation of Farm Bill programs. The Wildlife Society is strongly supportive of the FY 2017 budget proposal of \$761 million in funding for CTA, a slight increase from FY 2016. An increase in funds will allow for further implementation of the changes that resulted from the 2014 Farm Bill. In the 2014 Farm Bill, Congress demonstrated strong support for the use of mandatory funds for **Technical**

Assistance (TA), but these funds can only be used in association with a specific Farm Bill program. Appropriated funds for CTA are still essential for NRCS to provide efficient customer service and strong conservation results. **The Wildlife Society therefore encourages Congress to provide \$860 million for discretionary TA, including \$761 million for CTA, and \$1.0 billion for mandatory TA in FY 2017, per the President's request.**

The Wildlife Society also recommends that all Farm Bill conservation programs be funded at levels mandated in the 2014 Farm Bill, including \$500 million for the Agriculture Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) and 1.65 billion for the Environmental Quality Initiatives Program (EQIP). Demand for these programs continues to grow, yet during a time when greater assistance is needed to address natural resource challenges and conservation goals, the NRCS can only fund a small portion of the overall demand for these popular programs.

Farm Service Agency

The President's request would provide funding for the **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)** at \$1.9 billion in FY 2017. 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 for 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 \$1.9 billion per the President's request, or at a level that fully utilizes the program's general enrollment authority.**

FY 2017 Appropriations Recommendations - The Wildlife Society

USDA Agency/Unit	Program	FY 2015 Enacted	FY 2016 Estimate	FY 2017 POTUS	FY 2017 The Wildlife Society
APHIS/Wildlife Services	Wildlife Damage Management	90M	101M	86M	90M
	Methods Development	19M	19M	19M	19M
NIFA/Formula Grants	RREA	4M	4M	4M	10M
	McIntire-Stennis Coop. Forestry	34M	34M	34M	34M
NRCS/PLCO	PLCO- Discretionary TA	846M	851M	860M	860M
	PLCO- Mandatory TA	900M	903M	1,034M	1,034M
	PLCO- Total	1,746M	1,754M	1,894M	1,894M
NRCS/Farm Bill Conservation Programs	ACEP	394M	419M	500M	500M
	EQIP	1,347M	1,329M	1,650M	1,650M
	TOTAL-Farm Bill Programs	3,184M	3,123M	3,885M	3,885M
FSA/Conservation Programs	Conservation Reserve Program	1,741M	1,841M	1,923M	1,923M