



Advancing Conservation in the 2007 Farm Bill

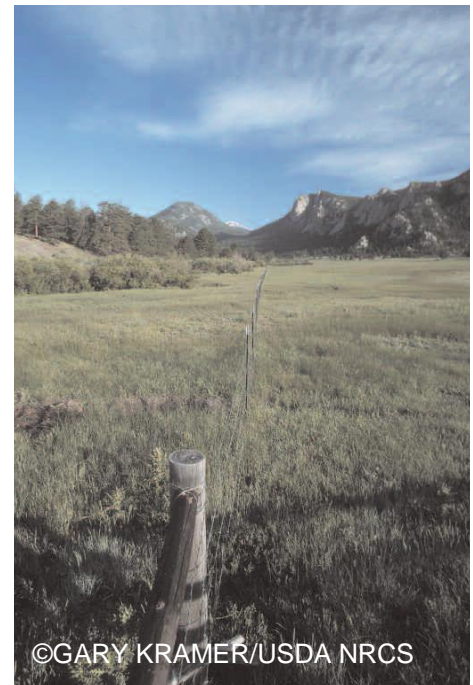
Conservation through the farm bill has a far-reaching impact on the conservation choices made by farmers and landowners. Following are several key components Defenders of Wildlife has targeted in the 2007 Farm Bill to help maximize the benefits for farmers and wildlife.

Reauthorize and Fund Conservation Programs

Defenders of Wildlife supports the full suite of farm bill conservation programs. Each should be reauthorized, with increased funding. We oppose the consolidation, elimination, or scaling back of the programs. We believe that the farm bill should continue to strike a balance between reserve programs and working lands incentives programs.

Promote Strategic Conservation

Every state recently completed wildlife action plans, the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategies, which identify at-risk habitats and species that need special conservation attention. Similarly, the National Fish Habitat Action Plan defines important priorities for protecting and restoring aquatic habitats. Farm bill conservation program funding should be linked to these plans, and Congress should give priority to wildlife conservation applications that address the goals and objectives of these plans. Congress should continue the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program with a 100 percent cost-share for projects that are 15 years or longer and target habitats identified in the state Wildlife Action Plans.



Enact Sodsaver Provision

The native grasslands of the United States are disappearing at an alarming rate. Grassland habitats are critically important habitat for ducks, shorebirds, and grassland songbirds. The pressure to convert these lands to crops is intense, especially given the subsidies available to producers. Once these lands are plowed, it is impossible to recreate this threatened ecosystem. Defenders supports legislation that would prohibit commodity, conservation, or crop insurance payments to anyone who brings these native grasslands into production.

Develop Sustainable Biofuels

Biofuels such as ethanol have the potential to help us reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and decrease carbon emissions that are contributing to global warming. Significant expansion of corn acreage for ethanol production can have negative consequences, in the form of lost wildlife habitat and increased use of fertilizers and pesticides. The farm bill provides a unique opportunity to facilitate the transition to a more sustainable future in biofuels. Defenders of Wildlife supports the development of a biofuels innovation program to help jump start the cellulosic biofuels industry. We also support research and working lands incentives to develop and reward the most sustainable and wildlife-friendly approaches to cellulosic biofuels production. In order to maximize the benefits to wildlife, biofuels should be grown and harvested in ways that take both wildlife and environmental concerns into account. Additionally, landowners should not use native grasslands or land under Conservation Reserve Program contracts to grow biofuels, as both provide valuable habitat to wildlife.

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Conserve Critical Riparian Areas

Defenders recommends that the 2007 Farm Bill expand the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) to allow funding for riparian habitat protection in the arid Southwest. These streamside corridors are vitally important for birds and other wildlife, but are currently ineligible for the program because they are not adjacent to protected wetlands.



Gary Kramer - NRCS/USDA

Promote Proactive Carnivore Conservation

New policies should be created to encourage private and public partnerships, such as proactive and market oriented incentive strategies, eco-tourism and eco-labeling. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) should explicitly allow funding of projects that safely reduce conflicts between wildlife and farming and ranching operations through funding activities like carcass removal.

Revise the Conservation Security Program

The Conservation Security Program (CSP), which rewards farmers for ongoing resource stewardship, can provide many benefits to wildlife. Although participants in CSP have seen wildlife benefits as a result of participating in the program, improvements to the program are needed. Defenders supports making CSP available nationally rather than in selected watersheds. Furthermore, Congress should also provide adequate funding and technical assistance for the program. Additionally, the program should balance rewarding existing stewardship with encouraging new conservation practices.

Offer One-Stop Shopping

Congress should create an administrative mechanism for one-stop shopping, allowing landowners access to multiple federal and state programs without the inconvenience of multiple applications. One-stop shopping would improve coordination and streamline the application process to encourage more landowners to apply for conservation funding within multiple conservation programs.

Increase Irrigated Land Rental Rates

The Conservation Reserve Program and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program do not provide sufficient payment levels in areas with high land values to encourage all landowners to participate in habitat protection. Congress should increase irrigated land rental rates to ensure a greater level of enrollment in these programs.

Increase Funding for Technical Assistance for Conservation Programs

Additional funding should be given to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), which provides technical assistance to landowners in the development of their conservation projects. Additionally, funds should be allocated to create a Resource Conservation Corps, whereby recent graduates with natural resource or agricultural degrees could participate in a two-year volunteer program in exchange for federal service and as a way to repay school loans.

Expand Conservation Technical Assistance Resources

Establish a Resource Conservation Corps which would offer loan assistance to agricultural sciences graduates in exchange for a commitment of service to US Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service, and thus increase vital conservation technical assistance resources.