

May 30, 2023

The Honorable John Boozman
The Honorable Tom Cotton
United States Senate

The Honorable Rick Crawford
The Honorable Bruce Westerman
The Honorable French Hill
The Honorable Steve Womack
United States House of Representatives

Dear Senators Boozman and Cotton, and Representatives Crawford, Westerman, Hill, and Womack,

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) programs are effective, in-demand programs that are routinely oversubscribed due to their popularity with farmers, ranchers, and other conservationists. NRCS programs have proven benefits to on-farm productivity, improved profitability, and improved outcomes for the environment, wildlife, water, and soil health but require increased support to meet producer demand.

The priorities identified below were developed by over 30 attendees of an **Arkansas Farm Bill Conservation Forum** hosted by the Arkansas Wildlife Federation (AWF) in partnership with the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) in Little Rock Arkansas on May 4, 2023. Attendees of the Forum included conservation leaders and farm bill program practitioners from agencies and NGOs across Arkansas.

In recognition of the pressures on Arkansas and United States' agriculture by degraded soil health, climate change, overuse of water, polluted rivers and streams, and stressed rural communities, the undersigned Arkansas conservation partners write in support of the following policies for the 2023 Farm Bill:

1. Increase Conservation Title baseline funding to meet producer demand and protect and build on conservation funding provided by the 117th Congress. Protect the historic \$20 billion investment in climate-smart agriculture and conservation technical assistance and ensure that this funding stays in Farm Bill conservation programs.
2. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program has a 10% funding set-aside for wildlife-specific practices, however some funds counted towards that cap do not have wildlife as the primary natural resource concern. Congress should direct NRCS to only count wildlife-focused practices towards that set-aside and review how practices, particularly relating to forestry, impact wildlife as a resource concern.
3. Improve RCPP to more fully realize the program's potential for at-scale public private partnerships. This includes directing USDA to allow some administrative costs for awarded RCPP projects so as to allow partners the necessary capacity to effectively implement the project, in line with other public-private partnerships at NRCS. Further, review NRCS application processes for farmers, ranchers, and

landowners to identify and remove redundancies without impacting the program's integrity and reduce the time between funding award and disbursement.

4. Increase Conservation Technical Assistance funding and improve the workforce pipeline for conservation professionals.

These policies will help American farmers and ranchers better meet their on-farm natural resource concerns, improve environmental outcomes for wildlife, water, soil health, and climate change, and improve their bottom lines. Stewarding Arkansas' lands for future generations is necessary for the revitalization of our rural communities and ensuring financial and food security for future generations.

Sincerely,

Arkansas Conservation Partners

Arkansas Backcountry Hunters & Anglers

Arkansas Wildlife Federation

Audubon Delta

Beaver Watershed Alliance

Northwest Arkansas Land Trust

Pheasants Forever, Inc.

Quail Forever