



Recommendations for the 2007 Farm Bill
Minnesota Chapter of The Wildlife Society
3-14-07

The Minnesota Chapter of TWS proposes the following recommendations for the 2007 Farm Bill. The Farm Bill has been one of the primary funding sources for wildlife habitat in the agricultural Midwest over the past two decades. Farm Bill programs have been documented to increase wildlife populations, reduce soil erosion, improve water quality, preserve open spaces, and contribute to the economic health of rural economies while maintaining working farms and ranches. We recommend the following:

- 1) Maintain or expand all of our current programs that place or maintain permanent cover on the landscape. These include the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Continuous CRP (CCRP), Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), Wetland Reserve Program (WRP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and Conservation Security Program (CSP). These programs provide a number of well-documented benefits to farmers, society, and wildlife.
 - a. These programs need to be re-examined to **facilitate enrollment** or re-enrollment. Farmers should not avoid these programs because of any difficulty in enrollment.
 - b. **Rental rates** need to keep pace with land values so that these programs continue to be financially competitive alternatives for farmers.
 - c. All programs should use **native species**, and wherever possible local genotype seeds.
 - d. The plantings should be **appropriate to the area**. Many grassland areas are still planted to tree species. Trees provide habitat for grassland nest predators.
 - e. **Incorporate supporting data** such as the USFWS's 'thunderstorm maps' (CP-37 program), state Wildlife Action Plans, or Natural Heritage Databases for determining focus areas and/or payment rates for these programs.
- 2) CRP language should be modified to allow permanent retirement on highly erodible soils.
- 3) GRP should be expanded to maintain native grassland communities and preserve ranching. Expand tax incentives programs to make voluntary protection a viable option.
- 4) WHIP should be expanded to provide benefits for fish and wildlife, especially for rural landowners who are not farmers.
- 5) Toughen and enforce **Swampbuster**. The Swampbuster provisions of the 1985 Farm Bill were a clear recognition of the importance of **wetlands** and are a powerful disincentive for wetland drainage. Without Swampbuster, thousands of small temporary and seasonal wetlands in the prairie pothole region would be vulnerable to drainage, with resulting decreases in game and nongame wildlife populations. In addition, wetlands absorb floodwater. More waters held in wetlands in the watershed during storm events means less flood damage downstream.

- 6) Promote **grass buffers** on waterways. Buffers filter sediment from the water before the water reaches the streams and rivers. Clean water is in everyone's best interest.
- 7) Regulate **pattern tiling**. Pattern tiling is a recent practice that indirectly drains wetlands by intercepting water, effectively removing the waters that fill "prairie pothole" type wetlands. It is essential that Swampbuster provisions be retained, including those for small temporary wetlands, and that loopholes allowing indirect drainage of wetlands be tightened.
- 8) Increase funding for and research on **invasive species**. Invasive species are one of the greatest threats to agriculture and wildlife alike. The USDA estimates invasive species cost agriculture \$138 billion per year. The USFWS lists invasive species as the second greatest threat to wildlife after habitat loss
 - a. Whenever possible, current invasive species problems need to be treated using **Integrated Pest Management (IPM)** instead of potentially harmful chemicals.
 - b. A **monitoring and rapid response program** needs to be developed to look for and immediately treat any infestations. Vigilance and treatment of an acre will be more cost effective than treating thousands of acres once the invasive species has become established in an area.
- 9) Increase funding for the **Conservation Security Program (CSP)**
 - a. While incentive programs are good and do help entice farmers into protecting their soil and water, many farmers already do this. They should be rewarded for their diligence. More importantly, there should be greater financial rewards for always having done the 'right' thing compared to those who are currently using unsustainable practices. It should pay to do the right thing when it comes to the societal costs involved with modern agriculture.
- 10) Strengthen and **enforce Sodbuster** rules. There should be no federal support for producers that break native grasslands. This will eliminate the federal government's role of subsidizing the conversion of fragile, ecologically sensitive lands.
- 11) Increase incentive programs for farming practices that **sequester carbon** from the atmosphere, including no-till farming and planting native grasses.
- 12) Develop **better communication and cooperation** between wildlife/natural resource and agriculture agencies. Both groups have numerous programs landowners can enroll acres into. But often one side isn't aware of the programs on the other side or is not aware of how programs could be stacked for the landowner's maximum benefit. Better cooperation between these groups will allow us to protect the maximum number of acres.
- 13) Use only **native species** when working with emerging technologies and economies such as cellulosic ethanol. Native species are adapted to the local growing conditions and do not need inputs of pesticides and fertilizers. More importantly, bringing in new species or genetically engineering native species could have severe repercussions for cross-breeding with native plant communities.
- 14) Provide **research dollars** to monitor the effectiveness of any new programs and use adaptive management techniques as the results of these studies become available. Research should be coordinated among national, state, and local, as well as wildlife and agricultural agencies. Research can be done by agency staff but also conducted by colleges and universities. Educational institutions can often perform this research at a lower cost, and they train the next generation of agency personnel.

Addendum 1:

The Minnesota Chapter of The Wildlife Society (MN TWS) is a professional organization of biologists dedicated to the sustainable management of wildlife resources and their habitats. The Wildlife Society is an international, non-profit, scientific and educational organization serving and representing wildlife professionals in all areas of wildlife conservation and resource management.

MN TWS subscribes to the objectives set forth by the parent organization of The Wildlife Society, which are to:

- Develop and promote sound stewardship of wildlife resources and of the environments upon which wildlife and humans depend;
- Undertake an active role in preventing human-induced environmental degradation;
- Increase awareness and appreciation of wildlife values; and
- Seek the highest standards in all activities of the wildlife profession.

The Minnesota Chapter objectives are to:

- Manage wildlife resources on a sound biological basis that benefits ecosystems and people; and
- Encourage the highest possible professional standards in those working with wildlife resources.

More information about the Minnesota Chapter of The Wildlife Society can be found on our website, including chapter contacts: <http://www.umcrookston.edu/tws/mn/>

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