



2018 Farm Bill Platform

National Wildlife Federation urges Congress to pass a 2018 Farm Bill that increases overall funding for Farm Bill conservation programs and includes strong provisions for wildlife, water quality and quantity, and soil health.

The Farm Bill is one of the most important federal policies affecting conservation and wildlife habitat. The Farm Bill offers the single largest source of funding for conservation on private lands.

Through Farm Bill conservation programs, farmers, ranchers, and forest owners work with the U.S. Department of Agriculture to create habitat for wildlife and pollinators, conserve sensitive grasslands and wetlands, improve soil health, sequester carbon, and address water quantity and quality concerns. With pressures on the landscape ever increasing, a Farm Bill with strong conservation provisions is more important now than ever.

CONTACT: Aviva Glaser / Director of Agriculture Policy / GlaserA@nwf.org / (202) 797-6616

TOP PHOTO: HOWARD HACKNEY

THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION'S

Top Priorities for the 2018 Farm Bill



1 Increase Conservation Title Funding

Increase overall funding for Farm Bill conservation programs, or at the very least, ensure that there are no cuts to the conservation title. Additionally, increase Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) to enable at least 35 million acres to be enrolled, increase funding for the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program to at least \$500 million, and increase mandatory funding for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).

2 National Sodsaver

Prevent conversion of native grasslands through a strengthened nationwide Sodsaver provision that closes existing loopholes in law and requires better tracking of grassland loss.

3 Conservation Compliance

Maintain the linkage between conservation compliance provisions and crop insurance premium subsidies, improve enforcement and implementation of compliance to better protect soil and wetlands, and reject efforts to weaken wetland compliance provisions.

4 Increase Wildlife Funding in Working Lands Programs

Increase the minimum amount of Environmental Quality Incentives Program funds that are required to be used for wildlife habitat conservation practices annually from 5 percent to 10 percent.

5 Better Align Crop Insurance and Conservation

Remove barriers within crop insurance for farmers who want to adopt conservation practices, such as cover crops, and better align conservation and crop insurance.

6 Increase Opportunities to Keep Grasslands in Grazing

Increase the amount of working lands program funding going towards grazing practices, create a structure to transition continually-re-enrolled CRP acres into long-term working grasslands, and provide greater flexibility for easements for grasslands of Special Environmental Significance.

7 Increase Conservation Benefits of Conservation Programs

Improve and target conservation programs to best meet our natural resource needs, ensuring strong provisions for wildlife, pollinators, water quality and quantity, and soil health and a preference for planting diverse mixes of native plants. Where conservation programs provide funding to promote a practice with a reasonable economic return to the farmer, payments should be limited in duration to simply assist in the transition to the practice.

THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION'S

Detailed Recommendations for the 2018 Farm Bill



Sodsaver

Over 90 percent of native prairies across the country have been converted to cropland – destroying a critical ecosystem that many wildlife species depend on. Sodsaver is a provision that protects native prairies by reducing federal premium subsidies for crop insurance on land where native sod has been plowed for row crop planting.

Currently, the provision only applies to six states: Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota. By strengthening Sodsaver and making it apply nationwide, we help disincentivize the destruction of remaining native prairies.

- » Prevent conversion of native grasslands through a strengthened nationwide Sodsaver provision.
- » Close the perennial crop loophole, also known as the “alfalfa loophole.”
 - This loophole allows producers to sidestep Sodsaver by converting native sod to perennial crops (e.g., alfalfa), introduced grasses, or any other non-annual crop that farmers typically don’t insure for 1-4 years. Farmers can then plant to an annual crop without being subject to Sodsaver disincentives for those years. Any native sod acreage converted after enactment of the law should be subject to the reduction in crop insurance premium subsidies for the first four years of federally insured crop production.
- » Require better tracking of grassland loss, including publicly accessible annual reports.

Conservation Compliance

In exchange for receiving certain farm program benefits, farmers must agree to basic soil and wetland conservation provisions to protect wetlands and reduce soil erosion. Conservation compliance prevents 295 million tons of soil from eroding every year into our rivers, lakes, and streams. The 2014 Farm Bill re-linked conservation compliance to crop insurance premium subsidies.

- » Maintain the linkage between conservation compliance provisions, crop insurance premium subsidies, and other farm benefits.
- » Oppose all efforts to weaken Swampbuster, including by limiting the types of wetlands covered, reducing penalties for non-compliance, setting unrealistic deadlines on NRCS to accomplish wetland determinations, and prohibiting NRCS from reviewing wetland determinations performed by private consultants.
- » Improve conservation compliance monitoring, enforcement, and reporting activities, in order to fully meet the wetland and soil conservation goals of the program.
- » Provide adequate conservation technical assistance funding to allow the agency to improve wetland determination quality, accuracy, and timeliness.
- » Direct NRCS to conduct a study to evaluate the effectiveness and accuracy of new State Off-Site Methods for Wetland Determinations, and make the results of the study publicly available.
- » Direct NRCS to use technically defensible means for conducting wetland determinations.
- » Oppose efforts to publicly subsidize private agricultural wetland drainage.
- » Direct NRCS to allow the release of conservation plans, wetland determinations, acreage amounts, flood damage surveys, noncompliance data, and Highly Erodible Land (HEL) determinations with adequate measures taken to protect the identity of producers.
- » Ensure HEL conservation plans are adequately reducing erosion and addressing ephemeral gullies.

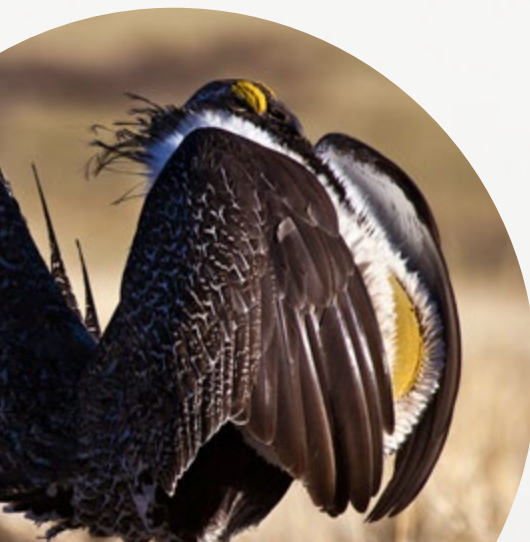


PHOTO: BLM

Crop Insurance

The federal crop insurance program is the primary safety net available for agricultural producers. By tweaking the program to better align crop insurance and conservation practices, we can improve conservation benefits on the landscape while still providing the support needed to keep farming viable.

» Better align crop insurance and conservation practices

- End the cover crop termination guidelines and instead manage all cover crop issues through the Good Farming Practices process.
- Encourage RMA to coordinate with NRCS and other agencies to help remove barriers within crop insurance for farmers who want to adopt conservation practices.

» Update prevented planting to better encourage planting cover crops

- If a producer is unable to plant a crop before the final planting date due to moisture or drought, require the farmer to plant a cover crop, if possible, in order to receive their prevented planting indemnity payment.
- Alternatively, require farmers to substitute a yield of 60 percent of county T-Yield for their Average Production History (APH) when they choose not to plant a cover crop, but allow those farmers who plant a cover crop to continue to exclude the year from their APH.

» Take steps to modernize the risk rating process

- Create a pilot program or study that incorporates soil type data into risk ratings and assesses the correlation between soil type and yield risk.
- Call on RMA to conduct a study on the impact of practices (namely tillage practices and crop rotation) on crop yield variability and to establish strategies to incorporate results into the existing risk rating process.
- Call on RMA to open up the risk rating process to stakeholders to review the design to improve the accuracy of the risk rating system to better account for the risks of various practices that are not available under existing crop insurance policies.

» Adjust APH to incentivize the removal of marginal, low-yielding parts of the field from production.

- Prohibit or reduce premium subsidies on land capability classes designated as unsuitable for crops, with the exception of pasture, forage, and range policies.
- Eliminate buy-up coverage for prevented planting and require conservation practices to obtain additional buy-up coverage.
- Direct RMA to create a pilot program to offer high premium subsidies for farmers who adopt risk-reducing conservation practices.
- Expand the Whole Farm Revenue Policy program in order to allow farmers more ability to diversify their crops.
- Add conservation and soil health to the “surveys and data collection” portion of the crop insurance statute.
- Eliminate or limit the use to 1 in 10 years of the APH Yield Exclusion policy that allows farmers to “drop” a year of bad yields from their APH.



PHOTO: USFWS MOUNTAIN PRAIRIE



PHOTO: FOREST SERVICE, EASTERN REGION

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

ACEP provides financial and technical assistance to help restore, maintain and protect agricultural lands, grasslands, and wetlands and their related benefits. The 2014 Farm Bill combined wetland easements, grassland easements, and farmland protection easements into one combined easement program. Conservation easements provide critical habitat for wildlife, including threatened and endangered species, help to improve water quality, reduce flooding, recharge groundwater, and protect open space.

- » Restore and/or increase baseline funding for ACEP to no less than \$500 million annually over the next 10 years.
- » Improve program flexibility by:
 - Providing the option for USDA to hold easements for “Grasslands of Special Environmental Significance” to provide easement opportunities for landowners in areas without eligible easement-holding entities.
 - Allowing landowners to donate the entire 25 percent matching fund requirement on ACEPs that qualify for “Grasslands of Special Environmental Significance.”
- Permitting “forests of special environmental significance” to receive up to 75 percent of federal cost share assistance (on par with existing “grasslands of special significance”);
- Allowing non-USDA federal funds to be used as eligible match on ACEPs, as is currently allowed under the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP); and
- Clarifying that forest-only easements are acceptable.
- Require NRCS conservation plans for all agricultural land easements, including those that do not have HEL or grassland. The plan should be designed to address all identified resource concerns, in addition to addressing the purposes for which the easement was established. Easements with forests should have forestland management plans.
- In order to ensure adequate funding for wetland easements, there should not be a minimum funding amount dedicated to agricultural land easements.



PHOTO: USDA NRCS

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

CRP is one of the most important land conservation programs for soil, water, and wildlife. In exchange for a yearly rental payment and cost-share payments, farmers enroll environmentally sensitive, marginal land in 10-15 year contracts, remove the land for agricultural production, and plant species that will protect soil, improve water quality, and create wildlife habitat.

- » Increase CRP enrollment to at least 35 million acres.
- » Ensure the continuation of high conservation quality enrollments and adequate continuous CRP sign-ups that target for multiple benefits.
- » Continue and strengthen CRP Grasslands.
 - Make CRP grasslands a percentage of the total acreage of the program,
 - Increase the amount of acreage going to CRP grasslands, and
 - Prioritize those grasslands as high risk of conversion and ecologically important grasslands, particularly those providing habitat for at risk species.
- » Create a structure to transition continually-re-enrolled CRP acres out of CRP and into long-term working grasslands and provide the infrastructure necessary to support the transition to grass-based agricultural production.
- » Improve mid-contract management, including through imposing penalties for not completing require a mid-contract management, and ensuring that mid-contract management activities address wildlife habitat goals.
- » Encourage USDA to broaden the practices eligible for grazing, if determined to be ecologically-appropriate and beneficial to wildlife and/or pollinator habitat, as determined by USDA in consultation with the state wildlife agency.
- » Strengthen forestry components in CRP:
 - Only re-enroll those CRP pine forests that have implemented management practices; and limit to only one re-enrollment.
 - Fund incentive payments at \$10 million for thinning and burning for management of existing pine stands, including better technical assistance.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

The RCPP is a new program that was created in the 2014 Farm Bill, promotes innovative partner-led projects to deliver conservation assistance to producers and landowners at the regional or watershed level. Working with USDA, partners help provide assistance to producers to adopt conservation practices that address critical resources.

- » Increase overall funding for RCPP.
- » Simplify and clarify the funding structure of RCPP.
- » Allow for additional program flexibility through:
 - Allowing a limited portion of partners' administrative costs and outreach costs to be funded through RCPP.
 - Allow for aggregate and/or alternate contracting arrangements to reduce burdens on partners, producers, and NRCS staff.
- » Better target projects by allowing for funding for advanced conservation planning.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

EQIP provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers in order to address natural resource concerns and deliver environmental benefits such as improved water and air quality, conserved water, reduced soil erosion and sedimentation and improved or created wildlife habitat.

- » Require that at least 10 percent of EQIP funds are used for wildlife habitat conservation practices annually.
- » Increase the amount of livestock funding targeted at grazing practices within EQIP, particularly prescribed grazing. If states have any funding set aside for livestock practices, they should be required to include a set aside for grazing practices.
- » Ensure that EQIP payments used for irrigation efficiency improvements result in real savings to in-stream flows and don't expand irrigated acreage. Alternatively, provide higher cost-share rates for projects that result in the conserved water increasing stream flows.
- » Provide higher cost-share rates for irrigation efficiency projects that provide significant water conservation benefits and which result in the conserved water increasing stream flows.
- » Increase the availability of and emphasis on long-term incentive payments and contracts within EQIP.

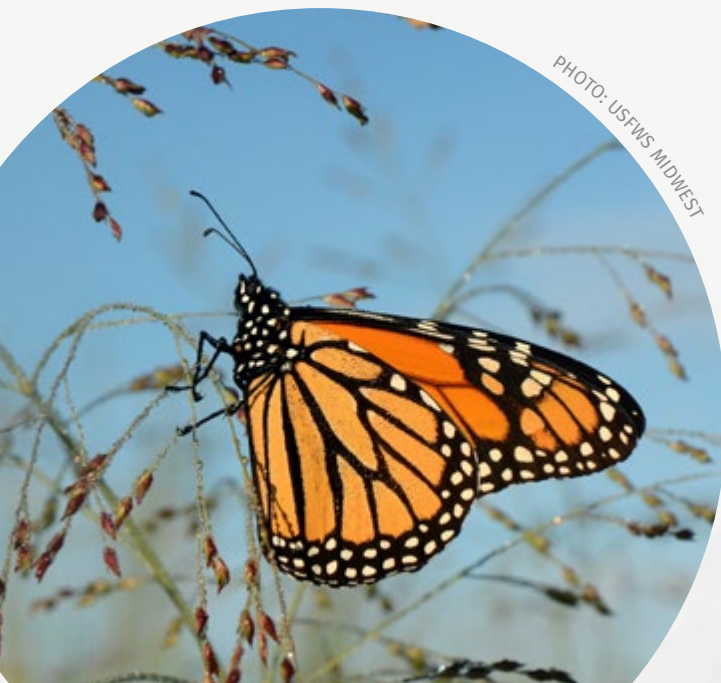


PHOTO: USFWS MIDWEST

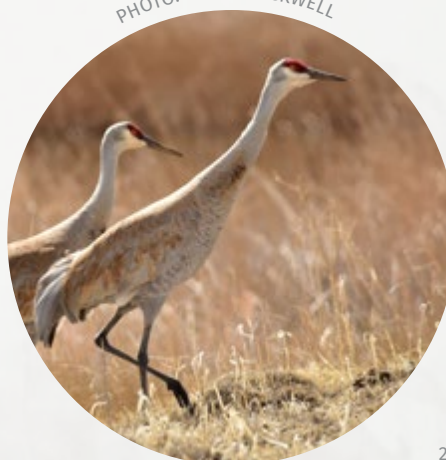


PHOTO: RYAN STOCKWELL

- » Allow all private lands capable of production to be eligible for enrollment in wildlife practices. Lands capable of production were previously eligible for the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, but only lands currently in production have been eligible for the combined program.
- » Increase program flexibility to allow EQIP cost share rates to be adjusted according to conservation or environmental performance.
- » In order to level the playing field, eliminate the \$20,000 payment limitation per year on farmers under the organic initiative to ensure that all farmers are subject to the same payment limitations in EQIP.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

CSP helps agricultural producers maintain and improve their existing conservation systems and adopt additional conservation activities to address priority resources concerns. Participants earn CSP payments for conservation performance—the higher the performance, the higher the payment.

- » Require that at least 10 percent of CSP acres be used for wildlife habitat conservation practices annually.
- » Create a supplemental payment for management-intensive rotational grazing parallel to the existing supplemental payment for resource-conserving crop rotation.
- » Ensure that enhancements do not promote or encourage expanded or improved agricultural drainage.

Energy Title

- » Reauthorize and provide mandatory funding at adequate levels for the Biomass Crop Assistance Program, Rural Energy for America Program, and Community Wood Energy Program.
- » Consider amending the Biomass Crop Assistance Program to a small grants program for piloting innovative new bioenergy scenarios involving agricultural lands.
- » Do not allow blender pumps to receive funding from Farm Bill Energy Title programs.

Forestry

- » Include the Timber Innovation Act in the Farm Bill.
- » Reauthorize the Healthy Forest Reserve Program at \$12 million/year mandatory to conserve and enhance wildlife habitat.
- » Prioritize funding for invasive forest pest research and prevention.
- » Include wildfire funding reform language in the Farm Bill.

PHOTO: DMITRY DZHUS





PHOTO: USFWS

Other Recommendations

Reauthorize the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentives Program at no less than \$150 million over five years, reflecting the annual level of funding requested by applicants; re-affirm the program priority of hunting, fishing, and other wildlife-compatible recreational activities.

Direct USDA to adopt a native vegetation standard that promotes and prioritizes the use of ecologically-appropriate and diverse stands of native vegetation for all agricultural conservation practices and programs wherever possible, allowing for exceptions for situations in which non-native introduced vegetation is more suitable for meeting resource needs.

Authorize and provide funding for monitoring, evaluation, and reporting of Farm Bill conservation program outcomes.

Promote prescribed fire and grazing, when ecologically appropriate, to benefit wildlife in accordance with the best available science and in consultation with the state wildlife agency.

Increase access for beginning farmers and ranchers and socially disadvantaged and minority farmers and ranchers to conservation programs, including through funding for the Outreach and Assistance to Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program in Section 2501.

Urban Agriculture:

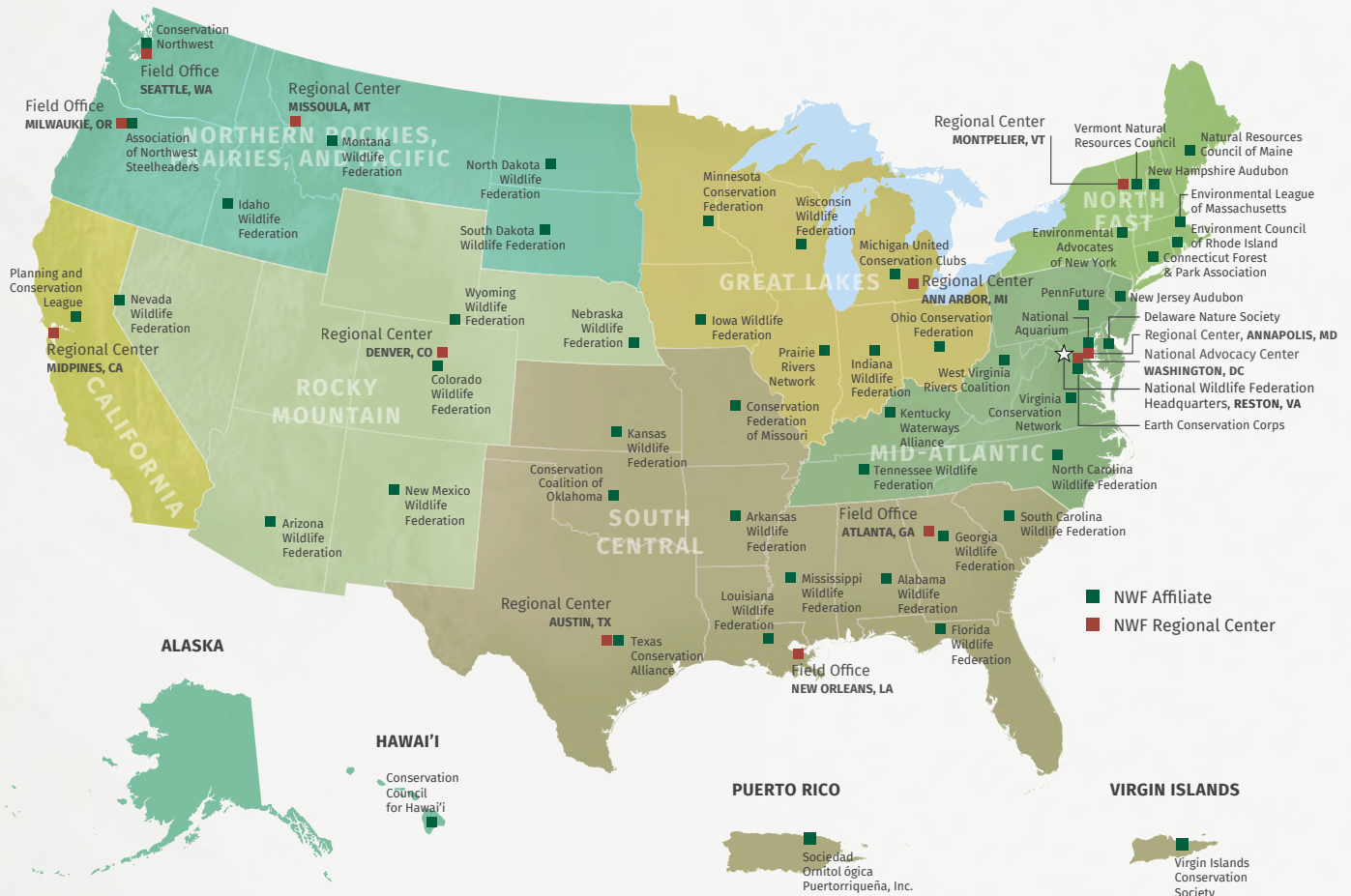
- » Make conservation technical and financial assistance more accessible to urban farmers.
- » Create a pollinator conservation practice specifically for urban agriculture.

Research:

- » Reauthorize and provide adequate funding for key research title programs related to organic and sustainable agriculture, including the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Program, the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative (OREI) and the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research (FFAR).
- » Fund research on zoonotic livestock disease research, particularly funding to improve the brucellosis vaccine.
- » Fund a study of the non-target effects and extent of Dicamba impacts on native ecosystems.
- » Prioritize funding for invasive forest pest research and prevention.

The National Wildlife Federation is America's largest conservation organization, uniting all Americans to ensure wildlife thrive in a rapidly changing world.

Over the past eight decades, the Federation has emerged as the nation's premier grassroots conservation organization with six million members and supporters, 51 state-level and territorial affiliate organizations, eleven regional offices, and a National Advocacy Center in Washington, D.C. The National Wildlife Federation has worked to connect people with nature, to protect wildlife and wild places, to inspire children through Ranger Rick magazine, and to help parents, educators, and youth group leaders find new ways to engage children with the wonders of wildlife. To learn more, visit www.NWF.org



National Advocacy Center / 1200 G St. NW, Suite 900, Washington, DC 20005 / nwf.org

Contact : Aviva Glaser / Director of Agriculture Policy
GlaserA@nwf.org • (202) 797-6616