



Steve Moyer
Vice President of Government Affairs

June 27, 2017

The Honorable, Robert Aderholt, Chair
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sanford Bishop, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Trout Unlimited strongly supports Farm Bill conservation program funding in your FY18 Appropriations bill.

Dear Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member Bishop, and Members of the Subcommittee,

I am writing on behalf of Trout Unlimited (TU) and its 300,000 members and supporters regarding the need for Congress to provide strong funding to Farm Bill conservation programs in FY18. The Farm Bill's conservation programs play a critical role in conserving fish and wildlife on private lands. We realize that your Subcommittee faces difficult choices when it comes to appropriating resources. In support of your efforts, please accept this letter as a reference to the virtues of some of the most impactful conservation programs within your jurisdiction, and as strong justification for rejecting some of the proposed cuts, highlighted below.

Over the past decade, TU's staff in rural communities working with ranchers and farmers have upgraded irrigation systems and restored habitat on ranch and farm lands throughout the country, keeping native trout off the endangered species list, and improving recreational fishing opportunities. The demand for this work is great. Drought conditions threaten many producers for whom water supplies are already under intense pressure. Aging irrigation infrastructure has reached epidemic levels throughout the West, and the cost of retrofitting this infrastructure often exceeds the capacity of individual operators or even organized irrigation districts. In the Midwest and East, farmers are grappling with ways to keep sediment and nutrients out of streams in order to improve water quality and fisheries in downstream bays, lakes and rivers.

With assistance from Farm Bill conservation programs – such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Reserve program (CRP), Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA), and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), farmers and conservationists nationwide have

A mission to conserve, protect, & restore North America's coldwater fisheries and their watersheds.

National Office: 1777 N Kent St., Suite 100, Arlington, VA 22209
T: (703) 284-9406 F: (703) 284-9400 smoyer@tu.org www.tu.org

banded together to solve these problems. As you head to mark up on Wednesday, please bear our recommendations in mind.

Providing full mandatory funding for conservation programs

In the Agricultural Act of 2014, Congress consolidated or eliminated nearly a dozen conservation programs and reduced mandatory spending by \$6 billion. The cuts contained in the 2014 Farm Bill mean that new enrollments in conservation programs will decline by millions of acres. Cuts to conservation programs limit the capacity of producers to implement common sense practices that conserve water and maintain habitat while supplying food and fiber to all Americans. We urge you again to avoid further cuts in your FY18 appropriations to critical conservation programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, and instead rely on the Congressional-mandated levels for USDA conservation programs.

The EQIP and the RCPP programs are by far the most effective tools that we use to work cooperatively with producers. We urge you to support the FY18 authorized level of funding for both, and especially urge you to reject the proposed elimination of funding for the RCPP program. We urge you to maintain full funding for mandatory Farm Bill programs in the FY18 Appropriations process:

The RCPP program is especially useful to our work. Although it got off to an inconsistent start, it has gotten better the past several years and now is a very effective innovation of the 2014 Farm Bill. This program provides farmers and ranchers with technical and financial assistance, and gives the NRCS and its partners the ability to install and maintain conservation activities on working lands at the watershed scale. Many important trout fisheries, like the Klamath River Basin and Driftless Region, have been substantially helped by the RCPP program. This program benefits local communities, private landowners, and environmental preservation groups by working together to develop sustainable projects. Please note the attached letter of strong support from our conservation, ranching and farming partners who are part of the Western Agriculture and Conservation Coalition (WACC).

Of special note, the CRP program has provided protection to the Chesapeake Bay Watershed from erosion and runoff that affect the health of the watershed. TU is directly involved with the water restoration of West Virginia's Potomac Highlands, whose waters are a part of the Chesapeake Bay watershed. The continued conservation of this watershed relies on CRP funding.

Provide adequate funds for the Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) program

TU requests the Committee maintain funding for the CTA program at FY17 levels. These funds help farmers develop and implement conservation plans to conserve resources on their farms. This is an extremely effective program that brings together farmers and organizations like TU to solve resource issues on private land. As an example, in West Virginia TU has constructed more than a million feet of agricultural fencing on farms, with the help provided by CTA and other Farm Bill program funds. This has resulted in enhanced operations and livestock management for farmers, and the protection of hundreds of miles of stream habitat for native brook trout.

Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations program

Finally, we urge you to provide adequate funding for the Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations program. This program funds locally-driven watershed protection projects across the country, including irrigation efficiency in the Colorado River Basin. NRCS estimates annual needs of \$1.4 billion for authorized but unfunded projects. Thank you for the Subcommittee's support for \$150 million in new funding for Watershed Operations in the FY17 Appropriations Bill. Given the demand for this important program, TU supports this same funding level of \$150 million in FY18, directed toward projects that achieve multiple benefits, including for upgrading agriculture operations and fish and wildlife conservation.

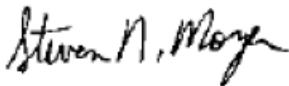
Conclusion

As the Subcommittees develop its FY 2018 appropriations bill, we urge you to keep the farm bill conservation programs intact, and to reject any cuts to conservation programs or to NRCS conservation field staff.

It is more important now than ever that the Appropriations Committees leave mandatory funding for farm bill conservation programs intact in FY 2018, as FY 2018 mandatory funding levels will carry over into the baseline assumptions for the next farm bill. A robust CBO baseline for conservation programs will allow Congress to craft a new farm bill through regular order, and will protect a vital investment in the infrastructure of rural America and in our future.

Thank you for considering our views on these important Farm Bill programs within the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies appropriations bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steven A. Moyer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "S" and "M".

Steve Moyer