

SUPPORT WILDLIFE CONSERVATION PROVISIONS IN THE 2002 FARM BILL

Beginning in 1985, conservationists recognized that the large amounts of money being spent at the federal level in farm bills for income support could be better used to help fund conservation activities. Income support programs, which

include such things as commodity support payments, deficiency payments, acreage set-aside programs, etc. typically have consumed from \$9-25 billion per year of the federal budget. These payments tend to be short term and the public benefits are debatable.

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in the 1985 Farm Bill was a voluntary program that retired croplands that were highly erodible. The set-aside period was typically ten years and the program was targeted to provide vegetative cover on erodible lands. CRP and other habitat enhancement programs provide substantial fish and wildlife benefits.

RECOMMENDATION

The Administration should identify and support conservation provisions for inclusion in the 2002 re-authorized Farm Bill and any “emergency” addendums to the existing or future Farm Bill.

The 1990 and 1995 Farm Bills recognized wildlife habitat as co-equal with erosion reduction in CRP programs, which expanded the benefits of CRP. In addition, a Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) as well as a Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) were authorized along with the CRP.

The 2001 Agriculture and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill raised the acreage cap on the WRP to a level not to exceed 1.075 million acres. In addition, this bill directs that certain funds in the crop insurance reform law be made available to fund the WHIP.

These farm programs, which incorporate conservation provisions, have become highly successful and enjoy broad public support. They provide income support for the landowner, while at the same time they provide public benefits in terms of fish and wildlife, reduced erosion, improved water quality, and open space in areas that otherwise would be developed. Current Farm Bill conservation programs expire in 2002. The reauthorization scheduled for 2002 provides substantial opportunities to include conservation provisions to further improve the resource benefits that have accrued to date. ■

