

Testimony of the Izaak Walton League of America
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug
Administration and Related Agencies

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March 19, 2010

The Izaak Walton League of America appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony concerning appropriations for fiscal year 2011 for various agencies and programs under the jurisdiction of the Subcommittee. The League is a national, nonprofit organization founded in 1922. We have approximately 38,000 members and nearly 300 chapters and state divisions nationwide. Our members are committed to advancing common sense policies that safeguard wildlife and habitat, support community-based conservation, and address pressing environmental issues. The League has been a partner with farmers and a participant in forming agriculture policy since the 1930s. The following pertains to conservation programs administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (“Farm Bill”) was enacted with a prominent commitment to increased mandatory conservation spending. It was bi-partisan and supported by more than a thousand diverse organizations engaged in Farm Bill policy. We urge the Subcommittee to maintain the mandatory spending levels for conservation programs as provided in the Farm Bill. The League strongly opposes the administration’s proposal to cut essential conservation programs by more than one-half billion dollars in fiscal year (FY) 2011 and beyond.

The League is also concerned that the administration’s budget would not only deprive farmers and ranchers of conservation and environmental stewardship assistance in FY 2011, but would also reduce the Farm Bill conservation baseline by more than \$1 billion, or nearly a quarter of the widely-lauded conservation increase. These programs benefit producers through improved soil quality and productivity of their land, and the American people through cleaner air and water and healthy habitat. Reducing the Farm Bill baseline in the face of increasing future demands for resource protection and productivity is counterproductive.

The League and its members across the country are especially focused on the following core conservation programs:

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) – The Farm Bill mandates 3.041 million acres, a \$1.2 billion allocation over the life of the measure, for WRP. The president has proposed cutting WRP by more than 15,000 acres in FY 2011—a \$111 million reduction from the FY 2010 funding level—and permanently cutting a total of 57,018 acres from the 2008 Farm Bill’s mandatory total. Restoring the multi-benefit functions of wetlands and accompanying upland is the vitally important purpose of WRP, and a major priority for the League. We urge the Subcommittee to adhere to the carefully negotiated and mandated funding level established in the Farm Bill and reject the proposed cuts.

Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) – The Farm Bill adds 1.22 million acres to the GRP, scored at \$300 million, over the life of the bill. The president’s FY 2011 budget also proposes to permanently cut GRP by 183,662 acres, spending \$22 million less next fiscal year than this one. The League opposes this reduction because it will undermine efforts to protect one of the country’s most threatened natural resources.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) – The Farm Bill established an annual enrollment of 13 million acres in CSP. In proposing to cut the program by 770,000 acres in FY 2011 (a \$70 million cut), the administration threatens to undermine the tremendous potential of this new and innovative approach to agriculture policy. CSP makes conservation the basis for a producer to receive federal support rather than limitless subsidies for intensive production of a few select crops. This vital new CSP paradigm rewards producers for having and incorporating resource protecting practices throughout their entire farm or ranch operation. The League believes that federal policy and investment should actively encourage – not discourage – this approach.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) – The Farm Bill established an investment baseline of \$85 million annually for WHIP. The administration’s proposal to permanently cut the program, unilaterally re-defining the baseline at \$73 million annually, undermines an important and already modest program. WHIP is another example of a more comprehensive approach to conservation that supports producers while enhancing and expanding critical wildlife habitat that also benefits hunters and anglers. The League opposes efforts to reduce investment in WHIP.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) – We were disappointed when the Farm Bill reduced the total acreage limit for CRP from 39.2 million to 32 million acres. However, the administration’s budget is positive for CRP because it proposes to allow landowners to enroll up to 4 million acres in FY 2011. After the Farm Bill reduced the overall acreage limit for CRP—coupled with the fact that no new land was included in CRP in fiscal years 2007, 2008, and 2009—the commitment to once again allow farmers and ranchers to protect their most sensitive lands and most important habitat is especially welcome. Suspending sign-ups has left CRP with a current enrollment millions of acres below the reduced national total of 32 million acres, which provides additional urgency to enroll new acres. We encourage the Subcommittee to maintain the baseline established by the Farm Bill and full enrollment for CRP.

Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program – The League further emphasizes the importance of fulfilling the commitment made to supporting habitat and hunter and angler access by fully funding the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program we championed in the 2008 Farm Bill. Commonly referred to as “Open Fields,” this critical and very modest investment in wildlife conservation and public access must be funded at the required \$16.67 million annual level.

Finally, effective implementation of Farm Bill conservation programs depends upon adequate technical resources to work with landowners in addressing their unique environmental concerns. Although conservation programs are available, under-

investment in technical assistance limits agency support to assist farmers and ranchers in selecting and optimizing appropriate programs for their operations. Resource concerns and conservation practices vary throughout the country and the technical assistance provided to program participants is necessary to address specific environmental concerns. The technical expertise of the Natural Resource Conservation Service and partners that assist in the delivery of programs and technical assistance directly to landowners is necessary for the adoption and maintenance of conservation practices. We request that the Subcommittee support the mandatory levels of conservation program funding as provided in the Farm Bill to enable robust technical resources to implement those programs successfully.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify in strong support of fully-funding agricultural conservation programs.