

**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 30, 2012

The Izaak Walton League of America appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony concerning appropriations for fiscal year 2013 for various agencies and programs under the jurisdiction of the Subcommittee. The League is a national, nonprofit organization founded in 1922. We have more than 39,000 members and 250 community-based chapters 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, unilaterally reducing the Farm Bill baseline for fiscal year (FY) 2013 and beyond.

The League is concerned that the administration's budget would deprive farmers and ranchers of conservation and environmental stewardship assistance in FY 2013 and reduce the Farm Bill conservation baseline. 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:

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) – The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) reduces soil erosion, protects water quality, and enhances habitat through long-term contracts with landowners that convert highly-erodible cropland to more sustainable vegetative cover. The administration's FY 2013 budget for CRP proposes a reduction in the Farm Bill authorized acreage limit from 32 million to 30 million. It is encouraging to see the announcement of a general sign-up in FY 2012, and the special provision for 1 million acres of wetland and grassland restoration, but that does not alter the proposed cut to CRP's mandatory authorization for FY 2013.

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) – The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) provides technical and financial assistance to landowners to restore and protect wetlands on their

properties. Wetlands are generally conserved through permanent or 30-year easements purchased by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Unfortunately, the administration takes no action to request new Farm Bill funding for WRP, which expires with the current Farm Bill authorization in FY 2012. The League urges Congress to continue the decades-long commitment made to the goals of the program.

Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) – The Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) focuses on limiting conversion of pasture and other grasslands to cropland or development while allowing landowners to continue grazing and other operations that align with this goal. Again, the League is disappointed that the administration has not proposed continuing GRP or any form of the program beyond FY 2012. 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 Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is a comprehensive approach to conserving soil, water, and other natural resources across a range of lands, including cropland, prairie, and forests. CSP makes conservation the basis for a producer to receive federal financial support rather than limitless subsidies for intensive production of a few crops. It is troubling that the administration's FY 2013 budget is proposing to cut the mandatory spending for CSP by \$68 million. The League opposes this cut because CSP is a comprehensive, whole-farm approach to conservation that can maximize benefits to natural resources, fish and wildlife, and producers alike.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) – The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program helps agricultural landowners develop habitat for upland wildlife, wetland wildlife, threatened and endangered species, fish, and other wildlife. The president's FY 2013 proposal also seeks to permanently reduce the mandatory commitment established for WHIP in the Farm Bill. The budget would cut FY 2013 funding for WHIP by \$12 million. The League opposes this damaging cut to a program with the central goal of supporting wildlife resources in rural America.

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. 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.