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

Submitted by Bill Wenzel, Director, Agriculture Program

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The Izaak Walton League of America appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony concerning appropriations for fiscal year 2014 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 41,000 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 partnered with farmers and participated in agriculture policy development 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. This commitment represents a long-term investment in conservation programs that preserve and protect the resources critical not only to the environment but also to the long term productivity of agricultural lands.

Unfortunately, this investment is being squandered. Since the passage of the 2008 Farm Bill, approximately \$3.2 billion has been cut from mandatory conservation program funding levels. Although we recognize that spending cuts were and continue to be necessary to put the nation's fiscal house in order, a disproportionate share of Farm Bill program cuts have come from conservation programs. Nearly 77% of cuts from mandatory Farm Bill programs since the passage of the 2008 Farm Bill came from conservation programs.

We urge the Subcommittee to maintain the mandatory spending levels for conservation programs as provided in the 2008 Farm Bill. If changes in mandatory program spending (CHIMPS) are necessary to meet deficit reduction goals, those cuts should be distributed proportionately among all Farm Bill titles.

Furthermore, repeated annual cuts to the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and other mandatory conservation programs have created huge backlogs among qualified landowners seeking to enroll in those programs. This failure to enroll qualified producers in a timely fashion results in needless delays in getting conservation practices implemented that protect water, land and other vital natural resources. The League strongly opposes cuts to these critical natural resource conservation programs.

Additionally, the 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, underinvestment 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 directly to landowners is necessary for the adoption and maintenance of conservation practices. We request that the Subcommittee support the levels of conservation program funding as provided in the 2008 Farm Bill to enable robust technical resources to implement those programs successfully.

Finally, the League remains hopeful that a new Farm Bill will be enacted in 2013. Authority for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and funding for both the Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP) and the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) expire on September 30, 2013. If a new Farm Bill is not passed by the end of FY 2013, we request that the Appropriations Committee explore alternative funding mechanisms for these and the numerous other Title II Conservation programs that were de-authorized as a result of the expiration of the 2008 Farm Bill.

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