



September 27, 2010

Director, Conservation and Environmental Programs Division (CEPD)
USDA FSA CEPD
Mail Stop 0513
1400 Independence Ave, SW.
Washington, DC 20250-0513

Dear CEPD Director:

The Izaak Walton League of America (IWLA) is a private, non-profit conservation organization that for 88 years has supported strong federal conservation policies on private lands, especially agricultural lands. Our nationwide membership lives, works and recreates in rural communities. We have a decades-long record of support for farm families and collaborative efforts to achieve conservation that sustains agriculture, habitat, and all natural resources.

Since enactment in 1985, the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) has long been regarded as the premiere and foundational conservation program established by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In fact, it was in 1937 that the IWLA first proposed program principles and goals now contained in CRP. And along with Wetland Conservation and HELC compliance provisions also originating in 1985, the Izaak Walton League of America holds CRP as fundamental to the federal farm program.

IWLA comments:

§ 1410.4 Maximum county acreage.

We strongly approve of providing a means for enrolling continuous CRP signup acreage including CREP, FWP, and SAFE in excess of 25 percent of the total cropland in a county. The specific goals and purpose for designating continuous signup acreage as high-priority defines such acreage as deserving of voluntary protection regardless of the ultimately irrelevant presence of WRP easements or CRP contracts in a county. Due to this fact, we would further register an objection to requiring concurrence from the county government for CCC to allow a waiver for such acreage in excess of 25 percent of total cropland. While acknowledging Congress did not require such waiver implementation, the 2008 Farm Bill did designate that the Secretary may implement the waiver. The

IWLA requests that the rule designates implementing the waiver be subject only to a decision of the Secretary.

§ 1410.6 Eligible land.

We acknowledge the 2008 Farm Bill provision and the Interim Rule's designation that changes the dates of the cropping history required to be eligible land from 1996 through 2001, to 2002 through 2007. We nonetheless register our objection to native prairie or other land converted to crop production after 2001 being eligible for CRP. Providing an economic opportunity under the guise of conservation for converting historic rangeland, pasture, native prairie, woodlands, or any land without a longstanding production history, runs counter to the goals for taxpayer investment in agricultural conservation. IWLA is further unclear on what if any ramifications will exist for such converted land upon expiration of CRP contracts in terms of subsequent eligibility for Title I and other federal farm program benefits. It is our understanding that land converted to production since 2001 does not have a historic base and is ineligible for federal farm program benefits predicated on having a historic base (e.g. DCP benefits). This ineligibility must exist upon the expiration of a CRP contract on such land as well. Further, the IWLA would reinforce and clarify that with the current exception of federal crop insurance payments, federal farm program benefits are subject to Wetland Conservation and HELC compliance provisions. This appropriately must prevent CRP contracts for any acreage converted since 2001 that has not since that date participated in any federal farm program other than federal crop insurance benefits (WC compliance and HELC compliance and conservation plans would have to have been established prior to CRP enrollment for production on the compliance applicable acres in production for 4 of the 6 years from 2002 to 2007). IWLA stresses that such a prerequisite be enforced, and seeks clarification if our interpretation is incomplete or incorrect.

Conclusion

We thank you for your consideration of these comments on the Interim Rule. Please direct any communication regarding this submission to Brad Redlin, IWLA Agricultural Program Director, bredlin@iwla.org, (651) 649-1446 ext. 13.

Sincerely,



Brad Redlin
Izaak Walton League of America
Agricultural Program Director
1619 Dayton AVE, STE 202
St. Paul, MN 55104