



May 23, 2022

FSA SD State Office
Mr. Steven Littlefield
State Environmental Coordinator
200 Fourth Street, Room 308
Huron, SD 57350

Dear Mr. Littlefield,

The South Dakota Division of the Izaak Walton League of America (Division) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Draft Programmatic Environmental Assessment for the proposed Big Sioux River Watershed (BSRW) Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) in South Dakota. The program would be implemented by the United States Department of Agriculture Commodity Credit Corporation and administered by the South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks Department (SDGFP).

The USDA Farm Service Agency administers the Conservation Reserve Program, the nation's largest private-lands conservation program. CRP is a voluntary program that provides long-term conservation measures that improve ground and surface water quality, reduce soil erosion, and enhance wildlife habitat on environmentally sensitive land.

CREP began in 1997 to address environmental issues through conservation practices on agricultural lands. CREP utilizes federal, state, tribal, and non-government funding and can be implemented in specifically defined geographic areas including watersheds.

The BSRW includes portions of 18 eastern South Dakota counties covering 3.8 million acres. The Big Sioux River and many of its tributaries are impaired due to agricultural runoff from fields and pastures. The BSRW CREP's goal is to initially enroll 25,000 acres, with a final objective of enrolling 100,000 acres within the watershed.

The Division supports the BSRW CREP proposal and the stated federal and state criteria. We expect this program will reduce agriculture impacts to the watershed. We support CREP's goals that will:

- Improve and protect water quality for drinking and recreational use
- Restore wetland and grassland habitat to increase wildlife populations for increased hunting opportunities to bring more hunters to the area
- Add habitat for monarch butterflies and other pollinators
- Increase the number and quality of grasslands for livestock producers to hay or graze
- Enhance people's quality of life with a minimum of 250 new locations open to unlimited, free walk-in hunting and fishing

The Division also endorses the objectives of the proposed BSRW CREP that:

- Restore wetlands and grasslands to help store water and provide breeding and nesting habitat for migratory and resident wetland and grassland species
- Establish a minimum of 5,000 acres of conservation cover adjacent to rivers and streams to reduce water flow and capture sediment and nutrients
- Maintain the stated minimum reductions of sediment, phosphorus, and nitrogen runoff from previously cropped agricultural land
- Provide additional upland and wetland habitat for increased wildlife production
- Evaluate the cultural resources on land to be enrolled with the State Historic Preservation Office, Tribes, and other agencies
- Deliver long-term benefits to threatened and endangered species in and downstream of enrolled land

The South Dakota Division of the Izaak Walton League of America agrees that most of the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program attributes described in this Programmatic Environmental Assessment will be advantageous to the Big Sioux River Watershed region and to the producers who enroll land into the program. Enrollment is entirely voluntary and will be open to any qualified producer.

We believe the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program in the Big Sioux River Watershed will become as popular and beneficial as CREP is in the James River Valley. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this Environmental Assessment and for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



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