National Association of Conservation Districts

March 1, 2006

The Honorable Charles H. Taylor
Chair, Subcommittee on Interior,
Environment and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
B-308 Russell Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Norman Dicks
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Interior,
Environment and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
B-308 Russell Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Taylor and Ranking Member Dicks:

On behalf of the nation's 3,000 conservation districts, I am pleased to provide you with recommendations for fiscal year 2007 funding for selected conservation and natural resource programs under your subcommittee's jurisdiction.

Established under state law, conservation districts are local units of government charged with carrying out programs for the protection and management of natural resources at the local level. They work with a wide array of landowners and operators to help them protect and conserve natural resources both on private and public working lands in the United States. Conservation districts work closely with the Forest Service and several Interior agencies in carrying out various conservation programs. Districts also play key roles in several water programs of the US Environmental Protection Agency. For their part, conservation districts and state conservation agencies bring more than a billion dollars in state, local and private funding to the conservation table to complement federal and other state and local resources.

The partnership of conservation districts, state conservation agencies, the Forest Service and the Interior Department provides land managers and other land management agencies with critical technical help in protecting and improving the quantity and quality of our soil, water and related resources.

The State and Private Forestry accounts of the Forest Service are key sources of assistance that help private forestland owners maintain the health and ability of these lands to produce the materials and products that help fuel the American economy. We are very concerned that the President's fiscal year 2007 budget request proposes substantial decreases in several important S&PF accounts. The request reduces funding for Forest Health Management and Cooperative Fire Assistance by $17 million and $7 million, respectively. To help maintain this needed assistance to private forestland owners and rural communities we urge you to restore funding for these and the other important S&PF programs as outlined in the enclosed chart.

With respect to the Environmental Protection Agency, we have serious trepidation over the proposal for the agency's Section 319 nonpoint source pollution program. The 2007 request for the program is more than 8% the 2005 level, not counting any adjustment for inflation. Section 319 funding has provided substantial water quality benefits in both rural and urban areas over its nearly 20-year history. The program has been instrumental in leveraging dollars for innovative,

non-regulatory conservation programs that promote the voluntary adoption of nonpoint source best management practices

Many success stories have been made possible with Section 319 funds and the required state matching resources. New York's Agricultural Environmental Management Program helps all farmers operate environmentally sound and economically viable businesses while voluntarily complying with tough water quality and other environmental standards. Another 319 success story is California's Biologically Integrated Orchard Systems has been instrumental in helping growers adopt whole-system management approaches that have substantially reduced pesticide use. There are numerous other examples around the country that demonstrate how the Section 319 program has spawned partnerships and leveraged funding to effectively address nonpoint source pollution control.

Conservation districts urge you to continue support for Section 319 at the level suggested in our chart. If anything, we should be growing this valuable program, not shrinking it.

We are also troubled by the President's request to reduce funding for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (SRF), $204 million below the 2006 level and $413 million below the 2005 level. The Clean Water SRF helps states and communities meet wastewater infrastructure needs. At a time when the EPA projects that communities across the country will have to spend at least $388 billion on new and repaired equipment over the next 15 years just to meet current clean water infrastructure needs, we believe such a cut would be ill-advised. We urge you to restore funding for the Clean Water SRF to the 2005 level.

In addition to the Forest Service and EPA, the enclosed chart includes recommendations for a number of programs of the Bureau of Land Management and the Fish and Wildlife Service. The funding levels we propose would, we believe, strike a balance between the conservation needs of our nation's private and public working lands and the need for fiscal responsibility.

If properly managed America's public and private working lands will provide many benefits to our citizens, including clean water and air, fish and wildlife habitat and open space. Conservation districts and their partners help make this possible.

We appreciate your favorable consideration of our recommendations.

Sincerely,

Bill Wilson
President

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Fiscal Year 2007 Recommended Appropriations for Selected Federal Natural Resource Programs—March 2006 Interior and Environment Appropriations Subcommittee

Figures Represent Millions of Dollars	FY 2005 Final	FY 2006 Final[1]	FY 2007 NACD[2]	FY 2007 Administration
US Department of Agriculture—Forest Service				
Forest Land Enhancement Program	10.000	0.000	10.000	0.000
Forest Health Management	101.865	101.603	104.000	84.430
Cooperative Fire Protection	38.837	39.028	40.000	32.818
Forest Stewardship	32.320	34.352	35.210	33.880
Urban & Community Forestry	31.950	28.586	58.000	26.800
Economic Action Programs	19.031	9.582	20.000	0.000
Forest Legacy	57.134	56.806	61.500	61.500
Forest Resource Info & Analysis	4.958	4.610	5.000	0.000
Watershed Forestry Assistance	0.000	0.000	15.000	0.000
Tribal Watershed Forestry Assistance	0.000	0.000	2.500	0.000
Secure Schools Act[3]	Not available	404.925	415.000	See note below.
Community and Private Lands Fire Protection	0.000	0.000	35.000	0.000
Wildland Fire Management	2098.000	1761.601	1768.000	1768.000
US Department of Interior—Fish and Wildlife Service				
Landowner Incentive Program (LWCF)	22.000	23.760	25.000	24.000
Private Stewardship Grants (LWCF)	6.903	7.312	9.000	9.000
Partners for Fish and Wildlife	50.022	53.792	55.000	42.700
Endangered Species Conservation Fund	80.462	81.378	83.400	80.000
Habitat Conservation	95.841	101.970	104.500	90.500

[1] 2006 figures reflect a 1% across-the-board reduction for all programs as mandated by the 2006 defense appropriation act.
[2] NACD numbers in general reflect a 2.5% upward adjustment for inflation.
[3] The Secure Rural School and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 addresses the decline in revenue from timber harvest in recent years received from federal lands, which have historically been shared with counties. These funds have been used for schools, roads and local conservation projects. For each year 2001-2006, the law allows counties to receive a payment from the federal government based on the state average of their top three years of payments from Federal lands. The budget proposes to make these payments from the sale of public lands so no amount is shown.

Figures Represent Millions of Dollars	FY 2005 Final	FY 2006 Final[1]	FY 2007 NACD[2]	FY 2007 Administration
Coastal Programs	10.886	13.266	13.600	13.000
Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grants	16.000	15.840	16.240	12.000
State and Tribal Wildlife Grants		67.492	75.000	74.666
North American Wetlands Conservation Fund	37.472	39.600	41.464	41.464
US Department of Interior—Bureau of Land Management				
Payments in Lieu of Taxes	230.000	233.640	239.500	198.000
Land Resources[4]	190.000	189.510	194.250	186.880
Threatened and Endangered Species	21.144	21.356	22.000	21.430
Wildlife & Fisheries Habitat	38.087	40.673	42.000	40.800
Challenge Cost Share	7.396	9.900	10.200	9.350
OR&CA Grant Lands	107.497	108.969	112.400	112.400
US Environmental Protection Agency				
State Management Grants				
Water Quality Management (§106)	210.000	230.571	236.400	221.700
NPS Management Grants (§319)[5]	209.000	208.664	300.000	191.040
Brownfields	50.000	24.750	25.000	24.637
Targeted Watershed Grants	18.000	16.687	20.000	6.900
National Estuary Program	25.000	29.700	30.500	18.417
Great Lakes Legacy	22.500	29.700	49.600	49.600
Infrastructure				
Clean Water SRF	1100.000	891.000	1100.000	687.600
Drinking Water SRF	850.000	841.500	850.000	841.500
Brownfields	90.000	106.920	110.000	89.119

[4] Provides for management of rangeland and forest resources; riparian areas; soil, water, and air activities; wild horses and burros; and cultural resources.

[5] NACD supports the use of these funds only for purposes delineated in Section 319 of the Clean Water Act, as amended.