National Association of Conservation Districts

March 13, 2006

The Honorable Robert Bennett
Chair, Subcommittee on Agriculture,
Rural Development and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
188 Dirksen Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Herb Kohl
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Agriculture,
Rural Development and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
188 Dirksen Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Bennett and Ranking Member Kohl:

On behalf of the nation's 3,000 conservation districts, I am pleased to provide you with recommendations for fiscal year 2007 funding for US Department of Agriculture 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 farmers, ranchers and other cooperating landowners and operators to help them protect and conserve natural resources on private working lands in the United States. In that capacity, conservation districts work closely with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Farm Service Agency (FSA) and other USDA agencies in implementing a number of conservation programs, including those authorized by the Farm Bill.

Several proposals in the President's budget request cuts for discretionary programs for 2007. First, even in the face of increasing costs of doing business, the request would severely cut NRCS's Conservation Operations account and reduce staffing at a time when farmers and ranchers are calling for and need more technical help. The budget also proposes to eliminate entirely funding for NRCS Watershed Operations, Emergency Watershed, and Watershed Surveys and Planning Programs and reduce funding for Watershed Rehabilitation and the Resource Conservation and Development Program by more than half.

The budget request also caps most of the Farm Bill conservation programs well below their authorized levels. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program would be funded almost $300 million below its authorization and the Conservation Security Program proposal would provide a much smaller signup than was available in 2005. The Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program and Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program are proposed well under authorized levels, as well.

All of these conservation programs provide farmers with critically needed assistance to help them protect and conserve our nation's vital natural resources. Considerable progress has been made over the last several years in elevating the priority of natural resources conservation. The nation

cannot afford to sacrifice this progress. The bottom line with cutting conservation is that not only does the environment lose, the American people lose, as do America's farmers and ranchers. In order to avoid this, some of the key actions needed include:

- Restore funding for the Conservation Operations account and retain sufficient personnel numbers to ensure producers receive needed conservation assistance;
- Restore funding for watershed protection and rehabilitation programs;
- Maintain a viable, nationwide RC&D program; and
- Fund the Farm Bill conservation programs at their fully authorized levels.

We urge you to consider these recommendations, along with the others we offer in the enclosed chart. The funding levels we propose would, we believe, strike a balance between the conservation needs of our nation's private working lands and the need for fiscal responsibility.

We appreciate your favorable consideration of our recommendations.

Sincerely,

Bill Wilson
President

Attachment

cc: Committee Members

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Fiscal Year 2007 Recommended Appropriations for Selected Federal Natural Resource Programs—March 2006

Figures Represent Millions of Dollars	FY 2005 Final	FY 2006 Final[1]	FY 2007 NACD[2]	FY 2007 Administration
US Department of Agriculture—Natural Resources Conservation Service				
Discretionary Spending				
Conservation Operations				
Technical Assistance	696.253	695.646	714.000	634.320
Grazing	23.500	27.225	30.000	0.000
Soil Surveys	85.975	87.268	89.500	89.291
Snow Surveys	10.500	10.544	11.000	10.588
Plant Materials Centers	14.433	10.442	11.000	10.678
CO Total	**830.661**	**831.120**	**855.500**	**744.877**
Other Discretionary				
EWP[3]	250.000	403.455	150.000	0.000
Watershed Operations	75.576	74.250	190.000	0.000
Watershed Surveys & Planning	7.083	6.022	35.000	0.000
Watershed Rehab	27.500	31.245	75.000	15.300
RC&D	51.641	50.787	56.000	25.933
Healthy Forests Reserve	0.00	2.475	25.000	2.475
RAMP	0.000	0.000	25.000	0.000
Total Other Discretionary	**411.800**	**568.234**	**420.200**	**43.708**
Total Discretionary	**1242.461**	**1399.354**	**1411.500**	**788.585**
Mandatory (CCC) Programs				
EQIP				
Base Program	1017.000	1006.830	1270.000	1000.000
Water Conservation	51.000	50.490	60.000	51.000
Klamath Basin	10.826	7.920	8.200	5.852
CSP	202.411	256.410	Full Funding	342.237
WRP[4]	250.000	250.238	402.637	402.637
WHIP	47.000	42.570	85.000	55.000
FRLPP	112.000	72.765	97.000	50.000
Watershed Rehab	0.000	0.000	65.000	0.000
GRP	81.574	NA	NA	NA
Biomass R&D	14.000	11.880	14.000	12.000
Reimbursable CRP Technical Assistance[5]	70.000	89.100 (estimated)	92.000 (estimated)	80.000 (estimated)

[1] 2006 figures reflect 1% across-the-board reduction for all programs mandated by the 2006 defense appropriation act.
[2] NACD numbers in general reflect a 2.5% upward adjustment for inflation. Budget reconciliation reduced 2007 authorization for EQIP from $1.3 billion to 1.27 billion. It also reduced CSP by a yet to be determined amount.
[3] EWP is generally funded through emergency supplemental appropriations. NACD policy calls for establishing a baseline account for faster emergency response.
[4] Full enrollment of 250,000 acres.

Figures Represent Millions of Dollars	FY 2005 Final	FY 2006 Final[1]	FY 2007 NACD[2]	FY 2007 Administration
AMA	6.000	6.000	20.000	0.000
US Department of Agriculture—Farm Service Agency				
CRP	2000.000	2000.000	2093.000	2093.000
Emergency Forestry CRP	NA	404.100	TBD	TBD
US Department of Agriculture—Forest Service				
US Department of Agriculture—Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service				
Extension Activities				
Renewable Resources Extension	4.093	4.019	15.000	4.050
McIntyre-Stennis	22.384	21.983	30.000	22.000

[1] Estimated reimbursement from FSA for NRCS technical assistance for CRP. This is not an appropriation line item.

[5] Estimated reimbursement from FSA for NRCS technical assistance for CRP. This is not an appropriation line item.