



National Association of Conservation Districts

December 3, 2015

The Honorable Hal Rogers, Chairman
House Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Nita Lowey, Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Thad Cochran, Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski, Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee

As you negotiate final appropriations legislation for FY 2016, the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) urges you to protect mandatory funding for farm bill conservation programs, support robust discretionary funding for Conservation Technical Assistance, and support funding for Watershed Operations and the Watershed Rehabilitation program.

The National Association of Conservation Districts represents America's 3,000 conservation districts and the 17,000 men and women who serve on their governing boards. Conservation districts are local units of government established under state law to carry out natural resource management programs at the local level. Districts work with millions of cooperating landowners and operators to help them manage and protect land and water resources on all private lands and many public lands in the United States.

Last year, the Agricultural Act of 2014 consolidated or eliminated nearly a dozen conservation programs and reduced mandatory conservation funding by \$4 billion, with sequestration adding an additional \$2 billion. The House and Senate Agriculture Committees did their part to reduce federal spending and did so voluntarily. In addition, under current law sequestration alone will cut \$260 million from mandatory funding for agricultural conservation programs in FY 2016. With these cuts in mind, we ask you to protect mandatory funding for conservation programs that incentivize farmers, ranchers, and foresters to address natural resource concerns on their land.

We also urge you to adopt the Senate funding level of \$855 million for discretionary Conservation Operations, which includes Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA). USDA's ability to deliver conservation programs to farmers and ranchers depends heavily on on-the-ground technical assistance. CTA provides landowners with the site-specific solutions needed to implement conservation practices on their lands, while providing accountability to ensure maximum return on the public investment. Inadequate technical assistance would reduce the effectiveness of conservation practices on the land.

The catastrophic wildfires engulfing western states this summer are further proof of the need for Congress to support the management of our nation's forestlands in a collaborative effort of federal agencies, industry and the local residents most directly affected by these fires. NACD fully supports increased funding for wildfire prevention, management and restoration of our public forests and rangelands; legislation that expedites analysis required by the National Environmental Policy Act; policies and budgets that allow conducting effective prescribed fire,

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pre-suppression activity and silvicultural treatments; and increased pre- and post-fire grazing on at-risk public lands.

We understand that the House bill had minimal discretionary funding for the Watershed Rehabilitation Program and both bills had no discretionary funding for the Watershed Operations Program, but the collective Watershed Program benefits to rural and urban communities across the country add up to a stronger national economy and a more productive and secure nation. Investment in the Watershed Program represents expanding opportunities for natural resource conservation coupled with important national economic and environmental dividends for all Americans. Any additional investment in these programs would be appreciated.

In closing, we must reiterate our opposition to re-opening the farm bill, whether it is through the appropriations process with Changes in Mandatory Programs of conservation programs or cuts to the crop insurance title through the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015. The conservation and agriculture community is strongly committed to the belief that balancing the Federal budget is important, which is why we supported the passage of the 2014 Farm Bill that saved billions of dollars. The farm bill is a careful balance of priorities and should not be reopened before its expiration in 2018 for any reason.

Sincerely,



Lee McDaniel
NACD President

Cc: House Committee on Agriculture and Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry