



National Association of Conservation Districts

February 24, 2015

Senator Jerry Moran
Chairman
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development and FDA
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Senator Jeff Merkley
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development and FDA
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman and Ranking Member:

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) represents America's 3,000 conservation districts and the 17,000 locally elected 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.

The Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) program, part of the Conservation Operations (CO) account administered by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) supports critical, voluntary conservation practices to ensure quality water, productive land and other vital environmental benefits. Thousands of landowners will not be able to install conservation measures without this request. We understand the need to address our nation's finances, but with increased pressures on working lands to produce food, feed, fuel and fiber for the world's growing population, discretionary funding for technical assistance is needed now more than ever.

Due to the increasing need for conservation planning and implementation across the country, **NACD respectfully requests re-approval of the Fiscal Year 2015 budget of \$846 million as a base for the NRCS Conservation Operations account in the Fiscal Year 2016 Agriculture Appropriations Bill. We also support the President's budget request to provide additional technical assistance funding for farm bill conservation programs.** Maintaining funding will allow for the delivery of critical conservation programs; help ensure the best technical and scientific knowledge is available when designing and implementing conservation plans with landowners; and most importantly, provide for the continued availability of the conservation practices that ensure clean water, healthy soils and other vital benefits on which the public relies each day.

NACD supports maintaining all mandatory conservation program funding for Fiscal Year 2016 as allocated in the Agriculture Act of 2014. The Farm Bill conservation programs are important resources to all producers and landowners by helping them receive financial and technical assistance to implement conservation practices or activities like conservation planning that address natural resource concerns on their land. Continued cuts to these programs sets a dangerous precedent at a time when conservation of our nation's natural resources is of utmost importance.

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The Agricultural Act of 2014 made a historic commitment to maintaining and repairing the infrastructure associated with the nation's many watersheds through the Watershed Rehabilitation Program. Some of these structures are decades past their original designed lifespan. **NACD supports full mandatory and discretionary funding for the Watershed Rehabilitation Program.**

In addition to the Watershed Rehabilitation program, dually as important to preserving the nation's water quality and quantity is the Watershed Operations account's discretionary funding. The President's budget made a positive step by requesting \$200 million for Fiscal Year 2016. **NACD supports a funding level of \$300 million for the Watershed Operations account.** 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. The Watershed Program represents opportunity for the perfect blend of natural resource protection and the creation of economic opportunity for rural America. Investment in the Watershed Program represents expanding opportunities for natural resource conservation coupled with important national economic and environmental dividends for all Americans.

Successful conservation requires a strong public, private partnership; efforts begin at the local level, with technical assistance and funding from federal, state and local governments and the private sector. NRCS is an essential federal partner and resource in helping landowners plan and develop conservation practices on their property. For example, ongoing restoration efforts in the Chesapeake Bay, Great Lakes, Mississippi River Basin and the Trinity River demonstrate locally led conservation efforts with national significance that benefit from technical assistance.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. We look forward to working with you as we continue to serve the nation through natural resource conservation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Lee D. McDaniel'.

Lee D. McDaniel
NACD President