



National Association of Conservation Districts

March 16, 2020

Honorable Sanford Bishop
Chairman
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug Administration,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Jeff Fortenberry
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug Administration,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman and Ranking Member:

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) 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. NACD requests the following funding be included in the FY21 Agriculture Appropriations bill for USDA-NRCS:

- Conservation Operations at \$840 million
- Farm bill conservation program funding at the mandatory funding level
- Watershed Rehabilitation Program at \$75 million
- Watershed Operations at \$200 million

Due to the increasing need for conservation planning and implementation across the country, **NACD respectfully requests \$840 million for the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Conservation Operations account in the fiscal year 2021 agriculture appropriations bill.** This level of 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.

The Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) program, funded by the Conservation Operations account, supports critical voluntary conservation work by helping landowners meet their specific natural resource concerns. Despite having a desire to implement the best conservation practices, many landowners don't have the technical or scientific expertise to evaluate their land's unique resource needs and require CTA assistance to help address them. In a time when the world's demand for food, feed, fuel and fiber is projected to increase more than 70 percent in the next 30 years, discretionary funding for technical assistance is needed now more than ever.

NACD has been very concerned about hiring at NRCS, and while USDA has provided hiring authority, Congress should continue to encourage USDA to make progress in filling vacancies at the local level to



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strengthen the ability of local NRCS offices to effectively deliver conservation. In addition to funding the Conservation Operations account for FY21, we urge the Subcommittee to include strong language directing NRCS to hire staff.

NACD also supports maintaining all mandatory farm bill conservation program funding for fiscal year 2021 as allocated in the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018. Farm bill conservation programs provide financial and technical assistance to landowners so they may implement conservation practices or develop conservation plans specific to their natural resource goals. Continuing to cut these programs through the appropriations process is the wrong choice at a time when the conservation of our nation's natural resources is of the utmost importance.

The Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018 committed to maintaining and repairing the infrastructure associated with the nation's many watersheds through the Watershed Rehabilitation Program. Over the past 70 years, conservation districts across the country have stepped up to sponsor these projects, which often require significant financial resources and long-term technical assistance. Today, many of these structures are decades past their originally designed lifespan. **Therefore, NACD requests \$75 million for the Watershed Rehabilitation Program.**

Equally as important to preserving the nation's water quality and quantity is the Watershed Operations account's discretionary funding. **NACD supports a funding level of \$200 million for the Watershed Operations account.** The Watershed Program generates approximately \$2 billion in collective benefit for rural and urban communities across the country, helping to build a stronger national economy and more secure nation. The Watershed Program represents the prospect for the perfect blend of natural resource protection and the creation of economic opportunity in rural areas.

Successful conservation requires strong public-private partnerships. These 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. The voluntary, locally-led, incentive-based conservation delivery system has proven successful over the last several decades, but only continues to succeed with the investments made by this subcommittee.

NACD thanks you for your consideration of this request and looks 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 "Tim Palmer".

Tim Palmer
NACD President



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March 16, 2020

The Honorable Betty McCollum
Chairman
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and
Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC, 20515

The Honorable David Joyce
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and
Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC, 20515

Dear Chairman and Ranking Member:

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) 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. The following requests are for the **EPA**, the **U.S. Forest Service** and the **Bureau of Land Management**.

The 319 Nonpoint Source Grants are critically important to stream bank stabilization, stormwater management, low-impact development and other projects led by conservation districts to address water quality at the local level. Working lands are under increased pressure to produce food, feed, fuel and fiber for the world's growing population. Because of this reality, it is more important than ever that we dedicate the resources necessary to ensure local communities continue to have access to and realize the benefits of clean water. **For Fiscal Year (FY) 2021, NACD respectfully requests an appropriation of \$173.7 million for the Environmental Protection Agency's 319 Nonpoint Source Grants.**

State and Private Forestry is one of the few U.S. Forest Service (USFS) programs that provides technical and financial assistance to private landowners. For this reason, State and Private Forestry programs should be staffed and funded at levels that allow for strong public-private partnerships and ensure greater forest management and economic opportunity on private, non-industrial forest lands. **NACD requests \$347 million in the FY2021 Interior appropriations bill for the U.S. Forest Service's State and Private Forestry programs, which includes a small increase to the incredibly important Forest Stewardship program to \$23 million.**

The Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 as amended directs U.S. federal agencies to manage wild herds to "maintain a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple-use relationship" on herd management areas (HMAs). Bureau of Land Management (BLM) scientists have established appropriate management levels (AML) to achieve that balance. Unfortunately, current management efforts have failed to control the ever-increasing horse and burro population, which continues to strain the natural resource capabilities of these lands beyond their carrying capacity, resulting in rangelands that in certain areas are already unrecoverable. **NACD urges Congress to continue investing in non-lethal population management by providing \$116.8 million for BLM's Wild Horse and Burro Program as**



requested by the agency to continue addressing excessive herd populations. NACD is working closely with other stakeholders to ensure the health of these populations while managing the land's natural resources for multiple use.

The federal government currently owns an estimated 640 million acres, equivalent to the combined size of Alaska, Texas and California. NACD believes that the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) should no longer be used for additional land acquisition, but rather provide maintenance to our roads, bridges, buildings and other infrastructure. According to the Department of the Interior, there is \$16 billion in deferred maintenance needs among its agencies, with the National Park Service making up the largest share of that total. **As a programmatic request, NACD supports a prohibition of funds from LWCF for new land acquisition and recommends LWCF be used to pay for the deferred maintenance.**

Thank you for your consideration of these requests. We look forward to working with you as we continue to serve the nation through locally-led natural resource conservation.

Sincerely,

Tim Palmer
NACD President