

April 15, 2008

The Honorable Harry Reid, Majority Leader
The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Minority Leader
Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the House
The Honorable John Boehner, Minority Leader
Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Harkin, Chairman
The Honorable Saxby Chambliss, Ranking Member
Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and
Forestry Committee
328A Russell Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Collin Peterson, Chairman
The Honorable Bob Goodlatte, Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Distinguished Congressional Leaders:

The below mentioned groups represent millions of America's conservationist and sportsmen/-women. We would like to thank you for your continued efforts in working to advance the Farm Bill. We appreciate the open dialogue we have engaged in with you and your staff throughout the reauthorization process. Because the conservation programs of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) are so critical to maintaining healthy soil and water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities for America's 34 million sportsmen/-women, we strongly believe that we must grow conservation in the Farm Bill to meet the diverse needs of our farmers and ranchers while providing them the options and tools needed to succeed in meaningful conservation.

As conference negotiations for the final version of the Farm Bill progress, we would like to highlight one provision specifically that is a top priority for all of our collective organizations. This provision, known as Sodsaver will provide a tremendous benefit to this nation's most threatened and fragile ecosystem: our remaining native grasslands. A broad Sodsaver provision enacted in the Farm Bill would help defuse the threat to our native grasslands and to our country's traditional ranching families who depend on this land.

Support and leadership for such a provision has been astounding not only from Members of Congress and the Administration (USDA's 2007 Farm Bill priorities which includes Sodsaver), but also from the national media -- spurred by the Governmental Accounting Office (GAO) report on grassland conversion that was released last September, and USDA's new breakings report.

We write asking for your leadership to ensure the Sodsaver language is included in the final Bill. While the Senate language is not everything we want or think needs to be done, we did find the Senate's version denying crop insurance and noninsured crop disaster assistance program (NAP) benefits on lands converted from native sod after passage of this farm bill critical. Also the Senate bill language does not set a time limit on ineligibility and thus is fundamental to policy success over the House version that does set such a limit to four years. Furthermore, we are supportive of the Senate version's "common sense" de minimus exception of 5 acres. We do not support increasing this de minimus exception acreage by any amount.

We are cognizant of the budget implications on this Farm Bill and how critical every source of revenue and savings has become. We remind you that the Congressional Budget Office has scored the Senate's version of Sodsaver at a savings of \$23 million over 5 years and \$119 million over 10 years.

Finally, we would underscore that a Sodsaver provision **does not** prohibit landowners from breaking native grassland, but federal payments should no longer provide incentives for doing so.

We look forward to working with you on this and other elements of the Farm Bill as you proceed with conference deliberations. As demands on our nation's land, water, and resources continue to expand, conservation must become a national priority.

Sincerely,

**American Farmland Trust
American Sportfishing Association
Archery Trade Association
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Bowhunting Preservation Alliance
Campfire Club of America
Carbon Fund
Center for Native Ecosystems
Coevolution Institute
Dallas Safari Club
Defenders of Wildlife
Delta Waterfowl
Ducks Unlimited
Environmental Defense Fund
Environmental Working Group
Healing Our Water Coalition
Illinois Stewardship Alliance
Intermountain West Joint Venture
International Hunter Education Association
Izaak Walton League of America
Land Trust Alliance
Madison Audubon Society
Mississippi Fish & Wildlife Foundation
Mississippi Flyway Council
Mule Deer Foundation**

**National Audubon Society
National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture
National Trappers Association
National Wildlife Federation
North American Bear Foundation
North American Grouse Partners
Northern Great Plains Joint Venture
Northern Great Plains Working Group
Playa Lakes Joint Venture
Pope & Young Club
Prairie Pothole Joint Venture
Quail Unlimited
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
Texas Wildlife Association
The Nature Conservancy
The Wilderness Society
The Wildlife Society
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Trout Unlimited
Union of Concerned Scientists
Whitetails Unlimited
Wildlife Forever
Wildlife Management Institute
World Wildlife Fund**

Enclosure: Letter from Senator Thune regarding Sodsaver

cc: Secretary of Agriculture Ed Schafer
Chairman James L. Connaughton, Council on Environmental Quality
Director Dale Hall, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service