



DEPARTMENT OF GAME, FISH AND PARKS

Foss Building
523 East Capitol
Pierre, South Dakota 57501-3182

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
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 South Dakota Department of Game, Fish, and Parks appreciates the work of both the House and Senate as we move toward a new Farm Bill and we look forward to your support of USDA programs that restore and protect soil, water quality, and wildlife habitat within South Dakota.

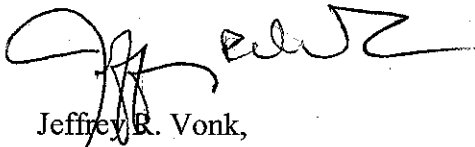
Despite progress regarding soil, water and wildlife habitat, one area where South Dakota has lost ground is the conversion of native prairie grassland to cropland. Native prairie grassland is a vital natural resource that benefits South Dakota's livestock industry, soil, water quality, and abundant wildlife. Currently, high commodity prices and Farm Bill policies are providing incentives for producers to convert native prairie grasslands to cropland. From 2002-07, South Dakota alone has lost an estimated 330,894 acres of native prairie grassland. A strong Sodsaver provision in the next Farm Bill would help slow the grassland conversion trend by removing USDA financial incentives to those who choose to convert their grassland to cropland. A Sodsaver provision would maintain a producer's right to plow up their native prairie; they just would do so at their own risk – without benefit of the Federal Farm program.

Because the native prairie grassland conversion trend is increasing, South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks strongly supports a Sodsaver concept that withholds USDA program benefits, especially crop insurance and noninsured crop disaster assistance program (NAP) benefits, on lands converted from native prairie grassland for the life of the Farm Bill. It is our belief such an

approach is a sound, workable, solution to address native prairie grassland losses and would result in significant, long-term cost savings to the taxpayer.

The South Dakota Department of Game, Fish, and Parks appreciates the opportunity to provide you our recommendations for a strong Sodsaver provision. We look forward to supporting you and your staff in any way possible to protect irreplaceable native prairie grasslands via a strong Sodsaver provision.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey B. Vonk,
Department Secretary

cc: Governor M. Michael Rounds
Senator John Thune
Senator Tim Johnson
Congresswoman Stephanie Herseth Sandlin
Secretary of Agriculture Ed Schafer