

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