

## **Kansas Conservation Coalition Priorities for the 2007 Farm Bill**

*The 2007 Farm Bill has the potential to benefit every Kansan. The most powerful influence on the American landscape, the Farm Bill can enable farmers and ranchers to produce conservation in harmony with food, fiber and fuel. The following conservation priorities for Kansas will ensure robust conservation outcomes from the 2007 Farm Bill.*

### **Conservation Priorities Summarized:**

- **Continue and increase success of proven programs:** CRP, WRP
- **Prevent conversion of native habitat to crop production:** Sodsaver, Conservation Compliance
- **Protect the ecological integrity of working lands:** CSP, GRP, EQIP, FRPP, Forestry
- **Link Commodity Payments to Conservation:** Increase public benefits of Commodity Title programs by linking them to conservation and wildlife benefits
- **Continue to provide for wildlife habitat and associated public benefits in Farm Bill:** WHIP, Open Fields, Wildlife benefits in EQIP
- **Biofuels and Renewable Energy:** Encourage sound conservation and wildlife-friendly production systems of biofuels and renewable energy

### **Conservation Priorities Detailed:**

- **Continue and increase success of proven programs:**
  - **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)** – Reauthorize USDA’s most successful conservation program and ensure the competitive viability of the program. Cropland eligibility criteria for enrollment in CRP should retain the requirement mandated in the 2002 Farm Bill to ensure that the most fragile lands are prioritized for enrollment. The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and Continuous CRP authority should be reauthorized. Overall CRP acreage should be expanded to 45 million acres.
  - **Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)** - Increase America’s number one wetlands restoration program to 300,000 acres per year to improve wetlands conservation, mitigate wetlands loss, provide migratory bird and fisheries habitat and improve water quality.
  - **Conservation Performance Measures** – Identify and authorize specific mechanisms for tracking the successes of conservation measures.
- **Prevent conversion of native habitat to crop production**
  - **“Sodsaver” or Non-cropland Conversion** – Any land that does not meet the definition of cropland, as determined by the USDA/Farm Service Agency, converted from non-cropland status to cropland should be made ineligible for any federal benefit, including but not limited to price and income support payments, crop insurance, disaster payments, conservation program enrollment, and FSA farm loan benefits. To preserve its identity, non-cropland converted to cropland shall be reconstituted as a separate farm by FSA.
  - **Conservation Compliance** – Sodbuster/Swampbuster compliance should be linked to all federal farm program benefits including crop insurance and disaster program eligibility. A farm shall be ineligible to receive federal benefits for the year noncompliance is discovered. Following year eligibility may be approved if noncompliance is rectified and restoration certified within six months of discovery.
- **Protect the ecological integrity of working lands:**
  - **Conservation Security Program (CSP)** – Reauthorize CSP and ensure it provides increased measurable and consistent benefits for soil, water, air, and fish and wildlife conservation. CSP should require fish and wildlife habitat improvement components for all program tiers and require that NRCS engage federal and state fish and wildlife agencies and non-government conservation organizations when developing fish and wildlife and habitat criteria and assessments. CSP should enhance other USDA conservation programs and not replace or reduce their funding. A CSP model should also be adopted for private forestland owners.
  - **Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP)** – Increase GRP to 2 million acres per year. Require that a minimum of 60 percent of the agreements are long term easements of 30 years or more. Provide incentives for large tract native grasslands.
  - **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** – Reauthorize EQIP, increase allocation percentages for fish and wildlife practices. EQIP funding shall be approved only for practices and structures that do not adversely impact wetlands, riparian zones, streams, native grasslands, forests and other environmentally sensitive areas.
  - **Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP)** – Reauthorize at \$300 million per year. Allow transfer of water rights on enrolled land consistent with state law. Allow landowners the right to prohibit non-cropland conversion on land subject to the easement.

- **Forestry** - Reauthorize the Forest Stewardship Program, at a minimum, at its current authorization level. Conservation programs should promote long-term healthy forest ecosystems and enhance management for fish and wildlife habitat, water quality, recreation and timber production. The Healthy Forests Reserve Program should be expanded nationwide.
- **Link Commodity Payments to Conservation** - Commodity programs should be linked to broad public conservation and wildlife benefits by 1) Providing conservation and wildlife incentives to direct commodity payments (DCP), and 2) Shifting current loan deficiency payments (LDP) and counter cyclical payments (CCP) into working lands conservation programs.
- **Continue to provide for wildlife habitat and associated public benefits in Farm Bill:**
  - **Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)** - Gradually increase the WHIP funding from \$100 million to \$300 million during the term of the 2007 Farm Bill with a significant portion of new funds targeted for aquatic restoration activities, including in-stream habitat improvement projects. Enhance conservation partnerships and program benefits by incorporating the assistance of states, municipalities and non-government organizations to deliver and manage WHIP.
  - **Access** – Include a provision based upon “Open Fields” legislation, S. 548/H.R. 1351 in 109<sup>th</sup> Congress, to provide \$20 million per year in grants to fund state-managed voluntary access programs. Program funds shall be used to enhance wildlife management and improve recreational opportunities on land enrolled in Farm Bill conservation programs. Landowner assurances that reduce liability and risk can be provided through the state-managed public access programs. A higher enrollment priority shall be granted to a conservation program application that includes a public access component.
- **Biofuels and Renewable Energy** - The 2007 Farm Bill Energy Title provides a unique opportunity to promote the next generation of biofuels and renewable energy. Research and development funding should promote biofuels and renewable energy technology based on sustainable polycultures that are consistent with fish, wildlife, soil, nutrient management and water conservation goals. Taxpayer investment in conservation and wildlife gains accomplished during the past 20 years under Farm Bill conservation programs should not be sacrificed or diminished.