



GREAT LAKES CONSERVATION PRIORITIES FOR THE 2018 FARM BILL

The Conservation Title of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (Farm Bill) provides funds and technical assistance to conserve soil, water, air, and wildlife. The partnership between the federal government and farmers is critical to protecting the Great Lakes, but this success is at risk unless conservation programs are strengthened and funded under the next Farm Bill.

Farm Bill conservation programs have ensured that American farms and ranches produce healthy food and fiber and conserve millions of acres of high-quality wildlife habitat, which supports a multi-billion-dollar hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching industry. These farmland conservation practices also filter pesticides, fertilizers, and sediment out of water that millions of Great Lakes residents depend upon for drinking, bathing, fishing, and swimming. Conservation easements slow urban sprawl and ensure supplies of productive farmland.

The Conservation Title of the 2018 Farm Bill is the largest land, water and wildlife conservation program for private landowners in the nation. The Healing Our Waters – Great Lakes Coalition supports the following priorities for the Farm Bill to protect our region’s soil, drinking water, and wildlife while promoting a strong farm economy:

1 Increase Farm Bill conservation title funding and acreage caps so they more closely reflect farmer demand and meet the critical need for conservation practices.

2 Improve voluntary working lands, easement, habitat and river restoration, and invasive species control programs so the U.S. Department of Agriculture can meet farmer and partner demand to conserve farmland, wetlands, grasslands, rivers, streams, and forests.

- **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program**
 - Increase and restore baseline to at least \$500 million.
 - Improve wildlife habitat, watershed restoration, and water quality benefits through prioritized placement of easements.
 - Improve program efficiency for landowners and partners.
- **Regional Conservation Partnership Program**
 - Fully fund and improve the Regional Conservation Partnership Program to increase flexibility in program administration and better facilitate partnerships with landowners and other nonfederal partners.
 - Provide incentives for innovative practices with the greatest potential to address regional Great Lakes concerns.

- **Conservation Reserve Program**

- Secure a robust increase in Conservation Reserve Program funding that approximates historical levels of enrollment to accommodate demand and meet soil, water, and wildlife conservation goals.
- Expand the working lands options (particularly grazing) within CRP in ways that decrease costs per acre and increase benefits for soil, water, and wildlife.
- Refine prioritization of CRP funding to align with regional water quality and conservation priorities.
- Promote innovative conservation practices through enrollment under Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, Continuous Conservation Reserve Program, and State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement.



- **Environmental Quality Incentives Program**

- Increase the minimum amount of Environmental Quality Incentives Program funding invested in wildlife to 10 percent and sustain initiatives for soil health, landscape conservation, and wildlife.
- Prioritize funds to protect drinking water sources and formally recognize source water protection as a U.S. Department of Agriculture priority.

3 Maintain existing conservation program compliance requirements to sustain the conservation of valuable wildlife habitat, water quality, and land.

- Conservation compliance has been the law for the past 30 years and has been instrumental in reducing soil erosion and maintaining Great Lakes wetlands, which contribute to fish and wildlife habitat, water quality, and land conservation.

4 Expand funding for and flexibility of conservation technical assistance to promote adoption and implementation of successful practices to increase soil health, improve water quality, increase farm productivity, and conserve valuable wildlife habitat.

- Technical assistance programs empower agricultural producers and other landowners to undertake practices achieving the “triple bottom line” for our economy, environment, and society.
- Develop incentives, support innovation and clarify definitions of technical assistance to allow for creative public-private partnerships, including technical services from agricultural retailers, non-governmental organizations, and partners to enhance uptake of conservation practices on farms.

5 Strengthen methods for demonstrating conservation success and improve research and evaluation of conservation programs.

- Support uniform and transparent methods for measuring success and demonstrating the value of Farm Bill programs.
- Provide authority and funding for measurement and evaluation of conservation outcomes for all Conservation Title investments.
- Support and expand the Conservation Effect Assessment Program to assess the impacts of conservation practices on wildlife and water quality.
- Continue to support Agricultural Research Service work demonstrating efficacy and opportunities for improvement, including soil health practices that benefit land owners, increase productivity, and protect the environment.



THE HEALING OUR WATERS–GREAT LAKES COALITION

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CONTACT US. WE'RE HERE TO HELP.

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