

To: Mike Gratson  
From: Ernie Ables

SUPPORT THE 1995 FARM BILL

The conservation community in the United States is having a difficult time finding something to cheer about at this juncture. Almost all federal conservation and environmental programs are under attack. The Endangered Species Act, the Environmental Policy Act, The Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act and other important pieces of legislation are viewed as part of what is wrong with government. Even common and popular buzzwords such as biodiversity and ecosystem management now must be whispered rather than announced. I have been writing our state congressional delegation regularly in support of funding for the National Biological Service and the Nongame Initiative but their responses have not been encouraging. However, there is one federal conservation program that seems to have support from the different camps. This is the 1995 Farm Bill with its conservation provisions.

On a personal level, my first experience with federal farm programs began with the 1933 Agricultural Adjustment Act (known as Triple A in those days). As a youngster I accompanied my dad whose job was to measure acreages allocated to certain crops. Today's set-aside acreages for both soil and wildlife conservation purposes are offshoots of the original AAA legislation and were first included in the 1965 Cropland Adjustment Program. A decade later the 1985 Food Security Act provided for taking highly erodible lands out of production and planting them in wildlife food and cover plants for erosion control. Two provisions of this act, the Sodbuster and Swampbuster clauses that placed penalties on plowing or draining of these respective acreages, were put in place through hard work by the wildlife community. On a national basis lands placed in these set-asides (referred to as CRP, or Conservation Reserve Program lands) have substantially increased both game and nongame wildlife numbers.

In calendar year 1995 the Farm Bill is up for re-authorization. This Bill has been reviewed in depth by TWS Policy Director and by the Wildlife Management Institute. It is critically important that all of the original conservation clauses be retained and strengthened. In addition, State Technical Committees that have wildlife expertise should be established.

In Idaho we perhaps place most of our attention on federal land management and not as much on farm lands. Nationally, wildlife habitat on more than 400 million acres of farmland can be enhanced by conservation clauses in the 1995 Farm Bill. In Idaho at present there are 850,000 acres in CRP set-asides and wildlife benefits on these lands are viewed by many as the best in the western United States.



Fortunately, some key figures involved in this year's farm legislation are members of Idaho's congressional delegation; Senator Larry Craig, Representative Mike Crapo and Representative Helen Chenoweth. We should write these members of congress and let them know that we support the 1995 Farm Bill with its conservation clauses. This is an excellent opportunity to show our support for soil conservation and wildlife conservation integrated into a comprehensive program that offers multiple benefits to society. Addresses are: United States Senate, Washington, D.C. 20510-1203; and U. S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515-1142.

Mike,

Don't forget to Date  
the next Newsletter.

Ernie