



THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

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Idaho Chapter, The Wildlife Society
c/o Fish and Wildlife Department
University of Idaho
Moscow, Idaho 83844
June 6, 1995

Senator Dirk Kempthorne
367 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510-1204

Dear Senator Kempthorne:

I am writing on behalf of the Idaho Chapter of The Wildlife Society, a 243-member group of professional wildlife biologists and managers in the State of Idaho. As an organization, we are concerned about the impact of the 1995 Farm Bill on fish and wildlife resources of the State. Idaho has nearly 6 million acres of cropland and many more millions of acres of private forest and rangelands. Most of Idaho's fish and wildlife use these lands at least during some part of the year. Consequently, the impact that these lands have on our wild animal resources can not be overstated.

The single portion of the Farm Bill with the most benefits to Idaho's fish and wildlife is the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Over 850,000 acres of marginal Idaho croplands have been enrolled in the CRP with the majority of the acreage being in eastern Idaho. While CRP has benefited many species including grassland obligates such as the lark sparrow and long-billed curlew, some of its most dramatic impacts have been on game species. The Columbian sharp-tailed grouse was at low levels throughout its range when CRP began in 1985. CRP has allowed this species to increase in numbers by several fold since then in spite of severe drought. Grouse from Idaho are now being used to restore or improve populations in several other western states. If CRP is lost this species will be in great jeopardy throughout its range.

Big game habitat has also been greatly improved in many CRP-impacted areas. The grass, clover and alfalfa present in many CRP plantings provide valuable forage for deer, elk and pronghorn antelope throughout Idaho. To help maintain these large big-game populations desired by Idaho and nonresident hunters, this habitat is crucial. These acreages provide forage and help alleviate crop damage on adjacent private land. We recommend that the 1995 Farm Bill allow these high value parcels to be reenrolled.



We have the following specific recommendations for the 1995 Farm Bill:

1) The Conservation Reserve Program should be maintained at its current level of enrollment with targeting of lands that provide the most soil erosion, water quality and wildlife habitat benefits.

2) Wetland protection must remain a key part of the Farm Bill. Incentives, including the Wetland Reserve Program, should be used whenever possible to protect these lands. However, some regulation will need to continue to ensure protection of the wetlands that are so important and so rare in most of Idaho.

3) Conservation plans should be written to keep soil loss at or below "T". Currently, new highly erodible land can be brought into production without meeting normal Conservation Compliance standards if the producer claims economic hardship. This defeats the intent of the "Sodbuster" portion of the current Farm Bill and provides incentives to bring more highly erodible land into crop production.

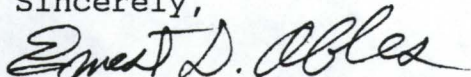
4) The Forest Stewardship and Stewardship Incentive Programs have fostered a closer working relationship between wildlife biologists, foresters and private landowners with resulting better management of Idaho's private forestlands. All programs of the Forestry Title should be continued.

5) Water Quality Initiatives were designed to provide incentives to landowners for natural resource management practices that improve water quality. Wildlife habitat and wetland management options were specifically identified in the 1990 Farm Bill, but were never implemented. These practices should be part of the 1995 Farm Bill and effectively implemented by USDA.

In summary, the 1995 Farm Bill must continue to provide leadership in conserving the long-term productivity of Idaho's agricultural lands while doing all it can to protect water quality and wildlife habitats on these lands.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns and please feel free to contact me with any questions or comments.

Sincerely,



Ernest D. Ables, President,
Idaho Chapter, The Wildlife Society

