

Montana Wildlife Federation ♦ Western Bear Foundation ♦ Laurel Rod and Gun Club
Helena Hunters and Anglers ♦ Mule Deer Foundation ♦ Flathead Wildlife, Inc.
MT Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers ♦ Russell Country Sportsmen Association
Hellgate Hunters and Anglers ♦ Anaconda Sportsmen Association

September 5, 2018

The Honorable Pat Roberts
US Senate
109 Hart Senate Office
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Roberts,

On behalf of the undersigned sportsmen-conservation organizations, we would like to express our support for strong conservation programs in the Farm Bill. Together our groups have led efforts to protect Montana's abundant fish and wildlife, our natural lands and waters, and public access for hunting, fishing, and other outdoor recreation.

Our collective organizations represent thousands of Montana's hunters and anglers who rely on the Farm Bill to provide abundant wildlife, quality habitat, and public access. The largest private land conservation tool, the Farm Bill provides essential habitat for Montana's waterfowl, upland birds, deer, and countless other species. All Montanans benefit from a strong Farm Bill.

As the Farm Bill moves into Conference, our organizations continue to support strong conservation measures. Particularly maintaining the funding within the Conservation Title. We also want to maintain the increase in the Conservation Reserve Program, with the addition for a permanent easement option. We were proud to see the Senate focus on private land conservation with an emphasis on programs that have been proven effective for farmers and ranchers, fish and wildlife, and hunters and anglers; our organizations hope that these programs get strengthened in Conference.

Our collective organizations approved of the Senate's amendment to increase the minimum percentage of EQIP funding that is used for wildlife habitat. Currently 5% of funding in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), one of the big farm bill working lands programs, must go towards wildlife habitat practices. This amendment would increase the minimum percentage going towards wildlife to at least 10% - leading to an increase of tens of millions of additional dollars going directly towards helping farmers, ranchers, and forest owners create habitat on working lands every year. We also support Senate amendment to increase funding for the Voluntary Public Access – Habitat Incentives Program (VPA-HIP), from \$25 million to \$40 million over the life of the bill. VPA-HIP (also known as "open fields") is a competitive state block grant program that funds efforts by states and tribal agencies to

enhance public access to private lands for hunting, fishing, and other recreation activities. Lastly, we hope that the Conference avoids playing political games that try to chip away at our nation's bedrock environmental protection laws including the Endangered Species Act and Clean Water Act.

The Farm Bill, with its bipartisan support, represents an opportunity for this Congress to help Montana's farmers, prairie pothole landscape, wildlife species, and outdoor recreation. We respectfully ask for strong conservation provisions to be included on this bill. By working together across the aisle and across chambers, we can ensure working farms, abundant fish and game, and opportunity for future generations.