

May 15, 2023

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition,
and Forestry

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition,
and Forestry

The Honorable Glenn Thompson
Chair
House Committee on Agriculture

The Honorable David Scott
Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow, Ranking Member Boozman, Chair Thompson, and Ranking Member Scott:

The undersigned organizations write to express support for the reauthorization and improvement of the Water Source Protection Program (WSPP) in the next Farm Bill. Congress authorized the WSPP in the 2018 Farm Bill to provide the U.S. Forest Service with authority to partner with municipal, agricultural, and community-based organizations and other end users to develop and implement water source protection plans. The intent was to encourage public-private partnerships to invest in the restoration and protection of forested source water infrastructure – the mosaic of forests, wet meadows, and streams – that serves as the primary source of drinking and irrigation water supplies across much of the country. Restoration of forested source watersheds can reduce flood and wildfire intensity, increase natural water supply and storage as a hedge against drought, enhance fish and wildlife habitats, and improve water quality.

The WSPP is a straightforward tool to support targeted investments in the restoration and protection of forested source water infrastructure. Additional changes in the next Farm Bill could greatly improve this tool, making it more effective for water users and communities. Specifically, we support the following changes:

- Ensure WSPP provides a clear role for on-the-ground partners to drive the development and implementation of projects.
- Streamline WSPP and make the program more accessible and easier for rural and smaller water users such as acequias, mutual ditch companies, and other rural and historically underserved water providers and communities. Examples include reducing or waiving the non-federal cost-share requirement, supporting investments in local capacity and technical assistance, and eliminating redundant planning requirements.

- Give priority to source water restoration and protection strategies incorporating a holistic approach that bundles multiple activities, including restoring wet meadow hydrologic function and natural stream channels, with other forest health treatments. These aquatic restoration methods provide water reliability and quality benefits while addressing risks associated with wildfire, flooding, and drought.
- Reauthorize the WSPP and increase the authorized funding amount to no less than \$50 million annually. Investing in integrated restoration will produce synergistic benefits for water reliability, supply, wildfire risk reduction, and public safety.

We strongly support the reauthorization of and improvements to the Water Source Protection Program and encourage you to include these changes in the next Farm Bill.

Sincerely,

American Fly-Fishing Trade Association
American Sportfishing Association
American Water Works Association
Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies
Conservation Northwest
Family Farm Alliance
National American Grouse Partners
National Deer Association
National Wildlife Federation
Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition
Salt Lake City Dept. of Public Utilities
The Nature Conservancy
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Trout Unlimited
Watershed Research and Training Center
Western Landowners Alliance