



Bringing back the birds

Farm Bill Conservation Update

The 2018 Farm Bill will expire on September 30th. We expect to see both Houses of Congress introduce their respective versions of the Farm Bill in the next few weeks, but the bill will not be finished in time to avoid a Continuing Resolution on the 2018 version of the law. Odds are good that a Farm Bill won't become law until late winter or early spring 2024.

A government shutdown would further slow the Farm Bill legislative process and potentially prevent the Administration from administering conservation programs, the most important of which is providing technical assistance to farmers and ranchers. Funds for some USDA conservation programs will hopefully continue due to a CR and the terms of the Inflation Reduction Act. Others, like the Conservation Reserve Program, are funded through the Commodity Credit Corporation, which means funds will remain available there as well.

Rangeland Conservation Program Needed

There have been a number of so called "Marker Bills" introduced that may be included in the Farm Bill or offered as amendments that contain important ideas and language to advance conservation. ABC is actively working with partners to find a sponsor for legislation to provide more tailored conservation for grasslands needed to reverse major bird declines in the region.

The idea is to create a new program that would function like CRP, but would target working range, pasture and grasslands by offering incentives for [resting pastures from grazing](#). These rested pastures would inexpensively provide conservation services, including carbon storage, water filtration, erosion control, and nutrient cycling and are vital to recovering grassland bird populations. The bill concept is being referred to as *The Rangeland Conservation Program Act*.

A couple of noteworthy Marker Bills we recommend be included in the Farm Bill:

The Forest Conservation Easement Program Act of 2023 ([S. 2631](#)) was introduced By Senator Kirsten Gillibrand in late July. This bill aims to provide added protection for private forests.

The Streamlining Conservation Practice Standards Act of 2023 ([S. 2603](#)) was introduced by Senator Joni Ernst (IA), Roger Marshall (KS), Amy Klobuchar (MN), and Martin Heinrich (NM). This bill would expand the ways to create new conservation practice standards and require an expedited process for USDA to follow when considering new practices.

The Farmer to Farmer Education Act of 2023 ([S. 2614](#)) was introduced recently by Sen. Lujan (NM). Its main purpose is to build capacity for farmer-to-farmer networks, connect farmers with mentors or group learning opportunities, and support goal setting to increase long-term adoption of consistent, science-based, site-specific practices designed to achieve conservation objectives on land active in agricultural, forestry, or related uses.

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