

September 3, 2008

The Honorable Robert Byrd
Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-131 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-146A The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable David Obey
Chairman
House Committee on Appropriations
H-218 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jerry Lewis
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Byrd and Obey and Ranking Members Cochran and Lewis:

As the nation's leading hunting, fishing, and conservation organizations representing millions of citizens, it was with great alarm that we reviewed the President's recent FY 2009 budget request proposing total elimination of funding for the "Open Fields" program which was authorized in the 2008 Farm Bill. The Open Fields program will help establish state-administered, voluntary, incentive-based programs to expand public access to private lands for hunters, anglers, and outdoor enthusiasts and encourage the creation and conservation of quality fish and wildlife habitat. This new program, which has been sought by the sportsmen and conservation community for several years, has not even begun implementation and is already being targeted for elimination by the President. We are writing to express our full support for maintaining the guaranteed funding of \$50 million for this program and ask that you do everything within your power to protect that funding.

More and more hunters, anglers, and other outdoorsmen/-women are finding "no trespassing" signs on their favorite old spots or they are watching urban sprawl eat up the chunks of woods, waters and fields into which they used to escape. Consequently, more and more sportsmen/-women of average means, who can't afford to pay for a place to hunt or fish, are walking away from their cherished outdoor pastimes and fewer young people are getting a chance to take up hunting or fishing. Open Fields is critically needed to expand access to places to hunt and fish and reverse this trend that is eating away at treasured American traditions and the outdoor way of life. This program will help get our children re-engaged with the natural world, including hunting and fishing. We estimate that this program will encourage landowners to open up more than 4 million new acres of private land to the public each year, dramatically enhancing the experiences of hunters and anglers as well as bird watchers, hikers, and others who enjoy the outdoors.

A total of 21 states already have established programs to work cooperatively with private landowners to allow public access to their lands for recreational hunting and fishing, and many of these states' programs include additional incentives for habitat improvement. Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming, in particular, have very successful programs that open millions of acres of land to the public each year, and several other states are initiating similar programs. These programs are popular with hunters and anglers as well as private landowners. In fact, many states have long waiting lists of landowners ready to enroll their acreages into a State-sponsored access program, but a lack of funding stands in the way. By supplementing state resources that currently are being dedicated to access programs, Open Fields funding not only will provide additional income to ranchers and farmers, while encouraging them to make their acreage more fish and wildlife friendly, but will greatly expand opportunities to hunters, anglers, and outdoor enthusiasts. Just as important, states that have held off on establishing access programs likely will institute them if they know a partial federal funding source is available.

Again, as you consider the President's supplemental budget request and complete the appropriations process, we strongly urge you to uphold full funding for this vital new program authorized only months ago. We would be pleased to meet with you in person on this matter to discuss the issue further and answer any questions. Please feel free to contact TRCP Initiative Manager Geoff Mullins at 202-654-4609 for more information. Thank you.

Sincerely,

American Sportfishing Association
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Boone & Crockett Club
Campfire Club of America
Catch-A-Dream Foundation
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Conservation Force
Dallas Safari Club
Delta Waterfowl
Ducks Unlimited
International Hunter Education Association
Izaak Walton League of America
Land Trust Alliance
Mule Deer Foundation
National Rifle Association
National Shooting Sports Foundation
National Trappers Association
National Wild Turkey Federation
National Wildlife Federation

North American Bear Foundation
North American Grouse Partnership
Orion The Hunter's Institute
Pheasants Forever
Pope and Young Club
Quail Forever
Quail Unlimited
Quality Deer Management Association
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Ruffed Grouse Society
Safari Club International
Texas Wildlife Association
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Trout Unlimited
Whitetails Unlimited
Wild Sheep Foundation
Wildlife Management Institute
The Wildlife Society

cc: Senate Committee on Appropriations
House Committee on Appropriations
Chairman James Connaughton, Council on Environmental Quality
Director James Nussle, Office of Management and Budget