

March 30, 2023

The Honorable Glenn Thompson
Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC, 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC, 20510

The Honorable David Scott
Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC, 20510

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC, 20510

Dear House and Senate Agriculture Committees,

The undersigned hunting and angling, conservation, outdoor recreation, and scientific organizations extend our full support for the Voluntary Public Access Improvement Act of 2023, which would reauthorize the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) at \$150 million. This highly successful state and tribal-led private lands access program is a top priority for America's sportsmen and women in the upcoming Farm Bill.

Throughout much of the country, access to quality hunting, angling, wildlife viewing, and other outdoor recreational opportunities is widely cited among the most challenging barriers to participation. As such, the ability to provide critical access opportunities, particularly in states with limited public lands, while safeguarding private property rights is of the utmost importance. Fortunately, VPA-HIP, as the only federal program designed to incentivize public recreational access on private lands, provides an opportunity to address this challenge. Since its reauthorization in the 2018 Farm Bill, the USDA has invested \$49 million through 27 state and tribal wildlife agencies to expand public access and enhance wildlife habitat. State and tribal wildlife agencies design access and habitat improvement programs to reflect local needs, land use, and landowner objectives, and enrollments are voluntary and incentive based. As a result, demand for the program continues to grow.

Local economies also benefit from the program. Because lack of access is a limiting factor for hunter and angler participation, areas with abundant hunting and fishing access attract visitors from across the country, which supports local businesses and drives economic activity. A recent economic analysis of the VPA-HIP estimated a nationwide return on investment of over 8:1. This directly supports thousands of jobs in the \$862 billion outdoor recreation economy and helps catalyze rural economies nationwide.

We thank you for supporting this important priority for sportsmen and women across the country, and we look forward to working with you to successfully incorporate this legislation into the next Farm Bill.

Sincerely,

American Sportfishing Association

American Woodcock Society

Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies

Backcountry Hunters and Anglers

California Waterfowl

Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation

Delta Waterfowl

Ducks Unlimited

Houston Safari Club

Izaak Walton League of America

Michigan Sharp-Tailed Grouse Association

Montana Wildlife Federation

Mule Deer Foundation

National Bobwhite & Grassland Initiative

National Deer Association

National Shooting Sports Foundation

National Wild Turkey Federation

National Wildlife Federation

The Nature Conservancy

North American Falconers Association

North American Grouse Partnership

Orion: The Hunter's Institute

Pheasants Forever

Pope & Young Club

Quail Forever

Ruffed Grouse Society

Texas Wildlife Association

Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

Whitetails Unlimited

Wildlife Management Institute

The Wildlife Society