

2018 FARM BILL HAS MAJOR BENEFITS FOR CONSERVATION

CONSERVATION
POLICY COLUMN



James L. Cummins
B&C REGULAR MEMBER
CO-CHAIR, CONSERVATION
POLICY COMMITTEE

I am pleased to join the other Co-Chair of the Boone and Crockett Club's Conservation Policy Committee, Paul Phillips, and the rest of our policy team in authoring the first column on the Club's policy efforts. If you have not yet done so, I encourage you to read President Tim Brady's first column. He states, "The Boone and Crockett Club remains committed to the task of maintaining a model of conservation that is recognized throughout the world." He also states that it is the Club's duty to maintain and improve upon what the conservation leaders before us created. He is so right. The purpose of this column is to report to you, as readers of *Fair Chase*, what the Boone and Crockett Club is doing in regards to such efforts. Our founder, Theodore Roosevelt, once said, "Far and away the best prize that life has to offer is the chance to work hard at work worth doing." If that is the case, the Club has won first place. The conservation policy team is pleased to report to you in each issue of this great publication the results of this hard work.

All too often we associate public land with wildlife, but private lands are vitally important to the conservation of wildlife in the United States because they constitute 74 percent of the land ownership in the lower 48 states. In addition, 50 percent (890 million acres) of the land base in the contiguous United States is managed as cropland, pastureland, and rangeland, and 30 percent (673 million acres) is managed as forestland.

The successes in conservation and wildlife management we have been able to

achieve in this country are anchored by key pieces of legislation that have been passed in the last 100 years. One such critical piece of legislation has been the Farm Bill, which had its beginning in the 1930s, back when it was known as the Agricultural Adjustment Act.

This past December, the latest Farm Bill passed the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate, and President Donald J. Trump signed the measure into law. The Boone and Crockett Club applauds the passage of the new Farm Bill, which includes several critical conservation and forest management provisions.

The Farm Bill is one of the largest single sources of conservation spending in the federal budget, and it represents the single largest federal investment in private-lands conservation. This bipartisan legislation delivers robust, voluntary, incentive-based conservation programs that promote healthy wildlife habitats such as forests, wetlands and grasslands, and clean waters for all of us that hunt, fish, or just enjoy the outdoors. The Club has been closely involved with the Farm Bill since the early 1990s.

This initial legislation in the 1930s was intended to help steer the country out of the Great Depression. It addressed widespread domestic hunger, falling crop prices for farmers, and the catastrophic Dust Bowl that resulted in massive soil erosion. This Act restricted agricultural production by paying farmers subsidies not to plant part of their land, let natural vegetation grow, and to remove excess livestock. Its purpose was to reduce the surplus of agricultural commodities, and therefore effectively raise the

value of crops. Periodically, the legislation is re-enacted with evolving policy, addressing commodity payments such as disaster and price supports, as well as nutrition programs.

The Farm Bill of recent times is a compilation of many different acts that have been passed by the United States Congress to enhance agricultural productivity and conservation on private lands. The Farm Bill is not a single piece of legislation but a dynamic series of acts over the past nine decades that includes new programs or revises existing ones. It affects every citizen whether it's through clean air, clean water, or healthy food, to those who grow our food or who recreate on the landscape.

The 2018 Farm Bill continues the voluntary, locally-led, incentive-based conservation model. It builds on the success of the 2014 Farm Bill by streamlining, simplifying and improving program administration. The bill also provides additional investment in soil health practices, such as cover crops, ultimately providing "downstream" benefits to communities in the form of cleaner air and water, healthier soils, healthier forests, and more wildlife habitat.

From a sportsmen's perspective, the most effective provisions in the conservation title of the Farm Bill are the Conservation Reserve Program, or CRP, the Wetland Reserve Easements, or WRE, and the wildlife habitat practices in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, or EQIP. These provisions directly impact wildlife habitat and therefore, healthy upland bird, waterfowl, and big game populations.

The forestry title in the

new Farm Bill includes nine provisions that will help streamline our processes so we can get on with the business of better managing our forest lands. While the forestry title is not perfect, these provisions are moving our nation's forest management policies in the right direction. The most effective forestry provisions in the Farm Bill are the Timber Innovation Act and Good Neighbor Authority. Special thanks goes to Congressman Bruce Westerman of Arkansas, the only professional forester in the U.S. Congress, for his hard and insightful work on the forestry provisions of the bill.

I am especially grateful to my U.S. Senator, Cindy Hyde-Smith of Mississippi, for making chronic wasting disease research (CWD) a priority of the research title. This will help land-grant universities throughout the United States better understand and combat the spread of CWD.

The passage of this Farm Bill would not have been possible without the long, dedicated efforts of the Club's members, staff, lobbyists, and partners. I am also very thankful for the time the members and staff of the House and Senate Agriculture committees provided listening to the Club's needs and desires on the Farm Bill. ■

