



February 26, 2020

RE: HF 2957 and HF 3431, Appropriating money to provide state incentives for conservation reserve program

Position: SUPPORT

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee,

Ducks Unlimited (DU) is the largest wetland conservation organization in the state of Minnesota with over 43,000 members and a habitat conservation footprint of over 233,000 acres since 1984. We firmly support HF 2957 and HF 3431, establishing a state incentive payment for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Agricultural producers are some of our most valued conservation partners in the prairie region of the state, where DU focuses conservation delivery, and we therefore strongly support the expansion and promotion of voluntary incentive-based conservation programs that help farmers and private landowners.

CRP has historically been one of the most effective federal Farm Bill programs for protecting or reestablishing grasslands that support robust wildlife populations, including grassland-nesting birds like ducks and other economically significant gamebirds, and non-game species too. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that since 1992, CRP contributed to a net increase of approximately 2 million additional ducks per year in portions of the prairies. Unfortunately, Minnesota has undergone a steep decline in CRP enrollment over the last several years, currently down over 700,000 acres from the historical high of 1.8 million acres in 2007. This loss has had a profound impact on grassland wildlife populations and is limiting the state's ability to meet the goals of Minnesota DNR's Duck and Pheasant Recovery Plans.

Thankfully, the latest 2018 Farm Bill increases the CRP acreage cap from 24 million acres to 27 million acres and so a state supported incentive payment program, as this legislation would create, would help ensure that many of these additional acres get enrolled right here in Minnesota to benefit our citizens and our wildlife.

On behalf of Minnesota DU's 43,000 members, I thank the legislative leaders who authored this legislation and encourage the committee to approve.

Sincerely,

Kyle Thaemlitz
State Chair
Minnesota Ducks Unlimited