

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow  
Chair, Senate Agriculture Committee  
328A Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Glenn Thompson  
Chairman, House Agriculture Committee  
1301 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

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

The Honorable David Scott  
Ranking Member, House Agriculture Committee  
1010 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

February 1, 2024

Dear Chair Stabenow, Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Boozman, and Ranking Member Scott:

On behalf of the [Central Grassland Roadmap](#) - a collaborative working across three countries and multiple Indigenous Nations, with a diversity of voices including the private sector, conservationists, producers, industry and more, we respectfully urge you to support conservation efforts in North America's Central Grasslands. This landscape represents 700+ million acres, 60% of which has been lost to the plow or tree and shrub invasion. We are at a tipping point for the future of our grasslands, and the historic investment in agriculture conservation programs provided by the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) can help ensure that our grasslands and the communities that depend upon them can thrive for generations to come.

Therefore, as Congress reauthorizes crucial Farm Bill programs, **the of the Central Grassland Roadmap collaborative strongly urges you to protect the full investment in climate-smart agriculture and conservation technical assistance included in the IRA** and ensure that this funding remains in Farm Bill conservation programs. These conservation dollars are vital for conserving our Nation's grasslands, a critical landscape for securing a climate-resilient future.

The IRA provided roughly \$20 billion in critically needed funding for USDA conservation programs. These funds support rural communities, Indigenous peoples, underserved communities, hunters, anglers, and other outdoor recreation enthusiasts. They also provide important investment in programs to keep grasslands intact and support sustainable grazing. Preventing conversion of natural lands is also critical for protecting biodiversity, wildlife habitat, and freshwater resources, which in turn benefit ecosystem health, communities, and downstream agriculture that depends on that water. As documented by WWF's [2018 Plowprint report](#), plowing up healthy grasslands increases sediment flows into rivers and fertilizer seepage into waterways, leading to algal blooms and other harmful events. Communities that depend on these rivers for drinking water are forced to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to filter and clean the water that has made its way downstream.

The Roadmap supports and believes that through the IRA funding, NRCS research can further demonstrate how grasslands provide significant opportunities to mitigate carbon emissions. Additionally, the increased funding through the IRA targets climate mitigation focused conservation practices pertinent to improving the health and resilience of grassland ecosystems. The Migratory Bird Joint Ventures are public-private partnerships with a history of helping to target and implement significant Farm Bill program funds for the benefit of birds, other wildlife, and people. The eight Migratory Bird Joint Ventures that work in the central grasslands have estimated 27.8 million acres of conservation at a cost of \$1.9 billion per year are needed to stabilize declining bird populations over the next 20 years (\$38 billion total). At a minimum, a four-fold increase in technical assistance and delivery capacity is also needed.

USDA programs are an important funding mechanism for achieving these objectives, further underscoring the critical importance of continuing USDA conservation investments.

Moreover, USDA conservation programs face record levels of applications and are consistently oversubscribed. Two examples from this past fall include the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), for which \$250 million was made available under the IRA, received nearly 9,000 applications totaling nearly \$475 million; and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), for which \$250 million was made available under the IRA, and received project proposals exceeding \$2 billion in funding. American agricultural producers are depending on these conservation resources from the IRA, and we strongly oppose any effort to redirect IRA conservation funds to other Farm Bill programs. The historic funding provided by the IRA for Farm Bill conservation programs can forever change the trajectory of our grasslands to a healthy stable state for future generations through climate-smart solutions.

Thank you for your leadership on these important issues. Our organizations look forward to working with you to help American farm and ranch families fully participate in USDA conservation programs that are so important for our nation.

Sincerely,

The Central Grassland Roadmap Policy Working Group

*Tammy VerCauteren: Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, Alison Holloran: National Audubon Society, Audubon Rockies, Martha Kauffman: World Wildlife Fund, Northern Great Plains, Aviva Glaser: National Wildlife Federation, Catherine Wightman: Northern Great Plains Joint Venture, Laura Kahler: South Dakota Grassland Coordinator, and Steven Riley and Aimee Roberson: American Bird Conservancy*



## CENTRAL GRASSLANDS ROADMAP

GUIDING US TOWARDS RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE GRASSLANDS AND HUMAN COMMUNITIES