

Farm Bill 2014: Conservation Round Up

Below is a summary of conservation programs and provisions in the final Farm Bill (H.R.2642 – The Agricultural Act of 2014). In general, conservation groups were in agreement that the final bill was good for wildlife and wild lands and all but one supported final passage of the bill. In addition to the successes detailed below, it should also be noted that despite the House version of the bill containing a number of anti-environment riders the final bill was clean, with the exception of a Clean Water Act exemption for storm-water runoff from roads used by the forestry industry.

	Program/Provision	Change in Direct Spending 2014-2023*	What Conservationists Wanted	What Conservationists Got
Title I Commodities	Conservation Compliance	N/A	To re-establish the link between crop insurance premium subsidies to conservation, requiring recipients of the subsidy to adopt a conservation plan.	The final bill re-establishes the link between crop insurance premium subsidies and conservation. The requirement was first created in 1985 but broken by the 1996 Farm Bill. Conservation compliance has saved between 1.5 and 3.3 million acres of wetlands across the US
Title XI Crop Insurance	Sodsaver	N/A	A national Sodsaver provision to reduce incentives for converting grassland to farmland. In other words, farmers, not taxpayers, assume the risk of farming on these lands, a move that cuts spending and maintains the integrity of native grasslands.	A Sodsaver provision in six states (ND, SD, IA, MN, MT, and NE).
Title II Conservation	Conservation Title Overall Direct Spending (\$57.6 billion)	-\$6 billion**	To maintain overall funding for conservation programs. The removal of fiscal year limitations to end the annual return of unspent conservation money to Treasury.	The final bill provides \$57.6 billion over a ten-year period for conservation programs. However, that includes a \$6 billion cut. The fiscal year limitation was successfully removed.

	Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)	-\$3.3 billion	In 2008 the acreage cap for CRP was cut from 39 million acres to 32 million acres. Conservationists wanted, at the very least, to see the 32 million cap continued.	Despite the program being responsible for saving the habitat of species that may otherwise have become threatened or endangered, unfortunately the CRP acreage cap has been cut even further. By 2018, only 24 million acres will be eligible to partake in the CRP.
	Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)	+\$497 million	Strong funding for EQIP, a program that provides financial and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers wanting to implement conservation practices on their land.	EQIP funding has been set at \$1.6 billion a year, or higher, from 2015 until 2018 – a strong result. The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) has now been rolled into EQIP with the final bill allowing for “at least” 5% of EQIP funding to go towards WHIP – a big improvement on the WHIP funding cap stipulated in the House version of the bill.
	Regional Conservation Partnership Program	-\$28 million	The consolidation of four programs (Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative, Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative, the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program, and the Great Lakes Basin Program) into this new program designed to target conservation funding at the most-needed areas via a competitive application process.	The new program was included in the final bill with about \$275 million made available for conservation grants, some of which will be distributed federally, and some of which will be applied for by states, which will distribute them.
	Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)	+\$1.2 billion	Strong funding for the Grassland Reserve Program, Wetlands Reserve Program, and Farm and Ranchland Protection Program.	The final bill merged these programs into one - ACEP. While the funding was less than conservation groups wanted, ACEP has been authorized and funded for the next ten years, which means if the new Farm Bill is extended next time, as opposed to re-authorized, ACEP will have continued funding.

	Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)	-\$2.3 billion	A high acreage cap for CSP, previously set at 12.8m acres a year.	The final bill set the CSP acreage cap at 10 million acres a year. Although disappointing, this is better than the 8.7 million acre cap set in the House bill.
	Other Conservation Programs	+\$454 million	Strong funding for the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP), which provides grants to farmers who allow outdoor recreation on their land.	In 2008, VPA-HIP was funded at \$17 million a year. The new bill puts it at \$40 million across five years. Still, that is \$10 million more than the House bill allowed.

*According to [Congressional Budget Office Analysis](#)

**CBO analysis puts the overall reduction in direct spending for Title II at just under \$4 billion. However, this figure does not account for sequestration, which will automatically shave off an additional \$2 billion from conservation programs (proportionally) each year until 2024, with the exception of CRP. As such, all the above numbers, apart from the \$6 billion overall cut, are correct on paper but will be less in reality. For more information see [2014 Farm Bill Drill Down: The Bill by the Numbers](#), a blog post by the [National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition](#).

Other Sources: NGO Statements and Supporting Documents

[Coalition Statement](#)

[American Farmland Trust](#)

[Defenders of Wildlife](#)

[Chesapeake Bay Foundation Statement](#)

[Chesapeake Bay Foundation Summary](#)

[Environmental Working Group](#) [Opposed final 2014 Farm Bill]

[Natural Resources Defense Council](#)

[National Wildlife Federation](#)

[The Nature Conservancy](#)

[The Wilderness Society](#)

[Union of Concerned Scientists](#)