

## Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts 2007 FARM BILL RECOMMENDATIONS

WACD strongly supports Conservation Provisions of '02 Farm Bill (Conservation Title). Wyoming resources and producers have benefited greatly from Farm Bill Programs delivered through the Partnership. Programs must be locally led and flexible. These concepts are the foundation of effective conservation on the ground.

Recommendations include streamlining and consolidating programs with guidelines for the three basic types of programs: Land Application, Easement, and Stewardship/Entitlement. Recommended program delivery improvements focus on Small Farmer/Rancher definition, funding, and Technical Service Providers. Additional points focus on the outlook for the future, communication, and the conversion of agricultural lands to other uses.

### **Local Direction and Control:**

Flexibility must be retained within the programs to identify and address local priorities and concerns.

Support expanding Local Work Groups (LWGs) role in program delivery. Should have involvement in wider set of issues, such as:

- Carbon Sequestration
- Alternative Energy
- Air quality
- Small Acreages
- Private Forest Lands
- Invasive Plants
- Wildlife

### **Streamline Programs & Processes:**

- Consolidate land application programs (Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Agriculture Management Assistance, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, Wetland Reserve Program (costshare).
- Consolidate easement/rental programs (Wetland Reserve Program, Grazingland Reserve Program, Conservation Reserve Program, Farm & Ranch Protection Program).
- Consolidate Stewardship/Entitlement programs (Conservation Security Program).
- Clarify program terms, policies, and purposes earlier in application process.

### **Most Utilized Conservation Programs in WY:**

#### **Land Application Programs (EQIP, AMA, WHIP):**

- Conservation Technical Assistance should be delivered along with application programs.
- Conservation Technical Assistance needs to be provided for non-Farm Bill assistance to producers.
- NRCS must retain "single practice" approach where applicable.

**Easements (FRPP, WRP, GRP):** Farm Bill easement programs need to focus primarily on retaining production



**Local conservation plans benefit sage grouse and their habitats**



**Buffington's of Platte County sign first CSP contract in Wyoming.**



**Sims ranch working with NRCS District conservationist on monitoring program through EQIP.**



**EQIP is utilized by ag producers to install livestock/wildlife watering facilities.**



**EQIP has been important in assisting producers with animal feeding operation issues addressing Clean Water Act requirements.**



**The Wetland Reserve Program assists landowners with wetland restoration.**

agriculture land use. Easement terms should be locally directed as much as possible.

**Stewardship/Entitlement (CSP):** Process needs to be streamlined and simplified. Adequate funding should be provided. Digitized soil surveys need to be accelerated since it is a requirement of program. Present tier system should be re-evaluated.

**CRP:** Total exclusion as required in Continuous CRP buffer practices is not generally the best management. Program should be administered by NRCS based on technical needs of program. Existing CRP acreages should be maintained or increased.

#### **Program Delivery**

**Small Farmer/Rancher:** While the purpose is to help people establish careers in production agriculture. This program has been abused by non-traditional producers who enter agriculture as a hobby. We recommend re-definition of Limited Resource and Beginning Farmer/Rancher criteria at national level to emphasize production agriculture.

**State decisions:** Most provisions are currently under the control of States, ie: cost-share rates, ranking criteria, eligible practices, county allocations, etc. Work needs to continue to improve State-level decision making to optimize local control (consolidation of programs would help to address this concern).

**Funding:** Current annual funding allocation procedures limit flexibility in program delivery. EQIP contracts should have flexibility to utilize most current costs. AMA funding should be secured & maximized.

**Technical Services Providers (TSP):** Currently very complex & difficult for TSP, NRCS, and Producer. Can reduce quality of product and increase time required. Payments often don't cover costs. When done through Contribution Agreements with conservation districts, the program seems to work well. Program needs to be continued and improved.

#### **Other:**

- Losses of agricultural lands, open spaces, urbanization are critical issues in WY.
- Improved communication and coordination is needed among State and Federal agencies, especially in mixed ownership areas.
- More assistance is needed for privately owned forest lands