

Committee: Wetlands and Waterfowl

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Intended Recipient: Secretary United States Department of Agriculture, USDA, 1400 Independence Avenue, Southwest, Washington DC 20250 and Chief of NRCS, USDA, NRCS, Office of the Chief, 1400 Independence Ave. SW, Room 5105-A, Washington DC 20250

Protection of Prairie Pothole Region Wetlands

WHEREAS, Prairie Pothole Region (PPR) wetlands provide essential ecological functions and values that significantly benefit society; and

WHEREAS, these functions include surface and subsurface water storage, nutrient cycling, particulate removal, improved water quality and ground water recharge; and

WHEREAS, the PPR is rich in plant and aquatic life, and supports over 50% of North America's breeding waterfowl as well as a myriad other wetland dependent species; and

WHEREAS, recent landscape analysis conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Habitat and Population and Evaluation Team (HAPET) indicates that nearly 2 million small, unprotected, shallow wetlands are embedded in cropland within the U.S. PPR provided breeding capacity for over 3 million ducks; and

WHEREAS, more than 90 million U.S. citizens participate in wildlife-dependent recreation (e.g. hunting, birding), providing direct benefit to those citizens and additional benefits to local communities and economics; and

WHEREAS, the Mississippi Flyway, which Missouri is a part of, hosts approximately 50% of U.S. duck hunters, and the vast majority of ducks these hunters pursue nest in the PPR each spring; and

WHEREAS, in order to conserve wetlands to include prairie pothole wetlands, Congress established legislation, beginning in 1985, to stop farmers who converted wetlands from receiving any USDA farm benefits and that legislation, commonly referred to as "swampbuster" has been renewed through consecutive Farm bills in 1990, 1996, 2002, 2008 and 2014, representing an abiding commitment to preserve wetlands; and

WHEREAS, the Secretary of USDA delegated responsibility for this program to NRCS as the lead technical agency; and

WHEREAS, the Secretary of USDA delegated responsibility for this program to NRCS as the lead technical agency; and

WHEREAS, the results of the January 2017 Office Inspector General (OIG) audit report *Wetland Conservation Provisions in the Prairie Pothole Region* (PPR) resulted in 75% of the wetlands OIG reviewed are no longer being protected and subject to drainage because wetlands were incorrectly classified as non-wetland primarily through the use of pre-1996 wetland maps; and

WHEREAS, the OIG report identified that pre-1996 wetland maps are not sufficient quality to make a determination of ineligibility for program benefits; and

WHEREAS, if the findings of the OIG audit hold true across the PPR an alarming percentage of wetlands are at risk of damage; and

WHEREAS, new state of the art wetland maps and technologies are available that can identify prairie pothole wetlands; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED that the Conservation of Missouri assembled at the Capitol Plaza Hotel, Jefferson City, MO, this 12th day of March 2017, recommend that the Natural Resource Conservation Service immediately discontinue use of the pre-1996 wetland maps and instead use the newest state of the art wetland maps and technologies to certify wetland determinations.