



## **Support cooperative conservation measures in the 2018 Farm Bill**

### **Actions Requested:**

- Support funding for the conservation title in the 2018 Farm Bill at least at the current level of about \$6 billion.
- Target 10% of conservation funds in the Farm Bill to protecting sources of potable water.
- Support efforts to emphasize source water protection as part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's overall water quality and water quantity mission because of the public health concern when drinking water sources are contaminated by agricultural runoff.

### **Administrative provisions**

Conservation programs at USDA can have a profound effect on the quality of our nation's waters. However, AWWA strongly believes in conservation activities in which water utilities and the communities they serve work in a *cooperative* manner with agricultural producers in their watersheds. In that light, we seek to include language in the Administration Section of the Food Security Act of 1985 affecting all conservation programs that would do four things (language attached):

1. Emphasize the importance of protection of sources of potable water.
2. Authorize the Secretary to work with drinking water utilities and State Technical Committees to identify local priority areas in each state.
3. Provide additional cost share and incentives for practices that have significant downstream water quality/quantity benefits but little on-farm benefit.
4. Target 10% of Conservation Title funds to protecting sources of potable water

### **Collaborative Approaches**

Cooperative, collaborative, and innovative programs such as the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) are a critical component of the conservation title. RCPP, established in the 2014 Farm Bill, includes several provisions that offer additional, more targeted, tools to help agricultural producers undertake effective nutrient management activities in critical watersheds to improve local water quality. RCPP also encourages partnerships between agricultural producers and municipal entities such as water and wastewater utilities and non-governmental organizations to help farmers manage nutrients more effectively. AWWA would like to see the following improvements made to RCPP:

- Increase mandatory funding for the program
- Specifically authorize source water protection as an eligible activity

- Give PL-566, The Watershed and Flood Prevention Program, the same flexibility as other donor programs within RCPP

#### Examples of current cooperative projects

Mills River Source Water Protection, North Carolina

Project Value: \$1.5 million (including match)

The goal of this project is to help protect 85,000 people in the North Carolina cities of Hendersonville, Asheville, and surrounding counties who depend on the Mills River for their drinking water. Activities will include streambank restoration and construction of an agrichemical handling facility. Other project activities will involve cattle operations where bank sloping, riparian fencing, and off-channel watering tanks will be implemented.

Otter Lake Source Water Protection Effort, Illinois

Project Value: \$1.7 million (including match)

Otter Lake lies in the heart of Illinois corn and soybean country; about 20 miles southwest of Springfield. The 765-acre lake's primary importance is as a source of drinking water for 14,500 rural residents. The lake has experienced excessive levels of sedimentation, and nutrients have brought about algae blooms and phosphorus loading. Project partners will pre-identify sites where conservation is needed. Then, working with producers, they will use high-tech precision conservation tools to further refine the areas needing work down to the sub-field level.

Milford Lake Watershed RCPP Project, Kansas

Project Value: >\$8 million (including match)

Milford Lake, the largest lake in Kansas, serves as a source of drinking water for about 800,000 people and provides habitat for many types of aquatic and terrestrial wildlife. In recent years, an annual formation of harmful algal blooms has hurt the lake's ability to serve as a reliable water source as well as habitat for wildlife. This project is one of the largest efforts undertaken within the Milford Lake Watershed to bring together partners to work with NRCS on implementation of conservation practices to reduce nutrient runoff.

#### Suggested legislative language:

#### SOURCE WATER PROTECTION THROUGH TARGETING OF AGRICULTURE PRACTICES

- (a) In general. —In carrying out any conservation program administered by the Secretary, the Secretary shall encourage water quality and quantity practices that protect sources of potable water (including protecting against public health threats) while mutually benefiting agricultural producers.
- (b) Collaboration with drinking water utilities and increased incentives. —In encouraging practices under subparagraph (a) the Secretary shall—
  - (1) work collaboratively with drinking water utilities and State Technical Committees to identify local priority areas; and
  - (2) for water quality practices that primarily result in off-farm benefits, offer increased incentives and higher cost share rates to producers.
- (c) For each of the fiscal years 2019 through 2023, at least 10% of funds or acres of any conservation program administered by the Secretary shall be made available to protecting sources of potable water.

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