

STATE OF THE BIRDS

2017



*The Farm Bill provides a crucial safety net,
for America's farmers and ranchers ... and America's birds*

For birds, the Farm Bill secures important habitat for more than 100 bird species and is America's largest source of funding for habitat conservation on private lands.

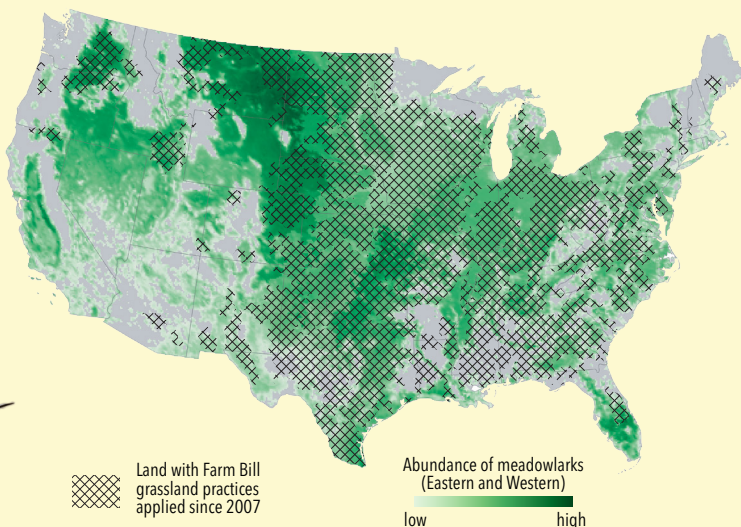
For landowners, Farm Bill conservation programs are part of the safety net for farmers, ranchers, and forest owners. It provides financial support for vital ecological services, such as clean water, and keeps working lands working.

"[The Farm Bill] helped us build a chemical and fertilizer containment facility... This is a good example of how ... Farm Bill dollars lead to improved water quality for everyone."

— FARMER DAVID WILLIAMS AT
A FARM BILL FIELD HEARING IN
FRANKENMUTH, MICHIGAN



Meadowlarks and the Farm Bill



Declining grassland birds, such as Eastern and Western Meadowlark, rely on habitat provided by Farm Bill conservation programs. Private lands support 97% of the breeding range of Eastern Meadowlarks, and 73% of the range of Western Meadowlarks.

TOP: WESTERN MEADOWLARK ON HAY BALE © TODD KLASSY, **LEFT:** WESTERN MEADOWLARK BY DONALD METZNER, **ABOVE:** MAP OF EASTERN AND WESTERN MEADOWLARK ABUNDANCE FROM EBIRD DATA, AND FARM BILL CONSERVATION PRACTICES FROM USDA-NRCS DATA.

THE FARM BILL IS AMERICA'S HARDEST WORKING LEGISLATION

FOR BIRDS, FARMERS, AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

Keeps birds off the Endangered Species List



Through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, the Sage Grouse Initiative has worked with 1,300 ranchers across the West to improve more than 5 million acres of sagebrush habitat—an area **twice as large as Yellowstone National Park**. These voluntary, incentive-based programs influenced the 2015 decision not to list the Greater Sage-Grouse as endangered.

“Without these [Farm Bill] lands ... sage-grouse would go extinct in two of the three sub-populations.”
— SCIENTIST ANDREW SHIRK ON THE FARM BILL AND SAGE-GROUSE IN EASTERN WASHINGTON

Pays huge natural dividends



Farm Bill conservation programs provide big benefits in the Prairie Pothole Region:

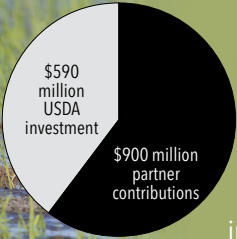
- 37 million** Increase in number of waterfowl from 1992 to 2011
- 44 billion** Pounds of sediment prevented from reaching waterways in 2013
- 150 billion** Gallons of floodwater catchment capacity
- \$430 million** Annual economic impact of hunting and birdwatching
- \$1 billion** Net benefit of ecological services (water quality and wildlife habitat) over 20 years

Creates eco-benefits for the entire farm

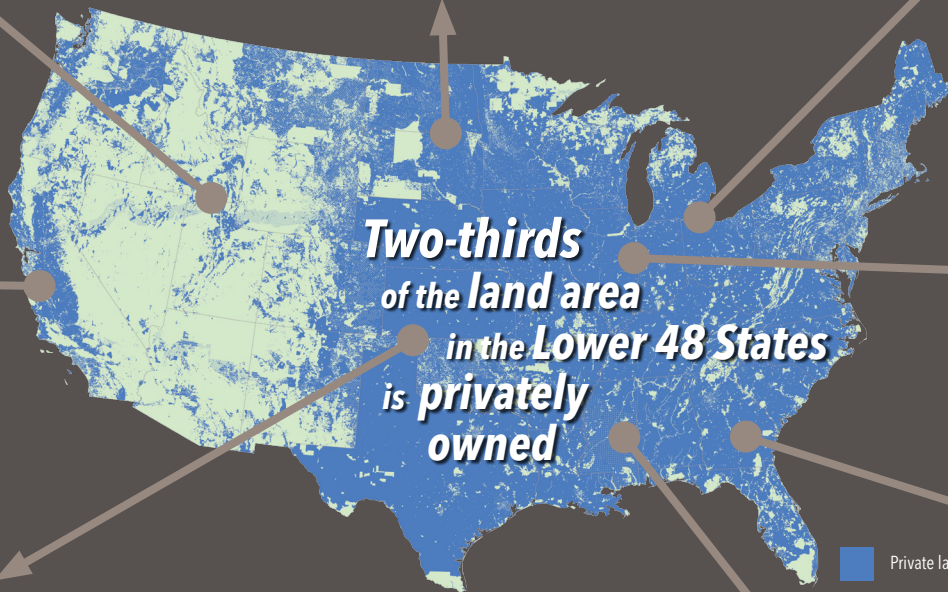
The ecological benefits created by Farm Bill grasslands also benefit the entire farm by improving soil health, and even providing pest control. In a study of rural farm areas in Wisconsin and Michigan, grassland plots within crop landscapes **doubled the numbers of grassland birds and increased the rates of predation of insect pest eggs by 30%.**



Promotes public-private partnerships



Through the Farm Bill's Regional Conservation Partnership Program, **20% of California's Central Valley rice acreage is temporarily flooded after harvest to provide important shallow water habitat** for thousands of migratory shorebirds. In the first 3 years of RCPP, USDA has used Farm Bill dollars to leverage partner contributions for \$1.49 billion in total conservation impact.



THERE ARE 1.5 BILLION ACRES OF PRIVATE LAND IN THE LOWER 48 STATES, INCLUDING 911 MILLION ACRES OF FARMLAND. MAP BY JOCELYN AYCRIGG, UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO. DATA SOURCE: U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, GAP ANALYSIS PROGRAM (GAP), MAY 2016. PROTECTED AREAS DATABASE OF THE UNITED STATES (PAD-US), VERSION 1.4 COMBINED FEATURE CLASS.

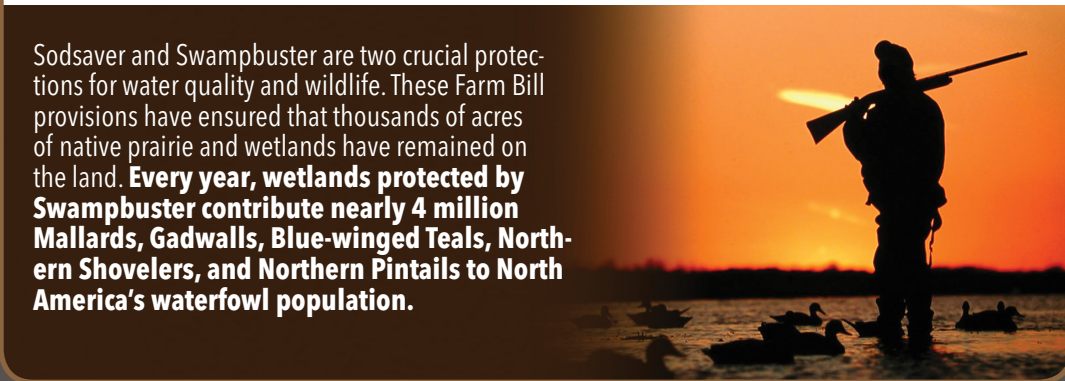
Delivers return on investment in birds and clean water



25x
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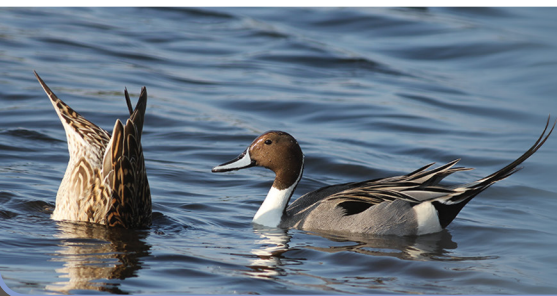
In Illinois farm counties with the highest CRP sign-up rates, **spring bird counts for Henslow's Sparrows are 25 times greater now** than they were before CRP. In the Chicagoland area, Henslow's Sparrow grassland habitat provided **\$900 million in flood control, groundwater recharge, and water purification services.**

Protects vital prairie grasslands and wetlands



Sodsaver and Swampbuster are two crucial protections for water quality and wildlife. These Farm Bill provisions have ensured that thousands of acres of native prairie and wetlands have remained on the land. **Every year, wetlands protected by Swampbuster contribute nearly 4 million Mallards, Gadwalls, Blue-winged Teals, Northern Shovelers, and Northern Pintails to North America's waterfowl population.**

Feeds North American waterfowl populations



34% of all **duck food energy on private lands in the Mississippi Alluvial Valley** comes from Farm Bill wetlands, a critical food source for waterfowl species such as Northern Pintail, Mallard, and Wood Duck.

Sustains a timber economy and forest birds



88% of the timber harvest in the United States comes from private working forests
83% of the population distribution of Eastern forest birds comes from private working forests

Farm Bill Forestry programs have grown the South's longleaf pine forests by 50% to 4.7 million acres, providing a source of timber supply that keeps working forests working and wildlife habitat for 36 bird species, including Northern Bobwhite quail and the endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker.

GREATER SAGE-GROUSE BY GERRIT VYN

BLACK-NECKED STILT BY CALIFORNIA RICE COMMISSION

DUCKS UNLIMITED

USFWS MOUNTAIN-PRAIRIE; NORTHERN SHOVELER BY PETE BLANCHARD

NORTHERN PINTAILS BY KEVIN MCGOWAN

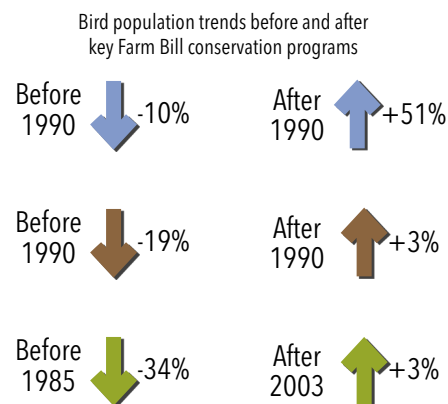
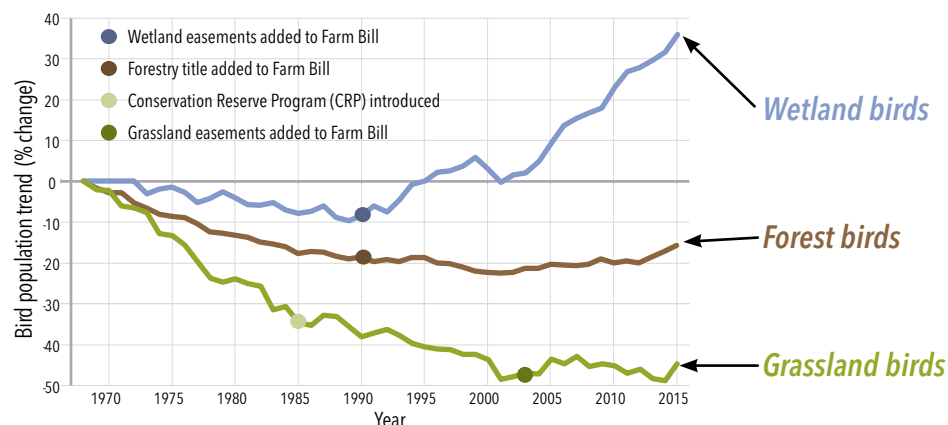
JASON JOHNSON

HENSLOW'S SPARROW BY JEFF TIMMONS/MACGULAY LIBRARY # 5554871

NORTHERN BOBWHITE BY JOAN CAMPBELL/MACGULAY LIBRARY # 3070771

Farm Bill conservation programs reverse bird population declines

After two decades of declines, wetland bird populations grew dramatically—and forest and grassland birds stabilized—following the introduction of key Farm Bill conservation programs.



GRAPH BY JOHN R. SAUER, U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

Conservation priorities for the next Farm Bill

1 Increase funding for Farm Bill conservation

The Farm Bill's voluntary, incentive-based conservation programs support farmers and ranchers financially while also supporting our natural infrastructure of grasslands and wetlands that provides flood mitigation, clean water, soil health, and wildlife habitat. The next Farm Bill is a prime opportunity to reinvest in programs that conserve and enhance habitat on marginal lands, secure easements to protect habitat, and encourage conservation partnerships on working lands.

2 Improve the impact of Farm Bill conservation programs on priority wildlife species

Farm Bill conservation programs should continue to incorporate state input to better target funding towards priority wildlife species identified in initiatives such as State Wildlife Action Plans, and require at least 10% of annual funding from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program to be used for wildlife conservation practices. Increasing the availability of long-term conservation incentive payments and contracts can also encourage sustained management and benefits for wildlife.

3 Enhance the capacity of Farm Bill public-private partnerships

Partnerships are the key to delivering Farm Bill programs. Partner biologist positions play a critical role by matching landowners with the conservation programs that best fit the landowners' wildlife and land-use goals. These positions, which are supported by state and NGO partners working with USDA, result in more farmers, ranchers, and landowners taking advantage of the Farm Bill conservation programs available to them.

4 Support the use of science to maximize Farm Bill conservation effectiveness

Investing in monitoring and evaluation of Farm Bill conservation programs enables science-based decision-making and strategic planning. Dedicated funding for the Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP) would allow for measurement and adjustment of multi-year conservation projects and improve conservation outcomes.



The U.S. North American Bird Conservation Initiative is a forum of government agencies, non-government organizations, and bird initiatives helping partners across the continent meet their common bird conservation objectives.

stateofthebirds.org

Suggested citation: North American Bird Conservation Initiative, U.S. Committee. 2017. The State of the Birds 2017: A Farm Bill Special Report. Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, N.Y. 4 pages.



Scientists documented an increase in Golden-winged Warbler numbers and breeding success on more than 5,700 acres of newly created nesting habitat across 150 private forests. These data are being used to fine-tune management recommendations to further benefit warbler breeding in working forests.

— CEAP ANALYSIS OF APPALACHIAN WORKING LANDS FOR WILDLIFE

GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLER BY GERRIT VAN

For citations and sources of information in this report, see stateofthebirds.org.