



Resolution 26-08

Resolution type: National Directive

Habitat Connectivity in Farm Bill Conservation Programs

Submitted by: Lewis and Clark CD

BACKGROUND DESCRIBING ISSUE

- Working lands and the farmers and ranchers who steward them play an important role in wildlife habitat conservation; working lands often allow for wildlife movement and provide winter range, summer range, and stopover habitat.¹
- As the nation's largest federal investment in private lands conservation, the Farm Bill provides billions of dollars annually to help farmers and ranchers improve soil health, water quality, and wildlife habitat.
- Landowners are not passive beneficiaries of conservation programs, they are lead investors. Western landowners spent at least \$407.5 million of their own money on conservation in 2024 in 11 Western states, above and beyond normal operating expenses and exceeding USDA EQIP spending (\$341M) and Pittman-Robertson/Dingell-Johnson combined (\$342.7M) in the same states.²
- Senator Tim Sheehy and Representative Ryan Zinke have introduced the Habitat Connectivity on Working Lands act into the US Senate and House, respectively. These are marker bills, meant to show support for key provisions to be included in larger pieces of legislation, like the Farm Bill. The House passed the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026 ('Farm Bill 2.0') in April 2026.³ This bill includes provisions from the Habitat Connectivity on Working Lands Act. The included provisions would help USDA scale up popular, locally led, voluntary big game migration pilot projects with private landowners, conservationists, and agriculture groups.
- Key provisions of the Habitat Connectivity on Working Lands Act include: allowing producers enrolled in Grassland CRP to receive EQIP and CSP cost-share on the same

¹ U.S. Reps. Gabe Vasquez and Ryan Zinke, "[The Habitat Connectivity on Working Lands Act](#)," fact sheet, 2025, p. 1.

² Lesli Allison, Shaleas Harrison, Avery Shawler and Louis Wertz, [The Scale of Landowner Investments in Conservation Across the American West](#), Western Landowners Alliance and Southwick Associates, 2026.

³ [Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026](#), H.R. 7567, 119th Cong. (2026)

acres ('program stacking'), so producers can be compensated for the forage they provide to wildlife while investing in habitat improvements while expressly preserving emergency grazing and haying access; adding wildlife habitat connectivity and migration corridors as a priority resource concern within RCPP critical conservation areas; making habitat connectivity one of the criteria for increased EQIP payment rates; incorporating nonstructural livestock management tools such as virtual fencing into USDA conservation practice standards; making virtual fencing a high-priority USDA research and extension area.

- The Senate Agriculture Committee is developing its own farm bill, and negotiations between the chambers are ongoing, making this a critical window to ensure habitat connectivity provisions are retained in a final Farm Bill.

Why this matters to conservation districts:

- These are voluntary, incentive-based tools delivered through existing USDA programs.
- The bill's provisions are commonsense, largely no-cost adjustments to existing Farm Bill programs that give producers more flexibility and more compensation options for stewardship.

ACTUAL RESOLUTION TO BE INCLUDED IN NACD POLICY BOOK IF ADOPTED

- NACD supports the inclusion of habitat connectivity and wildlife corridor provisions in Farm Bill conservation programs through voluntary, incentive-based, locally led approaches that support agricultural producers.
- NACD encourages USDA to prioritize habitat connectivity across its conservation programs in a manner consistent with locally led conservation and private property rights.

SPONSOR(S) ACTIONS TO DATE

- LCCD has not initiated any federal advocacy on the Farm Bill.
- This policy aligns with the new USDA Migratory Big Game Initiative that NRCS and other partners are working to implement.

HOW WILL YOUR DISTRICT CONTINUE TO SUPPORT, BE INVOLVED WITH, AND TRACK THIS RESOLUTION AFTER IT GOES TO NACD?

- LCCD will work alongside MACD and NACD to support this resolution at the national level. LCCD can provide additional policy support and expertise as needed.

ARE THERE ANY EXISTING MACD (Montana) POLICIES THAT THIS WOULD IMPACT OR INTERACT WITH?

- **Crested Wheatgrass and Smooth Brome in CRP (13-02):** MACD requests the Montana Farm Service Agency to allow existing stands of crested wheatgrass, smooth brome grass and Kentucky bluegrass in environmentally sensitive areas of CRP to earn enough points to stay in “as is” as resource-conserving grasses with some wildlife value.

Next Sunset Review: 2026

Subcommittee Recommendation: Retain

ARE THERE ANY EXISTING NACD (National) POLICIES THAT THIS WOULD IMPACT OR INTERACT WITH?

This resolution aligns with NACD’s existing Farm Bill advocacy. Existing policies within the NACD policy book that this could interact with include:

- NACD supports offering stewardship incentives for sustainable ecosystems. (95) AO2021/TBR2026
- NACD supports protection and improvement of riparian habitat and critical season ranges for livestock and wildlife benefit. (84) AO2025/TBR2030
- NACD supports recognizing agricultural working wetlands for benefiting wildlife habitats through an incentive and reward mechanism. (08) AO2025/TBR2030
- NACD supports State Acres For Wildlife Enhancement that are not subject to the County and National CRP cap in any ongoing legislation dealing with the Food Security Act of 1985. AO2026/TBR2031
- NACD supports a balanced program of resource conservation, development, and efforts to provide adequate food, cover, and water of suitable quantity and quality for fish and wildlife. AO2024/TBR2029
- NACD does not support NRCS funding that perpetuates single species wildlife initiatives that are not a locally-led priority. (12) AO2024/TBR2029
- NACD supports research on livestock and wildlife inter-relationships. (84) AO2025/TBR2030
- NACD supports fencing as a last resort for riparian area rehabilitation when other methods are less expensive and of lower impact to livestock grazing, wildlife movement, and recreational activities. (92) AO2021/TBR2026
- NACD supports the development of programs to preserve and improve farm windbreaks, shelterbelts and timbered areas to promote wildlife habitat, wind erosion control, and energy conservation, among others (02) AO2024/TBR2029

HOW WOULD THIS POLICY IMPACT NACD?

This resolution aligns with NACD’s existing Farm Bill advocacy rather than creating a new workstream and would have minimal impacts to budget and staff time. This resolution aligns with MACD and NACD’s imperative for voluntary, locally-led conservation.

IF APPROPRIATE, POTENTIAL FISCAL IMPACT ON THE FEDERAL BUDGET

The intent of the resolution is to support provisions that add flexibility to existing authorities rather than creating new programs. This should not have any significant impact on the federal budget.

MEETING AND DATE ADOPTED BY SPONSORING ENTITY

8/13/2026

AUTHORIZED SIGNATURE(S) AND TITLE(S)

Jeff Ryan, LCCD Board Chair

Addendum

For LCCD/MACD reference:

- **Zinke press release:**

“The bill directs USDA to provide more resources and incentives for farmers and ranchers to improve habitat connectivity and wildlife movement on working lands, prioritizing wildlife corridors within critical conservation areas under the Regional Conservation Partnership Program and building on efforts like Wyoming’s Big Game Conservation Partnership. It encourages practices like virtual fencing to better manage livestock and expand USDA research and guidance on connectivity tools. Congressman Zinke has long led on this issue, including as Secretary of the Interior when he signed Secretarial Order 3362 in 2018 to work with western states on improving big-game winter range and migration corridors on federal lands while respecting state authority and private property rights, a framework that helped states like Wyoming protect key mule deer migration corridors in southwest Wyoming.”⁴

- **Sheehy Press release regarding Habitat Connectivity on Working Lands:**

“Whether you’re a farmer, rancher, private landowner, or public land hunter, this is a bipartisan commonsense bill that we can all get behind. By empowering locals with voluntary incentives, not heavy-handed mandates, the Habitat Connectivity on Working Lands Act will help us protect our outdoor heritage for generations to come. This is a win-win and I’m proud to be leading the effort in the U.S. Senate,” said Sheehy.”⁵

⁴ Office of U.S. Rep. Ryan Zinke, “[Farm Bill Passes House: Zinke Secures Huge Wins to Repeal Cottonwood, Support Farmers & Ranchers, Improve Wildlife Conservation](#),” press release, April 30, 2026.

⁵ Office of U.S. Sen. Martin Heinrich, “Heinrich, Sheehy Reintroduce Legislation to Scale Up Locally Led Big Game Migration Initiatives,” press release, March 26, 2026.