

June 21, 2011

The Vice President
Executive Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20501

The Honorable Daniel K. Inouye
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jon Kyl
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Max Baucus
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Eric Cantor
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable James E. Clyburn
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Vice President Biden, Senators Inouye, Kyl, Baucus and Representatives Cantor, Clyburn, and Van Hollen:

We are a diverse group of organizations representing millions of Americans committed to the conservation of our nation's fresh water, air, land, productive soils, oceans, fish and wildlife, and places for outdoor recreation and to the industries and rural communities these resources support. We are writing to express our deep concern about the fate in the budget negotiations now underway of federal programs that sustain our nation's natural resources.

We are concerned that a failure to reach consensus on how to address the multiple causes of the budget deficit will put undue pressure on domestic discretionary spending generally, and on both discretionary and mandatory spending dedicated to natural resource conservation.

As you know, conservation programs are grouped in "Function 300" of the federal budget. This is America's "natural resources budget," which spans a number of programs across the Interior, Agriculture, Commerce and other departments. It represents the sum of our country's remarkable, successful, and bi-partisan 100-year effort to conserve the natural resources that are a foundation for the health, safety, prosperity, national security, and quality of life of the American people.

With federal spending on land, water, ocean, and wildlife programs just 1.26% of the federal budget in 2010, it is clear that this spending is not a primary cause of the current federal budget crisis. Over the past 30 years, federal expenditures have increased dramatically over 100% in real terms. At the same time, spending on natural resources has been stagnant with negligible growth of approximately 2% from 1980 to 2009.

And yet, immense progress has been made in improving the health and quality of our environment. Our water, air, bays and estuaries are cleaner. Risks from toxic chemicals have been reduced. Land and water valued for fish and wildlife habitat, outdoor recreation and historic importance have been set aside for public use. The cost-share and reserve programs of the Conservation Title of the Farm Bill, most of which fall into the category of mandatory spending, have demonstrated that government can partner with farmers, ranchers and forest land owners to protect and restore natural habitat on millions of acres and reduce soil erosion and other impacts of farming while increasing agricultural productivity. Many marine fisheries have been restored. Water resources for human consumption, industrial use and agriculture have been better protected.

The result of our investments in conservation has been to help secure the use and enjoyment of America's natural resources on into the future. Such use remains a large and essential part of our country's economy. According to USDA, farm and farm-related employment includes about 24 million jobs. Estimates by the American Forest and Paper Association are that forest management and forest-dependent industries account for approximately 5 percent of the total U.S. manufacturing GDP, produce about \$175 billion in products annually, and employ nearly 900,000 people. According to NOAA, commercial fishing supports one million full- and part-time jobs and generates \$116 billion in revenue. A study by US Fish and Wildlife Service found that hunting, angling and wildlife-dependent recreation contribute \$122 billion annually to our national economy. Much of this economic activity is located in rural areas where there are fewer other options. Natural resources-based products represent a significant proportion of the export sector so essential to our economic health.

And government investments in conservation have leveraged billions of dollars in non-federal capital for conservation including the personal resources of America's private landowners.

The recent flooding along the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers is a good example of the need for continuing conservation funding. The protection of natural floodplains, in places like the Atchafalaya Basin in Louisiana, allowed floodwaters to be diverted from the mainstem of the river, saving costly damage to urban areas. In a time of economic constraints, continuing investment in such "natural capital" can be the least-cost and most effective way of avoiding the risks of natural hazards and meeting human needs.

But now, we fear that ongoing budget negotiations could result in top line cuts that, without even considering the merits of the nation's key conservation programs, will result in devastating impacts for the future of America's environment. These fears have been realized in both the House Appropriations Committee's FY12 Agriculture and Related Agencies bill, which imposes severe reductions to many Farm Bill Conservation Programs, and the Final FY11 Continuing Resolution, which included disproportionate cuts to programs like the Land and Water Conservation Fund and Forest Legacy. All of these programs help keep our citizens on working farms, ranches, and forests that produce agriculture and forest commodities while maintaining natural resources and environmental quality. Further, these programs provide benefits to the rural economy through hunting and angling opportunities provided by these private lands.

Of course we recognize the need to reduce the size of the federal budget, and conservation should do its share. There is room for creativity and for improving the coordination, efficiency and cost-effectiveness of individual programs, but the House-passed budget resolution for FY 12 cuts all natural resource programs by 18% from 2010 levels and proposes to cut this group of programs by a total of 46% by 2016. The federal budget cannot and should not be balanced on the back of conservation. The natural resource budget should not be cut disproportionately to the budget as a whole. Sufficient funding should remain to keep protection and conservation of America's exceptional environment operational and successful.

In 1912 Theodore Roosevelt said, “There can be no greater issue than that of conservation in this country.” Over the last century, in good times and bad, with broad bi-partisan support, America has invested in the conservation of land and water, productive soils and wildlife habitat for the benefit of the American people. We have done so in the belief that, regardless of the other demands of society, each generation has a responsibility to pass on to the next natural resources that are healthy, clean, productive and beautiful. We hope and trust the current budget negotiations will not abandon this responsibility.

Thank you for your consideration.

National Organizations

Access Fund	Land Conservation Associates
Agricultural Stewardship Association	Land Trust Alliance
American Alpine Club	National Alliance of Forest Owners
American Bird Conservancy	National Association of Conservation Districts
American Farmland Trust	National Association of Forest Service Retirees
American Fisheries Society	National Association of State Foresters
American Fly Fishing Trade Association	National Association of University Forest Resources Programs
American Forest & Paper Association	National Parks Conservation Association
American Forest Foundation	National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
American Forests	National Wildlife Federation
American Hiking Society	National Wildlife Refuge Association
American Land Conservancy	National Woodland Owners Association
American Rivers	Natural Land Institute
American Whitewater	New Forests Inc.
Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies	Ocean Conservancy
Association of State Floodplain Managers	Organic Farming Research Foundation
Biomass Energy Resource Center	Outdoor Alliance
Blue Goose Alliance	Outdoor Industry Association
CarbonVerde, LLC	Outdoors America
Center for Biological Diversity	Plum Creek
Center for Large Landscape Conservation	Quail Unlimited
Center for Rural Affairs	Restore America's Estuaries
Coastal States Organization	Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Community Consultants	Scenic America
Conservation Law Foundation	Sustainable Forestry Initiative
Defenders of Wildlife	The Conservation Fund
Eastern Forest Partnership	The Garden Club of America
Ecological Farming Association	The Lyme Timber Company
Ecosystem Management Consultants	The Nature Conservancy
Endangered Species Coalition	The Wilderness Society
Environmental and Energy Study Institute	Tierra Environmental
Environmental Defense Fund	Trust for Public Land
Environmental Working Group	Wildlife Forever
Food System Economic Partnership	Winter Wildlands Alliance
Forest Capital Partners	World Wildlife Fund
Friends-of-U.S. National Wildlife Refuges	
Hardwood Federation	
International Mountain Bicycling Association	
Izaak Walton League of America	
Kinney Land Company	

Regional and State Organizations

1000 Friends of Maryland
Ahahui Malama i Ka Lokahi
Alabama A&M University
Alabama Coastal Foundation
Alabama Forest Resources Center
Alabama Innovation Engine
Appalachian Mountain Club
Appalachian Trail Conservancy
ArborOne Farm Credit
Battin Farm
Beaufort County Open Land Trust
Bedminster Regional Land Conservancy
Bernheim Arboretum and Research Forest
Big Blackfoot Riverkeeper Inc.
Black Warrior Riverkeeper
Blue Mountain Audubon Society
Blue Mountain Land trust
Branford Land Trust
Cacapon & Lost Rivers Land Trust, Inc.
Cahaba River Society
Cahaba Riverkeeper
Cane Creek Canyon Nature Preserve
Capital Region Land Conservancy
Capitol Land Trust
Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy
Cascade Land Conservancy
Catawba Riverkeeper Foundation, Inc.
Cazenovia Preservation Foundation
Center For Carolina Living
Central Coast Land Conservancy
Charles River Watershed Association
Chelan-Douglas Land Trust
Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Chicago Wilderness
Choctawhatchee Riverkeeper
Citizens United to Protect the Maurice River and its Tributaries, Inc.
Coastal Conservation League
Columbia Land Trust
Community Open Land Trust
Congaree Land Trust
Connecticut Audubon Society
Connecticut Ornithological Association
Conservation Council for Hawaii
Conservation Federation of Missouri
Conservation Resources
Conservation Voters of South Carolina
Countryside Conservancy
Cragmoor Conservancy, Inc.
D&R Greenway Land Trust
Davidson Lands Conservancy
Delaware River Greenway Partnership
Delaware Riverkeeper Network
Development and Conservation Management, Inc
Eastern Sierra Land Trust
Edison Wetlands Association
Endangered Habitats League
Environmental League of Massachusetts
Farmington River Watershed Association
Fire Island Land Trust
Five Valleys Land Trust
Flint River Watershed Coalition
Friend of Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuge
Friends of Acadia
Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges
Friends of Anahuac Refuge
Friends of Back Bay
Friends of Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge
Friends of Camas National Wildlife Refuge
Friends of Congaree Swamp
Friends of Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge
Friends of Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge
Friends of Haystack Rock
Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space
Friends of Kenai National Wildlife Refuge
Friends of Las Vegas National Wildlife Refuge
Friends of Necedah National Wildlife Refuge
Friends of Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge
Friends of Noxubee Refuge
Friends of Pondicherry National Wildlife Refuge
Friends of Princeton Nursery Lands
Friends of Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge
Friends of Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge
Friends of Sunkkhaze Meadows National Wildlife Refuge
Friends of the 500th
Friends of the Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge
Friends of the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge
Friends of the Columbia Gorge
Friends of the Lower Suwannee & Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges
Friends of the National Wildlife Refuegs of Rhode Island
Friends of the Neches River
Friends of the Prairie Learning Center
Friends of the Red River National Wildlife Refuge
Friends of the Refuge Headwaters
Friends of the Tampa Bay National Wildlife Refuges, Inc.
Friends of Tualatin River National Wildlife Refuge

Friends of Wake Soil and Water Conservation District
 Friends of Wertheim National Wildlife Refuge
 Gathering Waters Conservancy
 Genesis Farm
 George Rogers Clark Land trust
 Georgia Conservancy
 Georgia Land Conservation Center
 Great Egg Harbor Watershed Association
 Great Swamp Conservancy, Inc.
 Greater Irvington Land Trust
 Greater Newark Conservancy
 GrowFood Carolina
 Hampshire County Farmland Protection Board
 Hawaii Community Stewardship Network
 Hawaiian Islands Land Trust
 Hawaii's Thousand Friends
 Heart of the Lakes Center for Land Conservation Policy
 Heart of the Rockies Initiative
 Highlands Campaign
 Highstead
 Hudson Highlands Land Trust
 Hunterdon Land Trust
 Huron River Watershed Council
 Huyck Preserve and Biological Research Station
 Illinois Audubon Society
 Illinois Environmental Council
 Indian River Lakes Conservancy
 Indiana Division of the Izaak Walton League of America
 Institute for Ecological Health
 Ipswich River Watershed Association
 Jackson County Tourism
 Jefferson Land Trust
 Jersey Off Road Bicycle Association
 Kamakani O Kohala Ohana -- Kako'o
 Kentucky Forest Industries Association
 Kentucky Woodland Owners Association
 Keweenaw Land Trust
 Kilauea Point Natural History Association
 Kingston Greenways Association
 Kittitas Conservation Trust
 Lake County Forest Preserve District
 Lancaster Farmland Trust
 Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain
 Land Trust of Arkansas
 Land Trust of the Eastern Panhandle of West Virginia
 Land Trust of Virginia
 Leelanau Conservancy
 Life of the Land
 Livable Hawaii Kai Hui
 Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust, Inc.
 Lummi Island Heritage Trust
 Maine Coast Heritage Trust
 Maine Forest Service
 Mass Climate Action Network
 Mendocino Land Trust
 Mesa Land Trust
 Midwest Environmental Advocates
 Migratory Bird Research Group
 Minnesota Forestry Association
 Mississippi Department of Marine Resources
 Mississippi River Corridor - Tennessee
 Mississippi's Lower Delta Partnership
 Mobile Baykeeper
 Mohonk Preserve, Inc.
 Mojave Desert Land Trust
 Molalla River Alliance
 Monadnock Conservancy
 Montana Association of Land Trusts
 Montana Audubon
 Montana Wildlife Federation
 Montgomery Nature Conservancy
 Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust
 Mount Pleasant Land Conservancy
 National Association of Clean Water Agencies
 National Committee for the New River
 Natural Capital Development, Inc.
 Natural Resources Initiative of Mississippi
 Naturaland Trust
 Neponset River Watershed Association
 New England Forestry Foundation
 New England Wood Pellet LLC
 New Jersey Audubon Society
 New Jersey Conservation Foundation
 New Jersey Highlands Coalition
 New Jersey Recreation & Park Association
 New River Land Trust
 New York - New Jersey Trail Conference
 New York Agricultural Land Trust
 New York-New Jersey Trail Conference
 Nisqually Land Trust
 North Carolina Coastal Land Trust
 North Olympic Land Trust
 North Shore Land Alliance
 Northern Forest Center
 Northern Sierra Partnership
 Northern Virginia Conservation Trust
 Northwest Watershed Institute
 Oblong Land Conservancy
 Ohio Forestry Association
 Okanogan Valley Land Council

Openlands	The Friends of the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge
Orange County Land Trust	The Friends of the Southwest Louisiana National Wildlife Refuges and Wetlands
Orient Land Trust	The Greater Jackson County Chamber of Commerce
Pacific Crest Trail Association	The Land Connection
Pacific Forest Trust	The Land Conservancy for Southern Chester County
Parker River Clean Water Association	The Land Conservancy of New Jersey
Passaic River Coalition	The Land Trust of North Alabama
PCC Farmland Trust	The Longleaf Alliance
Peconic Land Trust	The Mountaineers
Piedmont Environmental Council	The Preserve Graydon Coalition
Pinelands Preservation Alliance	The Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham
PONO Pacific	The Trustees of Reservations
Prairie State Conservation Coalition	Three Village Community Trust
Protect Our Wetlands, Water and Woods	Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust
Putnam County Coalition to Preserve Open Space	University Center for Economic Development, Tuscaloosa, AL
Putnam Land Conservancy	University of Wisconsin-Madison
Redwood Coast Land Conservancy	Upper Raritan Watershed Association
Regional Plan Association	Upper Savannah Land Trust
Richland County Conservation Commission	Upper Valley Land Trust
Richland County Soil & Water Conservation District	Upstate Forever
Ridges to Rivers Open Space Network	Valley Conservation Council
Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust	Vashon-Maury Island Land Trust
River Alliance of Wisconsin	Vermont Land Trust
Roots of Change	Virginia Eastern Shore Land Trust, Inc.
Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy	Wallowa Land Trust, Inc
Save Mount Diablo	Warwick Conservancy
Save the Dunes Conservation Fund	Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition
Scenic Hudson	Weeks Bay Foundation
Scenic Virginia	West Virginia Land Trust
Schoolhouse of Wonder	Western Nebraska Resources
Seattle Audubon Society	Western Pennsylvania Conservancy
Sebasticook Regional Land Trust	Western Rivers Conservancy
Sequoia Riverlands Trust	Wheeler Wildlife Refuge Association
Sheepscot Valley Conservation Association	Whidbey Camano Land Trust
Shining Mountain Land Services	Wild South
Skagit Land Trust	Windward Ahupua`a Alliance
Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests	Wisconsin Environment
Soda Mountain Wilderness Council	Wisconsin Lakes
Somers Land Trust	Wisconsin Land & Water Conservation Association
South Carolina Aquarium	Wisconsin Wildlife Federation
South Carolina Businesses for Clean Energy	Woodstock Land Conservancy
South Carolina Conservation Credit Exchange	York Land Trust
South Carolina Wildlife Federation	
Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition	
Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy	
Spokane Riverkeeper	
Surfrider Foundation, Hawaii Chapters	
Tennessee Riverkeeper	
The Clinch Coalition	
The Conservancy of Montgomery County	