



# **FY 2013 Presidential budget calls for deep cuts in conservation program**

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The Mississippi River flows through the heart of our nation. It nourishes our farms, providing food and other resources to the entire world. The River sustains 18 million of us with its drinking water, it gives us a place to play along its banks and it gives us hope that future generations can continue to live and thrive in the heartland. But today, our Big River is in big trouble. Increased demands on farmland to produce commodity crops, biofuels and textiles result in increased demands on the River that functions as a backbone to our nation. Funding for conservation programs that protect the River must be preserved.

President Obama's proposed \$3.8 trillion budget for FY 2013 emphasizes savings by cutting direct payment-subsidies to producers and streamlining programs and costs, including those that restore and protect the nation's lands and waters for future generations.

The proposal would cut Farm Bill conservation programs to \$827 million, down from the \$898 million appropriated in FY 2011. These lower numbers will likely frame the debate that will take shape as Congress considers the 2012 Farm Bill.

"While it's clear that this is the time for cuts, we believe they can't be haphazard. Our government's job is to provide basic services to its people – including sustaining healthy land that can sustain us," said Brian Moore, Director of Budget and Appropriations for the National Audubon Society. "Farmer demand for Farm Bill conservation programs continually outstrips the dollar amount appropriated."

Over the years, Congress has created effective and efficient conservation programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Stewardship Program,

Wetlands Reserve Program and Conservation Reserve Program. These programs provide financial support to farmers to implement agricultural and conservation practices that reduce on-farm pollution, create wildlife habitat, restore wetlands and protect our water quality. These programs also help to alleviate stress being placed on the land and the environment as farmers attempt to meet the nation's needs for food, fiber and fuel production.

"We've been making the same mistakes over and over – cutting conservation programs first," said Christine Favilla, Three Rivers Project Coordinator for the Illinois Sierra Club. "Farming is a risky business; thus protecting crop insurance and other parts of the safety net is a top priority for producers. But, nationally, we never think to consider conservation programs as an integral part of the long-term safety net. This needs to change"

Following the trend of years past, cuts were made in Farm Bill conservation programs including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Stewardship Program and Wetlands Reserve Program, among others, with over \$1 billion in permanent cuts. The budget calls for reducing conservation funding by \$1.8 billion over 10 years "by better targeting conservation funding to the most cost-effective and environmentally-beneficial programs and practices." These cuts are so targeted, in fact, that unless it is reauthorized in the next Farm Bill, the Wetlands Reserve Program is effectively eliminated by this budget.

The Mississippi River Network, a coalition of 38 organizations, advocates better management alternatives that include effective funding levels and implementation of Farm Bill conservation programs.

As residents of a Mississippi River state, we all have a responsibility to help protect this national treasure. And as representatives sent to Washington, our legislators must protect the conservation programs in the FY 2013 federal budget.

The Illinois Sierra Club and National Audubon Society are members of the Mississippi River Network, a coalition of organizations working to protect the land, water and people of the Mississippi River. The Network works with an ever-growing number of River Citizens through its 1 Mississippi program. River Citizens are dedicated to learning more about their River and taking action to protect it.