

Feb. 5, 2014

A BIG WIN IN CONGRESS

**AFTER YEARS OF WRANGLING, A COMMON SENSE FARM BILL IS ON THE PRESIDENT'S DESK.
BIPARTISAN COOPERATION MADE THE DIFFERENCE**

Yesterday afternoon (Tuesday, Feb. 4) the U.S. Senate passed the Farm Bill Conference Report and sent it to President Obama for his signature. The speed of the final action is impressive. It was only last week that the four leaders of the House and Senate Agriculture Committees (two Republicans, two Democrats) reached agreement on their monumental Farm Bill Conference Report. Two days later the House passed that Bill Conference Report with a bi-partisan vote of 251-166. On Jan. 31 the Senate approved cloture (to limit debate) and yesterday approved the Conference Report by a solid margin of 68-32. The result is a good, common sense Farm Bill, all 1000 pages of it. Compromise does take a lot of words.

Although there are contested provisions, including reduced payments to farmers and a reduction in food stamps, the President has indicated he will sign it. Republicans and Democrats both had to compromise, and they did. They streamlined programs and made cuts where needed. The surprising large positive vote in both houses confirms just how important the Farm Bill is to our economy and the public. This is one bill that forward thinking legislators want to be sure they are in the "yes" vote column. In this case, serious debate of fundamental issues, and very hard work by the Committee Chairs broke long-standing resistance and opened new opportunities.

For woodland owners, about everything NWOA and our many partners in the forest community felt was critical is in there. Here is a sample:

- Includes a limit to EPA's regulatory reach as well as "citizen lawsuits" over forest road stormwater runoff. The bill adopts the most important terms of the Silviculture Regulatory Consistency Act, proposed to resolve the was drafted to resolve "Forest Roads lawsuit." Hopefully this saga is over.
- Consolidates twelve successful landowner assistance programs into five, with improved eligibility and program objectives.
- Permanently authorizes the Stewardship Contracting Program which allows private contractors to bid on forest health and improvement projects on federal land. This provision will be especially useful in treating overstocked and fire prone federal timberlands whose poor condition presents a real wildfire danger to rural communities as well as adjacent private woodlands.
- Improves the Forest Inventory & Analysis program to make supply data more useful to investors in forest industries to produce American grown wood.

A detailed report about the forestry provisions in the Farm Bill will appear in the Spring, 2014 issue of National Woodlands Magazine.

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