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Financial Assistance Programs Division
Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Room 5237-S
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20250-2890

To Whom It May Concern:

The US Department of Agriculture's (USDA) recent proposed rules to implement changes in the Farm Bill would make the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) USDA's largest 'working lands' conservation program. Unfortunately, the proposed rules fail to target the program aggressively enough to address climate change, or to address key fish and wildlife problems caused by crop and livestock production.

We ask the USDA to add Climate Change as a sixth national priority for EQIP. This would provide funds to help farmers and ranchers reduce greenhouse gas emissions from farm and ranch operations, and increase long-term carbon storage in soils through better grassland and cropland management.

We also ask that EQIP funds be made available to farmers with expiring Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres that will not be re-enrolled in the CRP. This would help protect some of the wildlife and environmental values of the land by assisting the owners or managers interested in adopting sustainable, well-managed grass-based livestock production practices rather than putting the land back into row crops.

Finally, we ask that you ensure that "water conservation" projects funded through EQIP result in an actual reduction in net water consumed, so they will improve stream flows or groundwater levels at the source of water for the farm. Ensuring adequate stream flows is critical when considering the pressures from both climate change and increased demands for water nationwide.

We appreciate your consideration of the above issues.

Sincerely,

Kim Erndt
River Restoration and Habitat Conservation Specialist
Prairie Rivers Network