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2008 Farm Bill Comments (Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program)  
Financial Assistance Programs Division  
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service  
P.O. Box 2890, Room 5237-S  
Washington, DC 20013

Via Fax: (202) 720-4265

RE: COMMENTS ON WILDLIFE HABITAT INCENTIVES PROGRAM

To Whom It May Concern:

I am executive director of the Mississippi Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Some of our more significant accomplishments include conceptualization of the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), the Healthy Forests Reserve Program and the Emergency Forest Restoration Program, helping pass the Grassland Reserve Program and developing many of the components of the Wetlands Reserve Program. I am a certified fisheries biologist, a certified wildlife biologist and a private landowner. My family's 140 acres have been in the family since 1833, during which time it has undergone many changes from cotton to cattle/corn to timber/wildlife today.

I appreciate the opportunity to submit the following comments.

As you might imagine I take great pride in this program. I especially want to commend the Natural Resources Conservation Service for a superb job in delivering this program since its inception. You are to be commended on developing over 25,600 agreements on over 4 million acres of fish and wildlife habitat. That is truly outstanding.

Basically, I have one comment. While I agree in principle that state-owned land should not qualify, there are unintended consequences of prohibiting such land. One shining example of the WHIP is the efforts to remove dams in New England, primarily for Atlantic salmon. The action by the Congress, in conference I might add, to

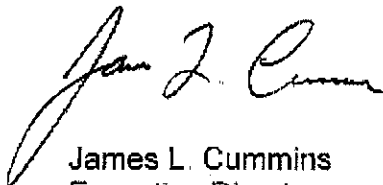
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prohibit state-owned land from qualifying is significant. While I would agree that we should not enroll thousands of acres of public land, the practice of dam removal is different. The removal of a dam, which in some states occurs on private land and some states on public land, depending on how land under public waters is defined, should not be deterred where there is a significant benefit that would accrue to private land. For example, in Mississippi, land under a stream or river would be classified as private land; in Louisiana, the same type of land would be classified as state-owned land. Nevertheless, this prohibition, especially on such a small acreage as that underneath a dam, is prohibiting the restoration of fish passages and riparian areas on thousands of acres of private land. This is certainly NOT the original intent of Congress, nor do I think of the current one.

I strongly encourage you to work to develop a solution to this issue so this much needed restoration can proceed. You might consider granting a waiver for state owned land where the acreage impact is very small and the impact to private landowners is very large.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments. If you desire to discuss them further, I can be reached at (662) 686-3375 or through e-mail at [jcummins@wildlifemiss.org](mailto:jcummins@wildlifemiss.org).

Sincerely,



James L. Cummins  
Executive Director