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Testimony to the Senate Committee on Agriculture,  
Nutrition, and Forestry

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Chairwoman Stabenow, Ranking Member Roberts and Members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, on behalf of the more than 1 million members and supporters of Ducks Unlimited from all fifty states, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today about the critical relationship between agriculture and the conservation of our nation's wetland and migratory bird resources.

My name is Becky Humphries and I am the Director of Ducks Unlimited's Great Lakes/Atlantic Regional Office located in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Our region includes 21 states in the Midwest and Northeast portions of our country, encompassing a wide variety of agriculture, water resources, people and wildlife. Prior to joining Ducks Unlimited, I served as the Director of Michigan Department of Natural Resources, including a 32-year career with the agency in a multitude of responsibilities. I have also served on a wide variety of national and international committees related to fish and wildlife through the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

Ducks Unlimited got its start in 1937, during the "dust bowl days" when North America's drought stricken waterfowl populations plunged to dangerous and unprecedented lows. Determined not to sit idly by while the continent's waterfowl dwindled beyond recovery, a small group of sportsmen joined together to form what soon became Ducks Unlimited. The mission

was simple: Habitat Conservation. Adhering to that single mission for decades, Ducks Unlimited is now the world's largest and most effective private wetlands and waterfowl conservation organization. DU is able to deliver its on-the-ground conservation work by forging partnerships with private individuals, landowners, agencies, scientific communities and other entities.

Waterfowl obviously are not the only beneficiaries of DU's habitat work. Wetlands improve the overall health of our environment by recharging and purifying groundwater, moderating floods and reducing soil erosion. Wetlands are nature's most productive ecosystems, providing critical habitat to more than 900 wildlife species and invaluable recreation opportunities for people to enjoy. The United States alone has lost more than half of its original wetlands and continues to lose more than 80,000 acres of wetlands crucial to wildlife each year.

DU's approach to wetlands and waterfowl conservation is continental in its scope and approach. To date, Ducks Unlimited and its thousands and thousands of partners have conserved approximately 4.3 million acres of critical wildlife habitat in the United States, 6.2 million acres in Canada, and 1.8 million acres in Mexico.

Conservation on such a large scale would not be possible without working with agricultural producers from across the country. This is perhaps what makes DU one of the more unique conservation groups: we actually work with farmers and ranchers to restore and improve the landscape for waterfowl and other wildlife. Whether its rice producers in California or the lower-Mississippi alluvial valley, ranchers in the prairie pothole region of the northern Great Plains, specialty crop farmers in Michigan, or any place in between, Ducks Unlimited staff are on the landscape assisting farmers and ranchers to conserve, restore and enhance critical habitat for North America's migratory birds. And underpinning most of these projects are the programs that comprise the Conservation Title of the Farm Bill.

Being that it is Great Lakes week in Washington, DC, I thought I would focus my time on the impacts of conservation programs on the Great Lakes watershed. The Great Lakes are a national treasure and contain 20 percent of the world's fresh water. They supply drinking water for millions of Americans and Canadians, provide abundant waters for a wide diversity of agricultural crops and products, habitats for a multitude of fish and wildlife, and a great source of

recreation for those that hunt, fish, watch wildlife, boat and enjoy our great outdoors. But the Great Lakes are in peril from a diversity of threats, including invasive species, wetland loss and degradation, and excess nutrients and pollutants.

Conservation programs in the Farm Bill are a major factor in reducing and eliminating these threats to the Great Lakes. Although much more needs to be done, without the Farm Bill conservation title the Great Lakes would be in much worse shape. Let me tell you about a couple of examples that have contributed to the health of the Great Lakes.

The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) has been instrumental in helping farmers find better uses for those extremely difficult places to farm. WRP has enabled farmers and ranchers to restore vital wetlands on their property, improving water quality and providing vital wildlife habitat for not only waterfowl, but threatened and endangered wildlife as well. Funds from WRP provides a great tool for producers to invest in more and better tillable acres, while deriving many other benefits from their WRP acres. Many of our landowner partners have marveled at the great hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities their WRP wetlands have provided for their family and friends.

WRP has been used also to compliment other state, federal and private conservation ventures within watersheds. In Muskegon County, Michigan, WRP is being used in conjunction with the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and state wildlife conservation programs in a partnership of local, state, private and federal partners to remove historic phosphorus contamination, filter 30 square miles of agricultural waterways, provide wildlife habitat, and restore fishing and swimming in Mona Lake. It's these types of innovative and collaborative partnerships that we need more of!

WRP needs to continue in this next Farm Bill so that projects like this can continue to thrive. WRP is a great incentive to restore wetlands on agricultural lands, which is exactly what we need in many other parts of the country that are feeling the impacts of excess nutrients, like Lake Erie,

the Mississippi River, Chesapeake Bay and several other areas. WRP wetlands can be critical to remove excess nutrients that need to be filtered before they enter our precious waterways. DU supports the consolidation of easement programs as developed by both Congressional Agricultural committees late last year. However, for WRP and other conservation title programs to be effective, technical assistance funds need to be commensurate with federal assistance funds. This issue is paramount to ensure we can serve our agricultural producers through these programs.

Another key program is the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and its companion the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). Today we are fortunate to have in the room Dave and Pat Jenkins who grow corn, soybeans, sweet corn, and other fruits and vegetables on their family farm along the Illinois River near Peoria, Illinois. The Jenkins are active conservationists who were one of the first families in Woodford County to enroll in the Illinois River Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). Over the course of several years they enrolled 89 acres altogether in filter strips and wetland wildlife habitat. Most recently, Dave and his brother Dan enrolled another 83 acres of frequently flooded cropland in the Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP) under NRCS's Mississippi River Basin Initiative. Ducks Unlimited is proud to be a conservation partner working with the Jenkins to assist them with wetland restoration on their land.

CREP is a model program involving a federal/state partnership, often enhanced and leveraged through private partnerships with organizations like Ducks Unlimited and Pheasants Forever, to establish conservation practices in critical watersheds. Along the Illinois River, CREP has been instrumental in establishing critical buffers, wetlands and riparian corridors to filter nutrients, reduce erosion and improve water quality, not to mention provide excellent habitat for waterfowl and other wildlife.

The next Farm Bill should build upon the successful partnerships like those I have mentioned. Farmers and ranchers, conservationists and sportsmen, and all citizens have much to gain from successful, sustainable farming that conserves soil, water and wildlife. The regional partnership program developed in the Super Committee report is a great idea that needs to find its way in this

next Farm Bill. Regional partnerships fueled by local diverse interest groups and supported by federal, state and private funders, are a key to accomplish watershed approaches and solutions that will yield a good farm economy and a healthy sustainable environment. I encourage the Senate Agricultural Committee to include the Regional Partnership program in this next Farm Bill.

Although the Great Lakes region has seen tremendous progress towards restoring wetlands and wildlife habitat, there is much more that needs to be done. Currently there are growing challenges on the landscape that if left unaddressed, will result in potential reductions in migratory birds not seen since DU was started 75 years ago. The CRP, perhaps our nation's most successful wildlife conservation program, was reduced in the 2008 Farm Bill from 39.2 million acres to 32 million acres. Now I've heard discussions that it will be reduced from its current level to as low as 20 million acres. The impacts on waterfowl populations and other wildlife would be drastic. In 2012, over a million acres of CRP will be expiring in the Dakotas with over 900,000 of those acres in the prairie pothole region. In 2013, another 364,000 acres will be expiring in the Dakotas with over 337,000 in the potholes. The loss of this pothole habitat and the millions of ducks produced on these CRP acres, as well as the pheasants and other wildlife that called these restored grasslands home, will be severe.

What does all of this mean? Quite simply, it means jobs. While we all know that conservation programs protect the soil, clean the water and create abundant wildlife, what we often overlook is the economic activity generated through conservation. For example, hunters and anglers spend approximately \$86.1 billion pursuing their passions every year. Wildlife watchers spend roughly \$51.3 billion each year. These expenditures include everything from rods and reels, guns, ammunition, boats, decoys, bows and arrows and tree stands, to hotel stays and dinners in small rural towns across the country. These jobs are important, especially in the small, rural towns throughout America, and most importantly, these are jobs that stay at home and cannot be exportable to other countries! In Michigan alone, 1.37 million hunters and anglers spend \$9.4 million dollars a day, supporting more than 46,000 jobs. To put it in a little bit different perspective, Michigan sportsmen annually spend more than the combined cash receipts for dairy, greenhouse/nursery, corn, soybeans and cattle, the state's top five agricultural commodities!

(\$3.4 billion vs. \$2.9 billion). And furthermore, we do not have to choose between the two. Adequately funded conservation title programs protect both the hunting and angling economy as well as the agricultural economy. It's equally important to note that during these increasingly difficult times, sportsmen spending generates \$406 million in federal taxes per year and state and local taxes of \$378 million per year. Conservation programs like CRP and WRP help provide the backbone to support the diversity of wildlife that drives this essential sector of our economy. So, when you are weighing how much and which programs to cut in the upcoming farm bill debate, and we all understand that that needs to be done, remember, when you save money from reducing conservation programs, there is a direct cost to the outdoor related sports industry through loss of opportunities and loss of jobs.

So Madame Chairwoman and Members of the Committee, a strong conservation title yields great benefits to all sectors of our society and economy. Farmers and ranchers gain in conserving soil, water and air, the essential ingredients for their economic success and well being. Sportsmen and women gain with healthy populations of fish and wildlife and recreation lands. Our environment benefits through programs that protect the quality of our precious water resources, keep soil on the land, and ensure nutrients and pesticides perform as they should.

And all of those benefits ensure a strong economy, so that my producer friends are productive, my daughter Jenn, my son Joel and I can successfully hunt and fish and rural communities can thrive from both a healthy agricultural economy and hunting and fishing industry. Thank you for your attention, and please know that Ducks Unlimited stands ready to assist you in developing a strong conservation title in the next Farm Bill.