



July 31, 2023

Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow
 Ranking Member John Boozman
 U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry
 U.S. Senate
 Washington D.C. 20510

Re: Western Agriculture and Conservation Coalition Support for *Healthy Watersheds and Healthy Communities Act*

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Boozman,

Throughout the western United States, family farms and ranches have facilitated the conservation and stewardship of the region’s natural resources while anchoring the region’s rich cultural heritage and identity. It is a landscape and a way of life that works for rural economies and resource conservation. Here, private land stewardship is the key to continued conservation innovation, resource and habitat enhancements, and sustainable working land partnerships. It is a region in which farmers and ranchers have been finding ways to successfully balance resource stewardship and their bottom line, thanks in part to the availability of Farm Bill conservation programs.

The undersigned members of the Western Agriculture and Conservation Coalition work together to bolster an effective balance between resource stewardship and economic viability. A key program that strikes this balance is the NRCS Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations Program, generally referred to as PL 566. We strongly support the further improvements to the program in the bill introduced by Senators Fischer and Bennet, “The Healthy Watersheds and Healthy Communities Act.”

The bill streamlines the Watershed Plan approval process and addresses the diverse needs for resource management throughout the country and in the West in particular. Among the most important of these elements are:

- Increases support for projects that provide multiple benefits to the public to maximize use of public dollars, including flood-risk reduction projects, irrigation system modernization projects, and watershed health projects;
- Doubles the allowable federal contribution to projects from \$25 to \$50 million to increase the likelihood of funding the most meritorious projects;
- Increases the responsibility of state conservationists for managing the project planning and approval process to improve timeliness of program delivery;
- Streamlines the watershed planning process; and,
- Makes irrigation districts, key partners in delivering drought resilience benefits under the program, explicitly eligible for assistance under the law.

These are important improvements that are worthy of the support of our coalition's members. We ask that you also support Senators Fishers' and Bennet's bill.

Thank you for your consideration of our views. Please contact the coalition's director Jeff Eisenberg if you have any questions about this position. His email is jeffeisenberg@msn.com, and his phone number is 571-355-3073

Yours truly,

California Farm Bureau Federation
California Irrigation Association
Environmental Defense Fund
Family Farm Alliance
Farmers Conservation Alliance
Irrigation Association
Oregon Water Resources Congress
The Freshwater Trust
The Nature Conservancy
Trout Unlimited
Western Growers
Wyoming Stockgrowers Association

Cc: Senator Bennet
Senator Fishcher