

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 17, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We write to express our strong support for the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) initiative within the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and to urge the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to prioritize enrollment and implementation of SAFE through future continuous CRP sign-ups.

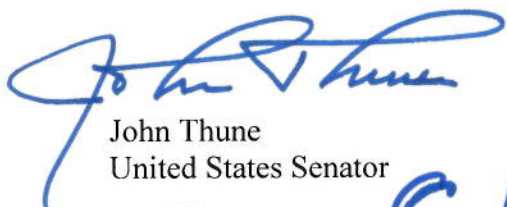
SAFE was created to allow states to design CRP practices that maintain the program's soil and water conservation benefits while targeting specific wildlife species and habitat types. Because wildlife needs and conservation priorities vary across regions, SAFE allows local and regional conservation groups, government agencies, agricultural producers, and others with first-hand knowledge to design projects and practices that help address the needs of high-priority species. By voluntarily enrolling their land in SAFE, landowners can also help avoid the need for future regulation through species listings, as in the case of the lesser prairie-chicken, greater sage-grouse, and other high-priority candidate species.

Since it was first available for enrollment in 2008, SAFE has benefitted more than 2 million acres of wildlife habitat throughout the country. According to the most recent enrollment numbers from the Farm Service Agency, 36 states have at least one SAFE project, and 11 states currently have more than 90 percent of their allocated acres enrolled. Despite the success and popularity of this initiative, USDA has not made these practices available for sign-ups on a nationwide basis since 2017.

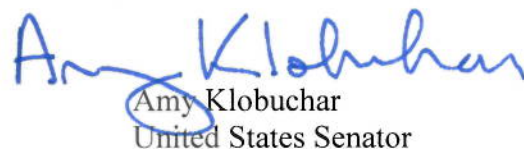
We are concerned that the decision to limit the practices and associated cost-share incentives available in recent continuous sign-ups, and excluding wildlife practices like SAFE, will decrease landowner interest in CRP and the effectiveness of the program. The statutory purpose of CRP is to "conserve and improve the soil, water, and wildlife resources" of enrolled land and "address issues raised by state, regional, and national conservation initiatives." The land enrolled through SAFE serves as an example of how USDA, landowners, and other partners can work together to address all three resource concerns on the same acre of enrolled land.

We urge you to make SAFE and other wildlife practices available in future CRP sign-ups. Doing so will maximize the benefits for wildlife habitat, soil health, and water quality while providing landowners with options when considering what is best for their operations and land. Thank you for your attention to this request, and we look forward to working with you and your staff to continue the success of this critical conservation program.

Sincerely,



John Thune
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Jerry Moran
United States Senator



Roy Blunt
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



John Boozman
United States Senator



M. Michael Rounds
United States Senator



Rob Portman
United States Senator



Cory Gardner
United States Senator



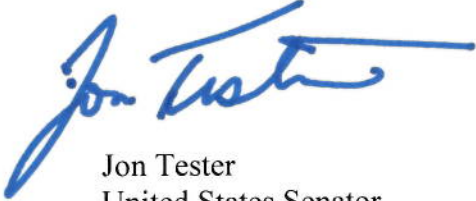
Gary C. Peters
United States Senator



Patty Murray
United States Senator



John Hoeven
United States Senator



Jon Tester
United States Senator