

Honorable Jon Tester
United States Senator
Washington DC

October 17, 2011

Dear Senator Tester,

The undersigned sportsmen's conservation organizations urge you to offer an amendment to the Agriculture appropriations bill when it comes to the floor to restore funding for the Voluntary Public Access program. Despite successful program implementation and significant unmet demand for the program, the Appropriations Committee failed to provide funding for it. We greatly respect the difficult challenges you face in getting the nation's fiscal house in order, but eliminating funding for this valuable program is a bad decision for sportsmen's interests around the nation, and we support your efforts to remedy this situation.

Hunters and anglers comprise an important part of the national economy, annually contributing nearly \$70 billion in economic activity. From coffee shops and hotels to tackle shops and guide services, fishing and hunting creates millions of jobs and through license fees and excise taxes, hunters and anglers also help to fund much of this nation's most important fish and wildlife habitat conservation.

It is essential that sportsmen have access to quality habitat, which, over the years has become increasingly difficult to find. Indeed, hunters and anglers often cite lack of access as the number one reason why they give up pursuing the sports they enjoy. Recognizing the inherent issues of falling sportsmen recruitment, a bipartisan group of Senators, with the support of many hunting and angling organizations, proposed a new Farm Bill program that would provide financial incentives to private landowners who make their property accessible to sportsmen. Since being included as a part of the 2008 Farm Bill, the program has been successfully implemented in 25 states nationwide.

In Montana, VPA funds are used to supplement one of the nation's largest public access programs, the Block Management Program. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks intends to use VPA funds to enroll 12,000 acres of upland bird habitat, and an additional 180,000 acres in its "Reconnecting Town and Country" initiative, targeted at acres within 20 miles of cities or towns.

Nationwide, USDA estimates that at full funding, the program could reach 25,000 landowners and open 5 million acres of private land to hunting, fishing, and other forms of outdoor recreation; an area twice the size of Yellowstone National Park. Yet, as FY2012 appropriations measures for the Department of Agriculture have moved through both the House and the Senate, funding for the Voluntary Public Access program has been eliminated.

The undersigned sportsmen's conservation organizations applaud your effort to restore some level of funding for the Voluntary Public Access program on the floor of the United States Senate, and appreciate your recognition of the important contributions sportsmen make, both in terms of the fabric

of rural America and the national economy. We look forward to working with you to help ensure that America's sportsmen have quality places to hunt and fish.

Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

Delta Waterfowl

Ducks Unlimited

Federation of Fly Fishers

Izaak Walton League of America

Montana Wildlife Federation

National Bobwhite Technical Committee

Pheasants Forever

Quail Forever

Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

Trout Unlimited

Wildlife Management Institute