



In Iowa's Interest:

Appreciating and Protecting Our Land and Resources

by Senator Tom Harkin

Fall in Iowa is a time for admiring the turning leaves, feeling the change of the seasons and readying ourselves for winter. It's also a time for taking stock and realizing the abundance and blessings we enjoy from our state's land. Months of hard work culminate in autumn's harvest, yielding the bounty of Iowa's rich, productive soils. Along with many other Iowans, and a few out-of-state visitors, I'm an avid hunter who tremendously appreciates Iowa's beautiful outdoor spaces and game. Year around — whether it's hunting, fishing, hiking, biking, bird watching, or other pursuits — Iowa offers such wide variety of rewarding outdoor activities.

These autumn reminders of Iowa's bountiful natural heritage also point to the importance of conserving and protecting our state's lands and natural treasures for the future. Iowans have a strong conservation ethic, a longstanding tradition embodied in such Iowa-born national leaders as Henry A. Wallace and Aldo Leopold. Iowans take pride in carrying on that tradition so that future generations will also enjoy and benefit from our state's natural resources.

That's why I'm working to do all I can at the federal level to assist and support farmers, landowners and all Iowans who devote their efforts and resources day in and day out to conserving soil, making streams, rivers and lakes cleaner, and improving habitat for wildlife. Because of the tremendous importance of food, agriculture and conservation to Iowa and our nation, I am very proud and fortunate to serve as a senior member of the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee. In serving as chairman of the Committee during the writing of the most recent two farm bills, I took a special interest in providing financial incentives to encourage good farming practices that conserve the land and natural resources so that our state and nation will have a strong agricultural sector for generations to come.

Among the conservation initiatives I worked to include in the legislation is the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), which I authored in the 2002 farm bill and improved and strengthened in the current farm bill, the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008. In order to protect the environment and conserve productive farm land for years to come, CSP provides financial incentives to farmers and ranchers who maintain and adopt sound conservation practices on land in agricultural production. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) carries out an enrollment period for CSP each year, and I encourage Iowa farmers to consider applying for CSP.

In addition to protecting our lands for farming, we also want to ensure that Iowans will be able to enjoy the great outdoors for recreation, which is a key purpose of the farm bill conservation initiatives. That is why I am pleased we adopted programs such as USDA's Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP). It provides financial incentives to owners and operators of privately held farm, ranch and forest land who voluntarily allow hunters, anglers, hikers, bird watchers and others engaging in outdoor activities access to their land. That is a winner for farmers and landowners and for people who love the outdoors.

These are just some of the many initiatives carried out by the federal and state governments and by private nonprofit organizations, in cooperation with private landowners, to help protect and conserve Iowa's precious natural treasures. It and it is my hope that eligible Iowans will consider taking advantage of these programs and that all Iowans will take the time to enjoy these resources and reflect on just how fortunate we are in Iowa.

For more information on USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Services please visit <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/>. For more information on the farm bill please visit harkin.senate.gov or call my office at 202-224-3254.