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July 8, 2005

Secretary Mike Johanns
U.D. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Johanns:

I am writing because grassland birds such as the Bobolink, Eastern and Western meadowlarks and Northern Bobwhite are in dramatic decline, mainly due to habitat loss and fragmentation.

Wetland birds such as the King Rail, Common Tern and Northern Pintail depend upon healthy wetland ecosystems to reproduce and raise their young.

Some of the most critical and comprehensive programs that can help protect these habitats are found in the Farm Bill.

As you begin work on the 2007 Farm Bill, I urgently ask you to expand the Conservation Title, thereby allowing farmers and ranchers to do more to protect vital habitat for birds and wildlife that desperately need their help.

In response to your call for public input on the 2007 Farm Bill, I wish to address QUESTION NUMBER 4: How can farm policy best achieve conservation and environmental goals?

The following are goals that I hope you will incorporate into the next Farm Bill:

- More funding for incentive-based conservation.
- Concurrent with support for incentive-based programs, existing conservation compliance provisions should be strengthened and expanded.
- Soil, water, air and wildlife benefits must be treated as valuable conservation commodities.
- Agricultural policy and conservation programs must be expanded beyond traditional farm commodities, so that small, non-conventional farmers do not fall through the cracks.
- Innovative technical assistance on the ground is critical to any effort to advance sound conservation stewardship. Adequate funding for conservation program field support staff is imperative.

Thank you for your consideration in this urgent matter.

Respectfully,

J. Capozzelli

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