

Testimony of Adrian Baber, President

National Association of State Conservation Agencies (NASCA)

House Appropriations Committee

Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and

Related Agencies

Testimony regarding the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program

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Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member:

The National Association of State Conservation Agencies (NASCA) is specifically supportive to increasing appropriations to the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program (The Watershed Program) administered by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Specifically, we are asking the Committee to provide \$300 million for Watershed Operations, \$35 million for Watershed Surveys and Planning, and \$75 million for Watershed Rehabilitation.

The National Association of State Conservation Agencies (NASCA) represents the agency of each state government with statutory administrative overview of our nation's conservation districts. These State Conservation Agencies address their missions of protecting and sustaining



our nation's soil and water resources by assessing natural resource needs and utilizing a variety of resources to address them. These resources typically may be of federal, state, or local origin. Undoubtedly federal resources play a critical role in addressing our nation's natural resource concerns, particularly those provided by a variety of Farm Bill programs administered by USDA. We are grateful for the variety of resources available through these programs.

However, while many Farm Bill program funding levels remain significant, NASCA is concerned about inadequate federal investment in the **Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program (The Watershed Program) administered by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)**. The Watershed Program, established through the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act of 1954 (Public Law 83-566), authorizes NRCS to work with local sponsors to install watershed protection and improvement projects, including critical water management infrastructure as well as upstream watershed conservation treatments. Together, NRCS and local sponsors deal with a wide range of natural resource issues, including flood control, water quality, sediment and erosion control, water supplies, and water-based recreation. In fact, there are many similarities between this program and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), in that both programs bring together multiple partners and leverage a variety of resources to address resource issues. The inherent difference is that RCPP project partners generally go their separate ways at the conclusion of the project, whereas Watershed Program local sponsors guarantee long-term commitments to projects.

Additionally, State Conservation Agencies have found a workable flexibility in the Watershed Program that is often missing in other Farm Bill programs, allowing conservation delivery

professionals in the federal, state, conservation district, and private arenas to more efficiently and effectively address natural resource concerns at the local level. Thus, we are perplexed that funding for this program has waned. We estimate that there is currently a \$20 billion federal investment on the landscape through the Watershed Program. While local sponsors have agreed to much of the long-term operation and maintenance responsibilities for these projects, there is nonetheless a continuing need to provide expert technical assistance to these local sponsors. Additionally, there is currently a three to four-year backlog of “shovel-ready” watershed projects awaiting funding. These are not merely appropriations, but rather investments in our nation’s green infrastructure that will provide a tremendous return on investment by stimulating our economy and mitigating the effects of climate change.

Therefore, NASCA respectfully requests your consideration of a greater federal commitment to the Watershed Program. We seek your leadership in providing **\$300 million for Watershed Operations, \$35 million for Watershed Surveys and Planning, and \$75 million for Watershed Rehabilitation.** Appropriations in these amounts to the **Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program (WFPF) accounts** will allow NRCS staff, State Conservation agencies, conservation districts, local sponsors, and other conservation delivery professionals to maintain a robust Watershed Program that will pay dividends to life, property, and resources for years to come.

NASCA appreciates your consideration of the aforementioned FY2017 funding requests for the Watershed Program. We would be pleased to provide any additional information to you, your committee, or your staff as requested.

Yours in conservation,

Adrian Baber
NASCA President