

November 7, 2007

The Honorable Kent Conrad
United States Senate
SH-530
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Pat Roberts
United States Senate
SH-109
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Conrad and Senator Roberts:

We are writing to express our support for the new "Open Fields" legislation which you will introduce on May 17, 2007 in the 110th Congress. The Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program Act of 2007 will establish state-administered, voluntary, incentive-based programs to expand public access to private lands for hunters, anglers, and outdoor enthusiasts and encourage the creation and conservation of quality fish and wildlife habitat.

More and more hunters, anglers, and other outdoorsmen and -women are finding "no trespassing" signs on their favorite old spots or they are watching urban sprawl eat up the chunks of woods, waters and fields into which they used to escape. Consequently, more and more sportsmen and -women of average means, who can't afford to pay for a place to hunt or fish, are walking away from their cherished outdoor pastimes and fewer young people are getting a chance to take up hunting or fishing. The "Open Fields" bill is critically needed to expand access to places to hunt and fish and reverse this trend that is eating away at treasured American traditions and the outdoor way of life.

Our children are facing a "Nature Deficit," as explained in the recently published book by Richard Louv entitled *Last Child in the Woods*. We believe the "Open Fields" bill will help get our children re-engaged with the natural world, including hunting and fishing. As representatives of outdoor enthusiasts that would benefit from landowners voluntarily offering greater access to private lands, and expanding the fish and wildlife habitat on their land, we applaud your efforts to enact this innovative incentive-based access program. We estimate that your legislation, funded at \$20 million per year, would encourage landowners to open up more than 4 million new acres of private land to the public each year, dramatically enhancing the experiences of hunters and anglers as well as bird watchers, hikers, and others who enjoy the outdoors.

A total of 21 states already have established programs to work cooperatively with private landowners to pay for access to their lands and many of these states' programs include additional incentives for habitat improvement. Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming, in particular, have very successful programs that open millions of acres of land to the public each year, and several other states are initiating similar programs. These programs are popular with hunters and anglers as well as private landowners. In fact, many states have long waiting lists of landowners ready to enroll their acreages into a State-sponsored access program, but a lack of funding stands in the way. By supplementing state resources that currently are being dedicated to access programs, your legislation not only will provide additional income to ranchers and farmers, while encouraging them to make their acreage more fish and wildlife friendly, but will greatly expand opportunities to hunters, anglers, and outdoor enthusiasts. Just as important, states that have held off on establishing access programs likely will institute them if they know a partial federal funding source is available.

Just as we support Open Fields, we also fully support programs that produce the wildlife that sportsmen go afield to hunt. We ask that in the course of pursuing this legislation that you also ensure the continued funding of wildlife habitat incentive programs like the Conservation Reserve Program and the Wetlands Reserve Program at least at past levels, to continue providing the game that people using this new hunter access program will pursue.

Considerable interest in and support for “Open Fields” is evidenced by the amount of positive press coverage it received these past few years. An Associated Press story circulated in November 2004 titled “Clamor for Access Leaves Some Hunters in the Cold” pointed out “With access to private land tightening further, some officials say it might be time to consider broader approaches. The so-called Open Fields bill introduced in Congress would provide financial incentives for landowners to open their land to hunters and anglers.”

We look forward to working with you to enact this much-needed and timely legislation as expeditiously as possible.

Sincerely,

American Fly Fishing Trade Association
American Sportfishing Association
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
BASS/ESPN Outdoors
Bear Trust International
Berkley Conservation Institute
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Conservation Force
Delta Waterfowl Foundation
Ducks Unlimited
Federation of Fly Fishers
International Hunter Education Association
Izaak Walton League of America
Land Trust Alliance
Mule Deer Foundation
National Farmers Union
National Wildlife Federation
National Wild Turkey Federation
New Mexico Wildlife Federation

New York State Conservation Council
North American Bear Foundation
North American Grouse Partnership
Pheasants Forever
Quail Forever
Quail Unlimited
Quality Deer Management Association
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Ruffed Grouse Society
Safari Club International
Texas Wildlife Association
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
The Wildlife Society
Trout Unlimited
Whitetails Unlimited
Wildlife Forever
Wildlife Management Institute
World Wildlife Fund