

Tips for *Writing a Letter* to Your elected Representatives-

Many people are reluctant to write their elected representatives concerning issues that are important to them. Some may feel their letter writing skills are not up to speed, while others feel no one will read or react to their letter so why bother. There are a multitude of other reasons people don't move to action and write. In fact most of them are dead wrong. **The letter to an elected official is still one of the most powerful tools we have in the democracy.** While we may choose to fax or email our words due to postal security delays, a simple, focused hand written letter is a most important effort.

Here are some quick tips for writing your elected representative on this or any other issue. Once we have names and addresses in hand we have to start somewhere. There are lots of suggestions on form and protocol but **"Dear Congressman" or "Dear Senator"** isn't a bad way to begin!

What do you want to write first? Let's start with developing a one sentence description of the issue. For example: **"I am writing to ask your support for watershed program funding beyond that proposed in the Administration's 2016 budget."**

The next point you want to make concerns the local connection to the issue you are writing about. Include a few brief sentences about your project and a few of the benefits it provides. For example: you might name the communities protected by the project, the number of structures, include the acres/population protected, recreation opportunities afforded, water supply, etc. Don't go overboard with numbers here, many people are unaware of the protection provided each day by these projects and with just a figure or two you can make your point.

Perhaps the next paragraph is the most important one in your letter. In two or three sentences sum up the action you desire your representative to take. For example: **"I am asking you to support the following figures as the minimum adequate funding level for the USDA Small Watershed Program: Watershed planning \$35 million, Watershed Operations \$300 million and Watershed rehabilitation \$85 million. In addition I would urge you to encourage USDA officials to**

administer of the program in an efficient and effective manner that will provide immediate beneficial results to local project partners and the citizens protected by this important program. I would appreciate your support for the program and it's funding as you visit with your colleagues in Congress as well."

Last but not least close your letter with thanks and an offer of additional assistance. "If you need additional information on the importance of this program in your congressional district as well as our state please feel free to contact me at_____."

You don't have to know all of the answers but you do probably know who to ask or who to refer any questions to. The local or state Office NRCS official, perhaps another well informed project sponsor or the National Watershed Coalition could be another source of information if additional information is requested.

Close your letter with a statement similar to: "Thank you for your time and for your consideration. I appreciate your efforts to support those issues important to us here in _____"

After your signature you may wish to show the recipients of copies of your letter. That can be a powerful tool as well. For example:

Sincerely,
Your name and title

Cc:
National Watershed Coalition
Governor _____
Mayor _____
NRCS State Conservationist _____
All Members of the State Congressional Delegation
US House and Senate Appropriations Committee Chairmen

With just a few minutes of work on your part you can make a difference by contacting your congressional delegation. Give it a try, watershed sponsors and partners everywhere will be grateful! And don't forget, if you're writing to Washington, D.C., an email or fax is the fastest and most efficient method.