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Farm Bill Watershed Update

Today Congressman Glenn (GT) Thompson, Chairman of the House Committee on Agriculture released the House version of a new Farm Bill. "We are pleased that the Committee's proposed bill contains the recommendations that the National Watershed Coalition (NWC) put forward on the USDA Watershed Program during the multi-year development of the coming Farm Bill. "We appreciate Chairman Thompson's efforts to improve the program and address the needs and concerns of watershed project sponsors across the country." said Tom Goode, NWC Chair.

Watershed Program Provisions in the proposed Farm Bill include:

- Authorizing the Department to fix the structural components of projects that do not rise to the complexity of a full rehabilitation project.
- Requiring a streamlining process to: (1) reduce or eliminate regulatory, policy, or procedural barriers to timely assistance; (2) coordinate with federal or state agencies for required reviews and permitting with the goal of streamlining and expediting the process; (3) conduct an assessment of USDA's planning technical support and approvals with the purpose of maximizing decision-making authority of NRCS State Conservationists; (4) prioritize use of agreement and contracting authorities for local organizations to provide planning, design, and construction.

- Requiring the Department to make data publicly available about projects, including funding, contracts and agreements, and modifications of projects; and
- Reducing the burden on local sponsors for rehabilitation projects.

NWC along with other conservation partners have long advocated on behalf of project sponsors for an increase in funding for the USDA Watershed Program. That historic funding was included in the One Big Beautiful Bill (OBBBA). “We appreciate that Chairman Thompson’s House version of the Farm Bill retains that historic funding and includes other recommendations made by the NWC for the Watershed Program that will preserve the investment in infrastructure and improve assistance to watershed project sponsors in carrying out their responsibilities for watershed protection, dam safety and conservation of our natural resources,” noted Gene Saurborn, NWC Executive Director.

“The NWC strongly supports these provisions and we believe they will provide much needed improvement in carrying out the many different aspects of the Watershed Program”, said Goode.

USDA Watershed Projects are planned and implemented by local watershed project sponsors such as conservation districts, cities, towns, and tribes in partnership with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).