



**Montana
Native
Plant
Society**

To observe - conserve - educate

P.O. Box 8783 Missoula, MT 59807

4 January 2014

Senator Max Baucus
511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Baucus,

We are writing on behalf of the 600 members of the Montana Native Plant Society (MNPS). We are an organization dedicated to preserving, conserving and studying the flora of Montana and educating the public on the values of the native flora and its habitats. We are writing because we are concerned that the new Farm Bill may encourage landowners to destroy Montana's and the Nation's native prairie and wetlands at the expense of the taxpayers.

MNPS is alarmed by the continued loss of native prairie in Montana and across the West. Between 2011 and 2012 more than 10,000 acres of native prairie were converted to croplands in Montana. Grasslands of the Great Plains are the most endangered ecosystem in the United States. They harbor an immense store of biological diversity. Over 3,000 species and subspecies of vascular plants are recorded from the Great Plains north of Texas. Many species of both plants and animals occur only in these grasslands. The soils of the region store carbon. Although the Great Plains province occupies approximately one-fifth of the United States, most of the native prairie has been lost to agricultural development. States such as Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, and Wisconsin have lost more than 99% of their native prairie. Numerous species of Great Plains plants and animals are listed as threatened or endangered under the Federal Endangered Species Act or are candidates for listing.

Federally-subsidized crop insurance encourages plowing native grassland, most of which is considered highly erodible and marginal for agriculture by NRCS due to low annual precipitation and potential for wind erosion. MNPS urges Congress to adopt a Sodsaver provision in the new Farm Bill that would make lands that haven't been previously used to grow crops ineligible for crop insurance or other federal benefits and would discourage unwise use of the Nation's rangelands. Sodsaver simply asks farmers that make risky financial and land management decisions to live with the consequences, rather than expecting taxpayers to cover the cost of bad decisions.

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MNPS is also concerned with the loss of wetland habitat. Wetlands provide a disproportionately large amount of biological diversity to Montana's valleys and plains. We need to discourage private landowners from draining wetlands. MNPS urges Congress to adopt a Swampbuster provision in the new Farm Bill that prevents farmers who drain wetlands from qualifying for farm bill programs. Together, Sodsaver and Swampbuster provisions will help preserve Montana's natural heritage and save taxpayer's money in the near future and over the long term. Thank you for your attention to our concerns. We appreciate your past efforts to protect Montana's natural heritage and hope that you will again be successful.

Regards,



Kathy Settevendemie
President



Peter Lesica
Conservation Chair