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May 10, 2019

Mr. William Northey
Under Secretary, Farm Production and Conservation
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington DC 20250

Re: Current Moratorium of the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

Dear Under Secretary Northey,

We are writing to express our concern over the current moratorium on enrollments in the Conservation Reserve Program and Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CRP/CREP) and seek your assistance to expedite the reopening of this critical program.

As you are aware, riparian forest buffers are a top priority conservation practice to improve water quality in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. To achieve their clean water mandate, Chesapeake Bay watershed states are calling for an estimated 100,000 acres of new riparian forest buffers on agricultural land from 2019 – 2025. Most of these acres will be implemented through the CRP/CREP program.

Since the moratorium was established in the summer of 2018, producers have been unable to enroll new acres into these programs. In addition, re-enrollment of existing buffers that expired during the hold have also been impacted. Potentially even more damaging over the long term is the perception of inconsistent availability of the program, which could negatively impact landowners' willingness to participate in the future.

The Chesapeake Bay Program Agriculture Workgroup's mission is to provide expertise and leadership on development and implementation of policies, programs, and research to reduce pollutant loads delivered from agricultural lands and animal operations to upstream waters and the Chesapeake Bay. Our membership includes a diverse array of stakeholder voices representing all jurisdictions within the Chesapeake Bay watershed, many of whom have expressed serious concern regarding the impact of this enrollment delay on the success of their state Watershed Implementation Plans (WIPs).



Chesapeake Bay Program
A Watershed Partnership

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The CRP/CREP programs are highly valued and critical to improving health and functioning of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. We appreciate your time and consideration of our request to reopen CRP/CREP enrollment. Please don't hesitate to contact me at jason.keppler@maryland.gov or Matt Monroe, Vice-Chair, at mmonroe@wvda.us, if you have any questions or would like to discuss these concerns in greater detail.

Sincerely,
Jason Keppler
Chair, Chesapeake Bay Program Agriculture Workgroup
Cc: Matt Monroe, Vice-Chair