

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 21, 2026

The Honorable Doug Burgum
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Burgum:

As Members of the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission (MBCC), we write to express our strong support for maintaining long-standing and science-based U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wetland easement protections and the current drain tile setback standards that have allowed for the conservation of wetlands in the Prairie Pothole Region for more than sixty years while providing benefits and certainty to participating landowners. These protections are essential to sustaining North America's migratory bird populations, protecting taxpayer-funded conservation investments, and preserving one of the continent's most important waterfowl breeding landscapes.

Congress established the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission to oversee and advance the conservation of migratory birds and their habitat through strategic federal investments and collaboration and partnership with private landowners. The Commission plays a central role in reviewing and approving land acquisitions, easements, and habitat conservation projects funded through the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund, including revenues generated by the Federal Duck Stamp program, and the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund. Through these authorities, the Commission helps ensure that public conservation investments produce lasting benefits for waterfowl, other migratory birds, sportsmen and women, and the American public. The Prairie Pothole Region produces more than half of the continent's migratory waterfowl. Wetlands protected through federal easement programs provide critical nesting and brood-rearing habitats that support waterfowl populations across the nation.

As Commissioners, we are concerned by recent actions that call into question the science-based, conservation-focused, and collaborative protections associated with permanent Fish and Wildlife Service wetland easements. These easements were voluntarily entered into by willing landowners and purchased using taxpayer resources to conserve wetlands in perpetuity. The value of these investments depends on maintaining the integrity of protected wetlands. Allowing activities that undermine wetland function would diminish both the biological benefits of these

easements and the public return on decades of successful public-private wetland conservation spending.

The Commission has long championed the principle that conservation investments must be durable, provide benefits and certainty for private landowners, and manage vital waterfowl habitat using the best available science. We respectfully urge the Department of the Interior to maintain the science-based drain tile setback standards that have successfully protected Service easements for decades; uphold the integrity of voluntary easement agreements; prevent the drainage of protected wetlands; and provide landowners with legal safe harbor and the certainty necessary to fulfill their conservation commitments. Doing so will honor commitments made to willing landowners, protect taxpayer investments, support healthy migratory bird populations for generations to come, and build upon the success of this conservation model.

Thank you for your continued commitment to conserving America's wetlands and migratory bird resources.

Sincerely,



Robert J. Wittman
Member of Congress



Mike Thompson
Member of Congress



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



John Boozman
United States Senator