

Thompson bills to protect land and wildlife included in Farm Bill

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WASHINGTON — On Wednesday, the House of Representatives passed a final version of the Farm Bill, which included two bills by Congressman Mike Thompson (D-CA) that would incentivize landowners who protect wildlife habitat, farmland and open spaces.

“Protecting public lands and the wildlife that live on them isn’t enough — we have to help our private landowners do their part to guard their land from development and restore critical wildlife habitat,” said Thompson.

The first Thompson provision would extend an important tax incentive for landowners who donate their land’s development rights to local land trusts, creating a conservation easement. Once placed under a conservation easement, the land cannot be developed at any time in the future, even if the land is sold. However, the landowner and all future owners can continue to farm the land.

The incentive was originally created by a previous Thompson bill that expired at the end of last year. The provision in the Farm Bill would extend the tax incentive for two more years.

“Our farm lands and open spaces are being lost to development at a frightening pace,” said Thompson. “Conservation easements give people the incentive they need to avoid selling their land to developers. Protecting our open spaces not only makes our air and water cleaner, it helps preserve our beautiful American landscape.”

The second Thompson provision would provide landowners with a permanent tax deduction if they agree to implement plans to recover threatened and endangered species. To qualify for the tax deduction, landowners must demonstrate that the species listed as endangered or threatened live or migrate through their property. In addition, the landowner must implement a government-approved recovery plan designed to reverse the decline of the listed species.

“If we want the Endangered Species Act to be truly successful, we have to help private landowners implement proven recovery plans,” said Thompson. “This provision will for the first time give landowners the incentive and the technical assistance to do what needs to be done to help protect endangered and threatened wildlife on private land.”

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