OBAMA-BIDEN TRANSITION PROJECT

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conserving natural resources for our future

National Association of Conservation Districts

December 8, 2008

To: President Elect Obama's Natural Resources Transition Team

From: Steve Robinson, President Elect, National Association of Conservation Districts

National Association of Conservation District (NACD) members, individual conservation districts, are local technical resources that assist landowners, communities, and others with natural resource protection. Conservation districts across the country have worked with landowners to adopt conservation practices for over 70 years. Practices we know as the cornerstones of good conservation and land stewardship are also practices that increase soil organic content, sequester carbon, improve water and air quality, and provide healthy habitat.

We believe that the work of conservation district employees and our conservation partners across the country are the original "green jobs." Our roots were planted after the Dust Bowl when President Franklin D. Roosevelt requested that states allow local landowners to form soil and water conservation districts. Action of soil technicians, environmental engineers, wildlife biologists and many others represent green jobs – those protecting and improving our environment. Investments in conservation programs result in green jobs and produce environmental benefits for local communities and across the country.

USDA is a leader in delivering conservation programs directly to forest landowners, agriculture producers and livestock operators. Conservation districts have a long working relationship with USDA in delivering conservation programs and working cooperatively with private landowners to undertake conservation practices on their land. The technical assistance that USDA provides to private landowners through USDA field staff, partnership agreements and third party technical service providers is critical to the adoption and maintenance of conservation practices.

Locally Led

USDA conservation program delivery provides for local input and priority setting, allowing for greater buy-in from landowners. This locally led delivery system is critical for the unique environmental and resource needs of communities, but also to foster a positive working relationship with local landowners. NACD believes that greater environmental benefits can be gained by working with landowners and community members to facilitate their understanding of the need to protect natural resources and what actions can be taken on their private land. Conservation districts assist USDA in gaining local input though Local Work Groups, convened to assist with implementation of Farm Bill conservation programs.

Climate Change

Today several of NACD's members are working with the Chicago Climate Exchange (CCX) and other partners, participating in carbon sequestration efforts to mitigate GHG emissions. Many districts have or are seeking to become aggregators of offsets or third-party verifiers of

National Headquarters
509 Capitol Court, NE, Washington, DC 20002
Phone: (202) 547-6223 Fax: (202) 547-6450
www.nacdnet.org

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contracted practices. As your administration and Congress works on legislative proposals, NACD recommends that climate change legislation recognize the contributions of agriculture, forestry and community conservation efforts to reduce GHG emissions via market-based payments for emissions offsets. Building upon our foundation of natural resource protection, we believe that additional gains can be made to sequester carbon and reduce GHG emissions. However, we must also recognize those landowners that have already taken appropriate conservation activities on their land, in order to protect existing valuable carbon stocks. We cannot risk losing the conservation efforts, sequestered carbon, and natural resource protections we have in place today.

EPA's 319 Grant Program

Section 319 of the Clean Water Act established a grant program to assist in nonpoint source pollution mitigation efforts. Conservation districts apply for grants from their state through funds provided by EPA. The type of projects they undertake may include: technical assistance, financial assistance, education & training, technology transfer, demonstration projects, and monitoring. This program provides a critical avenue for working with landowners on non point source pollution issues. Many of our districts undertake education efforts directly with landowners to not only meet the water quality goals today, but understand how to maintain water quality goals. That understanding and ability to continue good practices is vital to making long term behavior changes.

State and Private Forestry

The State and Private Forestry Programs are administered by the State and Private Forestry branch of the U.S. Forest Service in the Department of Agriculture. This branch works with a broad range of programs that address the protection, wise use and management of forested lands, normally in partnership with the state forestry organizations and other partners. It provides technical and financial assistance to landowners and resource managers to help sustain the nation's forests and protect communities and the environment from forest pests, invasive species and wildland fires.

With 73 percent of the nation's timberland privately owned, close cooperation between the federal government and private forest landowners is needed to ensure forest health. NACD supports State and Private Forestry programs and would like the partnership strengthened and staffed at a level that insures protection and increases the flow of goods and services from the private non-industrial forest lands.

Department of Interior

NACD and our conservation district members enjoy strong partnerships with the Department of Interior agencies, the Bureau of Land Management, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Reclamation and others. Working though programs such as the Healthy Lands Initiative and Partners for Fish and Wildlife, conservation districts work with local landowners to protect fragile lands and improve wildlife habitat. NACD has worked to address critical fuel reduction on public and private forest lands by increasing community knowledge and outreach efforts by local conservation districts.