

JOHN BOOZMAN
ARKANSAS

555 DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20510
202-224-4843

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 27, 2026

COMMITTEES:

AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY
CHAIRMAN

APPROPRIATIONS
CHAIRMAN, MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, VETERANS AFFAIRS,
AND RELATED AGENCIES

ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

RULES AND ADMINISTRATION

VETERANS' AFFAIRS

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

Dear Secretary Burgum:

We write as the 2025–2026 duck hunting season concludes to thank you and the Department of the Interior, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), for your work supporting America's more than one million duck hunters. We are, however, increasingly concerned about continued declines in duck populations and strongly urge continued stewardship of the National Wildlife Refuge System—particularly USFWS conservation easements in the Prairie Pothole Region—as the foundation for long-term population recovery.

The USFWS 2025 Waterfowl Population Status Report estimates 34 million breeding ducks, a figure below the long-term average and well below highs. Several key species for hunters, such as mallards, blue-winged teal, and northern pintails, remain short of North American Waterfowl Management Plan goals. This decline can be attributed to drought conditions in the Prairie Pothole Region, where pond counts have fallen below average in three of the last four years. These trends pose a significant challenge to the future of waterfowl populations, with profound implications down the Mississippi Flyway.

If these conditions persist, hunters could face shorter seasons and reduced limits. These outcomes would diminish hunting opportunities and harm rural economies, especially in Mississippi Flyway states such as Arkansas, Tennessee, Louisiana, and Mississippi. In Arkansas alone, duck hunters contributed more than \$300 million to the state economy, even in a lower duck population year like 2022. Nationwide, waterfowl hunting generates approximately \$4 billion in economic activity and supports nearly 57,000 jobs.

History shows that duck populations can rebound quickly when drought conditions ease and key breeding habitats are protected. Continued stewardship of the National Wildlife Refuge System, including both fee-titled lands and conservation easements in the Prairie Pothole Region, is essential to recovery and central to the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission's (MBCC) purpose.

106 W. MAIN ST.
SUITE 104
EL DORADO, AR 71730
870-863-4641

1120 GARRISON AVE.
SUITE 2B
FORT SMITH, AR 72901
479-573-0189

300 S. CHURCH ST.
SUITE 400
JONESBORO, AR 72401
870-268-6925

1401 W. CAPITOL AVE.
SUITE 155
LITTLE ROCK, AR 72201
501-372-7153

213 W. MONROE
SUITE N
LOWELL, AR 72745
479-725-0400

1001 Hwy. 62 E.
SUITE 11
MOUNTAIN HOME, AR 72653
870-424-0129

620 E. 22nd St.
SUITE 204
STUTTGART, AR 72160
870-672-6941

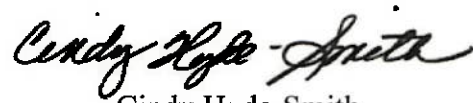
Since 1934, Duck Stamp revenues, paid for by generations of hunters, have conserved more than six million acres of habitat nationwide, including over 1.7 million acres protected by USFWS easements in the Prairie Pothole Region. These lands form the core habitat base needed for population recovery. We urge that these longstanding investments be fully considered as USFWS conducts its comprehensive review of the Refuge System under Director's Order No. 230.

For generations, hunters and conservationists have invested in the National Wildlife Refuge System to sustain waterfowl populations and preserve America's hunting heritage. As Secretary of the Interior and Chair of the MBCC, we encourage you to continue stewarding these investments—particularly Prairie Pothole Region easements—to support waterfowl, rural economies, and the future of duck hunting.

Sincerely,



John Boozman
United States Senator



Cindy Hyde-Smith
United States Senator



Tom Cotton
United States Senator



Marsha Blackburn
United States Senator



Bill Cassidy, M.D.
United States Senator



John Kennedy
United States Senator



Roger F. Wicker
United States Senator