



July 14, 2005

The Honorable Saxby Chambliss,
Chairman, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
Room SR-328A
Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC. 20510-6000
Dear Senator Chambliss:

Diminishing access to quality hunting, angling and other wildlife-dependent opportunities is a trend that slowly is pulling apart the American sporting tradition. The American Hunters and Shooters Association (AHSA), the nations newest pro-gun, pro-hunting and shooting organization seeks your support of S. 548, the *Voluntary Public Access and Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program Act of 2005* commonly known as "Open Fields,"

This bi-partisan legislation, introduced by Senators Conrad and Roberts addresses the issue of access to hunting, fishing and other recreational use on private land, and will assist farmers, ranchers, and small town businesses that are desperately looking for the means and opportunities to revitalize and stimulate their local economies. The need for better access for sportsmen who can't afford to lease land, and the need for economic stimulation in rural America have intersected and spurred the creation of highly effective state public access programs.

As you may know "walk-in" access programs are not a new concept. In fact they have successfully begun to reverse the trend of diminishing numbers of hunters and anglers in states with existing programs. Walk-in programs generate cash and economic activity in rural economies by encouraging increased numbers of hunters, anglers, and others who enjoy wildlife-related activities to spend more of their outdoor recreation dollars in rural America.

Eighteen states are already using their own limited funding resources to finance successful access programs. These programs have set the stage for even greater success in the future, but only if additional funding becomes available. If enacted into law, "Open Fields" will provide \$20 million per year in Commodity Credit Corporation funds over the next five years. These funds will be used to provide U.S. Department of Agriculture grants for states with recreational walk-in or access programs.

Moreover, the "Open Fields" legislation also offers benefits to many Americans who live in urban areas of the country. We all know that millions of city dwellers hunt and fish. Access to quality areas to hunt, fish, and enjoy other wildlife-related activities within reasonable distances from urban areas is becoming dramatically reduced.

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Currently, access programs are being successfully administered in states all across America. From Arizona, with 2 million acres, to Pennsylvania with 4.3 million acres, a total of 18 states have more than 23 million acres enrolled in such programs. Administrative and incentive payments total just over \$23 million per year, an average of about \$1 per acre.

According to a recently completed cost-benefit analysis, states with active access programs encouraged more than 276,000 hunters to continue to hunt who otherwise would have quit. This translates into about \$512.6 million hunters spend annually in these states. The \$20 million per year investment called for under this legislation will potentially return many times its initial cost. States with access programs are currently spending about \$23 million per year while generating more than \$512 million in additional economic activity. Through this legislation, the return on investment can become a reality for many more states and communities.

The "Open Fields" legislation is a means to encourage the States to partner with the outdoor recreation community and private landowners to preserve our hunting and fishing heritage and provide economic growth opportunities for rural America.

This is why the American Hunters and Shooters Association urges your support for S.548 the Voluntary Public Access and Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program Act of 2005.

Sincerely,

Ray Schoenke,
President, American Hunters and Shooters Association