

October 11, 2021

Jacob Glass
Program Examiner, Interior Branch
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Christine Nolin
Budget Chief
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
5275 Leesburg Pike
Falls Church, VA 22041

Dear Mr. Glass, Ms. Nolin,

Last week, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service made a heartbreaking announcement that it is proposing to remove 22 animals and one plant from the endangered species list due to extinction. These species—including the ivory-billed woodpecker, Bachman’s warbler, Scioto madtom, San Marcos gambusia, eight species of Southeastern freshwater mussels, eight birds and a flower from Hawai’i, and a bird and bat from Guam—will now join the list of 650 species in the United States that have likely been lost to extinction.¹

Sadly, the majority of extinctions are entirely preventable. The U.S. has one of the most powerful tools to end extinction—the Endangered Species Act—yet the Act has been chronically underfunded for decades. This lack of funding has resulted in many animals and plants waiting over a decade to receive safeguards. As a result, several species—including many in the Service’s recent announcement—were either extinct or barely clinging to survival by the time they were finally listed. In total, at least 47 species have been declared extinct waiting for protection. This is unacceptable.

The Service desperately needs additional funding, especially for its listing program, to be able to fulfill its mission to protect, conserve and recover our nation’s endangered species and natural ecosystems. We were encouraged to see that President Biden’s FY2022 budget requested a more than \$60 million increase for endangered species, but we were disappointed that this only included a mere \$1.5 million increase for the listing program. Listing a species is the critical first step for the Act to be used to help avert extinction, yet the listing budget hasn’t seen a meaningful increase in decades, despite recent Congressional support for significant increases to the program.

With additional funding, the Service could make tremendous progress toward stemming extinction in the United States. As a factual matter, the Service needs at least \$63.7 million, or an increase of at least \$8.7 million per year for at least the next 4 years, to process the backlog of 430 species that still need to be reviewed for protection under the Act. An increase of \$8.7

¹ Stein, B. A., N. Edelson, L. Anderson, J. Kanter, and J. Stemler. 2018. *Reversing America’s Wildlife Crisis: Securing the Future of Our Fish and Wildlife*. Washington, DC: National Wildlife Federation.

million could contribute to removing an additional 31 species from the listing backlog each year, at an estimated cost of around \$280,000 for each new listing decision. At current funding rates, however, it could take the Service up to 10 years to process all of the remaining species that the agency has identified as potentially needing protection. Meanwhile, if trends hold, one species will be declared extinct every year in the United States while waiting for protection under the Act. If we let that happen, it would be morally unforgivable.

As Secretary Haaland recently stated:

“The specifics for each of the species demise’ vary, but the story arc is essentially the same. Humans altered their habitat in a significant way, and we couldn’t or didn’t do enough to ultimately change the trajectory, before it was too late. But this moment as sobering as it is, can serve as a wakeup call our children and grandchildren will not know the earth as we do, unless we change the status quo. We’ve got to do better by this planet, and we need to do it now.”

There is no longer any time to waste. We have already lost hundreds of species to extinction in the United States, and now one million animal and plant species here and around the world are facing extinction in the coming decades if we fail to take immediate action. If the Biden Administration truly wants to stem the extinction crisis, it must make bold investments in protecting our nation’s most vulnerable species. Thus, we urge the Administration to significantly increase its request for the listing budget in the upcoming FY2023 budget request so that the program finally has sufficient funds to protect all species at risk of extinction.

Sincerely,

Center for Biological Diversity
Animal Legal Defense Fund
Animal Welfare Institute
Bat Conservation International
Born Free USA
Bucks County Audubon Society
Buffalo Field Campaign
Cascadia Wildlands
Conservancy of Southwest Florida
Conservation Law Foundation
Defenders of Wildlife
Earthjustice
Endangered Habitats League
Endangered Species Coalition
Environmental Protection Information Center - EPIC
FOUR PAWS USA
Friends of Blackwater, Inc.
Friends of the Earth
Greater Hells Canyon Council

Heartwood
Howling For Wolves
Humane Society Legislative Fund
International Marine Mammal Project of Earth Island Institute
Mass Audubon
Natural Resources Defense Council
NH Audubon
Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides
NY4WHALES
Oceanic Preservation Society
Resource Renewal Institute
Rocky Mountain Wild
Save the Manatee Club
The Humane Society of the United States
Turtle Island Restoration Network
Western Watersheds Project
WildEarth Guardians
Wildlife Conservation Society
Wolf Conservation Center
Wyoming Untrapped