

June 2, 2026

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
The Capitol H-307
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
1036 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Oppose Anti-Wildlife Riders in the FY2027 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Legislation

Dear Chair Cole, Ranking Member DeLauro,

On behalf of our organizations and our millions of members and supporters, we write to express our strong opposition to the FY27 Interior Appropriations bill, which slashes funding for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service by 5%. Alarming, the bill would cut the agency's listing budget by nearly \$7 million, or nearly half the FY26 level and two-thirds below the FY25 level, effectively dismantling the program in charge of determining which animals and plants deserve protection under the Endangered Species Act. Further, for the first time since FY2018, the legislation includes additional subcaps within the listing budget limiting the amount of funding available for critical habitat designations, listing foreign species, and 90-day and 12-month petition findings.

The legislation also contains a total of at least 21 anti-wildlife poison pill riders — **the largest number of policy riders that has ever been included in the base bill in the history of the Endangered Species Act.** These riders would cause irreparable harm by undoing decades of progress to stabilize and recover some of our most iconic species. They are also completely out of step with the American public, which overwhelmingly supports the Act and the protections it provides. Thus, we urge you to oppose these harmful anti-wildlife riders, detailed below. We also urge you to oppose any additional anti-wildlife amendments during full committee markup.

Sec. 116 - Blocks Protections for the Sage-Grouse. This rider would block the Service from protecting the greater sage-grouse, or any distinct population of greater sage-grouse, as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act. The sage grouse population has declined 40% rangewide over the last two decades and continues on a downward trend. Endangered Species Act protections are desperately needed to save this bird from extinction.

Sec. 122 – Prevents Agencies from Regulating Lead Ammunition and Tackle. This rider would largely block federal agencies from regulating the use on federal land or water of poisonous lead ammunition or fishing gear, which can harm endangered species like whooping cranes that ingest lead when feeding in fields and waterways. A 2022 study found that half of bald and golden eagles are suffering from chronic, toxic levels of lead due to lead ammunition.

Sec. 123 – Blocks Protections for the Lesser Prairie-Chicken. The lesser prairie-chicken is a highly imperiled ground-nesting bird that has declined to roughly 27,000 individuals — including at least a decline of 20% since 2021 — and its current population may now be well below even that number. It is found in less than 10% of its former habitats. After nearly three decades of waiting for protection, the Service in November 2022 protected the lesser prairie-chicken under the Endangered Species Act. However, a federal court later vacated the rule and the Service under the Trump administration delisted the bird in early 2026. This rider would block funding to implement the rule.

Sec. 124 – Blocks Increased Protections for Northern Long-Eared Bats. Northern long-eared bats have declined 99% across most of their range in a span of just two decades. White-nose syndrome, caused by an exotic fungus originating in Europe, has devastated this species. However, human activities are now exacerbating the bats' catastrophic decline. The Fish and Wildlife Service listed the bat as endangered in November 2022 after finding that its previous "threatened" status was not sufficiently protective to keep the bat from slipping further toward extinction. Nonetheless this rider would block funding to implement the listing rule.

Sec. 125 – Delists the Gray Wolf Nationwide. This legislation would remove federal protections for all gray wolves in the lower-48 states, except for a small population of Mexican gray wolves in Arizona and New Mexico. Gray wolf populations in the United States were decimated by decades of predator control programs, as well as loss of habitat and prey. Since receiving protection under the Endangered Species Act, the gray wolf has begun a comeback but remains far from recovered.

Sec. 126 – Blocks Protections for Wolverines. After waiting nearly 30 years for protection, the Fish and Wildlife Service issued a final rule in November 2023 protecting wolverines as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. This rare wilderness species is threatened with massive habitat loss due to climate change. No more than 300 wolverines remain in the lower 48 states. This rider would block funding to implement or enforce the final rule.

Sec. 127 – North Cascades Ecosystem Grizzly Bear Reintroduction Plan. This rider would block funding for the National Park Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service to establish a nonessential experimental population of grizzly bears under section 10(j) of the Endangered Species Act. Doing so would effectively prevent the agencies from implementing the North Cascades Grizzly Bear Ecosystem Restoration Plan. The plan involves transporting grizzly bears into the region from other areas with more robust grizzly populations, an essential step to recovering grizzly bears in the North Cascades.

Sec. 128 – Bitterroot Ecosystem Grizzly Bear Reintroduction. This rider would block funding for the Fish and Wildlife Service to restore grizzly bears to the Bitterroot Ecosystem of Montana and Idaho. Although historical records reveal that grizzlies once occurred throughout this area, it has at most only a few bears now. The Bitterroot Ecosystem encompasses one of the largest contiguous blocks of Federal land remaining in the lower 48 states and is ideal for grizzly bear recovery.

Sec. 129 – Exemption for Captive Fish Under the Endangered Species Act. This vague rider, which appears to benefit less than five commercial caviar sellers in Florida, would exempt all captive fish from regulations implementing the requirements of the Endangered Species Act, regardless of the impacts on conservation efforts for salmon, steelhead and domestic sturgeon species, all of which are held in captive breeding programs or hatcheries to further their recovery. Furthermore, such an exemption for the small handful of commercial caviar producers would undermine conservation efforts around the world, and likely result in more illegal caviar trade benefitting hostile nations including Russia.

Sec. 130 – Charles M. Russel National Wildlife Refuge. This rider would block the Secretary of the Interior from returning wild, free-ranging bison to their native homes on the refuge. These federal lands contain some of the most unique and viable native short grass habitat in Montana and support a variety of prairie wildlife species.

Sec. 131 – Blocks Revisions to Harmful Endangered Species Act Regulations. This rider undermines the Endangered Species Act and the federal agency rulemaking process by blocking the Fish and Wildlife Service from implementing or enforcing its 2024 final regulations that reversed or revised the

previous administration's rules attempting to gut Section 4 (listing and critical habitat) and Section 7 (interagency consultations) of the Endangered Species Act.

Sec. 132 – Imposes Unreasonably Burdensome Procedural Requirements on the Service. This rider reissues the 2018 Secretarial Order No. 3368 “Promoting Transparency and Accountability in Consent Decrees and Settlement Agreements,” which imposes overly burdensome approval and reporting requirements for consent decrees and settlement agreements that would undermine agency’s ability to resolve lawsuits addressing unlawful conduct. These tools that have long helped resolve disputes efficiently and compel agencies to comply with the Endangered Species Act. At a time when the Service is already severely underfunded and understaffed, this rider would divert critical resources away from conservation actions needed to protect and recover threatened and endangered species.

Sec. 134 – Fast-tracks the Destruction of Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. This rider would block funding to implement the most recent Monument Management Plan, a framework to protect one of the wildest desert landscapes of the West and one that took years of work, public input and Tribal consultation. The monument is home to mountain lions, bears, desert bighorn sheep, dozens of reptile and amphibian species, and more than 200 species of birds, including the endangered California condor and Southwestern willow flycatcher, bald eagles and peregrine falcons.

Sec. 135 – Consultation Exemptions for Land Management Plans. This rider would codify climate denialism into law by exempting the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management from updating their land management plans when a species becomes listed, new critical habitat is designated, or new information — which often includes new data on the severe impacts of climate change on species — demonstrates that endangered species are being harmed or killed on our nation's public lands.

Sec. 140 – Blocks Stronger Protections in the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska. This rider would block implementation of a 2024 rule, or a substantially similar rule, placing new restrictions on oil and gas development in the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska, which is home to migratory birds, caribou, polar bears, walruses, beluga whales and more.

Sec. 141 – Delists the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem Population of Grizzly Bears. This rider would remove Endangered Species Act protections for grizzly bears in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. The Yellowstone grizzly bear population remains isolated and under threat from habitat loss and human-caused mortalities

Sec. 146 – Weakens Habitat Protections for Northern Spotted Owls. This rider requires the Service to reissue a rule that significantly decreases protected critical habitat for northern spotted owls by approximately 3.5 million acres in Oregon and Washington. Northern spotted owls are only found in the forests of the Pacific Northwest and are on the brink of extinction due to habitat loss and invasive barred owls.

Sec. 147 – Weakens Habitat Protections for Canada Lynx. This rider blocks the Service from protecting 19,000 additional acres as critical habitat for the threatened Canada lynx. Lynx populations in the U.S. are small and fragmented, so protecting this habitat is crucial for its recovery.

Sec. 149 – Delists the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem population of Grizzly Bears. This rider would prematurely remove Endangered Species Act protections for grizzly bears in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem, which can be found in and around Glacier National Park in Montana.

Sec. 434 – Prevents Agencies from Regulating Lead Content of Ammunition and Tackle. This rider would block federal agencies from regulating the lead content in ammunition or fishing gear under the Toxic Substances Control Act or any other law.

Sec. 502 – Blocks Protections for Seven Texas Freshwater Mussels. This amendment would block protections for seven imperiled freshwater mussels in Texas and their critical habitat. These seven mussels—including the Texas pimpleback, Guadalupe orb, Texas fatmucket, Guadalupe fatmucket, false spike, Balcones spike, and Texas fawnsfoot—have waited for between 16 and 17 years to receive protection. These mussels are disappearing because of pollution, sediment, diversions, dams and development, as well as droughts, heat waves, and violent floods caused by global warming.

As we face an accelerating and unprecedented wildlife extinction crisis, now more than ever we need Congress to uphold our environmental laws and protect our nation’s most vulnerable animals and plants. For these reasons, we urge you to oppose this bill and any additional anti-wildlife amendments during full committee markup.

Sincerely,

Center for Biological Diversity
American Bird Conservancy
Animal Commons
Animal Defenders International
Animal Protection New Mexico
Animal Welfare Institute
Born Free USA
CalWild
Conservation Northwest
Defenders of Wildlife
Earthjustice Action
Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research
Endangered Species Coalition
Environmental Protection Information Center (EPIC)
FOUR PAWS USA
Friends of Blackwater.org
Friends of Nevada Wilderness
Friends of the Clearwater
Friends of the Earth
Grand Canyon Wolf Recovery Project
Green Mountain Animal Defenders
GreenLatinos
Humane World Action Fund
Humane World for Animals
Indiana Forest Alliance
International Marine Mammal Project of Earth Island Institute
International Wildlife Coexistence Network
Izaak Walton League Rapid City SD Chapter
John Muir Project
Kettle Range Conservation Group

Kids for Saving Earth
Large Carnivore Fund
League of Conservation Voters
Los Angeles Audubon Society
Los Padres ForestWatch
Maine Audubon
Natural Resources Defense Council
New York State Ornithological Association
North American Wolf Foundation
Northern Virginia Bird Alliance
NYC Plover Project
Ocean Defense Initiative
Oregon Natural Desert Association
Oregon Wild
Orleans Audubon Society
People & Pollinators Action Network
People and Carnivores
Prairie Hills Audubon Society (of Western South Dakota)
Predator Defense
Project Coyote
Project Eleven Hundred
Protect the Adirondacks! Inc.
Reintegrating Wildness
Resource Renewal Institute
RESTORE: The North Woods
Rocky Mountain Wild
Sage Steppe Wild
Save Our Sky Blue Waters
Save the Manatee Club
Sea Turtle Conservancy
Shedd Aquarium
Sioux Falls Bird Club
South Shore Audubon Society
Species Unite
Team Wolf
The Urban Wildlands Group
Western Nebraska Resources Council
Western Watersheds Project
Western Wildlife Conservancy
Western Wildlife Outreach
Wild Cumberland
WildEarth Guardians
Wilderness Watch
Wildlife for All
Wolf Conservation Center
Wolf Hollow
Wyoming Untrapped
Wyoming Wildlife Advocates
Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation
Yaak Valley Forest Council