

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 23, 2020

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairman
Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment, and
Related Agencies Appropriations
125 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Udall
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies Appropriations
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jerry Moran
Chairman
Subcommittee on Justice, Science and Related
Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Justice, Science and
Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Murkowski, Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Udall, and Ranking Member Shaheen:

As you begin the process of crafting the Fiscal Year 2021 (FY21) Interior, Environment and Related Agencies appropriations bill, we strongly urge you to support increased funding for endangered species conservation, including Endangered Species Act (ESA) listing, planning and consultation, species conservation and restoration, and species recovery. After decades of being systematically and severely underfunded, more robust funding is needed to recover and conserve our Nation's imperiled animals and plants.

In 2019, the United Nations' Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services released a dire assessment warning that 1 million animal and plant species are heading towards extinction, many in the next few decades, due to habitat loss, climate change and other human activities. More than 10 species have been declared extinct since 2010 in the continental U.S., and insects and other important pollinators around the world are declining at a rapid rate. In North America alone, scientists estimate that bird populations have declined by 30 percent in the past 50 years.

Fortunately, the U.S. Endangered Species Act is one of the strongest tools we have to combat the current wildlife extinction crisis. In enacting the Endangered Species Act of 1973, Congress recognized that imperiled species of wildlife, fish and plants "are of esthetic, ecological, educational, historical, recreational, and scientific value to the Nation and its people." Congress gave the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) a powerful set of tools to carry out the law's goal of conserving endangered species.

Nonetheless, implementing recovery strategies and partner activities in an effective manner requires both a significant commitment and sufficient resources. Strong funding for Ecological Services supports FWS's work with partners at the state and local level both to recover listed species and protect their habitats. Similarly, funding for NMFS

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Protected Resources Science and Management program is crucial for the protection and recovery of imperiled marine species.

The need for increased funding is evident from the over 400 threatened and endangered species that lack recovery plans, as well as the hundreds of species that receive zero dollars in recovery funding from any agency – federal or state. Congressional appropriations for recovery and consultation have simply not kept pace with the number of listed species or the complex challenges of conservation in a world facing the accelerating threats of climate change and habitat loss. Inadequate funding not only puts at risk the recovery of threatened and endangered species and conservation of their habitats; it also impedes FWS and NMFS’s ability to apply the best scientific knowledge available in a timely review of listing decisions for species in need of protection.

Unfortunately, animals and plants continue to go extinct in the United States while waiting for the Act’s protections. Creating an artificial bottleneck in the listing process—a process that is based solely on the best available science by law—is poor policy. Likewise, underfunding Candidate Conservation in the Conservation and Restoration line-item and the Cooperative Endangered Species Fund undermines the strong partnerships that the FWS is working to build. If Congress does not provide the funding increases necessary for FWS and NMFS to carry out their statutory obligations, endangered species could continue to move closer to extinction. More importantly, our nation could lose even more of our precious wildlife heritage.

For FY21, we request the following funding increases for FWS endangered species conservation:

- \$28 million for recovery
- \$8 million for planning and consultation
- \$9 million for ESA listing
- \$14 million for the Cooperative Endangered Species Fund

We also request level funding at \$13 million for FWS Candidate Conservation.

Finally, in the last few years we have seen the Southern Resident killer whales and the North Atlantic right whales approach crisis status, with 10 right whale deaths in 2019 alone and the killer whale population at its lowest levels in 20 years. Both species underscore the dangers of being complacent and not providing robust funding to NMFS. We recommend a \$20 million increase in funding to the agency’s protected resources budget to ensure that none of our amazing marine species slip irrevocably towards extinction.

All of this funding is critical to save more species from extinction and put America’s imperiled animals and plants on the path to recovery. We look forward to working with the Subcommittee to ensure that these programs are adequately funded in FY21.

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Sincerely,

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

Gary C. Peters
United States Senator

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Kirsten Gillibrand
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Chris Van Hollen
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Mazie Hirono
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Bernard Sanders
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Ron Wyden
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Martin Heinrich
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Sheldon Whitehouse
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