

March 31, 2020

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
The Capitol H-305
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
The Capitol H-305
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sanford Bishop, Jr.
Chairman
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
2362-A Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeff Fortenberry
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug Administration,
and Related Agencies
2362-A Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Lowey, Ranking Member Granger, Subcommittee Chairman Bishop, and Subcommittee Ranking Member Fortenberry:

The world is in the midst of a staggering wildlife extinction crisis unlike anything humans have ever experienced before and on a scale and pace unseen in millions of years. Wildlife populations around the world are crashing at alarming rates and with distressing frequency. One million species are heading towards extinction. Millions more are declining. Scientists warn of an insect apocalypse as populations of once-common pollinators and other insects plummet around the world.

Monarch butterfly populations have fallen by more than 80 percent over the past 20 years, and scientists at the U.S. Geological Survey estimate that there is nearly a 60 percent chance the monarch's spectacular, multigenerational migration in the eastern half of the country could completely collapse within the next 20 years.¹ More alarmingly, the western population that winters in California has collapsed by nearly 99.4 percent, and could disappear in just a few short years. Thus, we request that you significantly increase funding for the conservation of monarch butterflies to \$100 million per year starting in fiscal year 2021. This level of funding would cover the cost of restoring one million acres of milkweed and pollinator habitat per year so that the butterfly is resilient to threats from habitat loss, pesticides, severe weather, and climate change.²

Once a familiar sight, today the monarch's future is very much in doubt. The most recent annual count of monarch butterflies overwintering in Mexico—about 99 percent of all North American monarchs—showed a decrease of 53 percent from last year's count. The western population of monarch butterfly is doing even worse. That population has crashed by 99 percent, reaching a historic low of fewer than

¹ See Semmens, et al., *Quasi-extinction risk and population targets for the Eastern, migratory population of monarch butterflies (Danaus plexippus)*. Scientific Reports (2016), 6, p.23265. available at: <https://www.nature.com/articles/srep23265>

² According to Monarch Watch, the costs of restoration and maintenance of milkweeds and nectar plants ranges from \$100-\$1000 per acre.

30,000 butterflies for the second year in a row, down from 1.2 million two decades ago. Both populations are below the threshold at which government scientists predict the migrations could collapse.

The monarch butterfly has been decreasing towards extinction due to landscape-scale threats from pesticides, development, and global climate change. Although illegal logging and severe weather have contributed to the decline, the large-scale use of herbicides that destroy milkweed—the monarch caterpillar’s sole host plant and only food source during its caterpillar stage—is a driver of the butterfly’s decline. Milkweed has decreased by 21 percent in the U.S. between 1995 and 2013, and nearly 165 million total acres of milkweed have been lost to pesticide-intensive agriculture and development.³ Reversing that trend by actively restoring milkweed and other pollinator habitat is critical to ensure the long-term survival of the monarch butterfly.

While the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has taken some initial steps toward slowing the monarch’s decline—including the implementation of the Monarch Butterfly Habitat Development Project—monarchs desperately need more funding and an even greater commitment from Congress to ensure their long-term survival. The 2015 *National Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators* set a short-term goal of 225 million butterflies at the overwintering locations in Mexico occupying an area of 15 acres (6 hectares). This is the bare minimum needed to avoid extinction and is not a long-term goal for stability. Unfortunately, the latest annual count for 2020 found overwintering monarchs occupying just 7 acres (2.83 hectares).

The monarch butterfly population once numbered at least one billion monarch butterflies and 10 hectares of overwintering forest cover. Without substantial investments in the monarch’s conservation, one bad storm or strange climate event could result in migratory collapse. Dedicating \$100 million a year to monarch conservation gives these beloved butterflies a fighting chance at survival. We sincerely hope Congress will step up to the challenge and help save one of the world’s most iconic butterflies from further decline.

Sincerely,

Center for Biological Diversity
Alaska's Big Village Network
Animal Legal Defense Fund
Animal Welfare Institute
Animals Are Sentient Beings, Inc
Animas Valley Institute
Bard Center for Environmental Policy
Battle Creek Alliance & Defiance Canyon Raptor Rescue
Berkeley Partners for Parks
Beyond Pesticides
Beyond Toxics
Born Free USA
Boulder Rights of Nature, Inc.

³ See Flockhart et al., *Unravelling the annual cycle in a migratory animal: breeding-season habitat loss drives population declines in monarch butterflies*, *Journal of Animal Ecology* (2014) available at: <http://norrislab.ca/wp-content/uploads/Flockhart-et-al.-In-press.pdf>

California Wildlife Foundation/California Oaks
Californians for Western Wilderness
Center for Large Landscape Conservation
Christian Council of Delmarva
Citizens Committee to Complete the Refuge
Climate Law & Policy Project
Coastal Conservation League
Conservation Congress
Conservation Council For Hawaii
Cottonwood Environmental Law Center
Dana Beach Conservation Consulting
Delaware-Otsego Audubon Soc. (NY)
Dolphin Connection
Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research
Eco-Eating
Endangered Habitats League
Endangered small animal Conservation
Endangered Species Coalition
Environmental Action Committee of West Marin
Environmental Defense Fund
Food Empowerment Project
Footloose Montana
Friends of Blackwater, Inc.
Friends of the Bitterroot
Friends of the Earth U.S.
Friends of the Wild Swan
Geos Institute
Great Old Broads for Wilderness
Greater Hells Canyon Council
GreenFaith
Greenpeace
Heartwood
Herbicide-Free Campus
Hoosier Environmental Council
In the Shadow of the Wolf
Iowa Environmental Council
Kentucky Waterways Alliance
Kickapoo Peace Circle
Klamath Forest Alliance
Klamath Siskiyou Wildlands Center
Life of the Land
Los Padres ForestWatch
Magnatawan Pioneer Association
Maricopa Audubon Society
Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter {MRVAC}
MountainTrue

Native Seeds/S.E.A.R.C.H.
Natural Resources Defense Council
Northeast Oregon Ecosystems
Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides
Northwest Environmental Advocates
NY4WHALES
Occidental Arts and Ecology Center
Ocean Conservation Research
Ohio River Waterkeeper
Open Space Institute
Paula Lane Action Network (PLAN)
Peace and freedom party, socialist, on the California ballot
Pollinator Stewardship Council
Potomac Valley Audubon Society
Predator Defense
Preserve Lamorinda Open Space
Project Coyote
Public Lands Project
Raptors Are The Solution
San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society
San Juan Citizens Alliance
Save Animals Facing Extinction
Save Our Sky Blue Waters
Save The Colorado
Save The Cumberland Inc.
Sequoia ForestKeeper®
Severn Riverkeeper Program
Sheep Mountain Alliance
South Florida Audubon Society
Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance
The Cloud Foundation
The Forest Foundation, Inc.
the Interfaith Council for the Protection of Animals & Nature
The Lands Council
The Otter Project and Monterey Coastkeeper
Toxic Free NC
Unexpected Wildlife Refuge
Upper Peninsula Environmental Coalition
Utah Native Plant Society
Valley Women's Club's Environmental Committee for the SLV
Ventana Wilderness Alliance
Western Watersheds Project
Wild and Scenic Rivers
Wild Horse Education
Wild Nature Institute
WILDCOAST

Wildlands Network
Wildlife Rescue & Rehabilitation
www.All-Creatures.org