March 6, 2020

The Honorable Nita Lowey The Honorable Kay Granger

Chairwoman Ranking Member

Committee on Appropriations Committee on Appropriations

U.S. House of Representatives U.S. House of Representatives

The Capitol H-307 1016 Longworth House Office Building

Washington, DC 20515 Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Lowey and Ranking Member Granger,

On behalf of our millions of members and supporters, we request that you provide the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service the critical funding the agency desperately requires for endangered species conservation and recovery. While we appreciate the funding increase in the Fiscal Year 2020 appropriations package,[[1]](#footnote-2) as outlined below, the data show that the Service requires a budget of $531.3 million dollars across five programs to begin to make up for lost ground and put species on the path to recovery, starting in fiscal year 2021.

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. In May 2019 hundreds of scientists reviewing over 15,000 papers and reports released a groundbreaking assessment warning that 1 million animals and plant species face extinction in the next few decades due to the threats from habitat loss, climate change and other human activities.[[2]](#footnote-3) Following that report, the worst fire in decades ravaged the Amazon rainforest—home to 10 percent of Earth’s animal species—taking a massive toll on wildlife and altering entire ecosystems, while wildfires at the start of 2020 razed over 10 million acres in Australia, killing a billion individual animals.

Many once-common species are now rare. In North America alone, almost two-thirds of bird species have declined, some precipitously, in recent decades.[[3]](#footnote-4) The eastern monarch butterfly population, which numbered over a billion, crashed to just 30 million in 2013, while the western population of monarch butterfly has crashed by 99 percent.[[4]](#footnote-5) Scientists are warning of an insect apocalypse as populations of once-common pollinators and other insects plummet around the world.[[5]](#footnote-6) In the continental United States more than 10 species have been declared extinct since 2010, including two butterflies, two beetles, two freshwater snails, a snake, a crustacean, a pocket gopher and the eastern puma. Numerous other species haven’t been detected in decades and will likely be declared extinct within the coming years.

Fortunately, the United States has the strongest wildlife conservation law in place to help combat the global extinction crisis, the Endangered Species Act. Despite the protections the Act provides, decades of underfunding have prevented it from realizing its full potential. Too many species sit in limbo at the edge of extinction, or are being lost altogether, when we can ensure they remain part of our rich natural heritage. This funding package will ensure every listed species receives a minimum of $50,000 per year for recovery and will allow the Endangered Species Act to be implemented in the way Congress intended when it dedicated our country to protecting the species and the habitats that need it most. The scientific community agrees that significantly more funding is needed – to date more than 1,900 scientists have signed a letter originally published in the prestigious journal *Science* in November 2019, entitled “Solve the biodiversity crisis with funding” calling on Congress to fully fund conservation programs that protect biodiversity from severe and growing threats.[[6]](#footnote-7)

# Listing

Listing a species — placing it under the Endangered Species Act’s care — is the single best means of averting extinction. The Endangered Species Act is an incredible success for protecting species­­; the vast majority of listed species are still with us today. In contrast, nearly 50 unlisted species have been declared extinct while waiting for protections because of funding shortfalls. The Service’s seven-year listing workplan[[7]](#footnote-8) details how the agency will prioritize the evaluation of over 350 species for listing and is supported by many stakeholders. At current funding rates, it will take the Service at least 10 years to process all of the remaining species that the agency has identified as potentially needing protection under the Act. Based on the time and cost required to evaluate species for listing and status changes (such as delisting), we recommend increasing the listing program budget to $55 million in 2021 and thereafter. This recommendation is approximately three times current funding and would allow the Service to process the entire listing backlog in less than four years. To ensure species receive the detailed scientific analyses they need to determine if they need to be protected by the Act, we urge Congress to fully fund the listing program.

# Recovery

The Service’s recovery program includes planning for recovery, implementing recovery actions, and tracking recovery progress. Because funding drives recovery progress, it is essential to provide sufficient resources for the recovery program: it is how the Service can ensure threats are minimized or removed so species are conserved. Unfortunately, recovery appropriations have been essentially flat over the past two decades, and when controlling for inflation and the number of listed species, have declined since 2010 (purple line):



**Endangered Species Act funding for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has remained flat and even declined since 2010.** Note that the funding for two components shifts after 2014 because of budgeting changes, but does not change the overall pattern. Data from FWS, shown in inflation-adjusted 2018 dollars.

More concerningly, according to the reports provided by the Fish and Wildlife Service that are required by Congress each year, hundreds of endangered species receive less than $1000 a year for their recovery, with many receiving no funding from the Service at all.[[8]](#footnote-9) We strongly recommend that Congress provide a minimum of $50,000 per year per species for recovery to make sure that no species slips through the cracks.

Accordingly, Congress can significantly reverse the slide of more animal and plants towards extinction, and put every species on a path to recovery by providing the Service with $213 million for the recovery program in 2021, which is more than double the current—and insufficient—funding levels.[[9]](#footnote-10) This includes $50 million for recovery planning, which is essential to guiding species back from the brink; $150 million for recovery actions, which range from reducing poaching to invasive species control; and $13 million for conservation status reviews that need to occur every five years.

# Planning and Consultation

The Planning and Consultation program includes key processes that ensure species receive fundamental protections while allowing flexibility for infrastructure and other forms of development. The Service evaluates (“consults on”) the effects of over 10,000 federal actions on listed species per year to help protect species and their habitat—including conducting highly technical analyses for issues such as pesticide effects—as part this program. Over the past two decades, the Service has worked with states, counties, and private landowners across the country to create over 1,000 Habitat Conservation Plans for to help conserve species. But this program is stressed: appropriations have been flat or declining since the early 2000’s; nearly 1/5 of formal project evaluations run over deadlines; and the funding needed for conservation planning has dropped in past years, reducing the number of plans that have been completed.[[10]](#footnote-11)

There are opportunities to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of these processes, such as through the widespread adoption of technologies such as the Services’ Integrated Planning and Conservation (IPaC) system and the addition of dedicated personnel to monitor compliance with the Act. For planning and consultation to be maximally effective and efficient, Congress needs to provide the Service with $141 million in FY 2021 and beyond. This includes $130 million for standard consultations; an additional $1 million for pesticide consultations and $500,000 for IPaC development; $8 million for voluntary conservation; and $1.5 million for basic compliance monitoring that does not currently exist.

**Conservation and Restoration**

The Candidate Conservation component of the Conservation and Restoration program provides a key mechanism to help conserve species by improving their habitat and removing threats before they need to be listed. Early conservation action means species are more secure than waiting until species are on the brink of extinction, and it is much more cost-effective. The Service currently has 14 candidate species designated.[[11]](#footnote-12) We are grateful that the FY 2020 bill provided $13.3 million for Candidate Conservation and ask that this level be maintained in FY 2021 to efficiently keep species back from the brink of needing the protections of the Act.

**Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation**

Congress recognized the need for the federal government to cooperate with the states and others to conserve species, and the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund (CESCF) serves as an essential source of funding for states and conservation on private lands. Critically, at least half of all listed species spend a portion of their life cycle on private lands, and we need to provide the resources to facilitate recovery by everyone.[[12]](#footnote-13) The states cannot do this alone, whether because they lack the legal tools or the funding and other necessary commitments.[[13]](#footnote-14) To reverse the gap from previous funding shortfalls and match the current need for state and private lands conservation, the Service requires CESCF funding of at least $109 million for FY 2021 and beyond.

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The current extinction crisis is a wake-up call to society and Congress that more must be done. Conserving our planet’s natural heritage is a monumental challenge, but we can do more, and we know what to do for our most imperiled wildlife and plants. That means providing sufficient funding for the listing program to ensure species are recognized as imperiled; for planning and consultation to ensure basic protections are applied to species; for recovery planning and recovery work; and for collaborative work across public and private lands to ensure we work together to protect our natural heritage. The sooner we act, the more species can be saved from extinction, and the faster species can be recovered and delisted. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Center for Biological Diversity

Defenders of Wildlife

1. Pub. Law No: 116-94, Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020 (116th Cong.) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. S. Diaz, J. Settele, E. Brondizio, *Summary for Policymakers of the Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services* (2019) *available at*: <https://www.ipbes.net/news/Media-Release-Global-Assessment> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Rosenberg, L. V. et al. *Decline of the North American avifauna*. Science (2019) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Brower, Lincoln P., et al. *Decline of monarch butterflies overwintering in Mexico: is the migratory phenomenon at risk?* Insect Conservation and Diversity 5.2 (2012) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Goulson, D. *The insect apocalypse, and why it matters*. Current Biology, 29(19) (2019) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Malcom, J., et al. *Solve the biodiversity crisis with funding*. Science (2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Listing Workplan, 7-year workplan (Sept . 2016) *available at*: <https://www.fws.gov/endangered/esa-library/pdf/Listing%207-Year%20Workplan%20Sept%202016.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. *See* U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Federal and State Endangered and Threatened Species Expenditures (Fiscal Year 2016), *available at*: https://www.fws.gov/endangered/esa-library/pdf/2016\_Expenditures\_Report.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Evans et al., *Species recovery in the United States: increasing the effectiveness of the Endangered Species Act*, Ecological Applications (Jan. 2016), *available at*: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/289249207\_Species\_recovery\_in\_the\_United\_States\_increasing\_the\_effectiveness\_of\_the\_Endangered\_Species\_Act. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. *See* U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Conservation Plans by type and U.S. FWS Region, *available at*: <https://cci-dev.org/working_papers/agreements_overview.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. *See* U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Candidate Species Report, *available at:* <https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/report/table/candidate-species.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Stein et al., *Precious heritage: The Status of Biodiversity in the United States,* Oxford University Press (2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. *See* Camacho et al., *Assessing State Laws and Resources for Endangered Species Protection* (Oct. 2017), *available at:* https://www.law.uci.edu/centers/cleanr/news-pdfs/cleanr-esa-report-final.pdf; *see also* Kurose et al., *Unready and Ill-Equipped: How State Laws and State Funding are Inadequate to Recover America’s Endangered Species* (Feb. 2019), *available at*: https://centeractionfund.org/wp-content/uploads/CBD-AF-Unready-and-Ill-equipped-State-ESA-Laws.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-14)