August X, 2021

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro 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 1036 Longworth House Office Building

Washington, DC 20515 Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chellie Pingree The Honorable David Joyce

Chairwoman Ranking Member

Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,

and Related Agencies and Related Agencies

Washington, D.C. 20515 Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman DeLauro, Ranking Member Granger, Chairwoman Pingree, Ranking Member Joyce,

On behalf of our organizations and our millions of members and supporters, we first want to thank you for providing additional funding for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the FY2022 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies appropriations bill. We appreciate that the Committee recognizes the Service cannot adequately fulfill its mission to conserve, protect and recover our nation’s most imperiled animals and plants while operating on a shoestring budget. The $45.5 million increase to the Ecological Services program is a good first step towards making up for lost ground and putting Congress back on track to meet the funding needs the Service requires to implement the Endangered Species Act as intended.

We would also like to acknowledge, however, that combating the global wildlife extinction crisis is going to require more than just modest increases in funding. We were encouraged to see that President Biden’s budget requested a more than $60 million increase for endangered species—the largest increase requested for this program in history—and were hopeful that the Committee would, at a minimum, provide the Service with the amount it asked for and so desperately needs. Thus, while we appreciate the additional funding in the FY22 bill, we were disappointed to see the Committee undercut the President’s budget by $17 million, missing a critical opportunity to provide much-needed funding to an agency that has been starved of resources for decades. Further, more than one-third of this shortfall came from the recovery program budget, which has not seen a meaningful increase in funding for the last 20 years. By providing less than what the Service needs, Congress is exacerbating the extinction crisis and making it much more costly to recover endangered species in the long run.

We appreciate that the Committee increased the Service’s recovery budget, but we were disheartened to see that the total amount fell short of the President’s budget request by almost $6 million. Hundreds of endangered species receive less than $1000 a year for their recovery, with many receiving no funding from the Service at all. The agency desperately needs additional funding to help stabilize and save the most critically endangered species and ensure that every listed species receives a minimum amount of funding for their recovery. Funding drives recovery progress, and species will never be able to recover to the point where they can eventually be delisted if there continues to be a lack of sufficient funding. We also urge the Committee to develop and support dedicated extinction prevention programs for critically endangered species at the brink of extinction, including listed Hawaiian plants and forest birds, freshwater mussels, desert fish, and butterflies. Of all of the endangered species in the United States, these are some of the fastest declining groups and they desperately need emergency funding before it’s too late.

We are also concerned that the Service is not being provided sufficient resources to those species at greatest risk of extinction. For instance, the Committee provided an increase of nearly $4 million to the candidate conservation program—despite there being only 26 species currently on the candidate list—while providing a paltry $1.5 million increase to the Service’s listing budget to address nearly 430 species still waiting for a final listing determination. While both programs should be fully funded, increasing funding for the candidate program will not necessarily result in the greatest conservation benefit, as funds are not guaranteed to go towards the most imperiled species waiting for protection.

As a factual matter, the Service needs at least $8.7 million per year for at least the next four years to process the backlog of species that still need to be reviewed for protection under the Act. Of the 430 species still awaiting review, 330 of which are scheduled on the Service’s workplan for FY2021-FY2025. If Congress continues to fund the listing program at current rates, 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 go extinct every year in the United States while waiting for protection under the Act. If Congress truly wants to stem the extinction crisis, it must significantly increase funding for the listing program.

Lastly, we appreciate that the Committee highlighted in the FY22 report language the urgent need to fund recovery efforts for the American red wolf, one of the most endangered carnivores in the world, as well as the importance of accounting for climate change in species recovery plans. It is also encouraging to see the Committee recognize the devastating impacts that avian pox and malaria are having on Hawaiian birds, many of which have gone extinct or are rapidly declining because of the rise in disease-carrying mosquitos.

We hope that you will take our considerations into account in any future appropriations bill.

Sincerely,

GROUPS

Cc: The Honorable Patrick Leahy, Chairman, Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Richard Shelby, Vice Chairman, Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Jeff Merkley, Chairman, Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies