XX, 2024

The Honorable Patty Murray The Honorable Susan Collins

Chair Vice Chair

Committee on Appropriations Committee on Appropriations

United States Senate United States Senate

The Capitol S-128 The Capitol S-128

Washington, DC 20515 Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger The Honorable Rosa DeLauro

Chair 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

**Re: FY2025 Funding Request for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Ecological Services Program and Cooperative Endangered Species Fund**

Dear Chair Murray, Vice Chair Collins, Chair Granger, Ranking Member DeLauro,

In the years leading up to the Endangered Species Act’s passage in 1973, Americans were witnessing the catastrophic decline of some of our most iconic species, including the bald eagle, grizzly bear, American alligator, and Florida manatee. Decades of habitat destruction, exploitation, pesticides, pollution and other threats were pushing once-common species to the brink. It was in that heartbreaking moment when Congress decided to pass what would become one of the most successful conservation laws ever enacted by any nation.

Five decades later, the Endangered Species Act boasts a stunning record of success. It has saved countless imperiled species from extinction and has put hundreds more on the road to recovery. Thanks to the Act, millions of acres of forests, mountains, rivers, deserts, beaches, and oceans are protected. Simply put, the Endangered Species Act is our most powerful tool to combat the extinction crisis and stem the loss of biodiversity currently facing our country and the global community. However, decades of underfunding have kept it from realizing its full potential.

Thus, **we urge Congress to make bold investments in protecting our nation’s most vulnerable species by appropriating $845,480,000 for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to fully implement the Endangered Species Act.** Currently, the Service only receives around one-third of the funding required to properly implement the Act. To make matters worse, record-high inflation rates combined with relatively flat funding in recent years—and now a cut in the FY24 appropriations package—has resulted in even more reduced capacity at the agency. As a result, 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 $101,000 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.

Importantly, we also very much appreciate that the Committees did not include the riders from the FY 2024 House Interior appropriations bill that would have undermined the Endangered Species Act. We urge the Committees to reject any such riders that may be proposed during the FY 2025 appropriations process including ones that block protections for individual species.

Below are the specific details of our funding request:

**Listing**

Listing a species is the critical first step under the Act to avert extinction. Unfortunately, the listing budget has not seen a meaningful increase in decades. The Endangered Species Act is an incredible success for protecting listed species; the vast majority of listed species are still with us today. However, chronic underfunding for the listing program has resulted in many animals and plants waiting over a decade to receive safeguards. These delays can have devastating consequences. In total, nearly 50 unlisted species have been declared extinct while waiting for protections because of these funding shortfalls. This is unacceptable.

As a factual matter, the Service needs at least $70.1 million, or an increase of at least $11.7 million per year for at least the next four years, to process the backlog of approximately 200 species awaiting review. Currently, the Service fails to make dozens of findings from its listing workplan every year. An increase of $11.7 million could contribute to removing an additional 34 species from the listing backlog each year, at an estimated cost of around $340,000 for each new listing decision. At current funding rates, however, 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 be declared extinct every year in the United States while waiting for protection under the Act. Thus, we urge Congress to significantly increase the amount allocated to the listing budget in the FY2025 Interior and Environment appropriations bill so that the program finally has sufficient funds to protect all species at risk of extinction.

**Recovery**

The Service’s recovery program includes recovery planning, implementation, and recovery progress tracking. 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):

![Chart, line chart

Description automatically generated]()

**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 changes to the budget structure but does not change the overall pattern. Data from FWS, shown in inflation-adjusted 2018 dollars.

While we are grateful that the Inflation Reduction Act provides a temporary boost to the recovery program—$125 million over the next 10 years—the Service needs every dollar of additional recovery funding to help save the most critically endangered species from extinction. Currently, hundreds of endangered species still receive less than $1,000 a year for their recovery from the Service, with many receiving no funding from the Service at all.[[1]](#footnote-2) In addition, one in four listed species do not even have recovery plans, and the ones that do often have plans that are more than a decade old and may not reflect the best available science. 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.

Additional funding for the recovery program can also help support dedicated extinction prevention programs for critically endangered species at the brink of extinction, including listed Hawaiian plants, freshwater mussels, desert fish, and butterflies. Of all the endangered species in the United States, these are some of the fastest declining groups and they desperately need sustained funding before it’s too late. While the Inflation Reduction Act provided an initial downpayment to help recover these four groups of species, much more is needed to make up for decades of neglect.

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 strongly recommend that Congress appropriate a minimum of $101,000 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 $469.36 million for the recovery program in 2025, or an increase of at least $88.81 million per year over the next four years, which is more than four times the current—and insufficient—funding levels. This includes $133,393,807 for recovery planning and $162,850,471 for recovery plan revisions, which are essential to guiding species back from the brink; $168,495,447 for recovery actions, which range from reducing poaching to invasive species control; and $4,306,600 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, and over the past two decades has worked with states, counties, and private landowners across the country to create over 1,400 Habitat Conservation Plans to help conserve species. But this program is stressed: appropriations have been flat or declining for years. Additional funding can help the Service complete timely project evaluations, additional conservation plans, and overall better help conserve species and their habitats. Further, Congress made significant investments in our natural infrastructure by passing the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act. The Service will play an important role in ensuring that any infrastructure project stemming from these investments does not harm endangered species or undermine their conservation or recovery, and this additional funding will allow them to do that more effectively.

There are also opportunities to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of consultations, 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 should provide $185.56 million in FY 2025 and beyond, or an increase of at least $16.18 million per year over the next four years. This includes $164,396,196 for standard consultations; an additional $1,278,637 for pesticide consultations; $4,383,899 for “ECOSphere” development; $13,699,683 for voluntary conservation; and $1,826,624 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 23 candidate species designated, including America’s most iconic pollinator, the monarch butterfly.[[2]](#footnote-3) To efficiently keep species back from the brink of needing the protections of the Act, Congress should provide $10.5 million for Candidate Conservation.

**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.[[3]](#footnote-4) The states cannot do this alone, whether because they lack the legal tools or the funding and other necessary commitments.[[4]](#footnote-5) To close 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 $121.8 million for FY 2025 and beyond, or an increase of at least $16.11 million per year over the next four years.

\*\*\*

Combating the global wildlife extinction crisis and stemming the loss of biodiversity will require bold investments in protecting our nation’s most vulnerable species. There is no time to waste. Nationwide, 40% of animals, 34% of plants, and 40% of ecosystems are at risk. We have already lost hundreds of species to extinction in the United States, and now one million animal and plant species here and around the world are facing extinction in the coming decades if we fail to take immediate action.

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. *See* U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Federal and State Endangered and Threatened Species Expenditures (Fiscal Year 2020) *available at*: https://www.fws.gov/sites/default/files/documents/endangered-threatened-species-expenditures-%20report-to-congress-fiscal-year-2020.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. *See* U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Candidate Species Report, *available at:* <https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/report/candidate-species> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Stein et al., *Precious heritage: The Status of Biodiversity in the United States,* Oxford University Press (2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. *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-5)