

**American Bird Conservancy * American Forests * American Rivers * Born Free USA
Cascadia Wildlands * Center for Biological Diversity * Center for Food Safety
Clean Water Action * Conservation Northwest * Defenders of Wildlife * Earthjustice
Endangered Species Coalition * Environmental Protection Information Center
Friends of the Earth * Humane Society Legislative Fund * Humane Society of the United States
International Fund for Animal Welfare * International Marine Mammal Project of Earth Island Institute
Klamath Forest Alliance * Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center * League of Conservation Voters
Living With Wolves * Los Padres ForestWatch * National Parks Conservation Association
Native Plant Conservation Campaign * Natural Resources Defense Council
Northeast Oregon Ecosystems * Oceana * Oregon Wild * Predator Defense* Project Coyote
Quality Parks * Save the Manatee Club * Sierra Club * The Nature Conservancy
Turtle Island Restoration Network * Western Watersheds Project * WildEarth Guardians
Wildlands Network**

June 20, 2017

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairman
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tom Udall
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
125 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
142 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
125 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

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

As you work to develop the FY 2018 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies and Commerce, Justice Science and Related Agencies appropriations bills, we write to urge you to reject damaging funding reductions proposed in the administration's FY 2018 budget for programs that support implementation of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and conservation of imperiled and at-risk species. We also ask that the bills be kept free of riders that undermine the ESA as well as all other anti-environmental riders that would harm protections for our air, land, water and wildlife.

The ESA is our nation's most effective law in protecting wildlife and plants in danger of extinction. More than 99 percent of listed species have been saved from extinction. The American people care deeply about wildlife and are troubled by the concept of extinction. According to a June 2015 poll,

90 percent of American voters support the Endangered Species Act.¹ Another poll from December 2016 found that 81 percent of American voters agree that saving at-risk wildlife from going extinct is an important goal for the federal government.² Adequate funding for key programs is crucial in conserving imperiled and at-risk species and guarding against future extinctions.

The following programs are crucial for conservation of imperiled species.

INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is the nation's premier wildlife conservation agency.

Ecological Services – The president's budget cuts Ecological Services by \$14.8 million or 6.2 percent. We support funding at no less than the FY 2017 level of \$240 million for FY 2018 so that high priority work to protect imperiled wildlife and plant species can continue:

- **Listing:** At least the FY 2017 level of \$20.5 million for FY 2018. The \$3.4 million or 16.6 percent cut proposed for listing would disrupt a 7 year workplan recently developed by FWS and supported by a wide range of stakeholders that allows it to prioritize over 350 species for ESA listing decisions. The result will be further delays in listing decisions for many species leading to at least longer recovery times or at worst more extinctions of species.
- **Recovery:** At least the FY 2017 level of \$84 million for FY 2018. The \$4.2 million or 5.2 percent cut for recovery of listed species would worsen an already inadequate budget – the average dollar per species for recovery has decreased since 2010 and FWS receives less than 25% of funding needed to implement all recovery actions identified in recovery plans. Moreover, more than 400 listed U.S. species do not even have recovery plans – these include birds like the least Bell's Vireo, fish like the Topeka shiner, insects like the Miami blue butterfly, and many dozens of highly endangered plants.
- **Planning and Consultation:** At least the FY 2017 level of \$103.1 million for FY 2018. The \$4.3 million or 4.2 percent decrease in the budget would likely result in permitting delays for infrastructure, renewable energy, and other activities of national importance. Even under current funding resources to monitor for permit compliance are almost nonexistent.
- **Conservation and Restoration:** At least the FY 2017 level of \$32.4 million for FY 2018. The \$2.6 million or 8 percent cut would hinder continued conservation of candidate species as they await listing as well as work with states, private landowners and other stakeholders to stop declines of at-risk species.
- **Wolf Livestock Loss Demonstration Program:** At least the FY 2017 level of \$1 million for FY 2018. The budget eliminates funding for this innovative program that assists livestock owners co-existing with wolves.

Cooperative Endangered Species Fund – We urge at least the FY 2017 level of \$53.5 million for FY 2018. The \$34.2 million or 63.9 percent cut in the budget would significantly impact the work of

¹ Tulchin Research, *Poll Finds Overwhelming, Broad-Based Support for the Endangered Species Act Among Voters Nationwide*, July 2015, <http://www.defenders.org/publications/Defenders-of-Wildlife-National-ESA-Survey.pdf>

² Hart Research, *CAP Energy/Environment/Climate Voters Survey*, Dec. 2016, <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/content/uploads/2017/01/18040011/FI-CAP-Energy-Enviro-Dec2016.pdf>

states to conserve threatened and endangered species, especially needed land acquisition for Habitat Conservation Plans and species recovery both of which were zeroed out.

U.S. Geological Survey

The U.S. Geological Survey provides the basic science for the conservation of wildlife and habitat.

Ecosystems – We urge no less than the FY 2017 level of \$159.7 million for FY 2018 which should include restoration of the captive propagation program for the critically endangered whooping crane. The President’s budget states that the \$27.6 million or 17.3 percent cut to the Ecosystems budget includes elimination of this program which it nevertheless describes as “the largest dedicated captive breeding effort for Endangered Species Act-listed cranes....”

Bureau of Land Management

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages vast expanses of wildlife and fish habitat, including old-growth forests, coastal wetlands, southwestern deserts, half of the remaining habitat for the imperiled sage grouse, and almost 15 million acres of prairie grasslands vital to many declining grassland dependent species. These diverse habitats support more than 3,000 species of fish and wildlife, including more than 420 plants and animals listed under the Endangered Species Act, 110 species that are candidates for listing and over 1000 rare plant species.

Threatened and Endangered Species Management – We urge a return to the FY 2010 level of \$22.6 million for FY 2018. This program, which is responsible for implementing actions required in ESA recovery plans for listed species on the BLM lands, is already at severely inadequate funding levels. The \$1.3 million or 6 percent cut in the President’s budget would further undermine an already meager program.

Wildlife and Fisheries Management. – We urge no less than the FY 2017 level of \$115.8 million for FY 2018. The \$28.9 million or 25 percent cut in the budget would threaten implementation of the largest landscape level conservation and restoration effort in U.S. history to conserve the greater sage-grouse and more than 350 other sage-brush dependent species of conservation concern.

Office of Insular Affairs

The Office of Insular Affairs (OIA) carries out the Secretary’s responsibilities for U.S.-affiliated insular areas. These include the territories of Guam, American Samoa, the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI), and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), as well as three Freely Associated States (FAS): the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) and the Republic of Palau (Palau).

In 2016, OIA provided \$3.5 million in aid for control of the invasive brown tree snake. The proposed 2018 budget reduces this aid by \$656,000, a 19 percent cut. We urge a return to FY 2016 levels of \$3.5 million. This critical program prevents brown tree snakes from escaping from Guam and becoming established on other Pacific Island, including Hawaii, Saipan, and Rota. Brown tree snakes wiped out the native forest birds of Guam and would do the same to birds on other islands that lack snakes.

U.S. Forest Service

More than 420 species listed under the ESA and an additional 3,100 sensitive or at-risk species are found on National Forest System lands. These lands also encompass most of the remaining habitat for rare wide-ranging species such as the grizzly bear, Canada lynx and wolverine.

National Forest System Wildlife and Fisheries Habitat Management. – We urge a return to the FY 2010 level of \$143 million for FY 2018. The \$15.5 million or 11 percent reduction in the budget would undermine work to inventory and monitor, manage, and restore habitat on national forests and grasslands for fish, wildlife and plants including for listed and sensitive species.

COMMERCE, JUSTICE SCIENCE AND RELATED AGENCIES

National Marine Fisheries Service

The National Marine Fisheries Service is responsible for the management and conservation of living marine resources within the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone.

Protected Resources Science and Management – We urge no less than the FY 2017 level of \$185.8 million for FY 2018. The \$6.7 million or 3.6 percent cut in the budget would further hinder work on threatened, endangered and depleted species of marine mammals, sea turtles, and Atlantic and Pacific salmon.

Again, we urge you to reject these damaging cuts and maintain funding for these crucial conservation programs. We further ask that you keep the appropriations bills free of riders that undermine the ESA as well as all other anti-environmental riders that would undermine protections for our land, wildlife, water, and air. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

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American Forests
American Rivers
Born Free USA
Cascadia Wildlands
Center for Biological Diversity
Center for Food Safety
Clean Water Action
Conservation Northwest
Defenders of Wildlife
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