

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 4, 2023

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Chair
Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies Appropriations
The Capitol S-128
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies Appropriations
The Capitol S-128
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
Chair
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jerry Moran
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Merkley, Chair Shaheen, Ranking Member Murkowski, Ranking Member Moran:

As you begin the process of crafting the Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24) appropriation bills to fund the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), we strongly urge you to support increased funding for endangered species conservation, including Endangered Species Act (ESA) listing, planning and consultation, species conservation and restoration, and species recovery. Specifically, we request funding at levels equal to or above the President's budget request for FWS's Ecological Services line (\$384.5 million) and for NMFS's Protected Resources Science and Management line. Thousands of species depend on the Endangered Species Act for survival, yet it has been severely underfunded for decades. We applaud the moderate increase in funding in the final FY23 omnibus, and note that more robust funding is critical to recover and conserve our country's threatened and endangered species.

A recent analysis from NatureServe, a leading conservation data organization, found that 40% of our nation's animals and 34% of its plants are threatened with extinction. The risk of ongoing biodiversity loss is significant, because the health and resilience of wildlife and ecosystems are directly linked to human health and well-being. As one example, half a trillion dollars of crops per year are at risk from pollinator loss. Ecosystem services from fisheries to water filtration and more are threatened by declines in biodiversity. The World Economic Forum's 2022 Global Risk report identifies biodiversity loss as the third most severe risk to the global economy over the next ten years. A fully funded Endangered Species Act is our most powerful tool to prevent further species extinction and biodiversity loss. Thanks to the ESA, iconic species like the humpback whale and the brown pelican are still with us today.

In enacting the Endangered Species Act of 1973, Congress recognized that imperiled species of wildlife, fish and plants "are of esthetic, ecological, educational, historical, recreational, and

scientific value to the Nation and its people.” Congress gave FWS and NMFS a powerful set of tools to carry out the law’s goal of conserving endangered species. Implementing recovery strategies effectively, however, requires sufficient resources. Robust funding for Ecological Services will support FWS’s work with state and local partners to recover listed species and protect their habitats. Similarly, funding for NMFS Protected Resources Science and Management program is crucial for protecting and recovering imperiled marine species.

The need for increased funding is evident from the over 400 threatened and endangered species that lack recovery plans, as well as the hundreds of species that receive zero dollars in recovery funding from either federal or state agencies. Congressional appropriations for recovery and consultation have not kept pace with the number of listed species or the challenges of conservation in a world facing the accelerating threats of climate change and habitat loss. Inadequate funding not only puts at risk the recovery of threatened and endangered species and conservation of their habitats; it also impedes FWS and NMFS’s ability to apply the best scientific knowledge available in a timely review of listing decisions for species in need of protection.

Unfortunately, animals and plants continue to go extinct in the United States while waiting for the Act’s protections. In fact, nearly 50 species have been declared extinct while waiting for protections because of these funding shortfalls. Inadequate funding for ESA listings creates an artificial bottleneck in the listing process, which by law is required to be based solely on the best available science. Likewise, underfunding recovery and other endangered species programs undermines the strong partnerships that FWS is working to build. If Congress does not provide the funding increases necessary for FWS and NMFS to carry out their statutory obligations, endangered species could continue to move closer to extinction and our nation could lose even more of our precious wildlife heritage, and for that reason we urge particularly robust funding for both listing and recovery at FWS and NMFS.

Overall, funding the ESA at or above the President’s budget request will help save more species from extinction and put America’s imperiled animals and plants on the path to recovery. While we believe federal agencies could make good use of even more financial resources to conserve species, our funding request level reflects our understanding of the need to balance the many important conservation priorities in your respective appropriations bills. We look forward to working with the Subcommittees to ensure that these programs are adequately funded in FY24.

Sincerely,



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



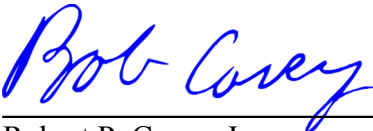
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United States Senator



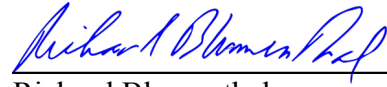
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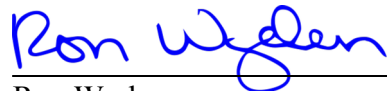
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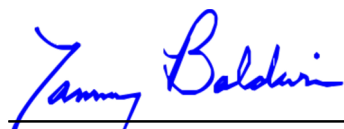
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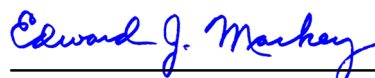
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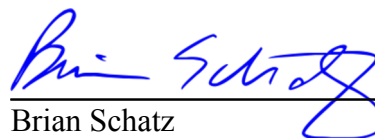
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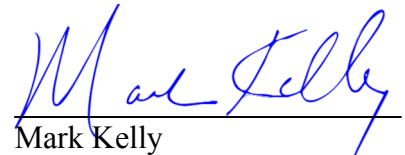
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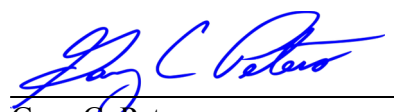
Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



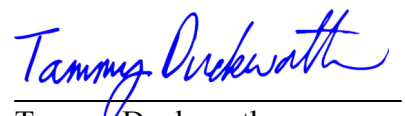
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