



*Bringing back the birds*

**Steve Holmer, Vice President of Policy, American Bird Conservancy, FY 2020 Appropriations Bird Conservation Recommendations**

On behalf of American Bird Conservancy, a 501c(3) non-profit organization dedicated to conserving birds and their habitats throughout the Americas, please support boosting effective U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service bird conservation programs in the FY 2020 Interior Appropriations bill including the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (NMBCA), Migratory Bird Joint Ventures, State and Tribal Wildlife Grants, North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA), Endangered Species Recovery State of the Birds Activities, and the early detection and control of invasive species. These programs are well-integrated and mutually support each other to promote bird conservation.

**Please Increase the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act to \$6.5 million.**

**Please Increase Migratory Bird Joint Ventures to \$19.9 million.**

**Please Increase State Wildlife Grants to \$70 million.**

**Please Increase the North American Wetlands Conservation Act to \$50 million.**

**Please Increase State of the Birds Activities to \$5 million.**

**Please Increase Funding for DOI Invasive Species Control by \$10 million.**

**Please Oppose Harmful Policy Riders such as the Greater Sage-Grouse ESA Listing Exemption**

Also, please oppose harmful policy riders concerning the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that would erode the Endangered Species Act (ESA) including listing exemptions to the Greater Sage-Grouse or other species. Other past riders to exclude regarding the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) include requiring EPA to treat air emissions from forest biomass as carbon neutral; prohibiting EPA from requiring Clean Water Act permits for certain agricultural practices; or prohibiting funding to regulate lead content of ammunition, ammunition components, or fishing tackle under the Toxic Substances Control Act or any other law.

### **Please Increase Funding for the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act to \$6.5 Million**

Since 2002, the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (NMBCA) has functioned as a matching grant program to fund projects that conserve neotropical migratory birds--those that breed in or migrate through the United States and Canada and spend the non-breeding season in Latin America and the Caribbean. NMBCA has helped conserve 400 species, representing more than 4 billion birds, including some of the most endangered birds in North America. All NMBCA grant requests must be matched with non-federal funds at least 3 to 1, and to date, the match has been 4 to 1. Please support increasing NMBCA to \$6.5 million.

### **Please Increase Funding for Migratory Bird Joint Ventures to \$19.9 Million**

Migratory Bird Joint Ventures are regional partnerships managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that identify conservation priorities and carry out projects to reverse population declines of at-risk bird species. The Joint Ventures (JVs) are essential to address the conservation needs of migratory birds, and they leverage significant matching contributions from partner organizations and foundations. Since the program's inception in 1986, Joint Ventures have conserved over 22 million acres of critical habitat for wildlife and people and leveraged 34 dollars of support for every federal dollar spent. We urge that the Migratory Bird Joint Ventures be fully funded at \$19.9 million.

### **Please Increase Funding for State and Tribal Wildlife Grants to \$70 Million**

State Wildlife Grants fund is the nation's core program for preventing wildlife from becoming endangered, and supports a wide variety of wildlife-related projects by state fish and wildlife agencies throughout the United States. In order to receive federal funds through the State Wildlife Grants Program, Congress charged each state and territory with developing an "action plan." The State Wildlife Action Plans are the result of a collaborative effort by scientists, sportsmen, conservationists, and other members of the community, and they now guide conservation actions in each state. We respectfully request the Committee allocate \$70 million for FY2020.

### **Please Increase Funding for the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) to \$50 Million**

NAWCA provides funding for conservation projects for the benefit of wetland-associated migratory birds in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Unfortunately, more than half of the original wetlands in the U.S. have been lost, contributing to the steady decline of migratory birds. NAWCA, in existence since 1989, has preserved over 30 million acres of wetlands by leveraging \$1.6 billion in federal funds with more than \$3.3 billion in partner contributions. We respectfully requests the Committee prioritize FY2020 funding for NAWCA at \$50 million.

### **Please Increase State of the Birds Activities for Critically Endangered Birds to \$5 Million**

We greatly appreciate the funding provided in the FY 2018 spending agreement for State of the Birds Activities dedicated to arresting the bird extinction crisis in Hawaii. More than 90 Hawaiian bird species have become extinct, and nine listed Hawaiian bird species are currently in decline. This prompted the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to provide \$2.5 million in annual State of the Birds Activities funding since 2009. We request \$5 million per year to fully fund ESA recovery funding for Hawaiian birds.

### **Please Increase Funding for Invasive Species Early Detection and Response by \$10 Million**

Early Detection and Rapid Response (including Eradication) survey for, report, and verify the presence of a non-native species before the founding population becomes established or spreads so widely that eradication is no longer feasible. Rapid Response is then employed to eradicate the founding population of a non-native species from a specific location. We recommend increasing funding for Early Detection and Rapid Response by \$10 million.

### **Solutions Benefiting Birds and Halting Climate Change**

Solutions and supporting policies are needed that both address climate change, and ensure the conservation of birds and their habitats. American Bird Conservancy's *Solutions for Conserving Birds and Halting Climate Change* includes detailed recommendations on how to conserve birds and mitigate impacts from new energy developments, and how forests can be better protected and managed to sequester carbon.

For new energy installations in the U.S., we are witnessing a rapid shift away from electricity generated by burning coal to renewable energy sources and natural gas. In 2017, solar was the leading form of new energy production with over 60 percent of the global market share, with bird friendly distributed solar accounting for nearly half of the U.S. total.

One key climate solution benefitting birds is to further incentivize solar installations in the already developed landscape such as rooftops and parking lots. This will further speed the growth in renewable energy and lower the risks to birds posed by other sources of energy production, new power lines, and climate change. Another is increasing investments in energy efficiency across all sectors of the economy.

It also necessary to have regulations to ensure impacts are mitigated and that available best management practices are being used as the energy infrastructure is transformed to run off renewables. This can be accomplished through the regular NEPA process, incidental take permitting under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, land management plans with mandatory mitigation and adaptive management requirements, and establishing a system to fairly compensate for any remaining unmitigated impacts.

Planting trees and protecting existing carbon stores is another key climate solution. Currently, eleven percent of U.S. emissions are absorbed by forests, but projected loss of forests to urbanization could see this natural carbon reduction cease sometime during the 2020's. Keeping these forests as forests, protecting high carbon areas, sustainably managing forests to build carbon stores over time, planting extensive new forests, and increasing urban forest cover all benefit to the climate and provide increased habitat for birds.

### **Loopholes to NEPA Causing Harm to Forests and Loss of Carbon**

Regarding categorical exclusions, American Bird Conservancy is opposed to the 3,000 acre exclusion and designation process created by the 2014 Farm Bill and urge that it be eliminated. Logging has significant impacts which always need to be considered in at least an environmental analysis. In addition, designated treatments areas were not adequately prioritized. We are opposed to new categorical exclusions for logging.

In particular, we strongly oppose expanding the breadth of existing categorical exclusions to enable large-scale salvage logging. The science is clear that post-fire salvage logging does not advance ecosystem integrity or restoration, and instead is a "tax" on the environment. There is a shortage of large snags and other features that birds such as the Northern Spotted Owl and Black-backed Woodpecker depend.

The 20-Year Monitoring reports of the Northwest Forest Plan indicate that it is recovering mature and late-successional forests as predicted, and as a result, water quality and the abundance of suitable habitat for listed species is increasing. Other studies confirm the Plan has turned the Northwest's forest from a carbon source to a carbon sink. Continuing the successful Northwest Forest Plan, and conserving other high-carbon forests should be an agency priority.

The Northwest Forest Plan includes a robust restoration program to create jobs in the woods restoring watersheds, and scientifically sound ecological restoration in plantations. Congress has never fully funded this aspect of the plan, but the potential remains. We recommend:

Expanding the successful Legacy Roads program and other watershed restoration initiatives. The 20-year monitoring report of the NWFP indicates that water quality is being improved (although is far from complete) across the region, and this effective process should be bolstered to create additional jobs.

Provide Community Protection/Defensible Space Grants. The purpose of these grants to homeowners, businesses, and communities is to create jobs reducing fire risks to structures, and carrying out defensible space work within high-risk urban and suburban areas.

Permanently reauthorize the Secure Rural Schools Act to provide a stable source of funding for economic diversification and forest restoration decoupled from timber receipts.