

FY 2021 Testimony of Jacob Malcom, Ph.D.
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House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

Madam Chairman, Ranking Member and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. I am Jacob Malcom, Director of the Center for Conservation Innovation at Defenders of Wildlife. Founded in 1947, Defenders has more than 1.8 million members and supporters and is dedicated to the conservation of wild animals and plants in their natural communities.

The science marshalled in recent months and years shows with unrivaled clarity that this is a pivotal time for that wildlife and ultimately, humanity. You are likely familiar with last year's global assessment on the status of biodiversity and ecosystem services, which found that 1 in 8 species on Earth – about 1 million species – are facing extinction. We are causing the loss of species tens to hundreds of times faster than the background extinction rate. This loss of species is driven by the fact that we have altered over 75% of terrestrial environments and 66% of marine environments. Combined with ongoing threats as diverse as climate change and invasive species, the damage we have done and are doing to nature is almost unimaginable. The consequences are as dire for humanity as they are for wildlife. 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 beyond, are all at grave risk because of the damage to natural systems.

In the face of these threats, the U.S. is fortunate to have solutions—from the Endangered Species Act (ESA) to a strong public lands system—that can work, but only if we fund them. Defenders appreciates the increases for key wildlife programs provided in the final FY 2020 omnibus appropriations bill. But years of severely inadequate funding and the scale of the catastrophe facing the planet's wildlife mean significantly more funding is needed in every area.

In addition, Defenders remains opposed to the administration's various efforts to reorganize the Department of the Interior and to restructure or relocate some of its agencies and programs. These efforts seem more focused on undermining agency transparency and dismantling programs that conserve the lands, water and wildlife under the Department's jurisdiction rather than to achieve any efficiencies or real improvements in management. We urge you to continue to reject these proposals, or in the case of the Bureau of Land Management relocation that is already underway, to do as much as possible to mitigate the impacts and to maintain continuity.

We were very grateful that the FY 2020 House bill did not retain the longstanding prohibition on protecting the sage-grouse under the Endangered Species Act, but we were extremely disappointed that the final omnibus bill once again reinstated the rider. We urge the Subcommittee to ensure removal of the rider in the final FY 2021 bill once and for all. Sage-grouse continue to decline in every state where they occur. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service must have all tools available to conserve this increasingly imperiled bird, and the rider is a conspicuous political interference with the integrity of the scientific process that is the foundation of the Endangered Species Act.

Fish and Wildlife Service

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is our nation's premier wildlife conservation agency. While we appreciate the increases provided in the FY 2020 bill, the agency needs significantly greater

increases to support recovery of threatened and endangered species; protection of migratory birds and fish, species of global conservation concern and other trust species; and prevention of both domestic and international wildlife crimes.

Ecological Services – Last year, a coalition of more than 200 organizations sent a letter to Congress requesting a significant infusion of funds into the Ecological Services program to begin to address the extinction crisis, a total of \$486 million, \$220 million more than the current level:

- **Listing:** Several years ago, FWS developed a broadly supported workplan to allow for timely listing decisions on 350 species. Because of funding decreases, FWS now has a backlog of 22 species with delayed listing decisions as well as 74 species in the workplan for a total current listing backlog of 96 species. For FWS to meet these and other obligations under the listing budget, a total of \$51 million is needed annually, an increase of \$30.7 million over the FY 2020 level. Species due for decisions include the Pacific marten, Eastern Black Rail, island marble butterfly, and Black-capped Petrel.
- **Recovery:** Currently, more than 400 listed species lack final recovery plans and another 500 plans will need to be updated in the next five years. Moreover, hundreds of listed species receive less than \$1,000 per year for recovery with many receiving no FWS funding at all. Congress should provide a minimum of \$50,000 per year per species for recovery to ensure no species slips through the cracks. For FWS to meet these and other obligations under the recovery budget, a total of at least \$196.7 million is needed annually, an increase of \$93.7 million. We very much appreciate the direction included in FY 2020 report language for FWS to establish extinction prevention programs for critically endangered species and we urge the Subcommittee to press for the establishment of these programs.
- **Planning and Consultation:** FWS conducts ESA Section 7 consultations on more than 10,000 federal actions each year so that projects can move forward while minimizing harm to listed species. The requirements of pesticide consultations in particular are large and essential to protecting species. To meet planning and consultation needs and to work with non-federal stakeholders to develop Habitat Conservation Plans, \$130 million is needed annually, an increase of \$21 million over the FY 2020 level. In addition, we are grateful for the direction included in the FY 2020 report for FWS to enhance the Integrated Planning and Conservation System and to plan development of a system for compliance monitoring. We urge continued oversight of these efforts.
- **Conservation and Restoration:** At least \$8 million per year from FY 2021 to FY 2026 is needed for the Candidate Conservation element of Conservation and Restoration to assist with early conservation action on the current 14 candidate species.
- **Wolf Livestock Loss Demonstration Program:** Defenders urges continued funding at no less than \$1 million for this program that assists livestock owners co-existing with wolves.

National Wildlife Refuge System – Our National Wildlife Refuge System is the largest network of public lands and water in the nation dedicated to wildlife conservation, unique in that it is one of the few places on the planet where wildlife comes first. While we appreciate the FY 2020 level of \$502.4 million for Refuge System Operations and Maintenance (O&M), a \$14.2 million increase, it has taken ten years to simply return O&M funding to just below the high-water FY 2010 level of \$503.2 million. Defenders recommends \$586 million for O&M for FY 2020, an increase of \$83.6 million. The Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement, a coalition of 23 hunting, fishing, conservation and scientific organizations estimates at least \$900 million is needed annually for O&M.

Migratory Bird Management – Research published last year^a showed that North America has lost about 3 billion birds since the 1970s, and the only groups to not suffer severe declines were waterbirds that have received substantial funding over the decades. Given that the Trump administration has eliminated long-standing protections for migratory birds against incidental take, funding for conservation is more important than ever. Defenders recommends a return to no less than the FY 2010 level of \$54.5 million, an increase of \$7 million over the FY 2020 level, to support crucial survey and monitoring programs and for building resilience of bird species and their habitats.

Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) – We are extremely grateful that the FY 2020 bill continues appropriated funding to support inspectors at ports of entry currently without personnel and we urge it be maintained. Defenders supports \$85 for million for FY 2021, an increase of \$2.9 million over the FY 2019 level, to help OLE continue to address the crisis in the illegal global wildlife trade.

International Affairs – Defenders supports \$21 million for FY 2021, an increase of \$2.2 million, crucial in continuing to combat illegal wildlife trade and to build capacity in range countries.

Cooperative Landscape Conservation and Science Support – We thank the Subcommittee for again restoring funding for these two programs which the administration had zeroed out in its FY 2020 request. We recommend increases over current levels, returning to the requests made in the last Obama administration budget for FY 2017 for \$17.8 million (an increase of \$5.3 million) and \$20.6 million (an increase of \$3.3 million) respectively. With these increases, FWS can continue to work to address complex challenges such as climate change across large landscapes and otherwise address scientific questions key to conservation of trust species.

Key grant programs – Defenders supports: \$100 million for the Cooperative Endangered Species Fund, an increase of \$45.5 million; \$6.5 million for the Neotropical Migratory Bird Fund, an increase of \$1.6 million; \$18 million for the Multinational Species Conservation Fund, an increase of \$3 million; and \$70 million for State and Tribal Wildlife Grants, an increase of \$2.4 million.

U.S Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management

The U.S. Forest Service (FS) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) are essential to the conservation of wildlife and habitat in the U.S. In its FY 2020 budget the administration proposed, and lawmakers wisely rejected, consolidation of nine National Forest System budget line items into a single budget line item. Defenders remains concerned that such a consolidation, given this administration's narrow focus on timber production, could be devastating to wildlife habitat and watersheds. Further, efforts to restructure the FS Research and Development program must retain the essential interdisciplinary functions of the agency's research arm. Under any scenario, Congress must reaffirm meaningful performance metrics for wildlife habitat, watersheds, and forest resiliency on FS lands. In addition, Defenders is extremely concerned about the impact of the BLM relocation on the agency's ability to sustainably manage its wildlife, land and waters given the disruption and loss of institutional expertise. We ask the Subcommittee to maintain strict oversight and to take all possible steps to ensure continuity and expeditious restoration of affected programs in the new location. Further, Defenders requests that BLM be prohibited from using any funds for seismic exploration, oil and gas drilling and other development activities within one mile of polar bear maternal denning habitat in the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in FY 2021.

^a Rosenberg KV, Dokter AM, Blancher PJ, Sauer JR, Smith AC, Smith PA, Stanton JC, Panjabi A, Helft L, Parr M, Marra PP. 2019. Decline of the North American avifauna. *Science* 366:120–124. DOI: [10.1126/science.aaw1313](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aaw1313).

BLM Wildlife and Aquatic Habitat Management – Defenders supports a total of \$200.8 million, an increase of \$14.3 million over the FY 2020 level. Within this amount, we ask the Subcommittee to maintain specific funding for Threatened and Endangered Species Management and provide a level of \$23.6 million for the program, an increase of \$2 million over the FY 2020 level to support the conservation of the 430 listed species and numerous candidate species found on BLM lands.

BLM Renewable Energy – Defenders supports no less than \$29.1 million, the same as the FY 2020 level, to continue facilitating renewable energy development on public lands while avoiding areas with natural resource conflicts, including habitat for sensitive wildlife species.

BLM Resource Management Planning, Assessment and Monitoring – Defenders urges \$69.4 million, an increase of \$2.3 million over the FY 2020 level of \$63.1 million, to support crucial data collection and monitoring of ecological conditions and trends on the landscape as well as continued development of the Enterprise GIS. We also appreciate the direction in the report for the agency to move forward with a refined range mapping pilot project for threatened and endangered species on BLM lands and ask the Subcommittee to monitor and ensure the progress of this effort.

FS Wildlife and Fisheries Habitat Management – We support restoring funding to at least the FY 2010 level of \$143 million, \$5 million over the FY 2020 level, to carry out critical conservation and recovery activities for the nearly 470 threatened and endangered species and 3,100 sensitive species that depend on FS lands, and to help address the loss of biologists that has occurred in recent years.

FS Land Management Planning, Assessment and Monitoring – Defenders supports maintaining funding at no less than the FY 2017 level of \$182.9 million, \$2.9 million over the FY 2020 level. Outdated forest plans lack effective habitat conservation and restoration strategies.

FS Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program – Defenders supports a total of \$80 million, as authorized by the 2018 Farm Bill.

FS Forest and Rangeland Research (FS R&D) – We urge a return to the FY 2010 level of \$245 million, \$17 million over FY 2020, which included \$30.5 million for Wildlife and Fish R&D. Adequate funding for this program is crucial in providing relevant tools and information to support sustainable management of both federal and non-federal forest lands.

U.S. Geological Survey

National and Regional Climate Science Centers – We are extremely grateful that the final omnibus bill rejected the administration’s proposal to “realign centers” and also provided a significant \$13 million increase together with direction to develop the Midwest Climate Adaptation Science Center, a total of \$38.3 million. We urge continued funding at no less than this amount to support scientific needs in planning for climate change adaptation and building resiliency of ecosystems.

Ecosystems – We thank the Subcommittee for rejecting the administration’s effort to restructure this activity, including its proposed elimination of the Cooperative Research Units. Defenders urges funding at no less than the FY 2017 request of \$173.9 million, \$3.4 million above FY 2020, to help support development of crucial scientific information for sound management of our nation’s biological resources.