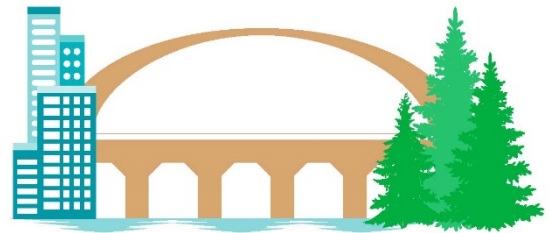


February 20, 2025

Hon. Bruce Westerman
Chairman
House Committee on Natural Resources
1324-A Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Hon. Jared Huffman
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources
1324-A Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515



National HCP Coalition

Subject: Habitat Conservation Plans Streamline Development, Limit Endangered Species Act Conflicts

Dear Chairman Westerman and Ranking Member Huffman:

On behalf of the National Habitat Conservation Plan Coalition (NHCPC), a broad coalition of local governments, state agencies, and stakeholders seeking to plan and implement largescale Habitat Conservation Plans (HCP), we attest that increased federal investment in largescale, programmatic HCPs is an opportunity for the federal government to streamline the development of infrastructure, housing, and transportation improvements. HCPs support growing communities across the country by reducing project risks due to Endangered Species Act (ESA) requirements. NHCPC representatives recently traveled to Washington, D.C. and met with key committees on the Hill, outlining the many benefits afforded by largescale, programmatic HCPs. One notable takeaway from our visit was that there is clear bipartisan support for HCPs.

HCPs were authorized by Section 10 of the ESA to support economic development and conservation of threatened and endangered species, while protecting open space for residents to enjoy. Lands are locally managed in perpetuity, contributing to species recovery that can enable their delisting or downlisting. Now more than ever, HCPs can play a critical role in support of our nation's growing population and economy. In practice, HCPs have expedited the permitting process for transportation and other infrastructure improvements by months, if not years, leading to cost savings for taxpayers. HCPs can also help streamline the Section 7 consultation process for activities with a federal nexus.

The Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund (CESCF) - also known as Nontraditional Section 6 grants - is a vital source of federal funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) for HCP Land Acquisition and HCP Planning grants. Historically, HCP Land Acquisition (and Recovery Land Acquisition) funding peaked at \$80 million in 2002, however funding levels have since declined and are not keeping up with existing needs or the inflating cost of land. Funding for the HCP Land Acquisition Grant program totaled \$26 million in Fiscal Year 2024, one-third of what was requested by federally qualifying plans. Many HCPs have land acquisition targets that cannot be met because willing sellers come forward, but no funding is available. There is bipartisan support to increase these funding levels to \$100 million, whether through increased annual appropriations or by reallocating funding within the LWCF or other sources.

The NHCPC looks forward to working with your office to identify opportunities for increasing planning and land acquisition funding for HCPs to help unlock needed infrastructure development across the

country and support our nation's economy. Should you have any questions about our request to be a part of the solution, please contact me at Abigail.fateman@dcd.cccounty.us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Abigail Fateman', written in a cursive style.

Abigail Fateman
National Habitat Conservation Plan Coalition, President