

Michael Mace, Director of Animal Collections and Strategy  
San Diego Zoo Global

February 26, 2019

The Honorable Betty McCollum, Chairwoman  
House Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
2256 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Joyce, Ranking Member  
House Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
1124 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman McCollum and Ranking Member Joyce:

San Diego Zoo Global (SDZG) remains dedicated to the welfare and conservation of species around the world. We thank the members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to submit the following testimony in support of funding for Endangered Species Recovery actions generally and for the Recovery Challenge Grant Program within the Fiscal Year 2020 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill. We appreciate the Subcommittee's continuous support in increasing funding for endangered species through the Recovery account and working with our partners at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to create the Recovery Challenge Grant program within the Fiscal Year 2018 Omnibus bill. We recognize the positive impact this funding has had on our recovery goals and encourage you to continue your support and prioritize funding for these important functions as we enter into the Fiscal Year 2020 Appropriations process.

San Diego Zoo Global holds an extensive record as a longtime leader in endangered species recovery. SDZG's Institute for Conservation Research (ICR) houses the largest, multidisciplinary, zoo-based research team with more than 150 researchers and staff who are leading experts in their field. SDZG carries out carefully tailored species recovery plans in partnership with the USFWS, a dedicated coalition of domestic and international nonprofit organizations, academic research centers, and other zoos. To date, San Diego Zoo Global has bred more than 165 endangered species and reintroduced more than 40 endangered species into native habitats.

One of SDZG's noteworthy recovery efforts includes the California Condor Recovery Program, in which a coordinated public-private partnership has been key in assisting a species once condemned to extinction, get firmly on the road to recovery. Partnering with the USFWS, State agencies, The Peregrine Fund, Oregon Zoo, Los Angeles Zoo, Ventana Wildlife Society, and several nonprofit partners, together, has provided critical genetic management, breeding, rearing, and release to recover the California condor. The success of our efforts is evident as the population grew from a low of only 22 birds to now reaching over 500. And in 2015, the

California condors reached a crucial milestone: for the first time in their recovery, more birds hatched and fledged than died in the wild. While significant progress has been made to save the California condor from extinction, the fight to fully recover the species is not over.

As a result of environmental degradation and threats from contaminants, such as lead, condors in the wild are only sustainable with substantial human intervention including managing the wild population, tracking, trapping, medical testing, and treatment for lead exposure. Our devoted nonprofit partners have been exceptionally willing to provide crucial expertise to ensure a thriving wild population. However, this is a costly effort in the long-term. Together with our nonprofit partners, we spend roughly \$3.66 million in privately raised dollars annually to sustain condor recovery efforts.

To assist in mitigating these costs, the condor partners, Association for Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), and the USFWS have worked with the Appropriations Committee to establish the Recovery Challenge Grant program in Fiscal Year 2018. This new program recognizes the critically important role of nonprofit partners to the USFWS's endangered species recovery efforts and it is a mechanism, through merit-based matching grants, to provide funding in a more commensurate manner to support and enhance these efforts. Recovery Challenge Grants are limited to nonprofit organizations implementing the highest priority recovery actions identified in recovery plans, such as for genetically-sound breeding, rearing, and reintroduction programs.

Additionally, Recovery Challenge Grants require a substantial 50:50 match, a match in which we have gone above and beyond in meeting, demonstrating our commitment to species recovery. The program also provides matching grant funding to many other longstanding priority partnerships outside of the California condor, in support of critically endangered species across the country, such as the Northern Aplomado Falcon and Steller's Eider. In FY 2018, the California condor recovery partners were thankful to have received four grants from this program totaling \$1.525 million, as it greatly assists us in providing the critical scientific expertise and on the ground experience essential to the USFWS's California condor recovery efforts.

Another example of a successful recovery partnership led by San Diego Zoo Global is our Hawaiian Endangered Bird Conservation Program (HEBCP), a three-way partnership operated in collaboration with the USFWS and the State of Hawai'i Division of Forestry and Wildlife (DOFAW). Since its inception in 1993, HEBCP has reared more than 1,048 birds of 16 species and released approximately 800 birds of ten species into the wild. Most notably, HEBCP has led the managed breeding effort for the 'Alala (or Hawaiian Crow) for more than two decades, with these efforts framing the 'Alala as an iconic case study of utilizing managed propagation and reintroduction to revive a bird species from the brink of extinction. The 'Alala was once considered extinct in the wild, today there are 19 flying free.

Throughout all of SDZG's recovery efforts, one major takeaway is that endangered species recovery is truly a shared responsibility. Our partners have made significant investments to keep efforts going, however, federal funding for Endangered Species Act (ESA) programs have historically not kept pace with the critical needs of imperiled species. The creation of the Recovery Challenge Grant program has been an incredibly important step in the right direction

towards encouraging the “Multi-Partner Recovery” model that has been so effective. As recovery funding is limited, it is more important than ever to leverage the significant resources and expertise already being offered by outside partners through increased federal investment and ensure long-term sustainability.

As the Committee develops the Fiscal Year 2020 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, we urge you to continue to provide robust funding for endangered species recovery and prioritize longstanding recovery efforts in which existing resources and partner expertise can be most effectively leveraged. Specifically, we request an increase for Endangered Species Act Recovery actions generally to \$100 million and request an increase in funding for the Recovery Challenge Grant program to \$8 million in FY2020. This funding will enable critical recovery partnerships to sustain their work so that we can realize the goal of full recovery for condors, as well as enable the USFWS and its partners to better recover other critically endangered species.

Thank you for your attention and consideration of this important request.