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**Statement of Kameran Onley, Director of U.S. Government Relations
The Nature Conservancy
Fiscal Year 2020 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations
Subcommittee
United States House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations
February 20, 2019**

Chair McCollum, Ranking Member Joyce and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit recommendations for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 appropriations. The Nature Conservancy is an international, non-profit conservation organization working around the world to protect ecologically important lands and waters for nature and people. Our mission is to conserve the lands and waters upon which all life depends.

As we enter the FY2020 budget cycle and another year of a challenging fiscal environment, the Conservancy wishes to thank this Subcommittee for the final FY2019 funding levels for conservation programs. Our budget recommendations this year reflect a balanced approach with funding levels consistent with FY2018 and FY2019 funding levels. Of particular note, we wish to work with this Subcommittee and the authorizing Committees on identifying a permanent funding solution for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. We strongly support the emphasis on funding for sage grouse conservation and urge Congress to continue support for ongoing sage grouse conservation efforts. We also support funding practical, innovative climate solutions to create an energy future that is cleaner, more secure and gives consumers more energy choices. Investing in nature brings strong returns for our security, the economy and our communities and families. The Conservancy is focused on supporting programs and investments that ensure economic and environmental benefits are enhanced today and made sustainable for tomorrow.

The Conservancy would like to take the opportunity to thank the Committee for its long-standing support of the fire funding fix in the FY2018 Omnibus appropriations bill passed last year. The passage of this much-needed funding solution means that dollars appropriated by this committee to the fire management accounts of both the USDA Forest Service and Department of the Interior can be used for their intended purposes and not be drained to fight catastrophic wildfires in upcoming fire seasons. Our forest management funding requests seek to reinvest savings resulting from a fire fix and which would reduce wildfire risk.

Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). The FY2019 Omnibus dedicated \$435 million in discretionary appropriations for LWCF. The Fund has strong bipartisan support and the Conservancy appreciates Congress's commitment to funding important on-the-ground conservation and recreation projects. The Conservancy supports \$600 million in discretionary

appropriations for LWCF for FY2020 and looks forward to working with Congress to find a permanent funding solution for LWCF.

Forest Legacy. The Conservancy support \$100 million for the Forest Legacy Program.

Endangered Species. The Conservancy supports continuing funding of at least \$53 million for the Cooperative Endangered Species Fund consistent with FY2019 levels. This funding provides critical matching grants to states and territories for conservation and species recovery efforts on non-federal lands. Further, we request your continuing support for Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) funding, specifically HCP Land Acquisition Grants. The demand for HCP acquisition grants has significantly outpaced available resources in recent years.

State and Tribal Wildlife Grants. The Conservancy supports the FY2019 Omnibus funding level of \$64.5 million for this program. Strong federal investments are essential to ensure strategic actions are undertaken by state, tribal and federal agencies and the conservation community to conserve wildlife populations and their habitats and to prevent species from being listed as threatened or endangered.

Wildlife Conservation Programs. The variety of wildlife conservation programs conducted by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) continue a long and successful tradition of supporting collaborative conservation in the U.S. and internationally. We urge the Committee to continue funding such established and successful programs as the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA), Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Fund (NMBCA), the Migratory Bird Joint Ventures, FWS Migratory Bird Management Program and the FWS Coastal Program at no less than FY2019 Omnibus funding levels. We support, at a minimum, sustained funding for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and the Cooperative Landscape Conservation and Adaptive Science programs. The latter will help support DOI in addressing large-scale conservation challenges across all ownerships, supporting collaborative problem solving for some of our nation's most challenging conservation issues. We also request strong funding for the National Fish Habitat Initiative.

International Programs. The international conservation programs appropriated annually within the Department of Interior are relatively small but are effective and widely respected. They encompass the FWS Multinational Species Conservation Funds, the FWS Wildlife Without Borders regional and global programs, and the U.S. National Park Service's International Program. We are requesting modest increases over FY2019 funding levels for these programs.

National Wildlife Refuge System. The Conservancy supports stronger funding for the Refuge System's Operations and Maintenance accounts. Found in every U.S. state and territory, national wildlife refuges conserve a diversity of America's environmentally sensitive and economically vital ecosystems, including oceans, coasts, wetlands, deserts, tundra, prairie, and forests. The Conservancy requests \$586 million in for FY2020. This represents the funding necessary to maintain management capabilities for the Refuge System.

Hazardous Fuels and Restoration. Strategic, proactive hazardous fuels and restoration treatments have proven safer and more cost-effective in reducing risks to communities and

forests by removing overgrown brush and trees, leaving forests in a more natural condition resilient to wildfires. The Conservancy recommends investing in the USDA Forest Service's Hazardous Fuels program at a \$500 million level and DOI's Fuels Management program at a level of \$210 million, in addition to repeating the Committee's FY2012 instructions for allocating funds to priority landscapes in both WUI and wildland settings. Additionally, we support increasing the CFLR program to \$80 million to allow for new projects, Vegetation & Watershed Management to \$210 million (carving out \$20 million for ecological reforestation) and maintaining the Legacy Roads and Trails program at \$50 million. Additionally, please provide funding to establish the new Watersource Protection program, enacted in the 2018 Farm Bill.

Research and Joint Fire Science. The USDA Forest Service's Forest and Rangeland Research program offers the scientific bases for policies that improve the health and quality of urban and rural communities. This program is vital for the long-term health and utility of our American forests and rivers. The Conservancy requests funding research at \$315 million. We ask to also include \$8 million for each the USDA Forest Service and DOI's Joint Fire Science programs, which have proven great success in supporting practical science that reduces fire risk and enhances economic, ecological and social outcomes nationwide.

Sage Grouse Conservation. The Conservancy requests continued investment to provide ongoing efforts to restore and conserve sagebrush habitat and the Greater Sage-grouse across federal, state, tribal and private lands. These resources are needed to implement on-the-ground projects and monitor habitat treatments, address rangeland fire and broader wildland fire prevention, suppression and restoration efforts, and facilitate the partnership and science necessary for effective conservation. Importantly, we ask that you remove language in Sec. 120 of the FY2019 Conference Report that bars the Service from proposing a rule to list the sage grouse under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). This language undercuts good faith conservation efforts by removing the critical backstop of a listing should conditions on the ground warrant such a step. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is facing perhaps the single most challenging effort in its history in conserving key sagebrush habitat, addressing identified threats to sage-grouse and promoting sustainable economic development across some 165 million acres in coordination with state and local managers and private land owners. We hope that all of our work together can avoid the need to list the sage grouse in the future

BLM Land Management and Renewable Energy Development. The Conservancy supports smart planning and management of public lands through implementation of Rapid Ecoregional Assessments, Resource Management Planning improvements, Regional Mitigation Planning, coordination with LCCs, and the Assessment, Inventory, and Monitoring Strategy. Many BLM programs contribute to these cross-cutting initiatives including: National Landscape Conservation System (\$39.8 million); Resource Management Planning program (\$63.125 million); and the new Wildlife and Aquatic Habitat Management budget line (\$128.846 million with \$21.587 allocated to threatened and endangered species). Additionally, the Conservancy supports continued funding for BLM's renewable energy development program at the FY2018 Omnibus level of \$28.3 million. Collectively, these efforts will help BLM manage its lands efficiently and effectively for energy development, species and habitat conservation, recreation, and other uses to maximize the public benefit from these lands.

Environmental Protection Agency's Geographic Programs. EPA's geographic programs, including the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, Chesapeake Bay, Puget Sound, Long Island Sound, and Gulf of Mexico programs, make a significant contribution to protecting habitat and water quality in the large landscapes where they work. These programs have a proven record of supporting the states' voluntary restoration efforts, and the Conservancy urges the Committee to continue the strong funding for these programs it allocated in FY19.

Colorado River Basin Recovery Programs. The Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program and San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program take a balanced approach to recovering four endangered fish species in the Colorado River basin. The Upper Colorado and San Juan recovery programs are highly successful collaborative conservation partnerships involving the states of New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming, as well as Indian tribes, federal agencies, and water, power and environmental interests. These programs provide critically important ESA compliance for over 2,450 federal, tribal, state, and private water projects across the Upper Colorado River Basin. Through these efforts, water use and development have continued in growing Western communities in full compliance with the ESA, state water and wildlife law, and interstate compacts. Implementation of the ESA has been greatly streamlined for federal agencies, tribes and water users. The Conservancy supports robust funding at FWS for the Colorado River Basin recovery programs, including recovery funds for both the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program and San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program, as well as fish hatchery needs associated with the recovery plans.

National Streamflow Network. The National Streamflow Network provides continuous streamflow information at over 8,200 locations across the country and is managed within the U.S. Geological Survey's Groundwater and Streamflow Information Program. Water managers, scientists, and other decisions makers, including within the Conservancy, rely on data from the National Streamflow Network to plan for floods, droughts, and other extreme events; design infrastructure, including the operation of federal reservoirs; facilitate energy generation; protect aquatic species and restore habitat; and manage federal lands. The Conservancy supports funding in FY20 to fully implement the National Streamflow Network.

Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Program. Subtitle C of Title V of the Water Resources Reform and Development Act of 2014 provides authority for low-cost credit that can leverage private investment for water infrastructure. The criteria include whether a project protects against extreme weather events or helps maintain the environment. The Conservancy appreciates the strong funding the Committee allocated to the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Program in FY19 and urges continued support for it.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit The Nature Conservancy's recommendations for the FY2020 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill.