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**Statement of Kameran Onley, Director of U.S. Government Relations  
The Nature Conservancy  
Fiscal Year 2021 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations  
Subcommittee  
United States House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations  
January 29, 2020**

Chair McCollum, Ranking Member Joyce and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit recommendations for fiscal year (FY) 2021 appropriations. The Nature Conservancy is an international, nonprofit 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 FY2021 budget cycle and another year of a challenging fiscal environment, the Conservancy wishes to thank this Subcommittee for the final FY2020 funding levels for conservation programs. Our budget recommendations this year reflect a balanced approach with funding levels consistent with FY2019 and FY2020 funding levels. Of 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 (LWCF). 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 and more secure and gives consumers more energy choices. Investing in nature brings strong returns for our security, economy, communities and families. We thank the Committee for its previous work on the wildfire suppression funding fix, but to fully succeed in this effort, we encourage the Committee to increase investments in forest resilience efforts that protect communities, reduce costs and improve habitats and forests. The Conservancy is focused on supporting programs and investments that ensure economic and environmental benefits are enhanced today and made sustainable for tomorrow.

**Land and Water Conservation Fund.** The FY2020 spending package dedicated \$495 million in discretionary appropriations for LWCF. The fund has strong bipartisan support, and the Conservancy appreciates Congress' commitment to funding important on-the-ground conservation and recreation projects across the country. The Conservancy supports full funding for LWCF at \$900 million in discretionary appropriations for FY2021 and looks forward to working with Congress to find a permanent funding solution. Additionally, the Conservancy supports \$150 million for the Forest Legacy Program that is funded through LWCF.

**Endangered Species.** The Conservancy supports continuing funding of at least \$60 million for the Cooperative Endangered Species Fund. 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 Land Acquisition Grants has significantly outpaced available resources in recent years.

**State and Tribal Wildlife Grants.** The Conservancy supports continuing the FY2020 funding level of \$67.5 million for this program. Strong federal investments are essential to ensure strategic actions are undertaken by state, tribal and federal agencies, as well as the conservation community, to protect wildlife populations and their habitats and to prevent species from being listed as threatened or endangered.

**Wildlife Conservation Programs.** The wildlife conservation programs conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) continue a long and successful tradition of supporting collaborative conservation in the United States and internationally. We urge the Committee to continue funding established and successful programs, such as the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Fund, Migratory Bird Joint Ventures, FWS Migratory Bird Management Program and FWS Coastal Program, at no less than FY2020 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 the Department of the Interior (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 DOI are relatively small but are effective and widely respected. They encompass the FWS Multinational Species Conservation Funds, FWS Wildlife Without Borders regional and global programs and National Park Service's International Program. We are requesting modest increases over FY2020 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 for FY2021. This represents the funding necessary to maintain management capabilities for the Refuge System.

**Reinvestments in Forests Following the "Fire Fix":** Congress took major steps toward stabilizing the Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Forest Service budget with the 2018 "fire fix." However, the fire fix will not be fully successful without substantial reinvestments in programs that would increase forest resilience. Strategic, proactive hazardous fuels and restoration treatments have proven safer and more cost-effective in reducing risks and leaving forests in a more natural condition resilient to wildfires. The Conservancy recommends investing in the USDA Forest Service's Hazardous Fuels Program at \$600 million and DOI's Fuels Management Program at \$250 million, in addition to repeating the Committee's FY2012 instructions for allocating funds to priority landscapes in both wildland urban interface *and*

wildland settings. Additionally, we support fully funding the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program at \$80 million to allow for new projects, funding vegetation and watershed management at \$210 million, dedicating \$30 million for a new ecological reforestation initiative and maintaining the Legacy Roads and Trails Program at \$50 million.

**Research and Joint Fire Science.** The USDA Forest Service's Forest and Rangeland Research Program offers the scientific basis 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 the program at \$315 million. We ask to also include \$8 million for each of the USDA Forest Service and DOI Joint Fire Science Programs, which have had 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 in 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 noxious and invasive grasses that enable and worsen fires, fund suppression and restoration efforts and facilitate the partnership and science necessary for effective conservation. To do this, appropriated sagebrush resources should specifically support the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) five-year integrated program of work, which holistically identifies landscapes with the highest likelihood for conservation and restoration. Congress should consider asking for an annual report from BLM on acres treated in priority areas for conservation and restoration in the sagebrush biome.

Importantly, we also ask for the Subcommittee's continued support as this process moves forward to ensure that the final spending bill for FY2021 does not contain the language in Sec. 116 of the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2020 that bars FWS 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 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 landowners in hopes of avoiding 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 Rapid Ecoregional Assessments, Resource Management Planning, Regional Mitigation Planning, Landscape Conservation Cooperatives and the Assessment, Inventory and Monitoring Strategy. Many BLM programs contribute to these cross-cutting initiatives including the National Landscape Conservation System (\$44 million), the Resource Management Planning Program (\$67 million) and the consolidated Wildlife and Aquatic Habitat Management budget line (\$130.8 million). Additionally, the Conservancy supports continued funding for BLM's renewable energy development program at no less than the FY2020 level of \$29 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 (EPA) Geographic Programs.** EPA's geographic programs, including the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and 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 FY2020 funding for these programs.

**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 in addition to Indian tribes, federal agencies and water, power and environmental interests. These programs provide critically important ESA compliance for more than 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 FY2021 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 FY2020 and urges continued support for it.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit The Nature Conservancy's recommendations for the FY2021 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill.