



January 29, 2020

Dear Interior Appropriations Committee Representatives:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. I am Steve Holmer, Vice President of Policy for American Bird Conservancy. On behalf of American Bird Conservancy, please consider the following recommendations for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service bird conservation funding and policy priorities for FY 2021. These include:

Increasing the Migratory Bird Joint Ventures to \$19.9 million, Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act to \$6.5 million, State and Tribal Wildlife Grants to \$70 million, North American Wetlands Conservation Act to \$50 million, State of the Birds Activities for Critically Endangered Hawaiian Birds to \$5 million, and a \$10 million increase for DOI Invasive Species Control.

We wish to thank members of this Subcommittee, and the 116th Congress for increases in the FY 2020 spending agreement in support of this package of effective bird and habitat conservation programs. We now ask the Interior Subcommittee to build on this progress, and to support further increases of these programs to the levels recommended above.

These increases are necessary because we know that birds are in severe decline across America and that more conservation work needs to be done. A groundbreaking study released last fall has scientifically documented a Bird Crisis: that we now have three billion fewer birds in the U.S. than just fifty years ago, a devastating 29 percent population decline. Common birds are becoming uncommon, and once relatively-abundant species are now at-risk of becoming endangered.

The success of restoring waterfowl populations and the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, show that there is a path forward. With concerted effort and smart investments we can reverse bird declines, protect essential habitat, and leave a legacy of abundant wildlife for future generations of Americans.

Migratory Bird Joint Ventures: Partnerships that Deliver Bird Conservation

American Bird Conservancy partners with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, State wildlife agencies, and other conservation groups to staff, manage and support the Migratory Bird Joint Ventures. Our staff analyzed the budget of each Joint Venture, and have found that a

number of them do not yet meet a minimal level of staffing and funding to carry out their mission.

That necessary amount is approximately \$15.67 million, which combined with the administrative overhead taken from the program, would come very close to the \$16.1 million allocated by this Subcommittee in the FY 2020 bill. However, this amount is not enough to meet the needs of declining migratory bird populations, and to address the Bird Crisis. The Association of Joint Ventures Management Boards has determined that \$19.9 million, a \$5.3 million increase, is what's really needed to meet this challenge.

Please Increase Funding for the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act to \$6.5 Million

Since 2002, the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (NMBCA) has functioned as a matching grant program to fund projects that conserve neotropical migratory birds--those that breed in or migrate through the United States and Canada and spend the non-breeding season in Latin America and the Caribbean. NMBCA has helped conserve 400 species, representing more than 4 billion birds, including some of the most endangered birds in North America. All NMBCA grant requests must be matched with non-federal funds at least 3 to 1, and to date, the match has been 4 to 1. Please support increasing NMBCA to \$6.5 million.

Please Increase Funding for State and Tribal Wildlife Grants to \$70 Million

State and Tribal Wildlife Grants fund is the nation's core program for preventing wildlife from becoming endangered, and supports a wide variety of wildlife-related projects by state fish and wildlife agencies throughout the United States. We respectfully request the Committee allocate \$70 million for FY2021.

Please Increase Funding for the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) to \$50 Million

NAWCA provides funding for conservation projects for the benefit of wetland-associated migratory birds in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. In existence since 1989, NAWCA has preserved over 30 million acres of wetlands by leveraging \$1.6 billion in federal funds with more than \$3.3 billion in partner contributions. We respectfully request the Committee prioritize FY2021 funding for NAWCA at \$50 million.

Please Increase State of the Birds Activities for Critically Endangered Birds to \$5 Million

We greatly appreciate the funding provided in the FY 2019 spending agreement for State of the Birds Activities dedicated to arresting the bird extinction crisis in Hawaii. More than 90 Hawaiian bird species have become extinct, and nine listed Hawaiian bird species are currently in decline. This prompted the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to provide \$2.5 million in annual State of the Birds Activities funding since 2009. This amount has since been

increased to \$3,250,000. We respectfully request \$5 million per year to fully fund ESA recovery funding for Hawaiian birds.

Please Increase Funding for Invasive Species Early Detection and Response by \$10 Million

Early Detection and Rapid Response (including Eradication) survey for, report, and verify the presence of a non-native species before the founding population becomes established or spreads so widely that eradication is no longer feasible. Rapid Response is then employed to eradicate the founding population of a non-native species from a specific location. We recommend increasing funding for Early Detection and Rapid Response by \$10 million.

In addition, American Bird Conservancy urges you to please consider support for the following additional priorities:

Preventing Bird Collisions with Windows

The FY 2020 House Interior report included language encouraging federal agencies to reduce bird collisions with the buildings they manage. We support this House-approved building collisions report language, and urge addition of the following in the FY 2021 bill:

All agencies under the jurisdiction of this Act are directed to consider bird-safe building design and materials for the structures they manage, build, or retrofit. In addition, agencies are directed to take low cost or no cost action, such as identifying problem windows and buildings that routinely cause collision, turning off interior lights in those buildings at night, and applying films or other adhesives to glass windows in those buildings to reduce bird collisions.

ESA Recovery: Condors, Falcons, and Eiders

\$3,500,000 for recovery of Northern Aplomado Falcon, California Condor, and Stellar's Eider.

ESA Recovery: Florida Grasshopper Sparrow

\$100,000 for recovery of the Grasshopper Sparrow, which is at risk of extinction.

Migratory Bird Treaty Act

The FY 2020 House Interior Committee Report included thoughtful language upholding a strong Migratory Bird Treaty Act. In light of the recent Bird Crisis study finding massive declines of bird populations, it is essential that our environmental laws be maintained and enforced. Please support inclusion of this language.

Endangered Species and Old Growth Forest Habitat Protection

The House FY 2020 report included language supporting Marbled Murrelet and Greater Sage-Grouse conservation. The FY 2020 House Interior bill included protections against offshore drilling (Sec. 438, 439, 442, 443), transfer of border lands (Sec. 427), and road building on the Tongass National Forest (Sec. 441). Please include these provisions in the base FY 2021 bill. We also recommend that similar language be included to protect old-growth forests in the Pacific Northwest which provide critical habitat for the threatened Marbled Murrelet and Northern Spotted Owl.

Greater Sage-Grouse Endangered Species Act Exemption

The FY 2020 House Interior bill omitted a harmful policy rider undermining the Endangered Species Act and hindering conservation of the Greater Sage-Grouse, whose population is rapidly declining across its range. Please support sage grouse conservation by omitting any provisions preventing ESA protection for an at-risk species.

Lead Poisoning of Eagles, California Condors, and Other Birds of Prey

We appreciate the FY 2020 House bill language preventing regulation of toxic ammunition and lead sinkers that kill millions of birds each year including our nation's symbol the Bald Eagle, as well as Golden Eagles, and the endangered California Condor. Please include this provision to support the use of non-toxic hunting and fishing materials.

Please let me know if I can ever be of assistance.

Sincerely,



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