

**Questions for the Record  
House Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife  
Legislative Hearing  
July 29, 2021**

**Questions from Rep. González-Colón**

**Question 1: I'm a cosponsor of H.R. 2773, the Recovering America's Wildlife Act, bipartisan legislation that would provide nearly \$1.4 billion in annual funding for States, Territories, and Tribes to implement their State Wildlife Action Plans. I'm pleased the bill would also revise the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Subaccount formula for Puerto Rico, ensuring the Island receives more equitable funding to address our species of greatest conservation need.**

**It is my understanding that currently, the main source of funding to carry out State Wildlife Action Plans is the State and Tribal Wildlife Grant Program, which is typically funded at approximately \$65 million per year.**

- a. Can you briefly discuss the purpose of State Wildlife Action Plans and how limited funding has impacted States and Territories' ability to fully implement them? For instance, in your testimony you mentioned "a backlog of work identified in the Action Plans."**

**Response:** The purpose of the State Wildlife Action Plans is to serve as conservation "blueprints" to benefit a diverse array of our Nation's fish, wildlife, and associated habitats, preventing species declines, and supporting proactive strategies to avert the need for new federal listings under the Endangered Species Act. The Action Plans vary in their approaches, but all 56 of them identify "Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN)" and their habitats, threats, and related information. SGCN represent state, commonwealth, and territory priorities for species and habitat conservation. SGCN lists serve as science-based, comprehensive collections of at-risk or imperiled species in need of immediate conservation interventions to prevent further declines and potential federal listing. States, commonwealths, and territories are required to update their Action Plans at least every 10 years. In 2017, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies issued new guidance for updating plans that encourages continual review and adjustment of plans and supports strategic adaptive management.

Under current funding levels provided through the State Wildlife Grant Program, states, commonwealths, and territories must prioritize the conservation actions identified in the Action Plans. FWS managers observe that most states, commonwealths, and territories are able to address only a fraction of their identified SGCN. H.R. 2773 would provide our partners additional resources to address SGCN, which include threatened and endangered species.

- b. Relatedly, how would higher levels of funding, as proposed in H.R. 2773, facilitate and enhance efforts to restore the populations of species of greatest conservation need across our States and Territories?**

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**Response:** H.R. 2773 would allow states to assign more resources to their Action Plans and implement strategic actions to address a greater percentage of the SGCN identified in their Action Plans. Even with well-informed, science based, and public-supported Action Plans, states, commonwealths, and territories must currently, in some cases, triage efforts to those species closest to the brink of extinction. Additional conservation efforts would avert the need for listing many more SGCN and assist states, commonwealths, and territories in recovering those SGCN that are already federally listed.

**Question 2: State Wildlife Grant funding has been crucial in supporting efforts to protect and restore the Puerto Rican Parrot.**

- a. **Can you briefly discuss some of this work, as well as other wildlife conservation initiatives the Service has been able to support in Puerto Rico through the State Wildlife Grant Program? This with the understanding that State Wildlife Grant funding for Puerto Rico is unfortunately inadequate, as the formula limits the Island to receiving no more than 0.5% of funds, whereas each State can receive between 1% and 5%.**

**Response:** The State Wildlife Grant Program has helped Puerto Rico address a variety of conservation needs for species identified in the Puerto Rico Wildlife Action Plan. As noted in its Action Plan, Puerto Rico has adopted the Puerto Rican parrot as an emblematic and surrogate species for advancing the conservation of other wildlife and habitats. Puerto Rico utilizes SWG funds to support efforts to conserve the Puerto Rican parrot through habitat restoration, propagation support, reintroduction, and monitoring survivorship. Puerto Rico has received SWG funds for research projects to better understand conservation needs for other species, including American eel, bats, and sea cucumbers. Additionally, SWG funds have been crucial in the removal of non-native, invasive species known to lower survival and reproductive success of some declining species in Puerto Rico.

**Question 3: H.R. 2848, the Marine Mammal Research and Response Act, would reauthorize the John H. Prescott Marine Mammal Rescue Assistance Grant Program. It is my understanding that last year was the first year the Service distributed Prescott Grant awards, which included two projects totaling \$200,000 to support manatee rehabilitation and stranding response efforts in Puerto Rico.**

- a. **Could you discuss how the Service intends to leverage funding under the Prescott Grant Program to support the rescue, treatment, and rehabilitation of marine mammals under its authority, including the Antillean manatee? How would H.R. 2848 improve or impact these efforts?**

**Response:** Section 408(e) of the MMPA requires a minimum 25% non-federal cost share for Prescott Grant Program awards. This cost sharing requirement leverages Prescott Grant Program funding with non-federal dollars and/or in-kind contributions. For example, the two \$100,000.00

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grant awards to Red Caribeña de Varamientos required a minimum \$50,000.00 non-federal cost share. Because H.R. 2848 would only redesignate current Section 408(e) of the MMPA as Section 408 (f), but not change the text of that provision, it would neither improve nor impact the Service's ability to leverage Prescott Grant Program funding. The FWS's Prescott Grant Program criteria and review and selection process continue to ensure the best applications are awarded funding.

H.R. 2848 would expand the Prescott Grant Program by establishing a new Rapid Response Fund to provide emergency financial assistance for response to certain marine mammal stranding or entanglement events. H.R. 2848 would also make clarifying changes to the Marine Mammal Unusual Mortality Event Fund, which provides financial assistance to stranding network partners who respond to Unusual Mortality Events (UMEs). The proposed changes would increase flexibility in the fund's administration, including authorizing the provision of funding throughout the occurrence of a UME and not solely as reimbursement after an event.