

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3905

May 15, 2009

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
Chairman
Interior Appropriations Subcommittee
United States Senate
131 Dirksen Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Ranking Member
Interior Appropriations Subcommittee
United States Senate
123 Hart Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Feinstein and Ranking Member Alexander:

As members who share your commitment to the conservation of our nation's wildlife, fish, plants and their habitats, we are writing to urge needed increases for the US Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) endangered species program in the FY2010 Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill.

When Congress passed the Endangered Species Act in 1973, it recognized that America has an obligation to protect its most vulnerable species of wildlife, fish and plants and to ensure a rich conservation legacy for our children and grandchildren. Unfortunately, we are falling short of that commitment by failing to provide needed funding to protect and adequately recover endangered and threatened plants and animals. The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is in crisis and has lost 800 staff in recent years. We appreciate the Subcommittee's work to begin to reverse this in FY2009 and ask you to aggressively build upon this year's effort.

Failure to provide adequate levels of funding for endangered species operations will only ensure that species slide closer to extinction, decreasing chances for recovery while increasing the costs. It has been reported that in recent years the program has experienced a 30 percent staffing shortage due to budget constraints, an unacceptable vacancy rate. The number of candidate species awaiting protection under the Act, many of which have been candidates for years, totals 252. The number of projects reviewed under the consultation program has increased dramatically, from 40,000 in 1999 to more than 67,000 in 2006. Development and implementation of Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs), which allow activities to proceed while still protecting species, continues to grow, with funding critically needed to help ensure timely and effective development and monitoring of nearly 600 existing and more than 300 new HCPs.

While we understand the existing budget constraints placed on the Subcommittee, we urge you make every effort to provide an increase of at least \$59 million over the

FY2009 funding levels for USFWS endangered species operating accounts to a total of \$217 million, with the increases allocated as follows: \$12.7 million for Listing, \$20.4 million for Recovery, \$21.5 million for Consultation, and \$4.3 million for Candidate Conservation.

In addition, the FY2009 appropriation of \$75.5 million for the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund continues to limit this successful cooperative program with the states, which previously received as much as \$104 million in FY2001. We further ask for the Subcommittee to consider an increase for the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund to a level of \$110 million, while also taking into consideration the demand for this program is two to three times this level.

Finally, private lands provide habitats for more than two thirds of all ESA-listed species. The Farm Bill enacted in the last Congress included a new program that allows landowners to deduct the cost of measures taken to implement species recovery plans on their property. We urge the Subcommittee to allocate \$5 million so that the USFWS has the resources to implement this important new program.

Thank you for your kind consideration of these requests. We look forward to working with you as the FY2010 Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill moves forward in the Senate in the weeks ahead.

Sincerely,




Senator Sheldon Whitehouse



Senator Mike Crapo




Senator Carl Levin



Senator Jeff Bingaman



Senator Joseph Lieberman



Senator Daniel Akaka

Barbara Boxer

Senator Barbara Boxer

Russell Feingold

Senator Russell Feingold

Olympia Snowe

Senator Olympia Snowe

Ron Wyden

Senator Ron Wyden

Debbie Stabenow

Senator Debbie Stabenow

Frank R. Lautenberg

Senator Frank Lautenberg

Robert Menendez

Senator Robert Menendez

Ben Cardin

Senator Benjamin Cardin

Bernard Sanders

Senator Bernard Sanders

Jeff Merkley

Senator Jeff Merkley

Mark Begich

Senator Mark Begich

Roland W. Burris

Senator Roland Burris