

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 24, 2021

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Chair
Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies Appropriations
The Capitol S-128
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies Appropriations
The Capitol S-128
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
Chair
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science,
and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jerry Moran
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Merkley, Chair Shaheen, Ranking Member Murkowski and Ranking Member Moran:

As you begin the process of crafting the Fiscal Year 2022 (FY22) appropriation bills to fund the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), we strongly urge you to support increased funding for endangered species conservation, including Endangered Species Act (ESA) listing, planning and consultation, species conservation and restoration, and species recovery. Specifically, we request funding at levels equal to or above the President's budget request of \$334 million for FWS' Ecological Services line and \$237 million for NMFS' Protected Resources Science and Management line. Thousands of species depend on the Endangered Species Act for survival, yet it has been severely underfunded for decades. Robust funding is critical to recover and conserve our country's threatened and endangered species.

Globally, we are in the midst of a staggering and unprecedented wildlife extinction crisis. Once common animal and plant populations are crashing around the world. Scientists warn that one million animal and plant species are heading towards extinction – many in the next few decades. Insects and other important pollinators around the world are rapidly declining. In North America alone, scientists estimate that bird populations have declined by 30 percent in the past 50 years, and globally nearly one third of freshwater fish are threatened with extinction. And perhaps most glaringly, the devastating global impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrate how dangerous it can be when we fail to sufficiently protect biodiversity.

Fortunately, the U.S. Endangered Species Act is one of the strongest tools we have to combat the current wildlife extinction crisis. In enacting this law in 1973, Congress recognized that imperiled species of wildlife, fish and plants “are of esthetic, ecological, educational, historical, recreational, and scientific value to the Nation and its people.” Congress gave FWS and NMFS a powerful set of tools to carry out the law's goal of conserving endangered species. Implementing

species recovery strategies effectively, however, requires sufficient resources. Robust funding for Ecological Services will support FWS's work with partners at the state and local level both to recover listed species and protect their habitats. Similarly, funding for NMFS' Protected Resources Science and Management program is crucial for the protection and recovery of imperiled marine species.

The need for increased funding is evident from the over 400 threatened and endangered species that lack recovery plans, as well as the hundreds of species that receive zero dollars in recovery funding from any agency – federal or state. Congressional appropriations for species recovery and ESA consultations have not kept pace with the number of listed species or the complex challenges of conservation in a world facing the accelerating threats of climate change and habitat loss. Inadequate funding not only puts at risk the recovery of threatened and endangered species and conservation of their habitats; it also impedes FWS and NMFS's ability to apply the best scientific knowledge available in a timely review of listing decisions for species in need of protection.

Additionally, inadequate funding for ESA listings creates an artificial bottleneck in the listing process, which by law is required to be based solely on the best available science. Likewise, underfunding Candidate Conservation in the Conservation and Restoration line-item and the Cooperative Endangered Species Fund undermines the strong partnerships that the FWS is working to build. If Congress does not provide necessary funding increases to enable FWS and NMFS to carry out their statutory obligations, endangered species will continue to move closer to extinction and our nation could lose even more of our precious wildlife heritage.

Lastly, in the last few years, a number of imperiled marine species have reached crisis status. There are now only about 360 North Atlantic right whales remaining, with possibly as few as 70 breeding females. Scientists predict the species could be functionally extinct by 2040 if current trends continue. The Southern Resident orca population is at its lowest level in 20 years. Vaquitas—the most endangered marine mammal on Earth—have plummeted by 90% in recent years, and scientists estimate that there are likely only 10 individuals left in the world. Each of these population declines underscore the dangers of failing to provide robust funding to NMFS to carry out their duties under the ESA. Thus, funding the agency's protected resources budget at or above the President's request is critical to help ensure that none of our iconic marine species slip toward extinction.

Funding the ESA at or above the President's budget request will help save more species from extinction and put America's imperiled animals and plants on the path to recovery. While we believe federal agencies could make use of even more financial resources to conserve species, our request level reflects our understanding of the need to balance the many important conservation priorities in your respective appropriations bills. We look forward to working with the Subcommittee to ensure that these programs are adequately funded in FY22.

Sincerely,



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator



Brian Schatz
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Gary C. Peters
United States Senator



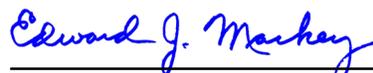
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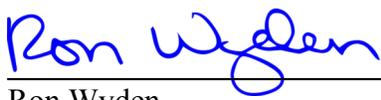
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Raphael G. Warnock
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Mark Kelly
United States Senator

/s/ Martin Heinrich

Martin Heinrich
United States Senator