

March XX, 2008

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

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

Dear Chairman Feinstein and Ranking Member Allard:

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 FY2009 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 Administration's Fiscal Year 2009 Budget includes a \$3.7 million or 2.5 percent cut to the endangered species program, further exacerbating the existing 30% staffing shortfall that was acknowledged last year in an article in the Los Angeles Times. The US Fish and Wildlife Service is in crisis, having lost 600 staff members in recent years, and we must take action now to reverse this trend.

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. The number of candidate species awaiting protection under the Act, many of which have been candidates for years, totals 280. 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 500 existing and more than 350 new HCPs that together will cover more than 70 million acres when complete.

While we understand the existing budget constraints placed on the Subcommittee, we urge you make every effort to provide an increase of at least \$38.4 million over the President's budget request for USFWS endangered species operating accounts to a total of \$185.2 million, with the increases allocated as follows: \$7 million for Listing, \$16.4 million for Recovery, \$11.6 million for Consultation, and \$3.3 million for Candidate

Conservation. This funding will enable these programs to hire the staff they need to be effective and provide greater support for on-the-ground efforts and long-term monitoring of HCPs.

In addition, the President's budget request of \$75.5 million for the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund continues to decrease funding for this successful cooperative program with the states from its historic high of \$104 million in FY2001. The demand for this program is two to three times the level of funding it receives, and some states have requested grants in excess of the amount of funding available. We ask for the Subcommittee to consider an increase for the Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund to a level of \$96.2 million, to enable the program to better meet this demand.

Thank you for your kind consideration of these requests. We look forward to working with you as the FY2009 Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill moves forward in the Senate in the weeks ahead.

Sincerely,

Cc: Chairman Byrd  
Ranking Member Cochran