

Testimony of Mr. Collin O'Mara
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Before the House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife
July 29, 2021

Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member Bentz, Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Westerman, and Members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of the National Wildlife Federation, our 53 state and territorial affiliates and our more than 6 million members, thank you for the honor of testifying before you today.

We greatly appreciate you holding today's hearing on the escalating wildlife crisis at home and abroad. The challenges facing wildlife are increasing rapidly as habitat is fragmented and degraded, invasive species and disease spread, and extreme wildfires, droughts, heatwaves, flooding, and hurricanes—largely fueled by climate change—ravage the landscape. And the world is still reeling from a zoonotic disease that killed more than 4 million people globally and crippled economies. There's never been a more important time to act.

Investing in proactive wildlife conservation is the ultimate ounce of prevention. It's much more cost-effective to save species before they require the emergency room protections of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) when they are on the brink of extinction. It's also good for people. When we save wildlife, we save ourselves. We create good local jobs in communities across the country, support healthier communities for people, reduce regulatory uncertainty for businesses, and strengthen the outdoor economy. And compared to many challenges facing the Congress, conserving the full diversity of fish and wildlife is relatively inexpensive. If we fully funded all of the bills before this committee today, they would only amount to 1/3 of 1% of the overall funding Congress is contemplating investing in our infrastructure and our economy in the coming months. We urge the Committee to work with Leadership to ensure that budget instructions include sufficient allocations for wildlife programs to seize this historic opportunity to direct imperative and wise investments that will ensure a brighter future for wildlife and our nation.

Recovering America's Wildlife Act (H.R. 2773)

The bipartisan Recovering America's Wildlife Act of 2021 (H.R. 2773) is the most important wildlife legislation since the Endangered Species Act passed nearly a half century ago. Put simply, Congresswoman Dingell and Congressman Fortenberry's bill is a game changer to ensure wildlife survives and thrives for future generations. The urgency and need are dire: More than one-third of U.S. species are at heightened risk of extinction. The Recovering America's Wildlife Act is bold and bipartisan, collaborative and proactive. It will have an immediate impact all across the country — without raising taxes. Whether you love watching wildlife in your backyard or on a hike or are a hunter or angler, this landmark bill will help the species from the backcountry to Americans' backyards — and conserve them for future generations.

The Recovering America's Wildlife Act is an overarching wildlife conservation bill that is needed to recover species and to address the crises facing America's wildlife and the people, communities, and jobs that depend on them. The bill empowers States, Territories, and Tribes to address wildlife declines through proactive and collaborative implementation of Wildlife Action Plans, before species decline to

the point that they need federal protections, as well as to partner with federal biologists to recover species that are already listed as endangered or threatened.

America's Wildlife Crisis

In 2018, the National Wildlife Federation, in partnership with The Wildlife Society and the American Fisheries Society, issued a report on "Reversing America's Wildlife Crisis," which showed that more than one-third of U.S. species are at heightened risk of extinction.

The findings note:

- More than 40 percent of our native freshwater fish species are at risk of extinction.
- Amphibian populations are disappearing at a rate of 4 percent a year.
- More than 60 percent of our freshwater mussels are imperiled or vulnerable.
- Many species of native bees, once very common in backyards across the country, are facing precipitous declines in the past few decades.
- Monarch butterfly populations have declined nearly 90 percent, while 17 percent of all butterflies in the U.S. are at risk of extinction.
- Woodland caribou once occupied northeastern, Great Lakes, and northern Rocky Mountain states, but after many decades of decline were fully eliminated from the continental United States in January.

The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Service (IPBES) found an unprecedented 1 million species are at heightened risk of extinction around the globe in the coming decades. And a major study published in *Science* documented dramatic declines in North American bird populations, with the loss of nearly 3 billion breeding birds since 1970, a nearly 30 percent decline.

I had the pleasure of testifying before this Committee nearly two years ago, in October 2019, on the Recovering America's Wildlife Act and the Wildlife Corridors Conservation Act. I cannot thank this Committee enough for the work it has done in multiple Congresses to advance critical conservation bills like these. Since I last testified, the situation for wildlife has only gotten worse.

Last summer's wildfires in Washington state wiped out half the remaining population of Columbia basin pygmy rabbits. Monarchs wintering on the coast of California plummeted to fewer than 2,000—a microscopic .01 percent of the numbers counted in the 1980's. Here in our nation's capital, this spring birds like blue jays, American robins, and other species commonly spotted in our backyards were found sick and dying. Scientists have conducted numerous tests for diseases and toxins, but the cause remains yet unknown—and this tragic problem has now been reported in nine states, and as far west as Indiana.

We're seeing the collapse in populations of large mammals like moose and caribou; familiar species like grassland birds, frogs, and bats; as well as invertebrates such as native bees, monarch butterflies, and freshwater mussels. The causes are numerous and compounding—habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation; diseases; invasive species; and a rapidly changing climate.

Let me be clear: we are in the midst of a sixth mass extinction. It affects all sizes and types of species, across the United States. The reports and field observations are a clarion call for action. Fortunately, history shows we can fix this, and the Recovering America's Wildlife Act provides the silver bullet.

A Path Forward

The United States has led the world in conserving species that we hunt and fish. The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, which combines scientific management with a user-pay model and collaboration among state agencies, federal agencies, conservation partners, and landowners, was born out of crisis. In the early 20th century, dam construction had disconnected aquatic species like shad and river herring from spawning grounds. Indiscriminate timber harvest and mining had harmed upland habitat and led to rampant erosion, destroying streams and heavily impacting many aquatic species. Many of our most iconic, well-known species were in serious trouble. Elk, wood ducks, pronghorns, striped bass, wild turkey and many other species had become extremely rare, with some on the verge of extinction. The American response to these conditions formed the basis of the conservation movement of the 20th century, and led to the successful restoration of these and other game and fish populations.

Funding at the state level was initially provided from hunting and fishing licenses directed back into professional wildlife departments. The federal government began supplementing state license funds through the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act of 1937, which redirected the excise tax on firearms and ammunition into state fish and wildlife management. Later, the Dingell-Johnson Sportfish Restoration Act of 1950 dedicated funds from fishing tackle to fish conservation. A key component of the success in recovering America's game species was the creation of these dedicated funding streams, but the third leg of the stool—dedicated funding for the full diversity of wildlife—never materialized. The Recovering America's Wildlife Act will fix this.

The cause and effect of investment is clear. In the same *Science* report that documented plummeting North American bird populations, the authors also showed that, contrary to overall trends, populations of waterfowl (ducks and geese) increased by more than 56 percent in the years since 1970. This variance was a direct result of combining collaborative efforts with dedicated funding for wetland conservation through the Federal Aid in Wildlife Conservation Act of 1937 (Pittman-Robertson), Duck Stamps, and innovative programs that leverage millions of private dollars, like the North American Wetland Conservation Act and parts of the Farm Bill, with common-sense protections under the Clean Water Act and Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The Recovering America's Wildlife Act, combined with targeted efforts proposed in several of the bills before the Committee today, as well as legislation like the North American Grasslands Conservation Act, could replicate the same successes that we've accomplished for waterfowl across the full diversity of fish and wildlife species.

We also have benefitted from the incredible success of the Endangered Species Act, which has prevented more than 99 percent of listed species from going extinct. This includes the recovery of iconic species like the Bald Eagle, Yellowstone Grizzly, American Alligator, Brown Pelican, Peregrine Falcon, and Louisiana Black Bear. Today, more than 1,630 wildlife and plants are listed—and more than 460 species are petitioned for listing—and that's just the tip of the iceberg.

We do a remarkable job saving species when we put our mind to it, and when we invest. Unfortunately, we're only investing in a small number of the species in need, and we are headed for an irreversible disaster if we don't act now. Not only will we lose magnificent species that define our outdoor heritage, but we will irreparably harm our nearly \$887 billion outdoor economy; industries will face greater regulatory uncertainty and litigation risk; and taxpayers will face ever-growing costs.

The Need for Reliable Funding

Recovering America's Wildlife Act can address a large part of the reason we are in a wildlife crisis: reliable funding in a time of rapid change. While Congress has taken steps, it has never wholly solved the

problem. In 2000, Congress created the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program (P.L. 106-553). This program was established as a subaccount of the Pittman-Robertson Fund, providing apportioned funding to state fish and wildlife agencies for implementing conservation programs targeted at species of greatest conservation need. However, unlike the primary Pittman-Robertson program, the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program (WCRP) was not set up with a dedicated source of funding. Congress provided one year of appropriations in Fiscal Year (FY) 2001, but the program has been unfunded since then.

In lieu of funding the WCRP, Congress has appropriated funds for State Wildlife Grants for the past 18 years. Appropriations have ranged from \$50 million to \$90 million over the period of Fiscal Years 2001-2019, with an average of \$60 million provided annually to all states and U.S. territories. This level of funding is woefully insufficient compared to the magnitude of the wildlife crisis we face.

With the establishment of the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program, Congress mandated that state fish and wildlife agencies develop State Wildlife Action Plans as a way to conserve all of America's wildlife, and guide the way each state spends their programmatic dollars. These plans set clear priorities by identifying those species in greatest need of attention, the habitats on which they depend, and the conservation actions necessary to sustain and restore their populations. Development of these plans is led by the state wildlife agencies, but they are crafted in coordination with a wide array of public and private partners and are intended to reflect a comprehensive and shared vision for wildlife conservation in the state.

In total, State Wildlife Action Plans have identified an astounding 12,000 species of greatest conservation need. While we have made incredible progress through the user-pay/user-benefit model (80% of state agency funding come from hunters and anglers) to recover populations of species that we hunt and fish, such as deer, ducks, turkeys, and trout, the vast majority of wildlife species have no stable or consistent funding.

State wildlife agencies have embraced their role in maintaining all of the wildlife and fish in their state, but lack sufficient funding to fulfill this responsibility. Many states have secured some additional funds through general appropriations, lottery funds, dedicated sales taxes, real estate transfer taxes, the creation of voluntary state tax check-off programs, or sales of specialty license plates. These creative solutions help, but fall short of the serious, compounding needs facing fish and wildlife.

Historic Investment in Tribal-led Wildlife Conservation

We also face escalating wildlife challenges on Tribal lands and waters, which are also vital for wildlife conservation. Tribes own or influence the management of tens of millions of acres, including more than 730,000 acres of lakes and reservoirs, 10,000 miles of streams and rivers, and 18 million acres of forests. These lands and waters provide habitat for fish and wildlife, including more than 500 species listed as threatened or endangered. Yet despite these immense resources, Tribes are excluded from most wildlife funding programs, save a small competitive Tribal Wildlife Grants program.

When the bipartisan Senate version of the Recovering America's Wildlife Act was recently introduced by Senators Heinrich and Blunt, Elveda Martinez, president of the Native American Fish and Wildlife Society, was clear: "For Tribes, the Recovering America's Wildlife Act is not just about an increase to fish and wildlife base funding, it is base funding," she said. "It's a game changer, in the way Tribes operate, manage, participate and assert self-governance in fish and wildlife stewardship. With the support of this

legislation, the Tribes stand ready and committed to ensure that wildlife endures for all of our future generations.”

Many Tribes have created some of the most innovative and accomplished natural resource programs in the nation. There are countless stories that exemplify the importance of funding Tribal nation’s fish and wildlife resource management. The Confederation Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT), based in Montana, led and directed efforts to achieve wildlife and wetland mitigation on the reconstruction of the main highway route through the center of the Reservation, resulting in the construction of 43 wildlife underpass crossing structures and one large overpass named “The Animals Bridge” on U.S. Highway 93. These state of the art wildlife crossings provide critical wildlife habitat connectivity and improve public/wildlife safety from the thousands of animal crossings occurring each year. From painted turtles to grizzly bears, nearly every type of four-legged animal found on the Reservation and even some birds utilize these highway crossings and they have become a model highway design across the country.

The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) Natural Resources Department is working to build upon generations of Cherokee stewardship and manage terrestrial and aquatic species of concern through an EBCI Wildlife Action Plan. Modern-day Cherokee lands located in the southern Appalachians harbor tremendous biodiversity and rare species that receive focused population monitoring and habitat protection efforts from EBCI biologists. These species include three ESA listed bat species, the federally endangered Carolina northern flying squirrel, the eastern elk, and many neo-tropical birds and salamanders. The EBCI is also successfully working with multiple government and non-profit partners to restore native aquatic species to EBCI watersheds such as the eastern hellbender, sickelfin redhorse, and multiple freshwater mussels. Sustained wildlife conservation efforts within the EBCI aboriginal landscape are critical to preserving ecosystem services, economic resources, and cultural values for future generations.

The Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho Tribes’ Fish and Game Department has been actively and successfully conserving fish and wildlife on the Wind River Reservation since the implementation of a “Game Code” in 1984. Wind River, encompassing over 2.2 million acres in west-central Wyoming, is an important part of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Prior to the implementation of the Game Code, unregulated hunting resulted in severely depleted populations of large game including pronghorn antelope, mule deer, elk, moose and bighorn sheep. Because of the vast expanse of high quality habitat, ungulate populations rebounded upwards of 500 to 1000% once hunting seasons and harvest quotas were implemented and enforced. Commensurately, large ungulate populations now support a large and robust contingent of medium and large carnivores including wolverines, bobcats, coyotes, mountain lions, wolves, black bears and grizzly bears. In addition to these successes, the Department is currently partnering with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Wyoming Game and Fish, University of Wyoming, The Nature Conservancy, and others on a variety of GPS-collaring studies to investigate the survival, movements and migration patterns of bighorn sheep, mule deer, elk, wolves, and grizzly bears located on Wind River. Information from these studies will further knowledge that leads to continued sustainability of fish and wildlife on Wind River for Tribal and non-tribal members alike.

The Lower Brule Sioux Tribe of South Dakota has a long track record of restoring native species to its Tribal lands. Perhaps the most notable effort has been the restoration of black-footed ferrets. Ferrets were first released in 2006 and a population was quickly established. Since becoming involved in ferret recovery, the Tribe has been a leader in several aspects of ferret recovery. The Tribe was the first to request and receive a scientific recovery permit for the reintroduction of ferrets, which has since been used by other Tribal, federal, and private land sites. The Tribe is an active member of the Black-footed

Ferret Recovery Implementation Team and the Black-footed Ferret Friends Group. The Tribe has drafted and implemented a management plan for black-footed ferrets and designated ferrets as a priority species in the Tribe's multi-year Wildlife Conservation Plan for its Tribal lands. When plague outbreaks created serious challenges to the Tribe's ferret recovery program, the Tribe stepped up and became the only Tribal partner in a study that occurred across 7 western states that tested an experimental plague vaccine that one day might prevent plague outbreaks from occurring.

Western Washington's 20 treaty Tribes actively manage wildlife to protect, conserve, and restore many of the Pacific Northwest's most iconic species. The NWIFC tribes' management efforts include a wide array of activities, including protecting ESA-listed species through habitat restoration, ensuring science-based conservation of important biological and cultural resources, and conducting research to better inform wildlife management. For example: in partnership with Washington State, Tribes returned the Nooksack elk herd to a sustainable population through a large-scale elk translocation project. The partners relocated elk from Mount Saint Helens to augment the 300 remaining elk residing in the Nooksack elk management area, and the population has since rebounded to 1,500. Tribes are also establishing baseline ecological information of the elk herds in the Indian and Elwha valleys prior to removal of two fish-blocking dams on the Elwha River from 2011-2014. The work contributed to a long-term monitoring program to detect changes in herd composition and population sizes following dam removal. On the Olympia Peninsula, Tribes are collecting data to provide a detailed understanding of cougar and bobcat populations. Data on habitat use patterns, home range size, relative abundance, productivity, prey selection and survival rates of both species were collected to assist in a tribal re-colonization effort. Work is underway to restore, enhance and protect in perpetuity 60 acres of floodplain habitat along the south fork of the Stillaguamish River. The effort is part of a 10-year conservation management project to ensure long-term protection of severely depressed chinook stocks. The project will also provide critical habitat for a variety of wildlife species and serve as a tool to teach tribal members about nature and cultural history.

The Red Lake Band of Chippewa, located in north-central Minnesota, governs most of Red Lake, its namesake. Walleye fishing in the lake is at the heart of the Band's heritage and economy. When the lake's walleye population collapsed, the Band took swift action. In 1997, the Band decided to stop fishing in its part of the lake. That was not enough. In 1999, the Band partnered with the state of Minnesota to ban all fishing on Red Lake. The Band then worked with the state, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the University of Minnesota to implement a recovery plan. The walleye rebounded in only seven years – way ahead of schedule.

The Recovering America's Wildlife Act: A Solution Matching the Magnitude of the Problem

We face a choice: Do we maintain the status quo, watch the ongoing losses, and try to prevent extinction primarily through regulation and litigation? Or do we choose a different path and catalyze unprecedented collaborative conservation to proactively put Americans to work restoring ecosystems and recovering species in every corner of the country?

The bipartisan Recovering America's Wildlife Act proposes a visionary, collaborative solution that matches the magnitude of the monumental crisis wildlife face. It is built on the recommendations of a blue-ribbon panel the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies convened in 2014, on which the National Wildlife Federation was proud to serve.

The Recovering America's Wildlife Act would amend the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Act to invest an additional \$1.3 billion a year for state-led efforts to implement State Wildlife Action Plans, and it directs

\$97.5 million to Tribal wildlife conservation efforts. This transformative legislation would meet the management needs of the 80 percent of wildlife not currently funded. Further, the bill is designed to leverage significant outside resources, while rewarding innovative solutions that are replicable and scalable.

The bill before the Committee today includes a few key improvements made by this Committee last congress, when the bill passed by a strong bipartisan vote of 26-6 and was included in part in the comprehensive infrastructure bill. These changes respond to the interests of Members of Congress and stakeholders—directing more funding to states with the most species conservation challenges; allowing for and incentivizing the conservation of imperiled plants; encouraging funding for historically underserved communities; increasing accountability; and clarifying that funding is for species in conservation need.

Just this month, Senators Martin Heinrich (D-NM) and Roy Blunt (R-MO) introduced companion legislation in the Senate, adding a funding mechanism generated from civil and criminal penalties, fines, sanctions, forfeitures, or other revenues resulting from natural resource or environmental-related violations or enforcement actions that are not deposited in another fund or otherwise committed or appropriated. This language will not affect funding that is committed to other important existing programs, similar to the language in the Great American Outdoors Act that ensured that investments in public lands maintenance would not affect the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

The Recovering America’s Wildlife Act now has the support of the full spectrum of the conservation community, including hunting, fishing, conservation, and environmental organizations. It is widely supported by the relevant federal, state, and territorial fish and wildlife agencies. Importantly, it is broadly and deeply supported by Native American Tribes who have been conservation and wildlife stewards without consistent, dedicated funding. The Recovering America’s Wildlife Act is supported by outdoor and natural resource businesses, and communities throughout the country. We urge all members of the Subcommittee and full Committee to support it as well and to commit to passing this urgently needed bill this year.

The Recovering America’s Wildlife Act marks the best chance we have to win our race against the clock. The introduction of a bipartisan companion bill in the Senate, and support from President Biden’s Administration, makes this Congress our best opportunity to pass this critical conservation legislation into law. The longer we wait to act, the more expensive and difficult the crisis becomes to solve.

The Extinction Prevention Act of 2021 (H.R. 3396)

The National Wildlife Federation supports Chairman Grijalva’s Extinction Prevention Act, which provides a partial corollary to Recovering America’s Wildlife Act by starting to establish dedicated funding for the recovery of federally endangered and threatened species, focusing on four categories of highly imperiled but severely underfunded species – North American butterflies, Pacific Island plants, freshwater mussels, and Southwest desert fish.

States have an important role in recovering federally endangered and threatened species, and will be able to contribute much more to their recovery with funding from the Recovering America’s Wildlife Act. Federal agencies are directly responsible for ensuring the survival and recovery of federally endangered and threatened species, however, and federal wildlife programs are for the most part sorely underfunded. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other federal agencies have particular difficulty

securing adequate funding for less charismatic endangered and threatened species, and certain groups of species are particularly poorly funded and/or vulnerable to extinction.

This bill takes an important step forward, and we know that the funding needed for federal endangered species and related wildlife programs is much greater, unfortunately. Last year, House Natural Resources Committee leadership and Members called for \$2 billion in funding for implementing Federal Recovery Plans for Endangered and Threatened Species to create short-term habitat restoration jobs and reduce regulatory uncertainty, as part of an overall request of more than \$19 billion to restore imperiled fish and wildlife habitat. A dozen senators have called for similar levels of funding this Congress. We urge both chambers to find agreement on substantial funding increases for federal endangered and threatened species programs.

Safeguarding America's Future and Environment, or SAFE, Act (H.R. 2872)

The National Wildlife Federation has been involved in supporting the SAFE Act since its inception. Congressman Cartwright's important bill focuses on the need for integration across the federal government on fish and wildlife climate adaptation—an imperative and laudable goal. The bill also calls for a mechanism to advance the implementation and regular updates to the National Fish, Wildlife, and Plants Climate Adaptation Strategy (released in 2011). We continue to support this bill, and look forward to working with Congressman Cartwright and the Committee to ensure the bill reflects recent progress on these ideas. For example, the current Climate Adaptation Science Center network includes regional components that directly interact with many users and applications. This network has proven to be one of the most effective ways of helping federal, state, and Tribal agencies better incorporate climate considerations into their species and ecosystem conservation and management efforts.

MONARCH Act (H.R. 1983)

One of the National Wildlife Federation's top wildlife recovery priorities is the restoration of iconic monarch butterfly populations through the restoration of milkweed habitat across the country. We are pleased that this committee is considering this bill and strongly support it. The western monarch butterfly population is literally on the brink of collapse, and we encourage the House Natural Resource Committee to move this bill to the House floor as quickly as possible.

The migratory monarch butterfly, one of many North American imperiled species, is recognized worldwide for its epic autumn and spring migrations in the east and west of the United States. Throughout its western breeding and overwintering habitats, the monarch population depends on diverse native habitats that are also the home of many other North American wildlife species. The breeding habitat of the western monarch population covers about 21 ecological regions in 11 states, including the Rocky Mountain forests, North American deserts, and the temperate Sierras. Most western monarchs overwinter in 200 different areas located in the California Marine West Coast Forest and Mediterranean California. Recent scientific data shows that western and eastern migratory monarch populations are in great jeopardy, but the western population is struggling the most.

During the 1990's, the estimated population of western monarchs was greater than 1 million, but has plummeted over the last thirty years. The western monarch butterfly has struggled to sustain a viable population size, and it was considered close to extinction at the beginning of this year when fewer than two thousand monarchs were sighted in their western overwintering grounds. The January 2021 count of 1,914 monarchs is far below the scientifically predicted extinction thresholds. In December of 2020, the monarch butterfly became a candidate under the Endangered Species Act when the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service announced that the decision to list the monarch as an endangered or threatened

species is warranted but precluded by higher priority listing actions. This is a clear signal to the national conservation community, state and federal agencies, and the public that the species is in peril, and immediate action is needed. There is no time to lose if we are to save the monarch.

The catastrophic declines in monarch butterfly populations, especially in the western United States, show that the species' very survival depends on immediate conservation actions and enhanced protections. The monarch butterfly and its long-distance migration is unparalleled, and we must treasure it as part of our natural heritage. Losing this species will cause irreversible ecological, economic, and cultural damages. To save the monarch, we need to protect and restore the western monarch's native habitats, including breeding grounds and migratory corridors, and implement other conservation strategies listed in the Western Monarch Conservation Plan (Plan).

The Plan, drafted by the Western Monarch Working Group, aims to reverse the decline of the western monarch population by executing a series of conservation strategies to support the entire life cycle of the western monarch. The Plan's primary target is to overcome the loss and degradation of the monarch's California overwintering grounds and the breeding and migratory habitats throughout the western U.S., as well as the effects of climatic-change across the region. To save the western monarch, the Plan establishes that by 2029 we must accomplish the following:

- *"A minimum of 50,000 additional acres of monarch-friendly habitat will be provided in California's Central Valley and adjacent foothills,"*
- *"Fifty percent of all currently known and active monarch overwintering sites will be protected and actively managed for monarchs, including 90% of the most important overwintering sites,"* and
- *"The preceding 5-year average of monarch butterflies counted will be 500,000 as estimated at 75 sites with the highest counts during the Western Monarch Thanksgiving Count."*

The Plan recommends the following conservation strategies through 2069:

- *"Protect and restore the western overwintering groves, including development of site-specific grove management plans; and conserve monarch breeding and migratory habitats in natural lands, urban and industrial rights-of-way, and agricultural habitat sectors;"*
- *"Harness the widespread appeal of the monarch to engage eight different audiences in education, conservation, and scientific research programs;"*
- *"Investigate priorities for overwintering and breeding/migratory life stages and monitoring to track population trends and threat reduction efforts."*

We need to encourage much greater proactive, collaborative, voluntary restoration efforts to recover Monarch populations rather than solely depending upon the Endangered Species Act to require needed conservation actions. We must scale up public and private investment that can encourage and support our States and other stakeholders to implement the Plan. The Monarch Action, Recovery, and Habitat Conservation Act of 2021 (MONARCH Act of 2021) will pave the way to the successful implementation of the Plan.

The MONARCH Act of 2021 authorizes the appropriation of critical funding for Fiscal Years 2022 through 2026 to establish a Western Monarch Butterfly Rescue Fund and to implement the Western Monarch Butterfly Conservation Plan. More specifically, the bill provides monarch conservation partners with necessary funds to support their conservation efforts of restoring, enhancing, and managing the overwintering and breeding native habitats and migratory corridors of the magnificent western monarch

butterflies. (The plight of the monarch also lends further evidence to the critical need for passage of Recovering America's Wildlife Act. Had the Act been in place years ago, states would have had the resources necessary to help prevent the dire situation for this remarkable species.)

The MONARCH Act of 2021 actively and timely seeks to prevent the extinction of the western migratory monarch population, and it will ensure that our children and grandchildren can witness this awe-inspiring butterfly's extraordinary long-distance migration, a one-of-a-kind phenomenon.

Marine Mammal Research and Response Act of 2021 (H.R. 2848)

Congresswoman Murphy's bill would reauthorize and expand the NOAA John H. Prescott Marine Mammal Rescue Grant Program, the primary funding source for organizations around the nation that rescue and rehabilitate sick or injured marine mammals. H.R. 2848 would ensure that members of the National Marine Mammal Stranding network are well-equipped to respond rapidly to marine mammal health needs and large stranding events, and it would ensure that data collected under the program is made publicly available to facilitate research and enhanced understanding of marine mammal health trends. The National Wildlife Federation supports this bill.

The National Wildlife Federation also supports an increase in the funding for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service from \$1 million to at least \$3 million annually, in order to better equip the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to collaborate with NOAA in responding to Unusual Mortality Events, such as the one currently devastating manatee populations in Florida.

Keep Ecosystems Living and Protected Act or KELP Act (H.R. 4458)

Chairman Huffman's KELP Act supports kelp restoration and conservation by authorizing a grant program within NOAA with the goal of restoring, conserving, and managing healthy kelp forest ecosystems. Protection of these critical and imperiled habitats is significant for promoting ecological resilience, maintaining high biodiversity areas, and addressing climate change and associated impacts. The National Wildlife Federation supports this legislation and looks forward to working with the Committee to ensure its passage.

Highlands Conservation Act (H.R. 2793)

The National Wildlife Federation has long been supportive of the Highlands Conservation program, as has our state affiliate, the New Jersey Audubon Society. We appreciate the work of Congressman Maloney and his cosponsors to reauthorize this excellent regional conservation program as well as to update and increase funding for it.

American Fisheries Advisory Committee Act (H.R. 3128)

The National Wildlife Federation supports the goal of the American Fisheries Advisory Committee Act to address the needs of fishing communities, including the health of the fish stocks and ecosystems on which those human communities depend. A diverse and balanced reputation will be the key to the success of this advisory committee and the grant program it oversees. The addition of a committee member representing recreational fishing communities was an important improvement to this program and is one we hope this Committee will ensure stays in the bill. We recommend the advisory committee also be expanded further to include a Tribal member representing the interests of the many Tribal and other indigenous fishing communities, and the committee should also include a member representing an organization dedicated to the conservation of native wild fish populations.

Prevention of Escapement of Genetically Altered Salmon in the United States Act (H.R. 273)

The National Wildlife Federation appreciates Congressman Young's leadership to protect native salmon populations. We encourage the committee to support the significant steps this bill would take toward halting the introduction of more genetically altered salmon into our native salmon populations and preventing significant potential unintended consequences.

Keep Finfish Free (H.R. 274)

The National Wildlife Federation appreciates Congressman Young and Chairman DeFazio's efforts to address the impacts of aquaculture operations on native fish populations. Offshore finfish aquaculture has the potential to result in substantial genetic deterioration, wildlife disease, and environmental degradation. We must address these concerns before any offshore aquaculture is permitted.

International Wildlife Conservation Bills (H.R. 1569, H.R. 2026)

The Committee has before it two bills to fund international wildlife conservation, the Critically Endangered Animals Act, H.R. 1569, from Chairman Huffman, and the Global Amphibian Protection Act from Congressman Jeffries. The wildlife crisis extends worldwide, and funding is needed in other countries as desperately as it is in ours. The United States has a proud and accomplished history of supporting and funding wildlife conservation efforts in other countries. These bills expand those efforts considerably. The National Wildlife Federation supports both bills and encourages Members to do the same.

The Critically Endangered Animals Act, H.R. 2026, authorizes \$5 million per year for Fiscal Years 2022-2027. This funding is meant to help some of the world's most vulnerable species like snow leopards, Andean cats, or African Penguins. It will reassert America's role as a partner on the global stage working cooperatively to address the biodiversity crisis internationally as well as domestically, and it will support projects that help prevent endangered species from going extinct. We consider it important that this bill focuses on IUCN Red-list species, and that it does not include species already covered by multinational species funds, and therefore does not pose any potential conflict over funding already committed to the conservation of elephants, tigers, apes, and other wildlife.

Bear Protection Act (H.R. 2325)

We appreciate the intent of the Bear Protection Act to help conserve bear populations worldwide by combatting the commercial trade in bear body fluids and internal organs, defined as "bear viscera." Ending commercial markets for most U.S. wildlife species is one of the signature accomplishments of the North American Wildlife Conservation Model, and allowed for the rebound of many severely depleted wildlife species. We would encourage the Committee to ensure that enforcement officials have sufficient resources to address the illegal trade of bear viscera under existing authorities and we also urge the Committee to work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and State Fish and Wildlife Agencies to ensure that H.R. 2325 conforms with existing laws, policies, and programs designed to combat the illegal trade of all wildlife, and does not pre-empt existing State management authorities.

Conclusion

It is not too late to save America's wildlife, although there is not a moment to waste. Inaction is the greatest ally of extinction. By making a relatively modest investment by passing the Recovering America's Wildlife Act and several of the other pragmatic conservation bills before the Committee today, we can ensure that our children and grandchildren inherit a full symphony of birds; streams teeming with fish; and grasslands dotted by herds of pronghorn and mule deer. We can recover wildlife populations cost effectively and conserve critically important ecosystems that provide a myriad of

ecological services and economic benefits for our local communities. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.