

March 14, 2023

The Honorable Senator Patty Murray
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C., 20510

The Honorable Senator Jeff Merkley
Chair, Senate Appropriations Interior
Subcommittee
531 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C., 20510

The Honorable Senator Susan Collins
Vice Chair, Senate Appropriations
Committee
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C., 20510

The Honorable Senator Lisa Murkowski
Vice Chair, Senate Appropriations
Interior Subcommittee
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C., 20510

Dear Senators Murray, Collins, Merkley and Murkowski:

The below signed hunting, wildlife conservation, and professional societies are writing to support funding for the efforts of the Department of the Interior (DOI) and the Department of Agriculture (USDA) to maintain, conserve, and enhance wildlife migration corridors and seasonal ranges, particularly for big game species.

Specific and dedicated funding is necessary to successfully implement these Departmental priorities. Historically, funding for this work has been redirected from existing agency budgets and programs, competing each year for limited agency resources. This uncertain and underfunded approach has created challenges for consistent implementation by the agencies and their partners. We ask Congress to ensure sufficient funding to conserve wildlife migration corridors and seasonal ranges during this appropriations cycle. Our specific funding recommendations by program are included as an addendum to this letter.

Since 2018, DOI has made available \$15 million to implement Secretarial Order 3362 by asking its bureaus to redirect funding from existing programs, rather than clearly delineating necessary funding across agency budgets. We ask Congress to consider a concise, targeted crosscut wildlife corridors budget to ensure year to year consistency and a reliable programmatic approach to wildlife corridors conservation. We identify several programs that contribute to the conservation of wildlife migration corridors and seasonal ranges in the addendum for your consideration.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) provide the agencies extensive funding for on the ground conservation efforts, however to date, little has been specifically targeted at wildlife migration corridors. We have urged the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and US Forest Service (USFS) to consider the broader benefits of utilizing IIJA and IRA funds in ways that support the conservation of wildlife migration corridors and seasonal ranges.

We ask that Congress support these efforts by encouraging the USFS to contribute \$10 million from IIJA and IRA wildfire risk and hazardous fuels reduction funds, to the America the Beautiful Challenge for activities on USFS lands that if conducted properly have a co-benefit of maintaining and restoring wildlife corridors and important summer ranges. We also ask Congress to encourage the USFS and BLM to contribute \$5 million each from USFS (wildfire risk & hazardous fuels) and BLM (conservation, ecosystem and habitat restoration) IIJA and IRA funds to NFWF's Western Big Game Seasonal Habitat and Migration Corridors Fund (Fund) in fiscal year 2024. Additionally, we strongly recommend Congress request BLM and USFS increase their annual contributions to this program. We also recommend amending the match requirement for this Fund to be similar to that of the America the Beautiful Challenge.

We are encouraged by federal efforts to provide guidance on wildlife corridor conservation at DOI and USDA, as well as underlying support by the Council on Environmental Quality and support dedicated funding streams to ensure their full implementation. These efforts complement ongoing efforts by DOI to implement Secretarial Order 2018- 3362, and the work of the Natural Resources Conservation Service through Working Lands for Wildlife and other programs. We applaud recent efforts by USDA and the USFS to emphasize conservation of wildlife migration corridors and seasonal ranges, specifically Secretary Vilsack's issuance of Secretarial Memo 1077 in June 2022, and August 2022 USFS guidance to Regional Foresters, "Habitat Connectivity and Migration Corridors in National Forest System Planning."

We look forward to working with the federal agencies to implement these directives, but guidance and policies are only as effective as the funding behind them. Funding to support agencies, and State, Tribal and other public and private partners, to engage in wildlife corridor conservation and to implement high-priority on-the-ground conservation actions, are critically needed. Targeted funding for the BLM, US Geological Survey, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the USFS to comprehensively conserve wildlife migration corridors and seasonal ranges will ensure that successful efforts to date do not falter.

We appreciate this policy focus, noting that measures to conserve big game migration corridors and seasonal ranges not only facilitate unobstructed movement for wildlife to access forage and other resources, but also contribute to overall habitat resiliency to changing conditions across a wide range of ecological systems and contribute to larger-scale efforts to increase connectivity for numerous species.

These funding priorities are critically important to maintain current efforts, which has widespread support from state wildlife agencies, and a wide diversity of both hunting and non-hunting based non-governmental conservation organizations. Please contact us if you need any further information or clarifications. We look forward to working with you on a budget that supports the needs of wildlife.

Sincerely,

Archery Trade Association
Backcountry Hunters & Anglers
Boone and Crockett Club
California Waterfowl
Camp Fire Club of America
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Conservation Force
Dallas Safari Club
Delta Waterfowl
Ducks Unlimited
Houston Safari Club

Izaak Walton League of America
Masters of Foxhounds Association
Mule Deer Foundation
National Bobwhite & Grassland Initiative
National Deer Association
National Wild Turkey Federation
North American Grouse Partnership
Orion: The Hunter's Institute
Pheasants Forever
Quail Forever
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
The Wildlife Society
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Wild Sheep Foundation
Whitetails Unlimited
Wildlife Management Institute
Wildlife Mississippi

Addendum

To maintain and improve wildlife migration corridors and seasonal ranges, we request that appropriations for Fiscal Year 2024 include the following budget amounts:

- **DOI Coordination and Support:** Over the past five years, the coordinator and agency liaisons have contributed greatly to successful federal, state, tribal and stakeholder coordination on wildlife corridor research, planning, and conservation. However, previous funding for these positions was drawn from existing bureau and agency budgets. Dedicated funding in the Office of the Secretary would maintain and enhance the ongoing success of these efforts, while keeping bureau and agency budgets whole. **We recommend providing an additional \$1 million to the Office of the Secretary for national and regional wildlife migration corridor coordination and support positions.**
- **USGS Science and Mapping Support.** The USGS has provided critical technical assistance to the agencies and state wildlife departments through its Corridor Mapping Team led by the Wyoming Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit (CRU). Over the last five years the USGS has directed over \$1 million for the analysis of big game movement data and corridor mapping. These investments have provided the spatial maps of migration corridors that are the basis for conservation, however much work remains to be done, including and especially the effects on wildlife migrations from climate change. **We recommend including an additional \$5 million in the USGS Land Management Research budget, with specific direction to direct these funds towards wildlife corridor mapping and research.**
- **USFWS Science Applications Program.** The USFWS Science Applications Program has provided significant funding for several years to state and tribal fish and wildlife agencies for state defined priority research projects to identify and assess threats to migration corridors. Funding for state and tribal fish and wildlife agencies to continue to expand migration corridor research is critical to ensure that the best available science is informing management decisions. **We recommend increasing the budget for this program by \$3 million, specifically targeted at addressing state and tribal priorities for migration corridors research.**
- **BLM Migration Corridors Planning & Implementation.** The vast majority of BLM resource management plans do not manage for wildlife migration corridors, with potentially disastrous results. By not including up to date science for wildlife migration corridors in land-use planning processes, decisions could be made that block or interrupt wildlife movements for several decades, and habitat improvement opportunities are likely to be overlooked. **We recommend increasing BLM's Resource Management Planning budget by \$5 million in FY24, with the additional funds targeted toward RMP evaluations, revisions or amendments focused on the management of wildlife migration corridors and seasonal ranges.**

We also recommend increasing BLM's Wildlife & Aquatic Habitat Management budget by \$5 million (\$7 million overall including the NFWF funding request below), to provide resources to support BLM's wildlife migration corridors conservation efforts.

- **Dedicated Wildlife Corridors Funding for NFWF.** Since 2019, NFWF has provided competitive grants from its Western Big Game Seasonal Habitat and Migration Corridors Fund for projects largely on public lands. This program has been highly successful, receiving far more requests for funding than available resources, and generating nearly \$30 million in matching funds from states and private sources. The Program is supported via pass-through funding from BLM, USFS,

and the USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife program, however dedicated funding over and above existing NFWF appropriations would ensure its continued success and minimize impacts to agency budgets. **We recommend increasing BLM's Wildlife & Aquatic Habitat Management and the USFS Watershed, Fish, Wildlife, Air and Rare Plants budgets by an additional \$2 million each, with the funds specifically directed to the NFWF Program.**

- **USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program.** This program has been critical for voluntary landowner engagement in wildlife migration corridor and seasonal range conservation on private lands. **We ask that the FY24 budget increase overall funding for this program by \$2M, \$1.5M for an internal grant process and \$500,000 directed to NFWF for winter range and migration corridor habitat conservation.**