June 30, 2021

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

It is time to get state, territorial and tribal wildlife managers the resources they need to realize their full potential to conserve wildlife and habitat by enacting into law the Recovering America’s Wildlife Act.

In the late 1990s, leaders in the environmental community came together with leaders of state wildlife agencies to discuss strategies to address the looming wildlife crisis by leveraging the resources and expertise of the states to fulfill their role in restoring the full diversity of America’s wildlife populations. Ten years later, the federal State and Tribal Wildlife Grant Programs were born out of that collaboration, and led to the creation and continuous improvement of state and territorial Wildlife Action Plans, and improvements in tribal wildlife plans, programs and projects.

On the 20th anniversary of these groundbreaking programs, they continue to play a critical role in what must be a comprehensive response to the ongoing biodiversity crisis, as the [20 year program review](#) highlights. Unfortunately, funding for State and Tribal Wildlife Grants has been extremely limited since Congress mandated these programs in 2000 and 2001 at the request of the environmental and conservation community. Funding currently stands at approximately $66 million for all states and territories, and approximately $4 million spread across all 574 federally recognized tribes. This falls far short of the $1.87 billion the states and territories estimate it will cost to implement their plans each year. It also falls short of the nearly $100 million tribes are requesting to help them address their wildlife management needs, money which will contribute to offsetting the chronic and damaging underfunding tribes experience across the board.

The current model of funding is also unpredictable, limiting the ability to undertake multi-year projects needed to reverse declines in wildlife. The bald eagle needed decades of state by state effort by federal and state agencies and many partners to achieve a phenomenal success - an increase from
417 to 71,400 estimated nesting pairs, removal from the endangered species list, and reliable and popular sightings in many parts of the country.

Since 2000, the crises facing wildlife have worsened considerably, exacerbated by climate change, evolving threats ranging from toxins to diseases, and a growing human population and footprint. States, territories, and tribes have stepped up to help address these challenges and are too central to wildlife and habitat conservation in the United States to be left out of the response to the biodiversity crisis if it is to have any chance of success.

States, territories, and tribes are essential to efforts to recover endangered and threatened species, but are uniquely capable of contributing upstream solutions that keep species from declining to the point of endangerment. However, they need far more resources to be effective at reducing the number of species and populations that warrant listing as endangered or threatened. Funding the labor-intensive work of restoring wildlife populations and habitat would also make a significant contribution to creating jobs tribes, communities, and the country need to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. The solution is to provide permanent funding at a level to meet the task.

**We urge you to pass the Recovering America’s Wildlife Act this Congress.** This action will commit $1.3 billion annually to implement state and territorial wildlife action plans, and $97.5 million annually to Tribal wildlife programs. This will provide the resources needed to maintain the species of greatest conservation need in each state and region of the country. The bill ensures at least 15% of the funding - $215 million – will go toward recovering species listed under the Endangered Species Act. It also funds and incentivizes the conservation of imperiled plants.

We also urge you to dramatically increase funding for federal biodiversity programs. Our support for funding wildlife conservation by states, territories, and tribes is complementary to our unwavering support for the fundamental role federal agencies play in wildlife and biodiversity conservation – including maintaining federal trust species such as endangered and threatened species, migratory birds, and bald and golden eagles, and species on federal lands.

We urge Congress to increase funding for federal biodiversity programs across the board, including the Endangered Species Act, federal land wildlife and plant programs, and other federal conservation programs such as the North American Bird Conservation Initiative and Migratory Bird Joint Ventures. This can be accomplished as part of a multi-year economic stimulus, infrastructure, or similar bill, as well as through separate stand-alone bills, and increases in annual appropriations. We stand ready to assist as these policy deliberations continue.

Thank you for considering these calls for a robust response to the wildlife and biodiversity crises.

American Bird Conservancy  National Parks Conservation Association
Bat Conservation International  National Wildlife Federation
Environment America  Natural Resources Defense Council
Environment California  Sierra Club
Environmental Defense Fund  The Nature Conservancy
League of Conservation Voters  Wildlands Network
National Audubon Society  World Wildlife Fund