

The Honorable Harry Reid
522 Hart Senate Office Bldg
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boehner
H-232, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Eric Cantor
303 Cannon Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
H-204, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

March 25, 2013

Dear Speaker Boehner, Majority Leader Reid, Majority Leader Cantor, Minority Leader McConnell, and Minority Leader Pelosi,

Finding long-term solutions to our country's fiscal problems is one of the most pressing public policy challenges of our time. With the federal debt at more than \$16 trillion and growing, there is an obvious need to reduce the size of the federal budget to protect the long-term fiscal well-being of the nation. The undersigned organizations understand that you face difficult choices in determining the best ways to address the country's federal budget crisis and reduce federal spending. We are writing to express our deep concern about the fate of conservation funding now underway in budget negotiations. We ask that, as you work toward substantive deficit reduction, you recognize the importance and value of the investments in the natural resources conservation programs grouped in function 300 and 350 of the federal budget.

America's public lands and waters help drive a robust economic sector and have helped to sustain millions of American jobs. Consumers spend \$646 billion on outdoor recreation annually, supporting 6.1 million jobs, and generating more than \$80 billion in state and federal taxes. This sector of our economy grew approximately 5 percent annually between 2005 and 2011 when most sectors contracted. Outdoor recreation is a significant economic driver in the US, and would not be possible without strong federal investment in the programs that conserve, manage and provide access to the lands and inland and coastal waters that Americans use for outdoor recreation.

Beyond economic stimulus, investment in America's public lands and waters has led to significant progress in improving the quality of our environment. Our water and air are cleaner, wildlife habitat is more diverse, and fish and game populations healthier for sportsmen and outdoor recreationists alike. Much of this was achieved by leveraging non-federal dollars, making these programs some of the most efficient administered by the federal government. In part because of the programs included in function 300 and 350 of the budget, Americans can lead healthier and more enjoyable lives.

In real terms, however, federal spending on environment and natural resources programs has declined over the last 20 years. This program area comprised about 1% of the total federal budget for FY 2012. While federal spending on the whole increased by 130% between 1980 and 2009, funding for these programs increased by just 2% during that same time period. Environment and natural resources programs are not major contributors to the federal deficit, yet they have been disproportionately targeted for cuts in the past. We believe this should be avoided as Congress works toward a comprehensive deficit reduction package. Instead, these programs should be held up as shining examples of the type of efficient and impactful investment that the federal government should pursue.

An evaluation of the country's short- and long-term fiscal outlook makes clear that we cannot balance the budget by cutting conservation and natural resources programs. We must make smart investments and address the long-

term structural causes of our country's fiscal problems without crippling our economic recovery and the health of our natural resources through further cuts to conservation funding. We appreciate your consideration, and look forward to working with you on solutions in the coming months.

American Fisheries Society

American Sportfishing Association

Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

B.A.S.S.

Berkley Conservation Institute – Pure Fishing

Delta Waterfowl

Ducks Unlimited

Izaak Walton League of America

Land Trust Alliance

Outdoor Industry Association

National Wildlife Refuge Association

Pheasants Forever

Pope and Young Club

Quail Forever

Snook and Gamefish Foundation

The Nature Conservancy

Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

The Wildlife Society

Trout Unlimited

Wildlife Management Institute