

Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairwoman, Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment & Related Agencies
U.S. Senate

Honorable Tom Udall
Ranking Member, Appropriations Subcommittee
on Interior, Environment & Related Agencies
U.S. Senate

Dear Chairwoman Murkowski and Ranking Member Udall:

We write to ask for your support for **an additional \$4.5 million to the existing \$17.3 million for the U.S.G.S. Cooperative Fish & Wildlife Research Unit** program in the USGS Ecosystems mission area in the Fiscal Year 2018 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill. This increase in funding is necessary to fill critical and chronic vacancies of scientists in the program, and to meet the actionable science needs of the states and other cooperators.

The 40 Cooperative Fish & Wildlife Research Units (CRUs) across 38 states are embedded in major research universities and bridge the gap between science and natural resource decisions. CRUs have a 3-fold mission: produce actionable science to meet the needs of cooperators; provide cooperators technical assistance in applying and integrating new science; and develop the next generation of natural resource professionals through graduate education.

This mission is implemented by fostering partnerships between state and federal natural resource agencies, academic institutions, and non-governmental organizations, as directed by the Cooperative Units Act of 1960 (P.L. 86-686).

CRUs are highly productive, cost-effective, and reputable sources of scientific information. **CRU scientists produce credible, applied science that meets the direct needs of cooperators and empower the front lines of fish and wildlife conservation.** Federal and state fish and wildlife agencies receive science to support sustainable hunting, fishing, and trapping seasons; evaluate and address challenges to endangered species listing and recovery; prevent and control invasive species and wildlife disease outbreaks; and actionable science to address many other natural resource management challenges.

For example, the New Mexico Unit has led investigations into the effects of energy development on lesser prairie-chickens, helping to inform conservation efforts and strategic energy siting options. Researchers at the Mississippi Unit are studying movements and habitats of shovelnose and pallid sturgeon to inform conservation efforts of those threatened and endangered fish, while the Vermont Unit has developed a statistical program that enables wildlife managers to make better harvest management decisions. The Alaska Unit has recently looked into how potential habitat changes could affect the distribution of moose and caribou, two species important to the hunting-based economy in the state.

Despite these benefits, CRUs are at a critical point. Scientist vacancies plague the program – 34 Unit scientist positions (30%) remain vacant as of FY17. State and university cooperators continue to fulfill their obligations of support, while federal funding for staffing remains stagnant, limiting the ability of the program to meet the growing needs of its collaborators.

To achieve the scientific needs and meet partner expectations, CRU base funding must be increased by \$4.5 million in FY18. Such funding will allow critical vacancies to be filled, address the erosion of CRUs cooperative capacity, and expand program offerings to new states.

Sincerely,

American Fisheries Society
Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies

Boone & Crockett Club
National Association of University Fish & Wildlife Programs
The Wildlife Society
Wildlife Management Institute

Enclosures: Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies Resolution #2015-01

Cc: Honorable Thad Cochran; Honorable Patrick Leahy; Members of Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies



Resolution #2015-01

An Endorsement of Full Staffing of the USGS Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit Program

This resolution urges Congress to fully fund the USGS Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit Program, in order to address critical staffing vacancies in this program, which delivers high-quality, actionable scientific research and training to the state fish and wildlife agencies.

WHEREAS, the Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit program was established in 1935 to enhance graduate education in fisheries and wildlife sciences and to facilitate applied research between natural resource agencies and universities to address current and emerging management-oriented science needs; and

WHEREAS, today, there are 40 Cooperative Research Units in 38 states; and

WHEREAS, the Cooperative Research Units provide much-needed applied scientific research to the state fish and wildlife agencies, delivering on average over 300 scientific papers and over 700 scientific presentations per year; and

WHEREAS, the Cooperative Research Units provide much-needed scientific training for the next generation of fish and wildlife biologists, graduating on average over 100 students per year; and

WHEREAS, the Cooperative Units Act as amended (P.L. 86-686, 1960) establishes the Cooperative Research Units as a cooperative effort among states, universities and the federal government with each party responsible for their share of the support; and

WHEREAS, the States and Universities have met and are providing their share of the support; and

WHEREAS, Congress has not provided adequate funding to fully staff the USGS Cooperative Research Units; and

WHEREAS, Cooperator needs, particularly those of the States and universities, cannot be met without full federal participation;

WHEREAS, current vacancies across the Cooperative Research Unit Program amount to 25% of the scientist workforce;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (Association) urges Congress to provide adequate funding to fully staff the USGS Cooperative Research Unit Program to accomplish applied research that is fundamental to the mission of the Association and its member agencies; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies encourages the United States Department of the Interior's US Geological Survey to administer funding provided to the USGS

Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit Program in support of research programs with direct application to the needs of the federal and state land and wildlife resource management agencies.

Adopted September 16, 2015
Tucson, Arizona

