



THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

South Dakota Chapter

1725 Mission Ct
Huron, SD 57350

REVISED LETTER

August 17, 2018

The Honorable John Thune
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC

Dear Senator Thune:

The following letter was revised to clarify a misleading point about the S.3223 budget allocations to South Dakota.

The Wildlife Society is an international non-profit association dedicated to excellence in wildlife stewardship through science and education. The South Dakota Chapter achieves this mission in part by evaluating proposed public actions that affect wildlife and habitats. Our Chapter goals and objectives are more clearly outlined at: <http://wildlife.org/south-dakota-chapter/>. On behalf of our members, we ask that you support, cosponsor and improve the Recovering America's Wildlife Act (S. 3223), recently introduced by Senators Risch, Manchin, Heitkamp, and Alexander. This bill is a milestone event in a many-decades-worth effort to identify a long-term funding source to accommodate the needs of all fish and wildlife species and native habitats, including efforts to avoid the need for future endangered species listings. However, it is critical that a dedicated funding mechanism be added to S. 3223 in order to improve and meet the needs of fish and wildlife.

Our Chapter is among an extremely strong and diverse array of interests that support this funding initiative. Supporters include the outdoor recreation retail and manufacturing sector, energy interests, private landowners, educators, conservationists, sportsmen and women and state and federal fish and wildlife agencies. In addition to our members' professional commitment to natural resources, many of us enjoy outdoor pursuits such as hunting, fishing, birding, hiking and camping, all of which are enhanced by a healthy and diverse natural world.

We consider S. 3223 an important first step and ask for your help to improve the bill to better address the needs of South Dakota's wildlife and associated habitats. Unlike the House version of Recovering America's Wildlife Act (H.R. 4647), which includes dedicated funding for fish and wildlife species and habitats, S. 3223 proposes that the federal matching funds be annually appropriated. We are concerned that S. 3223 follows the State Wildlife Grant (SWG) model of relying on annual appropriations rather than assuring dedicated funding. We work closely with the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Department and are familiar with the South Dakota Wildlife Action Plan. South Dakota's Plan focuses on the need for diverse and healthy habitats to accommodate the needs of 100 species of conservation concern. These habitats support game and nongame fish and wildlife; provide clean water for human consumption and use; foster ecosystems that support pollinators; enhance healthy soils and rangelands for farmers and ranchers; provide areas to hunt, trap and fish; and support sustainable resources for all South Dakotans. Wildlife Action Plans must address the needs of all fish and wildlife species and related habitats, but annual SWG funding provides only a small portion of what is needed to implement these state-led plans. Although SWG-funded projects in South Dakota and around the nation have yielded important accomplishments, including data that have influenced endangered species listing and delisting decisions, annual appropriations do not facilitate comprehensive efforts to build meaningful conservation and landowner programs that will make a long-term difference.

Stable, dedicated funds have been critical to the long-term success of the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program and its ability to create and protect habitat for fish and wildlife. Habitat is the key predictor of healthy fish and wildlife populations, and continued attention is needed to prevent even relatively common wildlife populations from declining. For example with the decreased enrollment of acreage in the Conservation Reserve Program in South Dakota since 2007, the state pheasant population estimate dropped from a modern-era peak of 11.9 million in 2007 to an estimated 4.6 million a decade later. Along with the associated economic impacts of declining pheasant numbers is the loss of countless opportunities to experience this traditional fall hunting pastime in South Dakota.

We believe S. 3223 has the potential to address a long-standing void in fish and wildlife funding with a proactive, state-based approach. We urge you to join legislative leaders to support, cosponsor, and improve this bill for the sake of South Dakotans and our precious natural resources.

Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,



Alex Solem, President
South Dakota Chapter of the Wildlife Society
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