

May 29, 2019

Chairman Jared Huffman
U.S. House of Representatives
Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Ranking Member Tom McClintock
U.S. House of Representatives
Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Huffman and Ranking Member McClintock:

Thank you for your interest in addressing the loss of biodiversity globally and implications for fish and wildlife in the United States. As we heard in last week's testimony, a new report from the United Nations Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services found that approximately one million animal and plant species are threatened with extinction globally because of changes in land and sea use, exploitation, climate change, pollution, and invasive species. The chair of the report, Sir Robert Watson, has previously noted that the health of our ecosystems is deteriorating more rapidly than ever and has called for **transformative action to meet this challenge**.

America has a global reputation for species diversity, with 200,000 species of plants and animals across the country, including over 2,500 species of vertebrates and 4,000 species of invertebrates. This includes unparalleled diversity among amphibians, freshwater mussels, freshwater fishes, and many types of mammals, birds and reptiles. As we see globally, many of these species, including historically abundant ones, have been steeply declining. The unfortunate reality is that the wildlife crisis extends to our own backyard.

Last spring, the National Wildlife Federation, the American Fisheries Society, and The Wildlife Society released the *Reversing America's Wildlife Crisis* report ("Wildlife Crisis Report"; attached) that documents the alarming declines in U.S. species from threats such as habitat loss, invasive species, disease, and other problems exacerbated by a changing climate. The Wildlife Crisis report found that up to one-third of U.S. species need immediate conservation action, including 40 percent of freshwater fish species, 42 percent of amphibian species, and 18 percent of bat species.

State fish and wildlife agencies operating on the front lines of this crisis have spent over a decade working to identify at-risk species and define appropriate conservation strategies to address their declines through State Wildlife Action Plans. These action plans were mandated by Congress, to prioritize, plan for, and address 12,000 species of greatest conservation need across the country

as a condition to receiving State and Tribal Wildlife Grant funding. However, this program is chronically underfunded in the annual appropriations process. As a result, its funding has never come close to truly addressing the magnitude of the problem.

The Wildlife Crisis report called for transformational change in the way we fund fish and wildlife conservation and we urge you to consider this approach as you look to solutions for the growing fish and wildlife crisis here in our country. Today, more than 1,600 species currently receive protection from the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). While the ESA has led to the successful recovery of many species, natural resource managers urgently need additional tools to keep vulnerable species from becoming endangered. Specifically, dedicated funding for State Wildlife Action Plans is needed for state agencies to implement much needed conservation measures to address these species' declines. This approach would provide more certainty for business and allow for more cost-effective solutions to address these declines. The Wildlife Crisis report provides examples of how such investments in conservation can indeed lead to successful recovery of species *and importantly*, how investments in prevention lead to stabilizing or increasing populations thereby avoiding their becoming endangered.

Last Congress, Rep. Jeff Fortenberry and Rep. Debbie Dingell introduced the Recovering America's Wildlife Act, a bill that would provide funding needed to empower state fish and wildlife agencies to conserve at-risk species, and adequately address the extinction crisis here at home. This soon-to-be-reintroduced bipartisan bill would dramatically change the dynamic by providing state and tribal agencies with \$1.4 billion in dedicated funding to implement voluntary and cost effective on-the-ground conservation work as detailed in State Wildlife Action Plans.

Thank you for your interest in working towards solutions to address the staggering threats to loss of biodiversity in the U.S. We look forward to continuing work with the subcommittee on this extremely important effort.

Sincerely,

American Fisheries Society

National Wildlife Federation

The Wildlife Society