

September 12, 2018

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on the Interior
Committee on Appropriations
U. S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Udall
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on the Interior
Committee on Appropriations
U. S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ken Calvert
Chairman
Subcommittee on the Interior
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Betty McCollum
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on the Interior
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Murkowski, Chairman Calvert, and Ranking Members Udall and McCollum:

On behalf of the state fish and wildlife agencies and U.S. fish and wildlife conservation professionals, we are writing to express our appreciation for your support for the Cooperative Research Unit (CRU) program at the U.S. Geological Survey in your respective FY2019 Interior Appropriations bills. We write to request your continued support for the program as the appropriations process moves forward. More specifically, we respectfully request that you fund the CRUs at the House-adopted level of \$19.3 million, an increase of \$1.9 million above the FY2018 appropriation.

Both committees and chambers have recognized the importance of the CRU program by approving increases for it. As you know, the program truly is cooperative and collaborative in nature, bringing together scientists with universities, state and local natural resource agencies, and managers in the field in order to solve real-world natural resource management issues, while at the same time training the next generation of researchers and managers. The units work to address a host of real-world problems, ranging from diseases impacting wildlife and the marine aquaculture industry to minimizing the impacts of energy exploration on rare and declining species, to combatting the threats posed by invasive species, as well as many other concerns that directly impact our fish, wildlife, and habitat resources.

All of this work is being performed while numerous CRU units around the country are facing staff vacancies. Both committees have noted this problem in their respective reports. While some units' vacancy problems are more acute than others, there is a critical need to ensure that more personnel are hired for the currently existing vacant positions in the system. The House report notes, in part:

“The Committee recognizes the value of the Cooperative Research Units (CRUs) program and rejects the proposed elimination of the program. The recommendation includes an additional \$1,916,000 for the purposes of filling critical vacancies at research institutions as quickly as practicable.”

In its report, the Senate committee states:

“The Committee notes that USGS Cooperative Research Units [CRU] have served as a cooperative network with Interior partners to improve and increase youth involvement in science and resources management. The Committee recognizes the value of these programs in building the workforce of tomorrow and strongly encourages the Survey to develop a plan and address open research positions at research institutions and fill open positions at CRUs as quickly as practicable to support the educational pipeline.”

In addition, because the units have been so effective and productive, several states which currently do not have CRUs have expressed interest in creating new units.

We respectfully request that the conferees adopt the House-approved level of \$19.3 million so that the critical work being performed by the CRUs can continue and be augmented by filling open vacancies and address the interest in creating new units in an appropriate manner.

Sincerely,

Virgil Moore, President
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

Dr. Douglas Austen, Executive Director
American Fisheries Society

Dr. John E. McDonald, Jr., President
The Wildlife Society

Dr. Steven Williams, President
Wildlife Management Institute