December 2, 2019

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-128
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-146A
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Chairwoman
House Committee on Appropriations
H-307
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Shelby, Chairwoman Lowey, Vice Chairman Leahy, and Ranking Member Granger:

The undersigned sportsmen, conservation, and professional organizations are writing to urge that, during the negotiation process for finalizing FY20 Agriculture Appropriations, you support the House floor-amended funding levels for state wildlife agencies to address chronic wasting disease (CWD) in free-ranging deer and other cervids.

During floor consideration of the House's FY20 Agriculture appropriations bill, a bipartisan amendment was adopted by voice vote that added $12 million to the committee level for a total of $15 million for the USDA's Animal Plant and Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to renew cooperative agreements with state wildlife agencies which are on the front lines of limiting the further spread of this disease in cervids, including deer, elk and moose. These funds not only assist states in the monitoring, testing, and surveillance of wild cervids but will help states respond quickly and effectively when a new outbreak occurs. Currently states are spending millions of sportsmen's dollars on CWD management, with very little in the way of federal or state assistance despite the national, and indeed global, scope of this wildlife health challenge.

The conservation community is concerned about the rapid spread of CWD in free-ranging cervids, which has currently been detected in 26 states. CWD is a contagious, 100% fatal prion disease that causes emaciation, abnormal behavior, and other neurological symptoms in cervids across the nation. Each year, new states and counties are added to the list of CWD-positive regions, increasing pressure upon America's wildlife and causing uncertainty amongst outdoorsmen and women about the future of these iconic species.

Deer hunting contributes nearly $40 billion annually to the U.S. economy and roughly $5.5 billion in state and local tax revenue. State wildlife agencies face increasing pressure stretching limited license revenues to pay for CWD testing, facilities to store tissue samples, and strategies such as emergency hunts to help control the spread of the disease. Several western state wildlife agencies, including Colorado and Montana, have expressed concerns about the potential for decreased nonresident hunting license purchases because of hunter apprehensions about CWD and the length of time required for completion of testing results before harvested animals can be transported because of limited laboratory testing capacity. Nonresident hunting license fees are the most significant funding source for these agencies. CWD threatens the very future of that powerful economy and this important American outdoor tradition.

As Congressional leaders work through funding levels for FY2020, the final report should include the higher number for state wildlife agencies to combat CWD and defer to the House floor-amended language. This funding is overdue, and essential to ensure that state agencies have the necessary resources to monitor and respond to this critical threat to wildlife health and conservation funding. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

American Woodcock Society
Archery Trade Association
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Boone and Crockett Club
Campfire Club of America
Catch-A-Dream Foundation
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Conservation Force
Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports
Delta Waterfowl
Houston Safari Club
Izaak Walton League of America
Mule Deer Foundation
National Association of Forest Service Retirees
National Deer Alliance
National Shooting Sports Foundation
National Wildlife Federation
National Wildlife Refuge Association
National Wild Turkey Federation
North American Falconers Association
Orion – The Hunter's Institute
Pope and Young Club
Professional Outfitters and Guides of America
Quality Deer Management Association
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Ruffed Grouse Society
Safari Club International
Sportsmen's Alliance
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Wildlife Forever
Wildlife Management Institute
The Wildlife Society

CC:
The Honorable John Hoeven, Chairman, Subcommittee on Agriculture
The Honorable Jeff Merkley, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Agriculture
The Honorable Sanford D. Bishop, Chairman, Subcommittee on Agriculture
The Honorable Jeff Fortenberry, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Agriculture