National Environmental Coalition on Invasive Species

Alliance for the Great Lakes ◆ Center for Invasive Species Prevention
Ecological Society of America ◆ Entomological Society of America
American Bird Conservancy ◆ The Wildlife Society ◆ National Wildlife Federation

March 13, 2020

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Chairwoman
House Appropriations Committee
H-307 U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
1026 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Betty McCollum
Chair
House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
2007 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable David Joyce
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Lowey, Chair McCollum, Ranking Member Granger and Ranking Member Joyce:

The National Environmental Coalition on Invasive Species (NECIS) appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony concerning the FY 2021 budgets for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Our coalition is made up of conservation organizations and professional societies whose mission is to promote sound policies for preventing the introduction and spread of harmful invasive species in the United States.

The priority programs outlined below have a direct impact on the nation's ability to combat the introduction and spread of invasive species. To tackle an issue that has an impact on many different facets of American life, we respectfully request the following programmatic funding and report language in FY 2021.

US Fish and Wildlife Service

National Wildlife Refuge System: Invasive Species Strike Teams
US Fish and Wildlife Service Strike Teams focus on early detection and rapid response strategies to combat invasive species both on Refuge System lands and neighboring private lands. Such strategies are critical in preventing damages from invasive species by responding to them before they can establish. Strike teams have proven successful and must be expanded.

Meanwhile, lack of funding perpetuates the Refuge System's inability to address the ongoing management costs associated with invasive species that have already established. These costs only compound and become more expensive with time. Inadequate management of invasive species reduces habitat quality for the full suite of wildlife within refuges and places nearby private lands at higher risk of infestations. **The Coalition supports the Administration's proposal of $249.5 million for the NWRS wildlife habitat management account, with the inclusion of robust funding for invasive species strike teams.**

US Geological Survey

Ecosystems Mission Area: Invasive Species Program

Invasive species cause annual environmental, economic, and health-related costs exceeding those of all other natural disasters combined. USGS monitors threats from hundreds of invasive animals, plants, and pathogens through the invasive species program in the Ecosystems mission area. Invasive species research within USGS focuses on control and management, early detection and rapid response, and habitat effects and restoration. This research helps inform federal, state, and NGO management decisions and predict what areas an invasive species will threaten next. **The Coalition requests $180 million program-wide for the USGS Ecosystems mission area and at least $26 million for the Invasive Species program.**

National Wildlife Health Center

Invasive species and diseases have emerged as two of the leading threats to wildlife in the 21st Century. They have caused dramatic declines in once common wildlife such as the little brown and northern long-eared bats and driven frog and salamander species to extinction. Chronic wasting disease (CWD) currently threatens populations of deer, moose, and elk, which are important to functioning ecosystems as well as the hunting traditions that support rural economies. CWD has spread to 29 states and increased funding is needed to cover research, monitoring, and containment efforts to minimize its impact. Given these threats, proposed cuts to the NWHC are poorly timed. The cuts will weaken efforts to combat the diseases caused by invasive pathogens that threaten the health of the nation's wildlife and the health and well-being of its people. The NWHC is the only national center dedicated to wildlife disease detection, control, and prevention in the United States. **The Coalition requests continued and robust funding for the NWHC across all USGS mission areas to permit it to perform its critical function.**

US Forest Service

Forest Health Protection

This program is essential to ensuring our forests' health. Yet, funding for the program has been cut severely over the past decade despite increases in non-native pests' numbers, geographic ranges, and impacts. In FY 2021, the Administration proposes to terminate assistance for threats to whitebark pines and management of several species - including laurel wilt and Port-Orford-cedar root disease - despite recommendations by USFS scientists to enhance conservation efforts to counter these pests. Additionally, sudden oak death (SOD) has already killed an estimated 50 million trees, but the Administration proposes to cut funding to counter SOD by 15%. This comes despite continued spread of the disease and the risk presented by the establishment of a second genetic strain of the pathogen in Oregon. Finally, Forest Health Protection must also address such emerging threats as beech leaf disease - present from Ohio to Connecticut - and the "rapid ʻōhiʻa death" fungi, which threatens a tree species that makes up 80% of the native forests in Hawaiʻi. **Given the multitude of threats to forest health, the Coalition requests funding the Forest Health Management on Cooperative Lands Program at $51 million and on National Forests at $59 million.**

Research and Development
Effective programs to prevent, suppress, and eradicate pests depend on knowledge gained through research. Funding for research on the worst non-native pests has been cut by over 70% over the past decade. In FY 2021, the Administration proposes to cut the overall USFS research budget by 25%. Among these cuts is the proposal to close the Pacific Southwest Research station, which houses the Service's crucially important expertise on sudden oak death and rapid ʻōhiʻa death fungi. Research from this station is urgently needed on the possible impacts of a second, more aggressive genetic strain of sudden oak death present in the forests of Oregon, as well as the vulnerability American trees species' to the 50 species of related microbes recently discovered in the forests of Southeast Asia. In addition, the Pacific Southwest station leads research efforts to counter the rapid ʻōhiʻa death fungi and other threats to Hawaiʻi's unique forests. The USFS Research and Development fish and wildlife research program has also worked on cost-effective ways to quickly identify presence or absence of invasive species in an aquatic environment and was the first program to create a nonlethal treatment for white-nose syndrome —a lethal fungal disease that has reduced bat populations by upwards of 80% in certain parts of the country. **The Coalition requests funding the Forest and Rangeland Research Program in FY 21 at $315 million, of which $32 million should be allocated to invasive species research.**

Environmental Protection Agency

Great Lake Restoration Initiative
By competing with native fish species and altering habitat quality, invasive Asian Carp species pose an urgent threat to fisheries, the outdoor recreation economy, and many Americans' way of life. Funding for this initiative is critical to preventing the further spread of Asian carp and other invasive species through the Great Lakes and the Ohio River and Mississippi River Basins. Tasks within the initiative include early detection of Asian carp in new areas, studying carp biology to better understand how they establish and survive, and testing technologies for the control and containment of Asian carp. **The Coalition requests at least $300 million in FY21 for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, which includes efforts to control Asian carp.**

Report Language Requests

Cooperative Weed Management Areas and Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas
One of the most critical pieces of infrastructure for addressing invasive species effectively is the national network of local invasive species collaborations. Cooperatives bring together resource managers to share what they see on the ground and plan collaborative projects. Because weeds and other invasive species don't recognize borders, a multitude of private landowners and public jurisdictions need to work together to be effective. Thousands of strategic projects at the point of impact are our best defense against new introductions and the spread of invasive species already present. This network is the backbone of our national response system, and strengthening it is a matter of federal significance. Subchapter V of the Plant Protection Act authorizes the US government to send federal funding to states and tribes for CWMAs and CISMAs. Such funding is a critical investment in the backbone of our national response system and has leveraged substantial engagement and funding from partners. **The Coalition requests the adoption of report language in support of grant program funding directed at Cooperative Weed Management Areas and Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas.**

National Invasive Species Council
Consisting of 12 federal departments and four executive Offices, the National Invasive Species Council (NISC) has coordinated the nation's invasive species response for the past twenty years. This work has included the implementation of several current federal priorities, such as pilot projects exploring the benefits of Early Detection and Rapid Response at the regional scale, evaluating the cost of invasive species on the nation's infrastructure, and guarding against the threat of invasive species in the Arctic. The Council is responsible for the creation and implementation of three-year management plans that highlight the priority areas for coordination on invasive species prevention work across the federal government for the long term security of the nation. Without continued funding, NISC will fail to provide the coordination to keep both agencies and stakeholders informed and ready to respond to emerging threats. **As in the FY 2020 appropriations cycle, the Coalition requests the adoption of report language directing the Administration to provide adequate funding for the continued operation of the National Invasive Species Council**.

Thank you for your consideration of the coalition's priorities and for your action in this Fiscal Year on combating and preventing invasive species. Please reach out to Caroline Murphy, Government Relations Manager at The Wildlife Society (301-897-9770 x 308; cmurphy@wildlife.org) or any of the organizations listed below with questions regarding these funding priorities.

Sincerely,

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