



THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

Leaders in Wildlife Science, Management and Conservation

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Submitted to: House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

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Re: **FY 2021 Appropriations for USGS, FWS, BLM, and USFS**

POC: Caroline E. Murphy, AWB®, cmurphy@wildlife.org
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The Wildlife Society (TWS; wildlife.org) appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony concerning the FY 2021 budgets for the **U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and U.S. Forest Service (USFS)**. Founded in 1937, TWS and our network of affiliated chapters and sections represent more than 15,000 professional wildlife biologists, managers, and educators dedicated to excellence in wildlife stewardship through science and education. Our mission is to inspire, empower, and enable wildlife professionals to sustain wildlife populations and habitat through science-based management and conservation. Appropriations for the following programs within the jurisdiction of the Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies will affect the current and future status of wildlife and wildlife professionals in North America. To enable the appropriate use of science within these programs and beyond, TWS respectfully requests the following programmatic funding in FY 2021.

*BLM Wild Horse & Burro Management funding request accompanies request to remove an associated policy rider

| FY 2021 Interior Appropriation Requests — The Wildlife Society | | | |
|---|---------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| Agency | Program | FY 2020 Enacted | FY 2021 TWS |
| USGS | Ecosystems Mission Area | 170.5 M | 180.0 M |
| | Cooperative Research Units | 24.0 M | 25.0 M |
| FWS | State & Tribal Wildlife Grants | 67.6 M | 90.0 M |
| | National Wildlife Refuge System | 502.4 M | 586.0 M |
| | Ecological Services | 266.0 M | 270.0 M |
| | NAWCA | 46.0 M | 50.0 M |
| | NMBCA | 4.9 M | 6.5 M |
| | Migratory Bird Joint Ventures | 14.6 M | 19.9 M |
| BLM | Wildlife & Aquatic Management | 186.5 M | 190 M |
| | Wild Horse & Burro Management | 101.6 M | *116.8 M |
| USFS | Research & Development | 305 M | 315.0 M |

U.S. Geological Survey

The Wildlife Society supports the critical and unique mission of the US Geological Survey to provide objective scientific research and data collection on the complex environmental and associated societal issues facing our nation. TWS specifically requests **at least \$180 million for the Ecosystems Mission Area**, which contains programmatic resources for fisheries, wildlife, invasive species, and the **Cooperative Research Units (CRU)**.

TWS requests a modest increase to \$25 million for the Cooperative Research Units program in FY 2021. This program fosters federal, state, NGO, and academic partnerships to provide actionable science tailored to the needs of natural resource managers on the front lines. The support of many state agencies, universities, and NGOs has allowed the program to leverage more than three dollars in outside funds for every federal dollar invested. By housing USGS scientists in Land Grant universities, this program also develops the next generation of wildlife professionals and provides them with an understanding of actionable science responsive to stakeholder needs.

TWS thanks Congress for the much-needed investments in the program in FY 2020. A small increase in funding for FY 2021 will allow the units to continue investments in long-overdue maintenance needs and continue to address the record 42 CRU (35%) scientist vacancies currently weighing down the program.

Within the Land Resources Mission Area, the **Climate Adaptation Science Centers** program responds to regional wildlife, ecosystems, and community-based stakeholder needs in the face of a changing climate. TWS again encourages Congress to retain this program within the Land Resources Mission Area and reject requests to defund the regional centers. The existing CASC framework has effectively leveraged millions in funding from nonfederal partners to provide stakeholders with a better understanding of how resources will react and respond to a changing climate.

TWS is thankful for the continued investments in USGS mission areas in previous budget cycles. However, one area that has seen consistent and unacceptable decreases in funding is **Science Support**. This program area is charged with several core operating functions, including processing of USGS grants, advertising and hiring for USGS scientists and support staff, and ensuring that USGS science is effectively communicated to decision makers and the public. Without these core operations being efficiently deployed, all other program areas in the Survey will slow to a crawl. **TWS requests Congress stop decreasing funding to the program, and instead work to increase funding in alignment with increases provided across Survey mission areas in prior fiscal years.**

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The **State and Tribal Wildlife Grants Program (STWG)** is the nation's *only* program that encourages development and implementation of State Wildlife Action Plans, thereby directly supporting states in preventing wildlife from being listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Collectively, STWG funds support strong partnerships among federal, state, tribal, private, and nonprofit entities that enable wildlife professionals to implement on-the-ground conservation activities that benefit over 12,000 at-risk species. In FY 2010, appropriations were at \$90 million for the program – allowing states to complete more projects necessary for

monitoring and recovery of at-risk species. Subsequent budget reductions in STWG, however, have prevented this highly effective program from reaching its potential. The Wildlife Society requests Congress provide **at least \$90 million in FY 2021**. TWS also requests the competitive funding portions be open to all states and tribes working on at-risk species recovery, and not be funded exclusively for implementing Interior Secretarial Order 3362 or at the expense of tribal programming.

The Wildlife Society requests at least \$586 million for the National Wildlife Refuge System's (NWRS) operations and maintenance accounts in FY 2021. The NWRS has long been an economic driver, generating approximately \$4.87 in economic activity for every \$1 appropriated by Congress. However, the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement estimates NWRS needs at least \$900 million in annual operations and maintenance funding to properly administer its 568 units, 38 wetland management districts, and 5 marine national monuments spanning over 850 million acres of land and water. Without adequate funding, ecosystems are not restored; invasive species are left unchecked; infrastructure for multiple use opportunities such as hunting, fishing, and hiking are not realized; and illegal activities like poaching and vandalism are not addressed. TWS supports the continued increases for Operations and Maintenance requested by the Administration and realized by Congress, notably on initiatives such as **Early Detection and Rapid Response** of invasive species.

Through the **Ecological Services Program (ESP)**, the USFWS works with diverse public and private partners to help identify species facing extinction and reduce threats to their populations so that required federal protections can be removed. Wildlife professionals in FWS are working on new strategies to increase efficacy of ESP and reduce regulatory burdens on private partners. To efficaciously move species through all components of the ESA listing and delisting process, **TWS requests Congress build on the successes of last year's budget to provide a modest increase to \$270 million.**

The **North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA)** is a non-regulatory, incentive-based program that has demonstrated success in maintaining and restoring wetlands, waterfowl, and other migratory bird populations by conserving more than 30 million acres since 1989. This program has remained chronically underfunded despite its demonstrated effectiveness. **TWS greatly appreciates the increase in funding provided in FY 2020, and asks that Congress provide a similar increase in FY 2021 with an appropriation of \$50 million.**

In the nearly twenty years since the **Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (NMBCA)** was enacted, the program has provided approximately \$70 million in grants to support 594 projects in 37 countries. These grants, leveraged with nonfederal dollars at an astounding 4:1 ratio, have enabled wildlife professionals to conserve approximately 400 migratory bird species on 4.5 million acres in the U.S., Mexico, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean. The needs of U.S. migratory bird species and conservation efforts to keep these species common extends to landscapes far beyond U.S. borders. As a result, **TWS recommends Congress increase funding to at least \$6.5 million in FY 2021 to achieve greater proactive conservation results under the program.**

The **Migratory Bird Joint Ventures (MBJV)**, part of FWS' **Migratory Bird Management** program, are locally-directed partnerships that develop and implement science-based habitat

conservation strategies for all species of birds across North America. These partnerships have leveraged federal funds at 31:1 to enhance and conserve over 27 million acres of avian habitat. **TWS supports \$50 million for Migratory Bird Management, including \$19.9 million for enhancing and promoting MBJV.**

Bureau of Land Management

The **Wildlife and Aquatic Management** program maintains and restores fish, wildlife, and their habitat across a large portion of America's western landscapes. This includes projects to balance effects of multiple public land uses, such as energy development and livestock grazing, with needs of native species. This program has also recently taken over management of the approximately 300 ESA listed species and 12 ESA candidate species on BLM lands. With the continued expansion of energy development on BLM lands—and the associated mitigation challenges—**TWS recommends Congress support the Wildlife and Aquatic Management program with at least \$190 million in FY 2021 - with robust funding applied to the Threatened and Endangered Species management subactivity.**

The Wildlife Society recognizes free-ranging horses and burros in the U.S. as ecologically invasive, feral species. Free-ranging, legally designated “wild”, horse and burro populations on BLM lands reached more than 88,000 individuals last year, exceeding BLM's estimated threshold for ecological sustainability by over 60,000 animals. The Administration's request for a \$14 million increase in funding to the program in FY 2021 is a positive step towards accepting that this natural resource sustainability issue needs to be addressed. However, given the Administration and Congress' statements supporting continuation of the status quo on removals, adoptions, and fertility treatments, by the BLM's own estimates it will take hundreds of millions of dollars and several years more to reach ecologically sustainable levels. In order to break this status quo and achieve ecologically sustainable levels in a cost-effective manner, **the current policy rider limiting sale and/or destruction of unwanted or unadoptable wild horses and burros must be removed from the Interior Appropriations bill.** TWS appreciates the continued attention Congress has on this issue, and urges continued pressure on the Administration for a previously mandated report detailing actionable solutions to this environmental crisis.

U.S. Forest Service

The Wildlife Society is in strong opposition to the Administration's proposed elimination of the wildlife and fish research program within USFS Forest and Rangeland Research. Improving the future health and sustainability of the nation's forest ecosystems within the multiuse principles of USFS lands requires a strong investment in R&D. Forest Service fish and wildlife researchers are leading scientists in their fields and specialize in providing applied research to natural resource managers and decision-makers in state and federal government and the private sector. Their research has informed conservation efforts across public lands and helped prevent ESA listings of forest and rangeland species. **TWS requests the committee include report language supporting the continuation of the wildlife and fish research program within Forest and Rangeland Research. TWS also encourages Congress to increase funding for all Forest Service R&D to a minimum of \$315 million in FY 2021, including at least \$232 million directed to Forest and Rangeland Research program areas exclusive of Forest Inventory and Analysis.**