



THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

Leaders in Wildlife Science, Management and Conservation

15 May 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-226, United States Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
S-255, United States Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
H-232, United States Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
H-204, United States Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Support for COVID-19 Relief and Recovery through investments in wildlife research and monitoring

Dear Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

The Wildlife Society appreciates your leadership in passing the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, which provides critical support to Americans as the global community continues to combat this pandemic. Now, as Congress turns towards future coronavirus response packages, we urge you to provide the necessary resources to support the important work of wildlife professionals responding to this outbreak and to other pressing wildlife disease and management issues.

The Wildlife Society (TWS; wildlife.org) inspires, empowers, and enables wildlife professionals to sustain wildlife populations and their habitat through science-based management and conservation. 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.

Our members work across the country, the continent, and the globe to ensure that wildlife populations and their habitat remain healthy and benefit society. Well-managed wildlife populations provide benefits far beyond their natural systems, and include a myriad of economic benefits to human populations. In the United States alone, the outdoor industry employs 7.6 million workers and generates \$887 billion in annual economic activity.

Addressing the risk of wildlife-to-human disease transmission for the benefit of all Americans will require a multifaceted approach that includes prevention, surveillance, management, monitoring and research of wildlife diseases. To accomplish this,

enhancements and modifications to the capacities of existing programs alongside the adoption of novel programs to allow wildlife professionals to respond to some of the nation's most pressing wildlife disease and management issues must be considered. We urge Congress to take the following steps to improve America's ability to respond to the threats wildlife diseases pose to human health, economic stability, and sustainable wildlife populations.

Enhancing the capacity of existing programs that prevent, detect, and mitigate the spread of wildlife disease is a necessary step to immediately increase our nation's security. Existing programs can be strengthened through robust funding:

- **The U.S. Geological Survey's National Wildlife Health Center** needs \$101 million in new construction funding to modernize the antiquated facilities of the National Wildlife Health Center (NWHC). As the only national center dedicated exclusively to wildlife disease control, prevention, and management throughout the US, this center is poised to provide the research required to determine susceptibility of a variety of species to the novel coronavirus and other wildlife and zoonotic diseases.
- The USDA-Wildlife Services **Methods Development program** provides federal, state, and tribal partners with the needed tools to manage and deter wildlife-human conflict and associated diseases. This program has the capacity and authority to provide grants to regional partners to ensure that wildlife disease and conflict research is responsive to on-the-ground needs. We recommend increasing funding to Wildlife Service's Methods Development by \$50 million to ensure an adequate injection of funds responsive to the wildlife disease and management needs of the nation.
- The USDA's **National Institute of Food and Agriculture** is in need of additional funding to ramp up projects that are of relevance to the current pandemic and can continue safely, as well as ramp down projects that are no longer able to be completed under current circumstance. An additional \$300 million in funding for NIFA grant programming provided through the programs such as the Renewable Resource Extension Act and the McIntire-Stennis Cooperative Forestry program will allow relevant natural resource management research and innovation to continue into this pandemic.

Congress must also look to **modify requirements of existing grant programming** to better allow state natural resources agencies to adapt to this crisis:

- State natural resource agencies are in need of short-term relief from federal match requirements for natural resource formula grant programs such as the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants program, the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program, and the Land and Water Conservation Fund. This relief will allow states to continue moving forward on long-planned, shovel-ready projects without needing to revert dollars as a result of shrinking state budgets.

We must also **address major gaps in existing government authorities** and programs that constrain our ability to prevent the introduction of new diseases, control existing wildlife diseases and invasive species, and minimize the potential for pathogens to spread

among wildlife populations and from wildlife to humans. We recommend that Congress fill gaps in existing authorities by advancing:

- The **Invasive Fish and Wildlife Prevention Act**, introduced in the 115th Congress as H.R. 6362, which would streamline and strengthen regulations designed to prevent the introduction and spread of injurious species and/or species that could cause harm to human or wildlife resources. **Special attention must be directed at reinstating the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's traditional interpretation of interstate transport under the Lacey Act** as not only prohibiting the importation of injurious into the United States, but also prohibiting the interstate transport of these harmful species. This misinterpretation of legislative intent brought on by the *USARK v. Zinke* decision must be corrected to promote needed federal-state coordination on invasive species. **TWS thanks House leaders for their consideration of this language in the stimulus and requests its adoption into any final legislative package.**
- A **package of three Chronic Wasting Disease bills**, which would create a cohesive response to this rapidly spreading disease that poses a direct threat to deer, elk, and moose populations, to rural economies, and to hunting license sales – a core funding mechanism for state wildlife agencies. We recommend adoption and investment in the **Chronic Wasting Disease Management Act** (H.R.1550, S.689), **Section 104 of America's Conservation Enhancement Act** (S. 3051), and the **Chronic Wasting Disease Transmission in Cervidae Study Act** (H.R.837; S.382).

Investing in new conservation programs will allow current and future wildlife professionals to be put to work on wildlife disease, conservation, and natural infrastructure projects that benefit all Americans:

- The **Recovering America's Wildlife Act** (H.R.3742) would provide \$1.4 billion in dedicated annual funding for enacting state, territorial, and tribal wildlife conservation projects to conserve at-risk wildlife species. The Act would leverage funds from universities and non-governmental organizations to boost the power of federal conservation spending, as well as provide greater regulatory certainty for industry and private partners working to stay afloat in this crisis. Long-term investments in proactive conservation today will provide a needed injection of funds to get the next generation of wildlife professionals working in the field tomorrow.

Many of our 15,000 members and affiliates work in seasonal and short-term positions that are subject to job insecurity during the best of times, let alone during this current season of uncertainty. The programs and agencies above provide valuable work opportunities for wildlife professionals and many other Americans. Advancements and modifications to their operations are required to ensure professionals are best able to continue their work in support of the public interest.

If you have any questions regarding these recommendations or would like more information, please contact Caroline Murphy, AWB®, government relations manager at The Wildlife Society (cmurphy@wildlife.org; 301-897-9770 x 308).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary C. White". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "G" and "W".

Gary C. White, PhD, CWB®
President