



THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

Leaders in Wildlife Science, Management and Conservation

Date: 16 April 2021

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

Submitted by: Carol L. Chambers, PhD
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Re: FY 2022 Appropriations for USGS, FWS, BLM, and USFS

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The Wildlife Society (TWS; wildlife.org) appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony concerning the FY 2022 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 represents approximately 15,000 wildlife biologists and managers with a mission 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 2022.

| FY 2020 Interior Appropriation Requests — The Wildlife Society | | | |
|---|---|------------------------|--------------------|
| Agency | Program | FY 2021 Enacted | FY 2022 TWS |
| USGS | Climate Adaptation Science Centers | 41.3 M | 60 M |
| | Cooperative Research Units | 25 M | 27 M |
| | National Wildlife Health Center | 55 M | *76 M |
| FWS | State & Tribal Wildlife Grants | 72.4 M | 100 M |
| | National Wildlife Refuge System | 503.9 M | 600 M |
| | Ecological Services | 269.7 M | 298 M |
| | NMBCA | 4.9 M | 6.5 M |
| | Partners for Fish and Wildlife | 56.9 M | 60 M |
| | Migratory Bird Joint Ventures | 15.1 M | 25 M |
| | MBTA Incidental Permitting | - | 750 K |
| BLM | Wildlife and Aquatic Habitat Management | 188.5 M | 193 M |
| USFS | Forest and Rangeland Research | *258.8 M | 330 M |

*no-year funding request appropriated until expended
*additional \$59.4 million of salaries and expenses provided

U.S. Geological Survey (USGS)

The USGS will be a vital partner in the federal effort to advance scientific understanding and adaptation to climate change. Within the Ecosystems 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 was encouraged to see long-awaited funding for a Midwest Climate Adaptation Science Center in the Fiscal Year 2021 appropriations package, and encourages continued growth of this program into the next Fiscal Year. **In FY 2022, we recommend at least \$60 million in funding for the Climate Adaptation Science Centers to maintain relevance with stakeholder and public needs for science-driven climate solutions.**

The USGS will also play a critical role in providing the nation with the tools needed to avoid the next pandemic. The Survey-wide **National Wildlife Health Center** located in Madison, WI is the nation's only federal BSL-3 facility exclusively dedicated to scientific investigation and research on wildlife diseases that threaten human, animal, and environmental health. The COVID-19 pandemic heightens the need for completing a long-proposed modernization of the facility to ensure early detection of biological threats and robust bio-surveillance for high-consequence pathogens in wildlife. TWS thanks Congress for providing \$55 million in funding for phase one improvements to the National Wildlife Health Center in FY 2021. Our organization **requests the remaining \$76 million in funding, appropriated until expended, to complete these much-needed infrastructure improvements.**

The USGS is also uniquely positioned to provide a scientific basis for understanding implementation mechanisms for the Administration's initiative to conserve 30% of U.S. lands and waters by 2030 (30 x 30). The **USGS Cooperative Fish & Wildlife Research Units (CRUs)**, which fosters federal, state, NGO, and academic partnerships to provide actionable science tailored to the needs of natural resource managers, will be vital to robust, stakeholder driven implementation of these efforts. The support of many state agencies, universities, and non-government organizations has allowed the program to be a model for cooperative natural resource science programming and leverage an average of three dollars in outside funds for every federal dollar invested. By housing USGS scientists in Land Grant universities and providing state, federal, and NGO cooperators an equal part of the decision-making process, this program also works to develop the next generation of wildlife professionals and provides them with an understanding of actionable science responsive to stakeholder needs. **An increase of funding to \$27 million will allow the CRUs to continue filling long-held federal scientist vacancies and work to establish new units in states that have long requested them.**

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

With over 850 million acres of lands and waters, the **National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS)** will play a key role in implementation of the 30 x 30 initiative. In order to align the multiuse goals of 30 x 30 implementation, significant investment in operations and maintenance costs are required. NWRS has over \$1 billion in deferred maintenance needs, and in 2020 alone the System had to defer habitat restoration and management projects on 8 million acres. While Congress did provide a modest increase to the operations and maintenance accounts in FY 2021, this increase did not even cover the cost of the one percent salary increase scheduled for federal employees. **TWS urges Congress to consider the significant shortcomings of the operations and maintenance accounts of the Refuge System in FY 2022, and provide at least \$600**

million in operations and maintenance funding to begin making inroads on adequate visitor services, habitat management activities, conservation law enforcement, and long term conservation planning.

The **State and Tribal Wildlife Grants Program (STWG)** is the nation's only program that encourages developing and implementing State Wildlife Action Plans, thereby directly supporting states in preventing wildlife from being listed under the Endangered Species Act. 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 of the projects deemed necessary for monitoring and recovery of at-risk species. Subsequent budget reductions in STWG, however, have not allowed this highly successful program to reach its full potential. **TWS requests that Congress once again work to increase funding for the program to at least \$100 million annually.**

Through the **Ecological Services Program (ESP)**, USFWS works with diverse public and private partners to help identify species facing extinction, reduce threats to their populations, and return species back to the public trust responsibilities of states and tribes. Wildlife professionals in USFWS are working on new strategies to increase efficacy of ESP, though the primary impediment to effectiveness remains inadequate funding. To efficaciously move species through all components of the ESA listing and delisting process, TWS requests **at least \$23 million for Listing, \$120 million for Planning and Consultation, \$39 million for Conservation and Restoration, and \$116 million for Recovery.**

Further promoting FWS' partnership with non-federal stakeholders is the **Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program**. This program allows voluntary habitat restoration goals, aligned with identified strategic priorities, on private lands to be achieved through cost-efficient financial and technical assistance. For the role this program plays in improving private lands wildlife stewardship while working to preempt ESA listings, **TWS supports a modest increase in Partners for Fish and Wildlife program funding to \$60 million in FY 2022.**

Since 2002, the **Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (NMBCA)** has provided more than \$75 million in grants to support over 600 projects in 36 countries that enable wildlife professionals to conserve approximately 400 migratory bird species on 5 million acres in the U.S., Mexico, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean. Moreover, NMBCA has achieved a partner match ratio of nearly 4:1 despite requiring only a 3:1 match. 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 2022 to achieve greater proactive conservation results under the NMBCA program.**

The **Migratory Bird Joint Ventures (MBJV)**, part of USFWS' **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 \$25 million for enhancing and promoting the highly effective and collaborative partnerships of the Migratory Bird Joint Venture.** TWS also supports the

inclusion of an additional **\$750,000 within the Migratory Bird Management program to allow for the creation and implementation of an incidental permitting process under the existing authority of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.** The creation and implementation of an incidental permitting process will allow USFWS to work proactively with private partners on best practices to ensure reduction in bird mortalities that may take place during routine operations.

Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

The **Wildlife and Aquatic Habitat 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 also includes management of approximately 300 listed species under the Endangered Species Act. **TWS recommends Congress support the Wildlife and Aquatic Management program with at least \$193 million in FY 2022 - 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 95,000 individuals last year, exceeding BLM's estimated threshold for ecological sustainability by over 65,000 animals. Within the Administration and Congress, there has been a continuation of support for a multi-faceted approach, including removals, adoptions, and fertility treatments. TWS is pleased to see an increase in removals over the past year and the associated \$14 million increase in funding for the program in FY 2021. By the BLM's own estimates though, 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, **a significant increase in removals alongside the elimination of an annual appropriations rider limiting sale and/or destruction of unwanted or unadoptable horses and burros must be considered.** This will allow for the flexibilities and long-standing protections to herd health as outlined in the 1971 Wild Free Roaming Horses and Burros Act to be implemented as originally outlined by Congress.

U.S. Forest Service

Improving the future health and sustainability of the nation's forests and grasslands in line with 30 x 30 goals requires a strong investment in USFS Research and Development (R&D). Through long-term monitoring and collaborative research efforts with states and other partners, USFS R&D generates broad environmental and societal benefits, including an understanding of wildlife-habitat relationships for multiple species and ecological communities that enables informed land management decisions. **The Wildlife Society encourages Congress to increase funding for all Forest Service R&D to a minimum of \$330 million in FY 2022, including at least \$236.5 million for Forest & Rangeland Research programming separate of Forest Inventory and Analysis.** Further, providing adequate resources for effective science-based wildlife habitat management is central to balancing the multiple uses of public forests and grasslands. Restoring wildlife habitats and maintaining habitat connectivity on National Forest System lands contributes to the recovery of more than a third of federally threatened and endangered species and enhances the economies of rural communities that benefit from healthy forest landscapes. **TWS requests a reinvestment in the Wildlife and Fish Habitat Management program located in the USFS National Forest System account.**