

8 December 2021

The Honorable Senator John Thune
SD-511 Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20003

Dear Senator Thune,

The South Dakota Chapter of The Wildlife Society is writing to **request your cosponsorship of the Recovering America's Wildlife Act (S. 2372)**, introduced in July by Senators Martin Heinrich (D-NM) and Roy Blunt (R-MO). This legislation would provide state and tribal wildlife agencies with a vital source of funding needed to proactively and cost-effectively conserve America's at-risk wildlife populations.

Founded in 1937, The Wildlife Society (TWS) and its 15,000 professional and associated members work to inspire, empower, and enable wildlife biologists and managers to sustain wildlife populations and habitat through science-based management and conservation. The South Dakota Chapter of The Wildlife Society achieves this mission in part by evaluating proposed public actions that affect wildlife and habitats. Our Chapter goals and objectives are more clearly outlined at: <http://wildlife.org/south-dakota-chapter/>.

TWS and other professional societies and conservation organizations are excited to support this legislation alongside similar, bipartisan efforts endorsed by dozens of representatives in the U.S. House (H.R. 2773).

Our members and organization have supported this effort for many years to fulfill a gap between our natural resource needs and available funding. RAWA identifies stable, long-term funding from existing revenues without raising or creating new taxes to address wildlife challenges using state-based priorities and strong partnerships that reach across all facets of life in South Dakota. Building on the successes of the Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration Programs, RAWA would provide more than \$16 million per year to South Dakota to enhance state agency priorities to address wildlife and habitat needs with proactive and preventive measures and help avoid the economic burden of additional threatened and endangered species listings.

In addition to addressing resource needs, we are particularly excited about funding in RAWA for outdoor education and recreation. We know that by experiencing the outdoors at an early age, we can gain a lifetime appreciation for it. South Dakota has much to offer to outdoor enthusiasts, whether hunters, anglers, birdwatchers, or photographers, in addition to those seeking a quiet place to enjoy nature. RAWA also includes funding to meet tribal needs for proactive wildlife conservation and to help recover species already listed under the Endangered Species Act.

RAWA will help states implement their Wildlife Action Plans, which identify wildlife and fisheries needs and chart strategies for meeting those challenges in a voluntary, nonregulatory way. South Dakota's Plan is available on the Game, Fish and Parks' website: <https://gfp.sd.gov/wildlife-action-plan/> More than 100 species are identified by South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks in their congressionally-mandated conservation action blueprint, known as a State Wildlife Action Plan. This includes species like the Greater Prairie-Chicken, which depends on native prairie; the Monarch butterfly, a species that has experienced habitat loss on breeding and wintering grounds; and the Pallid Sturgeon, an ancient species associated with the Missouri River that has responded to captive rearing and reintroduction. To learn more about how RAWA would impact South Dakota visit <https://gfp.sd.gov/rawa/>

Nationally, conservation efforts for these at-risk species are critically underfunded, only receiving about \$60 million annually through the existing State and Tribal Wildlife Grants program. This amount and the year-to-year nature of these funds are not nearly sufficient for states and tribes to plan for multi-year conservation and recovery projects or prevent costlier measures, such as Endangered Species Act listings, from occurring.

Passage of the Recovering America's Wildlife Act would match an appropriate solution to the scale of this crisis. By dedicating \$1.3 billion annually for the adequate implementation of State Wildlife Action Plans, and \$97.5 million annually for tribal agencies to plan long-term conservation projects, wildlife professionals will have the resources needed to hold the nation's wildlife in the public trust for generations to come. We consider RAWA as not only a species recovery tool but an opportunity to integrate and expand on many activities already happening in South Dakota in a more comprehensive and coordinated way. We look forward to expanded partnerships with landowners, members of the agricultural communities, educators, outdoor recreation industries and leaders, and everyday South Dakotans who appreciate wildlife and want to help assure a more secure future for wild animals and natural places.

Thank you for considering this important legislation. If you have any questions regarding the Recovering America's Wildlife Act and the South Dakota Chapter of The Wildlife Society's support for this legislation, please feel free to reach Eileen Dowd Stukel at Eileen.dowdstukel@state.sd.us.

Sincerely,



Julie Lindstrom
SD TWS President
