

WYOMING CHAPTER – THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

Leaders in Wildlife Science, Management and Conservation

7 December 2021

Senator John Barrasso
307 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Request to co-sponsor “Recovering America’s Wildlife Act”

Dear Senator Barrasso:

On behalf of the Wyoming Chapter of The Wildlife Society (WY-TWS), we respectfully request that you co-sponsor a landmark bill that will directly benefit Wyoming—*Recovering America’s Wildlife Act* (S. 2372).

About WY-TWS

The Wildlife Society is an international organization of wildlife professionals and students committed to addressing issues that affect the current and future status of wildlife in North America and the world through science-based decision making. The Wyoming Chapter (WY-TWS) is comprised of over 200 wildlife professionals in Wyoming who collectively promote awareness of and continued improvement in science-based wildlife management in Wyoming.

Economic Importance of Wildlife to Wyoming

Wildlife is foundational to the daily lives of many in Wyoming and contributes substantially to our economy, warranting efforts to bolster conservation and prevent population declines, potential listing under the Endangered Species Act, or even extinction of these species. According to a 2011 survey conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which are the most recent data available, over 140,000 residents and nonresidents hunted in Wyoming, over 300,000 fished in Wyoming, and over 500,000 participated in wildlife watching in that year alone.¹ Additionally, a 2018 analysis from the University of Wyoming showed that hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing activities made a significant impact on the state’s economy.² Hunters, anglers, and wildlife watchers spent an estimated \$788 million in Wyoming in 2016 alone, with the total economic importance up to \$1 billion in business activity. Furthermore, outdoor recreation is one of the primary contributors to Wyoming’s economy. The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis released a report stating that the total value of

¹ U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Department of Commerce, U. S. Census Bureau. 2011. 2011 National survey of fishing, hunting, and wildlife-associated recreation.

² Taylor, D. T. 2018. Economic importance of big game hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching to the Wyoming economy in 2017. Report for Wyoming Game and Fish Department.

Wyoming's outdoor recreation economy was \$1.2 billion in 2020 alone.³ Given the importance of wildlife to our culture and economy, Wyoming has a vested interest in the conservation of wildlife.

How *Recovering America's Wildlife Act* will Benefit Wyoming

The *Recovering America's Wildlife Act* would directly benefit Wyoming by providing much-needed funds for conservation efforts across the state. The funds provided by the *Recovering America's Wildlife Act* would provide nearly \$1.4 billion dollars for on-the-ground wildlife conservation—\$1.3 billion to state wildlife and fish agencies and \$97.5 million for tribal wildlife and fish agencies—across the United States each year. Currently, state and tribal agencies across the country receive much of their funding to implement their State Wildlife Action Plans through the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants program. This grant program is usually funded for \$60 million annually, which provides only a small portion of the funds necessary for implementing successful conservation measures. The Blue Ribbon Panel on Sustaining America's Diverse Fish and Wildlife Resources, co-chaired by former Wyoming Governor David Freudenthal, recommended that \$1.3 billion be dedicated annually to help states implement their State Wildlife Action Plans. Current funding pools, therefore, are insufficient to meet the demands of conserving species. Passing the *Recovering America's Wildlife Act* would implement the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Panel and provide states, including Wyoming, with a more robust and stable funding source for implementing conservation measures.

Furthermore, the *Recovering America's Wildlife Act* would create a conservation legacy on par with the passing of the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act itself. Funding opportunities that stem from the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act dramatically and positively transformed wildlife management, particularly the management of game species, in the United States. Wyoming has shared in this success, as Pittman-Robertson funds provide nearly 25% of the budget for Wyoming Game and Fish Department and help to fund habitat treatment efforts, research, administrative costs, and more. By supporting full funding of State Wildlife Action Plans, including Wyoming's, through the *Recovering America's Wildlife Act* you could create a conservation legacy rivaling that of Pittman-Robertson; Wyoming could emerge as a strong leader for conservation at a time when such a leader and legacy are desperately needed.

About Wyoming's State Wildlife Action Plan

Many species of wildlife in Wyoming are declining in number and face an uncertain future. The goals of Wyoming's State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) are to conserve wildlife in the face of this uncertain future through efforts to keep common species common, identify at-risk species, and work toward state-led conservation solutions that may preclude the need to list species under the Endangered Species Act. Over 200 species are currently listed as Species of Greatest Conservation Need in Wyoming's SWAP.⁴ Species listed as Species of Greatest Conservation need—including the bald eagle, greater sage-grouse, Wyoming toad, black-footed ferret, American pika, and many more—require conservation measures to prevent listing on the Endangered Species Act. For example, the black-footed ferret, a federally endangered species, requires continued reintroductions and population monitoring to prevent extinction of the species. However, there is currently insufficient funding to fully implement these measures. The funding provided by the *Recovering America's Wildlife Act*

³ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis. 2020. Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account.

⁴ Wyoming Game and Fish Department. 2017. State Wildlife Action Plan.

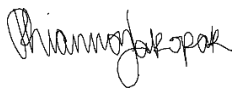
would allow state wildlife and tribal agencies to implement many of these conservation measures, helping to ensure that the wildlife that are a cornerstone of the culture and economy of Wyoming are conserved for the future.

Opportunity to Come Together: Bipartisan Support

Addressing the challenges that are facing wildlife across Wyoming requires broad collaboration. The hunting and angling community has done their part for wildlife conservation for over a century, as license sales by state agencies remains the primary source of funding for wildlife conservation and management in the U.S. Unfortunately, these funding contributions, along with federal dollars made available through the State and Tribal Wildlife Grant Program, are not sufficient to address the mounting conservation needs of all wildlife. The *Recovering America's Wildlife Act* would help support conservation through federal funds, and it also would foster strong partnerships with a suite of federal, state, and local organizations as states secure matching funds.⁵ The *Recovering America's Wildlife Act* would provide much-needed resources for conserving Wyoming's wildlife and outdoor heritage; we urge you to co-sponsor this important bill.

Senator Barrasso, given our collective years of experience managing and conserving wildlife in Wyoming and the urgent need to fund state management of all wildlife, we respectfully ask that you join the 32 bipartisan cosponsors who are supporting passage of the *Recovering America's Wildlife Act*. If you have any questions, please feel free to direct them to Rhiannon Jakopak (rjakopak@gmail.com), chair of the Legislative Affairs committee with WY-TWS. Thank you for considering the important role of wildlife to the people and economy of Wyoming, and we hope you will help support their conservation.

Sincerely,



Rhiannon Jakopak

On behalf of the Board of the Wyoming Chapter of The Wildlife Society
Wyoming Chapter of The Wildlife Society Legislative Affairs Committee Chair
rjakopak@gmail.com

cc: Darrin Munoz, bryn_stewart@barrasso.senate.gov

⁵ Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, 2021. Matching Funds for Grants: A report and catalog of proven and potential match sources for the Recovering America's Wildlife Act and other grant programs. Version 1.0. Washington, DC. 26 pages.