



THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

Leaders in Wildlife Science, Management and Conservation

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

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Re: FY 2023 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 2023 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 2023.

*no-year funding request appropriated until expended

FY 2023 Interior Appropriation Requests — The Wildlife Society			
Agency	Program	FY 2022 Enacted	FY 2023 TWS
USGS	Climate Adaptation Science Centers	51.9 M	85.74 M
	Cooperative Research Units	26 M	28.2 M
	National Wildlife Health Center Infrastructure Improvements	-	*82 M
FWS	National Wildlife Refuge System	519 M	712 M
	State and Tribal Wildlife Grants	72.6 M	100 M
	Ecological Services	277 M	356.2 M
	NMBCA	5 M	7.9 M
	Partners for Fish and Wildlife	57.7 M	68 M
	Migratory Bird Joint Ventures	15.6 M	25 M
BLM	Wildlife and Aquatic Habitat Management	197.7 M	239.1 M

U.S. Geological Survey (USGS)

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. Minor funding increases in recent fiscal years have allowed for increased program responsiveness through the launch of the Midwest Climate Adaptation Science Center and additional capacity in ensuring tribes have proactive opportunities to shape projects and distribution of associated resources. However, funding has not kept pace with identified needs, particularly in ensuring USGS has the resources to communicate scientific outputs to stakeholders to act on project findings. **In FY 2023, we recommend full implementation of the Administration's proposal, with a goal of reaching no less than \$85.74 million.**

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. However, an estimated \$82 million is still required for project completion. **TWS requests the remaining \$82 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 America the Beautiful initiative. 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. The Wildlife Society thanks appropriators for their understanding of this need and associated funding increases provided in FY 2021 and continued in FY 2022. The program has been able to fill a majority of vacant positions with this funding, and has been able to forge new partnerships with states and organizations not presently working with the program. **The Wildlife Society requests a small increase in funding to the Administration-requested \$28.2 million, which will allow the CRUs to build on these new partnerships and establish units in states that have long requested one.**

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

With over 850 million acres of lands and waters, the **National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS)** will also play a key role in implementation of the America the Beautiful initiative. Unfortunately, the current NWRS operations and maintenance (O&M) budget is nowhere close to meeting the moment. In order to adequately conserve NWRS lands and align with the multiuse goals of America the Beautiful, significant investment in O&M programming is required. Conservation planning, a core O&M subactivity that deals with the creation of multistakeholder comprehensive conservation plans for refuge system units, has been chronically underfunded. As

a result, 40 percent of these congressionally mandated plans are either out of date or do not exist. In addition to inadequate funding for long-term planning, the NWRS has lacked funding to meet their own identified needs in bringing diverse audiences into NWRS and USFWS programming. The Urban Wildlife Program, housed under NWRS O&M, seeks to target USFWS investments to underserved communities to bolster recreational access and conservation outreach. This program will be well-positioned to support DEI efforts outlined in America the Beautiful, but is not able to meet identified needs with the \$5.5 million currently allocated.

While Congress did provide a minimal increase across operations and maintenance accounts in FY 2022, this increase did not even cover the cost of the baseline 2.2 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 2023, and provide at least \$712 million in operations and maintenance funding to begin making inroads on adequate visitor services, habitat management activities, 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 effectively move species through all components of the ESA listing and delisting process, **TWS requests full implementation of the Administration's FY 2023 request of no less than \$356.2 million for all subactivities.**

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 partner entities and 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 no less than \$7.9 million in FY 2023 to achieve greater proactive conservation results under the NMBCA program.**

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. If adequately funded, this program has the potential to serve as a vital tool in implementing private land conservation efforts as sought in the America the Beautiful initiative. **TWS supports an increase in Partners for Fish and Wildlife program funding to no less than \$68 million in FY 2023.**

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.**

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 no less than the Administration request of \$239.1 million in FY 2023** - 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 were estimated at over 82,000 individuals in March of this year, only the second estimated population decrease in a decade. While TWS has been pleased to see the BLM's increased use of gathers and adoptions, population estimates still exceed the agency's threshold for ecological sustainability by more than 55,000 animals. By the BLM's own estimates, it will take hundreds of millions of dollars and several years more to reach ecologically sustainable levels. **TWS recommends continued financial support for the BLM in their efforts to employ all the tools at their disposal to achieve ecologically sustainable levels.** Additionally, TWS requests **the elimination of an annual appropriations rider limiting sale and/or destruction of unwanted or unadoptable horses and burros.** 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 the goals of America the Beautiful 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. Further, providing adequate resources for effective science-based wildlife habitat management is central to balancing the multiple uses of public forests and grasslands. TWS requests robust funding for the program in FY 2023 to ensure cooperative research on our nation's lands and forests can continue.