March 22, 2023

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Chairman
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Subcommittee
Senate Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Subcommittee
Senate Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Simpson
Chairman
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Subcommittee
House Appropriations Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chellie Pingree
Ranking Member
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Subcommittee
House Appropriations Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Merkley and Simpson and Ranking Members Murkowski and Pingree:

We write to thank you for providing fiscal year (FY) 2021 funding totaling $55 million for the modernization of the US Geological Survey (USGS) National Wildlife Health Center (NWHC) located in Madison, Wisconsin. The NWHC is unique because it is the only national center dedicated to wildlife disease detection, control, and prevention throughout the United States. Although NWHC did not receive additional direct funding to implement the full modernization in FY 2022 and FY 2023, we hope to work with the Subcommittee to secure the **remaining $135 million in no-year funding for FY 2024. Securing the remaining funding in FY2024 would be least disruptive option and would minimize the risk of rising costs due to inflation.**

The NWHC 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. Through a comprehensive program involving biomedical and ecological expertise and capabilities, the NWHC is a world leader in developing science-based solutions to some of the deadliest wildlife diseases including avian influenza, white nose syndrome of bats, and other emerging diseases that have devastated wildlife populations around the world and pose significant threats to our food supply and public health. For example, in 2014 the NWHC was the first to detect the Asian strain of highly pathogenic avian influenza in waterfowl in the United States - providing important early warning for the commercial poultry industry. The Center is playing a similar role in providing surveillance for highly pathogenic avian influenza in wild birds for the ongoing outbreak that commenced in 2021 and has been the most devastating animal disease emergency in US history. Furthermore, the NWHC has been a key partner in monitoring wildlife for spillover of the virus that causes COVID-19 to assess any public health risks from this pandemic virus.

The National Wildlife Health Center is making progress on the modernization plans and has awarded contracts for the building design and environmental assessment. The design is expected to be completed by October 2024, making FY24 appropriations especially timely. The NWHC continues to deliver impactful science on emerging diseases; for example, the Center produced rapid assessments of the risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission from humans to wildlife that were instrumental in the development of interventions to protect people and wildlife populations. The Center has also performed studies to elucidate the range of species that are susceptible to SARS-

CoV-2 and is conducting national surveillance for SARS-CoV-2 in free-ranging wildlife. The Center is also part of the federal interagency response to the recent detection of highly pathogenic avian influenza in North America and is conducting surveillance for avian influenza viruses in wild birds for early detection of threats to commercial poultry and endangered species, and is expanding its science portfolio to include other diseases such as chronic wasting disease in deer.

The NWHC consists of approximately 65,000 square feet of offices, common areas, and Biosafety Level Three (BSL-3) laboratories and animal holding facilities that are uniquely designed for wildlife species. The current facilities are 40-50 years old, and have been well maintained, but are now in need of life-cycle replacement. Importantly, without adequate funding for upgrades, the Center may not be able to meet future standards for the operation of high biocontainment facilities.

The NWHC studied various approaches to modernization, including the business case analyses to explore the most feasible, cost-effective, and least disruptive option for modernization. These options included comparing renovation versus new construction, owned versus leased facilities, and options for relocation. **Based on these analyses, NHWC determined that new construction on the current site is the most cost-effective option that minimizes disruption to continuity of operations.**

The analyses indicate approximately $195 million total is needed for new construction on the current site completed in one single phase with maximum efficiencies. This is the most cost-effective approach to the modernization. **Therefore, our organizations request the Subcommittee provides $135 million in no-year funding in the FY 2024 spending bill to allow NWHC to implement modernization in the most cost-effective manner, at a one-time cost.**

We feel strongly that NHWC has judiciously studied various approaches to identify the most economical path. As we've learned throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, preparedness investments made by the Subcommittee today yield incredible savings compared to the cost of a high consequence disease outbreak. The last avian influenza outbreak in Midwest poultry farms resulted in approximately $3 billion of economic losses. The costs of the COVID-19 pandemic will be measured in trillions of dollars.

Thank you for your consideration of this situation as the Subcommittee considers 2024 funding. Our organizations look forward to working with you and your staff on this important issue. Please do not hesitate to contact Kevin Hartley with the American Veterinary Medical Association at khartley@avma.org should you have any questions. Thank you again for your consideration.

Sincerely,

American Association of Bovine Practitioners
American Association of Mycobacterial Diseases
American Association of Small Ruminant Practitioners
American Association of Swine Veterinarians
American Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians
American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges
American Association of Wildlife Veterinarians
American Association of Zoo Veterinarians
American Dairy Science Association
American Veterinary Medical Association
Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies
Boone and Crockett Club

FASS
Mycobacterial Diseases of Animals – Multistate Initiative
National Association of Federal Veterinarians
National Deer Association
National Wild Turkey Federation
The Wildlife Society
United States Animal Health Association
US Dairy Forage Research Center Stakeholder Committee
Wild Sheep Foundation
Wildlife Disease Association