



THE ALABAMA CHAPTER OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

March 18, 2024

Senator Katie Britt
502 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Britt,

The Alabama Chapter of The Wildlife Society (ACTWS) was formed in 1978 and has a current membership of approximately 125 wildlife professionals representing academia, state and federal agencies, non-governmental organizations and private industry. We appreciate John Henry Woods meeting virtually with some of Alabama's conservation leaders on February 21, 2024 regarding the Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA). As stated during the virtual meeting, Alabama is at the epicenter of our nation's biodiversity and is near the top when considering the number of threatened, endangered, or species of greatest conservation concern. We have a tremendous need for additional funding to help conserve our rich biodiversity and the long list of species of greatest conservation need.

Endangered Species Act implementation requires enormous annual expenditures and impacts many facets of America's economy. Congress mandated states prepare State Wildlife Action Plans to address the management of the increasing number of species of greatest conservation concern and those already protected by the Endangered Species Act. State fish and wildlife agencies and partners have worked diligently with limited funding to address Congress' mandate. RAWA, if passed, would be an investment in the management of these species at a level commensurate with the level of needed management. RAWA would proactively and cost-effectively conserve America's at-risk wildlife populations while reducing the overall cost to society for species management and add dollars to our economy through increased wildlife-focused outdoor recreation and tourism.

RAWA or similar legislation has been introduced several times during the past decade. The "pay for" seems to be the stumbling block to passage. An excellent summary of RAWA developed by the Alliance for America's Fish & Wildlife is attached. The summary requests "permanent and dedicated" funding to ensure adequate plans are implemented "proactively and collaboratively" to enable states to develop the necessary programs for success. Alabama's wildlife resources and biodiversity would benefit greatly from RAWA passage as currently written. However, if the "permanent and dedicated" language is a barrier to passage, consideration should be given to providing a sunset for funding obligations. But the sunset must be far enough into the future (20+ years) to allow state agencies to develop the necessary programs and partnerships to meet the challenges of managing our nations threatened, endangered, and species of greatest conservation concern. Prior to sunset, RAWA's successes/failures could be evaluated to determine if re-authorization is warranted. Alabama used a "sunset" term of 20 years in the original Forever Wild Land Trust (FWLT) constitutional amendment in 1992. During the first 20 years, the FWLT purchased approximately 200,000 acres of land to be managed in public trust. Alabama's citizenry was very happy with the program and re-authorized the constitutional amendment in 2012. We believe the American people would support re-authorization of RAWA if evaluations indicate that management needs are being met and agencies are being fiscally responsible with the funding.

The ACTWS and the many partners who participated in the virtual meeting are available to discuss any concerns or questions you may have regarding the management needs of Alabama's wildlife resources. We encourage you to sign on as a RAWA co-sponsor and look forward to being part of any discussions where input from wildlife professionals is needed. If you have any questions regarding the Recovering America's Wildlife Act and the ACTWS support for this legislation, please feel free to contact our chapter at alabamatws@gmail.com.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Executive Board of the Alabama Chapter of The Wildlife Society.

Allison Cochran

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