



THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

Leaders in Wildlife Science, Management and Conservation

Date: 29 April 2024

Submitted to: Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies (agri@appro.senate.gov)

Submitted by: The Wildlife Society – Ed Arnett, PhD, CWB®, Chief Executive Officer

Re: **FY 2025 Appropriations for APHIS, NIFA, and NRCS**

POC: Kelly O’Connor, Conservation Policy Coordinator, policy@wildlife.org

The Wildlife Society appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony concerning the Fiscal Year 2025 budgets for the **Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)**. We respectfully request the following programmatic funding in FY 2025 and we thank you in advance for considering the views of The Wildlife Society.

The Wildlife Society (TWS; wildlife.org) inspires, empowers, and enables wildlife professionals to sustain wildlife populations and their habitat through science-based management and conservation. Founded in 1937, TWS and our network of affiliated chapters and sections represents more than 15,000 professional wildlife biologists, managers, and educators dedicated to excellence in wildlife stewardship. As leaders in wildlife science, management, and conservation, TWS promotes the use of science in all aspects of policy and decision-making and is also committed to the identification and removal of barriers to recruitment, effective mentoring, and retention of a diverse workforce.

Agency	Program	FY2024 Enacted	FY2025 TWS Recommendation
APHIS/Wildlife Services	Wildlife Damage Management	\$122.5 M	\$125 M
	Methods Development	\$25.5 M	\$27 M
NIFA/Formula Grants	RREA	\$4 M	\$10 M
	McIntire-Stennis	\$38 M	\$43 M
NIFA/Minority-Serving Institution programs	Hispanic Serving Institutions Education Partnerships Grants Program	\$16 M	\$20 M
	Alaska Native Serving and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions Education Grants	\$5 M	\$6 M
	1890 Institutions Centers of Excellence	\$10 M	\$11 M
NRCS	Private Lands Conservation Operations	\$827 M	\$900 M

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service - Wildlife Services

APHIS Wildlife Services provides essential services such as resolving human-wildlife conflicts and protecting wildlife, agriculture, and human health and safety from wildlife damage and wildlife-borne diseases. Within Wildlife Services, the **Wildlife Damage Management program** provides frontline assistance to cooperators to protect natural and human-made resources. We appreciate the modest increase for this program in FY 2024 and encourage Congress to continue to increase its funding, commensurate with the rate of inflation, to a level of \$125 million in FY 2025. Maintaining inflation-adjusted funding levels will allow Wildlife Services to carry out the programs identified by Congress as key focus areas, including the National Rabies Management Program, which distributes oral rabies vaccines to wildlife within targeted areas with the goal of disease eradication, and the feral swine management program, which works with partners to protect natural and human-made resources against this highly destructive non-native species.

Methods Development, also within Wildlife Services, funds the vitally important National Wildlife Research Center, which provides tools that the Wildlife Damage Management program, as well as their federal, state, and local partners, need to deter human-wildlife conflict in the field setting. TWS requests a modest increase in FY 2025 to keep pace with inflation and allow the National Wildlife Research Center to continue to deliver new research critical to state wildlife agencies, federal agencies, and municipalities, including novel deterrents to prevent predator conflict with livestock, the development of new humane toxicants against feral swine, and research into the efficacy of fertility control applications in free-roaming horses. We recommend funding of \$27 million for Methods Development in FY 2025.

National Institute of Food and Agriculture

The **Renewable Resources Extension Act (RREA)** provides resources to state extension programs that share the latest management tools applicable to forest and rangeland resources, including wildlife management, with landowners and managers. RREA funds private landowner outreach and effectively leverages cooperative partnerships at an average ratio of four to one. These extension programs improve management practices on over 43 million acres across the country. Authorized at \$30 million, RREA has seen flat funding at only \$4 million annually for more than a decade. TWS requests an increase in RREA funding to \$10 million in FY 2025, bringing the program closer to its authorized funding level.

The **McIntire-Stennis Cooperative Forestry Program** also has a long history of effectively leveraging outside dollars that benefit private land management practices. This program requires a 1:1 non-federal match for research projects related to producing, using, and protecting natural resources based on identified private landowner needs. The funds are targeted at public and land grant university research, which in turn fosters the next generation of natural resources professionals. Private landowners own approximately 300 million acres (or over 35%) of the nation's forests and woodlands. Funding of \$43 million in FY 2025 will allow NIFA to make continued investments in conservation and management techniques on the nation's private lands.

The USDA's FY25 budget includes \$365 million for Minority-Serving Institution programs, which support capacity-building initiatives, education, and pathways to employment at minority-serving institutions. TWS strongly supports policies, programs, and practices that advance efforts to recruit, mentor, and retain professionals from a broad spectrum of identities,

including individuals from historically underrepresented backgrounds. The **Hispanic Serving Institutions Education Partnerships Grants Program** expands and strengthens academic programs in the agricultural sciences, natural resources, forestry, and other disciplines tied to the food and agriculture production and delivery systems at Hispanic-serving colleges and universities. TWS encourages funding this program at \$20 million in FY 2025. The **Alaska Native Serving and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions Education Grants** is aimed at recruiting, supporting and educating minority scientists and professionals, and advancing the educational capacity of Native-serving institutions. TWS encourages funding at \$6 million in FY 2025. The **1890 Institutions Centers of Excellence** are designed to supply the country with a globally diverse workforce and support critical global development needs, thereby addressing trans-boundary research and education challenges including climate change, conservation, biodiversity and development. We encourage Congress to provide a small increase for this important program in FY 2025, bringing funding to \$11 million.

We also encourage Congress to support other USDA Minority-Serving Institution programs administered by NIFA, such as the National Scholars Program, which is intended to increase the number of minority students enrolling in agriculture, food, natural resource sciences, and other related programs in pursuit of a bachelor's degree at Land Grant Universities, and the Tribal Scholars Program, which seeks to increase the number of American Indian and Alaska Native students studying agriculture, food, natural resources, and related disciplines.

Natural Resources Conservation Service

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is the primary federal agency working with private land and farm owners to help them conserve, maintain, and improve natural resources on their lands, including soil, water, air, plants, fish, and wildlife. In FY 2025, TWS requests that Congress provide full funding to the conservation programs authorized by the 2018 Farm Bill, which work with landowners to provide measurable benefits for fish and wildlife. TWS also urges Congress to provide an increase in the critical discretionary funding for **Private Lands Conservation Operations** administered by NRCS, including **Conservation Technical Assistance** (CTA). The CTA program provides landowners with site-specific solutions needed to implement conservation programs, while also providing for public accountability to ensure funds are spent as intended. In 2023 alone, NRCS developed conservation plans covering over 75 million acres across the country. Funding from the Inflation Reduction Act has allowed the USDA to enroll more landowners and more acres in voluntary conservation programs than at any point in history, addressing a long-standing backlog. Given the increase in demand for CTA, we request that Congress fund this vital program at \$900 million in FY 2025.

Thank you for considering the views of wildlife professionals. Please reach out to Kelly O'Connor, Conservation Policy Coordinator (policy@wildlife.org), with any questions regarding these recommendations.