May 13, 2024

The Honorable Senator Patty Murray
Chair
Senate Appropriations Committee
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C., 20510

The Honorable Senator Susan Collins
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C., 20510

The Honorable Senator Jeff Merkley
Chair
Senate Appropriations Interior Subcommittee
531 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C., 20510

The Honorable Senator Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Interior Subcommittee
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C., 20510

Dear Chairs Murray and Merkley and Ranking Members Collins and Murkowski:

The undersigned organizations, representing millions of hunters, anglers, recreational shooters, wildlife professionals, and outdoor enthusiasts are writing to express our support for funding the Department of the Interior (DOI) and the Department of Agriculture's (USDA) efforts to maintain, conserve, and enhance wildlife migration corridors and seasonal ranges, particularly for big game species.

Specific and dedicated funding is necessary to successfully implement these Departmental priorities. Historically, funding for this work has been redirected from existing agency budgets and programs, competing each year for limited agency resources. This uncertain and underfunded approach has created challenges for consistent implementation by the agencies and their partners. Therefore, we request the Committee to ensure sufficient funding to conserve wildlife migration corridors and seasonal ranges during this appropriations cycle, and clearly delineate necessary funding across agency budgets.

We also request the Committee consider a concise, targeted crosscut wildlife corridors budget to ensure year-to-year consistency and a reliable programmatic approach to wildlife corridors conservation. We identify several programs that contribute to the conservation of wildlife migration corridors and seasonal ranges in the addendum for your consideration, including our specific funding recommendations.

We applaud efforts by USDA and the Forest Service (USFS) to emphasize conservation of wildlife migration corridors and seasonal ranges, specifically Secretary Vilsack's issuance of *Secretarial Memo 1077*, and USFS guidance to Regional Foresters, *"Habitat Connectivity and Migration Corridors in National Forest System Planning"* and the innovative efforts by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to pilot migration corridor conservation efforts

in a few western states and their commitment to develop a Western Migratory Big Game framework. Additionally, we are thankful to DOI for keeping *Secretarial Order 3362* operational and functional during this Administration.

We are working with the federal agencies to implement these directives, but guidance and policies are only as effective as the funding behind them. Funding to support agencies, and State, Tribal and other public and private partners, to engage in wildlife corridor conservation and to implement high-priority on-the-ground conservation actions, are critically needed. Targeted funding for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the USFS to comprehensively conserve wildlife migration corridors and seasonal ranges will ensure that successful efforts to date do not falter.

We want to highlight that measures to conserve big game migration corridors and seasonal ranges not only facilitate unobstructed movement for wildlife to access forage and other necessary resources, but also benefit countless other species while facilitating their ability to adapt to changing landscape conditions across a wide range of ecological systems.

These funding priorities are critically important to maintain current efforts, which has widespread support from state wildlife agencies, private landowners, tribes, and a wide diversity of both hunting and non-hunting based non-governmental conservation organizations. Please contact us if you need any further information or clarifications. We look forward to working with you on a budget that supports the needs of wildlife.

Sincerely,

Archery Trade Association
Boone and Crockett Club
California Waterfowl Association
Campfire Club of America
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Conservation Force
Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports
Delta Waterfowl
Houston Safari Club
Izaak Walton League of America
Masters of Foxhounds Association
Mule Deer Foundation
National Deer Association
National Shooting Sports Foundation
National Trappers Association
National Wildlife Federation
North American Falconers Association

North American Grouse Partnership
Orion: The Hunter's Institute
Pope & Young Club
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Safari Club International
Sportsmen's Alliance
The Wildlife Society
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Whitetails Unlimited
Wild Sheep Foundation
Wildlife Forever
Wildlife Management Institute
Wildlife Mississippi

Addendum

To maintain and improve wildlife migration corridors and seasonal ranges, we request that appropriations for Fiscal Year 2025 include the following budget amounts:

USFWS Science Applications Budget: This USFWS budget area includes funding for USFWS Science Partnerships, a budget vital to wildlife corridors conservation work, funding critically needed wildlife corridors research and coordination of DOI efforts to implement *Secretarial Order 3362*. **We recommend an overall increase of $4 million in the Science Partnerships budget, with this funding allocated in the following ways:**

- **State and Tribal Research priorities:** USFWS Science Partnerships has provided significant funding for several years to state and tribal fish and wildlife agencies for state and tribal defined priority research projects to identify and assess threats to migration corridors. Funding for state and tribal fish and wildlife agencies to continue to expand migration corridor research is critical to ensure that the best available science is informing management decisions. **We recommend providing an additional $3 million, specifically targeted at addressing state and tribal priorities for migration corridors research.**
- ***Secretarial Order 3362* Coordination and Support:** Over the past five years, the USFWS coordinator and agency liaisons have contributed greatly to successful federal, state, tribal and stakeholder coordination on wildlife corridor research, planning, and conservation. Dedicated funding would maintain and enhance the ongoing success of these efforts, while keeping bureau and agency budgets whole. **We recommend providing an additional $1 million for national and regional wildlife migration corridor coordination and support positions.**

USFWS Habitat Conservation Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program: This program has been critical for voluntary landowner engagement in wildlife migration corridor and seasonal range conservation on private lands. **We recommend increasing the overall funding for this program by an additional $2 million; $1.5 million for an internal grant process, and $500,000 directed to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) for winter range and migration corridor habitat conservation projects.**

USGS Science and Mapping Support: The USGS has provided critical technical assistance to the agencies and state wildlife departments through its Corridor Mapping Team led by the Wyoming Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit (CRU). Over the last five years the USGS has directed over $1 million for the analysis of big game movement data and corridor mapping. These investments have provided the spatial maps of migration corridors that are the basis for conservation, however much work remains to be done, including and especially the effects on wildlife migrations from climate change. **We recommend including an additional $5 million in the USGS Land Management Research budget, with specific direction to direct these funds towards wildlife corridor mapping and research.**

BLM Wildlife Program: BLM's Wildlife Habitat Management sub-activity supports BLM's wildlife, sage grouse conservation, threatened and endangered species, and plant conservation and restoration programs. The Wildlife Program is critical to BLM's ability to work collaboratively with State, Tribal and Federal partners to identify important habitat connectivity areas and to implement conservation actions to restore and conserve habitat connectivity areas and migration corridors on and across public lands. Unfortunately, funding for the Wildlife Program, the backbone of BLM's wildlife habitat management efforts, has declined by 50% since 2021. **We recommend providing an additional $18 million ($20 million overall including the NFWF funding request below) to BLM's Wildlife Habitat Management sub-account, specifically for the Wildlife Program.**

Dedicated Wildlife Corridors Funding for NFWF: Since 2019, NFWF has provided competitive grants from its Western Big Game Seasonal Habitat and Migration Corridors Fund for projects largely on public lands. This program has been highly successful, receiving far more requests for funding than available resources, and generating nearly $30 million in matching funds from states and private sources. The Program is supported via pass-through funding from BLM, USFS, and the USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife program, however dedicated funding over and above existing NFWF appropriations would ensure its continued success and minimize impacts to agency budgets. **We recommend increasing BLM's Wildlife & Aquatic Habitat Management and the USFS Watershed, Fish, Wildlife, Air and Rare Plants budgets by an additional $2 million each, with the funds specifically directed to the NFWF Program.**