

**American Bird Conservancy * Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies * California Waterfowl
Delta Waterfowl * Ducks Unlimited * National Audubon Society
National Wildlife Federation * Pheasants Forever
Quail Forever * Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
The Wildlife Society * Wildlife Management Institute**

May 20, 2024

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

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

The Honorable Mike Simpson
Chairman
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chellie Pingree
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment
and Related Agencies
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Merkley, Ranking Member Murkowski, Chairman Simpson, and Ranking Member Pingree:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we encourage robust funding for the Migratory Bird Program of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as part of the Fiscal Year 2025 Interior appropriations bills.

We are grateful for the continued funding for FWS programs that contribute to migratory bird conservation, and the important steps that have been taken under your committee leadership to support vital conservation efforts.

For FY25, we encourage continued and growing support for bird conservation programs to address the ongoing needs and growing challenges facing migratory bird populations, which have declined by 3 billion birds since 1970. Bird populations provide valuable recreational and educational opportunities for the public, and help boost our economy as part of the \$394 billion in annual spending on wildlife-associated recreation activities. The next fiscal year provides a significant opportunity to build on recent progress and increase the resources necessary to fulfill the Service's important role in conserving migratory birds.

To that end, we recommend strong Congressional support for the elements of the Migratory Bird Program and its grants, to provide federal leadership on migratory bird conservation by implementing bedrock laws and grant programs, undertaking biological monitoring, coordinating with partners across the nation and internationally, offering technical assistance, issuing permits efficiently, and more.

Migratory Bird Management Program

Conservation and Monitoring: This element provides critical conservation needs for the Program, including by supporting partnerships, working groups, and bird conservation planning efforts. The

funding should ensure that each of the plans, including for waterfowl, landbirds, shorebirds, and waterbirds, have sufficient funding for staffing, coordination, and implementation. This element also supports key needs for population monitoring and surveys, research, technical assistance and guidance, species conflict reduction, and efforts such as the Urban Bird Treaty program, which helps to conserve habitat and enhance engagement with urban communities. At least \$40.85 million is needed for FY25 for this element to continue to meet these responsibilities, and the growing challenges facing migratory birds.

Permits: To help meet the Program's responsibilities for permitting, including under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, at least \$13.43 million is needed for staff capacity for the Permits element, along with further support for the ePermits program, to help promote efficient, modernized, and coordinated permitting efforts, including to address incidental take. These resources can help support regional office staff in processing permits and provide technical assistance and training to help meet the needs of the public.

Federal Duck Stamp: The Duck Stamp program has been a successful venture for decades, and funding helps to support implementation of this program, including the Duck Stamp contest. The program has raised more than \$1 billion in funding since its inception, which has been invested back into wetland conservation and other habitats to benefit the National Wildlife Refuge System and the birds it supports, including waterfowl, shorebirds, songbirds, and more. At least \$1.14 million in FY25 will allow for continued success for the program.

North American Waterfowl Management/Joint Ventures: The network of Migratory Bird Joint Ventures provides highly valuable partnerships that bring together stakeholders to focus on landscape-level bird conservation delivery through non-regulatory and incentive-based programs. Since 1986, partners have invested more than \$4.5 billion in conserving 27 million acres to benefit birds and people. To help support conservation needs, we recommend an increase in base funding, and a \$25 million funding level will provide an important step forward.

North American Wetlands Conservation Act

Since 1991, the NAWCA program has been a highly popular and successful conservation effort that protects and restores wetlands and associated habitats on both public and private lands. It has leveraged more than \$4 billion to benefit more than 31 million acres from 3,200 projects in the U.S., Canada, Mexico, contributing to the long-term recovery of many wetland-dependent birds, and we urge continued robust funding levels for the program, with at least \$60 million for FY25.

Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act

More than 350 species of birds migrate annually between the U.S. and Canada, and Latin America and Caribbean, including many species of songbirds and shorebirds facing steep declines. Increased funding for the NMBCA, with at least \$6.5 million for FY25, will support essential bird conservation needs across the Western Hemisphere. Since 2002, more than 700 projects funded by the NMBCA have positively impacted more than 5 million acres of migratory bird habitat in the U.S. and Canada, and more than 35 nations throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests, and for your leadership. We look forward to continuing to work with you to support conservation efforts to benefit birds and people across the nation and their international flyways.

Sincerely,

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