

June 6th, 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:

The undersigned fish and wildlife conservation organizations and professional societies are writing with regard to Fiscal Year 2025 appropriations for several Department of the Interior and Department of Agriculture/U.S. Forest Service programmatic areas related to fish and wildlife science and management. Our groups strongly believe the identified agencies/bureaus and programs warrant stable funding for FY2025 to meet the scientific and management responsibilities for fish and wildlife and their habitat, which in turn benefit the American people.

### **USGS Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Units**

The USGS Cooperative Research Units (CRU) program includes 43 units in 41 states that facilitate cooperation between the USGS, state fish and wildlife agencies, a host university, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Wildlife Management Institute to advance fish and wildlife conservation, graduate education, and technical assistance.

We are requesting the President's Budget request of \$29.773 million in FY2025 for the USGS Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit (CRU) program with consideration for an increase to \$36 million given the current demand for the program. This higher level represents funds necessary for basic programmatic needs: 1) current scientist staffing levels at existing CRUs; and 2) ensuring staff salaries meet current inflationary costs, filling existing and anticipated vacancies, and filling positions at newly established units to meet federal commitments to cooperators. The estimated CRU total program needs are \$41 million factoring in vehicle and equipment needs, administrative support, and other programmatic costs. Understanding current fiscal constraints and budget caps, we look forward to working with your Subcommittees in support of increasing this program's budget in the coming years to address vacancies and other CRU program needs required to meet this important program's scientific obligations to the states and other cooperators.

The Honorable Jeff Merkley  
The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
The Honorable Mike Simpson  
The Honorable Chellie Pingree  
June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2024  
Page 2

## **USGS Fish and Wildlife Research – Ecosystem Missions Area**

Our community supports several USGS programs housed under the Ecosystem Missions Area and dedicated to fish and wildlife research. These important programs ensure our federal land and water managers, policy makers and other users have the scientific information needed to make informed fish and wildlife management decisions. The science and decision support tools USGS delivers are innovative and decision-relevant and touch down in a myriad of ways for our community from national strategic fire assessments to ungulate migrations in the Western United States. We encourage the Subcommittees to support stable to increased funding for these budget lines including the Species Management Research Program (\$66.85 million); Land Management Research Program (\$60.551 million); and Biological Threats and Invasive Species Research Program (\$45.466 million). We also support stable funding for the new Ecosystems Change Research Program and National and Regional Climate Adaptation Science Centers, two budget programs originating from the former Climate Adaptation Science Center and Land Change Science Program.

## **BLM Wildlife Habitat Management Program**

BLM's Wildlife Habitat Management Program 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. A portion of these funds (about \$3 million annually) are expended on research, and much of the funding supports the staff who work with external entities to build and advance partnerships, including those that lead to potential research projects. Unfortunately, funding for the Wildlife Program, the backbone of BLM's wildlife habitat management efforts, has declined by 50% since 2021. The sub-activity is severely underfunded, and we recommend providing an additional \$18 million to BLM's Wildlife Habitat Management sub-account, specifically for the Wildlife Program.

## **BLM Resource Management Planning Assessment, Inventory and Monitoring (AIM) Program**

Our community strongly supports the research and development programs of the Bureau of Land Management including the BLM Resource Management Planning Assessment, Inventory and Monitoring (AIM) Program sub-activity and requests \$12.4 million for this program. The AIM Program is built around strategies designed to reach across programs, jurisdictions, stakeholders, and agencies to provide a framework for consistent data and information valuable to decision makers. AIM data and analysis products address the health of upland rangelands, rivers and streams, wetlands, and riparian areas and how they are changing over time. AIM indicators

The Honorable Jeff Merkley  
The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
The Honorable Mike Simpson  
The Honorable Chellie Pingree  
June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2024  
Page 3

provide information about soil health, fish and wildlife habitat, water quality, site stability, biodiversity, plant invasions, and fire risk. This program has been important in ongoing DOI and BLM partnership efforts including sage-grouse conservation and monitoring within other priority habitats.

### **FWS Science Applications**

Our community strongly supports \$37.9 million for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Science Applications with funding dedicated to two sub-activities: Science Partnership Activities (\$27.3 million) and Service Science (\$10.6 million). The Service's Science Applications Program addresses landscape-scale conservation science and data management in a non-regulatory context and provides valuable resources for states and partners to identify knowledge gaps around such issues as reducing wildfires, controlling invasive species, and increasing coastal resilience. Further, the program assists with the development of state-supported regional landscape designs and capacity for regional landscape conservation planning, as well as Comprehensive Conservation Plans and step-down management plans. These efforts collectively support landscape scale conservation; conservation of species of greatest conservation need; resilience to climate fluctuations; more effective restoration of ecosystem processes; and, the facilitation of more effective partnerships.

### **USFS Forest and Rangeland Research**

For FY2025, our organizations support \$315.6 million for U.S. Forest Service Forest and Rangeland Research to continue research-focused investments in forest health, wildfire resilience, timber management, and wood products innovations. The USFS's research directly informs management actions taken by the agency, states, tribes, and other land managers to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands. Funding for this program enables the USFS to invest more in studying wildfire risk management projects such as hazardous fuels treatments and other forest health projects that improve resilience. This work is conducted at five geographically based research stations, the Forest Products Laboratory, the International Institute of Tropical Forestry, 81 Experimental Forest and Ranges, Urban Field Stations, and in the agency's Washington D.C. headquarters. Scientific research priorities, including improving the understanding of a changing climate and identifying adaptation and resiliency strategies, will address data gaps and provide forest owners and managers with better tools for managing for the future. The USFS Forest and Rangeland Research Program is the world's largest forest research organization, and we look forward to working with the Subcommittees to ensure its status as a national and global leader.

The Honorable Jeff Merkley  
The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
The Honorable Mike Simpson  
The Honorable Chellie Pingree  
June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2024  
Page 4

Thank you for your kind consideration of these requests. We look forward to working with you and your colleagues to ensure funding for USGS, BLM, FWS and USFS programs within the FY25 Senate and House Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bills remains stable and able to address the challenges ahead for fish and wildlife.

Sincerely,

AFFTA Fisheries Fund  
American Fly Fishing Trade Association  
American Woodcock Society  
Angler Action Foundation  
Archery Trade Association  
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies  
Backcountry Hunters & Anglers  
Bass Anglers Sportsman Society (B.A.S.S.)  
Bonefish & Tarpon Trust  
Boone and Crockett Club  
Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports  
Ducks Unlimited  
Fly Fishers International  
Houston Safari Club  
Izaak Walton League of America  
Masters of Foxhounds Association  
Mule Deer Foundation  
National Alliance of Forest Owners  
National Bobwhite & Grassland Initiative  
National Deer Association  
National Wild Turkey Federation  
National Wildlife Federation  
New York State Conservation Council  
North American Falconers Association  
North American Grouse Partnership  
Orion: The Hunter's Institute  
Pheasants Forever  
Pope and Young Club  
Quail Forever  
Ruffed Grouse Society  
Sportsmen's Alliance  
Tall Timbers  
The Wildlife Society  
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

The Honorable Jeff Merkley  
The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
The Honorable Mike Simpson  
The Honorable Chellie Pingree  
June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2024  
Page 5

Trout Unlimited  
Union Sportsmen's Alliance  
Whitetails Unlimited  
Wildlife Management Institute