



FY 2014 HOUSE INTERIOR BILL HARMS WILDLIFE

Wildlife and its habitat are valuable national assets. Wildlife related recreation is a \$145 billion a year industry. Moreover, protecting wildlife and its habitat also supports healthy natural systems that provide clean air and water, flood protection, food, medicines and other products. The value of benefits provided by natural habitats in the 48 contiguous states in the U.S. is estimated at \$1.6 trillion per year.

Despite the importance of wildlife and habitat, the FY 2014 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill would severely harm these resources through both draconian funding cuts and extreme and unnecessary anti-environmental riders.

WORST CUTS EVER FOR WILDLIFE AND HABITAT

Reductions since FY 2011 including, most recently, the detrimental FY 2013 sequestration, have already dangerously reduced funding for the agencies designated to manage and protect our air, water, wildlife and lands. Unfortunately, while there is a bright spots or two, the FY 2014 House Interior bill compounds the damage with cuts that are nothing short of appalling – including entirely eliminating funding for some programs.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is the primary federal agency responsible for conserving wildlife and habitat both domestically and internationally. FWS obligations include managing and conserving national wildlife refuges, imperiled plants and animals, migratory birds and wildlife of global concern, and stopping wildlife crimes. Yet the House bill singles it out for punitive and crippling cuts of **27 percent below the FY 2013 enacted level**.

The Resource Management Account which encompasses all FWS operating programs would be cut by 18 percent below the enacted level. In an underhanded move that hides the real impacts of the cuts, the Committee Report fails to list funding levels for each of the operating programs, instead leaving those hard decisions to the agency.

Endangered Species Programs – For 40 years, the Endangered Species Act (ESA) has helped prevent the extinction of our nation's wildlife treasures. Yet this bill would make destructive cuts in already underfunded programs. Cuts of 18 percent would cripple efforts to list about 180 candidate species including the red knot shore-bird, Pacific fisher, Pacific walrus, and New England cottontail rabbit, many of which have awaited protection for years. These reductions would also starve the necessary work to



recover the more than [1400 U.S species](#) currently protected under the ESA such as the threatened Steller's eider and Canada lynx and the endangered ocelot. The number of consultations, necessary to ensure projects minimize harm to species, would also be greatly reduced, leading to extensive delays in crucial projects such as development of both conventional and renewable energy.

In one small bright spot, the Committee recommends restoration of \$1 million in funding for the Livestock Loss Demonstration Program that assists livestock owners co-existing with wolves. But in the face of the dire overall cuts the agency will be forced to rob Peter to pay Paul in order the fund the program.

All funding for land acquisition is removed from the Cooperative Endangered Species Fund which would make it much more difficult for states to help conserve the 65 percent of listed species that occur on non-federal lands.

National Wildlife Refuges – The [National Wildlife Refuge System](#) is the largest land and water system in the world dedicated to wildlife conservation. Cuts of 18 percent would push it over the edge. Many refuges already are at minimum capability to perform the range of activities they currently must perform. With cuts of this magnitude, refuges would likely discontinue visitor services functions completely while wildlife management activities – the core mission of the System – would likely decrease by more than half. The Refuge System would

do a lot less of all the things it needs to do – habitat restoration, cooperative farming with local producers, prescribed fire and wildfire suppression, management of threatened and endangered species, visitor services, invasive species control, maintaining relationships with communities and volunteers, and more.



Cooperative Landscape Conservation and Adaptive Science – The bill includes legislative language that would specifically prohibit the use of any funding for the ground-breaking [Landscape Conservation Cooperatives](#), a signature FWS initiative to effectively and efficiently address large-scale complex threats to natural resources such as climate change, drought, and invasive species across jurisdictional boundaries at the landscape level. This prohibition would terminate the 22 Cooperatives that currently range across the U.S., that include partnerships with all 50 states and with Canada, Mexico, and countries in the Pacific.

Office of Law Enforcement – Iconic wildlife species are facing an unprecedented assault from poaching worldwide. The illegal wildlife trade is closely related to organized crime and drug-trafficking. Cuts of 18 percent would further reduce wildlife inspectors at ports and the already skeletal force of elite special agents, severely hindering numerous enforcement efforts including finding and breaking up smuggling rings that traffic in wildlife products such as rhinoceros horn, sea turtle parts, and jaguar skins and working with states to prevent poaching of commercially significant U.S. resources, including game species. The decrease would also undermine work at the National Fish and Wildlife Forensics Laboratory, the only forensics laboratory in the world dedicated to solving wildlife crimes.

Migratory Birds – Migratory birds are integral to healthy natural systems as predators, prey, seed dispersers, and pollinators and are actively appreciated and enjoyed by millions of people across the country. Unfortunately, U.S. bird populations are experiencing broad declines. An 18

percent cut for Migratory Bird Management would severely limit key programs such as crucial survey and monitoring, including research on golden eagles and seabirds to prevent harm from siting of energy projects and actions to conserve plunging grassland bird populations.

The bill also would completely eliminate funding for the already tiny Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Fund which is vital in work to conserve birds that move between the U.S. and Latin America and the Caribbean. Americans love these creatures that grace our backyards and communities.

International Conservation – Wildlife recognize no borders and the wealth of the U.S. in comparison to desperate situations around the globe means that modest conservation investments internationally can reap significant returns. An 18 percent cut would severely harm efforts to train key stakeholders in Africa and Mexico, conserve imperiled amphibians, and prevent unsustainable trade in native U.S. species.

The bill would cut the flagship Multinational Species Conservation Funds, by more than 14 percent which will severely hamper efforts to protect elephants, rhinoceros, tigers, great apes and marine turtles.

Environmental Contaminants – This program leads federal efforts in protecting wildlife and habitat from harmful pollutants such as pesticides, endocrine disruptors, heavy metals, oil and other industrial chemicals and in responding to spills of oil and other dangerous substances. An 18 percent cut would further overstretch its already insufficient number of expert contaminant biologists and also likely result in a reduction of restoration funding leveraged from responsible parties.

Partnership Programs – The budgets of several key cooperative programs also would be zeroed out, including:

- The State and Tribal Wildlife Grants program that was created by Congress in 2000 to assist states and tribes in voluntary efforts to protect more than 14,000 at-risk wildlife species from becoming endangered. Without funding crucial conservation efforts will be halted such as habitat protection and restoration, invasive species management, research, work with private landowners and more.
- The North American Wetlands Conservation Fund that supports protection and restoration of wetlands. More than half of the original wetlands in the U.S.

have been lost already and this cut would exacerbate declines of migratory birds and other fish and wildlife dependent on wetlands and drive up the costs of erosion control, water treatment, and flood protection that natural wetlands provide for free.

Bureau of Land Management

Overall, the bill cuts the agency's budget by about 7.2 percent. The bill does provide an important increase for sage-grouse conservation planning, but also provides significant increases for resource uses – 30.6 percent for grazing management and 6.5 percent for oil and gas development.



Sage Grouse, C. Robert Smith/ Elk Meadow Images/National Geographic

Greater Sage-Grouse – In one of its very few bright spots, the bill fully funds the President's request for greater sage-grouse conservation efforts in the Wildlife Management account. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands encompass half of the remaining habitat for the greater sage-grouse, an iconic but imperiled bird of the American West whose population has declined to less than 10 percent of historic numbers. A classic umbrella species, sage-grouse are an ambassador for the Sagebrush Sea, a landscape that supports hundreds of fish and wildlife species, including pronghorn, elk, mule deer, and native trout. An imminent 2015 decision whether or not to list the greater sage-grouse under the ESA has prompted federal land management agencies, particularly the BLM and the U.S. Forest Service, as well as state fish and wildlife agencies, to initiate an [unprecedented planning process](#) to develop and implement adequate conservation measures for sage-grouse. Unfortunately, the bill also includes a provision that would delay the listing decision, discussed further below.

Renewable Energy – Given the greatly expanded effort to develop renewable energy on BLM lands, it is absolutely crucial that the agency have the funding to ensure development occurs in a balanced fashion that sustains fish and wildlife populations and their habitat. Yet it appears that the bill cuts the Renewable Energy Program by more than 10 percent, making it more difficult to continue regional land use planning studies and environmental reviews of potential wind energy zones. These studies will help to identify future renewable energy zones that will avoid areas with potential natural resource conflicts, including conflicts with sensitive wildlife species such as sage-grouse, eagles, and desert tortoise.

Forest Service

Although the Forest Service (FS) receives an overall increase of 2.9 percent that includes a needed increase of 1.9 percent for Wildlife and Fish Habitat Management, there are damaging cuts to certain programs. And similar to BLM, the funding for resource uses is increased – 11.4 percent for grazing management and 1.8 percent for timber harvest with a directive to increase the harvest to not less than 3 billion board feet in 2014.

Land Management Planning – The bill zeroes out the planning budget entirely, leaving the agency without the resources to develop the intelligent plans that will be needed to sustain our forests, wildlife, and water in a world that faces increasingly complex ecological problems.

Research and Development – The bill slashes the Forest Service R&D program by an unacceptable 63.8 percent which would gut critical research capacity on factors such as wildlife fire, invasive species, soil, water and air quality, and fish and wildlife management. This information is needed to provide relevant tools and information to support sustainable management of National Forest System lands as well as non-federal forest lands.

Land and Water Conservation Fund

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) supports protection for lands in our national wildlife refuges, forests, parks and other federal and state public lands. The bill originally completely eliminated funding for the program. While an amendment in the full Committee restored \$20 million, that amount does not begin to meet the need or reflect historical funding. The U.S. Forest Service has estimated that every day, 6,000 acres of open space is lost in the U.S. to habitat fragmentation and destruction – that's four acres each minute. Once these lands are lost, they can never be recovered.

ANTI-ENVIRONMENTAL RIDERS

The House bill includes about three dozen damaging anti-environmental riders. Below are some that would seriously harm wildlife and habitat.

Undermining Endangered Species Protections

Delaying a Listing Decision for the Imperiled Sage-Grouse – Sec. 120 would defer a scheduled listing decision for greater sage-grouse under the Endangered Species Act by at least one year. The rider would not only delay a long-overdue listing decision for sage-grouse, but it could stall current conservation efforts with negative consequences for the grouse, public lands management, landowners, and other stakeholders. The rider also would set a negative precedent of Congress micro-managing individual, science-based administrative listing decisions prescribed by the ESA and once in the bill could be extended indefinitely. Finally, the Committee report needlessly questions the veracity of science and conservation prescriptions for the sage grouse, and directs BLM to support states in conservation planning which the agency is already doing.

Undermining Sound Science in Listing Decisions – Language in Title I would impose harmful and burdensome hurdles on the ability of the FWS to consider the best available science when making critical decisions relating to endangered species.

Avoiding Protections for Candidate Species – The Committee report directs the FWS to reevaluate its work plans pursuant to court-approved settlement agreements with conservation organizations that obligate the Service to make listing determinations for each of the candidate species under the ESA by 2017.

Undermining Protections for Endangered Mexican Wolves – The Committee report urges reconsideration of a proposal to designate the Mexican wolf an endangered subspecies of gray wolf as part of broader FWS proposal to delist gray wolves in the rest of the lower 48 states.

Overriding Protections for Our Public Lands

Preventing Establishment of New Wildlife Refuges – Language in Title I would prohibit the FWS from using any funds to administratively establish or expand the boundaries of any National Wildlife Refuge even though the agency must go

through a rigorous public process to do so. This would effectively stop the growth of the Refuge System.

Weakening National Forest Planning and Public Participation – One provision (Sec. 407) would exempt the FS from the requirement to revise forest management plans solely because they are more than 15 years out-of-date continuing to indefinitely stall progress toward a forest restoration paradigm that supports forest and ecosystem health for our water and wildlife. The provision also prohibits the FS from updating guidelines for evaluating forest lands that may qualify for wilderness designation, delaying needed improvements in the process. Another provision (Sec. 432) would remove even this reduced public participation currently allowed for FS projects approved through Categorical Exclusions under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).



Undercutting Sound Management of Rangelands – Several provisions would promote unsustainable grazing on public lands. One of these (Sec. 114) would require exhaustion of all administrative remedies before a citizen suit could be filed to challenge decisions concerning grazing on BLM lands. A second (Sec. 119) would exempt from NEPA compliance grazing permits that allow ranchers to trail livestock across public lands. A third (Sec. 411) would exempt NEPA compliance for grazing permits that are overdue for environmental review. A fourth (Sec. 434) would amend the Federal Land Policy and Management Act to double the maximum authorized term of federal grazing permits from 10 to 20 years. Finally, a fifth (Sec. 453) would require that vacant grazing allotments be made available to permittees under certain conditions.

Tying the Hands of Federal Land Managers – This provision (Sec. 438) arbitrarily limits the ability of federal land managers to close lands to hunting, fishing, or recreational shooting for all future years even though such closures may be warranted to conserve fish and wildlife populations or to protect public safety.